

*Poetry co-translation and an attentive cosmopolitanism: internationalising
contemporary Japanese poetry*

**Cassandra Atherton
Deakin University**

cassandra.atherton@deakin.edu.au

**Paul Hetherington
University of Canberra**

paul.hetherington@canberra.edu.au

**Rina Kikuchi
Shiga University**

kikuchi@biwako.shiga-u.ac.jp

Copyright©2021 Cassandra Atherton, Paul Hetherington and Rina Kikuchi. This text may be archived and redistributed both in electronic form and in hard copy, provided that the author and journal are properly cited and no fee is charged, in accordance with our Creative Commons Licence.

Abstract: The majority of Japanese poetry currently reaches a limited readership outside of Japan. As a result, many contemporary Japanese poets are searching for ways to have their poems translated into English and published in English-language journals. Achieving satisfactory translation results, however, is considerably more complicated than switching words from one language into another and scholarship on the subject of translating Japanese poetry is often vexed. This scholarship frequently traverses much of the same ground as the debate about Japanese prose translation where, depending on their approach, translators may be labelled ‘literalists’ or ‘libertines’. This paper argues that co-translating Japanese poetry may be as much about sharing ideas and ideologies as about lineation, cadence or word choice. Co-translating Japanese poetry has the power to build cross-cultural understandings and to explore and promote ways of understanding Japanese identity. We argue that while translation is often undertaken by the translators in their country of residence, the experience of genius loci and undertaking co-translation in situ may best accommodate such a cross-cultural synergy.

This paper draws on our collective experiences in a series of translation workshops at Meiji University. These were organised by Rina Kikuchi, a literary scholar and translator from Japan. Among other Australian poets and scholars, Paul Hetherington and Cassandra Atherton were paired with Japanese poets for co-translation purposes. They co-translated Japanese poetry into English and had their own poems translated into Japanese with the assistance of Kikuchi who acted as the lynchpin for the workshops. The experience was celebrated in a series of poetry readings in Tokyo and Nara. Significantly, although neither Hetherington nor Atherton is fluent in Japanese, they found the process of co-translation to include what one may call an attentive cosmopolitanism,

incorporating respect and understanding for different cultural assumptions and poetic ideas.

Keywords: Poetry co-translation, Japanese poetry, cross-cultural

Lost in translation

In the spirit of the original meaning of the word, translation may open up new ways of thinking and seeing, and a *carrying across* of fresh perceptions. Juliane House, for example, argues 'translation can provide access to new ideas and new experiences that stem from a different language community, opening horizons that would otherwise remain unknown behind the barrier of another language' (2018, p. 9). From this perspective, translation may be as much about sharing aspects of history, philosophy and culture as about translating words and, in this light, translators may be understood to be cultural teleporters or tour guides. Indeed, American poet and translator, Charles Simic, identifies translators as 'the first multiculturalists' (qtd in Kelly & Zetzsche, 2012, p. 106). He views the translator's role as builder and supporter of cross-cultural understandings by extending the readership of translated works.

House contends that translators are mediators 'between different languages, cultures and societies' (2018, p. 9), a point that is even truer today than it was only a few decades ago because, for the purposes of basic (as opposed to cross-cultural) understanding, online translation services have become readily available and relatively sophisticated. As a result, the role of human translators, whether they are dealing with conversation or fiction, has increasingly shifted towards allowing the translation of accurate, nuanced and appropriately contextualised meaning from one language to another (anyone who has used Google Translate knows that machine-translation often produces *gaucheries* and inaccuracies). And where the translation of poetry is concerned, there are further intricacies involved, including issues relating to literary tone, craft and technique. An early supporter of machine-translation, Norbert Wiener conceded, 'No reasonable person thinks that a machine translation can ever achieve elegance and style. [The nineteenth-century Russian poet] Pushkin need not shudder' (qtd in Hofstadter, 2018, n.p.).

Poetry translation has unsettled many scholars and poets, because they view the process as a kind of unachievable alchemy – partly because poetry depends so much on a particular disposition of words in a particular language. Poetry activates various verbal associations inherent in a language to achieve complex and often unparaphraseable meanings. Thus, one prevalent view is that if poetry is not even able to be successfully paraphrased in its original language, then it is very unlikely to be successfully translated into another. This view is evident from the frequent repetition of quotations that flag the impossibility of the task, including Roman Jakobson's argument that poetry by definition is untranslatable and 'only creative transposition is possible' (2000, p. 118). Robert Frost's well-known assertion, often rendered as 'poetry is what gets lost in translation', makes a similar point, especially when seen in context: 'I like to say, guardedly, that I could define poetry this way: it is that which is lost out of both prose and verse in translation' (1961, p. 7).

Despite the prevalence of views about the difficulty of translating poetry, Daniel Weissbort argues translators of poetry 'clearly think it worth attempting, even if crises of faith are quite frequent' (1989, p. xii). For the remainder of this paper, we take up the question of *why* poetry translation is worth attempting, focusing on some of what may be *gained* in translation. We argue that cross-cultural collaboration and an appreciation for poetry's ineffability may thrive in many of the more difficult moments of poetry translation. Sandy Farquhar and Peter Fitzsimons even suggest that what is 'lost' in translation is part of what allows the process of translation its profusion, diversity and openness:

The phrase 'lost in translation' brings together both openness to new ideas and a willingness to embrace multiplicity ... the idea of being 'lost' [is] a commitment to engaging in a journey, to finding new meanings and trajectories, and to embracing destinations that are tentative and negotiable ... translation is a commitment to openness and continuous reinterpretation, enhancing possibilities in our ethical endeavour as educators. (2012, p. 101)

When co-translating Japanese poetry into English, Frost's statement about what gets 'lost in translation' is now, at least in popular culture, irrevocably connected to Sofia Coppola's 2003 film of that name. Described as 'elegiac', 'poetic', even 'uncanny', this film is partly about what is discovered (as well as what is lost) when culturally dislocated people make various connections and 'translations' (Rich 2003, n.p.). In a retrospective review of the film, Mairead Small Staid argues, '*Lost in Translation* isn't a portrait of a place nor even of people, but of the shimmering space around and between them, a diptych that grows singular as it goes' (2018, n.p.). Rich's and Staid's discussions of the film can be repurposed as metaphors for the practice of poetry translation, especially its dependency on connections and ephemeral, creative and 'shimmering' spaces.

Translation: issues and debates

Writer and translator, Andre Gide believed that 'a serious writer owes his own language at least one good translation of good written work in another' (Davis 2007, p. 18). However, because relatively little Japanese poetry is translated into English, part of the decision to undertake translation from the Japanese into English may include the prospect of extending the readership of Japanese poets into the Anglophone world. When invited to participate in a series of translation workshops organised by Rina Kikuchi at Meiji University, both Atherton and Hetherington were interested in how such an international partnership may extend readership opportunities for all participants. They also saw the workshops as an opportunity to develop their interest in translation as an empathic process, where the translator is able to enter the imaginative world of the original poet.

This dimension of translation is not always discussed by scholars, but Russian poet Anna Akhmatova argues, 'for a poet, translating is like devouring one's own brains' (qtd in Hanne 2006, p. 216). Indeed, if the representation of poetry translation as an especially problematic process is not uncommon – as we have mentioned – such views often centre on the difficulty of translating the elements of prosody from one language into another and across cultures, and the associated difficulty of registering poetry's many, often ambiguous layers in a new language. In other words, although denotative meanings in a

language are often able to be successfully translated (for instance, a shopping list may not necessarily pose a major translation challenge), the connotative meanings of poetry are frequently elusive. These meanings are largely derived from the interplay of various specific words and other linguistic features in poems, along with the effects of cadence and numerous implicit cultural assumptions and understandings – and as recreated by a translator they can never be congruent with the meanings and effects in the original work.

While various scholars such as Jakobsen and André Lefevere, and poets including Robert Bly, have outlined a number of steps or stages in the translation process, broadly speaking there are two historical approaches to translation which are frequently understood to be in opposition to one another – although the distinction between these approaches is not always as clear-cut as one might assume. Wei Lu and Hong Fang call these approaches ‘literal’ and ‘free’:

Such debates have quite a long history both in the West and in China. In the west, the distinction between ‘word-for-word’ (i.e. ‘literal’) and ‘sense-for-sense’ (i.e. ‘free’) translation goes back to Cicero (first century B.C.) and St Jerome (fourth century A.D.). (2012, p. 742)

A famous and controversial example of relatively ‘free’ translation is Ezra Pound’s *Cathay* poems. Pound didn’t speak Chinese and his reading of Chinese poetry was, as Michael Alexander states, filtered through ‘the posthumous notes of an American [Ernest Fenollosa] learning from a Japanese’ (1981, p. 97). Pound used these notes to make his own English-language versions. Some European and Chinese critics admire his *Cathay* poems, while others repudiate their errors. Wai-Lim Yip writes that ‘To take *Cathay* for a group of excellent English poems based upon some Chinese text rather than for translations as such has become *the* attitude of most Pound critics’ (1969, p. 4).

Importantly, even so-called ‘literal’ translation usually goes beyond word-for-word translation, especially in languages that do not have definite and/or indefinite articles. In the translation of Japanese poetry into English, for instance, there are particular difficulties. Alison Kirby Record and Adnan K. Abdulla comment on:

the absence of articles, a lack of singular and plural markers, the use of special particles that mark case relations, and major differences in word order. With regard to the syntactical position of the headword of any grammatical phrase, English is a ‘headfirst’ language, while Japanese is ‘head-last’; in Japanese, objects come before and not after the verb. (2016, p. 172)

Harold Wright extends this argument by outlining these two historical models in the context of Japanese prose:

A number of years ago several of our Japanese-related journals carried an ongoing debate on the art or techniques of translating the prose literature of Japan. Some of these manifestos and arguments often degenerated into a subtle, or not so subtle, academic name-calling. But two distinct groups did emerge. One was called, by the other perhaps, the ‘literalists’ (those who strove as much as possible to remain faithful to the original syntax), and the other side was branded as the ‘libertines’ (those who moved away from the original syntax in an attempt, they

felt, to present the reading public a work in English that conformed to their own standards of literature). (2013, n.p.)

Importantly, he makes the point that while translators of Japanese poetry can also be divided into a literalist/libertine binary, 'for the most part, they seem to fall in the middle of the road' (2013, n.p.), supporting Record and Abdulla's discussion. Anglophone translators of Japanese are always on some level libertines, as they are unable to translate word for word because of the different structures of the two languages. In this context, translator Judy Halebsky's simile is useful in its focus on translation as 'a process of trust almost like spinning while holding hands. We both need to lean out and give weight to create the new poem without falling' (qtd in Musha, 2013, n.p.).

The Meiji University co-translation workshops

However interesting the translation process may be in theory, it is only when translators are working with original material and making new translations that the issues addressed by scholars really come into focus. In 2018, this coming-into-focus occurred during co-translation workshops that were undertaken at Meiji University and which then culminated in live poetry readings in Tokyo and Nara. Hetherington and Atherton were two of nine Anglophone poets paired with Japanese poets. Kikuchi was one of two bilingual co-translators involved in the workshops – and also the lynchpin in the translation process, moving between the pairs of poets throughout workshops, helping establish lines of communication, fielding questions, facilitating relationships and organising associated events, from poetry readings to lunch arrangements.

While a major stimulus for this project was to introduce Anglophone readers to exceptional contemporary Japanese poets and their work, the translation project developed into a two-way process where English-language poetry was translated into Japanese and published in Japanese journals; and translated Japanese poetry was published in English-language journals. These outcomes introduced poems and poets to new readers and, in this way, fulfilled one of the translation project's key aims. However, it is the experience and particular features of the co-translation process which is perhaps most enlightening where discussions about translation are concerned. For this reason, we will move to a discussion of our individual experiences in the translation workshops as a series of case studies focused on translation practice.

Rina Kikuchi: translation, cooperation and collaboration

Rina Kikuchi's role in the translation project began long before Atherton and Hetherington arrived in Japan. She selected Australian and Japanese poets for the project, giving priority to poets who she believed were open-minded and willing to learn. Kikuchi assisted in the selection of the best and most suitable poems for translation into the target language. Selecting poems for translation is not always straightforward, because the best literature in Japanese does not necessarily translate well. Examples are the writers Yukio Mishima and Natsume Soseki. Mishima is one of the most widely read Japanese novelists in English but Soseki is considered in Japan to be one of the greatest

authors of modern Japanese literature. However, Soseki's works do not always translate easily into English and, as a result, he is not as popular as Mishima with Anglophone readers. Kikuchi's experience as a translator ensured the selection of poems for translation had the greatest chance for success in reaching and engaging new readerships in the two target languages.

Kikuchi's role was also to pair Japanese and Anglophone poets who would work well with one another. She took into consideration the poets' personalities as well as their style of poetry. For example, she paired Hetherington with Yosuke Tanaka. Both are distinguished poets and university professors who have published many books of poetry and both are accomplished in free verse and hybrid forms. Atherton was paired with Mari Kashiwagi for more complementary reasons. Kashiwagi is an up-and-coming poet who prizes minimalism in her poetry, while Atherton is a prose poet, invested in the sentence rather than the line. Both partnerships were ultimately successful and Hetherington and Atherton discuss their co-translation relationships in more detail below.

In approaching the workshops, Kikuchi addressed the 'literalist'/'libertine' dichotomy in terms that were more unified, expressing her interest in a co-translation process that combined 'literal' translation and 're-creation'. This was crucial to all of the poetry translation workshops because it meant that the border between literal translation and re-creation was never seen by any of the participants to be fixed. Kikuchi wanted the translations to reflect the language, meaning and style (the more 'literal' aspects) of the source language but at the same time to have rhythms, sounds, echoes, imagery, colours and even smells that were consistent with expectations of poetry in the target language (re-creation).

Because co-translation workshops involving poets who have little significant knowledge of the source language remains a relatively unexplored frontier in the field of poetry translation, these workshops constituted a practice-led research project investigating what does and does not work in this notoriously slippery field. In a broad sense, the project outcomes added to the work of scholars who have written more generally about the importance of collaborative translation. For example, Sharon O'Brien comments that '[c]ollaboration is evident in all types of translation scenarios and across the whole process of translation' (2011, p. 17) and Joanna Trzeciak Huss observes:

[t]he definition of collaborative translation is highly contested and forms of collaboration are variously designated. When distinctions are drawn between, say, *co-translated by* and *translated in collaboration with*, rules and conventions for applying these epithets are often fluid, negotiable and subject to the discretion of various parties in the network of publication. (2018, p. 389; emphasis original)

More particularly, Kikuchi's approach was in sympathy with what Alexa Alfer has called 'translaboration' (2015, p. 26-27). It also revealed similarities to what Jessica Griffiths and Harry Williams describe as the TransCollaborate process, in which:

participants play one of two roles: either the 'source collaborator' (one who is fluent in the source text language but has only conversational fluency in the target text language) or the 'target collaborator' (one who is fluent in the target text

language but has minimal or no knowledge of the source text language). (2018, p. 44)

Kikuchi particularly emphasised how every translation reflects the individual way a translator reads and interprets a poem, and was also cognisant of the fact that, as each person reads a poem differently, translation is able to become a form of creative and constructive mis-translation; the result of a to-and-fro between what exists in one language and what is being newly made in another language. Such a process should not be a deterrent to translators or readers, because such 'mistranslations' saw the creation of excellent translations of Japanese and English-language poems (we say more about this process below).

This approach to co-translation is also one way of addressing Emily Apter's claim that 'Nothing is exactly the same in one language as in another, so the failure of translation is always necessary and absolute ... If there were a perfect equivalence from language to language; it would be a replica' (2004, p. xiv). Since the translation workshops simultaneously valued accuracy, creativity and collaboration, they enabled the 'failure' that Apter identifies to be considered as a new and shared opportunity for problem-solving and creative activity on the part of the participants. Additionally, and more generally, whatever the result of any individual translation, the collaborative translation activities adopted during the workshops demonstrated how dynamic the translation process continues to be. There may be many different translations of a single poem and, taken together, these variations enable a rich and complex understanding of the original.

Atherton and Hetherington as translators

At the beginning of this translation project, Hetherington and Atherton had modest claims as translators. Both had undertaken small amounts of translation work but, if asked, neither would have called themselves a translator. Nevertheless, both believed they had the capacity to translate poetry sympathetically – if only because of their interest in and understanding of poetic techniques and forms. This accords with Huss's contention that a poet–translator's 'poetic skills, knowledge and experience, and perhaps even a heightened sensitivity to the sonic qualities of poetic language, may compensate for any potential lack of fluency in the source language' (2018, p. 395). It is in this light that Huss quotes David Young's views that collaborative translation is 'half creativity and half scholarship' along with his further statement that '[w]hile fluency in the source language can be convenient, it can also be a hindrance, an intimidation. It's the target language that counts' (qtd in Huss 2018, p. 395).

While Atherton speaks some Japanese, neither she nor Hetherington writes or reads more than scraps of the language and both shared Young's interest in making persuasive works in the 'target' language while respecting the nuances of the original works as far as possible. When considering their participation in the co-translation workshops they agreed that the process would be best if it also involved a bilingual translator and, while Kikuchi and other workshop participants excelled in this role, it proved at least as important that Kikuchi encouraged both poets to embrace various strategies to overcome a translator's unfamiliarity with a language – most notably collaborative workshopping and an awareness of *genius loci*.

Paul Hetherington: A space to make decisions

In the translation workshops at Meiji University Hetherington was paired with poet, Yosuke Tanaka and translation companion, Andrew Houwen. Tanaka speaks English very well and translates poems from English into Japanese. However, because of the complexities involved in the co-translation of his own poetry into English, Houwen – who speaks fluent Japanese, but whose first language is English – was engaged to act as what Kikuchi terms ‘a conveyor’ between the two poets. Significantly, Tanaka’s poetry is layered with references to the past and he is known for his juxtaposition of historical and contemporary poetic forms. Yasuhiro Yotsumoto states:

Yosuke Tanaka ... casually introduces elements from the past or from other poetic forms such as tanka, combining them with a 21st-century sensitivity to create something extraordinary which is simultaneously old and new, traditional and experimental, lyrical and critical. (2008, n.p.)

With Tanaka’s and Houwen’s assistance, Hetherington was keen to trace this combination of historical and contemporary moments in the poems and find a way to re-create them for an Anglophone readership. The experience of working at Meiji University also significantly and positively impacted on Hetherington’s co-translations. As well as the workshops themselves, various interactions with Japanese students and academics, and hearing the Japanese language in use, allowed him to gain a sense of the sounds and rhythms that belonged to Tanaka’s poems.

On some days, as Hetherington participated in co-translation workshops, he discussed Tanaka’s poems with both the poet and Houwen, taking notes and explicating poems line by line. On other days, and in the evenings, he would attempt to learn more about Japanese history and culture. He travelled by train and on foot to shrines and museums, where he spent many hours – and there was also something about the coffees he drank and meals he ate that communicated a broader, contemporary and more intangible sense of Japanese culture. Such moments became an underlying part of the process of translation in a way that would not have been possible if he had undertaken this work in Australia.

Very little has been written about translating in situ as a way of using the idea of genius loci to enhance an understanding of place. Notwithstanding its origins in Roman religion, the Latin phrase, *genius loci* has become increasingly secularised to mean ‘the special atmosphere of a particular place’ (Samyn 2012, p. 23.). Marlilena Vecco has argued:

The discourse on the genius loci is characterised by a multiplicity and multidimensionality of theoretical approaches and theoretical approaches ... cover[ing] a very wide understanding, from physical substantiality of a place and its sense-based perceptions to spiritual experiences and intangible interactions, which imply a relationship between special and social processes. (2020, p. 2)

It is impossible to glean from research or technology alone the special and dynamic nature of a place. The feeling cannot be experienced on Google or through Facebook or

via another person's explanation. It has to be experienced in person. This is largely because, 'genius loci is a signifier of a process that is happening and cannot intentionally be created' (Vecco 2019, p. 1).

Prior the first workshop, Hetherington received the Japanese versions of three of Tanaka's poems and the literal English translations from Houwen. Beginning with a literal translation is common practice in many translation practices because, as Weissbort argues,

the most satisfactory procedure is to provide the non-linguist reader with a lexical and contextual commentary and an ad verbum, non-literary translation alongside the original, thereby enabling him to experience the source text for himself. (1989, p. xii)

During the first day of workshopping, Tanaka, Houwen and Hetherington met and Tanaka read his poems aloud in Japanese. This was important for Hetherington as he wanted to preserve some sense of the rhythm of Tanaka's original poems in his English translations. The three writers then discussed the poems and translations line by line, considering various options. Tanaka contributed a great deal to the discussion and was knowledgeable about how he understood his Japanese might be inflected in English. In some cases, Houwen was differently attuned to the contemporary vernacular idioms and associations of various English words.

Houwen provided the following literal translation of one of the stanzas in Tanaka's 'Orion':

Plaza in [*topic marker*] cleanly/beautifully polished bench [*subject marker*] one,
various-trees-wood(s) and
grain field(s) [*direct-object preposition*] can see/visible condition placed were.
Every day always, endless/eternal sleep in arrive/enter/adhere children are.
Lightly disinfectant 's smell [*subject marker*] flows.
Continuously north from sun [*topic marker*] this garden [*direct-object
preposition*] shines on. (Houwen 2018a, n.p.)

Here, Houwen signals issues such as the lack of pronouns in Japanese and the lack of clarity over plurals – which leaves a good deal of space to make decisions. Hetherington initially translated this stanza as:

There's a beautifully polished bench in the plaza among the numerous trees.
It has been placed to offer a view of the grain fields.
Every day there are children who sleep eternally.
A faint smell of disinfectant wafts.
The sun continually shines on this garden from the north.

Houwen and Tanaka read this version and discussed it with Hetherington, who took notes of the various comments and suggestions they made. He wanted to get both the details of the poems and the poems as a whole as close as possible to what Tanaka wanted, but also to take note of Houwen's meticulous advice about how key Japanese phrases and meanings might be interpreted in English. He also wanted to include his own understandings and re-create the poems with what he thought was an appropriate

overall aesthetic, achieving a balance between literal translation and a sense of how the whole translated poem should unfold – conveying an appropriate tone, sense of irony and something of the ‘feel’ of the originals.

Overall, Hetherington completed six drafts. Apart from numerous comments in person and by email on a number of these drafts, Houwen provided comments in track changes on his third draft. As one small example, the lines:

There’s a gleaming bench in the plaza, which
has been placed to offer a view of the natural forest and grain fields

were annotated with the comment: ‘My interpretation, also based on Yosuke’s comments, is that the bench is placed there *as if* offering a view of natural forest and grain fields’ (Houwen 2018b, n.p.). After working with this comment, the final version of this stanza became:

There’s a gleaming bench in the plaza, which has been placed
as if to offer a view of natural forest and grain fields.
Every day there are children here who pass from the world.
A faint smell of disinfectant wafts.
It is always from the north that the sun shines. (Hetherington, et al 2019, n.p.)

As well as the use of Houwen’s ‘as if’, the revised lines include a change in lineation to more fully capture the sense of the Japanese source poem and also to improve the flow of the English-language version.

In a second translation, Houwen’s literal translation focused on the many possible ways of translating the original poem, once again highlighting the lack of true pronouns in the Japanese language. Hetherington was keen to keep the synaesthetic qualities of the poem in the English co-translation and was assisted by his experience of eating ramen in Tokyo and Nara, and watching it being cooked and consumed. As he continued to work with Tanaka and Houwen, he turned Houwen’s original translation into a witty gastronomic tour de force of a poem. The list of food items and the restaurant in the literal translation, below, becomes a visible place with a cauldron of bubbling ramen creating a kind of chaotic magic. Here is the literal translation followed by Hetherington’s final draft:

To Someone/Those with Air-Conditioning Syndrome

Japan [*topic marker*] Asia ’s edge so
really good soup ramen can eat
that introduction from let’s begin

hot outside ’s road(s) from small door(s) [*direct-object preposition*] when enter
steam rising L-letter ’s counter(s) [*subject marker*] is/are
there at bearded uncles/middle-aged men [*subject marker*] work/are working.

first bean(s) [*direct object preposition*] base as done salty flavour’s drop [*direct-object preposition*]
immoral messy boiled/cooked soup as chopped/split
one pan/pot in water [*subject marker*] violently bubbling

noodles portion/clump/handful [*direct-object preposition*] small basket in put in and cooks

cooked noodles [*direct-object preposition*] bowl in put roughly disentangle, soup, red meat, yellow egg(s), black seaweed, green small vegetable(s) together with when eat

body [*topic marker*] its inside from fully warmed, definitely summer lose not is. (Houwen 2018a, n.p.)

By the time Hetherington completed his sixth and final draft the translation had become:

For a Person Suffering from Air-Conditioning Syndrome

Because Japan is located at the edge of Asia
you can enjoy great soup noodles there
Let's start with that as an introduction

When you enter a small door from the hot road
there's steam rising from an L-shaped counter
and bearded middle-aged men are working.

First, put salty fermented beans into a ramen bowl
then sieve soup from an unholy mess
In a cauldron the water convulses violently –
a handful of noodles is boiled in each small basket.

The noodles are roughly disentangled in a bowl,
and when you eat them with soup, red meat, a yellow egg, black seaweed and
small green vegetables
your body is fully warmed from the inside,
and you will never relinquish summer. (Hetherington, et al 2019, n.p.)

Such co-translations, whatever their strengths and weaknesses, emerge from an immersion in a new culture, and from a cooperative and creative process of exchange between various writers – original author, bilingual translator and translating poet. There are freedoms being taken with co-translation in this process, but they are scrupulous freedoms, tempered by a meticulous attention to the original work and a sense of the places from which that work emerged.

Cassandra Atherton: Translation at home and away

Atherton's first experience co-translating Japanese poetry with Kikuchi was in Australia. Atherton was initially invited to be part of an anthology of translated women poets and, because she writes prose poetry, often about tragedy, Kikuchi paired her with a poet who had written about the earthquake and tsunami in March 2011 in a prose-like structure. She emailed Atherton, introducing Nakamura Sachiko:

The poet, NAKAMURA Sachiko was born and grew up in Iwate-prefecture, and she is now in her early (or mid) 50s. Her home town was ... damaged ... by [the] 2011 earthquake.

... The town, called Oofunato, is by the sea, and her family used to grow oysters. She has been writing poems and prose since her childhood, but she [has] never really had a chance to publish her own poetry collection. This poem won [the] Iwate-prefecture 2011 disaster poetry prize. Her poems (including this one) have been published in a few anthologies/poetry journals.

[P]oets, who live away from Tokyo, do not have much chance to publish their works, unless they [have] got a lot of money ... (it has been like this for 100 years)

...

I assume there are lots of women poets, in the same situation ... (Kikuchi, 2017, n.p.)

This email makes clear how translation and publication outside of Japan is able to provide new opportunities for the publication of poetry, especially for women. It also demonstrates the importance, when translating, of knowing something about the poet's biography and situation.

When the poem Atherton translated was published in *Meanjin*, it was introduced with a description of the translation process:

Rina, a native speaker, completed a literal translation of the poem and liaised in Japanese with the poet, Nakamura, to clarify some of the ideas embedded in the work. Cassandra who has limited Japanese language but is a scholar in the field of Japanese disaster poetry, worked with Rina and her translation to create a poem in English that stayed true to the original, but engaged a readership outside of Japan. Once the English version was drafted, Rina who describes herself as a messenger between poets, took this to Nakamura and some redrafting was completed based on her feedback. (2018, p. 10)

Atherton initially found this co-translation challenging and it took her some time to find the right space for her own re-creation. Kikuchi provided a literal translation with which she began working. As part of this process, she also explained particular ideas reflective of Japanese culture – such as the reference to *shiju-ku-nichi* or the 49th day which Kikuchi stated was a '(special day – must get together to commemorate person's death)' (2018, n.p.). There were also restrictions – one of them being that Nakamura didn't want to use the words 'tsunami' or 'corpse'.

The first long translation session took place on Skype. Atherton was given some notes by Kikuchi and she then took more notes as Kikuchi explicated the poem line by line. The first stanza of her literal translation read:

1. Feeling empty inside heart questioning is this the emptiness of the heart after
I saw my father's death
2. Or is this the tiredness of long caring (elderly)
3. Or is this the feeling of guilt for being saved
4. From the hospital which is placed on the hill
5. Is this god's punishment? Because I was watching it...

Kikuchi explained, 'The narrator is feeling guilty for surviving and watching [the] tsunami washing everything, from the hospital window (the hospital stands on the hill, and she could see everything, and she was safe)' (2017, n.p.). Atherton's co-translation of these five lines became:

Is this the hollowness of my father's death
Or the bone tiredness of his long illness in my chest?
From the hospital window, I watched it unfold.
Is this emptiness the heavy guilt of inaction?
Or punishment for surviving? (2018: p11)

Keeping the same number of lines and the overall visual form of the poem was particularly important for Atherton. However, in re-creating the mood of the poem, she employed phrases such as 'bone tired' and 'the hollowness ... of death' to emphasise the sense the poem conveys of deep regret and sadness.

Atherton's favourite part of the poem was Nakamura's use of a black dot. She recognised it as a form of censorship, and Kikuchi explained in her notes to the poem:

[HUGE dot – government] black ink covers what has been written on the paper (used in WWII censorship) the authority are taking the coffins under their control so they can't get access to coffins (buy them) and therefore everywhere you go if you are an ordinary person ... (can't get a coffin). Be suggestive. The dot is controlling – everywhere you go. (Kikuchi 2017)

Atherton wanted to preserve the dot – and, indeed, she wanted it to be Nakamura's dot. She decided to copy and paste it from Nakamura's word document onto her own:

霊安室は満杯です棺は被災者様の分です●が押さえているので
*crematoria are overflowing there are no more coffins ● is to blame they control
the living* (Sachiko 2018: p. 12)

For Atherton, it was a perfect moment – where a symbol could be transported from one language to another and mean a similar thing in Japanese and as it did in English.

For her second co-translation, Atherton was paired with Mari Kashiwagi in the Meiji University workshops. They are of a similar age and a comparable stage of their poetry careers, but their styles are vastly different. In particular, as a prose poet, Atherton uses white space in her work very differently from the way it is employed in lineated poetry and – as Yasuhiro Yotsumoto states – there is an 'unusual amount of white space' in Kashiwagi's poetry, 'a few words spread over the pages not unlike the works of some Imagist poets, or of e.e. cummings' (2008, n.p.). The third stanza of one of her poems appears as seven lines stretching down the page:

つれていく
空へ
ぼくを
羽のびて
すきとおる
木を抱いて
うまれたよ
3.

(Kikuchi, 2018, n.p.)

Kikuchi explained that Kashiwagi's poetry is like Japanese emaki, or a picture scroll – words hang vertically like unfurled parchment. Atherton was keen to incorporate both the minimalism and the visual effects on the page. This required a delicate balance where very few words are chosen to convey the much larger picture. Kashiwagi speaks English, but does not write poetry in English and is invested in both the perceived connotations of her poems in English and their reception. For example, when Atherton discussed using the phrase 'intimate space' to convey a bower, Kashiwagi believed the word 'space' was too connected, however laterally, to aliens and outer space to capture her meaning. Therefore, much of the workshopping was about finding suitable synonyms with positive connotations in Japanese, as much as it was about co-translating for Angolophones. It was as if Kashiwagi was translating Atherton's co-translations of her poems back into Japanese to make sense of the word choices, which was an interesting layer of the co-translation process.

Kikuchi provided the following translation of the third stanza:

3.

(I am/ was) born (here, right now)

a tree holding/ embracing

transparent

wings come out/ grow (instantly)

I

the sky to

take (am taken)/ bring (am brought) (Kikuchi 2018, n.p.)

Atherton's co-translation of Kashiwagi's poems initially included too much information. The balance between expressing everything in the poem and maintaining its sparseness was challenging. Atherton also reacted to what she interpreted as a fear in Kashiwagi that her poems, with all their subtleties and ambiguities, would be lost in the translation process, primarily because she uses so few words. This is not uncommon for Japanese poets working in compressed forms – especially tanka-poets and haiku-poets. There is a belief that these poems cannot be translated into any other language because they use so few words to express large concepts, philosophies or beliefs.

If this co-translation had taken place with the poets in separate locations, it may not have been successful. This is because interpreting Kashiwagi's minimalism required considerable discussion – not just in terms of unfolding poetic meanings, but also how the poet was reflecting on Japan from a woman's point of view. Co-translation for Atherton included lunches and some dinners with Kashiwagi and discussions about their

lives, which unearthed similarities in their choices and decisions. The experience of sitting in classrooms and common rooms with Kashiwagi was in some respects similar to being in an Australian university, and in other respects vastly different. This binary assisted Atherton in working out how to approach the simplicity and detail in Kashiwagi's poetry as she searched for the middle ground between literal translation and re-creation.

Finally, Atherton's struggle with the visual component of the poetry was resolved through her experience as a flaneuse in Japan. While Atherton has been to Japan many times as a scholar on the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and was a Visiting Scholar at Sophia University, Tokyo, this experience of co-translation provided a very different insight into Japanese culture and philosophy as she walked the city in the days between translation workshops. Psarras argues the flâneur:

walks both physically and intellectually, the place – the streets – become embodied sensory avenues orchestrated with memory and imagination by him. Flaneur seems to be the genius loci himself as he celebrates place and its details to such an extent [sic] that he is the place – he becomes the street and the asphalt – he contains the very core of moment in the midst of the urban winds. He is the ambulant guardian spirit of place through a constant dialogue between senses, memory and intellectualism. (Psarras 2015, n.p.)

As a flaneuse Atherton was claiming a space for herself in the city and simultaneously a space for her re-creation of the poetry. As Lauren Elkin argues, 'the flaneuse walks the streets defiantly ... Rather than wandering aimlessly, like her male counterpart, the female flâneur has an element of transgression: she goes where she's not supposed to' (2016, n.p.). The movement of the flaneuse became a metaphor for movement in Kashiwagi's poetry. Atherton's final draft of stanza three used a visual element on the page to explore this motion:

I was born!

Embracing the tree,

Transparent wings

Sprout from my back

And take

me

to the sky (Kashiwagi, forthcoming.)

In her arrangement of 'take me to the sky', the word 'me' sits in the centre representing the twinned 'me' of poet and co-translators.

Call and response

The project confirmed for us that translation has the power to build significant cross-cultural understandings because in facilitating a broader readership for Japanese poetry, translators are not only exploring language, but are also exploring and promoting ways of understanding Japanese culture, values, identity and philosophies. Translating Japanese poetry in a way that simultaneously values accuracy and creativity is as much about sharing ideas as it is about lineation, cadence or word choice. Such translations aim to incorporate respect and understanding for one another's cultural assumptions and poetic ideas, sharing them across languages and national boundaries. This can be achieved through an understanding of *genius loci* – and of *flaneurism*, too – where a sense of a place and perambulation provide pathways towards understanding.

The experience of co-translation in Japan demonstrates that:

translation of poetry is conceivable. A translation dwells in imperfection, using equivalents and shunning mechanical replicas – which is the dream of literalists who believe in truth. It gives us the other. Or under another name it gives us itself. (Barnstone 1993, p. 266)

When engaged in this complex project – and we have only touched on its various intricacies in this paper – we considered a range of Japanese poems in terms of their meanings, shapes, histories, ideas, contemporary relevance and even the disposition of the white space on the page, along with pauses and particular inflections. We examined the emphasis in many of them on a more formal, and even elevated cadence and rhythm than we were used to employing in our own poetry. In this way, our translation of Japanese poetry into English involved something of a call-and-response process. And perhaps most importantly, it was a complex set of conversations that included many different people – what one might, in retrospect, think of as a chorus of translators. This involved what we would name as an attentive cosmopolitanism, as all participants embraced the idea of multiple enmeshed perspectives and shared, sometimes shimmering, understandings of different places, languages and cultures.

Bibliography

Alexander, M 1981, *The Poetic Achievement of Ezra Pound*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA.

Alfer, Alexa 2015 'Transcending Boundaries', *The Linguist* vol. 54, no. 5, pp. 26-27.

Apter, E 2004, 'Preface', in B Cassin (ed), *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, pp. vii- xvii.

Barnstone, W 1993, *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London.

Davis, C 2007, *Working Words: Creative Reading, Writing, and Teaching*, iUniverse, Inc, New York, Lincoln, Shanghai.

- Elkin, L 2016, 'A tribute to female flâneurs: the women who reclaimed our city streets', *The Guardian*, 29 July, retrieved 27 April 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/jul/29/female-flaneur-women-reclaim-streets#maincontent>>.
- Farquhar, S & Fitzsimons, P 2012, 'Lost in Translation: The Power of Language', in DR Cole & LJ Graham (eds), *The Power In/Of Language*, Wiley Blackwell, West Sussex, UK, pp. 101-111.
- Frost, R 1961, *Conversations on the Craft of Poetry*, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, New York, p. 7.
- Griffiths, Jessica and Harry Williams 2018 'History Studies and Collaborative Translation: The Role of Disciplinary Expertise', *mtm: A Translation Journal*. Special issue: Collaborative Translation. Vol. 10, 2018, pp. 43-63.
- Hanne, M 2006, 'Metaphors for the Translator', in S Bassnett & P Bush (eds), *The Translator as Writer*, Continuum, London and New York, pp. 208-224.
- Hetherington, Paul, Andrew Houwen, Shane Strange and Yosuke Tanaka 2019 'Five Translated Yosuke Tanaka Poems', retrieved 26 April 2020, <<http://cordite.org.au/translations/hetherington-houwen-strange-tanaka/>>.
- Hofstadter, D 2018, 'The Shallowness of Google Translate', *The Atlantic*, 30 January, retrieved 29 April 2020, <<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/01/the-shallowness-of-google-translate/551570/>>.
- House, J 2018, *Translation: The Basics*, Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon; New York.
- Houwen, Andrew 2018a, Unpublished Manuscript of Literal Translations of Three Poems by Yosuke Tanaka, 20 July 2018.
- Houwen, Andrew 2018b, Unpublished Notes on Paul Hetherington's Translations of Yosuke Tanaka's Poems, 26 July 2018.
- Huss, Joanna Trzeciak 2018 'Collaborative Translation', in Kelly Washbourne and Ben Van Wyke (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translation*, Routledge, London and New York, pp. 389-405.
- Jakobson, R 2000, 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation', in L Venuti (ed), *The Translation Studies Reader*, Routledge, London, pp. 126-132.
- Kashiwagi, M 2020, 'Bird, Flower and Cicada Song', trans. C Atherton & R Kikuchi, *Dusie Journal*, Susana Gardner (ed), forthcoming.
- Kelly, N & J Zetzsche, J 2012, *Found In Translation: How Language Shapes Our Lives and Transforms the World*, Penguin, London.

Kikuchi, Rina 2017, Unpublished Nakamura Sachiko Translation Notes for Cassandra Atherton, 18 May, 2017.

Kikuchi, Rina 2018, Manuscript of Mari Kashiwagi's Three Poems in Japanese and Unpublished Word-to-Word Notes for Translation Workshop, 13 July, 2018.

Lu, W and Fang, H 2012, 'Reconsidering Peter Newmark's Theory on Literal Translation', *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 741-746 retrieved 29 April 2020, <<http://www.academypublication.com/issues/past/tpls/vol02/04/13.pdf>>.

Musha, M 2013, 'Interview with Judy Halebsky on Japanese Poetry and Translation by Masashi Musha', *Poetry East West*, May 25, retrieved 29 April 2020, <<https://poetryeastwest.com/2013/05/25/interview-with-judy-halebsky-on-japanese-poetry-and-translation/>>.

O'Brien, Sharon 2011 'Collaborative Translation', in Yves Gambier and Luc van Doorslaer (eds), *Handbook of Translation Studies*, vol. 2, John Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp. 17-20.

Psarras, B 2015, 'Urban Metaphysics: Flaneur and Genius Loci', *Hybrid Flaneur*, 16 June, retrieved 29 April 2020, <<https://hybridflaneur.wordpress.com/2015/06/16/urban-metaphysics-flaneur-and-genius-loci/>>.

Record, AK & Abdulla, AK 2016, 'On the Difficulties of Translating Haiku into English', *Translation and Literature*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 171-188.

Rich, M 2003, 'What Else Was Lost in Translation', *The New York Times*, 21 September, retrieved 29 April 2020, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/21/style/what-else-was-lost-in-translation.html>>.

Sachiko, N 2018, 'And the Bright Morning Comes', trans. C Atherton & R Kikuchi, *Meanjin*, vol. 77, no. 2, pp. 10-12.

Samyn, P 2012, 'Dreams, Genius Loci and Structures', *International Journal of Space Structures*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 23-42.

Staid, MS 2018, 'Fifteen Years Later, Still Lost in Translation', *Jezebel*, 12 November, retrieved 29 April 2020, <<https://themuse.jezebel.com/fifteen-years-later-still-lost-in-translation-1830308411>>.

Tisgam, KH 2014, 'Translating Poetry: Possibility or Impossibility?', *Journal of College of Education For Women*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 511-524.

Weissbort, D 1989, 'Preface', in D Weissbort (ed), *Translating Poetry: The Double Labyrinth*, The Macmillan Press, Ltd., Hampshire, UK, pp. ix-xiv.

Wright, H 2013, 'The Art of Translation', *Kyoto Journal*, 5 November, retrieved 29 April 2020, <<https://kyotojournal.org/in-translation/the-art-of-translation/>>.

Vecco, M 2020, 'Genius Loci as a meta-concept', *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, vol. 41, pp. 225-31.

Yotsumoto, Y 2008, 'Mari Kashiwagi', *Poetry International Archives*, 1 October, retrieved 29 April 2020,

<<https://www.poetryinternational.org/pi/poet/12583/Mari-Kashiwagi/en/tile>>.

Yotsumoto, Y 2010, 'Yosuke Tanaka', *Poetry International Archives*, 1 January, retrieved 29 April 2010,

<<https://www.poetryinternational.org/pi/poet/15801/Yosuke-Tanaka/en/tile>>.

Yip, W 1969, *Ezra Pound's 'Cathay'*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Cassandra Atherton is an award-winning scholar and prose poet. She was a Visiting Scholar at Harvard in 2016 and a Visiting Fellow at Sophia University, Tokyo in 2014. Her most recent books of prose poetry are *Pre-Raphaelite* (2018) and *Leftovers* (2020). She co-edited *The Unfinished Bomb: Shadows and Reflections* and received an Australia Council Grant to write book of prose poetry on the Hiroshima Maidens. She is co-author of *Prose Poetry: An Introduction* (Princeton UP, 2020).

Paul Hetherington is Professor of Writing in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra, head of the International Poetry Studies Institute (IPSI) and one of the founding editors of the international online journal *Axon: Creative Explorations*. He founded the International Prose Poetry Group in 2014 and is an award-winning poet. With Ken Gardiner he has published translations from the Chinese poetry of Li Bai, Wang Wei, Tu Fu, Meng Hao-jan and Lu Lun.

Rina Kikuchi is a professor of literature at Shiga University, Japan, and an adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Canberra. She is currently working on a research project on Japanese women's poetry of the Asia Pacific War. Her bilingual books of poetry translations are *Poet to Poet: Contemporary Women Poets from Japan* (2017, co-edited with Jen Crawford) and *Pleasant Troubles* (2018, co-edited with Harumi Kawaguchi).