

The Three English Translations of Soseki's *Meian*

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When a new translation comes out for a book that has already a celebrated, or known, translation, there is the usual series of questions that gets tossed around: Why now? Were there major flaws in the first translation? How is the new translation better? Who would be making such an attempt anyway? This was the case when Haruki Murakami published his translation of Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* in 2003, when Ikuo Kameyama produced his version of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* in 2007.⁽¹⁾ Both times the backgrounds of the translators were in the press, comparisons with existing translations made on varying degrees. In both cases the new translations sold notably well,⁽²⁾ suggesting that despite the highly acclaimed prior translations, there had been a latent demand for more contemporary renderings. Attributing the merit of the incredible sales to simply the quality of the translations is to turn a blind eye to the multi-faceted process of selling almost anything; but the bottom line seems to be that both translators tackled, with success, what has been discussed by those such as Murakami and the prominent translator Motoyuki Shibata as the expiration date of translations. Times change, denotations and connotations are added and lost. Some words unnecessarily make the work feel outdated, while some words become a part of our lives in such ways that they no longer need to be in italics.

Interestingly enough, in this era of various e-gadgets asking the owners to simply and gracefully accept continual upgrades, inquiring after the story behind translation updates has become, if not automatic, a practiced pursuit. But when a work by a national literary hero, a work that has been given negative reviews by prominent critics both in and out of Japan, suddenly finds itself being the object of two English translations one after another when it has been left alone for forty years after it was first translated, one cannot help asking questions. Why now? Was there something wrong with the first translation? How are the new ones improved? This paper does not aim to praise or condemn one version over the other; rather, in an attempt to compare the translations of Natsume Soseki's *Meian* in their bids for readability, looks for specific differences in paratextual aid, in the use of idioms if in limited passages, in the presentation of interior monologue, and finally, in the interpretation of which of the two characters is on the receiving end of a gaze.

Soon it will have been a century since Soseki's death, and Soseki scholars and followers are no doubt paying attention to that fact. Perhaps it is in line with renewed vigor for commemorative forums and even tours to Soseki-related destinations that his last novel is gaining more attention. The novel, put on an eternal hiatus at the end of installment number 188 due to his death, was first published in the *Asahi Shimbun* from May—December 1916. According to Minae Mizumura who won the Minister of Education Award for New Artists for her sequel *Zoku meian* (1990), *Meian* is a work based on “two stories of betrayal”: one concerning the hero Tsuda, who is haunted with the question of why Kiyoko, the woman he loved, has left him to marry another man; the second concerning his wife O-Nobu who senses something wrong but “[w] hen the story stops ...does not know yet that she has been betrayed” (9–10). There have

been multiple attempts to finish the story by other writers as well, whether in the form of plot suggestions or published works, in Japanese.⁽³⁾ Critical analyses on *Meian* outside of Japan, such as those by Masao Miyoshi (1974), Kathryn Sparling (1982), Frederic Jameson (1991), Rieko Abe Auestad (1998)⁽⁴⁾ seem to have come later in the realm of abundant academic writings in English on Soseki. This may simply be due to the existence of more popular works by Soseki, of *Meian* being long, unfinished and therefore somehow less worthy, not to mention its low esteem by literary giants like Tanizaki or Donald Keene.

Lately, two new translations of *Meian* have become available. Its first English translation entitled *Light and Darkness* came out in 1971, and for four decades that version by V. H. Viglielmo was its sole English translation published. In 2011, Viglielmo revisited both his old translation as well as his critical article on the text at the end of the book, his reason being: “The changes in the world between the mid-twentieth century and the early twenty-first are almost incalculably great, so that it should hardly be surprising that I too have changed in my views both of Soseki and of his unfinished last novel” (345). Coincidentally, another English version of *Meian* was published by John Nathan in 2014 with the title *Light and Dark: A Novel*. Why he embarked on this project was a question directly posed to him by Minae Mizumura at a talk she and Nathan jointly gave in Tokyo in 2012.⁽⁵⁾ Nathan answered by saying that in spite of his years of reading Soseki’s works, he had not come across *Meian* till late in his career; and when he did, despite its length he was quite taken by it. Finding elements comparable to works by Henry James he saw just how closely Soseki was observing human beings, and upon learning of an English translation he prayed it would be a good one, that he was not looking for more hard work for himself.

One of the most conspicuous differences in the editions by Viglielmo and Nathan have to do with the visual effects: the book cover and the illustrations (or lack of).

	Viglielmo (1971)	Vigilemo (2011)	Nathan (2014)
Cover design	-Black background with a purple, branch-like image overlapped with a crescent	-Monotone: black for the bottom third, a gradation of gray for the rest -No illustrations	-Orange, green, and white background with "a pattern based on a rubbing of an ancient Chinese inscription on stone" which was "designed by Natsume Soseki for the cover of his novel <i>Kokoro</i> (1914)"
	-Title (<i>Light and Darkness</i>) in white at the bottom (less conspicuous than the author's name) -Author's name in a brush stroke-like font running vertically -No mention of the translator	-Title (<i>Light and Darkness: Natsume Soseki's Meian</i>) printed half-way down in black -Author included in the book title -Translator information (A new translation by V. H. Viglielmo)	-Title (<i>Light and Dark: A Novel</i>) in green and white (green is reserved for <i>Light and Dark</i>) -Black, book cover-like image in the center containing the title, author (orange), translator information (white) (Translated, with an Introduction, by John Nathan)
Illustrations in the text	-None	-None (but each installment heading given both in Chinese characters and Arabic numbers)	-Reprints of Natori Shusen's illustrations that accompanied each installment in 1916

The difference in visual appeal is notable. The newest translation uses images that, according to the back flap of the book, Soseki himself is said to have designed which then Milenda Nan Ok Lee, a book cover designer, chose to use for Nathan's translation. Nathans's also has the advantage of the 188 black-and-white illustrations at the start of each section that intrigue the reader by offering glimpses of what happens, who appears wearing what, where the scene takes place, or symbolic bric-a-brac for that installment. Viglielmo's second translation is self-published, which may account for its simple, less decorative presentation. But apart from such contrasts, the difference in the information on the cover is indelible.

The name of the translator makes an appearance in both Viglielmo's second and Nathan's versions, perhaps reflecting a slight improvement in the status of the translator as well as stricter conditions in academia for translations to count as achievements. Moreover, the biggest difference is arguably in the title itself. Viglielmo's *Light and Darkness* is Nathan's *Light and Dark*. Although both "light" and "dark" can be an adjective as well as a noun, "darkness" is a noun only. Viglielmo's title is a combination of situations (nouns) whereas Nathan's can be either nouns or adjectives. If they are adjectives, what might be the ensuing noun that is not given? If they are nouns, do they, in their monosyllabic repetition, somehow enhance its fidelity to the original word *meian*, comprised of two ideograms but is technically, one word? Or does the difference have more to do with asserting that Nathan's is an entirely different edition?

Such speculations aside, a comparison must extend beyond the title. In the translator's note Nathan brings up the issue of "the blandness of many literary translations" (20), a problem he admits to having had to tackle himself in translating *Meian*. Referring to a passage that had "bafled" (20) him, Nathan first introduces his own literal translation, then Viglielmo's "somewhat overarticulated version" (both 1971 and 2011 versions are identical for this passage), and finally the one he chose for his final draft "in the light of conjecture offered by the native readers [he] consulted" (21). The Japanese passage below is the original from Soseki's text, followed by the three translations:

然し彼の批判はそれぎり先へ進めなかった。他に対して面目を失う事、
万一そんな不始末をしでかしたら大変だ。これが彼の倫理観の根底に
横わっているだけであった。それを切り詰めると、遂に外観が悪いと
いう意味に帰着するより外に仕方がなかった。だから悪い奴はただ小

林になった。(Soseki 571)

But his critique could not proceed beyond that point. Dishonoring himself vis-à-vis another person, if ever he should perpetrate such a thing how terrible that would be! This alone lay at the base of his ethical view. On closer inspection one had no choice but to reduce this to scandal. Accordingly, the bad guy was Kobayashi alone. (Nathan 20 [literal translation])

And yet his assessment of such a hypothetical scene could not go beyond that point. If ever he should lose face in front of others, it would be dreadful. This was all there was at the root of all his ethical views. If one tried to express this more simply, one could reduce it to the simple fact that he feared scandal. Therefore the only person in the wrong would be Kobayashi. (Viglielmo [1971] 359, [2011] 329)

But he was unable to develop his critique beyond this. To disgrace himself in the eyes of others was more than he could contemplate. Saving face was the fundament of his ethics. His only thought was that appearances must be preserved, scandal above all avoided. By that token, the villain of the piece was Kobayashi. (Nathan 402 [final version])

No translation can hardly be expected to, as Frederick Jameson pointed out, “yield that sense of the passage of time any Japanese reader might feel on confronting a text written in 1916” (123). Contemporary readers following Soseki’s Japanese (as well as any one of the English transla-

tions) may find themselves in a world “imbued with a sense of the foreign” (Schleiermacher 39). To take an example from the passage above, *それぎり sore-giri* is the word Soseki uses, which in today’s usage would be *それきり sore-kiri* or even the more colloquial *それっきり sore-kkiri*, both meaning ‘without anything further’ or ‘nothing since.’ If minor, such phonetic differences are to a contemporary native ear another one of the continuous reminders that Soseki was writing, all too obviously, in a different era. Moreover, the ideogram 他 *hoka* meaning other/others is juxtaposed with a prompt that instructs us to read it as *hito*, phonetically highlighting and narrowing the term down to mean specifically, people.

Aside from such mechanisms that embrace the foreign-ness of the text, “the resistance of the original language” (Jameson 123) becomes more prominent in the multiple ways the passage above has been translated. First, on a more obvious level, Nathan’s literal translation (so referred to by himself) resorts to using an exclamation point where there is none in the original. Other notable phrasal differences from the passage above are as follows:

Soseki’s Japanese	Nathan’s literal translation	Viglielmo’s	Nathan’s final version
<i>sore wo kiritsumeru to</i>	on closer inspection	to express this more simply	his only thought was
<i>Dakara</i>	Accordingly,	Therefore	By that token,
<i>warui yatsu</i>	the bad guy	the only person in the wrong	the villain of the piece

The phrase *それを切り詰める*と *sore wo kiritsumeru to* uses a combination of ideograms that mean ‘to cut back on/ shorten/ do with less,’ and the three translations, facing similar difficulties, come to terms with the original in different ways. What is similar is that Nathan’s first translation does not specify “on closer specification” of *what*, and Viglielmo’s

does not have a direct referent that can stand in for *this* in “to express this more simply.” But Nathan’s final version combines *sore wo kiritsumeru to* with 外に仕方がなかった *hoka ni shikata ga nakatta* (‘had no choice but to’) and laconically settles for “His only thought was.” As for the common transition *dakara* which generally implies that what follows has a causal relationship with what was mentioned before, Nathan’s literal and Viglielmo’s translations are in simple, dictionary-faithful wordings, while Nathan’s final version uses a derivation of an idiom ‘by the same token.’ Nevertheless, despite the different word choices, all three versions use causal transitions. The phrase 悪い奴 *warui yatsu* includes an ideogram that traditionally connotes a male. The kanji 奴 read as *yakko* was a perjorative for male servants working for families of the *samurai* class, and the derogatory sense of *yatsu/yakko* remains to this day. Its slang-like tone is more apparent in Nathan’s versions (“the bad guy,” “the villain of the piece”) while Viglielmo’s is gender-neutral and adopts a more standard, less idiomatic tone (“the only person in the wrong”).

This is of course not to say that Viglielmo spurns idioms all together. Let us look at an instance where both translators resort to idioms to render an idiom in the original text. In installment no. 121 Soseki uses the phrase 引導を渡す *indo wo watasu* (365) in a scene where Tsuda has a minor, if significant, outburst. He is no longer able to maintain his composure in front of his antagonizing friend Kobayashi, who is insisting on staying with him at the hospital where he is recovering post-surgery until Mrs. Yoshiakwa, the Madame Merle-like figure, arrives. Such a meeting would jeopardize everything that Tsuda has been striving to maintain, including his wife’s ignorance of his attachment for Kiyoko, the other woman. Thus Tsuda has no choice but to be blunt and tell

Kobayashi that he must go.

Tsuda wa saigo no indo wo watasu yori hoka ni michi ga nakunatta.
(Soseki 365)

There was nothing left for Tsuda to do but to give him the coup de grâce. (Viglielmo [1971] 228, [2011] 209)

Tsuda's had no choice but to hand Kobayashi his walking papers [sic] (Nathan 268)

Both translators replaced an idiom with an idiom though Viglielmo's is distinctly non-American while Nathan's is one that a dictionary describes as "mainly US and Canadian" (*Collins English*). What these mere handful of samples try to show is that in comparison, Nathan's translation is more prone to use certain expressions (e.g. by that token, the villain of the piece, walking papers) that "cannot be understood from the meanings of its separate words but that has a separate meaning of its own" (*Merriam Webster*). In short, idioms.

Viglielmo's renditions are in ways more literal, by which I mean not necessarily direct but less reliant on (American) colloquialisms. If in the form of an online customer review of *Light and Darkness*, Soseki scholar William Ridgeway writes with a "full disclaimer" as the editor of Viglielmo's new translation that:

typos and other errata have been corrected, lacunae filled in, some obscure passages clarified. But it remains a literal translation. It is the sort of literal and "literariness" of Soseki captured by VHV that

sometimes shows the “strangeness” of the text, which, for example, is exactly what the newly acclaimed translators of Dostoevsky—Pevear and Volokhonsky—were lauded for: succeeding in reproducing idiosyncrasies of content and style.

In contrast to such an editorial policy with an emphasis on literal translation while retaining the strangeness of the original, Nathan’s, perhaps owing partly to it being the second translation out, strives for an improved readability as an English text. While asserting his firm belief as a translator that one should “rende [r] in English as resistant to easy comprehension of the original,” his ongoing dilemma of whether to “tam [e] it for the benefit of the English reader” is repeated in his pre-textual “A Note on the Translation”: “it would require the courage to fly in the face of the reader’s expectation that translations should proceed ‘smoothly’” (20).

From other parts of the texts I have found that Viglielmo, in his new translation, has dropped the British spellings (e.g. colour, labour, parlour) as well as certain hyphens (e.g. sliding-door, living-room, though not consistently perhaps), changed single quotation marks to double, refrained from italicizing Japanese terms such as *hakama* and *tatami* (while retaining italics for e.g. *go* clubs, *oden* shop, *gidayu*, *nagauta*), and left out all of the asterisks and footnotes in the 2011 version.

What to footnote and italicize are given a complete overhaul by Nathan. For example, Nathan italicizes *tansu* which Viglielmo simply translates as bureau. Nathan goes on to include footnotes for many other words that he opts to italicize: e.g. *hakama*, *fusuma*, *engawa*, *furoshiki*, *o-den* shop, *miai*. Footnotes are also added: *shosei beya*, which Viglielmo translates without footnotes as a “houseboy’s room,” is explained in the

margins by Nathan as a room “usually adjacent to the kitchen” and “made available to a university student for houseboy duties” (41); 圧 *oshi*, which Viglielmo contextualized as a wifely concern about her husband’s clothes not having been “pressed very well yet” ([1971] 29, [2011] 26) is explained paratextually by Nathan as a custom of “placing [clothes] beneath the mattress and sleeping on it for a night or two” (56).⁽⁶⁾ On the other hand, terms italicized by Viglielmo are concisely explained within the text by Nathan (e.g. “*gidayu*” becomes “puppet theater recitation”; “*nagauta*,” “traditional songs”; “*haori*,” “kimono jacket”).

The translations do slightly differ in their presentation of interior monologue. Instead of resorting to quotation marks (double or single) as Viglielmo did, Nathan uses italics to embed in the narrative the characters’ thoughts, including imaginary enunciations by other characters.

「己の云った通りじゃないかね。なければ仕合せだ。然し万一何かあるなら、又今ないにした所で、これから先ひょっと出て来たなら遠慮なく打ち明けなけりゃ不可いよ」お延は叔父の眼の中に、こうした慈愛の言葉さえ読んだ。(Soseki 180)

‘Isn’t it as I say? If not, I’m glad. But if there should be something, or even if there isn’t now, if there should be in the future, you mustn’t hesitate to tell me.’

She could even read those kind words in her uncle’s eyes.
(Viglielmo [1971] 111)

“Isn’t it as I say? If not, I’m glad. But if there should be something, or even if there isn’t now, if there should be in the future, you mustn’t hesitate to tell me.”

She could even read those kind words in her uncle's eyes.
(Viglielmo [2011] 102)

I have a feeling I was right about what I said. I hope not, but if something does come up, not now but later on, I want you to come straight to me and tell me all about it.

In her Uncle's eyes, O-Nobu read these compassionate words.
(Nathan 145)

The "I" in all versions refers to Okamoto, the man who took O-Nobu under his wings and raised her as if she were his eldest daughter. His words, in the passage above, are what O-Nobu reads in his eyes; he does not say them. O-Nobu is simply, egoistically to a degree perhaps but not omnipotently, echoing his thoughts. And yet the quotation marks have the typical effect of inviting the reader to accept, if momentarily, his words that O-Nobu imagines as having been spoken by him. Soseki uses 「 」 or the equivalent of opening and closing quotation marks for this effect. Viglielmo's deferral of the true "speaker" (thinker) follows Soseki's text in the same manner. Italicising internal monologue is what Nathan effectively and consistently does in his translation, though in this particular instance the slant gives away that the words are not said out loud by O-Nobu before the text ascertains it.

At the incipit of the next installment Viglielmo's O-Nobu is again depicted as effortlessly reading Okamoto's glance, a gesture not found in the other versions.

「お前は どう思う？」

特に「お前」という言葉に力を入れた叔父は、お延の腹でも読むよう

な眼遣いをして彼女を凝っと見た。(Soseki 181)

“Well, what do *you* think about it?”

He put special emphasis on the word ‘you,’ and then, with a glance that O-Nobu could easily read, he looked at her fixedly. (Viglielmo [1971] 111-112, [2011] 102)

“What did you think?”

Placing a particular emphasis on “you,” her uncle looked observantly into her face. (Nathan 145)

Literally translated, Soseki has Okamoto “looking intently at O-Nobu as if he were reading her stomach [thoughts].” Nathan, like Soseki, has the uncle reading her thoughts. At this point in the story, Okamoto is the interrogator who tries to “validat [e] her guess” (Nathan 146) as he tries to learn about what she has surmised on the nature of the get-together (a meeting for an arranged marriage for Okamoto’s daughter Tsugiko) the day before. Viglielmo, while translating that very same situation, portrays O-Nobu as the one doing the “reading”: it is yet again she who finds Uncle’s glance easy to read. The effect of this repetition is that it contributes to presenting O-Nobu’s closeness to Okamoto and underlies her feelings of entitlement to “pok [ing] fun at this light-hearted man” (103). Such a portrayal of O-Nobu does not deform the plot (though it may give an article of this sort another example to use to compare the differences in the texts) while bordering on mistranslation. In the limited context of having to answer a question from Okamoto, who is after all a minor character compared to the others O-Nobu must respond to (e.g. Kobayashi, Mrs./Madam Yoshikawa, Tsuda), the frank-

ness, the integrity of her relationship with Okamoto is not altered by her finding his glance yet again easy to read. On the other hand, while Viglielmo presents this passage as O-Nobu being comfortable or confident in her communication with Okamoto, Soseki, and by that Nathan in this particular case, place her on the receiving end of a gaze asking her to speak up about what she knows. This difference not only highlights the decisions each translator must continuously make, but generates the same, critical questions in this text: how accurate are O-Nobu's readings of those close to her? Does she know when the tables are turned?

By looking at specific aspects of the multiple English translations of Soseki's *Meian*, this paper looked at how aspects such as the book cover, illustrations, footnotes, italicizing of foreign words showcase the two translators' differences in embracing the foreignness of the text; how one version seems to have more of an inclination for idioms; how italicizing a certain interior monologue may give away slightly more information than the original; and how the difference in the interpretation of O-Nobu as the one "reading" or "being read" highlights her imperiled happiness all the same. If pressed to take a stance on which version displays more fidelity to the original, it is Viglielmo's for the particular instance of the interior monologue discussed, and Nathan's for the specific "reading" O-Nobu/Okamoto is depicted as doing. These comparisons are obviously based on limited samples from Soseki's longest novel and can offer only glimpses of each translation.

Notes

- (1) At a symposium entitled "Viva Karamazov!" held at the University of Tokyo on 22 July 2007, Yoshimitsu Numano praised Kameyama's translation as having surpassed prior translations by coming up with one that

offered a “surprisingly natural” reading and that as a translator, he had, in a sense, committed patricide. Cf. “Dosutoefusuki shinyaku Karamazofu no kyodai ga ninki” [New Translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* Well-received]. *Asahi Shimbun Digital*. Asahi Shimbun, 1 Sept. 2007. Web. 4 Aug. 2014.

- (2) Murakami’s translation of *The Catcher in the Rye* sold 350,000 copies by 2007. As of January 2013, in less than six years since its publication, the five-volume edition of Kameyama’s translation is in its 17th printing. See Miki Sato’s “Shinyaku wo meguru honyaku hiyou hikaku” [A comparison of critical writings on new translations] in *Media and Communication Studies* 57 (2009): 1–20, HUSCAP, 06 Sept. 2014. Sato outlines the conflicting theories on what is typically expected of new translations of classic works in contemporary Japan.
- (3) Cf. John Nathan’s “Introduction” in *Light and Dark: A Novel*. Nathan outlines suggested endings by Kusatao Nakamura and Kenzaburo Oe, as well as give information on the “four published attempts” by Mitsuki Kumegawa, Fumiko Tanaka, Ai Nagai, Minae Mizumura. He claims that “only Mizumura Minae has conveyed the pessimism that is Soseki’s primary color.”
- (4) Jameson himself mentions Miyoshi and Sparling’s papers as some of his critical resources. It was in 1998 that Auestad wrote that “none of these [i.e. *Kojin*, *Meian*, and *Botchan*] has been studied at great length outside Japan.”
- (5) *Contending with Meian: A Public Conversation between John Nathan and Minae Mizumura*. Iwasaki Koyata Memorial Hall, International House of Japan, Tokyo. 21 Sept 2012. Forum.
- (6) Nowadays there does seem to be a general trend for translating Japanese works without the use of notes; Minae Mizumura’s *A Real Novel* (2002), translated by Juliet Winter Carpenter in 2013, or many of the English translations of Haruki Murakami’s works, as well as numerous others by contemporary writers found in *Monkey Business: New Writing from Japan*, to name a few, seem to do without the footnotes. Obviously informative interruptions run the risk of highlighting the presence of the

translator or the fact that the text is a translation. Still, for example in a translation as recent as 2009 of Soseki's *Sanshiro* (1908), we can find Jay Rubin making use of annotations. Understandably a work written over a century ago requires more explaining for the modern reader.

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