Is Translation Really Possible?

Or, Shall I Compare Thee to *Natsu no Hi*?

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Is translation really possible? There is something absurd about the question. According to Ian Hacking in "Language, Truth, and Reason," W.V.O. Quine's theory of indeterminacy of translation "is empirically empty, because we know that unequivocal translation evolves between any two communities in contact."[1] It is undeniably true that the many language groups of the world are able to communicate with one another. But does this amount to a truly unequivocal translation from one language to the other? Should this really count as settling question?

Let us take the following translation of William Shakespeare's sonnet #18 into Japanese as an example:

> Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
> Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
> Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
> And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
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> 君を夏の日にたとえようか。
> いや、君の方がずっと美しく、おだやかだ。
> 荒々しい風は五月のいじらしい蕾をいじめるし、
> なりよりも夏はあまりにあっけなく去っていく。
>
> *Kimi wo natsu no hi ni tatoeyō ka?*
> *Iya, kimi no hō ga zutto utsukusiku, odayaka da.*
> *Araarashii kaze wa satsuki no ijirashii tsubomi wo ijimeru shi*
> *Nari yori mo natsu wa amari ni akkenaku satte iku.*

— Tr. Hiroyuki TODOKORO

So certainly a translation of Shakespeare into Japanese exists. But can the Japanese really read Shakespeare this way? We must feel hesitant to say yes. Indeed, this isn't the only translation of this sonnet into Japanese. There have been a number of other published translations, including:

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1. "Language, Truth, and Reason," p. 60.

君を夏の日にたとえても
君はもっと美しいもっとおだやかだ
手荒い風は五月の蕾をふるわし
また夏の季節はあまりにも短い命。

Kimi wo natsu no hi ni tatoetemo
Kimi wa motto utsukushii motto odayaka da.
Te-arai kaze wa satsuki no tsubomi wo furuwashi
Mata natsu no kisetsu wa amari nimo mijikai inochi

— Tr. Junzaburō NISHIWAKI

The careful reader will see several similarities between the two translations—beginning with *kimi wo natsu no hi ni tatoe*, using of a form of *utsukushii* for "lovely," using *odayaka* for "temperate," using *tsubomi* for "buds," etc.—but also many differences of word choice and even grammatical form. Back translating the two into English, we get,

Shall [I] compare you to a summer day?
No, your side [of the comparison] is far more beautiful and gentle.
After all violent winds will torment the touching blossoms of May,
And what's more, summer goes away very much too soon.

— Todokoro

Were [I] to compare you to a summer day,
You are more beautiful, more gentle.
Rough winds shake May blossoms, and
Also summer's season has very much too short a life.

— Nishiwaki

But how can there be two Japanese Shakespeares? If there is more than one, it seems it cannot be a perfect translation. Hence either there is no one unequivocal translation of Shakespeare into Japanese or if there is, it's not clear how one can tell which supposed translation is the real one. Of the two translations offered here, my personal feeling is that Nishiwaki's sounds better in Japanese, but sounding better in Japanese is hardly a criterion of having translated an original unequivocally, which is the issue at stake. Looking at the roundtrip translations, neither does the job of returning the original to us as it was. Does this mean that Quine has won the point over Hacking? Are these just

poor translations? Or is there some third alternative? Let us return to Quine's original assertions. He writes that we have,

> little reason to expect that two radical translators, working independently on [the hypothetical language called] jungle, would come out with manuals acceptable to both. Their manuals might be indistinguishable in terms of any native behavior that they gave reason to expect, and yet each manual might prescribe some translations that the other translator would reject. Such is the thesis of radical translation.[2]

This situation does not match Quine's description. We certainly have two different translations, but the fact of the translations being different does not give us any reason to doubt that there would be any difference between the two translators about acceptable *translation manuals*. For all we know, both Todokoro and Nishiwaki were using the same English-Japanese dictionary to help them write their translation. I used the same Japanese-English dictionary to help me write the back translations, but that didn't prevent my revising the back translations several times to try to achieve greater literality without making the translations incomprehensible. The plain fact is that Todokoro and Nishiwaki took different parts of the original to be of interest. Todokoro doesn't try to capture the "lease" of summer, whereas Nishiwaki feels he can be faithful to the nuance of both "lease" and "date" by referring to summer's "season." Todokoro does try to capture "darling"-ness of May's buds, but Nishiwaki feels a simpler translation would make the line sound better. None of this is evidence of different manuals of translation. Surely, both would agree that *araarashii kaze* and *tearai kaze* are both basically acceptable as translations of "rough winds." The two phrases even share a common root, *ara*. It was not the difference of translation manuals that lead to the difference, but the different sounds and poetic resonances of the words in the minds of the authors.

The more one considers it, the more problematic the idea of a translation manual becomes. Constructing a translation dictionary is surely a dispensable step in the actual practice of communication and translation. When the Jesuits came to Japan in 1549,

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2. "Indeterminacy of Translation Again," p. 66.

they managed to save souls for half a century before finally publishing a translation dictionary. Nor is a translation dictionary a "manual" per se. A translation dictionary does not break down the process of translating into a series of discrete, mechanical steps the way an auto-repair manual does. The closest one sees to a manual in that sense are the tourist phrasebooks, which breaks down the trip into a series of discrete interactions like hotel check-in ("I'd like to check in." チェックインをお願いします。) and requesting a larger room ("Could you give me a larger room?" もっと大きい部屋に替えてください).[3] Quine himself states that "my thesis of indeterminacy of translation applies first and foremost to sentences, holophrastically conceived".[4] This suggests that the translators of jungle or Japanese ought to be compiling something like a phrasebook. In the phrasebook compiled by Todokoro "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" gets one translation, and in Nishiwaki's it gets another. Yet the task of compiling such a phrasebook must be endless. Even if it were not, knowledge of the contents of such phrasebooks would not be knowledge of a foreign language. While a finitely sized translation dictionary might in theory be able to capture all the words of a language,[5] no finitely sized phrasebook would ever impart knowledge of a language. To actually know a foreign language involves something different from either memorizing a translation dictionary (a mapping of word pairs) or a travel dictionary (a mapping of sentence pairs). Among other things, knowing a language involves an ability to use the grammar of the language (although not an ability to explain that grammar). As such, it is not helpful to think of Todokoro and Nishiwaki as engaging in anything like the project of compiling a phrasebook. They are trying to bring Shakespeare to Japanese readers, not to teach Japanese readers phrases of English.

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3. Sample sentences from *Ryokō Kaiwa (Eigo)* included in Sharp's Edictionary.
4. "Indeterminacy of Translation Again," p. 66.
5. This claim requires that we don't count things like "eleven million and six" or "Toyota Tercel" as words. In any event, it must be the case that particular human language users know only a finite number of morphemes.

If we are beginning to be suspicious of the concept of a translation manual for Japanese, perhaps we should go to back and reexamine the context of *radical* translation. The examples we have used so far are from ordinary translations, not radical ones. Quine remarks,

> Radical translation is a near miracle, and it is not going to be done twice to the same language. But surely, when we reflect on the limits of possible data for radical translation, the indeterminacy is not to be doubted.[6]

Thus, we ought to imagine translators who are not engaged in the more advanced task of translating Shakespeare, but the very first beginnings of translation without any shared background whatsoever. In this case, we can doubt that Japanese as we know it ever was radically translated, since even the Jesuits probably had some Chinese, Malay, or Korean in common with their Japanese hosts. Nevertheless, as a thought experiment, let us imagine an intrepid radical translator with no knowledge of Japanese is dropped into Tokyo on a hot summer day. He finds his interlocutor, an otherwise ordinary seventeen year old girl who dropped out of school before compulsory English education began. The stand on the sidewalk. A car drives by. She says, "Atsui wa!" The translator scribbles this on the left hand side of his translation manual. On the right, he puts, "there's a car?" He waits until another car drives by. "Ahsooey wha!" She laughs at him. He frowns and scribbles in his notebook. There is a vending machine behind them. She buys herself a cold soda, holds it to her head momentarily, and says "Atsui wa ne" before drinking it. He scribbles "I'm thirsty?" He buys himself a soda and repeats her motion, "Atsooi wa nay." She laughs at him again. More furious scribbling ensues.

Our intrepid radical translator may have been close to figuring out that *atsui wa* 暑いわ means "it's hot" and not "there's a car" or "I'm thirsty," but in the end he is doomed to failure because the final particle *wa* is something that only female Japanese speakers use.[7] *Atsui wa* is certainly an observation sentence in Japanese. It is used in response to

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[6.] "Indeterminacy of Translation Again," p. 66.

concrete environmental stimuli (heat) with universal native consensus and even a much greater frequency of use than other purported observation sentences like "that's red," which one can't imagine an intelligent English speaker spontaneously uttering. And yet no matter what situation our translator tries to use *atsui wa* in, he is bound to be met with a negative reaction from Japanese natives because of who he is. In fact, there is something ridiculous about the way that the thought experiment of radical translation abstracts away the importance of the social role of the radical translator from the process of translation. Natives don't just say *gavagai* when a rabbit runs by. They go out and catch a rabbit and bring it to the translator and say, "Gavagai! Gavagai!" as they present it to their guest. The translator repeats "Gabaguy!" one time then says, "Rabbit! Rabbit!" The natives nod and say, "erbid, erbid!" The idea that a translator could determine the meanings of sentences merely by observing their use and perhaps repeating them to check for assent is quite fantastical. If that is how translators operated, then Quine is right that "indeterminacy is not to be doubted." In reality, however, translators must be more than observers of a language group. They must also *use* the language in interaction, and using a language gives one a role in the linguistic community. Even as outsiders, they are given a position in society, the position of stranger. But if one already has a position in a society, then the translation is not a radical one (one based solely on empirical data) after all. So whether translation is possible or not, radical translation at least is ruled out. This is not on the grounds of indeterminacy of translation but on the grounds of impossibility of a truly radical interaction with other human beings.

Ian Hacking in "Was There Ever A Radical Mistranslation?" shows that many supposed examples of mistranslations due to the indeterminacy of translation—such as

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[7.] In the mainstream Tokyo dialect. In other dialects, *wa* is used by men, but with a different tone. The female-only *wa* is not to be confused with the unisex topic marker *wa* used in the poems above. Note that this example is in Japanese only because it is the non-English language that I know best. It is my understanding, however, that the speaker specific gendering of Thai is much more thorough than that of Japanese and shows this point even more strongly.

kangaroo supposedly meaning "What did you say?"—turn out on closer inspection to be myths. Where something like radical mistranslation seems to be more possible is in the translation of dead languages. With dead languages, one faces the difficulty of hapax legomena and other factors which restrict "the limits of possible data for radical translation," but with living languages, the possible data are unbounded. Indeed, with dead languages we *do* find that translators publish incompatible manuals. In contrast, while the possibility of radical mistranslation of a living language cannot be ruled out a priori, it at least appears to be incredibly rare.[8]

If this is so, we must examine more closely how translation proceeds. According to Donald Davidson in "Radical Interpretation," specially modified T-sentences are an appropriate way to begin the process of radical translation. Ideally, we will form a number of T-sentence hypotheses connected to particular utterances and support or refute those hypotheses by way of empirical evidence beginning with sentences about which there is wide consensus (observation sentences) and ending with sentences for which there is no consensus or which do not depend systematically on the environment.[9] This is a departure from Quine in that Davidson is not beginning with a translation manual that maps sentences to sentences, but a theory of truth for the language in question that connects, for example, *atsui wa* with "*atsui wa* if and only if it's hot."[10] Hacking in *Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy?* appears to agree with Davidson on this being the basic pattern for translators to follow. He takes from it the conclusion that if Davidson is right, then there ought to be just one right translation from one language into another. He writes,

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[8.] One of the few cases where we do see linguists disputing about the translation of a living languages comes from the Pirahã tribe of Brazil. Linguist Daniel Everett has made a number of controversial claims about the nature of the Pirahã language. What is notable, however, is that these claims continue to be researched and debated on the basis of evidence. If translation were purely indeterminate, we would expect that consensus could never be reached, since there would be no fact of the matter about what system of translation is superior as either system would cohere as well with observed behaviors.

[9.] "Radical Interpretation," p. 136.

[10.] Or does *atsui wa* connect with "*atsui wa* if and only if it's hot and I'm a girl"?

> To get a theory of meaning out of a theory of truth, Davidson must, I contend, require that there be just one systematic system of translation, even if it is loose or ambiguous on small points of nuance. It must however be adequate and unequivocal on topics that touch most of our daily life.[11]

But when we return to the topics that touch most of our daily life, do we find that they are really concerned with something like truth conditions? When we reexamine the tourist phrasebook sentences "I'd like to check in," and "Could you give me a larger room?" we find that they are primarily performatives and only secondarily truth-apt. The first sentence looks like an assertion, but the hotel desk clerk won't protest even if she suspects that after a long day of traveling you would like to not check in but just to go straight to your room and sleep. The second sentence is a question and can only be fit into a T-sentence by violence. Even *atsui wa* is primarily a performative. There can be no purpose in pointing out to others in the same location that it's hot. They know it perfectly well themselves. The point is to commiserate. When we look at how children learn language, we find a similar imbalance between assertoric utterances and performatives. Parents surely don't wait until their children seem grateful for force them to say, "thank you." That is, if we interpret "thank you" as being primarily truth-apt, then children (who Davidson takes to be radical translators)[12] ought to form the T-sentence "'thank you' if and only if I'm ungrateful but a parent is goading." Beyond all of these problems, it appears that Todokoro and Nishiwaki had more than the truth conditions of "summer's lease hath all too short a date" in mind when translating the phrase. But what?

Though Hacking appears to agree with Davidson in 1975's *Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy?* by the time of 1982's "Language, Truth, and Reason" he gives up on the view that a mapping of sentences to truth conditions is the highest art of the translator. He writes,

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[11] *Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy?*, p. 155.

[12] Cf. "Radical Interpretation," p. 125, "All understanding of the speech of another involves radical interpretation."

> There is perfect commensurability, and no indeterminacy of translation, in those boring domains of "observations" that we share with all people as people. Where we as people have branched off from others as a people, we find new interests, and a looseness of fit between their and our commonplaces. Translation of truths is irrelevant. Communication of ways to think is what matters.[13]

In other words, the difficulty for translators will not be relatively simple observation sentences like "there's a rabbit" or "it's hot," but culturally specific and theory laden phrases like "summer's lease hath all too short a date" or "gender is a social construct." Hacking explains this with the example of translating Paracelsus, the hermeticist. Even supposing one possessed a translation of his writings into our language, this would not be enough to grasp the text, since "one still has to learn how he reasoned in order to understand him."[14] Learning how he reasoned is not a process of learning what phrases he takes as being true and then mapping it onto the core truths of your own set of beliefs in a Quinean/coherentist fashion. Most likely, one will take most of what Paracelsus considered to be medical fact to be completely false. Rather, Hacking claims that we must come to understand what it is that Paracelsus took to be a candidate for truth-or-falsity. The problem is that Paracelsus took as candidates for truth or falsity things which even when expressed in perfectly idiomatic English sound like nonsense, such as "Mercury signs the marketplace." To the modern ear, "Mercury signs the marketplace" is, in phrase of Wolfgang Pauli, "not even wrong." Coming to understand Paracelsus then is process of coming to understand what sorts of conditions would have bearing on whether or not such a phrase could be right or wrong—how we can tell when things are or aren't sign of other things, for example.

Although Hacking breaks away from Davidson in focusing on the styles of reasoning that make utterances possibly true or false rather than a network of truths into which an utterance must be integrated, the question of truth remains central to his understanding of translation. For Hacking, translation occurs on two levels. At the ordinary

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13. "Language, Truth, and Reason," p. 61.
14. *Ibid*., p. 60.

level, the common concerns of humanity make certain kinds of sentences non-problematic to translate, since they concern questions that are candidates for truth or falsehood in any human language community. At the higher level, certain sentences require interpretation even for competent speakers of a given language, since they concern theoretical entities and bring in different styles of reasoning. In these cases, the difficulty is not with the translating of a sentence from one language to another, but of making the translated sentence a candidate for truth or falsehood for speakers of that language.

In spite of having made significant strides away from Davidson, we can question whether Hacking's emphasis on sentences being candidates for truth and falsehood is wide enough to explain all of the difficulties we have encountered so far with translating Shakespeare. Certainly, Hacking is right to suggest that it would be difficult to unequivocally translate "summer's *lease* hath all too short a date" into jungle, a language which presumably has not yet been affected by advanced capitalism, in part because it is not yet concerned with the question of who owns what plot of land for how long. However, Japanese does have a perfectly good word for "lease"—*chintai* 賃貸—yet neither Todokoro nor Nishiwaki avails himself of this word. This cannot be explained as being caused by a difference of what counts as possibly true or false between Shakespeare and the Japanese. In this case, the difference is what sort of words are candidates for *being poetic*, not candidates for being true. *Chintai* is an ugly Chinese loan word used almost exclusively in real estate contexts. The Oxford English Dictionary by contrast reveals that around the time of Shakespeare, "lease" was beginning to gain common use in its figurative suggestion of semi-permanent occupancy.

To see why translation must go beyond conveying truth conditions, it helps to refer to Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," in which he writes,

> The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original.[15]

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15. "The Task of the Translator," p. 214.

An effect is not necessarily truth-related. Hacking inherits from Davidson a primary focus on transmitting truth or possible modes of truth as the task of the translator, but according to Benjamin,

> [A]ny translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information—hence something inessential. This is the hallmark of bad translations.[16]

Transmitting information is the hallmark of bad translations because very little of what we say is concerned with information alone. Recall the example of checking into a hotel. In that case, truth played merely a secondary role.

Benjamin insists strongly that the intended effect of a translation should not be thought of as a meaning which is reproduced in another language, since the connotations of a text always go beyond the meaning. Reversing our usual intuitions, Benjamin claims that it is the liberal translation of bad translators which best captures the meaning of a text, not a literal translation. Bad translators only tell us what a text means but give us no ability to judge for ourselves what the text connotes. For this reason, a good translation,

> instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.[17]

For Benjamin, the goal of translation is to bring all texts together into this "greater language," which is the pure language or true language which allows all intentions to be expressed as they are. This is the ur-language "which is realized only by the totality of [different languages'] intentions supplementing each other."[18] More than just a merger of different Hackettian styles of reasoning, it is a merger of all the Wittgensteinian games that can be played with language from punning to prose to promising to poetry. The process of language expansion sees its highest fruition in the process of translation, since

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16. *Ibid*., p. 210.
17. *Ibid*., p. 215.
18. *Ibid*., p. 213.

a great translator is someone who is able to search out the hidden core of text beyond its conventional meaning and bring that core into the target language, transforming it:

> While that ultimate essence, pure language, in the various tongues is tied only to linguistic elements and their changes, in linguistic creations it is weighted with a heavy, alien meaning. To relieve it of this, to turn the symbolizing into the symbolized, to regain pure language fully formed in the linguistic flux, is the tremendous and only capacity of translation.[19]

For Benjamin, texts differ in "translatability," by which he means the ability for a piece of text to so affect its target language's evolution into pure language. At the far end of untranslatability are both texts that are purely informative and translations themselves. The former are untranslatable because they have no lever to pry up their target language, and the latter are untranslatable because meaning only loosely attaches to them. With the first claim, Benjamin appears to be directly contradicting Hacking, whose claim is that ordinary, observation-sentence–like phrases are the most easily translated. The difference is that Hacking thinks of the best translators as being like seafaring merchants who are able to make a deal of thirty barrels of rum for five cases of imperishables even in an alien port of call, whereas for Benjamin, the best translators are those who change their language as Martin Luther changed German. Benjamin approvingly quotes Rudolph Pannwitz's claim that a good translator into German is one who turns the German language into Hindi, Greek, and English, rather than vice versa.[20]

When we look at Shakespeare's effect on English, however, we see that the process of language expansion is not just a process by which one language assimilates another in a dialectical reversal of Babel. An old joke has it that a man who goes to see a Shakespeare for the first time is asked what he thought of the play. "It was all right, but the writing was terrible. It was nothing but a collection of clichés." All language use has the potential to effect the language used. Carroll's famously nonsensical "Jabberwocky" accidentally introduced the words chortle and gyre into common use. The ability that Benjamin

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19. *Ibid*., 216.
20. *Ibid*., 217.

points to in translation is only a derivative ability gained from this more primordial reflexive power of language. First Shakespeare changed English; now, through translations, he is changing Japanese. Indeed, when we look at Todokoro and Nishiwaki's translations what is striking about the translations as poetry is not only that they were forced to omit the sonnet's rhyme and rhythm structure from their translations because of the nature of Japanese, but also that they similarly omitted the poetic structure that would have been deemed sine qua non for a sixteenth century *Japanese* poem. Japanese poems have traditionally utilized 5 and 7 syllable long phrases as basic poetic units and connected those units to one another through a complex system of seasonal, historical, and geographical references. Benjamin is right that a translation expands the language into which it is introduced, but what is surprising is that the expansion may not have anything in particular to do with the source language. Although Shakespeare conformed to a strict 10 syllable meter, he brought to the Japanese free verse.[21]

The effect of translation on language becomes more pronounced when we realize that for the great works of literature most likely to shape a language, translation is not a one time affair. A culture must be prepared to accept a translation, and it is common for a text to be translated a number of times before it is possible for the culture to begin to absorb any of its meaning. Paul Ricoeur comments in *On Translation*,

> As far as the great texts of our culture are concerned, we essentially live on a few retranslations which are reworked over and over again. This is what happens with the Bible, with Homer, with Shakespeare, with all the writers cited above and with the philosophers, from Plato to Nietzsche and Heidegger.[22]

The churning of this process of retranslation has a curious effect on our ability to think. Benjamin closes his essay with the comment that,

> Just as, in the original, language and revelation are one without any tension, so the translation must be one with the original in the form of the interlinear version, in which literalness and

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[21.] Ezra Pound likewise brought blank verse to English even though the Chinese poetry he was obsessed with was quite thoroughly rhymed.

[22.] *On Translation*, p. 22.

> freedom are united. For to some degree all great texts contain their potential translation between the lines; this is true to the highest degree of sacred writings. The interlinear version of the Scriptures is the prototype or ideal of all translation.[23]

This makes it seem as if the best translation could freely make use the words of the original language and so expand our language. Thus, it is repeated translation of Eastern classics prepared the West for better translations by introducing words like karma, dharma, zen, satori, dao, and so on into English and so enriched our thoughts. However, once these words enter our language they lose their place in their own languages. As Roger Ames and David Hall note in the introduction to their translation of the *Daodejing*, we must not allow ourselves to fall into the familiar trap of thinking of the Chinese term *dao* 道 as synonymous our English phrase "*the* Dao" with its misleading definite article and non-Chinese associations.[24] Old translations eventually come to bury the texts they once translated. Language never stops moving, and this both closes off old paths of translation as well as opening up new ones.

Ricoeur explains this as the tension between "the foreigner in his strangeness" and "the reader in his desire for appropriation."[25] This tension is the tension between the faithfulness and betrayal in translation or the tension between a work of recollection and a work of mourning. For Benjamin, a good translator is, as the Italian saying has it, a traitor. The treachery of the translator is not that she loses the original meaning, but that she is loyal to the pure language glimpsed in the original text rather than her own linguistic community. For Ricoeur however, this is not necessarily the case. Instead he writes about the ethical mandate to "linguistic hospitality." Linguistic hospitality should be seen as reversing Quine's abstracting away the social role of the radical translator. It is only hospitality that will cause our Japanese girl on a hot summer day to forgive the radical translator's butchery of the social etiquette built into Japanese grammar and

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23. "The Task of the Translator," p. 218.
24. *Daodejing*, p. 59.
25. *On Translation*, pp. 22–3.

allow him to progress in understanding of Japanese. Ricoeur reinterprets the myth of Babel in *On Translation*, and it would not be going too far to see his appeal to linguistic hospitality as a re-reading of the myth of Sodom and Gomorra. Texts, like the angels, are a beautiful strangers wandering in a strange land. Without the protection of some native, they will surely be destroyed—their foreignness assimilated into the vulgar mob. The mob sees Lot as a traitor for protecting these strangers and are blind to the fact that it is their inhospitality that has damned their land, not Lot's kindness. For Ricoeur, unlike Benjamin, the goal of translation is not the reconstitution of the pure language. Even if such a thing were possible, doing so would in fact make understanding impossible, because "After Babel, 'to understand is to translate'."[26] Taking away our ability to translate would mean either naturalizing the strangers as citizens of the city or dissolving the city into wandering strangers. Ricoeur asks "without the test of the foreign, would we be sensitive to the strangeness of our own language?"[27] and proposes instead to leave open the possibility of an encounter with something extraordinary, which is only possible while language is problematic for us. At the same time, he does not deny that their is great pleasure in seeing our language become something it had never before been.

So, we return to the original question, is translation *really* possible? Can the Japanese really read Shakespeare? Certainly, the tension between faithfulness and betrayal in translation ought to leave us uncomfortable with a simple yes or no to either question. Now however, we see also that since Shakespeare lived four hundred years ago and the English language has been changing all this time, the remaining question must be, can *we* read Shakespeare? Has English expanded enough to allow us to read Shakespeare in his strangeness which is our strangeness? If so, the Japanese must read him the same way.

[26.] *Ibid*., 24.
[27.] *Ibid*., 29.

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