Translator's Note:

Translating Classical Japanese Literature for a Younger Audience

By Alex Anaya

The adaptation of folktales for children within North America has largely been focused upon works from the canons of Western cultures. In translating "Asaji ga Yado", a short story from the classical text *Ugetsu Monogatari*, I was motivated by the desire to adapt an oft-ignored text from the Japanese canon for a modern youth audience aged seven to ten in order to reduce this perceived cultural hegemony and encourage further reading of non-Western literature. In setting out to do this, my main objective was to create an accessible translation. I felt that appropriating some stylistic techniques employed within the tradition of Western children's literature would be important in achieving this goal. On top of that, I would need to find a translation approach suited to creating a work of children's literature.

Given the other texts I could have chosen, an explanation of why I chose this particular text and short story is warranted. Published in 1776 during the Edo period, *Ugetsu Monogatari* is a collection of nine short stories, each containing a form of the supernatural. It was created in a time in which common people had gained much more access to both the production and consumption of high culture. The author, Akinari Ueda, was one of these educated commoners writing popular fiction "primarily for an audience of other well-educated urban dwellers" (Chambers 3). Within Japan, literati consider the text among the "finest works of fiction in the canon of traditional literature" (ibid. 1) alongside peers such as *The Tale of Genji* and view it as a work of "timeless significance and fascination" (ibid. 2) that has continued to influence key figures of twentieth-century Japanese literature. Translators consistently consider the tale "Asaji ga Yado" as belonging to the "most appealing, exciting, or evocative" (ibid. 27) of the stories within the collection. I have chosen it because the plot is easy to grasp and child-friendly due to its linearity, lack of relative complexity, presence of few characters, and lack of explicitly inappropriate content. Furthermore, the story appears almost familiar to a Western reader because of its incorporation of the supernatural element being closer to the Western concept of the word and lacks the amount of overt philosophical or ethical discourse attached to it in several of the other stories in *Ugetsu Monogatari*.

In formulating my translation approach I turned to several sources for guidance. To gain familiarity with children's literature, I looked at around twenty adaptations of other Japanese folktales with the majority published in the 1990's. Each author adopted a unique approach and gave me a general idea of elements that I could include in my actual translation such as onomatopoeia, repetition, and capitalization or bolding words for emphasis. I also referred to two previous translations by Leon Zolbrod and Anthony Chambers, published in 1974 and 2007 respectively. On one hand, adopting a method akin to Dryden's concept of paraphrase, Zolbrod domesticated the text to "read as if the original were written in common English" (Zolbrod 83) so that the same roles between writer and informed reader were present. On the other hand, believing that Zolbrod's approach attempted to reach an "impossible goal" (Chambers 34) due to the original not being written in common Japanese, Chambers chose to "leave Ueda alone as much as possible without doing violence to [the English]" (ibid. 35) thereby attempting to find the right amount of fidelity through foreignization. These differing views provided two possible directions that I could build upon for my own translation.

Initially I attempted to loosely follow Chambers' model by foreignizing with attention placed upon faithfulness to the original text to retain as much of the source's 'invariant core' plot points and cultural attributes. This approach could be characterized as containing Popovic's stylistic equivalence in attempting to maintain Ueda's style in conjunction with a "sense-for-sense" mode of equivalence. Thus my first translation was essentially the plot's core with little embellishment and, as a result, was awkward and not adequately accommodating to my target audience. Overall, it failed to satisfy my goal of accessibility and had to be reworked.

There were a couple major difficulties that indicated my chosen approach would adversely affect my translation's dynamic of approachability and faithfulness. Foreignization was meant to assert the source text's non-Western cultural genesis by giving the reader a glimpse into another culture. However, my motives for picking this tale inadvertently led to choosing a story lacking many distinct Japanese features, such as common loan words that have entered the English lexicon and the Japanese system of honorifics. This in turn hinders my ability to maintain or create a noticeably foreign feel. Likewise, it was difficult to justify introducing the embellishing techniques to make the story more accessible to children without significantly

compromising the original. Yet, if I maintained complete translation equivalence the language, the elements of the original would overwhelm or escape the young target audience.

Furthermore, disregarding the inherent language differences between Japanese and English, there is a intrinsic disability hindering a close adaptation of Ueda's "Chinese Japanese mixed style" (Zolbrod 57) that would lead to will lead to an incomplete "grasp [of] the classic beauty of the… original's literary style" (Chambers 34). First and foremost, the style has a complexity which Chambers describes as "terse, elliptical, sinewy, highly literary, allusive, scholarly, dignified, elegant, and sometimes obscure" (ibid. 34) that would prevent the creation of an easy-to-read text. Moreover, the edited intralingual Japanese translations that form the basis for all modern English translations already greatly dilute the original's style in order to make the text more accessible for a modern Japanese audience. Finding out firsthand that faithfulness to the style would be fruitless, I decided upon a change of approach.

My final translation approach retained the focus upon the sense-for-sense equivalence but was instead paired with the goal of replicating the relation between the audience and the text as was in the original context, similar to Nida's notion of dynamic equivalence. I found that an abusive, or flexible, translation would allow the "freedom to diverge from the original text" (Nornes 176) using an "inventive approach to language use and a willingness to bend the rules" (ibid. 179) that would result from using elements common to children's literature. As a result, this new view allowed me to focus more on adding said elements to appeal to my seven-to-ten demographic so as to "intensify the interaction between the reader and the foreign [text]" (ibid. 178-179) without necessarily having to worry about altering the source text.

First, there were a few things I had to omit that would needlessly distract the intended readership for the major plot points. Regrettably the original text is saturated with intertextual allusions to a variety of its Chinese and Japanese predecessors both directly and subliminally. In domesticating I deemed it necessary to exclude most of the historic and literary allusions present within the story because retaining the blatant allusions would risk alienating a target audience who would neither understand nor care about the references. In any case, the inclusion of inexplicably knowledgeable peasants from a rural location seems uncharacteristic of the common people I was trying to display and seems to reflect the work's intended aesthetics of high literature over realism. Additionally, omitting these references subtly strengthens the thematic

divide between the civilized capital and the rural backwater settings as well as ridding the text of an element that does not affect the plot. Comparably, there are several extensive asides throughout the story to historic events that temporally situate the story. Though placing the plot within a specific setting, the historical events only act as "factual background… [with] no direct bearing on the lives of [the protagonists]" (Chambers 92). For this reason I have only included basic information regarding the situation that divides the protagonists early on when it is applicable.

Within my new translation I kept the invariant core but modified or added multiple elements so as to ultimately increase accessibility and enrich the intended audience's reading. Firstly, I took the plentiful amount of longer sentences in the original Japanese and broke them down into several smaller sentences to make them succinct and easier to read. Next, following the trend present in the recent children's literature adaptations that I looked at, I chose to simplify the vocabulary as much as possible. Nonetheless, if I could easily contextualize the meaning of a word considered difficult I would include it because misunderstanding a few words would not hinder understanding the overall storyline and could in fact "help children develop readings skills" (Dils 24) and new vocabulary. I also included more instances of sensory language than was present in the original to enhance the reader's ability to imagine and experience the events within the story. However, I mainly limited this detail to visual imagery as it is the most natural kind that occurs within the story and to avoid unnecessary detail that would "bog down [my] plot line" and cause the reader to "[lose] sight of where the plot is going" (ibid. 19-21).

Additionally, to compensate for the previously mentioned deficiency of Japanese loan words I added a few so that the story is clearly situated in the land of scroll paintings, katana, and kimono. However, since this story may be the reader's first encounter with Japan and its culture, I would not want to introduce them to nor perpetuate stereotypes in my text. For this reason I have started the story with explicit mention of the differing time period and the fact that this tale does not deal with the samurai or ninja that are iconic images associated with historic Japan. I have also included a few words like 'tanuki'. 'ryō', and 'tatami' that are less commonly known. These uncommon words, though given no explanation in the text, are likely to be encountered in

other texts if readers do show a continued interest in Japanese culture and, hopefully, looking for a definition may spark such an interest.

Structurally, I have changed the text's appearance to be friendlier to the young reader. Since "young readers live in a world of dialogue" (ibid. 40), in many instances, I changed scenes to include more dialogue so as to make the text more engaging, exciting, and relatable. I have also separated dialogue on different lines to situate it away from the bulk of the story. Placing dialogue like this creates white space that makes the page "look less dense and more inviting to the reader" (ibid. 40). As well, to differentiate characters during conversation, lines of dialogue made by different speaker are placed on different lines to unconsciously signal a change in voice and personality to the readers. Since internal dialogue is "as important as the actual dialogue" (ibid. 40) and can create a further "sense of intimacy" (ibid. 41) between the main character and the reader, I applied the same structural framework to thoughts.

At a couple points I felt it necessary to create additions to the plot slightly to benefit readers and the plot's composition. I added an entire sequence in which the protagonist unwittingly wanders into his dilapidated house before reuniting with his deceased wife. I feel that it adds an ominous mood to the text in establishing the bleak condition of the protagonist's hometown previously only referred to. The short sentence structure and usage of sensory imagery that I employed additionally introduces the tense mood that remains in the latter part of the story. The description of the house's interior in this sequence also creates a kind of irony that will hit the reader upon reflection when the same location is stealthily described almost word-for-word later on in the story.

A major problem in adapting this tale to children's literature dealt with how the original ends abruptly with the ghost of the protagonist's wife not explicitly appeased. Although an ending with resolution would compromise this particular story's core, something had to change to bring the story closer to the usual children's literature fare. There is a consensus amongst experts that a story book aimed at a younger audience should lead to a resolution because "anything less than a payoff is a violation of the author-reader contract" (Lamb 77). Tessa Krailing believes there is a "moral obligation" to show that "Good must… triumph over Evil" (12) and that "every character is safely home, no matter how terrifying their adventures" (61) were. Likewise Nancy Lamb thinks that an ending should "offer comfort and closure to fragile

psyches" to give a "sense of security [and] a feeling that they can cope with circumstances they confront in their daily lives" (78). I have chosen to reject this notion of morally responsible mollycoddling to create an ending that maintains the tale's underlying premises of loyalty and accepting the consequences of one's actions while being a logical and fairly realistic resolution given the subject matter. My resolution shows that my protagonist has, as Dils puts it, "encounter[ed] the events of the story [and] is somehow changed" (15) for the better so that the tragic ending is only slightly softened to a bittersweet one. At the same time the lack of a blatant moral allows the reader to decipher whatever lesson they wish to gain from the story. Nonetheless, I leave the ending somewhat open so that the reader can speculate as to what specifically happens to the protagonist after the story concludes.

Lastly, in creating the translation I added performative elements common to storybooks that would give the reader freedom of expression during public readings as well as during private readings. I decided to imbue my translation with elements frequently found in children's literature that allow for expressive or public reading. For the most part, this presence manifests with words or exclamations within dialogue being bolded, capitalized, or italicized for emphasis. However, I have not indicated specific actions or voice tones for the entirety of the story. This allows for a completely open interpretation of elements like gestures, character voices, or environment during a performance of my translation that will inevitably lead to some degree of variance depending upon the reader.

I believe that the current translation satisfies my goal of accessibility. Through its use of flexible domestication, it allows individual readers to get engrossed in the story and mentally interpret many components of the story however they wish. Thus, my text allows multiple interpretations rather than a single concrete one regardless of whether the reader is reading privately or performing publicly. It is my hope that this ability to freely interpret my translation will allow it to continue to evolve and gain new life amongst readers.

The House Among the Reeds

From *Ugetsu Monogatari* by Akinari Ueda

Translated by Alex Anaya

This is not a story of samurai, ninja, or other heroes; this is the story of normal people: farmers. Long, long ago, in the tiny village of Mama, far, far away from Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan, there lived a man named Katsushiro. Since his grandfather's time, Katsushiro's family had lived a good life by farming rice. But, Katsushiro was really lazy and didn't want to do the hard work involved in growing rice. So, as the years went by, his money shrank and shrank and his family grew more and more distant. Katsushiro had enjoyed the good life and thought to himself,

"If I can cook up with a scheme to regain my wealth I can get back on good terms with my family."

Luckily for him, at that moment a rich traveling silk merchant named Sōji of Sasabe was on his yearly visit to family in the village. Katsushiro immediately rushed over to see Sōji and begged him,

"**PLEEEEAAASE**, bring me along to Kyoto with you. I truly *wish* to become a merchant too!"

"Okay," said Sōji, pausing for a moment, "if you're *absolutely* sure. But first you must get your own supply of silk and two ryō of gold. I will be leaving in five days."

Knowing that Sōji was a reliable fellow, Katsushiro quickly sold all of his rice fields for four ryō, used one ryō to buy a lot of silk, and eagerly awaited the day he would leave.

Katsushiro's wife, Miyagi, was an extremely beautiful and intelligent woman. Her skin was as white as snow. Her eyes gleamed like gems. And her long hair was like the finest black silk in all of Japan. Of course, upon hearing her husband's latest plans, Miyagi was worried about his safety and didn't want him to travel to the far-away capital. But, though she tried and tried to convince him not to go, she couldn't change Katsushiro's mind because of his starry-eyed stubbornness. Though she was also worried about her own safety, Miyagi loved her

husband so much that she started helping him pack for his upcoming journey. The night before Katsushiro was supposed to leave, the couple talked about the painful separation that would soon happen.

"If left alone, a woman's lonely heart will wander the fields and mountains at the limits of sadness. Every morning, every evening, please don't forget me and, *please*, return home quickly, dear" said Miyagi.

Katsushiro calmly reassured her, "Who wants to stay in a strange place like a leaf blown around by the wind or a piece of wood lost at sea? I promise that, when the leaves change colour this autumn, I will return. You must stay strong until then."

When the sky brightened and the rooster crowed, Katsushiro quickly grabbed his things, rushed to meet Sōji, and left for Kyoto.

Unfortunately, that summer problems between Lord Shigeuji and Governor Uesugi exploded into a war between their two samurai clans when Shigeuji killed Uesugi's son. Shigeuji's mansion was burnt to the ground and he barely escaped to a town in the same province as the village of Mama. As a result the entire eastern side of Japan was thrown into chaos. Although she was scared and had thought of fleeing, Miyagi kept on thinking to herself,

"Katsushiro promised to return this autumn; I must be strong. I'll endure this and wait for him."

But, because she was still nervous, Miyagi spent most of her time hiding away in her home and counting the days until her husband would return. Eventually, the leaves on the trees changed blood-red and the weather became deathly cold; Miyagi knew that autumn had arrived. Yet there was still no sight of Katsushiro. And, because they were a great distance apart and there was no one to deliver messages, there was no way to contact each other. The war had hit the world out of order; most people in Mama ran as far away as they could and those who stayed behind became extremely greedy and terrible. To protect herself, Miyagi kept the door locked and refused to see any strangers. Her only remaining maidservant finally fled and Miyagi was completely alone. Her small stash of money slowly shrank and shrank until it disappeared. A

new year came but nothing changed. The war continued and no place in the eight eastern provinces of Japan was safe.

Meanwhile, Katsushiro had arrived in Kyoto with Sōji and had sold all of his wonderful silk because, at the time, people in the capital collected beautiful things like scroll paintings, decorated samurai katana, and eye-catching kimono. Having made a lot of money, Katsushiro was just about to return home when he heard rumours that the area around his hometown had become the centre of the raging war. Remembering his promise, Katsushiro knew he had to go. But he did not know whether he would be able to make it home safely. Nevertheless, feeling uncertain, he left Kyoto at the beginning of August. One day, while climbing Kiso Hill, a group of fearsome robbers ambushed him and blocked the way. Several bandits ambled slowly toward Katsushiro; surrounding him. The bandit leader drew his sword and shouted,

"Hand over all your money right now **OR ELSE**!"

Katsushiro quickly gave all of his belongings to the thieves surrounding him and was allowed to pass. Shaken by his near-death encounter, Katsushiro stopped at a tea shop further on to rest and calm down. The tea shop's owner, an old woman called him over to her.

She said, "You're a traveller right? Are you heading east?"

Katsushiro nodded.

The old woman continued, "Oh…that won't do. Governor Uesugi's army has built barriers to trap Shigeuji. Travellers can't continue any further east."

Upset, Katsushiro returned to his seat and wept.

"Maybe my house has been destroyed in the war and maybe my wife is no longer living," he thought. "There's no point in going home anymore…I guess I should return to Kyoto…"

However, when Katsushiro was about halfway back to Kyoto he suddenly became very sick with a fever. Thankfully, he was near the town of Musa and decided to look there for help.

In Musa, Katsushiro begged a wealthy man, named Kodama Yoshibei, to help him get better. Being a kind-hearted person, Kodama paid for Katsushiro's doctors and medicine.

Though Katsushiro did get better, he still wasn't well enough to be able to travel and was forced to stay in the town until at least spring. During that time, Katsushiro's honesty won him many friends amongst the townspeople. Finally living a good life again with his newfound friends, he forgot all about his wife and his promise. Seven years passed as though they were a dream.

One day, a thought suddenly popped into Katsushiro's head.

"What am I doing with my life? I've been leeching off another person. I have done nothing! How long will this go on? I've left my hometown and don't even know what happened to my wife! I promised to never forget her but look at what I've done! I've spent so many months and years in a far-away place; how can I call myself truthful or faithful? Even though my hometown may be destroyed and Miyagi may be dead, I should've still gone to search for her or, at the very least, build her a grave long ago. The time has come for me to leave this place."

Katsushiro told his friends about his plans and left for home during some good weather in May. After ten days of travel, he entered his hometown for the first time in seven years.

Night was slowly approaching. Walking through the village, Katsushiro saw very few signs of life. Nothing looked the same as when he had left. Bridges were collapsed, houses were in ruins, and there was no one in sight. He thought it would be a good idea to visit a nearby reed-covered house to ask for directions.

"**HELLO!**" he cried.

There was a long silence. Katsushiro slid open the door and entered the home.

"**IS ANYONE HERE**? I'm looking for-,"

What he saw astonished him. Cobwebs dangled from the ceiling, brushing against his face. A bedroom's ceiling had caved in, filling the room with dim moonlight. Katsushiro could see that the walls were covered with vines, that the tatami on the floor was rotting and that, here and there, small weeds were growing in clumps. In another bedroom there was a makeshift grave covered with wood to protect it from getting wet. It was getting darker and darker and no one was to be found in this house so Katsushiro decided to continue wandering the village until he actually found someone. For several more hours, he stumbled around in the darkness until he

saw a tiny gleam of light in the distance. As he approached the building the light was coming from he recognized it as *his* house, in the exact same condition as when he left. He could see lamp light twinkling through the door.

"Could my wife still living here?" he thought.

Excited, Katsushiro rushed toward the door but, when he was about to greet whoever was inside, a voice softly called out to him,

"Who's there?"

His heart was pounding with excitement. Though it sounded older, the voice definitely belonged to Miyagi.

"**IT'S ME**! I've come back! It's a miracle that you've survived alone in this wilderness," he shouted.

Perhaps recognizing Katsushiro's voice, an unseen figure could be heard rushing toward the door. The door snapped open. The woman was covered in so much dirt that her skin looked black. Her sunken eyes stared back at him. Her bedraggled hair hung down her back. Her kimono was tattered and torn.

"Is this woman my wife?" he thought.

Seeing her husband, Miyagi immediately burst into tears.

Katsushiro was surprised into silence for a long time. Finally he opened his mouth and weakly whispered,

"If I had known that you were alive, I wouldn't have waited for all these months and years to come back. I'd heard about the fighting here and started to head back. But robbers stole all my clothes and money and then I'd heard that there were barriers further down the road blocking me from reaching here. I'd heard that our province was a battlefield and that our village was a blazing sea of fire. I thought that you'd become nothing but ash. I returned to Kyoto and lived for seven years on the charity of others. But I began to long for home and decided to return

and pay my respects to the dead. I never imagined that you'd still be alive. Am I dreaming? I hope you're not some sort of hallucination."

Miyagi replied tearfully, "After you left, that's when all the trouble started. Almost everyone fled and those who stayed behind became beasts. When you didn't come back in autumn I waited. In winter I waited. In spring I was going to go to Kyoto to find you but there was no way anyone could get past the barriers the army set up. So I stayed here…*alone*… Now that you're here though I'm really happy…all my anger and frustration toward you has melted away."

Suddenly her tears stopped and her tone turned very serious,

"But you should know that *a woman can die of loneliness*; waiting for her lover. A man can **never** know that feeling."

Immediately after saying this she broke into tears again. Katsushiro rushed to her side and said

"Come, it's late. I'm sure we're both tired. Let's go to bed. We'll feel better in the morning and we can talk more."

Almost as soon as his head hit the pillow, Katsushiro fell into a deep sleep.

Early in the morning, when the sky brightened, Katsushiro began to feel cold. He reached for his sheets but couldn't find them. He felt a drop of water on his face and opened his eyes. As he stared upward, he noticed that the roof wasn't there. He looked around. The doors were also gone. Cobwebs covered his clothing. The walls were covered in ivy and vines. The floor was rotting and, here and there, patches of grass and weeds had cropped up. The garden outside was a jungle of high grass.

"This is strange…this place seems so… *familiar*," was his first thought.

Rolling over to look at his wife, he was greeted by a grinning skull. His eyes widening, Katsushiro let out a loud scream,

*"**AAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!***"

As he sprang up from the bed he stared down at the skeleton on the bed wearing a tattered kimono with fear in his eyes.

"I've must've been bewitched …but this *IS* my old house. Does it belong to evil fox or tanuki spirits now? Was the woman I talked to yesterday my wife's ghost? Did she come back just to see me because of love? She was just as I remembered her. Why is it only I, I alone who is still unchanged?"

Frightened and confused out of his mind, Katsushiro rushed out of the house. Turning around, he recognized that this building was the same run-down one he had wandered into hours before meeting Miyagi. He realized that the crude grave he had found was his wife's and that she was dead. Overcome with sadness, Katsushiro fell to his knees and began to cry.

Just then, Katsushiro spotted a man walking nearby. Pulling himself together, he decided to ask him whether he knew anything though he didn't recognize him from the years past.

"You used to live here?" replied the man, "Sorry, but I've only just moved here last year and can't help you. However there's an old man who's apparently lived here for a while. In fact, he sometimes goes into your house. Try him."

Katsushiro followed the man's directions to the old man's house and, upon seeing it, knew it belonged to a man known as Grandfather Uruma. The wrinkled, old man with a deeply bent back glared at him.

"Where have you been all this time?" questioned Uruma.

Katsushiro explained everything that had happened since he had left including the strange happenings from the night before.

"Since I am old," said the man, "and my legs are lame, I, like your wife, stayed behind when fighting broke out. She was a brave woman who believed that you would keep your promise. She would've never dreamt of deserting your house. In all my years I've never seen such an unfortunate and courageous thing. The autumn when you promised to return passed, as did the spring, and your wife's health got worse and worse. She died on August tenth. Grieving, I traveled to your house and shaped a makeshift grave with these two feeble hands. I've visited her

every month since then. There is no doubt in my mind that the ghost you saw last night was your brave wife's. She was trying to tell you the great distress she felt. Now, let us go and pay our respects to her and finally put her to rest."

The pair walked back to the run-down house. They found the grave disturbed with a trail of dirt leading out of the room toward the door. The skeleton still rested on the remains of the bed in the other room. Katsushiro picked up all of Miyagi's bones and brought them out to the garden.

"I'm sorry that you've been all alone for all these years, dear" he said. "I should've kept my promise no matter what stood in my way. All I can do now is to make you a proper grave."

Working hard, Katsushiro dug and dug until the hole was deep enough to lay his wife's bones down in the earth. After following all of the Japanese funeral traditions, the two men spent the entire day chanting prayers in front of Miyagi's grave. With her spirit finally at rest, Katsushiro made one more promise before leaving.

"I promise that I will visit you at least once a year for as long as I live."

Within a month, Katsushiro had built a small shack nearby and had begun farming rice again. Living alone and working hard, he kept his promise to Miyagi for the rest of his days.

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