



<http://revueties.org>

**Revue TIES**

**7 | 2022**

*Speaking in Tongues:  
Celebrating Walt Whitman  
in Translation*

## Over-specification in Japanese translations of “Song of Myself”

**Emma Tămăianu-Morita**

---

**ABSTRACT.** *This contribution examines comparatively six Japanese translations of Song of Myself, focusing on a five-line segment from Section 4. Although to different degrees, the Japanese versions display a noticeable tendency towards lexical, grammatical and stylistic over-specification. The following types of phenomena were identified: referential over-specification; use of stylistically marked units instead of neutral ones; shift to tighter syntactic structures, with subordination instead of coordination; explicitation of cognitive modality by sentence-final particles or adverbs. These changes significantly narrow down the range of possible interpretations of the text, sometimes up to a univocal designation which reflects the translators' misguided attempt to 'clarify' the text, thus profoundly altering the Japanese reader's interpretive experience. Objective difficulties arising from the semantic organization and typological characteristics of Japanese are distinguished from translation choices that seem to originate in subjective predilections. In each case, the accuracy of the six versions is assessed, and more appropriate solutions are sought for, on the basis of a cross-linguistic comparison with several Spanish, French and German translations.*

**RÉSUMÉ.** L'examen comparatif de six traductions japonaises de *Song of Myself* de W. Whitman, portant principalement sur cinq lignes de la Section 4, révèle pour les versions japonaises une tendance notable à la sur-spécification lexicale, grammaticale et stylistique. Plusieurs phénomènes y sont identifiés : sur-spécification référentielle ; utilisation d'unités marquées stylistiquement au lieu d'unités neutres ; utilisation des structures syntaxiques plus serrées, avec subordination au lieu de coordination ; explicitation de la modalité cognitive de l'énoncé. Ces changements réduisent considérablement la gamme des interprétations possibles du texte, allant parfois jusqu'à une désignation univoque qui reflète le penchant des traducteurs de 'clarifier' le texte, modifiant ainsi profondément l'expérience interprétative du lecteur japonais. Les difficultés objectives liées à l'organisation sémantique et aux caractéristiques typologiques du japonais se distinguent des choix de traduction qui semblent motivés par des préférences subjectives. Dans chaque cas, l'exactitude des six versions est évaluée et des solutions plus appropriées sont recherchées, au moyen d'une comparaison inter-linguistique avec plusieurs traductions en espagnol, français et allemand.

**MOTS CLÉS :** langue japonaise, poésie, traduction, Walt Whitman

**KEYWORDS:** *Japanese language, poetry, translation, Walt Whitman*

---

## Introduction

This contribution examines comparatively, from a text-linguistic perspective, six Japanese translations of "Song of Myself:" Takeo Arishima (1921), Kintarō Horii (1931), Saika Tomita (1949), Shigetaka Naganuma (1959), Takashi Sugiki, Norihiro Nabeshima and Masayuki Sakamoto (1969), Masayuki Sakamoto (1998). In order to discuss individual strategies in depth and assess the adequacy of translation choices in each case, thereby also identifying the more general tendencies they may illustrate, the analysis focuses mainly on a five-line segment from Section 4 of "Song of Myself." For easier reference, the lines will be numbered conventionally as follows:

- (L1) Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,
- (L2) Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary,
- (L3) Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable certain rest,
- (L4) Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,
- (L5) Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it.

## Rationale

Two considerations justify the choice of this particular textual segment. First of all, multiple Japanese versions from various historical periods are available and ensure a wide-ranging comparative basis. Thus, a first reading of the six Japanese versions indicated above immediately yields an intuitive observation: although to different degrees, at least five of them display a noticeable tendency towards lexical, grammatical and stylistic over-specification, contrary to what might be expected, in view of the fact that the literary tradition of Japanese poetry does seem to offer models of conciseness and linguistic under-specification, manifested in genres such as the *haiku* or the *tanka*.

Consequently, in a very short fragment we can identify and analyze in depth problematic points pertaining to various levels of linguistic and textual organization (lexical, grammatical, stylistic, text-typological). In the following sections, five phenomena related to the lexical stratum of textual expression and three phenomena related to the grammatical stratum will be examined in detail. Discussed here with reference to Whitman's text, all of these phenomena are in fact symptomatic of problematic issues encountered, more generally, in the process of poetic translation from English into Japanese.

Secondly, a methodological aspect has been taken into account. The search for more adequate intra-linguistic options can benefit from the results of cross-linguistic contrast, deriving pertinent suggestions from the strategies adopted by translators into other languages. For the segment in question, numerous versions in European languages exist and can be taken as terms of comparison. Though operating with means of expression that may be much closer to English in terms of linguistic organization, these translators often had to face comparable challenges in precisely the same textual points that posed difficulties for the Japanese translators. In this

study we will refer to the following versions: Spanish (Alexander 1952, Villar Raso 1999), French (Bazalgette 1909, Athenot 2008, Mourier 2011), and German (Reisiger 1922).

### Contextual note on the six Japanese versions

The Japanese translations of “Song of Myself” chosen for comparative analysis range over eight decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and thus reflect not only individual tendencies and idiosyncrasies proper to the translators, but also socio-cultural and historical factors of the periods in which they lived and worked. In order to situate the versions within a minimal frame of reference, their basic bio-bibliographical information is indicated in Table 1.

Translator(s)	Year of publication	Basic bio-data
Takeo Arishima	1921	(1878-1923), novelist
Kintarō Horii	1931	(1887-1938), activist in Akita, translator
Saika Tomita	1949	(1890-1984), poet
Shigetaka Naganuma	1959	(1890-1982), translator
Takashi Sugiki Norihiro Nabeshima Masayuki Sakamoto	1969	(1899-1968), translator, academic (1904 - 1979), academic (1931- ), academic
Masayuki Sakamoto	1998	same as above

Table 1: Bio-bibliographical background of the Japanese translations

Only a few crucial aspects of this very complex socio-cultural background can be mentioned here. Thus, before WW II, the translations came mainly from intellectuals with a literary career of their own, who had learned English primarily

from native speakers, in Japan and during extensive stays in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, after WW II, we note a rising dominance of translations coming from the academic world: the translators are scholars with university positions in literary domains and memberships in scientific organizations, and their work unfolds in the context of the ensuing relations of authority and seniority. These personal factors may have swayed their mutual interactions and shaped their connections with editors and publishing houses. For example, in the materials examined here from a text-linguistic perspective, significant differences can be noted between the version published by Sakamoto in 1998 and the one elaborated much earlier, when he himself was the youngest member of a team (Sugiki, Nabeshima and Sakamoto 1969), in charge of a first translation draft that would be revised with/by the two senior professors. From the perspective of literary and cultural history such aspects certainly warrant a closer examination, if reliable contemporary and subsequent accounts can be found, so as to allow for pursuing the matter beyond the anecdotal and the speculative.

Apart from the historical interest of such an enterprise, however, what really matters, ultimately, is what kind of interpretive process the translated versions are apt to trigger in the experience of their potential readers, in the past as well as now. It is such a text-internal perspective that the present contribution aims to bring into focus.

### Conceptual framework

This analysis is carried out from the perspective of *text linguistics as a hermeneutics of sense*, developed by Eugenio Coseriu in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as part of an “Integral Linguistics”<sup>2</sup>—the study of language/speech as a cultural activity in all of its forms of manifestation. Text linguistics “as a hermeneutics of sense” (Coseriu 1981<sup>3</sup>, 151) focuses on the specific units and strategies which serve to create and articulate textual meaning (sense) as a functionally autonomous type of linguistic content. Language-specific significata and their associated designata function as semiotic expression for textual meaning; the latter thus presupposes and integrates the former two types of linguistic content, while at the same time expanding beyond

---

<sup>1</sup> For a brief literary-historical overview, see Beppu (1998).

<sup>2</sup> A concise outline of the dimensions and tasks of “Integral Linguistics” can be found in Coseriu (1984). For the justification of this term and an analysis of its implications, see also Kabatek / Murguía (1997), Ch. 7, esp. pp. 158-163.

<sup>3</sup> The original German version of this work is entitled simply *Textlinguistik. Eine Einführung* (1981). So important is the key phrase “hermeneutics of sense” as a descriptor of the theoretical perspective in the linguistic study of discourse/texts proposed here by Coseriu that Loureda Lamas, the translator and editor of the critical Spanish edition from 2007, brings it to the foreground by using it as a subtitle: *Lingüística del texto. Introducción a la hermenéutica del sentido*.

them, mainly owing to the contribution of a wide range of contextual knowledge manifested in the “evocative relations” of the signs which constitute the text.<sup>4</sup>

In this framework, translation is viewed as a “a peculiar form of speech:” “speaking by means of another language and *with a content that is already given.*” Thus, the translator acts as the creator of a new text (the translated text), but s/he does so with the knowledge that “the content to be expressed is given beforehand, *up to its very details*” (Cosieru 1977b, 215, 223; translation and emphasis mine –E.T.-M.). In other words, what is at stake in translation is not the transmission of a ‘disembodied’ content, but a *re-constitution* of the original text, with the materials of the target language, in such a way that the target-language reader is prompted to construct the overall textual designation and interpret the sense along the same lines as the original. Analyzing the source text *as a text*, and not as a ‘sample’ of the source language, involves identifying the text-constitutive units and strategies<sup>5</sup> that serve as vectors guiding this hermeneutic process of sense construction. It is these units and semantic vectors that need to be replicated or approximated in translation, and it is the extent to which this goal is achieved that can serve as a benchmark for assessing the appropriateness of the translated version. Given the complexity of the semantic decisions involved, we have argued elsewhere that the translator’s endeavor cannot be considered merely *secondary* to the primary act of producing the original but can justly be characterized as a process of “speaking raised to the power of two.”<sup>6</sup>

Due to space limitations, the present contribution will focus only on one type of text-constitutive units: language-specific significata from the lexical and grammatical strata of idiomatic organization, with the constellation of their paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations in the source language and serving as points of anchorage for one type of text-constitutive strategy–evocative sign relations.

Objective difficulties arising from the semantic organization and typological characteristics of Japanese will be systematically distinguished from translation choices that seem to originate in subjective predilections. In each case, the accuracy and adequacy of the six versions will be assessed, and more appropriate translation options will be sought for, in light of the solutions advanced by the versions in European languages reviewed for cross-linguistic comparison.

### **Text-constitutive units anchored in the lexical stratum**

Five categories of lexical phenomena will be examined, ranging from the language-specific organization of lexical significata as such, to the stylistic

---

<sup>4</sup> For a definition, classification and examples of “evocative sign relations,” see Cosieru (1977a, 201-202 and 1981, 68-101).

<sup>5</sup> The articulation of text-constitutive units and strategies is discussed extensively and illustrated through Whitman’s poem “So Long!” in Tămăianu-Morita (2012, 3-5) and (2014, 138-141), and “Night on the prairies” in (2013-2014, 72-81). These studies also examine how this articulation is dealt with in the process of translation into several languages, including Japanese.

<sup>6</sup> Tămăianu(-Morita) 2001, 144-149, 2013-2014, 73.

markedness of some lexical units and the evocative relations they engender. Emphasis will lie on the resulting changes in the construal of the textual world.

For easier comparison, in this section the six versions are presented in parallel in the form of tables, with the unit(s) representing the focal points for analysis highlighted in bold. In the tables, an explanatory gloss, consisting of literal equivalences and supplementary paraphrases or clarifications, is included after the Japanese original, in order to render explicit the Japanese significatum in itself, its functional status in the architecture of the language and, where necessary, its cultural evocations. To avoid overloading the tables, the Japanese translation is given only in the original script, while an alphabetic transliteration is added for the key units taken up in the critical discussion.

**(1) The problem of "I": diastratically / stylistically marked vs. neutral**

A first crucial decision that confronts the Japanese translator is a choice concerning the pronoun "I" and its related units, such as "myself" and "the Me myself." In Japanese the corresponding lexical units are personal nouns, but the major difference is that, while in English the personal pronoun is purely deictic, devoid of any particulars as to the identity and status of the speaker, in Japanese there is a whole range of personal nouns which are pragmatically specified via diastratic and diaphasic values: <male> vs. <female>, <young> vs. <old>, <formal / standard / colloquial / slang>, and many other sub-categories and combinations thereof. Merely employing one noun instead of another constructs a radically different identity of the poetic "I", and conveys a radically different relationship to the addressee—the "you" within the textual world. The choices of the six translations are indicated in Table 2.

Line (1)	"[...] stands what <b>I</b> am"
Arishima 1921	私というものは立っている "stands (upright) that which is (the real) <b>me</b> "
Horii 1931	俺は立っている " <b>I</b> <male> stand (upright)"
Tomita 1949	[...] から離れて所在するもの、それがわたしというものなのだ "that which exists separate from [...], that is (the real) <b>me</b> "
Naganuma 1959	私は[...]、あくまで自分を持している " <b>I</b> [...] after all, have 'myself' (idiomatic phrase, approx. "I have autonomy and stability given by unfaltering personal beliefs")

Sugiki, Nabeshima & Sakamoto 1969	[...] 干渉沙汰に僕という存在は無縁 “the entity which is <b>me</b> <male> is detached from the interference of [...]”
Sakamoto 1998	[...] お節介にぼくであるそのものはかかわりがない “that which is really <b>me</b> <male> has no involvement with the annoyance of [...]”

Table 2: Glossed versions for “stands what I am”

Arishima, Tomita and Naganuma choose the neutral unit 私 (*watashi*), which can be used both in male and female adult speech, in a standard or neutral register of politeness. In contrast, 僕 (*boku*) from Sugiki, Nabeshima and Sakamoto (1969) and Sakamoto (1998) is marked diastatically for <male speech>, and diaphasically as <colloquial>.<sup>7</sup> So is 俺 (*ore*), chosen by Horii: <male>, and <colloquial-rough>, i.e. serving to project an assertive and domineering image of the male speaker. Thus, the identity of the poetic ‘I’ is construed in radically different ways simply through the choice of personal noun.

In order to avoid imposing such limitations on the possible identity of the “I”, the solution needs to be the neutral 私 (*watashi*). This is especially true, in this particular context, of the phrase “stands what I am,” which projects the intimation of a quintessential “I” abstracted from the accidents of the empirical individual.

In a coherent relation with this element, the interpretation of the predicate “stands” should give precedence to the sense of “enduring,” rather than the physical posture of “standing upright.” Thus, if a lexical equivalent of similar organization (i.e. one word, like “stand,” that has both meanings) does not exist in Japanese, then 立っている (*tatteiru*, “stands upright”), should be replaced with a unit that designates intransience or permanence, such as 留まっている (*todomatteiru*, approx. “stays,” “endures”): “私”であるものが、留まっている。

This interpretation is further validated by the solutions adopted in translations into European languages: “se tient ce que je suis” (Athenot), “permanece lo que yo soy” (Alexander), “perdura lo que soy” (Villar Raso), “steht, was ich bin” (Reisiger).

## (2) Lexical significata, from abstract to concrete, and from concrete to localized: “an impalpable rest”

In the case of lexical significata, the further apart the source language and the target language are in terms of linguistic lineage and typology, the more frequently a need to adapt the level of genericity vs. concreteness will appear, entailing the use of

<sup>7</sup> Cf also Section 51 in Sakamoto (1998), “Do I contradict myself?” (“Boku ga mujun-shiteiru no *ka?*”), where the sentence-final particle for constructing the interrogative sentence is also one marked for <colloquial> <male speech>, *kai*, and not the neutral one *ka*.

a hyponym instead of a hypernym or vice versa. Such shifts are inevitable if a lexical unit of comparable rank does not exist in the target language, but should be avoided where a corresponding unit does in fact exist or can easily be created. Line (3) offers a prototypical example of how what should remain a generic significatum is specified and even localized, with the result that the spatial configuration of the textual world is completely modified.

Line (3)	“or bends an arm on <b>an impalpable certain rest</b> ”
Arishima 1921	或いは或る触れがたい寄りものに腕を頼み “or leans an arm onto a <b>hard-to-touch rest</b> ”
Horii 1931	肘をもたせて “reposes an elbow” (the sequence “on an impalpable certain rest” is omitted)
Tomita 1949	或いは感知し難い、支柱のうえで腕を曲げ “or bends an arm on a <b>hard-to-perceive pillar (/pole)</b> ”
Naganuma 1959	或いは感知しがたい支柱の上に腕をもたせ “or reposes an arm on a <b>hard-to-perceive pillar (/pole)</b> ”
Sugiki, Nabeshima & Sakamoto 1969	目には見えぬ確固たる宇宙の欄干に腕をまげて寄りかかり “bends an arm resting it on a fixed <b>cosmic balustrade invisible to the eye</b> ”
Sakamoto 1998	あるいは感知できぬ確固たる脇息に肘をのせつつ “or puts an elbow on a fixed <b>unperceivable elbow-rest</b> ”

Table 3: Glossed versions for “an impalpable certain rest”

Arishima’s 寄りもの (*yorimono*, lit. “thing to rest against”) is generic and does not evoke sensory features. On the other hand, 支柱 (*shichū*) is a support pillar or pole, 欄干 (*rankan*) is a balustrade, and 脇息 (*kyōsoku*) is a traditional Japanese low elbow-rest, such as one would find in a *tatami* (straw-mat) room. Major differences in the configuration of textual space-time ensue.

A pillar delineates a vertical axis with a single point (the tip) serving as somewhat unstable support for the elbow. A balustrade delineates a horizontal axis for relatively firmer support, but at the same time splits the space into two zones, like a fence. In Sugiki, Nabeshima and Sakamoto (1969), the interpolated characterization *uchū no* (“cosmic”) imposes a hasty answer to a mystery that should remain intact,



left for the reader to solve, as to the nature of the “impalpable rest.” Finally, while with a pillar or balustrade the poetic “I” is depicted as standing, with the traditional Japanese elbow-rest the poetic “I” has to be imagined in a seated position, against the background of a very traditional Japanese setting, a *tatami* room. All these three options are too concrete. A faithful solution is Arishima’s generic 寄りもの (“rest,” “support”).

On the other hand, with “impalpable” we notice the opposite tendency, of replacement with a more generic term, approximately “hard-to-perceive,” “unperceivable,” or a shift from tactile to visual perception, as in “invisible to the eye.” Nevertheless, “impalpable” also lends itself to a more accurate rendering: taking as a base Arishima’s 触れがたい (*furegatai*, “hard-to-touch”), it is perfectly possible to construct the phrase 触知できない (*shokuchi-dekinai*, lit. “cannot be felt by touch”), as a precise equivalent of “impalpable.”

### (3) Internal vs. external designational scheme: “unitary”

The adjective “unitary” from Line (2) raises the question of how to render as closely as possible the designational scheme generated by this unit. Does it describe the inherent essence of the poetic “I”, or does it place the poetic “I” in an implicit comparison or contrast with other individuals? In other words, does this adjective contribute with an internal or an external designational scheme to the construction of the textual world? The six Japanese variants are indicated in Table 4.

Line (2)	“Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, <b>unitary</b> ”
Arishima 1921	面白がつて、落付いて、憐れみながら、手をつかねて、 取乱さず立っている “[...] stands without flustering” (= “composed”)
Horii 1931	黙って見ている、静平に、らんだ（懶惰）に、びんぜん （憫然）と “[...] is looking silently” (= no clear equivalent)
Tomita 1949	陽気で、自己満足し、同情心あり、のほほんで、生一本 なのがわたしというものなのだ “[...] single-minded”
Naganuma 1959	興深く、悦に入って、しかも不便に思いながら、無為に 、ただひとり立ちつくす “[...] keeps on standing, just one / alone”

Sugiki, Nabeshima & Sakamoto 1969	超然として喜悅し、自足し、同情し、悠然としてひとり “[...] one / alone”
Sakamoto 1998	面白がったり、悦にいたり、同情したり、そしてのん びりと自立している “[...] is autonomous”

Table 4: Glossed versions for “unitary”

Arishima and Tomita adopt an internal scheme, with 取乱さず (*torimidasaazu*, “composed”) and 生一本 (*keiippon*, “single-minded”) respectively. On the other hand, the other translators adopt an external scheme, with (ただ)ひとり (*tada hitori*, “(just) one / alone” [i.e. without any others]) or 自立している (*jiritsu-shiteiru*, “is autonomous” [from others]).

The original word, “unitary,” favours an interpretation based on the internal designational scheme. The idea of internal “unity” can in fact be rendered in Japanese either by using the noun 統一性, *tōitsusei*, or its corresponding adjectival form 統一的な, *tōitsutekina*.<sup>8</sup> These equivalents can be incorporated in the syntactic structure of the respective sentence in the forms 統一性を保ち (*tōitsusei wo tamochi*, “maintaining (its) unity”) or 統一的であり (*tōitsuteki de ari*, “being unitary”).

**(4) Down the treacherous path of over-specification: “the pulling and hauling” and “Looks down, is erect”**

The tendency towards over-specification becomes more evident when it is manifested in interpolated segments which completely change the sense-constitutive vectors of the text, thus actually creating a different text from Whitman’s original. The segments “the pulling and hauling” (Table 5) and “Looks down, is erect” (Table 6) will be examined in order to analyze this phenomenon.

Line (1)	“Apart from <b>the pulling and hauling</b> [...]”
Arishima 1921	それらの押し寄せまきかへすものから離れて “Apart from those <b>things coming and going</b> ” (lit. ‘things pushing towards me and pulling away’)

<sup>8</sup> To a hypothetical objection that this lexeme does not sound “poetic” enough, more specifically that it evokes the discourse universes of science and philosophy rather than that of poetry, one would have to respond that this is precisely what the evocation of “unitary” is in the original.

Horii 1931	やったり、とったり、押したり、引いたり、なげうったり、なげうられたりする以外に “Aside from <b>the giving and taking, the pushing and pulling, the hurling and being hurled</b> ” ( <i>sic!</i> )
Tomita 1949	引っ張ったり、たぐったりするものから離れて “Apart from the <b>things pulling and hauling in</b> ”
Naganuma 1959	凡百のいざこぎをよそに “Aside from the countless <b>hassles</b> ”
Sugiki, Nabeshima & Sakamoto 1969	目ひき袖ひきの干涉沙汰に [...] 無縁 “is detached from the interference of (people’s) <b>calls for attention</b> ” (lit. “drawing my eyes and pulling on my sleeve”)
Sakamoto 1998	目ひき袖ひきのお節介に [...] かかわりがない “has no involvement with the annoyance of (people’s) <b>calls for attention</b> ” (same idiomatic phrase as above)

Table 5: Glossed versions for “the pulling and hauling”

Arishima and Tomita interpolate the lexeme *もの* (*mono*, “thing”), preceded by a paraphrase of the two actions (pulling and hauling), and thus justified as a discourse-grammatical means of nominalization. This is a reasonable solution in order to match the effect achieved in the original by the nominalized form of the verbs. Arishima settles for more generic significata to render the two actions, while Tomita resorts to more concrete ones, evoking the acts of manually pulling on a string or rope. The latter strategy, however, has the adverse effect of making the scene more difficult to decipher coherently, since such an overtly physical action can hardly be imagined in the given context. Horii’s verbose version multiplies the pair threefold. Sugiki, Nabeshima and Sakamoto (1969) as well as Sakamoto (1998) use an idiomatic phrase (*mebiki, sodebiki no kanshōzata / o-sekkeai*), lit. “drawing my eyes and pulling on my sleeve,” which limits the interpretation to a peculiarly human agent—the complications of human relations. While this option may be justified in an anaphoric connection with the “trippers and askers” from the very beginning of Section 4, in the analyzed segment “the pulling and hauling” covers the whole range of disturbances, temptations and distractions from which the “I” sets itself apart.

Thus, the most adequate solution here appears to be Naganuma’s *いざこぎ* (*izakogiza*, “hassles,” “complications,” “troubles”), possibly without *凡百の* (*bonbyaku*, “countless”). Two arguments support this evaluation: this compound is generic enough, and also maintains a parallelism with the symmetrical construction of the idiomatic phrase of the original.

These two aspects are also apparent in the translations into European languages: “À l'écart des va-et-vient” (Athenot), “Lejos de la contienda y (d)el conflicto” (Alexander, Villar Raso), “Abseits von dem Ringen und Raufen” (Reisiger).

An even more striking case of over-specification can be found in the equivalent of the sequence “Looks down, is erect” from Line (3) (Table 6).

Line (3)	“Looks down, is erect, [...]”
Arishima 1921	見おろし、直立し “Looks down, stands straight”
Horii 1931	立って見、居て見 “Looks while standing, looks while seated”
Tomita 1949	[そのものは] 見おろし、上を向き “Looks down, glances up”
Naganuma 1959	つたつて見下し “Standing haughtily, looks down”
Sugiki, Nabeshima & Sakamoto 1969	遙か下界を見下ろし、遙か天上に屹立し “Looks down upon the far-off netherworld, rises toward the far-off skies”
Sakamoto 1998	上から見おろし、毅然と立ち “Looks down from above, stands up resolutely”

Table 6: Glossed versions for “Looks down, is erect”

While Arishima proposes a concise and direct expression, in a subdued tonality, Horii and Tomita interpolate the idea of “looking” in the second clause, thereby constituting a pair of opposites that does not exist in the original. Naganuma specifies the clause “is erect” as a type of attitude that the posture supposedly indicates. Sugiki, Nabeshima and Sakamoto (1969) use the verb 屹立 (*kitsuritsu*), prevalingly collocated with mountains or tall buildings, and interpolate expressions that enlarge the scene up to a cosmic dimension. While it can be argued that Whitman’s vision does in fact imply a cosmic expansion of the poetic “I”, this

<sup>9</sup> Although in terms of semantic nuances “va-et-vient” differs from the Spanish and German equivalents, as it does not necessarily entail a negative connotation, the two features it shares with them (generic nature and symmetrical construction) support the view that the same type of translation strategy was applied in all of these cases.

element of the global textual world is not revealed in this particular point of the text, where the reader must still be allowed to experience fully the enigma of how the scene should (or could) be visualized. We can note that in his own new version Sakamoto (1998) adopts a more subdued formulation, closer to Naganuma's strategy, by deleting the interpolated expressions and adding only the attitude that the posture supposedly indicates. This attitude (haughty, resolute etc.) is, of course, a purely subjective interpretation on the part of each translator, and narrows down the reader's own choices, orientating the sense-construction process in a restrictive way that does not do justice to the original—where the poetic effect is achieved precisely by the baffling (one is tempted to say even “Zen-like”) task of imagining an immaterial essence (“what I am”) in a physical posture.

An adequate solution can be devised starting from Arishima's 見おろし、直立し (*mi-oroshi, chokuritsu-shi*, “Looks down, stands up straight”). For the sake of stylistic consistency, we can revert to the native Japanese words with the same meaning, instead of the Sino-Japanese compound *chokurisu-suru*. 見おろし、まっすぐ立ち (*mi-oroshi, massugu tachi*).

#### (5) The problem of “game:” diachronic and functional stratification of the Japanese lexicon

The lexical unit “game” from Line (5) foregrounds a problem arising from the stratification of the Japanese lexicon into layers defined by different diachronic periods (older genuine Japanese words vs. later lexical creations or borrowings in various periods, up to the contemporary period). This stratification results in coexisting words with the same designation, but often differentiated functionally, for slightly different meanings, or stylistically, for different evocations, in their usage. The equivalents for “game” proposed by the six Japanese versions are highlighted in Table 7.

Line (5)	“Both in and out of the <b>game</b> [...]”
Arishima 1921	勝負の中に又はその後 “Inside the <b>match (/gamble)</b> or after it”
Horii 1931	ゲームの中から、ゲームの外から “From inside the <b>game</b> , from outside the <b>game</b> ” (the English loanword as such)
Tomita 1949	その競技の当事者ともなりまた局外者ともなって “Becoming a participant in that <b>competition</b> , and also becoming an outsider”

Naganuma 1959	そうした面白い事の内外から “From inside-outside (= from all points of view) of this kind of <b>amusing stuff</b> ”
Sugiki, Nabeshima & Sakamoto 1969	浮世の戯れごとの外側に立ち、そして同時に内側にもいて “Standing outside the <b>hectic fretting of the fleeting world</b> , and at the same time being also inside it”
Sakamoto 1998	競技に参加しながら観客であり “While also participating in that <b>competition</b> , being a spectator”

Table 7: Glossed versions for “Both in and out of the game”

Naganuma’s paraphrase 面白い事 (*omoshiroi koto*, “interesting / amusing stuff”) suggests a more derisive and condescending attitude of the poetic “I” than the original can vouch for, and should be discarded for this semantic reason. Even more inadequate, however, no matter how “poetic” it may sound, is Sugiki, Nabeshima and Sakamoto’s 浮世の戯れごと (*ukiyo no zaregoto*, lit. “hectic fretting of the fleeting world”). Not only does this phrasing suggest that the “game” is mere inconsequential make-believe, but it also introduces a specifically Japanese cultural evocation, of the frivolous “fleeting world” of worldly pastimes and temptations as portrayed, for instance, in *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints. The nuance of competition or confrontation is completely lost.

Three valid choices remain: 競技 (*kyōgi*, Tomita and Sakamoto), which is used mainly to designate competitions, especially sports competitions or athletic contests, 勝負 (*shōbu*, Arishima), a Sino-Japanese unit whose characters literally signify “win-or-lose,” “victory-or-defeat,” used in similar contexts with the English “game” in the sense of “match” or “gamble,” and ゲーム (*gēmu*, Horii), which is the English loanword taken as such, with minimal phonetic adaptation, and written in *katakana* script. For the contemporary Japanese reader, this loanword is both the most modern and the most general, covering both the nuance of playful competition or inconsequential preoccupations, and the nuance of confrontation with winners and losers. Out of these three options, Arishima’s *shōbu* and Horii’s *gēmu* are the most faithful to the original and therefore the least restrictive in terms of interpretive possibilities.

If the whole phrase “both in and out of the game” is taken into account, then the idea of being simultaneously in and out of the game, conveyed in the original by the adverb “both,” should also be included in the translated version. For instance, a formulation such as 同時にゲームの中と外にいて (*dōji ni gēmu no naka to soto ni ite*, “being simultaneously in and out of the game”) can be proposed, with a simple coordination of *naka* (“inside”) and *soto* (“outside”), instead of a compound with

Sino-Japanese readings (Naganuma's 内外, *naigai*) or extended repetitive constructions as in Sugiki, Nabeshima and Sakamoto (1969). In some of the European languages, a similar translation strategy is adopted: “A la vez dentro y fuera del juego” (Villar Raso), “Dans le jeu et hors du jeu à la fois” (Athenot).

### Text-constitutive units anchored in the grammatical stratum

Proceeding now to the grammatical devices and constructions that play a major role in the configuration of the textual world, we shall examine in detail three types of phenomena.

#### (1) Grammatical subject: “stands what I am” vs. “I stand”

The Japanese translations put forward two conceptualizations for this structure. One is the clear differentiation of the subject, expressed in Line (1) and implicit in the rest, from a straightforward “I”, echoing the distinction conveyed in the original by the third person singular as opposed to a first person singular. Such is Arishima's version 私というものは立っている (*watashi to iu mono wa tatteiru*, “stands that which is me”), and similar versions in Tomita (1949), Sugiki, Nabeshima and Sakamoto (1969) and Sakamoto (1998) (see *supra*, Table 2). A contrasting choice is the mere equation of this subject with “I”: 俺は立っている (*ore wa tatteiru*, “I stand,” in Horii) and 私は自分を持している (*watashi wa jibun wo jishiteiru*, “I have myself,” in Naganuma).

The same alternative can be found in the two Spanish versions we took into account for comparison. Alexander proposes “permanece lo que yo soy” in Line (1), but then shifts to the first person singular of the verbs in Lines (3), (4) and (5) (“miro,” “me yergo,” “apoyo,” “participo,” “sigo,” “me pregunto”), whereas Villar Raso systematically maintains the third person singular as subject (“perdura lo que soy,” “perdure,” “baja,” “se yerge,” “apoya,” “mira”). The translations into French and German faithfully follow the third person conceptualization, in consonance with the original.

Although Japanese verbs do not have the category of person or number, and the closest correspondent to personal pronouns are personal nouns such as *watashi* (for self-reference to the speaker), paraphrases using the generic nouns *mono* or *sonzai* (“thing,” “entity”), indicated above as examples of the first conceptualization, represent valid solutions for this structure.

#### (2) Grammatical coordination: “Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary”

Whereas the English original presents a smooth, simple form of coordination, by the juxtaposition of adjectives and adjectival forms, this grammatical construction does not have a formal parallel in Japanese, so it is inevitable to replace it with functionally equivalent alternative structures. The Japanese translators' choices (see *supra*, Table 4) can be subsumed to three basic patterns:

- Pattern (1): conjunct (-te) forms of verbs or adjectives (Tomita; Sugiki, Nabeshima and Sakamoto 1969) or juxtaposition of adverbials (Hori);
- Pattern (2): one unit posed as simultaneous with the others through the form – *nagara* (“while~”) (Arishima, Naganuma);
- Pattern (3): tight syntactic structure, with three units posed as alternating (conjunct –*tari* forms of the verbs) (Sakamoto 1998): lit. approx. “sometimes amused, sometimes complacent, sometimes compassionating, and idly is autonomous.”

Because a choice between these alternative forms is inevitable, and because all of them are less neutral than the English juxtaposition, one would have to assess in relative terms which pattern is least marked, and therefore apt to remain closest to the original. Pattern (1) fits the description and can thus be validated as the most appropriate in the context.

**(3) Sentence modalization by sentence-final particles or interpolated adverbs**

In addition to the phenomena described on the basis of the five-line fragment discussed above, another relevant tendency pertaining to the grammatical stratum can be illustrated by the line immediately preceding the fragment: “But they are not the Me myself.” In the original this is a statement whose tonality, though firm and final, is at the same time objective and detached, without any indication of emotional involvement, thereby generating a coherent cataphoric link towards the separation of an essential “I” from the contingent “I” in Line (1) (“stands what I am”). This is the solution adopted by Arishima, whereas other Japanese versions introduce cognitive modalizations which signal the emotional or attitudinal involvement of the “I” as a human individual (see the four versions compared in Table 8).

It is true that in casual, everyday oral communication in Japanese it is more common to add such sentential modalizations, especially in final position, in order to emphasize the dialogic dimension of discourse and the interpersonal relationship between locutor and interlocutor. This might explain why some translators felt this to be more “natural” in Japanese. However, if applied to Whitman’s text, this device generates a cleavage between this line and the fragment that follows, and consequently modifies in a substantial way the construal of the textual world in this point of the text.

	“But they are not the Me myself?”	Modalization
Arishima 1921	けれどもすべては「私」そのもの ではない “But all those are not the real ‘Me’”	<Neutral> ~ no modalization



Tomita 1949	だが、それらは“わたし”のわたし 自身ではないのだ “But those are not the ‘Me’ of me myself + <sentence modalizer <i>noda</i> >”	<Explanatory statement + Emotive emphasis> ~ <i>noda</i> , approx. “I do say,” “you know”
Sugiki, Nabeshima & Sakamoto 1969	だが、むろんこうしたことが「ぼ く」自身ではない “But, <b>of course</b> , such things are not ‘Me’ <male> myself”	<Objective, conceptual counterargument> ~ <i>muron</i> , modal adverb, approx. “needless to say”
Sakamoto 1998	だがこれらのことが「ぼく」その ひとであるわけはない “But [that] these things should be the person ‘Me’” <male> himself + <sentence modalizer <i>wake wa nai</i> >”	<Strong counterargument> ~ <i>wake wa nai</i> , approx. “there’s no way”

Table 8: Glossed versions for “But they are not the Me myself”

Needless to say, all the translations into European languages that we have considered for comparative examination maintain the neutral tonality of the original. Once again, Arishima remains the most faithful to Whitman’s text.

### Overall tendencies. Possible motivations

The detailed analyses undertaken in the previous two sections evidence the following general tendencies in most of the Japanese translations:

- (a) referential over-specification by: shift from abstract to concrete significata, localization, restriction to one designational variant of a polysemantic significatum, interpolated clarifications;
- (b) use of stylistically marked units instead of neutral ones;
- (c) shift to tighter syntactic structures, with subordination instead of coordination;
- (d) explicit expression of cognitive and emotive modality by the use of interpolated sentence-final markers or adverbs.

These changes significantly narrow down the range of possible interpretations of the text, sometimes up to a univocal designation. This reflects the translators’ misguided attempt to “clarify” the text, with the direct consequence of profoundly altering the Japanese reader’s interpretive experience.

One major reason for these tendencies may reside in the pursuit of “natural” and “easy-to-understand” Japanese, to the detriment of the characteristics of the original, which is not meant to be natural or easy-to-understand in the same key as an everyday casual communication act. Secondly, it is also true that in Japan the general

(reading) public tends to feel uneasy with metaphor, vagueness and the abstract, possibly because of the lack of proper text interpretation training in school education in recent decades.<sup>10</sup> In this context, perhaps the tendencies towards over-specification and clarification do not always derive solely from the translators' personal decisions, but also reflect the influence of editorial policies dictated by commercial considerations.

The Western literary world is familiar with Japanese genres and discourse traditions such as the *haiku* or the *tanka* which appear to be characterized by extreme conciseness and therefore also by vagueness, and should thus warrant easier acceptance of similar features in the case of translations. In fact, however, what we have, especially in *haiku*, is not vagueness at all, but its very opposite: a form of highly coded abbreviation associated with a highly concrete (sensorial) construal of the textual world.<sup>11</sup>

Our comparative examination leads to the assessment that the versions least affected by these tendencies are Arishima (1921) and Naganuma (1959), which consistently remain the most faithful to the original.

### Concluding remarks: alternatives and a possible solution

In the course of our comparative analysis, we have emphasized that, subjective factors set aside, several objective limitations arise from the peculiarities of Japanese in contrast to English, in terms of purely linguistic organization. Thus, for example,

---

<sup>10</sup> While it is difficult to assess the situation in the decades immediately following WW II, due to the lack of direct evidence, this tendency has been documented for more recent periods. Telling examples of this state of affairs can be found in Burton's (2015) analysis of the decline in the level of English-language literature education at Japanese universities over the last few decades, on the backdrop of "[t]he academic decline of Japanese students in all subjects," caused, among other factors, by the "yutori *kyōiku* (relaxed education) policy" promoted by the Japanese Ministry of Education from the late 1970s onwards (p. 115).

<sup>11</sup> Let us take a famous example from Matsuo Bashō's *Oku no hosonmichi* ("The Narrow Road to the Deep North"): 五月雨を集めて早し最上川 (*samidare wo atsumete hayashi Mogami-gawa*). English versions revolve around the axis of three key words ("summer rains–swift–Mogami River"), as in, for example, "gathering the rains of summer, how swift it is–Mogami River" (Tim Chilcott). A literal gloss, however, is: "The rainy-season-downpour gathering, swift, Mogami river." First of all, 五月雨 (*samidare*, lit. "the fifth-month rains") is a *kiigo*, a seasonal key word selected from a pre-existing acknowledged set, and therefore acting as the anchorage point of a very concrete contextual frame: the downpour specific of the rainy season in Japan, where rains can continue for days on end, in stark opposition to what a European might imagine of "summer rains," and frequently cause flooding—with catastrophic effects on the livelihood of the inhabitants of rural Japan in Bashō's time. Secondly, Mogami River in the northern region, Tohoku, is known as one of the fastest flowing and most dangerous rivers in Japan, thus particularly prone to claiming human lives during the rainy season. The Japanese reader of *haiku* can *decode* the text based on these two clues, the *kiigo* and the toponym, and build a specific and concrete sensory image of a place and a moment in time. The step of interpretation, for example of the more general human relevance of this scene, can only start after this operation of decoding takes place. By contrast, in Whitman's text, of course, no such concrete decoding is possible, and this may underlie the Japanese reader's uneasiness with the semantic leap of faith required by a faithful translation, as indeed by the original itself.

it is inevitable to operate both categorial changes (adjective to verb, noun to adjective etc.), and shifts in the level of lexico-grammatical organization (syntagmatic procedures instead of paradigmatic procedures, compulsory choice between different conjunct forms of adjectives and verbs). It is also inevitable that some lexical units will be stylistically marked, due to the diachronic and functional stratification of Japanese vocabulary (native Japanese / Sino-Japanese / loanwords from English).

Despite these objective limitations, if the peculiarity of the original text *as a text* is given precedence, we can propose a Japanese version much closer to the original, apt to offer the Japanese reader an interpretive experience in keeping with the peculiarities of Whiman's text. The version below<sup>12</sup> pays tribute to the published translations analyzed here, by taking up and integrating, like pieces in an intertextual puzzle, some equivalences from Arishima, Horii and Naganuma (the units marked in bold), which have been appraised, in our examination, as valid and inspired solutions.

いざこざから離れて、“私”であるものが、留まっている  
おもしろがり、無頓着で、憐れみつつ、無為に、統一性を保ち、留ま  
っている。  
見おろし、まっすぐ立ち、あるいは触知できない確かなより物に腕を  
もたせ、  
頸をかしげながら、さて次に何が起こるのかと興味深々に眺め、  
同時にゲームの中と外にいて、それを一心に見つめ、いぶかる。

As indicated in the introductory considerations, our analysis is informed by a view of translation as a process of “speaking raised to the power of two,” which sets for itself a daunting task: to capture the voice of the original not merely by an interpretation of its overall meaning, but primarily by an accurate grasp of the strategies of expression which guide the reader of the original towards configuring the textual world and intuiting the text's meaning. Thus, the translator's role never equals blind subordination to the original in its material—or purely linguistic—form. On the contrary, what is required is a rigorous understanding of, and a selfless commitment to the dynamic map of discourse strategies that underlies the articulation of textual sense.

The translation of a famous text finds itself in a privileged situation from this point of view. Having the benefit of numerous intra-linguistic and cross-linguistic comparisons with previous versions, the translator is better equipped to analyze the text's constitutive units and strategies, and better informed in devising alternatives and choosing among them.

---

<sup>12</sup> Version by the author (E. T.-M.) and Tomo Morita.

## Works Cited

### Analyzed texts

Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass* (1891-92). (A Norton critical edition). Ed. Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett. New York & London: Norton & Co., 1973.

### Japanese translations

*Kusa no ba* (1921). Trans. Takeo Arishima. Tokyo: Kyōwa, 1948.

*Kusa no ba*. Trans. Kintarō Horii. Tokyo: Shunjūsha. 1931.

*Walt Whitman shishū. Kusa no ba*. Trans. Saika Tomita. Osaka: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1949.

*Kusa no ba. Whitman shishū* (1959). Trans. Naganuma Shigetaka. Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1999.

*Whitman shishū. Kusa no ba*, vol. 1. Trans. Takashi Sugiki, Norihiro Nabeshima and Masayuki Sakamoto. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1969.

*Kusa no ba*, vol. 1. Trans. Masayuki Sakamoto. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1998.

### Spanish translations

*Hojas de hierba* (1952). Trans. Francisco Alexander. Madrid: Visor Libros, 2009.

*Hojas de hierba. Antología*. Trans. Manuel Villar Raso. Madrid: El Mundo (Colección Millenium), 1999.

### French translations

*Feuilles d'herbe*, vol. I. (1909). Trans. Léon Bazalgette. Paris: Mercure de France, 1955.

*Feuilles d'herbe (1855)*. Trans. Éric Athenot. Paris: José Corti, 2008.

*Feuilles d'herbe (1855)*. Trans. Gilles Mourier. Paris: Jean-Paul Rocher, 2011.

German translation:

*Walt Whitmans Werk in zwei Bänden, Zweiter Band*. Trans. Hans Reisiger. Berlin: S Fischer Verlag, 1922,  
<http://www.whitmanarchive.org/published/foreign/german/reisiger2/text.html>  
(accessed 10 March 2014).

### Other cited works

BEPPU, Keiko. "Whitman in Japan," *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia*. Eds. J.R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings (eds.). New York: Garland Publishing, 1998,  
[https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/current/encyclopedia/entry\\_508.html](https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/current/encyclopedia/entry_508.html) (accessed 1 July 2018).

BURTON, Susan. "An Overview of English-language Literature Study in Japan." *Lit matters. The Liberlit Journal of Teaching Literature*, Vol. 1, Issue 2 (2015): 112-142.

- COSERIU, Eugenio. "Tesis sobre el tema 'lenguaje y poesía,'" *El hombre y su lenguaje. Estudios de teoría y metodología lingüística*. Madrid: Gredos, 1977a. 201-207.
- COSERIU, Eugenio. "Lo erróneo y lo acertado en la teoría de la traducción," *El hombre y su lenguaje. Estudios de teoría y metodología lingüística*. Madrid: Gredos, 1977b. 214-239.
- COSERIU, Eugenio. *Textlinguistik. Eine Einführung*, Tübingen: Narr, 1981. Critical Spanish edition by Óscar Loureda Lamas, *Lingüística del texto. Introducción a la hermenéutica del sentido*, Madrid: Arco Libros, 2007.
- COSERIU, Eugenio. "Fundamentos y tareas de la lingüística integral," *Segundo Congreso Nacional de Lingüística. 16 al 19 de Setiembre de 1981. Actas. Volumen 1*. San Juan (R. Argentina), 1984. 37-53.
- KABATEK, Johannes / Murguía, Adolfo. "Die Sachen sagen, wie sie sind..." *Eugenio Coseriu im Gespräch*, Tübingen: Narr, 1997.
- MATSUO, Bashō. *Oku no hosomichi* (1689). Ed. Yasuo Hagiwara. Tokyo: Iwanami. 1979.
- MATSUO, Bashō. *Oku no hosomichi / The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. Trans. Tim Chilcott. 2004, [http://www.tclt.org.uk/basho/Oku\\_2011.pdf](http://www.tclt.org.uk/basho/Oku_2011.pdf) (accessed 29 September 2020).
- TĂMĂIANU, Emma. *Fundamentele tipologiei textuale. O abordare în lumina lingvisticii integrale*, Cluj-Napoca: Clusium, 2001.
- TĂMĂIANU-MORITA, Emma. "The form of texts: possibilities and limitations of an «integral» text-typological model." *Energieia IV* (2012): 1-31.
- TĂMĂIANU-MORITA, Emma. "What makes you say so?" On the types of motivation in the domain of expressive competence. *Energieia V* (2013-2014): 63-88.
- TĂMĂIANU-MORITA, Emma. "Towards a Definition of «Textual Constitution» in the Framework of Integral Linguistics." *Coseriu: Perspectives contemporaines, II*. Eds. Eugenia Bojoga, Oana Boc and Cornel Vilcu. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2014. 130-145.