

Translating Japanese Poetry

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This poem comes from Murō Saisei's (室生犀星 1889–1962) first book of poetry, *Ai no Shishū* (愛の詩集 "Collection of Love Poems", 1918). As an early work in the genre of Japanese free verse poetry (自由詩 *jiyū shi*), it represents an example of how poets of this time were beginning to write new, vernacular verse as opposed to more traditional forms such as the *waka* or now globally familiar *haiku*.

Murō's poetry often deals with loneliness, and in translating "A Poem Written on a Beautiful Night," I aimed to show the way that this manifests in the poem. Contrasts between inside and outside, warm and cold, light and dark, past and present, manifest in many ways throughout the piece. One of the more difficult ones to translate was the change in the first person personal pronoun that Murō uses; at the beginning and end of the poem he uses a more formal one but in the flashback he uses the less formal 僕 *boku*. English does not carry this distinction, but I translated it as "I, myself" to try and convey the greater sense of interiority that this pronoun might implicate in the original.

REFERENCES and Further Reading:

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A Poem I Wrote on a Beautiful Night

Murō Saisei
Matthew Danzinger, translator

In this, my warm room
When it burns it gradually glows
In the light of the beautiful candle
I, poor and hungry, I starve and walk
I think of that cold winter night
That evening, no matter which street I walked
the windows of the houses were all enjoyably bright
There was hot tea
and beautiful, young lives
were brightly, enjoyably being lived
If one lives like that and studies under a quiet light—
I weep to think how much light
the things written there would possess
I, myself, wondered, forever in that bright room
and sitting together in a circle in the evening
will I ever be given that silent harmony again?
Just for one night
I want to feel that happiness
I was thinking about a day where I walked while freezing in the cold
Oh, so time has passed
I am now sitting in a lovely room
There is elegant chintz and other textiles
There are books
Again that pleasant happiness is visiting
Oh, I study

美しい晩にかいた詩

私のこの温かい室
燃えとだんだんに匂ふ
美しい蠟燭のあかりで
私は貧しく飢えかつゑて歩いた
ある寒い冬の夜の事を考へた
あの晩どの街を歩いて
どの人家の窓も楽しく明るかつた
そこには熱い茶や
美しい楽しい若やいだ生活が
晴れやかに営まれてゐるやうだつた
あゝして静かな灯で勉強したら
そこで書かれることは
どんなに光のあることかと流涙した
僕には永久あんな明るい室や
夜の団欒や
またしんとした平和が与へられないのかと思つた
ひと晩でよいから
あゝいふ幸福をなめて見たいと思つて
寒さに凍えながら歩いた日の事を考へてゐた
おお そして時が経つて
僕は美しい室に今は座つてゐた
立派な更紗や織物があり
本があり
また快よい幸福が訪づれてゐた
おお 私は勉強する