



漫谈翻译

《外国语》《译林》编辑部 编

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编者的话

为了繁荣我国的文学翻译，提高翻译质量，发现和扶持新生力量，江苏人民出版社的《译林》和上海外国语学院的《外国语》两家杂志联合举办了一次译文征文评奖活动。这是建国以来第一次全国性的文学翻译评奖。这次评奖，自一九八二年七月公布评奖办法起至一九八三年七月揭晓获奖名单止，历时整一年。在外语教育、翻译和出版界的领导、学者和专家们的关心与指导下，在全国广大读者的热情鼓励与支持下，这次译文评奖活动获得了良好的成果。

在这次组织评奖的过程中，我们收到了读者的大批来信，大家对翻译的理论和技巧表现出很大的兴趣，对如何准确流畅地把《儿子》这篇美国小说译成中文也提出了各种看法。这表明，文学翻译这项艺术创作，正在受到越来越多的人们的关切。为了结合《儿子》一文的翻译，进一步探讨有关文学翻译的理论与实践，我们特选编了这本小册子，以便交流从事翻译的体会，并帮助中青年译者更好地提高文学翻译水平。

应当说明一点，《儿子》这篇英文原作，在翻译中确有一定的难度，各人在理解原文上或中文表达上难免存在一些不同的见解。我们认为这是学术讨论中的正常现象，不必要也不应该强求一致。这是符合“百花齐放，百家争鸣”方针的。

愿这本书能给每一位参加这次译文评奖的译者带来美好的回忆。

愿这本书能给有志于文学翻译的读者带来有益的启示。

愿这本书对有关部门今后在组织类似的文学翻译评奖活动时有一定的帮助。

愿我们的中青年文学翻译队伍茁壮地成长！

一九八三年八月

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一、供翻译用的英文原文

John Updike (1932—)

JOHN UPDIKE was born in Shillington, Pennsylvania, a state that has provided the background for much of his writing. He attended Harvard University and the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art in Oxford, England. He worked in the editorial department of *The New Yorker* from 1955 to 1957 and it is in that magazine that most of his many short stories have appeared. His first published book was a collection of light verse, *The Carpentered Hen* (1958), which was to be followed by a number of short-story collections and novels. *The Same Door* (1959) and *Pigeon Feathers* (1962) demonstrate Updike's consummate artistry in the short-story form. Among his novels the best known are *Rabbit, Run* (1960), *The Centaur* (1963), and *Couples* (1968). In 1964 he received the National Book Award for Fiction.

His literary style is what has won the most praise for John Updike's writing and "Son" is a good example of why. Changing point of view and time sequences are problems that bedevil most writers. It is a marvel how skillfully in "Son" the author switches point of view back and

forth from objective to subjective to objective again in the attitudes of father, son, and grandfather and how he moves from the present to the past to the present again without once disturbing the smooth surface of his writing. Small town life especially engages Updike in most of his writing and father-son-relationships. The latter he portrays with great emotional warmth.

(上述作者介绍仅供译者参考,不必翻译。——编者注)

Son

HE IS OFTEN UPSTAIRS, when he has to be home. He prefers to be elsewhere. He is almost sixteen, though beardless still, a man's mind indignantly captive in the frame of a child. I love touching him, but don't often dare. The other day, he had the flu, and a fever, and I gave him a back rub, marveling at the symmetrical knit of muscle, the organic tension. He is high-strung. Yet his sleep is so solid he sweats like a stone in the wall of a well. He wishes for perfection. He would like to destroy us, for we are, variously, too fat, too jocular, too sloppy, too affectionate, too grotesque and heedless in our ways. His mother smokes too much. His younger brother chews with his mouth open. His older sister leaves unbuttoned the top button of her blouses. His younger sister tussles with the dogs, getting them overexcited, avoiding doing

her homework. Everyone in the house talks nonsense. He would be a better father than his father. But time has tricked him, has made him a son. After a quarrel, if he cannot go outside and kick a ball, he retreats to a corner of the house and reclines on the beanbag chair in an attitude of strange, infantile or leonine, torpor. We exhaust him, without meaning to. He takes an interest in the newspaper now, the front page as well as the sports, in this tiring year of 1973.

He is upstairs, writing a musical comedy. It is a Sunday in 1949. Somehow, he has volunteered to prepare a high-school assembly program; people will sing. Songs of the time go through his head, as he scribbles new words. *Up in de mornin', down at de school, work like a debil for my grades.* Below him, i.ksome voices grind on, like machines working their way through tunnels. His parents each want something from the other. "Marion, you don't understand that man like I do; he has a heart of gold." This father's charade is very complex: the world, which he fears, is used as a flail on his wife. But from his cringing attitude he would seem to an outsider the one being flailed. With burning red face, the woman accepts the role of aggressor as penance for the fact, the incessant shameful fact, that *he* has to wrestle with the world while she hides here, in solitude, on this farm. This is normal,

but does not seem to them to be so. Only by convulsion have they arrived at the dominant submissive relationship society has assigned them. For the man is maternally kind and with a smile hugs to himself his jewel, his certainty of being victimized; it is the mother whose tongue is sharp, who sometimes strikes. "Well, he gets you out of the house, and I guess that's gold to you." His answer is "Duty calls," pronounced mincingly. "The social contract is a balance of compromises." This will infuriate her, the son knows; as his heart thickens, the downstairs overflows with her hot voice. "*Don't wear that smile at me! And take your hands off your hips; you look like a sissy!*" Their son tries not to listen. When he does, visual details of the downstairs flood his mind: the two antagonists, circling with their coffee cups; the shabby mismatched furniture; the hopeful books; the docile framed photographs of the dead, docile and still as cowed students. This matrix of pain that bore him—he feels he is floating above it, sprawled on the bed as on a cloud, stealing songs as they come into his head (*Across the hallway from the guidance room / Lives a French instructor called Mrs. Blum*), contemplating the brown meadow from the upstairs window (last summer's burdock stalks like the beginnings of an alphabet, an apple tree holding three rotten apples as if pondering why they failed to fall) yearning for Monday, for the ride to school with his

father, for the bell that calls him to homeroom, for the excitements of class, for Broadway, for fame, for the cloud that will carry him away, out of this, out.

He returns from his paper-delivery route and finds a few Christmas presents for him on the kitchen table. I must guess at the year. 1913? Without opening them, he knocks them to the floor, puts his head on the table, and falls asleep. He must have been consciously dramatizing his plight: his father was sick, money was scarce, he had to work, to win food for the family when he was still a child. In his dismissal of Christmas, he touched a nerve: his love of anarchy, his distrust of the social contract. He treasured this moment of proclamation; else why remember it, hoard a memory so bitter, and confide it to his son many Christmases later? He had a teaching instinct, though he claimed that life miscast him as a schoolteacher. I suffered in his classes, feeling the confusion as a persecution of him, but now wonder if his rebellious heart did not court confusion. Yet his handwriting (an old pink permission slip recently fluttered from a book where it had been marking a page for twenty years) was always considerably legible, and he was sitting up doing arithmetic the morning of the day he died.

And letters survive from that yet prior son, written

in brown ink, in a tidy tame hand, home to his mother from the Missouri seminary where he was preparing for his vocation. The dates are 1887, 1888, 1889. Nothing much happened: he missed New Jersey, and was teased at a church social for escorting a widow. He wanted to do the right thing, but the little sheets of faded penscript exhale a dispirited calm, as if his heart already knew he would not make a successful minister, or live to be old. His son, my father, when old, drove hundreds of miles out of his way to visit the Missouri town from which those letters had been sent. Strangely, the town had not changed; it looked just as he had imagined, from his father's descriptions: tall wooden houses, rain-soaked, stacked on a bluff. The town was a sepia postcard mailed homesick home and preserved in an attic. My father cursed: his father's old sorrow bore him down into depression, into hatred of life. My mother claims his decline in health began at that moment.

He is wonderful to watch, playing soccer. Smaller than the others,^u my son leaps, heads, dribbles, feints, passes. When a big boy knocks him down, he tumbles on the mud, in his green and black school uniform, in an ecstasy of falling. I am envious. Never for me the jaunty pride of the school uniform, the solemn ritual of the coach's pep talk, the camaraderie of shook hands and

slapped backsides, the shadow-striped hush of late afternoon and last quarter, the solemn vaulted universe of official combat, with its cheering mothers and referees exotic as zebras and the bespectacled timekeeper alert with his claxon. When the boy scores a goal, he runs into the arms of his teammates with upraised arms and his face alight as if blinded by triumph. They lift him from the earth in a union of muddy hugs. What spirit! What valor! What skill! His father, watching from the sidelines, inwardly registers only one complaint: he feels the boy, with his talent, should be more aggressive.

They drove across the state of Pennsylvania to hear their son read in Pittsburgh. But when their presence was announced to the audience, they did not stand; the applause groped for them and died. My mother said afterward she was afraid she might fall into the next row if she tried to stand in the dark. Next morning was sunny, and the three of us searched for the house where once they had lived. They had been happy there; I imagined, indeed, that I had been conceived there, just before the slope of the Depression steepened and fear gripped my family. We found the library where she used to read Turgenev, and the little park where the bums slept close as paving stones in the summer night; but their street kept eluding us, though we circled in the car. On foot,

my mother found the tree. She claimed she recognized it, the sooty linden she would gaze into from their apartment windows. The branches, though thicker, had held their pattern. But the house itself, and the entire block, were gone. Stray bricks and rods of iron in the grass suggested that the demolition had been recent. We stood on the empty spot and laughed. They knew it was right, because the railroad tracks were the right distance away. In confirmation, a long freight train pulled itself east around the curve, its great weight gliding as if on a river current; then a silver passenger train came gliding as effortlessly in the other direction. The curve of the tracks tipped the cars slightly toward us. The Golden Triangle, gray and hazed, was off to our left, beyond a forest of bridges. We stood on the grassy rubble that morning, where something once had been, beside the tree still there, and were intensely happy. Why? We knew.

“‘No,’ Dad said to me, ‘the Christian ministry isn’t a job you choose, it’s a vocation for which you got to receive a call.’ I could tell he wanted me to ask him. We never talked much, but we understood each other, we were both scared devils, not like you and the kid. I asked him, Had he ever received the call? He said No. He said No, he never had. Received the call. That was a terrible thing, for him to admit. And I was the one he told. As

far as I knew he never admitted it to anybody, but he admitted it to me. He felt like hell about it, I could tell. That was all we ever said about it. That was enough."

He has made his younger brother cry, and justice must be done. A father enforces justice. I corner the rat in our bedroom; he is holding a cardboard mailing tube like a sword. The challenge flares whitehot; I roll my weight toward him like a rock down a mountain, and knock the weapon from his hand. He smiles. Smiles! Because my facial expression is silly? Because he is glad that he can still be overpowered, and hence is still protected? Why? I do not hit him. We stand a second, father and son, and then as nimbly as on the soccer field he steps around me and out the door. He slams the door. He shouts obscenities in the hall, slams all the doors he can find on the way to his room. Our moment of smilingly shared silence was the moment of compression; now the explosion. The whole house rocks with it. Downstairs, his siblings and mother come to me and offer advice and psychological analysis. I was too aggressive. He is spoiled. What they can never know, my grief alone to treasure, was that lucid many-sided second of his smiling and my relenting, before the world's wrathful pantomime of power resumed.

As we huddle whispering about him, my son takes

his revenge. In his room, he plays his guitar. He has greatly improved this winter; his hands getting bigger is the least of it. He has found in the guitar an escape. He plays the Romanza wherein repeated notes, with a sliding like the heart's valves, let themselves fall along the scale:



The notes fall, so gently he bombs us, drops feathery notes down upon us, our visitor, our prisoner.

The above short story is selected from *2000 Years of Great American Short Stories* edited by Martha Foley, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975.—Ed.