Multiple Translation Communities in Contemporary Japan

*Multiple Translation Communities in Contemporary Japan* offers a collection of essays in English that (1) deepens the understanding of the cultural and linguistic diversity of communities in contemporary Japan and how translation operates in this shifting context and circulates globally by looking at some of the ways it is theorized and approached as a significant social, cultural or political practice and harnessed by its multiple agents; (2) draws attention to the multiplatform translations of cultural productions such as manga, which are both particular to and popular in Japan but also culturally influential and widely circulated transnationally; (3) poses questions about the range of roles translation has in the construction, performance and control of gender roles in Japan; and (4) enriches translation studies by offering essays that problematize critical notions related to translation. In short, the essays in this book highlight the diversity and ubiquity of translation in Japan as well as the range of methods being used to understand how it is being theorized, positioned and practiced.

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Translation takes many different shapes, whether it is morphing between kanji characters and the alphabet, media adaptations or functioning as a trope. Like translation, Japan signifies in so many ways, and yet the idea of a culturally homogenous and monolingual Japan has been a difficult one to dislodge despite the obvious presence of imported writing systems and religious beliefs, indigenous and migrant peoples and multiple cultures and communities. *Multiple Translation Communities in Contemporary Japan* highlights the diversity of translation in and out of Japan and Japanese, as well as the range of methods being used to understand how it is being theorized, positioned and practiced. It looks at translation in contemporary communities engaged in cultural production and social activism, as well as the multiple directions in which translation circulates within Japan, among Japan and other Asian countries and globally.

Translation is now a mode of engagement animated by multiple texts in a mix of media accessed and read/viewed/played in multiple orders by multiple communities of readers/viewers/players. Translation is not relegated to the afterlife of a linguistic event; rather, it is now located among a number of cultural practices that “prolong worlds” in the networked present. The idea of a target language, reader or user requires adjustment when all the targets are moving and generative. The notion of the “multiple” found translation as transgeneric, performance, collective reworking or commercial production also applies to communities in contemporary Japan, neither exclusive nor stable, that are constructed, animated and sustained by translation. The worlds of Japanese popular cultural productions are creatively extended through the appropriation by and for the use of communities, where performances of the multitasking of the translator are powerful indications of why the association of translation with a sense of loss, inferiority or failure is no longer viable.

Further, fixed notions and locations of Japan and Japanese are unsettled by the multiple translation communities that interact with them. The chapters in this collection give a sense of the play of translation in these shifting contexts by drawing attention to the importance of networked communities linked through cultural productions, which are both particular to
and popular in Japan but also culturally influential and globally circulated. They pose questions about the range of roles translation has in the construction, performance and control of gender roles in Japan, especially where it is juxtaposed with essentialized, idealized or marginalized identities, and enrich translation studies by offering essays that problematize critical notions related to translation by repositioning them in terms of how they operate in Japan and in Japanese.

There was an initial attempt to organize the ten chapters in this collection into three broad but discrete sections on transgeneric translation: manga, film and theatre; genders, queer communities and cross-translations; and literary translation. However, the essays were unable to be discretely contained. Queer was addressed in media translations, and literary translations were imbricated with gender issues. Translation communities, too, signify in so many different ways.

The issue of media use is an integral part of the discussion of kinships in this volume. Transgeneric translation among manga, film and theatre is addressed and concerned with the transnational circulation of traditional and popular Japanese cultural productions and their multiplatform translations. Manga, or Japanese comics, has become a major cultural export, which in both authorized and fan-based translation now exerts significant influence on the style of contemporary comics worldwide. Beverley Curran’s “Death Note: Multilingual Manga and Multidimensional Translation” discusses the popular manga Death Note in terms of its representation of Japan as a multilingual location that can be accessed in a number of media. The essay considers the bilingual construction of both the Japanese manga and its English translation, as well as looking at intralingual anime and live-action adaptations in order to analyze their respective representations of intersecting worlds and tongues that interrogate the meaning of nation and national languages in the midst of transnational flux.

The longstanding interest in intertextuality and allusion that is such a significant feature of traditional Japanese works such as nō songs complicates the means of their translation as well as their possible meanings. The rebirth of Japanese cultural practices and productions, an ongoing critical preoccupation in Japan in which “external” political or cultural influences have often appeared as threatening, is considered here in the context of 1960s Japan, when media translation asserted itself as a mode of creative and self-conscious cultural renewal. In “Literature and Theatre into Film: Shindō Kaneto’s Kuroneko,” Titanilla Mátrai investigates how the director merges the classical repertoire and techniques of Noh theatre with the 1960s pop genre of monster cat films in Yabu no naka no kuroneko (1968), also known as Kuroneko or Black Cat, by tracing the narrative’s appearance in diverse sources and the cultural influences that are reconstituted in the film. Shindō masterfully alloys several literary and theatrical works and styles, including an episode from Heike monogatari, elements from Konjaku monogatari and Japanese legends, as well as narratives from Noh
and kabuki, to create a new and complex story. The analysis of the eclectic components of this media translation not only draws attention to the filmmaker’s striking originality, which has yet to be fully appreciated, but also to his unique mix of the simplicity of Noh with the gaudy style of kabuki and the characteristic excess of cinematic horror.

“Translating Kamui Gaiden: Intergeneric Translation from Manga to Live-Action Film” by Nana Sato-Rossberg considers the reconstruction of the hero of Shirato Sanpei’s manga Kamui Gaiden that takes place in the process of Kamui’s intercultural media translation from a hand-drawn two-dimensional character in the 1960s manga to a role embodied by a well-known Japanese actor in the 2009 film adaptation directed by Sai Yoi- chi. The film reimagines Shirato’s hero for a new political moment and a new media landscape, where generations have experienced anime and videogames before manga. This chapter traces shifts in the reconstruction of gender evident in the film casting, along with other shifts that take place as the character moves between media.

In her preface to the 1999 edition of Gender Trouble, Judith Butler remarks that “the face of theory has changed precisely through its cultural appropriations. There is a new venue for theory, necessarily impure, where it emerges in and as the very event of cultural translation” (1999, ix). Theories travelling in translation are subject to linguistic and cultural critique by virtue of inevitable contextual shifts in time and space. Gender studies and queer theory have traced distinct and vexed trajectories in translation, but they both inflect the way translation has been variously positioned as inferior, derivative or impossible. Butler said that the aim of Gender Trouble “was to open up the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized,” an aim that expands and welcomes gender options. When applied to translation in Japan, this idea not only encourages the recognition of multiple versions of a work and their inevitability but also undoes the presupposition of how they are related to each other. Japanese translations of American feminist theory are indicative of the significance of translation in opening up the possibility for “the emergence of theory at the site where cultural horizons meet, where the demand for translation is acute and its promise of success, uncertain” (Butler 1999, ix).

Two essays in this volume consider the particular reformulations of feminist theory that have taken place in the Japanese context in different decades and give an indication of the crucial importance of the women’s movement to repositioning the task of the translator in Japan involved in activism and community construction by viewing translation as an activity requiring dialogue and interaction. In “The Revolution Cannot Be Translated: Transfiguring Discourses of Women’s Liberation in 1970s–1980s Japan,” James Welker investigates Japanese women’s use of translation in the 1970s and 1980s and how selected texts were imported for translation for the purpose of putting them to use in support of domestic agendas. In the process,
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Welker shows that the multiple versions of these translated texts not only furnished a vocabulary that renamed women’s bodies and sexual identities but also inspired creative works that furthered that feminist project. Caroline Norma’s essay “Catharine MacKinnon in Japanese: Toward a Radical Feminist Theory of Translation” looks at how feminist theoretical texts and their Japanese translators have evolved. Norma discusses the challenges of translating complex theoretical language and legal concepts and again emphasizes the importance of dialogue between writer and translator, a significant and enduring feature of feminist translation methodology in Japan. The politics of radical feminism adheres to strict ideas about the role of theory in personal conduct and social activism, with implications for activist translators.

The performance of gender is embedded in traditional arts and popular culture in Japan, but unless it takes the form of entertainment, sexual diversity goes largely unacknowledged as a “local” phenomenon and is socially marginalized. In the 1980s and 1990s, scholars of queer studies tended to emphasize the historical differences in sexual behavior and identity in order to show that there was no such thing as a transhistorical, universal gay identity that explained all behavior. More recently, however, queer studies scholars such as David M. Halperin and Carolyn Dinshaw have been interested in trying to understand how and why various groups of queer people feel sympathy and camaraderie with others across the boundaries of time and space, as well as what political work identification performs in the present. Interestingly, their work has included little discussion of the role that translation plays in affective identification, even when queer folks are trying to “identify” with people speaking other languages. In “Translating Queer in Japan: Affective Identification and Translation in the ‘Gay Boom’ of the 1990s,” Jeffrey Angles looks at how queer readers and communities seek each other out through the acts of translating and reading queer texts and the emotional bonds that are created not only with those who read the translations in Japanese but also with readers who have read them in English. Angles is attentive to particular translations that were popular during the “gay boom” in Japan in the 1980s and 1990s but, more broadly, positions translation itself as a queer activity that forges both a community of readers and one of translators whose very praxis signifies queer.

Roman Jakobson’s description of intralingual translation as “rewording” seems strikingly narrow when we think of a “single” language in terms of the multiple cultures and communities that speak it in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. This may seem self-evident when considering a global language like English, but it should also be obvious in the “densely heterogeneous linguistic practices of people in Japan” (Inoue 2006, 4), which include Japanese as a language with three writing systems; distinct registers of politeness, respect and humility, as well as gender; pragmatic shifts in first-person pronominal references; and regional and subcultural varieties. Japanese Women’s Language (JWL) has been a facet of Japanese that has
garnered a great deal of critical interest by scholars in and outside Japan, extolled on the one hand as a unique aspect of Japanese culture or, on the other, as a powerful reinforcement of heterosexual normativity. It is an acquired language that translates its speakers into a particular construction of femininity, although its speakers may assume a wide variety of postures in relation to JWL, including its queering for the purposes of community building. In “The Perils of Paisley and Weird Manwomen: Queer Crossings into Primetime J-TV via Telops,” Claire Maree traces the morphing of a Japanese speech style known as onee-kotoba from the queer community to prime-time Japanese television in order to show how a community-based, radically queer speech style is domesticated for easy consumption on mainstream television, while distance from the queer community is carefully maintained.

The interlingual translation of onna kotoba, or JWL, is also the focus of Jiyoung Kim’s “Translating Gendered Voices: From Tanizaki Junichirō’s Naomi to Yoshimoto Banana’s Kitchen.” English translations of women’s works and women’s voices in Japanese have tended to reify an exotic image of Japanese women, Kim argues, instead of making room for the multiple ways that women speak and act as literary characters and creators.

The iteration involved in the translation and retranslation process can be read as an attempt to come ever closer to a definitive translation of a literary work or as a way to resuscitate interest in a work by making it appear new again. It might also be seen as a series of performances, in which each translation is anticipated as a means of discovering something not found in other versions. Masaya Shimokusu’s “Hirai Teiichi, the Japanese Translator of Dracula and Literary Shape-shifter,” considers a series of translations of Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897) by Hirai Teiichi, beginning with an abridged version in 1957. Its success initiated a publishing boom in fantasy literature and subsequent translations of Dracula by Hirai. At the same time that he traces the translation history of Dracula, Shimokusu contextualizes the literary translation that postdates popular film narratives of the vampire and positions the translator as a carnival barker, whose style is drawn from the world of spectacle.

In “Yun Dong-ju’s poetry in Japanese Translation,” Yin-ji Piao argues that although many postwar Japanese translators have been stymied by the obfuscation of the poet’s language and poetic intention, there have been multiple attempts to translate his work. The textual specifics that inhibit popular access to the poems in postwar Japanese translation make obvious the seams of social transition during a period of war and colonial expansion in East Asia marked by linguistic shifts, redrawn borders and regime changes. The poetic translations depend not only on an understanding of the world of Yun Dong-ju, which demands a sense of the political and historical cultural context of wartime and the relationship between imperial Japan and annexed Korea, but also on an understanding of the poet’s religious beliefs and use of symbolism.
The multiple translation communities found in contemporary Japan and Japanese coalesce around imagined and embodied identities, and fictions and realities draw attention to the technology that has changed how we read, make art and participate in a networked world. Texts, too, in whatever medium or hybrid form they take, are attached to other texts. Recognition of their constellations gives us a better awareness of the multiple worlds we inhabit with and through them.

REFERENCES

6 Translating Queer in Japan
Affective Identification and Translation in the ‘Gay Boom’ of the 1990s

Jeffrey Angles

INTRODUCTION

Literature projects strong images that shape people’s perceptions about the subjects that it describes. This is especially true of writing having to do with love and sexuality—literature strongly shapes perceptions of how we should feel when we are in love; how we might express those feelings, what we should and could feel when experiencing erotic desire and the ways people act on their erotic urges. In fact, because literature tends to provide such good access to the interiority of characters, one might argue that it teaches us even more about the inner, psychological workings of sexual desire than other media, such as film.

Because of this, literature about queer desire has often taken on special meanings for sexual minorities. In societies in which minority sexualities such as homoeroticism, sadomasochism and polyamory are met with silence, homophobia, legal oppression or outright violence, it is not uncommon for people with those interests to seek out examples of other people like them. Carolyn Dinshaw has noted how often sexual minorities turn to history in order to make cross-temporal, affective connections between “on the one hand, lives, texts, and other cultural phenomena left out of sexual categories back then and, on the other hand, those left out of current sexual categories now” (1999, 1). Such impulses are grounded in the attempt to extend “the resources for self- and community-building” and to create an “affective connection” across the distances of space and time (21).

David Halperin (2002, 13–15) has also noted how often people in one time and culture draw on other models of same-sex eroticism found in history and literature as part of their political projects. He notes a strong tendency, especially on the part of gender and sexual minorities, to assert bonds with people in other times, places and cultures who engaged in seemingly similar experiences, even though the cultural ramifications of those experiences may, in some cases, be profoundly different. The cultural effects of this kind of affective identification can be significant. Through identifying with other sexual minorities across the boundaries of time and culture, queer historians have engaged in important work, showing that
compulsive heterosexuality has not necessarily been the norm in all cultures across time.

Needless to say, it is not just to the past that people turn in their search for community. They often turn to the writing of their contemporaries or near contemporaries in other nations to learn about how people in other places and cultures deal with feelings outside the ones their own particular society sanctions. To give one example from Japan, there were a number of prominent early twentieth-century writers, including the detective novelist Hamao Shirō, the mystery writer Edogawa Ranpo and the modernist experimentalist Inagaki Taruho who took inspiration from such Western writers as Edward Carpenter, John Addington Symonds, Walt Whitman and André Gide, who had argued in different ways for the benefits and naturalness of strong emotional and erotic bonds between men (Angles 2011, 143–192). For this handful of early twentieth-century Japanese writers, Carpenter, Symonds, Whitman and Gide helped them argue against the idea, common in Japan at the time, that homosexual men were ‘sick.’ In other words, through turning to the West, these writers were able to see how culturally bound commonly held notions about gender and sexuality were, thus aiding them in their struggles against the seemingly hegemonic heteronormativity that they found in 1920s and 1930s Japan.

In recent years, queer history and theoretical writing have undergone what some have called an ‘affective turn,’ as more and more scholars pay attention to the roles that cross-cultural and cross-temporal identification play in shaping ideas about sexuality. Interestingly, however, there has been strikingly little examination of the role that translation plays in affective identification, despite the fact that most of this cross-cultural and cross-temporal identification also happens across linguistic lines and is mediated through the act of translation. One of the key assumptions of this book chapter is that in writing the history of queer thought and identity, it is critically important to examine the role of translation because it is translation that makes ideas available across linguistic lines and thus provides models of sexual practice and identity that people can either choose to relate to, modify or reject. In other words, affective links are often forged through the gateway of translation. Rather than treating these gateways as invisible and empty openings, one should pay attention to what is passing through, who the guards are and how their activities shape the kinds of cross-cultural affective links that emerge.

This chapter focuses on translation and affective relationships in an important moment in Japanese–Western cultural exchange, a moment during which many Western texts about nonheteronormative desire—and male–male eroticism in particular—were being translated into Japanese. Although Japanese writers, artists and filmmakers had been interested in the subject of same-sex eroticism off and on over the years, there was a wave of cultural production around the year 1990 as writers, directors and artists began to treat the subject of male homoeroticism with even greater
directness and frequency. There are a number of studies in English talking about various aspects of this so-called gay boom in television, film and novels and on the Internet, and perhaps the most dramatic but least studied aspect of this increasing of queer is in the field of translation (Buckley 2000; McLelland 2000, 2005; Miller 2000).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a small flood of Japanese translations of Western literature that touched upon various forms of nonheteronormative experience. This encompassed retranslations and new translations of classic texts, such as those of Oscar Wilde, André Gide, Herman Hesse and E. M. Forster, to a vast number of translations of a broad array of contemporary writers, including Hervé Guibert, Manuel Puig, Gore Vidal, Gordon Merrick, Michael Chabon and Christopher Davis. Not all of these figures specifically wrote about Anglo-American models of gay identity, in which same-sex eroticism is portrayed as a sexual preference, means of identification and the key factor leading to a ‘gay’ lifestyle; however, a very large number of the Western authors translated during the gay boom did focus on American gay culture, including Edmund White, Andrew Holleran, David Leavitt, John Fox, Michael Nava, Christopher Bram and John Rechy.

This chapter looks at a few of the most influential of these translations created during the early years of the gay boom to illustrate the impact that the translations of these books had on the Japanese reading world and, more specifically, on the Japanese gay community. It argues that the translation of these and other books performed important cultural work—not only did it help shape images of queer sexuality for audiences that went well beyond a queer readership in Japan, but it also provoked debate within the gay male community about the relationship between queer identity and literary production.

JOHN FOX AND THE BOYS ON THE ROCK

Over the course of the twentieth century, Japanese writers translated a number of European and American authors who had written about various forms of nonheteronormative sexuality, including figures as varied as Edward Carpenter, Walt Whitman and the Marquis de Sade. Some of these translations earned a great deal of attention; for instance, Shibusawa Tatsuhiko’s infamous translation *Akutoku no sakaе* (1959) of Sade’s *L’histoire de Juliette, ou les Prospérités du vice* led to a prominent and widely publicized court case that, when finally settled in 1969, helped define the parameters of ‘pornography’ in Japan. Although this and certain other translations of queer literature earned significant admiration, translations of Western queer literature appeared in a relatively spotty fashion—works by different translators would appear once every few years from various publishing houses. In other words, until the 1990s, there were no
single voices or institutional forces that produced translations of Western queer literature in any sustained, consistent way.

A watershed in the history of the translation of queer literature into Japanese was the translation of *The Boys on the Rock*, a 1984 novel by the American writer John Fox. It was this translation that started a mini-domino effect: it was subsequently followed by a large number of translations of novels about queer desire—more specifically, about gay men in the West. The idea for the translation of *The Boys on the Rock* came in the late 1980s, when Murakami Haruki, the prominent novelist and translator of American fiction, recommended a number of recent American short stories and novels, including Fox’s work, to Matsuie Masashi, an editor at the publishing company Shinchōsha. Matsuie was editing a collection of new American fiction about adolescence (*Amerika seishun shōsetsu tokushū*), which would appear as a special issue of the journal *Shōsetsu shinbō* (*New Tide—Fiction*; Koshikawa 2011). To translate this work, Matsuie chose Koshikawa Yoshiaki, a translator and scholar who specialized in American fiction and who would eventually come to be well known for his translations of Paul Bowles, Gary Indiana and Thomas Pynchon. Koshikawa’s translation of Fox ended up being the longest story in Matsuie’s collection, published in March 1989. Shinchōsha published it in book form later that year in 1989, and a few years later in 1993, it was republished in paperback in the Shinchō Bunko series. According to another translator, Kakinuma Eiko (Kakinuma et al. 1994, 112), about whom more will be said shortly, the book sold “explosively well,” showing Japanese publishers the potential market for Western gay literature in Japan, thus forging the way for other publishers to release other translations of novels about the American gay experience.

Fox’s works sold very well in Japan, but he is barely remembered in his homeland today. Born in 1952, Fox grew up in the Bronx; he participated in writers’ workshops in college along with future ‘brat pack’ author Tama Janowitz. *The Boys on the Rock* (1989) was the only full-length novel he published during his life, which, like that of so many talented artists of his generation, was cut short by AIDS at the age of thirty-eight. *The Boys on the Rock* describes a handsome, athletic boy who experiences a powerful attraction to other men but, shackled by the expectations of a society that eschews anything but heterosexuality, he struggles to understand how to express his feelings and what they might mean for his identity. The back of the 1994 English edition sums up the story as follows:

Written with uncanny precision and wild humour, this is the story of Billy Connors, high school student in the Bronx, member of the swim team, and all-around regular guy, who in his sixteenth year has to face the fact that he’s a little different from everyone else, a little ‘weird.’

Though he’s sort of going steady with a girl and popular at school he’s always worried that the secret fantasies he has about men would set him apart and make him ‘different’ if anyone knew about them.
How Billy faces up to himself—and his friends—as he discovers the complexities of life, the exuberance of sex, and what it means to be an adult in our imperfect world, makes for a touching, wise, and very moving novel.

Edmund White, one of America’s most prominent openly gay authors, confirms the high evaluation of the novel in a blurb on the back of the same edition: “This is some of the brightest, funniest, most touching writing about adolescence I’ve read in a long time. And if ever a book will give straight readers an exact sense of what it’s like to grow up gay, surely The Boys on the Rock will.” In other words, the novel is a coming-out story, which the publisher thought could be of benefit to sexual minorities dealing with their own issues of identity and self-expression, as well as straight readers who are trying to understand the struggles of sexual minorities. As these comments suggest, the book is in its inception, content and presentation deeply related to the American gay liberation movement, which had gained great public visibility two decades previously with the Stonewall Riots in New York City. In fact, the 1994 edition that provides the source of these comments was part of St. Martin’s Stonewall Inn Editions, which specialized in contemporary gay and lesbian writing from the United States. As the name of the series as well as the pink triangle on the upper left corner of the cover of the book suggests, the series was a product of the liberation movements of the 1980s and early 1990s, which adopted historical motifs of repression and turned them around to use as symbols of a proud, liberated identity.

The original English title contains an implicit reference to a very American symbol of repression, namely ‘the Rock,’ the jailhouse on Rikers Island located in the East River just outside the Bronx, where the novel takes place. Metaphorically, the title suggests that the queer boys are trapped in a sort of jail—a lower-middle-class, hawkish, conservative slice of America, which does not welcome much less nurture sexual minorities. Throughout the book, the threat of violence—both real, physical violence and psychological terror—looms over the characters caught in this metaphorical jail. In the last chapter, in the scene that gives the book its title, the protagonist Billy dreams that he and his friends are on a rock in the ocean, being shot at by straight acquaintances. The bullets, however, swing around and fly back at the straight aggressors, killing them (Fox 1989/1994, 144–145). This self-assured fantasy provides momentary hope, but for people trapped in America’s working class, such fantasies quickly run up against the harsh realities of homophobia. The same chapter informs us that one of the characters was, in reality, knifed to death in a subway, whereas another is so afraid his sexual identity will ruin his career that he abandons the man whom he loves. Only the central character seems to come away from the novel with any sense that he might conceivably be better off living a nonheterosexual life.

The Japanese translation of Fox’s novel is titled *Shiosai no shōnen* (*The Boys in the Roar of the Sea*), which sounds much more optimistic than...
the original English title. This shift eliminates the reference to Rikers Island, which could easily cause confusion for Japanese readers if translated in a way that suggested the work was somehow a jailhouse novel. At the same time, Koshikawa has substituted a poetically suggestive image of the tide—a symbol of slow, shifting change that has long been part of the lexicon of Japanese poetry. This title also contains romantic overtones in that it echoes the title of the novelist Mishima Yukio’s famous Shiosai (The Sound of Waves), one of the most famous heterosexual love stories of mid-twentieth-century Japanese literature. These romantic associations were not lost on Japanese readers, especially women, who tended to see the story as one of a doomed love that goes against the grain of society.

As mentioned, when the novel first appeared in Japanese, it was presented as a seishun shōsetsu—a term that, literally translated, means ‘novel of adolescence’ and functions as an equivalent of the German term Bildungsroman. Since at least the 1960s and perhaps even much earlier, Japanese publishers have frequently used the label seishun shōsetsu to market a subgenre of fiction about people around high school or college age dealing with the many different problems of life, sexuality and social issues as they figure out how to be adults. Perhaps one of the reasons for the success of this subgenre in Japan is that it appeals to the part of the psyche that wishes to revisit, revision and come to terms with one’s own formative adolescent experiences.1 In any case, during the 1980s, foreign ‘novels of adolescence,’ including the works of Bret Easton Ellis and Jay McInerney, sold quite well in Japan, so it was predictable that publishers like Shinchōsha, which commissioned the publication of Fox’s work, were seeking similar new works by young American authors.

The advertising band (obi) wrapped around the first edition of the Japanese translation of The Boys on the Rock, published by Shinchōsha in 1989, describes Fox as a new voice writing within the subgenre of novels of adolescence:

Summer at sixteen, a sexual awakening
The youthful muscles of an adolescent boy
His scent among the tide

From this depiction of the homosexual experiences of a handsome boy from the swim team and a college student, emerges a briskly depicted novel of adolescence, a ‘new classic’ by an author who, following in the tradition of Salinger, represents a new generation!

The comparison of Fox to J.D. Salinger, the author of the famous novel The Catcher in the Rye, was no doubt meant to appeal to Japanese readers who knew and loved this contemporary American classic, which had already been translated twice into Japanese and had earned Salinger a dedicated following during the introspective and tumultuous decades of the 1960s and 1970s.2
Koshikawa Yoshiaki, who does not identify as gay, has commented that he did not have any overt liberatory or political motives at work when he began translating Fox. He states that during the late 1970s and 1980s, Japanese translations of foreign works of literature experienced an ‘ice age’ of sorts, during which relatively plentiful translations began slowing to a trickle. As a result, Koshikawa was eager to see the introduction of new literary works. His goal in responding to Matsue’s request was not necessarily to contribute to the rise of ‘gay literature’ but more simply to provide access to many of the new developments in the English-speaking world (Koshikawa 2011).

Nonetheless, the impressive afterword that Koshikawa provided for his translation, “Gei to issho ni kangaete miyō” [Let’s Try Thinking Together with Gays], shows a great deal of sympathy for gay Americans, as well as a good understanding of the sociocultural factors affecting gays and lesbians in late twentieth-century America (Koshikawa 1993, 251–258). He notes that the civil rights and women’s rights movements helped set the stage for Stonewall and the subsequent flourishing of the gay liberation movement, which saw some successes, including successfully pressuring the American Psychological Association to remove homosexuality from its list of diseases in 1972. Koshikawa quotes cultural critic Frank Rich’s article in *Esquire* (1987) to argue that as a minority, queer men have made many critically important and visible inroads into mainstream American culture. At the same time, Koshikawa notes that American law has failed to grant gays and lesbians full civil rights, including protection from discrimination and the same rights accorded to cross-sex partners. It is precisely in the midst of such tensions that post-Stonewall writers began to candidly treat issues of self-discovery and sexual identity that previous generations of writers had only dealt with obliquely. Koshikawa follows these comments with a sophisticated discussion about the ways that this literature, as well as many aspects of 1980s gay culture, represents a psychological reaction on the part of sexual minorities who, finding little acceptance in a homophobic mainstream American society, responded by creating their own institutions and customs—a subculture that, in some cases, valued free sex and bar culture and, in others, constructed alternatives to the traditional family. It is in this context, he argues, that we should read John Fox’s novel.

In short, the translator’s afterword positions this work as representing the gay American experience, but as Keith Harvey (1998/2004, 2003) has noted in his pioneering studies of the ways that depictions of ‘gayness’ have travelled across linguistic lines, it is not unusual that when novels about homosexuality are translated into another language, passages having to do with queerness are often subtly reconfigured to match expectations already present within the target culture. In other words, certain elements of the Japanese translation suggest a subtly different relationship among sexual preference, sexual practice and identity than that found in the original English text. For instance, one sees this in one of the climactic scenes in which
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the main character Billy, who is struggling with his attraction to other men, goes to talk to his swimming coach. As he describes his feelings, the coach interrupts him.

“Are you saying you’re homosexual?”
“What?”
“Are you homosexual?”
“Uh, well—”

(Fox 1989/1994, 89)

In the Japanese translation, however, the coach’s question seems to be much less about sexual identity than sexual feelings (Fox 1993, 153). His first question, “Omae, dōsei na no ka?” contains the word dōseiai, which literally means “same-sex love” and has been one of the dominant words referring to the concept of homosexuality since at least the 1920s, when it emerged as a translation of the Western concept (Pflugfelder 1999, 251–252; Angles 2011, 5–7). Interestingly, however, he does not use the word dōseiaisha, which literally means “same-sex love person” and serves as the most common translation for the word “homosexual.” In other words, the coach’s question sounds something like, “You, is [what you are talking about] same-sex love?” His question seems to be confirming the nature of Billy’s feelings, not whether or has an identity characterized by those feelings. When the coach repeats the question, the subject is left out entirely, so the question becomes even slightly more ambiguous: simply “Dōseiai na no ka?” meaning something like “Is it a case of same-sex love?”

One sees a similar ambiguity regarding identity in another important scene that follows close on the heels of this one. Billy goes home and, looking in the mirror, says to himself, “You. Are. A. Ho-mo-sex-u-al,” as if testing out the label that his swim coach has just provided him (Fox 1989/1994, 96). In the Japanese translation, he looks into the mirror and says to himself, “Omae. . . Wa. . . Dō. . . Sei. . . Ai. . . Da,” meaning “As for. . . . You,” followed by the component characters of the word dōseiai meaning “same-sex love” or “homosexuality,” plus the copula da (Fox 1993, 166). Once again, Billy seems to be probing the nature of his own feelings more than his identity. This choice of language might have to do with the fact that dōseiaisha (homosexual) sounds relatively clinical in Japanese and did really not catch on among the queer population itself, although many magazines and queer bars used the abbreviated form homo in the 1960s and 1970s. In the United States and the United Kingdom, however, ‘homosexual’ was frequently used as a self-identifying label despite its clinical sound, until eventually liberationists shifted this toward the more positive-sounding ‘gay.’

The subtle difference in language, however, also reflects rather different attitudes toward the relationship between queer desire and identity in the US and Japan. In Japan, far fewer people are eager to take on a
self-identifying sexual identity at all. It is generally more common to hear one describing one’s sexual feelings and activities in terms of emotion or sexual play than in terms of something associated with an outward, political, social or subcultural identity. Until recently, there was relatively little use in Japan of identity-based language that implied a continuity between one’s sexual preferences and one’s subjectivity. Certainly, this is not to say that there are no people in Japan that identify according to their sexual feelings, but the numbers are far fewer than the number of people who actually engage in same-sex eroticism. In general, Japanese have seemed more reluctant than Anglo-Americans to embrace an identity that suggests that their sexuality represents the root of their entire personality; in fact, not all have even agreed with the need to.³ Given this context, the choice of language in Koshikawa’s translation, which explores feelings more than identity, is indicative of different attitudes toward identity and the ways that those attitudes are subtly reconfigured in the act of translation.

In the novel, around the same time that the passages discussed take place, Robert Kennedy is killed. When Billy goes to school the next day, he finds that a number of the students in his politically conservative school are laughing “at the stupidity of putting the flag at half-staff for that commie queer Kennedy.” Billy explains the use of the word, saying, “Everybody who wasn’t a total asshole was a queer” (Fox 1989/1994, 96). In other words, the schoolboys throw around the word ‘queer’ as an insult, even though it may in fact have nothing to do with the real sexual orientation of the person being talking about. The pejorative use of the word ‘queer’ resonates strongly with Billy, who is struggling with the question of how these words relate to him, and the fact that they are used so negatively makes him want to avoid them altogether.

In the Japanese equivalent of this sentence, however, the student states that it is stupid to lower the flag for a person who is an aka, meaning ‘red,’ and an okama, a word often used pejoratively to refer to an effeminate and passive homosexual, not unlike the word queen in English (Fox 1993, 167). Interestingly, the passage that explains the derogatory use of the word ‘queer’ among the schoolchildren does not appear anywhere in Koshikawa’s translation. In Japanese, most insults do not have to do with sexual orientation; they most commonly deride the intelligence of the person. It is possible that people might use the word okama pejoratively against a man who is effeminate or known to prefer men, but it is not terribly likely that one would suddenly pull the term out of the blue for someone who does not fit that profile. Rather than explain the use of the word ‘queer’ as a general, all-purpose insult, the translation leaves this out altogether.

One could point to a number of other small shifts in language in the text, but the purpose of pointing out these differences between Fox’s English and Koshikawa’s Japanese is not to criticize the translator or suggest that somehow the translation is ‘wrong.’ Instead, it is to indicate the subtle differences between the ways that the language present in the American and
Japanese texts relates to the idea of homosexuality and to suggest that, in fact, these subtle differences, either consciously or unconsciously, reflect different notions present within those two cultures. To borrow from Keith Harvey, “the translator has (inevitably, one might say) produced a text that harmonizes with the prevailing view of human subjectivity that obtains in his—the target—culture” (1998/2004, 415). The point is that although *The Boys of the Rock* served as an important moment in the translation history of Western queer literature into Japanese, some of the specific problems that the novel raises—questions of language, how to relate to it, and how to apply that language to oneself in the construction of identity—have in fact subtly been reconfigured in the translation to better fit the Japanese context. What the Japanese readership sees is a fine-tuned version of the novel that has to do with their culture just as much as with the American culture from which it originated.

**FEMALE READERSHIP AND THE RISE OF THE ‘GAY NOVEL’**

Since the 1970s, when the female manga artists Takemiya Keiko and Hagio Moto started writing about boys experiencing their first pangs of love in all-boys’ schools, one of the major themes of the comics for girls (*shōjo manga*) has been romantic relationships between boys. Manga belonging to this subgenre often feature beautiful young men with lithe bodies, large and expressive eyes and long hair that gives them romantic and often pensive looks. Not just the styling of the characters is highly romanticized but the plotlines as well. They often emphasize love at first sight, brief but powerful connections and, in many cases, star-crossed relationships that end with separation or even death. Both partners in these love stories are often male, but manga authors typically replace gender difference with other sorts of difference: body type, size, age, sexual experience or aggressiveness (Welker 2006). Young girls reading these manga often relate to them in intensely personal ways, seeing the stories of boy-on-boy love as romantic tales of star-crossed lovers, unable to find a place for themselves in the world.

Interestingly, Shinchōsha editors discovered that the Koshikawa translation of *The Boys on the Rock* appealed not just to gay men but to young women who were passionate readers of manga and wanted to read more about men who love men.4 Koshikawa has commented that he heard the translation was sold in the gay bookstores of Shinjuku Ni-Chōme, the biggest gay area of Tokyo, but it seems that the largest number of sales, which he estimated at around 60,000 copies for both the hardback and paperback editions, came from young women (Koshikawa 2011). There is little doubt that this motivated the editors at Shinchōsha, when repackaging the translation for publication as a paperback novel in 1993, to include an image on the cover that looks like it might be found in *shōjo manga*. In the novel, the protagonist Billy is described as a trim, muscular athlete on the swim
Figure 6.1  Cover of the paperback version of Koshikawa Yoshiaki’s translation of John Fox’s The Boys on the Rock (Shinchō Bunko, 1993)
team of his school, but instead of a figure of a tough, masculine young man, the cover of the 1993 paperback edition shows a dandy, complete with the long, floppy hair, skinny jeans and sultry looks that one might find in girls’ manga about boys’ love.

Similarly, the description on the back of the paperback contains starry-eyed, exaggerated language that seems more akin to the language one might find in manga than in the novel itself.

Summer at sixteen years old, when all looks like it is going well, but nothing goes quite as planned. Billy, who goes to a high school in New York, is overcome by lethargy. Teachers who are devoted exclusively to serious things, foolish classmates who do nothing but have sex. Exhausted parents who can do nothing but give orders and ask questions. But in the older college student Alfred alone, he begins to see a sparkle of light . . . In the scent of summer and the rising sensations of the skin, this novel depicts two men setting out on the ‘supreme relationship’ of homosexuality.

The reference to the ‘‘supreme relationship’’ of homosexuality (dōseiai to iu ‘shikō no kankei’) sounds very much like the kind of florid language about same-sex desire that one might find in manga. This blurb also appeals to the idea that the story depicts two ideal lovers, alone, misunderstood and pitted against the world—a common plotline in shōjo manga.

Because the book sold well among an unexpectedly broad demographic, Japanese publishers started translating more novels in the 1980s and early 1990s, including books by American novelists like Edmund White, David Leavitt and Michael Nava, who embraced a gay identity and wrote about the American gay subculture in their literature. As a result, a distinct subgenre of gei shōsetsu (gay novels) began to emerge from the already popular category of seishun shōsetsu. In fact, during the mid-1990s, a number of larger Japanese bookstore chains began to include sections in their stores with this label over the shelves. The very fact that such sections began to appear around the country suggests that queer novels were selling to populations broader than the small number of people who openly self-identified as sexual minorities. Because so many of these novels were translations, it was only natural that the word gei, the Japanese transliteration of the English word ‘gay,’ came to be used to describe this subgenre instead of other words that already existed in Japanese, such as dōseiaisha or homo, mentioned earlier. Another reason the term gei seemed more appropriate for this emerging subgenre was that a number of these works featured Anglo-American models of gay identity, in which the term ‘gay’ meant not only a sexual preference but an entire lifestyle and identity that placed one’s sexual preference at the core of one’s being.

The translator who played the biggest role in the boom in translations of Western queer literature in the 1990s was Kakinuma Eiko, a prolific
translator who produced dozens of translations of works by openly gay American and British novelists. In a roundtable discussion published in a 1994 issue of Barazoku (Tribe of Roses), Japan’s longest-running magazine for queer men, Kakinuma notes with a laugh that she is a straight woman who identifies as an okoge, or ‘fag hag’: a woman fascinated with the lives of gay men. She notes that she became interested in ‘the love of boys’ (shōnen’ai) through manga in high school, although she, like many of her schoolmates, fed her fascination by looking at pictures and stories of queer men in Barazoku (Kakinuma et al. 1994, 119–120). She notes that her own interest in gay literature represented an extension of her interest in manga by female authors for a female audience, but as she read more and more literature actually written by self-identified gay men, she found her sensibilities shifting away from the images of young, lithe, pretty men she found in manga.

Kakinuma: It may sound strange, but my sensibilities came to resemble those of a gay guy. I guess you could say they became the same.

Fushimi: You turned gay?!
Kakinuma: In the old days, I used to think big muscles were gross and hated them. However now, big muscles and genitals—I’ve come to like those things . . . (Laugh)

(Kakinuma et al. 1994, 120)

After doing a series of articles introducing English-language gay fiction to queer audiences in the magazine June, Kakinuma began discussing gay literature with the editors at the publisher Hayakawa Shobō. The result was that in 1990, she published a translation of A Boy’s Own Story, a semifictional novel published in 1982 by Edmund White, one of America’s most prominent openly gay authors. Kakinuma’s translation, Aru shōnen no monogatari, published in 1990, quickly sold through the first printing of 7,000 copies and entered a second printing within a single week. Between 1990 and 1992, it had gone through six printings—something relatively unusual for a book that had not yet been released in paperback. Works of translated fiction usually sell only 2,000 to 3,000 copies, so going through six printings of 7,000 copies apiece represented a small coup (Kakinuma et al. 1994, 112).

Kakinuma has commented that her readership seems to have been largely women (1994, 112–113). In Japan, books typically include postcards, which publishers use to encourage readers to send in thoughts about the book. The overwhelming majority of responses that came in from her translations of American gay fiction were from young women who, like her, were fascinated by gay men; however, the limits of these readers’ ability to identify with the novel came during the sexual scenes of the books. Kakinuma’s translation of the sequel to White’s novel, the book The Beautiful Room Is Empty (1988),
published as *Utsukushii heya wa karappo* in 1990, just two months after the prequel, sold far less well than its predecessor. By 1992, it had only gone through three printings compared to the prequel’s six. The sequel, in other words, sold only half as well. The reason, Kakinuma commented, is that it
follows a young man through his adulthood and his budding sexual adventures, including many that happen in places a young heterosexual female audience might have found unpleasant and sordid (1994, 13). In particular, she notes, a sexual encounter that takes place in a public toilet seemed to have put off many of her female readers—no doubt because those scenes did not jibe with beautiful, highly aestheticized illusions about the purity of boyish love that the readers had acquired from girls’ manga.

TRANSLATED ‘GAY NOVELS’ AND THE GAY MALE COMMUNITY

Although women seem to have provided the largest audience for the flood of translations published in the 1990s, the books did make an impact on the gay community as well. It is important to point out that although the majority of reader response postcards returned to publishers were from women, that percentage may not have been entirely representative of the entire readership of the book. Closeted queer men who were afraid that others might see them reading the book would, no doubt, have been concerned about writing down their feelings and sending in their thoughts to the publisher. The translator Kitamaru Yūji has commented that the 1990s was an era when many queer men still found it difficult to talk about their sexual desires. In fact, many were afraid even to be seen reading books about homoerotic desire, so reader response cards are most likely not an accurate measure of the full readership of these novels (Kitamaru 2011).

One can tell, however, that these translations of Western homoerotic novels were noticed within Japan’s gay community by looking in the magazine Barazoku, the important and long-running gay magazine. As Jonathan Mackintosh (2011) has described at length in his study of homosexuality in postwar Japan, Barazoku began publication in 1971, creating somewhat of a stir in the publishing world, but it proved enough of a success that it went on to become Japan’s longest-running magazine for queer men, continuing for more than three and a half decades.6 By the 1990s, a typical issue of Barazoku would include a glossy section at the front of pictures of scantily clothed and nude men, lightly censored photographs of intercourse and sometimes short reviews of things related to queer male culture—most often films or plays that contained some homoerotic content. This was followed by a long newsprint section of one-handed reading material; more photos; erotic manga; down-to-earth manga about the lives of gay couples; personal ads; letters from readers; and lots of information about bars and sex clubs. Without question, it was sex that sold copies of Barazoku, and judging from the makeup of the magazine, it seems safe to assume that most readers spent the majority of their time with the pictures, erotic stories, personals and racy advertisements.7 Queer activists in Japan have sometimes criticized Barazoku for favoring erotic titillation to the exclusion of queer social or
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political activism, but the magazine deserves credit for its important role in circulating information. It was through creating a base of shared information about bars, saunas, hot models, films, photograph collections, manga and books on queer themes that Barazoku’s editors believed they could contribute to the formation of a Japanese homoerotic culture—a culture centered on shared erotic practice and cultural sensibility more than on social or political subjectivity.

It is interesting to note that in the 1990s, Barazoku published a number of short reviews of literary works, including several novels in translation. In fact, more of the reviews of literary works in Barazoku are about Western queer literature in Japanese translation than about queer literary works written by Japanese authors. In a number of these reviews, the reviewers, who are usually unnamed, use the space of the review as a forum to make comments about the state of queer literature in Japan. One example is an April 1991 review of Kakinuma Eiko’s translation of Edmund White’s coming-out novel The Beautiful Room Is Empty. The review begins by drawing attention to the book’s homoeroticism in bold letters and then moves onward to talk about the politics of writing. Below is a translation of the entire review.

A story that develops from awakening, trepidation, toward full-fledged gay experiences—a work worthy of note. The second gay novel (gei-noveru) from the author of the previously published book A Boy’s Own Story, Edmund White. A tale in which a fretful, brooding boy (shōnen) puts his desires into action and starts engaging in bold sexual adventures. This author was the first-ever recipient of that ever-so American of literary awards, the ‘Bill Whitehead Award,’ which is granted for long-term contributions to gay and lesbian literature (gei & rezu bungaku) over many years. Recently, in Japan, as well, there have been quite a few novels about gays (gei), but there is not yet any such prize. It is said that in Japan, there are approximately 140 different prizes for fiction, criticism, poetry, and so on. If there are so many, we seem to take prizes a little too lightly. Perhaps someone like Shinchōsha, which sold quite a lot of copies of The Boys on the Rock, or Hayakawa Shobō, which has brought out this book, should create a prize for gay literature in Japan? It is worth noting that the translator of this book was a woman. There are a number of places that are quite juicy, but she did a pretty good job with the translation. Before long, could gay literature be subsumed by women’s power . . .? Thinking about it is enough to make one uneasy.

(Barazoku 1991, n.p.)

Clearly, the author—most likely Fujita Ryū, one of the contributing editors to Barazoku—is suspicious about the fact that it is not gay men themselves who have produced many of the recent translations of ‘gay novels.’
The author seems irritated that the Japanese literary system does not bring Japanese queer authors to the fore, giving them visibility and a voice, and whenever queerness is given a voice in the mainstream publishing world, it seems to be women who are doing the talking.

Indeed, the author is correct in that many of the translators of literature about nonheteronormative desire during the 1990s gay boom did not profess an openly queer identity, apart from two clear exceptions. One was the lesbian translator Ochiishi Ōgasutomūn, who gained attention with her translations of Andy Warhol, Gertrude Stein, Sara Schulman and (somewhat later) Chris Kraus. The other was Kitamaru Yūji, a self-identified gay male journalist who has translated several novels about gay men by Patricia Nell Warren, Alan Hollinghurst and Paul Monette, as well as the gender-bending play *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* by John Cameron Mitchell. Significantly, both of these writers were living in New York at the time, so in both their literary and personal lives, they were somewhat freer to act as outsiders, choosing projects that they felt were important and that might benefit society.9

When asked about his motivations for translating these novels, Kitamaru (2011) said that he undertook the translation of Warren as a response to what he saw as a lack of good information in Japan about gay male life. He notes that during the 1980s and 1990s, certain Japanese magazines were advocating closeted and sham marriages as a technique for gay men to survive in heterosexist society, and when the mass media did talk about gays and lesbians, they only treated them as sexual aberrations. Worst of all, the AIDS epidemic was in full swing, so there was no way to fight the HIV virus without talking openly about sexual activity and desire. As a result of this situation, Kitamaru recognized the urgency of providing positive and reliable information about the lives of LGBT people to Japanese readers. Since the Internet was not yet widely available and it was difficult to obtain books and magazines in Western languages in Japan, translating literature seemed like an effective way to share information about gay life. Around that time, Kitamaru had become too busy with his journalistic career in New York to do the research needed to write his own book on the subject, so when the publisher Dai-san Shokan approached him to talk about doing some translations, he proposed Warren’s modern gay classic *The Front Runner* (1974). This novel depicts the lives of two generations of gay men, the social conditions in which they live, the necessity for social justice for them and other sexual minorities, the ways that homophobia can affect the body and mind and the way in which one might begin to combat negative forces and find happiness—all within a gripping plot. Kitamaru undertook the project hoping that gays and lesbians in Japan could put this information to good use, changing their own lives and thus slowly constructing a society in which sexual minorities would be freer to talk about their lives. He also states that he hoped he could use ‘outside pressure’ to bring about change by helping Japanese readers understand that not all places in the world required one
to be closeted, and that if Japanese sexual minorities failed to talk about their lives more openly, they “could not face the rest of the world” (email correspondence 2011). Kitamaru estimates that his translation Furonto rannā (1990) sold around 20,000 copies in all.
It is clear from reading *Barazoku* that a number of queer Japanese readers learned a great deal about gay identity and life in the West from translations of foreign novels. In 1994, there was an exchange between the *Barazoku* editor Fujita Ryū and the queer activist Fushimi Noriaki that reveals some of the different ways that the Japanese queer community relate to translations of Western fiction. Fujita states that for him, novels about gay life from abroad helped guide him as a young man:

*Fujita:* [When I was young] I didn’t have information [about homoeroticism], so what I wanted to know was what men did together and where they did it—that kind of concrete information, but there wasn’t much of that.

And then there was the era when I wanted graphic descriptions of sex. However, I couldn’t find those. Instead, I suffered ‘cause all I could find were philosophical things or things about human rights. So when John Rechy came on the scene, I got incredibly turned on. That was almost thirty years ago.

(Kakinuma et al. 1994, 115)

*City of Night*, which describes the daily life of a hustler and his sexual encounters in several cities across the United States, was published in English in 1963 and then translated by Takahashi Masao as *Yoru no tokai* in 1965. (Takahashi, a critic and translator of American literature, is perhaps best known for his translations of Faulkner.) Fushimi challenges Fujita, suggesting that he just liked those books for their homoerotism and not because they depict the full dimensions of queer life.

*Fushimi:* It suits me much better if more political things are introduced, but you—shall I say this in a more straightforward way? *(Laugh)—you seem to enjoy literature that rejects more political things.

*Fujita:* That’s because I don’t have any ideology. *(Laugh)* (1994, 116)

Here and in the ensuing discussion, there is a standoff between two generations: an older generation that preferred literature having to do with gay male homoeroticism and a younger generation that preferred queer literature that explores the politics, subjectivity and lives of people living queer lives. Fushimi writes regretfully that unlike in America, where novelists like David Leavitt are able to make it big, it is not possible for writers to emerge and write relatively mainstream novels about the complicated lives of characters who just happen to be queer.

*Fushimi:* In Japan, we still do not have the groundwork laid for an author like Leavitt to emerge, but, well, that does not mean I think we will necessarily proceed along the same path, as if we were
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chasing after America. The flow of information is even faster than the changing of our situation so even though we are not yet equipped to receive American liberation ideology, suddenly it rushes in, and we get an intellectual situation that is hard to figure out. Two generations coexist: a generation with a mentality like yours, Mr. Fujita, and a generation geared toward politics like mine. In addition, there continues to emerge a generation with sensibilities like Leavitt’s. I believe that gay expression in this country will emerge from the midst of this confused situation.

(Kakinuma et al. 1994, 116–117)

What is clear from this discussion is that different portions of the Japanese queer world related to translations of Western literature in different ways. Although certain readers turned to Western literature for information about how to behave and how to engage in erotic encounters, there were others that read Western literature for its representations of politics and identity. In addition, there was a group that turned to Western literature in order to unsettle stereotyped notions about sexuality, including even homonormative notions of gay identity. In sum, all turned to translations of Western literature to forge invisible but productive affective links, finding sustenance, gaining self-awareness and sometimes even giving new shape to their erotic practices and sexual identities, even when their own experiences did not necessarily mirror Western experiences in all respects.

POSTSCRIPT

In lieu of a conclusion, this chapter will conclude with a short postscript about a couple of brief developments in the wake of the 1990s boom of gay translations. Nine years after the roundtable discussion quoted at length earlier, Fushimi Noriaki himself published an important novel about the inner life of a quiet, unassertive man who lives with his mother and never adopts a gay identity but engages in anonymous sex with men at bathhouses. Like the novels of David Leavitt that Fushimi raised as an example of the new queer literature in America, Fushimi’s novel *Majo no musuko* (*Son of a Witch*, 2003), which won the thirtieth Bungei Prize for literature, breaks away from the paradigms of the ‘gay novel,’ which often emphasized coming out, establishing a gay identity and discovering the mechanics of male homoeroticism. Fushimi’s work is more a queer novel than a gay one in that it explores the lives of Japanese men who do not identify with the European and American concepts of gayness but who engage in erotic behavior with other men. Given his interest in identity and practice that does not fall within easily defined parameters, one cannot help but suspect that Fushimi was writing this novel to set his characters off from the kinds
of characters in the wave of American and European gei shōsetsu translated in such abundance during the 1990s.

In 1995, at the height of the popularity of the gei shōsetsu, a center for lesbians and female bisexuals called Lesbians of Undeniable Drive (LOUD) and located in Tokyo’s Nakano Ward began holding a series of workshops. One of their projects was a translation workshop, taught by Kakinuma Eiko, the same translator who played such a key role in the translation of so much gay American and British writing in the 1990s. This workshop, which continues to be held monthly, describes its ultimate goals as the creation of professional translators and the publication of new lesbian literature (rezubian bungaku) while improving members’ English skills and validating lesbian culture in general (Narihara 2011). Workshop members have worked with novels, essays, biographies and other texts by a variety of authors, including Jane Rule, Katherine V. Forrest, Dorothy Allison, Leslie Newman, Edmund White and Willa Cather. In 1998, they self-published a collection called Ueruti no hanataba (Welty’s Flowers) before going on to publish a number of other articles and collections about the experience and work of transgendered people and lesbians. Needless to say, this is a project that is not only deeply involved with queer liberation ideology but also derives sustenance from the affective bonds with other lives, both real and fictional, accessed through the medium of literature.

In the mid-1990s, the digital revolution took place. Because the Internet suddenly made lots of information about queer life immediately available, the need for sexual minorities in Japan to turn to literature for information about queer life rapidly diminished. Meanwhile, the female readership that had made the publication of translations of Western gay literature profitable began to turn to another subgenre of fiction known as tanbi shōsetsu, or ‘aestheticized’ novels. Although these novels are often about schoolboys and adolescents in same-sex relationships, they are almost always written by women and thus represent the prose equivalent of boys’ love manga. It is not surprising that these often include manga images on the covers and inside as illustrations to appeal to young women raised on shōjo manga. Kakinuma has commented that these tanbi shōsetsu appealed to young Japanese readers more than translated gay literature because they included few “difficult foreign names”; moreover, they were cheaper to produce and more easily accessible, thus positioning them to take over the part of the literary market that had been carved out by the wave of translations of American gay literature in the early 1990s (Kakinuma et al. 1994, 113). Kakinuma herself dipped her feet into the waters of tanbi shōsetsu, publishing the potboiler Mashō no mori (Wicked Forest) for young women in 2001; however, this book quickly went out of print, proving far less resilient and lasting than her translations of authentic queer voices from abroad. Over time, tanbi shōsetsu also seem to have lost in popularity to the Internet, where stories about queer desire, both literary and factual, are written and exchanged with ever-increasing speed.
As the digital revolution continues, it is certain that technological developments will allow ever-greater access to information about queer life and identity in Japan and abroad. As a result, literature in translation no longer necessarily plays the same critical pedagogical function it did during the 1990s. Still, important works of literature about queer desire and identity
continue to be translated, sometimes with important political ramifications. Yonezuka Shinji’s translation of Annie Proulx’s novella *Brokeback Mountain* was published in 2006 to accompany the Japanese release of Ang Lee’s blockbuster film, and it quickly became a bestseller, read by hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of Japanese. In 1997, about a decade earlier, Yonezuka had translated Paul Elliott Russell’s 1995 book *The Gay 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Gay Men and Lesbians, Past and Present*, which attempted to forge affective bonds between past and present for the purpose of combatting the forces of homophobia in the present. Given this background, he seemed a likely candidate to translate a work like Proulx’s, which carried a powerful message about combatting homophobia through open discussion of the lives of others. Like Koshikawa’s translation of Fox’s *The Boys on the Rock*, Yonezuka’s translation of *Brokeback Mountain* was accompanied by a hefty postscript (2006) that discusses the complex ways that masculinity and homophobia are intertwined within the novel and that place the story in the context of contemporary American culture, including the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard. Yonezuka notes that what made the story of *Brokeback Mountain* so revolutionary was the message that same-sex love could arise anywhere, regardless of where or how one lives—a message that crosses international and linguistic boundaries.

NOTES

1. The *seishun shōsetsu*, if one were to go back even further, might be seen as an outgrowth of the first-person ‘I-novel’ (*shi-shōsetsu*) in Japan—a literary tradition that dates from the early twentieth century, focuses on the experiences of the author him or herself and gives an impression of unmediated directness.

2. *The Catcher in the Rye* was first translated by the social critic and Marxist writer Hashimoto Fukuo in 1952 then retranslated by Nozaki Takashi in 1964. Nozaki’s translation remained the standard Japanese version until 2003, when the popular novelist Murakami Haruki published his own translation.

3. In the 1990s, the hesitancy of young Japanese to take up a visible identity as a sexual minority was a source of anxiety and frustration for political activists such as the queer Japanese activist group OCCUR. Readers interested in the contestations over sexual identity in contemporary Japan should see the two studies by Fushimi Noriaki (2004) and Jonathan Mackintosh (2011).

4. While writing this essay, I searched online to determine what people had written about Fox’s novel on the Internet. The overwhelming majority of the reviews that turned up were written by women who also seemed to share an interest in girls’ manga and young women’s fiction. For one representative blog entry, see Kotobuki Neko (2008).

5. For instance, I remember seeing a large bookshelf labeled *gei shōsetsu* in the large bookstore Shinshindō in Kobe in 1996.

6. For more detail about the history of *Barazoku*, see Itō (2006).

7. *Barazoku* made money not just through sales of the magazine but also through the enormous number of ads in each issue. Readers responding to personal ads would include a handling fee with their response, which was sent to the
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editorial offices before the editors passed it along to the intended recipient. The rise of online advertising, hook-up sites and pornography in the 1990s, however, helped render many functions of Barazoku obsolete, reducing sales and eventually leading to the decision to close the magazine.

8. In fact, there were a number of books published around that time by Japanese authors on queer themes. Kakinuma and Kurihara (1993) contain a thorough list of books on the subject, but of course, numerous additional works have also been released since the release of this guide in 1993.

9. When I was speaking with one prominent translator in Tokyo in early 2011, he mentioned to me that it was common for publishing houses to turn to translators whom they know and trust. He felt that discussions of one’s own sexual life would likely get in the way of the relationship between translator and editor. As a result, he speculated that most translators tended to be quiet about their own sexual lives in order to help preserve work-related bonds. There are likely many gay translators, he surmised, but their sexual preferences are not publically known, and so in many cases, it is difficult to speculate about the extent to which personal preferences might have shaped translators’ choices about which novels to translate. When I expressed my hope to write about this subject, my informant requested to remain anonymous for exactly the work-related reasons he had described.

10. Sometimes, these novels are also known as shônen’ai bungaku (novels about the love of adolescent boys).

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