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The Pressure of Meaning. Polyphonic identities and inner tensions in literary translations from Japanese.

Mario Vargas Llosa, in his admiring review of Kawabata Yasunari's *The House of Sleeping Beauties* expressed his doubt that much of the original text, notably "nuances, allusions, perfumes, references or subliminal messages", might have been lost in the transition from Japanese to Spanish. Even though he argued that what was left was still valuable, he conveyed a sense of mistrust towards the rendering of Japanese into an altogether different language.

Such an attitude is fairly common in writings by non specialists of Japanese literature. These critics confer on the original text, regarded as unknown and inaccessible, some sort of superiority over its translated version. They perceive the presence, between the original text and its translation, of a zone beyond their control: an empty and impenetrable space.

The translator from Japanese is also confronted with a similar space, but he/she regards it in entirely different terms, as a space that can be filled and crossed, a bridge rather than a black hole. At the same time the translator is painfully aware of the problems in transferring the text from Japanese into another language. These problems range from the mere misunderstanding to an ideologically biased misinterpretation. The outcome of his/her work must be completely autonomous and yet incorporate the aesthetic qualities, the rhythm and the atmosphere of the source text. He/she also feels committed to respect the polyphony of identities which are as vital for the text as its syntax. In mastering the translation process, the translator is divided between such requirements and the equally strong necessity of bringing the meaning of the original text to its safe destination without discrepancies. He/she is far more conscious of the responsibility of keeping "nuances, allusions, perfumes, references or subliminal messages" than critics in awe of the inaccessible original text could ever imagine. However, this string of elements, more related to the formal aspects of the text than to its significance, is constantly threatened by the pressure of meaning. The translation is the product of this silent tension between the intangible yet ruling forces of form and meaning.