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Collier Gailmard 4/16/2013

Inoue Hisashi and the Idiot Cicada

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Abstract
Inoue Hisashi and the Idiot Cicada
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My thesis is an introduction and translation of Japanese author Inoue Hisashi's short story *Akuru Asa no Semi*. The story is in full English translation, and the introduction describes Inoue's status in Japan and his characteristic writing style. This style is important to Inoue's work and is one of the reasons for his success in Japan, but components of his writing also make translation of his work nearly impossible. Inoue's sense of humor in his work, both satire and non-satire, make for novels and plays that are amusing and insightful to a Japanese audience, but the techniques he uses to convey such humor are linguistically too far away from English for a proper translation to be possible. Dialect, a prominent aspect of Inoue's work, has different perceptions and starkly different structure in Japanese, and in a literary context, dialect is almost entirely limited to a Japanese audience in terms of understanding the connotations. This, as well as Inoue's love of wordplay, comprise Inoue's love of language and writing for a popular audience, but his work suffers in translation as a result. Problems in his translated works are explored through previous attempts at translation, and I discuss my own problems and choices in translating this short story. However, because of the story's strong sense of pathos, which is similar to one of Inoue's most popular works abroad, translation problems can be overcome and Western audiences can enjoy this story all the same. *Akuru Asa no Semi* is an appropriate introduction of Inoue to foreign audiences as it both represents him as a writer and approaches his themes in a way that is accepted worldwide.

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Introduction

Inoue Hisashi's prolific career and subsequent success is virtually unparalleled among modern writers in Japan. At the time of his death in 2010, Inoue was still writing and producing plays, as well as working on the 50th Anniversary celebration of one of his earliest works. He served in high positions in the Japan Playwrights' Association and the Japan Writers' Association, and received numerous accolades for his work, including the Tanizaki Prize. Despite this high achievement and the literally hundreds of works he produced, Inoue is virtually unknown outside of his home country. He has had some work published in translation: his most critically-praised play has been performed in over five countries, and some of his other works have been published or reviewed in various English-language journals. However, most of his work, including novels, plays, and essays, have been passed over for translation, even when contemporaries like Murakami Haruki have been receiving dozens of English translations. Nevertheless, Inoue's presence in Japanese popular culture and media is tremendous, and so the lack of published works in translation and global recognition is vexing. To begin to address this oversight, in this paper I will seek to introduction of Inoue Hisashi to a Western audience.

This paper is a critical introduce to one of Hisashi's most famous short stories, *Akuru Asa no Semi*, originally published in 1973. The story was made available for free through the Japan P.E.N. Club, of which Inoue was a member and served as president from 2003 to 2007. The Club is a branch of International P.E.N., which is comprised of "poets and playwrights (P), essayists

and editors (E), and novelists (N), who subscribe to the philosophy…of seeking peace and opposing all forms of suppression of freedom of expression" ("About Us"). It is fitting, then, that Inoue should have chosen this particular work to represent him in the Club.

The semi-autobiographical short story details the return of a young boy and his brother to their hometown after they were brought to an orphanage three years prior. The boy comes to realize the extent of the changes that have occurred in his absence, and despite his strong desire to stay in the town with his extended family, he accepts that the town is no longer his home. Towards the end, when the boy realizes that he can't stay with his family, he and his brother repeat that the orphanage "isn't such a bad a place," and they make an excuse about playing "in the orphanage harmonica band" to leave. The story is a reflection of Inoue's own experiences, providing a subtle and humane perspective on life. However, Inoue's tone and style allow ample opportunities for his audience to smile and enjoy the experience of the boy, and so the story does not leave the reader with a sense of sorrow and regret for what has transpired but with a feeling of hope and appreciation for the ridiculousness in human life. Even in the midst of a terrible feeling of loss in postwar Japan, Inoue remarks on the humor of a young boy writing, "The Holy War and evacuation will continue forever" (31) as a prayer for a cute girl to stay next door during World War II. It is a great representation of much of Inoue's work, as it maintains this sort of tone that life should be enjoyed and that nonsense should be relished. The nonsense in particular is a prominent element of Inoue's, and as such it is a critical element of his style.

Inoue as a Writer

Iwabuchi Kōichi, a specialist in Euro-Asian cultural borrowing and exporting, asserts that much of the modern developments in literature, among other things, are "in Japan's case, a product of an exclusive engagement with the West" (61), implying that the various philosophical and artistic movements are inextricably linked with the West. Following Japan's defeat in WWII, the US was largely counted upon to provide economic relief and development, and so much of the developments in media also followed the pattern set by the West. This topic of whether or not modern writing and media is solely attributable to the West is hotly debated, and modern Japanese writers often sought to find some inherent "Japaneseness" in their writing even when following a supposedly Western style. Even so, technological developments in media followed the example set by the West. The Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) was founded in the first half of the 20th century as a radio network modeled after the British Broadcasting Corporation, and it further expanded into television in the decades following WWII.

Inoue initially wrote radio shows for NHK in the 1960s, and as a result was soon recruited by the network to create one of the first children's TV programs in Japan a few years later. Inoue thus approached writing as a popular form of entertainment early in his career, as well as became a pioneer in modern mass media. In this way, he accepted, if not relished the opportunity to work in new genres and media regardless of the connotations of Western influence and popular culture. This notion of entering new media and writing for the entertainment of the general public would help him establish his successful career.

That first venture in TV would become an indicator of Inoue's particular style of humor in his work. The show, titled *Hyokkori Hyoutan-Jima* [*Bottle Gourd Island*], revolved around

schoolchildren who happened to get stuck on a moving island that travelled to fantastical locations. The show became popular among adults as well as children due to Inoue's insertion of wry and perhaps satirical humor into the program. One prominent example of such humor is an episode that involved an island filled with postmen, all of whom are completely inept. The episode would be pulled from the air due to protests from the postal workers of Japan, but the show itself would continue to air every weekday from 1964 to 1969, with every episode providing a new and perhaps bizarre location for the group of children. Inoue's work continued in this manner, and his work became characterized by a sense of lightheartedness through nonsense and juxtaposition of characters, settings, and other elements.

Inoue and Humor

Inoue produced works of satire and non-satire alike, but he is remarkable in his ability to maintain a similar sense of humor throughout both. One issue that Inoue was rather passionate about and used as a recurring theme for his works was the social connotations and linguistic variety within the Japanese language. Inoue came from the Tōhoku region, which is known in Japan for having a particularly unusual dialect that is considered to be substandard or "bad" Japanese by many people. He also studied French in secondary school from the Christian Lasalian Brothers, who happened to be from Canada. As a result, when Inoue left Tōhoku to attend Sophia University in Tokyo, he found that he was considered linguistically inferior in both languages, leaving him with a stutter and a lasting impression of the cruelty that a perceived standard form of language can inflict on those who do not speak it. This concept of

sociolinguistic prejudice in Japanese is noticeably pervasive in Inoue's body of work as a consequence of his experiences.

Although Inoue was justifiably displeased with that linguistic prejudice, he managed to deal with that theme in both a satirical and non-satirical way. He was fascinated by the sheer number of regional dialects in Japanese and often devoted his time to researching them. He sought to incorporate as much linguistic authenticity in his work as possible in the hope that he could show the Japanese people how intricate and culturally valuable each nonstandard dialect was. Satire was a natural way for him to demonstrate to his audience how linguistic variety is not something to be ashamed of. In the play *Kokugo Gannen* [*Year One of National Language*], first performed in 1986, the lead character is in charge of developing a standard Japanese dialect, but his task is cheapened by his personal staff, each member of which speaks a different local dialect. Christopher Robins, a recent scholar on Inoue's work in linguistics, describes this play as "the best example of Inoue's attempt to deconstruct and ridicule national language" (43), and it is also one of the clearest examples of satire that Inoue produced. Alternatively, a non-satire regarding language is *Mokkinpotto-shi no Atoshimatsu* [*Father Mockinpot's Cleaning Up of Things*], published in 1972. The story revolves around a well-meaning French-Canadian friar who speaks the Kansai dialect, another non-standard form of Japanese. This story was perceived as an entertaining interplay between sacred and profane in language, and Inoue would go on to produce the story as a popular cartoon for children. Judging by his decisions to make the story accessible and avoid serious critique of any cultural or social institution, *Mokkinpotto* is not an example of satire. In both instances, though, comedy remains a central element.

In both *Kokugo* and *Mokkinpotto*, comedy is the most important element in conveying the story and Inoue's style. In *Kokugo*, the satire is made stronger by the deft use of comedic

language. The protagonist, who spends his days agonizing over how to coerce the Japanese people to speak a common dialect, is welcomed home by his staff by several colloquial greetings, each one completely different from the one that preceded it. When the protagonist reaches his breaking point, in frustration yelling, "In other words, isn't this thing, regional dialect, like the illegitimate son begotten from incorrect pronunciation" (qtd. in Robins 45), he does so in his own regional Chōshū dialect that he has obscured throughout the duration of the play. While Inoue could have easily written a scathing depiction of national language, shaming the prejudice toward speakers of nonstandard dialects and portraying the absolute hypocrisy in unifying the Japanese language under one regional dialect, he chose instead to provoke thought and concern through lighthearted fun and comedy. The protagonist is not a caricature of a person in power, and his position ultimately seems silly rather than heinous. The audience is able to laugh at the juxtaposition of the dialects and understand that they should not be attacking the concept of national language but instead understanding the folly of such a perception.

Joel R. Cohn writes, "Inoue knows that a great comic upsetter must also be a great conciliator, balancing his satiric attacks and absurdism with a conviction that correction…just might be possible" (184). Inoue's satire is not characterized by blatant mocking or harsh criticism to the extent that the message is unreachable. His satire is comprised of lighthearted humor, and so his work is able to reach a wider audience, even one that might disagree with his ulterior motive or underlying message, due to the approachable nature of his comedy. *Mokkinpotto* is likewise rife with such humor. Although Inoue has no clear motive in writing about an outsider in two countries, speaking two non-standard dialects, the comedic value of the work is irrefutable. The interplay between the sacred, the status of the protagonist in religion, and the profane, the so-called vulgar speech, is of greater importance than any underlying message in

this particular work. Inoue places dysfunctional elements together in one character to create a nonsensical situation that can be enjoyed by people of all ages. This suggests instead that it is his ability to craft a story with humor, nonsense, and a general feeling of lightheartedness and appreciation for the comedy in ordinary life that separate him as a writer.

Humor is then one of the ways in which Inoue makes his work accessible and, in a word, consumable, even when he uses a slightly satirical tone. Cohn describes Inoue's job as a writer as such:

> Inoue characterizes his role as more like that of a Molière than of the *gesakusha* [traditional Japanese comedic writers], calling attention to human foibles and frailties and correcting them with laughter. But where Molière saw human nature as essentially healthy and suggested that society required only to be purged of the occasional infection of hypocrisy or delusion to maintain its equilibrium, Inoue sees healthy and unhealthy elements in a perpetual flux in every human being and in society as a whole. (181)

Again, the theme of disjunction appears in Inoue's philosophy in regard to his work, in addition to humor. In this description, Inoue's work seems to be primarily concerned with signifying human fault through folly, but Cohn notes that he seems less focused on drawing attention to an issue that needs correcting and more attentive to the idea that human nature and behavior is not divided into two finite categories. Inoue composed works based on the idea of pointing out foolishness not for the sake of intending some riotous response against it but for the purpose of entertaining the general public and seeing humanity for what it is, without any additional flourish or finger-pointing. He seems to delight in the idea of fragmentation and disjunction as well as the state of humanity in general, and even his satirical works like *Kokugo* seem to say, "Look how silly this is," as opposed to, "This is bad, stop it." This feature is quite typical of Inoue, who so liked to be involved in people's daily lives through his work and particularly enjoyed

demonstrating his themes to his audience by way of humor. However, this feature may also be why translations of his work are not widely available.

Inoue's Untranslatable Work

Despite the absolutely massive catalogue of plays, novels, essays, and television work attributed to Inoue, English translations are merely a small fraction of his total work, and one reason for this may indeed be his use of comedy. Cohn writes, "Inoue's reputation as a comic writer has been based largely on what is widely considered the most striking element in his work, his singular facility with language" (136). This is representative of Inoue's desire to fully express himself through language, stating, "…what I want to give the audience is a 'joy of living with the Japanese language' of the kind that makes people feel glad they were able to hear things expressed in Japanese" (Inoue, Okano). This fascination with the language as a concept leads to some of the most notable tools of his work, such as the use of dialects, wordplay, and other Japanese comedic devices.

In terms of dialect, Inoue felt a constant need to have the language reflect the setting of the story as well as the mood. In *Kokugo,* he obviously used dialect to great comedic effect, illustrating the disparity between different regional dialects of Japanese and playing with the idea of overt and covert prestige in language; that is, that while one dialect may be considered as standard and therefore worthy of more widespread use and appreciation, other, non-standard dialects may contain high emotional and community-based value to its speakers. While this surely makes an impact on the native speakers of Japanese who watch this play, it is tremendously difficult, if not impossible, to convey the subtleties of language as well as

sociolinguistic perception of those dialects in translation. English certainly has its own share of regional dialects in different countries around the world, but the way in which those dialects form and differ from others are quite different from Japanese dialects. English dialects primarily differ in terms of vowel pronunciation, like the monophthongization of vowels in the southern American dialects, and specific constant features, such as the absence of the postvocalic 'r' in some British and New England dialects. Overall pronunciation of sounds is key for discerning most regional English dialects, but Japanese dialects contain far more features to determine comprehension and recognition. Japanese dialects not only include variance in speaking pattern, from the "downward-stair" rhythm of the modern Tokyo speech to the singsong bouncing pattern of the various Kansai vernacular, but also major differences in vocabulary, verb conjugation, and grammatical markers. Dialects in English by comparison therefore do not have nearly the same degree of difference or sociolinguistic connotation as dialects in Japanese. As a result, translation to English in this case provides neither accuracy of the meaning nor proper emotional and social implications, for the variance in Japanese speech is so starkly different that an English-speaking audience would not be able to understand the original intent and meaning of the work.

For example, Robins lists the 'welcome home' greetings expressed in *Kokugo*: *mattyottado, omodoinaimonse, otsukareyasu, omodorinasaimase, okaen nasee, kutabitchabe, gokurohan yatte yanainke, keeratsushie, uerukamu hoomu,* and *yoo modottechiyoota* (44-45). Japanese speakers and non-speakers alike may be able to see the few similarities between the different phrases, but the differences between all of them are much more astounding even without the changes in speech pattern between each speaker. To translate just this short part of the scene when these phrases are stated is almost unthinkable in English. In regards to dialect in translation, Inoue says, "…it is not possible to communicate the specific beauties and interest

of…dialect" (Inoue, Okano). He also conceded that it would be possible to translate his work from Japanese (Inoue, Okano), but a work containing multiple dialects of this type or even a work containing dialects of specific colloquial meaning and significance would be nightmarish to try and translate in full. Because much of Inoue's work is dependent upon the meanings of such linguistic perceptions, it has gone largely without translation.

Wordplay is another attribute that creates difficulty for translation. Due to the nature of Japanese's system of speech sounds, where the number of sounds is limited and the syllable structure is consistently the same, words are much more easily manipulated into puns and comedic misunderstandings. Cohn writes, "The juxtaposition of related sounds and unrelated meanings, or rather of meanings forced into a relationship by similarities in sound, is the basis of... punning, Inoue's fundamental form of wordplay" (142-3). Punning has been a prominent characteristic in Japanese comedic writing for centuries, and Inoue proudly carries on the tradition of wordplay in his own contemporary work. Cohn provides an example, albeit somewhat rude: in discussing a character's frequent diarrhea, his friends say they refer to him as 'Gary Cooper' (gēri kūpā), for "if he has diarrhea (*geri*) when he tries to eat (*kuu*), it's a washout (*paa*)" (145). As one can see, the pun cannot be understood in English without a guide to the original Japanese. Even when the pun deals with some aspect of English, as it does in this example, most cases require contextual awareness and general Japanese knowledge is necessary. In a work based around puns, a translation will typically lose not just the nuance or implication of the words but the joke and perhaps the entire comedic situation as well. This can cause problems for the translator, who may grow frustrated at the inability to convey the meaning or come up with an accurate or equally useful pun, and the original author, who may be discouraged from future translations because of the potential inaccuracy. Because Inoue's work is so deeply

rooted in comedy, and because punning is such a large part of that comedy, it is then understandable why it may be troublesome to translate his work into English.

Inoue additionally utilizes other tools in multiple works that could cause problems for a translation in terms of the ability of a non-Japanese audience to understand the purpose or the appeal of his use of a particular comedic device. Some such devices are hyperbolic expressions, lists, and allusions. Hyperbolic expressions are easy enough to understand; Inoue uses extended hyperboles in descriptions of people, places, and things, to create an emphasized image in the reader's mind, often to humorous effect. These are not particularly difficult to translate, perhaps, but their usage in English literature may seem overdone and bordering on cliché or immature. Likewise, lists are used in literary and comedic contexts in Japan. The writer compiles massive lists of items, typically with a sort of verbal pattern or rhythm, and the reader is to find amusement in both the growing redundancy of the list and the skill of the writer to create such long lists of humorous details. Inoue provided, in his most prolific works, lists spanning up to three pages in length (Cohn 147). In the English-speaking world, the joke may be understood at first, but a list of such great length would quickly become boring and seem overdone, and the original pattern of the sounds in the list would also likely be lost. Allusions, as well, would be almost entirely lost in meaning. Inoue references well-known Japanese works of literature, but he also mentions various celebrities and other notable people of Japanese culture and society, nearly all of whom are unknown in the Western world. These elements, including dialect choices and wordplay, are present in much of Inoue's work, and so while the desire for English translations may exist, most of his collection is nearly impossible to convey accurately and clearly to a non-Japanese audience.

Some partial translations of Inoue's work show the difficulties in expressing the ideas found in his work to a Western audience. Roger Pulvers was an acquaintance of Inoue's and has attempted translations of a few of his works. Pulvers attempted a translation of Inoue's first novel, *Bun to Fun* [*Boon and Phoon*], in the late 1970s, nearly a decade after the book was originally published. The story details the struggles of a down-on-his-luck author who comes to certain fame after meeting a shape-shifting thief who can steal anything, even the intangible. As the content might suggest, this novel is filled with Inoue's comedic devices, and although it is apparent that Pulvers put effort into finding puns and trying to assimilate devices like lists into a digestible format for English-speaking readers (189), the translation remains incomplete. When attempting to translate a different work, Pulvers recounts calling Inoue for assistance with the names and places he used ("My Friend Frois"). He received an immense box containing the materials Inoue had used to write the work, and when he called to thank Inoue, the response was, "'Would you like more materials?' he asked. 'I only sent you about one-third of what I used to write the book'" ("My Friend Frois"). Even for Pulvers, the style of writing and the sheer amount of reference material for Inoue's work make translation rather difficult.

Another partially translated work is the play *Keshō* [*Makeup*], translated by Akemi Horie. This play is about a woman who owns and performs in a travelling *kabuki* company and the makeup she applies in order to conceal her identity as an actor as well as hide away from her personal secrets. This play has a strong cultural basis, and the actress makes allusions to various performers and people of note during her time, as well as to various aspects of *kabuki*. Even in the translation of what seems to be just a single scene, multiple footnotes are necessary to explain what the actor is talking about (894). With this level of difficulty for those who have

already attempted translations of Inoue's work, it is somewhat obvious as to why others have not attempted to bring his work into the English-speaking market.

Translating *Akuru Asa no Semi*

The work I have chosen is not without its own problems in translation. *Akuru Asa no Semi* contains the same aspects as his other works that make translating very difficult. Dialect, wordplay, and oddities in expression and formatting are present throughout. As such, I was forced to make certain decisions in my translation in regards to accuracy and accessibility.

The story is set in a village in Tōhoku, and while the dialect is not overbearing, it is noticeable and therefore a part of the story. The characters frequently use the sentence-final particle 'no,' which has different interpretations depending on the nature of the speaker. In this case, it is assumed that the 'no' is the one believed to be characteristic of rural speech and elderly speech. However, because English does not contain particles or words with meanings like that particle, it is almost impossible to translate directly. As a result, this particle was largely omitted from the English version. Also, the boys refer to their grandmother by a colloquial term: 'baccha.' What is interesting about the use of this word is that it is not exclusively written out in the Japanese syllabaries, as one might expect from a non-standard word; it is also written in the traditional Chinese characters for grandmother, usually read as 'sobo,' with a specific reading given above for the colloquial word. This word is perhaps more representative of the dialect in the story as a whole, for while it is apparent that the word and the overall structure of the dialogue is non-standard, it is not so overwhelming as to be meaningless in English. Here, I took the approach of adjusting the dialogue to be more casual, adding slight contextual changes to

make the voices of each of the characters separate. For example, although I could not find a decent translation for ‘no,’ I often kept the particle ‘ne,’ used to signify the speaker’s desire for confirmation, in the speech of the grandmother as ‘yeah’ or ‘yes.’ The boys’ speech is more reflective of how modern English-speaking youth might talk to each other. In this way, I overcame the issue of dialect through substitution or omission.

Wordplay was another issue. In the original text, Inoue put three words in bold. This appears to be his tendency in marking his puns or subversive language, as Pulvers also put his translatable puns in italics. The first bolded word is ‘baka,’ or ‘idiot, fool.’ This is used in the part of the sentence, “the lock was useless” (24). In literal translation, this section would be “the lock was turning into an idiot.” While this phrasing provides more comedic value in the original Japanese, the personification seems out of place in English and does not translate well. I used the word ‘useless’ in place of ‘idiot,’ as I believe that ‘useless’ has come to be just as much of an insult as ‘idiot,’ if they aren’t already synonyms. Certainly, the humor is lacking in comparison, but I again felt that this would have been out of place. The next bolded word is ‘age,’ or deep-fried, written in Chinese characters to make the meaning more explicit and purposeful. This appears in the phrase “who was hastily taking in the robe for my brother” (32) in place of the word ‘taking in.’ Contextual information, such as the grandmother’s needle and thread and the brother’s nakedness, indicate that the grandmother is somehow altering the robe for the brother and not, in fact, deep-frying it. The pun is not apparent in English whatsoever, and so it was more or less omitted in place of a word that made more sense for the scene. The final word was ‘ano koto,’ or ‘that thing.’ It was found in “I decided to say what I had planned on leaving unsaid” (38). The phrase ‘ano koto’ can be interpreted as a reference to intercourse, among other things, and so I believed it to be an indicator of the gravity or solemnity of the words the boy was about

to speak, as if he genuinely felt he was about to say something taboo. In a literal translation, ‘that thing’ does not flow well with the rest of the sentence, and so to illustrate the same context of the phrase, I attempted to intensify the seriousness of the coming phrase through the construction of the sentence. Essentially, I felt that many of the instances of wordplay were unnecessary for the story as they didn’t fit the mood, but attempted to insert the same perception of the words Inoue used when I could.

In terms of other comedic devices, lists appear to some degree of frequency. The list is a tricky technique in English, as it can quickly become redundant, boring, or pointless. Inoue writes these lists in relatively standard Japanese form: commas are the only punctuation used aside from the period marking the end of the sentence, and the main clause, containing the subject and predicate, is located at the end of every list. For virtually every list, the punctuation switched from only commas to a mixture of commas, semicolons, and periods to separate elements that didn’t fit well in English. I had three different methods in which I addressed this problem. The list regarding the seasonal work for the town, found on pages 22 and 23, was divided into different clauses for each season with a semicolon dividing them. The main clause of the original list, “Every bit of it was horse work” (23), was then placed into its own sentence. I chose this method for this particular sentence because although the descriptions of the seasons correlated together, they were best left as separate clauses, and the final summation had more impact in English as a separate sentence. The next list regarding the buildings of the street on page 23 took nearly the opposite form, with the main clause moving to the front of the sentence as an introduction for the following descriptions. This was more appropriate here because the objects in the list all had an identical component to them (namely that they were buildings) that could be introduced by a colon, whereas the horse work list would not have been as successfully

translated in such a way. The third way in which I handled the lists was addressed in the different activities planned by the orphanage on pages 24 and 25. This was a list where comedy was actually very significant for that section of the story, and so I tried to place it within a format that could be seen as humorous rather than annoying. I split the list into sentences, each containing two days' worth of events. This gave the list more a rhythm in English, allowing it to be more jovial in general, and helped to separate the events, making the comedy of the activities, which is very translatable, more digestible to an English-speaking reader. By creating different paradigms for different kinds of lists, the tone was easier to convey, and so the other lists of the story all follow one of these formats depending on the context.

Some final problems that arose dealt with the overall structure and content of the story. The most noticeable aspect of the story's structure is the attribution of the dialogue. This came across in the original work as a deliberate choice by Inoue, as it is non-standard formatting in Japan as well as in the West. The question of whether or not to keep the formatting like that or to make it more standard was constantly asked throughout the process of this translation. I ultimately decided to keep the attributions and paragraph breaks as they were, because the separation of the dialogue from the attribution made both the dialogue and the mood stronger. The dialogue feels very isolated as a result of the separation, highlighting the words being said, and this in turn leads to the reader feeling the sense of isolation and separation within the work as well. Another question was the title. The 'akuru' of *Akuru Asa no Semi* translates to 'coming' or 'next,' leaving potential titles as *The Cicada of the Coming Morning* and *The Cicada of the Next Morning.* I changed the translation to 'tomorrow' primarily for stylistic reasons, but the connotation was also more appropriate. In terms of style or flow, I did not like the sound of two words ending with 'ing' next to each other, and *The Cicada of the Next Morning* sounded rather

awkward. ‘Tomorrow morning’ sounds better in English in general, but it also leaves the reader with a feeling that there is a future ahead, that there is something to look forward to in the days to come. That feeling was important to convey, as *Akuru Asa no Semi* contains a specific element of pathos that makes it accessible and relevant to any audience.

The Universality of Pathos and Inoue’s *Cicada*

There is one important work that has been translated into multiple languages: *Chichi to Kuraseba* [*The Face of Jizō*]. This play is about a young woman who feels heavy guilt over the fact that she survived the bombing of Hiroshima while her father did not. Her father appears to her as an apparition in order to help her move past her guilt and go forward with her life, meeting a new love interest in the process. It has been performed in several countries since its original performance in 1994 and was made into a film of the same name in 2004. The entirety of the play is in Hiroshima dialect, and so the translations are perhaps not entirely accurate in a sociolinguistic context, but Pulvers, who also translated the published form of the play, decided to make the dialogue more casual and generally colloquial instead of attempting to apply a specific English dialect to the speaking style. Aside from that decision for the translation, the story itself is fairly simple and heartfelt in its subject matter, and even though it still contains Inoue’s typical material of humor and unusual juxtaposition of story elements, it is basic enough that the narrative, tone, and purpose of the work can be translated into multiple languages. This quality of pathos that Inoue brings forth is something that, unlike his other comedic devices, is easily understood across linguistic and cultural barriers.

Akuru Asa no Semi carries the same pathos, that same simplicity in writing and ability to be understood regardless of language. The short story comes from a collection entitled *Yonjūichiban no Shōnen* [*The 41st Boy*]. The stories are all based on events during Inoue's childhood that occurred after his father's untimely death. His mother, unable to find work in the small country town where they lived, put Inoue and his younger brother into an orphanage so that they would have a place to live. He would grow up in the orphanage, run by the Christian Lasalian Brothers in Sendai, several hours away from his hometown. The experiences of living in an orphanage and being separated from family would leave a deep impression on Inoue, and it seems he experienced some sort of catharsis from writing about those experiences. *Akuru Asa no Semi* is tells a story where a boy returns to his hometown for a brief vacation from the orphanage, hoping that perhaps he can return home for good. However, the situation at home has changed dramatically, and he must come to terms with the changes and perhaps his own loss of innocence as a result. The story is very personal for Inoue, and it is a good representation his style and his work as a whole.

Akuru Asa no Semi provides a good illustration of Inoue as a writer. Although it is not raucously funny, neither utilizing satire nor involving pastiche, it has many brief moments of levity. As I have mentioned before, it is Inoue's ability to create laughter and lightheartedness penetrate through even the saddest of moments and define the tone and quality of his work. The reader can almost smell the horse manure with the level of vivid description and attention Inoue provides. One can chuckle at the notion of a young boy being overworked by the laborious charity of the townsfolk taking pity on orphans. The tension of the moment of the boy discovering his grandmother's altered house is lessened by the notion that the house has been cut in half and moved down the block, leaving the house looking like a dead tuna. In the final

moments of the story, at the point of the greatest tension and potential tragedy, the eponymous cicada is revealed to be an idiot, flying into the ground at the great amusement of the two boys. The boys are then able to leave not feeling sad or hopeless but with anticipation of seeing that sort of cicada again, and so the reader is relieved of the tragic mood and also realizes that the boys will be moving forward with their lives in a positive way. This mood reflects Inoue's perception of human nature: good and bad coexist in humanity and are constant fluctuating. Even in tragedy, there is comedy, and even in comedy, there is tragedy. Inoue does not use his platform as a writer to make a bold statement about how humanity must act or how it must rid itself of ill qualities, but he instead writes about humanity as it is, with both good and bad, comedy and tragedy all at once.

There seems to be no greater sense of Inoue's fragmentation and disjunctive juxtaposition than there is in such a comedic tragedy such as this. The reader is left unsure of how exactly to feel due to sorrowful elements and funny elements lining up next to each other and occasionally colliding over the course of the narrative. Instead of writing about the homecoming as a nostalgic event, regretting the passage of time and the changes that have occurred, he ends the story on a note of moving forward, as the boys "were being pushed onward by the cry of the cicada" (46). While the story still most certainly holds a tone of sadness and a feeling of tragedy, Inoue seems to be nostalgic in the sense that things have changed from what they were, and that that is neither good nor bad but simply the way things have to be. The boy is not terribly remorseful when he leaves, and in fact he chooses to leave without telling his family. In this one short story, Inoue challenges the reader's thoughts on the past, nostalgia, war, and family, and all by way of humor.

Another reason why this story is a good example of Inoue's work is that it has the capacity to be well received by a Western audience. Its themes of nostalgia and moving forward

as well as its use of humor and lightheartedness make it very similar in nature to *Chichi to Kuraseba*, which is by far Inoue's most well-received work both in Japan and abroad. In introducing Inoue to the next generation of readers and translators, particularly those in popular media, a work that people can digest, so to speak, must be introduced first. Works filled with incommunicable dialect like *Kokugo* or laced with unknown references like *Keshou* are perhaps more suited for an academic audience, but that isn't as fitting for Inoue, the man who innovated popular children's television in Japan. Iwabuchi introduces the idea of "odorlessness" in cultural borrowing: an object of popular culture or art is more likely to be imported and accepted by a foreign culture if that object does not contain visibly identifying markers of the previous culture (70). In this case, the story is not filled with foreign vocabulary or unusual concepts of linguistic variety, and so it is much more likely to be accepted in the West without hesitation due to cultural context or problems in translation. Pathos here reduces the impact of relatively unfamiliar concepts like *yukata* or regional Japanese cuisine, allowing the story to progress with minimal interruption from cultural confusion. *Akuru Asa no Semi* shares its pathos and its themes with his most celebrated work, *Chichi to Kuraseba,* so the accessibility should be the same. Another important reason, though, for this work to be translated and received abroad is its continued relevancy in terms of a global perception of Japan.

What could possibly make *Akuru Asa no Semi* even more relevant in the present literary world is the setting of the story. Tōhoku, the region in which the story takes place, has become a buzzword in recent years due the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami. Tōhoku has consistently been perceived as a backwoods area in Japan, resulting in the previously noted linguistic prejudice and general dislike for the area, but the region has gained positive attention and support globally in the years following the quake. This makes the setting of Inoue's short story even

more appealing as a work of publishable material. *Chichi to Kuraseba*'s accessibility and subsequent success derive from its humanistic perspective as well as its setting in a city known worldwide for the events that occurred within it. Western readers may not understand the nuances of the Hiroshima dialect nor might they know how the town is perceived in Japan, but general familiarity with the location allows the reader to continue the story more easily. In the same way, Western readers do not understand the connotations of a town in Tōhoku, but they do recognize the location and perhaps understand the relevance of a story located in such an area, especially when the thematic elements of the story involve being unable to return home. Western readers can approach this story with an image already in their minds and no further elaboration is required for the setting. Although *Chichi to Kuraseba* is much more representative of Japan as a whole and is symbolic on a much larger scale, *Akuru Asa no Semi* is equally as important for its themes and current relevance. This cultural awareness, in addition to pathos, makes the narrative continue without hindrance from unfamiliar settings and the reader can easily understand the story of a boy's innocence and his development past his childhood.

Inoue Hisashi is, without a doubt, a very important writer. His relevance is understood in Japan, as he has published countless works of fiction and nonfiction, written a multitude of works for the stage, and produced some of the most memorable work of all time in Japanese television. This popularity, however, has not transferred to the Western world even when his contemporaries are finding opportunities for new translation and acknowledgement abroad. This is perhaps due to the complexity of Inoue's style of writing. His employment of humor in his work involves some elements that are particularly difficult to translate for a Western audience, and the overall accessibility of his work decreases as a result. It is that humor, however, that defines Inoue as a writer and is something that should not be merely an excuse to leave his work

untranslated. He should be celebrated for the way he so expertly crafted his stories around the fragmented state of humanity while still maintaining a place in popular culture. In order to present Inoue to a Western audience in a way that summarizes him as a writer and represents his style and illustrious career, I have translated a very personal work, his short story entitled *Akuru Asa no Semi* [*The Cicada of Tomorrow Morning*]. This story fully explores themes found in so much of Inoue's work, yet it has qualities about it that make it entirely acceptable for a non-Japanese reader. I hope that this story and Inoue's legacy can be appreciated in the present age for its continued relevance in literature and in society.

The Cicada of Tomorrow Morning

Only two people got off the train.

An elderly station worker leaned against a pillar doing his shift at the ticket gate; a towel hung from his neck, probably to prevent sweat from staining his shirt collar. I pushed two train tickets into his hand, and in only four or five steps, I was out of the station. In front of me, an old horse pulling a cart walked by with its tail swatting at a fly, and it left behind the smell of dirt, mixed with manure, and leather from his harness soaked with sweat. Just as I was inhaling the foul stench of the dirt and the harness, my younger brother came and stood next to me. His lips were thin. I suppose it made him angry that I had left the station without him.

"Take a deep breath,"

I said to him.

"Smells like horse, right? That's the smell of our hometown."

My brother dropped his travel bag to the ground, lifted his head, and sucked it in.

"Do you remember it?"

"Not at all."

He shrugged his shoulders like the Canadian brothers at the orphanage often did.

"Isn't it just how all hick towns smell?"

He had still been small when we left. Perhaps it was natural that he had no memory of it. But in my mind, I couldn't possibly separate the smell from this place. The town ran on rice production. In winter, they'd move compost to the fields covered in snow; in spring, they'd till the black soil of the fields appearing from under the melting ice; in summer, they'd remove the grass from the fields with heavy iron tools; then in fall, they'd move bundles of rice stalks into

sheds. Every bit of it was horse work. I'd left this place three years earlier, but even then the only automobiles in the town were commuter buses, about ten of them, and with only ten trucks as well, the job of transportation was also largely done by horses. Especially in the wintertime, when the snow was so deep that the other vehicles were useless, horse-drawn sleds became invaluable. The fact was that the stench of horse dung and leather harnesses was a part of this town. I took another whiff.

Behind me, the steam train that carried us blew the final boarding whistle. The cicadas that had been buzzing in the cherry trees lining the front of the station were startled and for a short moment fell silent. The whistle signaled me to move, and I began to walk under the shade of the cherry trees.

Shops that lined the street hadn't changed in years: an inn with a dining hall where peddlers of medicine and traders on horseback stayed; a bookstore with many gaps in the shelves; a store that was a ramen shop in the daytime, but when night fell, red lanterns that hung from the eaves advertised pairs of woven sandals; a fish store that only offered dried fish because the ocean was too far away to carry fresh; a shop that handled farming tools and fertilizer as well as operating as a life insurance office; and a candy shop where you could drink ice water on the bench out front, among others. Because of the heat of that summer afternoon, there was absolutely no sign of any other people walking outside underneath the shade of the cherry trees. Mountains surrounded the town on all four sides, preventing the heat from escaping, and so summer was remarkably hot and humid for a town in the northern provinces.

"Wait up."

My brother grunted behind me in the distance as he tried to catch up. I placed my trunk, tied with string, on the ground and sat on top of it to wait for him. My trunk was old, said to be

the one that my dead father used when he was a student. One of the metal scuff protectors on the corner had come off completely, and the lock was useless. I used the string in place of the lock.

It looked as though the road ended about thirty meters ahead of me. There, the old highway started. If I took a right on the highway and went about three blocks or so, I'd soon be at my grandmother's house. We were coming from the orphanage to visit her for part of the summer.

I was in my first year of high school, and my brother was in his fourth year of middle school.

"A little farther now, a little more."

I was already walking off by the time my brother had caught up and stopped to catch his breath. He bent his body backwards to balance the weight of his bag, carried with both hands in front of him, and tottered along. The highway ran alongside a considerably large river. The breeze carrying over the water was refreshing. It helped me to forget the weight of my bag somewhat.

"It'll be easier if we can get a bit farther."

I called out to my brother once more as I wiped the sweat off my brow with the back of my hand. It had occurred to me to visit my grandmother ten days after the start of summer vacation. Summer at the orphanage was filled with arduous work, and I, in my desperation to escape it, happened upon the thought of her. Our exertion there at the orphanage was caused by the relentless kindness and good will of the townspeople.

The first day of summer vacation was a saltwater bath from the young male volunteers of the city's Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the second day was participation in the Federation of Welfare's "Festival for Good Boys." The third day was a trip to a haunted house

and a fireworks display in the shopping center nearby, and the fourth day was a sports contest against the boys at the American School under the sponsorship of the GI's. The fifth and sixth days were spent camping by the river with the Boy Scouts, and the seventh and eighth days were spent camping on the mountain with the Girl Scouts. The ninth day was participation in the Ladies' Club's "Mother and Child Gathering," … and the purpose of all of this seemed to be to crush us with everyone's desire to be kindhearted. Those good-willed people very much wanted to know just how much we were pleased by their kind donations, so it was nothing less than required to repay them with happiness, frolicking, and fawning upon them. Of course we had to behave that way for their benefit, but it truly exhausted me to the core.

Returning from the "Mother and Child Gathering" on the ninth day, I went into the office of the orphanage and on the blackboard,

"Day 10, co-sponsored by a local high school's theater club: a puppet show convention. Day 11, sponsored by the municipal pool: a swim meet against the city orphanage. Day 12, sponsored by an influential local paper: Star Festival for children without parents and parents without children…"

I read this, and I was instantly terrified that I would collapse from being overworked in that never-ending summer vacation, and in that moment I thought of my grandmother and wrote her a letter.

"Three years have passed so quickly since we left. Please don't be alarmed, but my brother and I are now in an orphanage."

That had been my opening line, if I was remembering correctly. I continued:

"We went to the orphanage because Mother's business venture didn't go well. You know that she's just like a man in her stubbornness. No matter how troubling, and no matter how

painful, don't cry for me, Granny, and you must not write a full letter back. But we are exhausted in this place. We cannot return to Mother, though. She is a live-in maid at an inn now. Granny, I am sorry for the sudden request, but could you please take us in at your place?"

I didn't write that we would only stay for the summer in the hope that it would be okay for us to stay not just for a season, but forever.

There had been absolutely no response from her. My grandmother was extremely angry with my mother, and they hated each other beyond imagination. With that in mind, I was just about to reach the point of giving up when a registered letter arrived.

"Come straight home."

Two 1000-yen bills had been carefully glued to the piece of stationery on which she had written this single line like a telegram.

I became able to hear the sound of the river. I went past the cherry trees to walk out onto the highway. I leaned against the railing of the bridge, and I decided to wait for my brother who again could not match my pace. If we crossed the bridge and turned to the left, my grandmother's house would be at the end of the third block. Turning to the right and walking five blocks down would lead to the house where we had been living up until three years ago. That house now belonged to someone else. Once, we'd made our home in that house, and now a complete stranger was building a life there. That was something I didn't want to believe. I gazed at the shops lining the river downstream. The first building was a branch of the regional bank, and then was the post office, and both of them were the only two buildings in this town not made of wood but of stone. After them were a haberdashery, a brewery, a watch store… Looking at each shop in the line one by one, I started to think that something was wrong. Something was

different from before. I closed my eyes and tried remember what it had looked like three years ago.

The bank and the post office were fine; up until that point there wasn't any problem. After looking them up and down I became satisfied that nothing about them had changed. What had me puzzled was instead next to the post office. I wouldn't hesitate to say that before there had been countless barrels in a vacant lot for when the brewery was stocking up. The haberdashery must have been built after we left. Still, though, the building looked old. When I went closer and looked carefully, the wood showed decades of wear and had taken on a blackish color.

Shops along the highway had been built almost entirely in the Meiji period, and so they all shared certain features. The wide shop fronts were the most noticeable. Even on small buildings they were eight meters wide. Large shops were double that size. The store entrances were made up of fourteen or fifteen panels. All of the doors were made of glass, and it had become established etiquette that, except on windy or snowy days, one panel would without fail be pushed back and open to the street. The buildings were also all two stories tall. The second story windows were separated into large sections with lattice lain across them. None of the buildings used plaster on the corners. Thick, sturdy pine planks lined the walls. The look of the second stories reminded me of a dojo for an ancient martial arts master, or maybe just an ordinary rainy-day gymnasium for children.

The haberdashery had that same structure. Even so, something about it was strange for being a new building. I wondered why it hadn't been built in the modern fashion like the shops on the street with the cherry trees. I also wondered where they had obtained such old-looking

lumber. That thought weighed very heavily on my mind, and I started intently at the haberdashery for quite a while.

"Why were you hurrying off like that?"

My brother had caught up faster than I realized.

"What are you staring at?"

"You go on ahead."

I said as I pushed my brother's back.

"I'll catch up quick, all right?"

My brother bent his body back the same as before, and he wobbled forward.

Even though I could have been at my grandmother's in five minutes if I'd kept going, I couldn't make myself leave those shops. I got irritated, looking away from the front of the haberdashery to the second story windows and wooden walls, and my eyes suddenly landed on a certain spot, a spot at which couldn't stop staring. This was because the phrase "For the Holy War and evacuation to continue on forever" had been tediously carved into the wood with a nail, and I clearly remembered this exact scrawl of graffiti.

During the war, between the fall of my fourth year of elementary school and the summer of my fifth, I had left my mother and lived at my grandmother's house. I did this because a beautiful young girl who had been evacuated from Tokyo was living next door, and even though I was still a child, I thought that I wanted to be close to her. Without listening to my mother's warnings of "You'll break my heart, you know, if you really insist on living with her," I went to my grandmother's. I remember thinking that if the war could continue as it was forever, then it would be impossible for that girl to return to Tokyo, and so I certainly wanted the war to last. That's why, on the second floor of my grandmother's shop, I took a nail and carved the 15

characters of “For the Holy War…” My grandmother hated my mother, but she was always kind to my brother and me. When that graffiti had been found, she had been the one to smooth things over for me with my pissed-off grandfather…

But it was bothering me: why was that part of my grandmother’s house over there?

This new question troubled my heart. My grandmother’s house was called “Akamatsu.” It was actually named something else, but because there were akamatsu red pine trees immediately to the left of it, the name had completely changed without anyone noticing. Before the war, the shop had operated as a book and stationery store, as well as a drug store, and it commissioned the textbooks for the county’s schools. After the war, agrarian reform re-divided the land, the bookstore and stationery store closed, and our fortunes declined, but we were nevertheless still able to work in medicine. Seeing that part of the building cut off and sold down the street was so inconceivable to me. What on earth had happened? I felt as though my chest would split apart.

“What’s wrong?”

About one block ahead, my brother was waving. I waved back in response and picked up my trunk, but the weight of the suitcase seemed to increase to match the weight of my heart. Just like my brother, I bent my body back to balance my trunk as I carried it, and I slowly began to move forward.

As I went a little father, the sound of the river became louder. The river made a large bend to the left, revealing the shallows. The highway also curved to the left to match. If I stood in the middle of the road I would be able to see the red pines of my grandmother’s house. My brother and I craned our necks forward to try and do just that as the road snaked around.

I could see the trees. The moment I saw them, I felt a slight sense of confusion. Compared to the trees in my memories, these were awfully unkempt. Before, between autumn

cold spells, landscapers would come around to trim the pine trees in half a day. Thanks to that diligent shaping, shearing, and pruning, the pine trees always looked very neat. But, little by little over three years, the branches grew every which way, and their former glory was gone.

It was lonely seeing the front of the shop decreased in size by half. It turned out to be true that the haberdashery I had seen was the other half of my grandmother's house. The open, split section had had new planks put in, of course, but in the middle of the dark, weathered wood of the rest of the house, the part containing the new pine boards had a red tint for some reason, and so it gave me the feeling of looking at a tuna cut down the middle.

As was customary, one panel of the shop's glass door was open. A young man wearing a summer robe was crouching on the ground inside, and his eyes were lowered to the book he had on top of his lap.

"Oh, Uncle…"

It looked like he heard my small voice. My uncle lifted his head. In the dim interior of the shop, my uncle's white robe and pallid face were clearly visible.

"Sorry to bother you."

I bowed slightly as I placed my bag inside the shop. My brother mimicked me in bowing.

"… Mmm."

It almost looked like my uncle was smiling, but his eyes quickly returned to the book in his lap.

"I got this letter from Granny yesterday."

I pulled out two folded envelopes from the pocket of my open-collared shirt and pushed them under my uncle's eyes. The envelopes had become damp from the sweat soaking the fabric of my shirt. The ink of the address was smudged.

"… She wrote 'Come straight home,' and so we came right away from the orphanage this morning."

He gazed at the envelope for a moment. It might be better to say scowled rather than gazed, though. I grew nervous, taking back the envelopes and clutching them to my chest.

"Um, where's Granny?"

"In the back? Probably in the garden."

My uncle spoke for the first time, finally uttering real words. I breathed a pleasant sigh of relief. As I came further into the store, I asked,

"Are you on summer vacation, too?"

Shortly before we left, my uncle had enrolled in a private university in Tokyo. If he had done well, this would be his fourth year.

"… Next year is graduation, I guess."

"I dropped out two years ago."

He almost spat out the words. My brother made a shocked noise behind me. My uncle's eyes fell to his book once again, and, making a loud sound, he turned the page.

"I'll try going to the garden."

My brother and I walked with quiet footsteps out alongside the side gate.

"It would be really annoying to keep these bags in the store, huh."

My uncle said while scowling at his book. While apologizing more times than I could count, I took the trunk and travel bag and turned towards the side gate.

When I escaped through the door, I reached the yard. It faced the veranda and stretched out the entire length of the building. I placed the bags on that veranda, and my brother and I hurried out of the sight of our uncle. The stores in this neighborhood had yards in the back about

600 to 1000 square meters in size. People grew vegetables for self-sufficiency. Perhaps that was why there were very few greengrocers in town.

The yard was desolate. Only weeds seemed to be growing well. However, in the middle of the plot, a little stream was flowing, and I could see the red of tomatoes, the purple of eggplants, and the green of peas and cucumbers. The sound of shears snipping came from that area.

"… Granny!"

Just as we cried out, the sound stopped.

"Where are you?"

Something white moved from where the tomatoes were growing. My brother and I ran over.

"Granny, we're here."

"Oh?"

She nodded many times as she undid the sleeve ties on her robe, which was just the same whitish color that my uncle had been wearing. Tomatoes gleamed in the basket she had just grabbed.

"You really did come, yes."

"Thank you for the money."

"It probably wasn't enough, such a small amount…"

"We brought back all of it."

I grabbed the money with my left hand from my chest pocket to show her.

"We received travel money from the headmaster of the orphanage."

"Oh, what a generous man."

While making the excuse that a small bug had flown into it, Granny gently wiped her eye with her sleeve.

"Granny, on the way here we saw the haberdashery, but that's actually your house, right?"

"About the time you boys left, I think, Grandpa died, didn't he?"

I knew about that. When we had been talking about going to the funeral, I asserted that it wasn't necessary for me to go for that old bastard, and it had become quite the fight between my mother and me. I ended up talking her down and not going.

"… After Grandpa died, you must understand that I had quite a lot of debt. So I let someone else take half the store…"

My grandmother clapped her hands together loudly in front of her.

"It's been three years, hasn't it? A little early for gloomy talk, yes? I'll warm up the bath for you so you can clean off the sweat…"

My brother and I followed along after our grandmother towards the house. The sun was setting in the west. A cool wind came blowing on top of the weeds. Strands of my grandmother's bobbed hair rustled up. When I looked at her from behind I could see how little she was. Whether she had truly gotten smaller, or whether we had grown taller, I didn't know.

My brother and I emerged from the bath in exactly ten minutes' time. My grandmother, who was hastily taking in the robe for my brother, stared intently at us through her glasses.

"You have plans to see your old friends?"

"We'll see them tomorrow."

I answered as I tied my own robe. My brother, stark naked, crouched down next to my grandmother, fascinated by her hand movements.

“But hey, Granny, why do you ask?”

“Because you really jumped in and out of the bath. I can’t take a quick one like you boys.”

“It wouldn’t be right to stay in there, though,”

My brother said.

“It would bother everyone.”

“Nobody’ll be bothered any.”

My grandmother cut the thread of her needle with her teeth.

“I go in when the people before me are done, and that’s fine.”

While my grandmother was putting the robe on my brother,

“I guess you two are always in such a hurry,”

She said as she tilted her head.

I burst out laughing. I noticed that it seemed like the rules of the orphanage had stuck with us.

“The bath at the orphanage is about a meter wide. No more than five people can come in at once. Still, there are 40 of us. We go in groups of four, ten groups in all. If one group takes thirty minutes each, it would take five hours. So, you know, it’s a rule that one group takes ten minutes.”

My brother added to my explanation.

“If you don’t come out after ten minutes, yeah, one of the brothers comes in with a long bamboo pole and smacks the water. It really just makes you want to sink down underneath, and you can hide there, it’s deep. It’s funny.”

“You think very odd things are funny, huh.”

Shaking her head again, my grandmother finished tying my brother’s belt.

"Come on, go cool yourselves off out on the veranda while I finish dinner."

Our grandmother lightly patted our backs, and we went outside.

Sitting down, my brother and I swung our legs over the side while listening to the noises around us: the sound of a horse passing by on the other side of the house, the squeak of pebbles cracking under the iron wheels of the cart that the horse was pulling, the voices of the chirping frogs in the river that the road faced, the little notes of the wind chime swaying in the eaves, the occasional night wind swishing through the pine branches, the sound of the knife our grandmother was using in the kitchen, and finally, the sad singing of the cicadas clinging to the red pines.

My brother slipped on the garden shoes and quietly approached the pines. He liked to collect insects. (… I wondered what they were doing at the orphanage around that time)

I sprawled out across the wood of the veranda and rested my head on my arm.

(… 6 o'clock. Around the time for evening prayers at the chapel. Prayers were until 6:25, and then 6:30 until 6:45 was dinner. At 7, harmonica practice for an hour. At 8, catechism for forty-five minutes. At 8:45, bedtime prayers for fifteen minutes…)

As I recited the orphanage's daily schedule from memory, my mind wandered. Even though the calm and peaceful countryside, with all its various sounds surrounding me should have allowed me to be at ease, I was actually getting irritated. I felt bewildered by my surroundings like a lion that had been trapped in a cage its whole life and then suddenly released into the wild.

Standing and sitting, circling the house from front to back, I waited for dinner to be ready.

I heard the sound of the store's door opening, and at the same time the scent of a mosquito coil came wafting from inside the house.

"Well, come sit at the trays in the kitchen."

My grandmother was walking to the front of the store as she called. Probably to go and let my uncle know about the meal. The store and the kitchen were separated by about thirty paces. Between the store and the kitchen were a sitting area, a home shrine, and storage space, as well as several other rooms, and so you couldn't see straight through the kitchen to the store. So, during meals, my uncle would have to temporarily close things down.

Three or four minutes passed. My brother and I sat at our trays lined up with the wooden floorboards by the hearth, waiting for our uncle to come. The odor of the mosquito coil became harsh. I looked and saw that the coil had been thrown next to the hearth.

My grandmother soon returned.

"You don't have to wait for him."

She served us some rice in our bowls.

"He says he'll eat later."

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing. Closing and opening the shop like that is tiresome, I bet. Besides, he doesn't seem like he wants to eat right now."

The side dish was chilled soup, the town's specialty. Frozen tofu, green soybeans, eggplant and the like were put into a clear broth and left in the basement to stew.

"That's an odd way to hold your bowl,"

My grandmother said, looking at my brother's hands for a while. He was holding his bowl between his thumb, forefinger, and middle finger. More specifically, he was holding the bowl between his thumb and middle fingertip, his forefinger was hooked inside the bowl, and he was supporting the bowl from both the inside and the outside.

"That's from the orphanage, too."

My brother's mouth was occupied, so I explained for him.

"At the orphanage, the rice bowls and soup bowls, oh and vegetable plates, well, all of the tableware is metal. So when they serve hot rice or soup, the bowls become hot, too, so hot you can't hold them. But if you do like him then you can sort of can. Adaptation, basically…"

"Why are they all metal?"

"China breaks."

My grandmother held her chopsticks in the air for a moment, thinking about something. After that, she let out a single sigh,

"I appreciate the work of the men running the orphanage, but the children have it hard, too."

She said as she bit into a piece of pickled eggplant.

"… thank you for the food."

My brother said in a small voice while placing his chopsticks down and looking at the rice cooker in a sidelong gaze.

"Done already? You're all full?"

He remained silent. I had broken away from the orphanage rules and ate to my heart's content, but it was like my brother was bothered by not being able to do the same. I planned to lead by example by asking in a large voice for seconds and holding out my rice bowl. My brother once again picked up his chopsticks and, in a small voice, asked for more. Meals at the orphanage were single servings. If my brother was continuing that practice even at my grandmother's, of course he would put his chopsticks down after only one serving. There was

watermelon after the meal. Again, my brother followed the ways of the orphanage. He looked all the pieces over for a second and then grabbed what he perceived to be the biggest one.

My grandmother, who was watching the movements of my brother's nimble hand, spoke in a sad-sounding voice.

"Your granny runs a medicine shop. We have heaps of stomach medicine. So please eat until your stomach hurts."

My brother did just that. When his stomach began to hurt, he laid down in the tatami room next to the Buddhist altar. My grandmother covered him with a mosquito net, hanging it from four suspended hooks. I helped to spread out the net. When I breathed it in, that mixture of naphtalin and incense and mosquito coils, I suddenly thought, ah, this is a smell not found in the orphanage; this is found at home. As I thought this, the strange irritated mood I had had since the early evening disappeared, and I felt that I had peacefully arrived in a place where I should settle down, even if I didn't know specifically where I belonged.

The singing voices of the frogs in the river were interrupted abruptly. It sounded as though some kids had gone out for some night fishing. At the edge of the bamboo trees, they seized sleeping fish. Soon afterward I could hear the dum-dum-dum of taiko drums in tune with the frogs. Somewhere along the way, there was a spot where the wind was blowing, as the sound of the taiko would sometimes quiver and weaken. I plunked down at the desk in the corner and untied the string around my trunk. On the desk, I set up the books that I had brought, and I thought that I had made that tatami room much like my own.

"I believe that was your father's."

My grandmother sat next to it.

"You remember it?"

"I bought it for him, don't you know."

My grandmother tapped it with her finger.

"He was leaving for school in Tokyo, so that was 30 years ago, yeah."

My grandmother started to curl the finger that was tapping the trunk.

"Actually, yes, it was 31 years ago."

"The festival is coming up soon, right?"

I pointed in the direction of the beating of the drums.

"Those are for the lion dance."

"The festival is about a week from now."

"Is it okay for us to stay 'til then?"

My grandmother hesitated.

"Maybe not, actually."

"That's fine."

It would have been awkward to not say anything, so I spoke that in a loud voice.

"You're my first-born son's children, so you should be the ones to inherit this house. You should be proud."

I gained strength from these words, and I decided to say what I had planned on leaving unsaid.

"Granny, I have something to ask you."

My grandmother's eyes looked surprised as I suddenly knelt on the ground.

"Until my mother is able to get back on her feet and take care of my brother and me, please let us stay here."

"… but what will you do about high school?"

“The town’s agricultural school will be fine. I’ll help out at the store and do whatever I can.”

My grandmother looked back and forth at my brother and I, and eventually she placed her hand on her knee and slouched forward.

“The orphanage is awful, right, as I thought.”

“Once you accept that there’s nowhere else to go, it’s not a bad place at all. The brothers do many things for us, I do well in school, and I have friends there, too.”

“Then that’s that. If you complain, bad things will happen, yes.”

“B-but, honestly, I don't want to be there for one second longer. Granny, please think about it. Please.”

I heard the sound of the shop closing. My grandmother stood up.

“I haven’t prepared dinner for your uncle. I’ll think about what you’ve said.”

After my grandmother left, I sat absentmindedly at the desk for a while. The truth was that even though I had been lost as to when to start that conversation, I was surprised at how smoothly the words had come out of my mouth. I felt giddy and I burst into laughter alone. I laid down face up where I had been sitting, and I looked around at the room that, by some chance, might become the room where my brother and I would sleep for a long time. I thought about how many days it would take to correct my brother’s orphanage-style way of holding the rice bowl. He was breathing calmly in his sleep under the mosquito net… I crawled inside, stretched out as much as I could, and yawned.

From the veranda, one small light came inside and stopped above the mosquito net. It was a firefly.

You show me Star of morning

You show me Star of love

High in heaven You guide me on the way…

While murmuring the hymn I had learned at the orphanage, the light went out, and I fell asleep.

I didn't know how much later it was, but I was awoken by my uncle's voice. Because the firefly was still shining at the top of the mosquito net, it couldn't have been that long.

"…Is it fair, mother, that I had to quit school and come back here after Dad died and left you in so much debt that you couldn't pay my tuition…"

My uncle's voice was quavering.

"Didn't I take the pharmacy exam and take over the store because you begged me to or else you wouldn't be able to eat? Haven't I been working frantically because you pleaded with me in tears to pay back the debt in any way possible? So then shouldn't you listen to what I have to say? What else would you have me do?"

"Don't talk so loud. The kids can hear you."

"I already did what you asked."

My uncle's voice lowered a little.

"You say you won't get through this year without selling off the back field, what makes you think you can afford those two?"

My grandfather seemed to have left quite a large debt. I thought that if my grandmother had to sell the field, her soup wouldn't be good. If the vegetables weren't fresh-picked then it wasn't as delicious.

"I thought there might be some way to get by, you know?"

"Then you'll have to work the store, too. They say there's a huge markup in medicine, but you know just how little we're making. Especially out here in the hills, where people only ever buy stomach medicine and Mercurochrome. You'll have next to nothing to eat."

"But it won't be for long. It will be okay until their mother gets back on her feet."

"That is, in fact, the worst part of it all."

My uncle's voice became as loud as it was before.

"Their mother, isn't she the coldhearted woman who didn't show her face at the funeral of her father-in-law, my father? Maybe she was bullied around by you and Dad, I don't know. But her husband is gone. There's no point in her holding a grudge. Wouldn't it have been polite to just offer one incense stick for him? She didn't forgive my father, so this time I'm not going to forgive her. I'm done with her. I'm not going to do a single thing for her kids."

"But those boys are your nephews…"

I heard the sound of a tray being flipped over.

"If that's your answer, I'll sell off anything and everything and pay the debts, and I'll send you to an old folks home with the leftover money, and then you can take care of them from there. I'll go back to my own studies after that."

The din of my uncle stomping in the corridor came near, and the sound of his feet soon disappeared into the second floor of the shop. My uncle probably slept in the room at the far end of the second floor, where he could see the red pines.

I looked over at my brother, thinking that it would have been better if he hadn't heard that, and his eyes were wide open and staring at the ceiling.

"…We've gotten used to the orphanage, but it would be Granny's first time being at an old folks home, wouldn't it?"

My brother whispered.

"If that's the case, it would be better for us to go back to the orphanage since we're more used to it."

"Yeah."

I answered.

"If there's nowhere else we can go, that's not a bad place."

The firefly clinging to the mosquito net had disappeared. My uncle's wild footsteps must have surprised it and it flew away, I thought.

From then until morning, I passed the time staring at the ceiling. After that, seeing my grandmother would have been heartbreaking. I didn't think she would be able to say anything other than, "I actually need you to go back soon…" and so it'd be fine whenever she said it. When the store's large clock struck 5, I got up on the fourth chime and wrote a final note to my grandmother. It was very simple.

"I have forgotten something very important. Tonight, we have to play a memorial performance in the orphanage harmonica band for the US army camp. We will be leaving immediately. Granny, take care."

I left the note on the desk and I shook my brother awake.

"We're going back to the orphanage now."

He nodded.

"It would be bad to wake up Granny or Uncle, so we should keep quiet,"

My brother said in a small voice as he got up.

I carried the trunk and the travel bag outside through the back door. The morning sun was already shining. Muffling my footsteps, I turned into the field.

Buzz! Buzz!

The cicadas were calling loudly. I unintentionally stopped in my tracks because it was so loud. It was coming from the trunk of a red pine. I approached it and looked, and there was a large brown cicada with transparent wings. It was clinging to the base of the tree, facing down.

“It’s huge.”

My brother uttered.

“If it’s that big, it’s a large brown cicada. No, a bear cicada…”

“Isn’t it loud?”

He put a finger to my lips,

“It’s neither a large brown cicada nor a bear cicada.”

“Then what?”

“An Ezo cicada. An idiot cicada.”

“Idiot? Why?”

“When you make a loud noise, cicadas get startled and fly up and away. That only makes sense, but because this one lands upside down, it flies into the ground.”

“…And?”

“I catch them when they’ve gone unconscious. That’s all. I caught a lot of them before. Didn’t you do it before, too?”

“I don’t remember.”

“Normally you find them in pine forests in the mountains, it’s rare for one of these guys to come down here.”

My brother put his bag on the ground.

“Okay, let’s catch it. It’d be great to get it to stop making that noise, right?”

That’s right, I nodded, and then in haste covered his mouth with my hand.

“We’ll wake them up.”

He mumbled something. It was almost certainly a complaint that it was unfair. I put my mouth close to his ear and whispered.

“Hey, next Sunday, the men of the insect collecting club will come to pay their respects at the orphanage. I think they’ll definitely take you to a place where you can find these idiot cicadas. So let’s leave this one alone.”

My brother lightly nodded his head, and so I removed my hand from his mouth. Then, like we were being pushed onward by the cry of the cicada, we walked out to the front gate.

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