

ing his head. Staring after him, KUEI-FEN suddenly covers her face with the unoccupied hand and bursts into tears. Upon seeing what has happened, HUANG'S FATHER instantly turns pale. He hastens to come down and encounters KUEI-FEN beside the stairs. The latter, taken by surprise, abashedly forces a smile.]

KUEI-FEN: Venerable father. . . .

HUANG'S FATHER: (Looks at her contemplatively.)

Mm-m-m. . . .

[Presently, TS'AI-YU comes back through the back door with her grocery basket in hand and her eyes riveted upon them curiously. It starts to rain in earnest. Amid the children's noises in the alley, the curtain falls.]

The Art of Rendering Dialogue

Yao Hsin-nung, who writes in Chinese under the name Yao K'e (姚克), is a playwright in his own right and translates from English into Chinese as well. His *Malice of Empire* (清宮怨) was first produced in 1941, filmed in 1949, and revived on stage a number of times. His authorized English version of Ts'ao Yu's *Thunderstorm* (雷雨) was presented at the University of Hong Kong in 1954 under his own direction. The following is taken from Prof. Yao's Preface to his Chinese translation of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (World Today Press, Hong Kong, 1971.)

Aside from the title of the play [*Death of a Salesman*], the dialogue has also been a headache to the translator. It has been the practice in Chinese translations of foreign plays to strive only after something plain and understandable in dialogue, without regard to whether or not it is easily delivered on the stage. For this reason, a "literary vernacular" (白話文) is generally employed, and not the colloquial of everyday speech. This kind of translation suffers from two possible defects: 1. Much of the liveliness and colloquialism of the original speeches will be lost. 2. This necessitates a process of adaptation when it comes to staging, from the literary-vernacular to everyday talk; but the director and his cast are not always proficient in the original language of the play and when they start tampering with the dialogue "a miss is as good as a mile". That's why when I started translating *Death of a Salesman*, I resolved to render its dialogue into colloquial Chinese. Miller was born and raised in the Brooklyn district of New York City, and in his play he used the everyday speech of the New York middle class, slangy and full of Americanisms. To convey the spirit of this dialogue, to get across the living speech and colloquial give-and-take of the original, one must employ the Peking dialect or the patois of some other Chinese locale. For this reason I used the Peking dialect to render the dialogue of this drama.

However, Chinese and American attitudes and customs, along with their ways of life, are widely divergent; it is virtually impossible to translate some American talk into down-to-earth Peking dialect. For example, in exclamation Americans often use such expressions as *My God* or *for Christ's sake*. If we were to render these into the Chinese "O-mi-to-fo" (阿彌陀佛) and "for the sake of Buddha's golden face" (看菩薩的金面) we would approximate the meaning but produce something that would, after all, be a case of "putting Mr. Chang's cap on Mr. Li"—not only ill-fitting but ludicrous in effect. Imagine a performance on the stage: should those purporting to be American characters suddenly break out in "O-mi-to-fo's" it would certainly bring down the house. When I encounter such instances I would rather translate the original speech literally, in order to preserve something of its local color and characteristics. For a forced attempt to come up with Chinese idiomatic equivalents would be like substituting vinegar for soya sauce—roughly the same in color but vastly different in taste.

—YAO HSIN-NUNG