

**THE CHARM OF
POLYMORPHOUS
PERVERSITY**

two interviews

(1992 and 1993)

with

Howard Hibbett

interviews © Howard Hibbett
copyright reverts to the interviewer upon publication
publication © highmoonoon, 2010
back cover illustration © Yomogida Yasuhiro
cover design by Yamaguchi Kenjiro and T.B Design
all rights reserved

printed in an edition of 1,000 copies
by Aksornsamai Press
Bangkok, Thailand



9121 Sunset Boulevard
Hollywood, California 90069, U.S.A.
tel. 310-276-9522
fax. 310-276-0242
highmoonoon.com

an episodic festschrift for Howard Hibbett

Japanese literature
of the Edo period (1600-1868)
rendered into English
by his former students

these interviews are
the twenty-sixth and final volume



1974

INTERVIEWS

Over the many years of this project—*An Episodic Festschrift for Howard Hibbett* (2000-2010; conceived in 1991)—readers from time to time asked about Howard Hibbett, perhaps because there was little information on him in the booklets, which were aimed at filling a gap in the field, and therefore limited to Edo period (1600-1867) translations. The interviews were arranged from the start to be included in the *festschrift*, although I doubt anyone present at the time imagined so many evanescent autumns would

pass in the interim. Now that the generation of Howard Hibbett's students is itself retiring, his vantage point from the dawn of North-American Japanology seems evermore meaningful.

In 1992 and 1993 the following former graduate students gathered near Harvard to pose the questions, which have not been edited so as to allow for the spontaneity of natural utterances to emerge:

Chris Drake
Haruko Iwasaki
Regine Johnson
William Johnston
William Samonidas
John Solt
Ellen Widmer

-JS

HH : Howard Hibbett
• : students

PART ONE, 1992

- It seemed that maybe as a starting point...

HH I think we all should be drinking tea.

- Or gin and tonics. Is that gin and tonic?

HH Well, I think I confused the gin and the tonic.

- What do you think of theory?

HH I think it's a little like the method of Charles Rosen [1927—] in *The Classical Style* [1971] in music, trying to show how things developed, but always keeping his eye on the things themselves and not getting seduced into developing an abstract system which is overriding and which becomes the thing that you're trying to expound, in which case you try to look for things that will explain it. I think that's the danger of a theoretical bias, which now is very strong. It's great to have a lot of theory, and it's fun, and it's stimulating, it makes things come to the surface which you wouldn't otherwise

have, but unless you have an eye on the ball....

- It doesn't say very much about texts.

HH I think that theory should be an incitement toward thinking and looking at things. I was asked to do a lecture at Wesleyan this fall, and I of course had to have a title for it before I had anything whatever to say. I decided to think of the title, and called it "Parody Regained:" (*colon, you have to have a colon*), and after the colon, "Symbol and Stereotype in Japanese Humor." The idea is that "symbol" is such an old-fashioned lit-crit term, the New Criticism and so on, and "stereotype," on the other hand, is a politically loaded term, so I wanted to play these off together in regard to humor. Of course, I had to consider, "what does this mean?" but it's the sort of thing that makes me have to think about it.

- Isn't there a great deal of overlap between symbol and stereotype?

HH Yes, but they do come at things from different angles. The one is a Formalist term, and the other a rather political term. Both are necessary in humor.

- Are you intending to highlight or showcase a particular humorist?

HH Well, it's going to be focused on Edo in particular, but also on modern novelists like Inoue Hisashi [1934—] and so on, who are looking back at that.

At the moment I'm involved in trying to write something for the 300th anniversary of the city of Osaka, and that of course is a celebratory occasion, and being in Osaka you have to say something nice about Osaka and something nice about [Ihara] Saikaku [1642-93], and by that point you can almost sit down.

I think that it will be rather interesting because they're going to have special exhibitions, and the Kinsei Bungakkai ["Early-Modern Literary Society"] is going to meet that same weekend, and there will be some serious papers on Saikaku. Asano Noboru has organized the intellectual side of it, and the Osaka Board of Education is on the business side.

- Was it in 1980 that Maeda Kingorō came to Harvard?

HH Yes, I invited him to come. He sent a letter written in sprightly little handwriting with seventeen points that he was concerned about.

- You invited some wonderful visiting scholars. Besides Maeda, you also brought Noguchi Takehiko and Masao Miyoshi [1928-2009]. Nobody else at Harvard would've even dreamed of inviting Miyoshi because he was from the "wrong" school. Your attitude seemed to be sort of like, "poke the stick in the anthill and see what runs around." That fits with what you were saying earlier that no one ideology or school should dominate.

HH That's the problem with Edo studies, though. I think in Japan it's so institutionalized. The *kokubungaku* ("Japanese literature") people have their way of boring into it and, I must say, it's boring. There are volumes and volumes on Saikaku, and you think, "wonderful," and you look at them and they're as desiccated as can be. It's a terrible shame. On the other hand, the pop people who write about the reinvention of Edo and so forth are so shallow and wrong. There ought to be something in between, but which still has depth.

- What were the big schools or ideologies when you were in college? Were there any people that were the real rage?

HH I was in college mainly at the time when the so-called "New Criticism" was the rage. Wellek and Warren was the bible [*A Theory of Literature* (1949), René Wellek (1903-95) & Austin Warren (1899-1986)]. Fortunately, there were other people around like Harry Levin [1912-94] who were skeptical about it but said it was interesting as far as it went.

- Was Levin the main voice in the English department at that time?

HH Well, yes, in comparative literature; he had his internal enemies as well, nevertheless, he was my tutor when I was a sophomore. We used to meet once a week and discuss Henry James or someone like that. Have you seen his book *Playboys and Killjoys: [An Essay on the Theory and Practice of Comedy* (1988)] published by Oxford? He was always interested in stage comedy, and I heard him give something out of it at Harvard, and he had apparently done it elsewhere as well. He really had a histrionic side, and he loved to

give the dialogue and a little approximation of the stagey style. They're extremely dense and theoretically they're very sophisticated, as are all his writings, and of course they're full of all kinds of allusions which he doesn't trouble to point out. In fact, in this book he has no footnotes whatsoever, but he said, well, it would be just too much to indicate all the various sources and so on. But it's extraordinarily good. It's not easy reading, you really have to know a fair amount in order to savor it.

- What kind of theory were you tempted by?

HH I've always, from way back, been sympathetic to psychological theory.

- Freud?

HH Yes. At a very tender and impressionable age I read Freud. *Civilization and Its Discontents* was, I think, the first book I read in that area. I don't think Freud is the one and only word on it. I later attended the lectures of Erik Erikson [1902-94], who was extremely influential to me, and read more widely, and I think it's very interesting to

see these things as part of the historical process... and keep a healthy amount of skepticism, whether it's Freud or [Jacques] Lacan [1901-81] or whoever.

- Lacan was a big name—and Levin and Erikson. Were there other big names or influential teachers when you were an undergraduate?

HH Some were perhaps not so well known, but I was in comparative literature, more or less, and Renato Poggioli [1907-63] (whose daughter, Sylvia, is on National Public Radio now) was working with Levin, more or less in tandem. Poggioli was a wonderful, totally different sort of person, very open, very relaxed, had a sort of broad European background and had been a journalist and translator of Russian literature, and was just a marvelous person and very much the counterpart to Levin, in a different fashion. I'm sure there were a number of others, but he in particular was a very striking kind of figure in those days.

- Could you say something about your entry into the field and what brought you into it, and what the state of the field was then?

HH The field for me personally was when I started studying Japanese, and that remains the field in one sense. But I was always kind of curious and interested in it, and I had been exposed to Chinese in an indirect way, just seeing some Chinese writing, which was actually in a popular magazine, was just *chinpunkan* ["gibberish"], but it fascinated me and I tried to teach myself Chinese while I was at school. I was at that time at the Culver Military Academy, where I spent two years, a little known facet of my life.

- I heard that Culver was a really tough military school.

HH Modeled after West Point. I mean, the uniforms and everything were exactly like that, although now it's coed.

- Did you have to march every day?

HH Oh, of course. You marched everywhere. Except the afternoons were devoted entirely to sports.

- Good education?

HH Yes, they had good teachers and so forth, and small classes, so I think it was very nice. The other thing Aki [Howard's wife] would have appreciated, had she been a coed, is that they had an Olympic-sized swimming pool. I finally learned to swim there, which I hadn't before. They had a very good Australian swimming coach named Waletis, and he managed to teach even me to swim.

- How did you try to teach yourself Chinese?

HH I went into Chicago to study Chinese through the auspices of the public library there, and I found one book which was supposed to enable you to teach yourself, but it had only one character in it... which had fifty-two strokes. But it was strictly Chinese.

- What was your first exposure to Japanese culture?

HH I was interested in Japanese gardens because I had an uncle, or a great uncle, who had built a Japanese garden, and he and his wife had gone into Japan with the Garden Club of America

before the war. What I particularly remember about his garden is that he included snakes. I don't know if that goes well with Japanese gardening.

- That works well with Edo literature, though.

HH So, anyway, that was the extent with Japan, but when I came to Harvard, I wanted to study Chinese, and I was firmly told that was impossible because I was a freshman and it was not allowed. And Japanese at that time was only open to people who had had three years of Chinese. You were really supposed to be a graduate student.

- What did you major in?

HH Actually I started in English literature. I thought that was my field. I felt I could read English. How little I knew.

- Who did you work with?

HH A gentleman named James Buell Munn, who was an eminent professor at the time. In his latest years he was seen wandering across the

Yard and came up to a friend of mine and said, "I want to find a book." He had a collection of first editions from the Renaissance on. Before he could finish his sentence, my friend said, "Well, if you go to the Coop, I think you'll find one." His library was floor to ceiling mahogany shelves filled with rare, leather-bound volumes. But then he also had a large kind of library table on which he had the latest books, modern novelists and so on. He was quite interesting.

Anyway, when I told him that I was interested in Chinese, he said, "Oh, this is absolutely ridiculous. Later, maybe, sometime." But the second year the war began and that changed everything. A couple of gentlemen named [Serge] Elisséeff [1889-1972] and [Edwin O.] Reischauer [1910-90] suddenly offered in the spring term of 1942 an intensive course on Japanese, which began with fifty-six people of whom I was one of the final fifteen who completed the course, and then I went to Washington, D.C. with Reischauer to military intelligence.

- You were nineteen.

HH 1942.

- No, your age.

HH No, I was twenty-one by then because I had taken the two extra years after high school in Ohio to go to Culver. So anyway, we went to Washington and there we studied language with Reischauer and a group of Seventh Day Adventists, who had been recruited from Japan. They were really fascinating missionaries. Because we weren't allowed to have anything to do with people who were in any way ethnically related to Japanese. That was regarded as beyond the pale. Aki [Japanese-American] can fill you in on the attitude in those days.

- So we're several decades away from Aki at that point?

HH Yes. We studied Japanese for purposes of reading diplomatic cables, and it was all done in Romanization. But some of us were already hooked on the Japanese language and *kanji*, so we diligently transcribed them all into *kanji*, which slowed down the war effort greatly, but it was very helpful in later life. That was quite rigorous. For four years we worked for six days a week, eight hours a day, alternating between the day

shift, the evening shift, and the graveyard shift. Compared with people who actually went out and did something other than what we called the Battle of the Potomac, it wasn't too bad.

We passed our time quietly there, translating vital messages. One of our Adventist revisers checked and saw that a message which was supposed to be translated about Admiral So & So and Captain This & That, yet all their names seemed to me things like machine tools, lathes and drills... but that was the fun. We got the diplomatic code. We did exchanges between the ambassadors of the home office, and they were rather humanistic—it was rather fun—they would all be about interviews and how things were going. The people who really won the war were upstairs doing the naval codes, and they were sinking ships. The naval code was involved with all the ship movements, the freighters and so forth.

- And these messages were all...

HH Intercepted.

- Do you think the Japanese assumed they would be intercepted and translated?

HH Oh, the assumption was that these were totally secret, *gokuhi*, purple. And of course, from our side, we were all sworn to deathless secrecy for all our life. But long ago people have written books about it, all the codes about Magic and so on, they're all published now. Well it was a deep, dark secret to be in the Signal Corps, so we had little crossed semaphore flags. We had nothing to do with the regular Signal Corps. It was all very secret and referred to in quiet terms. But these messages were a strange conglomeration because sometimes along with *bungo* ["classical grammar"] you would have some phrases stuck in, in various languages... as when you transcribe foreign words into Romanization that vanish into something you can use your imagination on. There was one I remember called *baron dessei*, and people thought it was a French aristocrat, "Baron d'Essay." But it turned out to mean "trial balloon" [*ballon d'essai*].

- Did you have any textbooks at the time?

HH At Harvard they had the Elisséeff and Reischauer *Elementary Japanese for University Students* [1942], which was later modified to "college" students, and by the time we went down to

HH Oh, the assumption was that these were totally secret, *gokuhi*, purple. And of course, from our side, we were all sworn to deathless secrecy for all our life. But long ago people have written books about it, all the codes about Magic and so on, they're all published now. Well it was a deep, dark secret to be in the Signal Corps, so we had little crossed semaphore flags. We had nothing to do with the regular Signal Corps. It was all very secret and referred to in quiet terms. But these messages were a strange conglomeration because sometimes along with *bungo* ["classical grammar"] you would have some phrases stuck in, in various languages... as when you transcribe foreign words into Romanization that vanish into something you can use your imagination on. There was one I remember called *baron dessei*, and people thought it was a French aristocrat, "Baron d'Essay." But it turned out to mean "trial balloon" [*ballon d'essai*].

- Did you have any textbooks at the time?

HH At Harvard they had the Elisséeff and Reischauer *Elementary Japanese for University Students* [1942], which was later modified to "college" students, and by the time we went down to

Washington we'd been all through that. So we were really using live material.

- Were you learning the grammar or just trying to decode?

HH Oh, *bungo*, you know. We were brought up on *bungo*, because that's what it was. Can you imagine *kanbun*-style *bungo* in *rōmaji* [Chinese-style-Japanese-classical grammar Romanized]? That's what it was. And not the Heian pretty poetic type at all... no *waka* [31-syllable poems] involved.

- Is that why you haven't translated any *waka*?

HH Actually, I did translate some *waka* by Saitō Mokichi [1882-1953] for [Donald] Keene's [1922—] first anthology [*Anthology of Japanese Literature from the Earliest Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (1960)]. I really rather enjoyed that, and I almost developed, like everybody else, my own theory of *waka* translation, which I still feel is the best.

- Would you elaborate on that?

HH Well, it comes down to whether you're going to do it 5-7-5-7-7 or you're going to do five lines, four lines, three lines, two lines, or one line. And beyond that, what is even more crucial, I believe, is how you render the succession of images. I don't like to lose the surprise in order to fit English syntax or fit some perverted idea of prosody that's carried over from Western things or from Japanese into the West.

- I remember that it was riveted in my mind that you have to have the images in order. The rainbow comes after the rain.

HH So I probably ruined a lot of translations.

- In the midst of all this military stuff, how did you bridge over to *Genji monogatari* [*The Tale of Genji* (c. 1008)]?

HH We had a little group of people. All had read *Genji*. In English translation—Arthur Waley's [1889-1966] translation [1921-33], of course.

- Did you ever meet Waley?

HH No, I sent him a copy of my book, *The*

Floating World [in *Japanese Fiction* (1959)], and he wrote back and asked me to please come see him when I was in London. I was there not too long after that, but somehow he wasn't around at the time, so we never did meet.

- Why were you interested in reading *Genji*?

HH I was interested in all kinds of literature. I was really changing over from English to comparative literature and I was beginning to study. I'd always done French, I'd done German, and I was doing English. I'd done some Latin, and I was doing Greek. So when I came back to Harvard, I was sort of in the East Asian corral—at that point it was called "Far Eastern"—but I still continued doing that.

- Were you also reading soft stuff?

HH What do you mean by that? Soft stuff?

- I mean literature.

HH Oh, in Japanese I was interested in looking for things, and there was very little to

come by at that time. After I left Harvard—where of course I really wasn't able to cope with the Harvard Yenching Library (although it wasn't so great in those days, except in Chinese, but I never ventured into that particularly). There were some shops in New York which were mostly curio stores for Japanese, and I remember looking in. They were still in business except that they changed their name from Japanese to "oriental," and they had a little shelf of books, so I would look, and I found some books which I bought and tried to decode.

- So you used your military background to "decode" literature?

HH Washington was not entirely military in those days. Caresse Crosby [pen name of Mary Phelps Jacob, 1891-1970] of the Black Sun Press [1928-1950s]—her husband Harry Crosby [1898-1929] had committed suicide by that time—and she along with Fernand Léger [1881-1955] and a lot of other people had come to Washington, which like Los Angeles, was a kind of center for émigrés in the arts, and I met some of those people. She was interested in doing a journal called *Portfolio*. Her thought was to have something of

folio-size, like the Shakespeare folios, but just loose leaves and different kinds of paper, some butcher paper, some vellum, and elegant translations of different types. At one point I was going to do some Akutagawa Ryūnosuke [1892-1927] for her, but somehow that project never got carried out. It might have been fun.

PART TWO, 1993

- Who are you reading now that you find exciting?

HH Milán Füst [1888-1967] remains the best writer I've read in the last few years. I hear his name in Hungarian means "smoke." He is quite wonderful, and what's rather interesting to me is that he's a contemporary of Tanizaki [Jun'ichirō, 1886-1965] and, like Tanizaki, he really should've had the Nobel Prize but didn't quite make it. His book, *The Story of My Wife* [1942], is quite marvelous. You can learn something from it. It goes beyond Proust—*Swann's Way* [1913] and *Albertine Gone* [1925] and so forth—as a study of jealousy, because it is one compact novel with a much more architectonic form, even though it's told in a highly digressive manner... and very funny in many ways, too. But it's obsessive—that's what I like about Tanizaki, he's so obsessive, and so is Füst.

- I was wondering how you were drawn to some of the texts you chose to translate.

HH I thought about that a little bit, and you

find affinities. With [Natsume] Sōseki [1867-1916], obviously he's somebody remote. Akutagawa at least had committed suicide when I was seven years old, and I really felt a lot of affinity with him. One night I met in a little sushi bar with Akutagawa Hiroshi, his oldest son, who was an actor on stage. One son had died early in the war, and Yasushi [1925-89], the youngest son, had a career in music. Hiroshi was not a terribly good actor, but he was a very good producer, and he was quite active in theatre in all its forms. I remember meeting, and he looked like Akutagawa père, Ryūnosuke, and he had the most elegant manners, and total charm. Etō Jun [1933-99] told me the day after that "he's the sort of person, if he tells you he will meet you for lunch at twelve tomorrow, he won't be there."

But anyway, as far as Sōseki is concerned, I think it was a psychological interest. I wrote an essay on Sōseki as a psychological novelist, and what interested me about him was that he was very much involved with trying to understand himself. I was kind of trying to do this for myself, but I'm sure he got much farther than I did. He had a very analytical bent of mind toward himself, and it comes out marvelously in all his later novels, but particularly in *Kokoro* [1914].

It's among the novels that Takeo Doi used in order to illustrate psychoanalytical concepts [*The Psychological World of Natsume Sōseki* (1976)], because there's so much that's analytically very penetrating in it, yet it's all presented in dramatic forms in very living dialogues. So I really felt a keen identity with him. On the other hand, the charming thing about Tanizaki was all this polymorphous perversity. I could identify with that, too.

Mind you, I didn't have any particular interest in ladies' feet. It's just the openness to the imaginative side of things, you know, the fantasy and so on.

Akutagawa had this vision of Sōseki as balancing weight, scales in the sky made out of glass, a very analytical attempt, whereas Tanizaki could not be less analytical, and what interested me about him was how he had a variety of personas. When I finally met him, it was all charm, sweetness, and you wouldn't think he could be the curmudgeon which I know he was vis-à-vis his wife—wives. Although he had complex relationships, you can't just dismiss it as being a kind of patriarchal oppressive male dominance. In fact, he liked to be submissive with a dominance under the submission. But he could

not have been more charming. We were there at the time of his death. We had seen him not terribly long before then. For the wake they had a beautiful photo of him wreathed in a benign smile, and that was an aspect of his personality which one might not have guessed.

- People must have thought there should be a matching photo of the other side of his personality.

HH Well, I think writers in Japan, at least until recent times and maybe even now, develop such a powerful public persona. People have an image of them. I've noticed in the films made of Tanizaki's works that when they have a character identified with the author they always give the horn-rimmed glasses and the kind of presence that they identify with him.

But the writer I met first in Japan and really saw last among the famous people of this period was Kawabata [Yasunari, 1899-1972], and what I liked particularly about him was that his silences were marvelous.

He had such a sense of *noblesse oblige*. After he won the Nobel Prize, we happened to be there—in 1968—and there were banquets and

receptions every night, which he dutifully attended, and he actually hated every minute of it, but he very nobly put up with that sort of thing. He really was a silent person. [Edward] Seidensticker [1921-2007] and I went off with him for a weekend in Hakone which was arranged by a fellow named Take, who was quite an entrepreneur, and as we realized, he had told Kawabata we were coming so he should come, and he told us Kawabata was coming so we should come. And we all hated the idea, but it was at an inn which had been chosen because it was the site of one of Kawabata's works. When we were there he was having trouble sleeping and he depended on sleeping pills a great deal. He had the waterfall turned off during his stay there. The thing I particularly liked, having participated in some of these rather uncomfortably... was that he was known for having attended *zadankai* ["round-table discussions"] and not having said a word.

- Was there anything psychological that drew you to Saikaku?

HH Yeah, from the very first when I read him I thought, "My, this man is really witty and

charming,” and then I read some of the Japanese criticism, and I discovered he was a dark social critic showing how terrible things were back in those days. So I went back and looked at other translations and I began to understand how the dark and the light and so forth, all kind of succeed one another. You can be tragic or pathetic or whatever, and you can still have a ribald or witty side.

- It's really amazing that he could feel brave enough or courageous enough—it probably wasn't a conscious thing—to be able to deal with all that at once and keep it all within the same sensibility. I wonder if it's also due to history, in the sense that there were also other people who weren't as great writers taking chances, and they stimulated him.

HH But, Saikaku was also a great exponent of dialogic style, with multiple voices echoing back and forth, playing off one another.

- I think one common thread is the obsession that you talked about earlier. It's in Tanizaki and it's in Saikaku. And the perversity, let's not forget that. There's something so natural

about it... the lack of Christianity, perhaps.

HH Yes, no sense of evil or sin.

- In what context did you read Saikaku? Was it in class or was it something you picked up over here?

HH Oh yes, it was actually an assignment. Elisséeff of course was a sort of specialist in Edo literature, and he had a little book of reading and there was a chapter out of [*Nippon*] *Eitaigura* [1688; trans., *The Japanese Family Storehouse: or the Millionaires' Gospel Modernised* (1959)], of course that was the "proper" thing to have, and it was really fascinating.

- When did Elisséeff come to Harvard?

HH The Yenching Institute and [Harvard Yenching] Library were established in 1928, and he was recommended by Paul Pelliot of Paris [Sorbonne Sinologist] to come over. He came first as a visiting professor and then was brought over as director of the Yenching Institute.

- How were things when you arrived?

HH Yes, well, Elisséeff was the *chef d'école*, and there were young assistant professors such as Ed Reischauer, [James] Hightower [1915-2006], Lien-sheng Yang [1914-90], and Francis Cleaves [1911-95], who was, in fact, the senior among them. But they were all pointed toward Sinology, that was the big thing, what you were supposed to do. Elisséeff felt he ought to be a Sinologist, although that really wasn't his *métier*, he was a *littérateur* and a wonderful translator into French from Japanese. He was also a student of the arts, and he could do marvelous things just on the blackboard, and at his sixtieth-birthday party he did an elegant kabuki dance, so he was the spirit of the thing.

- Didn't you ever feel the need to be a Sinologist, except at the beginning when you were not allowed to do Chinese?

HH Oh yes, well, I sort of flirted with it considerably. In my later years in the army we decided Japan was all right. We were working on China, so I was studying Chinese with Hightower, as were some others in our military intelligence group, and when I came back to Harvard I took as many Chinese courses as Japanese. And

Achilles Fang [1910-95] thought it would be a great idea if I studied Chinese poetry, the *Hsi K'eng*, and I considered that. I told him at one point that if I went to Peking [Beijing] to further my studies, I would probably be put in jail by the communists, who were about to take over, and he said, "Yes, but at least you'd be in Peking."

- You didn't buy that argument, apparently.

HH Hightower was very much in the spirit even though he had been interned, so you wouldn't think he'd be terribly sympathetic. But Achilles came over with the feeling that Peking was where one should be, and we used to go down to Chinatown to a little restaurant that was underground, very good and very cheap, with no liquor license, and he would pour out some *baigar* in teacups, which we would drink copiously. And I mentioned to him that it was orange, and I thought *baigar* was supposed to be white, and he said, "Well, yes, but it came over in a metal container and ate away at it."

- Added to the taste, right?

cream store like Schrafft's but on the other side there was a bar which was known to be the most elegant in Harvard Square, and you would have a ceremonial cocktail. St. Claire's was around Brattle Square. As an undergraduate I was involved with the *Harvard Advocate*, which was a literary magazine, and St. Claire's was the setting for the most decadent stories that we printed.

- Was Elisséeff the only one who was doing Edo literature at Harvard?

HH Oh, sure.

- In the entire Western world?

HH The only other was Ryūsaku Tsunoda [1877-1964] at Columbia.

- Elisséeff had a series of students or just—

HH Elisséeff? If you trace it back at that period, almost everybody came from Columbia and Harvard, so there's a long genealogy. It soon became much more complicated, but in the beginning there were just two *gakuha* ["schools of thought"], and the main emphasis was on

Sinology. There were at least five Sinologists for every Japanologist. It has changed a good deal.

- Did Edo studies flourish at that time?

HH Actually, there was a long period there when people said the field was totally preoccupied with Edo studies because [William Theodore] Ted deBary did Saikaku translations. Richard Lane did Saikaku, Donald Keene and [Donald] Shively did Chikamatsu [Monzaemon, 1653-1724], Syd Crawcour was an economist, and everybody was doing it.

- Why do you think that was? Was the Edo period more interesting?

HH There is a tremendous rich variety of stuff—nobody can read it all, but there's something there for everybody. Also the field opened up because in Japan it had become acceptable, so that when Elisséeff went to Japan he was able to study [Matsuo] Bashō [1644-94], and people he knew like Fujimura Saku were studying Saikaku (of course, writers had discovered him in the Meiji period). Also Ryūsaku Tsunoda, who at Columbia was a seminal

person—not a great scholar in the sense of an academic scholar—but he had read these works, so he got deBary and Keene and others turned on to them. Tsunoda was a very significant figure, and in fact he's credited as one of the editors of the *Sources of Japanese Tradition* [Vols I-II, 1958], but he was everybody's *sensei* at Columbia, that's who they learned from.

- Who were some of your fellow graduate students at the time?

HH My undergraduate thing was broken up and I finished it off quickly once I came back in 1947. When I was working on my Ph.D., we had a little group which would go over to a place called Hazen's on Mass. Ave. and have coffee every day. And the people who were regulars there over the years were people whose names you know—[John] Jack Hall, Marius Jansen, Don Shively, [Richard] Dick McKinnon and myself. And then there were others who came and went, but we went on.

There was one job only in the field. Nobody knew whether you would ever be employed at all, I mean, zero prospects... and one position opened up at Stanford, and Ray Waters,

a friend, and I were both in the running for it. I was then offered an appointment to the Society of Fellows at Harvard, so I bowed out and he went out to Stanford. I visited him and we went over to San Francisco, and he said, "You know, out here on the peninsula people drink malted milks." He was a very urbane person from Philadelphia, and he finally couldn't stand it any longer and went back and became a stockbroker. And he's now probably rich enough to endow a chair.

- In the days when you started studying Edo literature, was it much respected within classical literature as a whole in Japan?

HH Well, that came in rather late, too. It was only through *chūsei* [the medieval period] that it was a really respectable thing. People like Fujimura Saku and others were among the earliest who became academically respectable. Yes, Elisséeff was right on the cutting edge of that in a way because he did a thesis on Bashō when he was at Tokyo University. Elisséeff once mentioned that there was a famous professor of Chinese at Yale who had translated *Bashō zenshū* as "a large collection of bananas."

- Bashō would probably have appreciated that. Within Edo literature wasn't Genroku [1688-1704] the cutting line of respectability?

HH Yes, I think Edo literature was considered Genroku. There were the big three—Bashō, Chikamatsu, and Saikaku, and that was it. I was interested in doing Saikaku, with whom I had felt an instant empathy when I began reading him, but Elisséeff said, “No, don't do Saikaku. Everybody's doing Saikaku in Japan. Do something different. Do [Ejima] Kiseki [1666-1735].” And the great advantage of that was that there were no commentaries.

- You could make it all up!

HH So anyway, that's why I worked on Kiseki, and I was kind of interested because the *ukiyo zōshi* [popular stories of everyday life] was a genre with much appeal. They were focused, satirical, and caricatural pictures, in a way, looking back on it, it was sort of halfway toward the later *gesaku* [“frivolous writings” of the mid and later Edo period], considering the portraits that you get later. Of course, the whole development since those primitive, early days

has been toward investigating later Edo literature, people like [Santō] Kyōden [1769-1858].

- It's just the beginning.

HH Yes, but it hadn't begun.

- Why did you choose to work on [*Kōshoku ichidai onna* [1686]]?

HH Well, because I wanted to include Saikaku. I was going to put that in. Yes, that was after the thesis, and I wanted to have a chapter on Saikaku, and also I wanted to use one more extended portrait. In a way I thought it came over well into English, but I quickly saw it was not a continuous narrative anyway, so it could lend itself very well to excerpting. And it was interesting that when Ivan Morris [1925-76] called me on the phone one day to say that he was doing a book for UNESCO on Saikaku, I mentioned *Ichidai onna* as being something good to do, and he said, well, he had the impression that was pretty boring. Then it turned out that UNESCO requested him to do *Ichidai onna*. Paul Schalow in a recent article in Japanese said that

Ivan Morris did a complete translation of *Ichidai onna*, so I guess he's forever identified with *Ichidai onna*.

- Did you also study with Noma Kōshin?

HH Yes, yes, he was my *sensei* at Kyōdai [Kyoto University]. I went first to Tōdai [Tokyo University] for a year and a half, with Aso Isoji and others, and I took seminars on Saikaku, but then my second extended stay in Japan for another year and a half was at Kyōdai, which people found really bewildering since I was associated with Tōdai. Anyway, that was a license I took as a foreigner, a *gaijin*. Noma was quite wonderful. He was a marvelous scholar, and we became good friends. We used to go out drinking a lot together in Kyōmachi.

- When did you become interested in the visuality of Edo culture?

HH I had dreamed up a project to work on that, and so as a result I spent most of the time going around to all the various libraries that had Edo editions and looking at photographic things. I have quite a lot of material which I've never

really used. I did one little article in *Monumenta Nipponica* on Saikaku and illustration. That was back in the late fifties. I was in Kyoto, and it was really a wonderful experience if you had an introduction, and I had one from a friend of mine who was a librarian at Kyōdai, Mr. Iwazaru. He would just write a little note to the librarian wherever, and you would go right in and look at everything. I spent a lot of time in the Kyōdai library stacks—it was just marvelous, being able to go through all these wonderful editions and handle them.

There was one night—there was a certain hour when they closed the stacks, and I heard the clang of those metal doors. I rushed up and started beating on them. Eventually a night custodian came and let me out. I thought I was going to be sleeping with the books as well as reading them.

- I think two things are going to be the focal point of Edo studies. One is visuality, the relationship between text and the images, and the other is the underlying *haikai*. And these are both very difficult.

HH The *haikai* is a way of linking them.

- What was Noma Kōshin like?

HH Noma in some ways was like Elisséeff. First of all, he was a sort of *bon vivant*, except in the kind of old-fashioned Japanese style—he always carried his umbrella or wore *wafuku* and so on, and like Elisséeff he enjoyed going out doing things. But also Noma had a rigorous ideal of training, and when he was studying Saikaku, he did it in the old traditional way, which was by copying the manuscript, the *gempon*. He said he did it because it made the original easier to read.

And Elisséeff learned to write Japanese well by translating *Sōseki* into English and then retranslating it into Japanese and then comparing the Japanese.

- And then you went out to California at one point?

HH That's right, in 1952.

- It seems like you haven't been quite the same since. I was out there about four or five years ago to see Etsuko and Joe Price's collection, and he talked a lot about you. He said, "Howard Hibbett was out here, and things were jumping. There

were film festivals.” He spoke as if it was the golden age of Japanese studies in Los Angeles.

HH It was primitive in a way, but I got acquainted with a film critic, Harold Leonard [Film Collection curator at UCLA], who didn’t know Japanese in particular, but who told me that the five best directors in the world were then working in Japan. And he and I together—mostly he, but I would help—organized the first festival of modern Japanese films. Japanese movies became known through “Rashōmon” [1950]. Harold and I used to go downtown to Little Tokyo twice a week, and there was a place on the West side, too, where they had Japanese films—near Sepulveda—so we’d see all the new films that came out. We got the theatre people involved and organized the festival. It lasted a couple of weeks and featured all the marvelous directors—Mizoguchi [Kenji, 1898-1956], Kurosawa [Akira, 1910-98], and so on—and their contemporary films.

Harold and I would go to the screenings to see what we were going to show, carrying big cans, and we’d have to wait while they were being shifted around. They had a couple of projectors. There’s a lot of physical labor involved.

We would go in the morning, stay all day long, and I remember an English professor who accompanied us once saying, "I'm so glad I work with books." It's another world out there, though. There was all this sort of film myth mixed in with things.

- How did you feel coming back to Harvard?

HH I was very happy to come back. I felt that this was where it was at as far as the possibility of working was concerned, because the library out there was pretty feeble in those days. It had been built up by Richard Rudolph [East Asian Library at UCLA, 1948—], who was interested in Chinese archaeology, so it was good for that.

I would go up to Berkeley, and Elizabeth Huff [1912-88] was in charge of the [East Asian] library there, and I noticed that she had put a sticker on the back of almost all the books which had "not to be removed from library." So, although theoretically we had the right to ask for anything to be brought down, most of them were not to be removed from the East Asiatic Library.

In any case, I returned to Harvard. I was in the class of 1944—although I came in 1940,

I left in the fall of 1942, came back in 1946, and graduated in 1947—but once you're in the class of 1944.... The class of 1944 had been dispersed to the four corners. We're observing our fiftieth reunion next year. I've never attended a reunion or a commencement. I almost thought I should go just to see what goes on. I dutifully wrote up a very short biography.

It's a problem having the right thing to wear for these, apparently, because you not only have to wear a cap and gown but the right one, and if you haven't reserved it, or rented it, or bought it years ago, as some people did, then you might be in difficulty. A friend of mine called me last year after he had just arrived from Barcelona, where he lives, and he said he didn't have anything to wear, and it was his fiftieth reunion.

- I must say so, and you'll probably kill me, but I think of you as always wearing the same thing. I don't mean the exact same items....

HH I had a colleague at the Boston Public Library who had a suit which he wore as it gradually molded itself to his body, then he would buy another suit.

- I don't mean that... I've never seen you in—you know, like *that* kind of outfit. In my mind's eye I always see the beret and a kind of quirky smile, and a very lighter-than-air....

HH You should see me in California. At an opening of a gallery in Berkeley I ran into a gentleman who'd been a professor of philosophy at Princeton, and he turned up in shorts and *zōri* and just loving it.

- I used to trail along behind you in the snow to see if you left footprints... you seemed so ethereal.

HH Did you find them?

- No, I didn't.
Were you ever tempted by Hollywood and film, let's say, to write screenplays or anything like that?

HH Well, no, not really. I just didn't do that, but I knew a lot of people who were in the lower reaches, who were very interesting people and editors and directors and so forth.

- How many years were you out there?
1952 to....

HH Six. A year and a half of that was in Japan, though, in the middle.

- What did you teach?

HH When I first went out I taught Japanese history, Japanese literature, Japanese language, and Chinese literature.

- At that time were you working on twentieth-century Japanese literature?

HH Well, I was always interested in it. I got eased into it, and I don't quite remember when exactly that was, but somehow Harold Strauss [Japanese literature editor at Alfred A. Knopf] who was interested in developing it for a conference, wrote to me because I was teaching there and he asked what I recommended for translation. I mentioned in particular Tanizaki's *Tade kū mushi* [1929; *Some Prefer Nettles* (1955)], and so he got Seidensticker to translate it. And then he wrote and said, "I've got to have somebody to translate *The Key*." [Kagi, 1956] So I did it [1961].

- Strauss was right to choose you for *The Key*.

HH I asked Reischauer at the time if he thought this was going to destroy my career, and he said, "You've got tenure, you can do anything you want."

- Reischauer used to call you Lieutenant Hibbett, I heard.

HH Oh, in the army. Eventually, yes. That was a long story, because we went in and had been promised commissions immediately, and it took a year and a half and a lot of finagling through people who had connections with important people in government before we finally got these wretched commissions.

- What was Reischauer like as a colleague, as a teacher?

HH Oh, wonderful. He was totally unmilitary. For a long time he wasn't in the army at all, he was a civilian and then eventually, after a year or two, for some reason or other they made him a major, but it didn't change him in the least.

Yes, he was marvelous.

- But he wasn't interested in "polymorphous perversity, " was he?

HH No, he was serious-minded.

- Were there any negative repercussions for translating *The Key*?

HH There was what I took as a highly negative review by Ivan Morris in which he complained that I hadn't revealed the subtle difference between the *katakana* and *hiragana* diaries. I really went to some lengths to attempt it, and in fact I thought I had succeeded to some degree. I was looking for a model, something to stimulate me for the woman's diary. I thought I could handle the other one well enough, and I found one. Alba de Céspedes [1911-97], a sort of middlebrow but good Cuban-Italian woman novelist, and she had a diary novel, *The Secret Diary* that really had a nice flavor and was translated into English. I thought it was a good translation. (I don't have that book anymore, that's one book that got away somewhere.) I really thought that was rather good, and it gave me

some thoughts for softening the flow.

- Why was your *The Floating World in Japanese Fiction* published by Oxford? I thought that Harvard would've latched onto it.

HH I never sent it to Harvard because nobody asked for it, and I didn't do any dealing or say "wouldn't you be interested?" I sent it in, as they say, over the transom to Oxford. And the assistant to an editor there liked it. I have to thank her for selling it to him. Of course, they lost a lot of money on it. I remember [Sir George] Sansom [1883-1965] saying that the people at the Clarendon Press in Cambridge could not resist telling him that his *An Historical Grammar of Japanese* [Oxford Univ., 1928; rpt. by Clarendon, 1968; rpt. by Routledge/Curzon, 1995] had lost more money than any book they'd ever published.

- Your book is one of the few that is still being used. It's had an incredible lifeline. Also, for art history, everyone says it's the best thing that has been written on *ukiyo-e*.

Did you know Sansom well?

HH I actually didn't meet him until he was

out of Stanford. I went there to work with Konishi [Jin'ichi] for a summer, and Sansom was in residence at that time so I went to see him.

- What was he like?

HH Charming man. Oh, yes, a real British aristocrat, diplomat, and so forth. He didn't care for *manga*; he thought they were really terrible, low class.

- Do you consider yourself more of a scholar or a translator or both? Or a *bon vivant*? How did you juggle those?

HH Well, I'm very unrepentant about translating. I find that for me it's the most intimate relationship between languages, works, and so on, because you really get under the skin of the other. Just to anatomize it from a critical and theoretical viewpoint is nice, but it's sort of distant and cold, it's like autopsy. But when you're working with it, it's alive and you really feel close.

- I once read something about Reuben Brower, who wrote *On Translation* [1959]...

HH Yes, he edited a volume, and there's a nice piece by Renato Poggioli, whom I mentioned, called "The Added Artificer," about the translator, and of course he had been one. It's an eloquent statement. He did an excellent book on what he called *The Theory of the Avant-garde* [1968].

- How did you feel when you became on such intimate terms with the wildly wonderful and peculiar texts you chose, such as [Tanizaki's] *Manji* [1928-30; trans. *Quicksand* (1994)] or *The Key*?

HH Yes, I see a lot of similarities between them, particularly *Manji*. It's amazing how close it is in some ways to *The Key*, which is a very late work.

- Did that have any effect on you as you were translating it?

HH It's a sort of impossible problem, you know. I finally settled for just trying to make it flow the best I could and trying to read it over and over until I could read it without stopping and saying, "there's something wrong here that has to be fixed."

- When you say that you keep reading the text until nothing really stands out at you, are you reading it aloud?

HH Well, aloud in my head, more or less. .. trying to hear it. That's one time when I have to turn off any music or anything... and try to hear the sound.

- What did you think of Cecilia Seigle's review of Paul McCarthy's translation of [Tanizaki's] *Neko to shōzō to futari no onna* [1936; trans. *A Cat, a Man, and Two Women* (1991)]?

HH She said that he didn't convey the *Kansai-ben* [dialect]. I wish she could have given an example of how he could have.

- Maybe a Texas drawl...

HH I always hope that in my reading I'll someday come across something, and you never do, that really would just hit the right tone. And to find the tone for a woman's voice in this novel I read a lot of women's writings, and there were a lot of things I liked, and a lot I thought were absolutely terrible. Many I thought very poor

although they were fairly highly regarded, like works by Alice Adams [1926-99] and so on.

But I particularly like Anita Brookner [1928—] although she was no great help to me in my writing, but I thought she has a wonderful wit, and her novels are terribly downbeat and so on, but her visual sense is fabulous. Of course, she's an art historian and has a perceptive eye and, as somebody said, you would not want her to look into your kitchen.

And Mary Gaitskill [1954—]—her first novel called *Two Girls, Fat and Thin* [1991] I felt was excellent but not quite as good as her book of short stories called *Bad Behavior* [1988], which is full of kinkiness beyond most anything in Tanizaki, on a literal level at least. But it's brilliantly observed and witty, and the dialogue is right on target. It's just a great book, I think.

- It's hard to find somebody who has such a wonderfully insidious tone the way many of Tanizaki's women do.

What is your next project? Are you working more on humor or are you doing more translation?

HH Right now I'm trying to develop

something for the Saikaku conference in Osaka. After I return from Japan, I'll go to the University of California at Santa Barbara to teach a course on modern literature and film.

I'm very keen to do it, and one reason is Van [C.] Gessel has written a book I've been meaning to write, namely a series of portraits of writers. It's called *Three Modern Novelists* [1994]—I think it's rather nice of him not to say "Japanese." Three modern novelists, and he writes about Sōseki, Tanizaki, and Kawabata. He was asked by Kōdansha to do biographical studies, and he's done a very nice job of it, I think.

But what I'd like to do is assign that and never refer to it, because I feel that there really is room for a relationship between biographical study and critical study of the text. I'll just talk about the books, and they will have read them (curiosity alone, I hope, will ensure that they do that). I would like to introduce there some of the interesting theoretical issues; for example the article we published [in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*] of Jim Fujii's is a kind of biographically-related study of *Waga hai wa neko de aru* [1905; Sōseki's *I Am a Cat*, trans. 1920s; 1961; and Aiko Ito and Graeme Wilson, 1972] except, of course, it's all politically interpreted, contesting the Meiji

subject, which is fine. But that's one approach, and then there are other elements of the biographical side of life, the more psychological, which are to my mind more important, and so I would like to encourage people to raise questions and issues along those lines.

- Any other future plans?

HH Yes, just the other day I got a letter from Adiana Boscaro [European Association for Japanese Studies], and they're going to have a thirtieth anniversary celebration for Tanizaki. It's Saikaku's three-hundredth and already Tanizaki's thirtieth *botsugo* ["after death"]. She's going to have a symposium and gathering in Venice a year from next spring, so I'd like to think about Tanizaki and go to that.

- Are you doing any more with Edo humor?

HH Yes, the paper for the Osaka conference is going to be on varieties of humor in Saikaku, and then also the one for Wesleyan will be along that line, except a totally different approach. Eventually I want to—if everything else doesn't intervene—revise the manuscript I have on that.

The thing is, you put it aside for a while and of course then you want to do it all differently [*The Chrysanthemum and the Fish* (2002)].

- I'm curious how you work. Do you write every day?

HH Yes, well, when I'm writing...

- Is there a certain time of day that you work or does it depend on your schedule?

HH Oh, morning. For me, I mean. Other people do it after midnight, whatever. If I don't do it in the morning I might as well forget it.

- Is that before your walk or after?

HH After.

- And is the walk a way of getting your mind clear to focus on your work?

HH No, it's a walk. There's no deeper purpose. That's one thing I've learned from Aki. When she does something, she does it.

- Were your students mostly in Edo, or in modern?

HH The balance has tilted from Edo. When there were fewer students, there were more in Edo.

- Of all the students that file through your...

HH Yes, I was asked to list them at one point for some darkly secret purpose which was for the *kunshō* ["emperor's decoration"].

- How many?

HH I don't remember.

- Have the students changed over the past twenty or twenty-five years?

HH Oh, heavens. Well, certainly... kaleidoscopic changes. But, I find it hard to generalize. I keep thinking of people individually.

- Are you going to retire from AAS [Association for Asian Studies] meetings?

HH No. Aki and I will attend the 1994 AAS meeting in Boston so we can entertain the Okinawan gang. The Ryūkyūanists. Subversive group.

- Any last-moment thoughts on retirement?

HH When finally I retire from retirement, I'll have some time.



Howard S. Hibbett is the Victor S. Thomas Professor of Japanese Literature, Emeritus, Harvard University.

1974 photograph of Howard Hibbett courtesy of the E.O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, Harvard University © 2010.

Festschrift participants gathered from around the world to celebrate Howard Hibbett's 90th birthday on July 27, 2010. We wish him continued good health and are grateful for his mentoring, his incomparable contributions to Japanese studies, and for the lovely vibrations of his existence.

This
episodic festschrift
celebrates the career of
Howard S. Hibbett (1920-),
eminent and decorated Japanologist
author, translator, editor, and professor.
A number of Edo-period translations by
Howard Hibbett's former students
was compiled by John Solt
during the years following
the professor's retirement
from teaching at Harvard University.
The introductions and translations
in the series preserve
the letter and spirit
of each of our
wayward
collaborators.