Additions should clearly contribute to the art, entertainment value, force and clarity of the original, and should make the programme a better production for the chosen medium. If an addition fails to contribute significantly it should be dropped.

Deletions and omissions

Material which is transitional or parenthetical to a major episode may be omitted.

Material which is unsuitable for presentation in the chosen medium may be omitted.

Omissions should not alter the impact of the original.

Omissions should make a significant contribution to the art, entertainment value, force and clarity of the original.

The ideas presented in this paper were stimulated by a workshop held by the UBS in Taiwan in April, 1975. I am deeply indebted to all of the participants in that workshop for their highly creative contributions. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Theodore Marr of the China Graduate School of Theology for much of the material which appears in the discussion of types of meaningful transposition.

NORMAN MUNDHENK & JAN DE WAARD

MISSING THE WHOLE POINT AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT—with special reference to the book of Ruth

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"Should the Bible Society really be drawing attention to the pornographic parts of the Bible by publishing them as separate portions?" Perhaps it was not expressed in exactly this way, but this was certainly the question behind the concern and the doubts. The Bible Society of India had decided to publish a book as a special portion aimed at women, in connection with the new UBS emphasis on this "50 per cent of the population". But the book involved was not the Song of Solomon, as some may have already guessed—it was the book of Ruth.

These worried translators were not giving theoretical objections about what it might sound like if they translated it. They had just finished putting the book into their own languages, in the best way they could, and it was their own work they were having serious reservations about distributing. At first their questions only hinted at what they were thinking: "It would be all right if we could just distribute it to adults, but what if the young people get hold of it?" Eventually the real problem became clear. Quite frankly, the plot of the book as it would certainly be understood by readers in these languages, would sound something like this: A young lady, urged on by her mother-in-law, dresses herself up as attractively as possible, and goes sneaking

off at night to climb into bed with a man who is her relative. After she seduces him, he agrees to marry her, and he begins to scheme out a way to manage events so as to make their marriage possible.

This simply is not what happens in this book. It shows one misunderstanding after another. The message which should be understood by someone reading the book of Ruth is very different. A young widow, because of her love for her foreign mother-in-law, is willing to leave her own land, and go to a strange country, and even to die and be buried there, completely cutting herself off from her own family and her own gods. In the new country, she supports her mother-in-law by her hard and faithful work. Finally, rather than trying to find her own husband, and have her own family, she is willing to give herself completely to the family of her mother-in-law and her own dead husband. Her mother-in-law urges her to try to marry a relative, according to Hebrew custom. Obediently she goes to this man and by a symbolic action shows him what she and her mother-in-law are hoping—that he will marry her, so that she may have children to carry on the name of her father-in-law's family. Ruth is a beautiful story of great and unexpected family loyalty on the part of a foreign woman who is a member of the family only by marriage. *Properly translated*, this book does indeed have something to say to the women of India and of other countries as well.

Two New Testament illustrations of problems in understanding

Very often translators will find that even though they have carefully considered all the obvious translation problems, chosen the words to fit the context, and translated paragraph by paragraph so that the story really flows well, something is still wrong. The tone of the passage is still misleading for their culture, and people are sure to misunderstand the whole story as a result.

As a first example, look at the story of Mark 2.23–28. This is not an easy passage to understand in any case, but it can become almost impossible in a culture where the first reaction is that these men (the disciples) are tramping through other people's fields, stealing their grain. People may then become convinced that "breaking the law" must refer to stealing and completely miss the mention of the Sabbath. Yet this is not the meaning of this passage, and if we translate so that we give this impression, *we have not translated faithfully*. Instead, we must find a way to express these events so that we exclude the wrong idea, and so that we make it as easy as possible to understand the right one.

In this Mark case it would be much more helpful in English to say, "Why are they doing something that we are forbidden to do on the Sabbath", than to say, "Why are they doing something on the Sabbath which we are forbidden to do?" English would have other ways, too, to bring out the right meaning, and other languages will have still other ways to do the same thing. In the new translation into Sundanese, the translators have put "the disciples began to casually pick the heads of grain . . ." The word "casually" makes it clear that they were not gathering large quantities of someone else's grain. If necessary to prevent a wrong understanding it would be quite acceptable to translate: "Why are they picking this grain today? You know that on the

Sabbath such work is forbidden." Of course it may still require some further explanation apart from the translation to make the meaning completely clear.

Certain ideas are *implicit* in this passage. One is that work was forbidden on the Sabbath. Another is that picking grain like this was considered the same as reaping grain, and so was forbidden Sabbath work. This was clearly understood by the early readers of Mark, and there was no need for it to be explained. Even though it is not actually said, it is an essential part of the meaning of this passage. If it will not be present in our readers' understanding without our telling them, then it may be necessary for us to tell them *explicitly* what is meant in order to faithfully give them the right meaning.

Let us look briefly at one more example of how implicit ideas must sometimes be made explicit. In Acts 5.1–11 we have the familiar story of Ananias and Sapphira. The way this is usually translated, it is not at all clear at first what this couple did that was wrong. We are told only that they had made some money selling land, and that they brought part of it as a gift. It seems a generous act, and Peter's violent reaction seems completely without reason. In fact, we are told in verse 8 what the crime was—they lied. It is not even that the young church expected such people to donate everything (see verse 4), but that Ananias and Sapphira had agreed to pretend that they were giving everything. This is apparently what Luke means us to understand in verse 2 when he says, "he kept back part of the money, with his wife's knowledge". And if this is so, we must translate this verse so as to let our readers know clearly that Ananias was doing something wrong. The Jerusalem Bible says, "with his wife's connivance", which is an excellent way in English of showing that they were plotting something evil. English could handle this problem in other ways, and it might be different again in other languages. The point is that we may have to *make explicit something which is implicit in the original to be sure that our readers understand the story correctly*. This is the principle.

Applying the principle in Ruth

How can this principle be applied to the book of Ruth so as to prevent people from understanding it in the wrong way? First, we need to identify all the passages which may contribute to a wrong impression. Then, we must study these passages carefully and find out what the implicit correct meaning is in each case. And finally, we must find a way to translate which excludes the wrong meaning, and makes the right meaning the most likely one for our modern readers to understand. Let us look at these three steps in order.

1. *Possible misleading passages*

The same passages will not necessarily be problems in every language. We will give a list of all the passages which we feel might possibly contribute to a wrong impression. In some languages most of them will have the right meaning, and only one or two passages will really be problems. In other languages, there may be more passages which give the wrong impression and which will have to be translated carefully. It seems better to discuss all of the danger spots, even though no one language should have trouble with every verse mentioned here.

2.5 Boaz sees Ruth for the first time, and asks, "Whose family does that young woman belong to?" Some might wonder why he should notice her

at all among the workers. Might it be that he is sexually interested in this girl from the first moment he sees her?

2.8 Boaz calls Ruth "my daughter". Translated literally this can cause many difficulties. In some languages it will sound very forward and suggestive. In other languages it may be possible for an older man to call some younger women "my daughter", but it would be considered incest if he later marries one of them.

2.8 Also in this verse it might sound as though Boaz wants Ruth to stay in his field because he wants to have her for himself.

2.10 Ruth asks Boaz why he is so kind to her. In some languages this sounds as though Ruth herself is getting suspicious of Boaz, and beginning to wonder if his motives are good.

2.13 In the NEB Ruth says here, "Please do not treat me only as a servant". This suggests that she is a rather forward, bold person, and is already beginning to make advances to Boaz.

2.14–16 Again Boaz is singling Ruth out for several special favours—inviting her specially to eat, and giving her special food, then telling his servants to let her gather grain in the very best places. Not only that, but he tells them to purposely leave good grain for her to pick up. This might very well sound like the actions of a man who has fallen in love at first sight.

3.1–4 These are some of the most important verses in the book from the point of view of the problem we are considering. It is possible for this section to sound very much as though Naomi is giving Ruth instructions about how to seduce Boaz. Four things in particular can contribute to the misunderstanding here. First, why does Naomi tell Ruth to dress herself up, as though in a special and attractive way? (verse 3) Second, why does she insist on secrecy? (verse 3) Third, when she says, "turn back the cover at his feet", is this possibly a euphemism for some kind of sexual advance or action? (verse 4) And fourth, when she says that Boaz will "tell you what to do", is this a euphemism for "then Boaz will have sex with you"? (verse 4).

3.7 Here Ruth carries out Naomi's instructions, whatever they mean, and "lifts up the cover" and "lies down".

3.9 Ruth asks Boaz to "spread the skirt of his garment over her". Again, this is a strange thing to do, and many people find themselves wondering if it is a euphemism. Whether euphemism or not, the whole idea of a woman proposing to a man is unthinkably forward for some peoples.

3.10 Boaz says, "you did not run after a young man, rich or poor", which implies that she has come running after him.

3.13 Boaz invites Ruth to spend the rest of the night with him, telling her specifically to lie down until morning.

3.14 Some Indian translators mentioned that often in love scenes in Indian films no sexual activity is shown, but the woman is shown sleeping afterward at the feet of the man, so that this action in itself may be suggestive.

3.14 Also in this verse, Boaz shows that he too is anxious for secrecy, and he asks Ruth to sneak away in the dark so no one will know what they have done.

3.15 In cultures where a woman typically wears only one garment, it may sound as though Ruth is stripping naked in order to carry away the barley.

3.16 Ruth told Naomi all that Boaz had done for her. This phrase could also be suggestive, especially if the whole passage is being understood in this kind of way.

Even if these are not the only possible points of misunderstanding, all the most serious ones are surely included, as well as several which may be problems only in very few languages.

2. *The correct meaning of these passages*

To understand Ruth as a story of seduction and secret night-time sexual activity is certainly wrong. Yet there are enough of these points which can be misunderstood in that way that even some commentators have felt that this night encounter must have been a sexual one. Most modern commentators completely reject this, but it will be worthwhile to look for ourselves at their discussion of the issues.

The answers to the questions we have raised are not always easy. It is rather disturbing that some translators seem to feel that it is enough to simply work out a reasonable and consistent theory of what was happening and to translate as though this theory is correct. It may be correct, but it is not enough only to *think* of a good answer. We need to test it against our general knowledge of the Bible and of the culture of Israel in Old Testament times. And it is most important that our theories should be tested against the full context of the book of Ruth itself. Often it is possible to think of several possible explanations for something. However, the right explanation is not the one we like best, but the one which really has evidence supporting it, and mhich does not have strong evidence against it.

3. *Translating to avoid misunderstandings*

Once we have made a careful study of the problem and worked out as well as possible what the correct meaning is, our final step is to translate so as to give our readers the correct understanding.

Often all that is necessary to have correct translation is for the translator himself to have the right understanding of what is going on. In 2.5, for instance, there are probably many ways Boaz' question can be asked, some suggestive, others quite innocent. When a translator understands this simply as a question about a stranger, he can often make this quite clear without adding anything else to the question.

At other times the culture of the readers may almost force a certain interpretation on the words unless in some way this wrong interpretation is explicitly denied. When this is true it may be necessary to add material which will show that this wrong interpretation is impossible. Sometimes this may have to be cultural background. At other times it may involve explaining explicitly the real motives of the characters in the story. When it is necessary to make something explicit, it is particularly important to carefully think through the passage and the context to be sure that the added material is clearly implicit (or is at least very likely) and does not itself conflict with something else. The translator cannot feel he has done his work if he simply substitutes a "good" misunderstanding for a "bad" one.

Looking at the problems in detail

When a translator is actually working on material which has problems like the book of Ruth, it is probably best to do the exegetical study of the whole problem before beginning to translate. Good translation cannot be done verse by verse. Very often you will find the answer to a question about one verse when you are studying a much later verse, as will become clear in the following discussion. However, it will be easier to follow the discussion in this article if we put everything about one verse in the same place. So as we look at each verse, the discussion will be divided into two sections. The first section is the exegesis—the discussion of the meaning; the second section discusses how the actual translation could be done.

2.5 Is Boaz sexually interested in Ruth from the first time he sees her?

The key to many of the problems in the second chapter is in verses 11–12. Boaz shows in what he says there that he has heard about Ruth and what she has done for his poor relative Naomi. Apparently he had never actually met Ruth herself before this. We must assume that Boaz was familiar with the people who worked regularly for him and that in verse 5 he simply notices that there is a stranger among them, and wonders who she is. If there is any reason for his question beyond his curiosity about a stranger in his field, we are not aware of it. There is no evidence whatever that he is interested in this stranger in a sexual way, and in fact this is contrary to the whole of Boaz' personality as developed in the book.

In translation a correct phrasing of the question should be enough. It should be a simple question for information, with no suggestion of deeper meaning. Boaz might add something like "I haven't seen her here before", if this helps to show that he is only asking about an unfamiliar stranger.

2.8 Why does Boaz call Ruth his "daughter"?

As soon as Boaz learns who she is, he is moved to do as much as he can to help her because he is impressed with her as a person. Ruth herself is surprised at all he does for her, and asks the question which leads to his explanation in verses 11–12. There is no reason to think that his explanation is not the true one, or that he is misleading her about his true motivation. In connection with this, the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3 are very important. Even though Ruth continues to work in Boaz' fields, there is no evidence that she sees him again after this. On the contrary, in 3.2 Naomi feels she has to remind Ruth who Boaz is, and to tell her again that he is their kinsman. Quite clearly Boaz is not doing these favors in order to keep Ruth near himself personally because he is physically attracted to her. He is simply trying to make the work she is doing as easy as possible because he is a kind and considerate man who is impressed with this faithful and hard-working woman. Therefore, when he calls her "my daughter" we should understand it simply as a paternal and kindly term of address.

The term by which Boaz calls Ruth should be appropriate to the culture of the translation. There is no need to use the term "daughter" if that is misleading. Use whatever term would be used by an older man talking to a younger woman on a lower social level than he is, but to whom he wants to show sympathy and kindness. It would of course not be a term which would suggest that they could not later get married, but it should not suggest any

thoughts of marriage yet. The fact that they are relatives is not brought out in this Hebrew term. If there is no good equivalent in a language, the term itself could be left out (as it is in TEV), and Boaz' feelings shown in the wording of what he says.

2.8 Is Boaz trying to lure Ruth into staying in his field?

It is true that Boaz does think of the possibility that Ruth may be physically attractive to some men. But he is not thinking of her as attractive to himself. He is rather thinking of what might happen to any young woman working by herself out in the fields among a number of men. He is not even sure that his own men would be able to resist this temptation. It is apparently an obvious enough danger, since it is also the first thing Naomi thinks of in verse 22. However, since they are his own men, he can specifically order them not to molest her (verse 9). Apparently he trusts his men to follow his orders; he certainly does not trust the men of other fields, and so it is for her own safety that he tells her to work only in his field.

If necessary, Boaz can be made to give a more explicit reason why she should not go elsewhere. He does not simply invite her to stay, he almost commands it. So it may be better to stress his fear that she might be molested: "It is better if you don't go to other fields to gather grain . . . You will be safe here. I've ordered my men not to bother you."

2.10 Is Ruth suspicious of Boaz' intentions?

Ruth's action here, bowing down so low, shows that she is not suspiciously accusing Boaz of having evil motives. Instead she is overcome by his kindness, and asks her question in a very humble way simply because she cannot understand why he should be so good to her, poor and unimportant person that she is.

This can be translated correctly merely by giving the correct emphasis to Ruth's words—awe and humility, rather than suspicion.

2.13 Is Ruth being bold and forward?

In spite of the way NEB has translated this verse (and it is not clear what leads them to do this) there is no evidence that Ruth's humble attitude changes as soon as she hears Boaz' explanation. The meaning taken by the other versions is surely the right one, emphasizing the awe she feels towards this rich man who knows about her and is impressed with her as a person. TEV has Ruth say, "You have given me courage", meaning "You have made me feel better able to do my work" or "more confident to carry out my responsibilities".

In translation this too can probably be handled correctly simply by translating so as to convey the humility and gratitude that Ruth feels.

2.14–16 Why is Boaz so generous toward Ruth?

Boaz' actions in these verses are certainly significant, but the motivations we give to them must come from what we see in the text itself. We see that Boaz has taken pity on Ruth. He knows her family situation, and how much they need the grain Ruth is getting. This seems to be his way of helping his needy relatives without embarrassing them—letting her continue to work rather than simply giving her the grain, but making it as easy as possible for her to get a lot. We are not definitely told why he uses this method of helping her, but this at least fits with the sympathy he feels for her. Anyway, as we

noted in the discussion of the first point under 2.8, there is no evidence that he is using this as a way of keeping her near him, something we would surely expect if he had fallen in love with her. From what we are told in the book, Boaz paid no more attention to her at all. The next time he saw her it was because Ruth had come to him.

The problem here is that these same actions could be produced by very different motives. In many languages it may be quite possible to word this in such a way that it shows clearly why Boaz is helping her. He feels sympathy and kindness, and wants to put her at ease. But some translators may feel that no matter how they put it, people will still think that Boaz is making advances. In that case, it may be necessary to add a word or phrase which explains his feelings and excludes any idea of romance.

In verse 15, the TEV has "don't bother her". Here this means "don't say anything to her which will make her think she's doing anything wrong". It means almost the same as "don't reprimand her" in verse 16.

3.1–4 Let us try to answer the four questions we asked about these verses:

(1) Why does Ruth dress up? To understand what is happening here, it is important to realize that Naomi was not sure how Boaz would react. Since she knows where he will be that night, some might wonder if she has planned everything with Boaz ahead of time. In some ways Naomi does seem to be fairly sure of the outcome. She at least does not seem to think that Boaz will do anything harmful to Ruth. But she has to ask Ruth how things went after Ruth comes back (3.16). This by itself, of course, does not prove her uncertainty—it could be merely a way of opening the conversation. The thing which shows most clearly that Naomi is uncertain is that she tells Ruth to wait until after Boaz has finished eating and goes to lie down. In verse 7 we seem to have the reason for this—she wants to wait until Boaz is in a good mood. If she feels this is important, then there must be at least some risk of failure. Naomi knows Boaz well enough that she can be fairly sure that he will do what she hopes he will do, and agree to marry Ruth. But there is enough uncertainty in her mind that she wants to do everything possible to encourage him to make the right decision.

Having Ruth dress up in a nice way is just one of these extra steps that Naomi takes to make sure of the outcome. The Hebrew does not make it sound as though Ruth was going out of her way to make herself sexually attractive. She was simply getting dressed up. Naomi seems to be saying "Don't go as you are, but wash and put on something nice." Some of the translators in India felt that the TEV has made things worse by having Ruth put on her "perfume" and "best clothes". The other versions do not do this. It may be true that these expressions can contribute to the wrong impression, but we believe the TEV has the right meaning, nevertheless. The way to avoid the wrong impression is not by hiding what the Hebrew is really saying. If Ruth did get dressed up nicely, we must say so. However, we want the reader to understand why, and translate so as to avoid implying that Ruth was trying to seduce Boaz with her perfume and dress.

(2) Why the secrecy? Here is one point where several possible solutions suggest themselves. Is it to avoid letting others know what is happening—an admission that there could be wrong implications at least, and possibly

wrong intentions as well? Is it to keep the other relative from hearing about this before Boaz has a chance to work things out properly? Is it to keep Boaz from knowing what is happening until the appropriate time? The wording in the text (verse 3) applies the secrecy only to Boaz. Naomi does not say, "Be careful no one else sees you", but only, "Be careful Boaz does not see you". This, too, seems to result from her uncertainty about how Boaz will respond. It is one more step toward putting the events as much as possible in Ruth's favour. Ruth must wait until he is in a good mood, as it says in verse 7.

The first two possible reasons for secrecy may be present elsewhere in the story, but there is no evidence that they are being thought of here. They will both be discussed in connection with 3.14.

(3) What are the implications of "turn back the covers at his feet and lie down"? It would be helpful to be able to prove that this was a Hebrew custom—a way of asking for protection, for instance. However, this is the only example of such a "custom" which we have in the Bible. Furthermore, we should remember that the book of Ruth was written long after the time in which it was set. In 4.7 the author finds it necessary to explain one old custom to his Hebrew readers of a later period, since even they would not have understood it. Since he does not do this here, we see that it is probably not something that the author thinks of as an old and forgotten Hebrew custom. This could mean that it was just a common custom, extending from the time of the judges right up to the time of the author. But Naomi does not even have to explain to Ruth that it is a Hebrew custom—does the author think it is a custom widely known throughout that area of the world?

All of this seems to show that it was not a custom at all. It was no common practice that Naomi was suggesting to Ruth. We cannot explain this strange action to our readers by saying, "Even though we would not approve, it was something the Hebrews thought nothing of." Quite possibly this action was almost as unexpected to them as it is to us. Is it then a euphemism for some sexual activity? We think we will see when we look at the verses where Ruth carries out Naomi's advice that this is not a sexual meeting. We can say confidently enough that this is not a euphemism, but should be taken literally. Nevertheless, it is an act which would be frowned on just as much by most Hebrew people as it would be by many other peoples of the world. We simply do not know for certain why Naomi chose to use this rather questionable method of approaching Boaz, rather than some other.

Our own feeling is that Naomi is probably having Ruth act out literally something which is only a Hebrew idiom, something which is not understood literally, the expression "to spread one's skirt over someone" (verse 9), meaning to "take over the responsibility of caring for someone". Although to actually carry out the action in this way may have been surprising or even shocking to the Hebrew readers, they were at least familiar with the idea of acting out idioms in ways that sometimes were shocking. The prophets did this on several occasions, as for example Jeremiah with his linen waist-band (Jer. 13), his jar (Jer. 19) and his yoke (Jer. 27). Isaiah surely shocked people when he went around naked (Isa. 20). The whole story of Hosea's life is a symbolic acting out of God's relation with his people. Naomi seems to be

using this same approach. By having Ruth do the action, then explain what she is doing, Naomi hopes to make clear in a gentle way to Boaz what they are hoping he will do.

(4) What does Naomi mean by "then he will tell you what to do"? (verse 4). As usually translated in English, it certainly suggests that Naomi knows what Boaz is going to do at this point. She may be fairly sure that he will accept Ruth's request, but does she really have some specific idea of what Boaz will say at this point? Is she trying to act mysterious with Ruth? There is no evidence in the text that Naomi's attitude is like that. We think it is much more likely that she is simply telling Ruth that from then on it is up to Boaz. A better English translation, if this is the right meaning, would be: "And then we'll just have to see what he decides to do." This, too, is based on the important fact that Naomi does not know for certain how Boaz will react to her plan.

A possible translation of these verses might be as follows (italics mark implicit material which has been made explicit): "My daughter, I must find a husband for you, so that you will have your own home. You know Boaz—you have been working with his servants. Well, *I think I've told you* that he is a relative. *Therefore he might be willing to marry you.* He's threshing out the barley tonight, and will be staying there. Why don't you try this—dress up nicely and go down there. But don't just go rushing right up to him. Wait till he's had a good meal and lies down to sleep. Then, *in order to let him know that you would like him to take responsibility for you,* go lift up the covers at his feet and lie down there. *Then we'll just have to see what he decides.* Do whatever he tells you to do."

This brings out in several ways the points which we have said were most important for overcoming possible misunderstanding in these verses. First, it stresses that Naomi does not know the outcome ("he might be willing", "why don't you try", "we'll have to see"). Second, it shows that all of these actions are aimed at asking Boaz to take responsibility for her by marrying her. Misunderstandings in some languages might be caused by a failure to understand certain other implicit points. In that case, the things that are made explicit in this speech would have to be different. In any case, this is given merely as an example of the sort of thing which can be done once you have studied the material carefully and are confident that this information really is implicit in the original.

3.7 Why does Ruth wait until Boaz is asleep? And exactly how is Ruth lying?

In most English translations Naomi does not clearly tell Ruth to wait until Boaz has gone to sleep before she herself goes and lies down. The Jerusalem Bible and TEV do translate so as to suggest it was part of the original instructions, and the Hebrew probably implies this. However, the situation almost demands it, and whether Naomi suggested it or not, it is hardly surprising that Ruth would wait. If in fact she is trying to act out something symbolic, it is important that she be permitted to do it. If Boaz was still awake he might see her coming and greet her before she had a chance to do anything.

As for how she is lying, in spite of translations which state otherwise in

verse 7, verse 8 says very clearly that when Boaz woke up Ruth was lying at his feet. Before she lies down, she pulls back the covers at his feet. Perhaps we are meant to understand that she then covers herself with these covers after she lies down. Others argue that it is more likely that she just lay down, and left the covers pulled back. This would avoid several practical problems in the story. It would avoid the problem of how there would be enough covers at his feet to cover her as well. It would also explain how he knew there was a woman there when he woke up. (If she was covered, how could he tell so quickly?) And it may even explain why he woke up, if his feet were cold! These are all good arguments, and they may be right.

However, we see no way of solving this point, and the crucial matter is that she was literally lying at his feet. Either way, the idiom which she uses is "to cover the place of his feet". She may have shown him what she wanted by actually covering herself there. Or she maybe showed him what she wanted by leaving his feet uncovered so that he would have to include her when he covered his feet again.

The position she is sleeping in is obviously important for the question of exactly what went on, and it might be quite helpful to have a picture in the book at this point to make things clear to the reader. Such a picture could also help the translator to word the text so that it too is as clear as possible. It is also important to translate what Boaz does when he wakes up (verse 8) so that it fits this context. The Hebrew word is usually translated "he turned over", but in English this is not an action that would help you see something at your feet any better, unless you were lying on your stomach to start with. The exact meaning of the Hebrew verb is unclear, and it seems better to translate it so that it will help Boaz to see his feet! Moffatt says that Boaz "bent forward". The Living Bible says he "sat up".

3.9 Ruth asks Boaz to "spread the skirt of his garment over her".

The meaning of this expression has already been discussed, and this meaning has been brought out quite clearly in TEV: "Because you are a close relative, you have the responsibility of taking care of me, so please marry me." This idiom occurs elsewhere in Hebrew. In Ezek. 16.8 and Deut. 22.30 it is related to the idea of marriage. Marriage is clearly what Ruth means here. A marriage proposal by a woman would be unusual in Hebrew culture. However this is a special case. The Hebrew custom of levirate marriage makes it in some ways Boaz' duty to marry her, and this helps to explain her proposal. Furthermore, this custom was intended to carry on the line of Ruth's dead husband, so she is not really even acting on her own behalf, but on behalf of this first husband, Naomi's son.

The TEV at this particular verse has already taken the literal Hebrew and made explicit here what is implied by the idiom. There is one difficulty with such a translation which gives only the meaning while omitting the idiom altogether! It may remove the only important clue the story gives us as to why Ruth uses this particular strange method of asking Boaz to marry her. It might be better to translate in some way so as to bring out both the idiom and its meaning: "Ruth answered with the idiom which showed Boaz that she hoped he would marry her, 'Since you are my closest relative, please spread the skirt of your cloak over me.' "

This helps to bring out the aspect of Hebrew culture upon which this strange marriage proposal by a woman to a man is based. It may also help to explain things to peoples for whom the man must always take the initiative. A cultural footnote might be helpful at this point, briefly describing the custom of levirate marriage. Or, since this custom is quite basic to understanding the story, it is something which could be explained in an introduction to the whole book.

3.10 What is the meaning of Boaz' compliment to Ruth?

This is one point where an understanding of the implicit cultural background is important. For us it may seem natural enough for a younger woman to be interested in an older man, particularly if he is well-to-do, and has already noticed her to the extent that Boaz noticed Ruth earlier. We completely miss the point that by coming to Boaz Ruth is not acting primarily in her own interest at all, but is once more sacrificing them to the family. The hope is that Ruth and Boaz will have a son, who will be considered the heir of Ruth's first husband, and therefore of her father-in-law. Boaz is deeply touched by this further sign of her family loyalty. No doubt he is also aware of the fact that he is older than a woman of Ruth's age would probably prefer. Perhaps there is even some suggestion that Boaz is a humble man who would not expect a woman to see anything in him anyway. But there is no real evidence for this.

What Boaz is saying here is that he is impressed once again with what Ruth is doing. This should not sound as though Boaz is impressed simply because she chose him, an older man, in place of a younger man. What impresses him is that she has given up *her own choice*, whoever it might have been, and is taking the man that her family responsibilities require her to marry. This is the emphasis the translation should bring out.

TEV has gone a long way toward making this explicit when it says, "you are showing even greater *family* loyalty in what you are doing now than in *what you did for your mother-in-law*". (Italics show what has been made explicit.) However, the second part of the verse might still be misleading. Living Bible is good there: "Naturally you'd prefer a younger man, even though poor. But you have put aside your personal desires."

3.13–14 How does Ruth spend the rest of the night with Boaz? Is there any possibility in the Hebrew text that sexual activity may have taken place this night?

It is quite clear that Boaz did not know when Ruth came. He woke up later and was quite surprised to see her. So nothing had happened before their midnight conversation. These two verses are the important clues concerning what happened during the rest of the night. In verse 13 he invites her to spend the rest of the night there. But the context is one in which he also tells her that he may not marry her if the other man would rather do it. And also one in which he swears before God that he will marry her if it is possible. These are the words and thoughts of a man totally concerned with doing what is right. In the words themselves there is no hint of any intended sexual activity (which would certainly have been viewed as wrong by the Hebrews).

The only possible problem comes from his invitation to her to stay there. Why does he do this? The implicit background here is the presence of night

dangers which Boaz wants to protect Ruth from. There would always be the possibility of thieves. At this harvest season there would also be more chance of meeting groups of drunken men. Boaz is giving Ruth permission to stay there rather than inviting or urging her to do so. In verse 14 we are told specifically that she lay at his feet until morning. This is no euphemism in Hebrew, and there is no reason to think it means anything other than what it literally says. It is quite clear from the Hebrew that this was not a sexual encounter.

This is another place where the tone of the translation can make the difference between the wrong impression and the right understanding. Boaz' words should be translated to suggest permission and concern rather than an invitation to anything sexual.

3.14 Why does Boaz want secrecy? If there is nothing wrong with what they are doing, why then does Boaz send her secretly away while it is still dark?

The reason is that his fellow citizens would have been just as suspicious of this midnight encounter as some of us are. Threshing and winnowing were men's work. A woman at the threshing floor at night was no doubt there as a prostitute. The fact that it is really quite innocent does not mean that Boaz and Ruth should therefore make a spectacle of themselves. He sent her away precisely in order to keep anyone from getting the wrong idea. As far as we know from the story no one saw her, and it worked. We who read the story, however, share the secret. The author assumes that we will see things from Boaz and Ruth's point of view, and understand. Instead, some of us take the part of the town gossips, and assume the worst.

Furthermore, it could have caused a lot of trouble if the other kinsman heard about this before Boaz spoke to him. If this man knew that Boaz himself wanted to marry Ruth, he would have been in a position to try to get as much as possible out of Boaz before giving up his own rights. In fact, if he thought he could lay a charge of adultery against Ruth, he could have exploited the situation even more. The text does not say, of course, that this other kinsman was such a villain. But it certainly shows (4.3–6) that Boaz was very careful in the way he approached the matter, making it sound as though property was his chief interest, and Ruth only secondary.

Here again it may be most helpful to simply make explicit why Boaz prefers secrecy: "Boaz felt that it was better if she left without anyone seeing that she had come there. 'There's no point in giving people the wrong impression,' he said." This is general enough to cover both the town gossips and the other relative.

3.15 Does Ruth strip naked?

The garment which Ruth takes off here to wrap the barley in is her cloak. It is only an outer garment.

In languages where the ordinary word will suggest it was the only thing she was wearing, it would be necessary to add something to make clear that it was an outer garment, and that she was still fully dressed without it. There was nothing immodest about removing it in front of a man.

3.16 Is there any reference here to improper behaviour?

This verse in itself is not misleading unless it is translated by a particularly suggestive phrase. Once we have seen what is really meant in the preceding

verses, it is quite clear what it means. Ruth has again been touched by Boaz' great kindness toward her, and she now tells Naomi all about it.

The words "all that he had done for her" may be misleading here, since there have not really been any actions as yet. Living Bible has "She told Naomi everything", which is very good in English. If necessary to avoid wrong implications in other languages, try "all that Boaz had said". His only *action* up till now was to give her the barley, and Ruth mentions that separately in verse 17.

Conclusion

Several times in our discussion we have pointed out that we do not expect every language to have problems or misunderstandings in exactly the same places. Even if a language does have these problems, the suggestions we have made here are meant only to show how to find answers. Someone who is translating Ruth should certainly not try to translate these suggestions just as they are. He should study the whole context in his own language, and decide what to say which will be faithful to the original meaning, good style in his own language, and which does not allow the reader to miss the whole point.

Most important, we hope that through this long example we have demonstrated the fact that this type of problem does exist. We hope we have shown that by careful work this kind of problem can be overcome quite successfully. Not all translators will be working on Ruth, but all translators will surely find places where people always seem to have the wrong idea after they have finished reading a passage.

We regret to inform readers of *The Bible Translator* that, because of continual increases in the cost of paper and printing during the last four years, it is necessary to introduce new prices from the beginning of 1976. Subscriptions already paid in advance will be honoured. The new subscription rates are: $5.00 or £2.00 a year for both series; $2.50 or £1.00 a year for a single series. Special student price applies to the two series only and is $3.00 or £1.20 a year. Individual copies are sold for $1.50 or 60p.

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