

TRANSLATION IN THE PERFORMANCE PROCESS

Gay McAuley
University of Sydney

Theatre exists at the interface of the oral and the literate, and it engages with both more intensively and in more complex ways than any other art form. The text as such is absent from performance, transformed by the actors and the *mise en scène* into lived event, yet as Walter J. Ong has shown,¹ drama was the first narrative genre to be written down, and the nexus between the written and the performed reaches back thousands of years to the very beginning of theatre history. The relationship between written text and performance event is a complex one, as might be expected in the circumstances, and the place of the written in the genesis of performance, and of performance in the genesis of the written have undergone many changes as acting and production styles have evolved over the centuries and from culture to culture.

Translation has been an important factor in the production process ever since the Romans began to borrow from Greek culture, but it is only in recent years that the widespread practice has begun to attract attention from theorists in either theatre or translation studies. There are many reasons for this, not least the marginalised position of theatre in nearly all contemporary social and critical theory, yet the theatre has a great deal to offer translation theorists and, conversely, translation provides an excellent means of opening to scrutiny the ways in which written text functions in the dynamic process of making theatrical meaning.

Translation for the theatre poses all the problems of interlingual and intercultural translation as they are currently being articulated,² as well as others which derive from the particular nature of play texts and of theatre writing more generally. Writing for the theatre is writing which is subjected to extraordinary pressures; it does not exist, like other writing, in order to be read, but in order to be transformed through the corporeal, vocal and spatial practices of actors, directors and designers. It is writing which is necessarily going to spatialise and be spatialised, in a process which Maurice Blanchot sees as constitutive of theatre itself: 'Le théâtre est l'art de jouer avec la division en l'introduisant dans l'espace par le dialogue.'³

It is writing which must be embodied and spoken, filtered through the always contemporary subjectivity of the actor, and it functions first and foremost in relation to the practitioners' creative processes. Theatre writing contains triggers for the actors who are the primary authors of the performance, and these triggers assist them in their work of creating the characters and the meaningful spatial relations and bodily behaviours that will articulate

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emotions and ideas and tell a particular story. Contrary to the beliefs of some playwrights and literary critics, the story and characters are not already present in the playwright's words, but have to be constructed with those words and other things by the actors and by the *mise en scène*, for the same words can tell many different stories in the theatre.

This paper is based on observations emerging from two of the comparative translation projects sponsored by the Centre for Performance Studies in 1993: in the first, actors Angie Milliken, Justin Monjo and Jamie Jackson worked with director Rhys McConnachie on three different English translations of a scene from Sophocles' *Antigone*, and in the second French speaking actors Véronique Bernard and François Bocquet and director Rénaud Navarro worked on a fragment of the trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice* in three French translations. An earlier project of a similar type involving work by Rex Cramphorn and a group of actors on four English translations of a scene from *Phèdre*, and the *Dom Juan* project in 1990 in which two different groups of actors with two different directors (Rex Cramphorn and Beverley Blankenship) worked on the same scene in the same translation have also fed into my thinking about translation and the theatre.⁴ Comparative projects of both these types have proved to be a fertile terrain not only for exploration of the translator's role in the theatrical meaning making process but also for observation of theatre practice more generally. They are particularly revealing in relation to the text/ performance nexus, providing insights into the ways in which contemporary actors use the text in their creation of performance, the kinds of textual detail that make a difference in the meaning making process, the kinds of writing that feed actors in their creative process, as well as those that seem to resist or block these processes.

The paper is also concerned with the way the translator in the theatre writes of necessity from within the theatre culture of his/her own day and with the impact of this upon theatre practitioners attempting to make performances with translated play texts. It has frequently been observed that translations have a circumscribed life span, even those that have entered the target culture as fully as the Authorised Version of the Bible, for example. Theatre translations seem to have an even shorter life span than other translations, which Jean-Claude Carrière puts at about ten years for the Shakespeare translations he has made for Peter Brook's company in Paris.⁵ It is interesting to explore the reasons for this as they reveal a good deal about the nature of the work process to which texts are subjected, and about the situation of enunciation in the theatre.

Comments about translations that feed or resist the actors' creative processes should not necessarily be taken as value judgements about the quality of the translations, nor even of their quality as theatre texts, for it must be recognised that the actors' processes are not fixed and immutable. On the contrary they are continually changing and evolving, meaning that ideas about the kinds of writing that best feed the actor are continually changing and evolving along with the processes themselves.

It is not simply that the cultural and political context of the performance changes as the society evolves. This does of course happen and it has an important impact on the way a given text may be interpreted, but the production process itself also changes, in part due to the other changes that are taking place in the culture. New practitioners have come to the fore in the twentieth century, such as the director or, more recently, the designer; acting and speaking styles evolve all the time, even though it is only with the advent of recording that we have become aware of how quickly this occurs; our understanding of the causes of human behaviour has been modified by new psychoanalytical and sociological theories and these have radically transformed actors' ideas about characters' motivation or even

about the very idea of character. Developments such as these mean that the questions asked of the play text in rehearsal and the ways in which texts are used in the production process have been continually changing too. It has become evident over the ten years that I have been observing and documenting rehearsal process that, even within this short period, rehearsal strategies, the shared terminology, the common buzz words and the preoccupations they denote have undergone significant changes.

Performance triggers in the text

The rehearsal processes observed in the projects mentioned above provided numerous examples of the way actors mine the text for the information they require to construct character and motivation and to create the story they are going to tell. Very significant performance decisions were frequently the result of an actor's response to a small detail in the text, and the comparative process threw into relief the role of these textual triggers. It was one sentence in F.C. Danchin's translation of *Le Marchand de Venise* that led François Bocquet to see this Shylock as proud, even arrogant, in contrast to the character indicated in the other two translations of the same line. The sentence in question, and the three versions are as follows:

<i>Shakespeare</i>	<i>F-V. Hugo (1865)</i>	<i>F.C. Danchin (1938)</i>	<i>J-M. Déprats (1987)</i>
Portia: Then must the Jew be merciful.	Portia: Il faut donc que le juif soit clément.	Portia: Alors, il faut que le juif se montre clément.	Portia: Alors le juif doit être miséricordieux.
Shylock: On what compulsion must I? Tell me that.	Shylock: En vertu de quelle obligation? Dites-le-moi.	Shylock: 'Il faut', mais qui m'y forcera, dites-moi?	Shylock: En vertu de quoi le devrais-je? Dites-le-moi.

Danchin's Shylock picks up and turns back on Portia her phrase 'il faut', he personalises and turns into a question of force what the other two leave as a generalised moral obligation, and he omits the 'le' from 'dites-le-moi'. This omission does not make the phrase ungrammatical, but it is certainly more direct, more colloquial, and it demands an answer more insistently.

François Bocquet has a background in mime and corporeal expression rather than in the psychologically based character acting derived from Stanislavsky that is still dominant in Australia. This meant that his perception was immediately physicalised in a very strongly marked stance, gesture and facial expression, as can be seen in the illustration. He placed himself firmly up stage centre on his entrance, his head held high, his demeanour uncowed. Bocquet's physicalisation of the character trait he found in those words had clear implications for Véronique Bernard as Portia in terms of the proxemic relations it set up between the two characters, the physical distance she was obliged to maintain, and the resulting aggressivity of her attitude to him.



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The physicalisation also had implications for the delivery of other lines in the scene that in themselves were not so marked, so it can be seen that the first perception, triggered by some small points of grammar and syntax, affected the whole scene. It is important to note that there is a two way process involved: actors search the text for hints, clues, triggers to the performance they are creating, but equally they impose interpretations on the text. In this case, the starting point was a verbal clue, but the performance consequences washed over the rest of the scene, colouring many phrases that were not so obviously marked in themselves.

My second example involves similarly small details of syntax and vocabulary. One or two sentences from Elizabeth Wyckoff’s translation of *Antigone* led Justin Monjo to see this Creon as a military man, and this came as something of a surprise to the director and the other actors. Once again, the perception was rooted in a few small textual details, and it had a profound impact on the way the actors interpreted the scene and the fictional world they created with it. Here are the lines in question:

<i>Lewis Campbell (1873)</i>	<i>Wyckoff (1954)</i>	<i>Malina (1966)</i>
How came she in thy charge? Where didst thou find her?	Explain the circumstance of the arrest.	What are you bringing her here for? Where did you catch her?

<i>Campbell</i>	<i>Wyckoff</i>	<i>Malina⁶</i>
Hast thou thy wits, and knowest what thou sayest?	Is this the truth? And do you grasp its meaning?	

<i>Campbell</i>	<i>Wyckoff</i>	<i>Malina</i>
And how was she detected, caught and taken?	How was she caught and taken in the act?	Give me the story.

The actors had trouble finding an appropriate performance style for Wyckoff’s verse, a very loose form of iambic pentameter which provided neither the rigour of a regular beat nor the freedom of prose, and the rather ‘chatty’ or ‘conversational’ feel⁷ of the language led to problems in determining the role of the Chorus in the scene. As Justin Monjo said, in the Brecht/Malina translation it is obvious that the Chorus represents everyone, including the audience, and in Campbell the language is public, but Wyckoff’s conversational language suggested to director and actors that the scene was occurring in a private space. Indeed, it was suggested at one point that Creon could even be talking to himself. Comparing the lines that follow the Chorus’s intervention in Campbell and Wyckoff, it is clear that Campbell’s Creon is speaking directly to the Chorus while in Wyckoff there is no necessary interaction:

<i>Campbell</i>	<i>Wyckoff</i>
Ay, but the stubborn spirit first doth fall. Oft ye shall see the strongest bar of steel, That fire hath hardened to extremity, Shattered to pieces.	Those rigid spirits are the first to fall. The strongest iron, hardened in the fire, most often ends in scraps and shatterings.

Rhys McConnachie thought that Wyckoff had attempted to turn the play into a domestic tragedy and all felt that ‘the scene should just be a conversation between the two of them’. When Justin Monjo reiterated his perception that this Creon was a military leader ‘or a cop’, the idea of a military dictatorship or police state was introduced. The context of the 1950s (the period of the translation) was evoked, the director referred to *The Prisoner* by Bridget Boland, furniture and props were brought in (these would have been totally incongruous in the context of the Campbell translation) and the scene was set

as an interrogation room. The Chorus was a simple soldier, like the Guard, unquestioning in his support for the Leader. In the private space Antigone's rebellion became personal rather than political, contrasting with the public stand they saw her taking in Campbell's version and the exemplary individual putting the cowardly crowd to shame in Malina's translation of Brecht. There were clearly many factors contributing to the Wyckoff scene as it developed in rehearsal, and the actor's response to the three lines quoted is only one, but it is nevertheless a good example of the intensity with which actors scrutinise the text, and of the chain reaction that one perception can precipitate.

Punctuation can also serve as a trigger for the actor, indicating in subtle ways the articulation of a thought process, speed of delivery, phrasing and even breathing. It is a means whereby the playwright maintains a certain control over the rhythm of a speech or an exchange, and hence over the rhythm of the whole scene. In the absence of uncorrupted manuscripts or even universally accepted rules or consistent practice in relation to punctuation in 16th century English, the punctuation of Shakespeare's plays has been left to editors and publishers, and they have varied considerably in their decisions. Translators of Shakespeare have taken similar liberties, and it is doubtless in recognition of the power such decisions can have on actors that Jean-Claude Carrière does not provide punctuation in the Shakespeare translations that he gives to the actors in Peter Brook's company. They are free to punctuate their own lines in terms of the meanings and rhythms that evolve during the rehearsal process and, as Carrière states, 'cela favorise leur travail car une virgule ou un point d'exclamation indiquent, d'une façon quasi inconsciente, un jeu'.⁸

Véronique Bernard noted that F-V. Hugo's translation of the *Merchant of Venice* scene was, in her words, 'peppered with full stops'. Compared with the Déprats translation, it is evident that Hugo has divided and marked the thought process of all the characters far more obviously, while Déprats allows thoughts to flow together, and the forward thrust of his verse favours a certain speed of delivery and greater emotional energy. The 'quality of mercy' speech, for example, is divided into nine sentences in Hugo's prose translation, as opposed to only three in Déprats' verse translation. The actor may thus be led insensibly to use the speech to make either a more intellectual (Hugo) or a more emotional (Déprats) appeal. The actors working on the three different translations of the same scene referred to the Hugo, as it developed in rehearsal, as their 'comic' version and, indeed, the Shylock in this version was more buffoon than villain or victim, and when Portia physically propelled him across the stage towards Antonio on 'Ainsi, prépare-toi à couper la chair', thrusting the knife into his unwilling hands, the moment veered towards slapstick. How much this was due to the more fragmented rhythms of Hugo's language and how much to other factors is not entirely clear but, in discussing the genesis of this version with spectators immediately after the performance, the director and the actors stressed the impact the punctuation had had on them.

The following speech is a good example of different punctuation through which it seems that the translator has envisaged, and is possibly encouraging, a different physical moment.

<i>Hugo</i>	<i>Déprats</i>
Portia: Doucement! Le juif aura justice complète... Douxement!... Pas de hâte! Il n'aura rien que la pénalité prévue.	Portia: Doucement! Le juif aura toute justice - doucement, pas de hâte! Il n'aura rien que la pénalité.

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Hugo has five exclamation marks, full stops and suspension points, while Déprats has only three in this short speech, which suggests that Hugo saw the moment as a very physical one and he has, as it were, inserted the space for this action via the punctuation. Déprats' version is less fevered and 'doucement, pas de hâte!' certainly points to a less physically charged moment than 'Doucement!... Pas de hâte!' despite the fact that the words are identical.

Even the decision to use a particular prop in this version was attributed by the director to Hugo's punctuation. Portia carried a large book, the book of the law, in which she searches for a solution to the problem posed by Shylock's 'billet' (bond). When asked about this choice, Rénald Navarro said

It came because of the full stops which gave us the idea ... of going from one step to another to another, of not knowing what the next step should be. This gave us the sense that there is a looking for something, so we introduced the physical thing of the book.⁹

While actors can, and often do, ignore the punctuation or override it in their vocalisation, it is incontrovertible that it can work, even at an unconscious level as Carrière claims, to affect their interpretation of a line, to suggest an energy level or to open a space for physical action.

These examples involve very minor textual details: choice of vocabulary, syntax, punctuation, and yet in each case a minor textual feature had major consequences in terms of the scene as a whole, as it developed in rehearsal. The textual details can be seen to serve as a trigger to the actor's imagination in the search for character and motivation, and the translator's choices in what might seem relatively unimportant matters led the actors to interpretive decisions not available in the other versions of the same scene. It is surprising how often important performance decisions are in fact triggered by a minor detail in the text, although the physical manifestation (paralinguistic features, gesture, movement, use of a particular prop, etc.) may be the dominant effect in performance. In the two-way process already mentioned, it is equally the case that many other less marked, or unmarked utterances may have a particular meaning imposed upon them as there is a dynamic process of meaning making going on. Even here, however, this imposition is not the result of factors totally exterior to the text but is usually to be traced back to an earlier textual detail of the sort described above.

The resistance of the text

The text provides clues, triggers, useful hints for the actors, but it can also create difficulties. These may be overcome in different ways, most brutally by changing or cutting the line, more frequently by changing its apparent meaning through gesture or intonation or by creating a new subtext. A text that resists the actors can lead to brilliantly inventive performance solutions, and indeed Anne Ubersfeld has suggested that genuine creativity in the theatre may depend upon a kind of struggle between the 'voices' of playwright and director:

Peut-être la création du metteur en scène a-t-elle besoin de la résistance d'une voix, peut-être le pluralisme inhérent à la création théâtrale a-t-il besoin de cette bataille entre les deux 'sujets de l'écriture...'¹⁰

Not all resistance is of this sort, however, and the Wyckoff translation of *Antigone* is an example of a text that seems to create difficulties for the actors in their attempt to find a performance. On the face of it this may seem curious: Wyckoff's English is fairly

neutral, it is less archaic than Campbell's pseudo-Shakespearian style, and her translation is highly regarded by scholars for its accuracy. Why then was it so difficult for the actors to work with it?

The following comments made by the actors during rehearsals of the Wyckoff text indicate the kind of difficulties they were experiencing and the extent to which these were to be traced to the nature of the language itself and the verse form adopted by Wyckoff:

'The verse feels more casual, so you can make it more casual'

'Rhythmically it is verse, but the imagery is literal'

'It's heightened language but still conversational'

'I'm much less clear about the Wyckoff and the ways to do it. We'll have to do it to find the way' (*the director at end of first afternoon's work*)

'This one is very hard'

'The language isn't enough'

'The ideas don't connect in the stychomythia'

One of the lines already quoted from this translation provides an example of the difficulties mentioned by the actors. Campbell and Wyckoff are both using iambic pentameter but Campbell uses the stress pattern of the verse to emphasise the

loaded words while Wyckoff's verse often results in the stress being placed on purely auxiliary words :

/ / / / /

And how was she detected, caught and taken? (*Campbell*)

/ / / / /

How was she caught and taken in the act? (*Wyckoff*)

There are many other lines in this scene in which the metre creates an awkward effect, and the actor is virtually obliged to ignore the metre and treat the line as prose. For example:

/ / / / /

We poked at each other with growling threats

/ / / / /

We saw this and surged down. We trapped her fast;

/ / / / /

None of these others see the case this way

/ / / / /

It was not your brother who died against him, then?

The actor has, as it were, to work against the grammar and sometimes even against normal pronunciation in order to use the stress or else must ignore the stress pattern to get the meaning. The actors involved here felt a kind of absence in the verse, a lack of direction, an openness that left them floundering. In the event they filled the gaps with meanings of their own, as they are used to doing when exploring the subtext in naturalistic prose dialogue. The use of props and set and the construction of an additional narrative (police state/military dictatorship, interrogation room, Eastern Europe in the 1950s) through these means may seem to be purely performance decisions but they were in reality a response to this style of writing.

The director, Rhys McConnachie, commented very perceptively after the first reading, that Wyckoff's verse was reminiscent of the verse drama of Eliot and Fry that was popular

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in the late 1940s early 1950s. This was perhaps one factor which led the actors to the 1950s for the fictional situation, but that decision was certainly also affected by the work they had already done on Brecht's 1948 adaptation which overtly uses Sophocles' play to reflect on the situation of Berlin in 1945. The spectators seemed to accept the 1950s setting as an interesting and effective performance solution, although the limitations of the project did not permit exploration of how far it would have been viable for a production of the whole play, but the actors clearly felt uneasy about the extent to which this solution had been, in Rhys McConnachie's words, 'imposed on the scene'. Their discomfort was also revealing about the ways in which actors and directors like to work with text to construct meaning in performance and the place of the text in a work process that is profoundly satisfying to actors.

The problems posed by this text reminded me of the difficulties caused by the John Cairncross translation of *Phèdre* in the comparative project undertaken by Rex Cramphorn in 1985. Cairncross has made a line for line translation that is basically very accurate, extraordinary for the way it manages to pack so much of Racine's meaning into lines which are two syllables shorter than the French, and yet the actors found it to be virtually unusable in a performance context. They even found it very hard to memorise. The actors' solution in the case of Cairncross's *Phèdre* was similar to that adopted for Wyckoff's *Antigone*: their frustration led them to impose an interpretation on the text, to furnish the space and introduce props with which to create a fictional world that would give the text meaning rather than finding a fictional world through the language.

The text in the performance / the performance in the text

It may seem from these observations that I am saying the *mise en scène* or the performance is somehow inscribed in the text, and that the actors are engaged in a search for the clues that will enable them to reconstruct this originary *mise en scène*. This would be a serious distortion of the creative process as I have observed it, for it is my experience that actors are not concerned with *re*-constructing anything, even if there were such a thing as an originary *mise en scène*, even if it were possible to inscribe this in the play text, but rather with constructing performance meanings in the here and now.

It is nevertheless true that a lot of performance possibilities are suggested by the play text, for that is indeed one of the distinguishing characteristics of dramatic writing, and actors skilled in this kind of work do scrutinise the text minutely for suggestions of the sort I have described in the *Antigone* and *Merchant of Venice* projects. They use these, however, to create their own performance and their own meanings. It is equally true that certain performance options may seem to be blocked by a given play text but, if director and actors desire to take those options they are free to do so and, given sufficient skill, can make a success of it, as the 'director's theatre' of the last 15 years has shown on numerous occasions. Performance always has primacy over the text for it is only through the performance that the words have meaning.

When Antoine Vitez remarked to a gathering of theatre critics 'De Molière il ne nous reste qu'une trace: pneumatique',¹¹ he was referring in his own inimitable way to the fact that actors performing in Molière's plays breathe as Molière did, and experience in their own bodies his consumptive breathing and shattered lungs. This observation, while controversial to academics who see the written word in more abstract terms, opens a fascinating area of speculation about the physicality of the play text, the performativity

that has been written into it, indeed about the function of the text in the actor's process. It cannot be denied that certain play texts do seem to possess qualities that fascinate practitioners: these plays are not exhausted by one production but continually demand to be re-explored, reworked, remounted, and it also has to be acknowledged that many of these were written by people such as Molière, Racine, Shakespeare or Chekhov who had a close involvement with the actors who originally performed them. The potency of these texts in suggesting elements of *mise en scène*, elements of performance cannot be denied, and it can be speculated that the close involvement with working actors led the writers to incorporate into their texts a kind of performativity that continues to be effective with subsequent generations of actors.

The textual features that feed actors in their work process are not, in our current state of knowledge, precisely definable, and perhaps they never will be. It is, however, evident that they are not normally to be found in the stage directions which might, on the face of it, have seemed an obvious place to find performance indicators. On the contrary, stage directions seem peripheral to the practitioners in their work process, despite the fact that playwrights have been trying since the 19th century to write the *mise en scène* they have imagined into their plays in the form of stage directions. In practice directions are frequently ignored and it is perhaps even true that a play with very precise and binding stage directions (such as Beckett's *Play*, for example) will have less of an afterlife than other plays. The very precision of the *mise en scène* that is incorporated leaves less space for the practitioners and the play is, therefore, perhaps a less potent vehicle for new thoughts and new meanings.

The question of authorship in the theatre is a complex one. The primacy accorded to the written in the past has been subjected to a great deal of criticism from both practitioners and theorists in the 20th century, but the result to date has largely been to replace the playwright by the director (or, in some cases, the principal actor) as the 'author' of the production: we refer to Olivier's *Henry V*, Planchon's *Tartuffe*, Liubimov's *Hamlet*. We do not yet seem comfortable with the notion of the group as author, with authorship as a collaborative process, yet from the work processes I have observed it is evident that, even in text based theatre, authorship is always multiple, always multi-factorial. The actors in such theatre are clearly the authors of their performances, and they must be seen as co-creators, co-authors of the work as a whole, together with the playwright, the director and the designers.

It has become fashionable in recent years to decry the role of the text and even to query the creativity of actors working in text/character/narrative based theatre.¹² I would claim that actors in text based theatre are skilled in a particular form of close reading, and that they possess this skill in addition to the performance skills that enable their 'reading' to be embodied and expressed, the ability to imagine what it is like to be another person, and the ability to work as part of a collaborative group, responding to what others are doing and expressing, perceiving the implications of each detail in the whole as it develops.

It is clearly absurd to claim that actors in this kind of theatre are somehow less creative than other performance artists, or that they are engaged in interpretation rather than artistic creation. As our projects have demonstrated over and over again, actors work with text in extremely subtle ways to make meaning, they do not find meaning ready-made in the text. As Justin Monjo said of his work in the *Antigone*, 'you play all the words you are given', and it is through this 'play' that the words begin to mean. Indeed, the actors' process has much in common with the deconstructive reading practices so much admired

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by poststructuralists and theorists of the postmodern and I would claim that the theatre, and text-based theatre in particular, provides a revealing paradigm for the reading process as we are coming to understand it.

The translator's genotext

In the comparative projects sponsored this year and in the earlier project on *Phèdre*, the translations chosen for production came from widely different periods (1706, 1961, 1963 and 1975 for *Phèdre*; 1865, 1938 and 1987 for *Le Marchand de Venise*; 1873, 1954 and 1966 for *Antigone*), and it was perhaps the sweep of translation and theatre history involved on each occasion that made so noticeable the fact that the translators have written into their translations in various ways their own idea of theatre, and that this idea is always rooted in the theatre practices of their own day. It seems that even if translators are intending simply to translate the performativity and the indications of performance practice that are present in the source text, they inevitably incorporate features of the theatricality of their own day.

Any text necessarily bears the imprint of the time and place of its writing but playtexts, because they are written to be part of a further creative process, also contain evidence of the staging conventions in force at the time they were written, and of the production process they were designed to serve. The problem for theatre translators is that current conventions and work processes in the target culture may be more or less different from, even radically opposed to, those inscribed in the source text. The problem for theatre practitioners attempting to put on a play in translation is even more complex, in that the text may incorporate performance indicators from both the original and the translator's period, and that both may differ significantly from the practices and conventions in force in their own period.

Kristeva's notion of the 'genotext' is useful in this context in that it provides theoretical underpinning for the idea that any text necessarily bears the traces of its own genesis. For Kristeva any linguistic utterance consists of two levels, the phenotext ('le phénomène linguistique (la structure) relevant du signe') and the genotext ('l'engendrement signifiant (la germination) qui n'est plus subsumable par le signe'), and neither can be read or understood without the other.¹³ While in her later work it seems that this genesis is seen in fairly rigidly psychoanalytic terms,¹⁴ Anne Ubersfeld adapts her term for use in discussing the relation between play text and performance. She suggests that no play text can be written without 'la présence d'une théâtralité antérieure', that the playwright writes for, with or against pre-existing theatrical codes, and she uses Kristeva's term to posit the existence of

un géno-texte antérieur à la fois au texte écrit et à la première représentation, et où le code théâtral du temps, les conditions d'émission du message, c'est-à-dire le canal prévu, jouent le rôle de matrice textuelle 'informant' le texte.¹⁵

Such a theatrical genotext includes experience of the kind of theatre building and stage arrangements that are the norm, the acting conventions in force, and an understanding of the social functions of theatre at the time.

The translator is not simply translating into the target language the playwright's idea of theatre, the traces of the playwright's theatrical genotext insofar as they can be perceived in the source text. A good translator will certainly be doing that, but the translator is a creative writer like any other and is necessarily situated in time and place; the linguistic

choices a translator makes ensure that the target text bears the traces of its own genesis, of its author's subjectivity and of its historical/geographical/social moment. I would argue further that the translated theatre text necessarily reflects the theatre culture of the translator, whatever that translator thinks he or she has done. That is to say that translators necessarily translate through the filter¹⁶ of their own theatrical genotext, and the more closely they are associated with the production process (as is increasingly the case in recent years), the more detailed their knowledge of actor's rehearsal techniques, the more likely it is that their translations will reflect the needs and perceptions of the theatre culture in which they are operating.

Jean-Michel Déprats has argued, in relation to Shakespeare at least, that

Une traduction impraticable sur une scène, régie par une poétique de l'écrit, méconnaît une dimension essentielle du texte shakespearien, tout entier tendu vers la représentation.¹⁷

It is likely that many translators would similarly claim to be translating the theatricality (however they might define this) that is present in the source text, and they would see a failure to capture this as a failure to translate accurately and fully what is there. However, the actors' comments on the task involved in 'playing the words' in the comparative projects that I have observed, suggest that it is practically impossible for theatre translators to ignore the theatre conventions of their own day, their own genotext is strongly present in their translations whatever they may claim to have done, and this genotext may to a greater or lesser extent replace the playwright's genotext, it may be more or less compatible with this, and indeed more or less compatible with the conventions in force in the practitioners' culture. These are the factors which lead practitioners to say that a particular translation 'works' or 'does not work'.

Monique Nemer has pointed out that François-Victor Hugo translates Shakespeare into French in the context of the proscenium arch stage of his day and that this has extremely serious consequences for the spatialisation of the action which Shakespeare situates in terms of levels and an inner/outer axis made possible by the existence of the 'inner stage'. She points out, in a very subtle reading of Hugo's translation of *Hamlet*, that the shifts in prepositional phrases consequent upon the different spatial organisation of the stage, present as part of Hugo's genotext, lead to a fundamentally different perception of the action.

On peut se demander si une des conséquences lointaines n'en est pas de 'psychologiser' le texte shakespearien: en effet, l'impossibilité de proposer une lecture symbolique de l'espace conduit à ne prendre en compte que l'échange verbal - en d'autres termes, à s'intéresser à des mobiles plus qu'à des enjeux.¹⁸

The dominant acting style is clearly as much a determinant for the translator as the organisation of the stage space. Contemporary translators, working often for a specific director and a specific production, may know which actors have been cast for which roles before they begin to translate. This knowledge may have a decisive effect on their choices, as MayBrit Akerholt has indicated.¹⁹ Even without this degree of specificity, it is evident that acting styles do change significantly even over a relatively short period. One has only to listen to the voices of newsreaders on radio or television of just a decade ago to realise how quickly fashions in speech styles change, and the fact that this comes as a surprise is evidence of the orality of these modes of communication. One of the dominant features of orality is that it exists only in the present²⁰ and it unobtrusively jettisons that which the culture no longer wishes to retain, but the advent of recording has meant that even orality can be made to live in the past, that orality has a history.

About Performance 1: Translation and Performance

Theatrical performance is very much an oral form, and listening to sound recordings of English actors like Lewis Waller and John Gielgud made between the wars can be very instructive in the context of thinking about the translator's work. In these performances, language is used as a physical event in itself, the long drawn out, modulated vowels and strongly marked metre move speech nearer to song, and one can imagine that actors and audience together could succumb to the power, rhythm and sway of language as vocal event. Laurence Olivier broke with that tradition of verse speaking because he wanted the audience to know what he was talking about. As he says of his own performance in *Henry V*, the audience 'weren't listening to someone singing an aria; they were hearing a man's thoughts set before them as clearly as I could'.²¹ The implications of all this for translators are extremely important, and it is evident that a translator whose experience of the theatre was that of the 'aria' style of acting would translate very differently from one who had contemporary rehearsal practice in mind. Actors seeking to 'play the words', exploring 'what action to play on that line', acknowledging that 'there are two thoughts there and you have to commit yourself to both' (all phrases noted during the *Antigone* rehearsals) need translations that nurture such a process.

One of the dominant phrases used in the rehearsals I observed in 1993 was the metaphor of the journey. Actors referred to the emotional journey travelled by a character in a single speech, and in their exploration of the language would pounce on the elements that enabled them to construct such 'journeys'. This, too, has implications for translators, as can be illustrated in the following anecdote, recounted by director Michel Bataillon at the *Actes Sud* colloquium that has already been mentioned.²² Bataillon was attempting to explain why he had taken the rather controversial decision to commission a new translation of Chekhov's *Platonov* rather than using the greatly revered translation by Elsa Triolet. Her translations date from the 1940's and 50s and have played a very important role in French culture due to her skill as a writer, her knowledge of the two languages and her position between and within the two cultures. The essence of Bataillon's critique was that her translation tends to smooth into an elegant flow what in the source text may be two or three rather disconcertingly juxtaposed notions. The example he gave was a speech by the General's wife to the young doctor in which she complains about his behaviour. The speech ends with the words:

Svintsvo, galoubtchik, khoditié

which Elsa Triolet translates as 'C'est dégoûtant, cher ami'. According to Bataillon the literal meaning of the three words is 'C'est une cochonnerie' (svintsvo), 'mon petit pigeon' (galoubtchik), 'à toi de jouer' (khoditié), a reference to the fact that they are playing chess while talking.

Bataillon points out that Elsa Triolet's translations bear the hallmarks of the kind of playwriting that was in vogue in the 1950s, by which I presume he actually means the earlier generation of Cocteau and Giraudoux rather than Beckett and Ionesco, but this comment indicates the working of the genotext. The thing that most interested me about the anecdote was what it reveals about the importance of the actors' process. For Bataillon's actors in 1989, as for the Sydney actors in 1993, it is certain that their focus on the character's 'journey' means that they value writing that leaves in the asperities, that gives two or three disconcertingly juxtaposed thoughts rather than smoothing these into one elegant phrase, writing that leaves room for the actor to make the journey required in moving from one to the other.

Elsa Triolet's polished, refined, elegant translation might be seen nowadays as tending to reduce Chekhov's play to a bland, bourgeois comedy. What is involved here is not a question of linguistic accuracy or fidelity to the original, although that is usually the way people express a preference for one translation over another. It is rather that translators necessarily make choices that reflect their theatrical genotext, which may be conditioned by their experience of current rehearsal practice or perhaps only by experience of theatre going (in which case the genotext will probably be that of the preceding generation). This makes it much more evident why theatre translations seem so quickly to become dated or to be judged by actors to be unworkable. The current practice of commissioning a translation for each new production will ensure that it meets the requirements of present day practitioners, but it is also possible that such translations may not have an effective stage life very long after the production: they will be as implicated in the processual construction of local meaning as the *mise en scène* itself.

It thus becomes more understandable why the effective life of a translation in the theatre is so short compared with that of other literary translations. It should also be pointed out that it may be fairly restricted geographically as well. To speakers of languages such as Dutch or Swedish where the language community is small, the situation of English must seem enviable in that the pool of native speakers is so vast and translations of a huge range of texts are readily available. In the theatre, however, this is not an unmixed blessing: there are significant differences between the varieties of English spoken in Britain, America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, not to mention the many other multilingual countries where English is the common second language used for certain activities in preference to any of the national languages. Frequently, however, the rights to an English translation are accorded to only one translator, usually British or American, and other English speaking countries have to make do with that translation. In the theatre this may pose very serious problems, and indeed may be a factor in a given play getting to performance or not. Publishers and copyright agents do not seem to recognise the desirability of having many English translations to reflect the situation of the many national varieties of English and to meet the needs of the very different production processes in vogue across this huge spectrum of the world's population. Actors and directors may evade the problem by simply amending the most alienating aspects of the authorised translation they are obliged to use, but this does nothing for the standing and reputation of the translator. It means that we still do not recognise the role played by the translator in the theatrical process, and that we are far from providing institutional support for the work practices that will lead to the most effective theatre.

About Performance 1: Translation and Performance

NOTES

- ¹ '...Greek drama, though orally performed, was composed as a written text and in the west was the first verbal genre, and for centuries was the only verbal genre, to be controlled completely by writing.' Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, London & New York, Routledge, 1982, p. 142. Performance analysts might query the confidence with which Ong asserts that the drama is completely controlled by writing, but the major point is that drama exists necessarily and essentially in both the oral and the literate regimes.
- ² See for example Joseph F. Graham (Ed), *Difference in Translation*, Cornell University Press, 1985; Theo Hermans (Ed), *The Manipulations of Literature*, London, Croom & Helm, 1985; J. Holmes, J. Lambert & R. van den Broek, *Literature and Translation*, Louvain, ACCO, 1978; D. Homel & S. Simon (Eds), *Mapping Literature: the Art and Politics of Translation*, Montreal, Vehicule Press, 1988.
- ³ (Theatre is the art of playing with division, introducing it into space by means of dialogue) Maurice Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969, p. 528.
- ⁴ I have written about the translation in both these projects: 'Body, space and language: the actor's work on/with text', *Kodikas/Code*, 12:1-2, 1989, pp. 57-79 (on the *Phèdre* project); 'Performance indicators in playtext and translation: who 'writes' theatrical performance?', in M. Sankey (Ed), *Mediations*, Department of French Studies, University of Sydney, 1994 (on the *Dom Juan* work).
- ⁵ 'Ce que nous pensons, c'est qu'il s'agit d'adaptations qui vont durer une dizaine d'années et qu'ensuite il faudra repartir à zéro car tout texte qu'on joue est lié à l'actualité, aux conditions sociales et économiques. Il faut recommencer constamment, de la même manière qu'il faut recommencer la mise en scène de Shakespeare.' (The way we see it is that they are adaptations which will last for ten years or so, and that after that it will be necessary to begin again from scratch, as any text that is performed is linked to the present, to the social and economic conditions of the day. You have to begin again constantly just as you have to keep on doing new productions of Shakespeare.) Jean-Claude Carrière interviewed by Georges Banu in *Théâtre/Public* No. 44 (special issue entitled 'Traduire'), March 1982, p. 43.
- ⁶ Judith Malina is translating Brecht's adaptation of Sophocles' play, and Brecht omits this line.
- ⁷ These comments are taken from the video recording of the rehearsal, Centre for Performance Studies, 1993.
- ⁸ Jean-Claude Carrière, cit., p. 43. (This enhances their work process, because a comma or an exclamation mark can suggest, even in a quasi subliminal way, how to perform the line.)
- ⁹ Transcribed from video recording of performance and discussion, Centre for Performance Studies, 1993.
- ¹⁰ Anne Ubersfeld, *L'Ecole du spectateur*, Paris, Eds. Sociales, 1981, p. 18. (Maybe the director's creativity needs the resistance of a voice, maybe the pluralism inherent in theatrical creativity needs this battle between the two 'subjects of the writing'...)

- ¹¹ Anecdote recounted by Michel Bataillon in a symposium entitled 'Traduire le Théâtre' in 1989, the proceedings of which were published by Actes Sud/Atlas, Paris, 1990, p. 70.
- ¹² In the closing session of the *Bleedlines* conference in 1993 at the University of Sydney, subtitled 'The Limits of Performance', a number of performance practitioners claimed that they felt themselves to be artists only when performing in group or self devised work. When working with a pre-existing text they felt themselves to be simply technicians.
- ¹³ Julia Kristeva, *Semiotike: recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Paris, Eds du Seuil, 1969, p. 284. (Phenotext - the linguistic phenomenon (structure) which is dependent on the sign; Genotext - the engendering of meaning (germination) which cannot be subsumed into the sign.)
- ¹⁴ Michael Payne provides a glossary of key terms in Kristeva's theory in his book *Reading Theory: an Introduction to Lacan, Derrida and Kristeva*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1993; for Genotext his definition reads: 'a process that forms articulate structures out of instinctual dyads, family structure, psychic structures, and related forms; the underlying foundation of language.'
- ¹⁵ (A genotext that predates both the written text and the first performance, in which the theatrical code of the time, the conditions of utterance of the message, serve as a textual matrix which 'informs' the text.) Anne Ubersfeld, *L'Ecole du spectateur*, Paris, Eds. Sociales, 1981, p. 15.
- ¹⁶ Sandor Hervey and Ian Higgins, in their *Thinking Translation* (London, Routledge, 1992) propose the notion of a filter made up of six levels of textual variables 'through which the translator can pass a text to determine what levels and formal properties are important in it and most need to be respected in the TT' (p. 46). While the notion as described is a tool for working translators, it seems to me that it provides the basis for a theoretical formulation of the translation process and I think that both filter and theatrical genotext are extremely useful concepts in any attempt to discuss translation in the theatre.
- ¹⁷ Quoted by Leanore Lieblein, 'Translation and *mise-en-scène*: the example of French translation of Shakespeare', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, V:1,1990, p.81. (A translation which does not work on stage, one governed by the poetics of the written, has failed to capture an essential quality of the Shakespearian text, oriented in its entirety towards performance.)
- ¹⁸ Monique Nemer, 'Traduire l'espace', *Théâtre/Public*, No. 44, March 1982, pp. 57-8. (We can speculate that one possible result of this is to 'psychologise' Shakespeare's text: if a symbolic reading of the space is blocked, we tend to concentrate exclusively on the verbal exchange, in other words we focus on motives rather than on what is at stake.)
- ¹⁹ May-Brit Akerholt, "'I had not better return with you to the croft then, Nils, had I?'" *The Text, the Whole Text, and Nothing but the Text in Translation*, p. 10.
- ²⁰ W.J. Ong, see chapter on 'Psychodynamics of Orality' in *Orality and Literacy*, op. cit., pp. 31-78.
- ²¹ Laurence Olivier, *On Acting*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1987, p. 49.