All the World's a Stage: Translation for the Theatre – William Gregory

In 2009, I was invited by City University to deliver the plenary lecture in their series on translation. While preparing in 2018 for a translation workshop I revisited the text I prepared and found that, while some things have changed (p2, for example: I do – mostly – make my living as a translator currently, translating plays; and in general the outlook for theatre translation and translators in theatre is a bit more varied and optimistic now that it was in 2009, I think), I think that much of what I talked about then is still relevant, especially when it comes to mainstream theatre perceptions of what translators are able/allowed to do. The target audience was fellow translators, but I hope this will be of interest to all those working in theatre, too. (21 February 2018)

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I want to start by addressing briefly the perceived 'otherness' or difference of theatre translation, within the communities of both theatre practitioners and translators. Actors are familiar, when meeting someone for the first time and confessing to being an actor, with the reaction of 'how *interesting*!' followed by 'will I have seen you anything?' Normally meaning 'have you been in Eastenders?' Translators, meanwhile, are likewise greeted with 'how *interesting*!' followed by 'so, what languages do you speak?' and, more often than not, 'I'm *terrible* at languages', and very little else. So imagine being a translator who specialises in theatre: you can't win either way. A few years ago I translated a play from Spanish and, after a performance, was chatting to one of the actors. After a few awkward exchanges about the fact that I was a translator, I revealed to the actor that I was an actor, too. His demeanour instantly changed: he relaxed. No longer was I a strange, dusty linguist, who lived life in a garret surrounded by dictionaries and thesauruses; I was, like him, a theatre practitioner; someone to whom he could relate.

Then, on the other hand, there are the translators I meet who, when they hear I translate plays, find it extraordinary. 'Wow', they say, 'that must be really *hard*,' or, 'I wouldn't *dare* try and translate a play.' Well, nor would I try and translate a thesis on microbiology or, for that matter, a tenancy contract. Last year I took a job at a news organisation, translating articles from the European business press into English. Before I started, I knew very little about the worlds of finance, banking or markets; I didn't know my covered bonds from my gilts or my rights issues from my flotations. It was only after training that my knowledge of these terms, and thus of the fields of translation that feature them, began to grow. The same would be true of scientific, technical or legal translation, and I am sure there are some people in this room today who are far more experienced in those areas than I am.

My point is that theatre is no different. It may seem 'other' to translators – too 'artistic', too fluid, too different to more conventional fields – and translators may seem 'other' to theatre practitioners – not artistic enough, too scientific, too conventional – but I feel strongly that these fears and prejudices on both sides are misplaced, and the consequence of a lack of true exchange between our two worlds. It's a shame, I think, that the translation of theatre doesn't really feature very much in translation training or qualifications, and that theatres, even those who truly value the work of translators, don't do more to nurture them. Because like science, business or law, theatre for translators is a specialism like any other: one we can learn; one in which we can improve; and one with its own very particular rewards.

But before I talk about these rewards, I should start with the bad news. For her book Theatrical Translation and Film Adaptation, Phyllis Zatlin sent out surveys to many translators working in theatre. Amongst the questions she asked was this one: 'In a nutshell, what advice do you have for aspiring theatrical translators who wish to get started in the field?' (Zatlin 2005: 31). Amongst the varied responses, one, from John London, a translator with a great deal of experience in the field, sticks out. He says, simply: 'Get a proper job' (33). Now, most people who have ever thought of working in theatre have probably been told something similar, but why translators? Well, the truth is that almost all theatre translators, in this country at least, do not make their living translating plays, and nor do they attempt to; I certainly don't. Some are academics; some are playwrights or actors; and some are full-time translators but they do most of their work in other fields. One reason for this is that there is simply not a great deal of theatre translation work out there.

In their introduction to Moving Target, a collection of papers on theatre translation and cultural relocation published in 2000, Terry Hale and Carole-Anne Upton claimed that 'approximately one in eight professional productions reviewed in Britain's national press at the time of writing is a translation' (ed. Upton 2000: 1). That was nine years ago, and if this assessment that translations made up 12.5 per cent of British theatre output in 2000 was accurate, there has certainly been a decline since. This weekend I picked up the latest Time Out, and of the 143 productions listed in its theatre pages, only eight are translations:

Waiting for Godot (Beckett, French)
Phèdre (Racine, French)
The Cherry Orchard (Chekhov, Russian)
Thyestes (Seneca the Younger, Latin)
A Doll's House (Ibsen, Norwegian)
Medea/Medea (Euripides, ancient Greek)

Typhoon 8 (collection of new plays from east Asia, various languages)
The Maids (Genet, French)

There are a handful of shows with foreign-language origins, not least a rather successful musical based on a novel by Victor Hugo and another based on a French film about drag queens, but leaving these aside we are left with translations accounting for under six per cent of Time Out's theatre listings (pp.110-118). This is of course not a like-for-like comparison to Hale and Upton's assessment of 2000, and the amount of translation being performed in London's theatres does still compare favourably with the amount of translated literature being published in the UK overall, which was found in 1995 to make up between just two and four per cent (ed. Upton 2000: 1). All the same, the news isn't good for theatre translators, especially when we consider that Samuel Beckett translated Waiting for Godot himself and that his estate is unlikely to agree to a new English translation any time soon. So we're actually down to just under five percent.

But let's not be discouraged. No one ever said a career in the theatre was easy. And, like other theatre practitioners, the reason most theatre translators do what they do is for the love of it. And there is a lot to love. Firstly, it's not often as translators that we hear our translations being read out or performed, and there really is something quite exciting about working on a translation and then seeing and hearing it come to life on stage. Secondly, it is a real privilege to work with plays, be they great classics such as the works of Lorca or Molière, or contemporary pieces hot off the laptops of emerging young writers from around the world. I have had the immense honour of translating new plays almost as they are being written by burgeoning playwrights from places like Cuba, Chile and Argentina, thanks to the work passed my way by the wonderful international department of the Royal Court theatre, for example. Translating theatre can broaden our horizons, introduce us to people and cultures that we had never expected to meet, and even allow us to express ourselves and to see what we do as translators as an art. And occasionally – very occasionally – it can bring us personal success. First performed in the original French in Paris in 1994, Yazmina Reza's Art was translated into English by Christopher Hampton. The translation premiered in London in 1996, where it ran for several years, and was later produced on Broadway. In 1998, Art won the Olivier Award for Best Comedy, the Evening Standard award for Best Comedy, the Tony award for Best Play.

There's another reason to be cheerful. Whereas new translations of novels are commissioned once in a blue moon, the trend in theatre is to commission a new translation for every new production. At a symposium held in February year at King's College London, organised by Out of the Wings, a project with a particular interest in the translation of plays from Spanish, the artistic director of one theatre

said that this is because translations tend to 'date' more quickly than plays in their original languages. I'll grapple with that assertion later on, but the upshot is that, even in the case of the most famous plays, translations are commissioned many, many times.

Let's take an example from the list in Time Out. I recently started learning Russian so, in my enthusiasm I've picked Anton Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard, which is currently running at the Old Vic theatre in a version by Tom Stoppard. That's all well and good, but only last year, Dover Publications published a different translation of the play, credited rather anonymously to 'Black's Readers Service Company'. In 2005, the Oxford Stage Company produced The Cherry Orchard in a version by Samuel Adamson. In that same year, Nick Hern Books published a 1998 translation of The Cherry Orchard by Stephen Mulrine. And yet, back in 1978, a translation of The Cherry Orchard was written which at least one commentator judged to be definitive: Michael Frayn's version of The Cherry Orchard attracted this praise from playwright Jacek Laskowski:

> Frayn has achieved as close to perfection in the translator's art as it is possible to get. Probably. The English is exquisite and the rendering of the Chekhovian mood and temper is virtually indistinguishable from the mood of the original. If Chekhov had written the plays in English, they would have been Frayn's translations. (ed. Johnston 1996: 188)

Still, Frayn was of course not the first. Ronald Hingley's translation was published in 1965; Ann Dunnigan's in 1964… I'm sure I could easily have carried on through the 50s, the 40s and so on all the way back to the first ever English-language translation of The Cherry Orchard, which was staged in 1911 (Loehlin: 89).

So, why so many translations of the same play? The idea that a text should be translated so many times is a strange one for those of us who work as translators in other fields. You wouldn't expect a contract of employment or a book about astrophysics to be translated over and over again by different translators, sometimes twice in the same year. You wouldn't even expect that treatment for a novel. And can so many translations really be so different from each other without at least some of them being plain *wrong*? Well, let's have a look.

Here, for the benefit of those who read Russian, is a short extract from Act 2 of The Cherry Orchard from Chekhov's original, where Yasha, a manservant, muses rather heartlessly about romance beside Dunyasha, a housemaid, who is quite smitten with him:

> Яша *(зевает)*. Да-с… По-моему, так: ежели девушка кого любит, то она, значит, безнравственная. *(Пауза.)* Приятно выкурить сигару на чистом воздухе… *(Прислушивается.)* Сюда идит… Это господа…
>
> *Дуняша порывисто обнимает его.*
>
> Яша. Идите домой, будто ходили на реку купаться, идите этой дорожкой, а то встретятся и подумают про меня, будто я с вами на свидании. Терпеть этого не могу. (Chekhov 1978: 36)

For the benefit of those who don't speak Russian, this how that same extract appears in the version by Tom Stoppard currently running at the Old Vic:

> Yasha *(yawns)* It's true, it's true. To my way of thinking, when a girl falls in love, she forgets herself. *(Pause.)* There's nothing like a cigar in the fresh air… *(Listens.)* They're coming this way, it's the mistress and that lot.
>
> *Dunyasha kisses him impulsively.*
>
> Go back to the house – take the path from the river as though you've been for a swim, otherwise you'll meet them and they'll think I'm keeping company with you – I can't be having that. (Chekhov, trans. Stoppard 2009: 31)

Now, those of you who read Russian may already be forming opinions about this rendering. For the rest of us, here's Ann Dunnigan's translation from 1964:

> YASHA [yawns]: Yes… As I see it, it's like this: if a girl loves somebody, that means she's immoral. [Pause] Very pleasant smoking a cigar in the open air… [Listens] Someone's coming this way… It's the masters. [DUNYASHA impulsively embraces him] You go home, as if you'd been to the river to bathe; take that path, otherwise they'll see you and suspect me of having a rendezvous with you. I can't endure that sort of thing. (Chekhov, trans. Dunnigan 1964: 339)

Comparing the two, and whether you understand Russian or not, it's pretty clear that they can't both be equally close to the letter of the original. 'She forgets herself' and 'that means she's immoral' are not the same; and 'It's the masters' and 'It's the mistress and that lot' are also quite clearly differing choices as translations. Now, just to broaden this slightly, and to avoid pitching just two translations against each other, I've taken just those two phrases and compared a number of different published translations of them:

Chekhov	Это господа
Dunnigan, 1964	It's the masters
Hingley, 1965	It's the missis and the others[1]
Frayn, 1978	It's *them*
Mulrine, 1998	It's the mistress[2]
Adamson, 2005	That's them. The *ladies* and the *gentlemen*. Your sort.
'Black's RSC' [2008]	It's the missus and the rest of 'em
Stoppard, 2009	it's the mistress and that lot

Chekhov	ежели девушка кого любит, то она, значит, безнравственная
Dunnigan, 1964	if a girl loves somebody, that means she's immoral
Hingley, 1965	if a girl's in love with anybody that proves she's immoral
Frayn, 1978	if a girl's in love with someone that means she's not a decent girl
Mulrine, 1998	if a girl loves a person, she must be immoral
Adamson, 2005	if a girl's in love, then she's probably soiled
'Black's RSC' [2008]	if a girl falls in love with anybody, then I call her immoral
Stoppard, 2009	when a girl falls in love, she forgets herself

Now, I know as well as any translator that context is everything and that we can't get too far analysing the translation choices surrounding tiny extracts like this. But I do think it's striking that even something as seemingly straightforward as 'Это господа' can lead to so many different interpretations. And if such short snippets of speech – and I could have picked virtually any line from the play – can end up sounding so different to each other in English, think about how these differences would combine when then relate to the entire play. 'Surely', one thinks, 'they can't all be right'. There must be one that's closest to Chekhov's original intentions, mustn't there? Perhaps it is Michael Frayn's version, which, as I mentioned earlier, was praised by one commentator as being near perfection.

I could bring up Frayn's translation of the extract from Act II now, but whilst we're thinking of accuracy and closeness to the original, I think this quotation from Michael Frayn himself, speaking at the National Theatre in 1989, might be more entertaining:

> The good thing about Chekhov is that you don't need to know a word of Russian to be able to translate his plays because everyone knows what

[1] (Chekhov, trans. Hingley 1989: 260)
[2] (Chekhov, trans. Mulrine 2005: 236)

> Chekhov is about, everyone knows by some sort of inner certainty what Chekhov intended and what he was saying, and the idea of referring to some original text is absolutely odious. (quoted in ed. Scolnicov and Holland 1989: 93)

Now, some or maybe all of you might be bristling at such an idea; at the idea that a play – or any text – could be 'translated' by someone who doesn't understand the source language. Just to be clear, I don't know for certain whether Michael Frayn has any Russian or not. What I do know, though, is that his statement in 1989 reflects, if in an extreme way, a view held by many – but not all – theatre producers in the UK today: they are often less interested in linguistic accuracy than they are in the theatrical potential of the text in the target language. And in relation to this, if we think back to the two translations of the extract from The Cherry Orchard, just think about this text as one that an actor is going to deliver on stage. Which of the two, if you were a producer, would you choose to stage? You, the producer, director or actor, don't understand Russian; you've probably never seen the original text; all you want is a script that, for you, is going to make a good play.

And here we're inching towards what has become a controversial concept in theatre translation, and one which has had several names. 'Theatricality' is one of them, but other terms are 'speakability', 'performability', 'actability', 'breathability' and 'playability'. Now, performability is a controversial concept in translation studies circles, not least because, as Susan Bassnett says, 'it is resistant to any form of definition' (Bassnett 1998:95).

But in the world of theatre, it's an acceptable concept, because theatre isn't a science, and it's not necessary in an art form that is so bound up with intuition, feelings and personal, emotional reactions to be able to pin down with absolute certainty what the right or wrong answer is to anything. That's one of the wonders of theatre; it's why you can go and see the same production of the same play on two different nights and experience something different. So bearing this in mind, and as vague as it may sound, it's important to realise that when an actor or a director approaches a text he or she is looking for something that can become a piece of theatre. And when the play in question is within a broadly 'naturalistic' or 'realistic' context –so one that has a story and characters and the intention to engage the audience on an emotional level so as better to help them identify with and consider the themes of the play – that means having dialogue that we can 'see' the characters in, or that we can believe has come out of an emotional or psychological place that we can believe is 'real'. Put simply, that means that the translation, or the theatre text in general, has to relate in some way to the way that people actually speak. Now, that's a huge generalisation and in many ways a problematic one, but basically, that's what 'performability' is.

And it's not a new concept. As Gunilla Anderman points out in her book Europe on Stage, Cicero talked back in around 46 BC about translating plays not just 'ut interpres' but also 'ut orator': not just for as a translator but also as a speaker (Anderman 2005: 13). A little more recently, in 1969, Lars Hamberg gave this advice to translators of theatre:

> [the translated dialogue] must characterise the speaker and thus seem genuine; […] an easy and natural dialogue is of paramount importance in a dramatic translation, otherwise the actors will have to struggle with lines which sound unnatural and stilted. (quoted in Espasa 2000: 53)

And finally, David Johnston, who is a very well-respected academic and theatre translator, has this to say:

> An overly 'faithful' translation […] like a loving dog gamboling round our feet at the most inopportune moments, can often make a foreign play awkward, torpid, colourless, like a Turkish tapestry viewed back to front. (Johnston 1996: 9)

Johnston's use of the word 'faithful' is important here, because it pitches the idea of accuracy directly against that of performability, and plays into the hands, if you like, of those who agree with Michael Frayn's idea that it's not even necessary to understand the source language to be able to translate a play. It even hints that it might be *better* not to understand the source language, as though understanding the original text word for word would be some kind of creative barrier. Again, I don't know if Michael Frayn, Tom Stoppard or Samuel Adamson have any Russian, but supposing they didn't, how on earth would they begin to 'translate' The Cherry Orchard?

The answer is the so-called 'literal' translation. I went to the Old Vic on Saturday and bought a programme for The Cherry Orchard: here it is. Here's the first page: 'The Cherry Orchard; Anton Chekhov; A new version of the pay by Tom Stoppard'… And here, on the next page, is the cast; and here, on the following page, under 'Production Credits' listed just after 'Bear Movement Coach for *The Winter's Tale*' is the credit for 'Literal Translation of *The Cherry Orchard*: Helen Rappaport.' And here's the published text: on the title page, it states:

ANTON CHEKHOV
The Cherry Orchard
in a new English version by

TOM STOPPARD
based on a literal translation
by Helen Rappaport

(Chekhov, trans. Stoppard 2009)

But on the following page it reads:

> Tom Stoppard is hereby identified as the translator of this work in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

So, legally, this is Tom Stoppard's translation of The Cherry Orchard.

I should point out that this is by no means unusual. The title page of Samuel Adamson's version from 2005 reads thus:

> The Cherry Orchard
> A comedy in four acts
>
> Anton Chekhov
> A version by Samuel Adamson

And the legal statement is as follows:

> The right of Samuel Adamson to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

But – and I think you know where I'm going with this – in the acknowledgements, Samuel Adamson says:

> Special thanks are due to […] Charlotte Hobson, who provided me with an annotated literal translation. (Chekhov, trans. Anderson 2005)

Now, again, I want to point out that this is normal practice in the UK theatre today, and that I'm only giving these two examples as an illustration.

So, in order for the final product to be performable, especially when it comes to classic plays like The Cherry Orchard or A Doll's House, a producer will in the majority of cases commission a 'literal' translation from someone who does understand the source language, and then give this literal translation to a playwright

to turn into a script for the stage. And I should also point out that the credits you see in these examples for those literal translators are a huge advance on the practice of just a few years ago. Back in 2002 I attended a seminar on theatre translation at the Royal Festival Hall, and a translator whose name escapes me arrived at this seminar with a pile of published playscripts, absolutely incensed, because of the lack of recognition she and other literal translators were getting for their work. Back then, literal translators were lucky to be credited at all, and, if they were, it was very rarely on the title page.

Now, what's the justification for this practice? Eva Espasa, in a paper tellingly titled *Performability in Translation: Speakability? Playability? Or just Saleability?* hints that it may be to do with the fact that theatre producers need a famous name to attach to a translation if they're going to get bums on seats, and it's probably true that The Cherry Orchard in a version by the great playwright Tom Stoppard is going to attract more custom than The Cherry Orchard in a version by the not-yet-famous translator William Gregory. But let's not be so cynical.

Another justification goes back to the actor I mentioned talking to at the beginning of this lecture; the one who was relieved to discover that I was an actor, too. There is an idea in the theatre community that translators just 'don't get it'; that we may be good at languages but that we don't understand the nature of theatre; that we can't get under the skin of characters or emotions, and our desire to be precise and to be faithful to the original prevents a play from 'taking off'. Another of Phyllis Zatlin's respondents, playwright Pam Gems, said as much, if less tactfully, of a literal translation that she used for a version of Federico García Lorca's Yerma:

> [it was] not drama. It was faithful and boring and C-R-A-P. It completely denied the notion that dramatic skills have any value. (Zatlin 2005: 23)

So this is what we're up against. Now, this critique is somewhat unfair, because Gems is talking precisely about a *literal* translation. And a literal translation, as its name suggests, is not *supposed* to be performable. A literal translation is intended to be a clinical, almost scientific dissection of the play, so that the playwright tasked with creating the final version can work his or her magic on it and render it performable.

Now, I hope you are all thinking right now that there is no such thing as a literal translation, because of course you'd be right. As translators we know that context is everything, and that even the words 'the' and 'a' can have many different translations depending on where they find themselves in a phrase, a sentence, a text. And, just to come off the fence here, I'm not a big fan necessarily of the practice of hiring a translator to do the technical work and then commissioning a writer to 'do the art'

and take most of the credit, copyright and remuneration. I rather like this description by Anthony Vivis of the practice:

> Some unfortunate drudge will be commissioned to provide that most mysterious thing – a literal translation – to which a star name will add the glitter of lilied phrases and wittily turned dialogue (*The Stages of Translation* in Johnston 1996: 37)

'The implication', says Vivis:

> is that translators marginalise themselves to a kind of library life by being linguists or academics. They can, it is conceded, chart a course through a dictionary but are all at sea with actors. (ibid.: 37)

And, to get on my soap box here, I think it is wrong to assume that translators can't handle theatre. And it's especially wrong for translators themselves to assume that. And there are theatres in this country, notably the Royal Court and the Gate, who do 'trust' plays to translators without feeling the need to seek out 'lilied phrases' from famous names. Nevertheless, the fact remains that literal translations do exist in British theatre, and that many translators, me included, have produced them. So, given that there is no such thing as a literal translation, how do you go about writing one?

For me, the easiest way to describe a literal translation is as a translation that – insofar as this is possible – leaves the interpretation and the choices to the writer who is going to create the final version. Now, obviously that's impossible: to take that to its logical conclusion you would have somehow to provide for every single word in the play a list of all of the possible translations that exist, and the result would be pretty much useless and completely impossible to read. But on the other hand you do need to expose those choices – that is to say, the choices that the translator would usually make – and then leave them for the adaptor to make. Another way of putting this would be to talk about problems, so exposing the problems in a translation and leaving them to the writer to solve. Now, this is no mean feat. For the purposes of this lecture I revisited the literal translation I produced for Samuel Adamson's stage adaptation of Pedro Almodóvar's film All About My Mother in 2006. And actually I had forgotten just how long I spent on it and how detailed it was.

The translation starts with a three-page introduction, and here are just a few extracts from it:

> I have attempted to be ruthless in not using two different words to translation one, or vice versa, resulting inevitably in some unconventional synonyms: *torta* becomes *gateau* to distinguish it from *pastel* for *cake*; *rostro* becomes *visage* to distinguish it from *cara* for *face*; *escondido* becomes *ensconced* to distinguish it from *ocultado* for *hidden* or *disimulado* for *concealed*.
>
> […]
>
> Spanish has two words for *to be*: *ser* (intrinsic/permanent) and *estar* (temporary/the result of an action), for example. The choice of which to use in Spanish depends on context; they are very rarely interchangeable without changing meaning; in English we understand this meaning by context.
>
> […]
>
> The two words for *landing* – *descansillo* and *rellano* – are both used in the text but there seems not to be an alternative word for *landing* in English. Meanwhile, *chica*, *muchacha* and *tía* all mean *girl*; English is short on synonyms or slang for *girl* without becoming condescending, pejorative or regional.

Now, that's just the introduction, and I'm not even going to go into the three appendices which last twelve pages and in which I harp on at length about the different uses of the subjunctive in Spanish. I will show you a small extract from the body text itself, though, as an illustration. This is from the scene in which Agrado, a transsexual former prostitute turned personal assistant to a famous but troubled actress, finds herself on the stage of a Barcelona theatre, having to explain to the audience that the show has been cancelled.

> http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wu2JuHIPkes

Now, this is a transcript cribbed from the clip you've just seen, because unfortunately I no longer have the published screenplay to refer to:

> Por causas ajenas a su voluntad, dos de las actrices que diariamente triunfan sobre este escenario hoy no pueden estar aquí. ¡Pobrecillas! Así que se suspende la función. A los que quieran se les devolverá el dinero de la entrada pero a los que no tengáis nada mejor que hacer y pa una vez que venís al teatro, es una pena que os vayáis. Si os quedáis, yo prometo entreteneros contando la historia de mi vida.

> Adiós, lo siento, eh.
>
> Si les aburro hagan como que roncan - así: Grrrrr - yo me cosco enseguida y para nada herís mi sensibilidad, ¿eh? De verdad…

And this is how that same section appears in my literal translation:

> AGRADO: *Bona nit*[3]. Through causes outside their will, two of the actresses who triumph daily on this stage, cannot be here today, Poor little [things][d]! So the *show*[4] is cancelled[r]. The money from the ticket will be returned[r] to those who want. But those who have[sv] nothing better to do, for once that you come to the theatre it's a pity that you should leave[s]. If you stay I[q] promise to entertain you telling you the story of my life.
>
> The actors exchange looks. *That*[5] was[i] not foreseen. Ten or twelve people rise in [the] direction of the exit door...
>
> AGRADO (says goodbye to them): Goodbye, I'm sorry... (To the audience that remains in the auditorium.) If I bore you[y] *act*[6] like you're snoring. Like this (she imitates the sound of a snore, a little exaggerated). I[q] [will] twig straight away... And you[v] won't wound my sensitivity *at all*[7], eh? *Truly*[8]...

[3] Catalan for *goodnight*, used, like the Spanish *buenas noches*, as both a greeting and a farewell.
[4] *función*: see appendix 2 'p'
[5] *aquello*: *that*; there are two words in Spanish for *that*: *eso* and *aquello* (with *esto* for *this*). *Aquello* denotes further distance, figurative or actual from the speaker than *eso*. *Eso* is used throughout the text unless otherwise stated
[6] *hagan*: lit. *do/make* (imperative)
[7] *para nada*: lit. *for nothing*
[8] *De verdad*: lit. *Of truth*

As you can see, the translation is riddled with footnotes, and this is what I mean about leaving the interpretation to the playwright when you produce a literal translation. In particular, we have the little superscript 'y' and 'v' indicating that Agrado switches from the informal *vosotros* to the more formal *ustedes* form for the word *you* when addressing the audience. There's also an explanation, rather than a translation, of the Catalan phrase *Bona nit*, and there's an explanation of the literal translation of phrases like *para nada* and *de verdad*. You can also see the use of the square brackets in 'I[q] [will] twig straight away', indicating that the original is actually in the present, rather than the future tense, and the superscript 'q' you see there

shows that in the original Almodóvar uses the first person singular pronoun *yo* when in Spanish it isn't necessary to includes it. Even here, though, you'll see that I had to resort to some interpretation: the word *twig* for *cosco* could easily have been *catch on*, *realise* or *understand*.

The other important feature of this translation, of course, is that it is definitely not 'performable'. It's clunky, it's awkward, and it's very, very dry. But as far as I was concerned this was the brief I was working to. The expectation of this literal translation was precisely that it would afford Samuel Adamson and the other creatives involved in the production an almost forensic insight into the way the published screenplay was structured. And let's not forget that he also had access to the film on DVD, with subtitles, and of course to Pedro Almodóvar himself, who was on board with the project.

There's also an advantage to the translator in producing a literal translation that is so unperformable. The angry translator I mentioned who attended the seminar at the Festival Hall back in 2002 was also furious because she had been commissioned to produce a 'literal' translation, had written it, and handed it in, supposedly for it to be adapted by a playwright, only to go and see the performance and hear entire tranches of her translation being performed on the stage, completely unchanged, but credited to someone else. This might be gratifying were it not for the fact that when you are commissioned to write a literal translation you are paid a one-off fee and the rights in the translation are completely bought out by the producer: any royalties from successful runs in the West End, publication or revivals twenty years later are reaped not by the literal translator, but by the writer who creates the final adaptation.

Now, I was fully aware of this when I accepted the commission to translate All About My Mother, and I have to say that, if you do agree to do a literal translation, the most important thing of all is to make sure you know exactly what the terms are before you start work: not just how much you'll be paid, but also what rights will be bought out by this payment; what sort of credit you will get in the programme, on publicity or in a published version of the play, and crucially, what the producer expects from the literal translation.

This last point is especially important, because to complicate matters further I have found that theatre companies use the term 'literal translation' for a number of different things. At the Out of the Wings seminar I mentioned earlier, someone who had worked with the Royal Shakespeare Company in the preparation of its Spanish Golden Age season talked about commissioning 'literal' translations for the initial purpose not of having the plays adapted by playwrights, but in order simply to choose which plays from the Spanish Golden Age to produce in the season. Essentially, the

translations were expected to give an idea of whether or not the plays were any good. Now, I would be horrified if anyone bypassed the original film of All About My Mother and went instead to my literal translation in order to assess whether or not this brilliant movie was worth watching. If I had been asked to translate Almodóvar's screenplay for this purpose, the translation would have been entirely different.

This happened to me a few years ago with a Nicaraguan play from the early 20th century, entitled Por los caminos van los campesinos or The Peasants Walk the Pathways by Pablo Antonio Cuadra. A theatre company was interested in Latin American work, had come across this script, and wanted a translation to see if it was any good. They basically wanted a flavour of the play, its story and its characters, and to be able to assess whether it was worth commissioning a full, 'performable' translation and putting the play into production. I explained that I would be happy to translate the play on these terms, but that the resulting translation would be no use subsequently as a 'literal' translation, not only because I felt that, if they decided to produce the play, I could do a good job of translating it myself, but also because by necessity I would have to make some of those more 'artistic' choice if I were to give the flavour of the play that the company was asking for. Here's a small extract from Act 1, where Sebastiano and Juana, two peasants, have just seen their youngest son press-ganged into service by government forces and are left consoling his young wife, Rosa:

> Juana – *a Rosa, que está de pie mirando y secándose una y otra lágrima.* - ¿Qué hacés ahí pasmada? ¿No ves que se te llevan al hombre? ¡Cogé tu motete y seguilo! ¡La mujer va detrás del hombre. Le va hacienda las tortillas, le va dando la vida! Y se cae… ¡Ni quiera Dios! ¡Toco Madera, no vaya a traerle mal agüero al muchacho!
>
> Rosa – *llorosa.* - ¿Si cae… qué?
>
> Sebastiano - ¿Pues qué? ¿Qué no sabés lo que es la guerra para la mujer del pobre…?
>
> Rosa – No… no sé… *(Llora desconsoladamente). Soledad llora también.*
>
> Juana – *emocionada:*–¡ No me saqués la ternura, muchacha! ¡Andá! ¡Cogé tus cosas y seguilo por los caminos! ¡Es tu hombre!
>
> (Cuadra 1982: 27)

And here's the translation I produced:

> JUANA: *(To ROSA, who stands watching and drying tear after tear.)* Why are you standing there stunned? Can't you see they're taking your man away? Pick up your bundle and follow him! The woman walks behind the man! She makes his tortillas, she gives him life! And if he falls... God forbid! Touch wood; may nothing bad happen to the boy!
>
> ROSA: *(Crying.)* If he falls... What?
>
> SEBASTIANO: What do you think? Don't you know what war means to the wife of the poor man...?
>
> ROSA: No... I don't know... *(Cries inconsolably. SOLEDAD also cries.)*
>
> JUANA: *(Moved.)* Don't you go soft on me, girl! Go! Pick up your things and follow him along the roads! He's your man!

As you can see, this translation doesn't necessarily trip easily off the tongue, and there are some slightly clumsy turns of phrase, but this translation can be read without too much need for lengthy footnotes and some of the choices highlighted in the extract from All About My Mother have already been made. So I don't make specific reference via footnotes or annotations to the fact that Juana and Sebastiano are referring to Rosa as *tú* rather than *usted*; I translated *no me saqués la ternura* as *don't go soft on me*, rather than dissecting the phrase word for word, and I use the contracted forms *don't* and *he's* – rather than *do not* or *he is* – to allow the dialogue to flow more smoothly. Elsewhere in the play, there appear several words referring to particular cultural phenomena – realia – which I did have to annotate. So in Act I there is mention of a *mecapal*, which is a basket, carried on the back and supported by a strap that stretches over the forehead; and later in that act, a soldier talks about *nacatamals*, which are a kind of empanada. As I'll discuss later on, just annotating these kinds of words is fine for a literal or a reading translation like this one, but in the event of staging this play one would have to make final choices about how, if at all, to translate them. Crucially, this translation of Por los caminos van los campesinos doesn't expose the underlying structure of the original play to any potential adaptor. I wouldn't, however, expect this translation to get anywhere close to a rehearsal room or a stage without my having worked on it a whole lot more.

Which brings us, at last, to the subject of translating plays with a view to our translations being staged without being rewritten first, and having talked at length about literal translations and a general disdain for the theatrical abilities of translators, I do want to reiterate that there *are* theatre companies who *do* commission

translations from translators for the purpose of performance, who give the translators full credit for their work, involve them in many if not all stages of the production process and remunerate them accordingly. In these situations, the translator retains the copyright in the translation, and shares in the play's success, however long that may last.

First of all I'm going to tackle this issue of performability and how translators might achieve it. How can we avoid falling into the trap of being 'faithful and boring' like Pam Gems describes, or producing translations that are 'awkward, torpid, colourless, like a Turkish tapestry viewed back to front', in the words of David Johnston? Well, rather like any other specialism within the profession of translation, the key – in the absence of more teaching – I think is one of practice and exposure to the area where we're planning to translate. This starts basically with obvious things like going to the theatre more often and reading lots of plays in the source and target languages to get an idea of how dramatists work, if only to realise that they work in extraordinarily differnet ways. Another thing that can definitely help is to get more actively involved in theatre, be it as a playwright or an actor, again to get used to the kinds of uses of language that exist within that world. This is very broad advice, I know, and it should really be a continuous approach that goes alongside our evolution as theatre translators, much the same as translators of business or legal texts should expect to keep up to date with developments in those fields.

When it comes to translating a specific text and assessing whether or not it is performable, you can do a lot worse than reading out aloud to yourself as you go along, and to try and hear the characters' different voices as you translate them, and, as playwrights and actors often do, to draw on your own life experiences to find these voices. Phyllis Zatlin talks about translating a play with three generations of women in it, and hearing the voices of herself, her mother and her daughter in the three characters (2005: 78). Michael Frayn talks about 'the proper translation of a line of dialogue' being 'what that particular character would have said at that particular time if he had been a native English-speaker' (Chekhov, trans. Frayn 1978: xx), and I think this notion of equivalence can be very useful as a starting point.

Just to give a few examples from my own work, here is a case from a Cuban play by Ulises Rodríguez Febles, entitled The Concert, which I translated for the Royal Court theatre in 2003. The Concert tells the story of a middle-aged man who, after stealing a statue of John Lennon from a park in Havana, attempts to reunite the illegal Beatles tribute band he and his university friends set up in the 1960s. When I finished the first draft of the translation and handed it in to the Royal Court, the feedback was generally good, but they felt that it was still a bit 'too literal' and that it needed more work in order for the characters and the story to work on stage. So I thought more

about how these characters might speak if English was their first language. Johnny, the protagonist, is an aging rocker who never really grew out of the 60s. His father, meanwhile, is a no-nonsense Party man who has no truck with his immature son's increasingly hair-brained schemes. And the whole play is about the Beatles. So I went to a bookshop and found a book of interviews with the Beatles in their own words, and this helped me to find some vocabulary and turns of phrase that I was able to use to help bring out the characters. Here's Johnny talking to Machucha, the mother of one of his former band-mates:

> JOHNY: […] Los dos decidimos armar el grupo. El Leader fue quien puso el nombre de Los Cruzados. Amaba al rock.
>
> MACHUCHA: ¿Lo amaba? ¡Nunca! Ésas fueron pasiones de la juventud. Lo de él era otra cosa. (Rodríguez Febles trans. Gregory 2004: 66)

And here is the final translation:

> JOHNNY: […] It was us two that decided to start up the band. It was the Leader who gave us the name: The Crusaders. He really dug rock'n'roll.
>
> MACHUCHA: 'Dug' it? Never! They were the passions of youth. He wasn't like the rest of you. (2004: 18)

So as you can see, I translated the name of the band, and played about a bit with bits of word order to make the whole thing flow a little more smoothly, and probably most saliently of all, translated *amar* using the slang verb *to dig*, which actually came out of those Beatles interviews, and which highlights a) that Johnny is still stuck in the 60s; and b) that his outlook on life is at odds with that of the older generation, for whom a term like *to dig* is not in common usage.

Later on in the play, Johnny is confronted by his father, who insists that he call a halt to his plan to reunite the Crusaders and return the statue of John Lennon to the park before anyone finds out. Search parties are on the prowl and he fears the worst:

> PADRE: Pues ahora la policía está buscando al ladrón. No lo dicen en ninguna parte. Tú sabes que los periódicos se lo callan todo para ayudar a la investigación, pero lo hacen. Todo el mundo está sobre la pista. Y te van a encontrar. Y éste que está aquí no va a meter sus manos si no me escuchas ahora. (2004: 71)

And here's the translation:

> FATHER: Well, now the police are looking for the thief. They aren't saying so anywhere. You know all the newspapers keep schtum to help the investigation, but they're looking. Everyone's on the trail. And they'll find you. And muggins here isn't going to get mixed up in it is you don't listen to me now. (2004: 23)

Again, we've got some features like the contraction of *are not* to *aren't* and *they are* to *they're*. But I think probably the most noticeable choices here are *keep schtum* for *callar* and *muggins* for *éste que está aquí*. And again, these are choices that I made following the feedback from the producers with a view to bringing out the characters more. Now, I am happy that the translation fitted the brief and did justice to the play. But I have to be honest and say I'm not sure I would make exactly the same choices today, especially in light of the fact that the translation has since been produced in St Louis, Missouri and I'm not sure what the Americans would make of a word like *muggins*. In fact, the translation as a whole, perhaps because I was thinking of Liverpool or simply because I'm northern myself, does have a bit of a northern English twang.

This does highlight one particular challenge of theatre translation, though, which is that, almost uniquely in translation, the text you translate is going to be taken from you and reinterpreted by any number of other people. Now, depending on the kind of theatre company you're dealing with, this might mean that the text is going to be performed exactly as you've translated it. And if this is the case, it is as well to think when you translate about who you are translating for. Michael Frayn talks about 'what that particular character would have said at that particular time if he had been a native English-speaker', but of course native English-speakers can come from virtually anywhere in the world: the UK and Ireland, of course; the US, Canada, Australia; India, South Africa, Malta, Jamaica… And in the case of The Concert I was translating for a UK company, an English company, a London-based company. And I am an English translator. It would have been impossible and pointless to produce a 'universal' English-language translation, and I have no doubt that an American translator, or for that matter a translator from the south of England, or even from my home town of Grimsby, would have made different choices.

Now, it's no good worrying about whether or not your translation might end up being produced on the other side of the world, I think. As I mentioned earlier in the lecture, it is common practice for theatre companies to commission new translations every time they produce a play, so for the purposes of translating a script I would say focus on the immediate brief, and have confidence in the fact that you and nobody else are the translator of this play, and that as a result your choices – your artistic

choices – are valid. Now, you have to be careful. You don't want to go too far and start turning the play into something it isn't. To continue with The Concert as an example, I did perhaps write a translation with a hint of northern England and throw in a few examples of slang from the 60s, but I think it would have been wrong to move the language and the characterization so far into Liverpool as to make the audience forget that the play is actually set in Cuba at the turn of this century. And to go back to Chekhov, Jacek Laskowski, who, as I said earlier, claimed that Michael Frayn's translations of the Russian dramatist were near-perfect, recalls a conversation with a director who felt frustrated by those same translations. The director complained:

> They are very good, of course they are. But they are *too* English. Reading his translations, I get no sense of otherness, no sense of foreignness […] I get no sense of *Russia*. And if I get no sense of *Russia*, then the plays themselves make no sense to me. (Laskovski: 188)

Now unless you are talking about some sort of deliberate adaptation, then no, you don't want to be transferring rural Russia to rural Surrey, or Havana to Liverpool, or Oslo to London. But on the other hand I feel quite strongly that it's not the translator's job to try and inject otherness or foreignness into a play. At worst, this can just result in the most awful application of cultural stereotypes, and even when well-intentioned can place too much emphasis on the foreign play as somehow 'representing' the culture of an entire nation. This is too heavy a burden to place onto one play or one writer, and more to the point it may well not be what the writer intends.

Furthermore, I think that a powerful argument for finding equivalents and rendering dialogue performable is that the distinctly Cuban elements of a Cuban play would not seem strange or 'other' to a Cuban audience. In many ways, then, the translator needs to see past the foreignness of a foreign-language play and to focus on story and character, and on the themes that concern the source-language writer rather than the target-language reader. Now, even saying this is problematic, because this involves interpreting the play and trying to work out what it is that the writer is most concerned with, and this interpretation will, like all interpretations, be subjective. Again, though, I feel a translator has to trust his or her instincts here and make those choices confidently, otherwise the play risks losing its character.

And all this to justify the use of the word *muggins*…

On the other hand, one of the great advantages of translating for the theatre is that issues such as the geographical and socio-cultural setting of the play are not entirely

the responsibility of the translator. If there is a danger of over-domesticating a foreign play by translating it, there is ample opportunity elsewhere in the production process to compensate for this. In 1975, the theatre studies scholar Tadeusz Kowzan identified no fewer than 13 different systems of communication that make up a theatrical production:

1: words
2: intonation
3: facial expression
4: gesture
5: movement [around the stage]
6: make-up
7: hair styling
8: costume
9: props
10: set design
11: lighting
12: music
13: sound effects (Kowzan 1975: 206 [my translation])

So, if the characters in William Gregory's translation of The Concert or in Michael Frayn's The Cherry Orchard are 'too English', then the balance can be redressed, if need be, by dressing the characters in costumes based on what those Cuban or Russian characters would actually wear; by playing Russian or Cuban music in between scenes; even by adjusting the quality of the light to reflect the kind of climate the play is set in.

This list of the thirteen aspects of theatre production does remind us, of course, that in theatre, and even in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of a text-based theatre that tends to respect the writer above all else, a translation, once completed, is then left somewhat at the mercy of everyone else involved in staging the play. Now, in some cases, translators are involved in the whole process: we are consulted as the script is finalized and are invited to attend rehearsals and give feedback. Actually, attending rehearsals is very useful to us as it is might inform us about the choices we have made as translators and even help us make any final adjustments. In other situations, however, we hand in our translation and our involvement ends there, until we go and see the play on opening night, with trepidation.

This can sometimes have frustrating results. I once saw a translated play – not one of mine – in which two characters met in a bar. They had, according to the play, both been born and raised in the self same city. How odd, then, that one of the characters

had an American accent and the other, an English accent. True, the play was set in no specific location, but it seemed to me as though the decision to cast these two actors had been taken because the play was a translation, and therefore accents didn't really matter. Similarly, I once saw a translated play featuring two sisters – not estranged, I hasten to add – one with an English accent, one with a broad Scottish accent. Again, I doubt this would have happened if the play's original language had been English. In a different kind of example, Phyllis Zatlin describes how, in an English-language production of a Spanish play, the direct translation of the idiom *ha pasado un ángel – an angel just went by* – meaning that there has been a pause in the conversation, led to the bizarre appearance of an actor dressed as an angel suddenly walking across the stage (86)! Personally I'm inclined to blame the director, rather than the translator for this: the translation may be a little literal, but I think it's understandable, and the whole problem would have been avoided if the director didn't think he or she had the right randomly to add characters to a play when they don't appear in the script in any language! I have more sympathy with the director of a German-language production of a Simon Gray play, however, in which the careless translation of the slang term *completely plastered*, meaning *drunk*, led to the poor actors entering the stage covered literally in plaster (Anderman: 28). But I think as translators we are all capable of making such clangers once in a while.

Assuming, then, that we are comfortable with an element of domestication or acculturation, or with the notion of smoothing out 'otherness' in order for the play better to speak to the target-language audience, what other issues do we face when trying to achieve this?

One is the realia I mentioned briefly when talking about the play from Nicaragua. These, as translator and director Szczęsna Klaudyna Rozhin describes, are 'words and combinations of words denoting objects and concepts characteristic of the way of life, the culture, the social and historical development of one nation and alien to another' (2000: 140). Rozhin gives the examples of English *scones*, Hungarian *puszta*, or Polish *barszcz*. The key challenge when translating these kinds of words for the theatre is that a play has no footnotes. Now, a *script* can have footnotes, of course, but a production doesn't have them. Rozhin talks about the possibility of putting notes in the programme or, more optimistically still, expecting the audience to have done some research about the foreign culture before coming to watch the play. As she acknowledges herself, though, this is wishful thinking (140). But as the theatre studies scholar Patrice Pavis notes, just leaving these cultural words untranslated or unexplained 'could isolate the text from the public': 'by trying too hard to maintain the source culture, we would end up making it unreadable' (37). Now there are many solutions to realia, ranging from simple transcription without explanation, through substitution, approximation or even deletion. Inevitably the solutions applied will

depend on each individual term, but here are a couple of examples from my own work.

I recently translated a new play from Chile in which the main character praises one of the country's most iconic foodstuffs. She says 'no hay nada como la marraqueta con mantequilla' – 'there's nothing like *marraqueta* with butter'. I don't know if there are any Chileans here today, but other that the Chileans here I suspect that very few people, even the Spanish-speakers, know what a *marraqueta* is, although the butter might be a clue. Well, *marraqueta* is a particular type of white bread that is like four crusty rolls fused into one loaf, and that you tear apart and then eat, preferably warm, with butter or whatever you like, and the fact is that the Chileans are indeed very proud of it, and rightly so. So when this character says there's nothing like *marraqueta*, this is loaded with national pride. But I can't put that in a programme note and expect the audience to read it. I could put it in a footnote and leave it to the director or the actors to worry about, but that would be a bit of a cop-out and doesn't exactly do much to the cause of empowering translators as theatre practitioners. So in the end I opted for the simple, if underwhelming translation of *Chilean bread*. So, there's nothing like Chilean bread with butter. It retains the sense of national pride, and isn't an overly lengthy explanation of what a *marrqueta* is, so it won't mess about too much with the rhythm of the line.

Another example of realia from the same play is the Palacio de la Moneda. Now, you may or may not know that the Palacio de la Moneda is the seat of the president of Chile, and you may or may not know that it was partly destroyed by aerial bombings during the coup of 1973, so, like the *marraqueta*, albeit for very different reasons, it has a lot of cultural significance for Chile. Unfortunately for me as a translator into English, it doesn't really have the same cultural resonance as Buckingham Palace, the White House or the Kremlin. For that matter, one might even get away with leaving Argentina's Casa Rosada untranslated thanks to the combined efforts of Eva Perón, Andrew Lloyd-Webber and Madonna. Ultimately, I opted for the less-than-spectacular *presidential palace*, and a lot of the resonance I've just described is lost, I admit.

Just because a phrase might not have immediate meaning for the target-language audience, however, there are some cases where it might be best *not* to help them understand. I wonder how many people in this room have heard of Frontex? Well, Frontex is a force set up by the European Union to control the movement of illegal migrants from North Africa across the Mediterranean into Europe. Now, Frontex popped up in a play from Spain that I was working on recently. I could have footnoted it; I could have explained it; I could have substituted it for something like *European border force*. But I didn't. Why? Because Frontex, as an acronym on its

own, is likely to be just as meaningless to a Spaniard as it is to someone from the UK, notwithstanding the fact that British people are in the main more eurosceptic than the Spanish.

Now, this raises an important point. I've been talking about acculturation and the idea of bringing the play, if you like, close to the target-language audience. But what if the play in the source language is intended to alienate? What if the play in the source language does not reflect the 'natural' speech patterns of that language? What if it deliberately breaks them? What if there is no conventional story or conventional characterization? This poses a real challenge for those who support the concept of 'performability' as one that basically means 'easy for the actor to say' and 'easy for the audience to understand'. As Susan Bassnett says:

> A post-modernist theatre, or a non-European theatre or indeed any form of theatre that is not based on psychological realism has no use for this concept. (1998: 107)

David Johnston goes further, saying that we should question the idea of 'speakability' in all theatre translations:

> Language which is not problematic in some way is not the stuff of drama. (2005: 35)

And I think a very good example of this kind of challenge is a playwright like Federico García Lorca. Now, it's often said that Lorca can't really work in English because his work is so bound up in the lyrical, poetic and folkloric world of Andalusia, and it is true that English-language productions of Lorca sometimes struggle. There's nothing more cringesome than seeing a group of English actors in a Lorca play trying to perform a *sevillana* with some kind of flair after having had a one-day flamenco workshop at some point during the rehearsal process. But in terms of the problems facing translators, I do think we deserve a break with Lorca. Let's just take an example from Act III in Blood Wedding, after the bride and her lover have fled into the forest and three woodcutters appear to discuss their fate:

> LEÑADOR 3.º Los buscan y los matarán.
> LEÑADOR 1.º Pero ya habrán mezclado sus sangres y serán como dos cántaros vacíos, como dos arroyos secos.
> LEÑADOR 2.º Hay muchas nubes y será fácil que la luna no salga.
> LEÑADOR 3.º El novio los encontrará con o sin luna. Yo lo vi salir. Como una estrella furioso. La cara color ceniza. Expresaba el sino de su casta. (Lorca 1994: 142)

And this is from Gwynne Edwards' translation:

> THIRD WOODCUTTER: They'll find them and they'll kill them,
> FIRST WOODCUTTER: But they'll have mixed their blood by then. They'll be like two empty pitchers, like two dry streams.
> SECOND WOODCUTTER: There are lots of clouds. Maybe the moon won't come out.
> THIRD WOODCUTTER: Moon or no moon, the bridegroom will find them. I saw him leave. Like a raging star. His face the colour of ash. He contained the fate of his family. (Lorca trans. Edwards 1989: 75)

Now, all I want to say, really, is that this isn't just drama; it's poetry. It isn't some vague concept of 'Spanishness' that makes Lorca hard to translate; it's his poetic style. Spaniards, even in Andalusia, don't walk around the high street talking about people being 'like two empty pitchers' or 'containing the fate of their families' any more than English people sit around pondering whether to be or not to be. Lorca is a challenge for the Spanish actor, let alone the English one, precisely because, like many other playwrights, he doesn't fit into the kind of style of psycho-realism that the concept of performability can easily be applied to.

So I think the important thing to take from this example and from what Bassnett and Johnston have to say about it is that the translator of theatre needs to learn to pick up these patterns in the source text and find ways of expressing them in the target language. Identifying them is the first step, so this does mean exposing ourselves as translators to the source language in its day-to-day spoken use as much as we can. In my daily life I speak a lot of Spanish because my partner is a Spanish-speaker; I have plenty of friends in Spain and I have a very talkative Spaniard sitting near me at the office, so this helps. My exposure to French is nothing like as frequent, though, and for this reason, despite having translated other kinds of texts from French, I have yet to translate a play from French and would be cautious about doing so.

Now, another feature of Lorca and indeed of Chekhov is that these playwrights were writing at the beginning of the last century and for that reason the originals are bound to have sprung out of the language of their day. We can say the same in English of the likes of George Bernard Shaw or Oscar Wilde. This does pose another challenge for the translator when we're thinking about performability and the target audience, because one of the reasons that so many new theatre translations are commissioned is, as I mentioned earlier, because translations are perceived to 'date' more quickly than original plays are. Now, I'm not really sure how you can judge that if the only language you understand is the language of the translation rather than

the language of the original. Lope de Vega doesn't sound any more modern to Spaniards than Shakespeare does to the English, but the Spanish don't feel any more need to modernize his work than we do to modernize Shakespeare's, so why should we do it in translation? My instinct is that it's helpful when a play is set in a specific time for the translation somehow to reflect that. Now, again, it's a difficult balance to strike, and I think you would be getting into dangerous territory if you tried to translate Lope 'in the style of Shakespeare' or Chekhov in the style of George Bernard Shaw. Susan Bassnett sums up the challenge here, when talking about translating Italian play set in the 1920s:

> It was difficult to avoid parodic language of the P.G. Wodehouse variety (i.e. a fake 1920s English) while ensuring that some sense of period was retained. (96)

I think this notion of retention of period is very important. You want the play to be accessible, but you don't want it to be anachronistic. A few years ago I was asked to translate a new play from Mexico by the name of Divino Pastor Góngora, by Jaime Chabaud. The play is set in 18th-century Mexico and is a monologue performed by an actor who has been imprisoned for alleged treason. He addresses the audience and one point starts performing a farce for us, until suddenly he hears the prison guards approaching and has to stop. Now, there is some slightly fruity language in this, so be warned:

> DIVINO: Esos ruidos me cortan en este punto..., galope de antorchas, promesa de cadenas, garrote de cómicos... nada que espante... música conocida es, pan de cada día... Sólo una cosa me sabe mal: No presentar a los personajes que venían en turno en el sainete me pesa... Fascínanme aquestos porque son tan carne de hoguera como yo, figuras de escándalo... Imaginaos: ella una fandanguera (mujer que mueve el culo) y él abrid oídos: un puto... sí, con sus cuatro letras: P-U-T-O... PUTO

Now, those of you who speak Spanish will know that *puto* is a less-than-complimentary term for a male homosexual, and of course the English language isn't short on modern equivalents, but very few of them were around in the 18th-century. So for this reason and a for others relating to this play I spent several hours in the British Library trawling through dictionaries of 18th-century slang and found some real gems. This is how my translation turned out.

> DIVINO: I am interrupted by noises… The galloping of torches, the promise of chains, the garrotting of actors… Nothing to fear… 'Tis a well-known tune, daily bread… Only one thing leaves a bad taste in my mouth: it riles me not to show you the characters who were just about to come into the farce…

> They fascinate me, because they are flesh for the bonfire, too, just like me; figures of scandal… Imagine: she, a fandango dancer – a woman who wiggles her arse – and he – open your ears – an indorser… Yes, just as you heard: a he-whore… A he-strumpet!

Other gems that I found in the dictionary included *twiddle-poop*, *milksop* and *gentleman of the back door*. And yes, they all made it into the translation. I also found lots of other wonderful 18th-century words like *bedizened*, meaning dripping with jewels and sparkles; *bracket-faced* for *ugly*; and let's not forget the wonderful *slubber de gullion* for a general good-for-nothing. Other ideas that influenced my choices when translating this text was the fact that the character is an actor and one with a rather high opinion of himself, and there are other nods to the period that you can see here, such as the use of *'tis* for *it is*, which you wouldn't really expect to find in modern English.

I am going to start drawing to a close now, but before I do I just want to pick up on one other challenge that we can face as theatre translators, which is the problem of when the characters switch languages. On several occasions I have translated plays from Spanish which have phrases in English. Now, in any other translation, even a novel, you could get over this quite easily just by adding 'she said in English', but of course we don't have that luxury in the theatre. Again, for a literal translation we can get away with doing that, but in a text for performance the problem has to be solved somehow. One solution is the use of accent, which can work in some circumstances. For example, a group of German characters, in a German play translated in to English, could be talking amongst themselves in German – so in English in the translation, but with an English accent – but then an English character who doesn't speak German might walk in. A solution could then be for the German characters to speak in English to the English character, but with a German accent, indicating that in the reality of the play they have switched from their native language – German – to a foreign language, English.

That can work in some cases, but doesn't really work if the languages are intermingled in a more complex way. Take this example from Seven-Eleven, a Mexican play by Iván Olivares, which I translated a few years ago. In the play, Cabrón, a gigolo and general dodgy-dealer, talks about his dreams of escaping to the United States with his sometime friend Jesús:

CABRÓN	¿What do you think?
JESÚS	¿Qué?
CABRÓN	Ignorante, ¿a dónde quieres llegar si no sabes inglés?
JESÚS	Es muy difícil.

CABRÓN Si quieres ser alguien ahora tienes que saber inglés.
JESÚS ¿Para qué quiero pensar en el futuro?
CABRÓN ¿No dices que quieres ser libre? ¿What do you think? Es ¿Qué crees? Of course not. Claro que no.

Now, I have to confess that this one defeated me, and the final published version ended up like this:

[CABRÓN: *What do you think*?
JESÚS: What?
CABRÓN: Idiot, you'll never get anywhere if you don't speak English.
JESÚS: It's very difficult.
CABRÓN: If you want to be someone these days you have to speak English.
JESÚS: What do I want to think about the future for?
CABRÓN: Didn't you say you wanted to be free? '*What do you think?* is 'What do you think?' '*Of course not.*' 'Of course not.']3

[3] The italicized words in this bracketed section are in English in the original. Given that this is unlikely to work in an English-language version, I would suggest replacing the section with the following (WG):
[CABRÓN: What d'you think?
JESÚS: What?
CABRÓN: Idiot. You'll never get anywhere being this stupid.]

(ed. Dodgson: 116)

So in performance, the English phrases in this exchange were omitted entirely, and in publication, there was an explanation. This was a shame, because Cabrón's use of English, like his obsession with Gatorade, hotdogs and the Seven-Eleven, is all bound up with his aspiration to move to the United States and his adoration of US culture. Luckily, Cabrón uses English several other times throughout the play, so I could make some attempt to compensate. Here, Cabrón consoles the unfortunate Jesús after the latter returns from killing his own stepmother. It's a comedy:

CABRÓN: Es un momento muy especial y muy doloroso. Es normal que te sientas así, porque la perdiste y al mismo tiempo deseabas que sucediera. Si matar a quien no conocemos duele me imagino cómo te siente. Don't worry, be happy!

Don't worry, be happy. Now, this works very well in Spanish, because of the contrast, but it wouldn't really have been enough to leave the phrase as it is in the English version. As I mentioned, though, the key to Cabrón's use of English is his obsession with the United States, so I couldn't just substitute any language. This actually wasn't solved until the rehearsal process and we came up with this:

> CABRÓN: This is a very special and very painful moment. It's normal for you to feel this way, because you lost her and the same time you wanted it to happen. Even killing someone you don't know hurts, so I can imagine how you feel. Hakuna matata! (155).

This works, I think, because a) it maintains the contrast with the language that Cabrón uses throughout most of the play (in the translation, this is English, of course); b) it is faintly ridiculous, like his appropriation of *Don't worry, be happy*, and c) despite being from the Swahili, it has supremely American connotations thanks to Disney's The Lion King.

And just to close with a similar example from earlier in the play, this time when Cabrón is on the phone to one of his clients:

> CABRÓN *Al teléfono.* At five, no, mejor at six. *A Jesús.* Terminamos rápido con lo de tu mamá. *Al teléfono.* / No vayas a hacer el amor en la noche, my darling. Espérame a mañana. / O.k. I see you tomorrow, baby.

So just with an eye on that last phrase talking about seeing her tomorrow, again, we came up with the solution in rehearsals. At one point I did have *A demain, ma chérie*, but the fact is that it made Cabrón sound a bit like Del Boy from the BBC's Only Fools and Horses, and in any case he has no interest in any country other than the US. So finally, after much thought, we found a phrase that has similar connotations of aspirations to coolness; is linked inescapably with the United States and with one of that country's biggest stars, albeit an adopted one, and which isn't in English, thus maintaining the contrast with Cabrón's everyday speech in the translation. And so, to close, here it is:

> Hasta la vista, baby. (115)

Thank you.

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