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Review

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Opera in Translation. Unity and diversity is a long-awaited book on opera translation. Nowadays chapters on opera translation regularly appear in most major publication on audiovisual translation like, for example, *The Routledge Handbook of Audiovisual Translation*, which includes Alina Secară's article on surtitling (2019); recent years saw also the publication of a number of books on music and translation, like Lucile Desblache's monograph with a self-explanatory title *Music and Translation* (2019). However, *Opera in Translation* is a rare example of an internationally available book devoted solely to opera translation and it contains chapters by such famous names as Lucile Desblache, Judi Palmer, Klaus Kaindl or Helen Minors.

The two major forms of operatic translation are singable translations and surtitles, and the book deals with both of them. It also offers not only purely translational, but also historical perspective. One of the biggest merits of the book, emphasised by its editors at the very beginning, is the fact that it describes not only Western opera, but also Asian operatic forms such as Chinese opera or Japanese Noh. That certainly determines the comprehensive, inclusive and precursory character of the book. Moreover, the publication is not homogenous even within the realm of Western opera, as it describes operas from different periods or of different types, for example *Die Zauberföte*

by Mozart, which is a Singspiel, or *Rusalka* by Dvořák, often called a lyric fairy tale.

The book comprises 5 sections and the idea behind each of them was to group chapters on similar subjects, though, for example, the title “Open perspectives” seems rather vague. Nevertheless, the division helps to preserve the logical structure of the book and guides the reader throughout the major themes.

Section one, “Open perspectives”, which is probably the strongest part of the whole book, opens with Helen Minor’s chapter on opera and intercultural musicology, in which she describes an operatic production of Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream* entitled *Sogni di una notte di mezza estate* and focuses on its directionality of translation. In the next chapter, Judi Palmer offers a unique insight on operatic surtitling, as Palmer herself is a surtitler working for the Royal Opera House in London. Contrary to many surtitlers in other opera houses, she expresses an opinion that operatic surtitles are becoming too long and they should be shortened – even though it may mean “training” audiences who are accustomed to longer lines of surtitles. If opera patrons think that not enough text is displayed on the surtitling screen, they often do not hesitate to complain or ask whether the screen works properly, so Palmer’s ideas may lead to an interesting discussion. Then, another famous specialist of operatic translation, Lucile Desblache, writes about W. H. Auden’s controversial translations of operatic libretti, and his rather dubious regard for translation and rather strong inclination for transgression.

Section two, “Across genres and media”, focuses on intersemiotic translation. The first chapter by Kenny K. K. Ng raises a noteworthy and rarely discussed topic of Chinese opera; the article deals with early Chinese opera film, but it seems too historically oriented and the translation aspects are not properly emphasised and discussed. Then, María Carmen África Vidal Caramonte goes on to depict a dance production, *The Car Men* by Matthew Bourne, which, as she explains, is an intersemiotic translation of *Carmen* by Georges Bizet. Referring to numerous canonical translation and cultural sources, she convincingly presents the production as a post-translation and rewriting. The chapter by Yoshiko Takebe presents another operatic genre virtually unknown to the Western culture, namely Japanese Noh. However, once again, even though the article shows a fascinating view on this operatic genre, the translation sections are not developed adequately.

The section entitled “Text and context” sees Pierre Degott present different singable translations of *Don Giovanni* and prove how they emphasise different social, cultural and sexual aspects of this opera. Degott also depicts both the issue of preparing translations in contemporary language and the potential of Da Ponte’s libretto, which can be explored in translation. In the next article Cindy S. B. Ngai raises the subject of translator’s invisibility, focusing on the translation of 16th-century Chinese opera *The Peony Pavilion* and gives a very thorough analysis of its 3 translations from Chinese into English. Then, Klaus Kaindl, author of *Die Oper als Textgestalt. Perspektiven einer interdisziplinären Übersetzungswissenschaft* (1995), one of the most iconic books on operatic translation, comes back to the topic of the Salzburg composer with his discussion of the translations of Amadeus Mozart’s operas in the Third Reich. He does not provide any examples, but shows the story of how the translations of *Don Giovanni*, *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Così fan tutte* were commissioned by the Third Reich and why they are still performed today. He tries to settle a dispute whether they are just “a harmless legacy” or rather glaring remnants of Nazi system, and presents the relations with the Nazi regime of such composers as Richard Wagner or Richard Strauss. The last chapter of this section is written by Danielle Thien and it is devoted to different translations associated with *Madame Butterfly* by Giacomo Puccini; the author explores how different translations – first, from short story and play to opera and then the translations of libretti – present the character of Butterfly as Other. Thien supports her analysis with interesting examples of, among others, pop singer Katy Perry alluding to Butterfly in one of her performances, but, for example, does not mention the musical *Miss Saigon* based on *Madame Butterfly*, which could serve as another case of translation involved with Puccini’s opera.

At the beginning of the fourth section of the volume, “From text to stage”, Gyöngyvér Bozsik describes a rarely staged Hungarian opera *The Bluebeard’s Castle* and shows the examples of its translations into English – both singable translations and surtitles. She focuses on the interpretative depth of the opera and the challenges of the Hungarian libretto. Then, Karen Wilson-de Roze starts her paper describing opera as a multimodal genre, which nowadays may already seem a cliché, but then she proceeds to an interesting and detailed analysis of Richard Wagner’s *Versmelodie* and focuses on the integration of words and music. The chapter by Özlem Şahin Soy and Merve Şenol includes a long and partly redundant description of operetta in Turkey, but the authors present also fragments of different translations of Strauss’s *Die Fledermaus* libretto into English and Turkish.

The last section, “Libretto translation revisited”, opens with an article by Patrick John Corness, who gives a thorough analysis of English translations of Dvořák’s Czech opera *Rusalka*. Then, Miquel Edo moves on to the issue of intertextuality in 19th-century Italian libretti, which he illustrates with *Adriana Lecouvreur* by Francesco Cilea and explores techniques such as compensation, internal marking and re-creation. The book closes with a paper by Marta Mateo focusing on multilingual libretti. The article is a continuation of her previous article “Multilingualism at the Cinema and on Stage: A Translation Perspective” (2014), as she analyses examples of multilingual libretti and their translations in greater details.

Generally, the book is certainly not devoid of deficiencies. First of all, it focuses primarily on singable libretto translation, which, unlike surtitling, is not the most popular form of translating operatic libretti nowadays – only the chapter by Palmer is entirely devoted to surtitling and in her chapter Bozsik analyses both singable translations and surtitles. It needs to be admitted that there are opera houses, like English National Opera, which exclusively stage operas in translation and, for example, Germany has a strong tradition of staging some foreign operas in translation; however, the newer and technologically advanced solution is largely omitted. A few articles are also too historically oriented, as it was the historical background that was their most important part. One more problematic area is the lack of consistency in libretti translation analyses. Out of 6 papers including detailed comparative analyses of chosen libretti lines only 3 of them include literal translations into English for the benefit of the readers, who may not be familiar with the language of the original.

Despite its lacks, *Opera in Translation* has also a number of very distinct merits. What impresses me most is its cultural and linguistic diversity: the book offers not only Western, but also Asian views on operas, which are usually missing in other Western publications; according to Desblache, opera is “a platform for national and international cultures” (2014: 14). Moreover, the original languages of analysed operas are not only Italian, German or French, i.e., most common operatic languages, but also Czech, Hungarian, Japanese and Chinese. The book offers also a vast historical perspective and – as was noticed above – though in some articles it may be too long, it certainly creates a noteworthy background. Additionally, even though most articles are devoted to singable translations, they also offer general insights on operatic translations.

Overall, the book under review is a significant publication in the area of translation studies and it sheds new light on our understanding of opera translation. Presenting this type of translation as an interdisciplinary field, the publication offers implications for further research and emphasises the modern potential of opera, which by many is considered an archaic genre. It makes essential reading for opera translation scholars and translators translating operatic libretti. *Opera in Translation. Unity and diversity* also raises the awareness of the significance of operatic translation, particularly because, as Burton claims, “we are no longer content just to appreciate the lovely sound of the voices and let the opera wash over us” (2009: 69).