

ŞERBAN, Adriana and CHAN, Kelly Kar Yue, eds. (2020): *Opera in Translation: Unity and Diversity*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 369 p.

Stephen Slessor

Volume 67, Number 2, August 2022

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1096271ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1096271ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0026-0452 (print)

1492-1421 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Slessor, S. (2022). Review of [ŞERBAN, Adriana and CHAN, Kelly Kar Yue, eds. (2020): *Opera in Translation: Unity and Diversity*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 369 p.] *Meta*, 67(2), 492–494. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1096271ar>

n'est quasiment jamais un acte autonome. Au contraire, il est un texte secondaire qui est d'emblée paramétré par le projet éditorial. (p. 189)

La troisième et dernière partie, « Approches, stratégies et choix traductologiques », contient trois contributions, qui analysent en détail des choix de traduction. Alors qu'Elisabeth Kargl se penche sur la traduction d'un des poèmes les plus célèbres d'Ernst Jandl et Aurélie Le Née sur les nombreuses traductions de *Schachnovelle*⁵ de Stefan Zweig, Martina Mayer étudie un exemple étonnant de transfert culturel à travers la traduction du livre jeunesse *Les P'tites Poules*⁶ en allemand standard autrichien, puis en allemand standard allemand, pour conclure en défendant « la nécessité d'appliquer avec régularité une politique provariétale de traduction, surtout quand il s'agit de littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse » (p. 240-241). Elle rappelle ainsi que la traduction est aussi un acte éminemment politique.

CÉLINE LETAWE

Université de Liège, Liège, Belgique

NOTES

1. On peut juste regretter que la table ronde qui a réuni lors du colloque la traductrice Marie-Claude Auger et les traducteurs Jean-Pierre Lefebvre et Heinz Schwarzingger n'ait pas pu trouver place dans le volume. Ces échanges, mentionnés dans l'introduction, auraient sans doute mérité d'être transcrits et commentés.
2. Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *La Vénus à la fourrure*, *Roman sur la flagellation* (traduction de Raphaël Ledos de Beaufort), Charles Carrington, Paris 1902.
3. Gilles Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, Les éditions de minuit, Paris 1967.
4. Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *La madone à la fourrure*. *Marzella ou le conte du bonheur* (traduction de Vianney Piveteau), Epel, Paris 2011.
5. Stefan Zweig, *Schachnovelle*, Bermann-Fischer Verlag, Stockholm 1943.
6. Christian Jolibois et Christian Heinrich, *La Petite Poule qui voulait voir la mer*, Pocket Jeunesse, Paris 2001. Le dernier volume de la série s'intitule *La Petite Poule qui voulait voir la mer* et date de 2021.

RÉFÉRENCES

- BARINE, Arvède (1879): Le Nouveau Job, par M. Sacher-Masoch. *La revue politique et littéraire*. (4.1.1879): 996-998.
- BOURGUIGNON, André, COTET, Pierre, LAPLANCHE, Jean, et al. (1989): *Traduire Freud*. Paris: PUF.

ŞERBAN, Adriana and CHAN, Kelly Kar Yue, eds. (2020): *Opera in Translation: Unity and Diversity*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 369 p.

The traditional place of opera within Translation Studies might be best described as a niche area of interest for intrepid researchers who have some experience in music or theatre. But more and more translation scholars of varying backgrounds are taking an interest in opera's complex, multimodal works, and I believe that is because opera is an art form brimming with translation. Even from a narrow view of translation as strictly interlinguistic transfer, most operas give translation researchers much to work with, be it the texts sung on stage, printed multilingual libretti, back translations that help singers learn their parts, multilingual liner notes that accompany recordings, subtitles projected onstage, subtitles displayed on screen, or plot summaries provided in programs. However, from an enlarged, post-positivist view of translation (Tymoczko 2007; Gentzler 2017), it is also possible to see operatic works as built on translation from conception to performance and beyond, from the intra- and interlingual adaptations and re-adaptations of literary works as operas to the translation of scores and libretti into multimodal live performances that are then reimagined in successive stagings around the world and over time.

Adriana Şerban and Kelly Kar Yue Chan have brought together an eclectic collection of recent research in this area with *Opera in Translation: Unity and Diversity*. The subtitle sets the stage by evoking the tension between unity and diversity that underlies opera's status as a singular art form that brings together drama, music and the power of the human voice in performance in a wide variety of cultural, geographic and temporal settings. The title perhaps also attempts to evoke the broad range of research being done in this area, as exemplified by the chapters included, while staking claim to a unified field nonetheless. The book is organised into five broad thematic sections: 1) Open perspectives, 2) Across genres and media, 3) Text and context, 4) From text to stage, and 5) Libretto translation revisited. Each section includes three or four chapters and there is as much diversity within the sections as among them, making it more important to consider the individual chapter titles and abstracts than the themes when deciding which chapters pique your interest. The contributions come from researchers of different backgrounds and levels of experience. There are offerings from well-known names in opera and translation, including Helen Julia Minors on opera as form of intercultural musicology, Lucile Desblache on the peculiar mix of tradition and

transgression in W. H. Auden's libretto translation practices, Klaus Kaindl on the politics of translating Mozart and his Jewish librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte in Nazi Germany, and Marta Mateo on translation strategies for multilingual libretti. Judi Palmer, who had a 25-year career as a surtitled at London's Royal Opera House, brings the welcome voice of a practitioner to the discussion; she reviews how surtitled practices have changed over time and argues in favour of a practice that recognises how surtitles fit within the multi-semiotic balance of the overall performance. And Ph.D. students and recent graduates add the perspectives of young researchers to the mix. Of note is Karen Wilson-deRoze's illuminating discussion of the intricate connections among language, poetry and music in Wagner's operas, which extends her practice-based doctoral work on producing singable translations of Wagner's works. I often come across claims that Wagner poses the ultimate translation challenge and Wilson-deRoze has helped me understand why.

As might be expected in a work on opera—a consummately European art form—most of the chapters in *Opera in Translation* deal with the role of translation in the creation, recreation and dissemination of opera in Europe. However, there is an attempt to broaden horizons with the inclusion of research on the importation of Western European operetta into Turkey and the subsequent development of local forms in response (Özlem Şahin Soy and Merve Şenol), the translation of European drama into Japanese operatic forms (Yoshiko Takebe), the intersemiotic translation of Chinese opera into film (Kenny K. K. Ng), and the English translation of a key classical Chinese opera (Cindy S. B. Ngai). To my reading of these chapters, I brought significant knowledge of European and North American opera, but little familiarity with the operatic arts in other parts of the world, so I appreciated the opportunity to make connections among similar art forms in disparate places. I was, however, left wondering what might be happening in Africa, South America, southern Asia and elsewhere. Of course, no collection can be expected to be truly comprehensive, so I hope that this book may lead to others that further broaden the geographic reach of research in this area.

Opera in Translation is typical of Translation Studies collections in that much of the research presented consists of case studies on a single work or a small number of related works and their translations. Some authors focus on the comparative analysis of a specific libretto and its translations from a linguistic and literary perspective, with others attempting to account for the interactions among the various modes of semiosis in opera. Such descriptive case studies are the bread and

butter of the field and will certainly be of interest to others working with the same languages or on operas from the same composers or librettists or the same period or genre. However, I find that I am most drawn to research that links the cases studied to a larger cultural or historical context or that uses textual analysis as a springboard for broader theoretical discussion. Kaindl's chapter is an example of the former, with its potent mix of opera, politics and history that gives us insight into the intersections of art and ideology during the Third Reich. M^a Carmen África Vidal Claramonte's work exemplifies the latter and is the chapter that gave me the most food for thought. She goes the furthest in exploring the enlarged view of translation that I evoked in the opening by grounding her discussion of *The Car Man*—Matthew Bourne's ballet adaptation that fuses Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen* with James M. Cain's novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and the novel's two film versions—in a post-positivist vision of translation as hermeneutic rewriting that considers all texts to be intertexts. What I most appreciate about Vidal Claramonte's work here is that she situates her case study in relation to evolving epistemological debates in Translation Studies and Musicology, thereby challenging her readers to examine and refine their own theoretical stances in response.

As a collection, *Opera in Translation* is stronger on diversity than unity. The variety of works analysed, theories invoked and methodologies deployed, along with the geographic and temporal range of the operas examined, makes it difficult to develop a unified sense of research on opera and translation. For many readers, only certain chapters will be of interest. However, diversity is as much a strength of this book as it is a weakness. Opera is such a multifaceted art form that a truly unified perspective would limit the breadth of research possible. Older collections dealing with opera were perhaps more unified in their focus on the linguistic and literary qualities of libretti and their translations. It is encouraging to see more and more Translation Studies researchers investigating opera from a perspective that goes beyond language and attempts to account for the breadth and complexity of opera's semiotic and artistic expression. I would encourage those with an interest in opera and translation to engage with research by translation scholars working on multimodality and translation in collections such as Boria, Carreres, *et al.*'s (2020) and Mus and Neelsen's (2021) and in Audiovisual Translation Studies more generally. There is much room for new approaches to opera and translation. Şerban and Chan's collection should provide readers with a good sense of the range of research already

being done, along with an aperçu of what might be possible as theoretical perspectives continue to evolve.

STEPHEN SLESSOR

University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada

REFERENCES

- BORIA, Monica, CARRERES, Ángeles, NORIEGA-SÁNCHEZ, María, *et al.*, eds. (2020): *Translation and Multimodality: Beyond Words*. London/New York: Routledge.
- GENTZLER, Edwin (2017): *Translation and Rewriting in the Age of Post-translation Studies*. London/New York: Routledge.
- MUS, Francis and NEELSEN, Sarah, eds. (2021): *Translation and plurisemiotic practices. The Journal of Specialised Translation*. 35.
- TYMOCZKO, Maria (2007): *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators*. Manchester: St. Jerome.

HATIM, Basil and MUNDAY, Jeremy (2019): *Translation*, Second edition. London/New York: Routledge, 376 p.

Following the first successful edition, Basil Hatim and Jeremy Munday have revised and updated *Translation* quite extensively for its second edition. It was published within the series Routledge Applied Linguistics, which offers readers comprehensive resource materials for their advanced study in some core fields of English language and Applied Linguistics. The series, including this book, is edited in a bottom-up and reader-friendly manner to allow researchers to explore the relevant fields according to their own stage of studying. It is elaborately designed and divided into three parallel and progressive sections, which are Section A: Introduction, Section B: Extension and Section C: Exploration. Each section consists of 14 units on a given topic so that the book can be read either in a linear way, which means it can be read from the beginning until the end, or in a thematic way, which means readers can choose only the topics that appeal to them. After introducing the topics in Section A, the authors carefully select some excerpts from the seminal works in Translation Studies in Section B. The thematic order may be of great use for researchers as Section C usually reviews the content in Sections A and B of the same unit and also develops the relevant topics for further research. This article will review the book according to the thematic order, briefly summarise the main ideas and analyse its advantages and aspects that warrant improvement.

As its title “What is Translation?” implies, Unit 1 tries to discuss the fundamental conceptions

of translation and Translation Studies through presenting Jakobson’s term “interlingual translation” and Holmes’s mapping of the field of Translation Studies respectively. It reveals that this field mainly deals with the varied phenomena of the process, product and function/context of translation, though it remains tentative as to whether there are any universals, or a general theory of translation for different kinds of translation texts or conditions. It finds that research into translation can be interdisciplinary, encompassing fields such as science, literature and politics, etc. Tracing the origin of the classical dichotomy in translation between the form and content of a text, which has led to some bi-polar “Translation Strategies” such as “literal” and “free,” “domestication” and “foreignisation,” Unit 2 argues that, at the least, translation strategies should not be regarded as extremes, but as a cline so that further research can be carried out on the elements, both within and outside the text, that influence the translation strategies and functions. Unit 3 touches upon an ambiguous area, or “The Unit of Translation,” the definition of which, in fact, has no full agreement due to the complexity of the translation process. It generally refers to the linguistic unit that the translator employs while translating. It can range from a word, clause or sentence to even higher levels such as text and intertextual levels. With the development of technical tools, empirical research in this area can be conducted from the perspective of the translator’s cognitive process. Following up the “Unit of Translation,” Unit 4 attempts to describe “Translation Shifts,” which is also a fuzzy concept to some extent. They are the small linguistic changes taking place between source and target texts. As has been mentioned above, since an evaluation of the unit of translation is required, the decision about whether a shift has taken place during translation will inevitably be subjective. Vinay and Darbelnet’s (1958/1995) categorisation of shifts between English and French remains a classical model. Although the analysis of translation shifts may ignore the bigger picture of discourse and the cultural context of translation, Hatim and Munday believe that it can still be a first step in the evaluation of translation (p. 246). Having discussed the shifts of meaning in translation, Unit 5, “The Analysis of Meaning,” tries to solve the question as to how to determine whether the source text meaning has been transferred into the target text. It is assumed that meaning can be observable, measurable and transferable in translation. Based on the linguistic field of semantics, or the study of meaning in language, the authors introduce some methods of scientific analysis such as the disambiguation of referential meaning through the analysis of semantic structure and componential