

Soleimanirad, E. (2023). [Review of the book *Theatre Translation: Theory and Practice*, by M. Morini]. *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series: Themes in Translation Studies*, 22, 181–183

**Morini, M. (2022). *Theatre Translation: Theory and Practice*. Bloomsbury Academic. <http://doi.org/10.5040/9781350195653> (pp. 168)**

Over the last two decades, a growing number of monographs and collections of peer-reviewed articles have been published on theatre translation, acknowledging that translation for the theatre has increasingly become a recognized field of inquiry within Translation Studies. Among noteworthy research books, including Aaltonen (2000), Bigliuzzi, Kofler & Ambrosi (2013), and Tiziana Tarantini (2021), there is now a more recent research piece. *Theatre Translation: Theory and Practice* by Massimiliano Morini draws on the complex activity of translating for the stage, which tends to take either a textual or a performative approach. This book extends the theoretical and practical discussions on theatre translation by proposing a methodology grounded in a selective investigation of Western plays.

The book comprises an introduction, eight chapters, and a conclusion that are fitted into three main parts, namely theory, methodology, and practice. The introductory chapter opens by stating that the present book's aim is first and foremost to offer a state-of-the-art synthesis of theoretical developments in the field of theatre translation. This part also gives a preview of the whole book.

The first part includes from Chapter 1 to Chapter 4. Chapter 1 starts by presenting the beginnings of theatrical productions in ancient Rome. Despite fewer theoretical studies, it is apparent that theatre translation in Rome began with translating the text with an eye on the performative aspect of the text. Later, however, Roman theatre translation was seen as a text-centric activity by humanists who had an exclusively text-based approach. This approach has influenced theatre translation scholars, who also have had a source-bound and textual approach for a long time, neglecting target context performance. This text-centric view of translation was developed during the Renaissance and spread quickly throughout Europe.

Susan Bassnett and Ortrun Zuber's ideas on theatre translation (from late 1970 onwards), were influenced by the development of Descriptive Translation Studies and combined with semiotic theories of theatre, are discussed in Chapter 2. Descriptive Translation Studies scholars, such as Toury and Holmes, consider translations to be products of the target culture. Therefore, Bassnett no longer accepted the idea that the process of theatre translation can be reduced to its textual dimension and attempts to include a performance-centered approach, although her analyses always start from a text-centered vantage point. This chapter also includes the now common understanding that plays can no longer be studied independently of their *mise-en-scène*. The theatre translator works on a piece the potential of which is realized only in performance. Like Bassnett, Zuber addresses the issue from the perspective of someone translating a play with an eye to the stage. In 1984, the developments of film and taping technologies resulted in the emergence of performance-centered theories of theatre. The chapter ends with elaborating on other scholars' attempts at text-centered terminologies such as 'subtext,' 'theatrical potential,' 'tradaptation,' and 'cultural relocation.'

Soleimanirad, E. (2023). [Review of the book *Theatre Translation: Theory and Practice*, by M. Morini]. *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series: Themes in Translation Studies*, 22, 181–183

Chapter 3 provides an overview of recent performance-centered theories in the 21st century. Sirkku Aaltonen's *Time-Sharing on Stage: Drama Translation in Theatre and Society* (2000) draws on performative aspects of theatre translation and presents that theatre translation means viewing a theatrical experience as a whole compromising all agents that contribute to the experience. She also speaks of the difference between 'imitation', 'adaptation', and 'translation', and the question of whether they belong to the sphere of theatre or translation. The remaining part of the chapter includes a review of different scholars' most important performance-centered collections and essays, the argument being that theatre translation should be seen in its totality, i.e., including all agents involved in staging it. This chapter aimed to unite theorists and practitioners to investigate the relationship between the written texts and their actual performance.

Whereas Chapter 3 examines contemporary theories of theatre translation from within the field of theatrical studies, Chapter 4 is devoted to the practice of theatre translation scholars. Sections 4.1 and 4.2 highlight Anne Ubersfeld's work, while also elaborating on Patrice Pavis' concept of 'intercultural theatre' (2010), and the pragmatic and semiotic techniques that began to attract attention in the 1970s and 1980s. In Pavis' perspective, 'interculturalism' means that theatre productions are the result of cooperation between all agents of which the theatre translator is but one.

The second part, only comprising Chapter 5, is dedicated to methodological issues. In this regard, this chapter points out the need for a theoretical definition of the relationship between 'theatre' and 'translation'. To Morini, the relationship between these two terms refers to an understanding of the theatrical 'text' that encompasses both the page and the stage, which reflects that translating and staging a play are two sides of the same coin, the resulting product being theatre translation. A four-fold methodology, which brings the theatre product to the audience, is a product-oriented view of theatre translation including interlingual, intralingual (adaptation), and intra/intersemiotic (mise-en-scène' or 'production') relationships acknowledging that the process of theatre translation involves all agents playing a role in the final staging of a translation: the translator of course, the playwright, the theatre and/or company director, the stage manager, the actors on stage, and the audience, and incorporating insights from various disciplines to understand the complexities of theater translation.

Part 3 begins with Chapter 6, which is entirely devoted to the application of these theoretical insights to the case analysis, namely the early modern translations (1602 and 1609) of Giovanni Battista Guarini's late Renaissance pastoral tragicomedy, *Il Pastor Fido* [The faithful shepherd] first published in 1590, in all major European languages. The analysis includes intra- and interlingual processes to produce a desirable theatre act, the popularity of which is dependent upon its final performance. Finally, the conclusion emerges that all versions were regarded as literary texts rather than a script to be staged.

Chapter 7 explores two recent Italian productions of English plays: William Douglas-Home's comedy *The Secretary Bird* and Warren Adler's *The War of the Roses*. The Italian producers have resorted to a variety of intertextual, intratextual, intersemiotic, and intrasemiotic sources, but they claim to have started from a single source text. However, Morini's analysis of the texts illustrates that there is a distance between the first version and the final

Soleimanirad, E. (2023). [Review of the book *Theatre Translation: Theory and Practice*, by M. Morini]. *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series: Themes in Translation Studies*, 22, 181–183

theatrical product performed on stage. The process of moving from source text to target production involves various interventions and alterations that are present on the stage.

In chapter 8, Morini looks at two recent translations in which the text does not hold a central position and where, as a result, the effects of inter- and intra-semiotic translation processes are much more apparent. In such cases, Morini argues, the theatrical performance is itself a form of translation, every new performance requiring additional modifications of its own. The stage productions of Heiner Müller's *Hamletmaschine* discussed in section 8.2, illustrate how different target performances are guided in different directions by different intersemiotic decisions. What happens on stage in such 'experimental theatre' productions can be far removed from its place of origin. Similarly, *Birdie*, an example of multimedia production, illustrates that in translation for the stage, the text is but one of the various sign systems that can contribute to the theatre's construction as a dramatic presentation.

The concluding chapter is a masterly summary of the discussion as well as an appeal to the reader to pursue the study of theatre translation. The chapter states that theatre translation aims to combine all existing methodologies for translating a play into one.

On the whole, this book, which is built on a historical overview of the theoretical and practical dimensions of theatre translation, from text-centered theories in the Renaissance to performance-centered theories in recent decades, can be regarded as an advancement in the field of theatrical translation studies. Such diachronic focus is novel and brings relevant historical perspectives on theatre and translation. Further, the book manages to combine these perspectives into a comprehensive methodology and illustrates how that methodology can be used. However, one limitation is that the examples are taken from English and Italian and their cultures that certainly cannot represent European theatre translation at large. One of the questions that remain open is to know whether the inclusion of non-Western cultures would lead to different theoretical and methodological insights concerning theatre translation as both textual and staged performance.

## References

Aaltonen, S. (2000). *Time-Sharing on Stage: Drama Translation in Theatre and Society*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Bigliuzzi, S., Kofler, P., & Ambrosi, P. (Eds.). (2013). *Theatre Translation in Performance*. New York & London: Routledge.

Pavis, P. (2010). Intercultural Theatre Today. *Forum Modernes Theater*, 25(1), 5-15.

Tiziana Tarantini, A. (2021). *Theatre Translation: A Practice as Research Model*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

## Elmira Soleimanirad

University of Antwerp, Belgium

Elmira.Soleymanirad@uantwerpen.be