**Monica Randaccio**

**PERFORMABILITY AND THE NOTIONS OF TIME AND PLACE AS RELEVANT ISSUES IN DRAMA TRANSLATION[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Summary**

The aim of this paper is to investigate diachronically the development of the notion of performability, one of the priorities of the stage dimension of a translation, and the notions of time and place, which establish the relationship between a source text and its translation. It is in the dual perspective of the dramatic text as an element of both the literary and theatrical that performability and the notions of time and space acquire relevance in drama translation.

Performability is a controversial term whose definition is elusive and changing according to specific historical times, although it subsumes unavoidable questions in drama translation, as many translation theorists have shown over the last thirty years. (Bassnett-McGuire 1978, Bassnett 1998; Eva Espasa 2000; Johnston 2004; Che Suh 2001; Espasa 2013). Thus, for Bassnett, performability cannot be “universally applied” (Bassnett1998: 98) as it is culturally determined. For Lefevere, performability is partly determined by what conforms with the theatrical and production systems (1992: 14-15). For Espasa, performability especially means ‘marketability’ (Espasa 2000: 56).

My contention is that, if performability has become an increasingly undefined notion, time and space, on the other hand, have played a crucial role in the reflections brought forward by many recent translation theorists and are the underlying notions of some of the most accomplished systematisation of drama translation.

Pavis, in his semiotic approach, shows how time and place inevitably change in drama translation at each step of the translation process. From an intercultural perspective, Aaltonen similarly states that “the choice of a translation strategy… is linked with *the spatially and temporally confined codes* which through these strategies become represented in the discourse of the completed translations” (Aaltonen 2000: 45). Robert Lepage and Jatinder Verma use the term ‘tradaptation’ to indicate a new form of re-writing from a non-Western perspective, in which time and place are totally transformed (Cameron 2000: 17).

More recently, Perteghella in her descriptive-anthropological model of theatre translation implicitly refers to time and place when she sees some linguistic and performance practices as the ideology guiding the translator, who is influenced by “*the historical period* and *its social and cultural milieu*” (2004: 11) (emphasis mine).

**Introduction**

Among the many metaphors that have been used to describe drama translation, a very apt one is certainly that devised by Aaltonen, who sees this ‘territory of translation’ as inhabited by ‘many tenants’. For him, each ‘user’ of a play text - readers, theatre audiences, scholars, translators, light and sound technicians, costume and set designers - functions as a magnifying glass for its meaning. However, the “the terms of occupancy” (Aaltonen 2000: 29) can be hard to define, and meaning construction a tiresome process.

In line with Toury’s and Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory and Lefevere’s framework of analysis developed in *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (1992), Aaltonen saw translation work for the stage as influenced and controlled by the dependencies between the theatrical system and the literary system. Thus, the emergence of the dual perspective of the translated dramatic text as a “written text” and a “theatrical performance” (Aaltonen 2000: 34) drew attention to the peculiarities which distinguish one from the other. Although it is not easy to separate the written text from the theatrical performance as they intertwine in various ways, Aaltonen showed how the effort to define the “theatrical potential” of a text is of primary importance.

Since the late 1970s, the theatrical potential of a text had been the favourite topic of many drama theorists, as Susan Bassnett-McGuire reported in one of her earliest articles on drama translation (Bassnett-McGuire 1985: 87-102). Thus, Pugliatti, in *I segni latenti: scrittura come virtualità scenica in King Lear* (1976,) devised “the notion of the *latent sign*”, arguing that the units of articulation of a dramatic text “should be considered as a linguistic transcription of a stage potentiality” (Bassnett-McGuire 1985: 89). Ruffini, in *Semiotica del testo* (1978), argued that the written text is not actual performance but “positive performance”, by which he means that the staging of a written text results in the merging of the two texts, with the performance text being “submerged” into the script of the play (Bassnett McGuire1985: 89). Ubersfeld, in *Lire le theatre* (1978), not only considered the written text as *troué*, “incomplete… [and] filled with blanks”, but also underlined how productive the tension between text and performance” is (Perron and Debbèche 1999: xvi). Finally, in the late 1990s Totzeva referred to the theatrical potential as “a semiotic relation between the verbal and nonverbal signs and structures of the performance” (Totzeva 1998: 81). According to her, the translation of a dramatic text must “create structures in the target language which can provide and evoke an integration of nonverbal theatrical signs in a performance” (Totzeva 1998: 82).

Aaltonen’s approach to theatrical potential in drama translation was instead broader than that of the above-mentioned semioticians. In fact, the so-called ‘cultural turn’ had already gathered momentum in Translation Studies and the scientific approach to ‘text’ and ‘equivalence’ had been abandoned in favour of a more articulated notion of culture, which included reflections on postcolonial, feminist and ideological readings in translation (Mary Snell-Hornby 2006: 50). Thus, theatre potential in drama translation started to appear, metaphorically, as a revelation at the confluence of many disciplines and different cultures.

The notion of translation as an interdisciplinary activity certainly invites caution for its semantic ambiguity. As Pym reminds us, translation studies has often indiscriminately considered as interdisciplinary any kind of exchange and, therefore, this notion cannot rely on any consistent interpretation (Pym 1998: 198). However, in the last two decades translation scholars such as Bassnett and Marinetti welcomed the potential openness of interdisciplinarity, which is enthusiastically described as a series of “electrical circuits and fields” (Bassnett 2012: 23) in order to “promote circularity and openness, fostering intellectual advancement through dialogue and relationship” (Marinetti 2013b: 308). Theatrical potential in drama translation has thus become more inclusive than in the past, as its definition has broadened the previous horizons of translation studies. The focus of theatrical potential seems to have shifted away from a more theoretical approach to favour the empirical process of translation for the stage. This is shown, for example, in the step-by-step staging of a translation with the help of translators, who acquire the more complex role of “cultural promoter” (Rose and Marinetti 2011:139-154); or how translators use rhythms and sonorities to produce translations accounting for the performative dimension of the dramatic language (Bains and Dalmasso 2011: 49-71).

More importantly, another change has recently taken place and, consequently, drama translation has moved from the ‘cultural turn’ to the ‘performative turn’. In line with a new theoretical development in the humanities, this change has meant a major reorientation in disciplines, such as cultural studies and gender studies, which view culture as performance and favour an interpretative approach based on the aesthetics of performativity. As Schechner in his seminal work *Performance Studies. An Introduction* (2002) maintained, “the world no longer appeared as a book to be read but as a performance to participate in” (Schechner 2002: 19). Performativity thus allows the interpretation of the world we live in, of drama and, by extension, of drama translation as performance, privileging “the performative to the representational” (Marinetti 2013b: 309). Recently, Bigliazzi, Kofler and Ambrosi, in fact, have observed, in their “Introduction” to *Theatre Translation in Performance* (2013), that ‘translation’ and ‘performance’ have sometimes been considered as coincident words:

Translation *as* performance and *in* performance… implies a dynamic process of (re)signification integrated with the overall event in its various phases of production – something which can hardly be assimilated to a more traditional text-based concept of theatre with its hierarchical system of roles (Bigliazzi, Kofler and Ambrosi 2013: 1-2).

In this new perspective, the theatrical potential of drama translation is in the awkward position of being gauged exclusively from the immediacy of performance, where any trace of the verbal as representative of the author has often vanished. Although the ‘performative turn’ has undoubtedly had the merit of bringing to the fore relevant issues in drama translation – playfulness of performance and consequent creative and translation options; blurring of the boundaries between translation, version and adaptation; importance of audience-targeted relocation practices to quote only a few - , the implicit paradox of translation for the theatre then becomes: “how can one reproduce in another language and context ‘theatrical performance’, which is by definition unique and unrepeatable?” (Marinetti 2013a b: 28). Thus, thirty years after Bassnett-McGuire’s “paradox of the translator”, according to which a written text and a performed text are coexistent and inseparable (Bassnett McGuire 1985: 87), Marinetti redefines the paradox of contemporary drama translation.

In order to answer this question, I have chosen to focus on notions which are particularly relevant in drama translation, namely that of performability, and those of time and place.

My contention is that if performability has become a more and more elusive and changing notion in the last thirty years, on the contrary, the notions of time and place have appeared to play an increasingly crucial role in some of the most accomplished systematisations of drama translation. The ‘opposite trajectories’ that performability, on the one hand, and the notions of time and place, on the other, have traced, will be investigated in their historical development, and their theoretical implications and practical outcomes will be considered.

**Performability: an open question**

Performability is certainly a controversial term and, in the ‘labyrinthic’ development of drama translation theory - to borrow a metaphor dear to Bassnett -, its validity has been contested several times but nonetheless remains a central subject of debate.

It is almost impossible to find an ‘objective’ perspective according to which the notion of performability can be analysed as it escapes any attempt at a holistic approach. Not later than 2011, in a detailed and informative article on the performative dimension of drama texts, Che Suh is adamantly clear in his rejection of ‘universals of performability’. In his view, the universal applicability of a set of criteria in order to establish performability is not a relevant issue, because the focus must be instead “on the predictability of such established criteria for a given culture, period or drama type” (Che Suh 2011: 3). What Che Suh highlights is how performability is not a constant feature of drama translation and this variation may be measured along a cline that establishes what is “the relationship between the verbal text on the page and the gestic dimension embedded in that text as performance” (Che Suh 2011: 1).

Although aware of the potential oversimplification implicit in the analysis of the relationship between the ‘verbal text’ and its ‘gestic dimension’ on stage, I have nonetheless chosen to follow this line of investigation, as it has proven the most orderly to account for the historical development of the notion of performability. It also allows articulation the most diverse positions adopted by translation scholars on this issue.

Any analysis of perfomability must necessarily start with a premise clarifying the meaning of this term. For example, Che Suh links performability to speakability and acknowledges that “these two notions [are] often regarded as fundamental to and characteristic of drama, and …represent the gestic/action and oral/acoustic dimensions of the drama/theatre texts” (Che Suh 2011: 1). Snell-Hornby, on the hand, further widens the implications of what performability is and equates the relationship existing between the stage text and the dramatic performance with that of the musical score with the global sensory effect of the music itself. For her, the key words in drama translation are “*performability/actability* (*jouabilité/Spielbarkeit*), *speakability* (*Sprechbarkeit*), and in the case of opera or musical *singability* (*Sangbarkeit*)” (Snell-Hornby 2007: 110). Another complementary term, which contributes to performability is *Atembarkeit* (‘*breathability*’), a concept which shows how “The stress patterns of sentence structures should fit in with the emotions expressed in the dialogue” (Snell-Hornby 2007: 111).

In order to trace a historical development of performability, Bassnett-McGuire is certainly one of the first translation scholars to have given relevance to this issue. However, in the effort to come to terms with such a challenging notion, in the last three decades, her critical thought has undergone many revisions, and her arguments have been rectified by correspondent counterarguments. In her first attempt to determine the “nature of the very special problems confronting the translator of theatre texts” (Bassnett-McGuire 1978: 161), Bassnett-McGuire must have been aware of the observations made by some authoritative voices in the field in the 1960s. In particular, Jirí Levy had already highlighted the importance of ‘speakability’ *(Sprechbarkeit*) as one of the fundamental requisites of drama translation (Jirí Levy 1969:128). Similarly, Corrigan in his essay “Translating for Actors” had summed up briefly: “Good translations of plays will never come from those who have not had a least some training in the practice of theater” (Corrigan 1961: 101). He had remarked, in fact, almost imperatively, that “language in the theater must always be gestural… it is necessary at all times for the translator to hear the actor speaking in his mind’s ear. He must be conscious of the gestures of the voice that speaks” (Corrigan 1961:97). Drawing on these illustrious predecessors, Bassnett-McGuire believes that the translator must be principally concerned with the “undertextual rhythms of the plays” (Bassnett-McGuire 1978: 161), which must be adapted into equivalents, if they cannot be translated. The undertextual rhythm thus includes a balanced tension between words and action, but translators are rarely aware of the need to recreate the unity between words and action because they are more intent on rendering ideas or trying to reproduce characterisation. Bassnett-McGuire quotes the example of Macbeth’s “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow” speech, in which the heavy rhythm of the Shakespearian words completely disappear in the Italian “Domani, e domani e domani”. This speech in Italian therefore can easily be parodied if the undertextual rhythms are not respected ((Bassnett-McGuire 1978: 165). Some years later, Bassnett-Guire makes explicit reference to “translating performability” (Bassnett-McGuire 1985: 90) as one of the strategies according to which dramatic texts have been usually translated. Performability is the “attempt to create fluent speech rhythms and so produce a text that TL [target language] actors can speak without too much difficulty” ((Bassnett-McGuire 1985: 90-91). This idea of performability includes the substitution of regional accents in the SL - source language - with regional accents in TL in order to break free from the SL cultural and linguistic context. For example, this was the principle that animated Peter Tinniswood when he translated the Italian dramatist Eduardo De Filippo’s *Napoli Milionaria* (1945) for the Royal National Theatre’s production in 1991. Performability was assured by adapting Eduardo’s play in the accent of Liverpool, the translator’s native city and, consequently, by distancing the Neapolitan context. However, at the same time, in the translator’s own words, Liverpool most resembled “the uniqueness of Naples with its wicked, cruel effervescence, its dark, brooding melancholy, its exuberance and wittiness and, above all, its indomitable spirit” (Peter Tinniswood 1992: 248).

Bassnett’s revision of her previous statements started in 1991 when she declares that performability consists in the individual translator’s decision on what is a speakable text for the performers. According to her, “There is no sound theoretical base for arguing that ‘performability’ can or does exists” (Bassnett 1991: 102). Some years later, she continued to reject the term ‘performability’ and reiterated the idea that it “has no credibility, because it is resistant to any form of definition” (Bassnett 1998: 95).

These are the years when those concepts such as speakability, breathability and, not least, performability, which had come to represent one major area of critical attention, almost acquiring a normative status in the eighties (Bigliazzi et al. 2013: 8), started to fall into disgrace and be sacrificed on the altar of the ‘cultural turn’.

The integrity of perfomability began metaphorically to dissolve in a multitude of contextual factors: “If a set of criteria ever could be established to determine the ‘performability’ of a theatre text, than those criteria would constantly vary, from culture to culture, from period to period and from text type to text type” (Bassnett 1991: 102). This new interpretation of the notion of performability informs many critical positions expressed by various translation theorists, who were starting to make drama translation emerge from being “the poor relation of translation studies” (Lefevere 1992b: 178) and gain scientific authority. Bassnett, therefore, straightforwardly admits that performability cannot be universally applied and that “the gestus is culture bound, not universal” (Bassnett 1998: 105). Performability, which has now been termed “gestic subtext”, is part of the hermeneutic dimension of the translation process and derives from different performance conventions between source and target cultures. This consideration is of the utmost importance especially when playtexts are transferred interculturally (Bassnett 1998: 105). According to this principle, many translator theorists focussed their attention on the wider cultural target context in discussing the translation of dramatic texts and gave many examples of their reception. The case of Brecht’s *Mütter Courage* translation into English when the play arrived in the USA, has become almost exemplary, as shown in Lefevere’s well-known essay “Acculturating Brecht” in *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (1992). The two versions of this play, translated respectively by Hays (1941) and Bentley (1967), may be considered as different readings of the notions of performability in the source and target texts. Lefevere acutely observes that both Hays and Bentley tried to negotiate as much as possible between the receiving culture and the original text in order to make Brecht fit Broadway. The two translators thus integrate the songs, which Brecht uses to create the ‘alienation effect’, fully into the play, approximating the model of the musical. In this perspective, the ironic conclusion is that in these two translations the performability of Brecht’s ‘epic theatre’ did not work particularly well on the American stage. Another case in point concerns some of the English translations of the Italian dramatist and 1997 Nobel Prize for Literature, Dario Fo, for the British theatre. In particular, it has been observed that the political relevance of his plays gets lost in the English versions, as shown in *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* (1970) and in *Coppia aperta, quasi spalancata* (1983) - written with his wife Franca Rame - respectively translated as *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (1979) by Gillian Hanna and *Open Couple* (1985) by Stuart Hood (Tortoriello 2001 : 79-97). In fact, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* fails to account for the political climate of the 1970s in Italy, prey to the so-called ‘strategy of tension’, which represented the counter-terrorist policy by the supposedly liberal democratic institutions. The play thus becomes instead a comic representation of the Italian police and the police characters are reduced to almost racist Italian stereotypes (Mitchell 1986: 99). Similarly, in *Open Couple* the feminist innuendo, the problem of Catholicism and the corruption of the Socialist party in Italy is downplayed and Fo’s and Franca Rame’s play becomes a naturalistic comedy more suitable for the British taste (Tortoriello 2001 :92-94).[[2]](#footnote-2)

At the beginning of the 21st century, other scholars contributed to question the notion of performability and new ways of viewing it start to multiply. Aaltonen concedes that terms such as speakability, playability and performability remain central terms to theatre discussion even though they are very vague.In fact, they cannot be very accurate terms to describe theatre texts because they vaguely refer to the requirement of being “simple and easy to speak” (Aaltonen 2000: 43). She is particularly critical of this simplicity because it may result in the domestication of plays. According to her, the domestication of foreign drama in fact depends mainly on the cultural circumstances of the target theatrical system. Similarly, performability, not as an inherent feature of play texts but as the result of external factors, is explicitly investigated by Espasa, who analyses performability at three different levels. Performability is examined from the textual, theatrical and ideological points of view. She first defines performability from a textual viewpoint as “the intention of underlining the fluency of the translated text” and from a theatrical point of view as “a whole set of strategies of cultural adaptation” (Espasa 2000: 50). More interestingly, however, from an ideological point of view, performability is seen not only as influenced by textual and theatrical practices, but also by the complex negotiation of the various components of the production process: “it is crucial to consider who has power in a theatre company to decide what is performable – and what is ruled out as unperformable. Thus, performability is shaped by a question of status” (Espasa 2000: 56). Rather than being dismissive of the complex chain of participants and of the interrelated economic factors that contribute to drama translation, Espasa views positively this process of negotiation as an explanatory factor of performability. In fact, she concludes: “I would argue for putting theatre ideology and power negotiation at the heart of performability and make such textual and theatrical factors as speakability and playability relative to it” (Espasa 2000: 58).

It is clear that all attempts to define performability as a unified notion have proven unsuccessful, as Espasa’s informative article testifies. In some quarters, however, performability has nonetheless represented an inescapable intrinsic quality of translation for the stage. Serpieri, academic and translator, has contributed to the debate on performability since the late 1970s and has admitted to being primarily interested to see if his translations of several Shakespearean plays into Italian were ‘performable’. In his 1978 Italian version of *Hamlet*, for example, the actor playing Claudius declared during rehearsals his inability to articulate the first speech of the king at the beginning of Act I, scene 2. Serpieri, in fact, had respected the rhetorical coordination of the original - parallelisms, anaphoras, oxymora and rhythmical scansion – in order to render the sophistication of the hypocritical attitude of the character. Once the actor was told the reason for this rhetorical complexity, he conceded that the that speech, even if was difficult to pronounce, would have helped him to get into the character. For Serpieri, therefore, performability seems to be in the written word of the original and must be reproduced in translation: “[the translator] must recognise and reproduce as much as possible the syntax, rhetoric, and rhythm of a special language which is both literary and situational, thus performing meaning and developing action” (Serpieri 2013: 53).

Similarly, Johnston, drawing on the example of the translation of Lorca’s *Blood Wedding*, states that performability can be secured when drama translators, working with production in mind, “engage in processes that are both intra- and inter-lingual, processes that move within and across the various languages which together constitute the discourse or grammar of performance” (Johnston 2004: 28). He adds that it is only in the performance environment that the exchange between characters becomes the unit of dramatic discourse, and this exchange helps to define the context of character interaction. In turn, this context is linked to the issue of characterisation and is relevant in terms of the performability which the translator negotiates for the actor: “the translator has travelled with the character from the source into the target language, negotiating communicative strategies, naturally occurring dysfluencies, hesitations and repetitions, and locating stylistic dislocation and markers within these” (Johnston 2004: 37).

In conclusion, with the notable exceptions of Serpieri and Johnston, it seems that performability is characterised by ‘fragmentariness’ of definition. In the last thirty years, the more performability has become a fuzzy, vague and imprecise term, the more it has been metaphorically described. In fact, Espasa reminds us how metaphors can be generally used as a shared language, as common ground to provide understanding between rich, diverse, and often contradictory views on stage translation (Espasa 2013: 38). She recalls all the various metaphors which have been used to describe drama translation, such as ‘the mask’, ‘the music score’, ‘the hourglass’ and ‘transubstantiation’ (Espasa 2013: 39-44) and how they help us to rethink the idea of performability. The mask metaphor questions the identities of performers and characters; the music score foregrounds the relationship between written text and performance; the hourglass metaphor pinpoints the connections and conflicts between cultures, and the uneasy coexistence of source and target texts in translated performances; the transubstantiation metaphor exemplifies the need of a community of believers for a text to be declared to be a translation (Espasa 2013: 44-45). However, the fragmentariness of performability expressed by this use of metaphors is also accompanied by the fragmentariness of the agency of translation, i.e., the various agents and roles involved in stage translation and performance. Thus, translation becomes a collaborative practice that extends well beyond the text and the question is no longer whether a performance represents a translated text, or whether a dramatic text is performable, but what is the *force* that the text has in performance, in other words, whether it functions in performance. Thus, a new notion has become the object of drama translation and performability has definitely given way to performativity (Marinetti 2013: 3 emphasis mine).

**Time and place in drama translation: attempts at systematisation**

In the late eighties, Pavis proposed his semiotic approach to drama translation, which represents the first attempt to systematise this area of studies since it became an independent discipline. He maintains that time and space are two fundamental factors which cannot be neglected when dealing with problems peculiar to translation for the stage: “We cannot simply translate a text linguistically: rather we confront and communicate heterogeneous cultures and situations of enunciation that are separated *in space and time*” (Pavis 1989: 25).

According to his theory, the translated text undergoes a series of transformations, or, as Pavis terms them, ‘concretizations’, in its journey from the original to that received by the audience and these ‘concretizations’ show how time and place inevitably change at each step of the translation process.

Pavis first notes that theatre translation is a ‘hermeneutic act’, “a transaction between the source and target situations of enunciation that may glance at the source, but has its eyes chiefly on the target” (Pavis 1989: 26) ” – in other words, in order to find out what the text source means, questions must be asked from the target language’s point-of-view. He then reconstructs the various stages that the dramatic text goes through in its journey from the original to that received by the audience.

The original text [T0] is the result of the author’s choices and formulations and is readable only in the context of its situation of enunciation, i.e., in relation to the surrounding culture. The text of the written translation [T1] depends on the initial situation of enunciation T0, as well as on the future audience who will receive the text in later stages. The text [T1] of the translation constitutes an initial concretization: the translator is in the position of a reader and *dramaturg*, who makes choices from among the potential and possible indications in the text to be translated. It is in this stage that some textual and linguistic microstructures must be reconstituted, such as the plot, the system of characters, the time and space of the action, the individual traits of each character as well as the system of echoes, repetitions, responses, and correspondences that maintain the cohesion of the source text. It is clear, therefore, that theatre translation is not simply a linguistic question because it has to do with stylistics, culture, and fiction.

The text [T2] of the dramaturgical reading is another step in the translation process. It is an analysis that must incorporate a coherent reading of the plot as well as the spatio-temporal indications contained in the text and in the stage directions. This dramaturgical analysis is necessary when the source text is archaic or classical. In such cases, the translation would be more readable for a target audience than the source text (in the original language) for the same audience.

The following step is testing the text on stage [T3]: concretization by stage enunciation. The *mise en scène* – the confrontation of situations of enunciation – whether virtual [T0] or actual [T1], proposes a performance text, by suggesting the examination of all possible relationships between textual and theatrical signs.

The last stage is the point at which the source text finally arrives at its endpoint: the spectator [T4]. The spectator thus appropriates the text only at the end of a series of concretizations, of intermediate translations that reduce or enlarge the source text at every step. The source text has thus always to be rediscovered and reconstituted anew. Pavis concludes that “it would not be an exaggeration to say that the translation is simultaneously a dramaturgical analysis, a *mise en scène*, and a message to the audience, each unaware of the others” (Pavis 1989: 29).

The detailed description of Pavis’s series of ‘concretizations’ helps to focus on how time and place inevitably change at each step of the translation process. In the initial situation of enunciation [T0], time and place are those created by the author of the original. In the reading of the text [T1],time and place start to be reconstituted, together with other textual microstructures, in order to allow the translator to make choices from among the possible indications of the text to be translated. In the dramaturgical analysis [T2], time and place are re-read for the reader/spectator. In step [T3], time and place are those belonging to the text to be performed and to the performance itself. Finally, in the last stage, [T4], time and place are those of the text to be performed, of the performance itself and of the spectator (Randaccio 2012: 135). This treatment of time and place is an exemplification of the fluidity that drama translation may create between source and target text, as in *The Mahabharata*. This nine-hour production was taken from the great Sanskrit epic of India, a major sacred text for Hindus, and adapted for the stage in 1985 by Brook and Jean-Claude Carrière. Pavis, in fact, is convinced that through the adaptation of the foreign culture and language the spectator has access to a mythical India, in which time and place of the original have undergone a transformation. The India portrayed in *The Mahabharata* stands for a place which is “both the real earth of the Indian subcontinent and the symbolic terrain of humanity as a whole” (Pavis 1992: 187), whereas the time of the play is “at once eternal and contemporary”, belonging to the original text and the audience at the same time (Pavis 1992: 187).

At the beginning of the 21st century, Aaltonen posed again the question of time and place as relevant features in drama translation from an intercultural perspective. In discussing various translation strategies, she states that “the choice of a translation strategy, a ‘faithful’ translation, a reactualisation or an imitation (that is to say, adaptations), is linked *with the spatially and temporally confined codes* which through these strategies become represented in the discourse of the completed translations” (Aaltonen 2000: 45 emphasis mine). She then clarifies, with an appropriate metaphor, that the relationship between the source text and its translation does not result from an independent choice because this choice is always tied up to “the time and place of the occupancy” (Aaltonen 2000: 47). Her systematisation of drama translation focusses, in particular, on how a different reception of a foreign text is influenced by different notions of time and place. In fact, she claims that “a theatre production is always tied to its audience in a particular place and at a particular point in time, and in consequence, when a foreign dramatic text is chosen for a performance in another culture, the translation as well as the entire production unavoidably represents a reaction to the Other” (Aaltonen 2000: 58). Aaltonen gives many examples of this ‘reaction to the Other’ in order to illustrate the changes a foreign dramatic text experiences when it reaches its target audience and culture (Aaltonen 2000: 53-61). Time and place greatly change in adaptation, a translation strategy which uses rebellion against fixed models, without any interest in the specificity of the Other. The Italian playwright and director Giovanni Testori uses this strategy when he readapted two Shakespearean tragedies, *Ambletto* (1972) and *Macbetto* (1974), a comic re-writing of the Shakespearean models. For example, in *Ambletto*, he changes the time and place of the play for its own purposes. The play, set in Lombardy, one of the largest areas of Northern Italy, takes place at an unspecified time to show Testori’s main concerns, such as his refusal of theatre as a bourgeois ritual (Alonge e Malara 2001: 675).

It must be noted that, for Aaltonen, time and place are shown in a new perspective according to quite clear-cut categorisations – compatibility, integration, alterity, etc…, whereas the controversial notion of ‘transadaptation’ further complicates the spatio-temporal dimension in drama translation.

‘Tradaptation’, which is a helpful concept to rethink the cultural exchange and the movement of texts from one language to another in western theatre, is the contraction of the terms ‘translation’ and ‘adaptation’. It was first used by the French Canadian theatre director Robert Lepage and later by Jatinder Verma, the Artistic Director of the Asian Tara Arts Theatre Company, whose writings trace the outlines of a theoretical and aesthetic rationale behind the company’s work. In particular, Verma uses the term ‘tradaptation’ in relation to his productions of Molière’s *Tartuffe* (for the Royal National Theatre), and *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (for Tara Arts). Both plays were set in the same period in India as when Molière originally wrote the plays and “provoked a re-perception of the Molière classics” (Verma 1996: 196). Although the re-location and updating of plays is not an unusual practice for the British stage, the process of ‘tradaptation’ goes beyond mining a play for fashionable parallels: ‘tradaptation’ is, in fact, “a wholesale re-working and re-thinking of the original text, as well as its translation and/or translocation into a new, non-European, aesthetic context” (Cameron 2000: 17). Moreover, the response of playgoers and critics, which was mixed, if not hostile, challenged the sense of appropriateness or ‘authenticity’ held by the British audience for centuries.

Derrick Cameron notes that “‘tradaptations’ interrupt the assumed processes of intercultural exchange in Western theatre” (Cameron 2000: 17), which suffer from a double limitation. First, there is a tacit assumption that the borders of cultural exchange are limited by the borders of the nation-state, which is assumed to be a fixed immutable condition. Second, the presence of borders implies a notion of indigeneity that cannot take into account the history of migration and the existence of Indigenous as migrants or citizens living and working in other parts of the world (Cameron 2000: 19).

This limitation can be overcome by an aesthetic practice called *Binglish*, which denotes a distinct contemporary practice in British drama, featuring Asian or black casts, produced by independent Asian or black theatre companies. This practice has three relevant key components. The first is the outsider’s perspective: Asian and black life in modern Britain is self-evidently ‘not-quite-English’ and equally characterized by a striving ‘to be English’” (Verma 1996: 195). Therefore, there is an ‘ambivalent sensibility’ which lies at the heart of Asian and black identity in Britain. The second component is represented by the way in which *Binglish* productions employ ‘other texts’, which can be existing European texts, adaptations of such texts, new texts from Asian and black writers, or texts from Asia and Africa. Cameron makes this ‘sense of otherness’ central and comments:

Thus a sense of ‘other-ness’ traverses the ‘other-ness’ of European drama for blacks and Asians; the unfamiliarity of ‘tradapted’ European work; the ‘other-ness’ of work by black and Asian authors from both Britain and abroad to white British audiences, and so on (Cameron 2000: 20).

The third component concerns the forms of presentation of a *Binglish* production, which is conceived from the perspective of an insider/outsider, someone who is critically aware of the dominant praxis of European staging, and also of the cultural and artistic heritage of their own past (Cameron 2001: 21).

It is clear that these components of *Binglish* cast light on the concept of ‘tradaptation’ and show also that notions of time and place must be reconsidered anew. The introduction of ‘the outsider’s perspective’ and ‘the use of ‘other texts’ crucially question the dimensions of space and time, and the sense of ‘otherness’ force us to revise the assumption that time and place can still change in translation with a certain linearity and, most of all, in discrete stages. ‘Tradaptation’, in fact, blurs definitely the borders between the time of the original and that of the translation, the place of the original and that of the translation and, more crucially, the time and place of the original with those of the audience. What playwrights and directors try to do is to challenge the process of cultural exchange by inverting it, in the attempt to find an identity for themselves at the interface of two cultures (Peacock: 2006: 189). This process is perfectly shown in the challenging productions of Jatinder Verma, who was born in Tanzania from parents emigrated from India, or in the plays of Caribbean-born Mustapha Matura. After three dacades of cross-cultural adaptations of classic texts transposed to Asian settings and produced with multicultural casts, Jatim Verma, for example, has recently adapted and directed a production of *The Tempest*, set in a Muslim-Mediterranean world in order to highlight its contemporary relevance. His dramatic choices continue to defy the spatio-temporal coordinates of what a British audience may expect to be a classic play (Cameron 2000: 18). It is interesting to see how this topic has affected research in both postcolonial and theatre studies. In fact, the process of cultural exchange in British Asian drama with reference to space and time has been extensively treated in Buonanno, Sams and Schlote, who have highlighted the complexity of this phenomenon in its historical development (Buonanno, Sams and Schlote 2011: 1-9).

However, it must be noted that ‘tradaptation’ as a systematisation of drama translation is certainly less encompassing that those proposed by Pavis and Aaltonen. A more rigourous model is that illustrated by Perteghella, who hopes that her model “may serve both translators and directors of international drama in approaching and choosing foreign texts for translation and production” (Perteghella 2004: 19). Perteghella, in her descriptive-anthropological model of drama translation, derived from Holmes’ descriptive framework of translation studies, also makes crucial the notions of time and place. She first elaborates the concept of ‘theatrical osmosis’, the continuous amalgamation of dramatic texts and performance style, which is at the basis of the development of drama translation, and she then analyses how this process takes place. Theatre osmosis thus works through ‘diffusion’ – dramatic text as cultural products are exchanged through trade, warfare, colonialism but also through travelling troupes of performers – and ‘modification’, during which some elements of the foreign culture become meaningless, as happened to Senecan tragedy when it was changed into the Renaissance revenge tragedy. Theatre osmosis can also lead to acculturation or assimilation in an anthropological sense, in which a playtext is metaphorically described as either ‘absorbed or digested’ in the receiving culture (Perteghella 2004: 5). Once theatrical osmosis is activated, Pertheghella then singles out the social functions that the translated texts serve in the new culture. The social functions such as ‘dissemination’ and ‘introduction of alien or new dramaturgy’ belong to the reader-oriented tradition, whereas other social functions such as ‘propaganda/protest’ and ‘introduction of alien theatrical practices’ belong to the stage-oriented tradition (Perteghella 2004: 7). For example, translation operating as dissemination can result in a scholarly text, such as an anthology of drama. The function of propaganda/protest is instead linked to power and politics and the translated text is translated according to a specific ideology, as happened with *Macbeth*, which was the most performed play in the Soviet theatre in the 1920s for its allegedly anti-monarchical message, in line with the October Revolution. Perteghella has shown, however, that drama translation can have more than one function in the target system and this may be determined by the time and place of its reception. Thus, as in the case of Senecan plays, the function of introducing a new type of tragedy in the fifteen century overlaps with the function of creating new scholarly texts of academic interest related to different ages. Perteghella, therefore, concludes that these linguistic and performance practices “should be understood as the ‘ideology’ guiding the drama translator(s), the discoursive positions which the translation agency adopts, influenced by the *historical period and its social and cultural milieu*” (Perteghella 2004: 11 emphasis mine).

**Conclusion**

The critical path followed so far in analysing the notion of performability, and that of time and place admittedly seems to trace two ‘opposite trajectories’. As shown, performability has become, in some cases, an empty concept, whereas time and place have proved crucial factors in the elaboration of the most interesting systematisations of drama translation. In particular, performability seems to have lost its appeal among many drama translation scholars, who have recently found ‘performativity’ a more suited notion to solve the problems posited by the dual nature of drama translation. Performativity, in fact, allows us to place original and translation, source and target texts, dramatic texts and performances on the same cline with the advantage of exploring the new and innovative effects that the “reconfigured text (as performance) has on the receiving culture and its networks” (Marinetti 2013b: 3). A conclusive cautionary note, however, must be sounded in order to avoid that the translated text is not ‘lost in performance’. It can be true that a dramatic text no longer has meanings to be translated but ‘performative force’ to be communicated (Marinetti 2013b: 9-13), relying on the macroscopic principle that ‘the world is a performance to participate in’, but sometimes this thought may prove disturbing in our globalised ‘society of the spectacle’.

**Bibliography**

Aaltonen S. 2000. *Time-Sharing on Stage. Drama Translation in Theatre and Society*. Topics in Translation 17. Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto and Sydney. Multilingual Matters.

Alonge R. e Malara F. 2001. “Il teatro italiano di tradizione” in Alonge R. e Davico Bonino G. “eds.” *Storia del teatro moderno e contemporaneo*. Vol vi. Torino. Einaudi. 567-701.

Bains R. and Dalmasso F. 2011. “Musical Realizations: a Performance-based Translation of Rhythm in Koltes’ *Dans la solitude des champs de coton*” in Bains R., Marinetti C. and Perteghella M. “eds.” *Staging and Performing Translation. Text and Theatre Practice*. Basingstoke. Palgrave Macmillan. 49-71.

Bassnett McGuire S. 1978. “Translating spatial poetry: An examination of theatre texts in performance” in J. S. Holmes J. S., Lambert J. and Van den Broeck R. “eds.” *Literature and Translation: New Perspectives in Literary Studies.* Leuven. Acco. 161-180.

Bassnett McGuire S. 1985. “Ways through the Labyrinth: Strategies and methods for translating theatre texts” in Hermans T. “ed.” *The Manipulation of Literature*. New York. St. Martin Press. 87-102.

Bassnett S. 1991. “Translating for the theatre: the case against performability”, *TTR: Traduction, Terminologie, Redaction* 4:1. 99-111.

Bassnett S. 1998. “Still trapped in the Labyrinth: Further reflections on translation and theatre” in Bassnett S. and Lefevere A. “eds”. *Constructing Cultures*. Clevedon. Multilingual Matters. 90-108.

Bassnett S. 2012. “Translation Studies at Cross-roads” in Brems E., Meyerlaerts R. and van Doorslaer L. “eds.” *Unknowns of Translation Studies*. Special Issue. *Target*, 24, 1. 1-15.

Bigliazzi S., Ambrosi P. and Kofler P. 2013. “Introduction” in Bigliazzi S., Ambrosi P. and Kofler P. “eds.” *Theatre Translation in Performance*. London. Routledge. 1-26.

Buonanno G., Sams V. and Schlote C. 2011. “Glocal routes in British Asian Drama: Between Adaptation and Tradaptation”, *Postcolonial Text*, 6, 2. 1-18.

Cameron D. 2000. “Tradaptation: Cultural Exchange and Black British Theatre” in Upton C. A. “ed.” *Moving Target. Theatre Translation and Cultural Relocation*. Manchester. St. Jerome Publishing, 2000. 17-24.

Corrigan R. W. 1961. “Translating for Actors”, in Arrowsmith W. and Shattuck R. “eds.” *The Craft and Context of Translation*. Austin. University of Texas Press. 95-106.

Espasa E. 2000. “Performability in Translation: Speakability? Playability? Or Just Saleability?” in Upton C. A. “ed.” *Moving Target. Theatre Translation and Cultural Relocation*. Manchester. St. Jerome Publishing, 2000. 49-62.

Espasa E. 2013. “Masks, Music Scores, and Hourglasses: Rethinking Performability through Metaphors” in Bigliazzi S., Ambrosi P. and Kofler P. “eds.” *Theatre Translation in Performance*. London. Routledge. 38-49.

Johnston D. 2004. “Securing the Performability of the Play in Translation” in ” in Coelsch-Foisner S. and Klein H. “eds.” *Drama Translation and Theatre Practice*, Frankfurt am Main. Peter Lang. 25-38.

Lefevere A. 1992a. *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. London. Routledge.

Lefevere A. 1992b*. Translating Literature: Practice and Theory in Comparative Literature Context*. New York. Modern Language Association of America.

Levy J. 1969. *Die literarische Übersetzung: Theorie einer Kunstgattung*, Frankfurt, Athenäum.

Marinetti C. 2013a. “Transnational, Multilingual and Post-dramatic: The Location of Translation in Contemporary Theatre” in Bigliazzi S., Ambrosi P. and Kofler P. “eds.” *Theatre Translation in Performance*. London. Routledge. 27-38.

Marinetti C. 2013b. “Translation and theatre: From performance to performativity” in Marinetti C. “ed.” *Translation in the Theatre*. Special Issue. *Target*, 25, 3. 307-320.

Pavis P. 1989. “Problems of translation for the stage: interculturalism and post-modern theatre” in Scolnicov H. and Holland P. “eds.” *The Plays Out of Context: Transferring Plays from Culture to Culture*. Cambridge. Cambridge UP, 25-44.

Pavis P. 1992. *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*. Translated by Lorenz Krugen. London. Routledge.

Peacock K. 2006. “Home Thoughts from Abroad: Mustapha Matura” in Luckhurst M. “ed.” A *Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama: 1880-2005*. Malden, Oxford and Carlton, Blackwell Publishing. 188-198.

Perron. P. and Debbèche P. 1999. “Foreword” in Ubersfeld A. *Reading the Theatre.* Translated by Frank Collins, Toronto, University of Toronto Press. Xiii-xx.

Perteghella M. 2004. “A Descriptive-Anthropological Model of Theatre Translation” in Coelsch-Foisner S. and Klein H. “eds.” *Drama Translation and Theatre Practice*, Frankfurt am Main. Peter Lang. 1-23.

Pym A. 1998. *Method in Translation History*. Manchester. St. Jerome.

Randaccio M. 2012. “Intercultural Theatre: Renegotiating Time and Place in Drama Translation” in Hogan C., Rental N. and Schwerter “eds.”, *Bridging Cultures: Intercultural Mediation in Literature, Linguistics and the Arts.* Stuttgart. Ibidem-Verlag. 125-142.

Rose M. and Marinetti C. 2011. “The Translator as Cultural Promoter: or how Renato Gabrielli’s *Qualcosa trilla* went on the Road as *Mobile Thriller*” in Bains R., Marinetti C. and Perteghella M. “eds.” *Staging and Performing Translation. Text and Theatre Practice*. Basingstoke. Palgrave Macmillan. 139-154.

Schechner R. 2002. *Performance Studies. An Introduction*. London. Routledge.

Serpieri A. 2013. “Semantic and Syntax in Translating Shakespeare” ” in Bigliazzi S., Ambrosi P. and Kofler P. “eds.” *Theatre Translation in Performance*. London. Routledge. 50-60.

Snell-Hornby 2006. *The Turns of Translation Studies: New Paradigms Or Shifting Viewpoints?*. Amsterdam, John Benjamins.

Snell-Hornby 2007. “Theatre and Opera Translation” in Kuhiwczak P. Littau K. “eds.” *A Companion to Translation Studies*. Topics in Translation 34. Clevedon, Buffalo and Toronto. Multilingual Matters.106-119.

Suh, J. C. “The Performability and Speakability Dimensions of Translated Drama Texts: The Case of Cameroon” in inTRAlinea, 13. <http://www.intralinea.org/archive/article/1671> (last access 20 September 2012).

Tinniswood P. “Note on Adaptation” in *Napoli Milionaria* in *De Filippo: Four Plays*. London. Methuen Drama. 247-248.

Tortoriello A. “Dario Fo in inglese: il teatro politico si può tradurre?” in Parks G. “ed*.” Miscellanea n. speciale*, Trieste, Università degli Studi di Trieste, Scuola di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori. 79-97.

Totzeva S. 1998. “Realizing Theatrical Potential. The Dramatic Text in Performance and Translation” in Boase-Beier J. and Holman M. “eds.” *The Practice of Literary Translation Constraints and Creativity.* Manchester. St. Jerome. 81-90.

Verma J. 1996. “The Challenge of *Binglish*: Analysing Multi-cultural Performance” in Campbell P. “ed.”*Analysing Performance: A Critical Reader*. Manchester. Manchester UP.193-202.

1. In accordance with Aaltonen (2000: 33) ‘drama translation’ is used as a term inclusive of ‘dramatic texts’ and ‘theatrical texts’. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Taviano has noted that “most British productions of Fo and Rame’s plays reveal a predominant approach to political theatre which aims at appropriating foreign plays by focusing on their entertainment value and their cultural identity while undermining their political function” (Taviano 2007: 46). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)