

Low, Peter (2017). *Translating Song. Lyrics and Texts*. London/New York: Routledge (Translation Practices Explained series), pp. 132, £115.00 (hardback), £32.99 (paperback); £23,09 (eBook). ISBN: 978-1-138-64178-5 (hardback), 978-1-138-64179-2 (paperback), 978-1-3156-3028-21 (ebook).

This new publication on vocal music translation is a good example of the growing interest that the field has lately attracted among researchers, as is testified to by the publication of several monographs over the last two decades (Gorlée 2005; Susam-Sarajeva 2008; Minors 2013; Apter and Herman 2016). Low's new contribution is a "'How-To' book" (3) since, rather than focusing on how vocal music has been translated in the past, it adopts a refreshing and most welcome practical approach, suggesting effective "strategies and tactics" (3) for successful song translation. Drawing on his previous research as well as his own experience as a translator of vocal music, Low takes a non-dogmatic, functional and pragmatic stance, illustrating the difficulties of translating musical texts with a wide range of styles, genres, times and languages.

The volume is structured into seven chapters, starting with an introductory one which deals with general issues relating to "song in human culture" and in translation: the various types and purposes that can be identified in vocal music; the important "often underrated" (2) role translation has played in the field of music; or the usefulness of the distinction between 'logocentric' and 'musico-centric' songs for translation. The author does not elude some controversial issues such as whether song lyrics are really worth translating, but prefers to focus on how to do it –whatever the song, the translator's motivation and purpose (5).

Chapters 2 and 4 are devoted to the challenges created at either end of the translation process –though the reader somehow wonders why they have not been placed together, before the three chapters dealing with the various modes of song translation. The ST analysis in chapter 2 considers 'outer' and 'inner characteristics' of lyrics –phonic figures of style, musical pattern, poetic subtlety, etc.– together with the song's overall effect, and common issues such as non-standard language, cultural load, archaisms, euphemisms, humour, metaphor or obscenity. In Chapter 4, Low moves onto general problems in devising the target text: e.g. sense –usually hard to translate because of the constraints imposed by the various media and because the words themselves usually matter; "the challenge of naturalness;" and controversial issues such as the domestication-foreignization dichotomy or whether songs should be sung in the SL or in singable translations, for which the author defends a functional standpoint again since the right decision will depend on the song genre and the translation *skopos*.

Chapter 3 focuses on translations to read (e.g. study translations, CD-inserts, surtitles, etc.), all of which imply a change of medium –from the original oral song to a written TT of its lyrics. Considering the various purposes, as well as format and technical constraints and the different reception contexts, Low suggests the most appropriate approach for each type of non-singable translation, complementing his discussion with up-to-date information and the latest innovations, such as fansubbing, a very popular screen modality for music videos.

Chapters 5 and 6 are reworkings of earlier articles by the author, presenting his Pentathlon Principle as a reliable and practical method to create singable translations. The five criteria it comprises are: *singability*, *sense*, *naturalness*, *rhythm* and *rhyme*. Compromises are always necessary here, Low insists, finishing his clear and detailed description of the five criteria with an interesting and welcome addition to his Pentathlon Principle: turning it into “A hexathlon” with a sixth criterion, of “stage effectiveness,” in order to take care of music-drama, whose performability requirements the author agrees have been understated in the book (110).

Adaptations are the object of the last chapter, in which Low tackles the thorny issue of terminology in the field of song translation, attempting a definition of ‘translation’ and ‘adaptation’ based on the nature of semantic changes –‘adaptation’ denoting “a derivative text where significant details of meaning have not been transferred which easily could have been” (116). Low himself admits that the border between the two terms is not clear cut, nor is the voluntary nature of the changes easy to determine; in any case, his definition seems practical and adequate.

The functional, receptor-oriented and pragmatic approach of this work is not only made clear by the author’s constantly reminding the reader that song translating may be made for a vast range of recipients and purposes, within very different contexts and through various media imposing their own restrictions, but also by Low’s references to translation theorists such as Reiss and Vermeer, Nida, Newmark, Kussmaul, Hervey and Higgins, Baker, or Nord. In line with the practical objective, all chapters end with a set of useful and imaginative exercises, practising different issues, addressed to diverse readers and based on authentic material. Two sections of Further Reading and relevant References are also included in each chapter, and there is a final glossary of key terms. Besides, along the text Low inserts quotations on controversial or important points for the reader’s reflection, anecdotes, real-life examples of theoretical statements, and useful information, like some musical terminology and website or YouTube links to sung versions of the songs discussed. All this makes the book a lively and compelling read, which may be of relevance not just to students and researchers but also to practitioners, singers and musicians.

There are just a few format issues –e.g. problems of cohesion between the text and some tables or figures, and a few typos- which should be revised

in future editions of this detailed and certainly useful study of vocal music translation.

References

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