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*Celebrity Translation in British Theatre: Relevance and Reception, Voice and Visibility*. By Robert Stock. Pp. 240. London: Bloomsbury, 2020. £95.

Robert Stock's monograph investigates the effect celebrity translators have had on audiences' responses to translated plays in Britain. Employing relevance theory and basing the analysis on interviews, reactions from audiences, theatre reviews, blogs, and posts on social media, Stock shows how prior knowledge of a celebrity translator (their personal and social background, style of writing, and so on) can have a significant impact on how spectators receive and interpret translated plays. The book makes a valuable contribution to the long-standing debate on the (in)visibility of the translator and offers insights into theatre translation as practiced and received today, as well as the ability celebrity culture has to attract new theatre audiences to foreign plays.

Stock analyses three canonical plays – each from different points of origin and eras – which have been translated by modern-day celebrity writers: Mark Ravenhill's 2013 *Life of Galileo* by Brecht (1943); Roger McGough's 2008 *Tartuffe* by Molière (1664); and Simon Stephens' 2012 *A Doll's House* by Ibsen (1879). Each chapter begins with a reconstruction of the making of the translation. For instance, Stock shows how Ravenhill employed a literal translation of *Leben des Galilei* by the playwright Deborah Gearing; McGough relied on previous published translations of *Tartuffe*; and Stephens, similar to Ravenhill, employed a literal translation of *Et dukkehjem*, only this time by the professional translator Charlotte Barslund. This is an excellent selection of different approaches to translating a range of languages, and of their invisibility in the eyes of theatre-goers. It also illustrates how the popularity of the celebrity translator arguably overshadows other agents whose work feeds into the translation process.

As for the celebrity translators' approach to the actual drama, Stock carefully details their different methods. To use Stock's words, Ravenhill 'queers up' his translation. As Stock argues, though Ravenhill has tended to distance himself from the 'gay playwright' label, 'this is not to say that Ravenhill's sexuality will not influence the contextual associations and cognitive contexts of spectators attending a performance of *A Life of Galileo*, whether consciously or subconsciously'. As for McGough, his renown as a poet has led him to approach Molière by switching in his translation between verse ('Oh what sadistic game love-sick girls like to play | making parents suffer when they don't get their own way') and prose ('Laurent! Rub some fresh stinging nettles into my hair shirt, will you? And can you put away the scourge ...'). Finally, Stock shows how Stephens takes a more empathetic approach to his play: 'Stephens's play belies a more compassionate and optimistic view of his characters and the society in which they operate than could often be said for in-yer-face playwrights such as Sarah Kane, Anthony Neilson and Mark Ravenhill.' The choice of texts, and the exploration of the various techniques and approaches adopted, makes these chapters stimulating and vibrant. The analysis is made more visually exciting through a series of lists, diagrams, mind maps, and tables.

Stock proceeds to base his analyses of the plays on illustrating possible audience interpretations of key moments in the source and target texts. Stock aims thereby to address one of the inevitable challenges entailed in an analysis of this nature: uncertainty about how an audience will react to the plays. I will take his analysis of Stephens' *A Doll's House* as an example. Each table in this chapter is divided into four separate columns, showing: 1. Ibsen's source text; 2. Stock's literal translation; 3. Audiences' strong implicatures; 4. Stephens' target text; 5. Potential chain of weak implicatures. As the phrasing implies, not all readers will concur about the 'potential weak implicatures'. For instance, when Nora confronts Anna about her children in Stephens' translation: 'I'm afraid they're going to get used to not having

me around quite so often any more’, we are told that ‘we question Nora’s lack of regret about leaving her children’. However, throughout the play, Ibsen shows how painfully difficult it is for Nora to leave her children behind, so this very phrase could be interpreted by the actress in a heavy-hearted way. Another example is when we are told ‘we find Nora’s sneering attitude towards her friend distasteful when she explains how she learnt the tarantella in Stephens’ text: ‘Did you know that I could dance the tarantella? I don’t imagine that you did, did you?’ Again, this would depend on how this line is performed. When Torvald asks Nora what people will say about her departure, she responds in Stephens’ version, ‘I don’t care about that’, and Stock argues that ‘we ultimately question Nora’s selfishness and coldness towards her husband and children’, but this overlooks Nora’s refusal to care about gossip. Indeed, following Nora’s response about her plight to Kristine (‘You wouldn’t understand. Even if I told you’), Stock comments that ‘we feel anger towards Nora as she increasingly alienates those who might be able to help here’, but, arguably, this ignores Nora’s unique circumstances.

As for interpretations of Torvald in the translations, there appears to be an overly sympathetic reading of his character. Stock suggests that ‘we continue to sympathize more with Torvald’ when he tells Nora in Stephens’ translation to ‘Calm down. You’re getting yourself wound up. I want my skylark back’, without acknowledging the belittling use of the word ‘skylark’. Readers continue to be told that ‘we sympathize even more with Torvald’s predicament in the light of Nora’s melodramatic and uncaring response’ towards him and Krogstad, again without acknowledging the suffering Nora has endured. Though the abuse Torvald inflicts on his wife is addressed throughout the course of the chapter, it remains difficult to assess how these interpretations emerge. Despite the room for disagreement, these chapters make an interesting read, partly because of the wealth of knowledge of each play and each individual celebrity translator.

A chapter entitled ‘Going forward’ closes the book. A subsection of this chapter titled ‘Call to action’ aims to inspire change in translation practice. One of the questions brought to the fore is that of gender. Though all three of the theatre works examined were written by men and translated by men, the directors, like the literal translators whose work they used, were women?: *A Life of Galileo* was directed by Roxana Silbert, *Tartuffe* by Gemma Bodinetz, and *A Doll’s House* by Carrie Cracknell. Stock rightly questions: ‘Might male or female celebrities be more assertive in imposing their own stamp on their texts, or which gender might audiences unconsciously expect to be more visible?’

The question of canon is also relevant to the book’s conclusion. As well as these canonical plays by canonical writers, it would be interesting to ask what happens with a non-canonical play. A recent example is the National Theatre’s 2013 version of Pirandello’s Sicilian dialect play, *Liola* (1916) by Tanya Ronder and directed by Richard Eyre, both, arguably, celebrity translators in their own right. Though Pirandello is said to be one of the most frequently translated authors in the UK, Ronder and Eyre chose to stage one of Pirandello’s lesser-known works. Stock indicates how audiences are likely to respond to the protagonists in well-known plays, adapted by well-known celebrities. Some reference in this final section to lesser-known plays would have added another dimension.

Another aspect ripe for further discussion lies in the fact that the plays examined are produced via a direct translation process, predominantly involving ‘major’ language. Even though Ravenhill’s and Stephens’ translations were mediated via a literal translation (which to some extent could be considered a third party), the process still involved a direct passage from language A to language B. It would, therefore, be interesting to think about whether adding a non-standard language or dialect into the equation would increase or decrease the translator’s visibility, and how this, in turn, would ultimately influence audiences’ responses to the translated play. Non-standard or ‘minority’ languages are often translated indirectly,

and, though the issue of indirect translation is alluded to briefly, as is the use of sociolects and idiolects, the question as to how minority languages could make a difference to the translation process and critical reception, particularly where a celebrity writer is concerned, would help develop the call for action.

Finally, though the book offers acute observations and analyses, perhaps it could have been more aligned with recent critical literature, such as Geraldine Brodie and Emma Cole's *Staging and Adapting Translation* (2017). For example, in one of the introductory chapters, Stock, citing David Johnston, takes the example of David Hare's response to his approach to Pirandello's *The Rules of the Game* (1918) in a production he staged in the 1990s ('It really made me quite queasy when they said "translations" because I said "I don't speak Italian, how can you say I translated it?"'). Similar interviews and conversations have been recently included in Geraldine Brodie's *The Translator on Stage* (2018), some of which involve prominent figures in the theatre industry, and reference to these would have helped show how the discussion has moved on since Hare's production. Likewise, reference to Margherita Laera's project 'Translation, Adaptation, Otherness: "Foreignisation" in Theatre Practice' (2016–19), results of which were published as *Theatre and Translation* (2019), might have strengthened the arguments made about the trend to strongly acculturate translated plays in the UK in recent years.

These considerations aside, Stock has contributed a different angle to the debates surrounding the nature of translating drama. The attention to detail in the theoretical and contextual chapters, and the close readings of the various interpretations of the plays, illuminate an intriguing example of the dynamics involved in theatre translation, showing the process from when the texts are initially translated (and how), commissioned, and finally appraised. What is more, this book sheds new light on how celebrity translations can enhance audiences' reactions to international plays and attract new audiences to the theatre, ultimately

helping to raise the status of translated drama in general. Stephens remarks at the end of the book that the main responsibility of theatre is to make people different from when they arrived at the beginning of the night. We can safely say, as scholars, critics, and general enthusiasts of both theatre and translation, that this book makes a difference to our understanding of the role of celebrity culture in our field.

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