

WHAT ARE YOU SURVEYING?

Dorothy Chansky

AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND DRAMATIC LITERATURE IN(TO) ENGLISH

In 2011 and 2012, I undertook a two-part survey to answer some large questions about the use of plays in translation in the higher education drama classroom in Anglophone North America and to test my ideas regarding the simultaneous ubiquity and invisibility of translation there. My project here is to report on that survey and to make clear why translation studies is ready to take a prominent role in theatre studies. U.S. colleges and universities constitute one of the largest single markets in the world for drama translated into English.¹ Most U.S. theatre history classes include plays from the world canon, and many specialized classes in theatre departments focus on plays from non-Anglophone cultures. In English departments, where other genres in translation (e.g., the novel) may be approached with caution, drama seems to be offered a “pass” because the notion of being dramaturgically literate depends on some knowledge of a sizable canon of

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I am grateful to Kent Wilkinson and Todd Chambers, both in the College of Mass Communications at Texas Tech University; Gary Elbow, associate vice provost for academic affairs at Texas Tech; and Paul D. Naish in the Department of Social Sciences at Guttman Community College of the City University of New York for their assistance with creating the survey. For their comments on an early draft of the essay, I thank Jonathan Chambers (no relation to Todd), David Mayer, Ann Folino White, and Elizabeth Reitz Mullenix.

non-Anglophone plays.² Yet despite its ubiquity, translation is often so normalized as to be invisible to those who depend on it. As Laurence Senelick notes, “For most students, a work exists wholly in its translated form, spontaneously generated.”³ Translation, as the survey confirmed, is part of the DNA of theatre studies. As such, I argue, it needs to be brought to the foreground of the field. In saying this, I am not unaware of the rich work undertaken by scholars, editors, and practitioners who are enmeshed in the difficult issues involved with translating plays, which include pressing for greater attention to cultural sensitivity and literacy.⁴ My focus here is on the academy and the classroom, where, for better or worse, the vast majority of future dramaturgs and audience members will cut their teeth on a critical mass of plays and where no single language or production entity or publisher can claim pride of place.

My personal musings leading up to the formal survey had to do with how professors in theatre and drama classes think about and select translations, whether they regard translation as an issue worthy of discussion in its own right, and whether these professors reflect the interests and demographics of their students with regard to language. I had a few hunches: that there were differences between how professors in praxis classes and those in academic classes chose translations; that U.S. college students are painfully monolingual; and that professors who are bilingual or multilingual grew up speaking languages other than (or in addition to) English. The first two of my assumptions were partially correct but were complicated by such things as the fact that students in the undergraduate classes of survey respondents speak a rich array of languages but seem to lack elementary skills in reading literature and thinking outside their immediate localities. The research showed that professors are passionately invested in translation but that there is little in the way of common vocabulary or expected basic knowledge, as there is, say, in acting, where regardless of specialty everyone assumes some grasp of how Stanislavskianism is not Brechtianism and how postmodernity eschews pictorialism. One of my goals here is to offer ways that translation can come into focus for theatre studies through some interventions that do not require significant revision of the curriculum but that can create shared scaffolding.

This article has three parts. The first uses the results of the forty-question survey to map the terrain in broad terms. The second part is based on in-depth, open-ended questions that twenty-four respondents from the original survey answered. The concluding section is my assessment of the problems and possibilities the survey suggests. My goal is not to propose any new translation theory but rather to address a pedagogical issue that is very much with us yet has barely been considered systemically.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

The 2011 survey was based on a few key areas of inquiry. First, if many American teachers of drama are themselves monolingual (38 percent of my respondents said they were fluent in at least one other language, which meant 62 percent considered themselves more or less monolingual), how do they assess translations and make choices?⁵ As I came to realize, even the concept of fluency

is subject to interpretation, and one respondent in the second part of the survey argued that English from other eras or from disparate parts of the Anglophone world requires explanation sufficient to qualify as a form of translation. Another key area had to do with how teaching assignments affected translation selection. Are those who teach survey classes hampered in the choices of translations they assign by the imperative to purchase a single anthology? Do acting and directing practitioners (often M.F.A.'s who went through programs with no language requirements) actually pay more attention to translation than scholar-historians do because they are able to focus intensely on the one or two works they might direct each year? For that matter, who are all these professors, and why do they matter as a group?

The survey, which I created on the Survey Monkey Web site, was sent to the members of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, the American Society for Theatre Research, the American Theatre and Drama Society, and the drama discussion group of the Modern Language Association. Because of overlap in the memberships of the first three groups, I estimate that I reached some 1,500 people, of which 207 took the survey, a response rate of about 14 percent.⁶ The demographic represented by the respondents is significant (which is not the same, of course, as definitive) for three reasons. First, 80 percent teach in drama, theatre, or performance studies departments. Others are in English, modern languages, communications, cultural studies, or multidisciplinary arts studies.⁷ Therefore, the respondents are involved with both text and performance, not only with texts as literature. They deal with the concerns of practitioners but many also engage with history, studies of multiple cultures, and critical theory, all areas in which the concept of a source language/ethos and slippage are foregrounded.

The second reason why my population of respondents is significant is that they teach in four-year schools (23%) or research universities (70%).⁸ They come from schools that are known for their theatre programs, schools that train a significant number of students who will perpetuate theatre studies as future professors and those few but influential students who will become professional dramaturgs. In other words, these respondents are most likely to shape the next generation of university-trained theatre practitioners and professors. The respondents are also geographically distributed, albeit lopsidedly so. The highest percentage (30.1%) teach in the mid-Atlantic states, followed by the Midwest (25.2%), the South (12.1%), and the Pacific Coast (10.7%, including Alaska and Hawaii). Finally, they are a significant population because 97.9 percent of them use plays in translation. Since respondents include those who teach playwriting, arts management, new media, and foreign languages, the number who do *not* use plays in translation seems remarkably low.

What makes it hard to generalize about certain aspects of the survey findings is the fact that many professors in theatre and drama departments in the United States and Canada wear several hats. It is not uncommon for a professor to be responsible for teaching theatre history, acting, directing, and an occasional dramatic literature class. Thirty-five percent of my respondents (72 people) said that theatre history, theory, and criticism constitute their primary teaching area.

But 58 percent (109 people) said they used plays in translation in a theatre history class. In other words, people whose mandate and research area is *not* history/theory/criticism are teaching history and selecting translations for such courses. (Only 25% [51] said that their primary teaching area was dramatic literature and dramaturgy, or literature including drama.) Not surprisingly, many theatre professors are adept at intellectual and aesthetic code-switching, which is to say that they might privilege immediacy in the acting class and a kind of precision that honors the esoteric in the literature class, especially when teaching dramatic literature in a language they have studied. Also, some instructors inherit course plans and syllabi—including choices of translations—that they are happy to perpetuate if these are in areas that fall outside their own research or creative specialties. Accordingly, some are unaware of the insights they have been handed, and others are unaware of the stodginess or errors they perpetuate.

Since I have pointed out that my respondents, though representing a small number of all North American drama professors, also form an important cohort, I want to flesh out the picture of the population who took the survey. The greatest number of respondents has been teaching for 7–15 years (36%). Thirteen percent have been teaching for 15–20 years, and 25% for more than 20 years. Thus, 74% of respondents have at least seven years of experience, but most have more. Fifty-four percent are associate or full professors. Almost 32% teach in universities that grant a doctorate in their home department (i.e., theatre, performance studies, or English). Nearly 91% are in departments that give a B.A. (21% offer the more praxis-focused B.F.A., with overlap), and 38% offer an M.A., whereas only 27% offer the M.F.A. (again with overlap), which in the United States is a terminal degree and is adequate preparation for tenure-line teaching in a research university. In other words, respondents come from schools that present plays and offer praxis classes but that institutionally favor academically focused degrees. Although this may not match the profile of some of the schools where some theatre or drama is taught (e.g., community colleges), it paints a clear picture of where most theatre and drama professors are trained.

The academic qualification of the respondents meshes with the institutional makeup just discussed: 73% hold a Ph.D. and 27% hold an M.F.A. If their terminal degrees make it clear how professors acquire their credentials, their undergraduate preparation adds questions to the mix. Only 4% earned B.F.A.'s, whereas 69% earned a B.A.⁹ It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the educational trajectories of survey respondents, but clearly most of the artists began in academic programs, and very few began as professional-track performers or designers in praxis-focused programs.

Given that most of the professors who took the survey are products of U.S. universities, what do they know about other languages and translation? Of the people who answered the survey,¹⁰ 38 percent said they were fluent in another language, and 73 percent said they had a passing reading ability in another language—a skill set I defined as “well short of fluency” but described as “you could handle a newspaper article or pick your way through a play but . . . you would probably want a dictionary and . . . it might be slow going.”¹¹ Such a person, I thought, would not be likely to *work as* a translator but would be sensitive to

the choices *made by* translators and would have a sense of how languages are not just squiggle codes on paper but embodied, evolving packages of communication with aural and physical components.¹² That said, 59 respondents (29%) had fully translated at least one full-length play, and eighteen of these people (just under 9%) had translated five or more plays. Most encouraging of all, to me, is that of those who reported fluency in another language, 83 percent said they did not grow up speaking the second language but had learned it in school or in residence abroad. In other words, North Americans who pursue work in theatre and spent their childhoods speaking only one language need not end up that way. If American professors can do it, then some American students can, too, at least in theory.

Here, though, it is worth considering how American theatre students are and are not like their American professors, which may say something about how professors approach translation. A majority of my respondents (56%) are female. The rank with the most respondents is associate professor (31%), and 38 percent of respondents have been teaching fifteen years or more. The foreign language in which most are either fluent or have a passing reading ability is French, and the category in which most identify themselves as specialists is history/theory/criticism. The emerging picture of the aggregate professor who answered the survey shows a woman at least a full generation older than her students who is accomplished in a language (French) that is no longer the foreign language of choice for most college students. (It is now Spanish by just about 4 to 1. One has to go back at least to 1965 to find a year when more college students were studying French than Spanish.)¹³ Slightly fewer than half the respondents said that their classes are 90% monolingual/English; nearly a quarter said that 10–25% of their students are bilingual in English and a number of other languages; 12% said their classrooms are 10–25% bilingual in English and Spanish. An additional 6.3% said that 25–50% of their students were bilingual, and 7.4% said that more than half their undergraduates were bilingual.

Although I have no reason to doubt the honesty of my respondents, it is worth pointing out that what they see in their classrooms does not reflect the numbers of speakers of foreign languages across the United States. A 2010 study issued by the U.S. Census Bureau shows that in 2007 more than 55 million residents of the United States, or roughly 20 percent of the population counted (just under 281 million), spoke another language at home; for close to 35 million (12.5%) that language is Spanish (or Spanish creole).¹⁴ The drop-off after that is precipitous for any single language: 2.5 million Chinese speakers and 1.9 million speakers of French or Cajun. These data do not negate the value of French (or Russian or German or Italian) for theatre studies. They may, however, indicate a disconnect between professors' academic preparation and the world of their students. They also say little about distribution across languages or cultures in the era of world theatre. The most important disparity between demographic data from the census and the casual observations of my respondents is that a far higher percentage of bilingual citizens show up in a university setting than in the population at large—although “at large” flattens out the actuality in many given localities, and lived life is nothing if not local.

Within this landscape then, what do theatre professors do with and about translation? One thing they do *not* do very much is assign readings about translation theory or methodology. Sixty-six percent said they did not assign any such readings; 26 percent do so in dramaturgy or special topics classes. Only 7.6 percent said that they do so in a dramatic literature class. Translation as a topic is reserved for specialists in the university theatre world. Professors, do, however, assign great numbers of plays in translation. Theatre history instructors typically assign ten or more plays in a single semester (49.4% of those who answered this question checked this box); one respondent who teaches a graduate seminar assigns 40–45 plays per semester. Those who pack all requisite theatre history into a one-semester course report that 50–75 percent of the plays they teach are in translation. For those who teach the first half of a two-semester theatre history sequence, 55 percent teach 7–12 plays, of which more than half are translations; 23 percent teach *more* than twelve plays in the semester, of which more than half are translations. Respondents report teaching slightly fewer plays and slightly fewer plays in translation in the second half of a two-semester sequence. Thus, a representative year in a two-semester theatre history sequence includes nineteen or twenty plays, nine or ten in translation, and yet no readings about translation.¹⁵

How professors select translations is perhaps at the heart of the issue of drama in translation, as any choice is already a pedagogical maneuver. The survey asked how professors selected translations in academic classes and how they selected them in praxis classes. The greatest number—39 percent (69 people)—of those who use plays in translation in academic classes said they select each translation individually. However, a larger number uses an anthology in some way, either alone or in conjunction with single scripts.¹⁶ As one respondent succinctly put it: “Lecture = anthology; Seminars = individual translations.” Another respondent noted the obvious reason for this in theatre history classes: the “sheer volume” of plays to cover. Two respondents noted pragmatically that an anthology could be used in several theatre classes.

Respondents favored two anthologies in particular. The first choice was *The Norton Anthology of Drama*, edited by J. Ellen Gainor, Stanton Garner, and Martin Puchner, which debuted in 2009 in two volumes then selling together for \$83 and now retailing for \$106.25. The second choice in theatre history classes was the *Wadsworth Anthology of Drama*, revised edition, edited by W. B. Worthen, listed in 2013 for \$160.95. In introduction to theatre classes, a variety of other choices shared second place, followed by the *Wadsworth* anthology in third place. A clear majority of respondents (60% in introduction to theatre classes, 61.6% in theatre history classes, and 64% in literature classes) indicated that the primary reason for their choice was the plays included, not the particular translations.

Professors who teach praxis classes responded quite differently. Of the 89 who said they used plays in translation in acting, directing, or design classes, 67.4 percent said they selected individual translations. Only 5 percent use an anthology. The strong preference for choosing individual translations in praxis classes may be based on economics. Why spend \$106 or \$161 for an anthology if your students will be designing just three plays, or if those in scene study will

all be using different plays, or if you teach directing and use comparative translations to help budding directors develop skills in making selections?

Most likely, though, if the panels at the 2010 American Literary Translators Association conference (which was devoted to drama) are any indication, practitioners focus on what speaks emotionally and with immediacy to their target audiences. As one respondent wrote, "The majority of published translations are not translations for performance, which it makes it difficult for MFA students to see their real potential." A translation-sensitive praxis respondent described his method as follows: "I've directed university productions of foreign plays in translation. I always read as many translations as possible but rarely use one translation without making changes. For a production of Chekhov's *Seagull*, I set aside 5 translations and had the actors read each and cobble together their own lines with the charge that they choose the most colorful and possibly difficult language."¹⁷ Copyright was not mentioned.

I have not yet addressed the place of contemporary plays in translation in the North American theatre classroom. One survey respondent commented, "I am appalled at how few American theatres produce plays in translation, other than the 'classics.' European theatres produce new American drama frequently." It makes sense that U.S. postsecondary theatre programs that purport to serve the commercial or the not-for-profit mainstream theatre would teach from anthologies offering selections from the Greeks, the Golden Age of Spain, the French neoclassicists, and the European modernists, as these are among the most likely to be produced from the non-Anglophone canon. The areas where anthologies change the most is, understandably, in their offerings of plays from the contemporary world canon. Selections are replaced as new pieces become "hot" and others become "dated." Here professors can and do also make selections based on their own biases, assigning their own translations or leaning heavily on drama from countries whose language and theatre they know and where they can confidently discuss comparative translations. The fact that plays are frequently published only after they have been produced means that industry choices determine to some extent what is available for classroom use.

When the first part of the survey was complete, I saw a landscape in which drama in translation is everywhere but theory about it is patchily deployed, and translation is approached one way by professor-practitioners and another by scholars. It is territory where preferences are often clear but expertise is limited. I was not certain how theatre studies as a discipline perceived the shared stakes in being a community of translation users with multiple agendas.

POSITIONS AND PRIORITIES/COMMITMENTS AND CONUNDRUMS

The twenty-four people who answered my detailed follow-up questions do not fit easily into any single category in terms of translation as a pedagogical concern. A newly minted Ph.D. wrote, "I'm not sure I ever thought about whether something was a good translation."¹⁸ At the opposite end of the spectrum, a senior professor in a major research university wrote, "In seminars . . . we compare translations to the original language and recommend some over others. In addition we

have held a separate seminar in ‘Translation’ in the past ten years and an on-going [*sic*] one on ‘Adaptation,’ which deals with the issue.”

Although this suggests a continuum from “barely aware” to “vigilantly concerned,” the reality is that all respondents showed concern; their concerns, however, reflect differences in teaching assignments, student bodies, training, institutional identities, and whether their primary affiliation is with scholarship or with production. This variety has a downside for the field of theatre and drama pedagogy: the responses indicate areas of shared concern that heretofore have arisen only sporadically and are not being discussed across the discipline.

The open-ended questions I posed covered four areas: (1) the degree to which translation is understood as mediatization and as a ubiquitous presence in our field; (2) the debate over “domesticating” versus “foreignizing” (i.e., should we choose translations for their accessibility or for some notion of “accuracy?”);¹⁹ (3) the paucity of translations of *new* plays from around the world; and (4) any other observations the respondent would like to make.

A majority of respondents clearly felt that North American education, culture, and students were responsible for monolingualism and indifference to translation as an issue, although a few implicated themselves as sharing responsibility.²⁰ One assistant professor wrote that our failure to address translation as a topic even as we are awash in it is perhaps “reflective of our own field’s lack of priority on language learning.” Another assistant professor at a Midwestern university with expertise in medieval drama observed, regarding his department:

[S]tudy-abroad opportunities have to be in English-speaking countries that aren’t too “scary” ... in large part because the students have virtually no foreign-language skills. Despite foreign language “requirements” in most gen ed curriculums, students just have absolutely no direct experience with how a foreign language relates to culture, otherness, thinking patterns, values, etc., so any discussion of translation is kind of like explaining the technology behind the telephone to people from the tenth century.

Two respondents noted that at the undergraduate level, mostly “we’re covering the basic transactions of drama,” as dramatic analysis classes include freshmen who sometimes “do not have the reading skills necessary to satisfactorily achieve even a basic reading of a play text.”²¹ Thus, monolingualism goes hand in hand with xenophobia and a lack of even rudimentary skills (for some) in assessing literature at the structural level. Translation phobia (or unawareness) does not exist in a vacuum. But the professors who decry illiteracy and monolingualism are from the cohort that estimates that more than 50 percent of their students are bilingual. The issue may be ability with literature rather than ability to speak—possibly an unarticulated subtext in many of the answers.

Respondents had differing ideas about how best to get students engaged with plays in translation. Oliver Mayer, an associate professor at the University of Southern California School of Theatre, unabashedly tends “to choose the translations that try to express a strong feeling taken from the original and translated into our immediate present; I find that the feeling is more important than the

historical reference or loyalty to . . . writing construction that might be awkward in English.” Ian Andrew MacDonald’s position is almost diametrically opposed to this privileging of feeling. MacDonald, an assistant professor of French at Dickinson College, sees questions about translations of world theatre into English as *ethical* questions with “cultural contexts . . . just one piece of a complex web of concerns that directly influences understanding, reception and performance. In the United States our students rarely are forced to confront questions of intercultural complexity, and theatre can be a place where they encounter it.”

Respondents who were firm about holding the line on language requirements admitted directly or indirectly that they were looking to the past. To some extent, these respondents believe that some level of skill in major Western languages is falling by the wayside and is sorely missed. For respondents in this category, although ability in Asian languages or other languages that are less connected to the canon included in most drama anthologies is an excellent add-on, it is largely just that. The issue of translation as a programwide pedagogical question, regardless of the particular languages concerned, takes a back seat to the perception that some languages are important and a kind of panic surrounding the disappearing competency in other languages. A senior professor with skills in French, German, Russian, Greek, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Swedish, Polish, and Yiddish gracefully side-stepped a follow-up question about the challenges of teaching a play translated from a language whose writing system might be illegible to the professor. He replied that it had been years since he taught “large survey courses in which such plays might appear. . . . In a university of any size, there is always someone, in one’s own department or another, who can be consulted in such cases.” This professor was one of a few respondents over the age of seventy who know an impressive number of languages but whose thinking ran to all they could do with these skills rather than what they might think about doing with a broader canon and with a student body that is not destined to replicate their skill set. John Swain, an assistant professor at California State University Northridge who has expertise in Japanese theatre, pointed out what he called a Catch-22 concerning Asian languages:

For many non-Asianists in the U.S., the cultural leap across the Atlantic, even if it is from California . . . is easier than the cultural leap across the Pacific. A less-than-stellar translation of a Japanese or Chinese play, with rough instead of smooth dialogue, makes the leap to understanding more difficult than, for example, a Czech or Polish play.

Japanese and Chinese are hardly obscure languages. If this problem can be foregrounded with these languages, issues of how (if? when?) to use speakers of other languages in the classroom become especially pressing. Respondents rarely reported making use of the bilingual students in their undergraduate classes. Again, the difference between speaking a language at home and being able to parse drama in that language is sizable; but might an amateur guide be better than no guide at all?²²

Respondents were honest about their attachments to particular translations, even as they recognized a certain nostalgia in the context of newer developments. Kirsten Pullen, an associate professor of performance studies at Texas A&M asserts that “the translation we read first is the translation we read ‘best.’ My entire interpretation of *A Doll House* is based on the translation I read as an undergraduate: the three couples in *Doll House* are a working through of the Hegelian dialectic, with Mrs. Linde and Krogstad as the synthesis couple.” When she later taught the play in a different translation, using an anthology she had selected for its breadth and its inclusion of Canadian plays, she “was surprised and rather dismayed to find that this translation offered much less evidence for my interpretation—and it was a matter of a few words of dialogue in a just a few scenes.” This professor understood her first translation as “true” and transparent because it was the one that imprinted the play in her consciousness.

My second question generated the most lively and impassioned answers. Numerous respondents cited production possibilities as being foremost in students’ minds. They also noted what John Fletcher, an assistant professor at Louisiana State University, labeled “considerable resistance to reading unfamiliar works.”²³ One associate professor of Theatre and Performance Studies at an urban research university on the East Coast acknowledged the need for both approaches (“literal” and “accessible”) but went on to note (emphasis hers):

We can often tell if it is a good translation *for us*: not necessarily of the play (there we have to be rigorous in knowing/studying the text in original language), but rather for the audience. WE can tell if something speaks to a contemporary audience and seems to awaken or chart some ideas, characters, language structures, that are not “of our here and now.” . . . That is an area where artists and likely teachers can judge, without acknowledging the distinction.

This respondent glosses over the impossibility of “knowing/studying” all texts in their original languages to jump to the idea that artists (whose skill sets and skill levels are undefined) “can judge” efficacy in the present. She was one of many respondents who drew on this idea.

Not surprisingly, though, respondents do not agree on exactly which translations satisfy the goals of produceability and immediacy. Adam Versényi, a professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a translator and the editor of an online translation journal, believes that “every play needs to be translated at least every twenty years, if not sooner.” But respondents have differing ideas of which ones speak persuasively and which are out of date. Lofton Durham, assistant professor at Western Michigan University, believes that Richard Wilbur’s translations of Molière are prime examples of “dated vernacular” masquerading as timelessness, “crowding out the needed updating to keep . . . relevant for audiences.” Fletcher, on the other hand, noted that rhymed couplets in English “rarely work well” but cites Wilbur’s Molière translations as “an exception.” Kathleen Dimmick, who teaches at Bennington College, wrote that “the more scholarly translations—like the Univ. of Chicago series or the Fitts/Lattimore—while

often stiff, at least carry some sense of weight and depth. . . . But . . . for the director or the acting teacher, speakability will trump scholarly authority every time.” For her 2009 production of *The Trojan Women* at Texas A&M University, Kirsten Pullen combined translations by the long-dead Lattimore, the longer-dead Edith Hamilton, and éminence grise Nicholas Rudall. She emphatically stated:

I needed to find a translation that was live and immediate to an audience very unfamiliar with theatrical performance traditions (the A&M students are engineers, not artists);²⁴ that spoke to the site (the historic administration building, constructed to look like a Greek temple); and that featured really gorgeous language for the chorus (because I was excited to work with them vocally).

Is Lattimore “stiff” or “live and immediate”? Is Wilbur dated or exceptional? The point, obviously, is not to answer the question definitively but to have the critical vocabulary to discuss it.

Respondents were forthcoming about their own pedagogical strategies. I include three here, because they pointed to something I had not anticipated when I began my research, namely, generational differences in teaching about translation, even when two professors have similar degrees and are specialists in the same languages. Two specific classroom interventions come from John Fletcher. Fletcher introduces his students to the concept of WEIRDness drawn from Joseph Henrich, Steven Heine, and Ara Norenzayan’s “The Weirdest People in the World?”²⁵ He exploits these authors’ “meta-look at baselines of ‘normal’ in the behavioral sciences, observing that most of these ostensibly universal standards of ‘normal’ are in fact based on the norms of the (sub)group of US citizens most often recruited to participate in neurological studies: university undergraduates. Far from representing universal neurological and behavioral responses, this subgroup (not surprisingly) instead manifests the reactions of what the authors term WEIRD culture: Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic.”

Fletcher is then able to prod students to engage by asking, “Is the reading difficult because the *play* is weird . . . or because *you* are WEIRD? . . . WEIRD gives them permission to recognize a comprehension–comfort gap between themselves and the material while also defusing that gap’s ability to serve as an excuse . . . to dismiss it as just too strange/hard.” Fletcher’s other classroom exercise was part of a graduate seminar on Ancient Performance in which he asked all the students to learn the Greek alphabet:

Doing a crash course in Greek [is] hopefully sufficient enough to let them recognize and sound out go-to theatre words like *κάθαρσις* or *ἀμαρτία*. It also gives them a hint at just how complicated the idea of translating a play is or should be. I also hit them with a goodly number of Classics articles (you know, the kind with loads of untranslated original language stuff). . . . I wanted to avoid having them launch overly ambitious arguments/projects without recognizing just how deep and crowded the pool was.

Here the project was deliberately one of estrangement, but estrangement realized by testing the water rather than looking at it and saying it was too wet.

Compare this with one emeritus professor's work with Greek:

I always searched for these untranslatable words and, entering a lecture room, put them on the blackboard so that students would see that they were germane to my lectures. If, for example, I lectured on *The Bacchae*, I put the words *sparagmos*, *omophagia*, *orgia*, *ecstasy*, *entheos* on the board and was certain that explaining and using these terms and how 5th century audiences would understand them constituted an important part of my lecture. We looked at text noting where these words were used and how they contextualized the play.

This scholar's preference for lecturing and his focus on Greek bespeaks a different strategy from Fletcher's, where the focus is on estrangement as a concept and in which neither professor nor students are expected to be fluent in Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit but all are expected to tread with caution. One strategy privileges specific linguistic expertise, the other privileges methodology.

Contrasting the two above approaches to Greek plays points up a salient generational difference in pedagogy regarding translation. Virtually all respondents under age fifty favored a case-study method and were comfortable with the idea that breadth was less important than training students in methodologies via hands-on work.²⁶ One assistant professor envisioned a "redesign [of] the whole [departmental theatre history sequence] around more of a case-study/performance-task style course rather than a content-delivery course hybridized with a research methods course." At the senior end, one outspoken respondent pulled no punches:

So long as instructors, educators, professors are monolingual or have only the rudiments of one other language, they will remain culture-bound. Not only will they be incapable of conveying the subtleties of a text to their students, but they will transfer their own lack of interest in language. Tighter, more rigorous foreign-language requirements should be instituted for degrees in theatre, drama and performance studies.²⁷

What, then, is at stake regarding translation in the North American Anglophone drama and theatre classroom?

FEASIBLE FUTURES

This is an article about pedagogy and institutionalism, not about translation theory. Nonetheless, I think it is important to put my findings into conversation with a small sampling of the most salient topoi in present-day translation studies. The two most frequently occurring concerns are invisibility (translators are under-employed and often uncredited) and importance (translations are our lifelines and windows on the world). Lawrence Venuti, arguably the dean of present-day translation theorists, problematizes the dichotomy of "accuracy" versus "the sense of it"

that I offered my respondents, criticizing both “domesticating” and “foreignizing” practices as encouraging complacency.²⁸ Domestication, whose goal is “transparency” (make it seem natural, everyday, immediate) renders the cultural other as recognizable and familiar; foreignization (show it to be old, other, distant) is “a strategic construction whose value is contingent on the current situation in the receiving culture.” The strategy works not by resorting to an “original” (whose context is unrecoverable) but “only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the translating language” to generate a sense of long ago, far away, elegant, archaic, poetic, or whatever else the translator seeks to foreground.²⁹ Choices of, say, lofty poetry in translations of Greek tragedy have less to do with “what was there” or “what it was like” than with the desire for an experience labeled “classical Greek” constructed in terms of modern North American fantasies and desires. For Venuti, this constitutes “ethnocentric violence.”³⁰ He eschews appeals to any “original,” as even notions of fidelity are historically determined. Rather, he argues for a “symptomatic reading . . . a historicist approach to the study of translations that aims to situate canons of accuracy in their specific cultural moment” and favors a genealogical historiography (of translation, among other things) that abandons teleology and objectivity in order to make clear that “transparency” is its own false consciousness.³¹

A gentler and perhaps more user-friendly plea for supporting translation as an endeavor in need of attention (and better remuneration) comes from Edith Grossman. Her overarching argument in *Why Translation Matters* is simply that without it, even those of us who may know as many as ten languages would still be doomed to reading just a fraction of the world’s literary glories. Grossman makes clear—as do many theatre/drama translators—that

a translator’s fidelity is not to lexical pairings but to context—the implications and echoes of the first author’s tone, intention, and level of discourse. . . . Words *mean* as indispensable parts of a contextual whole that includes the emotional tone and impact, the literary antecedents, the connotative nimbus as well as the denotations of each statement.³²

Context looms large in nearly all writing on translation and is frequently the thing said to be “lost” in the translation process.³³ This is so even as, in David Wiles’s words, “the source culture that we seek to honor is always some sort of fabrication.”³⁴ Theatre history and translation, then, go hand in hand in theatre studies, although one of them is sometimes dragged along by the other, and theatre history generally enjoys curricular pride of place. My respondents grappled with context one way or another, even when acknowledging the difficulties of accessing an original and allowing the receiving context to trump the source.

What might Anglophone theatre and drama studies do to develop knowledge about the translations that are everywhere? This subject needs to gain visibility in introductory texts, anthologies, and curricula so that it becomes part of our collective thinking rather than the special terrain of translators or literary scholars. My suggestions below are responses to five key areas of concern that showed up repeatedly in my respondents’ observations: monolingualism; provincialism/xenophobia/limited

ability with literary studies; available time in the classroom; letting go of favorites; and recognition that there are multiple routes to immediacy and efficacy.

Collectively, then, we might aim for intervention in three areas: incorporating pedagogy about translation in theatre studies classes, working proactively with anthologies, and embracing digital tools. In each area, every professor can do things to bring translation to greater prominence.

CLASSROOM INTERVENTIONS

1: Add Pedagogy about Translation

I offer seven suggested readings—one or two for each of three levels of classes in which translation may be either invisible or addressed in an ad hoc manner. These suggestions are not meant to be definitive; they are meant to prime the pump in a manageable way. The goal is to get some shared vocabulary in circulation from the start of a student's career, making clear that translation is not transparent, not timeless, and not always easy—to read or to do—but is essential to the endeavors of theatre studies. Ideally, a student who is introduced to these concepts early in his or her academic career will be imprinted with a mind-set that will prevent translation from ever being invisible or taken for granted again. That same student will be ready for nuanced theory about the subject when and if s/he undertakes graduate study or work in the professional theatre.

1. In the general education/introductory class, Sharon Begley's "What's Really Human? The Trouble with Student Guinea Pigs" is useful for introducing the aforementioned concept of WEIRD. This 400-word piece in *Newsweek* is available online.³⁵
2. Graham Ley's unit on translation in his *Short Introduction to the Ancient Greek Theater* is just over ten pages long, offers nine translations (written between 1777 and 1981) of the opening lines of *Agamemnon*, and is very useful for theatre history survey classes and undergraduate classes in dramatic literature.³⁶
3. Paul Woodruff's highly readable "Justice in Translation: Rendering Ancient Greek Tragedy" has short, clear sections on specific topics related to translation, such as "Polysemy and Etymology" (about 250 words) and "Translating for Performance" (roughly 400 words).³⁷ It has the distinction of being written by an author who is both a much-published scholar (Philosophy) and a frequently employed translator for the professional theatre (the Aquila Company). Woodruff deftly bundles issues of structure with issues of translation, and his conceptual thinking is of service well beyond the Greek classics.
4. Another highly readable piece that offers usable vocabulary while provoking thought is David Damrosch's chapter "Reading in Translation." Among other things, the chapter features an extended conversation on foreignization and offers pragmatic comfort to those of us who do not

know ten (or two) languages: “Even if we can’t read the source language ourselves, we can use translations to triangulate our way toward a better sense of the original than any one version can give us on its own.”³⁸

5. The ten short position statements in the special 2007 translation issue of *Theatre Journal* (ed. Jean Graham-Jones) are fun, varied, and guaranteed to generate discussion.³⁹
6. At a more advanced level (senior undergraduate seminar or graduate class), Venuti’s “Invisibility,” the opening chapter in *The Translator’s Invisibility*, lays out the contemporary terrain and throws down both the historicizing and the deconstructive gauntlets.⁴⁰ It is not for the faint of heart, but it is irreplaceable, with eyes wide open and vocabulary in place.
7. Finally, for advanced studies in which both internationalism and the idea of discourse as encompassing more than only written languages are incorporated, Clem Robyns’s “Translation and Discursive Identity” is a bracing treasure trove.⁴¹ Robyns’s engagement with defensive and integrative strategies offers rich possibilities for extending discussions of translation from those that address the page to those addressing stage and screen, with their attendant languages, idioms, and dialects.

2: Use Anthologies Productively

Neither implicit trust nor outright dismissal is a sufficient response to the ubiquity of anthologies in our curricula. I offer small interventionist strategies, some of which professors can implement on their own and all of which could be addressed in future editions of the major collections. First, make translators a visible presence. Not all the major anthologies do this. Bedford/St. Martin’s *Stages of Drama* and volume 1 of *The Broadview Anthology of Drama* include translators’ names on the table of contents pages, making it clear to the most casual of browsers that translation is in play.⁴² The *Wadsworth Anthology of Drama* names the translator at the start of each play, situating his or her name below that of the playwright and in a different typeface. *The Norton Anthology of Drama* puts translators’ names in a footnote on the page on which the play starts.⁴³ Instructors who use anthologies that do not include translators’ names in the table of contents might consider asking students to spend an hour finding the names of all the translators in their anthology and writing these in on the pages of the table of contents. If students do not wish to mark up books they plan to resell, instructors might digitize and make available these five or eight pages for students to download for the purpose of this exercise.

Most anthologies include photos of recent productions of the plays they print. Although the photo credits usually include the name of the photographer and the theatre where the production was presented and identify the director and sometimes actors, I have never seen one include the name of the translator for the production. Not doing so can easily leave the impression that a snazzy, accessible-looking production used the translation provided in the anthology, which is sometimes old, not necessarily gripping for WEIRD readers, and was

possibly rejected by the artistic team of the very production in the accompanying photo.

Might anthologies acknowledge how and why their translations were selected? *The Norton Anthology* features informed, informative, and highly engaging introductions to each of its plays. Martin Puchner's introduction to *Oedipus*, for instance, touches not only on theme and context but also discusses language (Puchner reads Greek) and later versions of the same source material. Nowhere, however, do we learn why Robert Fagles's is the translation of choice. Invoking cost should not be off limits. There is no facet of theatre—or of the academy, for that matter—that is not in some way linked to finances, and theatre students learn early on about budgets. If Fagles is the most desirable of the affordable, tell why. This is obviously a question for editors and not for readers/users. It is, however, a question whose answers would be valuable in future editions.

3: *Embrace Digital Tools*

Students can uncover many clues to what authors in other languages include in their dramaturgy by using such simple digital tools as searching for repetition. How many times does the word translated as “justice” appear in *The Oresteia*? If the number of times this word appears in Greek does not match the number of times it appears in English, then a translator has made choices about a word with multiple possible meanings, exploiting precisely this multiplicity. This sort of endeavor is useful for finding instances of rhymed endings, favorite phrases or words unique to individual characters, and tropes that appear in the mouths of many characters, indicating an authorial identity. Whether and how these show up in translation are things that anyone who knows how to use “find” or “search” and who has a little patience and curiosity can investigate. The goal is not to understand precisely what a translator did in relation to a source text but rather to recognize that s/he did *something*.⁴⁴

If North American Anglophone readers are an 800-pound gorilla in the translation room, I want to conclude by naming that gorilla as a smart, trainable, and curious species of the genus *Reader*. At worst it needs its eyes opened, but at best, if my survey is any indication, it is a creature that appreciates what David Damrosch offers:

Looking through the refracting lens of translation, we can best see the world it bodies forth if we attend to the translators' strategies as they seek to mind—and mend—the gap between then and now, here and there, another language and our own. As we become aware of the inevitable trade-offs that all translators must make, we can also appreciate their creativity as they build upon their predecessors and make a work anew.⁴⁵

Translation studies is poised to influence theatre studies in a manner analogous to the way that performance studies has influenced drama studies. The ubiquity of translation in the theatre classroom makes its hegemony clear. Its relative invisibility should be a wake-up call. My survey showed that professors are

interested and invested, but they do not seem to share concerns, strategies, or even vocabulary across the curriculum. Since most people who are destined for teaching theatre and drama seem to start in academic programs, why not think about starting there to equip them better from the very outset of their studies? And since all students now live in a world in which travel, study abroad, globalization, and “world theatre” are the new normal, doesn’t theatre studies owe it to them to give translation a spotlight of its own?

ENDNOTES

1. There are more than four thousand colleges and universities in the United States, of which 59.8 percent are four-year undergraduate schools or universities and the other 40.2 percent are two-year schools. “College Enrollment Statistics,” <http://www.statisticbrain.com/college-enrollment-statistics/>, accessed 19 June, 2013. One Web site’s data indicates 367 programs in theatre or drama in four-year schools, which include both undergraduate-only schools and those that give graduate degrees. “Drama and Theatre Schools/Programs in the United States,” www.univsource.com/thea.htm, accessed 24 July 2011.

2. Kurt Taroff reminds us “that no other branch of literature is studied in translation without attention to the translation itself as a form of mediation.” See “Whose Play Is It Anyway?: Theatre Studies, Translation Studies, and Translation for the Stage,” *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance* 4.3 (2011): 241–54, at 241. Survey Respondent no. 27 wrote, “As a theatre historian with a post in an English department, I was, in my first few years, continually surprised by the lack of use of texts in translation in the department—and indeed with the curricular restrictions against using texts that were not originally written in English. I agree with the premise in your introductory email that ‘globalization is . . . a default setting’ for theatre professors, and I never recognized exactly how default it was for me until I started trying to teach these courses and realized that I don’t think in terms of national boundaries or languages.”

3. Laurence Senelick, e-mail to author, 29 April 2012.

4. The October 2007 issue of *Theatre Journal* (59.3), edited by Jean Graham-Jones, was a special issue on translation and featured a forum entitled “What’s at Stake in Theatrical Translation?” I refer to some of the contributions—all articulate and deliciously varied—later in this article, but it is important to note that the pieces deal almost exclusively with the work of the translator, not the reader, the teacher, or the academy writ large. This is not a criticism; it is a reminder that my project here is pedagogical and institutional.

5. As I explain later, there was a category in the survey for respondents to indicate an ability to read with the help of a dictionary or to communicate in a rudimentary way in a second language. At this juncture I am calling those respondents monolingual, but clearly I am cheating a bit. Such a person would be able to tell you what was in the headlines or order in a restaurant in a second language but would not be able to eavesdrop across accents or be your advocate with a doctor. As with so much else in translation, there are gray areas. Jean Graham-Jones has observed that, for her, fluency requires complete ability to be immersed in the idioms and slang of the moment, not merely excellent reading ability and great skill with vocabulary and grammar (personal communication, 26 July 2012). For a discussion supporting this stance, see Clifford E. Landers, *Literary Translation: A Practical Guide* (Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters, 2001). Landers argues that maintaining fluency requires constant visits to the culture of the language in question.

6. Typical response rates for surveys among “customers and members” can range from 5 to 40 percent. For the “general public” the range is 1–20 percent. “Typical Response Rates,” Practical Surveys Web site, www.practicalsurveys.com/respondents/typicalresponserates.php, accessed 30 May 2013.

7. Additionally, a few are retired or are currently without institutional affiliation.

8. Two teach in conservatories, four are retired, one is a librarian, and one teaches in a business college. A few are unemployed or list themselves as independent scholars.

9. An additional 4 percent reported that they had earned a B.S. degree. Since this leaves 23 percent unaccounted for, possibly some respondents simply noted the *highest* degree they held, although the question (which perhaps was poorly designed) asked them to check *all* degrees they held.

10. Not all respondents completed the full forty questions. Percentages for any datum are percentages of the number of people who answered that question. The number who completed the entire survey is 183.

11. Of the twenty-two people who checked “other” for reading ability, the language that appeared most frequently was Latin (6), followed by Greek (5). One respondent wrote in Swahili, one wrote in Malay, and one wrote in Inezeño Chumash. Of the thirteen who checked “other” for fluency, two spoke Portuguese and one Catalan, languages consistent with Spanish studies. A person who checked fluency in one language could also check the reading ability box for yet another language.

12. Indeed, one respondent wrote, “Stage languages (gesture, movement, design, etc.) also require translation from culture to culture and period to period. This too is an area that your research might address.”

13. The MLA Language Enrollment Database shows that in 2009, 216,419 students in postsecondary education were enrolled in French classes. Spanish classes had a total enrollment of 864,986. Nelly Furman, David Goldberg, and Natalia Lusin, “Enrollments in Languages Other than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2009” (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2010), 25 (tab. 5); online at www.mla.org/pdf/2009_enrollment_survey.pdf, accessed 30 May 2013. For the year our “average” respondent associate professor might have graduated from college (1983), 386,238 were enrolled in Spanish classes and 270,123 in French classes. Richard I. Brod and Monica S. Devens, “Foreign Language Enrollments in U.S. Institutions of Higher Education—Fall 1983,” *ADFL Bulletin* 16.2 (January): 57–63, at 62 (tab. 5).

14. See Hyon B. Shin and Robert A. Kominski, “Language Use in the United States: 2007,” U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Service Reports, April 2010, 6 (tab. 2), www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/ACS-12.pdf, accessed 9 May 2013.

15. I regret that I did not specify in the survey that respondents might state their opinion as to whether they regarded plays originally written in medieval English but read in modern English to be translations.

16. Thirty-one respondents (17.5%) reported that they use an anthology exclusively; fifty-four (30.5%) reported that they use an anthology plus a few individually selected plays.

17. This person was one of six (3%) who preferred not to state their sex, so my use of “his” is arbitrary.

18. All quotes are from a follow-up questionnaire distributed electronically in May 2012 to the sixty-three respondents to the survey who agreed to be contacted with more detailed questions. Of the twenty-four who sent answers to the questions, all but two agreed to the use of their names. Nonetheless, I have decided in several instances to use no names where I think the information—albeit freely provided—might in any way embarrass the respondent. Professional ranks are those at the time the respondent answered the survey.

19. Some version of this putative standoff ghosts most writing on translation, but the source I will use—one that brings the debate into focus both clearly and with regard to what it overlooks—is Lawrence Venuti’s introductory chapter in *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2d ed. (London: Routledge, 2008). These are his preferred terms. It is also important to note that Venuti sees foreignizing not as more “accurate” but as more estranging for the target readership.

20. For the follow-up survey, a single Canadian citizen responded, but she teaches at a U.S. university.

21. Kathleen Dimmick (Bennington College, VT); John O’Connor (Fairmont State University, WV).

22. James Brandon, Professor of Theatre and Speech at Hillsdale College in Michigan, reports that students who have studied a foreign language “become valued ‘experts’ in the classroom

What Are You Surveying?

discussion.” Brandon allows students to select their own translations, suggesting an approach that privileges discussion and comparison from the outset.

23. One retiree was quite direct: “Greek drama is rhetorical and poetic. Young folks today cannot abide either”—taking responsibility, though, by adding, “you simply have to put the mother source into an understandable context for the students. Nobody is going to learn much about Philoctetes without some understanding of ancient Greek society, mythology, philosophy, theatrical style. . . . Why is that guy abandoned out there?” The need for an “understandable context” is hardly unique to theatre in arts and humanities studies.

24. Those who characterize a student body as one thing and not another sometimes ignore the students in their own classes. Clearly *some* students—her actors—were going to speak the “gorgeous language” that so appeals to Pullen.

25. Joseph Henrich, Steven J. Heine, and Ara Norenzayan, “The Weirdest People in the World?” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 33 (2010): 61–135.

26. This is not a hard-and-fast division, of course. Anne-Charlotte Harvey, professor emerita from the University of California, San Diego, wrote that “all aspects of the translation process should be presented. Those aspects cannot be studied without the ‘special interest’ or ‘case study methods.’ . . . The nitty-gritty, the hands-on that the students will remember and, one hopes, learn from.” And this does not mean that the senior scholars who responded with generosity and detail do not and did not do case studies.

27. Although beyond the scope of this essay, one element that figures in attitude toward learning languages is American educators’ long-standing tradition of valuing bilingualism when it is the product of literary study yet showing some dismay about immigrants who learn English but never become mainstream or “educated” or sophisticated.

28. Venuti.

29. *Ibid.*, 15.

30. *Ibid.*, 16.

31. *Ibid.*, 32.

32. Edith Grossman, *Why Translation Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 71.

33. Among those who argue most eloquently and beautifully for the importance of understanding context are J. Michael Walton, *Found in Translation: Greek Drama in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Michael Ewans, “Aischylos: For Actors, in the Round,” in *The Art of Translation: Voices from the Field*, ed. Rosanna Warren (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 120–39.

34. David Wiles, “Translating Greek Theatre,” in “What’s at Stake in Theatrical Translation? A Forum,” ed. Jean Graham-Jones, special issue, *Theatre Journal* 59.3 (2007): 363–6, at 365.

35. Sharon Begley, “What’s Really Human? The Trouble with Student Guinea Pigs,” *Newsweek* 156.5 (2 August, 2010):30, www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2010/07/23/what-s-really-human.html, accessed 13 July 2012.

36. Graham Ley, *A Short Introduction to the Ancient Greek Theater*, Revised Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 82–92.

37. Paul Woodruff, “Justice in Translation: Rendering Ancient Greek Tragedy,” in *A Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. Justina Gregory (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 490–504.

38. David Damrosch, *How to Read World Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), 65–85, at 71.

39. *Theatre Journal* 59.3 (2007); cf. n. 35.

40. Venuti, 1–34.

41. Clem Robyns, “Translation and Discursive Identity,” *Poetics Today* 15.3 (1994): 405–28.

42. Carl H. Klaus, Miriam Gilbert, and Bradford S. Field Jr., *Stages of Drama: Classical to Contemporary Theatre*, 4th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1999); Craig S. Walker and Jennifer Wise, eds., *The Broadview Anthology of Drama*, vol. 1: *From Antiquity through the Eighteenth Century* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2003).

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43. I thank Sara Warner for pointing out to me that this mode of crediting translators is a Norton house policy and therefore is not the decision of the drama anthology's editors and may not necessarily even be to their liking.

44. I acknowledge that this project is likely to be doable only in languages where Anglophone students can read that language's alphabet. For example, Italian, Hungarian, or even Turkish would be easy enough. Greek or Russian would be more difficult but probably manageable. Arabic and Hebrew might require too steep a learning curve, and languages with thousands of symbols—such as Japanese—would likely take far too much time. I thank Curtis Bauer for sharing with me an assignment he uses in creative writing classes in which students use the linear, syllabic, and rhyme schema of a poem in a language they do not understand as a template for writing a poem of their own in English. Bauer reports that this is usually the students' favorite assignment.

45. Damrosch, 84–5.