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## The Paramount Role of Translation in Modern Opera Productions

# ABSTRACT

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Opera is undoubtedly a particularly high and traditional genre of art, but recently there have been numerous attempts at breaking this stereotype and presenting opera in a contemporary light. The most popular way of achieving this aim is either staging modernized opera productions, i.e. transferring their plot from their traditional setting to the here and now, or considerably changing their interpretation. Staging modernized productions involves, first of all, the issue of stage design, and an alteration in the traditional interpretation is mostly created by acting, but nowadays it is also the translation shown in the form of surtitles that creates the significance of operatic productions.

**Keywords:** opera, libretto, translation, surtitles, visibility.

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The importance of operatic translation is very rarely recognized, but in a number of non-standard productions it is one of the most essential elements. Lawrence Venuti claims that translators and translations are still too invisible, but contemporary surtitlers definitely do not cease to improve upon their work's visibility. Depending on the operatic director's concept, the surtitles may either slightly shape the interpretation of the production, or diverge considerably from the original libretto sung by the singers. In such extreme cases these translations are usually adjusted to the action taking place on the stage, and they are a vivid example of rewriting. Subsequently, they may be considered as manipulative, but it is also true that in today postmodernist operatic theatre they are the most significant element that binds together the original libretto and modern concept of the director.

Translation has been connected with opera from the very beginning of the genre, and throughout the centuries, answering the needs and wishes of the audiences, it has adopted different methods and trends. Nowadays the vast majority of opera houses provides their audiences with libretti translation in the form of surtitles. The very term *surtitles* describes the translated text, which, contrary to subtitles shown at the bottom of the television or cinema screen, is displayed on an electronic screen above the stage. This type of translation is very popular among the audiences, who do not hesitate to express their dissatisfaction if opera houses fail to provide surtitles during the performances.

Regardless of the audiences' opinions, surtitles are still considered to be a mere addition to the performance. It is undoubtedly true that translation usually plays a secondary role in opera, as, first of all, it needs to guide the viewers smoothly through the performance. However, nowadays there are more and more opera productions that are either modernized, or considerably altered in interpretation. If they are to be successful and complete productions, they definitely need proper libretti translation. Drawing on Lawrence Venuti's concept of translators' visibility, I would like to argue that in modern operatic productions surtitles should play a dominant role and be a crucial element of creating a new modern interpretation.

At the beginning I would like to briefly present the trends in staging and translating opera, as modern opera productions and translations are the result of changing tendencies in operatic theatre. The craft of staging operas has always been significant for this genre because in opera the visual aspect is just as important as music and singing. The first treatise concerning the subject of stagecraft, *Il corago*, was written in Florence in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Created by an anonymous author writing from the point of view of a person supervising theatrical productions, it

contains a number of instructions and rules concerning staging and acting in opera (Savage 367). For a very long time, particularly at an opera première, it was the composer, who was one of those responsible for the staging; however, if the work was later staged in another theatre, the institution's musical director was most often appointed as the one in charge of the new production. His role strengthened considerably in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the next century witnessed the opera directors taking over the responsibility of staging new productions (Savage 389–90).

Whether rather conservative or more daring, up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century operatic productions used to follow the content of the libretti and its stage directions; but then everything changed. Some of the first operas which were staged as unprecedented extraordinary productions were the works of Richard Wagner. His operas are full of fantasy, symbolism and allegory, which is a good basis for reinterpretation and uncovering new meanings.

Interestingly, the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was also the point when the importance of the translation in opera increased. Up to that time the vast majority of operas were sung in Italian, as Italy was the most significant country for opera. If the non-Italian speaking audience wanted to understand exactly what was happening in the opera they were watching, they had to follow printed libretti during the performance, which was certainly impractical and it diverted their attention from the very performance.<sup>1</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries most operas were performed with their libretti sung in the language of the country where the production was staged; according to Lucile Desblache, there were two reasons for it: “the first was the emergence of strong national identities in Europe expressed in all artistic forms, including music; the second was the trend towards more realistic operas, less mythological texts . . .” (163). However, translating a libretto for singing brings with itself a number of problems and challenges, and the result was usually incomparable to the original. That is why opera houses started introducing surtitles invented by John Leberg and Lotfi Mansouri, who were respectively the technical and the general directors of the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto. The first opera performance with surtitles—*Elektra* by Richard Strauss—took place on October 21, 1983 in Toronto. However, it should be mentioned that live translation had already been known earlier in China, as at the beginning of the 1980s some of the Chinese opera houses used to show translation vertically next to the stage (Dubiski 208–09). Yet, before surtitles became popular and widely used, a great number of stage directors were strongly against them, claiming that

<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it was possible because, unlike today, until late 19<sup>th</sup> century theatre halls were illuminated throughout the whole performances (Desblache 162).

they spoil the special atmosphere of opera houses. James Levine, the artistic director of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, said that they would be introduced there only “over his dead body” (Tommasini). Nonetheless, he finally changed his mind, and the Metropolitan Opera’s seatback titles—*Met Titles*—were introduced in 1995 for a rehearsal of *Madama Butterfly* by Giacomo Puccini (Kozinn).

The emergence of surtitles coincided with the domination of opera revivals and it became obvious that if the production were to be successful, it would have to be absorbing both audibly and visually. Subsequently, to meet the audience’s wishes stage directors had to adjust the productions to the contemporary viewer. It is also evident that directors have become fascinated with the newest achievements of technology, and a great amount of sophisticated lighting, lasers, machinery and screens is frequently present on stage today. This has all led to various new interpretations and extraordinary or surprising staging.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has already witnessed many unusual and modernized opera productions and there are certainly a few reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, even more than in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the contemporary viewers have many ways of seeing a particular opera staged in different productions: they can go to an opera house, see a broadcast in the cinema or simply buy a DVD record. Therefore, opera directors and producers work towards creating productions that will draw attention of those who have already seen many productions of the same work. Moreover, in order to make a mark on their artistic work, numerous stage directors resort to applying more and more extraordinary ideas which will gain renown in the media and bring commercial success. Producing an opera is also undeniably very costly: providing the scenery, props and costumes for all the cast and choir of the opera which, for instance, is set originally in Antiquity or at an 18<sup>th</sup> century court usually proves to be highly expensive. Therefore, particularly in smaller opera houses which operate on tight budget, stage directors sometimes decide to modernize them and, in consequence, the performers may be dressed in contemporary clothes and the stage design is often considerably simplified. In addition, it is considerably easier to stage a modernized opera production than a traditional one. In order to produce a good production with original and traditional stage design, the director must possess great expertise in the epoch of the original setting: the costumes, interiors, customs or, for example, dances must all be in agreement with the epoch. However, even though the holistic approach to the performance is always significant, in case of staging a non-standard, i.e. modernized or reinterpreted, opera production, it is particularly necessary.

First of all, it needs to be emphasized that modernizing and altering interpretations should not depend only on acting and stage design, but also on translation. As I have stated in the introduction, nowadays almost all opera houses provide their audiences with surtitles displayed on a screen above the stage. Unfortunately, very often the quality of surtitles leaves a lot to be desired, simply because those translations tend to be too detailed. Translation shown in the form of surtitles should not be very faithful because operatic libretti tend to be highly complex: they are full of sophisticated words, flowery style and refined grammar constructions. The viewers should not be expected to focus on the surtitles too much (if they are unclear, the viewers often refuse to read them), so the language of the translation should be relatively simple. Repetitions of words or even whole passages of arias should not be included in translation, though sometimes it is useful to add some personal pronoun or a name in order to render the plot clear. According to Jonathan Burton, “the aim of surtitles is to convey the meaning of what is being sung, not necessarily the manner in which it is being sung” (62). It is important to remember that the audience comes to the opera house to see and listen to the performance rather than focus their whole attention on the surtitles.

In modernized opera productions the task of translation is quite complicated. Such productions very often differ considerably from the original staging and do not follow stage directions very closely, so the translators may either stay faithful to the text and produce a disharmony between the titles and the production, or they may adjust the text to the production, with the changes very often being substantial. Similarly in case of operatic productions the interpretation of which has been altered by the director. The clash between the action taking place on the stage and text shown on the screen above the stage would certainly be very confusing for the viewers.

It is interesting to notice, though, that sometimes the interpretation depends on translation rather than on acting. In such cases the surtitles may shape the meaning of a specific situation or character, and present them in a more favourable or disapproving way, different from the standard interpretation. David McVicar’s 2009 production of *Il Trovatore* by Giuseppe Verdi staged in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York is a good example here. The libretto and, consequently, the plot of this opera are famous for being highly complex and obscure; that is why directors sometimes attempt to shape the action. Sample 1 below presents Leonora’s cabaletta from act IV and the translation provided by the Metropolitan Opera House:

Sample 1

Original Italian libretto	Exact English translation (translation mine)	Translation provided by the opera house
LEONORA		
<p>Tu vedrai che amore in terra Mai del mio non fu più forte: Vinse il fato in aspra guerra, Vincerà la stessa morte.</p>	<p>You will see that the earth Has never witnessed love greater than mine. It defeated fate in a fierce war, It will overcome the very death.</p>	<p>You shall see that my devotion Is unmatched by any other.</p>
<p>O col prezzo di mia vita La tua vita salverò, O con te per sempre unita Nella tomba scenderò!</p>	<p>I will either save you At the cost of my life, Or I will descend to the tomb Eternally united with you!</p>	<p>I will risk my life to save you.  And we two shall live together Or unite at last in death!</p>

This cabaletta confirms that the libretto of *Il Trovatore* is indeed obscure and it is not free of violent imagery. The titles provided by the opera house change this concept considerably: in the original Leonora is convinced that she would die, and she imagines herself descending to the tomb. The translation, however, implies that there is the ray of hope: “And we two shall live together.” If that does not happen, she and her beloved will “unite at last in death,” which is certainly a much more romantic image, especially because it presents the lovers together. The translator also omitted three lines probably irrelevant for the production. This example proves that even without changing the acting, the interpretation may be shaped by the very surtitles.

Even though the translation above is not a faithful one, it does not diverge considerably from the original text and it is known that the production was fairly traditional, as well. If staging non-standard productions is considered to be controversial, then adjusting libretti translations to such productions is contentious, as well. Translations very often vary substantially from the origi-

nal libretto and in extreme cases they may be different not only in terms of the meaning, but also in form. The main point of controversy lies, however, in the fact that the original libretto is still very much present on the stage, as the singers almost always sing the original libretto with no alterations. If the opera is sung in a foreign language, the vast majority of the audience do not understand it and that is the reason why surtitles are indispensable. The viewers can hear the original, but, unaware of its meaning, they read the translation, to follow the action. It would probably not be exaggeration to claim that in such cases the audience is manipulated. It is certainly true that some part of the audience is either familiar with the language of the libretto or simply knows the text of the libretto very well, and they can notice the difference between the original and the translation, but the function of surtitles in non-standard productions consists evidently in both presenting and shaping the meaning of the original.

The issue of shaping libretti in translation is closely connected with the concept of visibility and invisibility of translators. Raised by Lawrence Venuti in his famous work *The Translator's Invisibility. The History of Translation* published in 1995, this subject is still very much valid. It can even be argued that these days it is even more valid than before because the post-modern era has redefined the question of the original and the author. Venuti claims that the role of translators is too often invisible, which is the result of both cultural trends and “the individualistic conception of authorship that continues to prevail” (6). This concept is significant for operatic translation, as well. Surtitles are still considered as a minor element of opera performance: on the one hand, they should provide the audience with the translation, but on the other hand, the audience should not pay much attention to them. In such cases the surtitler becomes indeed invisible because, as Venuti claims, “[u]nder the regime of fluent translating, the translator works to make his translation ‘invisible,’ producing the illusory effect of transparency that simultaneously masks its status as an illusion . . .” (5). The surtitles are traditionally expected to be as fluent and unobtrusive as possible.

However, modern translations adjusted to non-standard productions strongly defy this view. In 2007 Lucile Desblache touched upon this subject in her essay “Music to My Ears,” asserting that the role of the visibility of surtitles is rising, but she did not pursue the subject (165). Today there seems to be more and more surtitlers, who do not hesitate to assert their role and make their translation visible. Obviously, the visibility of the surtitles should be of a double, literal and non-literal, nature: first of all, the libretti translators always need to be credited in the opera programmes, and the surtitles screens should not be placed too high above the stage as a marginal element. But the non-literal aspect of the surtitles’ visibility, consisting in the very content, is equally significant. Not only may sur-

titles contain jokes or plays on words, which sometimes are considered irrelevant in this kind of translation, but they can also influence the productions' reception to a great extent. It is particularly interesting as non-standard productions very often diverge from the content of the libretto, even though the singers always sing the original version. Subsequently, the stage design and singers' acting may not agree with the libretto and it is the translation that binds them and supports the whole production. When the translation is strongly adjusted to extraordinary productions and becomes a crucial part of this production, its visibility can no longer be denied.

It needs to be emphasized that nowadays the issue of visibility of translators and translation should not be ignored, particularly because the basis for theatre, including operatic theatre, is the interpretation which depends on every individual taking part in the production. At this point it is useful to bring in Jacques Derrida, who claimed that translation is a proof that there is no individual and original meaning:

Difference is never pure, no more is translation, and for the notion of translation we would have to substitute a notion of *transformation*: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another. We will never have, and in fact never had, to do with some "transport" of ur-signifieds from one language to another, or within one and the same language, that the signifying instrument would leave virgin and untouched. (qtd. in Bassnett 11–12)

Derrida's claim shows explicitly that the notion of translation and original is changing; focusing on one interpretation is groundless and it would advocate the word-for-word translation. Such a claim can also be seen in the concept of *différance*, one of Derrida's central points of deconstruction, which presents the special relationship between the text and the meaning. The alteration of just one letter in the French word *différence* (Eng. "difference") shows that the *différance* between two differences or letters does not lie in the voice or written signs, but in the space between the words and writing (Derrida 378). It consists in the possibility of terminology, process and system (386), so it allows for the possibility of various ways of filling the aforementioned space, which, in this case, would be the possibility of diverse operatic libretti translations.

Lawrence Venuti also claims that meaning is not fixed and that the original can be translated in many rather than only one specific manner:

Both foreign text and translation are derivative: both consist of diverse linguistic and cultural materials that neither the foreign writer

nor the translator originates, and that destabilize the work of signification, inevitably exceeding and possibly conflicting with their intentions. As a result, a foreign text is the site of many different semantic possibilities that are fixed only provisionally in any one translation. . . . Meaning is a plural and contingent relation, not an unchanging unified essence, and therefore a translation cannot be judged according to mathematics-based concepts of semantic equivalence or one-to-one correspondence. (18)

There cannot be one perfect and ideal version of surtitles, as there cannot be one perfect version of any translation. Desblache very clearly argues that “the interpretation of operatic text is not exclusively bound to text but also largely depends on visual, musical and emotional elements present through each performance” (165). Thus, the translation is inextricably connected with the director’s interpretation and, subsequently, the operatic production.

The visibility of translators and translation, however, brings with itself great changes and the relation between the original libretto and translation may be blurred, which may be considered as undesirable. It is, nevertheless, significant to remember that “[t]ranslation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text” (Lefevere vii). André Lefevere insists that when we translate, we rewrite the original. In other words: we write it anew. It brings both advantages and disadvantages, but it is unavoidable. Moreover, if “the non-professional reader increasingly does not read literature as written by its writers, but as rewritten by its rewriters” (Lefevere 4), then translators create specific images of specific texts, and, subsequently, very often manipulate them (9). In opera the surtitles also create certain images of the texts, and, even though the audience hears the original libretti, they read the text rewritten by the translator, who, depending on the production, may be more or less visible. Lefevere defines rewriting as “the motor force behind literary evolution” (2), so it is possible to pose the questions: is rewriting the motor force behind opera revolution? Is emphasizing the visibility of operatic translation the motor force behind opera revolution? The examples I would like to provide prove that the answers for both questions are undeniably affirmative.

It can be safely assumed that if surtitles influence the reception of non-standard productions to a large extent, they are certainly not invisible. An interesting example is *Don Giovanni* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart directed by Kasper Holten and staged in 2014 by the Royal Opera House. This extraordinary production, set in the Victorian era, is in fact a psychodrama, presenting the psychological portrait of Don Giovanni. He still is a renowned and ruthless seducer, but this image certainly draws on Lord Byron’s romantic vision of this character. Mozart’s opera originally begins with a powerful scene when

Don Giovanni, having tried to seduce Donna Anna, tries to escape from her father's house without revealing his identity. However, in Holten's production Don Giovanni and Donna Anna are lovers. Let us look at the original libretto and translation provided by the opera house in the form of surtitles:

Sample 2

Original Italian libretto	Exact English translation (my translation)	Translation provided by the opera house
DONNA ANNA		
Non sperar, se non m'uccidi, Ch'io ti lasci fuggir mai!	Have no hope, I will never let you go, First you would have to kill me!	I'll never let you go!
DON GIOVANNI		
Donna folle, indarno gridi! Chi son io tu non saprai, No, tu non saprai.	Stupid woman, you scream in vain! You will never know who I am.	You silly girl, you don't know me!
DONNA ANNA		
Gente! Servi! Al traditore!	Help me, servants! The betrayer!	Someone come and help me!
DON GIOVANNI		
Taci, e trema al mio furore!	Silence, fear my fury!	You'd better keep quiet.
DONNA ANNA		
Scellerato!	Villain!	You're bad.
DON GIOVANNI		
Sconsigliata!	Fool!	And so are you.

The singers are singing the original libretto, but their acting imposes a different interpretation, as at the beginning of this production Don Giovanni carelessly emerges from the bedroom of Donna Anna who is clearly reluctant to bid her lover farewell. The translation intensifies this surprising scene. It needs to be noticed that this translation is not considerably different from the original in terms of meaning, but a number of concepts are omitted or changed; the significance of most phrases is altered by using words similar in meaning but with a different emotional significance. Translating the exclamations *Scellerato!* and *Sconsigliata!* as, respectively, “You are bad” and “So are you,” and combining them with singers’ explicit acting results in creating a provocative, erotic scene—the opposition of the traditional beginning of *Don Giovanni*. Such a scene is undoubtedly not expected by the viewers and if the translation were not adjusted to the production, the effect would be both confusing and incomplete.

*Don Giovanni* is an opera that is often modernized nowadays, as it is not very closely bound to specific time or culture. The situation is remarkably different when the libretto is deeply rooted in a specific time and place. *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Gaetano Donizetti is a good example. Based on Walter Scott’s *The Bride of Lammermoor*, this work is originally set in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Scotland. Lucia is a sister of Lord Enrico Ashton, the lord of Lammermoor, and her fiancé is Sir Edgardo Ravenswood. This opera is very rarely modernized: most directors set it, as Gaetano Donizetti did, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the viewers are usually presented with a conventional set comprising of a castle, cemetery, moors and woods. However, in the 2015 production of the Bavarian State Opera directed by Barbara Wysocka, the plot takes place in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States. Enrico is a politician, Lucia is modelled on Jackie Kennedy and Edgardo appears as a rebel modelled on James Dean, and drives a white convertible. Such an update was done “on the one hand, to show the balance of powers behind *Lucia* in modern times, and, on the other, to present the traditional patriarchal structures” (Hettinger, my translation).

The libretto of *Lucia di Lammermoor* contains numerous references to Scottish history or to the places (e.g., castle or cemetery) in which the story is set. Therefore, it is difficult to translate the libretto so that it is adjusted to a modernized production. An example of the adjustment introduced in the surtitles is the scene when Enrico tries to persuade Lucia to marry the man he has chosen for her. In the libretto he mentions historical figures, namely British monarchs Mary II and William III, but the translation generalizes this utterance, so that it can relate to the 20<sup>th</sup> century reality:

## Sample 3

Original Italian libretto	Exact English translation (my translation)	Translation provided by the opera house
ENRICO		
M'odi. Spento è Guglielmo – ascendere vedremo in trono Maria . . .	Listen. William is dead, we will see Mary ascend the throne.	A change of government takes place.

Such direct verbal changes are not the only way to serve a more modern production. There are also a few parts of the translation which generally create the effect of modernity. Therefore, the original line *Giorni d'amaro pianto s'apprestano per te* (Eng. “Days of bitter weeping await you”) which is sung by one of the characters is translated for the audience as “Days of bitter tears are in store for you”; and the original *Di ragion la trasse amore* (Eng. “Love deprived her of her reason”) is presented in the titles as “Love robbed her of her reason.” The register of the phrases “to be in store” and “to rob somebody of something” is only slightly less formal than the register of the original phrases, and, at the same time, this more contemporary use of language helps to create the effect of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century setting.

The translations shown above diverge from the original, but they are still in close relation with what the singers are singing on stage. There are, however, surtitles which have very little in common with the original libretto and cannot be defined as invisible. An interesting example is Charles Gounod's *Faust* staged by the Metropolitan Opera House and directed by Des McAnuff in 2011. Based on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust, Part 1*, it is originally set in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but McAnuff updated the story to the 20<sup>th</sup> century: his Faust is a scientist working on an atomic bomb. Because there are a few moments in which the production diverges from the original French libretto, the translation seen by the audience must have been considerably adjusted. The first change is visible when Méphistophélès visits Faust for the first time in his laboratory. Méphistophélès is dressed according to contemporary fashion, but in the original libretto sung onstage he describes to Faust his traditional outfit: cloak, hat with a feather and sword. At the same time, the audience receives a different version in the translation, adapted to what they actually see. Here is the text of the libretto and the translation:

## Sample 4

Original French libretto	Exact English translation (my translation)	Translation provided by the opera house
MÉPHISTOPHÉLÈS		
Me voici! – D’où vient ta surprise? Ne suis-je pas mis à ta guise? L’épée au côté, la plume au chapeau, L’escarcelle pleine, un riche manteau Surl’épaule – en somme Un vrai gentil-homme!	Here I am! Are you surprised?  You dislike my dress? My sword, a feather in my hat,  Money in my pouch and my rich cloak. All in all, a true gentleman.	Here I am! Why are you so surprised? I’m not what you expected? With the cane and panama hat,  Dressed to the nines . . .  Altogether: a real gentleman.

As a result, what can be seen on the stage diverges considerably from what the bass playing the role of the devil is singing. Méphistophélès is singing about his sword, cloak and a feather in his hat, but the audience does not see these objects; instead, they are presented with a cane, panama hat and suit. The translation presented to the viewers is adjusted to the production, and that is why the original “My sword, feather in my hat / Money in my pouch and my rich cloak” is translated as “the cane and panama hat, dressed to the nines.” It is the translation that helps the director’s bold concept integrate with the libretto; its visibility is therefore one of the crucial elements of the production: it is certainly not less important than the stage design or acting.

In conclusion, it should be stressed once more that the issue of opera titling is not usually a priority in the whole enterprise of staging an opera production. The interpretation and significance of particular productions are created not only by the use of words, but also by various visual elements, namely stage design and acting. Subsequently, it is the reason why the best opera houses employ the most imaginative directors and the most outstanding singers who also possess remarkable acting skills. It has become particularly essential today, when, thanks to live broadcast, the audience can see the close-ups and expects to enjoy not only a work of purely musical value, but something like the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Irrespective of various interpretations and staging, the singers almost always sing the original

libretti. The 16<sup>th</sup>-century Faust may be constructing a nuclear weapon and the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Scottish aristocrats may be driving white convertibles, but the original text never changes. What may be altered, however, is the translation in the target language.

André Lefevere argued that translation is “the most obvious rewriting of all” (10) and, in fact, modern surtitling confirms that claim. The original libretto is rewritten and the audience receives a certain image that the director and the translator intend them to receive. Therefore, by adjusting translations to particular productions and emphasizing their role, the translators make their work more visible, both literally and non-literally. In many cases, for example in literature, such drastic changes would be most probably questionable or even unacceptable, but in non-standard operatic productions the visibility of translation is both desirable and acceptable. According to Susan Bassnett, it is essential to “recognize the role they [translators] play in re-shaping texts, a role that is far from innocent, and is very visible indeed” (23).

Translating libretti is definitely a difficult task and that is why there are so many imperfect titles. In order to do it successfully, one needs “not only a wide range of linguistic and musical skills but also . . . in-depth knowledge of operatic cultural background and an artistic sensitivity” (Desblache 169). The coexistence and cooperation of translational skills and classical music expertise are therefore indispensable elements of achieving the goal of successful titles. Moreover, because of the high genre of opera, creating surtitles gains a special character, as well: “[t]he titling of opera is not only a craft, but also an art” (Burton 69). It is true that the very idea of modernizing operas “is a staple of opera directors today, especially in Europe, and it sparks feuds between traditionalists and updaters as regularly as the sun rises” (Wakin), but this trend is definitely here to stay, so it requires special translation of the operas’ libretti. Creating titles for such productions is definitely difficult, but it is also even more challenging and interesting. As this paper has shown, there are different kinds of adjusting the translations to the productions; for instance, *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Barbara Wysocka is an example of a moderately adapted translation, and *Faust* by Des McAnuff is definitely an extreme case. However, all of the modernized productions described here demonstrate the power of opera translation: translation that should not be regarded as only a marginal element of operatic production, but rather as its crucial and defining part.

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