

Adventures in Music Translation: *Italian Songs and Arias* (aka “The Yellow Book”) and Me

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This essay, while anchored in personal experience as a voice student (without much talent but lots of enthusiasm) and as a choir singer, is an attempt to open greater dialogue between researchers and practitioners in translation studies about the never-ending dialogue (sometimes polemical in nature) concerning the translation of the text underlay in the genre commonly known as the art song.

In the classical music tradition, an art song is typically defined as a vocal composition for a single voice with piano accompaniment. Within the art song repertoire are a variety of commonly accepted specialized terms, depending on the linguistic origins of the songs or song cycles included: German texts are usually titled as *Lieder* while French texts often distinguish between *mélodie* (for the art song) and *chanson* for other kinds of songs. The Spanish *canción* and the Italian *canzone* refer to songs in general, without specific terms for art songs. English also has a long tradition of art songs that distinguishes them generally from folk songs or popular contemporary song compositions.

One element that art songs have in common is that they are most often a musical setting of an independent poem or text. That is, the composer of the art song has set a previously written poem or text to music. If all the poem’s verses are sung to the same music, the song is *strophic*; but if the vocal melody remains the same with the accompaniment under it changing for each verse, the piece is called *modified strophic*. And if each section of the text receives a new musical treatment, the piece is *through-composed*. In terms of the foundational problems of translation, these poetic underpinnings of song text will prove to be critical.

All art songs, even those that are through-composed, usually involve some kind of repetition. And many art songs are ternary (ABA) in their form, which for musicologists is aptly termed “song form.” For both singers and translators, the particular pairing of text and music and/or changes in the language to be used in a version of the song for performance has been the source of much discussion over time. While many compositions for Baroque opera are strictly speaking called arias, because in contemporary performance they are so often presented detached from the opera they originally appeared in, they are also considered to be within the art song realm and provide much of the basic corpus for discussions relating to the pros and/or cons as to their presentation in the original or in translation.

Songs with instruments other than piano (cello and piano, flute and piano, for example)

or songs for more than one singer are not included and are called vocal chamber music. Folk songs and traditional songs do not usually fall within the world of the art song unless they have been arranged in art-music style performance and often written by a specific composer. Two examples of this hybrid would be Manuel de Falla's *Siete canciones populares españolas*, Benjamin Britten's folksong arrangements, or Aaron Copeland's *Old American Songs*. Other hybrid art songs come from biblical or other sacred texts meant for performance and set to music for solo voice and piano (for example, Johannes Brahms's *Vier ernste Gesänge*). Composers of art songs come from a multitude of national backgrounds—British, American, Austrian, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Latin American, Eastern European, Nordic, Russian, Ukrainian, and others. We also see, more recently, keen interest about the benefits or potential losses involved in the translation of contemporary popular song or musical theatre (see, for example, H.P. Cintrã o's "Translating 'Under the Sign of Invention': Gilberto Gil's Song Lyric Translation" or Johanna Akerstrom's thesis, *Translating Song Lyrics: A Study of the Translation of the Three Musicals by Benny Andersson and Bjorn Ulvaeus*).

Although the precise definitional parameters of the art song remain a bit fluid, it has almost always been the case that in the hierarchy of vocal performance, it is opera that has always claimed pride of place. The controversies surrounding opera performed in the original language or in translation arose early on, and even today, the proponents of opera in translation continue to make a case for greater accessibility to this musical art form for the opera audience. The use of translation surtitles in most international opera houses continues to serve as an unsatisfactory compromise for many. As an offshoot of the ongoing discussions relating to opera, the musicology world has also had similar discussions for some time about the validity of the art song "in the original" or "in translation." The small personal example chosen here for study happens to come from the Italian tradition, but the question of performing a recital in your mother tongue or in the original language or languages of your repertoire comes up more often than one might suppose among singers of all levels. Yet since the art song in performance is not the major commercial art form that is opera, the attention paid to translation of text underlay has remained mostly in the background.

For well over a century, the Schirmer edition of *Twenty-Four Italian Songs and Arias of the 17th and 18th Centuries*, with its iconic yellow cover, has been among the most widely adopted first recital books assigned to voice students in the English-speaking world. Available in versions for a variety of male and female voices and voice ranges (medium-high, medium-low), it is at once a fabulous resource of familiar and popular Italian art songs as well as an excellent starting place for the novice solo singer. Most voice teachers require their students to learn these songs for performance (usually for recitals or as audition pieces for choral ensembles) in the original Italian. However, since Schirmer is a long-time leading American publishing house (founded in 1861) it is not surprising that every reprint has contained a text underlay in English. It is interesting to note as well that Schirmer editions are now distributed by Hal Leonard, the

publisher of most popular American sheet music and vocal collections as well. Unlike the dual language text underlays (German-English) typically found in scores of Mendelssohn's oratorio, *Elijah*, for example, translators for Schirmer's yellow book have not changed the musical notation in any way to facilitate a more appropriate translation of the non-English text. Indeed, there appears to be a consistent attempt to be entirely respectful of musical notation whether or not the English text is congruent with its Italian counterpart. For most voice students and even for some professional singers, this non-congruence perhaps causes no confusion at all. If the singer is monolingual anglophone, the English translation provided with the music is assumed to "mean the same thing" as the Italian they are learning according to International Phonetic Alphabet diction rules. If the general idea of the emotion or sentiment presented in the aria or art song is more or less accurate, singers turn their attention to technical issues of vocal production, phrasing, dynamic coherence, and the like. However, for monolingual singers of English who have at least a rudimentary knowledge of Italian, and especially for those who are also involved in translation studies, these English lyrics can cause serious confusion. Indeed, during one of my own voice lessons, after I had been puzzling over the English text during my practice sessions that week, I burst out, "Do people actually sing these songs in English? With lyrics like these?" When my teacher admitted that yes, sometimes they do, poor Dr. Theodore Baker (the English translator of the clear majority of the Italian art songs included within the yellow book) took his position on the list of "translators I don't like very much." For a singer faced with an English lyric like "lorn" ("my heart is lorn"), the issue becomes an interpretive difficulty. Yes, we understand that "lorn" is a form of "forlorn." It is not a question of the lexicon being understood rationally but rather a question of interpreting the lyric for the audience. The difficulty here is one that we will meet later in this essay in the issue of singability.

So questions remain. Why do we see such indignation from time to time about art song translations? Does it really matter? Is it that important? After all, don't "real singers" and true connoisseurs of Italian art songs want to hear them in the original?

I have focused my attention here on the art song, and indeed, the art song translated from Western European languages (primarily Italian, German, and French) into English rather than the English-language art song translated into another language. The translation of opera (both into and from English) involves a slightly different set of questions and has already received a fair amount of critical attention. Of course, the concept of "art song" itself has evolved over the centuries, and it is probably fair to say that perhaps the work of the American songwriter/composer Stephen Sondheim and many contemporary English-language songwriter/composers of various forms of folk or ethnic music will within another fifty years be elevated to the status of "art song." The usual discussions about the primacy of music over text, text over music will continue to keep scholars, musicians, and translators busy for at least another century. These preferences for original over translation or translation over original are analogous but on a much less serious level to arguments over translations of sacred texts, from

the Bible to the Koran. The translation versus original is also very much a part of the world of theatre as we will see later in this essay.

As Sebnem Susam-Sarajeva has eloquently stated: “[N]o other non-religious (multimodal) ‘text’ moves people as deeply as the combination of lyrics and music, becomes an intrinsic part of their lives, acts as a shortcut to their memories (seen from one’s childhood, holidays previous relationships, close relative who’s passed away, etc.) and often bears witness to the various stages of their life” (188). He goes on to comment that given the importance of songs in the daily life of virtually every culture, it would seem logical that the translation of song would long have been an important focus for translators and for translation studies. However, although it is certainly the case that song translation has long been in existence, it is not the case that it has long been a serious focus of translators or translation scholars, although it is also the case that this area has begun to receive greater critical attention. However, the difficulties of dealing with song translation remain.

The reason for these many difficulties centers on the “huge complexities and challenges involved from a musical and methodological and (multi) disciplinary point of view” (188). Another explanation often cited by theorists is that music *per se* has typically been considered somewhat “outside the borders of translation studies, as traditionally conceived” (189). Susam-Sarajeva adds that “the mere mention of translation within the context of music opens a huge can of worms. The fuzzy boundaries between ‘translation,’ ‘adaptation,’ ‘version,’ ‘rewriting,’ etc., and the pervasiveness of covert and unacknowledged translation in music have generally limited research in this area to overt and canonized translation practices, such as those undertaken for the opera” (188).

Added to these historical and/or methodological constraints it is also important to mention what I would term an aesthetic constraint. There exists a kind of critical continuum relating to the translation of song text stretching from one extreme that insists on its total untranslatability (the view that any song must be sung in its original language) to the other extreme that insists that any song text can be translated and that such translation needs to be attempted in order to allow the song to travel across the limbic no-man’s land between any two languages and/or cultures. This aesthetic constraint pulls with more or less force depending on one’s position within the world of the art song: songwriter, musician, singer, music critic, musicologist, composer. The variety of opinions here is endless.

Although song translation has not been the focus of a tremendous quantity of research in translation studies until recent years, there have nevertheless been scholars who have demonstrated a keen interest in the relationship between lyric and music in translation long before translation studies had even become the discipline it is today. If we consider two musicologists/music critics who were active during the early years of the 20th century, Arthur Henry Fox Strangways (1859-1948) and Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi (1877-1944), we can readily

observe some critical positions about song translation that are echoed today.

Both men wrote articles in 1921 that in their individual ways remain “contemporary” still. Fox Strangways begins his article, “Song-Translation,” with an opening sentence that is still relevant almost a century later: “The object of this paper is to draw attention to the neglected art of song-translation” (223). Fox Strangways’s style is eminently British, clipped and often a bit testy, and evokes a small smile when this style is compared to the contemporary, sometimes impenetrable, style of today’s academic discourse in the same area of research. However, in his painstaking and perceptive analysis of various English translations of Schubert’s *lieder*, Fox Strangways’s repeated emphasis that for song-translation, “the sense must be singable” (223) is a refrain that today continues to be the most important quality of an excellent song translation. In other words, the sense of the translated song has a functional role to play: it must work for the singer.

Here we can perhaps make a brief detour to another area of translation that also demands functional performability: theatre translation. In 2010 six theatre practitioners and scholars discussed translation for the stage at Queen Mary College, University of London, in the form of a panel. In her summary article, “Theatre and Translation as Collaboration: Aleks Sierz, Martin Crimp, Nathalie Abrahami, Colin Teevan, Zoe Svendsen and Michael Walton discuss Translation for the Stage”, Margherita Laera illustrates many connections that could be made between the concept of *singability* and what theatre translators and practitioners label as *performability*. Laera notes that theatrical translators (and in my view, somewhat like art song translators) are metaphorically pulled in two opposite directions by, “on the one hand, the source (con)text, and on the other, the target (con)text” (214). However, as she points out as well, “the practice of theatre translation is much more complicated than binary oppositions can account for, however useful they may be as theoretical categories” (214). In theatre translation, Laera asserts that it is more helpful to describe “its multiple practices on a spectrum of hybridity” (214). The debate forming the basic discussions during the panel presentations focused on “the problem of performability, along with its relation to the translation/adaptation of a foreign text into the target language, culture and theatrical conventions” (214).

One of the most intriguing round table exchanges between Aleks Sierz and Nathalie Abrahami about collaborative process in theatre translation could fairly easily be extrapolated into the world of art song translation:

Aleks Sierz: *As a director do you usually have a translator in with you in rehearsals, like a writer?*

Nathalie Abrahami: Yes, not for the whole period but usually for the first week or so when we are going through the text and answering the questions.

Aleks Sierz: *And then do you invite them back?*

Nathalie Abrahami: Yes, so they don't have to see the painful part. But I am always clear in auditions, I clarify what is the style of the play that we are going for because we don't want people to be at cross purposes and then get performability issues, because everything can be performed, but it can be performed in so many different ways so you could end up with a very poor production. (Laera 223)

The collaborative efforts within theatre translation could serve song translators as well. The working team would of necessity include the composer (if living), the lyricist (if living), the translator or translators (depending on the number of languages the source text would be translated into), and musicologists.

Interestingly enough, as an early example of my one end of the continuum observation, here is Fox Strangways's take on the 'never translate, translation is impossible' aficionados:

But the chief obstacle in the way of good translation is the indifference of the singer. His case, to put it as he feels it is something like this: "The music is in German, and it will not sound natural with any other words. I want to sing a certain number of foreign songs, in any case, to give variety to my programme. A foreign language has the additional merit of a certain obscurity which veils difficulties of enunciation and throws a glamour over rather trivial phrases. No translation I have ever seen was worth the paper it was written on. Suppose there were a good translation—better, even, than the original, as it often might well have been in Schubert's case—I should still feel awkward singing words that the composer had never heard. I have learnt the song with the original words which I should now have to unlearn." (218)

Clearly Fox Strangways had met a few singers in his time (many of these opinions persist today), yet after his analysis of a selection of Schubert *lieder* translations, he concludes with six major points that are worthy of retention, especially for anyone interested in tackling the complex issues that confront us in song translation today.

As Fox Strangways also points out:

Translators will always be criticized for the omission of those things they were not trying to include; they are not always given credit for what they succeeded in including. What is the order of importance, then of the points they should aim for?

- (1) The translation must be poetry or, if that is out of reach, at least fluent and interesting verse which manages to disguise the fact that it is not an original poem.
- (2) It may alter the lengths of the composer's notes provided it does not destroy his phrase; but, apart from this, it must never put the singer in any difficulty about his accented note nor propound to him difficult vocal problems.

- (3) If it pretends to translate, it must translate; but an adaptation is sometimes more to the point, or is even imperative, and then the translator should be given complete discretion and be judged by his result.
- (4) [It] must rhyme if the form of the stanza makes the rhyme expected, but this is the case less often than might be supposed. If the sense is good, it is wonderful how the sound will take care of itself, when sung.
- (5) Vowels and consonants which are appropriate in some way to the sense are, and those which preserve the sounds of the original may be, an advantage of the music or the verse; but this advantage is a luxury to be sought for only when the other conditions have been fulfilled.
- (6) It is quite unimportant that the translation should, as regards its form, read well on paper, though even that may have its reward in attracting a singer's eye. (223-224)

Calvocoressi, another well-known music critic of the time, after reading Strangways's piece, responded to it in his own "The Practice of Song Translation," adding to Fox Strangways's criterion of "singability" and his assertion that "[t]he technique of song-translation is that of a poet, as opposed to a versifier, with an exceptionally fine musical ear" (Fox Strangways 211) that:

[song-translation] is also the technique of an expert practical musician, perfectly versed in all that concerns musical prosody and phrasing, capable of the analysis of music, paying heed both to spirit and to letter, and sufficiently acquainted with questions of voice-production to be able to determine how far, given a certain combination of notes, the choice of syllables may affect, favourably or unfavourably, the singer's task. (314)

Although Calvocoressi would not have realized it in 1921, the idea of the applied nature of song translation is often essential in the work of today's translators, where musicians and singers are necessary informants to the lyric translator and in some cases members of the translation teams.

We are today not quite a century removed from these two song-translation critics, but we soon discover that many of their ideas still provide the bedrock for work in our study of the translation of song and the ongoing need for this work.

One of the best contemporary theorists of song translation is Peter Low, who has developed a system that purports to evaluate and analyze song translation, a rather curious but surprisingly effective tool. The Low "method" is based on the concept of the pentathlon, the Olympic sport requiring athletes to compete in five different areas of track and field sport in order to medal. In Low's pentathlon principle for analyzing and evaluating song translation, there are four aspects related to music and performance: (1) singability; (2) rhyme; (3) rhythm; and (4) naturalness, all of which must be balanced with a fifth aspect, (5) fidelity to the sense of

the source text (quoted in Franzen, 304; Low 2005).

Related to the work of Low is the work of Johan Franzen, who in relation to song translation, also lays out five “choices” or basic pathways to be followed by the prospective translator of song text underlay: (1) leaving the song translated; (2) translating the lyrics but not taking the music into account; (3) writing new lyrics to the original music; (4) translating the lyrics and adapting the music accordingly—sometimes to the extent that a brand new composition is deemed necessary; (5) adapting the translation to the original music (377). An important marginal note by Franzen deserves mention since it relates to the concept of “fidelity” in relation to song translation (one of the major problem areas between musicians and text translator). Here Franzen references Malvina Reynolds, who wrote some 50 years ago:

Who translates foreign songs? I do. You don't really translate, of course. You make a singing song of it, near as you can to the meaning and feeling of the original. This is especially difficult, because the genius of the language determines the music line in the French, Russian or Greek song, and if you can move it into our language without wrenching the music line or the English idiom, you've done something valuable, I think.
(6)

Franzen's instructive schema organizes the many choices that translators face when tackling song lyrics. What Franzen terms “a singable lyric” can be achieved in three different forms of “matching”: (1) prosodic; (2) poetic; and/or (3) semantic-reflexive. In a prosodic match, the translator must observe the music's melody (music as notated), which appears in the text as syllable count, rhythm, intonation, and stress. The optimal result will be a comprehensible lyric that sounds natural and produces sounds for easy singing, as Arthur Graham references the song, “Funiculi Funicula”, which many singers have never realized was a translation, “for the words fit the music so well” (32). Graham goes on to point out that the song “in translation” is actually a new text set to the original music (32). In a poetic match, the translator focuses on the music's structure (the music as performed) through an analysis of rhyme, segmentation of phrases or lines, stanzas, parallelism, contrast, and the location of key words. These singable lyrics attract the audience's attention and achieve a poetic effect. Franzen uses a Swedish to Finnish translation of the song “Bleka dödens minut” (meaning “the last gasp”) (393). In a semantic-reflexive match, the translator studies the music's perceived meaning, which is expressed through the story told, the mood conveyed, the character or characters expressed, description or word-painting, and metaphor, the totality of which produces a song translation that successfully reflects or explains in words what the music “says.” Interestingly enough, Franzen's illustration focuses on the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, *The King and I*, and its famous song sung by the king, “A Puzzlement” (391-393). Franzen, the translation theorist/analyst, like Graham the singer, does not argue that any of his examples are ideal. As in any translation there are gains and losses and difficulties arising from the multimedia nature of song translation from wherever the “source”—from opera to musical theatre. It is obvious from

the interrelationships of all these elements that any text translator will be subject to multiple constraints, depending on the predominant match that seems to work well with the particular song text in question.

Turning again to one of the Schirmer yellow book's most popular art songs for soprano, "Caro mio ben," with music composed by Giuseppe Giordani (Giordanello) (1794-1798) and English lyrics by Dr. Theodore Baker, we can perhaps see more clearly some of the problems discussed above. Published by Schirmer in 1894 with the translation copyright renewed by Baker in 1922, the Italian text is accompanied by the English text directly beneath the original. Here are the original Italian side by side with Baker's English translation.

Caro mio ben, credi mi almen,	Thou, all my bliss, believe but this:
Senza di te languisce il cor.	When thou art far, my heart is lorn.
Caro mio ben, senza di te	Thou, all my bliss, when thou art far
Languisce il cor.	My heart is lorn.
Il tuo fedel sospira signor	The lover true ever doth sigh;
Cessa, crudel, tanto rigor!	Do but forgo such cruel scorn!
Cessa, crudel, tanto rigor,	Do but forgo such cruel scorn,
Tanto rigor!	Such cruel scorn!
Caro mio ben, credi mi almen	Thou, all my bliss, believe but this:
Senza di te languisce il cor,	When thou art far, my heart is lorn.
Senza di te languisce il cor.	When thou art far, my heart is lorn.

If we were considering Baker's translation as part of an exercise in a translation course, we would be examining various issues: the lexicon, the language level, the flow of the meaning of the text. But of course this is not simply a poetic text moving from a word text in the source language to a word text in the target language. It involves the central presence of Giordani's music and the usual conundrum for the song translator: which came first, the music or the text, or more pertinently, which is more important, the text or the music. Indeed, we are not to know in this case since for the 17th and 18th centuries, composers were named, while lyricists (or pirated poets) faced a similar fate of many translators for many centuries after: invisibility. Obviously,

there are later examples of music composed specifically to bring a particular poet's works to life, but for most of the works contained in the yellow book, the Italian lyrics are simply "there."

We can be fairly critical of Baker's lexicon: the awkward rhyme bliss/this and lorn/torn or the clunky syntax of "The lover true ever doth sigh." *Forlorn* becomes *lorn* for syllabic sense; *my bliss* a bit overstated for *mio ben*. Yet given the constraints imposed by both rhyme and rhythm here, and the overall "fidelity" to the song's main lyric intention, we should perhaps not be too harsh with Baker.

However, after suffering through learning "Caro mio ben" for my first voice recital, I was pleasantly surprised to discover a semi-rescuer of Dr. Baker in the person of John Glen Paton, who returned to the Yellow Book's Italian pieces in the late 1980s and produced a new edition (unfortunately not one uniformly adopted by voice teachers): *26 Italian Songs and Arias* in 1991. Its full title (*An Authoritative Edition Based on Authentic Sources*), its additional two art songs, and its absent iconic Schirmer yellow cover has led to the Paton edition being referred to as the "Purple Book" for medium/high voices or the "Blue Book" for medium/low voices. The celebrated contralto Marilyn Horne, has said of this revamped edition:

The publication of early Italian songs and arias is most impressive. The edition is an invaluable resource because it has corrected misinformation and provided in-depth details about the composers and history of these songs. But beyond the overall improved quality of the song collection is the following: this edition removed Romantic era misinterpretations and 19th century piano accompaniments, restoring the clear bright sound of Baroque music. (Paton np)

For voice students who may also be translation scholars, the changes in the Paton edition have clearly improved the musicality of the songs in terms of their singability. The clear objective of making the pieces easier to learn and to perform has resulted in completely new translations of Baker's Yellow Book versions by James P. Dunn, but *three* different English versions of the Italian songs: (1) a singable rhymed translation; (2) a readable prose translation; and (3) a word-for-word literal translation of the Italian text for those who do not know the language or who are in the process of learning it in a voice diction class.

In the Purple Book version of "Caro mio ben" the first note provided for the singer (the same procedure is followed for every song contained in the collection) is headed "Poetic Idea:" "Dear, I love you so much that when you stay away, I feel ill. Please be kind to me." We also learn that it was not Giuseppe Giordani who composed "Caro mio ben" since archival research by Paton revealed the actual composer to be Tommaso Giordani (1730-1806), who had composed the song for a concert presented in London and who was no relation to Giuseppe. The double grace notes included for the singer as well as the other ornaments have been added to the Purple Book score by Paton from other manuscript volumes dating from 1788.

Now unfortunately the rhymed English translation by James P. Dunn does not show much improvement from Dr. Baker's Yellow Book, but for a contemporary singer and a contemporary audience, the modernization of the lexicon represents a small step towards improvement: "Ah, dearest love, /If you should leave, /Heaven above/ Knows how I'd grieve. / Ah, dearest love, / Heaven above/ Knows how I'd grieve. / Your faithful friend/ Sighs without end. / This cruel torment/ Cease now, I pray! / This cruel torment/ Cease now I pray! / Ah, dearest love, / If you should leave, / Heaven above/ Knows how I'd grieve. / Ah, dearest love, / If you should leave, / Heaven above/ Knows how I'd grieve." This is the underlay for the original musical score and necessitates no change in musical notation whatsoever.

At the bottom of the page singers can also see what the editor has called an "idiomatic translation:" "My dear beloved, believe me at least, without you my heart languishes. Your faithful one always sighs; cruel one, cease so much punishments."

"Caro mio ben" in its Yellow Book and Purple and Blue Book half-sisters gives us a small look into the world of translation of the art song. While opera and popular song still claim more interest of translation studies scholars, the art song would appear to live more comfortably within the world of practitioners who prefer "singing in the original," whether from custom or simple habit. The issues in song translation persist within the art song world, and it would be a wonderful area for creative interdisciplinary work for a team of musicians, musicologists, and translators.

Indeed there is a very functional, applied role for song translation beyond the theoretical issues discussed here. Functional approaches often offer flexibility and draw attention to the variety of options available to translators because they emphasize the importance of different *skopoi* (Susam-Sarajeva 191). So although earlier work discussing song translations did tend to be more normative, more recent studies have attempted to address a variety of questions, such as who will sing the musical product or listen to it. What kind of performance will it have (incorporated into a CD or simply presented one or two times, with no permanent record kept)? How transitory will the reception be? Is the song to be translated into several languages? Will the translated version be a written version only (appearing in a concert program or a CD insert) or will there be visuals as well (as in opera surtitles)? With singers, composers, lyricists, and translators working together in a multidisciplinary way, song translation has much to contribute.

Before concluding this discussion, since we have been focusing on the concept of singability as discussed by theorists or scholars up until now, it might be instructive to consider the opinions of practitioners—vocal professionals themselves—who have often weighed in on their opinions about singing in the original and singing in translation. Whereas Calvocoressi has, from a critic's point of view, stated in rather negative terms, why some English-speaking singers prefer to sing in the original, Arthur Graham, in his intriguing essay, "A New Look at Song Translation," has given us a different position.

I am not a translator; I am a professional singer turned college professor. As student, performer, and teacher I have always avoided song translations despite the ready availability of syllable-for-syllable versions for the entire song repertory—and almost all singers do likewise—because most translations don’t ring true as texts a sensible composer might possibly have set. (31)

Graham continues to argue that both amateur and professional singers make great efforts to learn appropriate vocal diction to be used in singing French, German, Italian, or other languages rather than use available translations. And why? According to Graham, “The dedicated, talented, and intelligent people who have written the translations I won’t use do not understand how difficult it is to translate singable texts for the fixed pattern of a pre-existing song. Integrating knowledge from the fields of prosody, psychology, and music will enable us to create acceptable, even artistic, translations” (31). He also makes an interesting point relating to the relationship between English and audience psychology, noting that whereas English is not a bad language for song and there exists a wide amount of excellent vocal music written to original English texts, “English-speakers have, however, in our reaction to singing, a psychology or aesthetic that is different from that of other cultures” (31). Graham quotes Herbert F. Peyser to this effect, who wrote: “To sing a sentiment or a statement is, in the Anglo-Saxon view, to enhance, ennoble or idealize it. But to ‘ennoble’ a colloquialism or platitude...is almost willy-nilly to achieve satire” (31).

Graham cites several reasons for the failure of song translation into English: the insistence on rhyme, the relativity of syllable length, the variety of degrees of “weight” of accented syllables, and differences in languages’ rules for poetry as well as its own aesthetic for how words may combine with music. Of course, Graham is here dealing solely with translation into English rather than translating into another popular language for vocal music performance. He also refers back to the much earlier opinions produced by Fox Strangways and Calvocoressi’s about song translation in English, noting that he admires and “would have translators heed Calvocoressi’s comments, for increased attention to such details will improve translation” (34). However, Graham also urges us not to become oversensitive and “despair of matching the qualities of the original combination of text and music” (34).

After all, English-speaking audiences go to recitals of foreign-language songs for the music and the voice, not poetry. The “art” for this audience is in the music and in the singer’s personality, not in the balance of original text and music. Songs are tied more or less to their texts, but songs live because their music lives. Many a song survives after its text has become dated and is more artifact than art. It is difficult enough to translate poetry. To translate it to fit a Procrustean bed of note lengths, to avoid hurting the music, to stay close to original meaning, and to create something of literary value—all at

the same time—is nearly impossible. Yet, where translations are not actually embarrassing, is it not better for the audience to have a text to combine with the music? (34)

Although Graham makes the point that availability of translation is important for audiences, he goes on to argue that the “merely non-embarrassing translation” is not adequate. It might be argued that with understandability, correct accentuation, and normal vocabulary would produce better translations, singable translations, is still not enough. Performability is also key. According to Graham singers need words that can be sung with sincerity, “and part of the singer’s sincerity is in the assumption that the text is worth hearing” (35). A respected translation, that is, one that achieves a quality that is more than “merely non-embarrassing,” gives “pleasure to the audience and inspires artistic interpretation” (35).

Given our preceding discussion of the potential analogy to be made between song translation and translation for the theatre, Graham, too, links his thoughts to the connection between performability of the singable text to performability in the theatre: “A play printed in a book is very different from that play on stage. The experienced playwright creates for performance, not for a reading public. Translators may not be experienced enough in the aesthetics of live performance to imagine their words in the ambience of the recital hall. Texts that may seem inane, naïve, and out-of-date on paper may be well-received even by sophisticated audiences” (36).

Writing from the position of singer, Graham reminds us that translations into English are for English-speaking audiences and not for other translators; evaluation of the translated text should be done in performance and by listeners who are not familiar with the original text. He also argues that poetic sensitivity is of greater importance than fluency since the two losses of song translation are the sounds of the original language and the fit of words and music designed by the composers. However, Graham argues that these losses “are far outweighed by understanding the text.” For Graham “lyrical talent must be combined with technical knowledge to produce texts that performers will respect, enjoy, and sing” (36).

In conclusion, it seems fair to say that the future work in music translation, whether we are working in a high art form like opera, a middle-brow form like the art song, or more contemporary and popular forms like musical theatre, folk, rock, or indeed, any genre where lyric and music are combined, will be best served by working as collaboratively as possible. The tensions between primacy of music and text will continue to exist. The varying positions along the continuum among those who prefer all music and text to be “original” and those who prefer a divorce between music and its text will also continue to exist. The more interesting and, I believe, more positive movement that we see in the realm of music translation and translation scholarship is the increasing interest for practitioners and translators working together. Maybe a

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multidisciplinary team will even take another try at dealing with the Yellow Book's English translations. Until that happens I'll just work on my Italian diction lessons and avoid reading the English text underlay.

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