

Who's afraid of Dario Fo? Paratextual commentary in English-language versions of
Accidental Death of an Anarchist

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This article analyzes the paratextual commentary in six English versions of Dario Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. In the paratexts, translators, adaptors and literary critics engage with two problems: Fo's permission to freely adapt his texts, on the one hand, and the demand for fidelity in a philological sense, on the other.

Keywords: theatre translation, paratextual commentary, translation, adaptation, authenticity in translation.

Cet article analyse les commentaires paratextuels dans six versions anglaises de *Mort accidentelle d'un anarchiste* par Dario Fo. Traducteurs, adaptateurs et critiques littéraires font face à deux problèmes: d'un côté, la permission que donne Fo de adapter librement ses textes et, de l'autre côté, l'exigence de rester fidèle dans un sens philologique à l'original.

Mots clés : traduction théâtrale, commentaire paratextuel, traduction, adaptation, authenticité en traduction

Morte accidentale di un anarchico, one of Dario Fo's best known plays, is based on a true story: in 1969, a railway worker, Giuseppe Pinelli, was accused of involvement in the Piazza Fontana bombing in Milan. During police questioning, Pinelli fell to his death from a window on the fourth floor, raising the question as to whether he jumped or was pushed. In the play, the central figure called the "Matto" – variously translated as "the Maniac" or "the Madman" – resorts to playing different roles (a high court judge, a police officer, a bishop) in order to show that the true culprits were the policemen interrogating the anarchist. Six different English translations or adaptations of this particular play were published in the twenty-five years between 1978 and 2003 (as many as of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in about ninety years). There have also been various unpublished translations. In this article, I engage with several questions: where does the need to attempt yet another English-language

translation of *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* come from? How do the agents involved in the translation and adaptation justify their textual interventions on the paratextual level? And, finally, do the translated and adapted texts reflect the strategies described in the paratext?

Fo is known to encourage theatre directors and actors to adapt and change his texts as they see fit. He insists that the audience is in fact co-producer and actors are authors in their own right. The authenticity of the experience, he suggests, is more important than authenticity intended as faithfulness to the original text. Jennifer Lorch points out that Fo is “quite relaxed about his relationship with his text but not so relaxed as to have no attachment to his work.”¹ What I am interested in here is how Fo’s permission to freely adapt his texts has influenced the English-language translations and adaptations of *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. There is no consensus on what exactly distinguishes a translation from an adaptation, which is usually defined quite broadly: “Adaptation may be understood as a set of translative interventions which result in a text that is not generally accepted as a translation but is nevertheless recognized as representing a source text.”² In this article, I make do with the appellations the published texts are given: three are called translations, three are called adaptations. I use the umbrella term ‘version’ to subsume both translations and adaptations.

Issues of Translation

Perhaps one of the most difficult facts about Fo to transmit to a non-Italian audience is that he is revolutionary and radical where politics are concerned, yet “an intransigent conservative in poetics,”³ that is to say, steeped in the tradition of Italian popular theatre. Translators and adaptors find themselves struggling with the task of

merging Fo's particular brand of popular humour with the political fervour of the plot. Like many of Fo's other plays, *Accidental Death* refers to a specific historical event with which the audience is expected to be familiar. Interpreters must decide whether and how to communicate this context to a non-Italian audience.

Another difficulty for the translators and adaptors is that of identifying an original. Fo starts off with a rough copy of a play that he constantly changes during rehearsals. In the case of *Accidental Death*, Fo was still changing lines and scenes while on tour from 1970 to 1972 to keep up with developments in the trial of the policemen involved in the Pinelli affair. The Italian text is available in three editions (the 1970 Bertani, the 1973 Mazzotta and the 1974 Einaudi editions, the last reissued in 1976, 1988, 2000, 2004 and 2007). Fo's wife, the actress Franca Rame, who is duly acknowledged as the editor of the play, has collated all of these editions from a variety of different playtexts.

The three Italian editions present the reader with two renderings of Fo's drama. The Mazzotta edition resorts to a framing device, setting the story in 1921 in New York, where another anarchist, Andrea Salsedo, fell out of a window during police questioning. In the Einaudi edition, this framing device is dropped. The main difference between the two renderings is the ending. The first ends with an explosion and prolonged screaming which the audience witnesses in complete darkness. Shortly afterwards, the actor playing the "Matto" reappears on stage as the true judge come to conduct the enquiry (this is the ending used in the latest 2004 and 2007 re-editions of the 1974 Einaudi edition). The second ends with a socialist critique of society, namely with the words: "Siamo nello sterco fino al collo, è vero, ed è proprio per questo che camminiamo a testa alta."⁴

Yet another matter to consider is the practice of translating playtexts for the theatre. In the Western tradition, there are two dominant ways of translating for the theatre: a stage-oriented tradition, which concerns itself with a specific staging aimed at a specific audience in a contemporary setting, and a reader-oriented tradition mainly concerned with philological exactness and literary values.⁵ In the English-speaking world, a theatre company usually commissions a so-called ‘literal’ translation from a translator. Then an adaptor (usually a playwright, often a prominent one, but not necessarily fluent in the source language) changes the text in order to make it work for the particular show that is being set up.

A general consensus amongst English-language theatre makers seems to be that theatre productions based on translation, especially from ‘the South,’ face particular obstacles. Stefania Taviano argues that these perceived obstacles (high emotionality, stronger folk tradition, more diversified local customs and dialects) are not so much innate to Italian theatre, but rather exaggerated by a general British attitude towards the Mediterranean, in particular Italy: the British are drawn towards the ‘cradle of civilisation’ but at the same time tend to establish their cultural superiority over the chaotic Mediterraneans.⁶

There are two ways of dealing with these obstacles, and both are visible in the choices adopted for *Accidental Death*. Either one adheres to a stereotypical image of Italian culture, thus reducing characters to caricatures, or one transfers the plot to, for example, a British milieu, the assumption being that the original is too exotic and that the audience will feel more at ease with a domesticated text. Inevitably, this domestication results in heavily adapted translations. Perhaps as a reaction to this practice of heavy adaptations, “critical discourse surrounding British productions of Italian theatre continues to be characterized by a normative approach built around

concepts such as faithfulness, authenticity and truthfulness to the original.”⁷ Since this critical discourse often occurs on the paratextual and metatextual levels surrounding a printed playtext, these paratextual and metatextual levels merit close analysis.

Six published versions of Fo’s play are available in English:

- Gavin Richards’s 1979 adaptation based on Gillian Hanna’s literal translation (commissioned in 1978), first published by Pluto Press (1980) and then by Methuen (1987);
- Susan Cowan’s translation for *Theater Magazine* in 1979;
- Richard Nelson’s 1983 adaptation of Cowan’s translation, published by Samuel French Inc.;
- Alan Cumming and Tim Supple’s 1991 adaptation for the National Theatre, published by Methuen (no literal translation is indicated as source);
- Ed Emery’s translation, not written with an immediate staging in mind, published in a 1992 Methuen collection of Fo plays;
- Simon Nye’s 2003 translation for the National Theatre, published by Methuen in two versions: a plain playtext with no commentary and a student edition with over sixty pages of commentary.

In the following sections, I will focus on the paratextual corpus and on comments of a metatextual nature in five out of the six versions, leaving aside Suzanne Cowan’s translation for *Theater Magazine*, as it is not in book form and does not include any paratext. I am also not including any adaptations that did not result in a published drama text, such as Robyn Archer’s adaptation of the Cumming and Supple text for an Australian audience or the 2005 translation used by Luca Giberti for his 2005 staging at the Oxford Playhouse.⁸

Gavin Richards

Gavin Richards's adaptation of Gillian Hanna's translation was commissioned by Belt & Braces Roadshow Company in 1978. In January 1979, the first performance at Dartington College saw Fred Molina in the role of the Maniac. After initial success, the production moved to London, first to the Half Moon Theatre, then to Wyndhams Theatre where Richards took over the role of the Maniac as well as continuing his position as director. The English playtext was first published in 1980 by Pluto Press. A corrected edition appeared as part of the Methuen Modern Drama series in 1987. The 1987 text was republished in 2001.

The paratext in this edition is considerable: an eight page introduction by Stuart Hood written in 1986, a five page contribution by Fo exclusively written for the 1980 English text, and a postscript by Fo (Emery's translation of the prologue of the Italian 1974 text). On this paratextual level, the reader is confronted with only two voices, Hood and Fo: we do not hear directly from the 'literal' translator Hanna or from the adaptor Richards.

Fo's postscript concentrates on the context that led to the production of *Accidental Death* and describes the changes to the text during Fo and Rame's two-year tour of Italy. Fo clearly states that adaptations are always necessary. During the tour, "the spiral of the [Italian government's] strategy of tension has increased, and has created other victims: the play has been brought up to date, and its message has been made more explicit."⁹ Adaptors, therefore, Fo advocates, are free to change the playtext *as long as* their aim is to make the message more explicit and the didactic function of theatre more effective. This is a crucial point.

Hood's 1986 introduction provides a short biography of Fo and an overview of his and Rame's theatrical practices. He accords *Accidental Death* half a page, thus

focussing mainly on positioning this play within Fo's larger oeuvre. Hood's personal view of Fo's importance as a political playwright emerges briefly in the final paragraph.

Hood's self-effacement in the introduction leaves room for a more critical voice, Fo's own, in the "Author's Note" written for the English text. The note serves several purposes. First, Fo defines his play as a "farce of power." Second, the note justifies the need for three different Italian editions published within a short time frame.

Finally, Fo points out the difference between the Italian and English audiences:

Why three different editions? Simply because the play had to follow the increased consciousness of Italian public opinion and the sharpening struggle by the working class and the student movement, and to evolve the political developments that resulted from absorbing themes and syntheses from the new political and social events which were emerging. [...] The English public, seeing this play in its present adaptation, obviously cannot feel the real, tragic, tangible atmosphere which the Italian public brought with them when they came to the performance. It can share this only by the act of imagination or – better still – by substituting for the violence practised by the powers in Italy (the police, the judiciary, the economy of the banks and the multinationals) equally tragic and brutal facts from the recent history in England.¹⁰

Fo clearly advocates the translator's and adaptor's freedom and has himself freely adapted Brecht's work. Yet Fo is critical of Richards's adaptation for quite specific reasons:

I have the impression – more than an impression – that some passages which have been skipped in Gavin Richards's version may have produced some erosion at a satirical level, that is to say in the relationship of the tragic to the grotesque, which was the foundation of the original work, in favour of solutions which are exclusively comic.¹¹

Satire is part of Fo's didactic theatre; simple slapstick comedy is not. Fo is not alone in this judgment. Theatre and literary scholars with knowledge of Italian agree that by opting for entertainment the Richards version has left the defining didactic and satirical elements in Fo's theatre out of the equation.¹²

Tellingly, Fo ends his "Author's Note" with a popular Sicilian song from the nineteenth century in which a madman laughing at a king escapes punishment because the people know "it is great bad luck to kill a madman protected as they are by the pity of St Francis 'the great madman of God.'"¹³ Fo introduces the song with

the following words: “We [in Italy] are not yet a sufficiently modern nation to have forgotten the ancient feeling for satire. That is why we can still laugh, with a degree of cynicism, at the macabre dance which power and the civilisation that goes with it, performs daily, without waiting for carnival.”¹⁴ Fo suggests that, historically, the popular understanding of social hierarchies and the handling of satire in Italy are radically different to those in other European countries.

To summarize, the “Author’s Note” defines the play in terms of genre (political farce) that belongs to both the specific tradition of Italian satire and to a more universal tradition of carnival figures who possess jester’s licence. Fo charges the Richards version with being less effective both didactically and satirically than its Italian original. Yet he is willing to accept that this might not be exclusively the adaptor’s fault but due to fundamental differences in theatre practices and political cultures.

The paratextual apparatus aims to provide readers with as much contextual information as possible about the author, authorial intention and the history of the play itself. It is quite strange then to see that the playtext proper not only provides very little context in the Richards version but also sometimes sharply contradicts the aims of the paratext. In my view, there are two metatextual moments in particular that reveal a certain degree of uneasiness on the part of the adaptor.

Right at the start of the play, in an added scene, Inspector Bertozzo introduces himself to the audience as “Francesco Giovanni Batista Giancarlo Bertozzo of the Security Police” and informs them that he has been struggling to do his daily work because of the public outrage following a “sordid little incident a few weeks ago when an anarchist, under interrogation in a similar room a few floors above, fell through the window.”¹⁵ Then, before questioning the Maniac (this is how the Italian play starts) he directs these words at the audience: “I ought to warn you that the author of this

sick little play, Dario Fo, has the traditional, irrational hatred of the police common to all narrow-minded left-wingers and so I shall, no doubt, be the unwilling butt of endless anti-authoritarian jibes.”¹⁶

Belt & Braces were known in the UK as a left-wing theatre. Ideally, the audience would interpret this first dig at Fo as tongue-in-cheek or as irony in line with Fo’s permission to freely adapt his texts. Yet, the words “sick little play” and “traditional, irrational hatred” may also be understood as markers of distance: are the adaptor and actors perhaps distancing themselves from some of the political messages contained in the play? Ultimately, Richards seems to be undermining the didactic function of Fo’s theatre for a single laugh from his audience. In my view, this first scene twists one of Fo’s intentions, that of portraying the Italian police as he perceived it to be: violent, unpredictable, and corrupt. The first few scenes of the play in Italian are ambiguous: it is not yet clear who will triumph over whom, who will be the butt of the joke in the end. Richards does not leave any doubt about who is going to be ridiculed all along.

Towards the end of the play, the Maniac uses as examples Anthony Blunt and Guy Burgess, clearly English references, at which point the ‘Superintendent’ addresses the actor playing the Maniac by name before saying: “This isn’t Dario Fo.” The Maniac replies that he knows but that he does not care. There follows an exchange between Inspector Pissani, Inspector Bertozzo, the Maniac and the journalist Feletti:

Pissani: This is an unheard of distortion of the author’s meaning!

Maniac: He’ll get his royalties. Who’s moaning?

Pissani: Get back to the script!

Superintendent: This is an insult to Dario Fo!

Feletti: Good. I’ve got a bone to pick with him. Why is there only one woman’s part in his blasted play? I feel marooned!

Maniac: The author’s sexist?

Feletti: He’s pre-historic!

Bertozzo: Then why are we bothering?

Maniac: He’s a pre-historic genius! On with the dance!¹⁷

Though reminiscent of techniques such as Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* and consistent with Fo's anti-illusionistic tendencies, the contrived departure from the script seems to me to actually undermine the didactic function of Fo's theatre. More interestingly perhaps, this metatextual moment expresses Richards's struggle to find a balance between the freedom granted to him by the author who will "get his royalties" anyhow and the restrictions imposed by cultural conventions regarding the nature of translation. These conventions tend to demand a return to an authorized or original script.

The Richards adaptation was highly successful – it defined how Fo would be seen in the United Kingdom for a very long time. If one only reads the playtext without any of the commentaries in the paratext or any other knowledge of Fo's theatre, the text in itself works. Yet, as we have seen, there are discrepancies between the message of the play proper and the message given to us in the paratext (the introduction and postscript by Fo). When publishing an adaptation, perhaps greater care should be taken to bring the text and paratext more in line with one another. The published text would be more coherent if Richards had explained his adaptation strategies in a paratextual contribution or if certain discrepancies between the Italian texts and the translation had been explained in footnotes.

Richard Nelson

The first and only version of *Accidental Death* to have appeared in a North American publishing house (Samuel French, Inc. in 1987) contains a limited paratextual corpus, none of which can be assigned to a single identifiable individual. The first page provides biographical and bibliographical information about both Fo and the adaptor Nelson. Another two pages are dedicated to copyright acknowledgements and

“Important Billing & Credit Requirements” which are very detailed, specifying the size of type and prominence of credit to be accorded to the playwright, adaptor and theatre that first staged the version in the United States in the event of a restaging. A further two pages reproduce the programme and cast list of the Broadway show.

The final two pages of paratext preceding the playtext proper consist of a note on the text and a brief prologue which mentions the Pinelli and Salsedo cases. Uneasiness about the involvement of a variety of agents and the consequent proliferation of voices is palpable in the note, which deserves to be quoted at length:

The version printed in this volume was first created by Richard Nelson in 1983 for a production at Arena Stage. His adaptation was based on Suzanne Cowan’s literal translation, published in *Theater Magazine* in 1979. For the Arena Stage production and the subsequent Broadway production, both directed by Douglas Wager, Nelson revised the dialogue for the American stage, and added some references to current politics. Dario Fo approved his adaptation. Subsequently, Fo asked for further changes in the text, which were made by Ron Jenkins and Joel Schechter, in collaboration with Fo and Franca Rame. His changes included some new political references, and dialogue closer in meaning to that of the original Italian text. These changes were made with the consent of Richard Nelson, who remains credited as the American adaptor of the play. Future productions of the text may require further alteration of political references, unless our President is elected for a life term, and outlives the century.¹⁸

Conscious of Fo’s negative reaction to the Richards version, the American team of adaptors tried very hard to respect authorial intent. The play was successful in San Francisco and in Washington D.C., but on Broadway it closed after twenty performances and fifteen previews. Fo’s involvement in the ‘politicization’ of the play may have resulted in a version closer to the originals, but it failed to inspire audiences. Stefania Taviano has suggested that this may be due to a very specifically American definition of ‘political’ and ‘political theatre.’ Political theatre in the United States is perceived to be broadly equivalent to propagandistic and didactic theatre, starting with the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) under Roosevelt’s New Deal. Founded in 1935, the FTP served a double aim: to provide work for unemployed actors and to draw in people who would not usually go to the theatre. In a new dramatic form, the “Living Newspaper,” this kind of political theatre focused on social issues (such as

housing, health care, labour unions). Several other political theatre groups emerged over the decades, such as Group Theatre, Moscow Art Theatre, Living Theater, the Performance Group, which were also perceived to be “both agit-prop and [...] dealing with social and identity issues.” In the United States, Taviano concludes:

political has come to mean anything which is not highly commercial, which does not correspond to Broadway’s standards and is not staged in mainstream theatres. The definitions of political theatre functions as a handy label, a category to identify theatre texts that are disturbing, challenging and therefore difficult to stage.¹⁹

Based on these criteria, the categorization of Fo’s play as ‘political’ perhaps made its failure on Broadway in the 1980s inevitable. Other stagings, in smaller, non-mainstream theatres, have been relatively profitable. Only recently, in the summer of 2011, a version of the play closely based on Emery’s 2003 translation was successfully staged in New Jersey.²⁰

Alan Cumming and Tim Supple

In 1990, Alan Cumming and Tim Supple wrote another adaptation of Fo’s play for the National Theatre, which toured the UK before moving to London in January 1991. The drama text, published in 1991, was advertised both in the jacket text and on the first page as a “fresh new version, faithful to the clear-sighted insanity of the original.” In many respects, this version is closer to the Italian published versions than the Richards or Nelson versions in terms of language and political intent. Yet, the 1991 adaptation was received less well than its predecessor, although, as we have seen, fidelity to the original is traditionally claimed to mark the better translation. By then, the Richards version had made its way onto syllabuses in UK universities, thereby attaining the status of an “original” in its own right, both for audiences and (many) critics. Cumming and Supple stress that their version is different in many ways from Richards’s: in a similar move to Nelson, they invited Fo during the

rehearsals and got “a few gags” from him.²¹ No literal translator is mentioned in this version, and despite the reference to the original, the adaptors do not reveal what Italian editions they worked with.

By 1991, Stuart Hood, the author of the introduction to the 1987 Methuen text, had become series editor of the Methuen Modern Drama series. As such, he was in a position to decide what sort of paratext would be published alongside the new adaptation. Unlike the Richards adaptation to which Hood also contributed, the 1991 text contains neither an author’s note nor a translation of any of the available Italian prefaces, introductions or postscripts by Fo. Instead, the paratext consists of two introductions, one by Hood himself, one by Christopher Cairns, another literary scholar, a short “Note on the Present Text” by the adaptors, as well as two texts that follow the playtext: the lyrics to the song used at the end of Act 1 and a list of changes made to the script while on tour. While we had heard twice from Fo in the 1987 version and not at all from the adaptor, here the adaptors get to say their share but Fo is only ever quoted.

Hood’s introduction is exactly the same as the one in the Richards version with no further comment on developments in Fo’s life or oeuvre between 1986 and 1991. Cairns explains the historical facts of the Pinelli case in some detail and also explains Fo’s credo that “everything must be done through irony” and that it is the ironic role reversal, what he calls a “rising crescendo from the realistic through the implausible to the grotesque” that makes *Accidental Death* special.²² Cairns quotes Fo’s criticism of directors who choose the easy way of entertainment while leaving aside the political message:

This game of grotesques, of paradox, of madness, is a device quite capable of standing on its own without the political message. So much so that some directors (heaven forgive them) concerned to create pure entertainment, have taken out of the play all the real conflict, they have built up the comedy to the point of making it into an exchange between clowns, arriving, in the end, at a kind of surreal

pochade, where everyone splits their sides laughing, and goes out of the theatre quite empty of political anger or indignation.²³

The British audience might now better understand Fo's point, Cairns continues, in the light of the recent judicial cases of the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six.²⁴

Cumming and Supple themselves add a note, a short page and a half, which starts off with the following statement:

From the outset we knew that a revival of *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* must grow directly from Fo's original text. Even in literal translation, we were aware of an uncomplicated satire [...] that we had not recognised in other English adaptations. We understood how, as Fo put it, tragedy had been turned into farce: the farce of power.²⁵

Having learned from Richards's and Nelson's shortcomings, Cumming and Supple claim that their characters are never caricatures but reveal themselves through action and situation. While they clearly wanted the audience to laugh, they never lost sight "of the target, [to] release the anger and indignation contained in the play."²⁶ They seem to have taken on board what Fo so clearly stated in the "Author's Note" to the Richards version: this is a play "born out of classic satirical principles and the deepest roots of comedy, shaped by a master of performance into a modern political farce."²⁷

The content of the play was sadly familiar, because Britain had its own farces of power, and therefore the aim had to be to "show Italy through a British filter and so, we hope, to see both clearly."²⁸ Foregrounding Fo's belief that theatre is continuous substitution, Cumming and Supple continue: "We trust that any future production will be as free with our version as we were with Fo's original in these areas [topical and linguistic references to Britain in 1990 - M.D.]."²⁹ With future shows based on their adaptation in mind, Cumming and Supple add at the end of their script a list of changes made to the script as well as the song adopted at the end of Act 1 during the touring production. The text is very much seen as a fluid product that needs to be adaptable according to a director's and an actor's needs and expectations. At the same time, Cumming and Supple also advocate a stronger reliance on the original text as

well as a deeper understanding and the thorough implementation of Fo's intentions. However, in the paratext, the voice of Fo is heard only in quotation and not in a more substantial form, such as an author's foreword.

Because Cumming and Supple engage with authorial intentions and their adaptation strategies in the paratext, there are no striking examples of metatextual engagement with these issues of the kind found in Richards's version within the playtext itself. The play starts as it does in the Italian original, with Bertozzo questioning the Madman (no longer called a Maniac, as in the previous versions). Act 1 is preceded by a short prologue that gives the audience facts about the incident behind the play in a neutral register. In the 1991 version, one can also note the tendency to let the lead actor take centre stage, a typical characteristic of Fo's theatre, which relies heavily on monologues. Richards, on the other hand, perceived this as an imbalance that he redressed by adding lines for other actors, making the whole play more dialogical.

Ed Emery

Ed Emery's 1992 translation is part of the first volume of Fo's plays published by Methuen Drama alongside four other plays: *Mistero Buffo* and *One Was Nude and One Wore Tails* (also translated by Emery), *Trumpets and Raspberries* (translated by R. C. McAvoy and A.-M. Giugni), and *The Virtuous Burglar* (translated by Joe Farrell).³⁰ The volume was reissued in 1994 and 1997.

The latest edition contains a chronology with the most important dates in Fo's life up to the Nobel Prize in 1997. In his introduction, series editor Stuart Hood explains the importance of figures of Italian popular theatre for Fo's poetics: Pulcinella and Arlecchino from the Commedia dell'Arte, the *giullari* (jesters entertaining people in public spaces) and Zanni (a Venetian clown). Then he moves on to describe why each

of the texts chosen for the collection was important in a political and/or theatrical sense. The power of *Accidental Death*, Hood argues, derives “from the tension which Fo deliberately sets up between the comedy arising from confusions of identity, always one of the principal elements of farce, and the tragic circumstances surrounding the death of an innocent man.”³¹

Emery’s text is the closest to the published versions of the Italian text. This closeness to the originals might be due to the fact that it was not translated with an immediate staging in sight. In the “Translator’s Note,” Emery explains very briefly his translation strategies: he has maintained all the original references (to Italian political scandals rather than finding equivalents in the UK) and he has also avoided swearwords “which may or may not be characteristic of the constabulary world-wide, but which are not characteristic of Dario Fo.”³² Emery is clearly aware of the existence of various originals and of the licence given by Fo to adaptors: “There is by now a tradition with the staging of Fo’s plays: theatre companies take the original texts and adapt the political and cultural references to suit their own circumstances. You are invited to use your own imagination and creativity accordingly.”³³

The paratext to this version consists of a “Translator’s Note”, a translation of Fo’s prologue from the 1973 edition, the postscript by Fo written for the 1974 edition and a page of notes to the translation. As Emery decides to maintain every single cultural reference in the play, he needs, of course, to explain the public figures and places mentioned. However, there are no more than nine endnotes, which seems to suggest that an English language readership is able to cope with a literal translation very well. The need to adapt the text, therefore, seems to stem from theatrical practice rather than from a quality innate to the text that renders it incomprehensible to a foreign audience. The publishers at Methuen Drama clearly are aware of this fact: otherwise

they would not have commissioned and published yet another, the third, translation of the play in less than fifteen years – and a translation that is faithful in a philological sense.

Emery's "Translator's Note" is only half a page long and mainly describes the strategies adopted for the translation. This self-effacement is evident in the footnotes as well, which are kept short and to the point. The paratextual apparatus is quite short; besides Hood's introduction which briefly mentions the historical situation in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s, the readers are not given much socio-historical context. The text, the relatively short paratextual apparatus seems to suggest, is powerful enough to speak for itself.

Simon Nye

Although Simon Nye's 2003 text is the only version unequivocally set in Britain and therefore a profoundly domesticated text, it is not called an adaptation but a translation. It was first performed at the Donmar Warehouse in London in February 2003 with Rhys Ifans in the role of the Maniac. The plain playtext consists of ninety pages, following a one page introduction written by an anonymous person. There is no postscript, either. In a departure from the editing practices of the Methuen Drama series up to that point, there is no paratextual apparatus to speak of: on one single page, there is a short paragraph about the play that describes how Fo's "skill at writing farce and his gifts as a clown brilliantly serve his politics" and which also states that "this new translation by playwright and screenwriter Simon Nye is faithful to the Italian version."³⁴ Interestingly, at the beginning of a new millennium, translation is still presented in terms of faithfulness and equivalence. A very brief biography of Fo mentioning plays that were successfully performed in England is also

provided. As mentioned above, neither the paragraph dedicated to the play nor the biography is signed.

The near complete absence of paratextual commentary in the 2003 edition is recouped in the 2005 student edition. However, neither a translator's note nor an author's note of the kind contained in the earlier editions is included in this version. Yet the paratextual corpus is the most considerable in an English-language version to date: about sixty pages of commentary on author, plot, background, difficulty of translation and a further thirteen pages of notes on the text by Joseph Farrell as well as questions for further study. The proliferation of paratext is not surprising: it is clearly motivated by its intended audience, students of drama and world literature classes. While the translation does mirror the Italian original in a way similar to Emery's translation, Nye is also the only Fo translator/adaptor to set the play unequivocally in Britain. In cases of divergence from the Italian (when the *bersaglieri* become *Ghurkas*, for example) Farrell's footnotes explain Nye's translational choices in relation to the Italian original.

As was the case with the Richards version, the paratextual commentary often works in a different direction, providing a complementary perspective to the playtext proper. In the Nye version, the paratextual commentary reminds the reader that this is an originally and deeply Italian text. However, rather than just presenting text and paratext alongside one another, the notes and detailed commentary provided by Farrell engage with the inherent discrepancies between these two types of text and carefully construct a double perspective. This is a first in the translation history of the play. This double perspective, however, is available only to the reader of the student edition. If you sit in a performance of Nye's version of the play or if you read the version published in 2003 that has virtually no commentary at all, the links to an

Italian context are weak and diluted (in the first case perhaps necessarily so, as a performance cannot include explanations of the kind provided in the paratext).

In his introduction to the 2005 student edition, Farrell, a professor of Italian at Strathclyde University, uses interviews and theoretical texts by Fo to argue his case. He terms Fo's style of drama "didactic farce".³⁵ Farce makes catharsis impossible, it leaves the spectator or reader with anger alongside a specific, defiant type of laughter. Farrell includes a long section on the situation in Italy in 1969 (over fifteen pages), thus providing the reader with a deeper understanding of the genesis of the original text although the translation does not refer to any of these events as it is set in contemporary Britain. Farrell also engages with the reasons why Fo seems to need an adaptor more than other foreign playwrights:

An adaptation involves a wider switch, where the adaptor, who in Britain is likely to be different from the translator, makes alterations designed to update, to change setting, to alter the topic of any discussion of satire, to modify character or in some other way to domesticate and make more familiar what is foreign and strange.³⁶

Yet another innovation of the Nye version (2005) is Farrell's overview of the different versions available in the UK (Richards, Cumming and Supple, Emery). According to Farrell, the Richards adaptation "involved a switch of theatrical culture, from an Italian commedia dell'arte style to a messier style based on British music hall. It was not Fo and was more vacuous than the original, but it had a fire, a drive and a comic force of its own."³⁷ Cumming and Supple chose "an imprecise setting, half-Italy and half-England"³⁸ but then used the play to point out political injustices in Britain. In his brief discussion of Emery's translation, Farrell implies that Nye's translation is similarly faithful in a philological sense to the Italian originals. The major difference between the two is that Emery sets the play in Italy while Nye sets the play unambiguously in Britain: the *bersaglieri* become *ghurkas*, the University of Padua becomes the University of Des Moines, references to Venice and other Italian

locations disappear completely or are replaced by English locations (Huddersfield instead of Vibo-Valentia Calabrese). Also, the references to the Inspector's possible involvement with the Nazis are updated: he is now suspected to have been running a mercenary outfit in Bosnia.

The final paragraph of Farrell's extensive commentary to the Nye version is dedicated to the poor reception of *Accidental Death* in the United States, attributed to "the poor quality of the adaptations and the productions. In all cases, companies have sought to emphasise the comedy at the expense of the politics."³⁹ In comparison, Farrell states, Nye's version is a "witty and lively translation".⁴⁰

Conclusion

According to Antonio Scuderi and Joe Farrell, critics who have written extensively on Fo, one of the problems with the English Fo is that there is no "official" Fo translator who could give his writings a certain consistency in the target language.⁴¹ It might help to give Fo one voice in English rather than many; yet, as the practice of adapting plays is accepted and widely practiced, and as Fo himself believes in the need to update political theatre, fixing his voice in a uniform published edition of his major works would still only be a philological rather than theatrical success.

One simple explanation for the many translations and adaptations of a single play such as *Accidental Death* (with one publisher producing five different versions in several editions in less than three decades!) is that – to put it bluntly – each new production represents an opportunity to reissue this bestselling play. Further, because it is a theatre text and a text by a playwright who advocates artistic freedom, it can reinvent itself on a regular basis in a variety of ways. This reinvention must, however, be justified in a culture which still judges translations in terms of authenticity and

faithfulness. There is, as we have seen, a conflict between the adaptor's freedom given by Fo and the demand for fidelity to the original, a conflict that is quite visible on the paratextual level. My close reading of the paratexts has also shown another issue in this regard: while Fo advocates the adaptor's freedom in theory, in practice his credo sometimes falters, as his critical position towards some translations and his active involvement in the shaping of others shows.

While the author's position towards the translations is inconsistent, this may also be true of the publisher. There exists no single editing strategy when it comes to translated playtexts, not even in the Methuen Drama series. While there generally is a varying amount of paratext, there does not seem to be a standard procedure for deciding whose voices should be heard in the paratext: those of the author, the translator, the adaptor, literary critics? Within a single publishing house and within a single series there probably should be a clearly defined strategy when it comes to the presentation of texts. Ideally, the aim would be to provide the reader of the drama text with as rounded a picture as possible by allowing all major agents involved in the production of the text to have their say. An introduction by a specialist in the field that focuses on the genesis of the text and its impact in the original culture is always helpful. So are notes from the adaptors and translators, as they have to engage with translation and adaptation strategies. If, as is accepted practice in the UK and the USA, the playtext appears in conjunction with or after a specific staging, the paratext could also include extracts or a facsimile of the programme. Ultimately, the author should also be heard, whether in a translation of an original preface or introduction, or – as is the case with the Richards version – in a text specifically written for the translation or adaptation in which an author is given space to comment on the new version of the text.

The repeated attempts at an English-language *Accidental Death* make one think of Erika Fischer-Lichte's remark that acts of translation and adaptation are egotistical because they do not primarily serve the purpose of getting to know another culture but rather reinforce one's own culture:

The starting point of intercultural performance is, therefore, not primarily interest in the foreign, the foreign theatre form or foreign culture from which it derives, but rather a wholly specific situation within the own culture or a wholly specific problem originating in the own theatre. The net of relationships which an intercultural performance weaves between the own theatre, own culture, and the foreign theatre traditions and cultures from which it adopts elements, is thus clearly dominated by the 'familiar.'⁴²

In the case of *Accidental Death*, the overall translation and adaptation trend has been one of domestication. Jennifer Lorch has claimed that "it is not possible to produce a version of this play that aims both to be faithful to the author's intentions of the period and to make of it a viable play for the English/American stage, whether fringe or mainstream. The gulf between the two political cultures is too great."⁴³

Farrell argues that "there is the same need with Fo as with other, more obviously "serious" playwrights, to identify the inner vision and to respect that vision as well as the quirks, oddities, idiosyncrasies and comic predilections of the surface".⁴⁴

However, he also argues that out of Fo's entire oeuvre the versions of *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* have to date been the most successful. The heavily domesticated texts may refer to

the plight of airport protesters in Japan or spy-scandals in Britain, but this has prevented it suffering the fate of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *Gulliver's Travels*, both works that began life as political satires. The international success of that play is a testimony to the theatrical mastery of Fo, to his skill in imagining original theatrical situations and to his expertise in devising structures marrying the extra-theatrical passion to appropriate theatrical techniques, but also to the value of a process which, combining translation and adaptation, conveys all these qualities to other cultures. The result might be, for purists, a variation on a theme, but the music is Fo's.⁴⁵

Some may argue that the case of Fo's political theatre as exemplified by *Accidental Death* is quite unique; and the play does pose a particular set of problems, as we have seen. However, I contend that the proliferation of voices that is quite visible in the English versions of Fo's play (author, translator, adaptor, academic, editor) is actually

the rule rather than the exception in most translations. It may be time for readers, academic and general, to make a conscious effort to acknowledge and differentiate the various voices in (translated) literature, and the distinct strategies these voices advocate.

Notes

¹ Jennifer Lorch, "Morte Accidentale in English," in *Dario Fo. Stage, Text, and Tradition*, eds. Joseph Farrell and Antonio Scuderi (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), p. 144.

² George L. Bastin, "Adaptation," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, eds. Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 5.

³ Joseph Farrell and Antonio Scuderi, *Dario Fo. Stage, Text, and Tradition*, p. 19.

⁴ "It's true – we're in the shit up to our necks, and that's precisely the reason why we walk with our heads held high." Translation by Ed Emery in Fo, *Plays: 1*, ed. Stuart Hood, trans. Ed Emery, Joe Farrell, R. C. McAvoy and A.-M. Giugni (London: Methuen, 2006 [1992]), p. 206.

⁵ See Manuela Perteghella, "A Descriptive-Anthropological Model of Theatre Translation," in *Drama Translation and Theatre Practice*, eds. Sabine Coelsch-Foisner and Holger Klein (Berne: Peter Lang, 2004), 1-23; on the two translation strategies, see p. 6. On non-Western translation traditions, see Eva Hung and Judy Wakabayashi, eds. *Asian Translation Traditions* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2005).

⁶ Stefania Taviano, "British Acculturation of Italian Theatre," in *Translation in Context: Selected Papers from the Est Congress, Granada 1998*, eds. Andrew Chesterman, Natividad Gallardo San Salvador and Yves Gambier (Amsterdam and New York: John Benjamins, 2000), pp. 340-44.

⁷ Stefania Taviano, "British Acculturation of Italian Theatre," p. 340.

⁸ Textual strategies adapted by Archer are described by Tim Fitzpatrick and Ksenia Sawczak: "Accidental Death of a Translator: The Difficult Case of Dario Fo," in *About Performance: Translation and Performance. Working Papers 1* (1995), pp. 15-34. For Giberti's staging, see reviews by Holly Dickens, "Accidental Death of an Anarchist," <<http://www.dailyinfo.co.uk/reviews/theatre/anarchist2005.htm>> and Rosie Hetherington, "Accidental Death of an Anarchist at the Oxford Playhouse," <http://www.bbc.co.uk/oxford/stage/2005/02/accidental_death_of_an_anarchist_review.shtml>.

⁹ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, adapted by Gavin Richards (London: Methuen, 2001 [1987]), p. 79.

¹⁰ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, adapted by Richards, pp. xvi-xvii.

¹¹ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, adapted by Richards, pp. xvi-xvii.

¹² See, for example, Stefania Taviano, "Translating Political Theatre: The Case of Dario Fo and Franca Rame," in *Drama Translation and Theatre Practice*, pp. 325-40.

¹³ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, adapted by Richards, p. xviii.

¹⁴ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, adapted by Richards, p. xviii.

¹⁵ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, adapted by Richards, p. 1.

- ¹⁶ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, adapted by Richards, p. 2.
- ¹⁷ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, adapted by Richards, p. 68.
- ¹⁸ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, adapted by Richard Nelson (New York: Samuel French, 1987), p. 6.
- ¹⁹ Stefania Taviano, *Staging Dario Fo and Franca Rame. Anglo-American approaches to Political Theatre* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), p. 69.
- ²⁰ See Anita Gates, "Searching for Truth, Under Cover of Lies," <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/14/nyregion/accidental-death-of-an-anarchist-at-drew-university-review.html>>.
- ²¹ Andrew Burnett, "Rebirth of an Anarchist," *List*, 26 October 1990.
- ²² Dario Fo, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, adapted by Alan Cumming and Tim Supple (London: Methuen, 1991), p. xvii.
- ²³ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, adapted by Cumming and Supple, p. xix. The quote Cairns uses is taken from Dario Fo and Luigi Allegri, *Dario Fo, Dialogo provocatorio sul comico, il tragico, la follia e la ragione*, I Robinson (Roma: Laterza, 1990).
- ²⁴ The Guildford Four (Paul Michael Hill, Gerry Conlon, Paddy Armstrong and Carole Richardson) were accused of having been directly involved in the IRA bombings of pubs in Guildford in October 1974. Sentenced to life imprisonment in 1975, the convictions were quashed in 1989 after it emerged that police had fabricated and suppressed evidence and heavily edited notes from the interviews with the suspects. Similarly, the Birmingham Six (Hugh Callaghan, Patrick Joseph Hill, Gerard Hunter, Richard McIlkenny, William Power and John Walker) were accused of having contributed to the Birmingham pub bombings in November 1974. Again, they were released in 1991 and their cases described as a miscarriage of justice.
- ²⁵ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, adapted by Cumming and Supple, p. xxiii.
- ²⁶ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, adapted by Cumming and Supple, p. xxiii.
- ²⁷ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, adapted by Cumming and Supple, p. xxiii.
- ²⁸ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, adapted by Cumming and Supple, p. xxiv.
- ²⁹ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, adapted by Cumming and Supple, p. xxiv.
- ³⁰ The Italian titles of these plays are: *Mistero Buffo, L'uomo nudo e l'uomo in frack, Clacson, trombette e pernacchie, Non tutti i ladri vengono per nuocere*.
- ³¹ Dario Fo, *Plays: 1*, p. xi.
- ³² Dario Fo, *Plays: 1*, p. 124.
- ³³ Dario Fo, *Plays: 1*, p. 124.
- ³⁴ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, translated by Simon Nye (London: Methuen, Methuen Drama, 2003). Unpaginated page.
- ³⁵ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, translated by Simon Nye (London: Methuen, Methuen Drama Student Editions, 2005), p. xxiii.
- ³⁶ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, translated by Nye, 2005, p. lx.
- ³⁷ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, translated by Nye, 2005, p. lxii.
- ³⁸ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, translated by Nye, 2005, p. lxii.
- ³⁹ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, translated by Nye, 2005, p. lxiii.
- ⁴⁰ Dario Fo, *Accidental Death*, translated by Nye, 2005, p. lxiii.
- ⁴¹ Joseph Farrell and Antonio Scuderi, "Editors' Preface," in *Dario Fo. Stage, Text, and Tradition*, unpaginated page.

⁴² Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Staging the Foreign as Cultural Transformation," in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference: Theatre, Own and Foreign*, eds. Erika Fischer-Lichte, Josephine Riley, and Michael Gissenwehler (Tübingen: Narr, 1990), p. 283.

⁴³ Jennifer Lorch, "Morte Accidentale in English," p. 157.

⁴⁴ Joseph Farrell, "Variations on a Theme: Respecting Dario Fo." *Modern Drama* 41, no. 1 (1998), pp. 19-29. Here p. 28.

⁴⁵ Joseph Farrell, "Variations on a Theme," p. 29.

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