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Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 59, No. 899 (Jan. 1, 1918), pp. 21-23

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/908754>

Accessed: 24-11-2015 12:40 UTC

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THE TRANSLATION OF SONGS AND OPERAS INTO ENGLISH.

BY N. DE V. HART.

(Concluded from December number, page 551.)

Rule 5.—With regard to this rule, as indeed with regard to all the rules, it is by no means necessary, or even advisable, invariably to obey it. But it frequently happens that some special effect in the music would be destroyed if the trans-

lation did not prolong the syllables over one or more notes in a manner corresponding to that of the original. Thus the vocal and musical effect of the phrase from Vulcan's song from Gounod's 'Philemon et Baucis':

EX. 4.

Sans é - cou - ter le re - ste, loin du se - jour cé - les - te Moi, je fuis.
I . . dare no long - er stay, But with hea-vy, hur-ried step I haste a - way.

would be completely lost if the distribution of the syllables of the translation did not coincide with the composer's distribution of the syllables of the original. The translation here given, which is the one usually sung, is by no means an ideal one (for example, the shifting of the comma one note back at the word 'but' is rather clumsy), but the translator has made at least some effort to obey Rule 5. Imagine what the effect would have been if he had placed one word on each note of the descending scale, or if, in the third bar, he had not given one word to each of the heavy, thumping C sharps and D's!

It would seem that no translator could, in like circumstances, make so egregious a mistake; but the conventional desire to write rhymed verse will lead to the most surprising results. Take, for example, Mr. H. B. Farnie's translation of the 'Waltz Song' from Gounod's 'Romeo et Juliette':

EX. 5.

Je veux vi - - vre . .
Song, jest, perfume and dan - ces,
Dans ce rê - - ve . .
Smiles, vows, love-la-den glan - ces.

This song is of the *prima donna* type, and requires perfect *bel canto* for its execution. Here, if anywhere, one would have thought, the translator would have paid particular regard to the vocal and musical effects. The composer has set the words very lightly to the music, and the outstanding effect of the song, an effect on which the delicate rhythm depends, is the device of putting three notes to one syllable in certain symmetrically-recurring phrases. The translator has seen fit throughout the song to put one word to almost every note, and has thus not only lamed the rhythm and marred the symmetry, but has multiplied the vocal difficulties to such an extent as to make it quite impossible to get the beautiful mixture of *staccato* and *legato* singing to which the original lends itself so admirably.

The example I have just given is rather an extreme case: the mistake is usually made on a smaller scale. For example, in Mrs. R. H. Elkin's translation of Schumann's 'Aus alten Märchen winkt es,' from the 'Dichterliebe,' which is on the whole a good piece of work, a slight error of judgment is found:

EX. 6.

Da singt - es und da klingt - es von
And all around floats a mys - tic sound As
There's sing - ing and there's ring - ing, Glad

This phrase is intended by the composer to be sung with a rapid *portamento*, or *glissade*, of the voice from the E *via* the first G to the second G on the words

singt es, and again from the first G of the last bar *via* the first C to the second C on the words *klingt es*. By putting in an extra syllable, the translator has rendered impossible this vocal effect, for which the composer has made special provision. In this one phrase, but hardly anywhere else, the translation of Mr. Percy Pinkerton is to be preferred: 'There's singing and there's ringing, &c.' This not only avoids a breach of Rule 5, but it is nearer the meaning and rhythm of the original words.

We now come to the singer's requirements. These have already been incidentally referred to, because the factors that go to make up a good translation dovetail into each other in such a way that it is impossible, even in analysis, to keep them quite separate.

Rules 6 and 7.—The first thing to be pointed out with regard to these rules is that the English language possesses, from the point of view of the singer, too many consonants and too few vowels. Every consonant means a momentary interruption of the flow of sound. In any phrase, therefore, which demands an extremely *legato* style of delivery, the translator should endeavour to avoid the use of words containing many consonants or double-consonants. It is the many monosyllables, which abound in English, beginning and ending with groups of consonants, that particularly require watching in this regard.

The French Symbolists and Mystics, and the Modern English Schools of poetry which have founded themselves on Symbolism and Mysticism, have taught us that vowels and consonants have an aesthetic value in the combination and grouping of them, quite apart from the meaning of the words in which they occur; and that they can, by their mere sound, create an atmosphere, or *Stimmung*, as surely as the music itself. In view of the many and varied requirements that he has to satisfy, no great subtlety or faithfulness in this respect can be demanded of the translator of songs; but there are times when certain vocal or declamatory effects can be executed by the singer only if the translator has provided him with the necessary vowels and consonants. There are brilliant and dark, closed and open, broad and pinched vowels; and there are hard and soft, murmurous and resonant, sharp and dull consonants; and sometimes in particular instances it is necessary for the translator to take this into consideration.

For example, to translate the first phrase of Schumann's 'Ich grolle nicht,' which phrase recurs throughout the song, by 'I murmur not,' is to take from the singer all power of delivering the phrase with the declamatory force it requires. The soft nasal *m's* create at the outset an atmosphere of gentle melancholy which is far removed from the heart-broken, forcible anguish of the poem, and which the harsh, guttural *g* and rolling *r* of *grolle* convey so perfectly. To translate *grollen* by 'to grieve,' as has been suggested, betters things a little; but it is not quite the meaning of the German, and the vowel-sound is too pinched. 'I grumble not' is the best translation, for it contains just the right consonants, reproduces the dark vowel-sound of *grollen*, and is the exact sense of the German. The one objection to 'I grumble not' as a translation is that the word 'grumble,' for some mysterious reason, has something of the atmosphere of colloquialism about it, and seems to many people to be unpoetic. It is, however, a legitimate and purely-English

word, and I venture to think that its slightly homely sound is not unsuited to the deliberate uncouthness and force of Heine's poem.

Sometimes the repetition of a particular vowel or consonant, or a particular grouping of them, constitutes the main effect of a phrase or sentence. This is most noticeable in Wagner's book of the 'Ring,' the alliteration of which, as a general rule, must be reproduced. Mr. Jameson's magnificent translation should be studied on this point. But even he occasionally forgets that what may appear to be sufficiently alliterative to the eye, may fall short of what the singer requires for the correct delivery of a specific phrase. Mr. Jameson's translation of the famous 'Winter stürme wichen dem Wonnemond,' from 'Die Walküre,' is all that could be desired from every point of view, except in one short, but highly important, phrase, where he has not given the singer a sufficient number of hard vowels for the reproduction of the effect desired by Wagner. Mr. Jameson translates 'Keim und Spross entspringt seiner Kraft' by 'Bud and shoot spring up by his might':

Ex. 7.

Keim und Spross ent-springt sei-ner Kraft.
bud and shoot spring up by his might.
grass and shoot up-spring at his call.

This is inadequate. The hard, scintillating *k*'s cannot be represented by the cotton-wool-like *b* and the gentle *m*, nor the purposely many-consonated *entspringt* (five consonants in succession, with no vowel between) by the weak word 'spring up,' while the sharp, pinched vowel of *-springt* cannot be replaced by the broad vowel of 'up.' It is curious to observe that the translator has placed the vowel of 'spring,' which was just the vowel required for the high F, on the lower and unaccented note C. The phrase is, admittedly, a difficult one to translate, and a complete reproduction of its brilliancy and force is impossible; but I think that a better version than Mr. Jameson's can be found. The words *Keim* and *Spross* are so closely allied in meaning that it is clear that in placing them in juxtaposition Wagner was not so much considering the separate idea contained in each as he was their consonantal and vowel values when sung. Consequently, a slight departure from the literal meaning of the words, if it succeeds in retaining the required consonants and vowels, is not only permissible but it will be nearer the spirit of the poem, which is here almost onomatopœic, than will a very literal rendering such as Mr. Jameson's. I suggest the following: 'Grass and shoots upspring at his call.' The *k* of *Keim* is reproduced by another guttural, *g*, which, though it is not so sharply brilliant as the *k*, is nearer to it than the *b* of 'bud.' The word 'grass' also contains the rolling *r* which runs through the whole phrase of the original. The *k* sound of *Kraft* is reproduced by the hard *c* of 'call' which, though it lacks the rolling *r* and the sharp *t* of *Kraft*, is the best word available without straying too far from the meaning of the original. The vowel of 'spring,' it will be observed, now falls on its right note, and by means of the *ö* of 'up' and the *spr* of 'spring,' I have retained in identically the same spot four out of the five successive consonants mentioned above. Mr. Jameson's translation reads infinitely better than mine and is more literal, but I submit that any singer will prefer mine on the ground that it makes it possible for him to get nearer to the vocal effect which Wagner contemplated.

The question of vowels is most important, from the singer's point of view, in the case of high notes and notes on the extreme limits of registers. Where these occur the translator's care should be not to make the task of the singer harder than the composer himself has chosen to do. In the case of an extremely high note, an open vowel is preferable to a closed one, unless the note is to be sung *pianissimo*, when a closed vowel actually aids the singer in mixing in the head resonance which is necessary in the production of pure soft notes. The consonant that precedes a very high note is also a matter for consideration. A consonant pronounced with the lips, teeth, and the tip of the tongue—such as *m*, *n*, *f*, *r*, *b*, *p*, *d*, *v*, *l*—is an aid to the production of a high note; gutturals—such as

k, *g*, *ch* (as in the German word *ich*); sibilants—such as *s*, *z*, *sh*, *ch*—tend to throw the voice to the back of the throat, and are actual hindrances to production—hindrances which every good singer must know how to overcome but which the translator should bear in mind and not needlessly multiply.

For example, in the exceedingly difficult phrase from Canio's 'Sobbing Song' from 'I Pagliacci,' which the composer directs to be sung *a piena voce, straziante*:

Ex. 8.

sul tuo a-mo-re in fran-to!
for the love that is end-ed!

the *fr* and the *nt* of the word *infranto* help the singer to hurl forth the *fortissimo* high second A and the G which follows it. The translator has made a sibilant *s* precede the A, and thereby not only deprived the voice of the support lent to it in the original by the *fr*, but introduced a consonant with a tendency to throat production, and so actually added a difficulty to a phrase which was already sufficiently formidable.

Rule 9.—This rule not only affects the singer, but, as we saw when we were considering Rule 2, its breach often results in the loss of unity of the musical phrase. The rule is especially important in songs which require *bel canto* treatment. It is not always necessary to distribute the syllables in a manner precisely similar to that of the original, but care must be taken never to check the flowing enunciation of words in phrases which demand *legato* singing. The current translation of the Serenade from 'Don Giovanni' commits just this blunder:

Ex. 9.

Se ne-ghia me-di dar
A-rise, and show the stars

The song, as a whole and in detail, requires the most sustained *legato* singing. The pause that must, if the singer is to make the sense clear, be made after the invocation implied in the word 'Arise' renders it impossible to enunciate the whole phrase as an even-flowing unit. Again, there is the same fault in the translation of Franz's 'Stille Sicherheit':

Ex. 10.

Hoch, wie still es wird in dunkeln Hain,
Hark, how still 'tis in the grove, no tone!

To put two separate words, 'grove' and 'no,' divided by a comma and requiring a pause to make the meaning plain, on the notes E and D, on which in the original the one word *Dunkeln* falls, is to break, quite unnecessarily, the continuity of the whole phrase. No singer can sing the English words as here given with the smoothness and quietness which the musical phrase demands.

Rule 10.—This rule is so obvious as to require little comment. A singer must be understood by his audience, and no translator has the right to force on him involved constructions and parentheses which, clear though they may be to the eye of a reader, are difficult of comprehension when sung and prolonged over several bars or phrases. Such simplicity as is compatible with the spirit of the original poem is what the translator should aim at.

Rules 11, 12, 13 and 14.—The literary requirements have already been dealt with in detail in the course of discussing the other factors. This was rendered necessary by the fact that nearly all the errors which have been pointed out were found to be due, directly or indirectly, to the disproportionate importance given to the literary aspects of translating by the traditional methods. Now I, too, am in a sense prepared to assign great importance to these aspects; but I believe that a mechanical and slavish adherence to the literary form

of the original poem, except when the composer has himself followed it very closely, defeats its own ends. It is, as every translator knows, extremely difficult to reproduce literary form in detail, even in a translation which is to be read and not sung. When the many musical and vocal factors come into play, as they do in songs, the task is not merely difficult: it is impossible. Something must be given up. The conventional method is to consider mainly the literary aspects, and to leave the fate of the music and of the singer more or less to chance. This results, curiously enough, in translations which, when sung, grate on the nerves of any person possessed of poetical instincts. The words of the translation may read quite well, but when forced on to the music in a manner regardless of the rhythm and phraseology of the composition, or of the physical and technical requirements of the singer, the effect is usually far from that which the translator imagined when he complacently read over the stanzas which on paper seemed so neat and accurate. He finds the singer giving a strong accent to words that have only a slight accent when read; he hears unimportant words fervently prolonged on the key-note of the phrase; he hears sentences haltingly and jerkily delivered; and he watches the singer struggling painfully with technical difficulties, and spitting forth at intervals mouthfuls of spluttering consonants. The whole thing, he discovers, sounds lame, heavy, and forced. He shrugs his shoulders, and says, 'Ah, well! It just shows how far even good translations fall short of the original.'

When he reads this article he will perhaps realise that if he concentrated his attention first on the spirit of the poem, then on the music of the song, and finally on the vocal effects and the requirements of the singer, the literary form would suffer less than he imagines, even if the translation be read; and that a translation which sounds flowing, easy, and spontaneous on the lips of a singer, and which fits the musical phrases as a glove fits the hand, even if it lacks some of the literary frills, offends the poetical ear of a listener far less than a translation which is formally perfect but which is pinned down on the music as washing is clothes-pegged on a line.

MR. W. W. STARMER ON 'CARILLONS' (LIVERPOOL).

Mr. W. W. Starmer gave a lecture on 'Carillons' to the local members of the I.S.M. on December 8. His highly interesting address was illustrated by fine lantern-slides as well as by deftly-played pianoforte examples of original music for carillons. The address was especially timely in view of the suggestion that has been made that the new Liverpool Cathedral with its magnificent central tower should be provided with a carillon worthy of such a building, for which a bequest has been set apart for the bells under the will of the late Mr. Thomas Bartlett. On this matter Mr. Starmer said:

I feel that before leaving the subject of carillons I must mention an important matter concerning bells which I am sure is of the greatest interest to everyone here. You are building in this city a most noble Cathedral which when completed will be one of the finest structures in the world. For the Cathedral, bells of unusual size and excellence will be required. The late Mr. Thomas Bartlett—who left a large sum to the building with special provision for the bells—employed me to advise him as to the latter, and I probably know more than anyone what his particular desires were concerning the bells. The sum he left for the purpose will be sufficient under normal conditions to provide for the finest ringing peal of twelve bells in existence, and the probable cost was based on the weight of the tenor bell being seventy-five to eighty hundredweights. In addition to the peal of twelve, a large Bourdon bell to weigh not less than thirteen tons was included in the estimate, and it was thought that as the money provided would not be required for some considerable time it would accumulate sufficient interest to increase the weight of the Bourdon so as to exceed that of Big Ben. I however put forward as an alternative to the Bourdon bell a scheme for a carillon of four octaves. This idea fascinated and interested him very much, so much so that he could not make up his mind which he preferred. This being the case he ultimately decided to name a sufficient

sum which should be spent at the discretion of the authorities, when the tower was ready for the bells. I provided him with every necessary detail of these three schemes, but as far as I am aware he left no definite instructions as to how his gift for the bells was to be specifically dealt with. In this I think he was wise, because owing to the great fluctuation of the prices of copper and tin—the components of bell-metal—it would be impossible to estimate the probable cost, say ten years hence, and now of course the exigencies of war increase the difficulty. However, his great desire was to make the new Cathedral supreme in the matter of bells, and as I understand that already a suggestion has been made that a carillon should be installed in the grand tower suited to the magnitude and dignity of the building, surely this would be exactly in accordance with the wishes of the donor of the bells. At any rate, I sincerely hope that such a project will receive the serious consideration of the Cathedral authorities, for the magnificent central tower will be an exceptionally fine 'setting' for such an instrument. The great height of the tower offers a very particular advantage, as the chamber containing the bells of a large carillon should never be less than 120 feet above the ground level.

People are apt to confuse carillon-playing and change-ringing, but there is a wide difference between them. In many towers, and especially in those of short (or low) proportions, when change-ringing is being practised—that is, when the bells are being rung in full swing—the volume of sound from the peal is almost deafening, particularly in the immediate vicinity of the tower. I daresay most of those present can call to mind more than one church where such is the case. With the carillon the bells hang stationary, and the movement of the clappers is limited, and what I might term the exceedingly *robust* tone of change-ringing is not possible. A full, rich sound, however, can be produced, and with an artist at the clavier the power of the tone can be reduced to the most delicate *pianissimo*. But the auditor must not take up his position too far from the tower if he wishes to hear the music at its best. I know of one place in Great Britain where there is a carillon of thirty-seven bells. At its inauguration some of the people went two or three miles out of the town to hear the bells, with the result that they were grievously disappointed. Five hundred yards from the tower would have been a more satisfactory distance. I well remember the first time I heard the magnificent carillon of Malines played by the greatest carillonneur, Josef Denyn. It sounded to me like a gigantic harpsichord, although he was playing on bells ranging from eight tons to a weight which must be reckoned in pounds.

Now the finest carillon in the Kingdom is at Queenstown Cathedral, Ireland, and consists of forty-two bells weighing seventeen and a-half tons. For tone and accuracy of tune they are the finest set of bells in Europe of that weight and compass. As the population of Liverpool is at least a hundred times as great as that of Queenstown, little Queenstown seems to me to point a moral as to what is expected from Liverpool's citizens!

The carillon should be complete in itself and quite distinct from the ringing peal. The reasons for this are: (1.) The scale of the bells for carillon use is quite different from that for ringing purposes; and (2.) Even if this were not so, the constant disconnection of the clavier action is a great trouble and most undesirable on account of the minute regulation of the touch, which is imperative, and which would have to be adjusted every time the clappers were disconnected.

The salient points in favour of a carillon are:

(1.) The position of the tower; (2.) The height of the tower, both exceedingly important factors for the best musical effects of the bells. Such conditions would allow their sounds to travel in all directions without hindrance, and as there are no buildings in close proximity the unpleasant reflection of sound would be avoided.

It would remain for this great city to produce or discover an artist worthy of the carillon. I might say, a Best of the clavier, to elicit the best from the bells. Lastly, I am confident that nothing would have pleased the late Thomas Bartlett, the donor of the bells, more than a fine carillon so well placed.

We understand that Mr. Herman Klein is the new musical critic on the *Saturday Review*.