

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

<p><b>Institution:</b> Queen’s University Belfast</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 28 - Modern Languages</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Theatre Translation and Cultural Encounter</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study describes the impact generated by new thinking on the representation of the foreign in translation for the theatre. The main beneficiaries of the research are theatre audiences across the English-speaking world, as well as theatres, theatre companies and publishing houses. As a result of the project’s insights into localisation and performability, theatre audiences have benefited from intellectual and imaginative engagement with a more authentic and lucid interpretation of Hispanic theatre and culture that challenges their own cultural values. The work has also contributed to the creative economy through the generation of income from the stage productions and the publication of translations.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The principal research questions addressed by Johnston in his underpinning research and translation practice are: what translation strategies and actions are necessary to ensure that the translated play functions as drama, and to what extent can translated plays in performance avoid the trap of excessive domestication and promote intercultural encounter?</p> <p>Central to Johnston’s research and practice is a recognition of the cultural and dramaturgical consciousness of the translator. The strategies underpinning this are established in <i>Stages of Translation</i> (1). This and subsequent publications analyse how the ‘performability’ of the foreign-language play in English may be secured. The theoretical bases of the performability of translation are set out for the first time in Johnston’s work (see 2); previously, the task of rendering a play performable was generally attributed to the director (see the work of Susan Bassnett in this regard). Johnston’s research proposes an enriched sense of the term ‘performability’, encompassing strategies of localization (see 3) and concepts of cultural visibility by which the play’s principal thematic concerns are modulated to articulate the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar (4). In this way Johnston’s research proposes a translation methodology that draws both upon theatre practice and translation theory (5). Theatre pragmatism, accordingly, should be enriched by a commitment to translation as an ethical regime, so that translations should work on stage as fluent and engaging pieces of theatre, as well as inviting mainstream audiences on a journey that will offer a new perspective on their own historically- and culturally-contingent state. In that way this translation practice seeks to resist a notable tendency of the professional English-speaking theatre, which is to erode cultural and linguistic difference (6). In short, the interdisciplinary nature of Johnston’s work brings the ethical anxieties of Translation Studies – revolving around the representation of cultures alien to us – into creative tension with the pragmatism of commercial stage practice, a theoretical position that has been generally credited for bringing theatre translation (described by Lefevere in 1992 as the ‘cinderella of translation theory’) into the theoretical mainstream (7).</p> <p>Johnston’s work represents a qualitative shift in stage translation in that it establishes the translated text not as second-order creation, but rather as an opportunity for a different quality of reception, one that is enriched through the heightened impact of cultural encounter (8). By analysing the dramaturgical consciousness (rather than philological training) that underpins a commercially and artistically successful translation practice, Johnston’s work provides a detailed</p>

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response to the first of the research questions articulated above, and in doing so provides the basis for theatre translation as a writing practice. Beyond this, his emphasis on translation ethics – namely, that plays in translation, appropriately negotiated by the translator, can and should bring the dynamic possibilities of cultural encounter into the auditorium – prompts translators, including himself, to produce texts that will challenge and enrich the spectator experience. As the section on impact will show, the creative tension between these two aspirations lies at the heart of the multiple and continuing productions that his translations have enjoyed.

The body of underpinning research for which impact is claimed was carried out by Johnston since 1996 while employed at Queen's as Professor of Spanish.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Johnston (ed.) *Stages of Translation* (Bath: Absolute 1996). 'It should be required reading for everyone who works in the field, as either translator or director', *New Theatre Quarterly* 13 (1997), 400.
2. Johnston, 'Securing the Performability of the Text', in: Coeslch-Foisner and Klein (eds.) *Drama Translation and Theatre Practice* (Berlin: Peter Lang 2004), 24-43.\*
3. Johnston, 'Valle-Inclán: the Meaning of Form', in: Upton and Hale (eds.) *The Moving Target. Theatre Translation and Cultural Relocation* (Manchester: St Jerome, 2000), 85-99.
4. Johnston, 'The Cultural Engagements of Stage Translation: the case of García Lorca', in: Anderman (ed.) *Voices in Translation. Bridging Cultural Divides* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters 2007), 78-93.
5. Johnston, 'Metaphor and Metonymy: The Translator-Practitioner's Visibility', in: Baines, Marinetti and Perteghella (eds.) *Staging and Performing Translation: Text and Theatre Practice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2011), 13-29.\*\*
6. Johnston, 'Professing Translation: the acts-in-between', *Target*, Vol. 25, 2013.\*\* This is the first leading international Translation Studies journal to devote a special issue to theatre translation. Johnston's article was specially commissioned. See also Anderman, *Europe on Stage* (London: Oberon, 2005), throughout.
7. Boyle and Johnston (eds.) *The Spanish Golden Age in English: Translation and Performance*, (Oberon, 2007).
8. Essays dealing with this ethical practice have been commissioned for recent key books, such as *The Lope de Vega Companion* (Tamesis, eds. Thacker and Samson, 2008), *The Comedia in English* (Tamesis, eds. Paun de García and Larson, 2008), *Staging and Performing Translation* (Palgrave Macmillan, eds. Baines and Marinetti, 2010), and *Remaking the Comedia: Spanish Classical Theater in Adaptation* (eds Paun de Garcia and Harley, at press).

**Evidence of quality:** Items marked \* were entered in RAE 2008; items marked \*\* have been entered in REF.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Johnston's research into the tensions between performability and authenticity was disseminated in the first instance through scholarly publications, but they are further explored in his own translation practice. It is primarily through this mechanism that he has achieved impact beyond academia. His translation work led him to become engaged with theatre publishers and with professional theatre practitioners, including actors, directors and theatre companies, with whom he has developed collaborative workshops, readings etc. His translation strategies have brought invigorating new performance pieces to the English-speaking world through which he has challenged the cultural values and assumptions of his audiences. The translations and performances have produced revenue streams for publishers, Hispanic playwrights, theatres, theatre companies, and theatre practitioners

**Cultural Life and Civil Society:** Johnston's work has made a major contribution to the diversification of the repertoire of English-language theatre, thereby increasing opportunities for

theatre-goers to experience different cultures and alternative lived experiences that may challenge their own cultural prejudices and assumptions. This impact has been achieved in the first instance through his work as a practising translator (for example, through his translations of Lope de Vega and Lorca), in which his understanding of ethical performativity informs and invigorates the translation process. The reach and extent of his impact is considerable. Since 2008, eight of Johnston's translations from Spanish (and one from French) have received thirty-three professional, twelve amateur and eight educational productions, 55% of them in the UK and Ireland; 29% in the US; 10% in Australia and New Zealand, and 6% in Canada. He has established a performance tradition in English for Lope's theatre in particular: between 1900 and 2006 Thacker counts only 22 Lope productions in the UK but Johnston's translations have received 6 professional and three amateur/semi-professional productions in the last five years alone. He brought Lope's *Dog in the Manger* to the Washington Shakespeare Company in 2008 where it won five Helen Hayes Awards nominations, including Best Play (1). The *Washington Post*, acknowledging Johnston's strategy of engineering cultural encounter, observed that 'the comedy and characters manage to seem of their own time and ours' (2). Since the RSC season, *Dog in the Manger* has become the first Spanish Golden Age play to enter the amateur repertoire, receiving ten amateur productions since 2008. His *Madness in Valencia* (Lope) was re-staged in London in 2009 by a new company – Black and White Rainbow. It was nominated *Time Out's* Critic's Choice and Show of the Week and transferred to the West End (3).

Johnston's research-led practice has increased the diversity of the repertoire through the introduction of previously unknown plays to the market. Since 2008 Johnston has been commissioned by theatres such as London's Gate and the Royal Court to write translations of plays by writers such as Edgar Chías and Juan Mayorga. Since bringing Mayorga, for example, to the attention of the English-speaking spectator, Johnston has brought four more of his plays to production (*Nocturnal*, Gate Theatre, *Hamelin* in Toronto, Melbourne and Belfast, *The Boy at the Back*, in London, and *The Le Brun Method of Happiness* in a special edition on National Spanish Radio). Johnston's translation of Mayorga's *Way to Heaven*, for example, has been performed professionally eleven times since 2008, including a nine-month run in New York (4). Its run in the Odyssey Theatre, Los Angeles, received five *LA Weekly* nominations and won two awards. Translations of modern classics, such as Lorca's *Blood Wedding* and *The House of Bernarda Alba*, have received a range of productions (four educational, two professional). Johnston's translations of Lorca have been profiled in the *New Statesman*, where the writer recognizes Johnston's approach to translation, noting that *Bernarda Alba* 'works well because it avoids falling into the trap of trying to localise or foreignise the performance' (5).

An important strand in his impact strategy is direct engagement with theatre companies, directors, actors, and students. He has collaborated closely in the development and production of his translations with major theatres and institutions in the UK and Ireland, including the Royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre, Gate Notting Hill, Lyric Theatre Belfast, Rough Magic and Galloglass of Dublin, the Royal Court London, and RADA, e.g. through involvement in workshops and rehearsals. As well as numerous educational productions of his translations (see above), he works directly with future and emerging artists to explore the significance of the shape and tone of his translations. His *The Lady Boba* (Lope) received a workshop reading at the London Academy of Music and the Dramatic Arts (LAMDA) in January 2013 prior to its professional premiere in the Theatre Royal, Bath, and he delivered training seminars (January 2012 and June 2013) to LAMDA staff and students, as well as a seminar to MRes Creative Writing students at the University of Birmingham (February 2013). He also led post-show discussions after student productions of his translations at the Universities of Warwick (2008) and Birmingham (March 2013), with combined audiences of around 200. His work has increased the accessibility of

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Spanish theatre for students and has, for example, made possible the introduction of a module in Spanish Golden Age theatre as part of the MA in Classical Theatres in Performance at LAMDA. Johnston also promotes awareness and understanding of Spanish theatre among practitioners through the 'Out of the Wings' website which has been live since 2010 (6). This resource, which emerged from a project funded by the AHRC on which Johnston was CI, has become the first point of reference for theatre translation in Spanish and attracted 18,557 unique visitors in the period 1 Jan-1 May, 2013.

**Creative Economy:** Johnston has generated wealth in the creative sector through the publication of translations, the staging of plays and increased international exposure and copyright revenue for Hispanic playwrights. The publishing industry has benefited through the publication of new translations (four since 2008) and repeat sales of older translations: five translations published by Oberon have sold over 9000 copies in the census period, and his translation of *Blood Wedding*, published by Hodder, is currently in its thirty-third impression. Productions of Johnston's work have generated substantial audiences for theatre companies and houses and an estimated gross revenue of £1.5 million. *Dog in the Manger*, for example, has played professionally to over 20,000 spectators in the US, Australia and New Zealand, while *Madness in Valencia* played to over 3000 spectators in London. Returns from theatres for professional productions of Mayorga and Lorca indicate a combined audience for these plays in excess of 30,000 spectators since 2008, while his translation of *On Insomnia and Midnight*, by the previously unknown (in English) Mexican writer Edgar Chías, has now played to over 19,000 spectators around the world (including in Mexico), and is published in British and American editions. In the Irish context, Johnston's translation of Moliere's *The Miser*, that transferred from the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry to the Lyric Theatre in Belfast in 2010, gave the Lyric its first ever all-Ireland tour, playing to over 7000 spectators (7).

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

###### Productions and reviews:

1. <http://dctheatrescene.com/2009/02/18/the-dog-in-the-manger/>
2. Review of *Dog in the Manger*. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/gog/performing-arts/the-dog-in-the-manger,1154417/critic-review.html>.
3. <http://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/event/155696/madness-in-valencia>
4. Johnston (trans.) *Way to Heaven* (Juan Mayorga: *Himmelweg*). See, for example, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Way\\_to\\_Heaven\\_\(play\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Way_to_Heaven_(play)) and, for the New York production, <http://www.waytoheaventheplay.com/>. A viewing of the Australian premiere is at <http://www.youtube.com/user/GriffinTheatreTube/videos>.
5. <http://www.newstatesman.com/theatre/2008/11/lorca-play-johnston-stage>
6. [www.outofthewings.org](http://www.outofthewings.org): AHRC-funded project with King's College, London and Oxford University (approx. £760,000), 2008-12
7. <http://www.lyrictheatre.co.uk/lyric-live/specific/audience-reviews-from-the-miser>

###### Organisations and individuals for consultation: (see corroborating contacts)

- London Academy of Music and the Dramatic Arts (Head of Theatre Practice). Can comment on the innovative approach adopted by Johnston in his translations, corroborate the influence of his translations on the production of Spanish theatre in Britain and can confirm the impact of Johnston's collaborations on the experience of drama students at LAMDA.
- Oberon Books (Director). This publisher can corroborate the popularity and significance of Johnston's oeuvre, and confirm the importance and economic impact of Johnston's translation work to the publishing industry of bringing new and diverse works to the marketplace.
- Playwright. This independent playwright can comment on the economic importance of increased royalties generated for playwrights whose work has been opened up to new audiences through Johnston's translations and can testify personally to the significance to the artist of the resulting higher visibility and esteem.