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► **To cite this version:**

Julie Vatain. Borrowing another voice or the Cyrano complex. Vocal identity in Tina Howe's *Painting Churches* and its translation. *Sillages Critiques*, 2013, 16, 10.4000/sillagescritiques.3059 . hal-03262498

**HAL Id: hal-03262498**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03262498v1>**

Submitted on 16 Jun 2021

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### Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/sillagescritiques/3059>

DOI: [10.4000/sillagescritiques.3059](https://doi.org/10.4000/sillagescritiques.3059)

ISSN: 1969-6302

### Publisher

Centre de recherche VALE

Brought to you by Sorbonne Université



### Electronic reference

Julie Vatain, "Borrowing another voice or the Cyrano complex", *Sillages critiques* [Online], 16 | 2013, Online since 14 June 2013, connection on 16 June 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/sillagescritiques/3059> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/sillagescritiques.3059>

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## Introduction: the polyphony of Howe's theatre

- Throughout the dozens of full-length works and ten-minute plays she has composed since she was first inspired to write for the stage by the “detonating” language of Eugène Ionesco<sup>1</sup>, Tina Howe has penned dialogues for a remarkably large variety of voices, in a shifting array of styles, accents, and even languages. Her English scripts are frequently laced with French, German, Hebrew, or unspecified Eastern-European tongues.<sup>2</sup> In terms of male characters, the voices in her works range from a four-year-old played by “a large hairy man” in *Birth and After Birth* (Howe, 2010, ix) to a four-hundred-year old, when Rembrandt pops in from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to visit his own exhibition at the Met in *Rembrandt's Gift*. And as far as female characters are concerned, Howe's stages feature everything from foul-mouthed little girls, such as Miranda in *Coastal Disturbances*, to artists and lovers of all ages, some of whom are directly borrowed from Ovid or Shakespeare: thus Daphne flees from Apollo on the New York subway in *Skin Deep*, and Ophelia bursts out gasping for air in the middle of a modern-day swimming pool in *Water Music*. In *Pride's Crossing* the same female protagonist is given several voices at different stages of her life, whereas in *Approaching Zanzibar*, the parents and the children exchange voices as well as personalities for a scene.<sup>3</sup> The voices in Tina Howe's plays are in constant movement, forever breaking or erupting, whether into monologue, into song or scream, into nursery-rhyme or quoted verse. They are forever treading the line between chaos – that delight in cacophony inherited from the plays of Ionesco – and pure lyricism, which is most often framed by silence or music.
- Tina Howe divides her early plays into those written with “bare-hands”, and those composed with “white gloves”, thus highlighting the difference between her most

openly feminist and eccentric works, such as *Birth and After Birth*, and the ones with a more nostalgic, less unsettling setting in the eyes of New York audiences.<sup>4</sup> *Painting Churches*, a comedy in two acts which premiered in 1983 at the Second Stage theatre in NYC, belongs on the “white-gloved” side, but the aim of this article is to show that even in a wistful New England play featuring just three characters, there is a vibrant explosiveness of the voice ever bubbling just below the surface of the dialogue. The action is linear and clear: *Painting Churches* takes us into the living-room of an old Boston couple – formerly distinguished poet now turned slightly decrepit Gardner Church, and his socialite wife Fanny Church – who are in the process of moving out of the townhouse they can no longer afford. Their daughter Mags, a rising young painter in New York, joins them in order to help with the packing but more crucially, facing a long-awaited challenge, she comes to paint their portrait, thus proving her artistic abilities to her parents. The play progresses through elegy and farce as the objects pile up in – and spill out of – the boxes, and the tone alternates between violence as Mags flings painful memories at her mother, digging deeper and deeper into her childhood, poignancy as the father struggles with his senility under the realistic gaze of his wife, and tenderness as time runs out and moments of grace are achieved.

- 3 Autobiographical in many respects, *Painting Churches* is very much a play about identity, intimacy and self-expression, yet, paradoxically, its textual flesh appears obsessed with quoting external references. These quotes are either sonorous, as the father resonantly recites lines by Yeats, Dickinson or Dickey, and even the parrot manages the opening lines of Grey’s “Elegy,” or highly visual, since the Churches recreate everything from Grant Wood’s *American Gothic* to Michelangelo’s *Creation* while searching for the perfect pose. The question of representing and voicing one’s own identity, balancing idiosyncrasy with the references of a shared language and culture, prompts us to examine the issue of vocal identity or, to borrow a technical term, the idea of voiceprint. In its proper sense, the term “voiceprint” designates the spectrogram of a voice, a visual record where speech is analyzed with respect to duration, frequency and amplitude. But if we apply it to the theatre, figuratively, the notion becomes intensely complex, since the visual record of the playwright’s voice, the text, precedes the utterance: there is already a voiceprint before the voice of the actor speaks. In that case, whose voiceprint is left on the audience’s auditory memory at the end of the show? The question can be asked both acoustically, since each actor’s voice is trained and transformed to become the character’s, and metaphorically, since the creative voice of the dramatist itself is split into polyphony. A further way to look at this is also to study the evolution of the playwright’s voiceprint not only in the actors’ incarnations of the characters, but also in foreign-language performance. Through an analysis of *Painting Churches*, this article will therefore focus on the definition of voiceprint in the metamorphoses undergone by the voices in Tina Howe’s theatre, as well as in its translation. This will enable us to question the place and definition of the playwright’s voice, at once silenced and amplified, throughout these processes.

## Metamorphosing voices: the widening range

- 4 In some respects, the dialogue of *Painting Churches* could be termed perfectly realistic; or at least, as realistic as a fictional dialogue composed for the stage can be.

Throughout the play, the spontaneity of the lines is crafted through the rhythmical insertion of exclamations, hesitations, impulsive swearwords and colorful idiomatic expressions. This is palpable from the very first scenes, as in the following example:

FANNY: He's as mad as a hatter and it's getting worse every day! It's this damned new book of his. He works on it round the clock. I've read some of it, and it doesn't make one word of sense, it's all at sixes and sevens... (I, 1. Howe, 1989, 141)

The punctuation here materializes the expressivity of the voice high-pitching into exclamation or trailing off into suggestion, while the snatches of sayings foster a sense of recognition and familiarity between the characters and the audience. The time of the play is indicated as being "several years ago" (129) which also coherently explains the presence of old-world expressions and cultural references: a recurring instance of this being Gardner asking his daughter if she'd like something to "wet her whistle" around cocktail time while humming Al Jolson tunes (I, 2, 149). However, what proves to be more revealing than the realistic aspects of the dialogue is the way in which the voices regularly deviate from the expected register of fine Boston families, in order to achieve a much greater range. This includes replacing the articulate voice with animal sounds, when the stage directions indicate that Mags makes "happy grunting sounds" (I, 2, 145) or "tiny pointed-teeth nibbling sounds" (I, 3, 157). It also involves exchanging an educated adult voice for a childish one. The following quote exemplifies this as Fanny tries to help her helpless husband pack the disordered pages of his latest manuscript, turning the process into a noisy game of war which Gardner embraces with a crescendo of onomatopoeias:

FANNY: (*Kicks a carton over to him*) Here, you use this one and I'll start over here... (*She starts dropping papers into a carton nearby*) BOMBS AWAY!... Hey... this is fun!

GARDNER: (*Picks up his own pile; lifts it high over his head and flings it down into the carton*) BOMBS AWAY... This is fun!

FANNY: The whole thing is to figure out a system! [...] (*Makes dive-bomber noises and machine-gun explosions as she wheels more and more papers into the carton*) TAKE THAT AND THAT AND THAT!

GARDNER: (*Joins in the fun, outdoing her with dips, dives and blastings of his own*) BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM!... ZZZZZZZRAAAAAA FOOM!... BLATTY-DE-BLATTY-DE-BLATTY-DE-KABOOOOOOOM!... WHAAA... DA-DAT-DAT-DAT-DAT... WHEEEEEEE AAAAAAAA... (II, 1, 176)

- 5 Situations spinning into chaos and conversations building up into screams are a recurrent feature of Tina Howe's dialogues, as she herself confesses: "I sometimes think the whole reason I write plays is so I can ignite these lunatic climaxes when all hell breaks loose" (Howe, 1989, preface, n.p.). Strikingly enough, the transition always proves very abrupt between the language of conformity, represented by expressions which assert the speaker's allegiance to the norm ("mad as a hatter," "at sixes and sevens"), and the linguistic no man's land of yells and sound effects created by the actors. In fact, the stage becomes a way of exposing this lack of transitions, these sudden discrepancies, this eruption of what Jean-Jacques Lecercle calls the "violence of language":

There is another side to language, one that escapes the linguist's attention, not because of his temporary failure or failings, but for necessary reasons. This dark side emerges in nonsensical and poetic texts, in the illuminations of mystics and the delirium of logophiliacs or mental patients. (Lecercle, 5)

According to this analysis, the violence of language lies in what Lecercle terms "the remainder," which concentrates everything that does not fit into the traditional categories of grammar or philology. It corresponds to the "dark side" of language

which emerges through nonsense and poetry, with the consequence that “It is no longer possible to think of language as a system of signs – we must view it as a locus for contending forces” (Lecerclé, 45). A rather tempting analogy can be drawn between this conception of language as a locus for contending forces and the stage as a space for contending voices, whether these be the voices of different characters, or various stages of the same voice that cracks and splinters. The tears and mutations in each voice betray a wealth of underlying conflicts and terrors. When the Churches imitate machine-gun sound effects, although there is something highly farcical in the spectacle of two seventy-year-olds down on all fours miming dive-bomber explosions, the laughter nonetheless sticks in the audience’s throat. These grotesque voices turned to playfulness call to mind Shakespeare’s “voice / Turning again towards childish treble, pipes / And whistle in his sound” in the sixth age of man which immediately precedes the “last scene of all, / That ends this strange eventful history” (*As You Like It*, II, 7, 160-163). The adult-childish voice is a voice conscious of approaching death, as Fanny makes clear in a speech immediately following this, confronting her daughter Mags:

FANNY: *Paint us?!... What about opening your eyes and really seeing us?... Noticing what’s going on a round here for a change! It’s all over for Daddy and me. This is it! “Finita la commedia!”... All I’m trying to do is exit with a little flourish; have some fun... [...]. If you want to paint us so badly, you ought to paint us as we really are. There’s your picture!*  
 (Fanny points to Gardner, who’s quietly playing with a paper glider.)  
 Daddy spread out on the floor with all his toys and me hovering over him to make sure he doesn’t hurt himself! (II, 1, 177)

While one character (Fanny) rationalizes the situation in explicit terms, the other (Gardner) has become most openly expressive of his condition in a state beyond words: a silent picture of senility.

## From the inarticulate to the lyrical

- 6 If the animalistic and childish voices unite physical comedy with underlying tragedy at one end of the spectrum, at the other end of the vocal range lies the rhythmical lyricism of poetic utterance. Tina Howe’s theatre is haunted by lines of quoted verse which disrupt and highlight the music of her prose, from the insistent little rhymes of *One Shoe Off* to Elizabethan pastiches in *Water Music* or to the full recitation of Yeats’ “Song of Wandering Aengus”, as the characters pose for their portrait in perfect stillness in the second act of *Painting Churches* (II, 1, 164-5). But perhaps the most telling examples are the ones where familiar prose and lyrical verse overlap instead of interrupting each other. In the final scene of the first act, Mags struggles to reveal the painful origins of her calling as a painter: one winter when she was nine years old, she was repeatedly sent to eat dinner in her room, and there experienced her own fascination for color. While her mother resists and resents the narrative, her father, drawn in by her exaltation, joins in with lines by Wallace Stevens which overlap in sound and in theme:

MAGS: ... I sat on my bed listening to you: clinkity-clink, clatter-clatter, slurp, slurp... but that got pretty boring after a while, so I looked around for something to do. It was wintertime, because I noticed I’d left some crayons on top of my radiator and they’d melted down into these beautiful shimmering globs, like spilled jello, trembling, pulsing...  
 GARDNER: (*Overlapping, eyes closed*) “This luscious and impeccable fruit of life

Falls, it appears, of its own weight to earth..."

MAGS: Naturally, I wanted to try it myself, so I grabbed a red one and pressed it down against the hissing lid. It oozed and bubbled like raspberry jam!

GARDNER: "When you were Eve, its acrid juice was sweet, Untasted, in its heavenly orchard air..." [...]

MAGS: Once I'd melted one, I was hooked! I finished off my entire supply in one night, mixing color over color until my head swam!... The heat, the smell, the brilliance that sank and rose... I'd never felt such exhilaration! Every week I spent my allowance on crayons. I must have cleared out every box of Crayolas in the city!

GARDNER: (*Gazing at Mags*) You know, I don't think I've ever seen you looking prettier! You're awfully attractive when you get going! (I, 3, 160-161)

The lines of blank verse from Stevens' "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" match the story of Mags' epiphany in theme by alluding to temptation and to the discovery of something delicious and forbidden through a certain loss of innocence. But they also match it in *color*, in their sensory, almost sensual approach to description, displaying an extreme consciousness of touch, taste and brilliance. What Mags, in her unsophisticated reminiscence, calls a "pulsing," "shimmering glob", becomes in the voice of the experienced artist a "luscious and impeccable fruit of life." The images echo each other, and the hiatus in style comes to represent the leap taken by artistic experience into the perception of beauty. Jean-Paul Sartre argues that prose and poetry correspond to one side of language and its underside (*l'endroit et l'envers du langage*), and that the poet's outlook is one that considers words as objects rather than signs:

L'homme qui parle est au-delà des mots, près de l'objet ; le poète est en deçà. Pour le premier, ils sont domestiques, pour le second, ils restent à l'état sauvage. [...]

Mais s'il s'arrête aux mots, comme le peintre fait aux couleurs et le musicien aux sons, cela ne veut pas dire qu'ils aient perdu toute signification à ses yeux.<sup>5</sup> (Sartre, 18-19)

The analogy drawn between the physicality of words in the eyes of the poet and the plasticity of colors on the painter's palette is exactly relevant to Howe's scene. Since colors cannot be imprinted by the author on the script, poetry takes over to stir up the sensation of color in the audience's mind. The overlapping of one side of language and its underside, of the exhilarated female voice in wavering prose and the resonant male voice in learned verse, lends to the revelation of the childhood secret a solemn dimension, almost a mythical, Edenic one, just before the curtain falls in silence on the first half of the play:

Mags rises and runs out of the room overcome as Fanny and Gardner watch, speechless. THE CURTAIN FALLS. (I, 163)

This silence as the curtain falls is what seems to prolong the voice, functioning both as a resonating chamber after the revelation and as a way to shift into the purely visual, into the tableau – since after all, from the title onwards, we are promised paintings. The alternative way to prolong the speaking voice and answer the questions which Giorgio Agamben asks about endings – what remains after the poem has collapsed?<sup>6</sup> – appears to be a shift into yet another art form, as theatricality turns to music and movement. Comparing the stage directions makes this clear: while the first half of the play ends in speechlessness and motionlessness, the whole stage incarnating a state of shock, the second half ends in a visual poem set to the music of Chopin, with Fanny and Gardner waltzing around an empty stage on which the only prop left is Mags' painting:

Fanny and Gardner pick up speed, dipping and whirling around the room. Strains of a far-away Chopin waltz are heard. [...] The lights become dreamy and dappled as they dance around the room. Mags watches them, moved to tears and... THE CURTAIN FALLS. (II, 184)

The final *mise en abyme* effect is double since the characters are dancing in imitation not only of their own portrait, but also of the couples in Renoir's dance paintings (*Danse à la ville* and *Danse à la campagne*). The play thus ends on the visual and musical conceit of a dance that is both ephemeral, since the characters are old and almost outdated, and timeless, through the interplay of echoes and the intrinsic circularity of the waltz itself.

- 7 On Tina Howe's stages, voices run the gamut of register, in accordance with dialogues orchestrated like musical scores. The voiceprint corresponds to a very wide sound scan, which requires a certain versatility on the part of the actors and defines the stage as a space where voices are polished, stretched, refined, constantly deformed and magnified – since they are placed under the permanent magnifying glass of the audience's gaze or, to switch metaphors, in the amplifier of the audience's ear.

## Translating the voice range: rewriting vocal identity

- 8 Another way to probe the vocal identity of a text is to examine the processes involved in its translation for foreign voices. In fact, one could wonder what exactly is being translated in the case of a play: is it a literary text fully situated on the side of the written work, or is it something more akin to a musical score written in words, with silences arranged for rhythm and effect, gaps destined to be filled in by the actors' bodies, and phonetic props meant to direct and guide the voice through incisive consonants, snappy monosyllables and melodious alliteration? The historical practice of translation features a traditional dichotomy between translating for the page and translating for the stage, yet this excessively resolute distinction seems to harbor a misunderstanding as to the essence of the theatrical genre. Any dramatic text is a paradox, a compromise between the written word and the spoken word, between composition and spontaneity, which should be translated as a paradox and not by choosing either one of these sides. The literary qualities of the script, whatever the style, are precisely what makes it fine raw material for the stage. With *Painting Churches*, the pitfalls awaiting the translator are not only linked to the "stage-worthiness" of the text, but also to the setting and atmosphere of the play. On the one hand, one may be tempted to focus on the old-world Boston charm, turning the play more or less into a *boulevard* piece by attenuating the violence which is at odds with the expectations of a complacent audience, thus toning down the crudeness of the screams or the frenzy of onomatopoeias, and orienting Howe's comedy towards the strictly picturesque. On the other hand, the translator might choose to emphasize the images of the English dialogue, whether lexicalized or not, to the detriment of idiom or physicality, thus making the translation more remote and more poetic than the original, less grounded in the body for a foreign actor. Translation in itself is already a disincarnating process: it adds distance and presupposes a loss of common ground between character and audience. If this is accompanied by the habitual tendencies pointed out by Antoine Berman such as ethnocentricity, hypertextuality or ennobling the register (Berman, 1999), the result can quickly become a dialogue entirely woven in the cloth of nostalgia, with no anchorage in the "guts" as it were, making it harder for actors to appropriate the lines. It is a very pleasant task to invent a French voice for each of Howe's characters, transliterating sound effects and recreating the right dosage of humor and colloquialism, but here too, as in the case of the staging, the real



difficulty lies in the extent of the range. According to Berman, translation requires a predetermined set of ethical choices: here these must include the resolution to translate all the instances of exclaiming or yelling as punctually as if the script were a musical score, and the desire to respect the brusqueness of the changes in tone, switching without flinching from a highbrow artistic reference to a joke about incontinence.

- 9 The use of poetry, however, raises a more diplomatic issue. People scream at each other in all languages, making the experience intrinsically translatable, but Roethke and Dickinson only wrote in English, and only on an English-speaking stage can their words foster a sense of belonging in anyone besides the most erudite spectators. Recognition plays a seminal part in the perception of vocal identity, as nine different poems are recited in the course of the play – some of them more famous than others, like Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard” or Robert Frost’s “Fire and Ice”. Through their regular rhythms, these poems create moments of suspended time in the vortex of the prose dialogue, while giving us a glimpse of the former poetic glory of the father. This is particularly clear in the first scene of act II, where the poems are used almost as a form of breathing, introducing parentheses of tranquility in the middle of a violent fight.
- 10 Such considerations prompted me, as I translated *Painting Churches*, to replace some of the English-language poems by French poems, and for instance to metamorphose Yeats’ verse of Irish lore (“The Song of Wandering Aengus,” II, 1) into Apollinaire’s fairytale narrative poem of olden days (“Le Trésor”). Replacing Yeats’ voice by Apollinaire’s is clearly an ethnocentric translation choice, as there is no claiming that one can be the *equivalent* of the other, even though there are deliberate similarities in theme, tone and period between the two pieces. Yet what prompted this choice was not the desire to transplant the Bostonian characters into Parisian culture (which would have been incoherent as well as unfaithful) or even an intention to make the references more accessible for French productions: it was inspired by a consideration of the effects produced upon the audience. Some of the poets alluded to in *Painting Churches* become key references of the plot, like Robert Frost or Ezra Pound, whom Gardner is supposed to have known. These authors should evidently remain themselves in the French text, thus contributing to the mixture of alienation and pleasure which is intrinsic to the experience of any “foreignizing” translation. But *Painting Churches* also features many lines of poetry which remain unidentified in the play – like Yeats’ – and whose foremost purpose is not literary history, but an ephemeral transcendence of the dialogue. If translated into prose, these might not even be recognized as poetry, thus spoiling the effect as well as the sense of familiarity. And as for translating them into verse, the history of translation shows how awkward this proves between the rhythms of a stress-timed language and those of a syllable-timed language. Insofar as the identity of the lines or their authors appeared little relevant to their theatrical effect, the most fitting solution seemed to be to replace them by authentic lines of poetry in French, so as to present the audience with the same utter discrepancy between the trivial register of a family quarrel and the little miracle of rhythm and sound that is an original poem. Here is an excerpt of Act II to illustrate these combined processes:

GARDNER: I TURN MY BACK FOR ONE MINUTE AND WHAT HAPPENS...? MY ENTIRE STUDY IS TORN APART! (*He exits.*)

MAGS: Oh Daddy... don't...please... Daddy... *Please?!*

GARDNER: (*Returns with a new batch of papers which he tosses up into the air.*) THROWN OUT...! THE BEST PART IS THROWN OUT!... LOST...

MAGS: (*Reads one of the fragments to steady herself.*)

"I have know the inexorable sadness of pencils,  
Neat in their boxes, dolor of pad and paper-weight,  
All the misery of manila folders and mucilage..."  
They're beautiful... just beautiful.

GARDNER: (*Stops.*) Hey, what's that you've got there?

FANNY: It's your manuscript, darling. [...] (*Hands him several random papers.*) You see... no one lost anything. Everything's here, still intact.

GARDNER: (*Reads.*)

"I knew a woman, lovely in her bones,  
When small birds sighed, she would sigh back at them;  
Ah, when she moved, she moved more ways than one:  
The shapes a bright container can contain!..."

FANNY: (*Hands him another.*) And...

GARDNER: Ah yes, Frost... (*Reads.*)

"Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.

From what I've tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire."

ROLAND<sup>7</sup> : J'AI LE DOS TOURNÉ UNE MINUTE, ET VOYEZ-VOUS LE RÉSULTAT ? TOUTE MON ÉTUDE MISE EN PIÈCES ! (*Il sort.*)

CATHY : Oh Papa... non, s'il te plaît. Papa. Je t'en prie !

ROLAND : (*Revient avec une nouvelle liasse de papiers, qu'il jette dans les airs.*) À LA POUBELLE ! LES MEILLEURS MORCEAUX SONT PARTIS À LA POUBELLE !... PERDUS...

CATHY : (*Lit l'un des fragments pour se calmer les nerfs.*)

« Sois sage, ô ma Douleur, et tiens-toi plus tranquille.

Tu réclamaï le Soir ; il descend ; le voici :  
Une atmosphère obscure enveloppe la ville... »  
C'est magnifique... magnifique.

ROLAND : (*S'arrête.*) Hé, qu'est-ce que tu tiens, là ?

FANNY : C'est ton manuscrit, chéri. [...] (*Lui tend une série de papiers au hasard.*) Tu vois : personne n'a rien perdu. Tout est là, parfaitement intact.

ROLAND : (*Lit.*)

« Avec ses vêtements ondoyants et nacrés,  
Même quand elle marche on croirait qu'elle danse,  
Comme ces longs serpents que les jongleurs sacrés  
Au bout de leurs bâtons agitent en cadence... »

FANNY : (*Lui tend un autre poème.*) Encore...

ROLAND : Ah, oui, Robert Frost... (*Il lit.*)

« Ils disent que le monde périra par feu  
Ou peut-être par glace.  
Ce que j'ai pu goûter du désir amoureux  
Me pousse à m'associer aux fidèles du feu... »

Such choices remain eminently debatable, and might be reevaluated every time the translation is produced on stage. But if we subscribe to Umberto Eco's conception that translation is a ceaseless process of negotiation – with the lines, the author, the public and even the language<sup>8</sup> – the bargain to be struck with the text, in this case, should always include the vocal resonance, the associations and the theatrical effects of the poetry as a primary concern.

## Cyrano: the playwright as bashful exhibitionist

- 11 As a last point, let us consider the notion of voiceprint in a different light, and turn from the acoustic voices of the actors to the playwright's metaphorical voice. The idea of the "Cyrano complex" mentioned in the title of this article has been borrowed from Tina Howe's account of the genesis of her play *Women in Flames* :

*Cyrano de Bergerac* has long been a favorite of playwrights because it shows an audience the thrilling deceit of our craft. A disfigured poet hides in the shadows and woos the woman he loves via a gorgeous stand-in. It's exactly what we do – place our carefully chosen words in the mouths of handsome actors who then seduce everyone in sight. (Howe, 2006)

Cyrano arises as a powerful allegory of the playwright, for whom the stage acts both as a muzzle, since the author loses the right to speak as soon as the curtain rises, and a megaphone, through which his or her lines are enlarged and sublimated. One could almost find here a mirrored image of Saussure's oft-quoted distinction between the signifier and the signified: the actor being the form, the voice, and the playwright representing the meaning, the words. The actor's voice *signifies* the playwright's voice by giving it a sound shape. And a closely similar argument could be made about translation. If the playwright likes to hide in the shadow of Roxane's balcony, the translator emerges as a sort of Cyrano "squared", borrowing both the voice of someone else and the thoughts of someone else. Only the language is his/ hers – as well as untold possibilities of invention within a finite scope.

- 12 Howe's analogy also interestingly puts forward the idea of seducing the audience through a double movement of exposure and deceit. The actress is exposing her voice and body but borrowing the words; the playwright is exposing her most intimate relationship with language but borrowing someone else's face and intonations, thus defining theatre as a collaborative art of vocal seduction, where the virtuosity of the voice and the virtuosity of the writing join forces perhaps more equally than in any other art. In the case of *Painting Churches*, there is also a collaboration of voices with the quoted poets, where the plurality of the writing voices mirrors the plurality of the speaking voices and adds another snare to the arsenal of fascination used to vanquish the audience. But eventually, as happens in *Cyrano*, the voices merge, influence each other and morph into one, and the critical element becomes the perceived voice, what Roxanne hears or thinks she hears. The question that remains does not involve the original identity of the play's voice so much as it concerns the identity that is fantasized by the audience as it experiences the play, and the compelling work of the voice that seduces.

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## NOTES

1. "There's something free and unfettered about excess,' Ionesco wrote. 'You're not eating to live, you're eating to burst.' It's this bursting that makes his work so extraordinary. The first of his plays I saw was *The Bald Soprano* [...]. But it wasn't the characters or inanimate objects that detonated, it was language itself! The words the actors spoke kept exploding." (Howe, Introduction to Ionesco, 2006, x).
2. For instance, the character of Minty speaks indifferently in French and English in *Pride's Crossing* (Howe, 2000), while Magda, in *Milk and Water*, is presented in the dramatis personae as "the Eastern European or Russian girl" whose few lines should be translated accordingly by the production team (Howe, 2009, 82).
3. *Approaching Zanzibar*, II, 2 (Howe, 2010, 119 sq).
4. "The message was clear, artistic directors weren't ready for this, so I covered my bare hands with white gloves and turned to the gentler rituals of the charming but doomed Wasps I'd grown up with. No more erstaz birth scenes on the rug, but cocktails in Boston townhouses, walks along misty beaches and giddy afternoons of croquet," Howe writes about her work in the early 1980s, after *Birth and After Birth*, first written in 1973, had been refused by theatres. *Birth and After Birth* was not produced until 1995 (Howe, 2007, 7).
5. "A man who speaks stands on that side of the words, close to the thing itself; a poet stands on this side of the words. In the eyes of the former, they have become domestic, in the eyes of the latter, they remain wild. [...] But if the poet stops at words, as the painter stops at colors and the musician at sounds, it does not imply that words have lost any meaning for him." [My own translation].
6. « Qu'est-ce donc que cette chute du poème dans le silence ? Qu'est-ce qu'une beauté qui tombe ? Et que reste-t-il du poème après son écroulement ? » (Agamben, 136)
7. For reasons of euphony as well as familiarity on French stages, the names of some of the characters (Gardner and Mags) have been changed in the French translation. The "new" names

exist in both languages (so as not to give the illusion that the characters have suddenly become French), and have been suggested by Tina Howe herself.

8. “Between the purely theoretical argument that, since languages are differently structured, translation is impossible, and the commonsensical acknowledgement that people, in this world, after all, do translate and understand each other, it seems to me that the idea of translation as a process of negotiation (between author and text, between author and readers, as well as between the structure of the two languages and the encyclopaedias of the two cultures) is the only one that matches our experience.” (Eco, 34)

## ABSTRACTS

The voices in Tina Howe’s theatre run the gamut of register, from inarticulate or animal sounds to impassioned monologues and quoted verse. This article focuses on one of the playwright’s greatest successes, *Painting Churches* (1983) in order to investigate the vocal identity of the text through the alliance of screams, rants, everyday conversation, music and silence which makes up the dialogue. It then enquires into the processes implied in the translation of such a wide vocal range for foreign actors, questioning the relationship of the audience to the foreign and the familiar, and considering the paradigms of hiding and revealing one’s voice which are involved in writing, acting and translating a play.

Dans le théâtre de Tina Howe, les voix parcourent une large gamme de registres, qui va de sons inarticulés et autres bruits d’animaux à des monologues passionnés accompagnés de citations poétiques. Cet article s’intéresse à l’un des plus grands succès de la dramaturge, *Painting Churches* (1983) afin d’examiner l’identité vocale de ce texte fait d’une alliance de cris, de diatribes, de conversations banales, de musique et de silence. On se tournera ensuite vers les procédés que nécessite la traduction d’une pareille amplitude vocale pour des comédiens étrangers, ce qui suppose d’interroger la relation du public au familier et à l’étranger, et nous amène à étudier les paradigmes de dissimulation et de dévoilement de la voix qu’impliquent l’écriture, la mise en acte et la traduction du théâtre.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** amplitude vocale, citation, comédie américaine, empreinte vocale, lyrisme, référence culturelle., rire, Tina Howe, traduction théâtrale

**Keywords:** American comedy, cultural reference., dramatic translation, laughter, lyricism, quote, Tina Howe, voice range, voiceprint

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