

# THE TRANSLATION OF MUSICAL THEATRE SONGS

CLIC/CEREP Day (VUB)

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# GRANT / FUNDING?

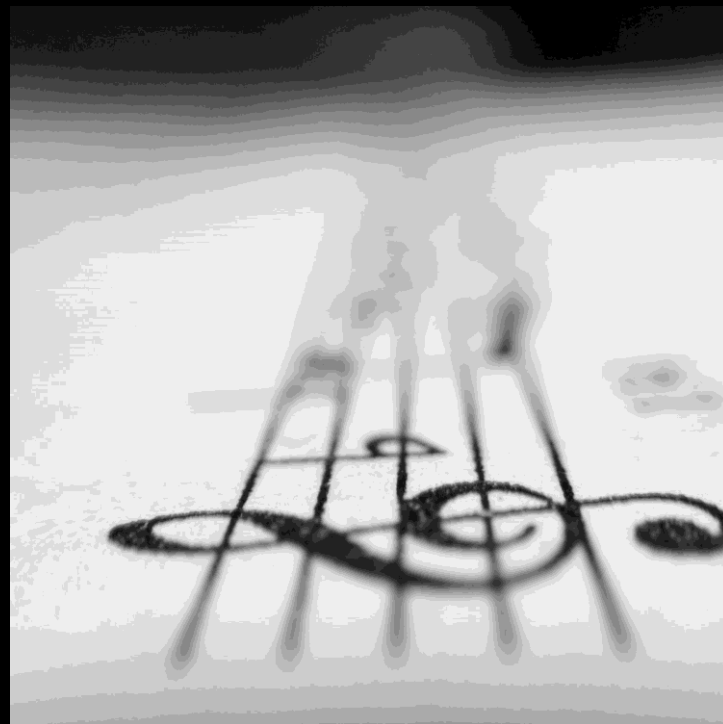


- PhD student / teaching assistant
  - 6-year contract (Sep. 2023 → 2029)
    - Modern Languages Department:  
Translation studies (English-French)



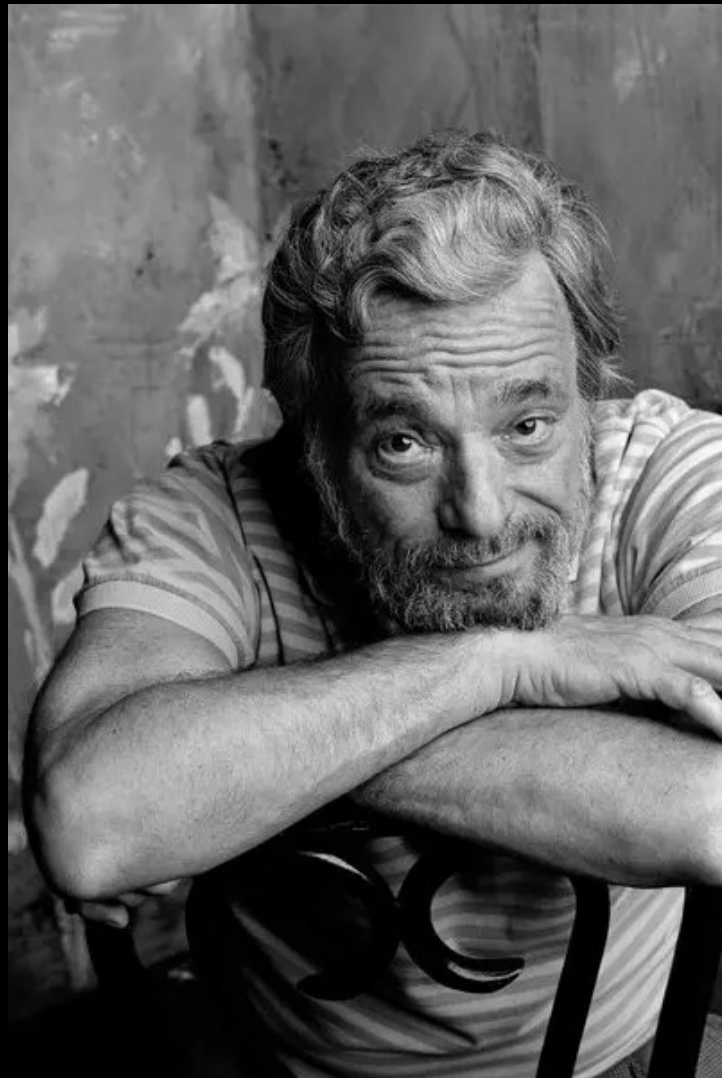
# PHD PROJECT #1

- Field → Translation of singable texts (// musical theatre songs)
- Corpus → Three musicals by Stephen Sondheim + my own FR translations





# CORPUS



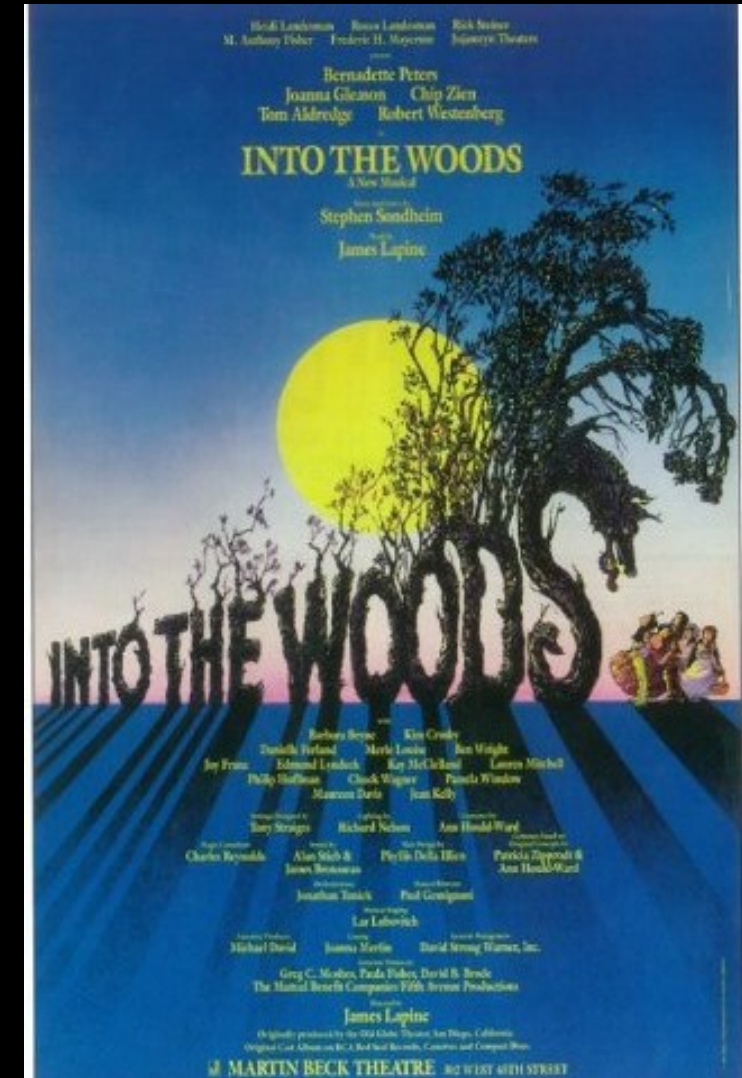
1930-2021



2015



2018



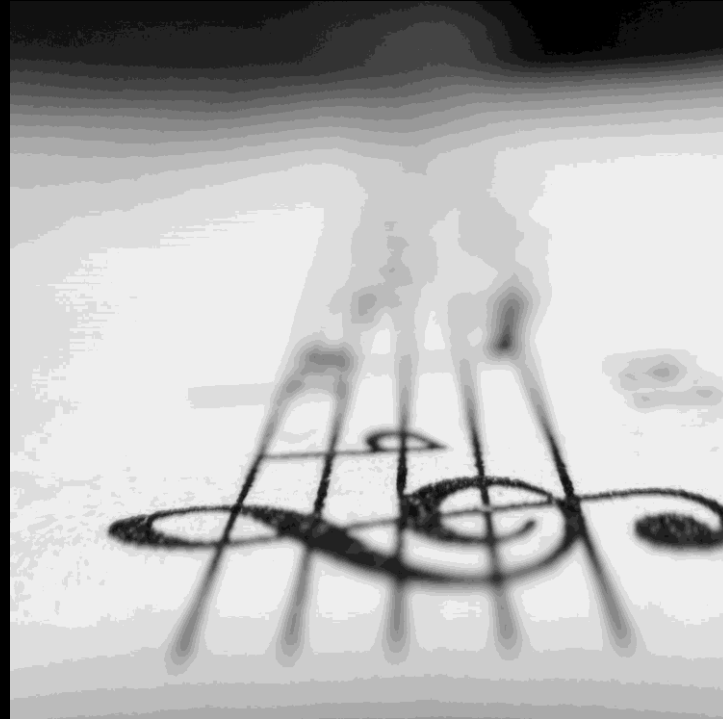
1987

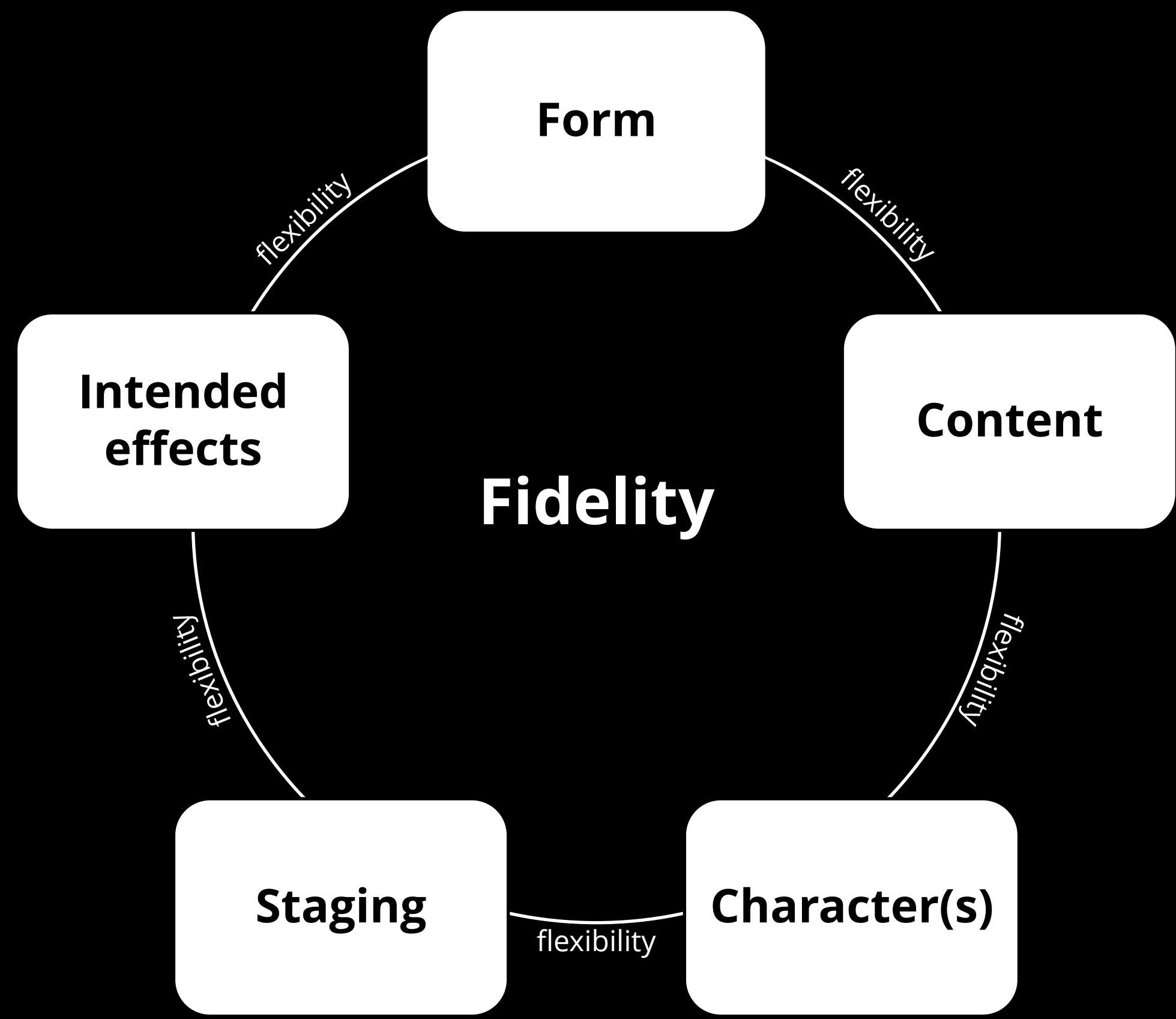




# PHD PROJECT #2

- Objectives →
  - Develop a translation theory/model called “The New Pentathlon Tool” (NPT)
  - Describe and explain my own methodology and translation process
  - Assess the relevance of the NPT and its criteria





# THE NEW PENTATHLON TOOL

- **“New”** → Other version of Peter Low’s Pentathlon Principle
  - Low’s PP = 5 criteria (singability, sense, naturalness, rhythm, rhyme)
- **“Pentathlon”** → 5 criteria = 5 types of fidelity
- **“Tool”** → Translation + quality assessment  
(upstream) (downstream)



# FIVE TYPES OF FIDELITY

## Fidelity to the form

- Singability
- Naturalness
- Rhythm
- Rhyme

## Fidelity to the content

- Explicit sense
- Implicit sense

## Fidelity to the effects

- To move
- To make people laugh
- To soothe
- To disturb
- To convince
- ...

## Fidelity to the characters

- Linguistic markers that define a character's identity (their register, tone, or accent)

## Fidelity to the staging

- Fixed written cues (= stage directions)
- Interplay of various staging elements:
  - Choreography
  - Costumes
  - Sets
  - Lighting
  - Sound effects

## + Flexibility

- Plays a critical role in maintaining an appropriate balance among the criteria
- Flexibility and fidelity coexist and complement each other
- The role of the musical theatre song translator is to "exercise damage control and try to choose the components one sacrifices advisedly, locally, and individually" (Golomb 2005: 137)

**= being faithfully flexible  
and flexibly faithful**

(Robaux 2025)

# THANK YOU

