

Comprehension and interpretation in the multiple translations of Federico García Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York*

Juan C. Sager

UMIST. Manchester

Abstract

It is well known that there are never two identical translations of a single text. In literary translation each version can be said to correspond to a different interpretation of the work. An analysis of some poems of Lorca's *Poet in New York* demonstrates the different modes of comprehension and interpretation of different translators through the polysemy of symbols used in surrealist poetry. The extension of meaning of Lorca's relatively simple vocabulary is a particular feature of these translations.

Key words: Federico García Lorca, *Poet in New York*, translation, poetry, English, comprehension.

Resum

És ben sabut que no hi ha mai dues traduccions idèntiques d'un únic text. Es podria dir que en traducció literària cada versió respon a una interpretació diferent de l'obra. Una anàlisi d'alguns poemes de *Poeta en Nueva York* de Lorca demostra les diferents maneres com diversos traductors els comprenen i els interpreten mitjançant la polisèmia dels símbols utilitzats en la poesia surrealista. L'extensió del significat del vocabulari relativament simple de Lorca és una característica d'aquestes traduccions.

Paraules clau: Federico García Lorca, *Poeta en Nueva York*, traducció, poesia, anglès, comprensió.

There are basically three types of poetry translations. On the hand we have poets who translate other poets as a form apprenticeship, or as homage, or in order to maintain an important tradition. This is a practice quite common in other art forms: musicians, painters and sculptors have always imitated what they considered to be models for their art or style¹.

1. For an example of a discussion of adaptation, see Sager (1966).

The second type of poetry translation attempts to convey the poet's message as closely as possible, accepting that there will have to be compromises of either content or form. They often appear in bilingual editions with original and translation on opposite pages. These translations can be described as attempts to transmit the poet's sensibility through the medium of another language as far as this is possible. The translations discussed here are mainly of this type. They generally aim at retaining the rhythm of the original text but usually at the expense of rhyme or metre. The poems chosen for analysis are written in a free verse form so that the question of rhyme and metre does not arise. Where translators have provided notes or introductions, they do not comment on the poetic form they have chosen though some versions vary the line distribution and hence the rhythm of the original.

The third type of poetry translation concentrates on the content of the message at the expense of its form by converting the poetic form into prose. These prose translations are usually characterised by being printed in smaller type at the bottom of the page, following the original². Some of these translations are indistinguishable from the second type of translation.

These various types of translation are exclusive to literature. We omit the first from serious consideration because adaptations and imitations pursue a different objective. The existence of the other two types is justified because of the ambivalent position of literary translation with respect to the source and the target cultures. By being removed from the orbit of their language and culture of origin without entering the orbit of the target culture, translations of novels, plays and poetry are an intercultural type of literature which lies outside the canon of either culture and hence outside evaluation by criteria of either culture. Lorca's *Romancero Gitano*, for example, is part of the Spanish literature of a particular historic period. *The Gipsy Ballads*, as some translators have called the English translation of this book of poems, are no longer part of Spanish literature, nor will they ever form part of the English literature canon. The recognition of this situation is most important for translators because it frees them from the pressure or temptation of imitating literary forms of the target culture³. It follows from these observations that serious readers of literary translations will always be conscious of the fact that they are reading a translation. For serious translators this means that they do not try to convert their translation into a work of the target culture, nor that they will maintain overly obtrusive characteristics of the source language, such as associations and allusions which would be incomprehensible to target readers.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it is an attempt to discover what it means for translators to understand a poem so that they can produce a target language version which conveys as close an impression as possible of the

2. See the translations by J.M. Cohen (1972) and J.L. Gili (1960), cited in the bibliography.
3. For a full discussion of the conditions of literary translation, see Sager (1998).

original. A second reason was to examine how the imagery of surrealist poetry represents additional obstacles to this process of comprehension.

Considering the problems associated with translations of poetry in general and the relative paucity of translations of poetry from other languages into English in particular, it is surprising to find an abundance of English translations of most of the works of Federico García Lorca. Without much searching it was possible to assemble up to seven versions, not of the more popular works, but even of his most controversial book of poems, *Poeta en Nueva York*⁴, published only after his death in 1936. The choice of these poems for this type of analysis is additionally motivated by the uncertainty surrounding their interpretation in the source language. When translators can fall back on an authoritative interpretation of a particular image or metaphor explaining an obscure passage, as is the case with a great deal of Lorca's earlier poetry, they can more readily find a satisfactory solution to a translation problem. What remains for discussion then are problems of culture-specific concepts and misunderstandings or misreadings which have little theoretical interest, as, for example the following lines from «Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías»:

El otoño vendrá con caracolas,

The autumn will come with small white snails

Autumn will return bringing snails

The autumn will come, shepherds blowing conch shells

Autumn will come with its conches*

* (Translator's note: Horns blown by the shepherds on the hills)

(Alma ausente)

This is a simple case of misreading. Two of the translators did not know the meaning of «caracolas» or considered it a typographical error, because they could not associate autumn with conches. The third version is more explicit, and the last provides a translator's note to explain what for an English reader would be incomprehensible. It is, of course, a moot point whether an average Spanish reader can make the association.

No te conoce el lomo de la piedra, ni el raso negro donde te destrozas

The back of the stone slab does not know you, nor the black satin shroud in which you crumble

The stone's back does not know you nor the black satin in which you are crumbling

The back of the stone does not know you nor the black satin in which you crumble

The saddleback of rock does not know you nor the black satin where you tore apart

(Alma ausente)

4. See the bibliography of editions between 1940 and 1997 cited.

The context tells us in this case that the poet speaks of the tomb of the bull-fighter Ignacio Sánchez Mejías and that the satin refers to the lining of the coffin. The first version seems to understand the context; in the second and third we cannot be sure because they maintain the implicitness of the original. The fourth version does not make sense and we must ask what image the translator was thinking of or how he understood the text.

These examples already show the variations from the original encountered in poetry but the interpretation seems clear.

This paper does not pretend to come to any conclusion about the quality of the individual versions of *Poet in New York* used for exemplification, but examines several alternative translations in order to discover to what extent individual translators' understanding varies and is specific to poetry, as opposed to the understanding needed for other types of text. The corpus chosen for this purpose consist of the three poems which form the second section, «Los Negros», of the book, containing one of the best-known poems of this cycle, «El rey de Harlem» and the poem «Aurora», which, according to the different editions appears in the first or the third section.

Poeta en Nueva York was a new departure for the poet and his readers. here Lorca speak with a different voice and presents a highly original outlook on the world. This work has never been subjected to a full commentary which might guide translators. Critics do not even agree whether this poetry is surrealist, symbolist with surrealist elements and images. Besides, there is no agreement —it is unlikely that it will ever occur— about the meaning of many of the symbols used. We have to accept that certain symbols at times have positive associations and at other times negative values. There exist isolated comments on individual lines of these poems but no complete line-by-line interpretation. In his introduction to the translation by Ben Belitt, the Lorca specialist Angel del Río (1955), speaks of «the obscurity of the text» for which readers of the translations may be tempted to blame the translator.

Another problem, in this type of text more than in any other, is the uncertainty about the precise wording of the poems. In the introduction to the first English version in 1940, the translator Rolfe Humphries stated:

I have followed the typescript as closely as I could, sometimes when I was not too sure it made sense —who can always tell, in surrealist poetry?— but there are some instances where I have had to try to establish the text.

(Humphries, 1940: 16)

It is important to note that Humphries himself admits to doubts about his ability to capture the meaning of the text; nevertheless he translates it. How? This is the fundamental question for which we are looking for an answer in this study.

In «El rey de Harlem» we find two important occurrences of alternative versions in the critical Spanish edition, which oblige the translator to choose the worlds which for him make sense.

[...] **con un rubor de frenesí manchado.**

Es preciso cruzar los puentes y llegar al rumor/rubor negro

para que el perfume de pulmón nos golpee las sienas con su vestido de caliente piña.

[...] to reach the murmuring blacks

— the florid black found

[...] to reach the black murmur

— to find the negro blush

[...] come to the dark rumour

— arrive at the black flush

(El rey de Harlem)

In equal numbers, the translators have opted for one or the other reading and have tried to make sense out of it. The context does not seem to assist them in clarifying their doubts.

No hay angustia comparable a tus rojos/ojos oprimidos

a tu sangre estremecida dentor del eclipse oscuro,

a tu violencia granate, sordomuda en la penumbra,

a tu gran rey prisionero, con un traje de conserje.

[...] your oppressed reds

— your oppressed eyes

[...] your thwarted vermilions

— your oppressed eyes

[...] your crushed reds

[...] your oppressed scarlets

(El rey de Harlem)

Here too, speaking of Harlem, there can be doubts about the words that would finally have been preferred by Lorca. «Red» can be a symbol for a number of things. The translator Merryn Williams justifies her translation of «your crushed reds» by saying that Lorca is here referring to

to black people's great warmth and vitality and the fact that they are being oppressed.
(Williams 1995: 124)

whilst the first translator, Rolfe Hymphries, found «rojo» incomprehensible and for this reason opted for «ojos». Elsewhere translators have read «cieno» (mud) for «cielo» (sky/heaven); «cebra» (zebra) for «cabra» (goat) and found nothing odd in a contextual association of «cabra» with «sierpe» (snake/serpent) and «mula» (mule) which occur nearby. But let us turn from the author's own uncertainty to those of the translators.

Homonyms constitute a serious problem for any translator. In the previous example, «la caliente piña» was translated alternatively by «pine-apple» and by «pien cone» which oppresses us with its perfume and there is no external guide to resolve this homonymy. A more serious problem of alternative reading is the following case:

El preciso matar al rubio vendedor de aguardiente,

a todos los amigos de la manzana y ala arena;

y es necesario dar con los puños cerrados

a las pequeñas judías que tiemblan llenas de burbujas...

against the little Jewish women who tremble, filled with bubbles,
 the gone little jewesses, in a lather of bubbles:
 the little French beans wich tremble, full of bubbles,
 the little haricot beans which tremble full of bubbles
 the small Jewesses that tremble full of bubbles,
 the little jewesses who tremble full of bubbles,
 The little Jewesses that bubble over

(El rey de Harlem)

The context, given in the three preceding lines, is that of violence against the presumed enemies of the blacks. We must assume that two of the translators, Merryn Williams and J. L. Gili, deliberately ignore the context when they introduce vegetables into this line, presumably influenced by «manzana» (apple) in the line above. We should exclude the possibility that they did not know both meanings of the word because any dictionary would have listed both meanings. Another example of homonymy is «flor» (flower) and «a flor de» (on the surface of)

el amor por un solo rostro invisible a la flor de piedra.

Love, by a single, invisible, stone-deep face.

and love, in the lonely, invisible face, on the rind of a rock.

and love by a single invisible face on the surface of the stone.

love, by a single face, invisible on the surface of stone.

love by a single face invisible on the flower of the stone.

Love by a single face invisible on a flower of stone.

(Norma y paraíso de los negros)

We can rephrase the original question and ask what it means for a translator to understand a poetic text. Who of us can give a definitive explanation of the image evoked by «llenas de burbujas» (full of bubbles) and its association with the preceding noun? Because we ourselves cannot find another interpretation than the literal one chosen by the translators, can we conclude that this phrase was translated satisfactorily? And therein lies the problem. To understand a poem is obviously not the same as understanding a technical text, say, an instruction manual for a machine. To understand poetry amounts to feeling an emotional affinity with the poet, or, more precisely, what we think to be the poet's feelings, or the emotive reaction which the poet wants to achieve. For this to succeed it is not necessary that we can interpret every image, every metaphor or allusion in the sense intended by the poet. All we need is to approximate the impression he intended to create. This type of comprehension is often deepened by repeated readings of the poem, something we rarely do with a prose text.

In the case of surrealist poetry, or poetry with surrealist images as in *Poeta en Nueva York* the illogical contrast of different nouns (abstract or concrete) or of unequal realities, creates impressions which we must accept intuitively and immediately as separate images. The several parts of a surrealist image cannot

be integrated or merged in a single one; our imagination must perceive them simultaneously in all their diversity and hold them in balance in the way one looks at an irrational painting which cannot be reduced to a familiar reality. Let us try to visualize any image of «El rey de Harlem» which may even exceed the pictorial skills of a Salvador Dalí; painters do not command the superior power of the word but are restricted to presenting their visions in colour on a two dimensional canvas.

**Un viento sur de madera, oblicuo en el negro fango,
 escupe a las barcas rotas y se clava puntillas en los hombros;
 un viento sur que lleva
 colmillos, girasoles, alfabetos
 y una pila de Volta con avispas ahogadas.**

(A south wind of wood, slanting in the black mud, spits at the broken boats and pierces its shoulders with deggers/nails/tracks; a south wind which carries tusks, sunflowers, alphabets and an electric (Volta) battery with drowned wasps.)

In her study of this book of poems, Betty Jean Craig (1977:46) states that the immediate impact of this technique is of a two-dimensional world, without natural relationships among the objects of the images which gives us the impression of a world out of time and out of place. For a reader the images of *Poeta en Nueva York* are more like a number of superimposed paintings which have a global impact of a world almost totally separate from nature. As readers we may be able to accept the advice on translator gives us:

If the reader has difficulty with certain passages, it is best not to worry about the exact meaning and to concentrate on the images and their emotional power.
 (Williams, 1955: 18)

In their first reading, translators may have the same reaction as the reader but they must go deeper, they have to unravel the images and identify the elements which contribute to the poetic effect. They have to identify words, phrases and syntactic structures and replace them by others. Finally, in order to permit the reader the same enjoyment of gradual discovery of the whole meaning, they have to try to maintain the same complexity of images and the same hermeticism which the poet has given his text.

But how do translators proceed, how do they choose among the available words and structures? In a few isolated cases translators can fall back on comments by the poet which allow them to interpret the meaning, as for example in the following enigmatic line:

los mulatos estiraban gomas, ansiosos de llegar al torso blanco,
 the mulattoes stretched rubbed, thinking anxiously of turning their torsos white,
 the mulattoes pulled rubber, impatient to gain a white torso,
 mulattos chewed gum, trying to get a white torso,
 the mulattoes were stretching gum, anxious to reach the white torso
 (El rey de Harlem)

In order to approach the meaning of this line we can cite the introduction Lorca gave to his own reading of the poems in Madrid in 1932.

protesté contra lo mas triste de todo, que los negros no quieren ser negros, que inventan pomadas para alisar sus rizos exquisitos y polvos que hacen sus caras grises... (I protested against the saddest thing of all, that the negroes do not wan to be black, that they invent creams for straightening out their delightful curls and powders that turn their faces grey...)

Sometimes critics try explain the techniques used by translators and we can confirm what they find from a few examples: Speaking of Rolfe Hymphries, Angel del Río says:

[...] the two main liberties he has taken are the occasional transposition of terms in the metaphor when it was required either by the rhythm of the line or the character of the language, and the free interpretation of images or concepts which are far from clear in the original.

(Angel del Río, 1955b, p. XXXIX)

This liberty may be seen in the following examples:

y deambulan intactas las lluvias bailarinas
and the rains dance away undiminished
and the untouched rains dance and stroll
and the dancing rain walks off intact

(Norma y paraíso de los negros)

Un viento sur de madera, oblicuo en el negro fango,
A wooden wind from the south, slanting through the black mire,
A wooden wouth wind, atilt on black slime
A south wind of wood, slanting through the black mud,
An oblique south Wind of wood in the black mud
A wind of wood from the south, oblique in the black mud,
A wooden south wind slants across the black mud

escupe a las barcas rotas y se clava puntillas en los hombros.
spits on the broken boats and drives tacks into its shoulders.
spits upon boatwrecks and tacks down its shoulders;
spits at broken boats, drives nails into shoulders;
spits at the broken boats and pierces nails in its shoulders;
spits upon the broken boats and puts nails in its shoulders;
Spits on the broken boats and is tacked in the shoulders
spits at the wrecked boats and pierces its shoulders with tacks;

(El rey de Harlem)

Reading these versions we must doubt whether it is, indeed, possible to «understand» poetry in the sense normally associated with this verb. Obviously,

we can observe several levels and modes of understanding and there is no doubt that the translators have understood these lines in some way; but each one seems to have understood it slightly differently. In these cases something other than that understanding is taking place.

Let us see some examples where translators differ significantly in their understanding and where they have produced quite different versions.

Las muchachas americanas llevaban niños y monedas en el vientre y los muchachos se desmayaban en la cruz del desperezo.

and the boys stretched their limbs and fainted on the cross.

and the boys lay inert on the cross of a yawn and stretched muscle.

and boys fainted on the cross where they were stretched.

and the boys fainted stretched on the cross of lassitude.

and the boys were fainting on the stretched cross.

And the boys hung swooning outstretched on the rack of the waking yawn.

and youths fainted on the cross of the slow awakening

(El rey de Harlem)

These lines are obviously meant as criticism of the white residents of New York. All translators seem to have understood the symbols associated with the «American girls» in a similar way and rendered them more or less aptly, but the majority was confused by «cruz» (cross), taking it for a concrete object whereas it simply is the image of the boys extending their arms and leaning back in a gesture of laziness.

We should be able to reconstruct the translators' interpretations through the words and the syntax they have chosen. This would appear to be a simple matter when it comes to a vocabulary of concrete nouns, but as we have just seen in the examples of the cross, we cannot even be sure whether a word is used in a literal or a figurative sense. Comparing the multiple versions of the four poems of *Poeta en Nueva York* we are struck by the considerable variety of words chosen by the translators. For simple words like «golpear» (knock), «dar» (give) «grande» (large) «viejo» (old) we can find up to seven different versions in seven translations. The present list (table 1) is a selection of a much larger number of incidents of unusual polysemic uses. The centre column gives the range of equivalents that may reasonably be found in a bilingual dictionary. The right column lists the extreme interpretations chosen by translators which go far beyond the original meaning.

The range of alternatives chosen must have their origin in the interpretations the translators have given of the verse. Without wishing to evaluate individual versions, we can note a few common tendencies in all of them.

Recent research, as, for example, that of Laviosa Braithwaite (1997), has shown that translations exhibit a more explicit vocabulary than the original when translators feel the need to provide greater detail or precision, and that they use more general words than the original when translators cannot find an expression at the same level of precision.

Table 1

Verbs	conventional (dictionary) equivalents	translators' extensions of meaning
arrancar (ojo)	dig out, gouge out, scooped out	
asesinar	assessinate, kill, murder, cut down	
bajar	drop, descend, go down	roar down
clavarse (de puntillas)	drive tacks into, tack down, drive nails, pierce n., place the dagger (bullfighting term)	
cubrir	cover, overspread	flood
crujir	crack, crackle, rustle, resound	
chapotear	splash, dabble, paddle, wade	
dar (puños)	use the fists, batter with fistblow, beat/bang with closed fists	shove
devorar	devour	ravage, rend
dudar	doubt	discredit
empañar	tarnish, blur, cloud	
empapar	drench, absorb, soak up	tarnish
estirar (goma)	stretch rubber/gum, pull rubber	chew gum
estrellarse	smash against, crash against	burst, explode
gemir	groan, moan	sob, wail, grieve
girar	revolve, circle, go round	spin
golpear	hit, slap, strike, swat, thump, spank, buffet, beat, whack	
levantarse	rise	loom up
limpiar	clean, scour, cleanse	
llegar a	reach, find	go down
llenar	fill, cover	flood
llorar	weep, cry	wail
machacar	flatten, smash, squash, crush	maul
mirar	watch, look at, keep a watch, gaze	stare
quebrar	rupture, break/(up), burst	shatter, dislevel
rodar	wheel, toss, roll, tumble	
rondar	pace, roam, prowl	
salir	go out, come out, escape, deliver from, rise	
taladrar	penetrate like drills, perforate, enter, pierce	sting
tragar	swallow, gulp	devour
turbar	rock, disturb	
venir	come	flow

Table 1

Nouns	conventional (dictionary) equivalents	translators' extensions of meaning
aire	air	wind
alegría	gaiety	courage
angustia	anguish, anxiety	pang pain
ascensor	lift, elevator, dumb-waiter	elevator shaft
azotea	terrace, rooftop, roof	shed
caracolas	conch, conch shells	shed
cieno	mire, mud, filth, slime, slough, bog	
conocimiento	understanding, thoutht	mastery
desperezo	stretch	lassitude
destrozarse	crumble	tear apart
enjambre (monedas)	swarm, shower	rabble
esperanza	hope	promise
fango	mire, slime, mud	
gentío	mob, crowd, tribe	
hueco	emptied space	torsos
huella	strack, footprint, trace, trail	print, footprint
judía	Jewess, Jewish woman, Franch bean	
lámina	sheet, plate	metal-plate, metal sheet
ley	law	stricture
moneda (de plata)	silver money/coinage/coins	money bags
naufragio	shipwreck	disaster
ortiga	nettle	thorn
piña	pineapple, pine cone	
prudencia	prudence, caution	moderation, wisdom
rastro	bypath, furrow	rake
recuerdo	remembrance, recollection	memory
retama	broom, Scotch broom, bracken, furze	bush
reto	challenge	menace
traje	suit, unifirm, street-clothing, costume, clothes	
trasero	ass, rump, bottom, behind	
tristeza	sadness, sorrow	mourning
tropel	rabble, throng	rout
vestido	covering, guise, suit, dress, vesture	
viejo	old man	patriarch

Table 1

Adjectives	conventional (dictionary) equivalents	translators' extensions of meaning
ahogado	drowned, suffocated, smothered	
ansioso	impatient, anxious	
apagado (perro)	uncared-for, snuffed-out, lifeless, corpse, burnt out	
caliente	warm, hot, peppery, burning	
confundido	in confusion, befuddled, bewildered	abased
descuidado	careless, negligent, unaware	
dibujado	traced, drawn, drafted, fine-drawn	
durísimo	hardest, very hard	unbreakable
erizado (flor)	bristling, stiff, spiked	
estremecido	shuddering with rage, shuddering, shaken	
exacto		particular, punctual
exprimido	wrung, pressed out of, dried, squeezed	
grande	great, big, large	full
infinito	infinite	immemorial
inmenso	enormous, immense	towering
intacto	untouched, intact	evil
oprimido	oppressed, crushed	thawarded
quieto	motionless, mute, quiet, still	
rubio	blond, fair-haired, yellow-haired, golden haired	
sapientísimo	wisest, all-knowing, most wise	shrewdest
sin arte	mindless, artless, without skill	without genius
sin duda	fearlessly, assuredly, no doubt, without fear	
vacilante	swaying, irresolute	fleeting
vacío	empty, hollow	idle
yerto	rigid, fixed, still, stiff	

The translations analysed here confirm the trend towards greater specification, a form of explicitation; there are, however, very few cases of generalisation, namely «bush» for «retama» (broom) and «disaster» for «naufragio» (shipwreck).

Examples of specification:

para que el rey de Harlem cante con su muchedumbre,
 for the king and his hosts must come singing from Harle,
 For the King of Harlem to chant with his full *choir*

a tu sangre estremecida dentro del eclipse oscuro,
or your blood *shuddering with rage* inside the dark eclipse,

**Sangre que busca por mil caminos muertos enharinadas y ceniza de nardos
(nardo),**
The blood that seeks, by a thousand roads, *death powdered dust*, ashes of nard

a que cicutas y cardos y ortigas turben postreras azoteas.
Till hemlock, thistle, and the nettle *set and root confusion* in the farthest roofs.
(El rey de Harlem)

Other cases of duplication intensify the image at the same time.

No busquéis negros su grieta
Negroes, seek not its cleft or crack

El sol que se desliza por los bosques
The Sun who slips through glade and forest
(El rey de Harlem)

We also observe a tendency to move from the abstract to the concrete, whereby translators convey to the reader their personal interpretation and simultaneously remove the reader's own freedom of interpretation, or at least limiting it. Here are some examples:

Con la ciencia del tronco y del rastro llenan de nervios luminosos la arcilla
Theirs, with the lore of the trunk and the bypath, to *flood* all the radiant nerve
ends of clay
(Norma y paraíso de los negros)

Cuando sale la luna, el mar cubre la tierra
When the moon comes out the sea *floods* earth's surface
(Cuando sale la luna⁵)

Lorca uses two polysemic words «cubrir» (cover) and «llenar» (fill). We must assume that he did this on purpose because he could have chosen the Spanish word for «flood» (inundar), which is what the translators did. Other examples of intensification and concretisation of the image occur when we read «sky» por «azul» (blue) y «patriarch» por «viejo» (old man). This concretisation unduly interferes with the readers' own interpretation.

yo no temería el sigilo de los caimanes,
I would never have feared for the crocodile's secret
I wouldn't fear the crocodiles *lying in ambush*
(Iglesia abandonada)

5. The line of this poem is taken from Lorca's *Canciones* (1924).

Hay que huir!

there must be some way out of here,

Escape, since you must:

huir por las esquinas y encerrarse en los últimos pisos.

some *street* to flee down, some *locked room on the top floor* to hide in,

(El rey de Harlem)

At times one has the impression that the translators want to intensify the image in order to improve Lorca's work or to expose the English reader to a more intense and concrete experience. As an example of this tendency we can cite the first few lines of «Rey de Harlem», in which polysemic and neutral words are replaced by words expressing violence and forcefulness.

Con una cuchara de palo le arrancaba los ojos a los cocodrilos

With a wooden spoon he *dug out* the crocodiles' eyes,

With a spoon he was *digging out* the eyes of the crocodiles

With a spoon he *gouged out* the crocodile's eyes

With a wooden spoon he *gouged out* the eyes of the crocodiles

With a spoon he *scooped out* the eyes of crocodiles

With a spoon he *scooped out* the eyes of crocodiles

with a spoon he *scooped out* the eyes of the crocodiles

y golpeaba el trasero de los monos.

and *beat* the monkeys on the behind.

and *hitting* the rumps of the monkeys.

and *swatted* the monkeys on their asses.

and *thumped* on the monkey-rumps.

and *slapped* monkey' bottoms.

and *spanked* the monkeys on their bottoms.

and *whacked* monkeys on their bottoms.

los tanques de agua podrida.

the vats of *putrid* water arrived.

the tanks of *putrid* water arrived.

the tanks of the *pestilent* water arrived.

the tanks of *stinking* water arrived.

the tanks of *polluted* water were arriving.

the tanks of *foul* water were coming.

a tu gran rey prisionero, con un traje de conserje.

ou your king a prisoner in the uniform of a doorman.

your *hobbled*, great king in the janitor's suit.

y traigan pedacitos de corazón por las heladas montañas del oso.

and swallow pieces of heart by the bear's frozen mountains.

and *devour* little slivers of heart on the frozen ascents of the bear.

(El rey de Harlem)

We also encounter examples of variant readings of the syntactic structures when the translators interpret the ubiquitous prepositions «de» and «en» in very different ways.

[...] **los camellos sonámbulos de las nubes vacías**

[...] the sleepwalking camels in the hollowing cloud.

[...] camels of empty clouds moving in their sleep.

[...] sleepwalking camels of idle clouds.

(Norma y paraíso de los negros)

y estrellarse en una aurora de tabaco y bajo amarillo.

and burst into an aurora of tobacco and low yellow.

and explode in a low-yellow dawn of tobacco.

to smash against a yellow and tobacco-coloured dawn.

and to crash against a dawn of tobacco and subdued yellow.

and burst in a low yellow dawn of tobacco.

To burst in a dawn, low yellow, tobacco brown.

and to crash against a tobacco and dull yellow daybreak.

Es por el silencio sapientísimo cuando los cocineros y los camareros

Through the all-knowing silence, cooks, waiters

In the shrewdest of silences go the cooks and the valets

It is in the wisest silence that waiters and cooks

Through the most wise silence when the waiters and cooks

It is in the wisest silence when the waiters and the cooks

Through the heart of the wisest silence cooks and headwaiters

(El rey de Harlem)

«Por» is privileged in permitting many interpretations even in this type of text:

por las heladas montañas del oso.

by the bear's frozen mountains

on the frozen ascents of the bear.

upon the icy mountains of the bear.

through the frozen mountains of the bear

(El rey de Harlem)

Having shown a number of examples of how translators interpret Lorca's text, we can attempt to summarize what we have learnt about poetic translation.

A poem represents the poet's imaginary world by means of conventional linguistic signs. Even in surrealist poetry, the poet must use conventional signs in order to permit the reader access to his world. But the available conventional signs are less numerous than the shades of meaning the poet wishes to express and for this reason he creates new collocations and stretches and extends the meaning of the words he uses. In addition he employs words with multiple meanings, i.e. polysemic words and expressions that lend themselves to

ambiguous interpretations. In return for this freedom, the poet accepts that his readers will interpret the signs differently and so obtain different views of his imaginary world.

Reading a poem requires an effort to approach the poet's imaginary world through the polysemy of the conventional signs he has used. In his effort to understand the reader is conscious of the ambiguity of the meanings encompassed by the polysemy of the signs; he accepts that the conventional signs are bridges between his world and the poet's. By crossing this bridge the reader gives one of several interpretations to the signs the poet has used. Consequently, the reader is also prepared to accept various interpretations simultaneously or step by step as the result of various separate readings or, indeed, as they appear in alternative translations. Simultaneous interpretations of multiple readings are also the basis of wordplay and puns.

A translation, in contrast to a reading of the original, attempts to re-create the poet's imaginary world for a different linguistic community. Since, in the first instance, translators are readers of the poem in its original form, they approach this world through the range of meanings they can associate with any one word. In their versions, they ought, in theory, to preserve the richness and diversity of the poet's associations. In practice, there is no guarantee(a) that they understand all the associations, and (b) that they are able to reproduce them in the target culture which may have other values or give different priorities of associations to some symbols. For example, Lorca's religious and very catholic references can be translated into another language and culture of Christian belief, but many references cannot have the same impact on a reading public that is not intimately familiar with the ritual of the Mass. In «Iglesia abandonada» there are numerous references of this sort, which must be incomprehensible for a sensibility unfamiliar with the catholic rite.

Lo vi jugar en las últimas escaleras de la misa

I saw him at play on the uppermost stair of the Mass,
I saw him playing on the last raised steps of the Mass
I saw him playing on the last stairs of the mass
I saw him playing on the last steps of the mass.

y echaba un cubito de hojalata en el corazón del sacerdote.

launching a little tin scoop at the heart of the priest.
and he lowered a tin bucket into the priest's deep heart.
and he was tossing a little tin pail on the heart of the priest
Thrusting a little tin bucket in the heart of the priest.

Yo tenía un pez muerto bajo la ceniza de los incensarios.

I'd a dead fish in the ash of the censers.
Once I had a dead fish beneath the ashes of the censers.
I had a fish dead under the ashes of the censers.
I had a dead fish under the ashes of the thurible

En las anemonas del ofertorio te encontraré

Dear heart — let me find you in Eucharist's gift of anemones
 I'll find you, my dear son, in anemones of the offertory
 In the anemones of the offertory I shall find you my heart!
 In the anemones of the offertory I shall find my heart

cuando el sacerdote levante la mula y el buey con sus fuertes brazos

when the priest with the might of his arms lifts the ox and the ass
 when the priest lifts the mule and the ox with his powerful arms,
 when the priest lifts the mule and the ox with his strong arms
 When the priest lifts mule and ox with his powerful arms.

para espantar los sapos nocturnos que rondan los helados paisajes de cáliz.

to frighten te night-toad that paces the chalice's snowscapes.
 to frighten nocturnal toads that roam the chalice's frozen landscape.
 to scare away the nocturnal toads that prowl about the icy landscapes of the
 chalice.

To scare the toads of night that haunt the frozen landscape of the chalice.

pero en el centro de la misa yo romperé el timón

but I'll smash, on the core of the Mass, the rudder-post;
 but in the middle of Mass I'll break the rudder
 but in the center of the mass I will break the rudder
 But in the heart of the mass I will break the rudder

These examples show that in the Western tradition which shares many cultural values and many common symbols, the translation of surrealist poetry does not seem to be more complex than other forms of poetry. Despite their differences of detail, the versions, as demonstrated in the examples quoted, repeat virtually all Lorca's metaphors and symbols. Perhaps this is the only way of tackling the translation of a text which cannot be understood the way we understand other texts.

If the translation of poetry as a hybrid form of literature serves the purpose of permitting the readers of one culture to become familiar with the poetry of another culture, we may ask whether reading multiple versions of translations assists with this familiarisation. In the case of *Poet in New York*, this assistance appears to be limited, though this cannot be taken as a criticism of the translations; we would no longer hear the poet's voice if every metaphor and every symbol were to be paraphrased and thereby explained by the translator. We can, however, say that the complementary reading of multiple versions can help a detailed understanding because:

- it helps to identify grave errors, as in the case of «judías (Jewesses-beans), or «rastro/rastra» (bypath, rake) or «cieno/cielo» (mud-heaven);
- it can also give possible interpretations of images and in this way assist comprehension, form example:

[...] **no habrá paraíso ni amores deshojados**
 [...] there will be no paradise or loves that bloom and die
 [...] there will be no paradise nor amours stripped of leaves
 [...] there will be no heaven or natural love
 [...] there will be neither Eden, nor passion unleafing
 [...] no paradise ever, no loves bereft of leaves
 [...] there will be no paradise nor natural love

(La aurora)

- In other cases, it may simply make us pause in the interpretation of a line and call our attention to possible alternative readings, as in the case of

Odian...

la aguja que mantiene presión y la rosa en el gramíneo rubor de la sonrisa.

the needles of pressures and roses in the grass-grown flush of a smile.

the needle that pressures redness into their smiles as green as the grass.

the needle keeping pressure and rose in the carmine flush of the smile.

(Norma y paraíso de los negros)

To conclude, let us remind ourselves of the global effect of these poems as perceived by the very first translator of Poeta en Nueva York, Rolfe Humphries (García Lorca 1940:16):

(These poems) cannot, and should not, be expected to sound too much like English poems...; but their strangeness should suggest Lorca's subtle and extravagant imagination rather than merely the bald and conventional awkwardness of alien rhetoric and allusion.

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