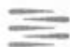

3 POET-TRANSLATORS

Langston Hughes to Paul Blackburn

The creative misreading of Lorca among American poets has a cultural, not a linguistic, cause. In my view, at least, the main issues involved have very little to do with the inherent differences between the Spanish and English languages, or even with the shortcomings of individual translators. The belief that relatively minor imperfections in a translation are serious obstacles to cross-cultural communication (or that an ideal translation would make all obstacles disappear) represents a kind of "magical thinking." Logically, even the most perfect rendering can do nothing in and of itself to prevent readers from seeing Lorca's poetry through an orientalist lens. While inadequate translations can perpetuate cultural misunderstandings, I prefer to see them more as a symptom than a cause.

The Lorca who influences American poetry of the postwar period is, however, a poet read *in translation*, and this fact has far reaching implications. In the first place, translation itself might be considered as a form of *apocryphal Lorquiana*, "the making finally of something that Lorca did not write."[1] To read poetry in translation, in fact, is always to read words that the poet did not write—except, of course, in cases of auto translation. A corollary of this principle is that to translate poetry in verse is to write poetry or, at the very least, to make a series of poetic choices.[2] Although some scholar-translators do not define themselves

explicitly as poets, the versions they produce will inevitably be compared to those of poet-translators: there is no clear-cut distinction to be made between the work of poets and scholars, since translators in both categories employ a wide gamut of approaches.[3]

While all verse translation entails the creation of a new poem, the apocryphal nature of translation becomes especially pronounced whenever the process of translation itself becomes visible, whether in demonstrably weaker versions—those that unintentionally traduce the original text—or in those that deliberately eliminate "the translator's invisibility" through the use of modernist techniques.[4] Lorca translations produced before 1970 are variable in both approach and quality, and thus offer fertile ground for the study of this particular kind of apocrypha. Despite the oft-repeated claim that Lorca's poetry possesses a certain "clarity," many translators have had difficulty in finding an appropriate register in English. There has been no single leader in the field—a translator universally recognized as both excellent and influential—and thus no consensus about what an acceptable translation of Lorca ought to look like. Even some expert readers of the period did not appear to differentiate strongly between translations of variable quality. Edwin Honig, for example, praised Ben Belitt's edition of *The Poet in New York* as "a model of scrupulous textual work and heroic translating."[5] This is wholly at odds with my own judgment, but it is hard to dismiss Honig, since he was himself one of the more adept translators during the same period. A retrospective look at Belitt's work reveals serious flaws, but in historical terms it cannot be denied that Belitt was influential in popularizing Lorca's New York poetry.

Instead of attempting a comprehensive evaluation of the entire corpus of Lorca translations, I have limited my discussion here to a few historically significant and influential cases.[6] The decade of the 1950s is a crucial one for the entry of Lorca into the mainstream of American poetry, so I begin with Langston Hughes's *Gypsy Ballads*, which he began to work on in Madrid during the Spanish civil war and published in 1951. The two translations that generated the most enthusiasm for

Lorca in this decade were both published at the halfway point, in 1955: *The Selected Poems of Federico García Lorca*, a compendium of translations by various hands, and Ben Belitt's *The Poet in New York*. Paul Blackburn's *Lorca/Blackburn* did not have the historical impact of these other translations, since it was published posthumously in 1979. Blackburn's translation, however, was produced during the pivotal period of American Lorquismo and throws into relief some key issues about the practice of translation at midcentury.

I. VERNACULAR LORCA: LANGSTON HUGHES'S *GYPSY BALLADS*

Romancero gitano [Gypsy balladbook] is Lorca's best-known book in the Spanish-speaking world, containing some of the poet's most famous and most frequently translated poems. Rolfe Humphries, Carl Cobb, Robert Havard, Michael Hartnett, and Will Kirkland have all published translations of the complete work into English, while numerous other translators, including Bly, Lloyd, Spender and Gili, Blackburn, Merryn Williams, William Bryant Logan, and a probably a few others as well, have given us versions of individual poems. Only a very few works of twentieth-century European poetry, like Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* and *The Duino Elegies*, have been translated more frequently than Lorca's *Ballads*.[7]

Lorca's *Romancero gitano* presents a set of unique challenges to the English-language translator. I believe it is harder to translate, in fact, than the notoriously difficult *Poeta en Nueva York*. The *Romancero*, because of the precision of its language, leaves much less room for error than the "surrealist" conundrums of Lorca's New York poetry. The first problem is metrical: Lorca's verse rhythms are too strong and distinctive simply to be ignored, but there is no ready-made equivalent in English. The use of the English-language ballad stanza might produce jarring effects like this:

> I took her to the river
> believing her unwed;
> the fact she had a husband
> was something left unsaid.[8]

Many of Lorca's individual lines, with their internal repetitions of words and sounds, have a distinctive, memorable quality in Spanish: "Huye, luna, luna, luna," "verde que te quiero verde," "por el monte, monte, monte," "noche que noche nochera." Rolfe Humphries translates Lorca's famous lines: "El niño la mira, mira, / el niño la está mirando" as "The child stares at the moon, / fixedly all the while," erasing the poetic effect that Lorca achieves through repetition of the verb.[9] Even lines without such repetition can be unforgiving in their strength and integrity, showing up any obviously weaker equivalent: Humphries renders "romano torso desnudo," creditably, as "A Roman torso, naked," but his additional comma needlessly breaks up the noun phrase.[10] Punctuation, since it is a marker of rhythm, is never a trivial matter in verse.

A related challenge is to maintain rhythmic and narrative momentum while doing justice to the metaphorical density of this poetry. The images flow in rapid succession, appealing to the five senses, and are of a baroque complexity in their elaboration. Lorca's four-part analogies are particularly tricky. Take the lines: "El jinete se acercaba / tocando el tambor del llano" [The horseman was drawing near / playing the drum of the plain]. Not only is the plain, metaphorically, a drum, but the horse's hooves become mallets or drumsticks. Will Kirkland's version—"Closer comes the horseman / drumming on the plain"—captures the speed of the lines, but blunts the force of the metaphor by using the verb *drum*, which in English usage is a dead metaphor (e.g., "*drumming* ones fingers on the table").[11] The plain has to *be* a drum. Humphries realizes this, but destroys the effect with verbose, explanatory writing that interrupts the continuity of the narrative: "Rider *and horse* appear / With a *long* roll of the drum, / The *great* drum of the plain.[12]

Langston Hughes, one of the most significant poets of the Harlem Renaissance, is also one of the earliest and most accomplished translators of Lorca into English, although his *Gypsy Ballads* did not appear in print until 1951.[13] (Like the British poet Ted Hughes, he also translated *Blood Wedding*.) In a short translator's note, Hughes gives this account of the stages through which his *Gypsy Ballads* passed:

> First translated at the "Alianza de Escritores" in Madrid during the civil war with the aid of the poets, Rafael Alberti, Manuel Altolaguirre, and other friends of Lorca's. Revised in New York, 1945, with the aid of Miguel Covarrubias; and in June, 1951, with the poet's brother, Francisco García Lorca, at Columbia University. Checked with the Lloyd, Spender, Humphries, and Berea versions of certain poems, also with published French and Italian translations. Final copy, June 10, 1951.[14]

Although the existence of Hughes's translation is no secret to scholars in the field, there has been no in-depth analysis of its strategies and successes. In my own judgment, *The Gypsy Ballads* has to be included among the best poetry that Hughes wrote. Just as Ezra Pound's translations of Chinese poetry (*Cathay*) and of a section of the Anglo-Saxon poem "The Seafarer" are classics of modernism, Hughes's Lorca translation must be considered a significant work of American poetry at midcentury. Nevertheless, the text of these translations appeared only as a chapbook of the *Beloit Poetry Review* and was never reprinted.[15] Until the advent of the Internet, it was available only to those with access to a good university library with back issues of the *Beloit Poetry Review*. It was left out of the volume of Hughes's *Collected Works* that included his versions of *Blood Wedding* and of poems by the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén.

The main strengths of his *Gypsy Ballads* are its colloquial sharpness and its musicality. Unlike many other translators (Spender, Humphries, Kirkland), Hughes does not water down Lorca's language through redundancy or weak lexical choices.[16] He achieves a vernacular quality, but without evoking any *particular* dialect of the spoken language. There is no identifiable African American slang or dialect, for example. He is attentive to rhythm, but avoids the singsong effects that might result from a naive use of the English ballad-stanza. He is not afraid of assonance or alliteration: "Smoky anvils are her breasts / moaning round songs."[17] "Loosely luscious ladies pass /eating sunflower seeds."[18] Hughes also excels at translating Lorca's touchstone lines: "Fly, moon, moon, moon"; "When the night came, / that nightly comes nightly."[19]

"Green as I would have you green," however, seems less satisfying: the ambiguity of Lorca's "Verde que te quiero verde" [Green I love {want} you green] is virtually untranslatable.[20]

The virtues of Hughes's method can be seen in passages likes these:

Preciosa throws away her tambourine
and runs off without stopping.
The stud-wind pursues her
with a hot sword.
The sea scowls up its roar
The olive trees grow pale.
Flutes of forest shade sing,
and the smooth gong of the snow.
. . .
The judge, with the Civil Guards,
comes through the olive groves.
Slippery blood sings
a silent song of serpents.
Honorable Civil Guards:
the same as usual—
four Romans dead
and five Carthaginians.[21]

The voice of the poet Langston Hughes can be heard in these translations. His intervention is not *invisible*, to use Venuti's criterion, but neither is it overly intrusive. One area where his presence is strongly felt is in a relatively direct treatment of sexuality and violence. His "*stud*-wind" and "*cocky* angel" accentuate the implied sexual force of Lorca's "viento-hombrón" and "ángel marchoso."[22] Where other translators blunt the force of Lorca's violence, Hughes's more colloquial and direct language allows it to come forward. He calls a *reyerta* a *brawl* rather than a mere *dispute* (9) and knows that the verb *cercar* means *lay siege*, not merely *surround* (29).[23] As with almost any translation, it would be possible to quibble with any number of Hughes's individual choices, but his overall approach reveals him to be a strong translator, in sympathy with Lorca's sensual directness.

Because his *Gyspy Ballads* was never published by a major publisher like New Directions, Grove, or Knopf, Langston Hughes has remained a largely forgotten link in the history of North American Lorquismo. He anticipates the later interest in Lorca among subsequent generations of African American poets, including Baraka, Kaufman, and Mackey, but his work as a translator is more often *mentioned* than read. Modern biographers also believe that Hughes was a closeted gay man, but the gay poets interested in Lorca in the 1950s—Duncan, Spicer, Ginsberg, O'Hara—would probably not have seen him in this light. Ironically, the Lorca boom of the 1950s often drew its inspiration from translations of indifferent quality rather than seeking out the work of Langston Hughes, the most prominent poet to have translated Lorca in the previous generation.

II. *THE SELECTED POEMS OF FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA* (1955)

The Selected Poems of Federico García Lorca, published by New Directions in 1955, represents a selection of the best translations currently available to the editors, the poet's brother Francisco García Lorca and the influential editor Donald M. Allen. As an editor at Grove Press, Allen was also the force behind Ben Belitt's translation of *The Poet in New York* (also published in 1955) and, of course, *The New American Poetry* (1960). Since this latter volume helped to popularize the generation of American poets most enthused with Lorca's work, including Creeley, Spicer, Blackburn, Ginsberg, O'Hara, Koch, and Jones (Baraka), Donald Allen would appear to be a pivotal figure in the North American adoption and adaptation of the Spanish poet on several levels.

The paperback edition, published in 1961 as ND paperback 114, has sold more than 120,000 copies and never gone out of print.[24] (My personal copy is from the twenty-fourth printing.) A new edition, with an introduction by W. S Merwin, one of the original translators included in the book, was published in 2005. James Laughlin's New Directions and Barney Rosset's Grove Press were the two most significant U.S. publishers of modernist and avant-garde literature during the

1950s. The simultaneous publication of collections of poetry by Lorca in these two presses marked Lorca's definitive entry into the canon of poetry-in-translation. Of course, for this to occur Lorca had to have *already* been a figure of some note. It took almost two decades after his death for him to become an "overnight success": as noted in chapter 2, New Directions had already published Edwin Honig's *Federico García Lorca* in 1944, and Lorca's *Three Tragedies* in 1947.

The initial list of translators in *The Selected Poems* lists eighteen names, although some of these are represented by only a few poems each. W. S. Merwin and Edwin Honig are also amply represented, along with Lysander Kemp, who would later translate several novels by Carlos Fuentes. (The presence of a single female name, Harriet de Onís, indicates that the translation of Lorca was then, as it is now, a mostly male enterprise.) The strategy of choosing work from among the best available poet-translators made *The Selected Poems* a fairly good representation of Lorca's work, considering its time of publication. If we compare any given poem translated by Onís, Kemp, Honig, or Merwin to the same poem in *The Collected Poems of Federico García Lorca*, edited by Christopher Maurer in 1991, we can see that the best translations in the earlier volume can still hold their own against more recent work. Where the Maurer edition has the edge, of course, is in its completeness, consistency, and scholarly rigor.

The most notable weakness in *The Selected Poems* is the inclusion of so many poems translated by the team of the British poet Stephen Spender and the Catalan bookseller and publisher J. L. Gili. The two account for a little more than one quarter of the total number of pages in the book, taking into account several longer poems like "Oda a Walt Whitman," "Oda al rey de Harlem," and "Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías." This might have seemed a natural choice, given that the two had previously published, in 1939, the most extensive selection of Lorca's poetry available prior to the 1955 *Selected Poems*. Spender and Gili, however, often take a flat-footed, literal approach to the text while at the same time diluting the force of Lorca's language. Both flaws can be seen in these lines from "Thamar y Amnón":

La tierra se ofrece llena
de heridas cicatrizadas
o estremecida por agudos
cauterios de luces blancas.

. . .

Earth *shows itself* full
of *cicatrized* wounds
or *shaken* by *acute*
cauteries of white lights.[25]

The phrase "shows itself full" simply mimics the reflexive structure of the Spanish syntax: in more idiomatic English we would probably say "the earth looks full." Even the most literal version of the original phrase, "offers itself up," would be an improvement. To Anglo-Saxon ears, the more "clinical" latinate cognates *cicatrized* and *acute* lack the immediacy of *scarred* and *sharp*. The word *shaken* is weaker than *estremecidas*: the verb *estremecerse*, from which this adjective is derived, is equivalent to the English *shudder* or *tremble*, whether from extreme pain, fear, cold, or sexual arousal. By downplaying the vernacular power of Lorca's imagery, Spender and Gili also tend to miss the sexual undercurrent. This particular passage *shows itself* as a typical crib that a native speaker informant (Gili) might provide to a poet-translator (Spender), who would then refine it. In this case, perhaps, Spender simply let the crib stand.

Dilution takes several related forms in the Spender-Gili translations. A symbol, trope, or rhetorical figure vanishes when translated by a more direct, nonfigurative expression. "Camborio de dura crin" for example, is translated as "An authentic Camborio."[26] The expression *dura crin* [hard mane] is a metonymy for the wildness and power of a horse (or lion). The word *authentic*, in contrast, has no such symbolic charge: it short-circuits the chain of association and *domesticates* the image. Another form of dilution occurs when a word with a strong sensory charge is translated with an equivalent that fails to appeal to any of the five senses. Spender and Gili translate the verb *gemir* [cry out, moan] with the English verb *mourn*, which evokes an emotional process but not a sensory one.[27]

Spender and Gili, in contrast to Langston Hughes, soften Lorca's characteristically violent imagery, translating "Guardias civiles borrachos / en la puerta golpeaban," as "Drunken Civil Guards / were *knocking* at the door."[28] A stronger verb like *pounding* or *banging* would have been preferable. Similarly, *violador* should be translated as *rapist* or at the very least *ravager*, not as *violator*, a word with much weaker connotations in English.[29] The word *injured* is less forceful than *heridas* [wounded], and the verb *surround* does not convey the military implications of *cercar* [besiege]. [30] Violent emotions, too, suffer, as when Spender and Gili demote Lorca's *angustia* [anguish] to the category of mere *anxiety*.[31]

While any one instance of dilution might be appropriate in a particular translation, there is no plausible justification for the frequent or systematic weakening of Lorca's poetry: this practice leads neither to greater fidelity to the semantic meaning or poetic values of the original, nor to greater power or acceptability in the target language. The immediacy and sensuality of Lorca's language might have found an analogue in English-language poetic models of the modernist period, like the imagism of Pound and Williams or the vernacular mode of Langston Hughes. This was an era in which American poets were "professors of the five senses," to borrow Lorca's apt formulation, as well as serious students of speech rhythms. The back cover of *The Selected Poems* hints at this convergence: "No other European poet of the twentieth century has attracted more English-speaking translators than Lorca, whose clarity and lyricism recommend themselves to poets working in the Anglo-American vernacular." It is precisely this *vernacular* quality, present in Langston Hughes, that Spender and Gili fail to exploit. Lorca's language does not always possess *clarity*, of course, but even at its most obscure it has an imagistic sharpness and sensuality.[32]

While the Spender-Gili translations represent a missed opportunity for convergence between two branches of modernism, I have found no evidence to suggest that the dilution of Lorca's language had a decisive impact on the reception of Lorca in the United States. Francisco García Lorca and Donald Allen could have chosen more translations from the

more vernacular Langston Hughes, and fewer from Spender and Gili, and the end result might have been very much the same. Translation is often a *translucent* rather than an *opaque* medium, in the sense that readers are able to *see through* a weak translation to a stronger original. In fact, most readers are realistic enough to make allowances for unsurprising qualitative gaps between original and translation, taking on faith the greater vigor of the original.[33] Taken as a whole, the *Selected Poems* presented a sufficient number of translations, of variable quality, to excite enthusiasm for Lorca's poetry among American readers.

III. BEN BELITT: THE TRANSLATOR'S EGO

Ben Belitt was an American poet and translator born in 1911 who is now best known, perhaps, for his problematic translations of Neruda. The role of his 1955 Grove Press edition of *The Poet in New York* was a crucial one, since it brought renewed attention to Lorca's New York poetry, which had first been brought into English, somewhat uncertainly, by Rolfe Humphries in 1940. No other complete translation of this work appeared until 1988, when Greg Simon and Stephen White came out with a far superior version. Belitt's edition, then, stood virtually alone for more than thirty years, given that Humphries's translation had long since become a bibliographical rarity.

Belitt's edition also included the first English-language translation of "Juego y teoría del duende," which Belitt translated as "The Duende: Theory and *Divertissement*."[34] This marks the precise point at which the duende itself enters the English-language conversation about Lorca's poetry. It is curious to consider that English-language readers of Lorca managed to do very well without the duende between 1937, the year of Lloyd's *Lament for the Death of a Bullfighter*, and 1955. Edwin Honig does not mention the lecture at all in his 1944 study of Lorca—the first book on the Spanish poet published in the United States, and the first guidebook in English. Francisco García Lorca does not invoke the duende in his introduction to the *Selected Poems*, nor does Ángel del Río, introducing Belitt's own translation.[35] Belitt himself could not have realized how much the translation of this

essay would transform the reception of Lorca in the United States. If Lorca without the duende was already a focus of intense interest in the United States, the duende would later become the principal vehicle by which enthusiasm for Lorca would spread from poet to poet.

The success of Belitt's edition of *The Poet in New York* presents a paradox, given the problematic nature of this translator's practice. His creative translation, a carryover of certain features of his own poetic style as a "poet in his own right" (to use the stock phrase), produces a peculiar strain of apocryphal Lorca. The poems he translates are Lorca's, of course, but the translation has the effect of effacing and obscuring an already difficult text. Belitt's infractions include verbosity, ennoblement, awkward syntax and punctuation, outright obfuscation, the erasure of poetic devices like metonymy and syntactic parallelism, wildly inappropriate shifts of register and tone, inexplicable lexical choices, and the dilution of metaphors and sensory images.

In the interest of concision I will look at only a few instances of Belitt's characteristic mode of translation—a small but representative selection of the multiple abuses that I have found. My own bracketed translations are not the "correct" translations that Belitt should have used, but explanations of the meaning of the Spanish words and phrases in these fragments. If I were producing my own translation of the book, I might use several other strategies in addition to this explanatory literalism. Nevertheless, this method provides a kind of baseline against which to measure other versions.

To complain about a translator's punctuation might seem overly fastidious, but Belitt often breaks up a single phrase in Spanish into two or three phrases, introducing fragmentation and awkwardness where none exists in the original:

> Emilio en la yerta ginebra que se olvida en el vaso
> . . .
> Emilio in a staling jigger of gin, in the tumbler, forgotten[36]
>
> [Emilio in the stiff {lifeless} gin forgotten in the glass]
> . . .

La mujer gorda
que vuelve del revés los pulpos agonizantes
. . .
The fat lady
who turns up the cuttlefish and leaves them to die, wrong side out[37]

[The fat woman / who turns the dying octopi inside out]

These lines are pointlessly convoluted, introducing semantic elements not present in the original and breaking a single clause into two or three separate units. Where Lorca has a single *vaso*, Belitt requires both a *jigger* and a *tumbler*. Turning a *cuttlefish* inside out takes Belitt thirteen words, to Lorca's six. And why is the *cuttlefish* substituted for the more evocative *pulpo*?

The addition of lexical items that do not correspond to anything in the original text can have the effect of obfuscating a comparatively simple phrase:

y que el mar recordó ¡de pronto!
los nombres de todos sus ahogados
. . .
and the sea could remember—so suddenly!—
the *rout* of its drowners by name[38]

[and that the sea remembered, suddenly! / the names of all its drowned]

What sense of the word *rout* is relevant to Lorca's image? Although Lorca's poetry has often been called "surrealist," the sea remembering the names of all those who have drowned in it is a straightforward conceit. These lines might remain difficult, but their *literal* sense is not hard to construe. Belitt does the same thing with "El nacimiento de Cristo":

Los pañales exhalan un rumor de desierto
con cítaras sin cuerdas y degolladas voces.
. . .
The swaddling *clout* falls in the breath of a wilderness murmur,
and zithers with *keyboards* unstrung, and headless ones singing, *are heard*.[39]

[The diapers {swaddling clothes} exhale a desert murmur / with unstrung zithers and beheaded voices]

Lorca's difficulties occur at a higher level of comprehension: we know what it means for zithers to be without their strings, for example, but not necessarily what the symbolic import of this image is. Belitt's version is difficult to follow on the literal level. Zithers have strings but not *keyboards*. What is the *clout* of a *swaddling*, and what could it mean for this *clout* to *fall in the breath*?

Rhetorical figures and tropes also fall victim to Belitt's creativity:

No duerme nadie por el cielo. Nadie, nadie.
No duerme nadie.
. . .
No sleep in the sky: nobody, nobody.
No one lies sleeping[40]

[Nobody sleeps in the sky. Nobody, nobody. / Nobody sleeps.]

Few poets use repetition as effectively as Lorca: here he uses the word *nadie* four times and repeats the phrase "No duerme nadie" at the beginning of two successive lines. Belitt feels the need to introduce as many different ways of saying the same thing as possible within the equivalent space, as though he were bored with Lorca's repetitions.

Even more serious is the erasure of metaphor in these lines:

A veces las monedas en enjambres furiosas
taladran y devoran abandonados niños
. . .
Only now and again a furious rabble of coins
that enter and ravage the dispossessed childhoods.[41]

[At times coins in furious swarms / drill and devour abandoned children]

Here Belitt changes *children* to the more abstract *childhoods* and erases Lorca's visual image of a swarm of coins on the rampage. Lorca's verbs, *taladran* and *devoran*, are more specific and powerful than Belitt's *enter* and *ravage*. Since *enjambre* is the word used in Spanish for a swarm

of insects, Lorca is implicitly equating the coins with a flying swarm of bees, wasps, or locusts. Belitt's use of the word *rabble* completely erases this metaphor, which is effective because of the similarity of size between coins and the unnamed insects.

It is not even necessary to compare lines like "your spirit's lukewarmness, that cannot construe you, still lacking you" or "Let me blubber, since now I am minded to" to the original text to know that something has gone seriously amiss.[42] Although translation often aims to reach an appropriate compromise between the conflicting demands of the source text and the target audience, Belitt's vandalistic approach to Lorca is not oriented toward *either* end of the spectrum. Like the dilution observed in Spender and Gili, it serves no discernible aim, since its sacrifice of accuracy does not lead to more aesthetically satisfying poetry for the English-language reader.

This, of course, is my own judgment: one could always imagine a reader for whom Belitt's translation would be a brilliantly creative approach to Lorca or a valuable experiment in experimental translation. Belitt's approach, in fact, is quite appealing in theory, since it evokes positive values like freedom, imagination, and creativity, while condemning slavish literalism. His defense of the translator's prerogative might be oddly compelling, were it not the preface to the "swaddling clout" of his own translation. The following appeal to epistemological doubt might be particularly attractive to critics reared on postmodernism:

> It is here that the true "morality" of translation may be said to reside, its real conscience: in an exploration of real temptations, real perils, real equivalences, from which the trot and the hack and the self-serving complacencies of the "accurate" way are excluded. Here, in short, the translator is at liberty to contemplate the universe of the given poem as its creator originally contemplated the universe of his given experience—not as a datum substantively present in the nature of things, but as a precarious search for exactitudes, correspondences, analogies that will mirror their model only in flashes, and which will demonstrate nothing so much as its partial knowability in the end.[43]

The problem is that Belitt's heady existentialist dismissal of the "trot" and the "hack" is ultimately rather simplistic. His reflections on translation, collected in *Adam's Dream*, are structured around a binary opposition between imaginative recreation and the fetish of literalism. He berates Donald K. Walsh, for example, for a supposedly dull, word-for-word approach to Neruda's *Residencia en la tierra*, arguing that the position of the translator as "nobody in particular" is spectacularly uninteresting.[44] Belitt is able to score some points at the expense of Walsh's literalism, but he actually inflicts more damage by pointing out some outright "howlers" and ineffective paraphrases—instances, that is, where Walsh is *insufficiently* literal and, ironically, quite akin to Belitt himself. It is not particularly helpful, in any case, to conceive of translation as a choice between the extremes of slavish literality and precarious freedom: these alternatives are not, in fact, the two dominant paradigms in the history of translation of poetry into English, so framing the debate in terms of these two polar opposites is profoundly misleading.[45]

It is also questionable whether the subsumption of the "translator's ego" leads, necessarily, to dull results. There is a special fascination in the process by which a translator negotiates a nuanced compromise between conflicting demands. The translator is always, in fact, someone in particular, situated in a particular time and place and possessed of given orientation toward both the source text and the target audience. He or she must make multiple decisions about how best to exploit the poetic resources of the target language and, where appropriate, the idiosyncratic strengths of an individual poetic style: translation is almost never a simple matter of subordinating one set of interests to another.

Belitt's answer to this complex set of demands is to sacrifice any sense of fidelity to a set of idiosyncratic stylistic features. Clayton Eshleman applies the phrase "the translator's ego," borrowed from the translator Eliot Weinberger, to this method:

> My first experience with what I think Weinberger means by "the translator's ego" was with Ben Belitt's translations of García Lorca's *Poet in*

New York, in 1959. Belitt appeared to be imposing his own poetic voice onto the Spanish text when, for example, he translated the last line of Lorca's poem "La Aurora," "como recién salidas de un naufragio de sangre" as, "as though lately escaped from a bloody disaster." Lorca's "shipwreck of blood," a powerful direct image that needs no translational revision, had not only been lost but turned into English-English slang—Belitt's "bloody," as in "he's a bloody good bloke," neatly effaced Lorca's "blood." In the case of Belitt's Lorca and Neruda translations, we hear the translator-poet's own mannerisms leaking into and rendering rococo the meaning of the original texts. It is as if Belitt is colonizing the foreign terrain of these poets instead of accommodating himself to the ways in which they differ from his own poetic intentions.[46]

Whereas Belitt finds the "morality" of the translator in epistemological uncertainty, Eshleman argues from a more convincing ethical imperative: the need to avoid the ravages of literary colonialism. As we saw in chapter 2, American poets are quite willing to use Lorca in support of American cultural nationalism and identity politics. Belitt's translation, however, is ultimately too eccentric in its effects to serve even this neocolonialist purpose: his use of Lorca for his own poetic project ultimately seems narcissistic.

IV. *LORCA/BLACKBURN*: MODERNIST TRANSLATION

Unlike either Belitt or the Spender-Gili team, Paul Blackburn works explicitly to translate Lorca into the Pound-Williams tradition, exploiting the convergence between the Spanish poet's vivid, sensual language and the concern with imagistic clarity and nuanced musicality that we might see in poets like William Carlos Williams, Lorine Niedecker, or Blackburn himself. While the posthumous publication of *Lorca/Blackburn* in 1979 obviously came too late to have an impact on the American Lorca boom of the 1950s and 1960s, Blackburn's enthusiasm for Lorca is quite typical for poets of his generation. (Like other poets studied in this book—Creeley, Bly, O'Hara, Kaufman, and Ginsberg—Blackburn was born in 1926; Spicer and Koch were a year older.) Jerome

Rothenberg dedicates his own translation of Lorca's *Suites* to Blackburn, who is a significant translator of Troubadour poetry and the prose of Julio Cortázar as well as a poet in the tradition of the Black Mountain School. Blackburn lived in Southern France and Spain for a few years in the 1950s, and many of his own poems evoke the Spanish landscape.

Lorca/Blackburn contains translations of thirty-seven poems in a bilingual format.[47] Blackburn favors Lorca's shorter, more lyrical poems, including twenty-one poems from the early *Canciones.* He includes a single poem from *Romancero gitano* ("La monja gitana," an unusual choice), two from *Diván del Tamarit,* and none of the "surrealist" poems of *Poet in New York.* Four of the poems in this volume are not, in fact, written by Lorca, although they were included under the heading "Cantares populares" ["Popular Songs"] in the Aguilar edition of Lorca's *Obras completas* from which Blackburn was working. "Los cuatro muleros" ["The Four Muleteers"], "Anda jaleo" ["Hit It!], "Los reyes de la Baraja" ["Kings in the Deck"], and "Nana de Sevilla" ["Seville Slumber Song"] are anonymous songs from the oral tradition for which the multitalented Lorca had written piano accompaniments. It is not clear whether Blackburn knew or cared that these were not Lorca poems: this distinction could easily be lost on a American reader who is not a specialist on Spanish poetry. George Economou in his "Foreward" [*sic*] to *Lorca/Blackburn* and David H. Rosenthal in his introduction do not signal the presence of this apocryphal material, so the nonspecialist reader of Blackburn's book might never suspect that these four texts are not by Lorca: I myself did not notice until I sat down to make a list of the provenance of each poem in the book, even though I had looked through the volume several times before. Since *Lorca/Blackburn* was not prepared for publication by Blackburn himself, he did not have to opportunity to clarify the issue in a prologue of his own.

The most *visible* feature of Blackburn's translation practice is the introduction of certain graphic elements that do not correspond to anything in the original text: ampersands and arabic numerals, simplified spellings like *altho* or *thru,* additional blank spaces within lines, and

a ragged left margin. He also introduces enjambments where Lorca's lines are end-stopped. These graphic features are characteristic of the Black Mountain School of poetry with which Blackburn was loosely affiliated. They thus serve to mark the translation as the work of a poet in a particular time and place. (Rothenberg also uses ampersands throughout his translation of the *Suites*, which he dedicates to Blackburn.) Another purpose of these visual markers is to distinguish the translation stylistically from the original, but without sacrificing very much in the way of semantic fidelity: the numeral *7* and the sign *&* are no less literal than *seven* and *and* written out as words, but they give a different appearance to the poem on the page and allow for some measure of expressiveness: in a bilingual edition, the two facing pages present a quite different visual aspect.

Apart from these visual elements, Blackburn employs a combination of techniques rather than one consistent approach. At times he is quite literal, almost *transliterating* rather than translating. Lorca's "Cantan las siete / doncellas" becomes "They sing / 7 donzellas."[48] Blackburn mimics Lorca's verb-subject word order, and uses an archaic spelling of the Spanish word *donzellas* [damsels], while breaking the line at a different syntactic juncture. Similarly, in his translation of "Es verdad," he maintains Lorca's title in the original Spanish and translates the opening lines word for word: "Ay, qué trabajo me cuesta, / quererte como te quiero." "Ai, what work it costs me /wanting you like I want you" (60–61). A more idiomatic rendering might be "Ah, how much effort it takes / to love you as I love you."

At the other end of the spectrum, Blackburn's translation can be quite free and idiomatic, even slangy, in English. These lines "Nana de Sevilla," combine the *transliteration* seen in other poems with a more colloquial approach:

No tiene mare, sí;
no tiene mare, no;
no tiene mare,
lo echó a la calle.
. . .

Has no mother, *sí*,
has no mother, *no*,
ain't got no mother, she
threw him in the street.[49]

Here Blackburn transliterates the words *sí* and *no*, while conveying something of the colloquial flavor of the original by omitting the subjects of the verbs—the norm in Spanish but markedly slangy in English. The Spanish original uses the Andalusian dialect *mare* in place of the standard *madre*, so perhaps "ain't got no" in the third line of this stanza is meant as a tonal equivalent. This poem, of course, is one of the popular songs mentioned above: Lorca himself rarely if ever uses such dialect spellings in his poetry.

Blackburn's translation of the poem "Adelina de paseo" is one of the freest in the book. Here is the first stanza:

La mar no tiene naranjas
ni Sevilla tiene amor.
Morena, qué luz de fuego
Préstame tu quitasol.

. . .

Oranges
do not grow in the sea
any more than there's love in Sevilla.
Dark one, the sun's that's hot, I'm—
loan me your parasol[50]

Blackburn erases Lorca's parallel structure ("La mar no tiene . . . ni Sevilla tiene") and introduces elements extraneous to the text, thus producing a rather unwieldy paraphrase that departs from the elegant, songlike simplicity of the original. In this case, the use of paraphrase rather than the usual literalism leads to less satisfying results. In the same poem, Blackburn renders "tus palabras, pececillos" [your words, little fish] as "your words, your sinful little words," perhaps confusing *pececillos*, the diminutive form of the word *peces*, with *pecados* or the English derivative *peccadilloes* (originally from the Spanish *pecadillos*).

In a few other places, Blackburn seems to have misconstrued the literal sense of the Lorca's original. He translates "un oso panza arriba" as "a bear with a high stomach" rather than "a bear belly up," in other words, "on its back," as Hughes translates this phrase.[51] Most of Blackburn's departures, however, cannot be attributed to identifiable missteps in the reading of the original, but to a deliberate strategy that might be termed "modernist translation," after Lawrence Venuti. Although he does no more than mention the Lorca translations, Venuti uses Blackburn's extensive work on Troubadour poetry as one of his principal examples of innovative modernist translation in the Poundian tradition.[52] For Venuti, modernism brought with it "new translation strategies that challenged fluency by cultivating extremely heterogeneous discourses."[53]

Blackburn's Poundian approach to translation flouts the conventional approach that seeks a sensible equilibrium between semantic fidelity and idiomatic fluency. While Blackburn is capable of combining literalism with freer approaches in the same poem, he tends to avoid the middle ground of balance or compromise. This does not mean that he is uninterested in the goals of more conventional translation: fidelity and the creation of original poetry in English. He invests effort, in fact, at *both* ends of the spectrum at once, through literalistic transcription and transliteration, on the one hand, and the creation of jazzed-up audiovisual textures on the other. The resulting approach might seem rather disjointed in its peculiar combination of freedom and fidelity, but this apparent inconsistency forms part of a consistently modernist approach.

As was the case with Belitt, there is no clear preestablished criterion for evaluating the success of Blackburn's efforts. Those heavily invested in the Poundian tradition of modernist translation, or in the Pound-Williams tradition in American poetry to which Blackburn belongs, are likely to render a more favorable judgment than those who place a premium on the fidelity and fluency of more conventional modes of translation. My own view (as a reader who belongs, to some degree, to both of these categories) is that Blackburn's experimental translation

practice produces predictably mixed results. The high points are the colloquialism and musicality seen in the opening lines of poems like "Blackberry Bush" and "Echo":

Blackberry, with the grey stem, give me
a handful of berries to eat.

Blood & thorns. Closer!
If you love me, I'll love you.[54]

. . .

Dawn's flower has already
    opened itself
        up.
            (Remember?
        the depths of the afternoon?)[55]

In this last case, Blackburn's use of white spaces and indentations provides a kind of visual analogue to a musical score, as is frequent in poets of the Pound-Williams tradition.[56] In my view, the ultimate justification for the poet-translator is the creation of new poetry in the target language. The disruptions of fluency that result from awkward paraphrase, awkward literalism, and mistranslation have no particular value when they do not lead to poetically satisfying results.

V. FOUR (OR FIVE) DEGREES OF DOMESTICATION

As with Belitt, the question of literary colonialism arises with Blackburn's translations. Purists might object to the distractions of the graphic signs of difference that he introduces into his versions of Lorca's work. There really is no way, however, of escaping the domesticating effects of translation. The term *domestication* refers, in the first instance, to translations that *tame* or *dilute* the force of the original in order to make it conform to domestic ideals of fluency. In the larger sense, however, *domestication* is the process by which a translation reflects *any* norm derived primarily from the target culture. All translations domesticate the source text; even a *foreignizing* translation, one that pursues modernist strategies of defamiliarization, answers to some

domestic agenda. In the case of Blackburn, I would argue that the principal aim is to assimilate Lorca to the ideals of Poundian translation, not to render the qualities of Lorca's original Spanish text. This is a debatable point: in my experience, translators sometimes delude themselves into thinking that their efforts to satisfy the needs of their own target audience will bring them closer to the original.

The versions of Lorca's poetry examined here follow four separate strategies of domestication. Langston Hughes's vernacular register contrasts with that of Spender and Gili, who offer up a fairly sedate Lorca, taming the poet's wildness and dulling the force of his violent imagery; Ben Belitt domesticates *Poeta en Nueva York* by making it reflect his own stylistic eccentricity. What this diversity of approaches suggests is that the English-language literary culture into which Lorca was translated in the thirty or forty years after his death was not a monolithic one. If I had examined additional translations I might have come up with seven or eight separate strategies.

Another type of domestication is the more middle-of-the-road strategy followed by Merwin, Honig, or Maurer. Apart from Jerome Rothenberg, more recent translators of Lorca have, in fact, followed this more conservative strategy. They have not attempted to reproduce Blackburn's modernist techniques; nor have they followed the example of Ben Belitt and made radical claims for the translator's right to reshape the text. Though it would be possible to quibble with individual choices ad infinitum, recent translations of Lorca into English have for the most part been adequate if not particularly distinguished. Given the history of Lorca translation, the pragmatic value of mere competence should not be discounted, even when the resulting translation is not poetically brilliant. Versions of Lorca's poetry that are both reasonably accurate and acceptable to their target audience do not raise the problem of Lorquian apocrypha in the same manner as the experiments of Belitt and Blackburn. When these translations do fall short, it is usually the result of a Stephen Spender style dilution of Lorca's powerful language, rather than of vandalism à la Belitt.

Early translators of Lorca inflicted some real damage to the understanding of the Spanish poet in at least two significant respects:

1. The *dilution* of Lorca's language at the hands of Spender and Gili made this Spanish variety of literary modernism seem alien from the sensual immediacy of poetic language in the Pound-Williams tradition. This kind of translation paved the way for the questionable arguments made later by Robert Bly, who emphasized Lorca's difference from Anglo-American imagism. In chapter 4, I will argue that Bly's clumsy, propagandistic translations helped to perpetuate the notion of Lorca as an anti-intellectual poet unconcerned with craft. By stripping Lorca of his precise language and resonant rhythms, Bly created a poet-in-translation more in tune with his own views of poetry.
2. Ben Belitt's abstract and obscurantist approach to some of Lorca's most difficult poetry erected obstacles to a fuller understanding of Lorca's "surrealism." An American reader wanting to have access to Lorca's text through Belitt's translation would have been right to complain of the obfuscatory elements that the translator has introduced: Lorca's New York poetry is already difficult in Spanish, and Belitt introduces additional problems of comprehension, thus bequeathing an exaggerated conception of Lorca's bizarre irrationality to subsequent generations of American poets.

In both cases, the process of translation introduced spurious differences. Nevertheless, Lorca managed not only to survive Spender's dilution and rough treatment at the hands of Belitt and Bly, but even to grow in reputation. American poets and readers of poetry in the 1950s and 1960s did not have access to scholarly reliable editions and competent translations, like those edited by Maurer in the last two decades of the twentieth century, but this did not diminish their enthusiasm. If inadequate translations could not sink Lorca, then better ones would not necessarily have made a measurable difference in his reception. Access to more accurate translations at an earlier stage in the game would probably not have impeded the creation of the romantic myth of Lorca. In fact, the romantic stereotype, embodied by the ubiquitous duende, is as dominant now as it ever was, despite the

abundance of accurate information at the disposal of any interested English-language reader.

There is a very short step from the variable strategies of domestication seen in these translation of Lorca to the apocrypha that will be the subject of the remaining chapters of this book. Whatever our assessment of the merits of Belitt and Blackburn, it is clear that their work forms part of the larger reinterpretation of Lorca undertaken by their contemporaries. Blackburn's possibly unintentional translation of songs from the popular tradition *as though they were by Lorca* calls to mind the strange genesis of Creeley's apocryphal "After Lorca." Belitt's insertion of his own poetic personality into his translation of *The Poet in New York* anticipates Jack Spicer's appropriation of the Spanish poet to his own ends. Before turning to these examples in chapter 5, however, I will first consider the poetry of the deep image, a movement that claims to enact an American version of Lorca's specifically Spanish poetics.