



PREFACE

This is not a book about the Spanish playwright and poet Federico García Lorca (1898–1936). I do not wish to add an additional monograph to the vast and erratic bibliography on his life and work. It is, rather, an exploration of the apocryphal afterlife of García Lorca in the poetic culture of the United States. Twentieth-century American poets, in large numbers, have translated his poems and written imitations, parodies, and pastiches—along with essays and reviews. With the possible exception of Rainer Maria Rilke, Lorca is the twentieth-century European poet with the strongest presence in the English language.¹

A list of prominent English-language poets, the majority of them from the United States, who have translated Lorca or invoked the Lorquian duende at some point in their writing lives would have to include the following names: Conrad Aiken, Amiri Baraka, Ben Belitt, Paul Blackburn, Robert Bly, Roy Campbell, Leonard Cohen, Robert Creeley, Victor Hernández Cruz, Robert Duncan, Allen Ginsberg, Donald Hall, Edward Hirsch, Langston Hughes, Ted Hughes, Steven Jonas, Donald Justice, Bob Kaufman, Galway Kinnell, Kenneth Koch, Denise Levertov, Philip Levine, Frank Lima, Nathaniel Mackey, W. S. Merwin, Hilda Morley, Michael McClure, Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Rexroth, Barbara Jane Reyes, Jerome Rothenberg, David Shapiro, William Jay Smith, Stephen Spender, Jack Spicer, William Carlos Williams, William Stafford, Diane Wakoski, and James Wright.²

While not all of these poets have been equally devoted to Lorca, the sheer length and variety of this list indicate several possible avenues of approach to the study of Lorca and English-language poetry. We could use a monograph with the title *Lorca and African American Poetry*, addressing his impact on poets like Hughes, Kaufman, Baraka, Mackey, and another on his importance for gay male poets (Duncan, Spicer, Ginsberg, O'Hara . . .). A critical look at the history of the translation of Lorca into English would be a worthy project, as would a study of Lorca's influence on the poetics of the deep image. The book I have written does, in fact, address these issues, some in more depth than others. Nevertheless, I have not been able to address every single instance of English-language *Lorquismo*. I have been guided by my own tastes and interests and by a desire to develop a thesis.

My overarching idea is that Lorca in English translation and adaptation has become a specifically *American* poet, adaptable to the cultural and ideological desiderata of U.S. poets during the cold war period.³ I will argue, further, that the American Lorca is largely an apocryphal figure, an invention of poets in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. Lorca is unique in the extent to which he, or at least some image of him, has been fully assimilated into the American idiom. Other foreign-language poets have been influential in the United States, but none has been so thoroughly Americanized.

One model for my critical project is the work of Marjorie Perloff, who has organized several books on twentieth-century poetry and poetics around a pivotal figure: Arthur Rimbaud in *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*, Ezra Pound in *The Dance of the Intellect*, and Ludwig Wittgenstein in *Wittgenstein's Ladder*. The central figure in each one of these books is used as a fulcrum to address writers from a very specific critical perspective and to offer new interpretations of literary history. This model not a rigid one: it plays out differently in these three Perloff books, and differently yet again in my own project. My Lorca, like Perloff's Rimbaud, is a tutelary duende, a patron for a particular tradition (or set of traditions) within contemporary American poetics. Nevertheless, I cannot see American *Lorquismo* as a faithful translation

of a genuine original. The object of my study has been elusive: I have looked for Lorca in the usual places and not found him there, yet I have sometimes found more substantial evidence of his presence in unexpected places. I have been especially interested in delineating the "negative space" of Lorca's influence, as in a drawing that suggests the shape of two objects by depicting the empty space between them. What Lorca is *not*, in the American context, is just as significant as the positive values he represents.

The genre I have termed "apocryphal translation" is key to my exploration of this negative space. Robert Creeley's "After Lorca" and several poems from Jack Spicer's book of the same title are translations of texts that *do not exist* in the original Spanish. As with Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets From the Portuguese*, there are no original texts standing behind these translations. Unlike Browning's poems, however, these texts sometimes create the strong *illusion* of an original text, or in other cases an uncertainty as to whether any original exists. Expanding the definition of "apocryphal translation" to include other varieties of *Lorquiana* in U.S. poetry, I have considered further examples: Frank O'Hara's "Lorcaescas," a nonextant work mentioned in another O'Hara poem; Kenneth Koch's hoax (or parody) "Some South American Poets," based, in my surmise, on an amalgam of Lorca and José Luis Borges; and Jerome Rothenberg's *The Lorca Variations*, a book-length set of variations based on Rothenberg's previous translation of Lorca's *Suites*.

Rearranging the letters of the word APOCRYPHAL, an acquaintance of mine, Herb Levy, found a perfect anagram: HAPPY LORCA. Taking this anagram as a propitious sign, I have concluded that the ways in which U.S. poets have reinvented Lorca, while problematic in many respects, are felicitous, generative of new poetic possibilities. The standard practice of translation, which aims for a satisfactory compromise between fidelity to the source text and acceptability by the target audience, remains necessary. Apocryphal translation, however, contains a higher concentration of *information* about the negotiation of cultural differences. The less faithful the translation is, the more information

of this type will become available. When the original text does not exist at all, then, we get a pure vision of how one culture might imagine another.

Since my focus is on the translation of works that Lorca did not write, my examination of his literary career will be necessarily brief. In chapter 1, "Federico García Lorca (Himself)," I will sketch the portrait of a charismatic, protean, and enigmatic authorial figure. The purpose of this chapter is to establish an implicit point of comparison with the Americanized Lorca that dominates the rest of the book. *My Lorca* has a greater intellectual capacity and a more highly developed literary culture than the mythic stereotype allows for. Distorted views of Lorca go wrong, usually, by virtue of being incomplete, of failing to account for the multifaceted nature of his achievement.

No study of Lorca's poetry on its own terms can explain why his poetry resonated so strongly in the United States. For an explanation of this resonance, I turn in a second chapter to a set of purely *domestic* criteria that have little to do with Lorca as he might appear within his own cultural context. Lorca was particularly attractive to poets seeking to define a new variety of American cultural nationalism. He arrived on the scene as an alien figure, strongly identified with a quite different brand of national exceptionalism—that of Spain itself. Far from being an obstacle, however, Lorca's foreignness proved useful to those in search of a form of American cultural nationalism that might stand opposed to cold war politics. Lorca's poetry came to the fore with the poets associated with *The New American Poetry*, an anthology published in 1960. The contributions of African American and gay male poets are especially noteworthy during this period, but there is also a more generic Lorquismo, characterized by a tone of naive enthusiasm and by a proliferation of abusive citations of the duende.

Poet-translators have played a key role in the creation of the American Lorca. In chapter 3, I will examine the strategies of *domestication* seen in a few paradigmatic cases, from Langston Hughes through Paul Blackburn. The sheer number of translations of Lorca is such that I have been forced to be selective, since an exhaustive survey would have

been impractical. Chapter 4 will address the phenomenon of "deep image" poetry, a movement in midcentury U.S. poetics that reportedly owes a portion of its initial impetus to Lorca. I will conclude that the debt of deep image poetry to Lorca is less substantial than many critics have assumed. The founders of this movement drew inspiration from many sources aside from the "Spanish surrealism," while Lorca himself has a minor role in the later development of this style.

In chapters 5 through 8, I will examine the Lorquian writings of Creeley, Spicer, O'Hara, Koch, and Rothenberg. The choice of these particular poets, and not others, requires some explanation. Spicer's *After Lorca* and Rothenberg's *The Lorca Variations* are obvious choices, since they are book-length homages to the Spanish poet by major figures. Creeley's short poem "After Lorca" is too perfect an example of apocryphal translation to omit. The chapters on O'Hara and Koch, on the other hand, show the connection between Lorca and American poets who are not usually associated with Spanish poetry: by looking at the Spanish side of poets usually associated more with French poetry, I attempt to take measure of the extent of his penetration into American poetry.

At many points during the writing of this book I have found myself torn between two contradictory perspectives. Long an admirer of Creeley, Spicer, Koch, O'Hara, and Rothenberg, I want to celebrate the inventiveness of their apocryphal Lorcas. As a Hispanist professionally dedicated to Spanish culture, on the other hand, I have resisted the entire notion of creating an "American Lorca" with so little of the complexity of Lorca as I view him. I have also felt some resentment of the virtual monopoly of Lorca in the reception of Spanish poetry in the United States: while a few other poets have emerged from Lorca's shadow, his dominance is still unquestionable. Lorca's poetry establishes the very terms by which other Spanish poets are read in the English-speaking world. It would be easier to find a publisher for the sixth or seventh translation of *Gypsy Ballads* than for the first translation of a major poet of the last half of the century like Claudio Rodríguez.

I could not have written this book without being provoked by the problematic nature of American transformations of Lorca, who remains a fascinating but unfathomable writer—multifaceted, Protean, open to multiple and conflicting poetic performances. My hope is that the book will be provocative in its turn, stimulating other critics to examine the thorny problems posed by the vicissitudes of crosscultural understanding.