



Essentially translatable poetry – the case of Lorca’s *Poet in New York*

Andrew Samuel Walsh

To cite this article: Andrew Samuel Walsh (2018): Essentially translatable poetry – the case of Lorca’s *Poet in New York*, *The Translator*, DOI: [10.1080/13556509.2018.1536307](https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2018.1536307)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2018.1536307>



Published online: 24 Oct 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

ARTICLE



Essentially translatable poetry – the case of Lorca's *Poet in New York*

Andrew Samuel Walsh

Department of Translation and Interpreting, Comillas Pontifical University Madrid, Madrid, Spain

ABSTRACT

Poet in New York by Federico García Lorca represents a paradigm of translatable poetry as it possesses certain textual characteristics which have facilitated its translation into English on several occasions since its first publication in 1940. Indeed, despite belonging to the category of his 'difficult' poetry, it has proven to be one of the most translatable of Lorca's works and, paradoxically, one of the least problematic for English language translators. There have currently been five complete translations of the book in addition to numerous partial translations and this article seeks to examine the inherent facilities that it offers to English language translators and readers by highlighting the salient characteristics of the original text which have allowed it to be so successfully translated. These poems were based on Lorca's visions of the great American metropolis during his residence there from 1929 to 1930 and the English versions of the text have exerted a considerable influence on the poetic vision of the city of New York due to the extraordinarily fertile reception of retranslations of this poetry in the English-speaking world, a reception that is in no small measure due to the textual qualities that make PENY essentially translatable.


KEYWORDS

Translatability; retranslation;
Lorca; Spanish poetry

Introduction

Is it possible to translate poetry from one language to another? [...] We must recognize that that the immense majority of the poetic procedures can be inserted into a different language without any detriment to readers. We could say that all of them are essentially translatable, except those which operate from the signifier i.e. rhythm, rhyme and cases of expressiveness specifically linked to that rhythm (Carlos Bousoño)¹

These observations by the Spanish poet and critic Carlos Bousoño (1923–2015) can serve as a pretext to reflect on what has become a deeply ingrained axiom of the theory of translation: poetry cannot be properly translated and that any attempt to do so is a literary chimera which is inevitably doomed to fail or at least fall short. This pessimistic tenet has been defended by many theorists and poets throughout the ages, ranging from the immense scepticism expressed in 1656 by John Denham ('poetry is of so subtle a spirit, that in the pouring out of one language into another, it will all evaporate') to the utter rejection formulated by Percy Bysshe Shelley, who in his *Defence of Poetry* (1821)

CONTACT Andrew Samuel Walsh  aswalsh@comillas.edu  Department of Translation and Interpreting, Comillas Pontifical University Madrid, C/Universidad de Comillas, 3, Madrid 28049, Spain

© 2018 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

referred to the 'vanity of translation' and expressed the trenchant belief that it was folly to 'seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet'. This position was still supported in 1959 by Roman Jakobson in his seminal article 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation', in which he concluded that 'poetry by definition is untranslatable and only creative transposition is possible' (Jakobson 1959, 238). In his *Art of Translation*, Theodore Savory stated that 'all experts agree that translating a poem properly is impossible' (Savory 1968, 75), and, according to Susan Bassnett, 'within the field of literary translation more time has been devoted to investigating the problems of translating poetry than any other literary mode' (Bassnett 2014, 86). Thus, there would appear to be a certain theoretical consensus regarding the difficulty of this type of translation and the implicit limitations of trying to render a poem in another language. The names of those who have questioned the very feasibility of poetic translation are far too numerous to reproduce here, but it is noteworthy that even the titles of certain contemporary studies of this question would tend to lend weight to this critical generalization.²

Specifically, those who question the very feasibility of poetic translation point to three elements of a poem which they consider to be notoriously untranslatable: metre, rhythm and rhyme. As we have seen in the introductory quote, even a staunch defender of the possibility of poetic translation such as Bousoño considered that rhythm and rhyme were notable exceptions to the principle of the essential translatability of poetry, and as the metrical form of a poem is one of the pillars of its rhythm, the transposition of this form from one language to another is clearly one of the major impediments to poetic translation. Indeed, in his *Translating Poetry: seven strategies and a blueprint*, André Lefevere was particularly harsh on the search to reproduce metre and rhyme in translations, and specifically advised against attempts to expand or compress a text to recreate the rhyme and metre of the original, an approach that he believed to be 'doomed to failure from the start' (Lefevere 1975, 49), and Lawrence Venuti has written that 'only rarely can one reproduce both content and form in a translation, and hence in general the form is usually sacrificed for the sake of the content' (Venuti 2004, 154).

In my view, however, despite the critical tradition of negationism and what by now, thanks to Robert Frost's celebrated aphorism, has become the received wisdom that 'poetry is what gets lost in translation', *Poet in New York* by Federico García Lorca (1898–1936) represents a paradigmatic refutation of the notorious resistance to translation which so many theorists have ascribed to poetry. Indeed, despite belonging in theory to the category of his 'difficult' poetry it has proven to be one of the most eminently translatable of Lorca's works and, paradoxically, one of the least 'difficult' for English language translators. Although it forms part of what is deemed to be his most cosmopolitan work, it has perhaps not enjoyed the popularity and extra-academic fame accorded to his more apparently traditional and supposedly more accessible work whose profoundly Andalusian subject matter and intensely local references render them much less readily translatable. Despite their more powerful presence in the Lorca myth of the intuitive Andalusian genius, touched by the 'duende' and imbued with the world of gypsy folklore, the translations of these rural tragedies have tended to lend credence to the assertion made by one of Lorca's most celebrated translators, Ted Hughes, who having concluded his version of *Blood Wedding*, declared that Lorca 'cannot be Englished'.

The key proposal of this study is that *Poet in New York* (henceforth, *PENY*) represents not only a notable refutation of the perceived impossibility of poetic translation but also a paradigm of translatable poetry as it possesses certain textual characteristics which can explain why it has been successfully translated into English on several occasions since its first publication in a bilingual edition in 1940. At the time of writing, there have been five complete translations of *PENY* and numerous partial translations that have included the most significant poems from this collection (for example, there are currently ten translations of 'Ode to Walt Whitman') and these changing versions have largely served to construct the reception of Lorca among English-speaking readers. In this study, I seek to examine the reasons for the **essential translatability** of *PENY* by analyzing the inherent facilities that it offers to English language translators and readers and highlighting the salient characteristics of the original text which have allowed it to be so successfully translated into English.³ It is a quintessentially cosmopolitan text which possesses a great universality expressed through a highly personal vision of the metropolis *par excellence*, a vision which is perfectly familiar and comprehensible to any reader of modern poetry. Indeed, as one of the most emblematic books of contemporary poetry based on the individual's sense of urban isolation, it displays some powerful parallels and a profound affinity with the world of T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land'.⁴

These poems were based on Lorca's reaction to Manhattan during his residence there from 1929 to 1930 and it is no exaggeration to say that the English versions of such a totemic text have exerted a considerable influence on the poetic vision of the city of New York itself to the extent that it is possible to speak of a genuinely 'American' poet called Lorca due to the extraordinarily fertile reception of this poetry in the English-speaking world.⁵ Artists such as Leonard Cohen, Lou Reed and Allen Ginsberg have all been seduced by Lorca's vision of New York and the contention of this article is that one of the fundamental reasons for this transcultural phenomenon is that *PENY* is **essentially translatable**.

The translatability of Lorca

Although the history of *PENY* began with a translation, as the 1940 first edition of the book appeared in bilingual format, translated and edited by Rolfe Humphries, Lorca's work had already been translated into English as early as 1929. During his American sojourn, the Manhattan-based Hispanic journal *Alhambra* had published anonymous translations of 'Preciosa and the wind' and 'Ballad of Black Sorrow' in a special edition which appeared in August 1929. Moreover, during this same visit to the USA, Lorca had also closely collaborated on his friend Philip Cumming's translations of *Canciones* ('Songs'), although this text would not be published until 1976.⁶ Lorca had also been personally involved in the English version and production of his play *Bodas de sangre*, which was translated into English by José Weissberger as *Bitter Oleander* and performed to decidedly mixed reviews in 1935 at the Lyceum Theatre in New York. Indeed, such was the extent of Lorca's interest in the project that he even rewrote some passages of this play to facilitate the task of the translator (Maurer 1992, 16).

Since his murder in 1936, Lorca's work has been translated completely or partially into English on numerous occasions to a degree that in Spanish literature only

admits comparison with Cervantes. The list of translators of Lorca's work is much too long to reproduce here, but includes fellow poets as diverse as Stephen Spender, Langston Hughes, Roy Campbell, and Ted Hughes. This list has grown exponentially and shows no signs of waning as Lorca continues to fascinate internationally.⁷ Nevertheless, the protean nature of the work of Lorca, its constant and conscious oscillation between the traditional and the avant-garde, has given rise to some very mixed results in English translation. As stated previously, the most popular elements of his rural dramas, the flamencoesque references and use of a heavily stylized world of gypsies that characterize his most Andalusian poetry, are notoriously resistant to translation. For example, the 'palos' (styles) of flamenco to which he directly alludes in the *Poem of the Deep Song* are extremely hard to adapt to the rhythmic structures of the English language and the corresponding Andalusian tropes can often seem incomprehensible or even faintly risible to English speakers unfamiliar with this milieu, as evinced by the unfortunate laughter that greeted the aforementioned 1935 production of *Bitter Oleander*. Although the tragic essence of his rural dramas has often been successfully maintained (just like in the case of those ancient Greek tragedies that continue to move us with the universality of their emotional charge), all too frequently the popular and profoundly Andalusian essence of these plays has inevitably been relegated to the status of a certain 'local colour' and the demotic speech of the *Vega* of Granada has evidently presented considerable resistance to translation into English.⁸

Having considered some of the difficulties that Lorca's work has historically posed for the English-language translator, we will now conduct a detailed analysis of those elements of *PENY* that represent textual facilities for the English-speaking translator, and thus attempt to demonstrate what makes this book a paradigmatic case of **essentially translatable poetry**.

Physical and human geography

In the case of *PENY*, we must firstly remember that the book was conceived and composed against the backdrop of the modern metropolis par excellence of the English-speaking world, and for Lorca's friends and contemporary readers this volume meant a profound aesthetic and formal departure from his poetic origins that some of them could never fully accept. Some critics would even attribute the book's 'strangeness', its break with traditional poetry, to a mistake on Lorca's part that had to be indulged as a superficial concession to surrealism and one which would then be discarded.⁹ Indeed, its first translator, Rolfe Humphries curiously did not care much for the poems and much preferred his 'Andalusian stuff' which he also translated.¹⁰ In this sense, it is worth recalling Angel del Río's prologue to Ben Belitt's 1955 translation, in which he reflected this initial rejection of the book among the poet's friends and contemporaries:

It has been said repeatedly that Poet in New York is the most enigmatic and challenging of Lorca's works. When the poems were first circulated, either by publication in periodicals or, as was customary with Lorca, through readings to friends, few could see a clear connection in theme, language, imagery or tone with what was considered typical of the author's poetic world, deeply rooted in the Spanish tradition and landscape. (Del Río, 1955, ix)

If Lorca's poetic world had hitherto been 'deeply rooted in the Spanish tradition and landscape', *PENY* represented a starting point towards a whole new poetic terrain, one which was infinitely more cosmopolitan, modern and essentially American. In this sense, it was the thematic antithesis of Lorca's Andalusian poetry, characterized by gypsy clichés (which Lorca himself came to loathe), rural mythology and intensely local allusions. Indeed, with the exception of the last section of the book, entitled 'The Poet arrives in Havana', the overwhelmingly majority of the poems in the book are located expressly in the U.S.A. and many contain highly specific references to the city of New York, which is in fact simultaneously the subject and the scenario of this collection of poems, just as a partly mythical Andalusia was the backdrop to the *Gypsy Ballads*. Thus, of the thirty-five poems that make up what we can now consider the definitive version of the text edited by Andrew Anderson in 2013,¹¹ there is a direct reference to several locations in the city of New York in the title of seven of them and many another geographical locations in the USA that Lorca visited are expressly mentioned in the book. Specifically, the following places in New York are mentioned either in the names of sections of the book, in the titles of the poems or directly in the verses: Manhattan, Columbia University, Broadway, Wall Street, the Stock Exchange, Harlem, Coney Island, Battery Place, Riverside Drive, the River Hudson, the East River, the Bronx, Queensborough, Brooklyn Bridge and the Chrysler Building. In terms of references to places further afield in the USA, there are also explicit references to Lorca's visits to other places in the titles of poems (Lake Eden Mills, Newburgh, Vermont).

As we can see, the physical and human geography of the poems in this book would have been instantly familiar to Anglo-American readers and, in fact, many of these places would even have had a considerably greater power of evocation for readers in the target culture. Thus, for example, the symbolic importance of the opposing worlds of Wall Street and Harlem would undoubtedly have been more resonant in the collective imagination of Anglo-American readers than in that of those Spanish-speaking readers for whom the poems were perhaps originally intended. Indeed, regarding the target public of the English language versions of *PENY*, the book's second translator Ben Belitt made the following sage reflection:

No apology, I hope is needed for the new translation of a work which refers its author most directly to the American reader. It was to American readers in the broadest sense of the term – the readers of Neruda's Canto General de Chile and Martínez' Los senderos ocultos, as well as to the 'vomiting multitudes' of Coney Island and the somnambulists of Brooklyn Bridge – that the poem was initially addressed by its publishers in Mexico, Argentina, and New York, a decade after its completion in Havana and four years after the inexorable murder of the poet. Today, Poet in New York remains an indispensable book for readers of two Americas.

Phonic properties

Among the principal obstacles cited in terms of poetic translation, we inevitably have to recognize the phono-semantic relationship present in the source text i.e. the close relationship between sound and meaning in a text, which is considered almost impossible to transfer to the target text. The problem of transferring these phono-

semantic properties of a poetic text is an ineluctable one for translators, but as this is by no means one of the outstanding features of *PENY*, this has meant much less of a challenge for the successive translators of the book. On the contrary, *PENY* is not characterized by a close phono-semantic relation, but rather by a torrent of startling images in frequently shocking juxtaposition. Nor does *PENY* display any notable musicality, certainly not in comparison to the *Poem of Deep Song* or the *Gypsy Ballads*, although one might make a justifiable exception in the cases of ‘Fábula y Rueda de los Tres Amigos’ or ‘Son de Negros’, both of which have a strong and clearly identifiable rhythm based on lexical repetition which is successfully maintained in translation.

In my view, one of the keys to the essential translatability of *PENY* lies in the fact that the phonic features of the poems are not among their most outstanding elements. Although every poem to a certain extent strives for a phonic aesthetic effect, not all of them place this effect at the heart of the composition nor is this always the primordial consideration of the poet. Specifically, euphony and alliteration are not notable features of *PENY* and instead the text’s poetic force is based on the strength of the images proposed and the extraordinary conceptual contrast between these images. Furthermore, those poems which are the most conspicuously urban and even rather disagreeable (due to their shockingly scatological, sexual or violent references) such as ‘Landscape of the multitude that urinates’ or ‘Landscape of the multitude that vomits’ (both of which were titles that Lorca crossed out several times in manuscript form, unsure of their acceptability) or the well-known case of ‘Ode to Walt Whitman’ (which he first published abroad with great discretion in 1934)¹² are instead characterized by a certain cacophony and recurrent dysphemism which was deliberately used to suggest the feelings of disgust and repugnance that the poet wishes to transmit and can be maintained quite simply in translation.

Although phonic intentionality is naturally present to some extent in any aesthetic decision involved in the creation of a poetic text, it is certainly not one of the leitmotifs of this book and, crucially for the translator, is not perceived as such by the reader of the original text. *PENY* is instead characterized stylistically by a veritable torrent of startling and disconcerting images and frequently shocking juxtapositions. Therefore, as one of the primordial objectives of literary translation is to create an effect for the reader which is as close as possible to that experienced by readers of the original text (unless we deliberately aim to foreignize the text and make the translator as visible as possible, pace Venuti), this lack of phono-semantic intentionality in the source text obviously removes a considerable obstacle for translators of this book.

Lexical and syntactical repetition

According to Miguel García Posada, *PENY*, along with *Sobre los ángeles* by Alberti, *Espadas como labios* by Alexandre, and Cernuda’s *Un río, un amor*, is one of the great books that consolidated free verse in Spanish poetry (García Posada 1981, 195). In principle, the translation of free verse should not present so many problems as other verse forms that have a much stricter phonic and syllabic structure inherent to their form

e.g. the sonnet or ballad forms amply used by Lorca in other texts. In these cases, as the versification cannot usually be maintained from a Romance language to English, an important element of the original poem is inevitably lost in the translation.¹³ In the case of the translation of free verse, no truly fundamental element of the original poem is lost and, in this sense, it is pertinent to recall the words of Esteban Torre regarding the relative ease of translating free verse:

Even fewer difficulties are presented by the translation of so-called free verse, which is not subject to any syllabic limits or rules on stressing certain syllables. In this case, the problems posed by translating the text are exactly the same as those of any other type of artistic or literary prose, or indeed any prose with some stylistic complication (Torre 1994, 172).

Although free verse does not have a fixed syllabic or stress pattern, it does of course have an inner rhythm due to what Jakobson referred to as the essence of the poetic function: repetition. Undoubtedly, a poetic rhythm based on semantic and syntactic repetition and not exclusively phonic repetition poses fewer problems for literary translators who 'merely' have to identify this rhythm and maintain it in the translated text, and in the case of *PENY*, one of the clearest repetitions is in the profuse employment of certain keywords in the text such as 'love', 'death', 'void' and 'sky/heaven'.¹⁴ Another fundamental repetition throughout the poems is found in the recurrent use of presentatives ('there is/are' and their negative form) and possessive structures ('has/does not have'). These simple grammatical structures are repeated throughout the book and naturally do not represent any conceptual or linguistic difficulty for Anglophone translators. Specifically, there are nineteen uses of the affirmative presentative ('*hay*') and fifteen uses of the negative ('*no hay*').¹⁵ In terms of possession and non-possession, Lorca frequently refers to what New York has or (much less frequently) does not have, and thus we can find sixteen examples of possession in relation to New York ('*tiene*') but only two examples of non-possession ('*no tiene*').

There are also relatively few adjectives in relation to the preponderance of nouns, and another notable lexical tendency is the proportionally small variety of verbs to be found, of which the majority of those we can find are predominantly action verbs without any significant polysemy ('go', 'come', 'look for', 'find', 'cry', 'look at', in addition to a marked repetition of simple verbs of emotion ('love', 'hate'). All of these verbs are naturally quite simple to reproduce in English translation without any loss in meaning or aesthetic effect. Therefore, the 'difficult' nature of this book for all readers both in the source and the translated text evidently lies in its shocking imagery, not in its lexical composition or grammatical structures. *PENY* is essentially constructed around an abundant series of very simple verbal phrases that vertebrate the poems in the book and pose relatively few formal problems for an English language translator. In fact, it is the dense succession of startling images presented through these grammatically simple phrases which represents one of the most accessible and advantageous elements in the poems for an Anglophone translator, despite the declared reticence towards this textual characteristic expressed in 1940 by Rolfe Humphries:

Lorca's poetry, in one respect at least, tempts the translator with provocative encouragement, for it abounds in images, and visual matters can be passed readily enough across the barrier of

language. The difficulty here, one soon comes to learn, is an embarrassment of riches; the profuse succession of images, their seeming lack of relation, the prompt availability of the poet's unconscious – all this comes a little swift for the Anglo-Saxon mind; and in the surrealist poems, there is a tendency for the material to be listed, rather than composed. (Humphries 1940, 16)

Finally, perhaps the most significant example of lexical repetition occurs in the case of the book's notable tendency towards substantivization or the predominance of noun forms. The prevalent syntactic structure of *PENY* is undoubtedly its extensive use of the construction 'noun of noun' ('column of mire', 'dawn of New York', 'shipwreck of blood', etc) whose direct reproduction is quite simple for English language translators who can preserve this simple syntactic structure from the source text, although this is evidently not the only option available.¹⁶ However, the frequent and evident repetition of this simple syntactic structure throughout the book has allowed translators to reflect it faithfully in their versions by conserving the syntax with a slightly foreignizing effect, but one that maintains the key internal repetition present in the source text. Indeed, this syntactical structure is absolutely dominant in Lorca's New York cycle of poems and in his introduction to Ben Belitt's 1955 translation, Ángel del Río offered an opinion based on a personal, uncorroborated impression without any statistical computation, but one which I believe to be of paramount importance in terms of the successful translation of this book into English:

No effort has been made at any statistical computation, but it is my impression nevertheless that more than in any other of Lorca's works the predominant form here is the substantive (del Río, 1955, 28).

Furthermore, in his 1978 PhD (*Los poemas neoyorquinos de Federico García Lorca*), which would later be revised and published in 1981 with the title *Lorca: interpretación de Poeta en Nueva York*, Miguel García Posada recognized the perspicacity of this reading and recalled that 'Ángel Del Río pointed out that the book is dominated by nouns like no other work of Lorca, and there is a scarcity of abstract nouns and an abundance of concrete ones, The dominance of the noun form is, indeed, unquestionable' (García Posada 1981, 205). He then proceeded to partially quantify the degree of substantivization in six poems from the book ('Son de negros en Cuba' 'Navidad en el Hudson' 'Crucifixión' 'Paisaje de la multitud que vomita', 'Ciudad sin sueño' and 'Cementerio judío') and these partial results confirmed the subjective impression of Ángel del Río. Curiously, none of the translators seem to have expressly mentioned this, but both the first impression expressed by Ángel del Río and the partial confirmation by Miguel García Posada have led me to complete an exhaustive analysis of the dominance of the noun form in the poems, which in my view, is one of the keys to the essential translatability of *PENY*. Thus, respecting the triple distinction Noun/Adjective/Verb¹⁷ established by García Posada and taking as our reference point the definitive edition by Anderson, we can observe the following lexical concentration in the poems reflecting both the total number of words in the poem and the percentage represented by each of the three categories:

Poem	Nouns	Adjectives	Verbs
'Vuelta de paseo' (79 words)	21	9	7
1910 (Intermedio) (179 words)	53	16	14
Fábula y rueda de los tres amigos (402 words)	123	28	37
Tu infancia en Menton (309 words)	105	15	26
Norma y paraíso de los negros (200 words)	63	21	18
El rey de Harlem (895 words)	285	67	70
Iglesia abandonada (Balada de la Gran Guerra) (338 words)	90	11	39
Danza de la muerte (669 words)	200	54	57
Paisaje de la multitud que vomita (Anochecer de Coney Island) (353 words)	98	20	40
Paisaje de la multitud que orina (Nocturno de Battery Place) (368 words)	99	39	33
Asesinato (Dos voces de madrugada en Riverside Drive) (53 words)	10	1	8
Navidad en el Hudson (275 words)	78	23	25
Ciudad sin sueño (Nocturno del Brooklyn Bridge) (391 words)	89	23	57
Panorama ciego de Nueva York (397 words)	103	35	47
Nacimiento de Cristo (160 words)	57	14	16
La aurora (134 words)	42	11	16
Poema doble del lago Eden (341 words)	94	29	37
Cielo vivo (247 words)	63	23	24
El niño Stanton (473 words)	135	31	42
Vaca (122 words)	36	8	14
Niña ahogada en el pozo (Granada y Newburg) (187 words)	49	11	23
Muerte (115 words)	38	9	7
Nocturno del hueco (509 words)	138	42	40
Paisaje con dos tumbas y un perro asiático (165 words)	44	11	29
Ruina (157 words)	41	6	15
Amantes asesinados por una perdiz (579 words)	145	33	73
Luna y panorama de los insectos (Poema de amor) (486 words)	143	34	51
Nueva York (Oficina y denuncia) (462 words)	122	19	42
Cementerio judío (440 words)	130	31	49
Crucifixión (378 words)	109	27	48
Grito hacia Roma (556 words)	160	33	60
Oda a Walt Whitman (932 words)	314	55	70
Pequeño vals vienés (261 words)	76	11	30
Vals en las ramas (188 words)	44	7	17
Son de negros en Cuba (175 words)	66	11	27

Conclusions

In one of his letters home from New York dated 22 January 1930, Lorca clearly expressed his wish to see an English translation of his New York poems and even suggested that a search was already under way for a poet who could translate these verses, although he was uncertain about whether anybody would be capable of recreating such a densely allusive text:

I think that the poetry that I'm writing in New York with graphics, words and drawings is something incredibly intense, so intense that they won't understand it and it will definitely provoke some arguments and scandal. But I'm sure that it's my best poetry and, of course, my intelligent American friends are looking for a poet to translate it, although I think that's going to be very difficult. (García Lorca 1997, 677)

This has clearly proved not to be the case and, in conclusion, I believe that there are essentially **four reasons** that explain the **essential translatability** of *PENY*. Firstly, the crucial fact that the imagery of the source text is not based on conventional ideas or habitual associations and is instead focused on the aesthetic and linguistic 'shock of the new' which is at the heart of the poems meant that this modernist classic has remained equally powerful in translation. This has ensured that the power and the novelty value of the images, the sheer impact of their unlikely and startling juxtapositions, have been preserved

intact in the successive complete and partial English versions. Secondly, another key to the book's essential translatability lies in the universal and often even specifically Anglo-American nature of the geographical reference points. This stood in stark contrast to the densely allusive Andalusian gypsy folklore world of *The Gypsy Ballads* or the Poem of the Deep Song. Thirdly, the lack of any clear phono-semantic relationship and the use of free verse ensured that neither the original sound or structure of the poems were apt to be lost in translation. Finally, the clear dominance of the noun form, and in particular the combination 'noun of noun', presents no particular resistance to translation and, in my opinion, loses nothing in the English versions of the poems.

As we have seen previously, *PENY* was a striking stylistic departure that led Lorca into Modernist, Eliotian territory and, with the exception of 'The Waste Land', it is indeed difficult to think of a text which is more suitable for the study of the translation of modern poetry. *PENY* is a prime example of a successful case of frequent retranslation leading to a profound and productive reception, and a compelling example of the possibility of poetic translation. Consequently, I believe that the book's potent reception through frequent translation into English represents a striking refutation of Robert Frost's attractive but perhaps rather superficial aphorism, and a notable demonstration of the very possibility of this genre of translation. Due to the particular textual characteristics which we have analysed in this article, this canonical Spanish text has lent it itself extremely well to multiple English renderings and, in my view, is a paradigm of **essentially translatable** poetry.

Notes

1. (Bousoño 1970, 338). All translations from Spanish are mine unless otherwise indicated.
2. *Poetry and Translation: The Art of the Impossible* (2010) by Peter Robinson.
3. The complete English translations of the book are by Rolfe Humphries (1940), Ben Belitt (1955), Stephen Fredman (1975), Greg Simon and Steven F. White (1988, a revised edition appeared in 2013), and Pablo Medina and Mark Statman (2008).
4. In his Introduction to Ben Belitt's 1955 translation, Lorca's friend Ángel del Río referred specifically to his acquaintance with *The Waste Land* by Eliot 'which he undoubtedly read in the Spanish translation, *Tierra Baldía*, of Ángel Flores' and, referring to the startling parallels between the two works, stated that 'there is not only a similarity in mood and in the main theme of death, destruction and the end in nothingness of modern civilization, but also, what is more important, a striking coincidence in vocabulary and imagery (1955, xxxi).
5. For a complete study of Lorca's US reception, see Mayhew (2009).
6. *Songs*, translated by Philip Cummings with the assistance of Federico García Lorca, edited and introduced by Daniel Eisenberg, Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1976.
7. In a recent review (29/10/2017) in the New York Times of American poet Sarah Arvio's 2017 volume of translations entitled *Poet in Spain*, Dwight Garner spoke of how Lorca's 'early death has rendered him a permanent political and cultural object of desire' and also referred to 'the flourishing industry of works (ballets, opera, films, novels, pop songs, poems) that reference and adapt his life and work.' <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/30/books/review-poet-in-spain-federico-garcia-lorca-sarah-arvio.html> (accessed 12/11/2017).
8. One of the most successful exceptions to these doomed attempts to find a dynamic equivalence for Lorca was made by the African American poet Langston Hughes who translated both the *Gypsy Ballads* and *Blood Wedding* into a natural, vernacular equivalent in English.
9. 'Lorca went and stayed in the U.S.A. for some time [...] The result on his poetry was entirely negative [...] In Lorca's New York poems, the *Poeta en Nueva York*, his metaphors and

images fall out of focus; his verse becomes loose, plaintive, and slightly mephitic.' (Campbell, 1952, 71).

10. In a letter to his friend Louise Bogan, he would complain that 'the New York stuff is pretty much on the surrealist side and I seem to detect in Lorca a show off bad kind of bohemianism around that period, which I don't like so much [...] there will be a fine passage now and then, but in general I think the new world, and New York, were rather too much for him, and the surrealist stuff got up his nose too much [...] that surrealist smarty side [...] gets more boring as time goes on [...] And the New York poems still sound pretty hysterical' In Eisenberg (1976, 58–59).
11. *Poeta en Nueva York*. Gutenberg: Barcelona (2013). This text can now be considered the canonical Spanish original text, following the appearance of the original manuscript in 1999 and its acquisition by the Federico García Lorca Foundation at an auction in 2003.
12. It was published privately and selectively (only fifty copies were printed) by the Alcantía Publishing Press Mexico in 1933 and also appeared in partial form in the second edition of Gerardo Diego's celebrated anthology of Spanish poetry which appeared in 1934.
13. Some of the many translators of the *Gypsy Ballads* have sought to find an equivalence through use of the English ballad form. e.g. Roy Campbell, Rolfe Humphries and Carl Cobb.
14. These words appear 64, 21, 16 and 44 times respectively throughout the text.
15. Lorca also uses 'hay' three times to imply obligation ('*hay que huir*') and there are also three examples of this verb form in the subjective ('*no haya*'), two in the past ('*hubo/había*') and one in the future ('*habrá*').
16. For example, when a proper noun appears in this construction, such as in the case of 'the dawn of New York' (translated this way by Fredman), this can also be rendered quite naturally as 'Dawn in New York (Humphries, Simon and White, Medina and Statman, Belitt), 'New York dawn' or even 'New York's dawn'.
17. Like García Posada's, my noun count does not included the abundant use of personal pronouns, nor the frequent use of '*todo*' (everything) or '*nada*' (nothing), all of which are very simple to translate. I include the adjectival use of past participles such as '*herido*' (wounded). As verb forms, I include the indicative, subjunctive and imperative forms, but not the infinitive.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Andrew Samuel Walsh is a lecturer in English and Translation Studies at the Translation and Interpreting Department of Comillas Pontifical University in Madrid. He is the author of three books including *Jaime Gil de Biedma y la tradición angloamericana* (a study of Gil de Biedma's relationship with the Anglo-American literary canon and of his translations of several notable English language authors) and is the co-editor of *Literary Retranslation in Context*. He is currently working on a monographical study of the history of Lorca's reception through translation into English.

References

- Bassnett, S. 2014. *Translation Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Bousoño, C. 1970. *Posibilidad de las traducciones en la lírica', Teoría de la expresión poética*. Vol. II. Apend. III. Madrid: Gredos.
- Campbell, R. 1952. *Lorca. An Appreciation of His Poetry*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Del Río, Á. 1955. *Poet in New York: Twenty Five Years After. Introduction to Poet in New York*. New York: Grove Press.
- Eisenberg, D. 1976. *Poeta en Nueva York: Historia y problemas de un texto de Lorca*. Barcelona: Ariel.
- García Lorca, F. 1997. *Epistolario Completo*. Madrid: Cátedra.
- García Posada, M. 1981. *Lorca: Interpretación de Poeta en Nueva York*. Madrid: Akal.
- Humphries, R. 1940. *Translator's Note' in the Poet in New York and Other Poems of Federico García Lorca*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Jakobson, R. 1959. *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation' in on Translation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lefevere, A. 1975. *Translating Poetry: Seven Strategies and a Blueprint*. Amsterdam: Van Gorcum.
- Maurer, C. 1992. "Traduciendo a García Lorca." *Boletín de la Fundación Federico García Lorca* 10-11: 15-17.
- Mayhew, J. 2009. *Apocryphal Lorca. Translation, Parody, Kitsch*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Savory, T. 1968. *The Art of Translation*. Boston: Writers .
- Torre, E. 1994. *Teoría de la Traducción Literaria*. Madrid: Síntesis.
- Venuti, L. 2004. *The Translation Studies Reader*. London: Routledge.