

Empathy and Engagement in Translation: Langston Hughes's versions of Lorca's *Gypsy Ballads*.

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**Summary:**

The talk will explore the personal empathy and political engagement that lay behind the translation of Lorca's *Gypsy Ballads* that Langston Hughes began in Madrid in 1937 and finished in New York in 1951. Specifically, it will examine how the pro-Republican Hughes's innate identification with Lorca's representation of the oppressed gypsies of Andalusia mirrored his representation of his own people in the South of the USA, and how Lorca's deceptively simple popular ballads echoed with Hughes's defence of his own ethnic minority.

The talk will also reflect how the themes and rhythms of the source text generated a translation which was the consequence of Hughes's profound aesthetic response to Lorca's stylized ethnopoetics of a mythical Andalusia of downtrodden but dignified gypsies. For Hughes, there were evident parallels with the plight of his black compatriots in the South of the USA, where Jim Crow laws on segregations were still in force. Hughes himself also drew attention to the common anguish of the poor and oppressed that he believed was shared by flamenco and blues, and Lorca's Andalusian tropes and verse forms would find their corresponding expression in Hughes's Harlem inflections and register.

Hughes's version of the *Gypsy Ballads* was long condemned to an undeserved relative anonymity which meant that these translations went largely unread by his peers, despite their immense poetic quality. The reclaiming and reading of these versions is long overdue and this talk will highlight the essential poetic qualities of Hughes's version

through a selective textual analysis of some of the most brilliant translational solutions he proposed and, ultimately, attempt to provide an answer to the following fundamental question: why is this “lost translation” of the *Gypsy Ballads* not much better known and why did it not have a more profound influence upon Lorca’s reception in the English-speaking world?

**Biodata:**

Dr. Andrew Walsh is a lecturer in English, Translation and Communication Studies at the Department of Translation and Interpreting at Comillas Pontifical University in Madrid and has also taught at the University of Granada and the Autonomous University of Madrid. His research interests lie in the fields of literary translation and comparative literature. He is the author of two books and several articles and scholarly papers in this field and is the co-editor of *Literary Retranslation in Context* (Peter Lang, 2017).