
Homographic Translational Poetics: The Outlawed Subject's Resistance and Dependence on the Heterosexist Codification of Nation and Body

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After a yearlong stint in New York (1929-1930), Federico García Lorca makes a dash for Havana, Cuba, where he reworks his "Ode to Walt Whitman" and writes his play *El Público*. John K. Walsh speculates in his essay "Lorca's *Ode to Walt Whitman*" that Lorca's Cuban hiatus marked his "open passage into a homosexual mien, and the acknowledgment of his proclivities" (Walsh, 258). This would seem to be the case, considering how much Lorca gives over to *los maricas* in these works. However, I would add that Havana acts as the imaginative site where Lorca's poetics begins to dissolve not only sexual boundaries based on heterosexist characterological types, but also national borders that, as Octavio Paz puts it, cause us not to "live in a continent but in islands, so terribly isolated" (Paz, 274). So, Lorca's *Ode to Walt Whitman* not only introduces us to a poetics in its most sexual element, but it also provides us with the bridge between North and South American literary imaginations.

The homosexual as theme, here, throws Lorca's "Ode to Walt Whitman" into what literary comparativist Claudio Guillén calls, a "supranational assemblage"—a systematic look at a theme that rejects the limitations imposed by dividing literature up by national boundaries (Guillén, 3). Homosexual thematics not only provides us with the necessary supranational appa-

ratus, it also leads us to question the role of nation-building—the creation of a "pure" national identity and voice—in twisting discourses of sexuality. In interrogating boundaries, sexual (heterosexual and homosexual) and national (imperialist, colonialist, capitalist) we can begin to understand how nation and body intertwine. By investigating the theme of heterosexist codes of nationalism that convey on one hand a fear of homosexuality and on the other a hot desire for homosexuality, we can see how borders, sexual and national, exist in a fragile state. Heterosexist codes that repress and suppress this fear-desire dynamic shake on the edge of a chaotic abyss.

The supranational assemblage can only take place in this in-between space where borders that demarcate the aberrant from the normal, in terms of body and nation, are confused. Ironically, this type of border collapse occurs at the extremes of the heterosexist conquest, where we see most aggressively how power functions to keep difference intact. At first glance, the homographic thematic elements reverse the heterographic (nationalist discursive forces that codify the body as either deviant or normal) by turning the heterosexist codes upside down. This is too easy and an academic cliché. In fact, after taking a closer look at not only Federico García Lorca but also the poets Rubén Darío of Nicaragua

and Pablo Neruda of Chile (those directly involved in literary nation-building agendas) we see a less straight-forward resistance to national and heterosexual hegemonic landscapes. Rather, we see how these poets break with certain hegemonic codes only to find themselves embroiled in other dialectic systems of dominance and submission. Namely, their call to a homographic thematic doesn't offer a clear-cut rupture of the heterosexist, nationalist powers that be. Darío and Neruda set up two different models for unleashing homosexual desire: Darío's poet-narrator requires apocalypse while Neruda's sees homosexuality as part of an everyday, even "normalizing" art—not to be equated with wild bohemianism, but rather an art that seeks a stay-at-home bourgeois idealism. Both poets, intentionally or not, set up the same range of possibilities that Lorca negotiates. But even Lorca's rupture is complicated. He comes into an identification of a "pure" sexual (polymorphous perverse) rupture, but only when he, a European, lands in Cuba. His act of creating holes in the hegemonic codes of sexual containment, ironically, makes them interplay with other controlling codes, those of colonialism.

Darío's, Neruda's, and Lorca's poetics exist within a modernist frame—a frame, in Oscar Montero's words, "nurtured on the one hand by the decadent, and often implicitly homoerotic literatures of Europe and North America, and fueled on the other by the none too subtle homophobia of various discourses of national affirmation" (Montero, 92). In 1933, Lorca and Neruda gave a joint *in memoriam* to Ruben Darío in Buenos Aires, where a queer, two-

headed monster of *modernismo* lifted its head:

Neruda: Ladies . . .

García Lorca: And gentlemen. There is a pass in bullfighting called *al alimón*, in which two bullfighters incite the bull while grasping either side of the same cape.

Neruda: Federico and I, tied together by an electric wire, are going to act together in response to this very impressive reception.

García Lorca: It is customary, at meetings like this, for a poet to offer his living words, whether silver or wooden, and to greet his friends and colleagues with his own voice.

Neruda: But we are going to set up a dead man among you, a widower companion, obscure in the darkness of a death greater than other deaths; life's widower, who in his day was a dazzling husband. We are going to hide under his fiery shadow, we are going to repeat his name until the power leaps out of forgetfulness.

García Lorca: [. . .] we are going to fling a great name onto the table, with the assurance that [. . .] a crash of the sea will stain the tablecloth. We are going to name the poet of America and Spain: Rubén.

Neruda: Darío

(Pen Club, Buenos Aires, 1933)

So, between the lines of a seemingly straightforward male-bonding moment we see how nationalism, with its heterosexist codes of conduct ("dazzling husband"),

Homographic Translational Poetics

veils the homoerotic bond between, at the least, two of the three poets. The bullfighting imagery, even the climactic structure of the speech, sets the homoerotic tone: First, in an intoxicating moment Neruda and Lorca participate in the Whitmanian "body electric," tying themselves together "by an electric wire." Second, self-figured as *toreros*, Neruda and Lorca work together to bring the bull out: touching as they cross arms, they "grasp either side of the cape." Linguistically speaking—the word "queer" itself derives from the Indo-European root *-twerkw* which means *across*—they enter into queer-ness. (See Sedgwick's *Gender Trouble* for a full account of this etymology.) Here, they begin to tease the bull out into the open where they can do the bullfighting thing and become one. Once out, and after a series of flingings and stainings on tables, Neruda and Lorca jointly release the name. Darío as the voice of nation and the homoerotic come together.

Incidentally, Darío, voice of Spain and America, is also hyper-heterosexualized. He's not just any old widower, he's "life's widower"; he's not just a decent husband, he's a "dazzling husband." Darío as voice of nations is thus firmly configured within the heterosexual matrix; he's straighter than straight, leaving Neruda and Lorca to defend for themselves behind Darío's "fiery shadow." All of this talk of heterosexual prowess, set against the homoerotics, can only mean one thing: it's a smokescreen of sorts, suppressing, and not so well at that, the same-sex desire-fear dynamic caught up within any discourses of national affirmation. The sodomistic act must take the back seat for a unified sense of nationalism to adhere. Once the anal encounter

begins to take shape textually, heterosexist constructed nations might dissolve into the unknown. In sum: Suppress the same-sex desire at all costs ("dazzling husband et al), or else, and we'll see later, chaos will ensue.

Nationalism moves simultaneously back and forth between fear of and desire for the rectum. The net result: nationalism as an aesthetic movement, represented by poets like Darío, Neruda, and Lorca, ends up, in this conflictual process of self-sodomization. Nationalism, in its anal suppression, then becomes a self-sodomized aesthetic form; it has a voice through its, at the very least latent, queerness.

Darío gives us not only a glimpse of the ideology of sodomy as it is played out in imperialist moves, but also a picture of what might happen if boundaries of nationalism dissolve. When national borders begin to blur, we have sexual mayhem. In Darío's "Agency" the poet-narrator's vision of a world where the traditionally centralized discourses can no longer hold are displaced by those traditionally marginalized. "Deviant" sexuality (sado-masochism, prostitution, etc.) takes over the dominant space, that which is usually occupied by straight, "normal," sexuality:

The whole world smells rotten.
There is no balm in Gilead.
The Marquis de Sade has landed,
just in from Seboim.
The Gulf Stream has changed course.
Paris whips itself to delight.
[. . .]
The palace of the Antichrist
is ready and waiting, somewhere.
There are intercommunications

Homographic Translational Poetics

friendship," humanizes any deviancy in the poem. Oddly, the narrator normalizes through a declaration of deviant sexual proclivity. Whereas with Darío deviancy and sexuality play by the heterosexist rules, here we begin to see more of the reverse discourse. Through its articulation of self (personal pronoun "I") and other (the intimacy of "Federico" and "you") culminating in the narrator's offer of a "manly man's friendship" we begin to see how the "deviant" subject, in Foucault's words, "speak[s] on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (Foucault, 101). For Neruda, there seems to be room for the existence of social and sexual misfits within the everyday; these don't need an absolute apocalypse to exist. Recall "Come, so I can crown you, youth of health/and of the butterfly." Maybe reversing the discourse can work for Neruda because he doesn't complicate the articulation of the same-sex libido by thrusting nationalism into the picture?

Darío's sexual rupture requires apocalypse; Neruda's requires less a bending of the same-sex libido into "perverse" shapes and more its normalization. Lorca's bending of national identities based on panoptic surveillance of sexual and national boundaries is further complicated in his poem "Ode to Walt Whitman." Like Whitman's poet-narrator in *Leaves of Grass*, whose presence causes national boundaries to stretch and disappear, Lorca's narrator in "Ode" is continually in a state of arriving and stretching in the hole between North and South America, between different na-

tions, between different sexualities.

Yet, in looking at the in-flux sexuality in the "Ode" we cannot sidestep issues of colonialism. Lorca's poet-narrator can explore outlawed sexuality, existing in a pre-capitalist, "primitive" mode—as a subject with the power to travel, to re-visit, even re-conquer the sexual other, *los marícas de Cuba*. Writing of sixteenth-century Spanish "heterosexist" conquest of the virgin territory, José Piedra unveils the sexual/colonial paradox:

the [. . .] accounts would repudiate anal intercourse as the 'wrong' form of mediation for both the hole-makers and the holed ones. And yet, many chroniclers believed that this was the predominant form of sexual expression between natives and a privilege of the upper classes. After reading account after account of the "fear" of sodomy, I also suspect that the practice was tantalizing and threatening on both sides of the Atlantic. [. . .] many Spaniards secretly adopted sodomy to provide human contact and sexual release while skirting the dangers of miscegenation. Add to this equation sodomy as a form of domination provoked by elite natives who desperately needed to be brought under control. In the end, sodomy and homosexuality become transatlantic forms of birth control as well as metonymic expressions of male-centered elitism and imperialism on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as a unifying macho-saving feature of transatlantic colonialism

(Piedra, 397-398).

Although sodomy acted as birth control, biologically, it certainly didn't prevent insemination on ideological, cultural grounds. But, more to the point, sodomy in the Caribbean functions within the discourse of power. We see such a fear of and a desire for the anus as it is explicitly caught up in colonial-based nation-building strategies narrativized in Lorca's "Ode to Walt Whitman."

The "Ode" is not only Lorca's last poem in his *Poet in New York* collection, but it is clearly the most queer in focus. It is in Cuba that we see the birth of a narrator who is willing to express a fear and desire for outlawed sexuality. Moreover, in Cuba Lorca invents a poet-narrator who renders explicit this relationship between sodomy and colonialism. Lorca by way of his narrator discovers an "allowed" sexuality (homosexual prostitution was as visible as its heterosexual counterpart) not in his native Spain, not in New York, but rather as an outsider in an economically, socially, and politically dominant position. The narrator has the power to observe, to participate and to comment. In order to experience a new sexual freedom, Lorca's narrator reinscribes and supports the heterosexist codes that have exploited the Third World body.

Not surprisingly, the narrator of "Ode to Walt Whitman" slips and slides in and out of states of repulsion and celebration of same-sex encounters—a friction caught up in colonialist discourse as the narrator moves between nations. The narrator cries:

Contra vosotros siempre,

*Fairies de Norteamérica,
Pájaros de La Habana,
Jotos de Méjico,
Sarasas de Cádiz
Apios de Sevilla,
Cancos de Madrid,
Floras de Alicante,
Adelaidas de Portugal
¡Marícas de todo el mundo, asesinos de
palomas!*

(Lorca, 162)

Interestingly, the *maríca* here, unlike in Piedra's configuration, is the hole maker, the colonizer; the *marícas* revile the narrator; they make the holes; they sully that which is pure, "palomas" or "doves". The narrator's list of derogatory labels for *los marícas* climaxes with "*Marícas de todo el mundo*" then de-tumescens with "*asesinos de palomas*" ("*palomas*" also means "penis" in Spanish). Interestingly, a similar flow occurs in terms of national identification. We see the move from identifying specific countries, side-by-side with deviant sexual labels, to the conflation of all nations into "*todo el mundo*." We have, in the climactic moment, a move from specific, actively circumscribed identities, sexual and national, to the mixing of all into one. In sexual terms, we see the narrator's desire to move away from the clearly delineated, specifically sexualized erogenously mapped body back to a more infant-like, polymorphous perverse body. This process takes place at the level of sexuality and nation: "*Marícas de todo el mundo*." Thus, the poem can only exist as an imaginary hole, the in-between "island bridge," when it reverts back to a human stage of sexual development before the body is mapped before the

rator re-maps the body, nations, in terms that no longer polarize that which is "pure" and that which is "dirty."

The polymorphous perverse, where notions of clean and dirty do not exist, becomes clearer as we see the narrator identifying both *los maricas* and Whitman with ideas of "pure" and "sullied". For example, the narrator on one occasion tell us, "*maricas de las ciudades/ de carne tumefacta y pensamiento inmundo; [. . .] urban faggots, /tumescent flesh and unclean thoughts*" (Lorca, 160) are "*saliendo en racimos de las alcantarillas*"; "emerging in bunches from the sewers" (Lorca, 157); on another occasion, the narrator tells us, "*Que los confundidos, los puros,/ los clásicos, los señalados, los suplicantes/os cierran las puertas de la bacanal*"; ("Let the confused, the pure,/ the classical, the celebrated, the supplicants/close the doors of the bacchanal to you") (162-163). The narrator identifies the festival of the bacchanal—the celebration of traditionally coded transgressive sexuality—as that reserved for the "pure" class of homosexual, our "*bello Walt Whitman, duerme a orillas del Hudson/con la barba hacia el polo y las manos abiertas*"; "lovely Walt Whitman, stay asleep on the /Hudson's banks/with your beard toward the pole, openhanded" (Lorca 162-163). The narrator's re-drawing of boundaries between sullied and pure leads to the transgression not just of sexual boundaries but also of national boundaries—a carnival of body and space takes place.

The narrator's remapping of the body—through the confusion of same-sex classifiers, "pure" vs. "dirty" by infusion within this polymorphously perverse Whitman figure—spills over into remap-

ping of nation as the narrator identifies the machine behind the construction of repressive same-sex desire:

*Duerme: no queda nada.
Una danza de muros agita las pradas
y América se anega de máquinas y llanto.
Quiero que el aire fuerte de la noche más
honda
quite flores y letras del arco donde duermes
y un niño negro anuncie a los blancos del
oro
la llegada del reino de la espiga*

Sleep on, nothing remains.
Dancing walls stir the prairies
and America drowns itself in
machinery and lament.
I want the powerful air from the
deepest night
to blow away flowers and inscriptions
from the arch
where you sleep,
and a black child to inform the gold-
craving whites
that the kingdom of grain has arrived.
(Lorca, 162-163)

The equation is as follows: The "normal" body, a sleeping Whitman, is set against results of too much activity (like the *maricas* earlier in the poem): the 1930 Wall Street crash, slavery, and colonialism. Contemporary Chicana poet and novelist Ana Castillo summarizes the social, cultural, and economic conversion of homosexuality within our capitalist driven system where "commodities to be given value by men and exchanged by men, but men themselves cannot enter into the present system as commodities. Overt homosexuality would dis-

rupt the system in which men are not commodities but agents of commerce and is therefore made a social taboo" (Massacre, 80). Deleuze and Guattari take this theory a step further, writing of capital as a machine that privatizes the body by removing through a process of containing and sanitizing, our organs from the public sphere. The first organ to undergo privatization was "the anus." According to their theory, "it was the anus that offered itself as a model for privatization, at the same time as money came to express the flows' new state of abstraction" (Deleuze and Guattari, para. 143). We can read this moment as the inscription not so much of the poet-narrator within the capitalist machinery, that which constructs difference, but of the narrator who foregrounds the process that maps normal/abnormal onto the body; the machine that identifies nation and non-nation. Through the eyes of the narrator we witness how the machine maps difference—urban vs. agrarian; buggerer vs. buggered; white vs. black; good vs. evil—to control the flow of production.

As mentioned earlier, however, the poet-narrator's resists heterosexual codes that map the body and nation according to restrictive, characterological types by way of the primitive other. Namely, the Third World body, *los jotos de Cuba*, function as the transgressive vehicle. The exhausted West is revitalized as it crosses the racialized, outlaw-sexualized other. John K. Walsh suggests that this primitivist process reflects on the biographical Lorca, who could only "tolerate his own homosexuality" by disconnecting himself "from the grotesquerie of visible categories" (Walsh,

271).

Lorca invents a narrator who destabilizes the heterosexual codes that circumscribe the body and nation, yet he does so at the expense of re-charting age-old colonialist valorizations of the "primitive" other. Finally, Lorca's "Ode to Walt Whitman," can be read accordingly: First, in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a "schizoid work of art," as disruptive; Lorca's poet-narrator pushes fragments of reverse-discourse, active and passive homosexuality/sodomy, into the seemingly tightly sealed gaps of a heterosexual hegemony; the poet-narrator forces fragmented images, like the schizoid artist, "into a certain place where they may or may not belong, their unmatched edges violently bent out of shape, forcibly made to fit together, to interlock with a number of pieces always left over" (Deleuze and Guattari, 43). Second, as a method of controlling the body of the primitive, Cuban *joto* other.

Neruda, Darío, and Lorca all employ a homographic thematic to expose the heterosexual, imperialist, and colonialist control of the subject. However, homosexual desire doesn't necessarily function to disrupt and expose. In fact, Neruda takes the sting out of the homographic theme by "normalizing" homosexuality. Of course, Lorca's poetic both disrupts heterosexual codification of the outlawed body and reinscribes such a body within controlling codes of colonialism.

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