

Analogy, Transmutation, Resurrection: Three Framings of Octavio Paz's Translation Practice¹

(Analogía, transmutación y resurrección: tres marcos para la praxis traductora de Octavio Paz)

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ABSTRACT


Despite mounting research on his translation theoretics, Octavio Paz as a translator has been somewhat overlooked. Rather than a “unified field theory” of Pazian practice, Paz’s poetic output in English-to-Spanish translation, alone or in collaboration, and largely from his collected translations, *Versiones y diversiones*, will be mined to illustrate concretely the poet’s approach to translation. Paz is shown to see into a poem’s latency, but sometimes, artfully and indistinguishably, he interprets into digressionary *translatio*. Paz’s metaphorical figuration of translation as analogy, transmutation, resurrection frame analysis of his interventions in concrete textual cases.



RESUMEN

Pese a abundantes investigaciones acerca de sus teorizaciones de la traducción, los estudios de las traducciones de Octavio Paz han sido escasos. En vez de proponer un análisis exhaustivo de la producción paciana en la traducción inglés-español, ya sea sólo o en colaboración, indagaré en su *Versiones y diversiones* a fin de ejemplificar su aproximación a la traducción. Paz se adentra en la potencialidad

1 Recibido: 23 de enero de 2025; aceptado: 6 de junio de 2025.

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presencial del poema, sin desestimar la evidencia puntual de la divagación o desunidad del mismo. La figuración metafórica que emplea Paz —analogía, transmutación, y resurrección— subyace el análisis de casos de sus intervenciones translativas.

Keywords: Octavio Paz; poetry translation; translation philosophy; quantitative transformation; presence

Palabras clave: Octavio Paz, traducción de la poesía; filosofía de la traducción; transformación cuantitativa; presencia

Introduction

Why did Octavio Paz translate? Two important reasons were to build international relationships and to acquaint his country's readers with new literary references.³ In his "Nota preliminar" to his collected translations, he cites "passion," "curiosity" and "happenstance" (*casualidad*) as motivations as well, and in his discussion of indirect translation of Chinese poets via Ezra Pound, he writes, "Ante un poema escrito en una lengua extraña, la afición a la poesía fácilmente se transforma en un reto y en una invitación."⁴ In his interview with Edwin Honig, he calls translation a "moral urge, a didactic impulse."⁵ Rodríguez García suggests another rationale, one more dynamic, that of transculturation, which he sees as both emulational and competitive, and a phenomenon that throws the reader into hesitation over the relationship of continuity or discontinuity between the translation and the translated.⁶ In fact, more than one observer has described the initial rejection they feel toward Paz's translations, only to "resignedly surrender to their charms" ("ceder al encanto con resignada aceptación")

3 Celene García-Ávila and Luis Juan Solís-Carrillo. "Octavio Paz: traducción y relaciones literarias," *La Colmena* 83 (2014): 10-11.

4 Octavio Paz, "Nota preliminar," *Versiones y diversiones: Edición aumentada y revisada* (Barcelona Galaxia Gutenberg, 2000b) 7, 657.

5 Edwin Honig, "Conversations with Translators, II: Octavio Paz and Richard Wilbur," *MLN* 91, 5 (1976): 1074. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2907116>.

6 José María Rodríguez García, "John Donne after Octavio Paz: Translation as Transculturation," *Dispositio* 21, 48, *The British New Left and the Rise of Cultural Studies* (1996): 155-182 (155-157).

in Bradu's words.⁷ The title of the Nobel's collected and annotated translations, *Versiones y diversiones*, at first blush suggests an ancillary role for translation, but Paz's relationship with the art was foundational if asystematic, embracing works from Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, English and Swedish. "Versión," his frequent word for his translations, tells one part of the story, and "diversión," another, especially if we consider the latter word as both recreation—play—and redirection. This volume⁸ was revised and expanded from the 1974b first edition and the 1978 corrected second edition. I will consider it in the detail allowable here, remedying a gap in Paz's studies on translation that have tended to overlook textual analysis of a corpus, though studies of specific translated works have been undertaken.⁹

Certain individual aspects of Octavio Paz's translation poetics have been pursued by various authors.¹⁰ These studies include Paz's

7 Fabienne Bradu, "Octavio Paz traductor," *Vuelta*, 259, 22 (1998): 30. https://letraslibres.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Vuelta-Vol22_259_12OPzTrdFBdu.pdf. The author is describing José Bianco's reaction in particular.

8 Paz (2000b).

9 For example, Frances R. Aparicio, "Epistemología y traducción en la obra de Octavio Paz," *Hispanic Journal* 8, 1 (1986): 157-167; José María Pérez Fernández, "Traducción y poética en Octavio Paz a través de sus versiones de John Donne" (part 1) *Letral* 5 (2010): 70-90; and part 2 *Letral* 7 (2011): 13-37; Rodríguez García 1996; Ilan Stavans and Charles Hatfield, "Silence is Meaningful," *Buenos Aires Review*: 15 July 2015. <http://www.buenosairesreview.org/2015/07/silence-is-meaningful/>; and Isabel Cherise Gomez, *Reciprocity in Literary Translation: Gift Exchange Theory and Translation Praxis in Brazil and Mexico (1968-2015)*, Diss., UCLA (2016).

10 Bradu, 1998; Fabienne Bradu, *Los puentes de la traducción: Octavio Paz y la poesía francesa* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) 2004; Domnita Dumitrescu, "Traducción y heteroglosia en la obra de Octavio Paz," *Hispania* 78, 2 (1995): 240-251; Alicia Piquer Desvaux, "Las relaciones entre traducción y creación en la obra ensayística y poética de Octavio Paz," *La traducción: metodología, historia, literatura: ámbito hispanofrancés: [Actas del III Coloquio de la Asociación de Profesores de Filología Francesa de la Universidad Española (APFFUE)]* /coord. por Francisco Lafarga, Albert Ribas y Mercedes Tricás Preckler, 1995: 327-334; Roberto Cantú, "Ideograms of the East and the West: Octavio Paz, Blanco, and the Traditions of Modern Poetry," *Journal of East-West Thought* 1, 3 (2013) 64n3; Roberto Cantú, "Introduction," *The Willow and the Spiral: Essays on Octavio Paz and the Poetic Imagination* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014) xxix; Toming Jun Liu, "Lichtung in Correspondence with 'Lu Zhai': Five Ways of Reading Octavio Paz's Translations of Wang Wei," *The Willow and the Spiral: Essays on Octavio Paz and the Poetic Imagination* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014) 38-66; Eliot Weinberger and Octavio Paz, "Further Comments," *19 Ways of Looking at Wang Wei: With More Ways* (New York, NY: New Directions Books, 2016) 50; Marília Librandi, Jamille Pinheiro Dias, Tom Winterbottom, *Transpoetic Exchange: Haroldo de Campos,*

translational collaborations and friendships, the influence of translations on him, specific works of his translation theory, intergeneric traces, or his translation of individual writers, national traditions, or even a single poem. As textual examples are still scarce, and attention to Anglophone poets is rarely given, I consider some below in a descriptive study, reviewing his translational thinking first. Our primary objective is, building upon the review, to hold textual evidence from a corpus derived from Paz's English-to-Spanish translations up to the light of his translation philosophy. In what way does *presence* rather than mere representationality appear as an operative principle guiding Paz's translations? While for reasons of space I cannot go beyond a selection of examples that support the framework, and they should not be considered systematic, this exploratory study will use discourse analysis, including contextual analysis, centering on a broad selection of Paz's translations (see Corpus).

Three Key Metaphors

Paz's poetic output in English-to-Spanish translation will be mined for strategies that reveal or confirm—or elude or contradict his theorizing and his work in other language pairs—the poet's approach to translation. First, I will posit three key, overlapping metaphors, drawing from Paz's own recurrent language, that can help organize his pronouncements and practice; these are framings to help document

Octavio Paz, and Other Multiversal Dialogues (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2020); Tom Boll, *Octavio Paz and T. S. Eliot: Modern Poetry and the Translation of Influence* (London: Legenda—Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2012); Tom Boll, "Octavio Paz and Charles Tomlinson: Literary Friendship and Translation," *Sociologies of Poetry Translation: Emerging Perspectives*. Jacob Blakesley, ed. (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 223-243; Odile Cisneros, "Odile Cisneros Traducción y poéticas radicales: El caso de Octavio Paz y el grupo noigandres," *Estudios Hispánicos en el siglo XXI*, 5 (2014): 213-227; Odile Cisneros, trans., "Translation and Radical Poetics: The Case of Octavio Paz and the Noigandres Group," Librandi, Pinheiro Dias, Winterbottom (2020); María Luisa Pérez Bernardo, "Teoría y práctica de la traducción en 'Traducción: literatura y literalidad' de Octavio Paz." *La traducción literaria en el contexto de las lenguas ibéricas*. Gerardo Beltrán-Cejudo, Aleksandra Jackiewicz, Katarzyna Popek-Bernat and Edyta Waluch de la Torre, eds. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2020), 13-26; and García-Avila and Solís-Carrillo.

specific interventions rather than empirical facts of his practice, and thus this work does not pretend to exhaustiveness, but rather exemplarity. For Paz, poetic translation is the “resurrección de la experiencia y su transmutación,” “sólo que no busca la imposible identidad sino la difícil semejanza.”¹¹ Let us look closer at the three translation metaphors contained therein: analogy, transmutation, and resurrection. At bottom these are three modes of creation rather than reproduction: “Translation is only one degree of this balance between repetition and invention, tradition and creation.”¹² Above all, Paz subscribed to poetry translation as “the preservation of a plurality of meanings.”¹³ Therefore one does not replicate a word or meaning, in his view, but an orbit; a paradox: words are irreplaceable in poetry but translatable.

Analogy

I can begin with analogy. “Translation is an art of analogy, the art of finding correspondences. An art of shadows and echoes,” Paz tells Edwin Honig in a revealing interview.¹⁴ Shunning mathematical concepts such as equivalence and identity, poetry translation for Paz creates analogous texts at the same time that it is an operation occurring analogously in all art: “La idea de lenguaje contiene la de traducción: pintor es aquel que traduce la palabra en imágenes plásticas; el crítico es un poeta que traduce en palabras las líneas y los colores. El artista es el traductor universal.”¹⁵ Elsewhere he notes that writing is a translation without an original: “Each original poem is the translation of the unknown or absent text.”¹⁶ Paz takes a page from Paul Valéry to describe effects over means: “Valéry lo dijo de manera insuperable:

11 Octavio Paz, “Lectura y contemplación,” en *Entre uno y muchos. Obras completas I. La casa de la presencia. Poesía e historia*, 2ª ed. (México, FCE, 2014) 539.

12 Honig, 1077.

13 Octavio Paz, “Translation: Literature and Letters,” Irene del Corral, trans., in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 158.

14 Honig, 1075.

15 Octavio Paz, “Presencia y presente: Baudelaire crítico de arte,” *El signo y el garabato* (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1973) 31.

16 Honig, 1077.

el traductor busca producir, con medios distintos, efectos parecidos.”¹⁷ He describes his translations of Guillaume Apollinaire in the introduction to “El puente de Mirabeau” using a self-deprecating intersemiotic metaphor, as “fotografías en blanco y negro” in which “han desaparecido los colores de los originales, y con ellos, los matices, las armonías, los contrastes velados.”¹⁸ Bradu’s insight into Paz’s use of the translation as photograph is revealing. Following from Paz’s idea that originals are translations of unknown or absent sources, Bradu redeems photography, *and translation*, from second-order reproduction: “En efecto, la fotografía nunca puede considerarse como un simple reflejo de la realidad: es una mirada que hace surgir una realidad desconocida o ausente.”¹⁹

Paz’s artist is a translator just as the poet is a translator-decipherer of the coded book of the universe:

No es menos vertiginosa la otra idea que obsesiona a Baudelaire: sí el universo es una escritura cifrada, un idioma en claves, “¿qué es el poeta, en el sentido más amplio, sino un traductor, un descifrador?”. Cada poema es una lectura de la realidad; esa lectura es una traducción; esa traducción es una escritura: un volver a cifrar la realidad que se descifra.²⁰

Paz’s imagery here is hermetic, positing the ancient Book of Nature as inaccessible and ciphered, the reader (like the author) as a translator-decoder, and works as authored by language. Legibility, and authorship, shift:

17 Octavio Paz (2014), 539.

18 Octavio Paz, “Guillaume Apollinaire,” *Obras completas* v. 2 (Galaxia Gutenberg, Barcelona: Círculo de Lectores, 1999c) 76. In the original source, the passage continues, revealing Paz’s lament in the face of his struggles with the translation (notice the language of the senses, and the translation’s contending with the source text as a matter of reconciling *suggestion* and declaration: “¿Qué ha podido quedar de esa indefinible mezcla de vehemencia y delicadeza, melancolía y pasión? Me consolaría si, al menos, los lectores adivinasen, entre las confusiones y vaguedades de mi traducción, el trazo fino de las líneas: eco del eco de una melodía más pensada que oída” (76). Paz, a believer in translatability, comes here as close as he probably ever does to pleading his own insufficiency, the *mediocritas mea* translation trope.

19 Bradu (2004), 232.

20 Octavio Paz. “Analogía e ironía,” *Obras completas: La casa de la presencia*, v. 1 (Barcelona: Galaxia Guteberg Círculo de Lectores, 1999a) 481-82.

El poema es el doble del universo: una escritura secreta, un espacio cubierto de jeroglíficos. Escribir un poema es descifrar al universo sólo para cifrarlo de nuevo. El juego de la es infinito: el lector repite el gesto del poeta: la lectura es una traducción que convierte al poema del poeta en el poema del lector. La poética de la analogía consiste en concebir la creación literaria como una traducción; esa traducción es múltiple y nos enfrenta a esta paradoja: la pluralidad de autores. Una pluralidad que se resuelve en lo siguiente: el verdadero autor de un poema no es ni el poeta ni el lector, sino el lenguaje.²¹

Language itself is a translation (perhaps “translation”) from the nonverbal world, or as he writes in *El mono gramático*, “La escritura humana refleja a la del universo, es su traducción, pero asimismo su metáfora [...]”²² Paz points to the translated nature of all texts, which reveal sameness and difference intermingled:

...while translation overcomes the differences between one language and another, it also reveals them more fully. Thanks to translation, we become aware that our neighbors do not speak and think as we do. On the one hand, the world is presented to us as a collection of similarities; on the other, as a growing heap of texts, each slightly different from the one that came before it: translations of translations of translations. Each text is unique, yet at the same time it is the translation of another text [...].²³

Analogy is the goal, one reason (in addition to the ego) that translation works in reverse of poetic creation, Paz argues.²⁴ To achieve the analogous poem, Paz convinces us, the translation *departs from*

21 Paz, 1999a, 482.

22 Octavio Paz. *El mono gramático* (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1974a) 135.

23 Octavio Paz (1992), 154.

24 Paz is more categorical elsewhere: “...the poets of the English language, for their part—particularly Eliot and Pound—have shown that *translation is a process indistinguishable from poetic creation*. Our century is the century of translations.” (Octavio Paz, “Introduction,” *Renga: A Chain of Poems*. Octavio Paz, Jacques Roubaud, Edoardo Sanguineti and Charles Tomlinson. Charles Tomlinson, ed. New York, George Braziller, 1972, 17 (my emphasis).

the source in order to follow it more closely. Translation is paradoxical.²⁵ The last line in his 1973 “Nota preliminar” (included in the 2000 publication) reveals his global strategy: “a partir de poemas en otras lenguas quise hacer poemas en la mía.”²⁶

Transmutation

The second metaphor is transmutation. Translation for Paz is re-creation. “No es una verdadera traducción sino un poema escrito a partir de otro poema. Una recreación, en el doble sentido de la palabra.”; that is, Paz ties recreation (*divertissement*) to re-creation.²⁷ He nuances re-creation as an inward process:

El poema está hecho de palabras necesarias e insustituibles. Por eso es tan difícil corregir una obra ya hecha. Toda corrección implica una recreación, un volver sobre nuestros pasos, hacia dentro de nosotros. La imposibilidad de la traducción poética depende también de esta circunstancia. Cada palabra del poema es única. No hay sinónimos. Única e inamovible: imposible herir un vocablo sin herir todo el poema; imposible cambiar una coma sin trastornar todo el edificio. El poema es una totalidad viviente, hecha de elementos irremplazables. La verdadera traducción no puede ser, así, sino recreación.²⁸

Translation, if conceived as a recurrence, then, is impossible for Paz; translation is not to recur in order to replace, but to render living thing for living thing.

25 The fallacious temptations of this paradox are clear: If x approaches y by moving away from y , then *any* movement away from y could be claimed as approaching y .

26 Octavio Paz, “Nota preliminar,” 2000b, 9.

27 Octavio Paz, “Notes to Han Yü,” 2000b, 659.

28 Octavio Paz, *El arco y la lira* (México, FCE, 2003) 45. In “Analogía e ironía” he finds correspondence itself dependent upon mutability, regressive translation, and the illusory nature of the source text: “...la correspondencia universal significa perpetua metamorfosis. El texto que es el mundo no es un texto único: cada página es la traducción y la metamorfosis de otra y así sucesivamente. El mundo es la metáfora de una metáfora. El mundo pierde su realidad y se convierte en una figura de lenguaje. En el centro de la analogía hay un hueco: la pluralidad de textos implica que no hay un texto original” (Paz [1999a], 481).

Transmutation *is* the literary process. He uses the image of a concert, in which original composition and translation harmonize in a vast improvisational symphony:

[O]jimos un concierto en que los músicos, con diferentes instrumentos, sin obedecer a ningún director de orquesta ni seguir partitura alguna, componen una obra colectiva en la que la improvisación es inseparable de la traducción y la invención de la imitación.²⁹

Implicitly the dissolution of the ego is at work in this metaphor. We see the transmutation of the individual ego in his linking poetry experiments (see below) as well. As language is the author of poetry, noted above, the notion of authorship dissolves or expands; the author, beginning in Symbolism, becomes a medium for the subconscious through automatic writing, and the interpretive role of the reader gains ground.³⁰ Aparicio points to this self-translation implied in the translational act:

Para Octavio Paz, la traducción es un proceso en que “cambiamos aquello que traducimos y, sobre todo, nos cambiamos a nosotros mismos.” El cambio ontológico se debe al diálogo implícito que se establece entre la voz del otro, quien representa otra época, lugar y lengua, y la voz del traductor quien, en su empeño por recrear un texto anterior a su época, mantiene una continuidad con su pasado “al transformarlo en diálogo con otras civilizaciones.”³¹

Paz's poem “Hermandad” shows the “brotherhood of life that continues with or without the individual,”³² at the same time it

29 Paz (1971), 17.

30 Aparicio (1991), 66.

31 Aparicio (1986), 160. Cf. the similar passage in Paz (1972), 18, in which he writes, “...in translating, we change what we translate and above all that we change ourselves. For us translation is transmutation, metaphor: a form of change and severance; a way, therefore, of ensuring the continuity of our past by transforming it in dialogue with other civilizations (an illusory continuity and dialogue: translation: transmutation: solipsism).”

32 Octavio Paz, *The Poems of Octavio Paz, edited and translated by Eliot Weinberger with Additional Translations by Elizabeth Bishop, Paul Blackburn, Denise Levertov, Muriel Rukeyser, and Charles Tomlinson* (New York: New Directions, 2012b) 600.

instantiates a reading of Ptolomy's poems VII and IX, a blurring of the boundaries between creation and homage (translation), nature and culture, reader and author, author and other authors:

Hermandad

Homenaje a Claudio Ptolomeo

Soy hombre: duro poco
y es enorme la noche.
Pero miro hacia arriba:
las estrellas escriben.
Sin entender comprendo:
también soy escritura
y en este mismo instante
alguien me deletrea.³³

We translate within our own language as well, transmuting intralingually: “en un sentido riguroso, lo que llamamos sinónimos no son sino traducciones [...] en el interior de una lengua; y lo que llamamos traducción es traslación o interpretación.”³⁴

Resurrection

The third metaphor is resurrection. When Paz contends that poetry is not words, he is expressing an idea Gifford had expressed as “Translation is Resurrection, but not of the body,”³⁵ meaning the trajectory of the poem is the same, even if the material, lexical, traveler is not. Translation is resurrectional in the initiatic sense, as an undertaking of the journey into understanding (cf. “When we learn to speak, we are learning to translate....”).³⁶ Resurrection is also societal, a means of revitalization: Paz believed in a “universal syntax of civilizations in which ancient cultures—prostrated and fossilized through centuries

33 Octavio Paz, *A Tree Within*, Eliot Weinberger, trans. (New York: New Directions, 1988) 28.

34 Octavio Paz, “André Breton o la búsqueda del comienzo,” *Corriente Alterna* (México, Siglo XXI, 2000a) 54.

35 Henry Gifford, “The Poet as Translator,” *Agenda* 33, 2 (Summer 1995) 63.

36 Octavio Paz, 1992, 152.

las obras de arte: la de hoy mismo.”⁴³ Bradu sees a *quest for the instant* (“acercamiento al instante”) in Paz’s translation work, one that “rebasa las identidades de los estilos, las formas y las tradiciones. Esto no es exactamente una traición ni una “pacianización” de las versiones, sino el ejercicio de una misma pasión a varias voces.”⁴⁴

The translator, as we saw above, is a vessel for the poem, just as the poet is a vessel for the mute universe: “El poeta no es el que habla sino el que deja hablar.”⁴⁵ Paz also conceives humans as vessels for translation: “por nosotros fluyen los lenguajes y nuestro cuerpo los traduce a otros lenguajes.”⁴⁶ And despite the mystification of translation in such metaphors, he says in “Nota preliminar” something revealing about his practice as a trade or craft, requiring technical, skilled toil or artisanship, that is, requiring *making* (“Poetry, like history, is made”): “trabajo de carpintería, albañilería, relojería, jardinería, electricidad, plomería —en una palabra: industria verbal.”⁴⁷

Resurrection, the *madeness* of poetry, can be illustrated in a particular translation choice appearing in William Carlos Williams’ “A Sort of Song” / “A manera de una canción”:⁴⁸

—through metaphor to reconcile
the people and the stones.
Compose. (**No ideas**
but in things) Invent!

Paz’s lines read:

—por la metáfora reconciliar
gente y piedras.

43 Paz (2000b), “Nota final,” 15.

44 Bradu (2004), 232.

45 Paz, “El sentimiento de las cosas: Mono no aware,” *Obras completas, 2, Excursiones / Incursiones: Dominio extranjero*. Círculo de Lectores / Fondo de Cultura Económica (Barcelona / México 1999d) 381.

46 Paz, “La nueva analogía,” *La nueva analogía: discurso de ingreso* (Mexico: El Colegio Nacional, 2012a) 65.

47 Paz, “Nota preliminar” (2000b), 9.

48 Paz (2000b), 220-21.

Componer. (**No ideas:
cosas.**) ¡Inventa!

Williams' "No ideas / but in things" took on anthemic force as the watchword of Imagism, vorticism, and objectivism, and in Spanish is proverbial as "No ideas sino en las cosas" or "No hay ideas sino en las cosas," or Montiel's translation: "Ideas, sólo en las cosas."⁴⁹ The details are important: in the former translation, the "sino" does the work of ensuring that things alone bear ideas; in the latter, the emphasis shifts to the inherence of ideas in things, not in their poetic creation *through* their materialization. Paz as translator confidently collapses ideas and things, trusting their haecceity, their thisness, to contain rather than negate ideas. Verbs can also assist this presence, as in Paz's translation of Wang Wei's Deer Park poem, ending "Luz Poniente: / alumbra el musgo y, verde, asciende." Paz makes a case for ascendance in the final verb to accentuate the spirituality of the whole,⁵⁰ which Eliot Weinberger confirms in stating that the Chinese *shang* has a forgotten meaning, intuited—resurrected, we might say—by Paz and only Paz.⁵¹ In this case we know Paz is deliberate in this reconciliation, as in *Excursiones* he discusses the poem with familiar language: "Componer: no ideas sino en las cosas."⁵² Williams and Paz were mutual translators, as the former translated "Himno entre las ruinas," which ends with an Orphic birth of the speech act:

Hombre, árbol de imágenes	man, tree of images,
Palabras que son flores que son	words become flowers become fruits
Frutos que son actos	which are deeds.

49 William Carlos Williams, *La invención necesaria: Ensayos, cartas, poemas. Selección, traducción, prólogo y notas*. José Antonio Montiel, ed. and trans. (Santiago, Chile: Eds. Universidad Diego Portales, 2013) 18.

50 Weinberger and Paz (2016) 50.

51 Weinberger and Paz, "Postscript" (2016) 51.

52 Octavio Paz, "La flor saxífraga: W.C. Williams," *Obras completas*, v. 2 (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg Círculo de Lectores, 1999b) 294.

In another poem he writes that poetry “no es un decir: es un hacer.”⁵³ Or as he exposts in an essay: “The poem is not a double of the sensation of the thing. Imagination does not represent: it produces. Its products are poems, objects which were not real before. The poetic imagination produces poems, pictures, and cathedrals as nature produces pines, clouds, and crocodiles.”⁵⁴ Paz is an interpretive step ahead of his reader: the poet produces like nature produces, and the “cosas” he writes are *verbal objects*. The translation resurrects the verbal object, the thing-as-idea; Paz’s translation is a critical act that inscribes the word with a performative will to existence. He is channeling the ancient belief in “la poesía pensada y vivida como una operación mágica destinada a *transmutar* la realidad.”⁵⁵ In Hart Crane’s masterpiece, “The Broken Tower,” where the American wonders if his words link to the divine, “My word I poured. But was it cognate, ...?” [The linguistic sense of “cognate” drops in the Spanish for a human kinship, rather than a more transmundane one, the speaker doubting his speech’s own power to join with God’s: “Manaron mis palabras... ¿mas fueron de la estirpe...?”].⁵⁶ In fact, the first line of the poem tells of a bell that “gathers God,” a startling collocation that suggests the divine is either plural or accessibly human. For this Paz uses a set phrase, “a Dios convoca,”⁵⁷ which can be the prosaic “summon,” suggesting distance, but it also has another sense of assemble, as if God, being everywhere, were rendered present in that place alone. The simple verb “convocar” presences by straddling both the imploration to God and his imminence.⁵⁸

53 Octavio Paz, “Árbol adentro,” *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz*, Eliot Weinberger, ed. (New York: New Directions, 1987a), 484.

54 Octavio Paz, “William Carlos Williams: The Saxifrage Flower,” *On Poets and Others* (New York, Arcade, 1986): 16, ctd. in Esther Sánchez-Pardo, “Vicente Huidobro and William Carlos Williams: Hemispheric Connections, or How to Create Things with Words,” *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies* 7 (2017): 183.

55 Octavio Paz, *Los hijos del limo* (Barcelona, Seix Barral, 1987b) 91-92.

56 Paz (2000b), 256-57.

57 Paz (2000b), 254-55.

58 The centrality of presence for Paz is seen in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in Literature (Paz 1990a): <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1990/paz/25350-octavio-paz-nobel-lecture-1990/>. Paz’s presence can profitably be compared conceptually with Translation Studies’ take on relevance theory.

Collaboration

Paz's enacting of translation as a "solo in two voices," to borrow the title of his 1973 volume of poetry, is borne out in literary partnerships—collaborative translations and mutual translations—that show intimate negotiations of self and other, translation and creation. Examples include *Haibum de Basho: Oku no Homosichi (Sendas de Oku)*, assisted by Eikichi Hayashiya, and indirect translations from Chinese using interlinear cribs, phonetic transcription, and versions by other translators. For several translations from Asian languages, "he tenido a la vista varias traducciones al inglés, al francés y al italiano; por medio de la comparación y guiado no por la filología sino por el gusto, me arriesgué a componer poemas en español."⁵⁹ He translated four Swedish poets with Pierre Zekeli. And his translations of Czeslaw Milosz ("Carta a Raja Rao" and "El premio") come not from the author's Polish but his English. Collaborative translation and mutual editing can help clarify the most private or inscrutable of images, and its products can offer insight into a work's genesis. The *New Directions* excerpts (1981), "Airborn," however, misses the point of the bilingual interplay, monolingualizing both process and product by presenting only the English.⁶⁰ Each set of quatrains is both half a source text and half a translation, as the alternating verses were translated by the other, Paz into Spanish and Tomlinson into English. Four sonnets on two different themes would be written, the last sonnet of each sequence would be monolingual and single authored, and the translations would occur *before each full poem was complete*, an aspect that reviewers have missed. A translation of a work in progress cannot use the whole of the work to use the awareness of fully negotiated meanings in their

59 Paz (2000b), 657.

60 Octavio Paz and Charles Tomlinson, "Airborn," *New Directions 42: An International Anthology of Poetry and Prose* (New York: New Directions, 1981a) 36-43.

fullness; this was a correspondence translation, “in slow motion” as Paz joked in the preface, that approached simultaneous interpreting.⁶¹

Clark provides insight into the *renga* experiment involving Octavio Paz (Mexico), Jacques Roubaud (France), Edoardo Sanguineti (Italy), and Charles Tomlinson (United Kingdom). He presents it not as a partaking in tradition but as Paz called it, a translation of compositional method itself: “una verdadera traducción: no de un texto sino de un *método para componer textos*.”⁶² That is, Paz conceives of the product as a process. The focus shifts, as Clark describes it, to the “movement,” to translation as a “medium of interaction” and as “overlapping linguistic borders,” each language dislocated and “foreign,” part of “interference patterns” creating a “hybrid creole.”⁶³ Paz accordingly in the Introduction figures the exercise in both corporeal and incorporeal images, vital coordinates that yet are unfixed: “I would like our *renga* to appear not as a tapestry, but as body in a perpetual state of change, made of four elements, four voices, four cardinal directions which meet at a center and disperse.”⁶⁴ The goal is movement via “the plural word, the place of confluence of different voices, currents, traditions.”⁶⁵ Cantú summarizes Dunsmoor’s work as uniting “Emmanuel Levinas and Octavio Paz on the philosophical question of ‘Otherness’ in the sense of an implicit dialogue defined as an ethical relationship. *Renga*, as a result, is fleshed out as a Western poetic exercise with two objectives: the annulment of the personal self, and that of the ego-related question of intellectual property.”⁶⁶

61 Bradu, apropos of *Versiones* but applicable here, noted that not presenting translations *en face* with their prior texts is consonant with Paz’s view of translation (1998), 30-31.

62 Matsuo Basho, *Sendas de Oku*, “La tradición del haiku.” Octavio Paz and Eikichi Yahashiya, trans. (Barcelona, Seix Barral, 1981), 20.

63 Timothy Clark, “‘Renga’: Multi-Lingual Poetry and Questions of Place,” *SubStance* 21, 2, 68 (1992): 32-45 (33-34). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3684900>.

64 Paz, Roubaud, Sanguineti and Tomlinson, 21.

65 Paz, Roubaud, Sanguineti and Tomlinson, 21.

66 Cantú (2014), xxix; and Helena A. Dunsmoor, “Octavio Paz y *Renga*: ¿Experiencias de la Conjugación?”, 212-232. See also Helena Dunsmoor, *Las obras compartidas de Octavio Paz: práctica y poética de la colaboración*, Diss., University of Calgary, Alberta (2013); and Tom J. Lewis, “Poems to Invent a Poet by: *Renga*,” *Review* 72, 7 (1972).

The collaboration has been seen, in this sense, as a manifestation of *muga* (no-self);⁶⁷ Paz, for his part, had theorized the interaction as “the negation... of the reality of the I.”⁶⁸ What is often overlooked in analyses of the four poets' work is that self-translations ensued into each of the participating languages.

Another type of collaboration is mutual translation between two writers. Paz and Elizabeth Bishop translated each other mutually. Bishop's versions of Paz's poetry were carefully and respectfully checked by the poet, and with few exceptions but many variations, were published.⁶⁹ Paz revised his own poem “objetos y apariciones” after seeing Bishop's translation of it, titled “Objects and Apparitions: for Joseph Cornell” (1976).⁷⁰ Bishop's “The Monument,” “A Summer's Dream,” and “Visits to St. Elizabeths” appeared in *Versiones y diversiones* (1974b), and Paz translated “The End of March” and “North Haven” at least in part.⁷¹ Stavans and Hatfield remark particularly on the omissions and additions Paz uses to turn implied “silences” into sounds in Bishop, supplementing verbs where the reader of the English has to supply them.⁷² Hatfield, drawing on Paz's essay “Elizabeth Bishop, or the Power of Reticence”⁷³ observes the irony in Paz's view that poetry lies between words, and his appreciation of objects that “keep silent.” He discusses in particular Bishop's “A Summer's Dream” (1948), wherein quiet expectancy, we might say, is translated into noisy fulfillment: “Every night we **listened / for** a horned owl.” Thus the horned owl is expressed as a kind of silence in the poem—the speakers try to hear it (i.e., con el oído pendiente), but

67 Roy Starrs, “Renga: A European Poem and Its Japanese Model,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 54, 2 (2017) 275.

68 Paz, Roubaud, Sanguinetti and Tomlinson, 21.

69 Mariana Machova, *Elizabeth Bishop and Translation* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019) 80-82.

70 Gomez, 30.

71 Gomez, 82.

72 Stavans and Hatfield.

73 Octavio Paz, “Elizabeth Bishop, or The Power of Reticence,” *World Literature Today* 51, 1-2 (1977) 15-16.

it is not heard. Yet in Paz's translation, the speakers "**escuchá**bamos **gritar** al búho cornudo, [...]."

Recreating and Re-creating: Cases

Paz in his practice was also not immune to reducing or overlooking interdiscursive references. In his translation of John Donne's "Elegy 19: Going to Bed," he renders these lines: *My mine of precious stones, my empery, /How blest am I in this discovering thee! /To enter in these bonds is to be free; / There where my hand is set, my seal shall be* as "Mi venero precioso, mi dominio. / Goces, descubrimientos, / Mi libertad alcanzo entre tus lazos: / **Lo que toco, mis manos lo han sellado**" (162-163). This solution renders only one level of the text—the erotic—but it misses the legal idiom "to set one's hand," which here is framing a consummated encounter as "signing and sealing" a civil pact. One's "hand" here, then, is also one's signature. Rodríguez García rightly notes the imagery of writing overlaying the scene, and the woman as "mystic book."⁷⁴ The imperial "discovering," is in fact weakened in "descubrimientos,"⁷⁵ but what has not been teased out is that the weakening occurs by muting the historical allusion to the Conquest. In fact we see in these lines an organizing principle of *possession* (both of woman-as-territory, and of woman in a covenant of consent to erotic conquest). Man is inscribed as conqueror, protagonist of History. There is something crude in the misogyny of the lines, of course, but Paz's lines leave the pure carnality even more raw. In Donne the romantic consent is a legal affair. The first line of the stanza begins with unmistakably legal language in the lover's imploration: "License my roving hands"⁷⁶ Paz is consistent, at least, in his blind eye on this score: "**Deja correr** mis manos vagabundas."⁷⁷ Similarly, Paz renders the poem's ambiguous last line: I am naked first; / why

74 García Rodríguez, 159.

75 García Rodríguez, 159.

76 Paz (2000b), 160.

77 Paz (2000b), 161.

then / *What need'st thou have **more covering than a man**?* with the unambiguous and unerotic “Mírame, ven, **¿qué mejor manta / para tu desnudez, que yo, desnudo?**” The man is the covering, in Paz's reading, whereas the English allows that reading but also the idea of more covering than a man is *wearing*. Ironically, the end of the Spanish poem is more overtly sexual than Donne's, and yet Paz suppresses many of the theological-sexual double entendres. Rodríguez, while admiring Paz's work, finds the Spanish text “duplicitous” and “doctoring,”⁷⁸ but “reductive” may also apply.

The metaphysical poet Andrew Marvell's poem “To His Coy Mistress” is undertaken in “A su esquivada amante.” “Had we but world enough, and time” becomes the perhaps more operationally Romantic but resourceful locution, “Más tiempo el tiempo, más el mundo, ¡y nuestros!” However one may judge the results, Paz's technique here bears examination:

An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to **every** part,
And the last age should show **your heart**.
For, lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.

Un siglo en alabanza de tus ojos,
cien años más en contemplar tu frente,
el doble en adorar entrambos pechos
y treinta mil **cada secreta** parte.
Por revelar el pie, la ceja, el rizo,
un haz de siglos y una edad entera
para **tu corazón, sol de tu cuerpo**.

78 Paz (2000b), 160-1; see also García-Avila, Solís-Carrillo; and Pérez Fernández 2010, 2011, on Paz's translations of Donne.

Por ti, señora, pródigo no fuera
dilapidando siglos, eras, **astros**.⁷⁹

Paz heightens the motif of inaccessibility, and associations of woman with the unknown or occult, by means of additions (“*secreta*,” “*revelar*”), and he introduces a metaphor, the heart as the body’s sun, which is no idle creation, as the last line brings back **astros** to tie together the notion of elusiveness to the hyperbolic vastness of cosmic time needed to explore the beloved’s charms. Thus we see Paz scaffolding a whole new semantic field, mapping the body as celestial body, via improvisation in the etymological sense of *improvisus*, the unexpected. Paz’s translational exorbitance is Baroque—one hundred years of admiring gazes become centuries, epochs, *stars*. Stars mark universal time, rather than intimate time. Paz renders the woman as cosmos to employ the conceit—in the voice of the poem’s lovelorn narrator—of squandering not only time but space (“*dilapidar*” embraces both the material and the conceptual). But it is in the deliberate intertextualizing of the poem that Paz’s macrostrategy is visible; the first stanza ends with this warning to the woman about loveless death and the urgency of love among the living:

And into ashes all my lust;
 The grave’s a fine and private place,
 But none, I think, do there embrace.

Paz’s rendition borrows ironically from Quevedo’s sonnet “*Amor constante más allá de la muerte*,” which ends “*Polvo serán, mas polvo enamorado*,” affirming the deathless transcendence of love:

⁷⁹ Paz (2000b), 167.

polvo serás, cenizas mi deseo.
La tumba es aposento solitario:
si allí nadie te ve, nadie te besa.⁸⁰

But it is a technique, not a line, from Spanish Golden Age poetry that the translator introduces most dramatically. Paz's aesthetics of an "art of convergence, a "poetry of reconciliation" that finds an "imagination incarnated in a timeless now,"⁸¹ find expression in such features. In fact, Gomez describes the long poem "The Conquest" by Lysander Kemp, which narrates in a poetic diary Cortés' conquest of Mexico, and is written as an English pastiche of Spanish Golden Age verse.⁸² Gomez contends, "When Paz translates selections into a Spanish that sound like Garcilaso de la Vega, he is in a sense writing an original version of the poem that Kemp's poem imagined itself to translate."⁸³ Paz translates not lines but a poem and a genre, restoring the era-specificity in Marvell's poem as well as the "dateless time" of poetry. The speaker wishes to dedicate "An age at least **to every part**," or in Paz's extrapolated line, "Por **revelar el pie, la ceja, el rizo**," This line, a catalogue (poetic enumeration) is invented wholesale, an intergeneric translation of a class of poetry rather than a particular intertext. Paz, historicizing his translation in this way, represents the woman's attributes in a manner consistent with centuries-old tradition, especially the Renaissance blason form:

In poetry, the experience of a whole unbroken body or presence is impossible. Indeed, it has become something of a truism to say that the idealization of women in amatory poetry goes hand in hand with a process of fragmentation. In the poetry of a Garcilaso or a

80 Francisco de Quevedo, "(XXXI) Amor constante más allá de la muerte," *El Parnaso español, monte en dos cumbres dividido, con las nueve musas castellanas, donde se contienen poesías de D. Francisco de Quevedo*. vol. 7. (Madrid: La Imprenta de Sancha, 1794) 411. We know of Paz's affinity for Quevedo from such writings as Octavio Paz, *Reflejos: Réplicas [Diálogos con Francisco de Quevedo]* (Vuelta: El Colegio Nacional, México, 1996).

81 Paz (1990b), 54.

82 Gomez, 62.

83 Gomez, 62.

Góngora, a woman's presence is made manifest primarily through allusions to parts of her body: "el clavel del labio," "el blanco cuello," "las rubias trenzas," "el cristal de la mano." [...] The use of metaphor, metonymy, and circumlocution in poetry do as much to distance and abstract the beloved's body as to evoke it.⁸⁴

The translator's use of this device renders the abstract concrete, naming the unnamed parts in defamiliarized singular forms of the noun, creating the odd effect of an at once intimate and universal inventory, woman and Woman. This practice shades into *translatio*, or what Gérard Genette (1997; orig. 1982) calls a quantitative transformation, which includes excision, concision, extension, and expansion.⁸⁵ *El pie, la ceja, el rizo* are potentialities for Paz, not departures. Indeed, Paz activates many poetic details this way: "*Thou by the Indian Ganges' side / Shouldst rubies find*" is expressed as "tú, por el Ganges y sus rojas aguas, / tributo de rubíes." Paz trades a geographical redundancy for a sensorial addition, the "aguas rojas"; the finding of jewels is not exoticism but a "*tributo*," as if nature itself were honoring her. One is tempted to call this technique "narrativizing," the interpretive translational activation—not "addition" per se—of a non-narrative element.

Paz translated, similarly, on the level of the whole poem with ee cummings, where he found an aesthetics of surprise built on deliberate idiosyncrasies:

Ninguna de las llamadas "extravagancias" de Cummings—tipografía, puntuación, juegos de palabras, sintaxis en las que los sustantivos, los adjetivos y aún los pronombres tienden a convertirse en verbos—es arbitraria. Es un juego que, como todos los juegos, obedece a una lógica estricta. Lo maravilloso del juego es que, como la poesía,

84 Maria Cristina Quintero, "Mirroring Desire in Early Modern Spanish Poetry: Some Lessons from Painting," *Writing for the Eyes in the Spanish Golden Age*. Frederick Alfred De Armas, ed. (Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 2004) 88.

85 Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1997) 229-35, 254-62.

pone en movimiento la necesidad para producir el azar o algo que se asemeja: lo inesperado.⁸⁶

Let us consider one poem in particular⁸⁷:

[In spite of everything]
e.e. cummings
in spite of everything
which breathes and moves, since **Doom**
(with white longest hands
neatening each crease)
will **smooth** entirely our minds

A pesar de todo
lo que respira y se mueva, pues el **Destino**
(con blancas y larguísimas manos
lavando cada pliegue)
ha de borrar del todo nuestra memoria

“Doom” and “*Destino*” are linked by a metonymic chain proceeding from the notion of predestination, but convey different ideas. The longest hands “neatening each crease” are “*lavando cada pliegue*,” which Paz shifts from the semantic field of housekeeping to the horror of forgetting: *lavar* (cf. *lavar el cerebro*) and *borrar* here are violent acts (neatening and smoothing have the effect of oblivion but they are routine, apparently constructive acts).

Paz stumbles over, or “smears,” modal verbs at times, such as in Wallace Steven’s “*Esthétique du mal*”:⁸⁸

*Except for us, Vesuvius might consume
In solid fire the utmost earth and know
No pain (ignoring the **cocks that crow us up**)*

86 Octavio Paz, *Traducción: literatura y literalidad* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1971) 72.

87 Paz 2000b, 182-83.

88 Paz (2000b), 178-79.

*To die). This is a part of the sublime
From which we shrink. And yet, except for us,
The total past felt nothing when destroyed.*

Si no fuese por nosotros, el Vesubio, sin pena,
con fuego sólido consumiría estas tierras extremas.
No sabe que **los gallos cantan al morir**.
Ante esta faz de lo sublime, huimos.
Y sin embargo, si no fuese por nosotros
nada sentiría el pasado entero al ser destruido.

This is a miscue, or free association, not interpretive productivity. The translator misreads the cause for effect metonymy, and sees the rooster's song as announcing its own death, not that of the collective "we." In the English, the "us" is the human, or the routine, as the reigning theme is the impassivity of the non-human in the face of pain and fatality (or as Paz describes it in his notes to the poem, "la inocencia del mal en la naturaleza y la culpabilidad del espíritu").⁸⁹ The English, then, refers to *cocks that crow, waking us up to meet our deaths*. Steven's first stanza begins in part "Pain is human.;" the death in question is our human experience alone, though nature is unheeding of it, insensate to it, despite apparently being otherwise: "except for us" is no true exception.

Cummings' poem "love is more thicker than forget"⁹⁰ lays yet more traps:

love is more thicker than forget
more thinner than recall
more seldom than a wave is wet
more frequent than to fail
it is most **mad and moonly**

89 Paz (2000b), 648.

90 Source and translation in Paz (2000b), 182-85.

and less it shall **unbe**
 than all the sea which only
 is deeper than the sea
 [...]
 it is most **sane and sunly**
 and more it cannot die
 than all the sky which only
 is higher than the sky

Octavio Paz's first published version is as follows:

Amar es más espeso que olvidar
 más tenue que recordar
 más raro que una ola mojada
 más frecuente que caer
 es más **loco y lunar**
 y **menos no será**
 que todo el mar que sólo
 es más profundo que el mar
 [...]
 es más solar y soleado
 y más no puede morir
 que todo el cielo que solo
 es más alto que el cielo

Paz, wary of or shrinking before the agrammaticality, “thicker than forget,” elides it, and paraphrases cummings’ euphuistic locution (“less it shall unbe”/”*menos no será*”), but surrenders to sun-related wordplay (“*solar y soleado*”), perhaps where a thematic couplet would have served the architecture of the whole (“mad and moonly”/”sane and sunly”).⁹¹ The sun and sanity, the moon and lunacy, are invoked

91 “*Solar*” in Spanish also has the sense of *origen, cuna, linaje*, playing off the death motif. Paz’s affinity for “solar” seems to wane in his “*Délfica*,” by Nerval:

Mas nada turba aún el pórtico impasible.
 Dormida bajo el arco **solar** de Constantino
 se calla la sibila -piedra el furor divino.

(thus, ¿'loco y lunático / cuerdo y solático?').⁹² "Sane and sunly" are quasi-synonyms, in parallel with "mad and moonly"; "moonly" and "sunly" are only apparently occasionalisms, as "sunly" is attested in the OED, and "moonly" in Google Ngrams, appearing first in the early 17th century. The translator, prioritizing the ambiguous word class of "Love," changed his first line in the later edition of *Versiones*:⁹³ "*Amor es más espeso que olvidar.*" He heightens the repetition in the poem "these children singing in stone a," which itself intersemiotically translates a 15th-century bas relief.⁹⁴

cummings:

a

lit tle

tree listens

forever to always children singing forever

a song **made**

of silent as stone silence of

song

Paz:

un

pequeño

árbol escucha

para siempre a los siempre niños

cantando para siempre

Paz comments that the adjective "solar" betrays Nerval, and corrects it in his new edition for having rendered explicit what was only implied in the source. The new line is "Dormida bajo el arco **imperial** de Constantino." (Paz, 2000b, "Nota a la segunda edición," 10-11); Bradu shows no adjective at all in Paz's first draft: "Mas todavía, bajo el arco de Constantino." The French reads "Est endormie encor sous l'arc de Constantin (Gerarde de Nerval, "Les chimères" (1854). Poésie française.fr, <https://www.poesie-francaise.fr/gerard-de-nerval/poeme-delfica.php>, 2024).

92 One other published version has them as "lo más loco y lunamente" and "lo más cuerdo y solmente", e.e. Cummings, *Poemas*. Tomás Browne y Alejandra Mancilla, trans. (Chancacazo Publicaciones, Santiago de Chile, 2014) 32-33.

93 Paz, 2000b, 183; see also Gomez.

94 Paz, 2000b, 184-87, which omits the last stanza of Cuming's poem.

una canción **hecha**
de silencio como el silencio de
pedra del canto.

Cummings elides two ideas, “made / of silence” and “silent as stone,” sibilating them into “made / of silent as stone silence.” The second stanza begins with morphological play, and “silently lit” semantically is doubled into the liquid “silently little”:⁹⁵

ever these silently lit
tle children are petals

Paz, using “siempre” for “ever,” “forever,” and “always” follows suit with a ludic syntactic violation, though the lines do not work (as) independently of each other as the English does:

siempre esos niños silenciosa
mente pequeños son pétalos

In the Czesław Miłosz translations, Paz epitomizes Hans-George Gadamer’s emphasis on selective translational attention:

If we want to emphasise in our translation a feature of the original that is important to us, then we can do it only by playing down or entirely suppressing other features. But this is precisely the attitude that we call interpretation. Translation, like all interpretation, is a highlighting.⁹⁶

Miłosz’s English and Paz’s Spanish follow⁹⁷:

To Raja Rao

[...]

95 Paz, 2000b, 184-85.

96 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975) 347-48.

97 Paz, 2000b, 314-18.

For years I could not accept
the place I was in.
 I felt I should be **somewhere else.**

A city, trees, human voices
lacked the quality of presence.
I would live by the hope of moving on.

**Somewhere else there was a city of real presence,
 of real trees and voices and friendship and love.**

Carta a Raja Rao

[...]

Por años no pude aceptar
 que **el sitio en que estaba era mi sitio.**
 En otra parte estaba **mi lugar.**

La ciudad, los árboles,
 las voces de los hombres,
no eran, no estaban.
Vivía en un perpetuo irme.

**En algún lado había una ciudad real,
 árboles reales, voces, amistad, amor, presencias.**

Paz's asymptotic readings, his advance and retreat toward semantic extension, his "transconcretion" of abstract nouns, and his excavations are in evidence. In stanza two the repetition, tied to the next line, establishes a possessive: *mi sitio*, *mi lugar*. Startling choices then arrive in the third stanza: "lacked the quality of presence" > "*no eran, no estaban.*" This phrasing has the advantage of economy: Paz is simply uninterested in what "the quality of presence" might be; he focuses on two *kinds* of absence instead: *no eran* (*presentes*), *no estaban* (*presentes*). That is, he deprives them of both metaphorical and experiential existence. Then "I would live by the hope of moving on"

> “*Vivía en un perpetuo irme*” metaphorizes *hoping to leave*. (Paz’s poem “Piedra de sol” ends with the line “y llega siempre:”—with a colon—reinitiating the circle). Paz’s line is more powerful because it is a virtual, heightened image: to be always leaving. In the last line, Paz ends with a noun that embraces all the others, the collocate “real” shifting to the city, which he fills with presences. Paz emphasizes the concretion of the “real.” In another verse Paz renders the line: “We needed **God loving us** in our weakness / and not in the glory of beatitude.” as: “*Necesitábamos a un Dios que nos amase, / no en la gloria de la beatitud: en nuestra flaqueza.*” The line is subversive. The English does nothing to suggest the possibility that God does not exist; Paz pushes the question to the forefront with the indefinite article, “a *un Dios.*” It is God’s “constancy” in the English that is in doubt; in the Spanish, His existence. In few other instances can we observe a better demonstration of Paz’s belief that translations are “another work and not so much a copy as a metaphor of the original.”⁹⁸

Conclusion: Translations as Presence

Strong poets may have to learn to write in the service of otherness if they are to translate, lest they overpower their authors. The paradox is that the strength of what makes them poets cannot dim in the task of translation; translating poetry requires creating poetry. For Paz, poetry and translation reinforce each other, blurring the boundaries: “translation is often indistinguishable from creation; [... yet] there is constant interaction between the two, a continuous, mutual enrichment.”⁹⁹ Yet for all Paz’s assertions of writing’s essential nature as translational, he did distinguish translators: “[e]l buen traductor de poesía es un traductor que, además, es un poeta [...].o un poeta que, además, es un buen traductor.”¹⁰⁰

98 Octavio Paz, “Presence and the Present” Gregory Rabassa, trans., *The Hudson Review* 22, 1 (1969): 48.

99 Paz (1992), 160.

100 Paz (1971), 14.

This work contributes textual readings in support of the idea of Paz himself as a translator working consistently within his own model of the strong translator-poet; the sense of his having produced translations that are strong as *poems*, perhaps even over and above their status as strong translations, arguably emerges from this exercise. A paradox took shape in these readings: a translation *is* and *is not* the poem with which it communicates (“Un poema de Baudelaire traducido al español es otro poema y es el mismo poema”).¹⁰¹ This paradox leads back to our threefold framework of analogy, transmutation, and resurrection, three processes that produce this very paradox of poetic objects that *are not*, instead *seeming, changing, and returning*, and whose givenness cedes to *createdness*, to *instability*, and to *variation*. Paz’s belief in the universality of poetry and the possibility of translation must be elucidated with evidence of the means he uses to serve those ends. His solutions, seen in conjunction, stave off to some extent any notion of inaccuracy, as his *aim* is to translate otherwise, to avoid subservience and to tend toward *inventio*, a Renaissance inheritance, described in Theo Hermans’ study of the era’s paratextual imagery.¹⁰² Our readings of such practices are enriched through the understanding of Paz’s translation apologetics, scattered throughout his work and thinking. Pazian theory and Pazian practice in tandem make for stronger mappings and justifications of the larger outlines of his project, an art of translation not over craft but *via* craft. We saw a particularly Pazian translation signature, for instance, in his interpolations from target polysystem topoi such as the Baroque catalog, and cases of swerves or shifts—occasionally “drifts”—into new poems in Spanish. These rewritings—Genette’s quantitative transformations—are in evidence in our corpus on the whole, in which Paz assumes the

101 Octavio Paz and Claude Fell, “Vuelta a *El laberinto de la soledad*.” *Cahiers du monde hispanique et luso-brésilien* 25, (1975): 171-189 (176). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/carav.1975.1997>; https://www.persee.fr/doc/carav_0008-0152_1975_num_25_1_1997.

102 Theo Hermans, “Images of Translation: Metaphor and Imagery in the Renaissance Discourse on Translation,” *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation* (London & New York: Routledge, 1985/2023) 111-112.

role of transeditor, finding what he needs for the life of the new poem in its potentialities rather than its strict textual surface. We saw too, as in Paz's work on e.e. cummings, dimensions of mimetism outside of the referential function of language, or as Sánchez Benítez calls it, "esas reminiscencias sonoras, rítmicas, emotivas, rituales que presentifica cada poema."¹⁰³ The dimension of correspondence on the level of image, phrase, or line recedes in favor of translation on the level of larger translation units,¹⁰⁴ of the poem's metatextuality or effect, or of an "orbit-for-orbit" translation beyond sense-for-sense, even to where he is translating from an unseen, unwritten, ideal "original," or in the image noted above, "sin obedecer a ningún director de orquesta ni seguir partitura alguna." A fourth metaphor, Paz's adoption of Heraclitus' bow and lyre, may suggest not the analogy but the *homology* of the hunting tool and the musical instrument: the poem and the translation have similar structures but belong to different orders; in other words, as Caistor writes, poetry may be static like the music from the strings, but also dynamic like the bow, which can "shoot out into the world as the arrow does from the bowstring, to explore the otherness of the world outside the individual consciousness."¹⁰⁵ His theory and practice are further interilluminated, but we are left perhaps less with a conclusion than with more questions, including whether Paz's theory might apply to lesser translators, or translators without his historico-theoretical range, and whether it is generalizable as a translation philosophy, as the potential for its misuse is unmistakable. Moreover, is he *describing* or *prescribing*, and for whom? Paz, regardless, has added immeasurably to translation theory in both his

103 Roberto Sánchez-Benítez, "Octavio Paz: traducción y relativismo cultural." *Retos e incertidumbres: sobre la traducción de literatura en lenguas ibéricas*. Marta Katarzyna Kacprzak and Gerardo Beltrán Cejudo, eds. (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2022) 32.

104 Hermans, 112-113.

105 Nick Caistor, *Octavio Paz* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007) 83. There is much to mine still in Heraclitus' much-remarked image of the bow and the lyre; Paz unmistakably found in it, though, a harmony or reconciliation, and a paradoxical becoming of the self through change, or of continuity through change, an image of roots and self-transcendence (cf. n31, "continuity of our past by transforming"). The poem endures through translation-induced change.

theory and his translations themselves, exemplars of multiplicity, improvisation, spontaneity, and the recession of the source in favor of the new work (n28). He is shown to be a translator of subtle shifts that produce large effects. His awareness and practice of the chain of textuality in translation is at play in his work; his “arrangement” of texts in a musical sense asserts an active, exegetic role for the reader-translator, urging it beyond the passive vessel; his employment of his own idiolect foregrounds features personally resonant to him, such as the thematics of presence; his breaking down of the hierarchy of prior and subsequent text is consonant with his notion that all is translation; and the choice of writers that embraced unfamiliar authors and poetic forms in an inclusive othering are but some of the contributions he has made.

Octavio Paz’s example, considered in but one language combination, puts in evidence hermeneutically dazzling, if sometimes suspect, readings. Paz’s translations are never slavish verbal exercises but both critical and artistic engagements with an Other. Our hesitation when reading them stereotypically with the source, as we have seen, sometimes centers on whether Paz *truly* understood the English, not in its sweep but in its particulars, and weighed all the implications of certain choices. At times the depth of a poem’s intratextual networks in particular are left unsounded; elsewhere, Paz, contrary to his own precepts, will speak the silence, fulfilling or “presencing” a possibility. Elsewhere still, details grow, recede, shift, redirect or rebalance the whole. In short, Paz’s minor misreadings (in the everyday sense) are overshadowed, in this corpus, by the literary-critical notion of misreading, which is not a sign of misprision toward a parent poem but a strategy of engagement, and also of defense and creative reading. Analogy, transmutation, and resurrection, not coincidentally, take form in two kinds of semantic relationship of ways of rendering

near, or to use the Pazian term, *present*: that of *similarity*, and that of *contiguity*.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, Paz's theorization is one of rupture:

Para nosotros la traducción es transmutación, metáfora: una forma de cambio y de ruptura, por tanto, una manera de asegurar la continuidad de nuestro pasado y transformarlo en diálogo con otras civilizaciones, continuidad y diálogo ilusorios: traducción, transmutación, solipsismo.¹⁰⁷

He says of the poem, and no less is true of the translation: “El poema es un modelo de supervivencia fundada en la fraternidad—atracción y repulsión—de los elementos, las formas y las criaturas del mundo.”¹⁰⁸ The “cambio y ruptura” are integral to this perpetuation, this fellowship. Exchange characterizes this dynamic, as for Paz, a poem that is a *joint creation* or that belongs to none, but language loses the fixed identity that authorial possession imposes, and the roots and the burden of loyalty and mimesis. As with the catalog of many strong poet-translators through the ages, these poems reveal encounters, intersections, and the mutually illuminating trace of these readings, even when the readings are oblique or refractive. Paz's translations from English—part of his poetic legacy—are recreative in their rhizomatic plurality. He writes memorably, striking a Heideggerian note:

Poetry is the memory of peoples and one of its functions, perhaps the primary one, is precisely the transfiguration of the past into living presence. Poetry exorcises the past; in this way it makes the present habitable. All times, from the mythical time as long as a millennium to the sparkle of the instant, touched by poetry, become present. [...] The present of poetry is a transfiguration: time incarnates in a presence. The poem is the house of presence. Mexico, April 12, 1990a.¹⁰⁹

106 Cf. Andrew [Chesterman](#), “On Similarity,” *Target* 8,1 (1996): 159-164.

107 Octavio Paz, *El signo y el garabato* (México D. F., Mortiz, 1975) 135-136.

108 Octavio Paz, “La otra voz—poesía de fin de siglo,” *Vuelta* 14, 168 (1990b): 13-17. https://letraslibres.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Vuelta-Vol14_168_02OtVzOPz.pdf.

109 Octavio Paz, “Prólogo,” *La casa de la presencia. Obras completas*, vol. I (Barcelona, Círculo de Lectores, 1991) 16 i 27. <https://www.catedraferratermora.cat/activitats/panikkar/studium/en/aa/>.

Translation, then, is part of the aesthetics of transfiguration of the prior text that is, or is an envoy of, the past. In Paz's case, fully understanding translations *as presence*—or the play of presence—may be part of our remaining work.

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