

## **Beyond the boundaries: - Transcreation of Nerudian World Through Translation**

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**Abstract:** - From the beginning the act of translation holds an important place in the literary encounters of different languages and cultures. It is the act of translation that brought the literary canons of the past masters to the later vicinity throughout ages. Thus the translation transcends the boundary of a culture, nation acts as the agent for cross cultural assimilation and literary hybridity. In the present time translation does not remain a mere word to word presentation of a literary work to other language. Rather translation opens up the opportunity for transcreation. When a literary product gets translated to another language with a different cultural background and heritage, the process of translation serves double purpose- while at one hand it helps the literary work to attain wide acknowledgement and broader readership and on the other hand, the original acts becomes something new, something different in the hand of the translator. Hence translation is not a mere literary reproduction; it is also a process of cultural amalgamation. Here, in this paper of mine I want to highlight how the poetry of Pablo Neruda attains a different height when it is translated. Neruda's Latin American background, his wide travel and its experiences dominated his poetry through Love, politics, nation which is some of the most recurring themes of Neruda's poetry. This paper attempts to show how translation of the original ones enriches the flavours of Neruda's poems and transcends the Latin American Sensibility to attain universal appeal.]

**Keywords-** Pablo Neruda's Poetry, Cultural Hybridity, Post-colonialism, Translation and Transcreation, Latin American Sensibility

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Literary translation, at least in the English-speaking world, faces a difficulty that texts originally written in English do not; resistance by the public to reading literature in translation. There is no need to belabor this point, so evident to publishers in England, the United States, and the other Anglo-Saxon nations. As Jorge Iglecias has said that to know we are reading a translation implies a loss of innocence. This imposes a significant burden on the translator implies to overcome, and to do so means having a firm grasp on principles and techniques. One of the most difficult concepts about literary translation to convey to those who have never seriously attempted it- including practitioners in areas such as technical and commercial translation- is that how one says something can be as important, sometimes more important, than what one says. In literary translation, however, the order of the cars- which is to say the style- can make the difference between a lively, highly readable translation and a stilled, rigid, and artificial rendering that strips the original of its artistic and aesthetic essence, even its very soul. Literary translation is pleasurable and can be intellectually and emotionally rewarding, but there is no denying that it can also be hard work. In our own language we may skip over words, phrases, even entire paragraphs that we don't understand; the translator enjoys no such luxury. In the West, the Bible is the most universal example of the phenomenon of the slow decay of semantic integrity. Many of its agrarian from a simpler time convey little to the inhabitants of a complex, modern, urban society. Or take the well-known citation "suffer little children ... to come unto me"(Luke 18:16); lamentably, misunderstanding the word 'suffer', which at the time of the King James Version meant 'allow', some have interpreted this as a call to inflict regular beatings on children so they may 'come to see'. We neither can nor should rewrite the English of Shakespeare or Donne. How fortunate, then, that we can translate the Spanish of the Cervantes, the French of Villon, the Latin American of Neruda. It matters little that all translations are fore-ordained to obsolescence. Their value to the future lies in their expression of how we spoke and thought and wrote in our own time.

In recent years, translation studies have witnessed enormous expansion in scope. Spurred by the ground-breaking work of scholars in the early 90s, they have become a truly interdisciplinary field. This trend has been bolstered by a number of factors, above all by increasing attention to the processes of socio-cultural interaction that are made possible and also enhanced by translation.

Within the hectic cultural traffic generated by globalizing trends and globalized communication, translation has also come to encompass a host of new practices, largely determined by the increasing importance of the media and, more specifically, of audiovisual communication in our daily lives. If the quick and global dissemination of audiovisual texts allows for an unprecedented, worldwide sharing of images and sounds, it also urges people to come to grips with cultural difference and, at the same time, redefine their own identity through new or repeated contacts with once remote communities. On the whole, it seems plausible to say that cultural interaction, taking place in real life or represented through the media, constantly evokes translation as a means of bridging linguistic, technological and socio-cultural gaps, drawing people closer while also highlighting their differences and, on the whole, fostering processes of social and cultural exchange.

It is almost a cliché for the relationship between the author, translator, and reader to be represented graphically by an isosceles triangle. The concept is that ideally the translator maintains equal proximity to the author and to the reader. Fine in theory but the reality of the in-the-trenches translating usually results in a lopsided triangle at best. Moreover, real-world translating means there is an irregular swing, sometimes in a single paragraph, between favoring the author and favoring the reader. Perhaps a more accurate depiction of the author-translator-reader relationship might be a simpler linear one. This has the advantage of placing the translator more realistically in an intermediate position between the author and the reader, for without the intervention of the translator the author would be unable to reach the audience. At the risk of straining the analogy, we could think of the lines joining the three as elastic, at times bringing the translator closer to the author, at times narrowing the distance between translator and the reader.

For the literature of one country to be received and appreciated by another it needs to “pass through” several professional readers, through whom non-professional readers would perceive that literature and that culture. Ideological issues are present throughout the whole decision-making process, from the moment an author or a particular text is selected to be translated, to the point the target text appears in bookstores. Wolf claims:

“Translation can be interpreted as a strategy to consolidate the cultural Other, a process which implies not only the fixation of prevailing ideologies and of cultural filters but also the blocking of any autonomous dynamics of cultural representation. This phenomenon can be observed, for instance, at different levels of the production of translations, from the selection of texts to be translated to the modes of distribution, all marked by power relations, including the translation strategies adopted.”(Wolf,2002:188)

When the decision is made not to translate a text in its entirety, the selection of sections of a text to be translated may create certain images in the target culture, images of the source text itself, of its author and of the source culture, mediated by all of the professional readers involved. These professional readers are many, and most of the time the decisions for these selections are beyond the translator’s scope. Thus, apart from the translators, we have publishers, editors, anthologists, foreign authors and their agents, and institutions such as cultural agencies which may give subsidies for translation projects. For example, in 1965 the Rockefeller Foundation together with certain university presses in the USA started a project for funding the translation of books from Latin America<sup>2</sup> as Lefebvre points out:

“In the past, as in the present, rewriters created images of a writer, a work, a period, a genre, sometimes even a whole literature.... Yet the creation of these images and the impact they made has not often been studied in the past, and is still not an object of detailed study. This is the more-strange since the power wielded by these images, and therefore their makers, is enormous.”<sup>1</sup>

The poetry of Pablo Neruda (1904-1973), pen name of Chilean writer and politician Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto, has been appearing in English translation since the mid-thirties. By now, to be sure, he is one of the most widely translated of all modern poets. Neruda was accomplished in a variety of styles ranging from erotically charged love poems like his collection *Twenty Poems of Love and a Song of Despair*, surrealist poems, historical epics, and overtly political manifestos. In 1971, Neruda won the Nobel Prize for Literature, a controversial award because of his political activism. Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez once called him "the greatest poet of the 20th century in any language.

The early translators of Neruda, working in the thirties and forties, were more interested in the original Spanish than in their English versions of it. These scholars, usually professors of Romance languages, were primarily interested in understanding what Neruda had said, and so they tended to employ a literalist approach. It is evident to inject Neruda with his own peculiarities but the translators felt that they would only obscure Neruda’s personality as they burdened the English with clumsy Latinate words even false cognates, and followed the Spanish word order slavishly. For example, Craig, an early translator of Neruda’s poems in English, in his translation of “Maestranzas de Noche”(Machine Shops at Night), which is originally an appeal of social protest, translates from-

“Fierro negro que duerme, fierro negro que gime  
por cada poro un grito de desconsolación.”<sup>2</sup>

to –

“Black iron sleeping, iron black that groans

through every pore with moans disconsolate.”<sup>3</sup>

- results his failures of his intention to capture Neruda’s poetic spirit towards metaphrase but did not effectively construct the proper body of words in which the spirit could reside.

This type of translation was not literal renderings. They were the efforts of poet-translators, and so were acts of interpretation, sometimes word for word, sometimes sense for sense, with the aim of being accurate translations which would read like poetry written in English and would at the same time be faithful to what Neruda had said in Spanish. Grucci’s version of "Walking Around," however, faltered at certain important passages. For instance, he apparently misread "sólo" (only) as "solo" (alone) and thus distorted Neruda’s line, "Sólo quiero un descanso de piedras o de lana." Both Grucci and Hays took creative liberties to translate Neruda into real speech, as opposed to "translatorese." Their methods of translation recognized the fundamental differences between Spanish, an Italic language, and English, a Germanic language. Grucci and Hays were both aware of the limitations of using false cognates. As translators they understood that English requires a harder, more urgent kind of particularity. For instance, in the fourth line of "Walking Around," they confronted the image of "un agua de origen y ceniza" or, literally, "a water of origin and ash." Grucci re-created it as "spring water and ashes," and Hays re-created it as "a water of beginnings.

To reproduce the force of the Spanish word that literally means "tired of" in its original context, Bly, produced poetic paraphrases of Neruda’s "Walking Around," chose to use the more charged idiomatic expression "sick of," with its colloquial sense of revulsion and weariness. To express the sense of the sixth line, Merwin paraphrased it. He chose to amplify the sense of the words by translating "sólo" (only) as "nothing but" and by adding the word "either" to emphasize the contrast between the repose of stones and that of wool. Both Merwin and Bly paid close attention to the associations surrounding the English words they used in their translations, and both tended to prefer English words derived from Anglo-Saxon, in an effort to translate the immediacy of Neruda’s language.

Commenting on Neruda’s language and its implications presents some concerns that should be noted. First, as Western readers, we are typically consuming his poetry in translation. Without reading the work in its original form, it is impossible to know with certainty what the original intention and wording might have been. Even the most dedicated and careful translators are still using their own knowledge and perspective to reimagining the work. Additionally, we must acknowledge cultural differences. Neruda’s work was written in a different culture and historical time; in addition to the potential issues in translation, we cannot rightfully interpret original meaning or cultural implications while considering contemporary Western effects. Yet in discussing those Western effects, we can consider that poetry’s language is its power. This is important today because of the pervasiveness of Pablo Neruda. Themes such as purity, possession, power, and the feminine ideal permeate Neruda’s work, creating potentially damaging effects given our cultural dynamics. Pablo Neruda’s work is situated historically within the Latin American ‘Modernista’ literary movement, a movement inspired by Symbolism and Surrealism (Stavans, *Poetry* xxxiv). Neruda adopted and sought to alter the ode, intending to create poetry that was “down-to-earth” and in contrast to elevated ancient style. *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda* editor Ilan Stavans describes Neruda as “fractured,” a man with contrasting public and private personas, a man who has been accused of engaging in “selective” activism (*Poetry* xxxiv-xxxv).

Neruda’s politics are a large part of any discussion of his history and his work, showing another idea of his fractured persona—the political activist and the Latin lover. Stavans explains:

“Neruda’s ideological odyssey took him from apathy to Communism, turning him into the spokesman for the enslaved”.

Neruda, Paul Julian Smith says, “is the poet of politics and of nature”. His heightened sense of materiality and societal justice serve his poetry. He is also unmistakable in his poetry as a person, rather than simply a speaker. Smith explains views of Neruda’s voice: “[his] voice says ‘I’, this ‘I’ is also ‘you’, and when he celebrates himself...the poet is celebrating all men. Neruda is not merely a poet in these poems, but a ‘person’, at once individual and universal”(The Body,143).

Perhaps this universalized voice helps to explain his enduring appeal as a love poet to so many.

Neruda himself felt that his poetry suffered in English translation due to the fundamental differences between Spanish and English. Neruda knew English well enough to translate poets such as Blake and Whitman, and well enough to understand that the language did not "correspond to Spanish—neither in vocalization, nor in the placement, nor the color, nor the weight of the words." He therefore believed:

“This means that the equilibrium of a Spanish poem, which may be written with verbal lavishness or economy, but has its own order and way of placing each word, can find no equivalent in . . . English. It’s not a question of interpretive equivalents, no; the sense may be correct, indeed the accuracy of the translation itself, of the meaning, may be what destroys the poem. That’s why I think Italian comes closest, because by keeping the values of the words, the sound helps reflect the sense. ... It seems to me that the English language, so different from Spanish and so much more direct, often expresses the meaning of my poetry but does not convey its atmosphere.”<sup>4</sup>

And, shortly after Neruda's death, in a tribute to him in *The Nation*, the author noted:

“Neruda's poetry is in general ill-served by its English translations—through no fault of the scholars who have done the translating, some of them accomplished poets in their own right. The fault lies with the demotic speech that industrial society has fostered, and with the variant employed by literary men writing in English in our day. Poetry is above all the art of evoking powerful emotions through verbal music, and Neruda's exuberant Spanish has its counterpart in the English poetry of the Renaissance rather than in the sober dialect of our contemporary major poets—or the willful stridencies of some of our lesser writers. Neruda in translation tends to sound inflated and bombastic. Nothing could be less true of the original.”<sup>5</sup>

While of course failing to admit that Neruda had in fact produced some truly bad, inflated and bombastic poetry in Spanish, this commentary defined one of the more significant problems in translating his work.

In my last analysis, the controversy over translation poetics came down to what Belitt considered "the forfeits of expressive translation against the privations of anonymous translation: 'translation as personal mode,' against 'the translator as nobody in particular.'" Both were essentially "ploys, impersonations, heuristic deceptions."<sup>6</sup> The very nature of translation, filled with both possibility and impossibility, in addition to the different motives of translators, fostered a wide range of voices for Neruda. Consequently, no single mode could—or ever can—measure up to the standards of all interested parties. For this reason Neruda in English is bound to generate an irresolvable transcreations but we must contend with the real complexities of the art.

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>penny Johnson, *Text Selection and the Image of the Other: Translations of Pablo Neruda's Canto general*.45

<sup>2</sup>Pablo Neruda, 'Maestranzas de noche', *The Modernist Trend in Spanish-American Poetry*, p. 226.

<sup>3</sup>Neruda, "Arsenal by Night," tr. G. Dundas Craig, *The Modernist Trend in Spanish-American Poetry*, p. 227.

<sup>4</sup>*Neruda in Rita Guibert's Seven Voices*, tr. Frances Partridge (New York: Knopf, 1973), pp. 35-36.

<sup>5</sup>"Pablo Neruda, *The Nation*, 217, No. 12 (October 15, 1973), pp. 357-358.

<sup>6</sup>Belitt, p. 30.

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