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The 'Duende' in England:
Lorca's *Blood Wedding* in Translationⁱ

Karen Bennett

Knives

Love is a knife in the daylight.
I shift, shiver, stabbed by an old thought
Of her shining like a blade
At my side.

Loneliness is a knife. As I sit
And cut my heart into interesting little pieces
I see you walking down a street,
A stranger's face defining strangers' faces.ⁱⁱ

Brendan Kennelly, one of the translators of Lorca's 1933 play *Bodas de Sangre* (*Blood Wedding*), evidently understood the problem of knives. As he so neatly expresses in this poem, a knife is double-edged: it may be the shining instrument of ritual sacrifice and blood feud, symbol of the phallic love and possession that bonds communities and defines territorial boundaries, or it may equally be the scalpel of the scientist, the mystery-dispelling tool of dissection and analysis. As an Irishman schooled in the English tradition, and both poet and academic, Kennelly has a foot in each camp, and as such, would seem to be better placed than most to translate a play like *Blood Wedding*. For indeed, transporting the passionate instinctual world of rural Andalusia to the cold, rational terrain of modern England is clearly a task fraught with difficulties: the 'conceptual grid' is so different that we might expect most of the symbolic depth and intensity of the play to be lost when it is translated.ⁱⁱⁱ

The early English-language productions of the play certainly indicate some of the difficulties.^{iv} The first of them, in New York at the Neighbourhood Playhouse in 1935 under the title *Bitter Oleander*, was not a success. Lorca himself made an important contribution,

arranging some of the music and discussing aspects of the script with the translator, José Weissberger; but the audience was never really caught by the play's dramatic texture. It found many parts funny, and roared with laughter at the strangeness of some of the lines, particularly the Mother's passionate way of addressing her beloved son as 'my carnation'. A later New York production of 1980, played in realistic mode, seemed to disconcert the actors. The *New York Times* critic described it as 'mannered and curiously lacking in passion'; 'Consequently, there is much nervous staring into space where there should be anger, odd twitches of sentimentality where there should be dignity. It is almost as if the actors were embarrassed by the grand, almost primordial emotions of García Lorca's poetry' (Michiko Kakutani, *cit.* Edwards, p.xli.)

As for British productions, until 1986 they were notable by their absence. This, Gwynne Edwards tells us (p. xliii), was probably due to 'the unfamiliarity of British directors with Lorca's work, and ... the frequent clumsiness of the O'Connell/Graham-Luján translation, the "authorised" translation at that time'. When the fifty-year copyright expired in 1986, new translations appeared, and the play began to be produced more frequently. But it is notable to what lengths directors went to avoid a harsh confrontation with English culture: the Manchester production of 1987 had a multi-racial cast; a 1988 production used Scottish accents; the following year saw a production by the Asian Co-operative Theatre in London using not only an Asian cast but also an Asian setting; and in 1991, the National Theatre version was set in Cuba, supplying a distinctly Afro-Caribbean character. Edwards concludes her overview of these productions by observing that '*Blood Wedding* is indeed hard to get right on a British stage' (p. xlvi), and Lorca's biographer Ian Gibson claims this is due to the 'virtual impossibility of rendering Lorca's Andalusian idiom into viable English'.^v

But if Lorca is indeed so impossible to translate, how are we to account for the massive increase in anglophone interest in his works, and this play in particular, in the

closing years of the millenium? In December 1999 a bookshop I use was offering no less than six English translations of *Blood Wedding*, all but one of which had been executed in the previous five years. Does the tale of a blood feud in Andalusia really have something to say to a British audience, or is Lorca's work being appropriated to serve some other purpose on the domestic agenda? These are the questions that I will consider here in my examination of four of the current translations of the play.

In addition to the 'conceptual grid', André Lefevere also identifies in the same passage a 'textual grid' that preconditions a reader's response to a literary work. This indicates the text's relationship to other works in the literary system, and has much in common with the notion of genre. It may be marked explicitly (as when an author labels his text 'fable' or 'novella' or 'epic') or implicitly (by phrases such as 'Once upon a time' or 'Dear Diary', which immediately signal the receptive posture that readers are supposed to adopt). Like the conceptual grid, it is the result of the socialization process, and may not always be easily transferable to a foreign environment. This is particularly true in the case of *Blood Wedding*. Lorca labelled the play 'Tragedia en tres actos y siete cuadros', which may be literally translated as 'A tragedy in three acts and seven scenes'. Yet this simple, apparently accurate rendering belies a universe of difference in the interpretation of the term *tragedia*. Lorca wrote to Margarita Xirgu on the day before the first performance of the play in Barcelona:

This is a real premiere. Now you will see the work for the first time. Now it will be shown in its entirety. Imagine, they have put on the posters the real name the work was given, 'tragedia'. Theatre companies call them 'dramas'. They don't dare to put 'tragedia'. Fortunately, I have come across an intelligent actress like Margarita Xirgu, who calls works by the names they ought to be called by.^{vi}

As this quotation illustrates, there was resistance even in Spain to staging the play as a fully-fledged *tragedia* in the intended sense of the word. But at least the label, when applied, would have been understood, if only in opposition to the more popular category ‘drama’. English, unfortunately, does not make this distinction. The original sense of ‘tragedy’ has simply been overlaid with more modern meanings, and consequently its full intensity is not accessible to a modern audience without extensive glossing. This has conditioned Anglo-Saxon critical approaches to the work. Instead of *Blood Wedding* being seen as a classical play, which is how it tends now to be viewed in Spain,^{vii} it is generally considered by British and American critics to be a Modernist, Symbolist, or Expressionist work.^{viii} The cumulative effect is to reduce the major social dimension of the play to the private domain of the individual psyche, and thus to diminish its power substantially.

The essential problem with tragedy as a medium has been extensively explored in George Steiner’s well-known monograph *The Death of Tragedy*. Steiner traces the development of the tragic vision from its Greek beginnings to its ultimate submergence in the seventeenth century upon the advent of Cartesian rationalism and the associated materialist, anthropocentric view of the world. The form is, he argues, incompatible with the modern mindset:

Any realistic notion of tragic drama must start from the fact of catastrophe. Tragedies end badly. The tragic personage is broken by forces which can neither be fully understood nor overcome by rational prudence. This again is crucial. Where the causes of disaster are temporal, where the conflict can be resolved through technical or social means, we may have serious drama, but not tragedy. More pliant divorce laws could not alter the fate of Agamemnon, social psychiatry is no answer to

Oedipus. But saner economic relations or better plumbing *can* resolve some of the grave crises in the dramas of Ibsen. The distinction should be borne sharply in mind. Tragedy is irreparable ...

Tragic drama tells us that the spheres of reason, order and justice are terribly limited and that no progress in our science or technical resources will enlarge their relevance. Outside and inside man is *l'autre*, the 'otherness' of the world. Call it what you will: a hidden or malevolent God, blind fate, the solicitations of hell, or the brute fury of our animal blood. It waits for us in ambush at the crossroads. It mocks us and destroys us. In certain rare instances, it leads us after destruction to some incomprehensible repose.^{ix}

Not only was Lorca an avid reader of the Greek classics, especially tragedy,^x he also sensed the tragic pulse alive and strong in Andalusia in the *duende*, a concept central to his poetics. Ian Gibson has defined this as 'a form of Dionysian inspiration always related to anguish, mystery and death'.^{xi} Lorca himself describes it thus:

This 'mysterious power which everyone senses and no philosopher explains' is, in sum, the spirit of the earth, the same duende that scorched the heart of Nietzsche, who searched in vain for its external forms on the Rialto Bridge and in the music of Bizet, without knowing that the duende he was pursuing had leaped straight from the Greek mysteries to the dancers of Cádiz or the beheaded, Dionysian scream of Silverio's *siguiriya*.^{xii}

Making this connection between the primitive societies of ancient Greece and rural Andalusia was intuitive on Lorca's part, but the validity of the association has since been confirmed by

anthropological work. Josepchs and Caballero, referring to a study undertaken by the anthropologist Julian A. Pitt-Rivers, claim that the Andalusian *pueblo* has more in common with the Greek *polis* than with the Roman *urbs* that led to modern urban structures:

As a consequence of the radical conservatism of the Andalusian countryside and numerous socio-historical factors – including the Moorish invasions, the marginalisation of the Andalusian countryside by the Castillian invaders, and the stagnation of the whole country after the collapse of the Spanish empire – the old Mediterranean lifestyle of the south of Spain, very similar to that which gave rise to Greek tragedy, was ‘frozen’ while the western world underwent its great industrial, scientific, political and religious revolutions.^{xiii}

Not only is such a society, dependent on the land and bound by powerful ties of blood, long gone in most of the Western world; even our connections with tragic art of previous eras are likely to have been disrupted by more modern habits of thought. Lawrence Venuti, quoting the classical scholar John Jones, suggests that even our inherited interpretation of Aristotle’s notion of tragedy is a false one:

‘The *Poetics* which we have appropriated to ourselves derives jointly from modern classical scholarship, and from Romanticism’. Guided by a Romantic concept of individualism, in which human agency is seen as self-determining, modern scholars have given a psychological cast to Aristotle’s concept of tragedy, shifting the emphasis from the action to the hero and the audience’s emotional response. This individualistic interpretation, Jones felt, obscures the fact that ‘the centre of gravity of Aristotle’s terms is situational and not personal,’ that ancient Greek culture conceived

of human subjectivity as socially determinate, ‘realised in action and recognised – intelligibly differentiated – through its truth to type’ and ‘status’.

Venuti goes on to discuss the concept of *hamartia*, and describes how a series of lexical and syntactical choices in the standard translations shift the focus of attention:

Aristotle’s demand that the change of fortune shall be bought about by the *hamartia* of ‘the intermediate kind of personage’ does not entitle us to style that personage the Tragic Hero; for to call him the hero can only mean that we put him at the centre of our ideal play – as commentator after commentator has alleged that Aristotle does, thrusting the hero on his treatise.^{xiv}

It is wrong to assume that the tragedy of *Blood Wedding* is provoked single-handedly by a ‘fatal flaw’ in Leonardo or in any other of the characters. In fact, all the natural world participates in the action, and the characters are swept along by a chthonic force (the *duende*) that is completely out of their control, along the lines Steiner suggests:

The tragic theatre ... is founded on the assumption that there are in nature and in the psyche occult, uncontrollable forces able to madden or destroy the mind ... Tragedy can occur only where reality has not been harnessed by reason and social consciousness.^{xv}

To examine to what extent this tragic vision is transferable into English is my main motive in looking at the English translations of *Blood Wedding*. I shall analyse how the various translators have dealt with those elements of the play that seem to me to concentrate

most heavily the tragic vision, namely the notions of ‘fate’ (*sino*) and ‘guilt’ (*culpa*), and the symbolic representations of libido and wrath. The four translations I shall deal with are as follows:

Gwynne Edwards, *Blood Wedding* (1987), a student edition with extensive notes and commentary.

Brendan Kennelly, *Blood Wedding* (1996), a flamboyantly packaged edition, containing only the text, a poetically-phrased translator’s note, and cast-list of the associated performance.

Ted Hughes, *Blood Wedding* (1996), a slimline edition containing only the text, a brief introduction to Lorca, and cast list of associated performance.

John Edmunds (1997), a World’s Classics edition titled *Four Major Plays*, which includes not only this play but three others by Lorca, an extensive critical introduction, and a translator’s note.^{xvi}

* * *

One of the most difficult aspects of the play to capture in translation is the notion of Fate. Although the English lexicon still contains plenty of terms implying fatalism (‘destiny’, ‘doom’, ‘inexorability’, ‘inevitability’, etc.), in modern usage they have either been trivialized (as in the idea of ‘tempting fate’, which is no more ‘felt’ than any of the other popular superstitions such as walking under ladders or avoiding Friday the Thirteenth), or have taken on a melodramatic tinge as a result of overuse in sensationalist films and best-sellers. Either way, it is difficult to capture the true sense of foreboding contained in the play.

There are several references in the play to a kind of malevolent presence hanging over the heads of the characters. In I.i, when the Bride throws her garland to the ground, the maid cries: ‘Niña! Qué castigo pides tirando al suelo la corona?’ In context, this is not just an expression of a tired superstition: there is true fear in the maid’s voice. She has sensed the dark forces at work, and trembles at the consequences. But most of the translators trivialize this by recourse to cliché. Gwynne Edwards’s servant scolds the bride maternally for her petulant behaviour: ‘Child! Don’t tempt fate by throwing the flowers on the floor!’ In John Edmunds’s version she adopts the shocked tones of the upholder of social mores, appealing to the Bride’s good sense in a carefully formulated sentence: ‘Really! Don’t you know you’re asking for bad luck, throwing your wreath on the floor like that?’ Hughes manages to achieve more immediacy of emotion and a more appropriate register by using shorter, incomplete sentences and an inversion: ‘Child! Flinging your wedding wreath away! Are you trying to tempt Fate?’ (In this version, the clichéd nature of the collocation ‘tempt fate’ is partially overcome by the use of the capital letter which personifies it, a device which will not, however, be transmitted in performance.) But Kennelly’s rendering has an Irish lilt: ‘Child, you are calling down God’s wrath on you by flinging these orange-blossoms on the floor!’ His translation makes use of Irish dialect features throughout, and the effect is to create a vibrant living dialogue. As an Irishman, Kennelly has at his disposal a community of English speakers whose way of life is closer to the *pueblo* of Andalusia than anything in mainland Britain, and he makes ample use of this throughout the play. In invoking ‘God’s wrath’, the servant was obviously as genuinely concerned as Lorca’s ‘criada’, and this phrase is more alive than any of the other translations. However, the intrusion of ‘God’ adds a Catholic dimension to the play which is, as we will see, sustained throughout the translation.

Another important reference to a malevolent fate comes in III.i when the woodcutters are talking about the Bridegroom, who has rushed off in pursuit of the lovers, ashen-faced

and furious: 'Expresaba el sino de su casta.' The line deliberately echoes the opening scene of the play where the mother is bewailing the loss of her menfolk ('es buena casta', she says of her husband), and we feel that the Bridegroom is playing out a destiny that has hung over his family since the beginning of time. Most of the English translations reduce the force of this. Edwards is predictably very matter-of-fact, and her use of the word 'contained' strikes a strangely static and material note: 'He contained the fate of his family.' This is echoed by Hughes, although the sense of movement in 'carried' and the emphatic 'all' go some way towards expressing this destiny as a dynamic process of great magnitude: 'He carried the fate of all his family.' Edmunds tries to capture the sense of 'expresaba' ('In him showed the fate of all his family'), but the prosaic feel of the Anglo-Saxon verb 'show' does not complement the un-English inversion of the verb and subject, and the resulting mixture of registers gives the effect of a somewhat pretentious voice that does not really believe what it is saying. Kennelly is the only one who truly feels the words, and he has typically chosen a completely different, rhythmically contoured phrase to express this notion: 'All the dead of his family were gathered in his eyes.' He has once again omitted the word 'fate', presumably because he was aware that the word is no longer emotionally charged, and instead has opted for a strikingly original, visualizable metaphor that emphasizes the continuity of the blood bond, and the immense pressures on the one poor representative of the family to take single-handed revenge for the wrongs of the past.

The same banality that has unfortunately attached itself to the word 'fate' in English also applies to the language of cursing. In the absence of belief in the spiritual realm, the English have lost the linguistic capacity to curse. The subjunctive form of the verb has effectively disappeared, and imperatives such as 'Damn' have deteriorated through overuse into empty expletives. At the same time, the functionally explicit 'I curse you' is syntactically reminiscent of highly formal speech acts ('I hereby declare you man and wife'; 'I hereby

declare this ceremony open’) and therefore devoid of emotional impact. In I.i of the play, the Mother’s curse (‘La navaja, la navaja ... Maldita sean todas y el bribón que las inventó’) needs to be felt in all its ominous resonance. It is a real curse, uttered by someone in intimate contact with the chthonic powers that control this drama, and needs to be taken very seriously indeed.

Edwards as usual goes for the literal option and sacrifices all the portentousness of the original: ‘Damn all of them and the scoundrel who invented them.’ Edmunds’s version is similar, although the choices of ‘curse’ and ‘villain’ may increase the gravity a little: ‘Curse them all and the villain who invented them.’ Hughes tries to recover the intensity through repetition, but to my mind only succeeds in making the Mother sound hysterical: ‘Damn the knife, damn all knives, damn the devil who created knives.’ Kennelly, on the other hand, brings God into the picture again, together with a picturesque rendering of ‘bribón’ that is clearly taken from Irish dialect. He almost, but not quite, resurrects the dead subjunctive; we feel it there, elliptically, in the background, sitting perfectly naturally with the Irish cadences: ‘The knife, the knife ... The curse of God on all the knives and the devil’s knacker that invented them.’

Finally in this connection, how have our translators dealt with the irresistibility of the attraction Lorca conveys between the Bride and Leonardo? In II.i the Bride cries out in desperation:

No puedo oírte. No puedo oír tu voz. Es como si me bebiera una botella de anís y me durmiera en una colcha de rosas. Y me arrastra, y sé que me ahogo, pero oy detrás.

These very powerful, very beautiful lines convey the bewitchment that is lulling her and luring her to her doom as she struggles to break free. Edwards's tendency towards literalism has resulted in the faintly ludicrous lines:

I can't hear you. I can't hear your voice. It's as if I'd drunk a bottle of anise and fallen asleep on a bedspread of roses. And it drags me along, and I know that I'm drowning, but I still go on.

Edwards has failed to understand the force of the verb 'puedo'. Her choice of the modal 'can't' gives the impression that the Bride is trying hard to hear Leonardo's voice but for some reason is temporarily deaf (too drunk perhaps); and the preposition 'along' suggests a somewhat absurd image of her being pulled across the floor on the bedspread. The grand tragic heroine seems to have deteriorated into a drunken teenager at a party. Edmunds creates a similar image, only his Bride speaks with an upper-class accent:

I can't bear to listen to you. I can't bear to hear your voice. It's as if I'd drunk a whole bottle of anisette and fallen asleep on a quilt of roses. And it's tugging me forward; I know that I'm suffocating, but still I go on.

The vocabulary is of a much higher register ('quilt', 'anisette', 'tug forward', 'suffocating'), and the rendering of 'no puedo' by 'I can't bear to' is also a failure to perceive the irresistibility of the magnetism.

Hughes offers:

I daren't listen to you. I daren't hear your voice. It's as if I'd drunk a bottle of anise and fallen asleep on a great heap of lilies. It drags me, I know I'm drowning and I'm helpless.

This is better. The use of 'dare' includes the notion of danger, and the omission of any particle after the verb 'drag' releases him from the necessity of specifying in which direction the movement occurred. The substitution of 'colcha de rosas' by 'heap of lilies' is curious. Perhaps the realist in Hughes was perturbed by the image of the original, since the thorns would obviously prick and detract from the gentle seductive effect of the anise; or maybe it was the connection of lilies with water (an important symbol in the play) that attracted him.

Kennelly has, as usual, allowed himself the poetic licence to elaborate imaginatively on Lorca's words, and consequently arriving at a very felicitous rendering:

Your voice! I mustn't listen to your voice! I feel as if I were drunk and had fallen asleep all wrapped in a silken quilt of roses. I'm being dragged down, I'm drowning, I know I'm drowning, but I'm lost and trembling and I plunge on down and down.

The use of 'mustn't' is of course the sense of 'no puedo' that Lorca intended, and the repetition of 'down' very nicely expresses the sense of a vicious circle that sucks her to destruction. The addition of 'all wrapped' and 'silken' also contributes to the sense of irresistible but sinister enchantment. It is interesting to trace how this theme emerges elsewhere in Kennelly's translation. In I.iii, his use of 'hemp' to translate 'esparto' is, to my mind, a master stroke, for whilst the referential function is maintained (both are coarse grasses used in the making of mats), 'Indian hemp' is of course a drug, the 'doom' of the modern world.

The idea of Guilt also raises important problems for translation on the level of the 'conceptual grid'. It is a very resonant term in Christian cultures, and is received differently within the Catholic and Protestant traditions. Whereas in Spanish there is a whole word family based on the same Latin root ('culpa', 'culpabilidad', 'culpable', 'culpar', etc.), in English the various syntactical functions are spread across several different etymological roots. Indeed, there are at least three different social orders contributing to this lexical field: the primitive tribal culture of the Anglo-Saxons, the early Christianity of the Middle Ages, and the later Protestantism of post-Reformation England. From the Anglo-Saxon 'gylt' we get the noun 'guilt' and the adjective 'guilty', which, like all words of Anglo-Saxon origin, are closest to the emotional core of the English language and thus the most resonant. From Latin, there is 'culpable' and 'culpability', both of which are of a higher register, and thus tend to suggest not a private harrowing of the soul, but rather a socially determined, somewhat legalistic notion of transgression. The verb 'culpar' has to be expressed by a different word again, 'to blame', which has come into English from Latin via Old French ('blasmer') and is thus associated etymologically with the word 'blaspheme'. Also related is the word 'fault' (as in 'it's my fault'), which is also from Latin via Old French, and which, of all the words considered here, is the least emotionally powerful. This is probably owing to the fact that the primary meanings of the word imply insignificance: a small defect or blemish ('the article had a fault'), or a minor offence ('he committed a fault').

There are several references to Guilt in the play. Without exception, these are couched as questions (direct or indirect), revealing a desperate quest on the part of the characters to understand the source of the tragedy, or as negatives, denying individual guilt. The overall picture that emerges is of a decidedly non-Christian world order, where responsibility accrues to everyone and no one. The first reference is in I.i, when the Neighbour is trying to calm the

Mother's rage upon hearing the name 'Félix'. Although the Mother agrees that Leonardo is not *individually* responsible for anything, the fact of his being of Félix's blood means that he must necessarily be involved in the crimes:

Mujer, qué culpa tiene Leonardo de nada? Él tenía ocho años cuando las cuestiones.

Es verdad ... Pero oigo eso de Félix y el lo mismo ... Félix que llenárame de ceno la boca y tengo que escupir, tengo que escupir por no matar.

All the translators have used the verb 'blame' in the first line, which immediately posits the need for an agent, a person who does the blaming. This contrasts with the Spanish structure 'tiene culpa', which suggests that guilt somehow resides within the soul, independently of external relations.^{xvii} Edwards and Edmunds have overcome this problem by using a passive structure, which avoids the need for an agent, but does not get to the spiritual heart of *culpa* ('Woman, how can Leonardo be blamed for anything?'); while Hughes has overtly put the onus for the allocation of blame onto the Mother ('You can't blame Leonardo for those things'). Kennelly slides between the two forms, using first the passive-type 'Leonardo is not to blame', but then moving to the 'question' 'Will you blame an eight-year-old child?' (which of course is not really a question about the future, but an accusation).

The notion of poison as a metaphor for rage has been introduced by Edwards ('I have to spit so that it doesn't poison me') and Kennelly ('I must spit, spit, spit, or that filth and muck will poison all my body and my mind'), echoing the language of psychoanalysis and thus making the phrase more explicit to a highly socialized readership. Edmunds sticks closer to the original, but in saying 'I have to spit because I can't kill' he has unwittingly removed the Mother from her context, in which blood feuds are a fact of everyday life, and relocated her in modern 'civilized' society where the rules of conduct have been so profoundly

internalized that killing is no longer an option. Hughes is closest to the original: 'I have to spit – or I shall have to kill.'

The next reference to Guilt is in II.i, in the impassioned dialogue between Leonardo and the Bride. Leonardo says:

Después de mi casamiento ha pensado noche y día de quién era la culpa, y cada vez que pienso sale una culpa nueva que se come a la otra; pero siempre hay culpa!

Edwards here uses 'fault', which, as explained earlier, reduces the grand tragic notion of Guilt to the level of a minor misdemeanour:

From the day of my wedding I've thought night and day about whose fault it was, and every time I think I find another fault that eats the old one up, but it's always someone's fault!

The rendering of 'siempre hay culpa' as 'it's always someone's fault' has seriously distorted the meaning. The Spanish is impersonal, a kind of generalized guilt shared not only by all the personages in the drama but also the landscape, the moon, and indeed the whole natural world. Edwards has narrowed the field and reduced the power, in a sense 'civilizing' the emotion. Not only this, she has once again created the danger of a ludicrous visual image, owing to the various possible denotations of the word 'fault'. The 'fault that eats the old one up' may suggest a geological fault, a great crack in the ground, operating like the monster in children's stories ('eat up' and 'the old one' both sound rather infantile).

Edmunds is more successful here, with the higher-register verb ‘swallow’ creating more literary connotations and evoking a chain of involvement that stretches out from the individual: ‘

Ever since I got married, night and day I’ve asked myself who was to blame, and every time I think about it I find some new thing to blame that swallows up the one before; but blame there is, always!

He and Hughes have both resorted to the verb ‘blame’, which quite adequately denotes Leonardo’s desperate attempts to hold someone or something responsible. It is interesting that the translators have found themselves having to choose between making the object of the blame animate or inanimate. Hughes, like Edwards, has opted to limit the field to people, which in a sense domesticates the notion: ‘

Ever since my own wedding day I’ve been asking myself night and day who was to blame. And I’m always finding somebody new to blame. – Because somebody somewhere must be to blame.

Kennelly’s rendering is characteristically more imaginative, and although he too has used ‘fault’, he has overcome the limitations of this word by a metaphoric effusion that aptly captures the sense of a widening circle of implication:

From the first moment of my marriage I’ve spent nights and days thinking about whose fault it was. Every thought leads to a different thought, and every old fault gives birth to a new one. And when I think I’ve seen them all, yet another fault

springs up like a crisp black flower of evil to astonish and disturb my mind. I live under a cloud of madness – sleeping, waking, walking or on horseback.

The intrusion of the word ‘evil’ is interesting. Lorca never uses this word, and although there are one or two Christian references in the play (particularly in the final scene), the cosmology is comprehensively that of a pre-Christian, almost animistic order amorally accepting of the inevitability of destruction as part of the life cycle. Kennelly’s ‘black flower of evil’ implies moral decadence (echoing Baudelaire, perhaps) and explicitly introduces a Christian ethos into the world of the play.

The next reference to ‘culpa’ is in the poetic scene in the wood (III.i), where Leonardo and the Bride are trying to come to terms with the implications of what they have done. Leonardo denies his individual guilt:

Que yo no tengo la culpa,
que la culpa es de la tierra
e de ese olor que te sale
de los pechos y las trenzas.

Edwards continues to trivialize, making Leonardo sound like a little boy telling tales about a school-fellow:

Oh, I’m not the one at fault.
The fault belongs to the earth
And the scent that comes
From your breasts and your hair.

Hughes has made similar lexical choices, but his poetic attention to rhythm has endowed the lines with a new vigour:

But none of it's my fault.
 It's the fault of the earth
 And of that perfume
 That comes off your breasts and your hair.

Kennelly has again employed the strategy of compensating in other ways for the deficiency inherent in the language:

It's not my fault,
 Not the fault of my body,
 It's the fault of the earth itself
 And this sweetness that pours from your flesh,
 From your breasts and your hair.

His added line ('Not the fault of my body') makes us rethink the preceding cliché, and the addition of 'itself' after 'earth' recuperates the monumental dimension. The verb 'pours' also adds the notion of a glorious suffusion of perfume that would turn anybody's head. Finally, Edmunds's higher and slightly archaic register makes the passage more lyrical:

It's not I who am to blame;
 The blame lies in the earth

and in that fragrance stealing
from your breasts and from your hair.

He once again opts to translate 'culpa' by 'blame', in collocation with the verb 'lies' to suggest some primordial energy source deep in the heart of our world. That this energy is caught 'stealing' from her breasts and hair supplies the notion of something illicit or shameful, and it is tempting to suggest that Edmunds has here imposed a puritanical sexual reticence upon the foreign text.

Two of the more important tragic aspects of the play, the compulsion of the libido and the desire for revenge, are transmitted in an essentially symbolic way, and indeed, the marked symbolic dimension of this play has frequently caused *Blood Wedding* to be categorized as a work of Symbolism. It is also this aspect that most alienates the English reader, who has generally been brought up on a diet of literary realism and is unused to the kind of abstractions so beloved of the romance tradition. Act III, in particular, with its personified Moon, sinister Woodcutters, and strange poetic texture, is not easily approachable by the Anglo-Saxon reader. However, it is not my objective here to discuss all the extensive ramifications of Lorca's symbolism. I wish rather to concentrate on those symbols which throw light upon the tragic vision, and I focus here upon blood, knife, and horse, all of which are related to the tragic catalysts of libido and revenge.

To each of these symbols accrues a substantial set of meanings which are intimately interconnected in a way not immediately obvious to the analytical mind. Indeed, they are so basic and far-reaching that it is tempting to consider them as 'archetypes' emanating from the collective unconscious. Yet universality cannot be taken for granted. The *Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre* claims that Lorca's insistence that death be played by an irresistibly

attractive woman was ‘in startling contrast to convention’, apparently unaware that the noun *muerte* in Spanish has feminine gender and is thus in at least one respect naturally personified as a female form.^{xviii} Similarly, colour symbolism is far from being universally decodable, which may be why some of the translators have chosen to omit Lorca’s stage instructions. In this section, I aim to determine by looking at the respective translations how far the concepts these central tragic symbols stand for are transferable into the English language.

Blood, as the title suggests, is the symbol at the heart of this play, and a crucial concept in the tragic vision. The most important meanings of this symbol are accessible to an English audience and are encoded not only in ritual but also in the language.^{xix} They are: passion (as in ‘hot-blooded’); kinship (‘blood ties’, ‘blood is thicker than water’, ‘blue blood’, ‘half-blood’); and death (‘blood sports’, ‘bloodshed’, ‘bloodthirsty’). What may not be immediately obvious are the various interconnections between these concepts. While we are probably aware of all the collocations quoted above, we may not have paused to reflect that phrases such as ‘blood feud’ and ‘bad blood’ link the notion of family with that of death (i.e. revenge). In fact, as we consider these various collocations, a pattern of interconnected meanings begins to emerge, centred around a notion of blood as symbol of a primitive life-force that drives man on to reproduce himself and defend his own to the death. It seems that we are back with the *duende*! In fact, this unexpected parallel with Andalusian culture exists because the word ‘blood’ is of Anglo-Saxon origin, and thus had its origins in a similar tribal community. The English language of course shows the effects of many other influences (most notably Latinate words such as ‘sanguine’), but even today, Anglo-Saxon remains the emotional core, and it is to its repertoire that writers resort when they wish to appeal on a primary level. Clearly, then, all the references to ‘sangre’ in Lorca’s play may easily be translated into English by ‘blood’, and most of the rich web of connotations will remain intact. For this reason, on this point I will not consider the translations at any length.

The symbol 'knife' is very closely related to that of 'blood'. As an instrument of revenge it spills blood and leads to death; as a phallic symbol, it also spills blood and leads to life. In ritual, a knife is associated with sacrifice (as in the typically Andalusian bullfight), and with the death/rebirth involved in initiation. All these meanings are present in Lorca. To what extent a modern English reader will be aware of this symbolic underlay is, however, debatable. Knives do not feature much in modern society (except as cutlery), and most of the ancient rituals have long been abandoned, or survive only in a fossilized or commercial form. An alert reader might notice the proximity of 'knife' and 'bull' in the first act, and make the connection to the bullfight; but it is unlikely to have any emotive power other than to add a little local colour. In fact, the only aspect of the symbol to be perceived by most readers, given the fashion for psychoanalysis, is the sexual.^{xx}

Lorca's text uses not one but a wide range of different terms for the implement ('navaja', 'puñal', 'cuchillo', 'garfio', and 'hoz'), all of which describe different kinds of cutting instrument but none of which is a generic term. Indeed, all are banded together (with firearms too) in the Mother's curse at the beginning of the play, which suggests that they should be read as symbolically synonymous: 'La navaja, la navaja ... Maldita sean todas y el bribón que las inventó ... Y la escopetas y las pistolas y el cuchillo más pequeño, y hasta las azadas y los bieldos de la era ... Todo lo que puede cortar el cuerpo de um hombre.' All our translators have used the term 'knife' for 'navaja' (which they repeat later for 'cuchillo' too); it is the obvious choice, being the generic Anglo-Saxon term, and therefore the richest in connotation. Most of them have translated the ensuing catalogue of weapons as (respectively) '(shot)guns', 'pistols', 'the smallest/tiniest knife', 'mattocks', and 'pitchforks'. Kennelly, however, offers a more pointed interpretation: 'And the curse of God on guns, machine guns, rifles, pistols ... and knives, even the smallest knife ... and scythes and pitchforks.' The introduction of machine guns and rifles into rural Andalusia is curious. The effect, combined

with Kennelly's consistent use of Irish slang and figures of speech, is to give the impression that this blood feud is taking place in present-day Ulster. The translation of 'azada' as 'scythe' (it is literally 'hoe') may also be a kind of domestication, since in Anglo-Saxon culture Death is always personified as a hooded old man (the Grim Reaper) who carries such an implement. This felicitously complements the classical flavour of the blade that cuts the wool spun by the Fates, used in the final scene of the play.

A third symbolic element important to the tragic impulse of the play is the horse. It is generally associated with the character of Leonardo, and it evokes the libido and uncontrollable sexual urges. It first appears in the lullaby about the horse that won't drink the water, and then takes on concrete form when we learn that Leonardo has been riding his animal to death in order to catch a glimpse of the Bride in her remote dwelling. Later, Leonardo will not accompany his wife to the wedding in the cart, preferring to ride alone (a refusal to be domesticated); and, of course, the lovers escape on the horse. This symbol should be accessible to English readers, thanks chiefly to Freud's legacy; indeed it is frequently used in films and advertising. The language contains some references to it too, such as the cliché 'unbridled passion', which has clearly been taken from horse-taming. The word 'stallion' is particularly highly charged, with a symbolic function that perhaps takes precedence over the referential (it is rare to encounter a stallion in Britain today, given the tendency of modern society to castrate all male animals it wishes to use), and several of the translators have taken advantage of this.

The various translators have dealt variously with the lullaby about the horse that refuses to drink the water in I.i (a song which Lorca apparently invented around a popular Granada nursery rhyme):^{xxi} 'Nana, niño, nana / del caballo grande / que no quiso el agua.' Edmunds and Kennelly both use 'stallion', presumably to prefigure the sexual symbolism, and they resort to the formulae of English nursery rhymes for the opening line. Edmunds

gives ‘Hushaby, my baby / Oh the great proud stallion / that would not drink the water’, while Kennelly’s version runs ‘Rock on my breast, my sweet baby, / Dream of the big black stallion / At the water, at the water.’ Hughes’s version is terser and more rhythmic: ‘Hush, baby, hush. / Sing of the great horse / That wouldn’t drink the water.’ Edwards also uses ‘stallion’ in the opening lines of the song, but later reverts to the childish form ‘horsey’, supposedly to make the song sound more like an authentic nursery-rhyme: ‘Horsey’s hooves are red with blood, / Horsey’s mane is frozen’. This once again indicates her policy of subordinating the symbolic to the realistic, the intangible to the concrete. The various strands of connotative meaning inherent in the Spanish word ‘caballo’ have, then, been split between different lexical items in English, with ‘stallion’ bearing the more intense emotive charge. It is thus difficult for translators to capture the ‘innocent ominousness’ of the Spanish nursery rhyme without provoking an incongruous clash of registers.

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The four translations considered have dealt in quite different ways with this play. Gwynne Edwards’s version, as befits a student edition, is a functional translation, clearly directed at a young and unsophisticated audience focused on the here and now. The language is down-to-earth and colloquial, and, as might be expected from a didactic approach, there is a kind of belaboured accuracy and attention to detail, frequently achieved at the cost of imaginative or poetic fidelity. The great emotive potential in the Anglo-Saxon linguistic repertoire is scarcely considered, with preference given throughout to contemporary terms that her readership will most easily recognize. Key concepts like ‘fate’ and ‘guilt’ appear in deracinated and cliched modern collocations, and she fails to attempt any alternative means of transmitting Lorca’s grand cosmic vision. In short, Edwards has only translated the surface

of the text, either because she doubts the capacities of her readership to grasp anything more profound, or because she herself has been unable to escape the filter on her own perceptions resulting from the materialism and functionalism of twentieth-century Britain. John Edmunds's translation, on the other hand, is packaged as that of a canonical work, and makes use of a fairly elevated literary idiom. This comes off well in the more poetic sections (although it almost runs to bathos in his rather unrealistic attempts to reproduce the cadences of peasant speech), and enables us to hear behind his discourse the echoes of other canonical works. For example, his translation of the Moon's soliloquy in III.i has a decidedly Shakespearean feel about it (it is a little reminiscent of the 'Out, out, brief candle' speech in *Macbeth*), and so may provide an English audience with a useful point of contact with the tragic vision.^{xxii}

Ted Hughes's version of the play is the least 'marked' by any distinctive style or obvious interpretative filtering. Like Edwards, he sticks closely to the original in quantitative terms, and his style is terse and down-to-earth. But he is much more aware of the rhythmic possibilities of English, and frequently uses rhythm to compensate for the prosaic dullness which may sometimes result from low register lexis. His background, as translator of the classics, shamanistic poet, and protagonist in a very high-profile emotive drama of his own, allows us to imagine that his choices will have been made in cognizance of the tragic spirit of the original. Whether he has in fact managed to transmit this to a modern English audience is, however, debatable.

Brendan Kennelly's translation is the most adventurous of all. He clearly experiences the force and passion of the original on a primary level, thanks to the cultural similarities between rural Ireland and rural Andalusia. The Irish dialect has been a great resource for him, and he has used it throughout his translation to excellent effect (and not inappropriately, given that *Bodas de Sangre* was itself influenced by J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea*). It is a

variety of English which contains elements of Gaelic syntax (such as a tendency to invert verb and complement, as in ‘Healthy and well you’re looking’ for ‘Tu estás bien’, I.i), and is characterized by effusiveness and an extravagant use of wildly imaginative vocabulary and metaphor.^{xxiii} He has thus been able to capture in natural, living language some of the elements of the dialogue that are characteristically Andalusian. The fierce emotions associated with blood feud are intelligible to Irishmen (indeed the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland bear many characteristics of tribal warfare), and the notion of an all-powerful force that impels the universe and holds man’s little lives in sway is also not strange. However, the two cultures diverge in their perception of this force. While the Andalusian vision is predominantly animistic and chthonic, the Irish perception is Catholic, and the concept of Fate becomes personified as an omnipotent and primitive God-figure. In the Kennelly translation, as I have already shown, references to Fate are consistently Christianized, which implies a domestication, a rewriting of Lorca to accord with the Irish world.^{xxiv}

The fact that these four very different interpretations of *Blood Wedding* are all on sale simultaneously may suggest that a single canonical view of a foreign text is no longer presumed the norm, as other voices compete for recognition on the literary scene. But why should this text be so popular in the first place? What has changed in the conditions of reception since that first production in New York? I would suggest that a great deal has changed. The United States in 1937 was drunk on its own myths of modernity and progress, and was eager to effect a breach with the past. This implied not only a distancing from its European roots in the creation of a new common identity, but also an espousal of a mechanistic, rational vision of the universe that left little room for imagination, let alone *duende*. It is natural that audiences felt little sympathy for a tale of blood feuds and uncontrollable passions. In contrast, Britain at the turn of the millenium is a society that has become disillusioned with modernity. Technological progress has been shown to lead to

ecological disaster, consumerism to spiritual emptiness, individualism to social fragmentation, and excessive rationalism to emotional repression and psychic disorder. There has been a resurgence of interest in pre-Cartesian or oriental forms of thought, particularly as manifested in new forms of spirituality to answer needs that the established church has long been unable to respond to. Lorca's play thus has a place on the shelves alongside the magic realist novels, guides to Celtic mythology, and works on astrology that occupy so much space in the bookshop. But is it really Lorca we are reading, or some domestic representation of the Other against which our own culture seeks to define itself?

While it is undeniable that all translators proceed by seeking points of contact between the foreign text and the home culture, and that this inevitably results in distortion of the original experience, I would suggest that the motivation underlying all four of these translations is not so much the desire to appropriate and domesticate, as may have been the case in the colonial era, but a sincere desire to discover new modes of representation to replace those which are felt to be inadequate in the domestic culture. *Bodas de Sangre* has an emotional intensity that is extremely attractive to an over-sophisticated British public; it is exotic in its Otherness, yet not so strongly as to preclude a flicker of recognition. Something stirs in the depths of our collective memory, some shadowy recollection of a lost era before our communities broke up and instinctive responses were socialized out of us. It is the yearning for our more primitive self, for that state of connectedness with the universe, that has provoked such an interest in this work in recent years. The translators considered here seem to have approached the text in a spirit of quest; the very act of attempting to understand it and render it into English has urged them to chip away like archaeologists at their language, trying to find evidence of some common ancestry. They have varying success. John Edmunds, despite evidently sharing the same yearning, is too constrained by the weight of his inheritance to surrender himself entirely. Gwynne Edwards is too pragmatic; she takes

everything at face value and seems blind to the presence of the spirits lurking behind and within the words. Ted Hughes makes a valiant attempt to unyoke some of the rhythmic and semantic potential in the Anglo-Saxon roots of our language, and to a certain extent succeeds. In the meantime, Brendan Kennelly leaps about flamboyantly like a Dionysian reveller, secure in the knowledge that the ‘deep song’ of this text has a similar melody to a reel which has been piped for generations in the green hills of Ireland.

Perhaps all this frantic archaeological activity signals a move away from the surface concerns of the last 400 years. Perhaps the change of paradigm implicit in the shift to postmodernism may lead to a valuing of the points of similarity between cultures instead of an excessive preoccupation with their differences. If we keep on digging, we may start to feel the power of the *duende* ourselves, or even unearth a few sacrificial knives, still warm with blood, from the rubble of our own collective subconscious.

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NOTES

1. Brendan Kennelly, *A Time for Voices: Selected Poems 1960-1990* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1990), p. 95.
2. André Lefevere coins the term 'conceptual grid' to describe the network of cultural and conceptual interrelationships surrounding a text. See his 'Composing the Other' in *Post-Colonial Translation*, edited by Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (London, 1999) pp. 75-94.
3. For information regarding early productions I draw on the introduction to Gwynne Edwards's translation of the play (*Blood Wedding*, London, 1997), pp. xxxvi-xlvi (hereafter 'Edwards'). See also her article 'Bodas de Sangre in Performance', *Anales de la Literatura Española Contemporánea*, 22 (1997), 469-91.
4. Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca: A Life* (New York, 1989), p. 400.
5. Quoted in the introduction to *Bodas de Sangre*, edited by Allen Josephs and Juan

Caballero (Madrid, 1998; hereafter referred to as 'Josephs and Caballero'), p. 13 (my translation).

6. On this point see Josephs and Caballero, pp. 13-26, and the introduction to Edwards's translation, pp. xxxi-xxxvi.
7. Such interpretations are on offer, respectively, in Christopher Soufas, *Audience and Authority in the Modernist Theatre of Federico García Lorca* (Alabama, 1996); J. L. Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice*, 3 vols (Cambridge, 1983), II, 84-91; Paul Binding, *Lorca: The Gay Imagination* (London, 1985), p. 168.
8. George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (1961; reprint London, 1995), pp. 8-9.
9. See Josephs and Caballero, p. 18.
10. Gibson (n. 4), p. 114.
11. Quoted from Lorca's 'Play and Theory of the Duende', translated by Christopher Maurer; Lorca et al., *In Search of Duende* (New York, 1998), p. 49.
12. Quoted in Josephs and Caballero, p. 17 (my translation).
13. Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London, 1998), pp. 69, 70.
14. Steiner, *Death of Tragedy*, p. 342.
15. The respective places of publication are London, Newcastle, London, and Oxford. For Edwards's work I refer to the London, 1997, edition. Lorca's play is quoted from the Josephs and Caballero edition.
16. The Spanish form may reflect Catholic culture, in which guilt can only be absolved through divine grace. The English verb 'blame', on the other hand, suggests more superficial public accusation, and thus removes the issue from the spiritual domain to the political.
17. The *Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre*, edited by John Russell Brown (Oxford, 1995), p. 411. The symbolism of gender is explored by Roman Jakobson in his article 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation', conveniently reprinted in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, edited by Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (London, 1992), pp. 144-51. Perhaps the English convention of personifying death as an old man is related to the Germanic gender of the

word's etymological root.

18. Rituals involving blood contain the notion of initiation, either into a group or into a new phase of life. Thus they link the notions of kinship and of death (death of one phase implying rebirth into another). One such initiation ceremony still in use in some modern societies is circumcision, as is the female equivalent, the ritual rupturing of the hymen upon marriage.
19. Homosexual readings of the play tend to concentrate upon the equation of knife and phallus. See Paul Binding, *Lorca: the Gay Imagination* (n. 7), pp. 171-3.
20. See Josephs and Caballero, p. 100, n. 22.
21. It should however be borne in mind that Shakespearean tragedy already involved a 'rewrite' of the classical concept of tragedy. See Steiner, *Death of Tragedy*, pp. 11-44.
22. Synge wrote in his Preface to *The Playboy of the Western World*: 'Anyone who has lived in real intimacy with the Irish peasantry will know that the wildest sayings and ideas in this play are tame indeed, compared with the fancies one may hear in any little hillside cabin in Geesala, or Carraroe, or Dingle Bay . in countries where the imagination of the people, and the language they use, is rich and living, it is possible for a writer to be rich and copious in his words, and at the same time to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form. In the modern literature of towns, however, richness is found only sonnets, or prose poems, or in one or two elaborate books that are far away from the profound and common interests of life.' *The Playboy of the Western World and Riders to the Sea* (New York, 1993), p. vii.
23. In this translation there are in total twenty-five references to God and two to Jesus Christ, whereas the only references to Christianity in the original are the formalities 'Anda con Dios' e 'Dios bendiga tu casa', and the song of the women in the final scene ('Dulces clavos / dulce cruz /, dulce nombre / de Jesús') as they watch the approach of the procession bearing the bodies.

ⁱ Published in *Translation and Literature*, Vol. 11(1), Edinburgh, 2002 (24-44).

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- ii. Brendan Kennelly, *A Time for Voices: Selected Poems 1960-1990* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1990), p. 95.
- iii. André Lefevere coins the term ‘conceptual grid’ to describe the network of cultural and conceptual interrelationships surrounding a text. See his ‘Composing the Other’ in *Post-Colonial Translation*, edited by Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (London, 1999), pp. 00-00 (p. 76).
- iv. For information regarding production history I draw on the introduction to Gwynne Edwards’s translation of the play (*Blood Wedding*, London, 1997), pp. xxxvi-xlvi. See also her article ‘*Bodas de Sangre* in Performance’, *Anales de la Literatura Española Contemporánea*, 22 (1997), 469-91.
- v. Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca: A Life* (New York, 1989), p. 400.
- vi. Quoted in the introduction to *Bodas de Sangre*, edited by Allen Josephs and Juan Caballero (Madrid, 1998; hereafter referred to as ‘Josephs and Caballero’), p. 13 (my translation).
- vii. On this point see Josephs and Caballero, pp. 13-26, and the introduction to Edwards’s translation, pp. xxxi-xxxvi.
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- ix. George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (1961; reprint London, 1995), pp. 8-9.
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- xi. Gibson (n. 4), p. 114.
- xii. Quoted from Lorca’s ‘Play and Theory of the Duende’, translated by Christopher Maurer; Lorca *et al.*, *In Search of Duende* (New York, 1998), p. 49.

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- xiv. Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London, 1998), pp. 69, 70.
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- xxiv. In this translation there are in total twenty-five references to God and two to Jesus Christ, whereas the only references to Christianity in the original are the formalities 'Anda con Dios' e 'Dios bendiga tu casa', and the song of the women in the final scene ('Dulces clavos / dulce cruz /, dulce nombre / de Jesús') as they watch the approach of the procession bearing the bodies.