

**“*Sólo Soy Un Guitarrista*”:
Bob Dylan in the Spanish-Speaking World—
Influences, Parallels, Reception, and Translation**

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“Sólo soy un guitarrista” - Bob Dylan, Tarantula (1966)
“La guitarra. . . como la tarántula, teje una gran estrella”
- Federico García Lorca, “Las seis cuerdas,” (1931)

Spanish Manners: An Introduction

This paper aims to examine the relationship between Bob Dylan’s work and the cultures, literatures, and musics of the Spanish-speaking world. The relationship is bidirectional, taking in Spanish and Latin American influences and themes in Dylan’s production, as well as the influence and reception of that work in the Hispanophone universe. I further consider not only direct influences but also literary and musical parallels, and also briefly examine the translation of Dylan into Spanish. What I am offering is a case-study in intercultural relations, not an excursion into theory, and I shall not be explicitly entering into issues of ethnoliterature, ethnomusicology, cultural studies, or translation studies. I do, however, stress by way of introduction that I believe Dylan’s work is a particularly interesting case of a hybrid cultural object, the result of a fusion, not so much between a bipolarised “high” and “low” culture as between *three* different cultures—intellectual culture, mass culture, and folk or traditional culture. Much in Spanish and Latin American cultures, both literary and musical, is similarly—and fecundly—hybrid in its make-up, building bridges between the official culture and more popular elements. Meanwhile, today Spanish is one of the few languages that can seriously compete with English: as the transculturation scholar Dora Sales Salvador wrote in 2005, “both English and Spanish have taken on the role of global *lingua franca* as well as literary

language.”¹ Given all this, to study the links and connections between the Hispanophone cultural area and Bob Dylan’s work should prove a fruitful and illuminative exercise.²

The Spanish Moon: Spain and Latin America in Dylan’s Texts

The Songs

In his 1975 song “Abandoned Love” Dylan sang: “The Spanish moon is rising on the hill,”³ and over his career references to things Spanish and Latin American have been scattered through his work. In his prose text of 1963 “My Life in a Stolen Moment,” recalling his University of Minnesota days, Dylan actually claims some knowledge of Spanish: “I did OK in Spanish though but I knew it beforehand.”⁴ Be that as it may, the 1974 song “Something There Is About You,” which speaks of youthful times in Duluth, the town of Robert Allen Zimmerman’s birth, mentions a character called Danny Lopez.⁵ Dylan thus relates a Hispanic name to the idea of beginnings. Other Dylan characters find themselves south of the border. In “Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts,” Big Jim thinks he has seen the Jack of Hearts “down in Mexico”; the Brownsville Girl too disappears, in the song that bears her name, “way down in Mexico.” “Goin’ to Acapulco,” “Romance in Durango” and “Just Like Tom Thumb’s Blues” (located in

¹ From Dora Sales Salvador, “The Translation of Indian Literature in Spain: Documentation’s Turn” (2005:68).

² I will here make two brief terminological clarifications. First, where I refer to “popular culture” I may, in accordance with context, be referring either to traditional (folk or artisan) culture, or to the broader field encompassing both that area and more recent mass culture: however, when I say “popular culture” I am using the term in a sense closer to Walter Benjamin than to Marshall McLuhan. Second, regarding the term “Latin America,” I am aware that, in strict semantic terms, it includes Portuguese-speaking Brazil and French-speaking Haiti as well as the eighteen Spanish-speaking republics; I shall nonetheless, for the sake of convenience, use the term to mean “the Spanish-speaking territories in the Americas.” It should also be noted that all translations of texts and titles from Spanish (and in one case Catalan) in this essay are my own.

³ All quotations from Dylan’s lyrics are taken from Dylan 2004b.

⁴ See Dylan (1988:100). Prose text is not included in Dylan 2004b.

⁵ The text in Dylan (1988) omits the acute accent on the “o” of “López.”

Ciudad Juárez) are all explicitly set in or near Mexican cities. “Durango,”⁶ in particular, addressed in the first person to a woman called Magdalena by an unnamed gunman, refers to Mexican culture (“past the Aztec ruins and the ghosts of our people”) and history (“We’ll drink tequila where our grandfathers stayed / When they rode with Villa into Torreón”). “Señor (Tales of Yankee Power),” though it does not name Mexico, is surely set there, and has often been read as a critique of US intervention in Latin America.⁷ That subject is visibly taken up in its economic aspect in “North Country Blues” (“it’s much cheaper down / In the South American towns / Where the miners work almost for nothing”), and “Union Sundown” (“the car I drive is a Chevrolet / It was put together in Argentina / By a guy makin’ thirty cents a day”). Argentinian cultural or political motifs feature in “Farewell Angelina” (“little elves . . . dance / Valentino-type tangos”), that song’s double “Angelina” (“Tell me, tall men, where would you like to be overthrown, / In Jerusalem or Argentina?”), and “The Groom’s Still Waiting at the Altar” (“She could be respectably married / Or running a whorehouse in Buenos Aires”).

Across the Atlantic, Spain features in the Dylan song canon via “Boots of Spanish Leather,” with its “mountains of Madrid” and “coasts of Barcelona”: those boots originally walked out of the folksong “Black Jack Davey,”⁸ with its gypsy theme,⁹ which Dylan covered years later on *Good As I Been To You*. “Cross the Green Mountain,” his song of the American Civil War from 2003, has the lines “Heaven blazin’ in my head / I dreamt a monstrous dream,” which recall Francisco Goya’s famous etching “El sueño de la razón engendra monstruos” (“The sleep of reason produces monsters”). Elsewhere, “Spanish” appears as an adjective, whether pointing to Spain as such or things Hispanophone in general, as in the Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands’ “Spanish manners.” Dylan even sings a few words in Spanish on two recordings—the already-mentioned “Romance in Durango” (“No llores,

⁶ Co-written with Jacques Levy. The title refers to the Mexican state of Durango, whose capital is also called Durango.

⁷ See my essay on this song, entitled “‘Señor’: A wasteland with no easy answers” (1999). This essay is included on the “Bob Dylan Critical Corner” website available at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/6752/rollason.html#wasteland>.

⁸ See my essay “Boots of Spanish Leather” (1998), also on the “Bob Dylan Critical Corner” site, <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/6752/rollason.html#Boots>.

⁹ I use “gypsy” rather than “Roma” or “traveler,” because that is the word Dylan uses.

mi querida / Dios nos vigila . . . / Agárrame, mi vida”—“Don’t cry, my darling / God protects us . . . / Hold on tight, love of my life”), and the traditional “Spanish is the Loving Tongue,” set in Sonora, Mexico (“Mi amor, mi corazón”—“My love, my heart”). It may not, then, come as a total surprise to learn that in the late 70s/early 80s there were rumours of Dylan making an entire album of songs in Spanish.¹⁰ This album, which would have had official release only in the Spanish-speaking world, would have consisted of Dylan classics, translated into the “loving tongue” and performed by the master himself. There was even talk of the songs being rendered into Spanish by none other than Robert Graves, a long-term resident of Majorca whom Dylan, in *Chronicles Volume One*, recalls meeting once.¹¹ The project, however, was foreclosed by Graves’ death in 1978.

The Prose Writings

The references in the songs are joined by further Spanish/Latin American allusions in Dylan’s prose writings. The *Planet Waves* liner notes give Duluth another Spanish connotation, calling it the place where “Goya cashed in his chips”; the notes to *World Gone Wrong* mention Evita Perón. *Tarantula* name-checks a whole roll-call of figures and images from the history and culture of Spain: Goya again (“the Goya painting seeking poor Homer”), Lorca (“dead babies in Lorca graves”), Cervantes (Sancho Panza), Pablo Casals, the flamenco (“down these narrow alleys of owls and flamenco guitar players”), the *malagueña*, and, in a more sinister register, General Franco.¹² There are also Latin American allusions, including probably Dylan’s only Peruvian reference in “el dorado,” on the very first

¹⁰ See Francisco García, “Spanish Album Incident,” an essay published in *The Telegraph* in 1991, and later, in Spanish, on the “Kaw-Liga’s Shelter From The Storm” (www.geocities.com/kawligas/), a Spanish-language Dylan site of which he was webmaster but which unfortunately no longer exists. García further states that another candidate for rendering Dylan into Spanish-language song was the Nicaraguan-born poetess Claribel Alegría, Robert Graves’ neighbour on Majorca, but this too came to nothing.

¹¹ Dylan (2004a:45). On the same page, Dylan expresses his admiration for Graves’ ethnographical study *The White Goddess*.

¹² Dylan 1994:63, 56, etc.

page,¹³ and a Cuban gibe (“wonder why Castro hates rock’n’roll?”).¹⁴ What is most arresting, though, is the considerable number of Spanish phrases (26 in all) that are scattered, capitalized and unglossed, across four of the episodes, all relating to a Spanish-speaking character called María. I give one example, from the section: “*Tus huesos vibran, eres como magia, no sere tu novia, tu campesina, tu forma extraña, sólo soy un guitarrista*” (“Saying Hello to Unpublished Maria”).¹⁵ Translated, these phrases read: “Your bones vibrate, you are like magic, I won’t be your girlfriend, your peasant woman, your strange form, I’m just a guitarist” (we may especially note the last). In the text of *Tarantula* as published, accents and tildes are lacking, as are the double question marks used in Spanish, but in 24 of the 26 cases the Spanish is otherwise correct. Indeed, in some cases it is very idiomatic, as in the use of *la chota*, a Mexican slang term for “the police.” *Tarantula* displays in these passages a sophisticated, idiomatic Spanish which must surely have been supplied by a native speaker, no doubt with an inside knowledge of colloquial Mexican Spanish. *Chronicles, Volume One* also offers numerous Spanish/Latin American allusions. Goya appears again, twice: in the remark “Goya himself would have been lost at sea if he had tried to sail the new wave of art,” and in a straight allusion to his paintings, alongside those of Velázquez and Picasso. Dylan further says of the Brecht-Weill song “The Black Freighter”: “It was like the Picasso painting *Guernica*.” South America is present in the mention of “Simón Bolívar’s biography,” and Dylan even declares: “When I left home, I was like Columbus going off into the desolate Atlantic. I’d done that and I’d been to the ends of the earth—to the water’s edge—and now I was back in Spain, back where it all started.”¹⁶ Here again, things Hispanic are associated by Dylan with beginnings, with bringing it all back home.

Across the Borderline: Dylan’s Reception in Latin America

I shall now examine the history of Dylan’s reception in Spain and Latin America, integrating objective aspects (tours, critical reception, influence on musicians) with more speculative considerations analogies

¹³ Dylan 1994:1.

¹⁴ Dylan 1994:65.

¹⁵ Dylan 1994:30.

¹⁶ Dylan 2004a:90, 269, 274, 37, 108.

between Dylan's work and local literary and musical traditions. Dylan has toured in Latin America to date four times, performing in four Spanish-speaking countries plus Brazil (Brazil, 1990; Mexico, 1991; Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, 1991; and Argentina, Chile and Brazil, 1998). Response to his work in Latin American intellectual, literary, and musical circles has been favorable and substantial. I shall now consider that response in three countries where he has performed, Argentina, Chile and Mexico, and one, Peru, where he has not; also suggesting parallels and analogies in those countries' own cultural contexts that help explain a certain sense of affinity.

Dylan's work has had a considerable impact in Argentina. The crowd at his debut concert in Buenos Aires, on 8 August 1991, was estimated to be as high as 5000 (Olivero 1991). Argentinian singer-songwriters such as León Gieco and Andrés Calamaro have explicitly acknowledged their debt to Dylan. Argentina is, we may note, a country whose culture has been notable for its tendency to creatively fuse high-cultural and folkloric aspects. The tango began as an eminently plebeian genre, in the whorehouse environment mentioned by Dylan in "The Groom's Still Waiting at the Altar," but later attained quasi-classical status with Astor Piazzolla. Much Argentinian poetry has operated in popular or semi-popular genres; the country's greatest writer, the renownedly cerebral Jorge Luis Borges, was also an outstanding scholar of Argentinian popular culture, and, indeed, allowed some of his poems to be set to music as tangos for a recording by Piazzolla himself.¹⁷

Argentina's national poem is the epic *El gaucho Martín Fierro*, composed in octosyllabics by José Hernández in 1872 in a simulacrum of popular language; it was a notable best-seller in its time (Hernández 2001). The gaucho motif is closely related to the profession of the "payador," a fusion of guitarist and storyteller whose verses, typically improvised, were much in demand in the "pulperías" or popular hostelryes. Hernández's career is chronicled in an essay by Borges, who argues that, although in the gaucho genre "we do not find . . . a poetry made by gauchos," nonetheless "gaucho poetry is genuinely popular";¹⁸ a formulation which could also be applied to Dylan's poetics. *Martín Fierro* narrates a story akin to a Dylan song: the

¹⁷ See Allen B. Ruch 1994, "Astor Piazzolla: *Borges and Piazzolla*" on the website called "The Modern Word," which can be accessed at http://www.themodernword.com/borges/borges_borges&piazzolla.html. "The Modern Word" is a literary site devoted to a number of twentieth-century writers, including Borges.

¹⁸ "No se trata . . . de una poesía hecha por gauchos . . . [pero] la poesía gauchesca es . . . genuinamente popular" (Borges and Guerrero 1983:15).

hero is a gaucho who returns from conscription into the military to find his homestead destroyed, and becomes an outlaw. Borges himself, intriguingly, also made a hero out of an outlaw not unknown to Dylan, chronicling the saga of Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid in a chapter of his 1935 volume *Historia universal de la infamia (A Universal History of Infamy)*.¹⁹

In Chile, Dylan has won a substantial public. The Chilean poet Jorge Teillier cites Dylan as poet in one of his volumes;²⁰ in 1993, another poet, Raúl Zurita, was charged in the Chilean press with plagiarizing from “Highway 61 Revisited”;²¹ in a newspaper article that asked Chilean poets for their views on Dylan as Nobel candidate, Nicanor Parra, himself a Nobel prospect, praised the qualities of “Tombstone Blues” (Parra 2000). Dylan’s writing is, indeed, similar to that of Chile’s most renowned poets. Gabriela Mistral, the only Spanish-speaking woman to be awarded the Nobel (1945), wrote of tormented landscapes that might recall Dylan’s in “Where Teardrops Fall” or “Moonlight.” Chile’s other Nobel, Pablo Neruda, speaks in his most famous poem, “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” (“Heights of Macchu Picchu”) (Neruda 1992:125-141) in a bardic, prophetic tone that parallels “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall”; he also writes on the Dylanesque outlaw theme in his play, *Fulgor y muerte de Joaquín Murieta (Splendor and Death of Joaquín Murieta)* (Neruda 1973), which tells the true story of a Chilean adventurer lured to California by the 1849 Gold Rush, who, after the murder of his lady companion by pernicious “yanquis,” took to the outlaw’s life.

Dylan’s work also invites comparison with the two giants of modern Chilean song, Violeta Parra (1917-1967) and Víctor Jara (1938-1973).²² Both of these songwriters exemplify the relative looseness of the divide between intellectual and non-official culture in Latin America. Jara was a

¹⁹ “El asesino desinteresado Bill Harrigan” (“The disinterested killer Bill Harrigan”) (Borges 1971:65-72).

²⁰ Jorge Teillier, *En el mudo corazón del bosque*, Santiago: Cuadernos de la Gaceta, 1997. In a poem entitled “Cuartetos imperfectos a Heidi Schmidlin” (“Imperfect quartets for Heidi Schmidlin”), Teillier addresses the dedicatee: “Heidi, a quien un día retrató Durero,/cuyo rostro es un poema de Dylan” (“Heidi, whom [Albrecht] Dürer once portrayed/Whose face is a poem by Dylan”).

²¹ See Enrique Lafourcade, “Poeta de la macaca” (“Poet of inebriation”), *El Mercurio*, 3 September 2000; Claudio Aguilera, “Plagios literarios: peligrosa tentación” (“Literary plagiarisms: a dangerous temptation”), *La Tercera*, 28 October 2000 (information supplied by Andrés Urrutia, personal communication).

²² See Manns 1997 and Plaza 1976. Both volumes include song lyrics.

song composer but also a lecturer in communications studies at Santiago's Universidad Técnica del Estado. Violeta, a woman from an intellectual background, and Nicanor Parra's sister, traversed Chile collecting traditional music: her own compositions in the popular style have become folk music classics. On 15 September 1973, Víctor Jara's brutal murder in the Santiago stadium at the hands of Pinochet's thugs converted him into a martyr. The "nueva canción chilena" ("new Chilean song") movement of which both were part, had similarities with the American protest-song movement of the early 1960s; their work, though consistently more political than Dylan's, has features in common with it, drawing on the resources of both popular tradition and "official" poetry.

Peru, where Dylan has never performed, nonetheless offers strong evidence of interest in his work. In May 1991 the publication *Meridiano* featured an enthusiastic essay by Alejandro Ferreyros Küppers, concluding with a quotation from the Nobel-winning Mexican poet Octavio Paz: "La fijeza es siempre momentánea" ("the fixed is always fleeting"), approvingly applied to Dylan. In October 1998, a symposium at Lima's Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos on "Twentieth-century Poetics" included a contribution entitled "Bob Dylan, una poética de transgresión" ("Bob Dylan, a poetics of transgression") by Carla Vanessa Gonzáles, who also invoked Octavio Paz; in 2002, the same Carla Vanessa entitled her on-line collection of poems "Sueños de Carla"²³ ("Carla's Dreams"), a clear reference to Dylan's song, "Series of Dreams," a text quoted in her epigraph alongside lines from César Vallejo, Peru's national poet. These invocations of Paz and Vallejo suggest that even in Peru—which is off his tour circuit—Dylan is perceived not just as a poet in Latin American intellectual circles, but as one who can be named in the same breath as the masters. In recent years, the Peruvian press has regularly carried articles on Dylan, and on 18 November 2004 the publication *Caretas* published a long and favorable review of *Chronicles*, praising the book as "the testimony of one who looks his life square in the face, as it is, without excuses or shame."²⁴

²³ Carla Vanessa Gonzáles' poems are collected and available online at <http://www.geocities.com/yo.carla/>. The lines quoted from "Series of Dreams" are: "Dreams where the umbrella is folded / Into the path you are hurled / And the cards are no good that you are holding / Unless they're from another world"; those from Vallejo are "Y tú, sueño, dame tu diamante implacable, / tu tiempo de deshora" ("And you, dream, give me your implacable diamond / your untimely time"), from his poem "Trilce XVI" (1922).

²⁴ "El testimonio de quien mira su vida de frente, tal y como es, sin venias ni vergüenzas (Klinkenberger 2004:88-89).

We may also compare Dylan's fusion of high-cultural and folk elements with the work of the distinguished Peruvian writer José María Arguedas, who, born into a family of European origin, learned Quechua before Spanish, and whose career combined ethnology with fiction. Arguedas' most famous novel, *Los ríos profundos* (*Deep Rivers*, 1958),²⁵ integrates long passages of Quechua song, quoted in both that language and in Spanish, throughout the novel. Dora Sales Salvador, who has devoted a major study to Arguedas' novel, writes: "the musical intertext, incorporated through the Quechua songs woven into the narration, substantially modifies the form of the novel, creating a whole elaborate musical thread which marks the rhythm of the narrative discourse."²⁶ What Arguedas does by musicalizing the novel parallels Dylan's work bringing poetry into music, and one may also liken Arguedas' labor to Dylan's practical ethnomusicology on *Good As I Been To You* and *World Gone Wrong*.

The link found in Peru with Octavio Paz takes us to that poet's native Mexico, and it may surprise that Dylan has only once toured that country "so far from God, so near the United States," which has featured prominently in several of his songs. Nonetheless, just after Paz's death, on 24 April 1998, in an obituary in the newspaper *Público*, Juan José Doñán named Dylan among "los lectores y devotos pacistas" ("Paz's devoted readers") (Doñán 1998); certainly, Dylan's Aztec imagery in "Romance in Durango"—"the face of God will appear / With his serpent eyes of obsidian"—might recall similar details in poems by Paz. More strangely, Dylan's writing at times shows curious similarities with Mexico's leading women poets. The later poems of the postwar writer Rosario Castellanos employ an acerbically colloquial register that often resorts, Dylan-like, to the dramatic monologue.²⁷ Dylan's surrealist mode too has its female Mexican parallels: his "Series of Dreams," already mentioned, mirrors on a smaller scale, in title and dynamics, the remarkable seventeenth-century poem "Primero sueño" ("First dream"), the

²⁵ See Arguedas 1981 in references.

²⁶ "El intertexto musical, incorporado mediante las canciones quechuas entretejidas en la narración, modifica sustancialmente la forma de la novela, creando toda una elaborada hilación musical que marca el compás del discurso narrativo." - Dora Sales Salvador, *Puentes sobre el mundo: Cultura, traducción y forma literaria en las narrativas de transculturación de José María Arguedas y Vikram Chandra* (Bridges over the world: Culture, translation and literary form in the narratives of transculturation of José María Arguedas and Vikram Chandra), Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2004:543.

²⁷ See, for example, "Kinsey Report," in Castellanos 1985.

masterpiece of Mexico's first woman poet, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (Dela Cruz 2004). In addition, 1988 saw the publication in Mexico of a long study by Jaime Pontones that is probably the only original book on Dylan to have appeared in Latin America (Pontones 1988).²⁸

Boots of Spanish Leather: Dylan's Reception in Spain

If we now move “across that lonesome ocean” and consider Spain, we may reasonably affirm that Dylan has long been popular among listeners and well-regarded among critics in that country. The history of Dylan's reception in Spain up to 1999, and, notably, his tours, has been chronicled by Francisco García in his volume of 2000, *Bob Dylan en España: Mapas de carretera para el alma* (*Bob Dylan in Spain: Road maps for the soul*), a book that meticulously lists every known newspaper report of every concert.²⁹ Dylan has toured Spain in 1984, 1989, 1993, 1995, 1999, and 2004 (plus two one-off dates in 1991 and 1998). He has to date played 37 concerts there, in a total of 24 localities covering 12 of the 15 autonomous regions on the mainland. His debut 1984 concert, in Madrid, was attended by four ministers from the then socialist government, one of them Javier Solana, later to be NATO's secretary-general (García 2000:37). The second concert of that first tour, in Barcelona, attracted Jordi Pujol, head of Catalonia's regional government (García 2000:42). These VIP presences make it clear that Dylan's debut was perceived as a major event. Indeed, his 24 July 1995 concert in Barcelona was actually attended by a princess, the Infanta Cristina (García 2000:124), though it is not recorded whether she discussed “what's real and what is not.”

²⁸ Pontones 1988. *El Blues de la Nostalgia Subterránea. Bob Dylan: infiernos y paraísos* (Subterranean Homesick Blues: Bob Dylan, hells and heavens.) Mexico City: Posada.

²⁹ See García 2000. This book includes: full details of all Dylan's Spanish tours up to 1999, with all localities listed and a digest of press reports; a discography of Dylan's official and unofficial Spanish releases, again up to 1999, with full-colour illustrations showing every sleeve; and interviews with eleven Spanish-speaking Dylan experts or aficionados (musicians, writers, journalists, and so on). For more details, see my review, posted in 2000 on the “Bob Dylan Critical Corner” website available online at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/6752/multilingual.html#Mountains>. All of Dylan's Spanish concerts up to 17 July 2004, with exact dates and venues, are listed in the special edition of the Spanish version of *Rolling Stone* published in June 2004 under the title “Bob Dylan: Cuaderno de la gira” (“Bob Dylan: the tour logbook”).

Dylan has a strong and faithful following among the Spanish intelligentsia, as reflected in a steady stream of books and press articles, and among the prominent “dylanitas” (as the word goes) are literary figures such as novelist Mariano Antolín Rato and poet-novelist Benjamín Prado.³⁰ Of the main English-language books on Dylan, the only one that has been translated into Spanish is Antony Scaduto’s *Bob Dylan*.³¹ By way of compensation, however, there have been a fair number of Spanish-language Dylanological originals. In particular, a set of four volumes has appeared under the imprint “Los Juglares,” (Ediciones Júcar, Madrid), by, in order, Jesús Ordovás (1972), Mariano Antolín Rato (1975), Danny Faux (1982) and Vicente Escudero (1992). More recently, both *Love and Theft* and *Chronicles* have received ample coverage and acclaim in *El País* and other national newspapers: both Spanish- and Catalan-language reviews of *Chronicles* have laid great stress on the book’s literary qualities.³²

The bulk of Dylan’s work has appeared in authorized Spanish translations (in Spain only, with one exception). *Tarantula* has been translated no less than three times, once in Argentina—apparently the only official Latin American translation of anything by Dylan—and twice in Spain. *Chronicles* appeared in early 2005 in simultaneously issued Spanish and Catalan translations (Dylan 2005a and 2005b). There have been numerous cover versions released of Dylan songs over the years in Spanish (and also in Catalan, Galician, and Basque), and the majority of the lyrics have been translated into Spanish and published in book form. One should, of course, distinguish between a cover version intended to be sung, which retains rhyme and rhythm but will inevitably take liberties with Dylan’s meaning, and a printed translation, which is intended to correspond as closely as possible to the original sense but will be obliged to sacrifice rhyme and make Dylan’s songs look like free verse. The systematic

³⁰ See Prado 1995. Prado’s volume of poems, *Cobijo de la tormenta*, takes its title directly from Dylan’s “Shelter from the Storm.”

³¹ See Scaduto 1971. Translated by Ángela Pérez as *La biografía de Bob Dylan*, Madrid: Ediciones Júcar, 1975. The studies written by Michael Gray, Stephen Scobie, and Greil Marcus remain to be translated.

³² For reviews of *Chronicles*, see the works of Manrique 2005, Fresán 2005, Iriarte 2005, and, in Catalan, see Castillo 2005, available online at <http://www.avui.es/avui/diari/05/feb/10/k100310.htm>.

translation of the lyrics³³ began with the two-volume set *Escritos, Canciones y Dibujos* (*Writings, Songs and Drawings*), translated by Carlos Álvarez and published in Madrid (Dylan 1975). This was an authorized, bilingual Spanish/English volume, translating all of Dylan's *Writings and Drawings*, prose texts included, as well as the lyrics for *Planet Waves* and *Blood on the Tracks*. This Álvarez translation is no more than adequate: its Spanish texts contain a fair sprinkling of errors, do not always communicate the songs' linguistic particularities and cultural connotations, and offer no compensatory enrichments.

For more than two decades there was no authorized translation of the lyrics from *Desire* onwards. That gap was eventually filled, albeit in rather unorthodox fashion, by, once more, Francisco García, this time in collaboration with Antonio Iriarte (Dylan 1999).³⁴ This book, bringing the story up to *Time Out of Mind*, had the authorisation of Dylan's copyright administrators, but in return for two rather stringent conditions: no English parallel text, and a severely restricted print-run. It thus appeared as a limited edition of 250 copies,³⁵ offering a beautifully presented Spanish text only. This is a far more professional, careful and interesting volume than the Álvarez effort, but the conditions imposed deprived it a priori of two of that translation's practical advantages, namely, bilingual format and ready availability. Despite these constraints, this García-Iriarte production remains impressive in its quality and rigour. Many elements, inevitably, are lost in translation—not only rhyme and rhythm but ambiguities, puns and cultural allusions. The “eye for an eye” pun in the song “I and I” cannot be reproduced in Spanish, nor can the shock effect of the non-rhyme—where “lake” fails to call up the expected “snake”—at the end of “Man Gave Names to all the Animals.” These losses, however, are partly compensated by the sonority and verbal force of the Spanish translators and also by some felicitous localizations adding extra connotations—as in “What Can I Do For You?”, where, for “I know all about poison, I know about fiery darts,” the translation has: “*Sé todo sobre la ponzoña, sé todo sobre las saetas ardientes.*” This brings in, by rendering “darts” as “*saetas*,” an additional layer of reference by suggesting, in full consonance with the song's religious

³³ At the time of writing, there did not, however, appear to be any authorized translations of Dylan lyrics into Catalan.

³⁴ Translated by Antonio J. Iriarte and Francisco J. García Cubero. I reviewed this volume at length on the “Bob Dylan Critical Corner” website in April 2000.

³⁵ 200 numbered and 50 unnumbered.

theme, the Andalusian “*saeta*,” a flamenco-related devotional chant performed at Easter to recall Christ’s passion.

The García-Iriarte volume is to date the last officially sanctioned Spanish translation of Dylan lyrics (there is as yet no official translation for *Love and Theft*). It was, however, announced in early 2005 that the Spanish-market rights to *Lyrics 1962-2001* had been acquired by Global Rhythm, publishers of the Spanish and Catalan versions of *Chronicles*. A full new, bilingual Spanish translation of the lyrics was thus expected for 2005.³⁶

Lorca Graves: Dylan and the Spanish Poetic Tradition

I have so far considered Dylan’s impact on Spain, but there is good reason also to believe that Spain has itself affected Dylan’s songwriting, through the influence of that country’s remarkable poetic tradition. As in Latin America, the conceptual divide between classical and non-classical music is in Spain relatively non-rigid: composers such as Falla and Rodrigo have freely used folk and flamenco sources. Flamenco—a multimedia spectacle combining text, music and dance—has long been treated as a serious object of study, and in Andalusia there is a whole tradition of erudite “flamencólogos.” The Spanish poetic tradition, too, has drawn deeply on popular roots. The old “romances,” Spain’s equivalent of the Anglo-Scottish ballads, have been an inspiration to poets, from well before Luis de Góngora in the seventeenth century onwards. Folk influences were a major determinant on the nineteenth-century writers Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer and Rosalía de Castro; the latter took the daring step of writing the bulk of her distinguished poetry not in Spanish but in the then marginalized Galician language. However, the key Spanish poet to invoke in connection with Dylan is, beyond all doubt, Federico García Lorca.³⁷

Lorca (1898-1936) was executed in the village of Viznar near Granada by Franco’s fascists, soon after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. As we have seen, Dylan’s *Tarantula* speaks of “Lorca graves,” and, conversely and intriguingly, Lorca has a poem, “Las seis cuerdas” (“The six strings”), which compares a guitar to . . . a tarantula!: “La guitarra . . . como la tarántula, teje una gran estrella” (“The guitar, . . . like the tarantula,

³⁶ It is not yet known whether there will be a Catalan version of *Lyrics*.

³⁷ For a brief study of the Dylan/Lorca connection see Ruiz Rivero 2000.

weaves a great star”).³⁸ Lorca’s poetry was strongly influenced by Andalusian and gypsy traditions, notably the flamenco singing style known as the “cante jondo.” Indeed, Lorca was something of a part-time “flamencólogo,” lecturing on the “cante jondo,” and, notably, the “duende”—a kind of spirit of place, associated with deep, often painful emotion and in some sense the Spanish and Andalusian equivalent of the blues.³⁹ Lorca wrote: “Spain is in all ages moved by the ‘duende,’ as a land of age-old music and dance where the ‘duende’ squeezes early-morning lemons, and as a land of death, a land open to death.”⁴⁰ This emotive identification of place and music suggests analogies between Spain’s South and America’s South, striking a chord with those who know Dylan’s “Blind Willie McTell,” which hails the blues as the spirit of a “condemned” land.

In 1928, Lorca published an entire volume of “romances,” or modern-day ballads,⁴¹ with titles such as “Romance de la Luna, Luna” (“Ballad of the Moon, Moon”) and “Romance sonámbulo” (“Ballad of sleepwalking”),⁴² under the name *Romancero Gitano* (*Gypsy Ballads*).⁴³ Other Lorca volumes include *Poema del Cante Jondo* (*Poem of the Cante Jondo*, 1931), and *Poeta en Nueva York* (*Poet in New York*), published posthumously in 1940, a title which might recall Dylan’s own “Talkin’ New York.” The latter volume

³⁸ Federico García Lorca, “Poema del Cante Jondo” (1931), in García Lorca 1989.

³⁹ For an account of these lectures, with extracts, see Josephs and Caballero, “Introducción” in García Lorca 1989.

⁴⁰ “España está en todos tiempos movida por el duende, como país de música y danza milenarias donde el duende exprime limones de madrugada, y como país de muerte, como país abierto a la muerte”—Lorca, “Teoría y juego del duende” (“Theory and play of the ‘duende’”), lecture given in Madrid in 1933. Quoted and commented on in Josephs and Caballero, “Introducción,” 51-52; full text available online at <http://www.analitica.com/biblioteca/lorca/duende.asp>.

⁴¹ A detailed four-way comparison could be established between Lorca, Dylan and their respective ballad traditions. We may note here that Lorca’s essay on the “duende” includes a transcription of an ancient ballad, “Dentro del vergel” (“In the orchard”), which is narrated by a young man on the verge of death to his mother, which in significant ways recalls “Lord Randall,” the Anglo-Scottish ballad that was Dylan’s point of departure for “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall.”

⁴² We may compare Dylan’s own title “Romance in Durango.”

⁴³ See García Lorca 1989a in references.

includes an ode dedicated to Walt Whitman, and first appeared in New York in a bilingual English-Spanish edition.⁴⁴

In addition, Lorca's creative interests extended beyond poetry to music. He played flamenco guitar, composed guitar pieces, and was also a pianist. In 1931, accompanying the singer "La Argentinita" on piano, he recorded ten traditional Spanish songs he had both collected and arranged. Lorca's work fascinates Spanish musicians to this day, and many of his poems have entered the flamenco repertoire.⁴⁵

There is good cause to postulate a considerable, and fertile, influence of Lorca on Bob Dylan's poetics. The mention of Lorca in *Tarantula* dates from 1966, but internal evidence suggests that Dylan is likely to have known the Spanish poet's work rather earlier.⁴⁶ Lorca combines aspects of the traditionalist and the avant-garde, in a fashion paralleled by the presence of both elements in Dylan. Some of Dylan's most arresting imagery from the mid-1960s is remarkably similar to Lorca's, though at no point could one speak of straight transposition or imitation: it is, rather, a question of poetic method.

Dylan's image "peel the moon and expose it," from "Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window?," has a striking parallel in a Lorca poem from 1921 which ends with the lines: "*Si mis dedos pudieran / deshojar la luna*" ("If my fingers could / peel the moon").⁴⁷ *Poeta en New York* seems to have left its traces on Dylan. Lorca's volume is written in an experimental free-verse mode, favoring a long irregular line that resembles those employed (albeit rhymed) by the mid-60s Dylan. There is a powerful similarity in the use of surrealist imagery. The poem "*Norma y paraíso de los negros*" ("Norm and paradise of the blacks") contains the lines: "*azul donde el desnudo del viento va quebrando / los camellos sonámbulos de las nubes vacías*" ("blue where the wind's nudity breaks / the sleepwalking camels of the empty clouds"), which recall "Gates of Eden," with its "four-legged forest clouds." "La aurora" ("Dawn") offers the disturbing image: "*A veces las monedas en enjambres furiosas / taladran y devoran abandonados*

⁴⁴ See García Lorca 1940 in references.

⁴⁵ See Josephs and Caballero, "Introducción," 60-61.

⁴⁶ Stephen Scobie relates how, in August 1966 Allen Ginsberg gave Dylan a box of poetry books by various authors, Lorca among them (Scobie 2004:194).

⁴⁷ "Si mis manos pudieran desahojarse" in García Lorca 1971. García Lorca's essay on "duende" includes the phrase "la luna pelada" ("the peeled moon"), which is even closer to Dylan's "peel the moon." "Pelar" and "deshojar" are, in this context, synonyms.

niños” (“Sometimes furious swarms of coins / drill into and devour abandoned children”), which links to the atmosphere of “Gates of Eden” (“curbs ‘neath holes where babies wail”) and “It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)” (“money doesn’t talk, it swears”). “*Luna y panorama de los insectos*” (“Moon and panorama of the insects”) speaks of “*los paisajes que se hacen música al encontrar las llaves oxidadas*” (“landscapes that become music when they find the rusty keys”), in tones that might suggest “Visions of Johanna,” with its corroding cage and skeleton keys.

Lorca’s sexual orientation is well-known. And though in 2005, Spain stood in the vanguard of gay and lesbian rights as it prepared to legalize same-sex marriage, in 1936 the poet’s identity was not so comfortable in the Francoist civil war zone. Meanwhile, it is at least possible that Dylan’s “Standing in the Doorway,” composed in 1997, 61 years after Federico’s martyrdom, may carry within it a hidden tribute to the Andalusian poet. The song’s narrator says he is “strummin’ on my gay guitar,” and on the surface, “gay” might seem to have its old meaning of “joyful.” However, the phrase “gay guitar” draws attention to itself, and may be pointing to Lorca. The song has a number of details suggesting Spain, especially Andalusia: “walking through the summer nights,” “under the midnight moon,” “the dark land of the sun,” “live my life on the square.” The moon is the Lorca image par excellence; the repeated line “standing in the doorway crying” could suggest an Andalusian lament. The line “Maybe they’ll get me and maybe they won’t” evokes someone hounded, a wanted man fearing that the killers will close in on him. The song’s gypsy connotations converge with Andalusia and Lorca. Dylan’s line “eat when I’m hungry, drink when I’m dry,” though derived at first remove from the traditional song “Moonshiner,” as covered by himself,⁴⁸ ultimately points back to Romany lore: virtually the same words appear in the mouth of a gypsy character in Walter Scott’s *Quentin Durward*.⁴⁹ From one viewpoint, “Standing in the Doorway” is a song drenched in the American blues tradition, its very title being a blues stock-in-trade; and yet, if we consider the similarities between blues and “duende,” its final line, “blues wrapped around my head,” could also mark Dylan’s homage to Andalusia and Lorca.

Dylan’s concert of 18 April 1999 in Granada, provincial capital of the village where Lorca died, was sponsored by a cultural foundation, “La

⁴⁸ Recording of 1963, released in 1991 on *The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3*.

⁴⁹ “I eat when I am hungry, drink when I am thirsty, and have no other means of subsistence than chance throws in my way” (Scott 1947:210).

Huerta de San Vicente (Fundación García Lorca).” Laura García Lorca, the poet’s great-niece and chair of the Foundation, visited Dylan backstage; in her hands was *Federico’s own guitar*, made in 1908, for Dylan to see and even play, just before he went on stage (García 2000:153-4)! This was, admittedly, after Dylan had recorded “Standing in the Doorway”; and yet so moving a detail might suggest that to imagine Lorca’s ghost under that song’s surface may not be too far-fetched.

The River Bridge: Conclusions

If Dylan’s poetics draw heavily on popular and unofficial traditions, so too do those of Lorca and many other Spanish-language poets. Of the poets mentioned in this paper, Mistral, Neruda and Paz were all Nobel laureates;⁵⁰ meanwhile, Dylan is himself a Nobel nominee. The study of Dylan’s interaction with the Hispanophone world is of particular and double interest: firstly, it is an object-lesson in the complexities of intercultural relations; secondly, both terms of the comparison strongly manifest the desire to build bridges between official and non-official cultures, to connect across the divide.

I shall conclude with an image from Peru, from the pages of José María Arguedas (whom we have met above). At the end of *Los ríos profundos*, the boy narrator, liberated from his oppressive boarding school, finds emotional sustenance contemplating the Pachachaca river (whose name means “bridge over the world”) from, exactly, its bridge. Arguedas writes: “The Pachachaca moaned in the darkness at the bottom of the immense ravine. The bushes trembled in the wind . . . Past the hanging bridge of Auquibamba will flow the river in the evening.”⁵¹ Dylan, too, has used a similar image, in “Up To Me”: “When the dawn came over the river bridge, I knew that it was up to me.” To explore the fortunes of Bob Dylan in the Spanish-speaking world, and the presence of that world in his work, is

⁵⁰ In 1945, 1971, and 1990 respectively. The Spanish-speaking world has so far had ten Nobel literature winners (nine male and one female; five Spanish, two Chilean, one Colombian, one Guatemalan and one Mexican).

⁵¹ “El Pachachaca gemía en la oscuridad al fondo de la inmensa quebrada. Los arbustos temblaban con el viento. . . Por el puente colgante de Auquibamba pasará el río, en la tarde” (Arguedas, *Los ríos profundos*, 254). For the symbolic significance of this episode and the image of the bridge, I here gratefully draw on Dora Sales Salvador’s fine analysis of this passage (2004:556-7).

to follow in the footsteps of Dylan himself and of a long line of Spanish and Latin American poets, affirming communication and understanding within and between cultural systems and across barriers, and incessantly and successfully building “bridges over the world.”⁵²

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