



Federico García Lorca's "Ode to Salvador Dalí"

Intended for 3rd or 4th year Spanish students

Goals:

Students will practice translating literary texts from the Spanish.

Students will discuss a literary text and accompanying issues of translation.

Description:

In small groups, students translate sections of Lorca's "Ode to Salvador Dalí" and present their translations to the class to produce a complete English translation of the poem. Then the class discusses the poem and the accompanying issues of translation.

What to do:

1. Review Lorca's writing and Dalí's art and introduce the nature of their friendship.
2. Divide the class into small groups, distribute copies of Lorca's poem, "Oda a Salvador Dalí," in Spanish, and assign sections to translate. (Note: the poem consists of 28 4-line stanzas.)
3. When students are done working, ask individual groups to read their sections aloud—in Spanish—and then to present their translations to the class in the order in which the stanzas appear in the poem.
4. Discuss the issues involved with translating 1) a poem and 2) as a group. (See questions below.)
5. Discuss the poem. (See questions below.)

Lorca & Dalí:

Federico García Lorca, Spain's greatest modern poet and playwright, was born in Granada in 1898 and murdered by Fascist troops in 1936, shortly after the start of the Spanish Civil War. By the time of his death, his writings were famous throughout the Spanish-speaking world, and his murder became a symbol of Spain's martyrdom.

García Lorca and Salvador Dalí met at the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid and became quick friends. Despite the 6-year difference in age (Dalí was born in 1904), the two had a lot in common. Both were born into well-to-do middle class families and had

strong ties to the people and geography of the regions in which they were raised. Both had brothers who died as infants or young children, both had nursemaids who transmitted their regions' oral cultures, and both had fathers who wanted their sons to pursue conventional careers. Both were multi-talented and very ambitious. Both turned out to be rather impractical in daily life, both were made fun of in school as children, both believed they had ancestral ties to Spain's ethnic minorities, and both had what biographer Ian Gibson calls "an uneasy relationship with their sexuality." And along with fellow student Luis Buñuel—who would go on to become Spain's most famous film maker—García Lorca and Dalí formed the core of not only the Residencia's student avant garde movement, but also a new generation of Spanish artists.

Dalí and García Lorca collaborated on pieces of artwork—such as the 1927 drawing "The Bather" which is in the Salvador Dalí Museum's collection—and Lorca is present in a number of Dalí's paintings such as *Honey is Sweeter than Blood* (1927) and *Still Life (Cubist Portrait of Lorca)* (1925). The two friends traveled together—most notably to Dalí's hometown of Cadaqués where Lorca was an instant hit and where he became the object of affection for Dalí's sister Anna Maria—listened to jazz, and explored modern art and the concurrent development of their creative energies. And out of their intimate friendship came Lorca's "Ode to Salvador Dalí" (1926), one of the finest poems about friendship in the Spanish language, and a poem that sets forth the aesthetics of the modern art (Cubism) that both were exploring at that point in time. "Ode to Salvador Dalí" occupies a moment of transition in Lorca's poetry—a moment where the oblique and depersonalized language of modernism contributes to a tribute which is anything but depersonalized.

Shortly after the publication of Lorca's heralded volume of poems *Gypsy Ballads* in 1928, however, the two friends had a complicated and tragic falling out rooted in both personal and aesthetic tensions. Although the work of each turned increasingly toward surrealism, Dalí went to Paris and Lorca went to New York. Lorca's place in Dalí's life and art was subsequently filled by Gala Eluard, whom Dalí would later marry. Lorca and Dalí did meet and reconcile shortly before Lorca's assassination in 1936, but for all intents and purposes, they had little or no contact from 1928 on out.

"ODA A SALVADOR DALÍ"

—by *Federico García Lorca*

Una rose en el alto jardín que tú deseas.
Una rueda en la pura sintaxis del acero.
Desnuda la montaña de niebla impresionista.
Los grises oteando sus balaustradas últimas.

Los pintores modernos, en sus blancos estudios,
cortan la flor aséptica de la raíz cuadrada.
En las aguas del Sena un iceberg de mármol

enfría las ventanas y disipa las yedras.

El hombre pisa fuerte las calles enlosadas.
Los cristales esquivan la magia del reflejo.
El Gobierno ha cerrado las tiendas de perfume.
La máquina eterniza sus compases binarios.

Una ausencia de bosques, biombos y entrecejos
yerra por los tejados de las casas antiguas.
El aire pulimenta su prisma sobre el mar
y el horizonte sube como un gran acueducto.

Marineros que ignoran el vino y la penumbra
decapitan sirenas en los mares de plomo.
La Noche, negra estatua de la prudencia, tiene
el espejo redondo de la luna en su mano.

Un deseo de formas y límites nos gana.
Viene el hombre que mira con el metro amarillo.
Venus es una blanca naturaleza muerta
y los coleccionistas de mariposas huyen.

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Cadaqués, en el fiel del agua y la colina,
eleva escalinatas y oculta caracolas.
Las flautas de madera pacifican el aire.
Un viejo Dios silvestre da frutas a los niños.

Sus pescadores duermen, sin ensueño, en la arena.
En alta mar les sirve de brújula una rosa.
El horizonte virgen de pañuelos heridos
junta los grandes vidrios del pez y de la luna.

Una dura corona de blancos bergantines
ciñe frentes amargas y cabellos de arena.
Las sirenas convencen, pero no sugestionan,
y salen si mostramos un vaso de agua dulce.

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¡Oh Salvador Dalí, de voz aceitunada!
No elogio tu imperfecto pincel adolescente
ni tu color que ronda la color de tu tiempo,
pero alabo tus ansias de eterno limitado.

Alma higiénica, vives sobre mármoles nuevos.
Huyes la oscura selva de formas increíbles.
Tu fantasía llega donde llegan tus manos,
y gozas el soneto del mar en tu ventana.

El mundo tiene sordas penumbras y desorden,
en los primeros términos que el humano frecuenta.
Pero ya las estrellas, ocultando paisajes,
señalan el esquema perfecto de sus órbitas.

La corriente del tiempo se remansa y ordena
en las formas numéricas de un siglo y otro siglo
Y la Muerte vencida se refugia temblando
en el círculo estrecho del minuto presente.

Al coger tu paleta, con un tiro en un ala,
pides la luz que anima la copa del olivo.
Ancha luz de Minerva, constructora de andamios,
donde no cabe el sueño ni su flora inexacta.

Pides la luz antigua que se queda en la frente,
sin bajar a la boca ni al corazón del hombre.
Luz que temen las vides entrañables de Baco
y la fuerza sin orden que lleva el agua curva.

Haces bien en poner banderines de aviso
en el límite oscuro que relumbra de noche.
Como pintor no quieres que te ablande la forma
el algodón cambiante de una nube imprevista.

El pez en la pecera y el pájaro en la jaula.
No quieres inventarlos en el mar o en el viento.
Estilizas o copias después de haber mirado
con honestas pupilas sus cuerpecillos ágiles.

Amas una materia definida y exacta
donde el hongo no pueda poner su campamento.
Amas la arquitectura que construye en lo ausente
y admites la bandera como una simple broma.

Dice el compás de acero su corto verso elástico.
Desconocidas islas desmienten ya la esfera.
Dice la línea recta su vertical esfuerzo
y los sabios cristales cantan sus geometrías.

Pero también la rosa del jardín donde vives.
¡Siempre la rosa, siempre, norte y sur de nosotros!
Tranquila y concentrada como una estatua ciega,
ignorante de esfuerzos soterrados que causa.

Rosa pura que limpia de artificios y croquis
y nos abre las alas tenues de la sonrisa.
(Mariposa clavada que medita su vuelo.)
Rosa del equilibrio sin dolores buscados.
¡Siempre la rosa!

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¡Oh Salvador Dalí, de voz aceitunada!
Digo lo que me dicen tu persona y tus cuadros.
No alabo tu imperfecto pincel adolescente,
pero canto la firme dirección de tus flechas.

Canto tu bello esfuerzo de luces catalanas,
tu amor a lo que tiene explicación posible.
Canto tu corazón astronómico y tierno,
de baraja francesa y sin ninguna herida.

Canto el ansia de estatua que persigues sin tregua,
el miedo a la emoción que te aguarda en la calle.
Canto la sirenita de la mar que te canta
montada en bicicleta de corales y conchas.

Pero ante todo canto un común pensamiento
que nos une en las horas oscuras y doradas.
No es el Arte la luz que nos ciega los ojos.
Es primero el amor, la amistad o la esgrima.

Es primero que el cuadro que paciente dibujas
el seno de Teresa, la de cutis insomne,
el apretado bucle de Matilde la ingrata,
nuestra amistad pintada como un juego de oca.

Huellas dactilográficas de sangre sobre el oro
rayen el corazón de Cataluña eterna.
Estrellas como puños sin halcón te relumbren,
mientras que tu pintura y tu vida florecen.

No mires la clepsidra con alas membranosas,
ni la dura guadaña de las alegorías.

Viste y desnuda siempre tu pincel en el aire,
frente a la mar poblada con barcos y marinos.

[publicada en *Revista de Occidente*, Madrid, abril 1926]

Questions to ask about the translation (or to assign as homework):

1. Identify a moment of contention where members of your group disagreed on how to translate Lorca's "Ode to Salvador Dalí." What was the nature of this contention, what were people's viewpoints, and how did you work through it? Are you satisfied with the results?
2. Discuss the issues a translator might face in lines 99-100: "No es el Arte la luz que nos ciega los ojos. / Es primero el amor, la amistad o la esgrima." What are the possible subjects for "es"? What subtleties of meaning does "la esgrima" import? How might you go about answering these questions?
3. Focus on one stanza of the poem and slowly translate it, giving reasons for all the choices you make and noting where the English version "loses something" from the original—and why.

Questions to ask about the poem (or to assign as homework):

1. Near the end of "Ode to Salvador Dalí," Lorca writes: "Pero ante todo canto un común pensamiento / que nos une en las horas oscuras y doradas." If you were writing a tribute to a friend, what would be the "común pensamiento" which you would write about—and why?
2. Discuss the types of imagery in "Ode to Salvador Dalí." The poem provides excellent examples of modernist (even surrealist) imagery and metaphor. Can you come up with some examples? In addition, "Ode to Salvador Dalí" also provides examples of symbolic imagery—one of which is the rose. How is the rose significant in this poem? The poem also mentions classical figures such as Venus, Minerva, Bacchus, and the sirens. Who are these figures, and why might a modernist poem include them as well?
3. The term "eterno limitado" (line 40) seems to be a contradiction in terms. Can you resolve the apparent paradox?
4. Define the poetic technique of synesthesia. Can you find examples of it in the poem? (Lorca was a fan of Ruben Darío, the Nicaraguan poet who pioneered the use of synesthesia in Spanish poetry.) Come up with some examples of synesthesia on your own.