

# #11

# FROM PERFORMANCE TO PRINT: EXPORTING LORCA THROUGH PAPERBACK TRANSLATIONS OF *LA CASA DE BERNARDA ALBA* (1998-2012)

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**Abstract** || This article explores the proliferation of English-language translations and versions of García Lorca's *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (1936) published in paperback editions since 1998, in order to account for Lorca's assimilation into the English-speaking dramatic consciousness. Through an examination of cover art, blurbs and extra-textual material provided by the publishers and translators, this article considers what facets of Spanish national identity are being marketed to an Anglophone audience, and whether these editions contribute to a denationalised image of Lorca as a "classic dramatist".

**Keywords** || Theatre translation | Publishing | Cover art | Performance.

## 0. Introduction

English-speaking theatre audiences have been exposed to Federico García Lorca's final play *La casa de Bernarda Alba* since the 1960s, when San Francisco's Encore Theatre staged a production (directed by Lee Brewster) in 1963 and have enjoyed a myriad of performances since. David Johnston argues that Lorca has effectively entered the British theatre canon, and comments on the proliferation of productions since 1986, a year marking the fiftieth anniversary of the poet and playwright's death, and the loosening of copyright regulations (Johnston, 2007: 78; 92-93 n1). Catalan actress and director Núria Espert directed a London revival that same year that she describes as "muy violenta, trágica, apasionada y muy española" (Torres, 1986).<sup>1</sup> Transitioning from performance to print, this article examines the spate of translated versions published or reissued in paperback editions in Britain and Ireland since 1998, and questions how their covers and extra-textual materials preserve or omit this sense of Spanish national identity for a foreign reader encountering the text in a bookshop. Six versions will be compared, beginning 11 years after Espert's much-lauded production and the anniversary commemorations for Lorca in Spain, allowing a decade for the play to assimilate into the Anglophone dramatic consciousness.<sup>2</sup> Els Adringa notes:

the transfer of a foreign literary work into such a mutable and evolving cultural space with its many shifting subsystems constitutes a crucial part of any works "career". What is particularly fascinating to observe is how a work of literature *sediments* itself in such new environments, inspiring fresh evaluations that reflect on the receiving socio-cultural field, revealing as much about the *aesthetic potential of the text* as about the *structures and processes underlying the receiving socio-cultural field*. (Adringa, 2006: 202, my emphases)

These reception mechanisms embedded into the foreign cultural domain will be scrutinised here in relation to the visual aspects of each book's publication (cover and blurb) and the extra-textual material provided in the editions (translator's notes or preface), focusing on what each of these aspects reveals about the target readership and the play's "career" in English. Gunilla Anderman suggests that Lorca, like Chekov and Ibsen, has almost become an honorary British dramatist (Anderman, 2006: 5), consequently, this article will assess if this status is reflected in the afterlife of the play as a published edition in English.

## 1. Performability issues

Susan Bassnett writes about the absence of theoretical material on

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1 | Brief production histories are provided by Clifford (2012), Johnston (2007) and Edwards (2007, 1998).

2 | This article focuses on paperbacks because these are the editions most likely to be sold in commercial bookshops.

the subject of theatre translation, noting that “the difficulty lies in the nature of the theatre text, which exists in a dialectical relationship with the performance of that same text and is therefore frequently read as something ‘incomplete’ or ‘partially realised’” (Bassnett, 1989: 99) If the theatre script, published or unpublished, is a work in progress, and the final act of translation takes place on the stage, then *Bernarda Alba*’s “sedimentation” in a foreign cultural field has as much to do with the performance of the play as the text itself. The editions of translations discussed here by Jo Clifford (2012), Rona Munro (Methuen: 2009, Nick Hern: 1998), David Hare (Faber and Faber: 2005), Michael Dewell and Carmen Zapata (Penguin Classics: 2001, Penguin: 1992), John Edmunds (Oxford World’s Classic: 1999) and Gwynne Edwards (Methuen: 1998, reprinted in 2007) each present a text in motion, a product in transition from book to stage production. Considering that Lorca’s work has only been widely available and openly discussed since the dissolution of the Franco regime in 1975, these six translations that were on the market during a relatively short period attest to the Spaniard’s contemporary popularity and almost compulsory inclusion in any form of Hispanic study at university level, or within twentieth-century Drama Studies. Each of the published versions discussed introduce Lorca’s play to the English-speaking market and culture in a different way, with the majority using the visual enhancements of cover art and blurbs with accompanying material to engage with preconceived perceptions of the work and its land of origin.

### 1.1 Language and the canon

Although Lorca proclaimed that *Bernarda Alba* contained “not a drop of poetry” but only “reality! Pure realism!” (Gibson, 1989: 435), by reflecting the Falangist intolerance of homosexuality and the repression of women, the play functions as a poetic metaphor of oppression. The characters are at once universal, epitomizing the oppressed in a collective sense, while also reflecting a local culture and background.<sup>3</sup> They speak a dialogue that C.B Morris describes as possessing “a high degree of fidelity: to those who speak it and to the poet who devised it in a masterful performance, at once psychological and theatrical, of selecting the right words for the right moment and for the right emotional reason” (Morris, 1989: 498). This local colour and precise psychological profiling presents the ultimate challenge to the translator, who must attempt to transpose the Andalusian dialect of the time and the metaphorical aspects of the play, without alienating the Anglophone reader. Further to this, the poet’s brother, Francisco García Lorca writes;

It has been said that Federico, better than other poets of his generation, represents the Spanish in poetry. Perhaps this national character is the clearer defined because of his dramatic roots, his vocation of identifying

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3 | The Spanish names of the characters in the play are important, as all relate to oppression and suffering in some way. Angustias, from *angustia*, meaning anguish, Martirio from *martirio*, meaning martyrdom, Amelia derives from *amargo*, meaning bitterness. Magdalena is a common name derived from another metaphor of suffering, the phrase *llorar como una Magdalena* referring to Mary Magdalene weeping at the death of Jesus. Pepe el Romano’s name gives him a precise geographical origin, as people from the Vega area of Granada were known as *romanos* (See Gibson, 1989: 4). This name gives Pepe a symbolism as an ‘everyman’ figure, a faceless *romano*. This naming element is something typical of Lorca’s work and cannot be translated appropriately into a foreign language, but is extremely relevant and enriching to the Spanish original.

himself with the impulses of his country's people. (Graham-Luján and O'Connell, 1976: 6)

Thus how does the translator transpose this Spanishness into a new version in English? André Lefevere notes the monolingual foreign reader's reliance on their translator for access into the world of the original (Lefevere, 2004: 239-256). However, the popularity of Lorca in the Anglophone world means that many readers will have some idea as to the background of the drama, or as Borges puts it, "with famous books, the first time is actually the second, for we begin them already knowing them" (Borges, 1999: 69). Considering Lorca's status as a touchstone dramatist for Hispanists, students and theatre-goers alike, commercially speaking the different needs of these various target audiences goes some way in explaining the proliferation of translations during this period. Frequently referred to as Lorca's masterpiece and more often than not sold with a reminder that it was the final drama written before his death in 1936, the status of the text is elevated due to its socio-historic value. Indeed, in the Penguin edition with an "official" translation by Dewell and Zapata (2001), the title *The House of Bernarda Alba and Other Plays* reveals the commercial potential of the drama, with the collection marketed on the strength of its standing as the best-known play of Lorca's rural trilogy. This snapshot of women in rural Andalusia at a specific time in Spain's history is explored through the distinct covers, each appealing to a different reader and revealing the expectations of different facets of the publishing market.

## 2. Cover art and expressions of the national

Johnston argues that "residual cultural opacity" and a tendency towards "an embarrassing level of melodrama" have affected performances of Lorca's theatre in translation, with some descent into stereotypical interpretations of peninsular culture and traditions (Johnston, 2007: 78). This article argues that the same is true of the covers of published editions of Lorca's plays, as they export certain facets of Spanish national identity for a tourist gaze. Most of the covers engage with a foreigner's preconception of Andalusia and its people rather than the characters in the plays, portraying archetypal representations of Lorca's Spain. Anglophone literature on Spain such as *Homage to Catalonia* or *For Whom the Bell Tolls* provide this tourist gaze from within war-torn Spain, while the editions of translations of Lorca's play aim to project his insider's gaze and promote the play as an authentic piece of cultural history. In this particular study, the variation in cover design of the same text is startling. These editions are not for Andalusians, or even Spaniards, but the "national character" inherent to Lorca's work, identified by the poet's brother or by Espert, represents itself visually on each of

the covers, however, in a form acceptable and appealing to a foreign market. The changing nature of the covers used demonstrates Lorca's assimilation into the British canon, or at least into the theatre-going consciousness, as the artwork becomes more denationalised and production-focused.

The 1998 Methuen edition (translated by Lorca scholar Gwynne Edwards) depicts a scene from the Lyric Theatre's 1986 production directed by Espert. Bernarda, Poncia and three of the daughters are pictured during Act III, their shocked expressions and Bernarda's kneeling pose indicating the final moments of the play, as the matriarch proclaims a new period of mourning for her youngest daughter Adela. The cover distinctively presents the work as a living, breathing production rather than the culturally homogenous photographs or semi-famous themed paintings seen on many book covers. In the link to Espert's production, Methuen maintains the national specificity and reverence for the original. The black and white photography lends a degree of the artistic to the cover, but also conveys a certain sense of authenticity as a document of Espert's production, although Edwards describes the translation provided by Robert MacDonald for the Lyric Theatre run as "lacking" in certain points (Edwards, 1988: 346). However, the "truth" or "history" apparent in these photographs synthesise with Lorca's intention that the three acts appear as a "photographic documentary" (García Lorca/ Ramsden, 1983: 2).

Contrastingly, the 1992 Penguin and 2001 Penguin Classics edition (translated by Michael Dewell and Carmen Zapata) provide a painting, *Spanish Night* by Cubist/Dadaist/Surrealist artist Francis Picabia from 1922 as its cover art. The painting's title, signature and explanation (*Sangre andaluza/Andalusian blood*) appear as large as the font used in the editions title. The painting is monochrome, with the exception of red and yellow targets (the colours of the Spanish flag) on the female figure's body. The male and female silhouettes contrast in colour, clothing and posture, with the male dressed, standing in a dynamic flamenco pose, while the female appears to be nude, inert like a chalk outline of a dead body. However, the dominance of the male figure in the painting is somewhat misaligned. Men do not dominate in Lorca's drama, rather the oppression of women, particularly in rural areas, emanates from this trilogy of plays. The picture itself is a blackboard on an easel, with an empty box (presumably of chalk) on the floor nearby. This didactic element, with the painting functioning as a pictorial lesson about Andalusian blood, resonates in a similar fashion to the text within the book; Lorca's rural trilogy speaks as a lesson in Andalusia, its tragedies, its traditions and its people. The other plays *Bodas de Sangre/Blood Wedding* and *Yerma* relate similarly to this cover art. As we know from the title page, Dewell and Zapata are Lorca's official translators, and their authority adds another layer of didacticism to the text.

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Similarly, the 1998 Oxford edition (translated by John Edmunds) features a painting, *The Spanish Model* by Vanessa Bell. However, this stereotypical image of the Spanish *maja* has little to do with the black-clad family in mourning of *La casa de Bernarda Alba*. Yet, considering that Edmunds' edition is a collection of four plays, a perfectly coherent image for all four would have proved difficult to find. The cover is appealing and bright, with the pensive model a picture of the Andalusian tradition. Her accoutrements of fan, veil, flowers and shawl provide the Anglophone reader with an image so distinctively Spanish that it is impossible to locate the text anywhere else. The painting also locates the play in time without being too specific, the historic image representing a time in the past rather than the present. As an Oxford's World Classic, the historic weighs heavily on the publication regardless of the cover image, as any allusion to "classic" instantly locates a text in the past.

The intertextuality of the two covers featuring paintings engage with something very different to the 1998 Methuen, namely extra-textual visual art forms, while Edward's cover remains in the arena of theatre. Contrastingly, the Faber edition presents a black and white nude photograph published in 2005 to coincide with his David Hare's version of the play at the National Theatre. In the picture, a young woman faces away from the camera, hunched and vulnerable looking. Presumably this is Bernarda's youngest daughter Adela, after a not-so clandestine encounter with her lover, Pepe el Romano. However, this photo encourages other connotations, especially for readers without any background knowledge of the text. This nude figure is a universal, sensuous image in an artistic black and white photograph: a faceless, fragmented woman that could be anyone, yet the informed buyer can identify the image with Adela. This figure is not particularly Spanish, avoiding any stereotypes of Andalusia, placing the drama in a worldwide canon of plays, rather than singling it out as a historic or national drama. Non-Spanish readers of the text are not alienated by foreignness; rather they are given a familiar, denationalised image as an introduction to the play.

Geraldine Brodie comments that regardless of critical response to the play, as a production staged by a publicly-funded institution such as the National Theatre the large auditorium is expected to be full every night. For Brodie this creates:

an incentive to produce a certain type of translation; to make it accessible to a wide audience, to acknowledge the heritage and tradition of a play, while also re-energizing it and making it new. (Brodie, 2012: 66)

The same could be said of the covers of recent translations, providing novelty for the seasoned Lorca fan, and accessibility for the novice reader or audience member. This ease of understanding comes to the

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fore in Methuen's expansion of its catalogue of Lorca translations and adaptations with the 2009 publication of *The House of Bernarda Alba: A Modern Adaptation by Rona Munro*. Transposed to a contemporary Scottish context, Munro's version was first published by Nick Hern in 1999 with a black and white photo cover of two girls dancing, again removing any trace of national specificity. Nonetheless, this article focuses on the Methuen edition as an example of how different readerships are targeted by the same publishing house, especially one more likely to be on the shelves of a non-specialist bookshop. The 2009 cover features a photograph of actress Siobhan Redmond in the title role, dressed in black and austere gazing at the reader from an ornate chair, with a Rottweiler at her side. Like the Faber edition, the publication is tied to a specific production by the National Theatre of Scotland, with Munro's version touring various venues during 2009.

The reprint of Edwards' translation in 2007 was given a makeover with a photograph of a barred window on a whitewashed wall, with some cacti almost reaching the sill. The entire cover has a blood-red filter, complementing other Lorca translations of *Yerma* and *Blood Wedding*, advertised on the back cover. Notwithstanding the commercial advantages of producing a coherent, attractive cycle of works for sale, the increasing emphasis given to the publication series in the more recent translations adds to Lorca's denationalisation and assimilation into the canon of English-language theatre. Although the 2012 Nick Hern edition (translated by Jo Clifford) has no cover art to entice the reader, the book forms part of the "Drama Classics" (for pre-1945 classic drama, according to the Nick Hern website) series, targeting a broad readership who are named on the imprint page as "students, actors and theatre-goers". The playwright's name appears on the front cover simply as Lorca, confirming the familiarity with his work, while the back cover compounds his position as a canonical playwright, listing other dramatists published in the series, like Chekhov, Ibsen and others of many nationalities. This series-focused design denationalises the play to an extent, if not confirming Anderman's assumption about Lorca's honorary Britishness then placing him in a post-national dimension of 'classic' drama, and perhaps completing the cross-cultural sedimentation process. Lefevere writes:

since languages always reflect different cultures, translations will always contain attempts to "naturalise" the different culture, to make it conform more to what the reader of the translation is used to. (Lefevere, 2004: 243).

In this way, each of the translations examined present a different, although sometimes overlapping, receiving culture targeted by each publishing house with a distinct naturalisation of Lorca's last play.

## 2.1 Blurbs

The blurb on each edition, the “most avowedly commercial of all criticism” (Lefevere, 2004: 252), act as an advertisement to the reader, a succinct and concise statement that confirms the works greatness through the words of a well-known pundit or publication. Lefevere dubs critical material, reviews and other extra-textual commentary “refractions”, stating that it is “through critical refractions that a text establishes itself inside a given system” (Lefevere, 2004: 252). The accompanying critical material inside each edition also helps focus the marketing of a work on a certain audience, but lacks the immediacy of the cover and blurb.

Each blurb differs in its focus, highlighting various aspects of Lorca’s plays published therein, but it is the direct and indirect comments about each translation that are relevant to this discussion. For example, Faber/Hare’s edition does not mention his name or credentials, nor does it offer any review snippets of the publication or the National Theatre production of the play. As a first edition, it can be presumed that any new prints made of this book would include such material.

Both of the Methuen/Edwards editions provide two reviews, from *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, each commenting on Lorca’s dramatic prowess, while the Penguin/Dewell and Zapata text presents Seamus Heaney quote in huge font touting Lorca as “the epitome of Romantic Spain”. This practice makes a claim for the weight of the text as a canonical drama, and for Lorca as a classic dramatist. Rather than simply naming the newspaper that published the comment like the Methuen editions, referencing a Nobel Laureate like Heaney adds another veneer of authority to Dewell and Zapata’s version, and reminds the reader of Lorca’s national origins. The translator’s names do not appear on the front cover of the Penguin edition, but on the back they are credited with translating the three plays. Edmunds’, Hare’s and Munro’s blurbs do not provide outside critical input, rather the publishing houses commend Lorca and the translators themselves on the back covers. Overall, the blurbs impart another validation of the work, deeming the play worthy of translation and supplying a crystallised summary of the plot, Lorca and the edition itself. Only Clifford’s edition forgoes a blurb, providing the aforementioned list of “The World’s Greatest Playwrights” according to the house style for the Drama Classics series.

## 2.2 Preface/ Translator’s notes / Footnotes

To venture closer to the translated play itself, the preface, translators’ note or introduction provides an opportunity for the translator or adapter to place their work within a continuum of versions and justify their version. For example, the 1998 and 2007 Methuen/Edwards

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editions are published as student editions with a parallel text with extensive notes. The series contains works by Brecht and Chekhov amongst others, but only Edwards' text provides both original and translated text, in order to provide a coherent English version of the play as an access point for students. Edwards comments on the work of others before him, and writes that the previous translations by Dewell and Zapata and by Graham-Lújan and O'Connell have a "marked American tone and both translate the original fairly literally" continuing to point out "in general the intention is to provide a translation of the play which will be useful to actors and to students of Lorca" (García Lorca/Edwards, 1998: lii-liii).

Similarly in 1999, John Edmunds, whose version is described on the back cover as "fluent and rhythmic", claims in his translators note that the translator must work out the subtext of a play, as an actor does, and highlights his commitment to a performable version (García Lorca/Edmunds 1999: iii). As Bassnett points out:

theatre texts cannot be considered as identical to texts written to be read because the process of writing involves a consideration of the performance dimension, but neither can an abstract notion of performance be put before textual considerations. (Bassnett, 1989: 110-11)

This "duality" that Bassnett focuses on is the main problem faced by all the translators of *La casa de Bernarda Alba*. Edmunds focuses on the performability of his version; however, his explanatory notes lean towards a more academic readership. These notes are useful to the director or actor (which Edmunds himself is both), but are not an element of performance. Perhaps Edmunds claim is for a producible version of the play rather than a finished stage script.

Subsequently, as Lorca's "official" translators, Dewell and Zapata achieve their status in the title *The House of Bernarda Alba and Other Plays: The New Authorized English Translation by Michael Dewell and Carmen Zapata*. When writing his translators note, Dewell notes the lack of playable translations available in 1991 (García Lorca/Dewell and Zapata, 2001: xxvii). He cites the success of his and Zapata's translation of *Bodas de sangre/Blood Wedding*, with the acclaim and awards further bolstering their position as authorised and official Lorca translators. Despite the focus on performance issues in the preface, Dewell and Zapata's version targets drama lovers, not necessarily performers, those who love "the classics" (a fitting aim for a book belonging to the Penguin Classics Series). Lorca fans that may not have had access to these plays in English before can rest assured in the legitimacy and credibility of this translation, a factor which is pointed out by every means possible in this edition. However, just as Borges remarks that "there can only ever be drafts" (Borges, 1999: 69), Dewell similarly divulges his "dearest hope is that reading

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and seeing Lorca in English will encourage people to read his poems and see his plays in their incomparable Spanish original” (García Lorca/Dewell and Zapata, 2001: xxix), thus undermining the strict authority of his translation, admitting its inferiority to the original.

Hare’s edition seems aimed at performers and directors. In his preface, he acknowledges that his text is adapted from a literal translation by Simon Scardifield (García Lorca/David Hare, 2005, v). Regarding this system of indirect translation, Bassnett notes that the notion of performability is “used to excuse the practice of handing over a supposedly literal translation to a monolingual playwright, and it is this term also that is used to justify substantial variations in the target language text, including cuts and additions” (Bassnett 1989: 102). Hare does not pretend that he has mastered the Spanish language, claiming to be an “adapter” rather than a translator. However, the publications full title *The House of Bernarda Alba: In a New English Translation by David Hare* indicates otherwise. On first inspection this text is being marketed as a translation rather than an adaptation or version. Like Edmunds, Hare focuses on performability, but does not provide explanatory footnotes, endnotes or a glossary as the other 1990s editions do. Munro’s edition has no introduction or translator’s note, but the imprint page of the book gives a brief summary of her writing career in film, television and theatre, underneath a short biography of Lorca, giving her equal billing.

Although Nick Hern Books provide scripts chiefly for performance and control the production rights to the plays it publishes, Clifford’s edition, like others in the series, comes with a lengthy but “accessible” introduction, a timeline of Lorca’s life and suggested further reading. The imprint page also underlines the importance of being “actable and accurate” and remarks that while previous scholarship has been taken into account, no explanatory footnotes are provided; rather a glossary of “difficult words” follows the play (García Lorca/Clifford, 2012, imprint). Clifford’s translation was performed in 1989 at Edinburgh’s Royal Lyceum, but the back to basics approach of this revised edition veers away from the more academic focus of the 1990s editions, while the accompanying material sets a more didactic tone than the Hare or Munro versions, which are ultimately tied to their respective productions.

### 3. Conclusion

Ortrun Zuber identifies the problems of theatrical translation and claims “a double process of translation is often at work: the movement is from one type of theatrical experience to another, and sometimes one type of participant and of audience to another” (Zuber, 1980: 5).

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Thus the audience of a translated work is of utmost importance; not only has the play itself changed, but the receiving culture presents a markedly different audience from the original, in nationality, language, cultural background and time. Shifting from performance to publication mimics this movement and changed mode of experience, with the audience of a performed play and readership of a published edition not always overlapping, or sharing priorities and expectations of a translated edition. In conclusion, Lefevere writes:

It is through translations combined with critical refractions (introductions, notes, commentary accompanying the translation, articles on it) that a work of literature produced outside a given system takes its place in that “new system”. (Lefevere, 2004: 252).

In this way, Lorca’s play filters into the English speaking system, arriving as a text that is already renowned as canonical and much dissected. The “aesthetic potential” of the play is forefronted through the cover art, blurbs and critical material that accompany the translations, while each subsequent publication has contributed to Lorca’s assimilation into the British theatre canon. To use Adrington’s term, it is the “sedimentation” of the play into the consciousness of the receiving culture that becomes a substitution for the original, as the translated script functions as a tool for Zuber’s “double process”, providing access to the Spanish text for an English production. The “refractions” of cover art, blurbs and critical material provide valuable information as to the target audience and account for the abundance of translations in the given period, but it is the innumerable productions of the play around the world that truly capture the sedimentation of Lorca’s last drama in translation.

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