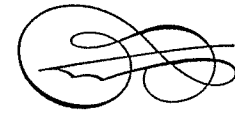




*Carlos Oquendo de Amat (center)
in front of the church in Puno, Peru*

OQUENDO'S "RAIN": A CHORAL RENDERING



Jonathan Cohen

The rain

The rain

It's the calling
card
of God

The telephone of someone's mother

And in the dirt
the rain's made two perfect little paths

Like two innocent little arms
reaching out for

SOMETHING

Trans. David M. Guss

Rain

Rain

Is the calling card
of
God

A mother's phone call

And in the mud
the rain has traced two deep tracks
A child's innocent arms
pleading for

SOMETHING

Trans. Margaret Sayers Peden

Rain,
rain,
It's a calling card
from God.

Some mother's telephone.

In the mud
rain has etched two clear pathways
like two innocent little arms
imploring

SOMETHING.

Trans. Margaret Randall

Rain:
rain
is God's calling-card,
a mom's telephone;

and rain has cut
two clear paths
in mud,
like two little open arms
that ask
SOMETHING.

Trans. Grace Schulman

Rain
Rain:

The calling card
of
God . . .

Some mama's telephone . . .

And here in the mud
rain has made two clear paths
like two little open arms
begging for

SOME-
THING

Trans. William Jay Smith

The rain

The rain

It's the calling card
of
God

A mother's telephone ringing

And through the mud
the rain has cut two clear paths
Like two innocent little arms
asking for

SOMETHING

Trans. David Unger

*And who art thou? said I to the soft-falling shower,
Which, strange to tell, gave me an answer, as here translated . . .*
Walt Whitman, "The Voice of the Rain"

1

Rain is a rare sight on the coastal plain of Lima, Peru. Even though a drizzling fog shrouds the city for much of the year, nobody owns an umbrella in Lima. The city is located on a sandy shelf between the Andes and the Pacific, and if not "the strangest, saddest city thou can'st see," as Herman Melville found it, it is a somber place, in tones of gray, brown, and dingy white, relieved here and there by the brilliant colors of roses and geraniums. When Melville saw Lima, he was struck by "the tearlessness of arid skies that never rain." Every few decades, however, the desert coast is inundated with great quantities of rain. This violent rain is the result of a shift in oceanic currents creating a southerly shift in the tropical rain belt. The warm current that flows south along the coast of Peru has long been called El Niño, which means The Child, after the Spanish *el niño Dios*, the Christ child, because it generally occurs around Christmas time (traditionally, in Peru, the supernatural being who brings children their Christmas presents is not Santa Claus, but *el niño Dios*). As for El Niño of the rain, its floods devastate the landscape; the fish leave the coast for months, wrecking the fishing industry, and the birds, lacking their customary food, die by the thousands. In the present century, El Niño brought especially heavy rains to the coast of Peru in 1925, the year before Oquendo's "Rain" appeared in the November-December issue of Lima's monthly journal of social science and letters, *Mercurio Peruano*.

The legendary Carlos Oquendo de Amat (1905-1936) was born in Puno, Peru, near Lake Titicaca in the Andes, east of the coastal plain. He grew up there in the Andean highlands, where hard rains often wash out the fields and great mudslides block the roads. The son of a doctor who

was also a politician, Oquendo enjoyed the good life as a child — in fact, he was the descendant of a viceroy and a long line of once-wealthy merchants. His father, however, died when he was thirteen, and with the death of his mother four years later, in 1922, he was left orphaned and penniless. Oquendo then moved to the capital city of Lima, where he lived in poverty, like a fallen angel, homeless, half-starved, sickly. Yet in his verses he does not reveal the horrors of his daily drama; on the contrary, his work displays a sense of joy about life, as well as a sense of humor.

Although Oquendo died young, leaving just one book — *Cinco metros de poemas* (1927), written between 1923 and 1925 (*Five Meters of Poems* [1986], trans. David M. Guss) — and four uncollected poems in magazines, including “Rain,” he was considered a poet of great promise. Time obscured his work, but in recent years he has begun to receive the attention due him, thanks to Mario Vargas Llosa, whose acceptance speech for the 1967 Rómulo Gallegos Prize featured an homage to the forgotten poet: “This countryman of mine was a consummate sorcerer, a witch with a word, a daring architect of images, a blazing explorer of dreams — a complete and obstinate creator who possessed the lucidity and the madness necessary to assume his vocation of a writer as it must be done, as one must do it: as a daily and furious immolation.”¹

The first English translations of Oquendo’s poetry, to the best of my knowledge, were made in the early 1940s by H.R. Hays, one of the great figures in the history of pan-American translation. Hays translated four poems which appear in Dudley Fitts’ *Anthology of Contemporary Latin-American Poetry* (1942). Among them is Oquendo’s fantastic “Poema del manicomio” (“Madhouse Poem”), written in 1923:

Tuve miedo
y me regresé de la locura

Tuve miedo de ser
una rueda
un color
un paso

PORQUE MIS OJOS ERAN NIÑOS

y mi corazón
un botón
más
de
mi camisa de fuerza

Pero hoy que mis ojos visten pantalones largos
veo a la calle que está mendiga de pasos

Here is the translation by Hays (who once explained to me that he translates what a poet says, *not* what he’d like him or her to say):

I was afraid
and I came back from madness

I was afraid of being
a wheel
a colour
a footstep

BECAUSE MY EYES WERE CHILDREN

and my heart
one button
more
on
my straitjacket

But today since my eyes wear long trousers
I look out at the street which goes begging for foot-
steps

Introducing his bilingual anthology, Fitts makes the following comment about original texts: "Certain unpublished poems by the late Carlos Oquendo de Amat, to cite one example [of 'the eccentricities of provincial composers'], circulate entirely in manuscript; and since there are as many variations of detail as there are admirers and hence promulgators of his verses, it is next to impossible to decide exactly what Oquendo wrote." And though Fitts was working with "rescripts at second or third hand," all of the Oquendo poems in his omnibus had actually been published in magazines or the poet's book.

As for the text of "Rain" used by the translators here, no manuscript exists. Three different versions have been published, two of them in the wake of the renewed interest in Oquendo. The version appearing in *Mercurio Peruano* (1926) was not only the first publication of the poem, but the publication arranged by the poet himself, most likely with the help of Enrique Barboza, who was a part-time editor of the magazine, and to whom the poem is dedicated "*fraternamente*," that is, affectionately, in a brotherly way:

La lluvia
La lluvia.

Es la tarjeta de visita
de
Dios.

El teléfono de alguna mamá.
Y en el barro
la lluvia ha hecho dos caminitos claros

Como dos bracitos ingenuos
que pidieran
ALGO.

Published in Barcelona in 1973, as a selection in *Surrealistas & otros peruanos insulares* (Surrealists & Other Insular Peruvians), "Lluvia" reflects a slightly different arrangement of the lines, as well as a different placement of the punctuation marks:

La lluvia

La lluvia

Es la tarjeta de visita
de
Dios

El teléfono de alguna mamá.

Y en el barro
la lluvia ha hecho dos caminitos claros

Como dos bracitos ingenuos
que pidieran

ALGO

The third version, which all but one of the translators used (Guss used the second) in contributing to the choral rendering of the poem here, appears on a pull-out page which accompanies an edition of *Cinco metros de poemas*, published in Lima in 1980. Although a footnote suggests that this "Lluvia" is the same as the original publication, one can see that it does, in fact, differ slightly from the version published by Oquendo:

La lluvia

La lluvia

Es la tarjeta de visita
de
Dios

El teléfono de alguna mamá

Y en el barro
la lluvia ha hecho dos caminos [*sic*] claros
Como dos bracitos ingenuos
que pidieran

ALGO

The differences in the spacing of lines alter the poem's music, though without grossly distorting it. To read all three versions aloud, pausing when indicated by spaces (or periods), makes clear the varied movement of energy: note the subtle differences in rhythm. The effect of the different typography is perhaps less apparent when these versions are read on the page — seen, not heard, especially since Oquendo's images (rather than the sound of his language) make the poem work. A relatively more significant difference between the latest version and the other two is in the editorial decision to replace *caminitos* with *caminos*, thus omitting the diminutive ending of the word: "little paths" became "paths," though *caminos* is also commonly used to mean roads, courses or pathways. This alteration may, however, simply reflect a printer's error; or, perhaps, "the eccentricities of provincial composers," as Fitts puts it. The word change, in my opinion, improves the line: it sounds better, less precious, and it lets the reader's imagination transform the image of two muddy roads into a pair of paths like the arms of a child, made by the rain. Translators of surrealist poetry, in particular, are often forced to puzzle out the meanings of seemingly simple words in order to recreate the "fantastic" images created by the original author, without reducing these images to the mundane sphere of

things. And translators working with surrealism also run the risk, as critics do, of mistaking the ordinary for the extraordinary (for translators, this risk adds to the thrill of it all).

The obvious questions arise: Why ask six different translators to reproduce Oquendo's voice in English, to form a choral rendering of his "Rain"? Why not simply present one *good* translation of the poem? Rainer Schulte, a leader in the field of translation, offers a few reasons for reading and studying multiple translations of the same text in his recent essay titled "Translation Theory: A Challenge for the Future." He explains:

One of the major functions of criticism is its ability to provide us, the readers, with possible entrances into a text so that we can enlarge our understanding of the literary work. Generally, we find the most complex linguistic and metaphorical structures and forms of expression in poetry. Thus, research in translation theory should be expanded to the study of multiple translations of the same poem, since *each translation offers a different perspective generated by the respective translator* [my italics] . . . The comparative study of multiple translations appears to be one of the most successful ways of bringing the reader closer to the original text . . . By juxtaposing the different solutions that translators have brought to specific moments in a given text, the reader becomes aware of the directions of thinking to which poets have given form through metaphorical expressions. The exploration of that diversity places the reader further into the internal dynamics of a textual situation.²

There are still more reasons to do a choral rendering: to demonstrate the range of approaches to translation; to show that the poem in translation is merely an approximation of the original work; to suggest that no two translations are alike; to prove that different translations of the same poem may well give readers vastly different impressions of the original author's achievement. A choral rendering can, moreover, make clear the real complexities of what it means "to translate": Middle English *translaten*, to transport, to translate, from Latin *translatus* (past participle of *trans-ferre*, to carry across, transfer, translate): *trans-*, across +

-latus, carried. Furthermore, in trying to understand translation as a literary venture, it is useful to look at different translations of the same text, with the following question in mind: Do they force English to do something new? In other words, do the translations themselves extend the range and capacity of our own speech, our own art and sensibility?

I had discovered the general idea of presenting translated literature in a "choral" fashion in Ben Belitt's book, *Adam's Dream: A Preface to Translation* (1978), in which he discusses his work as one of the many translators of Pablo Neruda's poetry. Belitt, who approached translating Neruda without attempting to produce the definitive work, says: "For me, translation remains the sensuous approximation of an amateur — a histrionic projection of my visceral and intellectual fascinations — and, I would always want to add, my *pleasure*. Translation should always give pleasure."³ Thus Belitt was glad to see the appearance of Neruda in English by other translators. In an interview with Edwin Honig, Belitt explains:

It's what I'd hoped for — many sounds, many orientations and intonations, many biases (though not their accompanying Mafia of vendettas), many permutations of pleasure — a whole orchestra tuning up on processes and procedures. But recent translations have all been on the side of a puristic leveling of Neruda to the lowest case of the literal word. Neruda is sacrosanct to his American idolators. *I prefer the 'choral' rendering of Neruda* [my italics] because tolerance and abundance are better than authorized or monogamous translation. I deplore all fixed points and terminal goals of translation.⁴

I asked Belitt to participate in the choral rendering of Oquendo's "Rain," but he declined. He explained (giving me permission to quote him): "I have withdrawn from the Great American Translation Venture myself almost completely." He did, nonetheless, encourage me to include in my discussion "the right note of curiosity and pluralism . . . to suggest the total jeopardy of the translator's enterprise

. . . [and to reveal] there are invasions, subversions, deprecations, and wafflings on all sides, as well as passing victories and consolations." He added: "I make it a practise to avoid rationales of my own translations because I believe the translator's vocation to be a 'comic' one."⁵

2

Reading, it must be emphasized, forms the root of what goes into a translation. Just as a poem begins with seeing, a translation begins with reading: critical reading. Moreover, this act of reading performed by a translator draws on a font of personal knowledge, which may include his or her scholarly findings about the author and the poem to be translated.

The most important scholarly work on Oquendo's life and verse has been done by Carlos Meneses, of Peru. His critical biography, *Tránsito de Oquendo de Amat* (Passage of Oquendo de Amat), appeared in 1973. It is truly a landmark publication, and remains the only book-length study of Oquendo available so far. Through correspondences and interviews with people who actually knew the young poet, Meneses spent years collecting pieces of the puzzle — who was Oquendo? — until at last he could put together a picture of the obscure legendary figure. The story of Meneses' book, however, is fraught with the kind of bad luck Oquendo himself had suffered, for it was poorly distributed, and then most of the copies were lost in a fire at the publisher's warehouse, and to make matters worse, the publisher went out of business.

Meneses left Peru some twenty-eight years ago. He now lives on the Spanish island of Majorca in the Mediterranean (his book on Oquendo was published in Spain). My own research has led to a fruitful correspondence with him, and we have been sharing our ideas about Oquendo's "Rain." He has explained to me that, for Oquendo, rain

tends to have a relatively sad meaning, though the poet uses it in various poems with different intentions, as seen in the following images rendered by Guss: “what a pity / the rain falls as unevenly as your name” (“Comrade”); “I know that you’re waiting for me behind the rain” (“Poem of the Sea and Her”); “The rain’s a dime to shave with” (“New York”); “You’re almost real / because for you rain is an intimate apparatus / for measuring change” (“Poem Beside the Dream”). That Oquendo gives rain so much importance is a curious thing — perhaps the torrential rains of his childhood in the Andes haunted him in Lima, where it so rarely rains.

Elaborating on this affinity Oquendo has with rain, Meneses points out that Lima’s *garúa*, the drizzling fog that shrouds the city, has a strange meaning for people there: they believe it may at times signify the beginning of a new universal deluge. Given that even drops of the *garúa* can suggest God’s Flood to *limeños*, the rare rainstorms brought by El Niño have the power to send shivers down their spines: “For after seven more days I [God] will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made.” It is, moreover, important to recognize that Oquendo’s native language expresses his culture’s particular sensibility. In Spanish the words for “sky” and “heaven” are one and the same, *cielo*, often a problem for translators because the secular and religious distinctions made in English are ambiguous in Spanish. For people in Latin America, what falls from the sky falls, to a degree, from heaven as well.

To Meneses, the first image of rain as “*la tarjeta de visita / de / Dios*” suggests a sign from God, announcing his presence. It echoes the verse from Genesis: “And behold I Myself am bringing the flood of waters on the earth.” The image calls to mind the Biblical deluge, signifying not only the destruction of the world, but another re-creation of it as well; that is, God’s capacity for both anger and mercy. Oquendo, who embraced certain Marxist ideas about reli-

gion, may well have rejected this cast of God, according to Meneses, or thought of him as an unfair God, who judged people too harshly — “that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Oquendo’s image, I should add, places God in the social context of 1920s’ Peru, in which affluent *limeños* would present calling cards to announce themselves as visitors; most still do, though the phone call is gradually replacing personal visits. Oquendo thus conjures a comic, yet no less terrifying, image of God, charged with both religious and sacrilegious overtones.

The second image of rain as “*el teléfono de alguna mamá*” gives another special meaning to it, transforming it into an instrument of communication used by this mother, who is in heaven; *alguna* here means “a certain” mother. Again, Oquendo had recently lost his own mother, about whom in 1925 he composed “Madre” (“Mother”), in which rain forms part of the image of his poetic voice:

Entre ti y el horizonte
mi palabra está primitiva como la lluvia o como los
himnos

Porque ante ti callan las rosas y la canción

(Between you and the horizon
my word’s as simple as the rain or a hymn

Because before you both the roses and the song are
silent)

Trans. Guss

In “Rain,” Oquendo’s heavenly mother can “phone” her child on earth, communicating by means of the rain. Moreover, that he calls her *mamá* — the Spanish *mamá* being the familial term for one’s mother, akin to the English “mom” — suggests that he sees her from the perspective of

a child: an ideal of maternity. Underscoring Oquendo's known obsession with his own mother, legend has it that *mamá* was his dying word.

The third and final image of two little rain-made paths in the mud, which Oquendo likens to the outstretched arms of a child asking for "SOMETHING," completes the poet's vision, Meneses argues. God has sent his card, and in our world this physical announcement of his presence becomes the child (Jesus) shouting to his father on behalf of humanity — a realistic vision of Jesus, more human than ever, and perhaps at a greater distance from God, much like the human world he wants to defend. Although Meneses was, until I informed him, unaware of the memorable rains of El Niño which visited Lima around the time Oquendo composed "Rain" there, he may now wish to expand his reading of the poem to include this relevant event in Lima's history, for the year before the poem appeared in print, "the waters prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth."

3

Since every translation embodies a reading, often refined during the process of composing the work in English, the six translations that form the choral rendering of Oquendo's "Rain" offer six different readings of the poem. To facilitate a discussion of these readings, the translators also contributed brief statements about their translations, focusing on their methods of translating the poem. Taken together, they provide meaningful insights into the poem itself, and into the nature of poetry in translation as well.

David M. Guss has spent considerably more time — years — with Oquendo than have any of the other translators. He has immersed himself in not only Oquendo's

poetry, but his life story as well. Guss' translation, *Five Meters of Poems*, is the fruit of a labor completed several years ago, during which he composed his "Rain." He is currently collaborating with director Jackson Phippen on a play based on Oquendo's life, to be called *The Brief Passage of Carlos Oquendo de Amat*, which will also focus on Carlos Meneses, from whose work Guss drew ideas that helped him in the process of reading and rendering Oquendo.

Guss offers a poetic commentary on his translation of "Rain," depicting the "afterimages" the poem evokes for him, "etched out and ineradicable":

TWO PERFECT LITTLE PATHS

remains the thing I remember after more than seven
years it could have been without articles it could have
been

Rain
Rain
Calling card of
God
A mother somewhere 's telephone
And in that dirt
the rain has carved
two perfect little paths
like two small arms
reaching out innocently

FOR SOMETHING

it could have been a lot of things it could have been the
image of Oquendo standing on a balcony in Spain un-
wrapping the paper from a new red shirt Oquendo at
dusk and dawn and in the mountains of Castile where
cannons light the sky both day and night Oquendo lost
to Spain lost to South America was his last word really
'Mama' he grasps the rail like a man at sea and stares at
the surf below him did it rain on the day Oquendo
died did troops liberate a warehouse filled with wine was
the Pope away at his summer villa

Here Guss depicts Oquendo's life after his outpouring of

poetry in the mid-1920s, when the young poet became a political activist — in 1930, he joined the Peruvian Communist Party — and his road became even more rocky. It ultimately led him to Spain, where in a sanitarium in the mountains outside of Madrid he died of tuberculosis on March 6, 1936, as the storm of the Spanish Civil War, soon to explode, was building up around him. Returning to Oquendo's "Rain," Guss concludes:

after this poem he wrote very little or if he did no one
ever saw them three published in *Amauta* and a hundred
speeches where today another path has risen

For Guss, as he suggests above, translating "Rain" comes down to the poem's rapid juxtaposition of images, given that he can envision it without the use of articles in English, freely altering both word order and line structure.

Margaret Sayers Peden brings to Oquendo's "Rain" a distinguished background as a translator of Latin American poets, novelists, playwrights, and critics: Emilio Carballido, Egon Wolff, Octavio Paz, Horacio Quiroga, Carlos Fuentes, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and Pablo Neruda, among others. She is also a scholar and prolific author in the field of Romance languages, and has contributed numerous articles to linguistics and literature journals.

Peden says she had "fun" playing "this game," though she wishes "the simplest things weren't so hard!" Describing her general translation philosophy, she points out that she is "a literalist, not an adaptor [like Belitt] — always bearing in mind those time worn (and simply worn) comments about where one draws the line between being faithful and betraying." She reads and re-reads the original text, "trying to hear cadence, meaning, sound, silence in the Spanish," and then listens "to what begins to come in English." Peden adds that she is "a particular nut about space in poetry." She likes to see "the same number of lines,

more or less the same *shape* of the original," noting "that visual form is found in its extreme in concrete poetry, but [to her mind] it operates in all poetry." Her thinking here determined one of her "moves" (her word) in her "Rain" — "perhaps not for the best." In sum, Peden tries to write in English what she hears and sees in Spanish (even though, she notes jokingly: "Not possible, naturally").

Peden's commentary on her translation works through the poem line by line:

Let's begin with the title, 'Lluvia,' and the first two lines? strophes?: 'La lluvia / La lluvia.' I am infuriated with the problem of articles. The Spanish title doesn't have to have them; grammar demands them in the Spanish 'La lluvia.' What do I do? I do not like the sound of the repeated 'the rain, the rain,' so I dropped the articles. That leaves me with the strange problem of the title. I almost decided on 'THE RAIN,' simply to reverse the presence and absence of articles, as in the Spanish. But I didn't like it. So I hope that the repeated 'rains' will be like falling rain.

Lines 7-11: 'Es la tarjeta de visita / de / Dios.' This is where I almost broke from 'shape': I think I preferred the naturalness of 'Is / God's / calling card.' I sacrifice that, though, because it totally reverses the arrangement of the original. I would make that change if the English simply didn't read. My English reads, I just like it a little less the way it is than my first version. But one makes a choice.

Line 14: 'El teléfono de alguna mamá.' The Spanish *teléfono* I read as metonymic: *llamado de teléfono* [lit., called by telephone], so my English picks up on the other half of that suggestion — the 'phone call' — because calling card and phone call (telephone) are both evidence of communication, and we end up with 'call' in each. (There must be other readings?) I drop 'some' [*alguna*] because 'a call' or 'a phone call from some mother' sounds really comic to me. That *mother* is practically reaching the disgrace (as a perfectly good word) of *patria*-as-fatherland. What we do to the language!

Line 17: 'Y en el barro.' Surely we can all translate this line the same: four words in Spanish, four words in English.

Lines 19-23: 'la lluvia ha hecho dos caminos claros / Como dos bracitos ingenuos / que pidieran.' The first line developed largely from sound: rain (flat a) suggested 'traced': 'traced' suggested 'tracks.' I like the repetition of 'tr' and the alliteration of 'traced two . . . tracks.' Since I had 'tracks'

instead of 'roads,' my 'clear' became 'deep.' As for *bracitos* [lit., little arms], the diminutive is always a dog. I shy away from 'little,' because to me that ending has more to do with the attitude of the speaker than anything physical about the person described — 'ito' can suggest affection, condescension, inferiority . . . a host of things. Here, in its place in the poem, and in combination with *ingenuos*, I get the clear message of 'innocent.' And '*que pidieran*': Yes, I see the past tense; yes, I see the subjunctive. I suppose the literal English should read 'that might be pleading for?' I'm not sure. I translated the line in present simply as 'pleading for.' The logic? I think because the pattern in the mud is *present*, is *now* (*ha*, not *habia*, *becho* [lit., has, not had, been made]); the image evoked is *before the viewer* (transformed into reader). Right or wrong, my choice.

Line 26: '*ALGO*': What can we do, other than the obvious? Oh, and I forgot the dedication: '*Para Enrique Barboza, fraternalmente.*' I tinkered with this quite a bit, rejecting 'fraternally' as artificial, trying 'with brotherly affection' (decided too much), wanting to write 'For my brother, Enrique Barboza.' I still think the last one's the best — I guess I was afraid of a literal reading of 'brother.'

Peden ultimately translated the poem's dedication as "For Enrique Barboza, with affection."

Born in New York the same year Oquendo died, **Margaret Randall** grew up to join both literary and political traditions to which he also belonged. She has worked as a teacher, model, waitress, and factory worker, and has spent many years living abroad in Mexico, Cuba, and Nicaragua. Describing her politics a few years ago, she claimed to be "a revolutionary aspiring to communist ideals and practice." As a literary figure, she distinguished herself as editor of *El corno emplumado/The Plumed Horn*, published in Mexico City between 1962 and 1969, the result of a common need to know "what was happening to the south, what was happening to the north." *El corno*, as it was called, made a significant impact as a bilingual literary magazine. Moreover, it became increasingly political and outspoken during the course of the 1960s until, in the aftermath of the 1968 massacre of hundreds of students by gov-

ernment forces (the students were taking part in a demonstration at the Plaza of Three Cultures), the Mexican government forced the publication to fold. Randall's many verse translations appearing in *El corno emplumado* — Spanish into English (Sergio Mondragón, Nicolás Guillén); English into Spanish (Robert Creeley, Paul Blackburn, Allen Ginsberg, Randall herself) — formed a significant part of the magazine's efforts to help form a pan-American community of poets and writers.

Randall is no stranger to the image-driven language of Oquendo's "Rain," nor to the Spanish way he has entered into his poem, like "the Spanish 'surrealist' or 'leaping' poet," to quote Robert Bly, who "often enters into his poem with a heavy body of feeling piled up behind him as if behind a dam."⁶ Drawing on her familiarity with Oquendo's poetics, Randall's reading places "Rain" in its cultural and historical context:

When I set out to translate a poem in Spanish into a version for an English-reading public, my first concern is for the time and place of the original; I try to put myself there — in this case, Peru in the mid-1920s. One must think, necessarily, of Vallejo (whether or not Oquendo and Vallejo knew one another's work [Oquendo did know Vallejo's]). One must transport oneself to that Andean land, rich in Quechua as well as Spanish tradition. I read the original text as many times as I feel I need to, until it allows me to take it, know it, feel at home with its words and its construction. I usually make a first draft quickly, then, and put it away, retrieving it hours or days later to attempt a fresh look. I may be satisfied with this process once; I may need to revise. That normally depends on my degree of familiarity with the poet, his or her place and time, his or her work. I believe in taking certain 'liberties,' poetic license if you like, and will frequently change a syntax or even the tense of a verb if I feel it does better by the original in terms of aura and intent. Translating the *sense* of the original is important to me.

Randall's commentary echoes Dryden's famous definition of "paraphrase," in the preface to his translation of Ovid's *Epistles* (1680):

All translation, I suppose, may be reduced to these three heads . . . metaphor, or turning an author word by word, and line by line, from one language into another . . . *paraphrase* [my emphasis], or translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view by the translator, so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense; and that too is admitted to be amplified, but not altered . . . [and] imitation, where the translator (if now he has not lost that name) assumes the liberty, not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion; and taking only some general hints from the original, to run division on the groundwork, as he pleases.

Like the other translations here that form the choral rendering of Oquendo's "Rain," Randall's effort clearly falls within the bounds of what Dryden defines as paraphrase. Her translation, moreover, embodies her reading of its *duende*, which, for instance, functions in her translation of "*que pidieran*" as "imploring," not simply asking, but pleading, begging for "SOMETHING," soulfully. Her word choice derives from the Latin *implorare* which means to invoke with tears, and it intensifies the sense of asking for something, charging it with earnestness, humility, and anxiety.

Grace Schulman is also a New Yorker, but unlike Randall, very much a citizen of New York (she has described her politics as "eclectic"). Poet, translator, scholar, critic, Schulman writes in several different forms and, since 1972, she has been poetry editor of *The Nation*, which welcomes verse translations. The editor of *Ezra Pound: A Collection of Criticism* (1974), Schulman belongs to the modern tradition of poet-translator Pound fostered: "1. Real speech in the English version. / 2. Fidelity to the original / a. meaning / b. atmosphere" — "Tain't what a man sez, but wot he *means* that the traducer has got to bring over. The *implication* of the word."⁸

Schulman's translation of "Rain" and her commentary on it came, she notes in her letter to me, "quickly" after a late-night phone conversation we had about the poem, dur-

ing "that marvelous rain" gently falling on eastern Long Island. She explains: "The only difference between the two versions I've enclosed is that in (1) I've allotted one image to a line ['is God's calling-card, / a mom's telephone;'], and in (2) I've split them ['is God's / calling-card, / a mom's / telephone;']. I think I prefer (1) because it's less pretentious, and it represents less of a break in rhythm between stanzas one and two." Her commentary elaborates:

If the first rule in translating a poem is to render it just as the author has written it, that wise principle is open to interpretation. Finding close equivalents in English may involve reversing lines to compensate for syntactical differences, altering line breaks to capture the spirit of the original, and changing some literal meanings for the music, or to make up for contrasting usage.

In translating 'Rain,' I wanted to keep the deceptive bareness, the compact two-part structure (of assertion and amplification, call and echo), and the surprise of his images. Oquendo's tone is elegant though conversational, and my effort was to approximate the natural syntax by reversing lines, when necessary, while using enjambment for surprise. I wished to preserve the sense of a turn at the outset of the second stanza, in which metaphor changes to simile, the voice is active, and the startling final image appears.

As an afterthought, she remarks: "Perhaps the knowledge that El Niño is the name associated with rainstorms in Peru helped me in making some of my choices. I don't know. I rather think that I listened to the music, the tone, the sense, the consecution of imagery, and then listened to a voice inside of me that dictated my decisions."

Over the years **William Jay Smith** has translated many foreign poets, including several French writers — Louis Aragon, for one — whom Oquendo read enthusiastically. His translation of "Rain" reflects his sensitivity to Oquendo's poetic language:

I was first struck by the simplicity of this poem, its

childlike quality. The images are those of a child — delicate, straightforward, sincere. And the formal arrangement itself is a kind of childlike collage. The poem has about it at the same time an unerring sophistication, what Mario Vargas Llosa calls the 'lucidity and madness' of 'a consummate enchanter, a verbal sorcerer.'

Since I did not know the work of Oquendo de Amat, I looked up his *Cinco metros de poemas*, which he calls these 'insecure poems' dedicated 'like his first words to his mother.' He asks his reader 'to open his book as one peels a fruit' [Oquendo's original publication and Guss' translation are printed on a fold-out page which actually opens out to five meters!], and in it he reveals a freshness that creates its own patterns, although influenced by the calligrammes of Guillaume Apollinaire.

In trying in my translation to keep the formal impact of the original, I have taken certain liberties with the punctuation, using a colon after the second 'rain' instead of the verb 'is,' a change that seems in keeping with the image of a calling card.

The poem begins, I think, abstractly: it would therefore be a mistake to translate '*La lluvia*' as '*The rain*' rather than '*Rain!*' But the poem ends very concretely, and I have taken the liberty of adding the word 'here,' which is implicit in the original and which makes for a greater directness in the final image. I have also divided the English word 'SOMETHING' in order to maintain the force of the shorter original word 'ALGO.'

Smith's reading of the poem takes into account Oquendo's naivetés, whereas the other translators refuse, perhaps, to transmit them. Smith alone has rendered *mamá* as "mama." In doing so, he risks conveying the many implications this word has in American slang. Oquendo, clearly, means mother, but he presents translators with the problem of finding an equivalent for the less formal word, to convey the bond associated with a mother-child relationship.

David Unger's translation is unique, in part, because unlike the work produced by the other translators, his is the result of a bilingualism deriving from his personal roots. He was born in Guatemala, and Spanish was his first language, English his second. His book of poems, *Neither Caterpillar nor Butterfly* (1986), reveals a poetic language akin to

both modern Latin American and contemporary Anglo-American traditions: strange, dark verbal motions.

Commenting on his translation of "Rain," Unger highlights not only the deceptive simplicity of Oquendo's poetic language, but the fundamental differences between Spanish and English as well:

As often happens, the simplest, most lyrical of poems present the most challenging obstacles for translators. Oquendo's 'Lluvia,' with its anaphora, its use of the genitive construction, its repetition, can boggle the mind. And what can we make of a line like '*El teléfono de alguna mamá*' which literally means 'The telephone of someone's mother' but whose implicit meaning leads us to connect the sound of rain falling to the ringing of a telephone? (No one can convince me that Oquendo meant that the rain is metaphorically 'some mother's telephone.') And then there's the line '*la lluvia ha hecho dos caminos claros*' where any viable translation must accurately reflect the poet's use of the word '*claros*' to signify paths that are visible to the eye, but also which carry clear, almost crystalline water. Finally, there's the phrase '*Como dos bracitos ingenuos*': any translation should suggest that the paths made by the rain resemble the arms of an infant reaching out for something.

There are parts of this poem that puzzle me: Why has the poet chosen this structure? Why do certain lines begin with capital letters and others don't? What can Oquendo mean when he says that the rain is 'the calling card of God'? So many other questions. I consulted with Peruvian poet and novelist Isaac Goldemberg while translating the poem. His comments were helpful, particularly in untangling the line '*El teléfono de alguna mamá*.'

Unger concludes by introducing his translation with these words: "What follows is my own botched version."

Carlos Oquendo de Amat was clearly a poet of great promise, who during the course of his short life made a significant contribution to the development of the image-driven language being created during the early decades of the present century by other Latin American poets, such as

Huidobro, Neruda, and Vallejo (who published in his first book [1919] a sonnet called "Lluvia" which opens like this: "In Lima . . . In Lima it's raining / water dirty with a grief / that's deadly. It's raining"). Like many of the young Latin American poets of his time, Oquendo was much attracted to the surrealism of the French writers, as well as to their politics. During his bohemian years in Lima, he had immersed himself in their poetry, especially the works of André Breton, Aragon, Apollinaire, and Paul Éluard, one of whose *Proverbs* (1925) would have told the young Peruvian: "He who has never felt rain scoffs at water lilies." Indeed, when Hays, who himself was an avid reader of the French surrealists, composed the biographical sketch of Oquendo for the Fitts anthology, he noted that Oquendo "wrote rather in the style of Éluard, but the character of his imagery creates an individual tone of gentle gaiety." And yet, "there is a haunting darkness," as Unger has recently pointed out in a review of Oquendo's *Five Meters of Poems*, "a deeply human core in many of his verses that transcends the juggling of words and images to create a powerful world uniting feeling and language." As demonstrated by "Rain," Oquendo succeeded in expanding the poetics of French surrealism, writing a dream poetry of his own invention, that is, dreaming with his eyes open, like the best of his generation in Latin America.

Concerning the choral rendering presented here, my original intention was, in part, to do it as an experiment to see if it would shed light on the matter of translation poetics. I think it has. During the months I spent working on the project, I kept recalling an important point made by William Arrowsmith and Roger Shattuck, in the introduction to their "critical symposium" on translation:

Identifiable 'genres' come easily to mind: the literal 'trot' (or 'transposition,' as Mr. Carne-Ross calls it); the scholarly-genteel or belletristic translation; the 'free' version; the 'adaptation'; the 're-creation'; the 'imitation' (in Robert Lowell's sense); and so on. Each of these different 'genres'

reflects a basic difference in function; each is good or bad according to its mode, and it is as idle to blame, say, a free version for not being literal (and vice versa) as it is to blame chalk for not being cheese.¹⁰

Rarely displayed today by readers, reviewers, scholars, teachers, and critics when they talk about translations, this understanding of the broad range of possibilities and the different values behind what makes a "good" translation is essential for knowing how to read literature that has come, somehow, from another language into English. □

NOTES

1. Mario Vargas Llosa, "Literature Is Fire," trans. Maurcen Abern de Maurer, *Doors and Mirrors: Fiction and Poetry from Spanish America (1920-1970)*, eds. Hortense Carpentier and Janet Brof (New York: Grossman, 1972) 430-31.
2. Rainer Schulte, "Translation Theory: A Challenge for the Future," *Translation Review* 23 (1987): 2.
3. Ben Belitt, *Adam's Dream: A Preface to Translation* (New York: Grove Press, 1978) 19-20.
4. Belitt 27.
5. In his letters to me, Belitt also says, "I am bored beyond words by the...[Neruda translators]...and their self-serving uproar, and see nothing but sterile reaction in the exegetical predations of grammarians, who literally find no way of changing English for Spanish but *their own*." The bitter criticism about translation poetics that accompanied the various publications of Neruda in English during the 1960s and 1970s has left Belitt with a feeling of isolation, of being the odd man out. Most critics failed to recognize his "free" approach to translating Neruda—for what it is and what it attempts—despite the long literary tradition to which this mode belongs. "From the outset," Belitt notes, "I've held the view that *curiosity*, and not *pontification*, was the proper posture for the would-be translator—an investigative wonder akin to Heisenberg's 'Uncertainty Principle' in the realm of quantum physics, not concerned with definitive outcomes. If two laureates in science like Heisenberg and Bohr can say to one another: 'When it comes to atoms, language can be used only as in poetry. The poet, too, is not nearly so concerned with describing facts as with creating images...[Bronowski's paraphrase], it should be equally possible for two translators to face each other across the same text and wonder at their common undertaking."

6. Robert Bly, *Leaping Poetry: An Idea with Poems and Translations* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975) 28.
7. As an English translation of *duende*, "soul" in American slang comes close, but loses much of the special meaning the word has accumulated in the culture of Andalusia in southern Spain. For an informative essay, see Federico García Lorca's "Theory and Function of the *Duende*," trans. J.L. Gili, *The Poetics of the New American Poetry*, eds. Donald Allen and Warren Tallman (New York: Grove Press, 1973) 91-103: "The magical quality of a poem consists in its being always possessed by the *duende*, so that whoever beholds it is baptized with dark water."
8. Ezra Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound: 1907-1941*, ed. D.D. Paige (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1950) 271, 273.
9. David Unger, rev. of Carlos Oquendo de Amat's *Five Meters of Poems*, trans. David M. Guss, *Review: Latin American Literature and Arts* 37 (1987): 80.
10. William Arrowsmith and Roger Shattuck, eds., *The Craft and Context of Translation: A Critical Symposium* (New York: Anchor Books, 1964) xiii-iv.