

**TRANSLATION
PROBLEMS IN E. E.
CUMMINGS'
EXPERIMENTAL
POETRY: VISUAL
APPEARANCE, PLAYS
ON WORDS AND
PUNCTUATION MARKS***

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to offer a description and evaluation of the Spanish translations of Cummings' poetry, paying special attention to the differences between them and the original poems. The first part consists of a brief account of the five translations into Spanish by José Casas, Alfonso Canales, Octavio Paz, Ulalume González de León and Juan Cueto-Roig. The second part focuses on three representative features in E. E. Cummings' experimental poetry – visual appearance, plays on words and punctuation marks– and the different solutions proposed by the translators for these features. It is my contention that the principal problem a translator

Resumen

El objetivo principal de este artículo es ofrecer una descripción y evaluación de las distintas traducciones en lengua española de la poesía de E. E. Cummings, prestando especial atención a las diferencias entre los textos origen y los textos meta. La primera parte consiste en un breve resumen de las traducciones al español llevadas a cabo por José Casas, Alfonso Canales, Octavio Paz, Ulalume González de León y Juan Cueto-Roig. La segunda estudia tres rasgos típicos de la poesía experimental de E. E. Cummings y las distintas soluciones propuestas por estos traductores. Sostengo que el problema principal con el que un traductor puede encontrarse al traducir a Cummings es si debe mantener estos rasgos tan peculiares o centrarse por el

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may find when translating Cummings is whether to keep these “eccentric features” or to translate the message leaving them aside. Throughout the whole article, problems and advantages of the two options will be considered as a way to propose new translations and approaches to the American author.

Key words: E. E. Cummings, translation, linguistics, experimental poetry, visual effect, play on words, punctuation marks.

contrario en el mensaje. A través de este artículo considero las ventajas e inconvenientes de las diferentes opciones y propongo nuevas traducciones y aproximaciones al autor americano.

Palabras clave: E. E. Cummings, traducción, lingüística, poesía experimental, efecto visual, juego de palabras, signos de puntuación.

1. INTRODUCTION

Edward Estlin Cummings (1894-1962) was one of the most important poets of his lifetime and probably the most striking one for some of his contemporaries.¹ Nonetheless, publications about him are limited, especially outside of the USA, while translations of his work are few, and even fewer studies of his works are translated.

The aim of this article is therefore to review briefly five Spanish anthologies of Cummings’ poetry and to analyze the main problems related to visual appearance, plays on words and punctuation marks, which seem to be some of the most representative devices used by this author. I would also like to investigate whether translating Cummings is an impossible task, as some authors have suggested. I must make clear that the devices I have included here are not meant to represent an exhaustive selection, but I have tried to concentrate on the features that are less related to meaning. Of course, I could have included questions such as metaphor, rhythm or rhyme, but it was my intention to focus on those aspects that traditionally are less associated with poetry.

My analysis will centre on the significant differences between some translations and others, and the effect the decisions of the translators produce on

¹ According to the New York Times newspaper (1962), Cummings was the second most read poet of his time after Robert Frost at the time of his death.

the reading of the poems. I will also suggest possible solutions to the problems encountered and propose new translations and approaches to examining this subject.

To this end, I have selected several poems published by Cummings in the course of his career. The criteria I have followed for this selection are based on the experimental features, because these apparently present a special difficulty for translation. They have been rejected by critics in some occasions,² and even they are rarely included in anthologies of poetry and literature in general. After studying them in detail, what I present here is the result of my investigation.³

I have taken the poems from the authorized electronic version of *Complete Poems* (Cummings 1998), which is available through the websites of many universities' libraries and corresponds to the print version that was published four years before by Liveright. The references to the poems appear in the article only the first time they are mentioned to avoid repetition; for this reason, I have also included an appendix at the end of the article so that the reader can easily locate them on the webpage.

2. SPANISH TRANSLATIONS OF E. E. CUMMINGS' POETRY

The translators mentioned here are not the only ones who have translated E. E. Cummings' texts into Spanish. Jorge Santiago Perednik (1995) and Mari Luz Fonseca (2003) also published two anthologies of his poetry, apart from some other loose translations in different publications. I have not been able to include these two anthologies since they were not accessible at the moment of writing this article; nonetheless, I have used a wide and representative sample that includes several translation options, so I think the results of this research will not be invalidated for this reduction. Alfonso Canales and Octavio Paz carried out free translations taking into account Cummings' poetry and his typographical techniques; José Casas and Ulalume González de León represent the neutral option as they produced versions that are close to the original ones,

² See, for instance, Blackmur (1931) or Winters (1939), who talked about Cummings as an eternal adolescent and a poet who used language in a fussy way.

³ For reasons of space, I have only included some of them. Likewise, the explanation and the alternatives that I offer are also brief, but I think they adequately summarise the main ideas that need to be put forward.

but they tried to use the author's linguistic resources as much as possible; finally, Juan Cueto-Roig has been the most conservative translator, since he has ignored these linguistic features systematically.

Buffalo Bill ha muerto: Antología poética (José Casas 1996) is the most complete and representative Spanish bilingual anthology of E. E. Cummings' poetry. In this book, we find the translation and the original text of almost one hundred and fifty poems carefully selected from each of Cummings' publications. They are placed in chronological order, but the author has not included his own experience when translating them, as in the case of Cueto-Roig (2006) or Canales (1964, 1973). The selection of the poems and the edition of the book were carried out by Miguel Ángel Muñoz San Juan and Antonio Figueras, who did not forget Cummings' most famous poems and also included some texts not published in his lifetime.⁴ This anthology includes transcendental and experimental poems, and the translations are singular in retaining the original sense of the texts without losing all the typical features of Cummings' language. For all these reasons, this is the widest and most representative of all the Spanish anthologies of E. E. Cummings.

Alfonso Canales published two anthologies of E. E. Cummings' poems (1964, 1973) including the same thirty texts and a version of "little tree" (*CP* 29) by Rafael León. The difference between them is that the latter includes the original texts in English and a revision of Canales' Spanish translations. This version is remarkable for the importance given to the typographical techniques, although this fact does not leave the message aside. Canales' option is not arbitrary, for he tries to translate into Spanish the most representative features in the author's poetry; this option means the Spanish reader may find some poems are difficult to read, as is also the case for English-speaking readers.

Octavio Paz has written many essays on the subject of translation. *Traducción: literatura y literalidad* (1971) is the most remarkable because Paz considers poetry universal and explains his loathing against the idea of the impossibility in translating Cummings: "Confieso que esta idea me repugna, no sólo porque se opone a la imagen que yo me he hecho de la universalidad de la poesía, sino porque se funda en la concepción errónea de lo que es la traducción" (Paz 1971:11). In this book, the chapter "e. e. cummings: seis poemas y un recuerdo" includes the experience of Paz as translator of

⁴ Most of the poems which Cummings did not publish in his lifetime appeared in 1983 in *Etcetera: The Unpublished Poems of E. E. Cummings*. George J. Firmage and Richard S. Kennedy, two of the leading figures in the study of the American poet, were responsible for this edition.

Cummings and the translation of five poems. Some years later, Paz published *Versiones y diversiones* (1974), where he included the same five poems –with some changes– and one more. He talks about extravagances and images, and he considers the extreme handcrafted development of the author's poetry. Due to this vision, the translator managed to keep the balance between message and form, respecting Cummings' artifices in every text.

Ulalume González de León produced several Spanish translations of different English-language authors, some as famous as Ted Hughes or Elisabeth Bishop. *El uno y el innumerable quién* (1978) is a small book where she included twenty eight poems translated into Spanish. Besides selecting poems related to love, the majority of them are experimental. González de León is notably willing to translate the typographical eccentricities in Cummings: "Dificultades planeadas para obligar a un esfuerzo que propicie la captación del poema, las de cummings multiplican los placeres de la lectura" (González de León 1978:6). It is not surprising, then, that the translator keeps these eccentricities in all her translations and dares to translate special poems such as "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" (CP 396).

En época de lilas: cuarenta y cuatro poemas (Cueto Roig 2004) is the most recent Spanish bilingual anthology. The translator includes here forty-four original texts as well as their translations, together with an introduction where he explains his stand on Cummings' typographical experimentations:

En esta mi "visión" de Cummings rehusé someterme (y someter al lector) a los rigores de una traducción literal y exacta. Respeté la idea y el estilo del poeta, pero no los malabarismos tipográficos que tanto abundan en su obra [...]. En primer lugar, porque no creo que una estricta obediencia a sus caprichos sintácticos ayude en nada al disfrute de su poesía y, segundo, porque soy un fanático de los signos ortográficos y de su tradicional uso. (Cueto-Roig 2004:13)

This vision the translator explains has significantly influenced the selection of the poems, for he excludes some texts as famous as "(a" (CP 673), "dim" (CP 674), or "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r", where the important points are visual and aural aspects.⁵ Although I do not share his opinion, this position has been

⁵ Canales (1964, 1973), González de León (1978) or Paz (1971) are some of the authors that recognize the importance of Cummings' experimentation in poetry. There are also many studies published in the USA in which scholars have shown their preference for the linguistic devices employed by the poet. There is a clear consensus on form as the essential element in Cummings' poetry.

decisive for contrasting his versions with the other translators', as we will see in the next section.

3. E. E. CUMMINGS' EXPERIMENTAL POETRY: THE CASE FOR SPANISH VERSIONS

From my point of view, working on Cummings' poetry implies embarking on a study of his linguistic devices. As Octavio Paz states, none of Cummings' "eccentric features" are arbitrary:

Ninguna de las llamadas "extravagancias" de Cummings –tipografía, puntuación, juegos de palabras, sintaxis en las que los sustantivos, los adjetivos y aún los pronombres tienden a convertirse en verbos– es arbitraria. Es un juego que, como todos los juegos, obedece a una lógica estricta. Lo maravilloso del juego es que, como la poesía, pone en movimiento la necesidad para producir el azar o algo que se asemeja: lo inesperado. Nada menos gratuito que una composición de Cummings, nada más sorprendente. Juego y pasión. (Paz 1971:72)

Consequently, we should describe this experimentation in order to discuss how the translation problems have been solved. Obviously, to include here an exhaustive classification and description of this experimentation is impossible in the context of a brief article, and only to mention most of them would imply a rather pointless, vague approach. I have therefore decided to focus on the three matters of visual appearance, plays on words and punctuation marks, keeping in mind two questions: first, that this is only a small portion of what can be said about devices and experimentation in E. E. Cummings; second, that he also published many poems that are completely different and do not present these features.⁶

⁶ "En sus versos de juventud, Cummings se aferra a la tradición poética inglesa, Tennyson y Keats primeramente, después los románticos y los isabelinos, y por último Rosetti, Swinburne y los decadentes de final de siglo, que eran muy apreciados por los modernos de Harvard de entonces" (Muñoz 1996). They are poems the author published in his first stage, in which scholars have included *The Enormous Room* (1922), *Tulips and Chimneys* (1923) and *&* (1925) besides his first poems that he wrote at Harvard and were published in some journals.

3.1. VISUAL APPEARANCE: CUMMINGS, THE IMAGISTS AND CONCRETE POETRY

In the second decade of the twentieth century, European and American literature experienced a big change thanks to an artistic movement called "Imagism." This movement preferred image, precision and clarity in language, and rejected the over-elaborate artifice that was typical in previous times, such as Romanticism or Victorian poetry: "En ese momento los escritores norteamericanos no pensaban en otra cosa que en oponerse a la sociedad y a la cultura anterior" (Veres 2001). The influence of this movement on Cummings became clearer as a result of his cordial relationship with Ezra Pound.⁷

Both E. E. Cummings and Ezra Pound, among others, were responsible for the blossoming of a new artistic movement related to visual appearance and known as Concrete Poetry. The importance of Cummings for this new movement has been stated in several publications:⁸

The American concrete poet finds himself in the strange position of being associated with a new formal movement whose origins are foreign and many of whose foundation stones were laid by e. e. cummings and Ezra Pound. [...] Until now cummings has remained for the American poet in a place uniquely his own, admired for his original style, death to imitate. (Solt 1968)

The basic principles of the two movements can be observed in Cummings' poetry, especially in his experimental texts.

With the passing of time, Cummings started writing and painting and he managed to make several painting exhibitions in New York. Since then, the relationship between poetry and painting and the concern with visual representation became central to his work: Cummings has "drawn" in his poetry a Christmas tree ("little tree"), a falling leaf ("a"), a park's square ("dim") or a moon ("to stand(alone)in some," *CP* 696), among others. Here are some examples:

⁷ In *Selected Letters* (1969) the reader may find more than thirty letters addressed to Ezra Pound, where Cummings shows his great affection for him. Cummings says: "there is a miracle in NY city. This miracle is worth your travelling to NY city. This miracle is a 'natural' history museum" (Cummings 1969:129). Further information on this topic can be found in Goodwin (1966).

⁸ See also O'Brian (1973).

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|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| l(a | dim | to stand(alone)in some |
| | i | |
| le | nu | |
| af | tiv | autumnal afternoon: |
| fa | | breathing a fatal |
| | e this park is e | stillness; while |
| ll | mpty(everyb | enormous this how |
| | ody's elsewher | |
| s) | e except me 6 e | |
| one | | patient creature(who's |
| l | nglish sparrow | never by never robbed of |
| | s)a | day) puts always on by always |
| iness | autumn & t | |
| | he rai | |
| | | dream,is to |
| | n | |
| | th | |
| | e | taste |
| | raintherain | not(beyond |
| | | death and |
| | | life) imaginable mysteries |
| 95P (1958): CP 673 | 95P (1958): CP 696 | 95P (1958), CP 674 |

The first poem,⁹ one of the most famous of Cummings' compositions, describes an autumnal afternoon. The striking point in it consists in the fact that the author has only used four words: "a", "leaf", "falls" and "loneliness". Besides the meaning conveyed through them, Cummings resorts to visual expression and provokes a reading quite similar to the movement followed by the leaf in its descent. In the second example, Cummings uses the second stanza to simulate the square shape of the park where the main character and the six sparrows are situated, placing an "e" at each corner of the square. Finally, the last example is the most explicit, for it resembles the shape of the moon, also referred to in the text as "this how / patient creature."

These and other poems are outstanding examples of visual representation, using not only the explicit meaning of words, but also images. This was partially thanks to Cummings' experience as a painter and the influence of the

⁹ For further information on this poem, there are many available publications. See, for instance, Landles (2001) or Welch (1995).

artistic movements predominant in the first half of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, this appearance is not self-contained, but depends on other linguistic features that will be explained later, such as blank spaces and lines or breaking of words.

One of the problems faced by translators when dealing with Cummings is to decide whether to translate a poem with a similar appearance or not; in fact, there are some experimental poems such as "(a)" that have only been translated once or twice, despite their significance as some of Cummings' quintessential poems. We may even find visual poems that have not been translated into Spanish by any of these translators. This is one of the main problems for two reasons: first, in the cases where the Spanish translator has decided to attempt Spanish versions of visual poems, the results are of a convincingly high standard; secondly, decisions of this nature give a "false" impression of Cummings' poetry, for an anthology that does not include poems like these is not an anthology of Cummings.

The poems that are mentioned above have all been translated into Spanish except for "to(stand)alone in some." As a general rule, translators have maintained this visual aspect of the texts, so they have emulated the represented images, have left the blank spaces and have placed the poems in the same position as Cummings placed them. There are some exceptions, such as Cueto-Roig, who did not leave blank spaces when translating "little tree." In addition to the fact that this is the only visual poem that Cueto-Roig translated, the way he omitted the spaces is not surprising, for he clearly declares his intention not to respect typographic deviation (Cueto-Roig 2006:13). With "dim," solutions become ambiguous, for González de León does not keep the four corners feature, while José Casas changes the length of the verses:

e this park is e
mpty(everyb
ody's elsewhere
e except me 6 e

95P (1958): CP 696

e este parque e
stá vacío(tod
os están ya en otra part
e salvo yo 6 e

Casas (1996)

o este parque v
acío (todoel mun
do en otra part
e excepto yo 6

González de León (1978)

o este parque o
lvidado (todos
en otra parte salv
o mis 6 gorrio

Canales (1964, 1973)

In the case of Casas, it is curious that he neither keeps the verse length in the first line of “(a”, and he does not represent the shape of the number one,¹⁰ concentrating on the message and leaving the shape aside.

On the question of whether to keep the shape in Spanish versions or not, I suggest an affirmative answer considering the existing examples. First of all, keeping the poem’s visual appearance does not imply making the reading of the poem harder; on the contrary, it reinforces the meaning and the context providing new perspectives of approaching the text. Besides, the author himself gives importance to this aspect, for he is recurrent in his use of it and has personally justified the visual appearance of certain poems.¹¹

The main concern when translating the visual effect is not to decide whether to keep the message or shape, but to unite both aspects, as Canales manages to do with “dim:”

“mí”

mi
nús
cu
l

o este parque o
lvidado (todos
en otra parte salv
o mis 6 gorrio

nes inglese
s) o
toño & l
a lluvi

a
l

¹⁰ The recurrence of number one is essential in this poem: Cummings placed it first in *95 Poems*, a book in which the author makes a thematic progression from loneliness –as clearly expressed in this poem– to the union of “you” and “I”, represented in the last line of the last poem, “if up’s the world; and a world grows greener” (CP 769). Moreover, Cummings repeats the concept “one” on several occasions: it appears in a line, the visual aspect of the poem is that of a number one, and the author uses the consonant /l/ five times, whose graphic appearance is quite similar to number one, especially on the typewriter he used for creating his work.

¹¹ In a letter to Frances A. Randall, Cummings (1969:260) explains the nature of the poem “un(bee)mo” (CP 691): “[...] all poem 19 [95 *Poems*] wants to do is to create a picture of a bee, unmoving, in the last blossom of a rosebush.”

a
lluvialalluvia

Canales (1971)

As we can see, the translator kept the visual effect of the poem just as Cummings had done in 1958. If we get to transmit the message and the poem's visual appearance, we will have managed to retain both content and shape: the two most important elements on which E. E. Cummings based his poetry.

3.2. PLAYS ON WORDS: COMPRESSING, DISORDERING, BREAKING AND CREATING

Plays on words are one of the most prominent features in Cummings' work. According to Friedman, "Cummings' distortion of grammatical and syntactical units is his next most radical device" (1960:105). They can be understood as the tools to produce the visual effect described above, and in fact, they are. But at times plays on words produce results that are not related to the general appearance of the texts.

Depending on the type of material process, I have distinguished four categories: compression of phrases, coinage, break-up of words and disordered spelling.

Cummings frequently compresses a phrase into one word; in *Selected Letters* (Cummings 1969) he constantly repeats the combination "bookofpoems,"¹² and in his poems we can find "onetwothreefourfive" ("Buffalo Bill's" CP 90) or "raintherain" ("dim"). These compressions produce a higher speed for the reading of the poem, besides continuity and rhythm.

Suffixes, prefixes, compounding and "apparently" illogic grammatical constructions are frequent tools that Cummings uses to coin new words and phrases. I say "apparently" because, on examination it becomes clear they are the result of a highly elaborate creative process and have a specific aim, for example "firmlysquirmy," "justgraze," "thickish," "firm-smoothness" or "moonly." Sometimes Cummings goes further, creating curious phrases that do not follow grammatical rules, as is the case of "more thicker than forget."

¹² Frequently, Cummings used this phrase to refer to his poetry publications when he talked to his friends about a new creation. For him, they were not simply "books", but "booksofpoems."

Probably as frequently as compressing, the author breaks a word into several lines, as in “(a” and “un(bee)mo,” or even reduces it by eliminating some of its letters. This feature produces dynamism and speed, and is also related to the concept of visual aspect, a concern that Cummings started showing when he was only eight years old.¹³

Finally, the most striking device consists in changing the order of the letters of a word inside a verse or throughout the whole poem; the most famous example is “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r,” where he emulates the jump of the grasshopper:

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                                r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r
who
a)s w(e loo)k
upnowgath
    PPEGORHRASS
                                eringint(o-
aThe):l
    eA
    !p:
S
                                a
                                (r
rIvInG    .gRrEaPsPhOs)
                                to
rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly
,grasshopper;

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No Thanks (1935): CP 396

Some authors have defined this poem as a willing failure, but the truth is that, thanks to this poem, Cummings reaches the extreme in visual representation, becoming one of the most popular examples of his creative techniques.

None of Cummings’ plays on words have been extremely difficult to translate, except for coining new words. For compressions, coinages and breakings, the solution has been clear: compressing, disordering or breaking words as the author did before. As this is not a real problem, most of the translators have kept these features in the Spanish versions.

¹³ In a letter Cummings wrote to his mother in 1902, he used vertical writing for the first time, dividing the text into five columns (Cummings 1969).

All compressions have been translated the same way. “onetwothreefourfive” has been translated as “unadostrescuatrocinco” by González de León and Casas, but Canales has used the masculine determiner “undostrescuatrocinco;” this alternative is explained by his use of free translation: Canales creates as well as translates –he is a poet and a translator–, so he writes “undostrescuatrocinco pichones” while the other translators have preferred “unadostrescuatrocinco palomas.” The same translators coincide when translating “raintheraintherain” as “lalluvialalluvialalluvia.” So, compressing words and phrases is not a difficult task from the formal point of view, as the Spanish versions have shown.

The most problematic category is the coinage of words, since the process may differ a lot as it depends on morphological categories that vary in each language:

[Cummings'] coinages –and a large portion of his vocabulary consists of words that he has invented– are derived by analogy from already existing words. Rarely, if ever, does he make up a word on the basis of root-creation, which produces coinages having no previous analogy in language. And of the words that he has thus adapted, by far the largest portion is formed by derivation in which parts of speech are changed, or new words are created by the addition of affixes to already existing words. (Friedman 1960:105)

As Friedman explains, most of Cummings' creations are based on a derivational process, so affixes are very frequent. Morphological differences therefore produce different alternatives by different translators. On the one hand, for “moonly” and “sunly,” González de León has made a literal translation, using the Spanish form “mente:” “lunarmente” y “solarmente.” Octavio Paz, on the contrary, uses existing words instead of creating new ones: “solar” and “lunar.” On the other hand, “firm-smoothness” has been respectively translated as “lisura-fiel” and “firme-suavidad” by Canales and Casas. In this case, the play on words is not kept, for Cummings has used two adjectives that can receive the same suffix and Spanish does not offer this possibility. As this is one of the most representative features, I believe every play on word should be translated as far as possible, and this has been the intention of Casas, Canales, González de León and Paz, who have kept them whenever it has been possible, although in some cases they have had to use their own creations.

Breaking of words has been consistently kept in Spanish translations with the exception of Cueto-Roig. They have thus transmitted the dynamism and verticality explained before. The only concern is with Casas' translation of “(a”, where he does not keep the verticality in the first line. These are the two Spanish versions together with the original poem:

| | | |
|---------------------------|------------|--------------|
| l(a | s(una | s(u |
| le | ho | na |
| af | ja | ho |
| fa | c | ja |
| ll | a | ca |
| s) | e) | e) |
| one | ole | o |
| l | d | l |
| iness | dad | edad |
| <i>95P (1958): CP 673</i> | Casas 1996 | Canales 1973 |

As we can appreciate, Casas' translation does not keep the graphic representation of the number one that was achieved by Cummings and Canales. Probably he should have kept it, since this general impression is fundamental in the poem, as has been stated by many researchers.

Finally, disordered spelling has only been dealt with by González de León, the only translator of "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r." Considered from a purely formal viewpoint, the Spanish version is exactly the same as the original poem, because it also provokes a jumping reading similar to the movement of the grasshopper. In both the original and the translation, the disordered spelling is arbitrary in relation to the noun, but not in relation to the position they occupy on the page. No matter what, translators could easily keep this disorder when they work with a poem using such a device.

In general terms, plays on words are a pillar in Cummings' poetry, and, except for coinages, these techniques are not really difficult to translate. Therefore, after having studied the Spanish alternatives, it should be recommended to keep all of them whenever possible.

3.3. CUMMINGS' CREATIVE USE OF PUNCTUATION MARKS

The experimental use of punctuation marks is also an outstanding device in Cummings' poetry. It is important to point out that this use is typical in both his

experimental and non-experimental poetry, so even at the very beginning of his career, we can find traditional poems that include this feature. For this paper, I have chosen what I believe to be the most common marks employed by the author, that is, parenthesis, commas, periods, inverted commas, colons and capital letters.¹⁴

A glance at Cummings' poems immediately shows that more than a half of them include parentheses, as in "up into the silence the green" (*CP* 673), "(a)", "un(bee)mo" or "my specialty is living said" (*CP* 473) where they are used ungrammatically, most of the time in the middle of a word:

un(bee)mo
vi
n(in)g
are(th
e)you(o
nly)
asl(rose)eep

95P (1958): *CP* 691

Sometimes, parenthesis do not split words, but interfere in the reading of the poem. In both cases, the result is a new point of view that solves the language's problem of linearity. Cummings grasps different linguistic levels besides including the poetic voice and his thoughts. Simultaneity is its main contribution, but, as Rushworth Kidder says:

There is no infallible rule for reading around or through parentheses. They are usually to be treated in standard fashion, as marks that isolate inserted material, whether they come between or within words. [...] On some occasions, however, we must ignore the parentheses. (Kidder 1979:15)

In relation to commas, periods, inverted commas and colons, as with other features, Cummings frequently leaves out these marks,¹⁵ while on other occasions, he uses them when he should not. If we face the last case when reading one of his poems, we do not need to worry about it –the only thing we have to do is delete them–, but if he has omitted the marks, then it would be difficult to include in the text certain elements that were not there before,

¹⁴ The punctuation marks that I have included are not the only ones that are foregrounded in Cummings' poetry, so hyphens and some others could also be considered.

¹⁵ In his introduction, Kidder also mentions this aspect, and he explains: "Cummings often deletes periods, commas, colons and quotation marks, which need to be reinserted by the reader" (1979:11).

especially in those sentences that do not include any clue. In “may i feel said he” (CP 339) Cummings did not include any mark, but it is quite easy for us to reconsider them as this is clearly a conversation between a man and a woman. This is a portion of the poem:

may i feel said he
 (I'll squeal said she
 just once said he)
 it's fun said she

 (may i touch said he
 how much said she
 a lot said he)
 why not said she [...]

No Thanks (1935): CP 399

Xerardo Fernández Álvarez explains in relation to this poem:

hay excepciones a este uso normal de las comillas, pero éstas se producen cuando no hay lugar a dudas sobre el foco emisor del enunciado, o por obvias razones de efectismo poético. [...] también en “may i feel said he” por ejemplo, en donde lo escueto, preciso y simétrico de las intervenciones del yo-lírico y su función como narrador del encuentro sexual de dos terceros elimina toda sombra de duda sobre la adscripción de las voces. (Fernández Álvarez 1998:37)

From the outset, Cummings' use of capitals led to much comment. In “my sweet old etcetera” (CP 275) he used lower case letters for proper nouns and at the beginning of some sentences:

my sweet old etcetera
 aunt lucy during the recent

 war could and what
 is more did tell you just
 what everybody was fighting

 for,
 my sister

 isabel created hundreds
 (and
 hundreds)of socks not to
 mention shirts fleaproof earwarmer

is 5 (1926): CP 275

Richard S. Kennedy said that, “as for punctuation, the purpose of which is to guide and clarify meaning for a reader, he realized that its absence could create significant ambiguities and complexities” (Kennedy 1980:107). Although most of the times Cummings used capital letters to emphasize some elements, it could be possible to use lower case letters for a specific purpose, such as to show his admiration for childhood or the rejection of adult values. The most controversial aspect is the use of the personal pronoun “I.” In one of his letters, Cummings tried to use “i” instead of “I” for the first time, but the editor thought it was an error and corrected the pronoun so that it appeared in capital letters (Kennedy 1980:109).¹⁶ Cummings himself said in a letter to an unidentified correspondent: “Concerning the small ‘I’: did it never strike you as significant that, of all God’s children, only English & Americans apotheosize their egos by capitalizing a pronoun whose equivalent is in French ‘je’ in German ‘ich’, & in Italian ‘io’?” (Cummings 1969:244).

Translators of poems including punctuation marks have not faced any problem and all of them have agreed on keeping them. Cueto-Roig is the only one who has not kept these marks on many occasions. It is curious the fact that this translator is not consistent with his beliefs, for in some cases, he keeps marks, while in others such as “may i feel said he” or “plato told,” he deletes them:

Puedo acariciarte, dijo él
 Gritaré, dijo ella
 Sólo es una vez, dijo él
 Es divertido, dijo ella

 Puedo tocarte, dijo él
 Cuán fuerte, dijo ella
 Bastante, dijo él
 Por qué no, dijo ella

(Cueto-Roig 2004)

As we can see, the translator has omitted the parenthesis. This decision has a real consequence on the reading of the poem, for the Spanish reader cannot perceive the duality between oral speech and thoughts that are differentiated by means of the parentheses in the original poem. As with many other devices, at first sight this use of parenthesis could be something arbitrary, but on closer

¹⁶ The poem was titled “i will wade out” (*CP* 68). The published text is not the original manuscript Cummings gave his editor –the one Kennedy refers to. In order to consult the original text, see Kennedy (1979:107-109).

examination, we can distinguish two different discourses: on the one hand, there is what the man and the woman are saying aloud one to another; on the other hand, there is what they are thinking to themselves. Although we have no real evidence that this is so, the translator should respect the devices used by Cummings for several reasons: firstly, the fact that Cummings ungrammatically used a punctuation mark is not arbitrary, he is clearly trying to produce a certain effect on the reader. Secondly, the rest of the formal features have been solved by keeping their original appearance, and this one should not be different. Thirdly, it is relatively easy to restore the marks that Cummings has deleted or to delete them when he has added them, so their absence or presence does not affect the reading, but it adds new perspectives. This is something the Spanish – or any other language– version should not lack.

4. CONCLUSIONS

After presenting the experimental features and comparing the Spanish translations to the original texts, it seems that translating E. E. Cummings' poetry into Spanish is not as difficult as it might seem at first sight. The ways the translators have solved the problems they may have encountered seem to fall into three different categories: paying attention only to content leaving aside formal aspects, admitting that content and formal aspects are on the same level –and consequently must be translated as faithfully as possible– and accepting the problem and reinforcing the duality by a process of new creation.

The first option, perfectly exemplified by Cueto-Roig, means that the translator only translates the message from one language into another, leaving aside any other linguistic element. This is a point of view that may have a negative influence on the reader, the text and even the translator: on the reader because the translator is not giving them what they are looking for –anyone who wants to read Shakespeare would like to find Shakespeare, and not the translator's personal feelings or beliefs towards the English poet; on the text because the translator does not show a representative sample of Cummings' poetry¹⁷ and does not keep the peculiarities of each poem; and finally on the

¹⁷ His skepticism for linguistic features, the phonetic use or the breaking with any norm may produce –and has produced in the case of Cueto-Roig– an insufficient selection of poems that leaves aside the most avant-garde texts and focuses on traditional ones.

translator, because he has followed his prejudices and personal tastes, ignoring Cummings' true poetry and the author's preferences for linguistic features.

Once the translators recognize the importance of both form and meaning, things become much more real. According to Mannani, "A clear cut-division between form and content in Cummings' poetry is almost impossible to establish and can only result in a superficial interpretation of his works" (1999). This concern does not mean any prejudice in the selection of poems and contributes positively to the text, the reader and the translator. This alternative satisfies and benefits the reader, because it is faithful to the essence of his poetry and it is what the reader expects from Cummings. It does not judge, but helps the understanding of Cummings' kind of poetry, besides playing with the possibilities language offers, even when these are not the same as in the second language.

But we can go beyond this, and this is where the third option is established. Paz and Canales get to keep the essence of Cummings' poetry and they are free to work on the texts with good results. One could argue that free translation can somehow distort the perception of the original poem, but after reading the translations by the two authors and studying the alternatives they offer, it is easy to assume that they are not only taking English language and its rules as the starting point, but also producing a new poem in Spanish that fits the readers' expectations and works by itself as goal text. Understanding the devices, applying them as much as possible and offering other solutions when these cannot be kept is presumably the best approach to Cummings' poetry.

After having analyzed the translations, I believe that translating Cummings is not an impossible task, but a complex and satisfactory one once we have achieved keeping both message and form.

Finally, I would like to stress that further studies are needed in order to expand knowledge on E. E. Cummings, especially those that concentrate on translation. The lack of studies and Spanish versions are due to a wrong impression about the impossibility of translating Cummings, which, as we have seen briefly here, is not the case. During the sixties and seventies, there was a great amount of interest in Cummings that produced much critical work, especially in the United States: Friedman (1960, 1964, 1972), Marks (1964), Berutti (1970), Schmider (1972), O'Brien (1973) Fairley (1975) and Kidder (1979) are some of the most representative. In Spain, this incipient interest provoked several translations that have been included in this study. In the last fifteen years, this concern has reemerged in both countries with Webster (1995), Heusser (1997), Ruiz Sánchez (2000), González Mínguez (2004) and Landles

(2008) among others. Nonetheless, this growth of interest does not include translation studies. So, the future is open for new translations, anthologies and academic studies to fill this unfortunate gap.

5. LIST OF POEMS AND LOCATION IN *COMPLETE POEMS*

| | |
|---|-----|
| (a | 673 |
| Buffalo Bill's' | 90 |
| dim | 674 |
| if up's the world;and a world grows greener | 769 |
| i will wade out | 68 |
| little tree | 29 |
| may i feel said he | 339 |
| my specialty is living said | 473 |
| my sweet old etcetera | 275 |
| plato told | 553 |
| r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r | 396 |
| to stand(alone)in some | 696 |
| un(bee)mo | 691 |
| up into the silence the green | 529 |

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