

The Journal of Frida Kahlo: translating the multimodality and materiality of a textual self-portrait

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Frida Kahlo's diary has been described as an aesthetic, expressive and intermedial compendium (Gronemann, 2006; Reis, 2012). Published in 1995, it was presented to the public through facsimiles annexed to English translations and explanatory notes by the American historian Sarah M. Lowe.

Due to its value as an exceptional transpictorial product, in this study we intend to evaluate the transference biases between source and target volumes that a mere interlingual approach cannot explain. We will examine both the English translation and glosses by Lowe, taking into account all the semiotic resources used by Kahlo "to construct meaning" (O'Sullivan, 2013).

To do so, we will focus on two intersemiotic aspects: the multimodality (Kress, 2009) and the visual and graphic aspect of language. For the former, we will describe three multimodal situations identified in mixed and transmedial pages (Morley, 2003): wordplays between image and text, the insertion of words in images and the overlapping of texts and images. As for the latter, we will examine intermedial elements such as chromatic codes explicitly established by the artist, typography (Leeuwen, 2005) crossings-out in the original, and the location and orientation of texts. For these purposes, we base our analysis on the semiotic functions of art in exhibitions (O'Toole, 1994), the hierarchy of modes (Stöckl, 2004), the semiotics of colours (Leeuwen, 2011) and graphology (de la Luz Hurtado, 2002).

We conclude that this artistic piece, which is beyond the silos of literary and pictorial classifications, should not have been dealt with from an exclusively interlingual viewpoint when edited or translated. For this reason, we suggest several strategies to preserve the language of the drawings and the material value (Littau, 2016) of the English rewriting to avoid significant losses of meaning with respect to the original.

References

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