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### TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

The Challenge of Translating Poetry: Analysis and  
Translation of Selected Poems from *The Venice Suite:*  
*A Voyage Through Loss*, by Dermot Bolger

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## ABSTRACT

The present project offers three proposals of translation from English into Spanish of selected poems from *The Venice Suite: A Voyage Through Loss*, written by the contemporary Irish author Dermot Bolger in order to commemorate his deceased wife. Moreover, it is included a detailed analysis which collects the difficulties found and the translation procedures applied when translating, since those poems had never been translated into Spanish before. Additionally, the controversial issue about the translatability or untranslatability of poetry will be discussed and a particular view will be defended based on the literary challenge we have faced.

**Keywords:** Dermot Bolger, contemporary Irish poetry, translatability/untranslatability, poetry translation, translation procedures.

## RESUMEN

Este trabajo ofrece tres propuestas de traducción del inglés al español de poemas seleccionados de la obra *The Venice Suite: A Voyage Through Loss*, compuesta por el poeta contemporáneo irlandés Dermot Bolger con el propósito de honrar a su difunta esposa. Además de una traducción, incluimos un análisis detallado de las dificultades encontradas y de los procedimientos de traducción que hemos aplicado hasta obtener un resultado satisfactorio, ya que además se trata de una obra que hasta ahora no había sido traducida al español. También hemos dedicado una sección al tema de la traducibilidad o intraducibilidad de la poesía, en la que defendemos una determinada postura en base al reto literario que hemos afrontado.

**Palabras clave:** Dermot Bolger, poesía irlandesa contemporánea, traducibilidad/intraducibilidad, traducción de poesía, procedimientos de traducción.



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## INTRODUCTION

In the present project we offer a translation into Spanish of some poems from a work by Dermot Bolger, titled *The Venice Suite: A Voyage Through Loss*, dedicated to the author's deceased wife Bernie. In spite of the theories which defend that poetry is impossible to translate, as we will explain later, and even though we are conscious of the risk and difficulties involved in a work of these characteristics, we have dared to go on with it and to do our outmost so as to attain a satisfactory result. Moreover, it should be mentioned that this has been a challenge for us, partly because these poems had never been translated from English into Spanish, and also because dealing with this literary genre demands certain skills and abilities difficult to master.

The carrying out of this work has taken us through several stages. First, a careful reading of all the poems that make up *The Venice Suite: A Voyage Through Loss*. Then, a selection of those poems we were to analyse in depth and translate into Spanish, since due to restrictions of time and space, it was impossible to include all of them. We have chosen three poems that are representative of the evolution of the poet in the different stages of mourning, namely, from the moment of his wife's death, until he comes to terms with it and finally decides to move on. After that, we proceeded to study and decipher the content of the selected poems, in order to understand their meaning and the underlying emotions. Finally, we undertook the proper translation of the texts. This phase required a lot of time and effort in order to find the appropriate words which expressed and conveyed the same message and perspective as the original, and at the same time striving to preserve the rhythm, tone, and structure of the original poems as far as possible. These characteristics should be respected, since they are the key that distinguishes poetry from other literary genres, making it something unique and special. After having completed the translation, we have done an analysis which collects the difficulties found and the translation procedures applied when translating the poems.

Regarding structure and organization, our work is divided into the following main sections: (1) The (Im)possibility of translating poetry; as this is an issue that causes special controversy in the world of poetry translation, the first section is devoted to pondering over the arguments used by the advocates of both trends; (2) Dermot Bolger and his work; a section that will contextualize the author and his poetic creation, especially *The Venice Suite: A Voyage Through Loss*; (3) Original and translated version of the poems “Warmth”, “So Many First Times...”, and “Where We Are Now” together with their respective summaries and analyses; (4) Conclusion; and finally the bibliographical section.

## **1. THE (IM)POSSIBILITY OF TRANSLATING POETRY**

In this section, we are going to discuss an issue that has long been a subject of debate, and it is still controversial at present. It deals with the possibility or impossibility of translating poetry, a topic about which many poets, translators, and critics have debated, providing consistent arguments in order to defend certain stance. Based on our brief experience as translators, and focusing heavily on the translation of selected poems by Dermot Bolger which are presented in this paper, we have considered necessary to cover this topic and argue our standpoint, forged from everything that has implied for us the challenge of translating poetry. As apprentices in the field of poetry translation, we cannot contribute anything new to the fundamental issue; however, we have taken up a position on it, and that is what we will try to explain below.

The task of the translator consists of reproducing in another language what the original author previously expressed in his native language, with the intention of making it accessible to a greater number of people. However, that requires dealing with linguistic and cultural differences between either languages or countries, and having to make decisions to convey the work in the best possible manner, and always respecting the original author. Therefore, in order to achieve a translation of good quality, the translator should make a huge effort and spend much of his time to work on it. Anyway, we should make a distinction between the translation of literary texts and those belonging to other genres.

According to Torralbo:

“El hecho de traducir un fragmento literario se convierte en una obra de arte, en un esfuerzo artístico y creativo. El texto literario contiene unas características especiales, tales como el deleite que disfruta la mente del receptor (en términos de Wellek), o el mosaico de fusión en influencias históricas (según Eliot), la forma peculiar (aplicando el estilo citado de Burke), el estilo memorable (tal como explican Auden y Garret) o la sensación de imágenes y la imaginación (según Richards, Spender y Stevens)” (Torralbo, 2011: 16-17).

More specifically, the greatest difficulty of a translator resides in poetry, given that this literary genre uses a figurative language which the translator has to understand, interpret, sense, and recreate, thus being able to transmit it to the readers (Álvarez Calleja, 1991: 125-126). Besides, it is also important that the original work engages with the translator in the first place in order to achieve an optimal result. As Álvarez claims:

“Es bien sabido que el éxito del traductor depende en gran medida de la elección del texto. Si no está de acuerdo con su sensibilidad, no será capaz de actualizar plenamente el sentido implícito de la obra, las connotaciones, deducciones, interpretaciones y asociaciones que contiene” (Álvarez Calleja, 1991: 128).

At times, the work of the translator is underestimated because it is considered a copy of the original, lacking creativity. However, the facts show the opposite, since according to Octavio Paz:

“Cada texto es único y, simultáneamente, es la traducción de otro texto. Ningún texto es enteramente original, porque el lenguaje mismo, en su esencia, es ya una traducción: primero, del mundo no verbal y, después, porque cada signo y cada frase es la traducción de otro signo y de otra frase. Pero ese razonamiento puede invertirse sin perder validez: todos los textos son originales porque cada traducción es distinta. Cada traducción es, hasta cierto punto, una invención y así constituye un texto único” (Paz, 1990: 13).

Therefore, both the translator and the poet have merit in their work. The difference is in their starting point; whereas the poet chooses his words and combines them in order to create the poem, obtaining a set of irreplaceable and irremovable signs, in the case of the translator it occurs the other way around. That means that the starting point of the translator is the fixed language of the poem, being that he has to take the pieces of the text and return its signs to the language. Thus, it should be considered that the translation is a parallel activity to the poetic creation (Paz, 1990: 20).

Going into detail about the heart of the matter, if we would say that poetry is untranslatable, we would be making a mistake. Undoubtedly, we assume that there are barriers which

separate one language from another. For example, it does not exist an exact word in Spanish for each one of the words in the English vocabulary. Nevertheless, that does not mean that we cannot express the same ideas or concepts in both languages, since concepts are universal. As Yves Bonnefoy explains:

“Las frases son traducibles, porque en este caso estamos en el nivel de experiencias ya globales que trascienden un poco lo que tiene de particular, de local el área propia de una palabra en su misma lengua. Y el traductor deberá entonces, desprendiéndose tanto como sea posible de las miopías del traducir palabra por palabra, o incluso frase por frase, buscar revivir en lo posible ese aspecto universalizable del trabajo del escritor que experimenta pero también reflexiona; de ahí que exista un pensamiento para llevar a cabo su obra. Tras lo cual el traductor le pedirá a sus propias palabras, todas desplazadas en relación con las del texto original, que le digan más o menos lo mismo” (Bonnefoy, 2002: 50-51).

A diametrically opposed view is held by Burton Raffel, who defends the following argument:

“The impossibility of translation is in a sense not debatable. If every human language is distinct (as it is) in structure, sound, and vocabulary, and if every language contains unique features, then clearly it is literally impossible to fully render anything written in one language into another” (Raffel, 1988: 11).

Consequently, literal translation is considered impossible because there are no exact linguistic equivalents, which does not mean that poetry is untranslatable, but the impossibility is found in the exact re-creation of a work. However, it is completely possible to achieve an approximation and obtain a good translation and an excellent result which reflects the original work (Raffel, 1988: 13). In addition, it is noteworthy the opinion of Jaime Siles, who through his experience as poet and translator, says:

“No se trata de que el traductor sea capaz de traducir la misma intensidad. La misma intensidad del original es imposible. Porque si ese texto original en verso en una lengua se pasase a prosa en la misma lengua ya no sería lo mismo. Yo creo que no es la intensidad lo que se ha de intentar traducir, aunque a veces sí se consiga (y hay que ser un muy buen traductor para eso). Lo que se traduce sobre

todo es el espíritu, el tono del poeta, el clima del poeta en el mejor de los casos. Creo que casi nunca se es capaz de traducir la totalidad.”<sup>1</sup>

Assuming the complexity that involves the translation of poetry, it is questioned if such translations should be done by poets, given that they possess the qualities and skills needed to interpret and recreate a work of such features. Supposedly this should be the case, but in fact poets are rarely good translators. They tend to take liberties and (intentionally or not) use the original poem to create their own poem, that is, with their own style. Here we are not meaning that it is at all impossible for a good poet to be a good translator, but poetry translators are poets and translators at the same time, since poetry translation is an analogous operation to poetic creation. (Paz, 1971: 6)

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that poetry translation is a difficult and complex task which requires effort, persistence, time, and creativity, but even so it should be clear that it is not impossible. Furthermore, if anyone (poet, translator or apprentice) resolves to do a translation of poetry -which in most cases stems from vocation, and results in satisfaction and fulfillment-, he will probably take it as a literary challenge and will insist and struggle until being satisfied with the results or, at least, having given as much of himself as possible. In fact, it is in large part due to the theory of the impossibility of poetry translation and thanks to the existence of its supporters, that many people feel tempted and encouraged to prove just the opposite. Thus, thanks to translators and their translations, literary works are becoming accessible to more and more people and, consequently, the number of readers enjoying literature originally written in foreign languages is nonstop growing.

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<sup>1</sup> The quotation comes from *Traducir poesía*, an interview published in Poesía Digital <<http://www.poesiadigital.es/index.php?cmd=documento&id=9>>. Retrieved on 14<sup>th</sup> July, 2014

## **2. DERMOT BOLGER AND HIS POETIC WORK**

Dermot Bolger is a contemporary Irish poet, playwright, and novelist born in Dublin in 1959. He is the author of nine novels and several plays, he wrote an adaptation of the novel *Ulysses* by James Joyce, and has also edited many anthologies throughout his life. In addition, Bolger usually contributes to several Irish newspapers, and occasionally writes reviews for foreign newspapers and magazines.

However, in this case we will focus on his poetic career and especially in the study of one of his works. So far, he has written nine volumes of poetry which have been published under the following titles: *The Habit of Flesh* (1980), *Finglas Lilies* (1981), *No Waiting American* (1982), *Internal Exiles* (1986), *Leinster Street Ghosts* (1989), *Taking My Letters Back: New and Selected Poems* (1998), *The Chosen Moment* (2004), *External Affairs* (2008), and the focus of this project being also the most recent one, *The Venice Suite: A Voyage Through Loss* which saw the light in the year 2012.

*The Venice Suite: A Voyage Through Loss* is a collection of poems dedicated to the author's late wife Bernie, whose death marked a milestone both in Bolger's personal and professional career. Bernie died on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010 of an undiagnosed ruptured aortic aneurysm, which left Dermot completely shattered and astonished, given that she had not shown symptoms of being unwell before. Bernie's death was so sudden that he had no time to prepare himself for that terrible moment, and as Dermot conveys in his own words, "it was my wife playing golf, sunbathing in the garden, swimming, and then dying in front of my eyes after this perfect day" (Leonard, 2013).

In fact, his feelings of sorrow and melancholy were that profound that he believed he would never be able to write again. However, Bolger received a huge support from his family and friends, besides from unpredicted places at BBC Radio 4. They asked him to write a play for them, but he rejected the proposal because he was not ready to resume writing and he did not even know if he would do it someday. Then, they sent him a cheque and, putting

their trust in him, said that he would write for them one day. That incredible gesture excited the author and was fixed in his memory forever. Moreover, the poet and friend of the family Paul Durcan sent him a poem written in memory of Bernie Bolger, which provided great comfort as much to Dermot as to his children. Indeed, that poem was engraved on her tombstone and at the same time serves as a prologue to the book we are dealing with now, written after a while. Thanks to this kind of small details, Bolger still felt more loved and valued both in his family environment and work setting, which helped him to move on.

With the passage of time, he was gradually resuming writing and also decided to write a work to honor Bernie's life, but he refused to write prose because he did not pretend to use her death as an opportunity to make money, neither he wanted to make a manual of pain, so he opted for poetry. Resuming his words, "Poems take longer to write than prose, and are read by fewer people, but they can be small monuments and pieces of art. They allowed me the space to deal with Bernie's death, and to create something from it. A book of poetry seemed to mark her death with more dignity." (Leonard, 2013)

The sixteen poems that make up *The Venice Suite: A Voyage Through Loss* are very personal pieces and transmit a lot of sentimentality and nostalgia from Bolger's part, which simultaneously allows us to feel closer to the author and to know him in depth. Furthermore, he finds in poetry a way of vent, since from that tragic day he had many emotions to show, and in this way he could tell his hardest moments in his day-to-day and how his sadness was magnified in times of family meetings like birthdays, anniversaries, and Christmas. The fact that Bolger expressed his feelings, emotions and memories facilitated assuming reality gradually and resuming his normal life.

However, as everyone experiences the loss of a loved one throughout his life, these poems can be helpful to avoid loneliness in those key moments and realize that it is possible to go ahead. As the author himself claims:

“These particular memories are unique to me, but the underlying emotions are not. Thousands of people every year articulate the emotions expressed here with far greater eloquence in the silence of their hearts than I have managed to do in reconstructing these thoughts first scribbled down on whatever scrap of paper came to hand”. (Bolger, 2012: 14).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This information in relation to his life and work has been taken from Dermot Bolger’s official website <<http://www.dermotbolger.com/>>. Retrieved on 14<sup>th</sup> July, 2014

### **3. ORIGINAL AND TRANSLATED POEMS**

#### **POEM 1: WARMTH**

##### **WARMTH**

In this dream I know that you are dead,  
Yet you allow me to touch your inner thigh,

Warm as life but with a hairline scratch  
To break the silky expanse of elegant skin.

5      I know my hands must stray no further,  
Because they would only encounter emptiness:

You have sent this sole segment of yourself  
As a parting gift, a remembrance of how it felt

To be at one with another soul inside an embrace:  
10     Two lives shared, one heartbeat, two breaths.

You allow me these eighteen inches of skin to touch  
So that when I wake in the parched ache of dawn

I will still retain some aftertaste of the warmth  
That stems from being spooned into a lover's flesh.

\*

15    After a loved one dies there are duties to complete:  
The daily ruse of tasks used to keep grief at bay.

But nights lack itineraries to camouflage the void  
Where desolation surges in to displace sleep,  
Where regrets congeal like stalactites on ceilings,  
20    Where I confront the fact that part of me also died

In the pandemonium of a hospital Emergency Ward,  
With staff too busy restraining junkies and drunks

To diagnose the scared patient in sodden swimwear  
Dying from an aneurysm on an ambulance stretcher.

- 25 Some nights I drink enough to ensure I blackout  
Into a pit devoid of dreams about our shared past.

Yet at dawn my subconscious recommences its tricks:  
We meet by chance and amiably chat in some corridor

- Until an inconsequential remark reminds me you are dead  
30 And jolts me awake into the nightmare of bereavement.

But in this dream you send only eighteen inches of yourself  
Which I may kiss and serenely caress for these brief seconds,

Totally aware that I am asleep and must soon awaken,  
Conscious you have died but I am somehow being allowed

- 35 The consolation of stroking your skin one final time  
Before I arise to resume being the actor I've become:

A walking ghost who fulfills contractual commitments,  
A poet now only attuned to the iambic pentameter

- Of spin-dryers and washing-machines in our shed,  
40 Coping with school lunches, ironed shirts, book lists,

Acutely aware of the sons whom you blessed me with,  
Conscious of every twist that our lives did not take,

Acutely alone except for the after-touch of a ghost  
Who came to me in a bed where we once made love.

## CALOR

En este sueño sé que estás muerta,  
pero me dejas tocar la parte interior de tu muslo,  
caliente como la vida pero con un fino rasguño  
que desentonan con la extensión sedosa de tu distinguida piel.

- 5      Sé que mis manos no deben ir más lejos,  
porque sólo hallarán un vacío.

Has mandado esta única parte de ti  
como un regalo de despedida, una rememoración de lo que se sentía

- 10     al estar en armonía con otra alma dentro de un abrazo;  
dos vidas compartidas, un latido, dos respiraciones.

Me dejaste estos cuarenta y cinco centímetros de piel para tocar,  
de modo que cuando despierte en el árido dolor del alba

todavía retenga algún regusto del calor  
que queda tras haberme acurrucado junto a la carne de una amada.

\*

- 15     Tras la muerte de un ser querido hay obligaciones que cumplir;  
el ardid diario de tareas se encarga de mantener el dolor a raya.

- Pero las noches carecen de itinerarios para camuflar el vacío  
donde la desolación irrumpen para espantar al sueño,  
donde los pesares se congelan como estalactitas sobre el techo,  
20     donde me enfrento al hecho de que una parte de mí también murió

en el pandemonio de la sala de urgencias de un hospital,  
con personal demasiado ocupado lidiando con yonkis y borrachos  
para diagnosticar a la paciente asustada en traje de baño mojado  
muriendo de un aneurisma en la camilla de una ambulancia.

25    Algunas noches bebo lo suficiente para asegurarme de quedar inconsciente  
en un hoyo carente de sueños sobre nuestro pasado común.

Pero al amanecer mi subconsciente reanuda sus engaños,  
nos encontramos por casualidad y amablemente charlamos en algún pasillo

hasta que un comentario intrascendente me recuerda que estás muerta  
30    y me sacude hasta que despierto en la pesadilla de la pérdida.

Pero en este sueño me envías solo cuarenta y cinco centímetros de ti  
que puedo besar y acariciar con serenidad durante estos breves segundos,

totalmente consciente de que estoy dormido y tengo que despertar pronto,  
consciente de que has muerto pero de alguna manera se me ha permitido

35    el consuelo de acariciar tu piel una última vez  
antes de levantarme para continuar siendo el actor en el que me he convertido;

un alma en pena que cumple con los compromisos contractuales,  
un poeta actualmente en armonía con el pentámetro yámbico

de secadoras y lavadoras en nuestro cobertizo,  
40    lidiando con almuerzos escolares, camisas planchadas, listas de libros,

plenamente al cargo de los hijos con los que me bendijiste,  
consciente de cada giro que no tomaron nuestras vidas,

extremadamente solo salvo por el roce de un fantasma  
que se acercó a mí en una cama donde una vez hicimos el amor.

## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

“Warmth” is one of the first poems of the book *The Venice Suite: A Voyage Through Loss* in which the author describes the sensations experienced when, despite knowing his wife was dead, he felt her presence. He also reveals the very strong bond that he had with her and the deep void she left after her death, leaving him immerse in a great loneliness. Moreover, Bolger shows his resentment towards the hospital staff due to their delay in assisting his wife who was dying of an aneurysm. Likewise, he feels the emptiness of his bed without his beloved partner and only wishes to reunite with her in dreams, although he awakes again in the “nightmare of bereavement”. Nevertheless, he speaks specifically of a dream in which he is able to feel and caress her skin, a wonderful gift that has been awarded to him to calm his grief. However, in spite of his regret and solitude, he has to fulfill his obligations as a father, doing housework and caring for their children.

Next, we are going to mention the major difficulties that we have found when translating this poem, in what way we have tried to solve them, and also the translation procedures that we have applied. First of all, we have omitted the personal pronouns “I” and “you” because the conjugation of the verb in Spanish already shows the person referred, and therefore they are irrelevant in this case. Then, at the end of the second line it appears “your inner thigh”, where we have applied the procedure called amplification, given that “there are more monemes (lexemes and morphemes) deployed in the language of the translated text than in the source language to express the same idea” (Vázquez-Ayora, 1977: 334). Therefore, the translation obtained has been “la parte interior de tu muslo”, which conveys the same message as the original line.

Moving on, it should be mentioned that the fourth line has been complicated to translate, since we were trying to find the same poetic sense in our native language while preserving the author’s tone. Whereas the original line says “To break the silky expanse of elegant skin”, in our translation it is expressed in the following way: “que desentona con la extensión sedosa de tu distinguida piel”. In particular, the major difficulty has been in the

verb “to break” and in the adjective “elegant”, because we did not find it satisfactory translating “break” as “romper”, or “elegant” as “elegante”. However, we think our final proposal covers the essence of the poem. In this part, we should emphasize the use of transposition which is defined as “a translation technique that involves a change of word class in the TT” (Palumbo, 2009: 138). Hence, while in the original poem it appears the verb “to break” in infinitive, we have built a subordinate sentence composed by the nexus “que” and the verb “desentona” which is in present tense.

Another difficulty has appeared in the ninth line, due to the peculiar syntactic form of the sentence: “To be at one with another soul inside an embrace”. In order to resolve the problem, we have proceeded to omit “at one” and replace it by “en armonía”.

Then, since each country uses different units of length, “eighteen inches” (in line eleven) have been converted into “cuarenta y cinco centímetros”, turning to adaptation, “a translation technique addressing specific differences between the SL and the TL in terms of situational contexts and cultural references” (Palumbo, 2009: 6).

Moving to line twenty-five where it says: “Some nights I drink enough to ensure I blackout”, this has been translated into Spanish by using transposition, which is defined as “the translation technique that involves a change of word class in the TT”. In this way, we have translated the past tense of the verb “blackout” as “quedar inconsciente” which is composed by the verb “querer” in infinitive and the adjective “inconsciente”.

Then, in order to translate line thirty-six, we have applied modulation, given that whereas the original verse appears as “Before I arise to resume being the actor I’ve become”, when we have translated it into Spanish, the word order and the perspective of the sentence have been altered, being expressed like this: “antes de que me levante para continuar siendo el actor en el que me he convertido”. On the other hand, when there are subordinate clauses in English, relative pronouns like “who”, “which”, and “that” can be omitted when they function as complement, which is what happens in this line. However, in Spanish,

subordinate clauses are always introduced by a connective, and for this reason we have resorted to amplification. In this case, we have added “en la que” (preposition + article + connective) which does not appear in the original line.

Moving on, at the beginning of line thirty-seven, the author describes himself as a “walking ghost”. As we were not satisfied with the literal translation “fantasma andante”, our choice has been “alma en pena”, since this expression describes a person who feels lonely, sad, and melancholic. Therefore, we could consider it as adaptation, given that “alma en pena” is commonly used in Spanish in order to make allusion to this mood.

In line thirty-nine, Bolger mentions two electrical appliances: “spin-dryers”, and “washing-machines”. Whereas these words are compound nouns in English, it is not the case in Spanish whose equivalents are “secadoras” y “lavadoras”. It should be mentioned that we have found difficulties when translating “spin-dryers”, since the word commonly known and used is “dryer”. However, the term “secadora” covers both functions: spinning and drying, hence it is unnecessary to mention both.

Finally, in line forty-three, the author describes a sensation he feels after being touched by a ghost, and uses the term “after-touch” to refer to it. In order to translate that concept, we have applied adaptation and we have replaced it by “roce” which conveys a similar feeling.

## POEM 2: “SO MANY FIRST TIMES...”

### **SO MANY FIRST TIMES...**

The first time you depart an airport with no one to fly home to:

First time you turn a street corner to find no kitchen light on:

First night away you realize you have no one to text *Sleep tight*:

The first time you sense how so many inconsequential moments

5 Were momentous for last being shared with someone you loved.

### **TANTAS PRIMERAS VECES...**

La primera vez que despegas de un aeropuerto y no hay hogar al que volar.

La primera vez que doblas la esquina de la calle y no hay luz en la cocina.

La primera noche fuera en la que te das cuenta de que no tienes a quien escribir *Que duermas bien*.

La primera vez que percibes cuántos momentos insignificantes

5 fueron importantes por haberlos compartido por última vez con la persona que amabas.

### **SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS**

“So Many First Times...” is the ninth poem of *The Venice Suite: A Voyage Through Loss*, and despite its brevity it is not less representative or relevant than the rest. Throughout its five lines, the author describes some hard moments or situations that he had to confront because he really noticed and regretted the absence of his wife. Moreover, he claims that there are many irrelevant moments in life that become special and significant for us for the simple fact of having lived them with the person one loved.

Next we are going to mention the difficulties found and the translation procedures employed when translating this poem. Firstly, as in the previous poem, we have omitted the

personal pronouns because the conjugation of any verb in Spanish already shows the person referred, and therefore these pronouns are irrelevant. On the other hand, when there are subordinate clauses in English, relative pronouns like “who”, “which”, and “that” can be omitted when they function as complement, which is what happens in this poem. However, in Spanish, subordinate clauses are always introduced by a connective, and for this reason we have resorted to amplification. For example, whereas in the source text we have “First night away you realize you have no one to text *Sleep tight*” (in the third line), in the translated text we have expressed it as follows: “La primera noche fuera en la que te das cuenta de que no tienes a quien escribir “*Que duermas bien*”. Therefore, we have added “en la que”, “de que”, and “a quien”.

Moving on, in the second verse we have omitted the adjective “on”, because in Spanish is unnecessary, and although we could choose to say “no hay ninguna luz encendida en la cocina”, we have chosen another form of expression: “no hay luz en la cocina”. Even so, it is clear that we do not mean that the kitchen had no light, but there was not any light on because Bernie had died.

“Sleep tight” is an interjection that is translated into Spanish as “que duermas bien”, and therefore that is an equivalence, which is defined as “the term used to refer a relationship of “sameness” or “similarity”, which however leads to the problems of “establishing relevant units of comparison, specifying a definition of sameness, and enumerating relevant qualities” (Palumbo, 2009: 42). Moreover, there is an adaptation in “escribir”, which we have used as equivalent of “text” because both refer to sending SMS messages.

### **POEM 3: WHERE WE ARE NOW**

#### **WHERE WE ARE NOW**

Three years have passed since a day of incessant snow  
That halted at midnight, when I ventured with our boys  
Through the unchained park gates opposite our house

Into a white moonscape untainted by footstep or bird claw.

- 5 Squadrons of swollen clouds impeded any moon or starlight,  
Allowing an eerie luminosity to emanate from the ground.

Branches overburdened, benches twice their natural size:  
Each everyday object transformed into a source of light.  
The ordinary made wondrous: rendered gleaming at midnight.

- 10 We three raced home to try and lure you from your bed  
To share in our witnessing of this miraculous spectacle,  
But you complained you were sleepy, snuggled down,

You waved aside each entreaty as we begged you to come:  
*“Not tonight”, you said, “not now, but I promise the next time.”*

- 15 None of us could have conceived that when the snow next fell  
It would cover your grave for weeks, leaving us shell-shocked,  
Mutely comforting each other as we mourned your absent radiance.

\*

- Two years after your death I have finally built our extension,  
With six feet of balustraded decking, five steps above the garden.  
20 Our sons have converted it into an impromptu amphitheater.

Tonight its recessed lights are abetted by the colossal supermoon  
That occurs each twenty years, when its orbit is nearest the earth.

Guitars and a mandolin have been brought out to accompany songs  
Composed by your sons and their friends, interspersed with old tunes

- 25 You would love to hear, as lads pass around long-necked foreign beers.  
We three have known grief; have carried coffins thrice in two years,

But tonight is serenely beautiful: this is where we are, in this moment  
That cannot be repeated. You'd love to sit here, but if you were in bed

- I would need to plead and coax you to get dressed and wander down,  
30 With you protesting: "*Not tonight, not now, but I promise the next time.*"

\*

Next time a supermoon occurs our sons will be forty and forty-one:  
I may be a pensioner of seventy-three or be long since deceased.

I don't know what or where I will be, I am robbed of all certainty,  
Liberated from trying to predict the future or shield you from it.

- 35 I know only the single lesson we have been taught by your death:  
There is no next time; no moment will replicate the wonder of now.

I feel you have moved on and I possess no desire to hold you back  
But, just this once, don't say "*Not tonight, but I promise the next time*";

- 40 Don't argue or prevaricate, but let your ghost come and sit, unobserved,  
On the wooden steps of this moonlit deck that throbs with song.

Be with us, for the eternity of this supermoon, as guitars change hands:  
See what fine sons you blessed the world with; what good friends

They have summoned around them with music and chilled beer.  
Two years on and this is where we are: mourning you deeply still,

45 Yet moving on, as we must move on: our eldest finished his degree,  
Our youngest immersed in college life, their dad in a battered hat

Joining the gathering briefly to sit and share shots of Jägermeister.

We don't know where you are, but we are finding ourselves again.  
I don't know if ghosts exist or just a welcoming emptiness awaits:

50 All I know is that, if you were here, dragged protesting from bed,  
You would love to hear these songs, these subtle guitar riffs.

So, whether your ghost sits here or not, I want you to know we are okay  
As I call you back to be with us one last time and then let you depart.

## DONDE ESTAMOS AHORA

Han pasado ya tres años desde aquel día de nieve incesante  
que a medianoche se detuvo, cuando me aventuré a atravesar con nuestros hijos  
las puertas abiertas del parque frente a nuestra casa

y a adentrarme en un níveo paisaje lunar impoluto de pisadas o huellas.

5 Ringleras de turgentes nubes impedían el paso de la luna y de toda luz estelar,  
permitiendo que una inquietante luminosidad emanara del suelo.

Sobrecargadas ramas, bancos que doblaban su tamaño natural;  
cada objeto común transformado en una fuente de luz.  
Lo corriente se volvía maravilloso, mostrándose reluciente a medianoche.

10 Los tres corrimos hasta llegar a casa para incitarte a que abandonaras tu cama  
para así contemplar junto a nosotros aquel increíble espectáculo,  
pero acurrucada protestabas que te encontrabas soñolienta,

Cada súplica rechazabas cuando te rogábamos que vinieras:  
“*Esta noche no*”, decías, “*ahora no, pero prometo que la próxima vez iré.*”

15 Ninguno de nosotros hubiera imaginado que cuando cayera la próxima nevada  
tu tumba cubriría durante semanas, dejándonos commocionados,  
consolándonos mutuamente mientras lamentábamos tu ausente resplandor.

\*

Tras dos años de tu muerte, he construido por fin el anexo a nuestra casa,  
con dos metros de terraza con balaustrada, cinco peldaños por encima del jardín.  
20 Y nuestros hijos la han transformado en un anfiteatro improvisado.

Esta noche sus luces empotradas cuentan con el respaldo de la colosal superluna,  
que se ve cada veinte años, cuando su órbita está más cercana a la tierra.

Han traído guitarras y una mandolina para acompañar canciones  
que tus hijos y sus amigos han compuesto, con melodías antiguas intercaladas.

25 Te habría encantado escucharlas, mientras los chicos repartían botellines de cerveza de importación.  
Nosotros tres conocemos bien la pena; en dos años hemos llevado tres ataúdes,

pero esta noche es tranquilamente hermosa: aquí es donde estamos, en este momento  
que no puede repetirse. Te encantaría sentarte aquí, pero si estuvieras en la cama

necesitaría suplicarte y convencerte de que te vistieras y bajaras,  
30 y protestando dirías: “*Esta noche no, ahora no, pero prometo que la próxima vez iré.*”

La próxima vez que haya una superluna nuestros hijos tendrán cuarenta y cuarenta y un años,  
yo tal vez sea un pensionista de setenta y tres o tal vez lleve ya muerto mucho tiempo.

No sé qué seré ni donde estaré, ya no tengo certeza de nada  
ni necesito tratar de predecir el futuro o protegerte de él.

35 Solo sé la única lección que hemos aprendido con tu muerte:  
no hay próxima vez; ningún momento repetirá la maravilla del presente.

Siento que tú has continuado tu viaje y yo no deseo retenerte,  
pero, solo esta vez, no digas “*Esta noche no, pero prometo que la próxima vez iré*”;

no protestes ni te evadas, sino deja que tu espíritu venga y se siente, inadvertido,  
40 sobre las escaleras de madera de esta terraza iluminada por la luna que vibra con la melodía.

Quédate con nosotros, para la eternidad de esta superluna, mientras las guitarras cambian de manos.  
Mira con qué buenos hijos bendijiste al mundo; de qué buenos amigos

se han rodeado con música y cerveza fría.  
Dos años después aquí es donde estamos: todavía guardando luto profundo,

45 pero siguiendo adelante, ya que debemos seguir adelante. Nuestro hijo mayor se ha graduado,  
el pequeño ha comenzado la universidad, su padre con un sombrero maltrecho

se une a la reunión por poco tiempo para sentarse y compartir chupitos de Jägearmeister.

No sabemos dónde estás ahora, pero nosotros nos estamos encontrando de nuevo.  
No sé si los espíritus existen o sólo nos aguarda un vacío acogedor.

50 Lo único que sé es que, si estuvieras aquí, sacada a rastras de la cama,  
te encantaría escuchar estas canciones, estas sutiles improvisaciones de guitarra.

Así que, tanto si tu espíritu está aquí sentado como si no, quiero que sepas que estamos bien  
mientras te pido que vuelvas con nosotros una última vez y luego ya te dejaré marchar.

## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

“Where we are now” is the fifteenth poem of the book *The Venice Suite: A Voyage Through Loss*. In this poem, the author reminds a day of constant snowfalls in which the night was simply extraordinary and enjoyed a special shine; even the most common and insignificant object was shown with an astounding beauty and brightness. Bolger was delighting in the wonderful landscape with his children until they returned home to ask his wife to come, but she refused to get out of bed and, complaining that she was sleepy replied: “Not tonight, not now, but I promise the next time”. However, that next time never happened, given that when the following snowfall fell she was already dead. By means of the repetition of this

previous quote, Bolger pretends to emphasize the idea that we have to seize the day because we have no certainty of what can happen tomorrow. Therefore, we should take advantage of the opportunities that come up because each moment is unique and unrepeatable.

The author does not know what awaits us after death, hence he has uncertainty of where is his wife now, but he wants to convey to her the message that they are well, although he would love her to come back one last time. It is possible that Bolger did not tell his wife all the things he would have liked, and so he feels the desire of bringing her back and demonstrating her how much he loved her. Indisputably, after Bernie's death, as much Dermot as his sons had a bad run, but after two years they have managed to move on, and although their life will not be the same for them as it used to be, and they will always remember her, they who are still alive deserve to be happy.

Once we have contextualized the poem, we will proceed to its analysis where we are going to mention the problems found when translating and the decisions made to resolve them. Given that there are evident morphological and syntactical differences between languages, we have employed several translation procedures to deal with those difficulties that we have found when translating the poem from the source language to the target language, as in this case are English and Spanish. Firstly, the title of the poem "Where we are now" has been translated as "Donde estamos ahora", omitting in this way the personal pronoun "we" because the conjugation of the verb in Spanish already shows the person referred. As well as in the title, we have eliminated other pronouns which appear throughout the poem for the sake of a more natural and fluent style.

On the other hand, in the fourth line, we have "garras de ave" as the equivalent of "bird claw"; nevertheless when there is a spotless white landscape we use the word "huellas" since the other term sounds unnatural in the target language. Another word that has caused us problems or doubts when translating is "shell-shocked", located in the sixteenth line, which literally means "traumatizado" or "conmocionado" because of the impact of war. The author makes use of this word to show the strong impact that the death of his wife

caused to them, wherewith we opted for the word “commocionados” as it is a good option to show this emotional state.

Going to the seventh stanza, in order to translate “extension” we have resorted to amplification, given that “this is the procedure whereby more monemes (lexemes and morphemes) are deployed in the language of the translated text than in the source language to express the same idea” (Vázquez- Ayora, 1977: 334). Therefore, we have expressed it as “el anexo a nuestra casa”. Then, as each country uses different units of length, “six feet” have been converted into “dos metros”, turning to adaptation, “a translation technique addressing specific differences between the SL and the TL in terms of situational contexts and cultural references” (Palumbo, 2009: 6).

Additionally, we found difficulties to understand and interpret the following lines because of their complex structure and words that were previously unaware to us: “Tonight its recessed lights are abetted by the colossal supermoon/ That occurs each twenty years, when its orbit is nearest the earth” (lines twenty-one and twenty-two). In the end, we managed to overcome the obstacle and faced the dilemma as follows: “Esta noche sus luces empotradass cuentan con el respaldo de la colosal superluna/ que se ve cada veinte años, cuando su órbita está más cercana a la tierra”.

To continue, in order to translate “long-necked foreign beers” in line twenty-five, we have used modulation which is defined as “a translation technique involving a change in point in the transfer from SL to TL” (Palumbo, 2009: 77). After having applied this technique, the result obtained has been “botellines de cerveza de importación”, introducing the word “botellines” and omitting the adjective “long-necked”, since it is understood perfectly that a bottle of bear has long neck, and therefore that characteristic is implied in “botellines”. Instead of using “extranjeras” we have chosen “de importación”, thus providing fluidity and spontaneity to the translated sentence.

Moving forward, line thirty-two, in the thirteenth stanza, has been translated by means of amplification, modulation, and transposition, given that “this is a translation technique that involves a change of a word class in the TT” (Palumbo, 2009: 138). In the source text the verse appears as follows: “I may be a pensioner of seventy-three or be long since deceased”. However, in order to pass it to the target language we have resorted to transposition, substituting the structure “may be” (auxiliary verb + infinitive) by “tal vez sea” (adverbial phrase + present subjunctive). Modulation and amplification have been applied at the end of the verse when it says “(may) be long since deceased”, which we have translated as “tal vez lleve ya muerto mucho tiempo”.

Complications also appeared when translating the lines thirty-three and thirty-four because it was not easy to express the same idea properly in Spanish. Thus, through modulation we have achieved to express “I am robbed of all certainty” as “ya no tengo certeza de nada”, maintaining the original meaning. Additionally, by means of adaptation we have managed to express “liberated from” as “ni necesito”, since it is more correct than using “liberado de”.

It should be mentioned an expression that we found interesting and that deserves an explanation which is: “their dad in a battered hat”, in line forty-six. Although this part makes reference to the physical aspect, what the author pretends to show is that his emotional state was so depressed that had triggered a state of neglect in his physical appearance due to grief. Therefore, after pondering over it for quite a while, we decided to use the word “maltrecho”, which we consider allows us to convey both physical and emotional implications. A final remark: in order to translate “dragged protesting from bed”, in line fifty; we have decided to omit “protesting”, given that “sacada a rastras” implies that the action is done without the consent of someone, and therefore when deleting that word the meaning of the original verse is not altered. Furthermore, we have also used a transposition in “sacada a rastras” (past participle + adverbial phrase), when translating the English term “dragged” (past participle).

## **4. CONCLUSION**

Throughout history, many literary works have reached us and have become worldwide known thanks to translations; hence, the work of translators should not be underestimated because it is essential to disseminate literature and make it accessible to everyone. Even though this might seem an unquestionable truth, in the preceding pages we have been dealing with a controversial issue that no one has been able to settle yet. In the midst of two confronted views, we have tried to test our conviction that it is possible to translate poetry. Even knowing there are many who stand for the theory of untranslatability, and assuming that there are no exact linguistic equivalents in two different languages, we still feel that it is possible to succeed if persisting in the venture. Undoubtedly, poetic translation is not a copy of the original, but a complex task that takes the translator through several stages, and requires lots of time, patience, and effort. In fact, the complexity that it entails is the most appealing aspect of this work.

Despite all the difficulties one has to face when accepting the challenge of translating poetry, we firmly believe that it is possible to get safely into port. Playing the role of poet and translator at the same time, we have striven to decipher the poems we have worked with –with more doubt than certainty-, and then we have re-created them, trying to convey the same message and feeling of the original while preserving its tone and rhythm. We must acknowledge that, from time to time, we came across some term, idiom or linguistic turn that made us think of giving up. Besides, the inherent conciseness of the English syntax contrasting with the much more periphrastic Spanish style, entails an even greater difficulty when translating poetry, a genre in which the length of phrases and sentences becomes so relevant for the sake of rhythm.

After having concluded this work and the whole process that we have gone through, we feel that we have managed to reach our goal. Of course, we assume that the translation we offer here is just one of the many possible ways in which the original poems could be rendered into Spanish, and it is quite probable that in the near future other versions will come up.

This is not only to be expected but also desirable, since in the field of translation there is always something that can be improved, as the poet Jaime Siles points out: “Todos los textos traducidos requieren siempre una revisión posterior. Por eso no hay traducciones para siempre: hay traducciones para cada generación”.<sup>3</sup> We would feel more than rewarded if, somehow, the translation we present here should encourage more people to face the same challenge, so that in subsequent years the entire collection may be fully translated.

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<sup>3</sup> The quotation comes from *Traducir poesía*, an interview published in Poesía Digital <<http://www.poesiadigital.es/index.php?cmd=documento&id=9>>. Retrieved on 14<sup>th</sup> July, 2014

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