

INTRODUCTION

In this essay, I'm going to try to prove the possibility of translation in poetry. There are many theories about translating poetry: Some authors believe that it is not possible and some think that it is.

There is no theory to solve that question: Is it possible to translate a poem?

I personally think that this type of translation is possible to a certain extent. I mean, when someone is going to translate a poem, the first step the translator must do before starting to translate a text is to understand the original text, in this case, a poem.

The problem is that a poem can have different interpretations depending on the focus, or the point of view it is read. There are several examples of one poem translated into different languages, at different periods of time, by different translators, and only one of those translations from the same poem has succeed, but not the original text.

How is it? Well, that's because as we can see, some poems have more than one interpretation, and the usage of poetic vocabulary with some words that have more than one meaning, creates ambiguity and sometimes it's very difficult to know what the author of the poem meant.

There are two ways of translating poetry:

–One way is to translate word by word, without caring much about the structure of the poem, which is a literal translation.

–And the other way would be (as many authors would say,) creating a new poem with the same structure and rhyme although the words wouldn't be the same used in the original poem, but the sense would be the same. Some authors think that the first way of translating is the best one, because it keeps the words that the original author wrote, so it's more closed to the original poem. However, most of times, you cannot translate versus literally because they wouldn't make much sense, and that's when the second way of translating is much better; because it keeps sense and, as I see it, that's the most important part in

translation.

That is why some people say that the translator, who has finished translating a poem in the second way, is not only a translator but also a poet, because many authors believe that that's a poem in another language, a new poem, not the same.

In my opinion, a good translation of a poem needs to rhyme if the original poem does, and also needs to have the same meaning than the original text.

It's true that sometimes poems have more than one meaning, but that's a problem that comes across in poetry translation, as there are also many other difficulties translating prose.

In the following pages, I've tried to verify my 'theory' about translating poetry using a well-known poem as an example of difficulty in this type of translation.

TARGET TEXT

In the following lines, you can read the poem I chose. Its title is 'AIR AND ANGELS'. The author of that poem is John Donne, a famous poet who wrote "Songs and Sonets."

Air and Angels

Twice or thrice had I loved thee,
Before I knew thy face or name;
So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame
Angels affect us oft, and worshipp'd be;
Still when, to where thou wert, I came,
Some lovely glorious nothing I did see:
But since my soul, whose child love is,
Takes limbs of flesh, and else could nothing do,
More subtle than the parent is
Love must not be, but take a body too;
And therefore what thou wert, and who,
I bid Love ask, and now
That I assume thy body, I allow,
And fix itself in thy lip, eye, and brow.

Whilst thus ballast love I thought,
 And so more steadily to have gone,
 With wares which would sink admiration
 I saw I had love's pinnace overfraught;
 Every thy hair for love to work upon
 Is much too much, some fitter must be sought;
 For, nor in nothing, nor in things
 Extreme, and scattering bright, can love inhere:
 Then, as an Angel, face, and wings
 Of air, not pure as it, yet pure, doth wear,
 So thy love may be my love's sphere;
 Just such disparity
 As is 'Twixt Air and Angels'purity,
 'Twixt women's love, and men's will ever be.

POEM'S ANALYSIS

This poem is divided in two paragraphs. It consists of 14 verses each paragraph and both parts follow the same structure. The structure is formed by verses of about eight or ten syllables although there is an exception in both paragraphs, in the third verse beginning by the end which has just six syllables. I think that the author wrote it like this on purpose, to emphasise the verse.

Along the poem we can see that it keeps the same rhyme in both paragraphs:

We can find five different endings in each paragraph.

The first verse (-thee /-thought) rhymes with the fourth (-be/-overfraught) and the sixth (-see/-sought), while the second one (-name/-gone) rhymes with the third

(-flame/-admiration) and the fifth (-came/-upon). In the verse seven there is another ending (-is/-things) which rhymes with the ninth verse. And in the eighth verse, we find another ending (-do/-inhere) which rhymes with verses ten (-too/-wear) and eleven (-who/-sphere). The last ending is the same in the last three verses of each paragraph. (-now, -allow, -brow; / -disparity, -purity, -be).

So as we can see, the poem follows a structure rhyme and length of verses repeated in both paragraphs. To keep also a nice rhythm along the poem and make it look nicer, the author uses several commas, semicolons, colons. and starts each verse with capital letter.

SENSE and MEANING

Air and Angels is written in old English, which means that there are some words that we don't usually use (nowadays). Moreover, the language used in this poem is poetic language, so there are also some ambiguous words, which have more than one meaning. When we translate it we will have to be careful, and try to find the right word in the other language which should have also more than one meaning.

I will only translate the first part of the poem, I think that's enough to show how difficult can be sometimes to translate such a poem.

In the following lines you will find how I understand the first part of the poem below each sentence of the original poem:

Twice or thrice had I loved thee
I had loved the idea of you two or three times

Before I knew thy face or name;
Before I knew how you were, or: before I met you

So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame
Angels affect us oft, and worshipp'd be;
Like in a voice or in a flame without shape, angels
appear in a similar way.
Angels affect us often and we worship them (although
we don't know how they are, in that guise.)

Still when, to where thou wert, I came,
And also when I came where you were (every time I came
to the place where you were so manifested)

Some lovely glorious nothing I did see:
I saw something quite indeterminate, and I had never
seen something that was more beautiful and splendid
than this (the idea of you).

But since my soul, whose child love is,
But since love is the descendent of my soul (love is
my soul's child)

Takes limbs of flesh, and else could nothing do,
My soul has taken on a body (limbs of flesh) and
without the body (the human body) it would be useless
(could do nothing else)

More subtle than the parent is
Love must not be, but take a body too;
Love shouldn't be more subtle or ethereal than the
soul is (the parent, which is more superficial), but
should also assume your body

And therefore what thou wert, and who,
I bid Love ask, and now
And so I ordered my soul's child enquire what sort of
person you were and who you were, and now

That I assume thy body, I allow,
I allowed Love to assume your body

And fix itself in thy lip, eye, and brow.
And I allowed Love to be set in your lips, eye and
brow. (I allow it to take up its permanent abode in
your face).

TRANSLATION

This could be a possible translation of the first part
of the poem. If we analyse that and compare it with
the original poem we can see that the length of verses
is exactly the same:

AIRES I ANGELS

T'he estimat dos o tres cops
Abans de conèixer com eres
Era una veu, una flama sens forma
Els angels que ens afecten i adorem
I quan, on tu eres, vaig venir
Alguna cosa preciosa vaig veure
Però des que Amor, fill de ma ànima
Adopta un cos i no pot fer res més
Serà més subtil que sa mare
Però ha de posseir un cos com ella ha fet
I doncs, el que eres i quí eres
L'Amor fa preguntar .
He permès a l'Amor posseir el cos
I que s'estableixi a la teva faç

Another possible translation of the first part would be the following, which does not follow the same structure (length of verses), but is more understandable:

T'he estimat dos o tres vegades
abans de conèixer el teu nom o el teu aspecte:
Una veu. una flama amorfa.
Com els angels que sovint ens afecten i nosaltres
adorem.
I doncs, quan vaig venir a trobar-te on eres,
vaig veure quelcom tan bonic i esplendit que en ma
vida havia vist.
Però des que la meva ànima té un fill que es diu Amor;
ha posseït un cos i res pot fer sense ell,
Més subtil del que és l'ànima mare
L'Amor no ho ha de ser, però també ha de posseir un
cos.
I per tant, ara faig que l'Amor preguntí:
–Quin tipus de persona eres?.Qui.?
Que assumeix el teu cos i jo ho permeto
I s'estableix en els teus llavis, ulls, i celles.

GOSSIP

As you may have noticed after reading this essay, it is very difficult to translate a poem. Of course there are easier poems to translate, which probably can be translated without any difficulty, but it is also true that by choosing this poem I realised that sometimes the theory of the possibility of translating poems is limited. Before I did this essay, I was sure that it is possible to translate anything, but now I'm sure that it is not always possible. I still believe that we can translate some poems, but as far as we understand them perfectly, I mean those poems that can only be interpreted in one way.

As you have seen I did two translations: The first one is more closed to the structure of the original poem, while the second one is just a translation of the meaning. It's not a literal translation because we wouldn't understand anything, but it is, at least, how I would interpret the poem in Catalan.

I have also tried to keep the rhyme, but I really couldn't do it. Maybe a very good poet could, but anyway, it wouldn't be a translation but a new poem.

The fact is that it is possible to keep the same structure and the same endings in the beginning, but as you go along the poem things become more and more difficult. And if you have to keep the rhyme and the same length of verses, it's impossible. Moreover it depends on how similar you want to do the translation, I mean:

- Following exactly the same structure of the original poem.

- Follow another similar structure.

- Or make up another different structure, independent from the original poem, but following a structure, just to show the reader of the translation that the original poem was following a rhyme.

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