
Translating, An Act of Interpreting

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No doubt, civilization development has been mostly possible due to the valuable contribution of talented people who endeavoured to translate works of real merit. So was it in the past, and the future, the same as nowadays, will, for sure continue relying on the responsible operative mediation of translators, but in this case of the professional translator acting as such in any of the fields available for their praxis.

At this point, and in line with what has briefly been put forward, it is necessary to make reference to what is here meant by translating. In his well-known essay *“On linguistic aspects of translation”* (1966, 233-9), Roman Jakobson remarks that *there is no meaning, in his own words “signatum”, without a linguistic sign, in his own words a “signum*. That is, meaning lies with the signifier and not in the signified. Then, as it is the linguistic verbal sign the one which gives an object its meaning, he concludes that *translation is the interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language*. Louis Kelly in his book *“The True Interpreter”* judges that the key word of the assertion is *“interpretation”*. He is right in saying so, but to speak of interpreting implies a previous step, that of specifying what is understood by language. I here adopt Lacan’s approach. For him language is *a system of signifiers and a signifier S_1 represents the subject for another signifier S_2* . Hence, it is easy to infer that the translator purpose should be that of consciously interpreting the signifier, but according to his own unconscious process of interpretation. Of real help to understand how this unconscious process is present in the version constructed is to analyse different versions of Sonnet XVIII by Shakespeare. The original text reads:

1. Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
2. Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
3. Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
4. And summer's lease hath all too short a date:

5. Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
6. And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
7. And every fair from fair sometime declines,
8. By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;

9. **But thy eternal summer shall not fade**
10. Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;
11. Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
12. When in eternal lines to time thou growest:

13. So long as men can breathe or eyes can see.

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SUPLEMENTO *Ideas*, II, 5 (2021), pp. 19-22
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14. So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

The beginning of the sonnet includes a reference to "summer", the Spanish equivalent of which, as a signified, would be "*verano*".

LINE 3 includes the reference to "May" as one of the months of that station, which, is described as "too short" - **LINE 4**.

Then there is a contrast between the short duration of the season and the eternal beauty of the person to whom the poem is dedicated - **LINE 9**.

Let's explore, then, some versions of the Sonnet and see the contrast detected.

Miguel Ángel Montezanti's version reads:

Si a un día de verano te comparo
tú eres más templado y placentero:
deja el viento al capullo sin amparo
y el plazo del verano es pasajero;

el sol del cielo alguna vez calcina
y otras veces opácense su oro,
toda belleza alguna vez declina:
o natura o azar causan desdoro.

Mas tu eterno verano no ha de ajarse
ni perderás dominio en tu hermosura;
de sombras no podrá muerte jactarse
cuando en líneas te guarde edad futura.

Mientras que el ojo vea, y hombre aliente
esto pervivirá y te hará viviente.

As we can see, Montezanti's version includes the reference of summer as "*verano*" and the translator here interprets that the addressee is a man, perhaps the young man to whom these sonnets are generally presumed to have been dedicated or perhaps he means that as the addressee is being compared to a day, he is *más templado* and *placentero* than a summer's day. This version doesn't include the reference to the month of "May"

Angel Batistessa, in his book "*Shakespeare en sus textos. Oír con los ojos*", offers a version where he includes both the reference to "May" and also the gender of the person. He interprets that the sonnet is addressed to a woman.

¿Puedo yo compararte a un día de **verano**?
Tú eres más adorable y mucho más **templada**;
los capullos de **mayo** agita el viento insano,
y el asueto estival no dura casi nada.

A. veces con sus ojos el cielo se ilumina,
y a veces él amengua su dorada entereza;
y toda cosa bella poco a poco declina,
por azar o mudanza de la naturaleza;

Pero tu eterno **estío** no verás agotado,
no serás despojada del don de la hermosura;
no alardeará la Muerte de haberte anonadado,
cuando en versos durables crezca tu donosura:

Mientras un alma aliente, y lea enternecida,
Vivirán estos versos, y en ellos tendrás vida.

I considered quite accurate is the version offered by Editorial Vergara of Spain in *Obras Completas de William Shakespeare* translated by Luis Astrana Marín. First of all, we should notice that the gender neutrality of the original has been maintained and that the translator has opted for "spring" as the equivalent of "summer" in the original. In Shakespeare's time the month of *May*, which is now part of spring, was part of what was called "summer". The prose version reads:

¿Te compararé a un día de primavera? Eres más deleitable y apacible. La violencia de los vientos desgarran los tiernos capullos de mayo, y el arriando de la primavera vence en fecha demasiado corta.

A veces brilla el sol del cielo con resplandor excesivo, y a menudo disminuye su tinte dorado; toda belleza pierde, tarde o temprano, su belleza, marchita por accidente o por el curso cambiante de la Naturaleza.

Mas nada ajará tu eterna primavera, ni perderás la posesión de tu reconocida hermosura; ni la muerte se jactará de verte errar en su sombra, cuando en versos inmortales se acrecienta tu nombre de edad en edad.

Mientras palpiten los corazones o vean los ojos, estos versos serán vivientes y te harán vivir.

Finally, my version reads:

¿A un día de primavera he de compararte?
Más encanto y más templanza tienes.
Vibran con los fuertes vientos los tiernos capullos de mayo
Y la vida de la primavera muy corto plazo tiene.

A veces con excesivo fulgor el ojo del cielo brilla
Y con frecuencia su tez de oro se despinta
Y en toda belleza, en algún momento, su belleza declina.
Porque el azar o el cambiante curso de la naturaleza la marchita.

Más tu eterna primavera no se esfumará
Ni perderá posesión de la belleza que es vuestra
Ni jactarse la muerte podrá de que errante por sus sombras te muestras
Cuando en versos eternos a través de los tiempos crezcas

Mientras los hombres respiren o los ojos vean
Mientras estos versos vivan y vida te confieran.

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