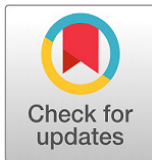


Permagel/Permafrost: Lesbian Desire and its Translation



Gonzalo Iturregui-Gallardo

gonzalo.iturregui@uab.cat

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3664-0045>

Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Cerdanyola del Vallès, Spain.

Abstract

Permafrost (*Permagel* in Catalan) is a novel by poet and writer Eva Baltasar. Published in 2018, it managed to gain notable popularity both in Catalonia and the rest of Spain. Since its publication, it has been translated into different languages with great success. Its English translation by American translator Julia Sanches arrived in the UK in 2020. Baltasar's story centres on a lesbian woman in her forties who, as a victim of the hostile environment in which she is obliged to live, fantasises about suicide and, at the same time, shows a hedonistic urge that leads her to the enjoyment of her human condition to its maximum, principally through sex. Sexual desire is explored in depth in the novel, artfully unfurled in the author's prose poetry. She manages to evoke deeply symbolic imagery and a strong sense of immediacy using a vast array of word combinations and metaphors. This article first explores the impact of the novel in both its original territory and among the English-speaking readership; particularly the topic of sex, which featured heavily in the reviews. Secondly, it aims to analyse the description of lesbian (queer) desire in the original and its transfer into the English language through the lens of queer and feminist translation. By applying a *queerfeminist* perspective, the analysis describes the effectiveness of the translation when transporting the contents into another cultural and linguistic reality.

Keywords: queer translation, feminist translation, lesbian desire, interculturality, literary translation, Permafrost

Permagel/Permafrost: el deseo lésbico y su traducción

Resumen

Permafrost (*Permagel* en catalán) es una novela de la poeta y escritora Eva Baltasar. Publicada en 2018, la novela ganó notable popularidad tanto en Cataluña como en el resto de España. Desde su publicación, ha sido traducida a diferentes idiomas con gran éxito. Su traducción al inglés llegó al Reino Unido en 2020 de la mano de la traductora estadounidense Julia Sanches. La historia de Baltasar se centra en una mujer lesbiana en la cuarentena que, víctima del entorno hostil en el que se ve obligada a vivir, fantasea con el suicidio y, al mismo tiempo, muestra un impulso hedonista que la lleva a disfrutar al máximo de su condición humana, principalmente a través del sexo. La novela explora en profundidad el deseo sexual, desplegado de forma muy estética en la poesía en prosa de



la autora, que consigue evocar imágenes de fuerte simbolismo e inmediatez en un amplio abanico de combinaciones de palabras y metáforas. En primer lugar, el presente artículo explora la repercusión de la novela tanto en su territorio original como entre el público anglosajón, y la fuerte presencia del tema del sexo, un tema muy citado en las reseñas de la obra. En segundo lugar, analiza la descripción del deseo lésbico (*queer*) en el original y su traslado a la lengua inglesa a través de las premisas de la traducción *queer* y feminista. Aplicando una perspectiva *queerfeminista*, el análisis describe la eficacia de la traducción al trasvasar los contenidos a otra realidad cultural y lingüística.

Palabras clave: traducción *queer*, traducción feminista, deseo lésbico, interculturalidad, traducción literaria, *Permafrost*

Permagel/Permafrost : le désire lesbique et sa traduction

Résumé

Permafrost (ou *Permagel*, en catalan) est un roman de la poétesse et écrivaine Eva Baltasar. Publié en 2018, il jouit aujourd'hui d'une popularité remarquable, aussi bien en Catalogne que dans le reste de l'Espagne. Depuis sa publication, sa traduction en plusieurs langues lui a valu un grand succès. Grâce à la traductrice américaine Julia Sanches, son adaptation en anglais est parvenue au Royaume-Uni en 2020. Le roman de Baltasar raconte l'histoire d'une femme lesbienne d'une quarantaine d'années qui, victime de l'environnement hostile dans lequel elle est contrainte à vivre, fantasme sur le suicide et est prise en même temps d'une pulsion hédoniste qui la conduit à profiter pleinement de sa condition humaine, principalement à travers le sexe. Déployé de manière très esthétique dans le poème en prose de l'auteur, ce désir sexuel est exploré en profondeur. En effet, grâce à un large éventail d'association de mots et de métaphores, l'auteur parvient à évoquer des images d'un symbolisme fort et d'une grande évanescence. Cet article commence par mesurer l'impact du roman, à la fois sur son territoire d'origine et auprès du public anglo-saxon, avant de se pencher sur l'omniprésence du sexe, sujet particulièrement récurrent dans les critiques de l'œuvre. Ensuite, l'article se fait l'analyse de la description du désir lesbien (*queer*) dans la langue source et dans sa version anglaise, à travers les prémisses de la traduction *queer* féministe. En adoptant une perspective *queer-féministe*, cette analyse décrit l'efficacité de la traduction dans sa capacité à transposer le contenu dans une tout autre réalité culturelle et linguistique.

Mots-clés : traduction *queer*, traduction féministe, désir lesbien, interculturalité, traduction littéraire, *Permafrost*

Introduction

Eva Baltasar's *Permafrost* was published in 2018 by Barcelona-based publisher Club Editor. The novel gained popularity almost entirely by word of mouth and reached the top positions in the best-sellers list (Abella, 2018). That same year, it won the Premi Llibreter for best book in Catalan literature, awarded by the trade of Catalan book sellers, for being a "bold, uninhibited, and risky" novel, for "the language used, with a clear poetic influence," and for "the way the evolution of the narrator is portrayed" (Gremi de Llibreter de Catalunya, 2018, my translation). Furthermore, it was a finalist for the 2020 French award, Prix Médicis, as the Best Foreign Novel. Just as its dedication reads – "to poetry, for permitting it" – Baltasar's style originates in poetry. She has published more than ten poetry collections and won multiple prizes in the genre. She has remarked that whereas her poetry is intimate and confessional, through these three novels she is able to put more distance between herself and her writing. It has been translated into different languages: Spanish, French, Italian, and English among others. Its English version, translated by American translator Julia Sanchez, was published in 2020.

Permafrost, part one of a three-part series, is followed by *Boulder* (published in 2020 and winner of the Omnium Prize for best novel in the same year). The series concludes with the recently published *Mammut*. The collection is linked through the nature of their protagonists, who happen to be women and lesbians. Baltasar's story centres on a lesbian woman in her forties who, as a victim of the hostile environment in which she feels obliged to live, fantasises about suicide while, at the same time, experiencing a hedonistic urge that leads to the enjoyment of her human condition to its maximum, principally through sex.

Permafrost received generally positive reviews both in Catalonia and around the globe. Reviews concur that the tone of the book is

sincere and harsh (Mcnamara, 2021; Kirkus, 2021; Suau, 2019), and they highlight the double-faceted essence of the protagonist; she is willing to commit suicide, fed up with life and society, while at the same time she manages to enjoy life's most essential experiences (Rodrigues Fowler, 2021; Kirkus, 2021). The contradictory personality of the narrator brings to the table a range of topics identified in the reviews, namely, society's hostility, medication used to survive this dangerous environment, maternity, family, life expectations and frustration, and unfulfilling and imperfect love among others (Chang, 2021; Abella, 2018; Haro, 2018, Zanón, 2018; Cardenete, 2018). The impetus for this study originates from one of the few negative reviews which eviscerated Baltasar's novel (Duval, 2020). While the majority of reviewers praise Baltasar's portrayal of same-sex desire as instinctive and raw, Duval asserts that *Permafrost's* treatment of desire is masculine and conservative, and that the only thing that really changes is the gender of the narrator: a woman.

This study aims to analyse the translation of *Permafrost* into English observing the texts from a queer feminist perspective. First, I will deal with Baltasar's representation of the lesbian and same-sex desire. The starting point for the analysis will be to frame *Permafrost* as a feminist novel (cf. Gilbert & Gubar, 1979) and as a queer text based on the ideas of queer lesbian feminist theorists such as De Lauretis (1991, 2011), Suárez Briones (2014), and Trujillo (2014, 2022) and authors such as Wittig (1986 [1973]) and Cixous (1983), who stand as key figures in lesbian feminist waves born in the 70s. Second, the translation will be examined through the lens of queer and feminist translation theories and practices, that serve as both translation and analysis tools. The basis of the queer translation theory will be inspired by the works of authors such as Anzaldúa (1987) and Baer (2018). For the analysis, I will be applying Démont's analysis of queer translations (2018), which delves into different modes to strengthen, unify, or hide the queerness of a

text. The feminist translation strategies will be drawn from those proposed by Castro (2008) and based on the work of important feminist translators and scholars (cf. von Flotow, Godard, Lotbinière-Hartwood).

The article will ultimately combine these two approaches in order to create and explore new avenues to tackle queer texts and translations. The conclusions will reflect on the overall translation quality and the importance of transmitting the queer in a text. It will end with a note concerning the status of English as a “global queer” language and how minority languages open space for new voices and generate debate and further research.

1. Lesbian (Woman): A Feminist and Queer Text

According to Baltasar, *Permafrost* is not deliberately a feminist novel in the sense that she has not written it for this purpose. I argue that if we see queer feminism as the natural progression of feminist theory (Trujillo, 2022), *Permafrost* is in fact a queer and feminist novel or, in other words, a queer text that is necessarily feminist. It is a feminist text because it immerses itself in a literary tradition based on the idea of author anxiety described by Gilbert and Gubar (1979) in their reading of female authors from the 19th and 20th centuries. Although their work has faced considerable criticism –deemed by some as essentialist (cf. Gezari, 2006)– they identified some key aspects in the work of female literary authors. They argued that female authors have historically tried to defy author anxiety (created by the dominant patriarchal gaze in the literary space) by searching for precursors to resist it, that is, they build upon previous female authors. Furthermore, *Permafrost* fits into the characteristics identified by Gilbert and Gubar (1979): Female authors have historically spoken more about their own experiences than male authors.

Additionally, and most importantly, it is a queer text. It is queer because it defies the

established sexual and social codes based on historical heteropatriarchy and homogeneity. Based on De Lauretis (1991), I am not only referring to having a lesbian as the protagonist but an uncomfortable lesbian who follows queer practices and has queer desires. In this regard, there is parallelism between *Permafrost*'s imagery and that found in important existing queer feminist literature precursors (i.e., Wittig and Cixous). The book explores sexual practices and a discourse related to desire that embraces a perverse and polymorphous sexuality (De Lauretis, 2011, p. 253), personified in the queer lesbian.

From the early classic imagery of Sapphic relationships on the island of Lesbos, the understanding of sexaffectivity between women has changed throughout history up to more contemporary approaches that consider the lesbian as something different from a woman or that reframe this type of sexual identity from a queer perspective. Even if in some cases, lesbian relationships have been considered sodomy, as happened with relationships between males, historically, sexual or romantic relationships between women were considered as non-existent. This is at least in Western countries since legal systems did not penalise nor even mention them. Their absence is clearly linked to a patriarchal society that has repeatedly erased women. Feminist movements originating at the end of the nineteenth century were able to allow women to start obtaining their rights and visibility. The feminist fight, however, did not start raising awareness of lesbian women until the 70s (Suárez Briones, 2013).

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir (2017 [1949]) describes the lesbian woman from a somewhat pathological perspective based on Freudian theories. Even if she does not reject or condemn lesbian women, she mentions that the lesbian is a woman who has not fully attained sexual maturation or that may be identified as a man. It would not be until some decades later that more modern conceptions of the lesbian arose. Such a change appears

in the so-called second wave of feminism that broadens the diversity of female identity and empowered lesbians

whose identity has been constructed in and from negation (lesbians are not real women) and from the lack and contempt (lesbians are pseudo men, pathetic copies that do not have what they must have): lesbian feminism not only defends lesbians as women but not less than the only women outside patriarchal control. (Suárez Briones, 2013, p. 28, my translation)

French activist, writer, and philosopher, Monique Wittig was one of the main voices of lesbianism within feminist ideology. “It would be incorrect to say that lesbians associate, make love, live with women, for ‘woman’ has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women.” (Wittig, 1992, p. 32). This marked the beginning of the lesbian no longer being described in terms of sexual desire but of political and ideological premises (Bunch, 1975, pp. 29–37). It is undeniable that advances were made on behalf of lesbians in order to gain emancipation and visibility as an identity group that was subject to different treatments and discriminations from straight women. The attribution of masculinity to the lesbian is directly linked to sexual desire and performance, as suggested by Newton (2000) when she says, based on Freud, that all desire and active erotic activity are masculine; and therefore, the woman who desires another woman cannot be other than masculine. The masculine lesbian is the new unmistakable obvious figure in her sexuality, as posed by Daly (1978), “[t]he terms gay or female homosexual more accurately describe women who, although they relate genitally to women, give their allegiance to men and male myths, ideologies, styles, practices, institutions, and professions” (p. 78).

This understanding of masculinity in lesbians was put to the test with the emergence of queer theories that fractured pre-established gender binarisms and expectations. De Lauretis (1991)

actually coined the term queer theory by defining its non-definition, its mutable nature. She first thought of the term “queer theory” to resist the “cultural and sexual homogenization in academic gay and lesbian studies” (De Lauretis, 2011, p. 257). Her understanding of the queer embraces a space that is “nonhomogeneous,” “a displacement, a transit, and transformation” (p. 246), by arguing that Freud’s analysis on sex and gender actually materialised the forbidden, the perverse, and polymorphous sexuality, inverting the distinction of what was normal and abnormal. Queer theory emanates from sexuality and transcends to the political by deifying the gender oppressive social structure embedded in feminist critique.

As put by Trujillo (2014), “queer feminisms have made possible spaces of existence and visibility for other bodies, other lives, other desires, other voices, other political experiences more radical, among them ours, those of the queer lesbians” (p. 131, my translation). In Butlerian lines, the queer implies a performance, and relates to an action, not to an identity or a category. Queer is a verb, not a noun; it turns the normal into weird in order to explore new possibilities outside patriarchal discourses and practices (Suárez Briones, 2014). Queer feminism allows for a rethinking of the old divisions and invites reflection on the way the lesbian is performed, portrayed, and represented. It is understood as an advancement in feminist theory which embraces more diverse bodies and experiences (Trujillo, 2022).

Under such light, *Permafrost* is a queer feminist text. Baltasar’s metaphors and narratives challenge what is established. In this regard, it is not only the portrayal of the narrator’s experience, trying to shield herself from society and the social expectations placed upon her which challenges and questions binarisms, but also the sexual and desire elements of the book, depicted by a plethora of metaphors. This is especially identifiable in passages in which the lesbian sexual practice is related to the realm of the masculine. In this new paradigm, previously

well-defined roles and identities become more ambiguous. It is within this framework that Baltasar's sexual desire is analysed in this proposal.

2. The Representation of Lesbian Sex/Desire

Baltasar depicts sexual relationships in a raw manner that also involves very suggestive images, symbolism, and metaphors. Duval's review (2020) describes some of its passages as being too "masculine" and mentions that the way Baltasar has portrayed sexual desire between women was not convincing enough. It is then arguable that Baltasar defies what may be expected from a contemporary lesbian author by sometimes using analogies that have historically been related to the masculine; this may be actually regarded as going against feminist postulates. However, the hypothesis that I suggest, observing the phenomenon under a queer light, is that she is able to perform the sexual on her own terms, trying to find in existing and understandable (but patriarchal) analogies and vocabulary a discourse that manages to express what she has in mind. In this sense, she may be queering lesbian desire, playing with the masculine and the feminine and bringing it to a middle ground or even elevated ground where such dichotomies are rendered obsolete. However, despite a queer reading of the depiction of lesbian sexual desire, it is probable that Baltasar's writing is influenced by the historical lack of resources to define the lesbian body and their sexual sphere due to a general indifference from the male and straight view (Cleveland, 2001).

In some cases, Baltasar's metaphors have resorted to the masculine in order to make reference to sensations and practices in female same-sex desire. It could be acknowledged that this assertion is made based on socially established binaries and that a queer understanding of the lesbian body and identity would dismantle such explanations. I argue that the historical and social connotations of what is related to

the masculine — powerful, active, violent — are also involved in the terminology employed by the author to illustrate lesbian sex. In particular, the narrator of *Permafrost* describes her lovers and sexual partners in an objectifying, very sexualised and somewhat brutal way. She mentions a "triplicated clitoris" that acts like "micro penis" (Baltasar, 2018, p. 88) and describes the sexual act as being so savage that if the protagonist was a man, she would have "made her pregnant" (Baltasar, 2018, p. 88). However, limiting the reading of *Permafrost*'s sexual desire depiction to those instances ignores an important part of its metaphorical dimension and reduces its queer imagery. Apart from the two aforementioned examples, the novel shows a vast array of metaphors that derive from the author's own voice and create a language far from what is culturally understood as masculine. As a matter of fact, Baltasar's representation of sexual performance and desire finds some parallelisms with well-known authors of lesbian feminist texts, Monique Wittig and Hélène Cixous. In their masterpieces, *Le corps lesbien* (Wittig, 1986[1973]) and *Le livre de Promethea* (Cixous, 1983), respectively, they use strategies to rethink sex and sexual desire through lesbian, feminist, and queer lenses.

As put by Cleveland (2001, p. 24), "Wittig exposes and resists through her reworking of the language" to combat the masculine gaze in which "the female body bears a long history of social and medical management". She chooses a vocabulary able to "resist the metaphor, the anatomical lexicon" (Hernández Piñero, 2013, p. 177, my translation), for instance:

your canines gash m/y flesh where it is most sensitive, you hold m/e between your paws, you constrain m/e to lean on m/y elbows, you make m/e turn m/y back to you, your breasts press against m/y bare skin, I feel your hairs touching m/y buttocks at the height of your clitoris, you climb on m/e, you rip off m/y skin with the claws of your four paws [...] (p. 22)

And she describes her lovers with passages such as the following:

The gleam of your teeth your joy your sorrow the hidden life of your viscera your blood your arteries your veins your hollow habitations your organs your nerves their rupture their spurting forth death slow decomposition stench being devoured by worms your open skull, all will be equally unbearable to her. (p. 15)

“However, this gesture of refusing the metaphor is twofold, since it is a gesture that implies at the same time the creation of new metaphors, of a new metaphorical sphere” (Hernández Piñero, 2013, p. 177, my translation). Cixous, in turn, configures “a desire between women as an excess or exaggeration. [...] Cixous has to destroy the distance between writing and life. According to the author, this means writing closer or before the metaphor” (Hernández Piñero, 2013, p. 177, my translation), as seen here: “And I? I drink, I burn, I gather dreams. And sometimes I tell a story. Because Prometheus asks me for a bowl of words before she goes to sleep” (p. 44). Examples of Cixous’ metaphorical dimension when she describes the desired body can be found in the following excerpts:

You make me thirsty, Prometheus, my river, you make me eternally thirsty, my water. As if I had spent my life in an old house of dried mud, so dry myself that I could not even thirst, until yesterday. (p. 43)

This is how I want you: larger and smaller stronger and weaker taller and trembling more, more out of breath that I more burning more penetrating bolder bossier more yielding more frightened narrower and more relentless than you are more than I. (1983, p. 72)

Or when she expresses the sensations and feelings of the narrator:

“It is because I am a deep, cool pyramid. Go through me. Pass through all my rooms and

know my subterfuge. But you are passing right by the little room that I want to keep closed, and you don’t see it.” (1983, p. 126)

It is in the framework of this task where Cixous and Wittig enquire into the sense, the limits, and the possibilities of the metaphor with the purpose of creating images of lesbian desire. Baltasar outlines a vision of lesbian desire where anatomy and excess are solidly present. Her narrator seeks refuge in a brutal and objectifying approach to her lovers, to the point where some metaphors use masculinity to portray intensity, exaggeration, climax, and violence and creates a personal gaze. Such a gaze, from a queer perspective, defies the aforementioned masculine view by refuting the definition of what is masculine and feminine, or better put, by challenging what is really masculine and feminine. This does not, by any means, dismiss the influence of the patriarchal association of the masculine with certain sexual practices and notions. Nevertheless, through a queer understanding, it would not be deliberately masculine. The reading of Baltasar’s *Permafrost* as merely masculine could dangerously reduce its plurality to a simplistic understanding of the author’s imagery in a way that, in Démont’s (2018) taxonomy of representing the queer in translation, would tend to simplify the queer content of a text to suit the political and social expectations.

Such an understanding and portrayal of lesbian sexual desire, which is profoundly attached to the author’s style and based on complex metaphors and imagery, needs to be tackled intimately in the transfer to another language and culture. The way queer messages circulate can help diversify the queer experience by facilitating the target culture’s comprehension of the text and guaranteeing their engagement and enjoyment.

3. Translating the Queer

From the so-called cultural and power turn in translation (Bassnett & Lefevre, 1990;

Tymoczko, 2000), there was a shift in the perspective of translation studies. Martínez Pleguezuelos (2018) notes that there is a parallelism in the development of gay and lesbian studies and translation studies during that time. With the overcoming of prescriptivist postulates towards more descriptive approaches, he states, translation becomes the ideal space to identify the discursive power dynamics that contribute to the formation of minority sexualities. If feminist translation tries “to actively validate the different types of feminisms (in plural) and ultimately eradicate (the also plural) gender discrimination” (Castro, 2008, p. 286, my translation), queer translation aims to bring to the surface sexual and gender diversity to unmask essentialist ideas to use the potential inherent in the fluid concepts of translation and sexuality and understand the practices and discourses involved in negotiating identities (Baer & Kaindl, 2018).

Kedem (2019, p. 159) approaches queer translation as “an object of immanent critique that challenges pre-established notions of both the concept of the queer and that of translation”. For queer theories to be effective critical modes of thinking, though they must cultivate a self-critical dimension that will secure its elasticity as a political practice, guarantee its dynamic and plural form and can thus also provide the means to counter its critics (Butler, 1993). In this sense, I view translation as a border, as presented in Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La frontera* (1987) and analysed in Baer (2020) as a key concept in queer translation. This border works as a margin that is not only a meeting point between two languages but that also exposes a view from the “position of the hegemon” (Baer, 2020, p. 32), hiding and opening what is found beyond, thus resisting mere equivalence and symmetrical monolingualism.

The “queer turn” in translation, as described by Santaemilia (2018), provides new possibilities for research in the field. Recent publications are proof of new applications and discussions, such

as the volumes by Baer and Kaindl (2018), Baer (2020), and Epstein and Gillett (2017), who deal with the diversity of identities of the LGBTQ+ community; Rose (2021), who focuses particularly on trans and intersex texts and their translation; or Martínez Pleguezuelos (2018) and Villanueva and Chaume (2021), who focus on the field of audiovisual translation and queer identities.

Villanueva and Chaume (2021) have applied a systematic review of the epistemological and methodological value of publications in the field of audiovisual translation and LGBTQ+ representation for the last two decades. Their study serves to conceptualise this very unstable field which departs from the conceptualisation of the label itself: queer. They mention that most of the studies conducted up to date are case studies with a single product (they focus on audiovisual content) and are qualitative studies. Their criticisms focus on the variability of the term “translation,” and they put emphasis on the logocentrism of the analyses. The differences in the understanding of the practice itself call for different methodologies of analysis and yield different results.

From my understanding, most of these qualitative analyses reviewed in Villanueva and Chaume (2021) lack a categorisation or taxonomy of strategies used for the translation and study of queer texts. It is here where I call for the modelling of feminist translation strategies in queer translation based on the fact that both feminist and queer translation share the same main objective. Feminist translation scholars and professionals have proposed different strategies that can bring feminist issues in a text that may be hidden, censored, or shifted in translation to the fore. Such strategies are summarised in the study of Castro (2008), expanded in the following section, who bases her work on previous scholars considered classics in this line of research such as the works of Godard (1990), Lotbinière-Harwood (1991), Simon (1995, 1996), and Von Flotow (1991, 1995, 1997).

I argue here, based on previous experiences (Iturregui-Gallardo, 2021), that feminist translation strategies constitute an adaptable referential framework for both the analysis and production of queer translations. The queer turn takes gender-conscious translation further in what Giustini (2015) names the *second paradigm* in translation. As put by Von Flotow (2007, p. 92, quoted in Giustini, 2015), “queer, as well as gay and lesbian studies concerned with other gender identities and in particular with individual choice in these matters, have taken debates to other, though not necessarily new, areas” (p. 2). Both approaches to translation share the emphasis on historically hidden discourses and narratives belonging to social minorities which evolved in the margins of power such as women and LGBTQ+ identities. The proposed combination or application of feminist strategies to the queer text offer multiple advantages.

4. Methodology: Queerfeminist Strategies

Permafrost was published in Barcelona in 2018; and its English translation, penned by American translator Julia Sanches, arrived in 2020. The totality of excerpts in which (lesbian) sexuality and desire were featured, identified, and gathered on a table opposite their English translation. With both texts in parallel, the analysis took place. The translations were located in one of the three modes described by Démont (2018), and the translation strategies proposed for feminist translation (Castro, 2008) were used as analysis tools. Both approaches aimed to show the gender-conscious intention of the translation that successfully maintains its queer component.

This article proposes a queer reading in which the practices represented in *Permafrost* can be considered undecidable, in the words of Rose (2021). Therefore, both the text and the translation would benefit from an analysis from this angle. My hypothesis is that Baltasar uses a vast array of images for her sexual metaphors by drawing from the feminine and masculine

and distilling both definitions into her own narrative. Consequently, Duval’s claims (2020) should be put to the test. It is true that the instances analysed in her review are blatantly masculine in the sense that Baltasar resorts to a series of male images to describe the power and brutality of lesbian sex. However, these do not account, by any means, for the totality of the images, since the novel presents many other passages in which lesbian desire is depicted in different forms; from the enumeration of female anatomy or their analogies with food, to the juxtaposition of sex and eating to describe excess which resonate with the aforementioned lesbian feminist texts by Wittig (1986[1973]) and Cixous (1983).

I depart from the categorization presented by Démont (2018) in which he proposes three different modes of translating literary queer texts. In this case, he is not proposing specific strategies on feminist translation, as provided by Castro (2008), but a collection of three possible outcomes in the treatment of the queer component of a text. He proposes two modes that hide or simplify the queer (*misrecognizing the queer* and *minoritizing the queer*) and a third mode that manages to transfer the queer in a text into the translated text, which I will name *preserving the queer* for the purposes of this study.

In the first mode, the one in which the queer is misrecognised, the translation is “subject to the normalizing and ‘straightening’ power of translators” and “by being connected to a whole new set of semantic associations, the potentially subversive content is turned into a conservative strategy to hide a queer sexuality” (Démont, 2018, pp. 158–159). The second mode, which is when the queer contents of a text are minoritized, reduces the text’s queerness “to the terms of the contemporary identity politics” suppressing “the potential discontinuities, associations, and uncouplings around which the original text, and its own sexual rhetoric, are organized.” (Démont, 2018, p. 162). Finally, preserving the queer encompasses the correct

recognition and transference of all the nuances that characterised the queer essence in a text.

For the successful identification and preservation of the queer, the present study puts forward feminist strategies not only as tools for translating queer texts but also as a framework of analysis. Feminist translation strategies (Castro, 2008) are primarily used to highlight and bring the feminist component of texts to the fore, to the point that they propose modification as a way of transcreation to subvert their patriarchal component. As suggested in the previous section, such strategies are utilised to transfer what may be hidden beyond the frontier of translation, as theorised by Anzaldúa (1987).

These strategies are *compensation*, where the translator directly intervenes and counteracts the differences between the source and the target in terms of connotations, gendered wording, etc.; *metatextuality*, a strategy that assembles paratexts such as forewords, or translator's notes, among others, to allude directly to the political intent of the translation, justify their interventions, and explain underlying meanings that could be lost in translation; *abjunction*, where the translator reclaims a text without feminist intent by introducing neologisms, changes or parodies in the plot, inclusive grammatical forms (such as sticking to a generalised grammatical female distinction), etc.; and *close collaboration with the author*, resulting in a process of co-authorship.

In the following section the analysis and discussion of the results are presented. The objective is to confirm that the translation of the novel into English was conducted by adopting a gender-conscious approach, paying special attention to the queer in the text and its transfer. Subsequently, the present work springs from the hypothesis that this translation is in fact a queer translation able to correctly preserve the queer. Ultimately, this study aims to confirm that a translation of a queer text with a queer feminist-conscious approach is possible.

Many studies are usually focused on examining previous (old) translations that have failed to recognise or have completely eliminated the queer and proposing new translations to address these issues (cf. Baer & Kaindl, 2018; Rose, 2021). Even though these contemporary studies align with the historical patriarchal perspective in the study of cultural phenomena, which are truly fundamental, working with contemporary authors and translations will provide an understanding of how such content travels and is expressed in current different linguistic spaces.

5. Results and Discussion

By looking at the passages described by Duval in her review (2020) and putting them in the context of the whole novel, it is clear that resorting to masculine aspects for metaphors when describing lesbian desire only happens twice throughout the novel (Examples 1 and 2). As a matter of fact, many other images are used to describe sex and desire (Example 8). Subsequently, the author writes with creative flair –showing her poetic background– and employs an array of intimate imagery in the novel. It could be stated, then, that the contents

Example 1

p. 88: Hem follat tota la tarda com animals al límit de l'extinció, si fos **un mascle** segur que l'hauria prenyada.

p. 59: We've fucked all afternoon like animals on the verge of extinction. If I were **male**, I definitely would have gotten her pregnant.

Example 2

p. 88: Els dits, els llavis i les mans, i el nas i la llengua i els peus, i les dents i els cabells i el meu clítoris, increïblement triplicat de mida, **com un micropenis altiu**... totes les meves extensions forçades dins seu fins a l'extrem pel poltre d'un desig il·limitat.

p. 59: Lips, hands and fingers, nose, tongue and feet, teeth, hair – and my clitoris, shockingly tripled in size, **an insolent micropenis**... my every extremity driven inside her, to the very edge of her, on the rack of unlimited desire.

of Duval's review (2020) may have deliberately simplified the author's vision by failing to identify other narratives, thus avoiding a queer reading of the text (cf. Démont, 2018).

Secondly, the translation shows a clear intention to preserve the author's understanding of sex and desire. Sanches' intention is noticeable in her lexical selection when describing certain practices and parts of the body (particularly, female genitalia). She uses literal translations that may sound unfamiliar or out of context in English but whose meaning is very connoted in the Catalan version. This is the case of the words used to name the vagina or vulva. In Examples 3, 4, and 5, I show how the author uses the Catalan word *cony* [cunt] to talk about the narrator's genitalia and that of her lovers. This word has particular connotations in Catalan, normally related to a colloquial or vulgar register. The word is also used as an interjection similar to the English *fuck*. However,

Example 3

<p>p. 73: Adoro, adoro les mans de dona. [...] Ungles curtes com a mi m'agraden, ungles curtes com a mi m'agraden. En realitat, qui ho repetia era el meu cony, pensador impenitent.</p>	<p>p. 49: I fucking love women's hands. [...] Short, the way I like them. Short, the way I like them. The one repeating this was actually my cunt, unrepentant thinker.</p>
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Example 4

<p>p. 130: Encara que tot, en ella, proclamava feminitat: el cap rapat i ros com un cony fort acabat de rasurar, els ulls de glaç trencat, els pits llargs i constants com llengües, reposant al damunt de la seva escala de costelles, els mugrons arremangats, les cames i els peus suavisssims i monocroms com extremitats d'un Kamasutra clàssic.</p>	<p>p. 84: Even though everything about her screamed femininity: head blonde and shorn like a solid and recently shaven cunt, cracked-ice eyes, breasts long and continuous like tongues resting over a flight of ribs, crimped nipples, legs and feet soft and monochrome like the drawings in the classical Kama Sutra.</p>
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Example 5

<p>p. 130: Animal a mig domesticar, però cabut i feréstec quan s'endinsava en el meu cony. Primer no volia. "M'encanta quan te'm menges", [...] Els nostres conys es van convertir en la nostra porcellana preferida.</p>	<p>p. 84: [...] a partially domesticated animal, dogged and feral when entering my cunt. She hadn't wanted to at first. "I love it when you eat me out," [...] Our cunts were our favorite set of fine china.</p>
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Example 6

<p>p. 104: [...] vaig pensar com seria sucar els dits a la figa de la Laura i quin gust tindrien en llepar-los. [...] Pensava en la figa sucosa de la Laura i m'escorria de seguida. [...] Fent-me petons a la ratlla que formaven els dits índex i polze, imaginant-me que eren els seus llavis, fent-hi lliscar la llengua entremig i preguntant-me si algun dia, quan fóssim més grans, la Laura em deixaria fer el mateix amb la seva figa.</p>	<p>p. 68: [...] Then I wondered what it would feel like to dunk my fingers into Laura's fig, what she would taste like. [...] The thought of Laura's syrupy fig immediately made me come. [...] I kissed the line between my index finger and thumb. I pictured them as her lips, slipped my tongue between them, and wondered whether one day, maybe when we were older, Laura would let me do the same to her fig.</p>
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by no means does it have those connotations in English; in fact, it is used as an insult, and quite a strong one in certain territories¹.

Contrarily, in Example 6, Baltasar makes use of the Catalan term *figa*, a fig in English, that is used for the fruit and also to refer to the vagina or vulva in its figurative sense. In Catalan, *figa* sounds less direct and violent; it also carries connotations of innocence. Indeed, this term is used when the protagonist is describing herself masturbating or her sexual arousal experiences when she was a young girl. The

¹ In the Cambridge dictionary, an offensive word for a very unpleasant or stupid person.

English term “fig” does not carry this meaning, but the translator has decided to maintain a literal translation that is easy to follow due to the context and revolves around the other food imagery presented in the passage (the girl is comparing the “fig” to a sort of heart-shaped candy). These translations (Examples 3 to 6) align with the feminist translation strategy of *compensation* or *abjunction* based on the fact that the target readership might be gaining more information about the source or find the selection of words odd. The translation is then rendered queer by resisting equivalents and offers the target audience a window into the source text, thus unveiling what is behind the translated word (cf. Anzaldúa, 1987).

In Example 7, two different terms are used to describe vaginal discharge when the young protagonist fantasises about one of her girlfriends. First, the original uses *substància viscosa* which has been translated literally as “viscous substance”. Later, the author refers to the same fluid as *suc* [juice], which has been used in this context to refer again to the food imagery recurrent in Baltasar’s novel. The literal English translation “juice” might have

different connotations, but it is able to convey the author’s vision. Again, the translator resists equivalents to bring the authors’ queer message to the fore with a translation based on *compensation* or *abjection*.

Another treat of the queer nature of the novel is found in the form of the text: Baltasar’s signature use of prose poetry. In fact, the author has pointed out in several interviews that the writing of her novels is performed in two steps: A first one in which the text, the plot, the story is built and a second one that has the sole aim of making the text aesthetically beautiful (Díez, 2019). Sanches’ translation has sought to maintain the rhythm of the original text while always staying close to Baltasar’s metaphorical dimensions. The sexual and desire dimensions of the book are demonstrated in Example 8. This example, which evokes imagery based on food again, is also proof of the author’s resourceful use of metaphors to deal with sexual desire. Here queer escapes what relates to the merely “gay and lesbian”, as suggested in De Lauretis (1991). In this sense, it refers to a sexuality which resists homogeneity and rejects the reproductive objective to embody the perverse and antisocial that is found in sexuality (Edelman, 2004, in De Lauretis, 2011).

Example 7

p. 104: Vaig notar com aquests pensaments feien que el meu cos produís més substància viscosa . Em va emplenar els dits i se'm va escampar per tota l'obertura, fins més amunt del clítoris. Feia unes setmanes que sabia que allò que em tocava per damunt de les calces quan em masturbava es deia clítoris, però ara me'l tocava directament, amb els dits recoberts del meu suc , les sensacions agradables es multiplicaven per mil.	p. 68: These thoughts made my body produce more of that viscous substance . It soaked my fingers and spilled from the opening, all the way up and over my clitoris. I'd known for some weeks that the thing I fondled through my panties when masturbating was called clitoris, but now that I was touching it directly with fingers smeared in juice , the pleasure I felt was a thousand times more intense.
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Example 8

p. 88: Tot el meu cos donant-se com xiclet calent i dens, emmotllant-se a cadascuna de les seves cavitats, cercant el punt on l'exterior fineix i s'obre a la polpa íntima i nua de l'interior. Sentia la necessitat de trobar-me amb la seva essència, d'integrar-m'hi. Hi havia un amor tan immens que exclòia de si mateix la paraula amor.	p. 59: My entire body is a stick of hot, dense chewing gum tailored to her every cavity, searching for the point where the outside gives way to the naked and intimate inner pulp. I yearn for her essence, to meld with it. There is love so enormous it precludes the word love.
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6. Conclusions

It has been suggested that *Permafrost* is a feminist and queer novel, even if the author insists on the fact that she has never had any active intention to make it so. She has mentioned in more than one interview that she writes about women who happen to be lesbians simply because she is a woman who happens to be lesbian (Instituto Cervantes Leeds, 2021). The author does not show a clear activist or political agenda in her work concerning feminist or queer ideologies.

However, the novel is built on a history of women's literature in the sense that it can be linked to the traces of female precursors vital to the development of queer feminism, and it is based on personal experience (cf. Gilbert & Gubar, 1979). Further, and most importantly, *Permafrost* is a queer text; based on the metaphorical language Baltasar employs to create images that resist homogeneity and defy normativity. She does not automatically use masculine referents to talk about sex; she is using images that originate from the centuries-old patriarchal model but that are part of the general imagery in which the masculine is linked to brutality and power. Why is this so? Do we really have a code to describe lesbian sex and desire?

It has been argued that the social understanding of certain sexual practices is linked to the male. It is clear that, unfortunately, historical androcentrism and patriarchy have had an impact on the referents, codes, and models we use today. Such an understanding of sex has impacted language as seen in Baltasar's work, who describes and expresses a series of practices and sensations with existing mainstream codes without showing a political and activist purpose. She uses a variety of images that define her voice as an author. By observing her texts from a queer approach, the imagery echoes previous canonical lesbian texts such as *The Lesbian Body* by Wittig or *The Book of Prométhea* by Cixous, which use a variety of metaphorical figures able to resist the male gaze or to portray lesbian desire based on

excess. Baltasar's metaphors, which include food, the female anatomy, and which make reference to the male body to represent excess create a queer representation of lesbian sex that may be deemed, first of all, uncomfortable (cf. Trujillo, 2022) and undecidable, that is, between or beyond feminine or masculine, in some passages (cf. Rose, 2021).

Sanches' translation shows a clear intention to preserve the original's queerness, following Démont's categorisation (2018). As shown in Examples 1 to 8, she has carefully selected the terminology to mirror the queer imagery of the original Catalan text. This can be seen in the words chosen to refer to female genitalia (*cony* and *figa* in Catalan; and *cunt* and *fig* in English) and to refer to vaginal discharge (*substància viscosa* and *suc*, in Catalan; and *viscous substance* and *juice*, in English) for which the translator opts for a literal translation that stays very close to the original text and conforms to a transparent translation that lets the original text be seen; thus moving beyond the frontier marked by translation (cf. Anzaldúa, 1987). She also manages to reproduce the author's prose poetry rhythm while meticulously transferring the nuances of the imagery in the original text.

The translator worked in collaboration with the author and wrote a prologue in which she reflects on her experience while translating *Permafrost* and her intentions as a translator. The use of metatexts is one of the strategies employed by feminist translators when faced with texts with certain contents that must be brought to the fore (Castro, 2008). Furthermore, the translation reproduces certain selections of images and metaphors that echoes feminist strategies such as *compensation* or *abjunction*, which are able to capture the original queerness. The translation solutions provide extra information about the original Catalan by opting for translations closer to the source text to frame the original analogies and metaphors that sound odd (queer) to the English-speaking readership.

Finally, and subsequently, queer feminist approaches to translation are essential to tackle the study of minorities in place of the patriarchal heteronormative canon that has long exerted its power over marginalised experiences. This study has shown how in the field of translation, common feminist strategies could also benefit both the analysis and production of queer translations. Furthermore, the transfer from Catalan into English (that is, from a minority language to a language of power) is particularly important; making new queer texts available promotes other images and narratives and thus reinforces the idea of the queer as translational (Baer, 2018).

6.1. Future Lines of Research

This study opens new avenues for future research. Considering the incipient renown of Baltasar as a novelist, attention will likely turn to her numerous poetry collections. In her poetry she explores same-sex love and desire; the exploration of their translation could provide new insights into her metaphorical and conceptual universe and how this is transported into other languages.

In the same vein, more research is required on the connection point of queer archaeology and queer creation in translation. Most of the studies on the queer have been based on previous translations and, in some cases, previous translations that one assumes should be repurposed. Even if these studies are of great value, more work is required to navigate translating the queer anew in the same way that feminist translators proposed their strategies.

Finally, research on minority languages is needed to obtain a clearer understanding of human diversity. The queer should also be unrooted from the English-speaking sphere. In the case of Catalan, queer and feminist experiences are flourishing in contemporary literature (and other forms of cultural expression); these texts are based on classic works that built the pillars and canon of dissident narratives, particularly

during the Spanish dictatorship. The study of the translation from minority languages into English (or other widely spoken and powerful languages) is key to the transfer of knowledge across territories and communities.

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