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The Lesbian Body in Translation: Gender Identity and Erotism in Adrienne Rich's Poetry

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Abstract

American poet Adrienne Rich was a strong believer in the transformative power of language. She defended women's right to create their own, feminine language with which to be able to destabilize the power structures that subjugated women and limited their participation in the social, sentimental, work-related and sexual spaces. Through this new feminine language, Rich intends to take those areas from which women had been excluded: political power, sexual pleasure, homosexual love, eroticism... in short, to create a feminine, feminist and lesbian microcosm in which to develop her identity freely. The voice of the poet expresses a carnal love for another woman in a way that had not been seen – or read – before. In the Spanish translations of these poems it is not only the message that must remain intact. The female language that Rich worked so hard to achieve must be transformed to achieve a language –in Spanish– equally evocative of the female body and its erotic capacity. This paper aims to explore the homoerotic poems of the American poet in their translations into Spanish in search of the fidelity to the lesbian and feminist elements that Rich's language imprinted in them.

Keywords: gender identity, Adrienne Rich, lesbian desire, feminist translation, women's writing

El cuerpo lésbico en la traducción: identidad de género y erotismo en la poesía de Adrienne Rich

Resumen

La poeta estadounidense Adrienne Rich creía firmemente en el poder transformador del lenguaje. Defendió el derecho de las mujeres a crear un lenguaje propio y femenino con el que poder desestabilizar las estructuras de poder que sometían a las mujeres y limitaban su participación en el espacio social, sentimental, laboral y sexual. A través de este nuevo lenguaje femenino, Rich pretende tomar aquellos espacios de los que la mujer había sido excluida: el poder político, el placer sexual, el amor homosexual, el erotismo… en definitiva, crear un microcosmos femenino, feminista y lésbico en el que desarrollar su identidad libremente. La voz de la poeta expresa un amor carnal por otra mujer de una manera que no se había visto ni leído antes. En las traducciones al español de estos poemas no es solo el mensaje el que debe permanecer intacto. El lenguaje femenino que tanto trabajo le costó a Rich debe transformarse para lograr un lenguaje –ahora en español– igualmente evocador del cuerpo femenino y su capacidad erótica. Este artículo tiene como objetivo explorar los poemas homoeróticos

de la poeta estadounidense en sus traducciones al español en busca de la fidelidad de estos a los elementos lésbicos y feministas que el lenguaje de Rich imprimió en ellos.

Palabras clave: identidad de género, Adrienne Rich, deseo lésbico, traducción feminista, escritura femenina

Le corps lesbien dans la traduction : identité de genre et érotisme dans la poésie d'Adrienne Rich

Résumé

La poétesse américaine Adrienne Rich croyait dur comme fer au pouvoir transformateur du langage. Elle a défendu le droit des femmes à créer leur propre langage, féminin, afin de déstabiliser les structures de pouvoir qui les assujettissaient et limitaient leur participation aux sphères sociales, sentimentales, professionnelles et sexuelles. À travers ce nouveau langage féminin, Rich visait à s'approprier les espaces au sein desquels les femmes avaient été exclues : le pouvoir politique, le plaisir sexuel, l'amour homosexuel, l'érotisme... en bref, à créer un microcosme féminin, féministe et lesbien où elles pourraient développer librement leur identité. La poétesse exprime un amour charnel envers une autre femme. d'une manière qui n'avait jamais été vue ou lue auparavant. Dans les traductions en espagnol de ces poèmes, ce n'est pas seulement le message qui doit rester intact : le langage féminin, durement acquis par Rich, dévait être transformé pour parvenir à un langage – désormais en espagnol – tout aussi évocateur du corps féminin et de sa capacité érotique. Cet article vise à explorer les traductions en espagnol des poèmes homoérotiques de la poétesse américaine, en quête de leur fidélité aux éléments lesbiens et féministes que la langue de Rich leur a conférés.

Mots clef : identité de genre, Adrienne Rich, désire lesbien, traduction féministe, écriture féminine

Introduction

The transforming power of language is undeniable, especially for American poet Adrienne Rich (1929-2012), who used her literary voice to claim realities that move away from the regulations imposed by the dominant patriarchal system. In a type of poetry that resists accepting tradition, both in form and content, and that recounts the female and lesbian experience openly and without fear, as was her case, words will become the necessary subversive tools to convey a personal and political reality to general readers.

The lesbian body becomes at the same time a creative origin, a source of inspiration and an object of desire in Rich's poetry, with her choice of words being essential to convey that message to readers, both in its original language and in its translations into Spanish. Translation is, then, a necessary tool to perpetuate Rich's poetry and make visible her experience as a feminist and lesbian woman in Spanish-speaking cultures.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the construction of a gender identity through language, using as an example poet Adrienne Rich's works and their translations into Spanish. To do so, we will explore Rich's ideology and how she developed her idea of gender identity through language in Section 1. Then, on section 2, we move on to explain the nuances of feminist translation, analyzing the implications of translating erotic language and, more concretely, lesbian erotic languages, and what this means for the translators and the strategies they use. In Section 4 we will analyze specific poems belonging to Rich's work *The Dream of a Common Language*, using examples from the "Twenty-One Love poems" poems IV, X, XIX and a "Floating Poem, unnumbered," along with their translations into Spanish by two different translators. Section 4 summarizes the most relevant topics covered in this article and wraps up with final thoughts about the topic of feminist and lesbian translation.

The terms female language and feminine language will be used indistinctively throughout this paper. We are aware of the nuances that might make both terms refer to different concepts or different realities to other theorists, which are worth studying and analyzing in further research, but here *female language* and *feminine language* will denote a type of language that is developed by a female body to consciously distinguish itself from male dominant language.

1. Language and Identity

Every social, political, or ideological movement is accompanied by discourses that support it. The same occurs with identity phenomena or expressions, which find different ways and modes of manifestation: Personal care, fashion, body expression, and, of course, language. The latter is a fundamental tool to define ourselves, and the discourses we create and develop as individuals help us shape our personal identity, which is in itself based on different aspects and which possibly has gender as one of its main definers.

Writers use their voice and their discourses not only to define themselves but also to position themselves in the myriad of political and ideological categories. Such is the case of Adrienne Rich, who fought to consciously create a feminine discourse in order to subvert the male dominated literary canon and, with it, the patriarchal system that controls and silences women's voices.

1.1. Adrienne Rich: Language and Gender Identity

Adrienne Rich was an American poet, essayist, and activist who fought to make the female and lesbian experience visible through her literature. Within the thematic concerns or obsessions that are reflected in her work, Rich (1979) gave special importance to language:

> It is clear that among women we need a new ethics; as women, a new morality. The problem of speech, of language, continues to be primary. For if in our speaking we are

> breaking silences long established, «liberating ourselves from our secrets» in the words of Beverly Tanenhaus, this is in itself a first kind of action. (p. 185)

While Rich reflects on language throughout most of her theoretical work, the collection *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* (1979) is worth noting for its reflection on the subjugation that women have always experienced by having to use a masculine language to express themselves. For Rich, this has implied an obligation to lie on the part of women, understanding by lying the fact of having to use a universal (non-feminine) language that is not their own in order to avoid being forced to "be sucked back into the realm of servitude" (Rich, 1979, p. 207).

Another of Rich's main maxims was that language is power. It is not surprising, then, that in an interview conducted by the American writer Elly Bulkin in 1977, Rich described an episode in which she felt extremely offended with two heterosexual friends. After reading her collection of poems "Twenty-One Love Poems" together with their (male) partners, these friends praised Rich, commenting on how "universal" these poems had seemed to them and how much they had felt identified in reading them. Rich argued the reason for her offense as follows:

> I found myself angered, and when I asked myself why, I realized that it was anger at having my work essentially assimilated and stripped of its meaning, "integrated" into heterosexual romance. That kind of "acceptance" of the book seems to me a refusal of its deepest implications [...]. I see [it] as a denial, a kind of resistance, a refusal to read and hear what I've actually written, to acknowledge what I am. (1979, p. 58)

The assimilation of lesbian love as universal means for Rich a rejection of her vindication, a refusal to listen or to understand the existence, in its broadest and most political meaning, of a lesbian woman in the repressive, patriarchal and homophobic society in which she lived. This example, among many others, perfectly illustrates the importance that Rich attaches to language and her conviction that it can represent exactly what the author who writes it is like (and how she feels).

Closely related to the importance of language, we can point to her claim to create a specific literary voice as one of the most outstanding characteristics of her poetry, both from an ideological and a stylistic point of view. It is an idea that worries her and on which she writes, reflects, theorizes and develops in her poetic work, in her essays and in several of her public appearances. In fact, one of her most notable works is titled *The Dream of a Common Language* (1977) and in it she explores the possibility of a common language between men and women. However, poem by poem, this possibility dissipates ("a woman's voice singing old songs with new words" Poem XIII. "Twenty-One Love Poems", *The Dream of a Common Language*), as the narrator realizes the impossibility of using a language that does not belong to them, the language of the oppressor, and the urgency of developing a common language, but only feminine

> For me it is always a question of language as a probe into the unknown or unfamiliar […] I didn't make poetry out of theories; I wrote from the need to make open and visible what was obscure and unspeakable. (Rich, 2013, p. 140)

This language is a weapon loaded with ideological implications that the poet consciously uses to distance herself from those who represent the other (man, the patriarchal system, the capitalist system, etc.). This force of language often implies a reaction to an unfair situation, a rebellion of women against the inequality they suffer. In an interview with writer and critic David Kalstone, Rich states: "the energy of language [comes] somewhat from the pressure and need and unbearableness of what's being done to you" (1972, p. 59). Oppression is a wake-up call for language to become a weapon of rebellion and feminist struggle.

Rich herself justifies this political character of poetry as follows:

> Is poetry, should it be, "political"? The question, for me, evaporates once it's acknowledged that poetic imagination or intuition is never merely unto-itself free-floating, or self-enclosed. It's radical, meaning, root-tangled in the grit of human arrangements and relationships: how we are with each other. The medium is language intensified, intensifying our sense of possible reality. (2006, p. 208)

Poetry is political in itself, since it is radical; the most sublime and, at the same time, complex representation of human emotions. It carries in its expression a series of meanings about the world and the relationships between the different individuals that inhabit it, which highlight the various hierarchies that are formed and the inequality that results from them.

Therefore, the discourse that develops in the literature produced by authors who, like Rich, write from a feminist perspective, will be key to the creation of a gender identity. Additionally, Butler (1990) considers gender a performative act; in other words, each subject forges their identity through the repetition of certain acts that socially have a gender category (such as domestic roles). Writing and language can be considered one of these repeated acts that define the speaker's gender identity and, in the case of an author like Rich, also define her female literary voice.

Despite the fact that much of her criticism and theory is based on binary male-female identities and the relationships of oppression-submission established between the two, Rich also explores non-binarism in her poetry, especially in *Diving into the Wreck* (1973), where her reflection on the figure of the androgyne appears recurrently:

> I am the androgyne
> I am the living mind you fail to describe
> in your dead language
> the lost noun, the verb surviving
> only in the infinitive
> the letters of my name are written under the lids
> of the newborn child.
> ("The Stranger", 1973)

Rich identifies with the androgynous in a phase of her search for her own identity, since she did not feel comfortable on the feminine roles (nor the masculine ones) that had been imposed on her since childhood. Thus, Rich tries to find her own identity in the androgynous though, for her, it is the cultural roles, or the rejection of them, that define the androgynous being.

Garber (1991) constructs a definition of androgyny that seems to perfectly reflect the ideas Rich moved between when exploring this concept:

> The third term questions the categories of feminine and masculine, since they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural. The third term is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility. Three calls into question the idea of one: of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge. (pp. 10-11, *my translation*)

It is part of this search for her own identity but, above all, for her own language, since for Rich, discourse is at the center of her conceptualization of the universe; her "dream of a common language" (1977) evaporates after verifying its impossibility, because, as we mentioned before, the language of the oppressor has been imposed on women and Rich dreams of finding a language that subverts this oppression. Thus, by declaring herself androgynous, she places herself outside the reach of this dead language, beyond what this discourse is capable of describing:

> if they ask me my identity
> what can I say but
> I am the androgyne
> I am the living mind you fail to describe
> in your dead language.
> ("The Stranger", Rich, 1977)

Despite exploring this concept as an idealized possibility of not having to adhere to any role

or stereotype, Rich soon returns to the distinction and differentiation between what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. She does so, however, by deconstructing traditional meanings and rebelling against them, since her primary objective throughout her career was to find her own feminine language, to create a communication link between women, and to fight against social and discursive patriarchy, thus subverting the power systems that relegate women to the background.

When considering this gender duality, there are specific concepts that are useful for analyzing Rich's theories, following Wittig (1975): "There are not two genders. There is only one: the feminine; the masculine not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine but the general" (p. 2). This universalization of the masculine gender and the consideration of the feminine as the only "marked" gender, —the masculine being the "default" gender—, is also found in Rich's theory, who affirms: "I had been taught that poetry should be 'universal', which meant, of course, nonfemale" (1979, pp. 44–45). It is this reflection, this awareness that the masculine is the universal and the standard, the basis which Rich and Wittig, as well as many other authors (such as Showalter), advocate for, developing a female voice of their own.

Discourse continues to be one more form of institutionalization of bodies, and Rich tries to make her body as a woman and, moreover, a lesbian woman, resist patriarchal institutionalization through a feminine and feminist language. The development of one's own female voice is part of the "struggle for authority as a struggle for the right to possess and determine meaning" (Arrojo, 1994, p. 154) of which feminist authors want to be part; it is no longer worth accepting that the authority in defining the meanings that conceptualize the world is intrinsically masculine; women want to be part of the struggle for that authority and, of course, they want to accomplish it, for their purpose is to be able to use language to define their experiences with self-made meanings.

The idea that women's poetry was eminently different from men's because it was "born" from a biologically different body was one of Rich's main ideological interests ever since she broke up with her universal (masculine) ideals about literature and started developing her feminine and feminist awareness. Rich's arguments brought her closer to the concept of *écriture féminine* (1976) coined by Hélène Cixous in the 1970s and developed by theorists such as Cixous herself, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray. Thus, Cixous states: "woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" (Cixous, 1976, p. 875). According to feminine writing authors and theoreticians, feminine language is different from masculine because it has its origin in the body in the most primitive sense, in the feminine experience that men are incapable of understanding. They defend that women use their own bodies as poetic inspiration, but also the bodies of other women as a source and origin of sexual desire and eroticism. Posada (2006) analyzes the way in which, for some theorists, their otherness as women is what defines this feminine writing

> for her [Cixous] writing as a woman is equivalent to expressing difference as the feminine, which flows in the text and thus overcomes phallocentrism through body and feminine gestures in writing. (p. 199, *my translation*)

In addition, these French theorists of difference take psychoanalysis as a basis to affirm that, while it was precisely those deficiencies that Sigmund Freud and others attributed to women —lacks supposedly caused by the absence of a phallus— that separated them from the "center" of patriarchal hegemony symbolic order, these shortcomings endowed them with a difference, with a creative freedom outside the limitations of that imposing center to which they did not belong, and to which they no longer wanted to belong. This is what Irigaray states (cited in Posada 2006):

> Female body will serve, then, as the nucleus for a new discourse that opposes patriarchal discourse and, in connection with it, will place the pleasure of women, which is the greatest threat to the masculine discourse since it would represent its irreducible "exteriority". Feminine pleasure escapes all the dichotomies of logocentric binary thinking; neither does it have a place within patriarchal phallocentrism, it cannot even be thought from the specular logic. (p. 190, my translation)

For other theorists who followed this school, female body was not only a creative origin but also an external source of inspiration — "women's writing proceeds from the body [...] our sexual differentiation is also our source" (Burke, 1978, p. 851)—, an idea that takes on special importance in Rich, who writes erotic poems using a woman's body as the object of inspiration-desire. It is a female author, developing a female voice to describe another female body that produces desire and pleasure. Rich always feels this urge to identify as a female writer, writing from a unique body and experience.

> To write directly and overtly as a woman, out of a woman's body and experience, to take women's existence seriously as theme and source for art, was something I had been hungering to do, all my writing life. […] it did indeed imply the breakdown of the world as I had always known it, the end of safety. (Rich, 2013, p. 249)

Without a doubt, Rich comes out of that safe space provided to her by the language that she had always known and used and launches herself into a feminine writing that ended up excluding men and the masculine experience from her discourse looking to giving maximum representation to female voices and universes.

> It is not surprising that voices and arguments soon arose that questioned or introduced nuances to those of the French theorists. One of the main lines that was presented as an alternative to biological difference as the center of the difference between male and female writing advocated focusing not on biological but on cultural difference. Female writing was different not because men and women were biologically different, but because they had different life experiences. One of the authors who defends this idea is Showalter (1985), who thus highlights the danger of speaking of biological differences as a fundamental principle to describe gender identity: "It is dangerous to place the body at the center of a search for female identity. […] This difference has been used as a pretext to 'justify' full power of one sex over the other" (p. 19)

If biological difference does not help us to explain the difference in (gender) identity, neither can it justify a writing style based on that identity. Showalter is not the only one who challenges that concept of gender, which is still patriarchally binary. Wittig (1975) denied the existence of two genders, since the feminine was the only marked gender. The implications that the masculine gender is universal, the default gender, endows the feminine with that otherness that Rich will assume in her literature to use language as a political and ideological weapon.

As Showalter (1985) stated, it doesn't matter where female language comes from; the only thing that matters is that it is not the language of the oppressor (p. 20). She challenges the use of the generic masculine (in languages with gender distinctions such as Spanish, Catalan or French) and therefore the patriarchal conceptualization of the world, which assumes that the feminine must be considered included, even if it is not mentioned. This is one of the main strategies to start configuring a new feminine language, a language that, mainly, should be differentiated from the masculine in its attempt to use every possible linguistic element to make the feminine visible.

For Wittig (1975) this implies an act of violence, a taking of language by force (the only way that, according to her, we women have access to that language that is universal and, therefore, not

feminine) with the aim to represent the feminine experience:

> The desire to bring the real body violently to life in the words of the book (everything that is written exists), the desire to do violence by writing to the language which I [j/e] can enter only by force: "I" [Je] as a generic feminine subject can only enter by force into a language which is foreign to it, for all that is human (masculine) is foreign to it, the human not being feminine grammatically speaking but he [il] or they [ils]. (p. 10)

Burke (1978) agrees with Wittig on the violence that taking patriarchal language implies and reaffirms the importance of not using the language of the oppressor, but introduces an important nuance: reflection on the gender of language, whether from the perspective of biological or cultural difference, is in itself fundamental because, whatever the conclusion we reach, mere reflection implies an awareness:

> Language is the place to begin: a *prise de conscience* must be followed by a *prise de la parole*… In this view, the very forms of the dominant mode of discourse show the mark of the dominant masculine ideology. Hence, when a woman writes or speaks herself into existence, she is forced to speak in something like a foreign tongue, a language with which she may be personally uncomfortable. (in Showalter 1985, p. 339)

In line with the above, Rich, whose obsession with developing a female voice is reflected in her poetic and essayistic work, feminizes not only language, but also the target reader, creating a feminine microcosm where the masculine has no room. "Rich's poems call up on a female *you* in order to constitute themselves, their own female *I* or speaking voice" (Hirsh, 1994, p. 118). Rich's language is feminine, exclusive and excluding. First, it frees it from conventional norms and later creates its own language, aware of the power of language as an agent of change. In the words of Simon (1996), "feminism has been one of the most potent forms of cultural identity to take on linguistic and social expression over the last decades: women's liberation must first be a liberation of/from language" (p. 8).

1.2. Rich's Lesbian Identity

All these theories, regardless of whether they focus on biological or cultural difference between genders, are essential to understand Rich's search for an identity through a language that is capable of reflecting each of her facets as a feminist and a lesbian woman and that is also political, and a mode of activism against all components of the hegemonic state that Rich intended to fight. In addition, these theories lead us to a series of reflections that can be extremely valuable when trying to analyze Rich's work autonomously, but also in relation to its translations into Spanish.

Rich understands that gender identity is a constant construction and reformulation of different categories (in her case, female, white, lesbian, Jewish, upper-middle class) and is not immovable (let's not forget that one of the most recurrent criticisms of Rich and her work focuses on highlighting alleged thematic and ideological contradictions, criticism that does nothing more than emphasize a search that Rich always admitted in different ways, different paths that allowed her to *do* feminism through language and literature), hence her exploration of the concept of androgyny and her identification, if only temporarily, with this possibility.

This search for a feminine identity also involved the construction of her identity as a lesbian woman because, for her, homosexuality was, more than a sexual orientation or a personal choice, a conscious and political decision, one more weapon to rebel against the oppressive patriarchal system. Likewise, Rich argues that heterosexuality is a political institution (1980, p. 23) which, like other institutions such as motherhood, relegates women to a submissive role within society, stripping them of all power and contributing, therefore, to the

survival of an unequal and unfair social hierarchy. Moving away from heterosexuality implies the ultimate expression of feminism: as a lesbian, she eliminates the presence of the masculine in all spheres of her life, even the sexual and emotional. This idea, like the rest of her obsessions and concerns, will mark her poetic and essayistic work, and will lead her to write her most relevant contribution to the lesbian theory of the time: her essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980).

In it, she explores the idea that her lesbian status, as well as the lesbian status of every woman —whether or not they have intimate relationships with other women—, is her greatest weapon of feminist resistance; Rich exercises it in her private life but defends it through her writing, through language. The creation of this text ("Compulsory Heterosexuality") represents an exceptional milestone in lesbian theory and criticism in the United States, since, as Zimmerman (1981) states: "Lesbian criticism begins with the establishment of the lesbian text: the creation of language out of silence" (p. 459). Rich's text is one of the first to break that silence —along with her poems, in which she speaks explicitly about love and sex between two women— by theorizing about lesbianism, contributing to the establishment of feminist and lesbian theory.

Rich rejects the social imposition of heterosexuality on women, and claims the total visibility of lesbianism as a way of life and as a feminist tool: "Lesbian existence comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life. It is also a direct or indirect attack on male right of access to women" (Rich, 1980, p. 649), denying another fundamental principle of the patriarchal system: the free access of men to women's bodies. Once again taking away from women the right to decide on their own bodies, even before becoming mothers, other subjects can decide on them and have access to them, depriving women of agency over themselves: the father, the state, religion, the husband… all of them wield power over female bodies.

That is why Rich finds in homosexuality a way for women to rebel, to regain control over their bodies and the decisions that are made about them. This rejection of heterosexuality by Rich concludes that heterosexuality, like motherhood, is an institution that serves to keep women victimized and subdued. It is also in this work that Rich defines two of her main concepts: first, that of "lesbian existence", which she proposes as an alternative to the term "lesbianism" when considering the second as limiting, understood as an idyllic union between women in a microcosm in which the man —and the masculine— is non-existent and completely expendable and emphasizing the idea that inside every woman there is a lesbian who urges us to rebel against conventional structures. Secondly, Rich develops in this essay the idea of the "lesbian continuum", a kind of female family tree in which the connection between women and between them and their predecessors implies the existence of a strong and lasting female bond that serves as the only weapon against the impositions of patriarchy on women. This link between women of the present and the past includes "the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support" (p. 27).

However, Rich's theorization about her own lesbianism (and about homosexuality in general) also responds to a broader concern that is reflected in her work: the perception of the lesbian and feminine identity in the society in which she lived. Her work fed on the otherness to which Rich felt she belonged (once again, as a woman, a feminist and a lesbian; also as a Jew, although this was perhaps the aspect of her identity that was least exploited in her work) and she approached other minority groups to which she did not belong but which she supported as an ally (for example, that of other black and lesbian poets, such as the aforementioned Audre Lorde and Alice Walker). For her, the feminist struggle had to be intersectional and include other oppressed groups to join forces against the common enemy: the patriarchal system.

In short, her great awareness of gender makes her reflect on identity dualities, which include not only the male-female duality, but also the heterosexual-homosexual one. Heterosexuality (in women) requires a very specific type of femininity that makes it easier for women to become the sexual beings that men expect them to be, but to which Rich refuses to belong. Part of this specificity goes through language, the discourses that, as we indicated before, help define gender identity. That is why Rich uses language, among other things, to subvert this convention, to create that feminine microcosm in which the man does not exist and, therefore, does not impose or condition in any way the gender and sexual identity of women. Through language, Rich wants to free us from the action of the oppressor, as do other theorists who prioritize the use of female language, without questioning how or where it comes from ("It doesn't matter where female language comes from. All it matters is that it's not the oppressor's language" (Showalter, 1979, p. 20)), as long as it differs from masculine language.

2. Feminist Translation

The relationship between language and gender certainly affects all types of expressions and discourses, including translation. Thus, the concept of gender in translation has been analyzed in connection to ideology, regarding the representation of women and the feminine through it, analyzing the way in which translation can serve as a weapon to revive or silence the underlying ideological message in the text.

Feminist translators are aware of the fact that manipulation in translation has been carried out mostly in the name of power and using a universal language that, as Rich herself (1979, p. 44) called it, was non-feminine (and completely anti-feminist). As a result, they struggle to use the agency of the translator to subvert this order and empower feminist ideology. These translators share a double responsibility in addition to a double awareness: "female translators who share not only an awareness of their gendered voices but, mainly, of the political responsibilities associated with such voices" (Arrojo, 1994, p. 149). And so, being aware of the responsibility that acknowledging their feminine voice entails, feminist translators do a conscious job of altering hierarchies. There needs to be a readjustment of power, a change of perspective in the concept of translational fidelity that leaves the original work and author in the background and that is now going to be directed towards the feminist project. Simon (1996) states that: "For feminist translation, fidelity is to be directed toward neither the author nor the reader, but toward the writing project —a project in which both writer and translator participate—" (p. 2). Therefore, if we translate with gender awareness, we must manipulate the language to deliver a message to the target culture that is ideologically faithful not so much to the original work, but to the feminist claim, making use of that agency available to translators insofar as they are also authors. As Álvarez and Vidal suggest: "The translator can artificially create the reception context of a given text. He can be the authority who manipulates the culture, politics, literature, and their acceptance (or lack thereof) in the target culture" (1996, p. 2). That is to say, translator and author have a social, ideological and political responsibility that, without a doubt, will contribute to shaping the thoughts of the target culture. What is already taken for granted in this translation approach (which uses the cultural turn and the Manipulation School as a reference) is that the object of translation is displaced from words to concepts and the effects they have both on the culture of origin and in the target culture:

> what needs to be translated is not the words themselves but the implicit conceptual structures that lie behind them; not the words, but the effects they produce, effects that arise not from the words themselves, but from the specific value given to the words by the structure of relations between all the pertinent properties that were in play when the writer composed them. (Lucey, 2015, p. 18)

The meaning of the words that are translated, furthermore, is not complete if the conceptual and ideological relationships that each of the cultures in which that text is going to be read (in its original or translated version) have with it are not understood or if the political, ideological, moral, etc. implication of what the words represent for each of the readers is not considered.

2.1. The Translation of Erotic Language

An important aspect to consider when translating Rich's lesbian and erotic poetry is how the language of sexuality is translated and how translation can contribute to making evident the existence of a homoaffective and homoerotic reality among women, a reality which appears more or less explicitly in lesbian-themed literature, but which is not always understood or maintained in the translations of these lesbian-themed works into other languages. This leads to the underrepresenting of the female figure in all its facets (also as a lover of another female figure) in the receiving cultures of these translations. The multiplicity of translation theories that have been developed throughout the history of this discipline, with concepts such as manipulation, authorship, subversion or gender-aware translation, make translation a pertinent means to be used on behalf of certain subaltern groups such as women and lesbian women.

Regardless of the recurrent debate in feminist criticism about the existence of a differentiated feminine and masculine language we want to assume as true what feminist theory has defended about the existence of a feminine discourse of its own, at least in matters of sexuality; that is to say, that the way of expressing desire from a masculine point of view is different from the way of expressing it from a feminine point of view, since the experience of the different sexualities especially experienced by bodies located at the two extremes of an unequal system in which historically and traditionally one gender has suffered innumerable abuses —both physical and symbolic— by the other is far from similar. To allow a masculine discourse that uses female bodies as its center to be perpetuated is to facilitate the continuation of patriarchal control over women.

> [...] The identification of women with a degraded conception of bodily reality has historically been instrumental in the consolidation of patriarchal power and the male exploitation of female work. This way, analyses of sexuality, procreation, and motherhood have been placed at the center of feminist theory and women's history. In particular, feminists have exposed and reported the strategies and violence through which male-centered systems of exploitation have attempted to discipline and appropriate the female body, revealing that women's bodies have been the main targets —privileged places— for the use of power techniques and power relations. (Federici, p. 27, *my translation*)

The sexual discourses produced by both bodies, the feminine and the masculine, cannot be identical since their experiences have traditionally been in conflict. But in addition, the problem is double because the female sexual experience has traditionally been described in works written by men, with male writers taking the license not only to talk about their own sexuality but to appropriate female sexuality and detail it, assimilating an authority over it to do so. The male gaze has monopolized our experiences, colonizing our bodies and taking over our discourses with an oppressive, patriarchal —and incorrect— voice about our eroticism:

> The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. (Lorde, 2007, p. 54)

2.2. The Reappropriation of Female Sexuality Through Translation

Fortunately, little by little, texts by authors have emerged who, like Rich herself, have

placed great emphasis on reappropriating their sexuality through language, developing erotic discourses that have contributed in an essential way to the creation of a feminine and subversive identity. The recognition that the erotic is in itself a power that has attempted to be taken away from women serves as a revulsive for them to use it and express it in those discourses that are elaborated with the intention of reconstructing, renaming, identifying and reclaiming one's sexuality.

> The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives. (Lorde, 2007, p. 53)

These discourses that entail the reappropriation of female sexuality have political implications, since they refer us once again to the feminist motto of "the personal is political" that the third wave brought to everyone's attention. Women who write about their sexuality want to assign real meanings to the discourses that speak of their oppression but also of their liberation, of their struggle for control and the total disposition of their bodies and of their rejection of the patriarchal system that tries to keep them subjugated.

> To name our desire might be somehow to name ourselves. And especially with feminists (as with any group which through choice or otherwise, is at a distance from the dominant representations of female desire), there is the pressing question of how far this apparently deep core of ourselves is formed by dominant representations and how far it is "free" to lead us to real pleasure and satisfaction. (Coward in Zavala & Díaz-Diocaretz, 2011, p. 30)

The description of our sexuality implies the definition of our true self, the construction of an identity that has been shaped from the outside and that we try to recover through words. It is, once again, a political decision, to rename our sexuality and to rename ourselves as women to get out of the yoke of control and objectification of our eroticism and our identity by the patriarchal system.

The relevance of these discourses for the feminist movement turns the task of translating them into an exercise in ideological positioning by the translator, since if we already affirm that translation in itself implies a certain degree of political manipulation, the translation of erotic texts increases their political dimension. As Santaemilia (2015) affirms:

> Translating the language of love or sex is a political act, with important rhetorical and ideological implications, and is fully indicative of the translator's attitude toward existing conceptualizations of gender/sexual identities, human sexual behavior(s), and society's moral norms. Therefore, both the omnipresence of sexuality and the discursive and ideological implications of translation and sexuality for ourselves make it highly relevant for careful scrutiny. (p. 139)

Translating these feminine, feminist, erotic and lesbian discourses is going to be a task loaded with political and ideological implications for the translator. In the first place, because, as Lefevere (1992) stated, every translation implies a rewriting of an already existing text and, as such, always shows a specific ideology, that of the translator, who prints his/her stamp on his/her translation, as long as it is in itself a work of literary creation:

> Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power. (p. 7)

Translating romantic and/or erotic discourses with gender awareness implies a great deal

of involvement on the part of the translator, who is going to act as a mediator between the source culture and the receiving culture. He/she possesses the authority to redefine the stereotypes of a sexual nature (from an ideological, moral and political point of view) that said language has associated with it. The lesbian elements also carry some additional implications, as Démont (2017) argues:

> queering translation seeks to resist the logic of domination or appropriation, [and] it also goes beyond Venuti's concept [of foreignizing translation] since the queering translation remains constantly sensitive to the queerness of the text by voluntarily refusing to offer an 'ultimate translation', by resisting the temptation to close the translation on itself, and by offering commentary that preserves its fundamental ambiguities and highlights its potential interpretative *lignes de fuite.* (p. 164)

Translations of texts loaded with lesbian or queer activism reject the idea of a definitive translation and in themselves imply the continuation of a social debate about the issues that the author intends to promote, but they are also susceptible of a type of censorship to which other more normative texts are not subject. Démont (2017) presents a categorization of the different types of translations we can find when we are dealing with queer texts: "the misrecognizing translation, the minoritizing translation and the queering translation" (p. 163). While the former rewrites the text from a hegemonizing point of view, the latter recognizes the disruptive approach to translation and focuses on transferring that approach to translation, making use of the intermediate practice —the "minoritizing translation"— a type of subtler censorship used with the aim of neutralizing the queer elements of the original work. Translation, therefore, becomes capital as a feminist and queer tool to subvert patriarchal ideas of language, femininity, the female and lesbian body, etc.: "The association between women's bodies, writing and the language of the mother/the mother-tongue is thus reiterated in translation; the translator talks about a translating body, a «body lost in translation»" (de Lotbinière Harwood, 1986, p. 83). […] "The body becomes the metaphor for the subject" (p. 368).

The translators of Rich's erotic poems need to be aware of the responsibility carried by their choices, as the way of describing sex, desire and eroticism defines the ideological and political positioning of a whole culture and gives away the perceptions and conceptualizations this specific culture stands for.

Sexually explicit language is, undoubtedly, a privileged space for understanding cultures we translate into insofar as it is a site where "issues of cultural sensitivity are encumbered by issues of gender stereotyping and cliché" (von Flotow 2000:31), where each culture establishes its moral and ethical limits, where we encounter its taboos (Santaemilia, 2015, p. 141).

This will determine the strategies translators use either to recreate the same conceptualizations expressed by the original's erotic language, to hide, minimize or neutralize it, or to use it as a political tool that shakes the target readers ideological beliefs and awareness.

3. The case of Rich's *The Dream of a Common Language*

The Dream of a Common Language (1977) is one of Rich's most celebrated works. It is, above all, a celebration of women, of their strength, their eroticism, their limitless capacity, an identification of the narrator with all the other women (in that lesbian continuum) by what unites them instead of by their differences: "We did this. Conceived / of each other, conceived each other in a darkness / which I remember as drenched in light. / I want to call this life / But I can't call it life until we start to move / beyond this secret circle of fire / where our bodies are giant shadows flung on wall […]" (Poem 3, "Origins and history of consciousness").

This idea culminates in her famous series of poems "Twenty-One Love Poems" (which had

already been published in 1976 as a special volume), which are a declaration of love and desire from a feminine *I* to a feminine *you* and which constitute in themselves a rebellion against the misunderstanding, the silencing, the exclusion that Rich, as a feminist and lesbian woman, felt in the United States of the 1970s. The "Twenty-One Love Poems" are subversive and revolutionary poems insofar as they represent the maximum expression of homoromantic and homoerotic literature in her work and her definitive departure from the limitations imposed by the most conventional discourses of the time. Rich revels in the love between two women ("we were two lovers of one gender, / we were two women of one generation" (poem XII)), in the desire, in the moments of intimacy between the two, in the complicity of knowing that they love each other and affirm the suffering that both carry on their backs for loving each other in a world that does not accept them ("I can hear your breath tonight, I know your face / lies upturned, the halflight tracing / your generous, delicate mouth / where grief and laughter sleep together" (poem XVI). Evidence of this defense of love and lesbian eroticism against a world that does not understand her and tries to silence her way of loving is the last poem of this work, "Transcendental Etude", dedicated to her partner, the writer Michelle Cliff. In this lengthy poem, Rich writes:

> Only: that it is unnatural,
> the homesickness for a woman, for
> ourselves,
> for that acute joy at the shadow her head
> and arms
> cast on a wall, her heavy or slender
> thighs on which we lay, flesh against flesh,
> eyes steady on the face of love; smell of her
> milk, her sweat,
> terror of her disappearance

And continues:

> two women, eye to eye
> measuring each other's spirit, each other's
> limitless desire,
> a whole new poetry beginning here

These two stanzas of the poem reflect, on the one hand, the love that Rich felt for Cliff in verses full of tenderness and eroticism, in which she entertains herself with the detailed description of the female body and in the primitive feelings and desires that it causes in her. On the other hand, she speaks of the new poetry that arises from that love, of daring to live according to her wishes despite the reproaches of a world that considers her existence as unnatural. We see the relationship between the body, identity and language, three of the essential elements that Rich uses in her poetry.

Critics have also recognized the importance of these poems in the formation of Rich's lesbian identity. Riley (2006) points out that "These poems stand out as the strongest statement of Rich's newly forming lesbian-identified vision in their powerful evocation of a relationship between two women" (p. 48) and that "The intimate touch between the two women, situates the lesbian body as a politicized location, one with external and internal forces impacting the women's relationship" (p. 51). The open expression of lesbian love becomes a political demand. Similarly, Oktenberg (1984) explains that these poems:

> are feminist in that they are woman-identified; they acknowledge, define and explore one set of the possibilities of love between women; they recognize the connection, the primary bond, between women as a source of integrity and strength. They are also radically feminist in that they constitute a critique, a re-vision, of patriarchal notions of love (p. 342).

When we look at the translations into Spanish of these poems by Myriam Díaz-Diocaretz in 1985 and Patricia Gonzalo de Jesús in 2019 and 2021 (there is a third translation of Rich's poetry into Spanish, by María Soledad Sánchez Gómez in 2002, that have not been included in this article[1]) we can see the difference that

1 María Soledad Sánchez Gómez's translations have not been included in this paper because her

every choice makes in how the target readers receive the feminist and lesbian implications of the poems. Although the two translators have different interpretations of Rich's work, their translations are written with a feminist intention and an attempt for vindication of the feminine and lesbian experience and existence.

Rich's collection "Twenty-One Love Poems" (1976) stands out for making explicit descriptions of love and lesbian sexuality between the narrator and her beloved. As Díaz-Diocaretz (1985) already pointed out, the first translations of this work, carried out by her, were made in a context of reception (the Spanish-speaking world in the 1970s) that was not used to those references and was not prepared for them. Therefore, her work was complicated and it represented a challenge, which she tried to solve by making the choices she considered appropriate to mediate between the culture of origin and the target culture, while being faithful to Rich's feminine and feminist voice. We understand that Gonzalo de Jesús, who published her translations of the same work much later (in 2019) did not find herself in such a hostile context, especially in the face of the LGTBI reality, and in what follows, we will examine the way in which the translators dealt with the erotic and lesbian elements present these poems.

In poem IV, the narrator returns home after spending the night with her lover "I come home from you through the early light of spring"; the gender of that lover is not revealed in the text —or in its translation— and this seems to invite Díaz-Diocaretz to get out of the textual and continuous universe of the "21 love poems" here. Díaz Diocaretz's translation into Spanish refers us, as readers, to a heteroromantic universe different from the one that the author developed. Díaz-Diocaretz not only eroticizes a poem that in its original does not make a direct allusion (other than what can be inferred from having spent the night with a lover) to the sexual act, but the eroticization that it carries out refers us, on the contrary, to a heterosexual relationship: "drinking delicious coffee, delicious music / my body still light and heavy with you" becomes in her translation "saboreando un delicioso café, escuchando espléndida música, y ligero y cargado, mi cuerpo sigue aún lleno de ti". The line "mi cuerpo aún lleno de ti" [my body still full of you (*my translation*)] produces in the target language readers a mental image that refers to a sexual relationship between a man and a woman, and even more, to the act of penetration by the man who "fills" the woman. This image of phallocentric sexuality refers to the Freudian and Lacanian concepts of sexuality and goes against the intention of the author, but also that of the translator herself, and most likely constitutes an act of unconscious self-censorship conditioned by the heteropatriarchal morality of the target culture.

In the translation of the same poem by Gonzalo de Jesús we see that, although the gender of the lover is not made explicit either, she does not sexualize (or masculinize) the eroticism in the poem. In this translation, that "my body still light and heavy with you" becomes "mi cuerpo aún a la vez ligero y grávido de ti", eliminating that phallocentric nuance that could be understood in Díaz-Diocaretz's translation and maintaining the ambiguity of the original poem.

Poem X also reflects this tendency of Díaz-Diocaretz to sexualize elements of the original poem in those translations in which the gender is not specified. In the line "that creatures must find each other for bodily comfort" there is no explicit erotic connotation. A body may seek the closeness of another body for support, comfort, or consolation —and of course also as a sexual approach, although this is not made explicit in the verse— as the original poem implies. However, Díaz-Diocaretz adds the erotic connotation, translating said verse as: "que las criaturas han de encontrarse para el placer

selection of translated poems does not include Rich's most representative lesbian poems.

físico" [that creatures must find themselves for bodily pleasure (*my translation*)]. Gonzalo de Jesús, on the other hand, remains faithful to the original verse, preserving the ambiguity of that contact that is recounted in the poem written by Rich, and translates it as: "que las criaturas deben encontrarse para consuelo del cuerpo".

Further into Poem X, we can read:

> that voices of the psyche drive through the flesh
> further than the dense brain could have foretold,
> that the planetary nights are growing cold for *those*
> *on the same journey*, who want to touch
> one creature-traveler clear to the end;
> that without tenderness, we are in hell.

Díaz-Diocaretz's translation reads as follows:

> que las voces del alma cruzan el cuerpo
> más allá de cuanto la compleja inteligencia puede predecir,
> que las noches planetarias son más frías para *esos*
> *compañeros* de viaje que anhelan acariciar
> a *otra criatura co-piloto* hasta el fin,
> que sin ternura, vivimos un infierno.

We understand the original poem, like all those in this series, as a portrait of a love between two women. The references to the intimate relationship between the *you* and the *I* in the poem are clear: they share tears and therefore suffering and frustrations, and the poem also refers to "bodily comfort" and "planetary nights". However, Díaz-Diocaretz does not at any time disambiguate the gender of either *I* or *you*, thus diluting the homoerotic universe that develops in it. In fact, the only moment in which gender is made evident in the translation is when translating "those on the same journey" by "esos compañeros de viaje", using a generic masculine which betrays the feminine microcosm and which implies that the narrator's path is the same as that of those "compañeros" (which unequivocally includes men) who yearn to have "otra criatura co-piloto hasta el final". In Díaz-Diocaretz's translation there is an assimilation of the masculine and feminine experience and also of the heterosexual and homosexual experience, since the simile that Rich uses between the company of her dog and her desire to have a partner with whom to share those cries and those conversations until the end of her days has little to do with the difficulties that may be experienced to achieve it outside of the homosexual context.

Gonzalo de Jesús also translates this poem using the masculine, "aquéllos en el mismo camino", once again dissolving the message of its vindication: that tenderness is necessary in everyone's life but that there are some people who are denied this longing, whose expressions of love and the search for other bodies to lie with are demonized and forced to hide, speak in whispers, make confessions at dawn, when everyone is asleep and no one can see them or hear them. Lesbian existence disappears in these translated poems.

Let's look now into Poem XIX:

> two women together is a work
> nothing in civilization has made simple
> two *people* together is a work
> heroic in its ordinariness,
> the slow-picked, halting traverse of a pitch
> *where the fiercest attention* becomes routine
> -look at the faces of *those* who have chosen it

Díaz-Diocaretz's translation is as follows:

> La fusión de dos mujeres es una arquitectura
> que la civilización ha complicado
> la unión de *dos personas* es una arquitectura
> heroica por lo sencilla y corriente,
> es el travesaño vacilante del declive,
> erigido con lentitud allí
> donde *la pasión más ardiente* se transforma en rutina
> mira los rostros de *cuántos* la han construido

The poem makes the distinction between what love between two women and love between two people entail. The difference (and the problem) lies in the fact that "two women" and "two people" are perceived in very different ways by society, as exclusive concepts and ignoring a possible metonymic relationship between them in which "two women" can be part of the "two persons" concept. This is so because, in a romantic context, such as that of the poem, it is necessary that the generic category "people" does not include the category "woman" so as not to allude to an unaccepted reality, that of lesbian love. Thus, women are excluded from the universal (since, as we have already pointed out, the universal implies the non-feminine (Rich, 1979) and, in this case, the normative).

There is, however, another context in which the category "persons" can include a woman as long as she is mentioned as a man's lover or partner, in a normative reality of heterosexual love. In addition, including only women in this context of the concept "persons", it is also possible to avoid that the exclusion of the feminine ends up referring to another reality that is equally not socially accepted, that of the fusion of two men in homosexual love. In short, the romantic reality that the system accepts is only one: that of two people who are a man and a woman, with no other possible option. So, going back to the poem, this shows us that while the union of two women is something that civilization has complicated, the union of two people (man and woman) is considered heroic instead.

When we focus on the translations, Díaz-Diocaretz's decisions again indicate a tendency to eroticize relationships only when they are or appear to be heterosexual. Díaz-Diocaretz translates "two people" as "dos personas", maintaining the ambiguity that exists in the original about the gender of said people, but with the implication that it is a question of a man and a woman due to the linguistic and ideological impossibility that they are two people of the same sex. The same thing happens in the last line, in which "those" becomes "cuántos", with the aggravating circumstance, according to our reading of the poem, of the use of the generic masculine (once again there is no option here in question), since this would imply a reference to a love between two men, a reference that does not exist in the ideological imaginary of the receiving culture). This provides a space of safety, created by the ambiguity or the generality of the genres that appear in the translation, and giving free rein to the increase in the level of eroticism that we can observe in the following verses. In this security space, Díaz-Diocaretz translates "the fiercest attention", an expression that does not make an explicit erotic allusion as "la pasión más ardiente" [the most ardent passion (*my translation*)], a concept that unequivocally refers readers to a sexual referent of heterosexual eroticism. Here the text is assimilated by the dominant culture and the referents in which it feels comfortable, again making use of a minoritizing strategy.

However, Gonzalo de Jesús offers another translation that, thanks to slight nuances, manages to approach Démont's (2017) queering translation:

> A queering mode of translation does its best to translate not only the semantic content or what Appiah defines as its literal content, but to offer a translation that preserves the web of virtual connotative associations and, therefore, the text's ambiguities and potentially disruptive content, in order to open new possibilities of readings. (p. 168)

This is Gonzalo de Jesús's translation:

> dos mujeres juntas es una tarea
> que nada en la civilización ha hecho
> sencilla
> dos personas juntas es una tarea
> heroica en su cotidianidad,
> la lentamente elegida, vacilante travesía de
> una pendiente
> donde *la más fiera atención* se convierte en
> rutina;
> mira los rostros de quienes lo han escogido

Gonzalo de Jesús maintains the ambiguity in that "quienes", avoiding using the generic masculine and, furthermore, does not sexualize "the fiercest attention", translating this term with the equally ambiguous "la más fiera atención". This ambiguity contributes, as Démont asserts, to preserving the "potentially disruptive" content of the original poem.

Perhaps the most illustrative examples are found in the unnumbered poem, entitled "The Floating Poem, Unnumbered", of which we will use several fragments for illustration. In this poem, even read independently, it becomes obvious that a lesbian sexual encounter is being described. The narrator is a woman and the body of another woman is described in detail as an object of desire. The original text creates images of great erotic content, explicit, sensual and forceful.

> Whatever happens with us, your body
> will haunt mine — tender, delicate
> your lovemaking, like the half-curled frond
> of the fiddlehead fern in forests
> just washed by sun. Your traveled, generous thighs
> between which my whole face has come and come—
> the innocence and wisdom of the place my tongue has found there—
> the live, insatiate dance of your nipples in my mouth—
> your touch on me, firm, protective, searching
> me out, your strong tongue and slender fingers
> reaching where I had been waiting years for you
> in my rose-wet cave—whatever happens,
> this is.

Díaz-Diocaretz translates the first verses as follows:

> Pase lo que pase, vivirá en mí
> tu cuerpo. El ondeante ejercicio de tu amor,
> Sensible, frágil como la fronda apenas enroscada

In these verses we see how the terminology used in the original (deep, obsessive, sexual) is neutralized in the translation. First of all, Díaz-Diocaretz decides to omit that "with us" from the first line; "pase lo que pase" [whatever happens (*my translation*)] and "pase lo que pase con nosotras" do not imply the same thing, they do not refer to the same reality. Furthermore, "haunt" does not evoke the same as "vivir" [to live]; the second term lacks darkness, complexity, obsession with the object of desire, the loved one, another woman. In addition, the translation of "your lovemaking" is especially surprising, which indisputably alludes to the sexual act, for "ejercicio de tu amor" [exercise of your love (*my translation*)], an empty concept, unnatural and, above all, of no sensual or erotic nature. A neutralization of the erotic element of this poem that is paradoxical in a translation with a continuation of the author's intention such as the one declared by Díaz-Diocaretz.

As the explicitness of the erotic images increases, we observe how the alterations in the translation follow one another and, although they do not eliminate the sexual load of the text, they do alter the image and, therefore, the reception of the not only erotic but also subversive intention of those verses. This is observed in the verse "the live insatiate dance of your nipples in my mouth", which appears in Spanish as "en mis *labios*, el *ritmo* tembloroso e insaciable de tus *pechos*" [in my lips, the trembling and insatiable rhythm of your breasts (*my translation*)]. Thus, "dance" loses intensity in the Spanish "ritmo" [rhythm] and, through metonymic resources, "nipples" becomes "pechos" [breasts] and "mouth" becomes "labios" [lips]. The mental image developed by the dance of nipples inside a mouth is not the same as the one produced by the rhythm of breasts on lips, and therefore the target readers receive a text that is less explicit, less erotic and more neutral than the readers in the original language.

In Gonzalo de Jesús's translation we once again see an alternative in which the erotic elements are not neutralized, but rather an attempt is made to work with the same signifiers and meanings with which Rich herself works, in an "effort not to blur the poetics or the ideology that Rich captures in the book" (Gonzalo de Jesús, personal interview[2], *my translation*):

> Pase lo que pase *con nosotras,* tu cuerpo
> *poseerá* al mío: tierno, delicado
> *al hacer el amor*, como la fronda medio enrollada […]

In addition, the eroticism of the verse "the live insatiate dance of your nipples in my mouth" is maintained, avoiding the euphemisms and metonymies used in Díaz-Diocaretz's translation, and it is translated as: "la viva, insaciable *danza* de tus *pezones* en mi *boca*".

We therefore see how the translation that presents the greatest problem when it comes to representing and transferring to the target culture the same references that Rich wanted to represent and express for the readers of the source culture is that of Díaz-Diocaretz, despite the feminist and subversive intention that the translator herself declares in her critical work on her translation of Rich (Díaz-Diocaretz, 1985). This exemplifies the unconscious self-censorship that occurs on occasions in which the dominant system of a country or culture imposes certain values and shapes the referential and ideological framework on its citizens.

4. Conclusion

This article has allowed us to explore the construction of Rich's identity through the language she uses and the discourses she creates in her works, as well as how the importance of language is accentuated in translation. Despite each of the translators having declared their intention to respect in their texts the transgressive purpose of language advocated by Rich, in this analysis we have been able to observe the different ways in which, in this case, Díaz-Diocaretz and Gonzalo de Jesús have undertaken this purpose. The different interpretations have led their translators to make translation decisions which on occasions are opposed to each other and on other occasions are contrary to the decisions that another interpretation (for example, ours) would have produced.

In addition, we can also conclude that translation is undoubtedly a tool through which language is altered for an ideological and political purpose. Even in translations carried out by translators who claim to be aware of the subverting intention of the original work and to have carried out their translation while being faithful to the author's feminist message, each of the translation decisions they make in the practice of preparing their texts are accompanied by important ideological implications responsible for the meanings and reception of these messages on the part of readers and the target culture. In addition, and in relation to this, we have shown that, within the same ideological line, there may be different options in the translation intention, different interpretations that only reflect that feminisms are part of a heterogeneous reality in constant evolution and in constant rewriting of its speeches; feminist translation theory is defined by its incessant search and exploration, which, however, has two immovable elements: first, the placement outside the hegemonic patriarchal system and, second, the rejection of any act of invisibility of the female voice, experience or existence.

Our analysis and our judgments about specific decisions are only the reflection of a different way of approaching a specific element on our part, of trying to find the specific terms that reflect the female and lesbian voice as we, translators, understand it. Let us not forget that positioning oneself as a feminist

2 Quote from a personal interview with Patricia Gonzalo de Jesús conducted on April 17th 2021.

translator implies placing oneself in a position of criticism (of one's own and others) and of constant search for new meanings but also for new signifiers to describe the world, never ceasing to question the implications of the language that we use in our way of inhabiting and transiting the world as feminist women.

In short, translation serves to perpetuate ideologies and we, as feminist women and scholars, would like to promote the use of literary translation to subvert the hegemonic system that has so often used translation as a means to censor freedom through the arts and through literature. Adrienne Rich's translations are just one example of how feminist and lesbian translation can be carried out. If we continue to rescue, reread and analyze female-authored works and translations, we may be able to promote an ongoing (and much needed) conversation on female and lesbian representation and visibilization.

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