
Translation of a Selection of Poems by Caitlín Maude and Mary O'Malley into Spanish

**Pura López Colomé (Introduction)
Enrique Alda (Translation)**

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Introduction. On Enrique Alda's versions

Upon reading Seamus Heaney's early poetry collections – and this was a long time ago – I was surprised by his subtle way of offering up his own versions of poems by other authors as a way to making them his own and moulding them with exacting precision into the specific theme of each given collection. Rather than referring to them as “translations”, he used the word *after* as an antecedent (to works by the likes of Dante, Baudelaire, Virgil, and some Gaelic authors) with the aim of reworking them into newly inspired viewpoints *a posteriori*; thus, the poem's metaphors and images, initially belonging to a different language, would be born again, this time to a different voice and melody – his own – in such a way that his harmonious yet elusive “music of events” was crafted into something visible and audible. I owe this great Captain the sudden epiphany of conceiving translation as creation, as an opportunity of feeding foreign sounds to a symphony of musical inimitability. As time went on, I had the chance to be present at some of his poetry readings, attended by audiences of varying sizes, where – to put it this way – “the yellow bittern”, otherwise known as the seventeenth-century “An Bunnán Bui”, would take flight in yet another twentieth-century poem by Heaney.

The Irish tradition is fortunate enough to host poet-translators whose bilingual output has been fostered by the co-existence of two languages: these authors write in what they feel to be their mother tongue, and then harken back to their second language. While those of us who live under different linguistic circumstances come across this realization in alternative ways, considering this background there is no room for doubt that the person wishing to render a poem into a different language must necessarily be a poet, or else should have experienced first-hand the implications of writing without colliding against semantic plurality. This poet-translator may have never published their poems; however, he or she has written them into existence, even if privately and far from the gaze of discerning eyes, or will do so in the future. Deep down, nevertheless, this poet must firmly believe that “translating” poetry is far from being a mere task of chancing upon perfect equivalents. It is precisely in this light that renowned poet Anne Carson defines as synonymy the relationship between poetry and translation, even if one is faced with muttering or complete silence. After all, absolute ownership of a poem has grown to matter less and less now that we have come to understand Homer as a conglomerate of poets rather than an individual entity.

Enrique Alda's translations of Caitlín Maude (1941-1982) and Mary O'Malley – the former being an excellent example of the Gaelic-English-Spanish triangle and the latter's poetry in English likewise dancing to vibrant Gaelic rhythms – are Greek in their approach:

that is, they see language as the veil under which the truth of all things shines away, and poetry as the revealing rip in the fabric elaborated by the individual language in question. The intense flow of his versions immediately catches the eye, in a way which recalls the literary compulsion of the naturally risk-taking poet, rather than the careful craftsman. His achievements remind one of Borges's perceptions on translation: "Translations are far from being inferior to the original, but we must necessarily perceive a difference between them ... which is not within the reach of the translator; rather, it lies in the way poetry is read".

Both poets *owe* themselves to Connemara, by which I mean that each utilizes her own style to replicate the deep rhythms and tonalities of the regional voice. While Maude's poetry stems from the Gaelic language, O'Malley's poetry is in English, which bridges both poets with Enrique Alda's language.

Caitlín Maude's versions (not the originals) have been put forth by a variety of authors intent on paying tribute to her genuine way of singing in the dark (in the corner of a room, or the darkness underneath the speaker's closed eyes) and the quiet summoning of readers or listeners willing to participate. Translators into English such as Trodden Keefe, Fitzmaurice, Hartnett and Ní Chonchúir show the necessity to emulate the brief and mostly nasal pauses, the long syllables at the end of sentences, the glissandos, and even the endings struggling to be spoken rather than sung – in itself a trait of ancient a cappella singing. Enrique is aware of the incapacity of the Spanish language to achieve that effect. He decides, therefore, to bestow his poetic enterprise with precise originality through the use of careful repetitions and impeccably flawless Castilian cadences; he never loses sight of the translator's task of contributing something *beyond the original version*, an outcome in turn to be desired from an artistic point of view, as Walter Benjamin and George Steiner have noted. The titles he chooses exceed mere literalism ("Tangled" is "Maraña"; "Interval" becomes "Arrebato"; "Entreaty" is translated into "Súplica", to mention but a few), thus instating a rigorous identification between meaning and content which he later sends to multiple directions and ends with his own personal touch in the form of a risky *addendum*. Let me briefly sample the poem "Maraña", which might as well have been composed in our own language. So faultlessly does the musicality of the final lines strengthen the original meaning that the protagonist/speaker feels compelled to actively – rather than passively – descend, wander out, and be swallowed whole by the depths of sorrow and loneliness: "Pasea esta noche por la playa,/mi amor,/ pasea y detén tus lágrimas,/ levántate y pasea esta noche,/no te arrodilles más/ante esa tumba en la montaña,/sus flores están marchitas/y mis huesos descompuestos.../esta noche te llamo/desde las profundidades del océano.../Una vez recorrí la orilla/hasta el final de la playa,/donde las olas jugaban/y la blanca espuma besaba mis pies./Inundando lentamente mi mirada/allí, en lo más profundo,/en la maraña de olas y espuma,/vi la soledad en tus ojos/y la pena en tu rostro".

These are both the original and Alda's solution to the ending of the poem:

"I wandered out in the depths/From knees to waist/And from waist to shoulders/Until I was swallowed/In sorrow and loneliness".

"Descendí hasta las profundidades/de la rodilla a la cintura/y de la cintura a los hombros,/hasta que me hundí/en la soledad y la pena".

It is likely that the spiritual direction of this song of love and lament has influenced the translator's choice of a well-defined musicality, which is evidenced in the speaker's *desire* to actually sink.

In the case of Mary O'Malley, Enrique's approach unearths further nuances of meaning and, as I see it, seeks to identify himself with the voice of the female through the reverberation of an intimate, private, and womanly speech, one which reaches out to its echo in the world. This time, poetic music does not lead the way; instead, it is the author's voice – whose particularly opaque elevation is painted with a religious, historical, mythological and legendary veneer and, as such, is not necessarily melodious – that weaves together landscape and word, place and syllable, home and consonants, brusque, loss-inducing, rupture-sounding silences and traditional moulds which have long lost their arbitrariness. The emotions of the natural world are brought to life in Spanish through the names of flowers and the most minute details of humans and animals, encapsulating both into a destiny which, far from being always entirely happy, is oftentimes cruel. I can earnestly say that in Alda's versions I do not search for the leftovers of poetic English: I am captivated by his symbols in Spanish of a present time blended into a continuous past: “Lo sabe por los caballos/ parados en todas partes/en los campos, la mirada/fluida como versos,/dejados de lado durante años/junto al rosario y las oraciones/pero abundantes de nuevo/como primulas o aulagas;/por el sucinto temblor en su piel/sabe que escuchan/las noticias que atañen/nuestro destino y el suyo”.

A distinguished translation of poetry can come *exceedingly* close to the original. It can let death abandon the pile of worn-out topics and come to the fore (in, as Enrique phrases it, “las voces atrapadas de los ahogados/ o el extraño grito de criaturas mudas/que anhelan algo más,/ser humanas”). It can make sure that speaking a language or not does not guarantee anything, thereby letting us prove that languages are not commanded. That poetry transcends all this.

Pura López Colomé
(Translated into English by Germán Asensio Peral)

A note by the editor

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Poems by Caitlín Maude

Aimhréidhe

Siúil, a ghrá,
Cois trá anocht –
Siúil agus cuir uait
na deora –
éirigh agus siúil anocht

ná feac do ghlúin feasta
ag uaigh sin an tsléibhe –
tá na blátha sin feoite
agus tá mo chnámhasa dreoite...

(Labhram leat anocht
ó íochtar mara –
labhram leat gach oíche
ó íochtar mara...)

Shiúileas lá cois trá
shiúileas go híochtar trá –
rinne tonn súgradh le tonn –
ligh an cúr bán mo chosa –
d'ardaíos mo shúil go mall
gur ansiúd amuigh ar an domhain
in aimhréidhe cúir agus toinn
chonaic an t-uaigneas id shúil
'gus an doilíos id ghunúis

Shiúileas amach ar an domhain
ó ghlúine go com
agus ó chom go guailí
nó gur slogadh mé
sa doilíos gus san uaigneas

TANGLED

Wander, my love
along the shore tonight –
wander and stop
your weeping –
rise up and wander tonight
bend your knees no more
at that mountain grave –

MARAÑA

Pasea esta noche por la playa
mi amor
pasea y detén tus lágrimas,
levántate y pasea esta noche,
no te arrodilles más
ante esa tumba en la montaña,
sus flores están marchitas

those flowers are withered
and my bones are mouldering...
I speak to you tonight
from sea-depth —
I speak to you every night
from sea depth...

I once wandered along the shore
I wandered to shore-end —
wave made game with wave —
white foam licked my feet —
slowly seeping into my vision
there out in the depths
in the tangle of foam and wave
I saw the loneliness in your eyes
and the sorrow in your face

I wandered out in the depths
from knees to waist
and from waist to shoulders
until I was swallowed
in sorrow and loneliness

(Trans. Joan Trodden Keefe)

y mis huesos descompuestos...
esta noche te llamo
desde las profundidades del océano
todas las noches te llamo
desde las profundidades del océano...

una vez recorrí la orilla
hasta el final de la playa,
donde las olas jugaban
y la blanca espuma besaba mis pies.
Inundando lentamente mi mirada
allí, en lo más profundo,
en la maraña de olas y espuma,
vi la soledad en tus ojos
y la pena en tu rostro.

descendí hasta las profundidades
de la rodilla a la cintura
y de la cintura a los hombros,
hasta que me hundí
en la soledad y la pena.

Impí

A ógánaigh,
ná tar i mo dháil,
ná labhair...
is binn iad
briathra grá —
is binne aríst
an friotal
nár dúradh ariamh —
níl breith
gan smál —
breith briathar
amhlaidh atá
is ní bheadh ann
ach 'rogha an dá dhíogh'
ó tharla
an scéal mar 'tá...

ná bris
an ghloine ghlan
'tá eadrainn
(ní bristear gloine
gan fuil is pian)
óir tá Neamh

nó Ifreann thall
 'gus cén mhaith Neamh
 mura mairfidh sé
 go bráth? —
 ní Ifreann
 go hIfreann
 iar-Neimhe...

impím aríst,
 ná labhair,
 a ógánaigh,
 a 'Dhiarmaid',
 is beidh muid suaimhneach —
 an tuiscint do-theangmhaithe
 eadrainn
 gan gair againn
 drannadh leis
 le saol na saol
 is é dár mealladh
 de shíor —
 ach impím...
 ná labhair...

ENTREATY

Young man,
 do not come near me,
 do not speak...
 the words of love
 are sweet —
 but sweeter still
 is the word
 that was never uttered —
 no choice
 is without stain —
 the choice of words
 is much the same
 and this would be
 to choose between evils
 in our present
 situation...

Do not break
 the clear glass
 between us
 (no glass is broken
 without blood and pain)
 for beyond is Heaven
 or beyond is Hell
 and what good is Heaven

SÚPLICA

Joven
 no te acerques
 no hables...
 dulces son
 las palabras de amor
 pero más dulce es aún
 la palabra no pronunciada
 ninguna elección carece de mácula,
 ni siquiera con las palabras,
 elegirlas en esta situación
 sería decidir entre la espada y la pared...

no rompas
 el diáfano cristal
 que nos separa
 (ninguno se quiebra
 sin sangre y dolor)
 al otro lado se hallan
 el cielo o el infierno
 y ¿de qué sirve el cielo
 si no es eterno?
 no hay peor infierno
 que haber conocido el cielo...

de nuevo, te lo imploro

if it is not
for ever? —
the loss of
Heaven
is the worst Hell...

I again implore you,
do not speak,
young man,
my "Diarmaid",
and we will be at peace —
untouchable understanding
between us
we will have no cause
to touch it
ever
as it ever
allures us —
but I implore you...
do not speak...

(Trans. Gabriel Fitzmaurice)

no hables
mi Diarmaid
y tendremos paz,
nunca habrá necesidad de tocar
ese entendimiento intangible
entre nosotros
que siempre nos tienta
pero, te lo ruego,
no hables...

Lá amháin

Lá amháin
bhí an clóscríobhaí tinn —

bhí ar stiúrthóir an chomhlachta
an clóscríobhán
a thabhairt isteach
ina oifig féin

chuir na litreacha
an oiread déistin air
gur stróic sé iad
'gus gur scríobh sé dán

tamall ina dhiaidh
d'éirigh sé as a phost
'gus ina dhiaidh sin
a theach
a bhean
agus a chlann

agus anois
tá sé ina fhile

an fear bocht

ONE DAY

One day
the typist was sick

the company director
had to take the typewriter
into his office

the letters
so disgusted him
that he tore them up
and wrote a poem

shortly after that
he left his job
and after that
his house
his wife
his kids

and now he's a poet
the poor fucker.

(Trans. Michael Hartnett)

UN DÍA

Un día
la mecanógrafa se puso enferma

el director de la empresa
tuvo que llevar la máquina de escribir
a su despacho

las cartas
le desagradaron tanto
que las rompió
y escribió un poema

poco después
dejó el trabajo
y más tarde
dejó su casa
a su mujer
y a su familia

ahora es poeta,
el pobre idiota.

Tá sé in am dán deiridh a scríobh

Tá sé in am dán deiridh a scríobh.
dán mar 'bheadh inneall nua-aoiseach den scoth
a bhfuil chuile smaoinemh i dtaisce ina chroí.
dán mar 'bheadh leabhar
nach gá a léamh
mar 'bheadh foclóir
aon leathanaigh
aon teangan
mar 'bheadh pictiúr
Ghairdín Pharrthais th'éis pheaca Éabh'.

dán teilifíse le nuacht an lae
dán a bhrisfeas do chroí
blaosc uibhe do chroí
ar an toirt

dán a bhfuil muirín fhada air
na mílte dánta beaga gleoite
ar imeall an phictiúir

dánta grá 'le fíormhothúchán'

dán siopa 29/11
dán tourists

a thugann aicídeacha teochreasacha leo
agus airgead
a thugann drochsmaointe don easpag
a chaitheann seanmóir bhreise a scríobh don deoise
lena choinsias a ghlanadh

dán galánta
dán leathghalánta
ciomach de dhán

IT'S TIME TO WRITE A POEM

ES HORA DE ESCRIBIR UN POEMA

It's time to write a poem
a poem like the best most modern machine
every thought stored up inside it
a poem like a book
one need not read
like a dictionary
with one page
with one language
like a picture
of Paradise after Eve's sin

Es hora de escribir un poema
un poema que sea la mejor de las máquinas modernas
que almacene todos los pensamientos
un poema semejante a un libro
que no es necesario leer,
a un diccionario
de una página
y un idioma,
a una imagen
del paraíso después del pecado de Eva

a telly-poem with daily news
a poem to break your heart
your eggshell heart
your egg of putty heart
on the spot

un poema telediario
un poema que te rompa el corazón
la delicada cáscara de tu corazón
tu corazón maleable
al instante

a longtailed poem
thousands of pretty poemlets
at the edge of the picture
a love poem "with true emotion"

un poema que traiga cola
miles de bonitos poemitas
al borde de la imagen
un poema de amor «con verdadera emoción»

a shop poem 29/11
a poem for tourists
that gives them tropical diseases
and money
that gives bad thoughts to the bishop
who has to write an extra sermon for the
diocese

un poema comercial un año y un día
un poema para turistas
que les transmita enfermedades tropicales
y dinero
que inspire malos pensamientos al obispo
y le obligue a escribir un sermón más para la diócesis

a stylish poem
a half-stylish poem
a slut of a poem

un poema elegante
un poema medio elegante
un poema puta
un poema para mujeres y niños

a poem for women and children
 a totally useless poem
 poem
 litany
 poem.

un poema totalmente inútil
 poema
 letanía
 poema

(Trans. Michael Hartnett)

Treall

Tabhair dom casúr
 nó tua
 go mbrisfead is
 go millfead
 an teach seo,
 go ndéanfad tairseach
 den fhardoras
 ‘gus urláir de na ballaí,
 go dtiocfaidh scraith
 agus díon agus
 simléir anuas
 le neart mo chuid
 allais...

Sín chugam anois
 na cláir is na tairní
 go dtóigfead
 an teach eile seo...

Ach, a Dhia, táim tuirseach!

INTERVAL

Hand me a hammer
 or a hatchet
 to demolish and
 to smash
 this house,
 to make a threshold
 of the lintel
 and floors of the walls,
 so that the screws
 and roof and
 chimney are razed
 with the force of my
 sweat...

Now hand me
 the planks and the nails
 so that I can build

ARREBATO

Dame un martillo
 o un hacha
 para derribar y
 hacer pedazos
 esta casa,
 para crear un umbral
 con el dintel
 y suelos con las paredes,
 para dismantelar
 la techumbre de turba
 y la chimenea
 con el sudor de mi frente...

Ahora, dame
 tablas y clavos
 para construir
 otra casa...

this other house...

Pero, ¡Dios mío!, estoy tan cansada...

But, my God, I'm tired!

(Trans. Nuala Ní Chonchúir)

Na blátha

Chuas amach an mhaidin sin
i mo pháiste
folaithe, do-ghonta –

tháinigéas isteach
i mo dhuine fásta
m'anam nocht feannta –

céadbhlátha an earraigh
– blátha buí – sláimín,
i lár an ghairdín –

ní raibh ann
ach ala gan chomhaireamh
inar bhlaiseas
rud éicint
nár den tsaol seo
inar cuireadh
ó aithne
orm féin mé
gur thuigeas
go rabhas leonta
le lann na háille –

lann ar a hainm
le glaine
le géire

níor bhlátha na blátha
ach beos
áille agus céasadh.

THE FLOWERS

I went out that morning
a child
unaware, invulnerable –

I returned
an adult
my soul bared, flayed –

LAS FLORES

Aquella mañana salí
siendo una niña
inconsciente, invulnerable

Regresé
adulta
con el alma desnuda, desollada

spring's first flowers
– tufted buttery blooms,
standing in the garden –

it was only
a passing moment
in which I tasted
something
otherworldly
in which I
was pulled
out of myself
to understand
that I'd been wounded
by beauty's blade –

beauty's name made
clean
keen

these flowers were not just flowers
but life
beauty and torment.

(Trans. Nuala Ní Chonchúir)

las primeras flores de primavera,
ramilletes de brotes dorados,
nacían en el jardín

fue un instante fugaz
en el que percibí
algo sobrenatural,
en el que despojada
de mí misma
comprendí
que me había herido
el filo de la belleza

y su nombre se reveló
puro
nítido

no eran simples flores,
sino vida
belleza y tormento

Poems by Mary O'Malley

NEWS

He knows by the horses
that are everywhere in the fields

unemployed, their gaze
fluent as verses,

put aside for years
with the rosary beads and prayers

but lately plentiful again
as primroses or furze;

by the quick shivers of their skin
he knows they are listening

to news that concerns

NOTICIAS

Lo sabe por los caballos
parados en todas partes

en los campos, la mirada
fluida como versos,

dejados de lado durante años
junto al rosario y las oraciones

pero abundantes de nuevo
como prímulas o aulagas;

por el sucinto temblor en su piel
sabe que escuchan

las noticias que atañen

our fate and theirs.

nuestro destino y el suyo.

SPACE TIME CURVE

ESPACIO TIEMPO CURVA

He was my knife then.
There were flashes
Of steel in the sun.
He cut an orange into quarters
and handed me one,
the blade sweet with juice.

Entonces era mi cuchillo.
Destellos de acero
en el sol.
Cortó una naranja en cuatro trozos
y me ofreció uno,
la hoja empapada en dulce zumo.

That's how it was in the sun,
Strawberries for lunch and a swim
Into life itself. Life tastes
Of salt and strawberries
And the flat lick of steel
Then the sting of a thorn in your heel

Así era en el sol,
fresas para comer y un baño
en la vida misma. La vida sabe
a sal y fresas
a lamer la hoja de acero,
después, una espina en el pie.

When time swerves and curls
Backwards and we're poised
at the top of a wave all unfurled
The girl, the fruit and the man
With the knife in his hand.

Cuando el tiempo vira y se encrespa
hacia atrás y estamos suspendidos
en lo alto de una ola desplegada
la joven, la fruta y el hombre
con el cuchillo en la mano.

GOLDFINCHES

JILGUEROS

Who can believe that God plays dice
and make a way through life?

¿Quién cree que Dios juega a los dados
y sigue su camino?

A foot from the window a cloud
Of goldfinches descend on the niger seed.

A un palmo de la ventana, un tropel
de jilgueros desciende sobre las semillas de Níger.

Nothing I have done merits this charm
their cat faces yellow and red, as if

Nada de lo que he hecho merece semejante encanto,
caras de gato amarillas y rojas, como si

exotic flowers had taken to the air
transformed and came here

unas flores exóticas hubieran levantado el vuelo
transformadas y llegado

to Seanbhaile, Maigh Cuilinn, the world
our egocentric sun revolves around

a Seanbhaile, Maigh Cuilinn, al mundo
en torno al que orbita nuestro egocéntrico sol

as Shakespeare saw the sun spin
around the earth because we all cling

tal como lo vio girar Shakespeare
rodeando la Tierra, porque

when all the Gods are banished down
to Saturn or Pandemonium

cuando los dioses se destierran
a Saturno o el Pandemonio

to a steady planet with a friendly sun
circling around us, even Einstein.

todos nos aferramos
a un planeta inmóvil con un sol complaciente

que da vueltas a nuestro alrededor, incluso Einstein.

DESCENT

I have looked for you among the Greeks
Where hate and love are close as blood
And blood is worth so much and no more

I went down among the Greeks reluctantly
not trusting in cheap plunder but there is
no more time. Threads have been pulled

time woven, knotted, snipped. I went
to the cities and the far islands
and met statues, women with blind eyes

and no mercy. In temples and bars and houses
everywhere I saw your likeness, and everywhere
women with their bored gaze

fixed beyond me, on some blue island
with dolphins, an olive tree, the dangerous bull
in his maze, and the woman who holds the thread.

None of them spoke to me, just one more
Crazed mother searching for her daughter
They are used to that here.

VIGIL

I have paid the coin time has extracted
With another in my mouth for the shroud
A willing deposit for when you are found.

I will stand in the helical stream with the winds
Scorching my ankles until someone looks up
And says 'Bargain' and then I will go down

To meet her and bring the small red
Seeds of the sun to remind her of home.
I will stand there until the dark breaks open.

DESCENSO

Te he buscado entre los griegos
en los que el odio y el amor son cercanos como la sangre,
y la sangre se valora, y nada más

Descendí entre los griegos a regañadientes
sin confiar en el expolio fariseo, pero ya
no hay tiempo. Se ha tirado de los hilos

el tiempo se ha tejido, anudado, cortado. Fui
a las ciudades y las islas lejanas
y encontré estatuas, mujeres con ojos ciegos

y despiadadas. En templos, en bares y casas,
en todas partes vi tu semejanza, y en todas partes
mujeres con mirada cansada

fija en la lejanía, en una isla azul
con delfines y un olivo, el peligroso toro
en su laberinto, y la mujer que sujeta el hilo.

Ninguna me habló, solo era otra
madre desesperada buscando a su hija
Allí están acostumbradas.

VIGILIA

He pagado la moneda que el tiempo me ha extraído
en mi boca hay otra para el sudario
un pago voluntario para cuando te encuentren.

Permaneceré en la corriente helicoidal y los vientos
me abrasarán los tobillos, hasta que alguien mire
y diga «trato hecho», entonces me hundiré

para reunirme con ella y llevarle las
semillas rojas del sol que le recuerden su hogar.
Permaneceré allí hasta que quiebre la oscuridad

Pura López Colomé is a Mexican poet, translator and literary critic. Twelve of her poetry collections have been published under the title *Poemas reunidos 1985-2012*. Her latest book of poems is *Via Corporis* (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2016). She has translated several of Seamus Heaney's works, collected in the bilingual edition *Obra Reunida* (Conaculta, 2015). Among the literary honors she has received are Premio Xavier Villaurrutia (poetry), Premio Nacional Alfonso Reyes (essay), Premio Nacional de Traducción Literaria (for her translation of Heaney's *Station Island*). She lives in Cuernavaca, México.

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