A Translational Poetics: Between Language(s) and Image in the Works of Alejandra Pizarnik and Susana Thénon

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Short abstract

This thesis offers new readings of Argentine poets Alejandra Pizarnik (1936–1972) and Susana Thénon (1937–1990) through the lens of translation. I argue that both poets develop a translational poetics as they move between languages, images, and art forms throughout their literary careers. Translation – understood as a creative rather than derivative act – plays a generative role in their poetic practice, transforming their 'original' poetry in the process.

Drawing on approaches from Latin American literary studies, translation studies, and intermediality studies, this thesis analyses three different forms of translation. Part I offers comparative analysis of Pizarnik and Thénon's literary translations of other writers to develop an understanding of their translation theories and strategies, establishing translator archives for both poets. Part II examines the potential of self-translation, and how this process leads both poets to experiment with multi-voiced poetry. Part III analyses the possibilities of visual translation, and what both poets call 'translations' between their poetry and visual art. This expanded definition of translation destabilises norms of the lyric, leading Pizarnik and Thénon towards non-lyric poetry.

I therefore reveal translation's role in the poetic process, as well as a shared kinship between these two figures. Pizarnik and Thénon are often grouped together as part of Argentina's 'generation of the 60s', but their legacies differ substantially: Pizarnik is one of Latin America's most renowned poets, while Thénon is celebrated in Argentina as a poet's poet and feminist figure. This comparative analysis highlights the points of contact between the two poets, and affirms the foundational and wide-reaching role of translation

in Latin American literary production. The thesis also contributes to translation studies by offering a template for reading the work of poets who are also translators, moving beyond limiting questions of influence or genealogy to consider translation's role within the creation of new literary works.

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Long abstract

How is poetry transformed by contact with translation? While translation is increasingly understood as a creative process – rather than a secondary or derivative approach to a source text – its role in the production of what we might call 'original' works is underappreciated. This thesis advances the concept of a translational poetics to argue that translation has played a crucial role in poetic production within Latin America. Analysing the works of Argentine poets Alejandra Pizarnik (1936-1972) and Susana Thénon (1937-1990), I consider their engagement with translation and how this transformed their poetics. Moving beyond narrow questions of genealogy, influence, or reception of translated works, I place central importance on the experience and practice of translation. As poet-translators, Pizarnik and Thénon write in ways shaped by poetry translation: attentive to semantics, syntax, and sound, as well as the differences between languages, and the variations contained within the Spanish language itself.

Despite critical developments in the field of translation studies, translation is often considered to be a 'secondary' literary activity, unless the translator is also an active and vocal theorist of the practice. However, translation has had a foundational role in Latin American literature, as Delfina Cabrera, Denise Kripper, and others highlight. In the nineteenth century, as the new republics of the region sought to innovate and establish their own national literatures, translation allowed writers to reject the influence of Spain, the former colonial power, and instead seek inspiration from elsewhere. However, the role of translation extends beyond canonical movements like *modernismo*, shaping a wide variety of poetics. Pizarnik and Thénon share superficial similarities in age, gender, and

nationality, but their legacies differ substantially: Pizarnik is one of Latin America's most renowned poets, while Thénon is little-known outside of Argentina, where she is celebrated for her feminist poetics. Despite this contrast, translation represents a common thread that brings their work together: revealing unexpected similarities and productive differences. By analysing their respective translational poetics, I argue that translation is a central practice not only within their work, but within Argentine poetry and Latin American literature more widely.

This approach has important implications for Latin American literary studies and translation studies more broadly. This thesis contributes to knowledge in three key areas: firstly, enhancing our understanding of Pizarnik and Thénon; secondly, highlighting the central role of translation in Argentine and Latin American literature; and thirdly, offering a template for analysing translational poetics in the region and beyond.

Within Latin American literary studies, I aim to establish new readings of Pizarnik and Thénon through the lens of translation. Vast amounts of scholarship have been produced on Pizarnik, with new contributions every year: however, studies of Pizarnik tend to reinforce the already dominant mythology of the 'suicide-poet', obsessed with silence and the failures of language. This is shaped by influential editions and biographies from Ana Becciú, Cristina Piña, and others. However, this critical focus on ineffability obscures Pizarnik's dedication to literary production. Fiona Mackintosh first drew attention to Pizarnik's work as a translator, and translation in fact reveals a prolific side to Pizarnik: she translated dozens of authors and several books in her short life. While Pizarnik herself sought to cultivate this image of a poet haunted by the ineffable, it overshadows other possible narratives. By reading Pizarnik through the lens of translation, I complicate truisms about the impossibility of poetic language. Whether it is by translating the writers she most admired, engaging in self-translation, or collaging together

poems from scraps of verses, I argue that Pizarnik does not give up on language and embrace silence; instead, she remains resilient in the face of writer's block, turning to alternative means of composition.

In the case of Thénon, I offer the longest study of her work in English to date, and the first comprehensive review of translation in Thénon's work. Frequently characterised as a solitary poet or outsider figure, Thénon in fact regularly collaborated with her peers, whether they were poets, scholars, translators, or dancers. Studies by Victoria Alcala and Paola Cortés Rocca illustrate the centrality of collaboration and interdisciplinarity for Thénon's poetry. While Thénon does not belong to a specific poetic movement or school, there is great benefit to reading her in conversation with others. Thénon's poetry is witty, biting, and innovative, yet her status within Argentine poetry remains marginal; this thesis aims to change that. The comparison between the two poets is also beneficial; just as their interplay with other media and languages opens up creative avenues for expression, setting their work in context and playing off their creative differences illuminates new and innovative ways to read their work. Women poets are still often studied on the sidelines, or alternatively chosen for their marginality. By placing Pizarnik and Thénon in conversation with each other, they form the centre of this discussion.

The comparison between Pizarnik and Thénon also emphasises the foundational role of translation in Argentine and Latin American literature. Moving beyond questions of the influence of translated works – which might suggest a hierarchy where the source text is idealised – I argue that the process of translation shapes original cultural production to a greater extent than previously believed. It is not contact with the translated works themselves, but rather the *experience* of translating that can transform a poetics. Translation is not only a relevant force for major figures like Rubén Darío, Jorge Luis

Borges, and Octavio Paz, but plays a significant role for a wide array of Latin American poets, including Pizarnik and Thénon.

This thesis also contributes to translation studies by offering a template for analysing translational poetics in Latin America and beyond. There is an increasing sense that translation is a creative act, or that translation is a form of creative writing, but rarely have critics considered how the practice of translation transforms writing itself. Both poets offer an inventive and expansive definition of translation that moves beyond fixed ideas to shape their poetic practice. By taking full account of translation in all its forms, I argue for the possibility of a truly translational poetics, with ideas of relevance for other scholars researching the relationship between poetry and translation. In line with María Constanza Guzmán's theory of the 'translator's archive', the use of translator archives is vital for the study of poet-translators like Pizarnik and Thénon, and establishes a framework for future studies.

My methodology draws on approaches from Latin American literary studies and translation studies, and incorporates further perspectives from comparative literature and intermediality studies. When analysing translations, I conduct comparative close readings between the source and target text, and take a multilingual approach to scholarship. This analysis is not done with the aim of finding mistakes, but instead highlights the translator's agency when making decisions. Following Isabel C. Gómez's invitation in *Cannibal Translation*, if and when errors are found, it is not a matter of proving a translator's limitations, but instead revealing their subjectivity.

For both poets, I establish translator archives that include their translations alongside other published and archival material, such as letters, notes, and press clippings. This allows me to present new conclusions, and also provides a foundation for other scholars to build upon. My approach is guided by the following principles: having

established the translator archive, I read widely to examine Pizarnik and Thénon's engagement with and ideas about translation. I then engage in close analysis of their translations – whether literary or visual – and consider the implications of their translational practices for their own poetry.

As examined in the introduction, there is significant precedent in literary studies and translation studies for analysing translation – and specifically poetry translation – as a creative act. Frameworks that make visible the creativity of the translator's labour – offered by Emily Apter and Lawrence Venuti – guide my approach. Further developments in translation theory that highlight the creativity of translation, underscore the instability of the source text as a product of various editing processes, and destabilise hierarchies of original/translation (as offered by Kate Briggs and Karen Emmerich) are particularly relevant for my understanding of translation in this thesis.

While the term 'translation' can occasionally be nebulous, the thesis follows a tripartite structure to address three forms of translation: literary translation, self-translation, and visual translation. Each part of the thesis contains two chapters corresponding to Pizarnik and Thénon respectively. Each pair of chapters is then followed by a comparative coda, reflecting on similarities and differences in Pizarnik and Thénon's practices. This allows for wider conclusions to be drawn about the role of translation in Argentine poetry of the period, and offers key considerations for defining a translational poetics.

The chapters in Part I, dedicated to literary translation, share a framework: having established both poets' engagement with literary translation, I read their critical writings to explore their respective ideas about translation. I then analyse a series of their poetry translation projects to assess both their translation strategies and the creativity at play. In Chapter 1, I consider Pizarnik's translations of Yves Bonnefoy, Antonin Artaud, and Friedrich Hölderlin, to establish strategies of affiliation and ventriloquism. This raises

questions of voice and accent in translated poetry, and also the status of translation as literary labour. In Chapter 2, I examine Thénon's more eclectic engagement with translation, analysing song translations from her archive and the translations of Rainer Maria Rilke she produced as part of her own photography exhibition. This reveals tactics of experimental play, as well as the strategic possibilities of translation as an expressive silence. These two chapters in conversation suggest that translation can become a poetic laboratory, offering poets the opportunity to test out different forms of expression.

Part I establishes the foundations of Pizarnik and Thénon's engagement with translation. In Parts II and III, the thesis focuses on how translation comes to shape their own poetry. Part II addresses self-translation, and how translational techniques emerge in their work. Chapter 3 offers the first detailed study of Pizarnik's French-language poetry and her self-translations. Taking Pizarnik's French-language compositions as an example of literary translingualism – where a writer adopts a language that is not their primary one, according to Steven G. Kellman – I assess her motivations for writing in French. I then look at her subsequent self-translations from French to Spanish, and trace these archival translations as they reappear in her published poetry: revealing translingual self-translation to be a poetic technique. Chapter 4 considers self-translation in Thénon's poetry. Thénon engaged so thoroughly in Renata Treitel's English-language translation of *distancias* that it could be considered a multiple translatorship or partial self-translation. Following the rewriting involved in self-translation, I chart the evolution of her poetry: from archival poems that address questions of language and translation, to the multi-voiced and ironic *Ova completa*. The collection's translational poetics come to the fore in its exploration of translation, circulation, reception and anthologisation. In comparison, the chapters of Part II reveal self-translation as a productive form of rewriting that encourages poetic innovation.

Part III examines the possibilities of visual translation, as both poets use the term 'translation' to describe the relationship between language and image. Each chapter considers their respective theories of visual translation, before analysing their artworks and then their poetry to assess whether visual techniques can be translated into written language. Chapter 5 considers Pizarnik's use of collage, drawing on the Surrealist history of the practice. Collage – used first as a visual and then literary technique – allows Pizarnik to mediate between language and image, and partially fulfil her desire for a material and embodied poetics. In Chapter 6, I assess Thénon's visual translations between poetry and photography. While the forms initially appear incompatible, with photography leading Thénon away from poetic composition, I argue that photography encourages Thénon to work with poetic space, as well as poetic time. *distancias* is a product of this interplay between language and image. The comparison between Pizarnik and Thénon reveals how visual translation allows both poets to continue writing when language appears difficult. Moving beyond the lyric, Pizarnik and Thénon approach non-lyric modes of poetry.

The conclusion unites previous reflections to define a translational poetics. I argue that translation – which moves between languages, texts, and voices – introduces instability into the poetic voice. Poetic compositions that employ translational techniques are therefore more likely to be multi-voiced and polyphonic, challenging the norms of the lyric. With the inclusion of visual translation, this also encourages creative approaches to the space of the page, leading to the emergence of non-lyric poetry. This is the consequence of a translational poetics: Pizarnik and Thénon are shaped by a translator's sensibility, and increasingly attuned to the limits and capabilities of poetic voice and language. As such, this thesis demonstrates the close relationship between poetry

translation and poetic composition, arguing that the creative process of translation shapes the production of new texts.

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Cada texto es único y, simultáneamente, es la traducción de otro texto. – Octavio Paz

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Abbreviations

APP	Alejandra Pizarnik Papers, C0395, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library
Fondo Pizarnik	Fondo Alejandra Pizarnik, Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno, Buenos Aires
Fondo Thénon	Fondo Susana Thénon, AR IIAC 03, Archivo IIAC, Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero (UNTREF), Buenos Aires
LMI	Susana Thénon, *La morada imposible*, ed. by Ana María Barrenechea and María Negroni, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Corregidor, 2019–2021)
PDN	Susana Thénon, *Paraíso de nadie*, ed. by María Negroni (Corregidor, 2022)

Introduction

Escribir es traducir. – Alejandra Pizarnik

el texto de la traducción se ha perdido y se ignora su / lengua original – Susana Thénon

How is poetry transformed by contact with translation? Considered together, the Argentine poets Alejandra Pizarnik (1936–1972) and Susana Thénon (1937–1990) transform our understanding of the ways in which translation can shape what we call 'original' literary production. Poets, translators, and visual artists, Pizarnik and Thénon move between languages, images, and art forms throughout their literary careers. Translation – understood as a creative rather than a derivative act – plays a unique role in their poetic practice, transforming the way they write poetry.

Poetry translation is commonly understood as a secondary operation that follows the creation of poetry, rewriting it in a different language for different audiences. However, scholarship in recent years has established translators as creative agents whose subjectivity shapes the process and products of translation. What might this creative understanding of translation mean for poetry? Translation has been credited as a foundational phenomenon within Spanish American letters, particularly for Rubén Darío's poetry and *modernismo*, which famously translated French Symbolism into the Spanish language. But translation was widely practised by writers across the region, and its reach remains underexplored.

In particular, I am interested in moving beyond questions of the influence of translated works, to instead focus on the generative possibilities of translation. Translators of poetry navigate the intricacies of semantics, syntax, sound, rhythm, and style, in their quest to produce poetry in the target language. The process of decision-making and

sustained contact with the source language – all while thinking of the possibilities within the target language – involve a translational kind of thinking, which can in turn shape poetic practice.

Poetry and translation have long been understood as interconnected literary practices, from Latin poetry and Spanish Golden Age literature through to the present day. Octavio Paz highlights commonalities between the two, arguing that 'la traducción poética [...] es una operación análoga a la creación poética.'[1] The creation of poetry is open-ended, constrained only by the possibilities of language, whereas poetry translation's opportunities are limited by the existence of another text. Yet both have the same goal: to produce poetry. The means may change, but the ambition is the same.

This intimate knowledge of both poetry and translation marks Pizarnik and Thénon's work. Both poets are occasionally grouped together in broader conversations, especially as part of Argentina's 'generación del 60'. These comparisons often draw on superficial similarities in nationality, age, gender, and sexuality; but their works and legacies differ substantially. Pizarnik today is known as one of Latin America's most famous poets, while Thénon is recognised in Argentina as a poet's poet and cult feminist figure. However, they are united by a common interest in translation, and I argue that for both poets, it was a driving force behind their poetic production, revealing a shared literary kinship.

In this thesis, I consider three different kinds of translation in Pizarnik and Thénon's oeuvre, and the way this practice shaped their poetics. I begin with their careers as literary translators, examining their respective ideas about – and approaches to – translation. I then turn to the question of self-translation, and the ways in which

[1] Octavio Paz, *Traducción: literatura y literalidad* (Tusquets, 1971), 14.

translational techniques lead to the generation of what we might call 'original' poetry. Finally, I conclude with what both poets call 'translations' between their poetry and visual art. By establishing an expansive definition of translation, this comprehensive overview demonstrates the foundational role of translation in their poetic practice. The experience of translation – of crossing between languages, but also between media – forges a translational poetics.

Alejandra Pizarnik: A Brief Biography

Alejandra Pizarnik (1936–1972) is today one of the most renowned figures of Argentine and Latin American poetry. She was born in Avellaneda, Buenos Aires on 29 April 1936, to Jewish migrants who had fled Eastern Europe in the early 1930s. Pizarnik was raised in a multilingual environment; she and her elder sister grew up speaking Spanish, while her parents also spoke Russian and Yiddish. She devoted herself to learning French, a language that would shape her literary activity throughout her life, and her library and papers indicate she also learnt some German, Italian, and Portuguese.

In the 1950s, Pizarnik pursued various courses of study, including painting with the Argentine Surrealist Juan Batlle Planas, and both journalism and *filosofía y letras* at the University of Buenos Aires. She also published her first three collections of poetry: *La tierra más ajena* (1955), *La última inocencia* (1956), and *Las aventuras perdidas* (1958). In 1960, Pizarnik moved to Paris, where she lived for four years. In France, Pizarnik met some of the most celebrated French and Latin American writers of the time – befriending Julio Cortázar, Octavio Paz, and others – and established her literary career. She published

Árbol de Diana (1962) with a prologue by Paz, cementing her literary reputation, and also worked for the publishers Julliard and Gallimard, and the magazine *Cuadernos*.[2]

Pizarnik returned to Buenos Aires in 1964, and a year later published *Los trabajos y las noches*, for which she received great acclaim and was awarded the Premio Municipal de Poesía. In 1966, she published the first version of 'La condesa sangrienta', a work which began as a review of Valentine Penrose's *La comtesse sanglante*, and ended up being one of her most accomplished and famous prose works. Pizarnik's *La condesa sangrienta* was written using techniques of translation and appropriation, practices that would become increasingly important in her later work. In the latter half of the decade, Pizarnik increasingly turned to prose poetry, especially in *Extracción de la piedra de locura* (1968). A year later, she was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship, and travelled to the USA and again to Paris. She remained prolific in the early 1970s, publishing several book-length translations and her final collection *El infierno musical* (1971). She was awarded a Fulbright scholarship that same year, but was unable to travel.

Pizarnik died in Buenos Aires on 25 September 1972, following an overdose of Seconal. This has influenced much of the posthumous reception of her work, and shaped what Fiona Mackintosh has called the 'suicide-poet myth': the idea that Pizarnik lived and died for her art.[3] This mythologisation has drawn comparisons to Alfonsina Storni, Sylvia Plath, and others, widely influencing how Pizarnik is read: usually in a tragic key. While it is true that Pizarnik herself sought to create this impression in her own writings, this myth continues to overdetermine critical readings of Pizarnik's work. It is this element of her canonisation that I hope to challenge by focusing on the role of translation in her work,

[2] APP Box 10, Folder 2.
[3] Fiona J. Mackintosh, 'Self-Censorship and New Voices in Pizarnik's Unpublished Manuscripts', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 87.4 (2010), 519, doi:10.1080/14753820.2010.483141.

instead of privileging biographical questions. Translation, as a practice of rewriting and editing, offers a strategy of resilience, and allows Pizarnik to continue writing even when poetic language appears to fail.

Susana Thénon: A Brief Biography

Susana Thénon (1937–1990) was a poet, artistic photographer, and translator, whose singular and iconoclastic voice has left an indelible mark on Argentine poetry and feminism.[4] Born in Buenos Aires on 7 May 1937, Thénon was raised in an intellectual environment. Her father, Jorge Thénon, was a celebrated psychiatrist who corresponded with Sigmund Freud, and was a member of the Argentine Communist Party. She attended the University of Buenos Aires and graduated with a degree in classical literature in 1964. Like Pizarnik, Thénon was multilingual: alongside Latin and Greek, Thénon also learnt Hebrew (she was of Jewish descent on her mother's side), German, and Russian, and she could read some English, French, and Italian.[5]

Thénon published five collections of poetry in her lifetime: *Edad sin tregua* (1958), *Habitante de la nada* (1959), *De lugares extraños* (1968), *distancias* (1984), and *Ova completa* (1987). She also produced the unpublished collections *Amores planetarios* and *Papyrus*, posthumously included in the collected volume *Paraíso de nadie*. Thénon's published work can be divided into two phases: the first three collections are more or less free-verse compositions in the lyric tradition, while the final two collections are more experimental and disruptive in form and content. Her last collection, *Ova completa*,

[4] Ana María Barrenechea and María Negroni give Thénon's dates as 1935–1991 in *LMI*. However, here I follow Victoria Alcala's biography, which referenced Argentine national records. See Victoria Alcala, *Susana Thénon. Loba esteparia* (Ediciones Lamás Médula, 2020).
[5] Alcala, *Susana Thénon*, 125.

remains her most celebrated and best-known work, especially in the Anglophone world: Ugly Duckling Presse published Rebekah Smith's translation in 2021.[6] The collection addresses personal and political themes with biting wit and humour, and exemplifies Thénon's mastery of bathos: her references range from the cerebral and classical to the everyday and banal.

Between these two phases of poetic production, Thénon took an extended hiatus from publishing poetry, and instead dedicated herself to photography. She won prizes for her work and held a number of exhibitions in the 1970s and 1980s. Most famous is her exhibit 'Rainer Maria Rilke. Palabra e imagen', first shown at the Instituto Goethe in Buenos Aires in 1979, during Argentina's last dictatorship; the exhibition combined artistic photography with Thénon's own translations of the Austrian poet Rilke. Her other major exhibition was at the Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAYC) in 1982, showing series including 'Los reales espejismos', 'Desconsuelos', 'Geometrías, and 'El otro espacio'.[7]

While Thénon began the poems included in *distancias* as early as 1968 – when she sent drafts to Ana María Barrenechea – she only completed the collection in the early 1980s. In the prologue to that collection, she credits her return to poetry to the experience of photographing the dancer Iris Scaccheri. Throughout the 1980s, Thénon pursued both poetry and photography. Collaboration was vital to this phase of her career; she worked with the North American academic, poet, and translator Renata Treitel on translating her poetry into English, and continued photographing Scaccheri's performances, publishing the photobook *Acerca de Iris Scaccheri* in 1988.[8] However, Thénon's health declined at

[6] Susana Thénon, *Ova Completa*, trans. by Rebekah Smith (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2021).
[7] Uncatalogued additions to the Fondo Thénon at the Universidad de Tres de Febrero include press clippings and interviews regarding Thénon's photography career.
[8] Susana Thénon, *Acerca de Iris Scaccheri* (Ediciones Anzilotti, 1988).

the end of the decade; she was diagnosed with a brain tumour in 1989 and passed away on 4 April 1990, at the age of 52.

Pizarnik and Thénon in Context

Born just one year apart, Pizarnik and Thénon's lives and literary practices intertwined periodically. They studied together at the University of Buenos Aires in the late 1950s, and became friends. Humour seems to have brought them together; they co-authored a comic text, 'Crónica social',[9] and their correspondence is full of cryptic jokes and funny illustrations, belying their serious and occasionally tragic reputations.[10] A dedicated copy of Thénon's debut collection, *Edad sin tregua*, at the Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno, testifies to their shared humour: 'A Alejandra, la muerta de risa, con una carcajada.'[11] Their friendship was cut short by Pizarnik's departure for Paris in 1960, although they remained in touch for a time; Pizarnik's diaries suggest she had a possible infatuation with Thénon.[12]

Alongside a shared sense of humour, Pizarnik and Thénon collaborated on various literary projects. Thénon founded the little magazine *Agua Viva* with Juan Carlos Martelli, Eduardo Romano, and Alejandro Vignati, publishing four issues in 1960 while Thénon was still a student.[13] The short-lived publication was marked by heterogeneity and a non-

[9] First published in Mariana Di Ció's doctoral thesis 'La cara deshecha en el vidrio cuarteado: la identidad del sujeto poético en «Edad sin tregua» de Susana Thénon' (thesis for *licenciatura*, UCA, 2003), and subsequently included in *PDN*, 313–14. The text is undated, but was likely written when both were studying at the University of Buenos Aires in the late 1950s. The text is addressed to Ana María Barrenechea, who taught there at the time.
[10] APP Box 9, Folder 11a.
[11] Fondo Pizarnik, item reference: TES3C172438.
[12] In a diary entry from early 1960, Pizarnik wrote: 'A. M. B. es más seductora de lo que yo imaginaba. Y yo, creo que me estoy enamorando de S. Maldito sea todo. Justamente ahora.' Pizarnik often used initials in her diaries, but this is a likely reference to Thénon and their mutual friend Barrenechea. See Alejandra Pizarnik, *Diarios*, ed. by Ana Becciú, 3rd edn (Lumen, 2016), 320.
[13] Digitised in full by the *Archivo Histórico de Revistas Argentinas*. See 'Agua Viva', *AHIRA*, <https://ahira.com.ar/revistas/agua-viva/> [accessed 25 March 2026].

conformist streak; in a 1988/1989 interview with *Diario de Poesía*, Thénon reminisced that, among the editors, 'no podía haber cuatro personas más diferentes en este universo'.[14] The magazine offered Pizarnik and Thénon another opportunity to collaborate: Pizarnik contributed a poem to the second issue that later featured in her breakthrough collection, *Árbol de Diana* (1962). We know they were in touch again in the late 1960s, as Pizarnik made lists of correspondents in her diaries.[15] This contact was likely re-established after Thénon edited Pizarnik and Ivonne Bordelois' translation of French poet Yves Bonnefoy for Ediciones Carmina in 1967.[16] Translation represents not just a moment of collaboration between the two poets, but a common thread across both of their careers.

Pizarnik translated throughout the 1960s and up until her death, working both alone and with co-translators. Working primarily from French, but occasionally from German and Italian, she translated authors including Antonin Artaud, Yves Bonnefoy, André Breton, Paul Éluard, Marguerite Duras, André Pieyre de Mandiargues, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Georges Schehadé, Friedrich Hölderlin, Salvatore Quasimodo, and many others.[17] She produced several book-length translations in the early 1970s, and regularly contributed translations to magazines including *Sur*, *Cuadernos*, *El cielo*, *Poesía=Poesía*, *Cormorán y delfín*, and others. Thénon's engagement in translation was more eclectic, but her major achievement was producing versions of 37 poems and excerpts by Rainer Maria

[14] Susana Thénon, Mirta Rosenberg, and Diana Bellessi, 'Susana Thénon: Maquillando el caos', *Diario de Poesía*, 11 (1988/1989), 3–4 <https://ahira.com.ar/ejemplares/diario-de-poesia-n-11/> [accessed 25 March 2026].
[15] There are five letters from Thénon to Pizarnik in the Pizarnik Papers in Princeton (APP Box 9, Folder 11a), dating to 1959/1960. No other letters between the two are included in their personal archives. However, Pizarnik refers to writing to Thénon as late as 1970: see *Diarios*, 931.
[16] See Ivonne Bordelois, *Bonnefoy y Pizarnik, una amistad con la poesía*, ed. by Fredy Yezzed (Abisinia Editorial, 2024) for a full account of the project. Carmina also published Thénon's third collection, *De lugares extraños*, that same year.
[17] Pizarnik's CV names a longer list of authors, including Aimé Césaire (APP Box 10, Folder 2). Césaire is often mentioned in lists of Pizarnik's translations, but I have not been able to locate these translations. This list names authors where I have confirmed the translation was published.

Rilke. Other published translations include a co-translation with Sonia Lida of a book by the French-Greek philosopher Kostas Axelos.[18]

Beyond literary translation, Pizarnik and Thénon also engaged with translation in more creative ways. While in Paris, Pizarnik composed poems in French that she would translate into Spanish in the late 1960s: an act of self-translation that later generated original compositions in Spanish. Thénon described the photographs she exhibited alongside her versions of Rilke as a kind of translation; she also collaborated at length with her translator Renata Treitel on the English translation of *distancias*. Both used the word 'traducir' and 'traducción' in more unorthodox contexts, implying that they considered translation to be an expansive creative practice.

Literature Review: Translation as a Creative Practice

The word 'translation', and its Spanish equivalent 'traducción', are both derived from Latin, but with slightly different origins. 'Traducción' comes from *traducere*, meaning 'to bring across', while 'translation' is derived from the noun *translatio*, which comes from the verb *transferre*, 'to carry from one place to another'.[19] This subtle difference in etymology reflects the mutability of the term. Translation is commonly understood to be the transfer of meaning from one language into another: what Matthew Reynolds calls 'Translation Rigidly Conceived'.[20] However, as Reynolds and others interrogate, what is being translated – and the 'languages' involved – are often up for debate.

As early as 1959, Roman Jakobson proposed a contested taxonomy of translation, which established three different types: intralingual (rewording), interlingual (translation

[18] Alcala, *Susana Thénon*, 72.
[19] Matthew Reynolds, *Translation: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 14.
[20] Ibid., 18.

proper) and intersemiotic (transmutation).[21] While I will examine a variety of definitions of translation in Pizarnik and Thénon's works, 'translation proper' – or Reynolds' 'Translation Rigidly Conceived' – is a useful point of departure. However, even this common conception of translation has provoked extensive critical discussion. Developments in understanding translation as a creative practice, influenced by the translator's subjectivity, are therefore particularly relevant for my research.

While translation has long been understood as both a creative and critical activity, key developments in the twentieth century transformed common understandings of the practice. The professionalisation of translation in the twentieth century, and the subsequent emergence of translation studies as a discipline in the 1970s and 1980s, have transformed how both the work of translation and the figure of the translator are assessed. Furthermore, with the 'cultural turn' in translation studies, which Susan Bassnett dates to 1990, there has been increased critical attention to 'issues of context, history and convention'.[22] As a result, the adjective 'literary' is more regularly used to describe certain translators and their work, establishing a distinction between those who translate literature as opposed to other genres of text. The literary nature of translation, however, has been a long-standing concern in critical texts, including before the cultural turn, and has been at the core of debates in both Anglo-European translation studies and Latin American translation theory and practice.

A foundational text of translation studies is Walter Benjamin's 1923 essay 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', which proposes that translation can revitalise a language. 'The Task of the Translator', as it is known in English thanks to Harry Zohn's influential

[21] Roman Jakobson, 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation', in *Theories of Translation*, ed. by Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (University of Chicago Press, 2020), 147.
[22] Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 85.

translation, served as the preface to Benjamin's translations of Charles Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens*, but has had a long afterlife in literary and translation studies, with numerous interpretations and translations. Indeed the 'afterlife' of literary texts – a contested translation of the term 'Überleben' – is a major consideration of the essay itself.[23] The titular task that Benjamin assigns to the translator is an ambitious one: 'To set free in his own language the pure language spellbound in the foreign language, to liberate the language imprisoned in the work by rewriting it, is the translator's task.'[24] Benjamin maintains a Romantic – and somewhat magical – belief in the idea of a pure language or 'reine Sprache' to which all languages aspire, but which none can attain.[25] Instead, the echoes generated between the source and the target language allude towards this supposed pure language, so the translation should also produce these echoes. In this essay on literary translation, there are already two kinds of translation at play: the translation between verbal languages – say, French and German – and the translation from this pure, idealised language into any verbal language.

Benjamin focuses on the specifics of poetry translation in the essay, of particular relevance for this thesis. He argues that a poem's responsibility is not to transmit a message or semantic content, but rather 'the incomprehensible, the secret, the "poetic"', which the translator can only render if they also write poetry in the target language.[26] Benjamin does not directly equate the task of the poet and the translator, as talent for one does not guarantee talent for the other; but Benjamin's ideal translator would open up new

[23] Steven Rendall, 'The Translator's Task, Walter Benjamin (Translation)', *TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction*, 10.2 (1997), 153, doi:10.7202/037302ar.
[24] Ibid., 163.
[25] Walter Benjamin, 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers' in Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften Bd. IV/1*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991), 19.
[26] Rendall, 'The Translator's Task', 152.

possibilities for poetry by paving a way towards this pure language. In this way, translation can revitalise poetic practice in the target language.

While Benjamin's essay is often held up as a touchstone of translation theory, it has occasionally been criticised. As Antoine Berman highlights, 'Benjamin's preface should by rights be titled "The Task of Translation," given that Benjamin says virtually nothing about the translator in the essay.'[27] Furthermore, when Benjamin characterises the translator, it is in ambivalent terms: as 'adequate', 'chosen', and 'genuine', but also repeatedly as 'bad'.[28] However, the translation history of 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers' might allow us to further develop Benjamin's theory of translation. In Paul de Man's 1983 lecture on the essay, he directs our attention to the multiple implications of the title. While 'Aufgabe' is most commonly translated as 'task' – and that is indeed the primary resonance of the word – 'Aufgabe' 'can also mean the one who has to give up.'[29] De Man describes this as the 'defeat' of the translator, and wonders 'why this failure with regard to an original text, to an original poet, is for Benjamin exemplary.'[30] Within de Man's framework of failure, Benjamin's pure language remains negatively charged, as it 'does not exist except as a permanent disjunction which inhabits all languages as such, including and especially the language one calls one's own. What is to be one's own language is the most displaced, the most alienated of all.'[31] In this rendition, translation is doomed to fail, but also to remind us of the failure of all language, and our ultimate alienation.

However, if we turn our attention to what de Man calls the 'messianic' element of the text, perhaps the *Aufgabe* can be reframed: instead of 'giving up', it might be better translated as a 'surrender'.[32] In keeping with the religious undertones of Benjamin's text,

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[27] Cited in Emily Apter, 'Taskography: Translation as Genre of Literary Labor', *PMLA*, 122.5 (2007), 1411.
[28] Rendall, 'The Translator's Task', 152.
[29] Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 80.
[30] Ibid., 80.
[31] Ibid., 92.
[32] Ibid., 76.

the task of the translator may be to surrender themselves to the higher power of the text, to give themselves over to pure language. This offers a reappraisal of the creative potential of translation. Benjamin praises several poet-translators who he sees to have fulfilled that task, and therefore renovated their own language by translating from another: Luther, Voss, George, and Hölderlin (himself translated by Pizarnik) are celebrated as pioneers who opened up new possibilities for the German language.[33] Benjamin signals the generative potential of translation, and in fact the necessity of the task – or the surrender – that he suggests. Instead of a focus on failure, it is possible to consider translation as (re)generation.

The concept of surrender, or giving oneself over to the text, resonates with translation criticism produced later in the twentieth century. At times, the translator is perceived to be missing to the extent that their absence is the topic of discussion, as in Lawrence Venuti's 1986 essay 'The Translator's Invisibility', a phrase which later became the title for his 1995 book on the history of translation.[34] Venuti focuses primarily on the figure of the translator, examining how their agency is made invisible both by reader response and by the conditions of production and evaluation of translations. The emphasis on fluency as a metric by which to judge the translated text leads to a conception of the translator as a pure medium for the author's message: 'fluency in translation produces an effect of transparency, whereby the translated text is taken to represent the foreign author's personality or intention or the essential meaning of his text.'[35] This leads to the assumption that there must be a single 'correct' translation, unaffected by the translator's

[33] Rendall, 'The Translator's Task', 163.
[34] Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (Routledge, 1995).
[35] Lawrence Venuti, 'The Translator's Invisibility', *Criticism*, 28.2 (1986), 187.

interpretation. This diminishes the translator's creative contributions; the translator, consequently, is effaced.

However, Venuti's suggestion for a creative strategy to overcome this invisibility has been contested. He argues that the translated text must perform its own translated nature: 'the translation must be seen as a *tertium datum*, which "sounds foreign" to the reader but has an opaque quality that prevents it from seeming a transparent window on the author or original text'.[36] This new binary of domestication and foreignisation has been increasingly criticised in recent years for essentialising a notion of 'foreignness'. Kavita Bhanot and Jeremy Tiang – the editors of *Violent Phenomena*, an anthology highlighting decolonial approaches to translation – note:

> The main problem with the domesticating/foreignising framework, is that it defines translation strategy in terms of difference from a presumed normality. In this paradigm, the 'mainstream' perspective is presumed to be a neutral, stable centre […] against which all translations must be measured.[37]

Venuti's strategy for countering the translator's invisibility, while resisting the idea of essentialising the original text's meaning, instead essentialises an 'otherness' which is attributed to the foreign language, text, and culture. It also presumes a typical reader in the target language and culture, who would perceive said 'foreignness' in the same way. And this is all within the English-language context, which reinforces dominant power dynamics given the hegemonic status of English as a global language; as Bhanot and Tiang note, this framework of domestication/foreignisation presumes the English-language text and English-language reader to be 'mainstream', to the detriment of other readers and languages. Furthermore, when it comes to translating poetry, poetic language is often

[36] Venuti, 'The Translator's Invisibility', 190.
[37] Kavita Bhanot and Jeremy Tiang, 'Introduction', in *Violent Phenomena: 21 Essays on Translation*, ed. by Bhanot and Tiang (Tilted Axis Press, 2022), 10.

considered to be atypical or abnormal in comparison to standard usage; trying to identify 'domesticated' or 'foreignised' language in poetry could seem fruitless.

Other critics have offered alternative frameworks for understanding the unique status of translation. Emily Apter's 2005 article 'Taskography: Translation as Genre of Literary Labor' understands translation as a specific form of literary activity and genre that should be assessed differently to the original text, although she is also interested in destabilising the binary between source and target text, or original and translation. Taking Eleanor Marx's translation of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* as her primary example, Apter implies that a foreignising approach would not be necessary as there is an 'intractable foreignness that is inevitably preserved in all translations, regardless of the translator's level of fluency'.[38] While this contributes once more to an essentialised 'foreignness' which lends a dubious exoticism to all translated texts, this 'foreignness' could also be a way of describing what elsewhere Apter names as translation's ability to effect 'a subtle generic shift in how we view the literary text'.[39] While translations may – and often do – attempt to convince us that we are reading something originally composed in that language, it is increasingly likely that readers are aware of the translated status of a literary text, and their interpretation is altered as a result; there is a sense of distance or mediation engendered by the knowledge that one is reading a work in translation.

Apter views this distance between the reader and the translated text as potentially beneficial. If translation becomes a genre with its own set of criteria, the translator is not a mere imitator of the original author, but instead the author of the translation. A consciousness of translation allows us to re-evaluate the supposed singularity of the text and the singularity of its author: the text becomes '*l'œuvre œuvrée*, the worked and

[38] Apter, 'Taskography', 1406.
[39] Ibid., 1410.

working text. No longer a stable object owned by a single author, it emerges as a site of translational or editorial labor'.[40] An appreciation of translation as genre allows us to value the creative contributions of the translator, and their consistent working of the text.

The concept of 'editorial labor' resonates with Karen Emmerich's creative understanding of editing, from her 2017 book *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals*. Emmerich maintains that the idea of an 'original' is less stable than traditional translation theory would have us believe, with varied editorial histories destabilising this 'original': 'the "source," the presumed object of translation, is not a stable ideal […] but a volatile compound that experiences continual textual configurations.'[41] Just as we can challenge the concept that 'foreignness' is a discrete and essential quality, so too should we challenge the essentialising of the original text. Translation consequently is just another process in the text's editorial history, a form of 'translingual editing' that 'continues the iterative growth of a work whose otherness *and* self-sameness are always provisional'.[42] By upsetting the hierarchy of original and translation to argue that both texts are 'derivative', Emmerich reframes our understanding of the status of translation, and as such, opens up possibilities for reimagining originality.[43] Attention to the instability of the source can also transform the way translations are evaluated. For example, Gareth Wood, addressing criticism of Jorge Luis Borges' translation of William Faulkner's *The Wild Palms*, notes that certain omissions might not have been because of Borges' propriety, as Efraín Kristal suggests, but instead a result of the fact that Borges was working from a UK edition of the text.[44]

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[40] Apter, 'Taskography', 1410.
[41] Karen Emmerich, *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 2.
[42] Ibid., 4.
[43] Ibid., 14.
[44] Gareth Wood, *Javier Marías's Debt to Translation: Sterne, Browne, Nabokov* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 141.

With this increased focus on the originality and creativity of translation, the translator is often presented as a creative practitioner, particularly in the emerging genre of the translator memoir. Translator memoirs bring together autobiography and theory to argue for the subjectivity of the translator. A growing trend in Anglophone literature, they are also present in the Argentine context, with Editorial Entropía publishing translator memoirs by novelist and translator Marcelo Cohen in 2014,[45] and poet and translator Laura Wittner in 2021.[46] One prominent example from the Anglophone world is Kate Briggs' *This Little Art* (first published in 2017), which draws both on her experience as a translator of Roland Barthes' lectures, and on examples of so-called 'bad' translations from literary history. Briggs defends the titular 'little art' of translation against the supposedly grander art of 'original' literature in a provocative way: she defends women translators who have been labelled 'bad', in order to show the intrinsic creative labour of translation. For Briggs, what these translators occasionally lack in grammatical accuracy, they make up for with their creativity and careful handling of the text. She is insistent on the labour of translation, characterising it as '*to have handled every single word* (space and punctuation mark) of the writing-to-be-translated, *to have taken a decision in relation to* its every single word (space and punctuation mark), and indeed *to have written* every single one of its parts' [emphasis in original].[47] Translation is seen as inseparable from the act of writing – as an ongoing, insistent, and creative working of the text, regardless of whether it might be perceived as such by the reader.

Translation is frequently described by contemporary poet-translators as a form of creative production. Wittner's translator memoir, *Se vive y se traduce* (2021), presents her

[45] Marcelo Cohen, *Música prosaica (cuatro piezas sobre traducción)*, 1st reprint (Entropía, 2017). First published 2014.
[46] Laura Wittner, *Se vive y se traduce*, 1st reprint (Entropía, 2023). First published 2021.
[47] Kate Briggs, *This Little Art*, 7th edn (Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2021), 268.

twin roles as poet in Spanish and translator from English. She suggests that translation is not only a creative act, but a source for further 'original' writing; while Emmerich, for example, maintains that the original and translation have more commonalities than differences, Wittner blurs the bounds between source and target altogether. She characterises her translation process as both creation and derivation, originality and plagiarism: 'Algunos domingos de lluvia traduzco versos sueltos de poemas y como son sueltos me tomo bastantes libertades y como me tomo bastantes libertades me los robo.'[48] Translation does not simply respond to an existing, stable source text (itself a highly contested notion), but serves as a prompt for creativity and invention, a practice that bleeds into the production of new literary texts. A pertinent example is Susan Bassnett's translation of Pizarnik; the volume *Exchanging Lives* includes Bassnett's original English-language poems, generated by her sustained interaction with Pizarnik's work.[49]

Don Mee Choi develops similar ideas further in her landmark essay *Translation is a Mode=Translation is an Anti-neocolonial Mode*, which takes the first part of its title from Walter Benjamin's essay; the second part refers to her work as a translator of feminist Korean poetry. As a poet and translator, Choi sees these practices as necessarily twinned, entangled with and inseparable from the politics of language: 'My tongue and your tongue are already an aggregate, a site of multiple and collective enunciation.'[50] While Choi is particularly focused on the hostile politics that have forced this aggregation, her contribution is vital for considering the originality and creativity of translation. No tongue, no language, is necessarily individual or singular, as no text is purely original; instead,

[48] Wittner, *Se vive y se traduce*, 25.
[49] Susan Bassnett and Alejandra Pizarnik, *Exchanging Lives: Poems and Translations* (Peepal Tree, 2002).
[50] Don Mee Choi, *Translation Is a Mode=Translation Is an Anti-Neocolonial Mode* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2020), 7.

both tongue and text are aggregate, shaped by multiple forces. For both Benjamin and Choi, translation is not simply the reproduction of an existing text, but a literary mode.

Within discussions of literary translation, poetry translation has drawn particular attention. The cliché goes that it is impossible to translate poetry, and so the practice is often maligned. This is particularly true of translations of lyric poetry, which is often strongly associated with the individual's poetic subjectivity – making translations vulnerable to accusations of 'infidelity'. Jonathan Culler, in *Theory of the Lyric*, addresses how lyric has become the dominant way of understanding poetry. Considering the enduring dominance of the Romantic theory of the lyric, Culler observes that a defining feature is that the 'lyric poet absorbs into himself [sic] the external world and stamps it with inner consciousness, and the unity of the poem is provided by this subjectivity.'[51] If poetry is read as lyric, then poetry translation is measured against its ability to correspond to a subjective impression of this subjectivity.

Furthermore, while all literary translations require consideration of semantics, form, and sound, poetry translation highlights the extent to which these elements can come into conflict with each other. This has led some to dispute whether it can even be called translation. Don Paterson refers to his 'versions' of Antonio Machado's poetry, and declares that it is 'surely, by now, axiomatic that poetry cannot be translated in a way that will preserve anything of the flavour of the original.'[52] As a result, Paterson argues that 'the only defensible fidelity is to the entirely subjective quality of "spirit" or "vision", rather than to literal meaning'.[53] This narrow conception of poetry translation has been critiqued by scholars and practitioners alike. Charlie Louth, while praising the quality of

[51] Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Harvard University Press, 2015), 2.
[52] Don Paterson, *The Eyes: A Version of Antonio Machado* (Faber & Faber, 1999), 56 <https://www.proquest.com/books/eyes-version-antonio-machado/docview/2147681116/se-2> [accessed 25 March 2026].
[53] Ibid., 58.

Paterson's versions of Rainer Maria Rilke, disputes the theoretical distinction between translations and versions: 'There is no alternative to attending to the word, whether translating or "versioning", and even the most basic kind of translation (which is really what Paterson reduces 'translation' to), the crib, will, in respecting the lexical, literal meaning of the words, inevitably open towards something more mysterious'.[54] Louth notes that Paterson also agrees there can be 'a lot of poetry in a literal version'.[55] Poetry translation is therefore possible, but in Louth's conception, it must attend in some way to semantics, and 'it needs to be a poem in its own right if it is to be more than a crib, but this has always been the case.'[56]

Contemporary critics also consider the ethics of hiding behind a 'version'. In the essay 'Western Poets Kidnap Your Poems and Call Them Translations: On the Colonial Phenomenon of Rendition as Translation', Mona Kareem observes how the 'co-opting' of literary translation often reflects latent attitudes towards non-Western literatures. She draws attention to the euphemistic use of terms like 'versions', 'bridge translations', or even what she calls 'renditions' – a play on 'extraordinary rendition', meaning state-sponsored abduction.[57] Kareem defends the creativity of translators in the face of the silent assumption that their work is literal, or simply a matter of translating words from one language to another. Translators who are not explicitly poets are still creative writers: 'What poets who are not translators fail to understand is that it is exactly "style, tone, and content" that makes or breaks a translator.'[58] Translators do not simply produce literal

[54] Charlie Louth, *Crossings: Essays on Poetry and Translation from Hölderlin to Jaccottet* (Legenda, 2024), 190.
[55] Ibid., 190.
[56] Ibid., 191.
[57] Mona Kareem, 'Western Poets Kidnap Your Poems and Call Them Translations: On the Colonial Phenomenon of Rendition as Translation', in *Violent Phenomena: 21 Essays on Translation*, ed. by Bhanot and Tiang, 144.
[58] Ibid., 144.

translations, but they are already attentive to the creative and subjective questions of style and tone.

A vital element of this thesis is the specific status of translation in Latin American literature. Recent works such as *The Routledge Handbook of Latin American Literary Translation* (2023) highlight the region's role as a 'specific *locus* of enunciation' for translation theory, given that translations were seen as fundamental for expanding the possibilities of Spanish-language literature in the new republics of the region.[59] Rubén Darío and Spanish-American *modernismo*, for example, took inspiration from the French language and Symbolist poetry as a way to move beyond Spanish-language traditions and the influence of the former colonial power, instead forging a new poetic identity. Cabrera and Kripper's volume is a milestone in establishing the importance of Latin American literary translation; yet developments in Latin American translation theory have often anticipated Anglo-European translation studies by several decades, and 'new' discoveries in translation studies can often find a precursor in Latin America. The most obvious example would be Jorge Luis Borges, who published the landmark essay 'Las versiones homéricas' as early as 1932. Borges' essay challenges the idea that fidelity is what makes a translation, and highlights the instability of the source text: 'El concepto de *texto definitivo* no corresponde sino a la religión o al cansancio.'[60] While poetry translation is seen to be challenging, as we cannot know the difference between 'lo que pertenece al poeta y lo que pertenece al lenguaje', Borges celebrates this: 'A esa dificultad feliz debemos la posibilidad de tantas versiones, todas sinceras, genuinas y divergentes.'[61]

[59] Delfina Cabrera and Denise Kripper, 'Delineating a Latin American Approach to Literary Translation' in *The Routledge Handbook of Latin American Literary Translation*, ed. by Cabrera and Kripper (Routledge, 2023), 1.
[60] Jorge Luis Borges, *Discusión*, 5th reprint (Alianza, 1995), 90.
[61] Ibid., 91.

Studies of Borges have become a touchstone of Latin American translation criticism. In *La constelación del sur: traductores y traducciones en la literatura argentina del siglo XX*, Patricia Willson highlights Borges' work as a translator and his belief in the instability of the text: 'Como se sabe, si todo es traducción, o si todo es copia, todo es, también, original; dicho radicalmente: si *todo* es traducción, *nada* también lo es.'[62] This decontextualisation of the translated text is foundational to Borges' literary production and translation practice. For example, when his project to produce a full-length translation of James Joyce's *Ulysses* fell through, the final result ends up being a single-page version of the novel, which only includes the end of Molly Bloom's monologue. This translation 'no sólo entraña una *descontextualización*, sino también una *descotextualización*, es decir, una eliminación del cotexto del texto traducido.'[63] The translation in this case has lost its source, its co-text: instead, it becomes a free agent, a literary text in its own right, with the ability to disregard the text which came before – indeed, this is true of how many literary translations circulate today.

This is exemplary of what Sergio Waisman terms 'displacement and irreverence', essential to Borges' understanding of both literature and translation.[64] This approach was foundational to Borges, and also to the publishing culture of the twentieth century. The avant-garde magazines of the 1920s and 1930s, including *Martín Fierro* and *Proa*, featured translations to internationalise their publications and engage in cosmopolitan networks. Beatriz Sarlo notes: 'Podría decirse, sin exagerar, que en los años veinte y treinta los escritores argentinos eligen de todas partes, traducen y el que no puede traducir lee traducciones, las difunde, publica o propagandiza'.[65] Alongside writers like Roberto

[62] Patricia Willson, *La constelación del sur: traductores y traducciones en la literatura argentina del siglo XX* (Siglo Veintiuno Editores Argentina, 2004), 111.
[63] Ibid., 118.
[64] Sergio Waisman, *Borges and Translation: The Irreverence of the Periphery* (Bucknell University Press, 2005), 40.
[65] Beatriz Sarlo, *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires, 1920 y 1930* (Ediciones Nueva Visión, 1988), 43.

Arlt, the role of Victoria Ocampo's magazine *Sur* cannot be overstated; Sergio Waisman has noted that *Sur* operated 'a politics of cultural importation' which placed Latin America at the centre, rather than the periphery, leading to an irreverent approach to non-Latin American texts in translation.[66] Consequently, texts that were translated for *Sur* could 'be appropriated by Latin American writers through their individual styles and preferences', as seen with Borges' translations of Faulkner, Virginia Woolf, and others.[67]

Octavio Paz is another poet-translator of relevance for this thesis, not least because of his friendship with Pizarnik. Paz translated and co-translated a wide variety of poetry from several languages, from Japanese haiku to the poetry of Fernando Pessoa. His 1971 book of essays, *Traducción: literatura y literalidad*, makes the claim that all texts somehow originate via 'translation':

> Cada texto es único y, simultáneamente, es la traducción de otro texto. Ningún texto es enteramente original porque el lenguaje mismo, en su esencia, es ya una traducción: primero, del mundo no-verbal y, después, porque cada signo y cada frase es la traducción de otro signo y de otra frase.[68]

Paz evokes the Romantic notion of an impossible pure language; however, with the influence of psychoanalysis, he attributes this to the 'mundo no-verbal', which in Lacanian psychoanalytic terms is the 'real', or that which cannot be described in language. Paz suggests that every text is unique and yet no text is: because 'el lenguaje' is understood as translation, even 'original' texts are composed through a kind of translation.

Paz asserts the importance of creativity in translation, and sees composition and translation as analogous processes: while the poet, composing freely, works with 'el lenguaje en movimiento, materia prima del poeta', the translator works with 'el lenguaje fijo del poema. Lenguaje congelado y, no obstante, perfectamente vivo.'[69] But while the

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[66] Waisman, *Borges and Translation*, 35.
[67] Ibid., 36.
[68] Paz, *Traducción*, 9.
[69] Ibid., 15.

process differs, the goal of the poet and the translator is perceived to be the same: the ideal is that either poem 'consiste en producir con medios diferentes efectos análogos'.[70] Paz's conception of poetry translation fundamentally associates translating poetry with writing poetry, and sees it as a similarly creative act.

Isabel Gómez's *Cannibal Translation* (2023) considers Paz in a panorama of Latin American translation practices, and offers vital reflections on literary translation's creativity. Drawing on Brazilian poet Haroldo de Campos' conception of literary cannibalism, Gómez presents a 'cannibal translation archive', which 'destabilizes the idea of textual originals to invent practices that reject what Roman Jakobson calls "translation proper," between two languages.'[71] Gómez's expansive sense of translation is derived from a 'reciprocal translation praxis cultivated in Latin America' between Paz, Haroldo and Augusto de Campos, Rosario Castellanos, Clarice Lispector, and others.[72] Gómez highlights the ethical considerations of the book, which 'include amplifying translations into languages other than English [and] figuring Latin America as a producer of translation theories'.[73]

Cannibal Translation is one of several recent studies which have sought to highlight the creativity and autonomy of Latin American translators, and the widespread influence of translation on intellectual and cultural life in the region. Translators themselves are increasingly the subject of fiction; Heather Cleary examines their representation in *The Translator's Visibility: Scenes from Contemporary Latin American Fiction* (2020),[74] while Denise Kripper's 2023 monograph privileges mistranslation as a

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[70] Paz, *Traducción*, 16.
[71] Isabel C. Gómez, *Cannibal Translation: Literary Reciprocity in Contemporary Latin America* (Northwestern University Press, 2023), 5.
[72] Ibid., 7.
[73] Ibid., 17.
[74] Heather Cleary, *The Translator's Visibility: Scenes from Contemporary Latin American Fiction* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

form of disrupting preconceived ideas of translation.[75] In this critical landscape, I aim to continue this work by presenting Pizarnik and Thénon as poet-translators with creative translation practices.

Literary translation is the initial focus of this thesis, but there are other types of translation that shape the development of my argument. Self-translation is an important consideration – particularly with regard to translation's role in the generation of 'original poetry' – and has generated significant critical interest in recent years. Discussions of self-translation often go hand in hand with literary translingualism, which Steven G. Kellman defines as 'the phenomenon of authors who write in more than one language or at least in a language other than their primary one.'[76] Translingualism often gives rise to self-translation, and critical studies often unite the two. For example, Kellman co-edited *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translingualism* (2022) with Natasha Lvovich, which includes Eva Gentes and Trish Van Bolderen's chapter on self-translation.[77] This is often seen to be a generative practice, from famous practitioners including Vladimir Nabokov and Samuel Beckett, to contemporary authors like the German-Japanese author Yoko Tawada, as explored in a chapter in Marjorie Perloff's *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century* (2010).[78] Self-translation challenges hierarchies between author and translator, original and translation, source and target, to productive effect.

Perhaps the most contested form of translation is intermedial translation. This might fall under the umbrella of Jakobson's 'intersemiotic translation', which he also calls

[75] Denise Kripper, *Narratives of Mistranslation* (Routledge, 2023).
[76] Steven G. Kellman, *The Translingual Imagination* (University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 8.
[77] Eva Gentes and Trish Van Bolderen, 'Self-Translation', in *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translingualism*. ed. by Steven G. Kellman and Natasha Lvovich (Routledge, 2022), 369–81.
[78] Marjorie Perloff, 'Language in Migration: Multilingualism and Exophonic Writing in the New Poetics', in Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 123–45.

'transposition',[79] understood as the 'interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems.'[80] While translation can be used as a way to grasp these relationships between forms of semiosis, critics have voiced concerns about vagueness in these definitions of translation, particularly when images are involved. In their volume *Translation and Multimodality*, Monica Boria and Marcus Tomalin note that '[t]here is currently no consensus about which sorts of meaning (re)communications can legitimately be classified as instances of translation', and that this vagueness increases once images or other multimodal forms are involved.[81] The term translation 'is currently deployed to denote meaning transfer across different modes and also within the same mode.'[82]

However, despite the risks of ambiguity, translation remains an important term, not least because Pizarnik and Thénon use it to characterise the relationship between language and image. While terms like ekphrasis – referring to the written description of visual art – can describe this relationship, ekphrasis is more limited and illustrative, whereas translation implies a transformative process. Classical lyric poets like Horace famously argued that 'in poetry as in painting', but Pizarnik and Thénon use 'translation' to emphasise the difference between art and poetry, as well as the possibility of overcoming that difference.[83] For both poets, language and image are very different forms that at times appear irreconcilable. Ultimately, 'translation', rather than any other term, seems to represent the process of mediating between these two modes of expression.

Within the Latin American context, there is a precedent for considering 'una extendida porosidad de las fronteras entre los diferentes campos de la estética', in the

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[79] Jakobson, 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation', 151.
[80] Ibid., 147.
[81] Monica Boria and Marcus Tomalin, 'Introduction', in *Translation and Multimodality: Beyond Words*, ed. by Monica Boria and others (Routledge, 2019), 3.
[82] Ibid., 5.
[83] Horace, *Satires; Epistles; the Art of Poetry*, trans. by H. R. Fairclough (Harvard University Press, 2014), 443.

words of Argentine critic Florencia Garramuño.[84] In *Mundos en común: ensayos sobre la inespecificidad en el arte*, Garramuño considers a series of contemporary practices where blurring boundaries is vital for achieving an expanded form of expression. For example, for Brazilian writer and artist Laura Erber, '[d]ibujo y texto se intercalan en la construcción de un discurso único que, al mismo tiempo, prolifera y se abre cada vez más gracias a cierta independencia de cada uno de ellos, que sin embargo mantienen, a su vez, una comunidad de sentido.'[85] Translation between different media can therefore open up discursive possibilities for poets beyond the limits of a single medium, making intermedial translation – and specifically visual translation – an important element of my discussion.

Pizarnik Studies

In the fifty or so years following Pizarnik's death, there has been an abundance of critical studies that discuss her life and work, making a full account beyond the scope of this thesis. However, a number of key developments have made Pizarnik studies possible, primarily thanks to the work of Ana Becciú and Cristina Piña. Becciú has edited major editions of Pizarnik's collected works for the Spanish press Lumen: most notably *Poesía completa*,[86] *Prosa completa*,[87] and *Diarios*.[88] Beyond the obvious risks of aiming for completeness in an author's collected works, Becciú's work has been criticised for portraying Pizarnik in a specific light. The version of Pizarnik that appears in *Poesía completa*, for example, reinforces the 'suicide-poet myth': the back cover quotes Pizarnik saying 'Sé, de una manera visionaria, que moriré de poesía'.[89] The choice of the final

[84] Florencia Garramuño, *Mundos en común: ensayos sobre la inespecificidad en el arte* (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2015), 14.
[85] Ibid., 23.
[86] Alejandra Pizarnik, *Poesía completa*, ed. by Ana Becciú, 2nd edn (Lumen, 2016).
[87] Alejandra Pizarnik, *Prosa completa*, ed. by Ana Becciú (Lumen, 2015).
[88] Pizarnik, *Diarios*.
[89] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, back cover.

poem – reportedly taken from Pizarnik's blackboard the month she died – ends with the lines 'hasta el fondo'.[90] Fiona Mackintosh has noted how this fuels the myth, since 'it is usually read as a desire to plumb the depths of the ultimate mystery, death', interpreting 'el fondo' in a specific way.[91]

Piña has criticised Becciú's first edition of Pizarnik's diaries, which 'parecería tener como una de sus metas –consciente o inconsciente– darnos una determinada imagen de Pizarnik, una figuración autoral en gran medida construida por la editora'.[92] Piña highlights errors and excisions, and questions whether Becciú wanted to produce a writer's diary, given the inclusion of personal, sexual, and familial references.[93] Piña's criticisms are valid, although it could be argued that any posthumous publication of an author's collected works would always feature signs of editorial decision-making.

Furthermore, Piña is one of the key contributors – alongside Becciú – to the specific image of Pizarnik that circulates today, as a leading biographer of Pizarnik. Following a first biography published in 1991,[94] Piña co-authored a new volume with Patricia Venti, *Alejandra Pizarnik: biografía de un mito* (2022).[95] Both volumes include substantial research of significant benefit to Pizarnik studies – although, as the title of the revised biography suggests, they do not strongly challenge the prevailing mythology around Pizarnik. In a footnote, the authors go so far as to offer a Lacanian interpretation of Pizarnik's surname (originally spelled Pozharnik), arguing that the etymology – derived from the Russian for fire, 'pozhar' – is significant because of 'ese amor por la literatura

[90] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 453.
[91] Mackintosh, 'Self-Censorship', 519.
[92] Cristina Piña, 'Manipulación, censura e imagen de autor en la nueva edición de los diarios de Alejandra Pizarnik', *Valenciana: revista de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad de Guanajuato*, 10.20 (2017), 30.
[93] Ibid., 33.
[94] Cristina Piña, *Alejandra Pizarnik* (Planeta, 1991).
[95] Cristina Piña and Patricia Venti, *Alejandra Pizarnik: biografía de un mito* (Lumen, 2022).

que desde que era muy pequeña empezó a arder en ella hasta convertirse en el incendio que arrasó con su vida y en ese desborde incandescente que marca su palabra.'[96] Not only does this reinforce the sense that literature is what led to Pizarnik's death, the word 'pozharnik' in fact means 'firefighter', a much less fatalistic image.[97] While Piña may disagree with Becciú's choices, Piña's own work creates similar effects. Their approach has been criticised by scholars including Anahí Mallol. With reference to tragic and biographical readings of her oeuvre, Mallol argues that 'estas formas de leer traicionan la poética misma de Pizarnik', given its strong focus on language: not to mention the humour of her later work.[98]

As a result, this thesis aims to move away from strictly biographical interpretations by reading Pizarnik's oeuvre through the lens of translation. Instead of dwelling on the apparent impossibility of literature and the failure of language, I argue that different forms of translation represent strategies for Pizarnik to continue writing. Fiona Mackintosh has raised awareness of Pizarnik as translator, analysing her prose translations of the Surrealists André Breton and Paul Eluard, and of the novelist Marguerite Duras. Mackintosh argues that Pizarnik adopted 'incipient feminist translation strategies' when translating the Surrealists; while translating Duras allowed Pizarnik to fulfil her goal of writing a novel.[99] I hope to highlight Pizarnik's prolific translation career by analysing a selection of her poetry translations. Ivonne Bordelois' recent account (2024) of her co-

[96] Piña and Venti, *Alejandra Pizarnik*, 34.
[97] 'пожарник', *Oxford Dictionaries*, n.d. <https://premium.oxforddictionaries.com/translate/russian-english/%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B6%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA> [accessed 28 March 2026].
[98] Anahí Mallol, 'Alejandra Pizarnik: El exilio de la lengua', *Cuadernos LIRICO*, special issue, published online 26 May 2023, doi:10.4000/lirico.13929.
[99] Fiona J. Mackintosh, 'Alejandra Pizarnik as Translator', *The Translator*, 16.1 (2010), 63, doi:10.1080/13556509.2010.10799293.

translation with Pizarnik of French poet Yves Bonnefoy brings important archival information to light, but there is a clear need for further research.[100]

In recent years, there has been renewed engagement with Pizarnik's relationship to the French language. Patricio Ferrari published two books in 2018 that brought Pizarnik's French poetry to light: *Poemas franceses* (in Ferrari's Spanish translation),[101] and *The Galloping Hour*, an expanded selection co-translated into English with Forrest Gander.[102] However, very little scholarship has been produced about the French poems, even though Ferrari notes that 'lo cierto es que por lo menos seis de los textos franceses […] darán origen a algún título, texto o parte de texto' in Pizarnik's Spanish poetry.[103] One of the few existing studies, by Fernando Copello, was published in a special issue of *Cuadernos LIRICO*, following an international symposium held at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris to mark 50 years since Pizarnik's death.[104] The special issue represents a significant reappraisal of Pizarnik's engagement with the French language, and demonstrates the benefits of a multilingual approach to her work.[105]

The recent anniversary of Pizarnik's death prompted several commemorations that have advanced Pizarnik studies: not only regarding her time in Paris, but also her engagement with visual art. In 2022, the Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno in Buenos Aires held the exhibition 'Alejandra Pizarnik. Palabra e imagen', and the catalogue features contributions from scholars including Mariana Di Ció and Evelyn Galiazo.[106] Di

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[100] Bordelois, *Bonnefoy y Pizarnik*.
[101] Alejandra Pizarnik, *Poemas franceses*, ed. and trans. by Patricio Ferrari (Cuadro de Tiza, 2018).
[102] Alejandra Pizarnik, *The Galloping Hour: French Poems*, ed. and trans. by Patricio Ferrari, trans. by Forrest Gander (New Directions, 2018).
[103] Pizarnik, *Poemas franceses*, 39.
[104] Fernando Copello, 'Noche y erotismo en un poema francés de Alejandra Pizarnik: "Le sexe, la nuit"', *Cuadernos LIRICO*, special issue, published online 26 May 2023, doi:10.4000/lirico.13960.
[105] *Pizarnik y París*, ed. by Hélène Davoine and Valentina Litvan, special issue of *Cuadernos LIRICO*, published online 24 May 2023, doi:10.4000/lirico.13906.
[106] *Alejandra Pizarnik: entre la imagen y la palabra*, ed. by Guillermo David (Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno, 2022).

Ció has also published a monograph on the visual elements of Pizarnik's archive,[107] while Galiazo has written an article on visuality in Pizarnik's poetry.[108] Carlota Caulfield pioneered the study of the image in Pizarnik's work, publishing a 1992 article on the influence of painting and Surrealism on Pizarnik's last collections.[109] These studies are influential, but they do not describe the relationship between language and image as a form of translation, despite Pizarnik herself using this framing. In dialogue with these ideas, I consider the possibility of visual translation in Pizarnik's poetry.

Thénon Studies

While Pizarnik studies have proliferated, much less attention has been paid to Thénon, despite the vitality of her work's poetic and political themes. Most contemporary scholarship owes its existence to Ana María Barrenechea, the Argentine literary scholar who taught Thénon at the University of Buenos Aires and became her friend. It is hard to overstate Barrenechea's influence; Marcela Croce describes her as a 'fundadora de objetos críticos' and 'quien estableció los objetos más proliferantes de la crítica argentina, modificando y actualizando permanentemente su labor.'[110] Barrenechea began publishing on Thénon's work as early as the 1980s, shaping early critical readings of Thénon's poetry.[111]

[107] Mariana Di Ció, *Une calligraphie des ombres : les manuscrits d'Alejandra Pizarnik* (Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 2014).
[108] Evelyn Galiazo, 'Alejandra Pizarnik o leer lo visible y contemplar lo legible', *Artilugio* 9 (2023), 135–48.
[109] Carlota Caulfield, 'Entre la poesía y la pintura: elementos surrealistas en *Extracción de la piedra de locura* y *El infierno musical* de Alejandra Pizarnik,' *Chasqui*, 21.1 (1992), 3–10.
[110] Marcela Croce, 'Ana María Barrenechea, fundadora de objetos críticos', *Cuadernos LIRICO*, 9, published online 1 September 2013, doi:10.4000/lirico.1086.
[111] Ana María Barrenechea, 'El texto poético como parodia del discurso crítico: los últimos poemas de Susana Thénon', *Dispositio* 12.30/32 (1987), 255–72.

Furthermore, Barrenechea and the poet María Negroni edited the first two volumes of Thénon's collected works, *La morada imposible*.[112] A third volume of Thénon's collected works, titled *Paraíso de nadie* and edited by Negroni alone, was published in 2022.[113] This editorial work has opened up possibilities for Thénon studies, publishing large amounts of archival material. Further archival research is also possible thanks to Negroni, who established the Fondo Susana Thénon at the Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero (UNTREF) in Buenos Aires in 2015. Additional uncatalogued material was incorporated to the Fondo Thénon in 2022, including press clippings, correspondence, and items related to Thénon's collaboration with the translator Renata Treitel. Negroni founded the 'Grupo Palimpsestos' with students at UNTREF, with the aim of conducting archival research, and in 2025 the group published their findings in the collection *Susana Thénon: Todas las voces del grito*, opening up important avenues for future studies.[114]

Alongside Barrenechea and Negroni's foundational contributions, there are a number of Argentine academics who have led the way in producing detailed studies of Thénon. Mariana Di Ció has written on Thénon's early poetics,[115] and Paola Cortés Rocca's ambitious study of *distancias* established several lines of inquiry: literary criticism, translation, photography, and dance.[116] As such, there is a recurring sense of interdisciplinarity throughout scholarship on Thénon. Dance has inspired several innovative critical studies of Thénon's work, including Juanita Cifuentes-Louault's article on choreographic poetry,[117] and Victoria Alcala's article on embodiment as explored

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[112] Susana Thénon, *La morada imposible*, ed. by Ana María Barrenechea and María Negroni, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Corregidor, 2019–2021).
[113] Susana Thénon, *Paraíso de nadie*, ed. by María Negroni (Corregidor, 2022).
[114] *Susana Thénon: todas las voces del grito*, ed. by Analía de la Fuente (Corregidor, 2025).
[115] Mariana Di Ció, 'Susana Thénon, despoetada', in *Poetas hispanoamericanas contemporáneas: poéticas y metapoéticas*, ed. by Milena Rodríguez Gutiérrez (Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2021), 158–72.
[116] Paola Cortés Rocca, 'Rueda de mujeres. Acerca de Susana Thénon', *Cuadernos LIRICO*, 9, published online 1 September 2013, doi:10.4000/lirico.1125.
[117] Juanita Cifuentes-Louault, 'La poésie chorégraphique de Susana Thénon', *ILCEA*, 24, published online 21 October 2015, doi:10.4000/ilcea.3577.

through poetry and dance.[118] Alcala has also published a biography, *Susana Thénon. Loba esteparia*, an important resource that provides substantial factual evidence following archival research and interviews, as well as creative interpretations of Thénon's life and poetry.[119]

Translation has been addressed by scholars of Thénon, although mostly in a general or thematic way. Barrenechea and others have analysed Thénon's work through the lens of translation, and while translation offers useful language for considering her various creative activities, little work has been done to analyse Thénon's strategies as a translator.[120] With the exception of Corina Dellutri's contribution to *Susana Thénon: Todas las voces del grito*[121] and Blanche Turck's master's thesis[122] – both analysing Thénon's translations of Rilke – there has not yet been a detailed study of Thénon's engagement with translation. This is in keeping with the limited scholarship available more generally, and some recent publications on Thénon's work have addressed the relative absence of critical studies. Manuela Morrone has written on Thénon's position outside of the canon,[123] and in the prologue to the first volume of *La morada imposible*, Negroni describes Thénon as 'una poeta huérfana y sigilosa'.[124] Even if she did not easily belong to any one poetic group or generation, this thesis aims to dispel myths of Thénon's solitude by showing the potential of reading her work in conversation with her peers.

Scholarship on Thénon in Argentina is growing, in part because of the ability to access her archive, but also due to her increasing reputation as a feminist poet. The

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[118] Victoria Alcala, 'El cuerpo: Materia múltiple y discontinua en la poesía de Susana Thénon', *Estudios de teoría literaria*, 9.18 (2020), 104–15.
[119] Alcala, *Susana Thénon*.
[120] Barrenechea, 'El texto poético como parodia del discurso crítico'.
[121] Corina Dellutri, 'Thénon y Rilke. La traducción: un derrotero sobre y hacia los pliegues del lenguaje', in *Susana Thénon: Todas las voces del grito*, ed. by de la Fuente, 103–08.
[122] Blanche Turck, 'Sur les traces d'une conversion énonciative. Susana Thénon traductrice de Rainer Maria Rilke', *CAELum*, published online 20 October 2020, doi:10.58079/of9q.
[123] Manuela Morrone, 'Susana Thénon, una voz fuera del canon', *El hilo de la fábula*, 17 (2017), 225–35.
[124] *LMI* I, 13.

publication *Diario de Poesía* was important in establishing the relevance of Thénon's final collection, publishing an interview with her in 1988/1989.[125] This was subsequently included in Jorge Fondebrider's *Conversaciones con la poesía argentina*, a volume that consecrated Thénon in one version of the Argentine poetic canon.[126] It is mostly for her later work that Thénon is best known: the poem '¿por qué grita esta mujer?', from *Ova completa*, has been adopted by the Argentine feminist movement in recent years. It serves as the epigraph to Selva Almada's book *Chicas muertas*, which chronicles femicides in provincial Argentina.[127]

Most work on Thénon has been produced by scholars based in Argentina and France, and there remains very little criticism written in English. The US translators Renata Treitel[128] and Rebekah Smith,[129] who translated *distancias* and *Ova completa* respectively, have contributed articles on Thénon, and Smith's doctoral thesis analyses her alongside two other poets, in an extended discussion of women poets' invisibility.[130] In the UK, Bernard McGuirk has produced innovative readings of *Ova completa* that focus on the politics of Thénon's later work.[131] However, this is the sum of scholarship available in English. As a result, one significant contribution of this thesis is to provide the first extended study of Thénon in English, in the hope that her work will be more widely taught and researched. Thénon's work – especially her later poetry – is feminist and anti-colonial, laced with acerbic wit and ironic humour. It is precisely because of her insightful and

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[125] Thénon, Rosenberg, and Bellessi, 'Susana Thénon: maquillando el caos'.
[126] *Conversaciones con la poesía argentina*, ed. by Jorge Fondebrider (Libros de Tierra Firme, 1995).
[127] Selva Almada, *Chicas muertas*, 3rd edn (Random House, 2015). First published 2014.
[128] Renata Treitel, 'Translating Susana Thénon', *Translation Review*, 18.1 (1985), 25–26.
[129] Rebekah Smith, 'The Poetic Excess of Susana Thénon's *Ova Completa*', *Interventions* 26.3–4 (2024), 513–31.
[130] Rebekah Smith, 'Let Their Eyes Adjust to Us: Re-Visioning Invisibility in the Poetry and Practice of Elouise Loftin, Ry Nikonova, and Susana Thénon' (doctoral dissertation, New York University, 2025), <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/let-their-eyes-adjust-us-re-visioning/docview/3172898205/se-2> [accessed 26 March 2026].
[131] Bernard McGuirk, *Latin American Literature: Symptoms, Risks, and Strategies of Post-Structuralist Criticism* (Routledge, 1997).

critical attitude towards institutions like the university in *Ova completa* that her work should be taught there.

Comparing Pizarnik and Thénon

There are few detailed studies that analyse Pizarnik and Thénon in comparison, even though they were friends and contemporaries. They are sometimes described as belonging to Argentina's 'generación del 60', although this is often considered a generalising label, as Ramón Plaza notes: 'Los 60' son simultáneos proyectos antagónicos. Son muchas poéticas conviviendo dentro de un mismo espacio.'[132] In truth, neither Pizarnik nor Thénon were strongly associated with a poetic school or group. However, several critics have noted similarities between their later works, often on the basis of humour. In their revised biography of Pizarnik, Piña and Venti describe the points of contact between Pizarnik's prose texts and *Ova completa*.[133] In *El testigo lúcido*, María Negroni addresses the commonalities between *Ova completa* and Pizarnik's *La bucanera de Pernambuco*, identifying a shared 'poética de la sombra' that incorporates 'el idiolecto más vulgar y el gesto más histriónico'.[134] Alfredo Luna also notes resonances between Thénon's unpublished manuscript *Papyrus* and Pizarnik's poetry.[135]

One significant study comparing Pizarnik and Thénon is Laura M. Martins' chapter on 'Per-verse Latin American Women Poets' in *The Cambridge History of Latin American*

[132] Cited in Jorge Fondebrider, 'Treinta años de poesía argentina', *Inti: Revista de literatura hispánica*, 52 (2000), 6, <https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/inti/vol1/iss52/3> [accessed 25 March 2026].
[133] Piña and Venti, *Alejandra Pizarnik*, 142.
[134] María Negroni, *El testigo lúcido* (Entropía, 2021), 115.
[135] Alfredo Luna, 'Hablar con palabras rotas. Las resonancias de Alejandra Pizarnik en uno de los borradores de *Papyrus*', in *Susana Thénon: Todas las voces del grito*, ed. by Analía de la Fuente, 78.

Women's Literature (2015).[136] Martins begins with the etymology of the word 'perverse', which leads to a discussion of poetic deviance that nevertheless focuses on both poets' gender and sexuality. While my discussion at times incorporates approaches from gender and queer studies, Thénon's own poetry invites caution in reducing poetics purely to matters of identity. I am mindful of the potential pitfalls of my position as an Anglophone researcher of Latin American poetry, and take Thénon's ruthless mockery of the fictional professor Petrona Smith-Jones in 'La antología' as both warning and guide. Smith-Jones feigns interest in Argentine poetry, but ultimately seeks poets who are 'si es posible lesbianas / y si es posible muy muy desdichadas'.[137] This satire of the academic gaze offers important direction for this thesis; my grounds for comparison are primarily literary, and not purely biographical.

Notes on Methodology

My methodology draws on approaches from Latin American literary studies and translation studies, incorporating additional perspectives from comparative literature and intermediality studies. I approach translation as both scholar and translator, drawing on my experience of translating Spanish-language poetry into English. As such, I analyse translations in dialogue with their source texts, not with the aim of finding errors – although these are often of interest – but instead taking a holistic view of the poets' translation strategies. I take a translingual approach to scholarship, moving primarily

[136] Laura M. Martins, 'Per-Verse Latin American Women Poets', in *The Cambridge History of Latin American Women's Literature*, ed. by Ileana Rodríguez and Mónica Szurmuk (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 504–26.
[137] *LMI* I, 183.

between Spanish, English, and French, supported by some reading knowledge of German, Latin, and Portuguese.

This thesis incorporates published and unpublished archival material, drawing on María Constanza Guzmán's idea of the 'translator's archive'. This would include not only translation manuscripts, but also other documents relating to the translator's life and work. This can involve creating a translator sociography: 'an examination of the translator's history and also of the translator's "stories" or "narratives," which also entails the observation of the context in which translation is practiced.'[138] Pizarnik's archives are divided between two primary locations: the Alejandra Pizarnik Papers, held at the Special Collections at Princeton University; and collections at the Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno and the Biblioteca Nacional de Maestros y Maestras in Buenos Aires. Some material has been published, primarily from the Princeton archives, but vast amounts of material remain unpublished. Alongside reference to manuscripts of poems and translations, I also make use of Pizarnik's diary entries. However, I consider Pizarnik's diary to be a literary work, and – as with other texts in the archive – read it as literature rather than objective evidence. María Negroni created the Fondo Thénon at UNTREF in 2015, with further additions in 2022: establishing an institutional home for Thénon's archive. Some of the new material – relating to Thénon's collaboration with the translator Renata Treitel – appears to originate from Treitel's own archive at the University of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Incorporating both archival and published material allows me to establish Pizarnik and Thénon's respective 'translator archives', of huge benefit for this thesis and future research.

[138] María Constanza Guzmán, 'Translation North and South: Composing the Translator's Archive', *TTR: Traduction, terminologie, rédaction* 26.2 (2013), 178.

Chapter Summary

As established in this introduction, the term 'translation' is used in a variety of ways, and as such, this thesis is divided into three parts, each corresponding to a different understanding of translation. The aim of this structure is to explore fully the resonances of 'translation' across Pizarnik and Thénon's poetry. Each part begins with a chapter on Pizarnik, followed by a chapter on Thénon. In Part I, I establish the nature of Pizarnik and Thénon's engagement with literary translation, and in Parts II and III, I assess two different forms of translation that impacted their poetry: self-translation and visual translation. Each pair of chapters is followed by a comparative coda, reflecting on similarities and differences in Pizarnik and Thénon's practices. This allows for broader conclusions to be drawn regarding translation's role in Argentine literature from the 1960s to the 1980s, and also reveals the differing ways that translation can shape a poetics.

In Part I: Literary Translation, I focus on their role as poet-translators, and their approaches to literary translation. In both cases, I look first at their own writings and engagement with translation theory, before turning to the texts and authors each translated. Chapter 1 focuses on Alejandra Pizarnik's translation practice, an important part of her literary career, that she maintained throughout her life. Pizarnik primarily translated poetry from French for magazines, but she also translated prose, occasionally worked from German and Italian, and published a number of book-length translations in the late 1960s and early 1970s. She translated a wide variety of authors, and I focus on three that reveal different elements of her approach to translation: Yves Bonnefoy, Antonin Artaud, and Friedrich Hölderlin. A close reading of these translations reveals strategies of affiliation and ventriloquism, and highlights questions of voice and accent in poetry.

Chapter 2 examines Susana Thénon's experience with translation. Thénon translated fewer authors and works than Pizarnik, and does not seem to have used the practice for income; however, translation is a recurring concern throughout her career, often appearing in playful and experimental forms. I begin by analysing two song translations from Thénon's archive; written in a hybrid Hispanicised Latin, they reveal translation's role in linguistic experimentation. I then turn my attention to her most significant achievement in translation: her versions of Rilke's poetry for her photography exhibition at the Instituto Goethe in Buenos Aires in 1979. Thénon described the photographs as a translation of the poems, which will be addressed in Chapter 6 on photography; in Chapter 2, I focus on the linguistic element of these translations, understanding translation as a form of expressive silence during Argentina's last dictatorship.

In Part II: Self-Translation, I consider how differing experiences of self-translation led both Pizarnik and Thénon to compose new poetry. In Chapter 3, working with Karen Emmerich's idea of translation as translingual editing, I consider Pizarnik's own poetry as a form of translingual editing. I begin with her self-translations from French to Spanish, where she translated poems written during her stay in France. Then, working with archival sources, I compare Pizarnik's draft translations with her later published poetry, with a particular focus on *Extracción de la piedra de locura* (1968) and *El infierno musical* (1971). This analysis reveals that the French poems were sometimes the source material for what we might consider Pizarnik's 'original' Spanish-language poetry. As such, I propose translingual self-translation as a mode of poesis.

Chapter 4 charts Thénon's engagement with self-translation into English, beginning with her collaboration with Renata Treitel on the collection *distancias*. I argue that Treitel's translation, published in 1994 after Thénon's death, can in part be considered a

self-translation, due to Thénon's interventions. These 'aclaraciones' addressed to Treitel are a milestone in Thénon's critical engagement with translation, as she considers the challenges and opportunities of translating her own work, where translating becomes the work of rewriting. Following an analysis of these 'aclaraciones', I analyse how the experience of translation transforms poems from Thénon's archive, and then focus on the poetic form of her final collection, *Ova completa*. I propose that *Ova completa* is a translational collection in that it responds in form, style, and content to the concerns of translation, international circulation, and reception. At times, this translational poetics looks like resisting the possibility of translation altogether.

Part III: Visual Translation considers the possibilities for expanding the definition of 'translation' in Pizarnik and Thénon's work, taking their own reflections on their visual art practices as a starting point. In both cases, they describe the relationship between image and language as a kind of translation, making visual translation impossible to ignore in a full account of their translational poetics. In each chapter, I choose an art form that they practised, in order to examine the possibilities and limits of moving between language and image.

Chapter 5 looks at Pizarnik's practice of literary and visual collage. Pizarnik produced small paintings, drawings, etchings, and collages throughout her life, often incorporating fragments of text into her visual compositions. This chapter opens with Pizarnik's reflection that her process of writing involves translating images and words from her mind into language on the page. Tracing the history of collage as a Surrealist practice, I argue that collage allows Pizarnik to synthesise language and image, or to 'translate' from mind to page. I then consider her artworks that incorporate text, including collage, and examine her poems that appear to be the result of collage compositions. Collage comes to represent not only a way of resisting writer's block, but an opportunity to

introduce materiality and embodiment to the act of poetic composition. A composition process that also includes fragments of her own – and others' – translations, collage allows Pizarnik to incorporate a variety of voices into her work.

Chapter 6 considers the relationship between Thénon as poet and as artistic photographer. Beginning with Thénon's claim that it is possible to translate between poetry and photography, I analyse the photographs included in the 1979 exhibition, *Rainer Maria Rilke. Palabra e imagen*. Given that the exhibition took place during an extended pause in Thénon's poetic production – seventeen years passed between *De lugares extraños* (1967) and *distancias* (1984) – I consider photography's role during that hiatus, and the forms of expression made possible by visual art. I then look at the photographs that Thénon credited with encouraging her return to poetry: the portraits of Argentine dancer Iris Scaccheri. I argue that photography changes Thénon's approach to poetry: while her earlier work is more influenced by the lyric tradition, her last two collections make use of the space of the page, and prioritise poetic space over poetic time. I examine these questions of space and visuality in poetry in relation to *distancias*, a formally challenging collection that plays with syntax and formatting to non-lyric effect.

In the conclusion, I consider the possibilities of a translational poetics in light of these three forms of translation: literary translation, self-translation, and visual translation. For both poets, translation involves a move away from lyric poetry, towards non-lyric modes. The multi-voiced nature of non-lyric poetry is at the heart of Pizarnik and Thénon's translational poetics: if translation is an act of ventriloquism, of polyphony, of the same voice with a different accent, a translational poetics will involve a chorus of voices. I also consider the wider ramifications of this thesis, and discuss areas for future research with Latin American literary studies and translation studies. Pizarnik and Thénon are rarely placed in conversation, but reading their work together – through the lens of translation –

offers the opportunity to develop our understanding of their respective poetics. As poet-translators, Pizarnik and Thénon uncover the creative, generative, and poetic possibilities of translation.

Part I: Literary Translation

Chapter 1 – Alejandra Pizarnik: Translation as Affiliation and Ventriloquism

Introduction

What do a poet's translations reveal about their poetics? Even as translation is increasingly celebrated as a creative practice, translations are rarely considered major works in a poet's oeuvre. Translation is often considered to be a 'minor' literary activity, and therefore less worthy of critical attention – unless the translator is also an active and vocal theorist of the practice (like Jorge Luis Borges or Octavio Paz, for example). When translations are analysed, they are often assessed on their perceived accuracy and 'fidelity' to the source text: a set of criteria which seem to insist that the translation must pale in comparison to the original. Recent developments in translation theory illustrate how this is a limited and limiting way to approach translators and their work. Instead, in Part I of this thesis, I consider translation as a literary practice, intertwined with other forms of writing.

Alejandra Pizarnik was a prolific translator who worked across genres and languages. She primarily translated from French, a language she learnt in Buenos Aires and honed during her stay in Paris from 1960 to 1964. She also translated from German and Italian, and a draft CV suggests she also attempted to translate Anglophone poets like e.e. cummings.[139] Her engagement with the practice began early; in 1959, Pizarnik was one of six translators involved in Editorial Sur's complete works of Italian poet Salvatore Quasimodo. In the 1960s, she contributed to magazines like *Sur*, *Cuadernos*, *El cielo*, *Poesía=Poesía*, and *Cormorán y delfín*, translating Antonin Artaud, Yves Bonnefoy, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Georges Schéhadé, Tristán Maya, Michel Leiris, Friedrich Hölderlin, and others. Her first book-length translation was published in 1967: Yves

[139] APP Box 10, Folder 2. I have not found a published or manuscript version of this translation.

Bonnefoy's *Poemas*, co-translated with Ivonne Bordelois. In the early 1970s, shortly before her death, she produced several book-length translations from French: Antonin Artaud's *Textos*, translated with Antonio López Crespo (1971); André Pieyre de Mandiargues' *La marée* (*La marea*, 1971); André Breton and Paul Éluard's *L'immaculée conception* (*La inmaculada concepción*, 1972); and Marguerite Duras' *La vie tranquille* (*La vida tranquila*, 1972). Pizarnik often translated alone, but did work with others on occasion. This might have been a linguistic necessity for the Italian translation, but in other cases, collaboration was connected to friendship. Her co-translations with Ivonne Bordelois and others challenge Pizarnik's relatively solitary image, revealing an openness to collaboration.

Pizarnik has been little analysed as a translator by scholars, with the exception of Fiona Mackintosh's work on Pizarnik's prose translations of Duras, Breton and Éluard.[140] These projects reveal varied translation strategies: in Breton and Éluard's text, Pizarnik tones down Surrealism's misogyny.[141] By contrast, translating Duras represents an indirect way to fulfil Pizarnik's desire to write a novel.[142] Focusing on poetry translations, however, offers different insights, particularly into Pizarnik's poetic strategies. Translation is evidently important to Pizarnik, as she continued practising literary translation throughout her career – even when she was publishing her own poetry at a prolific rate. Given her dedication to the practice, her translations merit closer attention.

In this chapter, I begin by outlining a possible Pizarnikian theory of translation: analysing her diaries, archival material, and other writings. I then turn my attention to three poets she translated – Yves Bonnefoy, Antonin Artaud, and Friedrich Hölderlin – to

[140] Mackintosh, 'Alejandra Pizarnik as Translator'.
[141] Ibid., 50.
[142] Ibid., 55.

examine her translation strategies, which often reveal tactics of affiliation and ventriloquism. Her commitment to translating these authors makes them particularly relevant; Bonnefoy and Artaud represent her only book-length translations of poetry. By contrast, Hölderlin seems an interesting exception: a German poet and Romantic whose work predates the other authors Pizarnik translated by at least a century. While Hölderlin appears to exist on the margins of Pizarnik's sphere of interest, her translations reveal his importance.[143] In analysing poetry translations, I am not focused on proving mistakes, although some errors might be revealing. In line with Isabel Gómez's invitation to 'elevate as choice' 'what was dismissed as error', I read these translations with a focus on the translator's strategies and motivations.[144] This illuminates the poetic and aesthetic considerations at play in translation, and reveals an understanding of translation as a creative endeavour.

Towards a Pizarnikian Theory of Translation

Across her body of work, Pizarnik refers repeatedly to translation: not only as a reader and producer of translations, but as a metaphor for her relationship to language. This use of the verb 'traducir', in particular, is central for understanding Pizarnik's attitudes to poetic language. Pizarnik uses translation in its most abstract sense – of transfer between two modes – to describe her writing process in a diary entry from 1963:

> Ahora bien: sucede que yo no *siento* mediante un lenguaje conceptual o poético sino con imágenes visuales acompañadas de unas pocas palabras sueltas. O sea que escribir, en mi caso, es traducir.[145]

[143] It appears Pizarnik planned in 1971 to publish Hölderlin's *Poemas de la locura*, co-translated with M. Dietrichstein, with the publisher Aquarius (who also published her translations of Artaud). However, it seems the project never materialised. See Pizarnik's notes on her publications (APP Box 5, Folder 3).
[144] Gómez, *Cannibal Translation*, 15.
[145] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 580.

Translation is used to describe the transfer from how Pizarnik feels or senses – in images accompanied by isolated words – into written language. Consulting Pizarnik's notebooks, it seems she may have taken the idea of writing as translating from the writing of Maurice Blanchot, particularly his essay 'La littérature et le droit à la mort' ('Literature and the right to death'). Her note-taking practice is a form of translation, as she paraphrases Blanchot's ideas:

> Lo escrito es el movimiento perfecto mediante el cual lo que adentro no era nada ha venido a la realidad del afuera como algo necesariamente verdadero, una traducción muy fiel (traduce a quien existe por ella y en ella), lo que llama Hegel la pura felicidad de pasar de la noche de la posibilidad al día de la presencia. [emphasis in original][146]

She annotates this passage in pen, writing 'écrire → traduire' ('writing → translating'). Pizarnik seems to identify writing as a movement that negotiates between internal and external realities to make language possible. This movement is 'una traducción muy fiel', as it is what makes writing possible in the first place.

> It is worth comparing Pizarnik's summary with Blanchot's words:
>
> […] c'est le mouvement parfait par lequel ce qui au-dedans n'était rien est venu dans la réalité monumentale du dehors comme quelque chose de nécessairement vrai, comme une traduction nécessairement fidèle, puisque celui qu'elle traduit n'existe que par elle et qu'en elle. On peut dire que cette certitude est comme le paradis intérieur de l'écrivain et que *l'écriture automatique* n'a été qu'un moyen pour rendre réel cet âge d'or, ce que Hegel appelle le pur bonheur de passer de la nuit de la possibilité au jour de la présence […].[147]

Blanchot describes writing in positive terms, praising Surrealist techniques like automatic writing for their ability to bring about a golden age. Pizarnik tends to gloss over this positivity in her summary, instead focusing on Hegel's idea of moving from 'la noche de la

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[146] APP Box 8, Folder 16.

[147] 'It is the perfect movement through which that which was inside enters into the monumental reality of outside, like something necessarily true, like a necessarily faithful translation, because that which it translates only exists through it and in it. One could say that this certainty is like the writer's internal paradise, and that automatic writing has been nothing but a means to make this golden age real, what Hegel calls the pure happiness of passing from the night of possibility to the day of presence.' Translation my own. Maurice Blanchot, *La part du feu* (Gallimard, 1949), 310.

posibilidad' – the internal world, dark yet ripe with possibility – to the 'día de la presencia' – the external world, where ideas become reality. This translational movement encapsulates a key idea at the heart of Pizarnik's poetics.

Pizarnik shows a repeated interest in the possibilities of 'traducir': whether between the visual and the written, the mind and reality, or the self and language. In her 1968 collection *Extracción de la piedra de locura*, she asks herself: '¿Qué significa traducirse en palabras?'[148] The object of translation is not a language or a visual image, but instead the self. This is arguably a central and recurring question of lyric poetry: what does it mean to express oneself – one's experiences, thoughts, feelings – in language? Much of Pizarnik's poetry grapples with this question. She frequently invokes the concept of ineffability – that which lies beyond language and cannot be expressed verbally – and relates it to her ideal of the poetic. In contrast to this idealised impossibility, Pizarnik often describes the language she must use to compose poetry as being contaminated by everyday life. This contamination is a product of 'este mundo', a key concept in Pizarnik's poetic imagination. The poem 'En esta noche, en este mundo' exemplifies this in its sense of fatalism and disappointment. Language is seen to be limited: 'las palabras / no hacen el amor / hacen la ausencia'.[149] Language is not understood as creating possibility – or the union or intimacy implied by 'el amor' – but is marked by a fundamental absence or lack.

If 'palabras' belong to 'este mundo', this suggests the possibility of 'otro mundo', an idealised realm of pure poetry. This recalls Walter Benjamin's attitude in 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', where he maintains that poetry translation is more than simply transmitting a message in another language. Instead, there is also the responsibility to

[148] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 253.
[149] Ibid., 398–99.

transmit 'the incomprehensible, the secret, the "poetic"'.[150] For Pizarnik, as for Benjamin, all true poetry should aspire to this Romantic ideal, perceived to be beyond linguistic expression. This belief in the limits of language therefore betrays a fundamental distrust in language itself. As such, when Pizarnik asks, '¿Qué significa traducirse en palabras?', the lack of an answer suggests an impossible task.[151] This mistrust of language bodes poorly for the possibilities of translation; if all language is seen to fail, then the translation must fail as the original does.

Pizarnik's attitudes to translated literature offer further insight. She was a voracious reader in the languages she knew well – predominantly Spanish and French – and she also read widely in translation. Her diaries often reference her reading habits, and she occasionally notes the translator of a given text, although this often comes with criticism. In 1958, Pizarnik wrote about rereading Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*:

> Desde ya estoy prevenida en contra del desaforado estilo del traductor: R. Cansinos Assens. Esto de las traducciones no me es indiferente. Por ello es que ya no leo la Biblia.[152]

The overbearing presence of the translator, indicated by his 'desaforado' style, biases Pizarnik against the translation. This might be due to differences between variants of the Spanish language, to which Pizarnik often displays ambivalent attitudes, especially when the writer is Spanish (as Cansinos Assens is). Given her sensitivity to the differences between Argentine and peninsular Spanish, her comments criticising this translator's style are possibly unsurprising.

Reading these comments closely, there may also be a connection between Pizarnik's attitude to translation and her Jewish identity: specifically Jewish beliefs regarding the untranslatability of religious texts like the Bible. Jewish intellectual tradition

[150] Rendall, 'The Translator's Task', 152.
[151] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 253.
[152] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 244.

maintains that the Bible can only be read in its Hebrew version, a distinction that began to be drawn during the Hellenistic period, in contrast with Greek-speaking Christians, as 'language became one of the central ways that Jews articulated their religious difference'.[153] Pizarnik repeatedly returns to and affirms her Jewish identity throughout her diaries, although it is not clear that she had the linguistic knowledge to read the Bible in Hebrew. While she studied Jewish languages at the Zalman Reizien Schule, Ivonne Bordelois suggests that 'Alejandra no hablaba una palabra en iddish'.[154] This may have been Pizarnik's choice, but if her knowledge of Jewish languages was limited, this might explain her unwillingness to engage with the Bible, if she could only do so in translation. A text's translated status therefore leads Pizarnik to challenge or question her engagement with it.

Despite her ambivalent attitude towards reading translations, Pizarnik continues to do so throughout her life: for example, Pizarnik criticises Cansinos Assens' translation of *The Brothers Karamazov*, but notes that it is a 'relectura'.[155] While translations might inspire criticism, they also merit critical reflection, and her review of Antonin Artaud – 'El verbo encarnado', published in *Sur* in 1965 – demonstrates this. Artaud, a dissident Surrealist best known for his 'theatre of cruelty', was one of Pizarnik's most beloved writers, and is regularly named in her diaries and *palais de vocabulaire* or 'vocabulary palace' notebooks, where she gathered her favourite quotations. Pizarnik seems to regard any translation of Artaud with suspicion:

> Leer en traducción al último Artaud es igual que mirar reproducciones de cuadros de Van Gogh. Y ello, entre otras muchas causas, por lo corporal del lenguaje, por la impronta respiratoria del poeta, por su carencia absoluta de ambigüedad.[156]

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[153] Magdalena Waligórska and Tara Kohn, 'Jewish Translation / Translating Jewishness', in *Jewish Translation - Translating Jewishness*, ed. by Waligórska and Kohn (De Gruyter, 2018), 2.
[154] Piña, *Alejandra Pizarnik*, 55.
[155] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 244.
[156] Pizarnik, *Prosa*, 273.

Reading in translation is equated with the artifice and distance of viewing reproductions of an artwork, suggesting that the translation cannot have the same immediacy for the reader. Pizarnik expounds an essentialised view of language, where form and content are highly connected: 'lo corporal del lenguaje' foregrounds the materiality of Artaud's language. This sense of embodiment becomes important to Pizarnik's approach to Artaud, as we will see when analysing her translations. Translation is therefore seen to run the risk of being ambiguous and distant, in contrast to the intimacy of the 'impronta respiratoria del poeta'.

However, Pizarnik's criticism of Artaud in translation is somewhat ironic, as these comments are the preface to her own translations of Artaud in the same issue of *Sur*. The text also serves as the basis for the prologue to Pizarnik's 1971 book-length translation of Artaud: *Textos*, co-translated with Antonio López Crespo. Nevertheless, the key phrase in Pizarnik's review is '*leer* en traducción' [my emphasis]. Pizarnik's attitude to translation changes depending on her position as reader or translator. And while she does not author a specific theory of translation, she alludes to the process in a positive way. In a diary entry from September 1970, reflecting on an unnamed project, she remarks: '¿Por qué detuve la traducción? Aun si no logramos publicarla, me hará muy bien hacerla.'[157] While she appears to have some reservations, translation clearly has value to her. Whether it is the ability to focus on another's words, or its perceived value as a literary activity, translation is appraised more positively as a *process*, rather than a product.

It is made clear that Pizarnik sees the creative potential of translation, in a note to the Franco-Argentine poet Hélène Sevestre:

> Ne te gênes pas – mais à condition de ne pas rire de mon néo-français – quant à demander mon aide à propos de la traduction de tes poèmes. Je suis très peu

[157] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 964.

> soucieuse de la sociabilité quand il s'agit de la poésie. Je suis même assez envieuse de voir comment ils (tes poèmes) vont se montrer dans ses doubles espagnols.[158]

Pizarnik is revealed to be sociable when it comes to literary collaborations, although clearly with some anxieties about her 'néo-français'. But she displays a strong interest in translating Sevestre's work, calling her proposed translations 'doubles'. This could be in the sense of 'copies', suggesting that translation is an imitation of an original work, but there appears to be a stronger sense of doubling or twinning: the idea that the work may have a second life in its Spanish iteration.

The potential of these translational 'doubles' is rarely explored explicitly in Pizarnik's writing, although it is possible to deduce elements of her translation philosophy by examining the texts she chose to translate. With Ivonne Bordelois, Pizarnik translated Yves Bonnefoy's translator's note for *Hamlet*, for *Sur*'s special issue on Shakespeare in 1964. This explains the choice of text, but Bonnefoy's version of *Hamlet* includes three translator's notes about the play: it is intriguing that Pizarnik and Bordelois chose to translate into Spanish a text about translating English into French. One motivation could be to endorse its ideas about translation:

> Para estas obras de decidida subjetividad, tales trasposiciones deben ser sólo tácticas. No se trata de 'literalidad', sino de una tenuidad de la atención. A mi juicio, por otra parte, en esto consiste el interés 'poético' de la tentativa y lo que le confiere su más verdadera posibilidad de lograrse. […] Hacer de cada palabra una palabra decisiva significará permanecer, a veces a pesar nuestro, por cierto, en el terreno de ese riesgo máximo. Ésta es justamente la fortuna del traductor: al arriesgarse, su fervor —inquietud y esperanza, energía y vacilación— se expresa, enlazando sus palabras a un alma, agregando a la *voz* decisiva y semiextraviada del poeta la intensidad de un *acento*. [emphasis in original][159]

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[158] 'Don't hesitate – but on the condition that you cannot laugh at my neo-French – to ask for my help with translating your poems. I am hardly anxious about sociability when it comes to poetry. I am also quite eager to see how they (your poems) appear in their Spanish doubles.' Translation my own. APP Box 9, Folder 31.

[159] Yves Bonnefoy, 'Trasponer o traducir Hamlet', trans. by Alejandra Pizarnik and Ivonne Bordelois, *Sur*, No. 289-290 (1964), 67, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5110832372/GDSC?u=oxford&sid=bookmark-GDSC&xid=b21552f0&pg=66> [accessed 26 March 2026].

Bonnefoy establishes the need for interpretation in translation by referring to the subjectivity of certain works, endorsing a creative strategy from the beginning. He casts doubt on the possibilities of literality, by placing it in quotation marks, and instead favours an attentiveness which aspires towards the 'poético', echoing Romantic approaches to literature. This idea of translation as attention is particularly fruitful, highlighting the attentive care and labour of the practice. Translation is a decision-making process with room for the translator's self-expression: each word becomes a 'palabra decisiva'.

While Bonnefoy recognises the risks of such decisiveness, he focuses on the potential benefits: the 'fervor' of the translator can be expressed, giving the intensity of an accent to the distant ('semiextraviada', and in French 'à demi perdue', half-lost) poet's voice.[160] Translation is often characterised in spatial language, in terms of distance and proximity from the source text and its voice, but Bonnefoy suggests that the translator's subjectivity can in fact bring a text closer to the reader. The analogy of an accent implies a subtle transformation of the translated text, as opposed to the loss of an original or essential meaning. Returning to Pizarnik's concept of the double, these doubles will necessarily look and sound different, being written in different languages. But the translator has a unique opportunity to bring a variety of strengths to the translation – 'inquietud y esperanza, energía y vacilación' – producing a more intense and intimate reading experience. This is reminiscent of Pizarnik's comments on Artaud and the intimacy of breath: closeness can be achieved in translation, and the translator may leave traces, whether it is their 'acento' or 'impronta respiratoria'.

Overall, Pizarnik's comments on translation paint an intriguing picture. As a reader of translations, she is at times concerned with their accuracy, at other times passionately

[160] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, trans. by Yves Bonnefoy (Mercure de France, 1962), 254.

engaged in the text; as a producer of translations, she sees the practice as beneficial. Translation allows her to engage closely with the source text, whether through producing its 'double', or lending an accent to the poetic voice. Beyond the practicalities, the movements and crossings of translation offer her an important metaphor through which to understand the relationship between word and image, mind and page, self and language. What is clear is that translation is central to Pizarnik's understanding of poetic language. As such, her translations are revealing; a close analysis of selected poetry translations not only offers insight into Pizarnik's theories of translation, but also her poetics.

Translation as Affiliation: Yves Bonnefoy

Pizarnik's co-translations of Yves Bonnefoy represent one of her earliest and most sustained engagements with translation, and the first time Bonnefoy was translated into Spanish. Pizarnik and Bordelois first translated three poems for *Sur* in 1962, selected from Bonnefoy's 1958 collection *Hier régnant désert*. In 1964, they published further translations in the Argentine magazines *Cormorán y delfín*,[161] and *Poesía=Poesía*.[162] Their book-length translation was published by Carmina in 1967; Bordelois suggests that editor Sofía Maffei commissioned the book after seeing the translations in *Sur*.[163] However, they continued to publish translations after the book was released, with further poems in *La Nación* on 28 November 1971.[164]

The translations in *Sur* are particularly relevant: a milestone in Pizarnik's literary career, they are the first translations she published while in Paris. While the translations

[161] Yves Bonnefoy, 'Aquí, siempre aquí', trans. by Alejandra Pizarnik and Ivonne Bordelois, *Cormorán y delfín*, 4 (1964), 17.
[162] Yves Bonnefoy, 'Toda la noche' and 'Poema', trans. by Alejandra Pizarnik and Ivonne Bordelois, *Poesía=Poesía*, 19 (1964), 12.
[163] Bordelois, *Bonnefoy y Pizarnik*, 255.
[164] APP Box 5, Folder 3.

were collaborative, Bordelois notes that translating Bonnefoy was Pizarnik's idea, and that Pizarnik initially introduced them.[165] Pizarnik's choice of Bonnefoy is therefore significant, and reveals a strategic approach to her own career. Pizarnik was living in Paris, and had the opportunity to meet Bonnefoy, who dedicated a copy of his Hamlet translation to her.[166] Bonnefoy was already well-known at the time, so it seems likely that Pizarnik translated him in part to affiliate herself with his work and reputation, capitalising on her Parisian connections. Publishing with *Sur* was also a strategic way to expand Pizarnik's influence and reputation at home, ensuring her name remained relevant in Buenos Aires literary circles. The strategy was clearly successful, if it resulted in a book-length publication upon Pizarnik's return to Argentina.

Bonnefoy's poetry also bears thematic similarities with Pizarnik's work, making the affiliation an obvious choice: Bordelois notes a kinship or 'afinidad' between their poetics, describing Bonnefoy as 'un explorador de las tinieblas'.[167] *Sur* published three translations: 'Veneranda', 'La même voix, toujours', and 'L'imperfection est la cime', translated into Spanish as 'Veneranda', 'Siempre la misma voz', and 'La imperfección es la cima'. 'Veneranda' in particular bears a striking resemblance to Pizarnik's work: consisting of two stanzas describing a praying girl who ages throughout the course of the poem, it explores common Pizarnikian themes of death and the passage of time.[168]

In *Sur*, each translation was published alongside the French. Beginning with 'Veneranda', the original French contains three small errors of interest. Two are possible typographical mistakes, introduced either by the magazine or the translators. The most interesting error is in the eleventh line, where the second-person singular imperative of the

[165] Bordelois, *Bonnefoy y Pizarnik*, 248.
[166] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, trans. by Bonnefoy. Held at the Biblioteca Nacional de Maestros y Maestras in Buenos Aires (SA D-AP 020).
[167] Bordelois, *Bonnefoy y Pizarnik*, 249.
[168] See Appendix, Figure 1.1.

verb ‘to see’, ‘vois’, is spelled incorrectly. Instead, the homophone ‘voix’ (‘voice’) appears. The word ‘voix’ appears elsewhere in the line, making the mistake more intriguing. While it is easy to confuse the spelling of homophones, the repetition of ‘voice’ echoes Bonnefoy’s comments on voice and accent in translation.

Overall, the translation is similar to the source text in terms of syntax and form; both are composed in free verse. Bonnefoy’s version occasionally rhymes, but as this is not within the constraints of a systematic rhyme scheme, the Spanish version does not echo these with explicit rhymes at the end of the line. In terms of style, the translators use a poetic Spanish, with ‘tú’ as the form of address; it would have been striking for Pizarnik and Bordelois to have used the Argentine ‘vos’, given that it rarely appears in Pizarnik’s poetry. However, there is one word that points to an Argentine influence: ‘pieza’ is used to translate ‘chambre’, instead of the more widely used ‘habitación’ or ‘cuarto’.

In terms of semantics, certain decisions subtly alter the nuance of the poem. The word ‘seule’ is repeated in the first lines of both stanzas, and generally means ‘alone’, but can also carry the emotive charge of ‘lonely’. However, the translators do not choose the same word for both instances of ‘seule’, first opting for ‘solitaria’ – or ‘lonely’ – as opposed to ‘sola’, enhancing the emotional intensity of the line. By contrast, the second line removes an element. While the French specifies the praying girl’s clothing – ‘sa robe’, her dress – the Spanish version changes the noun to a verb, having her ‘vestida’ in pure colour. ‘L’attente’ is also changed from a noun to a verb. While ‘l’attente des morts’ is ambiguous, and could mean either waiting for the dead or the dead who wait, the Spanish ‘que esperan los muertos’ makes the dead the subject of the verb, rendering the poem more ominous by associating the girl more explicitly with the dead.

The poem describes both the girl and the colour of the dress in an eerie way. The blue of the dress is 'éteint' – meaning 'extinct' or 'extinguished', or 'faded' or 'lacklustre' if speaking about colour – and it is described as 'écaillé', literally 'scaly' or 'scaled', but which could mean 'chipped' or 'flaking'. In Spanish, however, the blue becomes 'suave', a much more pleasing adjective in terms of sound and associations – implying a muted colour – and instead of the scaly 'écaillé', which evokes a hard and mineral aspect, they opt for 'jirones', describing fabric in tatters.

These changes subtly alter the imagery of the text, with two further choices of significance in the final couplet of the first stanza. The first is the adjective 'inapaisable', which describes a lack of peacefulness and could be translated as 'implacable': the girl has a 'inapaisable' presence. The Spanish could adapt the near cognate 'apacible', but Pizarnik and Bordelois increase the intensity, describing the girl's presence as 'inextinguible'. In the final line of the stanza, the poet talks about bringing words to the girl, 'en ces mots que je t'apporte encor'. 'Apporter' is commonly translated as 'llevar', but the Spanish reads 'en estas palabras que aún te abandono'. While 'abandonar' here means 'entregar, confiar algo a una persona o cosa', the other meanings of 'abandonar' resonate.[169] Where initially words are offered to the 'orante', in the translation the poet seems to abandon or surrender them. This trope of giving up on language appears repeatedly in Pizarnik's poetry, specifically through the motif of 'palabras', making it interesting that the most striking change in the translation is connected to the poet's evocation of language. Language is presented less as an offering, and instead in terms of surrender.

[169] 'Abandonar', *Real Academia Española: Diccionario de la lengua española*, n.d. <https://dle.rae.es/abandonar?m=form> [accessed 26 March 2026].

Pizarnik and Bordelois' translation of 'Siempre la misma voz' hews closely to the vocabulary, syntax, and form of the French poem. The French does not have an explicit rhyme scheme, but there are some resonances, such as the rhyme of 'des morts' and 'le port'.[170] The Spanish syntax differs so that these two words, which are full consonantal rhymes in Spanish – 'los muertos' and 'el puerto' – do not fall at the end of the line. In terms of word choice, there is one decision that alters the tone and intensity of the poem: pointing to the creativity of translation in generating alternative meanings. The poem presents a series of similes, and at the end of the first stanza, the poetic subject compares themselves to 'l'eau pure / qui t'accompagnera sur la terre des morts' ('the pure water / that will accompany you in the land of the dead'). The similes in the first two stanzas frame the poet as a supportive figure: providing sustenance through bread, even though the addressee might break him; providing warmth through fire; and providing accompaniment in the form of water (even if the image is somewhat ominous, with 'la tierra de los muertos' evoking the rivers of Hades). But instead of the near cognate 'acompañar', with its associations of companionship, the translators choose 'seguir', with a more ominous notion of pursuit. While the poetic subject appears benevolent and helpful in the opening stanzas, the final couplet presents the poet as a force of erasure – through 'effacer', to erase – and suddenly 'plus brusque et froid', brusquer and colder. Pizarnik and Bordelois' intervention foreshadows this eerie ending by erasing the sense of companionship and instead enhancing a sense of pursuit.

The third poem, 'La imperfección es la cima', includes the most interesting decisions: changes to verb tense and vocabulary.[171] The opening couplet begins in the past tense, with the phrase 'il y avait que', meaning 'so it was that'. Pizarnik and Bordelois

[170] See Appendix, Figure 1.2.
[171] See Appendix, Figure 1.3.

transpose this into the present with ‘sucede que’, ‘it so happens that’, bringing an immediacy to the poem’s opening. It also interpolates the opening of Pablo Neruda’s poem ‘Walking Around’, which begins: ‘Sucede que me canso de ser hombre. / Sucede que entro en las sastrerías y en los cines’.[172] This brings Bonnefoy into dialogue with twentieth-century Latin American poetry in a way that would have been recognisable for *Sur*’s readers. They also alter the second line about salvation; while Bonnefoy has it come at a price (‘prix’), for Pizarnik and Bordelois it is something that it is earned (‘puede ganarse’).

While the remainder of the translation generally works with near cognates or word-for-word translations, the second couplet alters the intensity of the destruction Bonnefoy describes. While ‘ruiner’ could be easily translated as ‘arruinar’, maintaining the sound and cadence of the original, the translators instead choose the verb ‘arrasar’, meaning to raze, flatten, or destroy. Bonnefoy speaks about spoiling or ruining things, but Pizarnik and Bordelois continue with the destruction signalled in the opening line. Similarly, ‘marteler’ has a near cognate in ‘amartillar’, to hammer, but the Spanish reads ‘triturar’, to crush or grind. This enhances the alliteration of the Spanish, as well as the imagery: ‘Triturar toda forma, toda belleza.’ By intensifying the imagery in Spanish translation, Pizarnik and Bordelois create a more dramatic poem. This melodrama is characteristic of Pizarnik’s early poetry; this translation was published the same year that *Árbol de Diana* was released, and displays a similarity in poetic vision.

In general, these translations stay close to the form, syntax, and semantics of the source, but not at the expense of poetic expression. Bordelois recalls that they spent a long time debating word choice – to the point that ‘nos peleábamos con diccionarios en mano’ – and they were ‘muy detallistas’.[173] In these translations, Pizarnik makes subtle decisions

[172] Pablo Neruda, *Residencia en la tierra* (Cátedra, 1999), 219.
[173] Bordelois, *Bonnefoy y Pizarnik*, 255–56.

that place the translated poet in dialogue with her own poetics, and with modern Latin American poetry more broadly. Translation offers an opportunity to affiliate her voice to the poet, allowing her to explore resonances with her own poetry, and also to further her literary career. In a letter from 16 December 1962, Octavio Paz praised her work, and exchanged his translations of Pessoa with her: 'Leí tus traducciones de Bonnefoy: me gustaron mucho.'[174] Not only did these translations garner admiration from others, but they also brought her closer to other poets, establishing a stronger sense of literary community. Pizarnik remained in touch with Bonnefoy, sending her own poems to him, and in a letter from June 1969, Bonnefoy's tone is formal but eager to keep in contact.[175] In this sense, Pizarnik's choice to translate Bonnefoy establishes a lasting sense of poetic kinship and affiliation.

Translation as Ventriloquism: Antonin Artaud

Translation represents a wise strategy for affiliation with living poets, but it also offers Pizarnik the opportunity to get closer to her other literary idols, particularly Antonin Artaud. In the early 1960s, the full breadth of Artaud's work was relatively unknown in Argentina, with editions of his work translated into Spanish starting to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This reflects the slow uptake of Surrealism in Argentina; while pioneered by Aldo Pellegrini in the 1920s, Surrealism did not emerge as a fully-fledged and specifically Argentine movement until the 1950s.[176] *Le pèse-nerfs* was one of Artaud's first works to be translated for Argentine readers, with the 1959 publication of *El pesa-*

[174] APP Box 9, Folder 8.
[175] APP Box 8, Folder 23a.
[176] Melanie Nicholson, *Surrealism in Latin American Literature: Searching for Breton's Ghost* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 48.

nervios by Ediciones Mundonuevo, translated by Gerardo Guthmann.[177] Pizarnik read *El pesa-nervios* that same year, and identified fully with its themes, writing in her diary: 'Todo su combate con su silencio, con su abismo absoluto, con su vacío, con su cuerpo enajenado, ¿cómo no asociarlo con el mío?'[178] When she first read Artaud earlier that year, she noted: 'describe muchas cosas que yo siento —en esencia: ese silencio amenazador, esa sensación de inexistencia, el vacío interno, la lucha por transmutar en lenguaje lo que sólo es ausencia o aullido— […]'.[179] It is unsurprising that she chose to translate Artaud's work, given this strong identification.

Pizarnik first published translations of Artaud in *Sur* in 1965, followed by another poem that same year in *Cormorán y delfín*,[180] and a prose translation in *El cielo* in 1968.[181] In 1971, Aquarius then published the full-length *Textos*, in Pizarnik and Antonio López Crespo's translation: the book includes Pizarnik's prologue for the *Sur* translations, and many of the same texts. As such, Pizarnik's first translations are of special interest, setting the tone for her sustained dedication to Artaud's work. The five texts translated for *Sur* are an eclectic mix: they include marginal texts among his work, such as post-scripts or poems that were not published in his more well-known collections. Their subject matter makes Pizarnik's motivations clearer; they explore her classic themes of the limits of language, silence, death, and alienation.

Pizarnik's co-translations of Bonnefoy reveal her creativity as a translator, with decisions revealing a sense of translation strategy. This makes the fairly literal translations

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[177] Antonin Artaud, *El pesa-nervios*, trans. by Gerardo Guthmann (Ediciones Mundonuevo, 1959).
[178] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 313.
[179] Ibid., 288.
[180] Antonin Artaud, 'Tutuguri - El rito del sol negro', trans. by Alejandra Pizarnik, *Cormorán y delfín*, 6 (1965), 7–8.
[181] Antonin Artaud, 'Fragmento de *Van Gogh, Le suicidé de la société*', trans. by Alejandra Pizarnik, *El cielo*, 2 (1968), 21, <https://ahira.com.ar/ejemplares/2-4/> [accessed 26 March 2026].

of the two short poems by Artaud more surprising.[182] Figure 1.4, simply titled 'Poema', appeared in a 1948 special issue of the magazine *84*, dedicated to Artaud after his death. Figure 1.5 is also fairly literal, but contains traces of Argentine Spanish: 'vous' is translated as 'ustedes', not 'vosotros', giving the text a more localised and colloquial feel. This might be a product of the immediacy of Artaud's style of address; it makes sense for Pizarnik to respond with the kind of Spanish she would have spoken on a day-to-day basis. There are several possible reasons for these more literal translations. Both poems are self-referential in French, naming the poetic subject as Artaud himself; given this strong authorial voice, it may have felt difficult for Pizarnik to introduce her own poetic sensibility (or 'accent', to use Bonnefoy's term). Furthermore, Artaud is a foundational writer for Pizarnik; her writings make clear that she reveres his talent. His status as Pizarnik's literary hero and model might dissuade her from anything that seems like a 'rephrasing', particularly given that she aspires to produce work like his.

In fact, by translating Artaud, Pizarnik is able to appropriate a poetic style that she greatly admires – she praises 'lo corporal del lenguaje, por la impronta respiratoria del poeta, por su carencia absoluta de ambigüedad'[183] in her review – and is able to associate herself with Artaud in the literary world through this translation. There is a certain intimacy to this act of appropriation. As Kate Briggs has noted, translation is an intimate, even tactile way to relate to a text: '*to have handled every single word* (space and punctuation mark) of the writing-to-be-translated' [emphasis in original].[184] In this case, translation appears to be an act of ventriloquism, with Pizarnik speaking through Artaud. When Artaud, in Spanish translation, declares 'Soy Antonin Artaud', we in fact read words

[182] See Appendix, Figures 1.4 and 1.5.
[183] Pizarnik, *Prosa*, 273.
[184] Briggs, *This Little Art*, 268.

that Pizarnik wrote on the page. Translation offers Pizarnik the opportunity to subtly appropriate Artaud's voice and even identity.

The other two poetry translations published in *Sur* (the fifth is a piece of prose) are longer poems, offering more opportunities for creativity. The longer poem 'Poema' demonstrates a series of small yet significant translation decisions.[185] The French version of the poem includes some errors of transcription, mostly to do with the *passé simple*, a literary form of the past tense in French: for example, the question 'mangea-je' should read 'mangeai-je' ('did I eat'). This may be a transcription error introduced by *Sur*, although Pizarnik also has a difficult relationship with grammar. Her French-language manuscripts include a number of errors, and in her diaries, she repeatedly expresses anxieties about grammar. In an entry from 14 November 1964 that references finishing her translation of Artaud – quoting '"Qui a mal aux os comme moi"' – she connects her struggle with life and language to grammar: 'Todo se debe a que no sé gramática.'[186] These grammatical errors might reflect a broader sense of uncertainty with poetic language.

The Spanish translation is generally close to the French in syntax and word choice, as with her other translations of Artaud, but Pizarnik subtly introduces her own poetic preferences. For example, the anaphoric series of lines that begin 'pas de' in French are translated as 'nada de'. Instead of 'not', we have 'nothing': a more intense form of expression, as the French for 'nada' is not 'pas' but 'rien'. As opposed to denying the physical body, as Artaud does, Pizarnik annihilates the body altogether, piece by piece. The choice of the poem is also significant in the context of Pizarnik's troubled relationship with eating, a recurring motif in her diaries. In 1959, the same year she discovered Artaud's work, she wrote: 'Oh y tengo tanto miedo de engordar. Quiero reducir mi cuerpo

[185] See Appendix, Figure 1.6.
[186] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 701.

a su verdad. Quiero adelgazar, recuperar más aún mi rostro y mi forma. Esto me importa enormemente.'[187] This idea of annihilating the body as a mechanism for finding truth is strongly present in her translation of Artaud. The rejection of every body part associated with digestion is presented as necessary to avoid the risk of 'ofrecerse a las miasmas', so the poetic subject can reconstruct 'al hombre que soy'.

Questions of voice and gender intertwine when Pizarnik translates a male poet who affirms his gender so explicitly: 'l'homme que je suis' ('the man I am'). It allows her to voice a masculine identity which might have appealed, considering her conflicted relationship with gender that is explored in the later prose works, like *La bucanera de Pernambuco o Hilda la polígrafa*. In her letters and diaries, Pizarnik often presents herself at odds with neat categories of gender or sexuality, in reflections marked by self-loathing. In a diary entry from 17 November 1959, she expresses anxiety about her gender presentation, feeling both insufficiently and excessively feminine: 'En el fondo, me repugna ser mujer'.[188] Many of Pizarnik's literary idols are male, and it may be that by translating a male voice, she is able to adopt a literary posture that she prefers. In the translational gesture of affiliating herself to Artaud, she also gets to speak with his voice, or to add his voice to her own.

The translated fragment from 'Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu' represents Pizarnik's most creative approach to Artaud.[189] It is an unusual text, excerpted from a radio play Artaud wrote towards the end of his life. Pizarnik does not include the sound poetry and other experimental elements of the play, instead translating a section where the themes resonate with her work: this might be a result of the text's difficulty, or with Artaud's

[187] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 265.
[188] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 307.
[189] See Appendix, Figure 1.7.

'impronta respiratoria' in mind.[190] In this translation, Pizarnik makes a series of interesting semantic choices, particularly towards the end of the poem. The poet speaks of eliminating the space between himself and the other: 'l'espace qui nous séparait poudroie, / il s'amenuise et devient plus petit' ('the space that separates us shimmers, / it diminishes and becomes smaller'). The verb 'poudroyer' means to turn into powder or to shimmer, and a Spanish equivalent might be 'polvorear', drawing on the shared root of powder: 'poudre' in French and 'polvo' in Spanish. But Pizarnik chooses a more active form of the verb, 'pulverizar', which carries stronger connotations of destruction. Poem 23 of *Árbol de Diana* uses the same verb, placing this choice in dialogue with her own poetry: 'la rebelión consiste en mirar una rosa / hasta pulverizarse los ojos'.[191] The verb 's'amenuiser' in the following line means 'to diminish', from the adjective 'menu', equivalent to the Spanish 'menudo'. However, by choosing the verb 'adelgazar', Pizarnik explicitly connects this to the bodily process of becoming thinner, which recalls both Pizarnik's obsession with weight and the glorification of a lack of eating in 'Poema'. While these are subtle decisions, they do intensify the meaning, or encourage interpretations in line with more common Pizarnikian themes.

Overall, translating Artaud represents an intimate process, marked by breath, voice, and embodiment. It appears to have deeply challenged Pizarnik at the time; not only does she reflect on the limits of the translation in *Sur*, but also in her diaries. In late November 1964, she references her 'angustia al tener que dedicarme a un solo autor', and her 'confusión' about whether she likes Artaud.[192] The labour of the translation and translator's note is described as challenging, and possibly damaging to her own poetry:

[190] Pizarnik, *Prosa*, 273.
[191] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 125.
[192] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 701.

'nadie deberá trabajar tanto como yo si quiere proferir "palabras puras"'.[193] However, this sustained engagement with Artaud is influential: Pizarnik comes to share his 'impronta respiratoria' by adding her accent to his voice. Her decisions are shaped by the importance of physicality and voice for Artaud, even noting that 'Artaud solía dictar sus escritos.'[194] Translation as a form of ventriloquism allows her to share his voice, to evoke the immediacy of the spoken word on the page.

An Exception that Proves the Rule: Friedrich Hölderlin

Considering Pizarnik's body of translations, Friedrich Hölderlin appears to be an anomaly. The German Romantic poet is far removed from the French Surrealists that Pizarnik is most commonly associated with, and it is one of the few occasions where Pizarnik translates from a language other than French. It is not impossible that she was working with the help of French or Spanish translations available at the time; in her personal library, a number of volumes of translated poetry – including Jaime Ferreiro Alemparte's translation of Rainer Maria Rilke,[195] and Rodolfo E. Modern's translation of George Trakl – are filled with annotations, with words crossed out and replaced by Pizarnik.[196] While these volumes only show the Spanish-language text, Pizarnik appears to be 'correcting' the translation: although it is not clear whether this is due to linguistic errors or her personal preferences.

Whether Pizarnik felt the need to improve existing translations, or wished to engage directly with Hölderlin in German, his poetics seem to have convinced her to make

[193] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 702.
[194] APP Box 6, Folder 14.
[195] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Antología poética*, trans. by Jaime Ferreiro Alemparte (Espasa Calpe, 1968). Held at the Biblioteca Nacional de Maestros y Maestras in Buenos Aires (SA D-AP 180).
[196] Georg Trakl, *Obra completa*, trans. by Rodolfo E. Modern (Goncourt, 1968). Held at the Biblioteca Nacional de Maestros y Maestras in Buenos Aires (SA D-AP 204).

the attempt. Surrealism is better known as one of Pizarnik's key literary influences, but Romanticism also has a profound impact upon her work. Pizarnik notes these divergent tendencies in a 1957 diary entry: 'Oscilación entre distintas expresiones poéticas. Hölderlin o los densos poemas surrealistas.'[197] The Romantic emphasis on individualism is a hallmark of Pizarnik's writing; her poetry is often marked by what Fiona Mackintosh has called her 'poetic solipsism'.[198] The belief in the sublime, or an ineffable sense of the 'poetic', is shared by Pizarnik, Benjamin, and the Romantics; there is an aspiration to – and belief in the possibility of – a 'pure' poetry. Pizarnik frequently refers to Hölderlin throughout her diaries, with admiration but also ambivalence. She praises him as an 'oráculo',[199] but also displays mixed feelings: 'aun Hölderlin, ciertos días no me da nada, me parece muy viejo, muy de otro siglo.'[200] Her admiration is reflected by the decision to translate his work; her hesitation regarding the temporal distance between them is reflected in her translation choices.

Pizarnik translated two well-known poems by Hölderlin for Arturo Carrera and César Aira's magazine *El cielo* in 1968. She translated 'Hälfte des Lebens' as 'Mitad de la vida', taken from *Nachtgesänge* (*Night Songs*).[201] The title of the collection, *Night Songs*, echoes Pizarnik's *Los trabajos y las noches*, although the poem does not explicitly reference the night, a key Pizarnikian motif. The German poem is in free verse, and the first stanza describes a calm natural scene. The second stanza draws a contrast with the imagery of the first, asking where the poet should hope to find such beauty as winter draws in. Pizarnik stays close to the imagery of the German, although the syntactical differences between German and Spanish lead to several changes in word order, and Pizarnik reduces

[197] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 203.
[198] Mackintosh, 'Alejandra Pizarnik as Translator', 45.
[199] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 272.
[200] Ibid., 203.
[201] See Appendix, Figure 1.8.

the length of the second stanza by one line. She also adopts a formal mode of address with 'vosotros', more typically associated with literary or peninsular Spanish. While Pizarnik went for the more Argentine – and contemporary – 'ustedes' when translating Artaud, the use of 'vosotros' is more traditional, recalling her comment that Hölderlin is 'muy de otro siglo.'[202] Correspondingly, she writes in an elevated form of Spanish; the adjective 'holden', which simply means 'lovely', is translated by Pizarnik as 'maravillosos'. Accompanied by the imagery of the 'cisnes', the adjective lends a *modernista* feel to the Spanish. It also creates a richer sense of sibilance across the whole line – 'vosotros, cisnes maravillosos' – whereas the German of the first stanza has less sound patterning.

In the second stanza, Pizarnik uses more expressive punctuation than the German poem, enhancing the emotional intensity of the passage. 'Weh mir', a common exclamation in lyric poetry, is rendered as a more emphatic '¡Ay de mí!'. Pizarnik chooses to use the infinitive instead of the first person – 'buscar' instead of 'nehm' ich' – which lends a greater sense of universality to the question: perhaps in slight contrast to the Romantic individualism which generally appeals to Pizarnik. In lines 3 and 4 of the second stanza, Pizarnik maintains some of the sibilance of the German: 'Den Sonnenschein / Und Schatten der Erde?' is rendered '¿Dónde la luz del sol / Con las sombras de la tierra?'. Her choice of verb subtly shapes the following phrase; instead of 'stehn' – from the verb 'stehen', meaning 'to stand' – in Spanish the walls 'se elevan', creating a sense of being actively enclosed in this shadowy landscape as the walls rise up. Pizarnik also condenses the last three lines into two: possibly due to reasons of space, as both translations were printed on the same page of the magazine.[203] If the line breaks broadly matched the German, those lines would read: 'Los muros se elevan / mudos y fríos, y en el viento /

[202] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 203.
[203] See Appendix, Figure 1.10.

rechinan las banderas.' While 'banderas' is one possible meaning of 'Fahnen', English translator Michael Hamburger notes it can also mean 'weathercocks': 'Wetterfahne' is a weathervane, and this corresponds to the metallic sounds of 'klirren' or 'rechinan'.[204]

The second Hölderlin poem displays similar translation choices in terms of vocabulary and mode of address, and shows Pizarnik's sensitivity to the poet's style. She translates 'Hyperions Schicksalslied', one of Hölderlin's most famous poems, as 'Canto del destino'.[205] By removing the reference to Hyperion, this enhances the potential universality of the poem: no longer attributable to an individual, it becomes a 'song of destiny' addressed to a broad 'vosotros'. The German poem is in free verse, and Pizarnik maintains this in Spanish, although the version reproduced in *El cielo* does not maintain the visual staggering of the lines, and has fewer lines in total.

In the first two stanzas, Hölderlin portrays a divine and peaceful world of music and art. The turn in the third stanza marked by 'doch' contrasts this divinity, associated with 'vosotros' and the second-person plural, with the miserable state of humanity, marked by 'nosotros' and the first-person plural. While Pizarnik's poetry does not generally share these religious tones, the turn towards despair and the imagery of falling can be found in her work. For example, 'Caminos del espejo' from *Extracción de la piedra de locura* – published the same year as this translation – meditates on falling: 'Mi caída sin fin a mi caída sin fin en donde nadie me aguardó pues al mirar quién me aguardaba no vi otra cosa que a mí misma.'[206] This 'caída sin fin' mirrors the imagery of Hölderlin's poem, indicating shared themes between 'Hyperions Schicksalslied' and Pizarnik's own work.

[204] Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hölderlin: Selected Verse*, trans. by Michael Hamburger (Anvil Press Poetry, 1986), 242.
[205] See Appendix, Figure 1.9.
[206] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 243.

As with ‘Mitad de la vida’, ‘Canto del destino’ uses ‘vosotros’ as the form of address, indicating a more traditional poetic style. The opening line, ‘Vosotros avanzáis levemente allá arriba en la luz’, is highly alliterative and lengthens the line in comparison to the German, creating a mesmerising atmosphere that corresponds to this divine scene. While Hölderlin notes that the geniuses are ‘selige’, or ‘blessed’, Pizarnik opts for a slightly more secular term, ‘venturoso’, meaning ‘fortunate’. With some differences in syntax, much of the remaining stanza is a word-for-word translation of the German, except for the last couplet: Pizarnik changes the line order, to end on the imagery of the ‘inspiradora’ instead of the ‘Heilige Saiten’, or ‘cuerdas sagradas’. The translation of ‘inspiradora’ is a shift from ‘Künstlerin’, which means ‘female artist’; Pizarnik’s choice of ‘inspiradora’ depicts the female figure as muse, as opposed to the artist who is inspired herself. Pizarnik might be working with the language of divine inspiration instead of artistry, although it is unusual for her to deny the female figure’s agency in this way.

Pizarnik chooses to reproduce certain sound effects in the second stanza. The alliteration of the first lines, ‘Schicksallos, wie der schlafende / Säugling’, is transmitted through similar sound patterning in Spanish: ‘Sin destino, como el niñito’, with lots of repeated ‘i’ sounds. However, the Spanish version differs substantially in the third and fourth line, as these two lines in Spanish correspond to four lines in German. It is possible that there was a constraint in space in *El cielo*, as both translations of Hölderlin are published on the same page, but this significantly alters the structure of the poem: where from the third line of the second stanza onward, the German has lines of a similar length, in Spanish only the last three lines are short, making them more emphatic. This makes the turn in the third stanza, ‘Pero a nosotros’, more striking, as the former state of ‘apacible claridad inmortal’ is more prominent.

This third stanza, emphasising the miserable state of humanity and its painful fall downwards, is more repetitive and exaggerated by Pizarnik, who finds herself in more familiar thematic territory. The first line of the stanza is almost twice the length in Spanish, due to its hyperbolic nature: 'Doch uns ist gegeben' becomes 'Pero a nosotros, a nosotros jamás nos fue dado', repeating 'nosotros' and adding 'jamás', an element that is not present in German. Where 'die leidenden Menschen', 'long-suffering people', fall and disappear in German, Pizarnik opts for a more individualistic approach, with a universal 'hombre doliente' doomed to bear the weight of human suffering. As with the second stanza, Pizarnik also combines the content of the German lines together to form longer lines in Spanish, with lines 3-8 in German corresponding to lines 3-6 in Spanish. However, the last line in German is spread across two lines in Spanish, again to enhance its poetic intensity: 'Jahrlang ins Ungewisse hinab' becomes 'A través de los tiempos, en lo incierto, / Hacia abajo.' While the German temporal expression is 'Jahrlang', meaning 'for years', the Spanish 'a través de los tiempos' makes the line less prosaic and more eternal. And 'hinab', a poetic word for 'down', is isolated on its own line in Spanish as 'hacia abajo', making the end of the poem more striking by visually enacting this fall. There is a much stronger sense by the end of the Spanish poem that man is doomed for all time, whereas Hölderlin leaves space for possible redemption. Indeed, the longer version of this poem ends: 'Im Arme der Götter wuchs ich groß' ('In the arms of the Gods I grew up', in Michael Hamburger's translation).[207]

While the Hölderlin translations seem like an anomaly, a close analysis reveals shared concerns and strategies. Strategies of affiliation are present: Pizarnik is able to associate herself with a canonical poet through translation, and also points to the relevance of different traditions for her own work. Moving beyond her associations with the

[207] *Hölderlin: Selected Verse*, 27.

Francophone or with Surrealism, translating Hölderlin reminds readers of Pizarnik's other affinities. As with Bonnefoy, Pizarnik also demonstrates her sensitivity to style and flair as a translator: adapting vocabulary and modes of address to create an evocative Spanish translation. While ventriloquism is less explicit than in the Artaud translations, the translation becomes more expressive when the poem is thematically reminiscent of Pizarnik's own works. When she repeats 'nosotros' in the line 'Pero a nosotros, a nosotros jamás nos fue dado', there are possible echoes of Pizarnik's own frustrations, intensified through translation.

Conclusion

Reviewed collectively, Pizarnik's translations offer insight into both her poetics and her literary aspirations. In these examples, I have focused on translations where Pizarnik's choice of poet and text seems to reflect either obvious or subtle themes in her own work. Bonnefoy represents a strand of contemporary French poetry, 'un explorador de las tinieblas' whose quest resonates with Pizarnik; Artaud, a dissident Surrealist who speaks with a voice Pizarnik desires, and opens up the possibility of an embodied poetics; and Hölderlin, a German Romantic who reveals the full range of Pizarnik's literary appetite. Her choices reflect tendencies in her own poetics, and whether translating from French or German, she tends towards a close or word-for-word approach, making even subtle differences more revealing. In general, Pizarnik seems to intensify or exaggerate certain moments to conform with her own style – with the exception of some of Artaud's poems, where his voice appears to be so present that she does not wish to intervene.

These translations also reveal Pizarnik's devotion to the literary labour of translation. These are the three poets that Pizarnik translated the most, either publishing or

planning book-length translations, but there are many other poets that drew her attention. Pizarnik dedicated herself to translation throughout her career, and collaborated with a wide range of magazines, establishing contact with editors including Victoria Ocampo, Roberto Juarroz, Ariel Canzani D., Arturo Carrera, César Aira and others. Even once she had achieved critical success with her own poetry, Pizarnik remained committed to translation. In 1962, translating Yves Bonnefoy was a wise strategic choice, revealing her dedication to this form of literary networking. But she continued the practice throughout the decade, suggesting that translation offered her the ability to experiment with other voices.

Whether it is Hölderlin's 'fin de siglo' tone or Artaud's 'impronta respiratoria', Pizarnik is able to inhabit other voices: either by ventriloquising, or lending her own accent. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, the primacy of voice and embodied expression becomes more important to Pizarnik: as affirmed in *El infierno musical*, 'No puedo hablar con mi voz sino con mis voces.'[208] Her experience of affiliating herself with or ventriloquising other voices is a necessary part of this development. As examined in Chapter 3, Pizarnik embraces polyphony more fully as she explores writing in French and translating herself into Spanish. Translation becomes more than just a literary laboratory – a place to perfect her own poetics, a place to play with and adopt the voices of others – but a form of poetic production in its own right.

[208] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 266.

Chapter 2 – Susana Thénon: Translation as Play and Silence

Introduction

Susana Thénon's literary career is marked by an eclectic but continuous interest in literary translation. While she did not publish many translations, the enduring presence of translation in Thénon's archive points to the importance of the practice. Thénon studied *Letras* at the University of Buenos Aires, with a focus on classics. Her earliest translations were produced in the late 1950s while she was still a student; she translated two songs from Spanish into Latin in 1959. These first translations coincide with her first poetry collections, *Edad sin tregua* (1958) and *Habitante de la nada* (1959). The Fondo Thénon in Buenos Aires also holds an undated translation of the 'Apología de Sócrates' from ancient Greek into Spanish.

Thénon was highly multilingual: beyond her studies of Latin and Greek, she learnt German, Russian, and Hebrew, and could read some English, French and Italian.[209] Thénon's first published translation was a co-translation with Sonia Lida of French-Greek philosopher Kostas Axelos, *El pensamiento planetario. El devenir-pensamiento del mundo y el devenir-mundo del pensamiento* (1969). However, her most substantial translation project came in the form of 37 poems or fragments by the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke, presented alongside an exhibition of Thénon's photographs at the Instituto Goethe in Buenos Aires in 1979. While she did not publish further translations in her lifetime, she engaged at length with Renata Treitel's English translation of her fourth collection, *distancias* (1984). Her involvement was such that the project could be considered a collaborative self-translation, so this will be analysed in Part II of this thesis, on self-

[209] Alcala, *Susana Thénon*, 125.

translation: Chapter 4 examines the nature of Thénon and Treitel's collaboration and self-translation in Thénon's later poetic work.

Existing scholarship has often engaged with translation in Thénon's work in abstract or metaphorical ways, and there has been little close analysis of the translations with regard to their techniques or strategies. Blanche Turck's master's thesis analyses Thénon's translations of Rilke, with a specific focus on the selection of texts and common motifs.[210] Corina Dellutri also considers the Rilke project and the implications of translation at that stage of Thénon's career, during a poetic hiatus that saw Thénon devoted to photography.[211] However, a close comparative analysis of the Rilke translations has yet to be undertaken, and the ephemeral nature of the song translations has perhaps led to reduced critical interest. However, both of these translations, undertaken at different moments of Thénon's literary career, show an evolving understanding of translation.

In this chapter, I draw on archival material to propose a Thénonian theory of translation, marked by an interest in play and the materiality of language. I then consider her more poetic translation projects – the songs translated into Latin, and the Rilke exhibition – to reveal the translation strategies at work. While the volume of material is limited, each translation was undertaken at a specific moment of Thénon's career, where her relationship to poetry is developing – or perhaps under threat. Tactics of linguistic play predominate in her approach to translation, but Thénon's translations are also marked by the political context of Argentina, and the repression of the last military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983. Translation in this context may represent the ability to take refuge in another's expression, or to seek expressiveness through the translator's curatorial role.

[210] Turck, 'Sur les traces d'une conversion énonciative'.
[211] Dellutri, 'Thénon y Rilke', 103–08.

Whether in the late 1950s or the late 1970s, translation opens up possibilities for expression when direct communication may be fraught.

Towards a Thénonian Theory of Translation

Thénon's attitudes to translation evolved throughout her career, first emerging as a serious concern around the time of the Rilke exhibition. Thénon's available archive is fairly small, consisting mostly of drafts of her own poems and select correspondence, but other archival material includes some of her first public reflections on translation. Thénon gave a number of interviews regarding the Rilke exhibition, both at the time and in subsequent years, and also included a translator's note in the exhibition catalogue.

The 1979 exhibition at the Instituto Goethe in Buenos Aires, *Rainer Maria Rilke: Palabra e imagen*, displayed Thénon's photographs on the walls, with her poetry translations included in the handheld exhibition catalogue. The prologue to the exhibition catalogue offers insights into her translation process. She primarily describes the photographs as a visual translation of poetry, but her remarks on visual translation also point to a possible theory for her literary translation practice:

> Más que describir, dialogar muchas veces con el texto; más que aferrarse a esquemas preconcebidos, ponerse a su servicio para expresar un clima poético. La poesía de Rilke se adelantó a su época y vaticinó realidades objetivas y subjetivas hoy vigentes. Nada mejor que un arte de este siglo para traducirlas.[212]

In the catalogue, Thénon describes a dual translation of Rilke: between poetry and photography (the subject of Chapter 6), and between German and Spanish. Creativity appears central to her understanding of the translator's task: rather than a derivative notion of fidelity to the original text, evoked by the clinginess of 'aferrarse', she highlights the

[212] *LMI* I, 213.

importance of dialogue. This idea of dialogue or exchange highlights the translator's active role in constructing a new text, rather than simply reproducing something that already exists. It becomes important to capture the poetic in a translation, this 'clima poético', rather than to take an overly literal approach. There is even the sense of giving oneself over to the text, in the gesture of 'ponerse a su servicio'.

By rejecting the 'esquemas preconcebidos', Thénon underlines the importance of innovating in the target language: recalling Walter Benjamin's idea that translation can revitalise a target language. Her understanding of Rilke's poetry as being ahead of its time also suggests the possibility of a certain timelessness inherent to great literature. This implies a belief in a universality that means the translator can respond in a contemporary way – with 'un arte de este siglo' – in their translation. While this comment may have referred to photography, it could also suggest that a translation need not be written using historical equivalents, such as translating Rilke with a *fin de siglo* Spanish.

In an interview with *La Nación* on 21 October 1979, Thénon reflects further on the specifics of translating Rilke. She describes working on the translations for several months, and in response to a question on the translation itself, highlights the difficulty of the process:

> Libré una especie de batalla y hubo momentos muy terribles en que creí que iba a fracasar en la traducción y en la fotografía. […] Se trataba, nada menos, que de la Anunciación de la Virgen.[213]

In a frank and conversational tone, Thénon describes her experience of the project in melodramatic terms. She describes it as 'una especie de batalla' and highlights her fear of failure with regard to both photography and translation. Emphasising the difficulty of the

[213] Fondo Thénon, uncatalogued material. 'Instantáneas: Rilke a través de una argentina', *La Nación*, 21 October 1979.

whole endeavour, she suggests it is as miraculous as the 'Anunciación de la Virgen'. In general, translation is characterised as a challenging feat.

However, with hindsight, Thénon reflects further on her motivation and interest in translation, returning to the 'universality' of Rilke and the possibilities of translation, rather than its struggles. In a 1988/1989 interview with Diana Bellessi and Mirta Rosenberg for the publication *Diario de Poesía*, Thénon explains her desire to translate Rilke anew:

> Sí, no me quedó otro remedio si quería que los poemas aparecieran en un castellano más universal, ante los dislates que encontré en las traducciones existentes.[214]

She highlights two fundamental flaws with pre-existing translations: firstly, errors or 'dislates', and secondly, the absence of 'un castellano más universal'. This suggestion of a more 'universal' Spanish comes as a surprise from the author of *Ova completa* (1987), given how her later poems play with a very colloquial Argentine Spanish, using 'vos' as a mode of address, and adopting Argentine slang and *lunfardo*. However, Thénon uses a different Spanish for her earlier, more lyrical collections like *De lugares extraños* (1967), using 'tú' and 'vosotros' for poetic address. It may also be the case that Thénon found the existing translations strongly marked by the norms of peninsular Spanish, and felt they did not have the same universality in the Latin American context. On balance, her reference to the possibility of 'universal' translations might imply a standardised Spanish, but it is more likely to connote a universality that Thénon perceives as the ideal of poetry.

In the exhibition text, Rilke is presented as having the ability to reach across time and space to have an impact on contemporary readers, and Thénon's translations may also aspire to this universality. Thénon seems to have faith in what Pascale Casanova calls the 'world republic of letters': a universal realm of world literature that can reach all readers,

[214] Thénon, Rosenberg, and Bellessi, 'Susana Thénon: maquillando el caos', 4.

regardless of geography or time.[215] While Casanova's 'world republic' comes with a Eurocentric bias, with Paris as its capital, other Latin American writers share this belief in the universal appeal of great literature: Octavio Paz, for example, describes himself as being very attached to 'la universalidad de la poesía'.[216] Translation is therefore presented in more idealistic terms, as making this universality possible.

Alongside the Rilke exhibition, engaging in self-translation also seems to have transformed her approach to translation. While self-translation will be addressed explicitly in Chapter 4, Thénon makes a series of comments that are illuminating for considering her own work as a translator. In an extended conversation with Treitel, Thénon draws parallels between the role of the reader and the translator, speaking of 'el lector, o el crítico o el traductor'.[217] As such, her comments on the interpretive role of the reader can be extended to the translator:

> Hay un mensaje, pero hay que encontrar la llave y la llave es libre. Es decir: hay tantas llaves como lectores. Para darte una imagen, digamos que yo soy la persona que lleva los materiales para una construcción: llevo los ladrillos, llevo el cemento, los clavos, la madera, y el lector es el arquitecto. […] Es decir: el lector puede construir y puede demoler también.[218]

Readers are described as having active agency in constructing the meaning of the text. While Thénon specifically refers to the 'mensaje' of her fourth collection *distancias*, the precedence she gives to the reader (and therefore the translator) is vital for understanding her attitude to translation. Thénon characterises the poet's task as creating possibility, through the metaphor of construction: as if the poem were constituted of raw materials and the reader is responsible for assembling and making artistic sense of them. Thénon is surprisingly open to the destructiveness of such a deconstructive approach: noting that the

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[215] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by M. B. DeBevoise (Harvard University Press, 2007).
[216] Paz, *Traducción*, 11.
[217] *PDN*, 83.
[218] Ibid., 82.

reader can choose to build and demolish. In the same conversation, Thénon does express interest in offering an interpretation when the text to be translated is her own (as will be explored in Chapter 4), but overall, she appears open to the translator's creativity and interpretation.

This becomes more explicit when Thénon discusses translating other poets. Thénon was a great admirer of Argentine avant-garde poet Oliverio Girondo, citing him as a major influence on *distancias*. In conversation with Treitel, Thénon describes what it would mean to translate his work:

> Una empresa titánica. Tendría que encontrar el equivalente. Ahí sí no hay escapatoria: tendría que encontrar el equivalente; crear… es decir, el traductor ahí tiene que ser tan creador como el autor. Tiene que ser un poeta. No hay más remedio.[219]

While Thénon's opening comments recall the difficulty she described when translating Rilke, creativity much more quickly comes to the fore. Thénon seems to believe in the possibility of equivalence in translation, but that 'encontrar el equivalente' is essentially 'crear', and that the translator should be as creative as the author. This twinning of translation and creation recalls Octavio Paz's ideas around translation. While Paz acknowledges that poets may not necessarily be good translators, because they use the task of translation to essentially write their own poetry, he notes that 'el buen traductor de poesía es un traductor que, además, es un poeta'.[220] This is because 'la traducción poética […] es una operación análoga a la creación poética'.[221] Thénon, in arguing that the translator should also be a poet, seems to share this belief.

This emphasis on creativity is vital to Thénon's understanding of translation. She admires Girondo specifically for his creative ability: '¡Crea conceptos! Es decir, está como

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[219] *PDN*, 96.
[220] Paz, *Traducción*, 14.
[221] Ibid., 14.

creando materia, este hombre.'[222] Referencing works like *En la masmédula* – where Girondo combines words and plays with language to create new concepts – Thénon values the creative potential of poetic language, and believes that the translator's responsibility is to find the equivalent through their own creativity. Poetry – and translation – can stretch the limits of language through creativity, experimentation, and play. Play becomes an increasingly important concept in Thénon's own work, shaping the poetry she produces in the 1980s. Poems from *Ova completa*, such as 'Poema con traducción simultánea español-español', become possible with Thénon's increased interest in exploring the limits of the Spanish language, and playing with different styles and registers.

Working towards a Thénonian theory of translation, these reflections – on her own translations, and the role of the translator – are paramount. Key concepts recur throughout her discussions of poetry translation: firstly, an awareness of its difficulty; secondly, a sensitivity to style and register; and thirdly, the importance of creativity. While Thénon appears concerned with the difficulties of literary and poetic translation, she sees the possibility for dialogue and creative exchange. At times, this focus on dialogue manifests as a belief in the universality of poetry, and the importance of translation in facilitating this. She recognises the translator as a reader, who can – and may even need to – bring their own interpretation to a text in order for the translation to be successful. Translation may entail risks and difficulties, but it also offers creative possibilities: concepts that come to the fore as we analyse her own translations. Thénon's translation projects are markedly different: an informal translation of songs into a hybrid Latin, and an extended engagement with Rilke's poetry. By examining these projects, undertaken at very different points in

[222] *PDN*, 96.

Thénon's career – and in Argentine history – with very different levels of seriousness and commitment, it is possible to chart translation's significance for Thénon's poetic practice.

Translation as Play: Tango and Bolero

Thénon translated the lyrics to two songs in 1959: the bolero 'Perfidia' by Alberto Domínguez Borrás, and 'Patotero sentimental', a tango by Manuel Romero.[223] These translations were handwritten on the back of a separate letter addressed to Ana María Barrenechea, and it is likely these were composed spontaneously and in an unconsidered way, possibly in dialogue with Barrenechea herself. This spontaneity indicates playfulness, an impression which is reinforced by the nature of the translations themselves: translations of love songs from Spanish into Latin.

Thénon studied classical languages at the University of Buenos Aires, so her command of Latin is not a surprise. However, the way she employs Latin is surprising, given the contrast between the source and target language. Nowadays, Latin exists only as a written language, associated with academia and elite or 'high' culture. By contrast, the love songs that Thénon translated represent popular oral culture, circulating in everyday social spaces. As such, translating these lyrics into Latin plays with the difference between Latin poetry and popular song in Spanish. This contrast is amusing, and points to Thénon's playfulness and sense of humour. In a 1983 letter to her translator Treitel, she writes: 'yo bruta; yo grosera; yo toda mezclada de latín, griego, mierda, tallarines, cultura y barbarie'.[224] This general comment captures the poetic playfulness at the heart of these

[223] *PDN*, 361.
[224] *LMI* II, 215.

translations. Thénon might also be demonstrating her linguistic capabilities and showing off through this slightly absurd exercise: that too is part of the fun.

The songs chosen are both love songs, with a first-person protagonist singing about the women he has loved and lost. The lyrics to the bolero 'Perfidia' speak of alienation from a loved one, and of longing for a kiss. If we consider translation a form of ventriloquism – as seen with Pizarnik's translations of Artaud – there is a powerful queer subtext to Thénon translating songs about loving women. The translation of 'Perfidia' into Latin opens with an address to the woman: 'Mulier, si potes tu cum deo loqui' ('Woman, if you could speak with God').[225] While Thénon was never explicit about her sexuality, it is generally understood that she was a lesbian. In 1959, when Pizarnik and Thénon were closest – it seems their friendship was cut short by Pizarnik's move to Paris in 1960 – Pizarnik notes in her diary: 'Susana me confió que es homosexual y que su madre sufre por eso'.[226] Reading the translation with this information in mind, a queer subtext comes to the forefront, where Thénon is able to adopt another's voice and perspective, and speak of loving women through translation.

The question of the genre of the text is also important: translating songs implies a consideration of performance and performativity. Within queer translation studies, B.J. Epstein and Robert Gillett observe that 'notions of translation as a performative practice, as an imitation with at best tenuous links to the idea of an original', among other factors, can mark translation as 'always already queer and as an appropriate metaphor for the exploration of queerness itself'.[227] In this case, translation offers Thénon an opportunity to perform an identity that may have appealed, although in a subtle or coded way. Without

[225] *PDN*, 361.
[226] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 269.
[227] B. J. Epstein and Robert Gillett, *Queer in Translation* (Routledge, 2017), 1.

needing to explicitly affirm her sexuality – which could have clear dangers or risks – Thénon is nevertheless able to perform her desire for women through translation.

The translation of 'Perfidia' is fairly literal, with few noteworthy choices beyond the language of composition, but the translation of the tango 'Patotero sentimental' has a more playful tone. As a tango, 'Patotero sentimental' includes lots of Argentine vernacular: including the 'patotero', a rowdy young man; 'bailongo', either a person who loves dancing, or the dance itself; and 'mina', slang for a woman or girl. Thénon opts to translate these all into a kind of Latinate Spanish, opting for 'patoterus' and 'bailongorum' for example. The translation of 'mina' is fundamental for a particularly funny line: 'in mea vita multas multas minas habui' ('in my life, I had many many "minas"').[228] This bragging line from the male subject of the song – the titular 'patotero' – is a typical example of macho posturing, but it is much funnier in Thénon's hybrid, queer-coded version. She clearly knows Latin well and takes it seriously, but she also enjoys the playfulness of inserting Argentine slang into a Latin text, and adapting it to the rules of that language.

While this might seem to some like an irreverent debasing of Latin, Thénon is not precious or sanctimonious about language: as we saw, she claims to be a mixture of 'mierda' and 'tallarines' alongside her classical influences, and in the same letter she adds: 'Yo encuentro creatividad en cosas muy distintas, que a veces se manifiestan en lenguaje "emputecido" y a veces en lenguaje sumamente "refinado" […] El lenguaje no se emputece ni se refina ni se alambica ni se simplifica. *Es* todas esas cosas desde siempre.'[229] This 'emputecimiento' of Latin in the tango translation is part of Thénon's creative play, and enhances our understanding of how translation is viewed as an enjoyable activity. Translation offers the opportunity to play with the boundaries of different

[228] *PDN*, 362.
[229] *LMI* II, 191.

languages, breaking and stretching them. Instead of a purist or overly reverent approach that sanctifies the source text, translation is a generative process that creates opportunities for humour and creative play.

Translation as Silence: Rainer Maria Rilke

In contrast to the song translations, which show Thénon's irreverent playfulness, her translations of Rilke are more serious in nature. The scale of the project indicates her sustained engagement with the endeavour: Thénon translated 37 poems or fragments from German into Spanish, selected from across Rilke's major works. The conditions of the translation are also unusual, both in terms of the format – published in the catalogue of a photography exhibition – and the time and place of the exhibition itself, at the Instituto Goethe in Buenos Aires in 1979, during Argentina's last military dictatorship.

There has been some critical speculation as to whether Thénon was truly interested in translation, or simply needed a pretext to display her own photography during the cultural repression of the military dictatorship. Victoria Alcala suggests that because the Instituto Goethe was a cultural space that was protected from persecution by the dictatorship, to exhibit her photography Thénon simply had to include some element of German-language culture.[230] It is true that the Instituto Goethe functioned as a cultural 'safe space' for many writers and artists. In a short text written for the Goethe's fiftieth anniversary in 2017, film critic Luciano Monteagudo describes its significance during the dictatorship: 'En esos tiempos de oscuridad, el Goethe era un faro, una casa amiga, un

[230] Alcala, *Susana Thénon*, 74.

cómplice.'[231] Therefore, if Thénon was keen to exhibit her work during the dictatorship, it seems that the Instituto Goethe was an ideal venue.

In the 1979 interview with *La Nación*, Thénon notes that 'como en el Instituto Goethe aceptaron mi proyecto, se impuso Rilke.'[232] While Thénon suggests that Rilke was a necessary condition for the exhibition, she did have a longstanding interest in both the German language and the poet himself. Thénon studied German long before this exhibition, mentioning in a letter to Ana María Barrenechea that she enrolled in an accelerated German course in 1968.[233] In conversation with *La Nación*, Thénon also mentions that her interest in photography came about after her time studying in Germany.[234] Rather than assuming the translation was a means to an end – allowing her to exhibit at the venue – it appears to have been a fortunate opportunity to unite a number of Thénon's interests. She says as much in the interview:

> La poesía de Rilke me apasiona desde la infancia, la fotografía desde hace menos tiempo, desde el año '71, y la lengua alemana ejerce una fascinación extraña sobre mí; entonces, se juntaron las tres cosas y nació esta exposición.[235]

If anything, her appreciation of Rilke's poetry is prioritised chronologically, described as a passion since childhood. Whether or not this is an exaggeration, Rilke's poetics appear influential in Thénon's earliest poetry. A Rilke quotation appears as an epigraph for 'Poema', taken from her second collection, *Habitante de la nada*: 'Yo creo en las Noches'.[236] A translation of the line 'Ich glaube an Nächte' from the poem 'Du Dunkelheit,

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[231] Luciano Monteagudo, 'Sin el Goethe, la Lugones no hubiera sido la misma', *Instituto Goethe Buenos Aires*, 2017 <https://www.goethe.de/ins/ar/es/ueb/50j/20912143.html> [accessed 26 March 2026].
[232] Fondo Thénon, uncatalogued material. 'Instantáneas: Rilke a través de una argentina', *La Nación*, 21 October 1979.
[233] *LMI* II, 191.
[234] Fondo Thénon, uncatalogued material. 'Instantáneas: Rilke a través de una argentina', *La Nación*, 21 October 1979.
[235] Ibid.
[236] *LMI* I, 56.

aus der ich stamme', from *Das Stundenbuch*, it illustrates her sustained interest in his work.[237]

The format of the exhibition also suggests that she wanted to give due precedence to the poetry translations; by having them in a handheld catalogue, visitors could read the translations easily. In a 1987 article, Barrenechea notes that 'los poemas estaban en manos de los espectadores (y lectores) que podían seguir la serie fotográfica, colgada en las paredes, con un número de orden correlativo, y aun llevárselos consigo. Este procedimiento permitía que ambas manifestaciones estéticas no se obstaculizaran'.[238] The translations were presented so as to highlight their importance for the exhibition; even if the photography was the primary motivation, the translation was taken seriously. Thénon clearly dedicated significant time to completing the project, and continued to reflect on it long into the 1980s, as highlighted by her interview with *Diario de Poesía*.[239]

The translation project nevertheless marks an interesting juncture in Thénon's work, as it occurs during a prolonged period of poetic silence. Her third collection, *De lugares extraños*, appeared in 1967, and she did not publish another collection for seventeen years. She began writing *distancias* in 1968, including drafts in her letters to Barrenechea, but did not publish the collection until 1984.[240] The motivations for Thénon's eventual return to poetry are multiple, and seem to pivot on her collaboration with Renata Treitel (examined in Chapter 4) and her experience with dance photography (analysed in Chapter 6). One prevailing narrative is that Thénon essentially abandoned poetry for photography, and that the Rilke translation is simply a justification for her to exhibit her photography. For example, Corina Dellutri associates Thénon's interest in translation as a

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[237] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Rainer Maria Rilke's The Book of Hours: A New Translation with Commentary*, ed. by Ben Hutchinson, trans. by Susan Ranson (Boydell & Brewer, 2008), 12.
[238] Barrenechea, 'El texto poético como parodia del discurso crítico', 268.
[239] Thénon, Rosenberg, and Bellessi, 'Susana Thénon: Maquillando el caos', 4.
[240] *LMI* II, 187.

continuation of her silence: 'En Thénon, la traducción asume estos dos movimientos: abandona la escritura –que es su territorio, su tierra– y se interna en una nueva lengua: el alemán.'[241] Dellutri suggests that translation moves Thénon away from Spanish and her own writing, towards the possible refuge of another language and another's writing. However, this elides the duality of translation: even if Thénon 'se interna' in German, she must also devote herself to poetic expression in Spanish if her project is to succeed.

The timing of these translations, when Thénon had otherwise abandoned expression in Spanish, is therefore significant. It might be easy to suggest that her poetic silence was enforced by a series of dictatorships – whether directly or not – but there are many layers to Thénon's silence. Her published work from 1984 onwards demonstrates a radical change in form, suggesting a profound struggle with her poetics in this period. *distancias* is formally inventive; the collection is characterised by unusual line breaks and spaces injected into the line itself, the titular *distancias* enacted typographically in these multi-voiced poems. *Ova completa* is less visually striking, but its polyphony marks its kinship with *distancias*: and both stand in contrast with *De lugares extraños*, which belongs much more comfortably to the lyric tradition.

Rather than considering Thénon's poetic hiatus as abandoning poetry, we can read the Rilke translations as a subtle interruption of Thénon's silence. Translation is one of her first public engagements with literary language during this hiatus, disrupting the prevailing narrative of 'silence'. Dellutri notes that '[m]ientras se exilia de su propia escritura, escribe a través de otro: Rilke.'[242] It is true that Thénon is able to write through translating Rilke, but it is not as simple as exiling herself from her own writing. An analysis of her translation strategies reveals her own expressiveness and subjectivity as a translator.

[241] Dellutri, 'Thénon y Rilke', 103.
[242] Ibid., 103.

Translation, as a way of transmitting the voice of another, allows Thénon to remain a silent presence.

In fact, what Lawrence Venuti calls the 'translator's invisibility' does not seem so troubling in this context.[243] For Thénon, translation permits a kind of silent expression through her curatorial abilities. She is able to choose poems that may speak to her poetic interests or concerns, without drawing too much attention to her own opinions. Silence, in fact, is a recurring theme of the excerpts she chooses to translate; the words 'silencio' or 'silencioso' appear seven times. Thénon actively curates the representation of Rilke, moving between a variety of collections and cutting up the poems themselves, translating fragments as well as whole poems. Dellutri notes that Thénon '[q]uiebra y demuele […] Más bien disecciona', arguing that the exhibition essentially constitutes 'otro poema'.[244] This work of cutting up, reordering, and rearranging poems in fact anticipates some of the work of *distancias*, which plays with the order and arrangement of voices on the page. Given the polyphony of Thénon's later collections, this translation provides an early opportunity to try out another's voice.

Reading Thénon's translations of Rilke closely, a number of patterns reveal an underlying translation strategy. The translations are generally accurate and attentive to the semantics of the German, indicating Thénon's linguistic competency and interest in remaining close to the meaning of the source texts. The translations themselves are not marked by Argentine Spanish, instead using the second-person plural 'vosotros'. This is clear from the opening lines of the first fragment:

> Por qué me arrancáis de mis horas pálidas y azules
> hacia el confuso resplandor

[243] Venuti, 'The Translator's Invisibility', 190.
[244] Dellutri, 'Thénon y Rilke', 104.

del remolino?[245]

The translations begin with this striking rhetorical question – with the emphatic alliteration of 'el confuso resplandor del remolino' – addressed to a mysterious 'vosotros'. This second-person plural differs from the usual Argentine plural of 'ustedes', and while this is perhaps out of keeping with Thénon's poetry of the 1980s, it does resemble the lyric voice of her first three collections: *Edad sin tregua*, *Habitante de la nada*, and *De lugares extraños*. In these collections, she generally uses the first person or a generalising third person, with the occasional intimate address using 'tú', and rarely using 'vosotros'. Given Rilke's canonical status, and his distance in time from Thénon at the time of translating – as with Hölderlin and Pizarnik – 'vosotros' might have seemed the most appropriate mode of address.

Another significant area of decision-making in Thénon's translations relates to poetic form. Many of the Rilke poems have a clear rhyme scheme, and while there are moments of sound patterning, Thénon prioritises semantics over sound and rhyme. This might be connected to her thoughts on 'universality'; rhyme was not popular with Thénon and her contemporaries, and it does not appear in her own work. In conversation with Renata Treitel, Thénon mentions her lack of interest in rhyme, noting that 'Yo me baso en más en el ritmo, en la rima nunca me basé'.[246] Furthermore, free verse was an established and dominant form in Spanish-language poetry by that time. A strong rhyme scheme might have seemed dated – and furthermore, in translation, rhyme schemes can make it nearly impossible to maintain the semantic meaning of the source text.

Poem 9 is the most obvious exception, where Thénon mirrors the rhymes of the first stanza:

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[245] See Appendix, Figure 2.1.
[246] *PDN*, 101.

> La hora se inclina y me toca
> con claro golpe metálico:
> vibran mis sentidos. Siento: soy capaz
> de abarcar el día plástico.[247]

The German poem has full rhymes in the following scheme: ABAB, CDCD, EFEF. Thénon maintains rhyme between the second and the fourth lines with 'metálico' and 'plástico', which keeps a semantic similarity to the German poem. The sixth line of the poem continues the rhyme with 'todo devenir permanecía estático', but then the translation drops a fixed rhyme scheme. This translation of the German line 'ein jedes Werden stand still' shows an attentiveness to rhyme, because there are many possible translations for 'still' – such as 'quieto' – yet Thénon chooses to maintain the rhyme for as long as she can. The assonantal rhyme in Spanish, across the final three syllables as opposed to the required two, corresponds to the richness of the German rhyme.

At other times, the clear rhyme in German is not present in Spanish translation. There are several sonnets – poems 21, 23, 34, and 35 for example – where the lack of rhyme is more obvious.[248] Poem 25, 'Schlaflied' – literally 'sleep song' – is a lullaby, with a rhyme scheme ABBA, CDDC, EFFE, and consistent line lengths throughout, but Thénon's version is much less rhythmic. The first stanza in Spanish is fairly irregular in terms of line lengths and contains no rhyme:

> Cuando te pierda,
> podrás dormir
> sin que sobre ti yo murmure
> como una corona de tilos?[249]

While the imagery closely matches the German, the decision not to maintain rhyme and rhythm means the Spanish version lacks some of the rhythmic and calming effects. There is some soothing sibilance in the third line, but otherwise the effects of the lullaby are lost.

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[247] See Appendix, Figure 2.2.
[248] *LMI* I, 244–45, 251–52.
[249] See Appendix, Figure 2.3.

Thénon often adapts line length in translation, as seen in 'Schlaflied', altering the poem's formal effects. When lines are edited in translation, they are generally made shorter, as seen in the second stanza of Poem 20:

> Circulan denigrados por la pena
> de servir sin coraje a cosas sin sentido,
> y sus ropas se ajan
> y sus bellas manos envejecen pronto.[250]

The third line stands out visually, being half the length of the previous and following lines, whereas in German the line is a similar length: 'und ihre Kleider werden welk an ihnen' ('and their clothes will wither on them'). In Spanish, a translation that reflected 'an ihnen', such as 'y sus ropas se ajan sobre sus cuerpos', would ensure even line lengths. Alternatively, translating 'werden welk' as 'se marchitan', given the floral connotations of the verb in German, would create a longer line. This also occurs in the first stanza of the same poem: 'durante noches indecibles' is Thénon's translation of the line 'in namenlosen Nächten sich entstellt'. It offers a word-for-word translation of 'in namenlosen Nächten' but does not include a translation for 'sich entstellt', meaning 'disfigures itself'. It appears at times – whether due to difficulty or other factors – Thénon chooses to simplify the poem in translation, preferring not to maintain rhyme and form, or removing words or phrases.

This tendency towards abbreviation is also reflected in Thénon's choice to occasionally present short poetic extracts, instead of full poems. There are several obvious reasons for this: the poetry translations were published in a small catalogue that accompanied the exhibition, which restricted the space available. Some of the Rilke poems that Thénon translated – such as 'Requiem – Für eine Freundin' – would be several pages long if printed in that format. It seems likely that Thénon abbreviated and edited the poems according to her own personal interests, as well as to draw connections between the poems

[250] See Appendix, Figure 2.4.

and photographs on display. Thénon's curation of Rilke's poetry was likely influenced by the photographs, although the available photographs from the exhibition do not simply reproduce the images of the poem (as analysed in Chapter 6).

The photographs were not the only visual consideration of the exhibition: the typographic presentation of the poems is also intriguing. The catalogue is a bilingual edition of the poems in German and in Spanish, and each poem is numbered. Words that are italicised in published editions of Rilke are not italicised in the catalogue. This is possibly a limitation of the typography, as the poems appear to have been typewritten. Instead, spaces are inserted between individual letters in words. Poem 32 employs this visual technique:

> Oh dicha de la p e q u e ñ a criatura
> que siempre p e r m a n e c e en la entraña que la ha parido!
> Oh ventura del mosquito que todavía salta a d e n t r o,
> aún en su boda! Porque la entraña es todo.[251]

This spacing offers an interesting approach to emphasis, encouraging a slower pace by making the reading experience more difficult. As some typewriters do not offer the possibility to underscore words, this technical limitation inspires an inventive use of spacing on the page, and prefigures the typographical experiments of *distancias* to come.

The translated poems are selected from across the breadth of Rilke's oeuvre, and key recurring themes suggest Thénon's motivations. Rilke's poetry is wide-reaching, but often considers questions of life, death, and existence. These themes appear in the opening poem (Figure 2.1), where the poetic subject objects to being torn from introspection and thrust into chaos. Throughout, earthly life is chaos, and so the poetic subject hopes for respite from the divine, although Rilke's poetry also addresses his frequent crises of faith and a profound sense of alienation. Select poems mention womanhood or motherhood,

[251] See Appendix, Figure 2.5.

including the aforementioned Poem 32; the decision to translate 'Schoß' – transcribed 'Schooss' in the catalogue – as 'la entraña' is striking, because the word commonly means 'womb' or 'el vientre'. In translation, Thénon offers a more animalistic and visceral image that rejects the language of safety associated with the womb – and perhaps the obligation of women to provide such refuge. Thénon's version of Poem 23, 'Ein Frauen-Schicksal' or 'Un destino de mujer', is a bleak indictment of the status of women, painting a picture of women as objects who are hoarded, put on display, and then left to grow old in solitude.[252] The status of women within a patriarchal society gains increasing thematic relevance through Thénon's poetry, particularly in '¿por qué grita esta mujer?' from *Ova completa*.

Many of the translated poems address death and existence, and in context it is easy to read this as an indictment of life during Argentina's last dictatorship. Blanche Turck notes that despite the varied nature of Rilke's poetry, Thénon's selection has a limited lexical range: the word 'muerte' or conjugated forms of the verb 'morir' appear thirteen times.[253] Thénon's selection from Rilke's 'Requiem' is telling:

> Yo tengo muertos y los dejé irse,
> y me asombraba verlos tan confiados,
> tan rápidamente a sus anchas en la muerte, tan justos,
> tan diferentes de su fama. Solo tú, tú regresas,
> tú me rozas, andas rodando, quieres
> chocar con algo para que suene por ti
> y te delate.
> ---
> Ven aquí, a la luz de la vela. No tengo miedo
> de mirar a los muertos. Cuando vienen
> tienen derecho a permanecer
> en nuestra mirada, como las otras cosas.[254]

The final stanza is a powerful moment of witness; while the poetic subject has accepted the inevitability of death, they insist on looking. In total, nine different poems mention 'la

[252] *LMI* I, 245.
[253] Turck, 'Sur les traces d'une conversion énonciative'.
[254] See Appendix, Figure 2.6.

muerte' or 'los muertos' in Spanish, making it a clear thematic focus of the exhibition. There is also an existentialist undertone to many of the poems, as in the aforementioned Poem 32, where the baby is blessed for remaining in the womb; life seems to bring only struggle. This existentialism feels influential for the poems that Thénon published after the exhibition. Renata Treitel describes *distancias* as 'una obra existencialista' in an interview with Thénon, who is surprised, but ultimately agrees.[255] Treitel also makes an explicit comparison between Thénon and Rilke in the same conversation.

With this in mind, it is possible to discern a political translation strategy. A number of factors suggest that Thénon was not focused on making an explicit political statement in the midst of the Argentine dictatorship – the predominance of photography, the translation of another poet's work, the protected space of the Instituto Goethe – but nevertheless, her politics emerge. Through her careful curation of Rilke's poetry, we are swept into a dark and troubling world, marked by death and decay and disturbed by existential questions. Given the explicit politics that emerge in *distancias* and *Ova completa*, it is hard to believe that the violence of the dictatorship did not trouble Thénon. While it would not have been safe to denounce the dictatorship's authoritarianism and human rights abuses directly, Thénon reflects on vital issues of mortality and cruelty through translation. This reflects what Josefina Ludmer in other contexts has called 'las tretas del débil', or the tricks of the weak.[256] From Thénon's limited and even 'weak' position, she remains strategic and commits to expression by disguising it through translation. There are repeated allusions to death and suffering; when she notes in the exhibition catalogue that Rilke 'vaticinó realidades objetivas y subjetivas hoy vigentes', the 'hoy' feels like a subtle nod to the

[255] *PDN*, 83.
[256] Josefina Ludmer, 'Tretas del débil', in Ludmer, *Lo que vendrá. Una antología (1963-2013)* (Eterna Cadencia, 2020), 189–98. First published in *La sartén por el mango. Encuentro de escritoras latinoamericanas*, ed. by Patricia Elena González and Eliana Ortega (Ediciones Huracán, 1985), 47–54.

contemporary political climate. As such, the thematic curation of the Rilke translations points to a core preoccupation with politics.

Conclusion

These two translation projects, undertaken at relatively early stages of Thénon's poetic career, reveal the power of translation as a tool for expression when direct communication may be fraught. The song translations are playful and even humorous, but allow Thénon to express love for women when it was otherwise difficult to do so. The Rilke translations are a serious endeavour, demonstrating dedication and commitment, and also allow her to explore political concerns while strategically protected by the translator's invisibility. The opacity of poetry translation becomes favourable: while there is no explicit denunciation of the dictatorship in the Rilke exhibition, reading the translations with Thénon's politics in mind reveals important subtext. Given the strategic focus on semantics, it seems that Thénon is primarily interested in his language and his themes; she is able to explore questions of existence and death through translation. Translation therefore serves as a kind of expressive silence at a dangerous political moment. As Thénon begins to exercise her poetic voice in the aftermath of Argentina's dictatorship, she explores political questions obliquely in *distancias*, and then with explicit humour and irony in *Ova completa*.

Translation allows Thénon to experiment with poetic language and expression, despite the difficulties and risks of doing so. The hybrid Latin of the song translations, for example, represents Thénon negotiating the differences between Latin and Argentine Spanish: the kind of linguistic enquiry that becomes essential in *Ova completa*, particularly the titular poem. Translating Rilke allows Thénon to adopt a markedly different lyric voice, and to explore formal and thematic questions that become recurring concerns.

Translation is therefore a vital experience that hones Thénon's poetics – or, as Dellutri notes, 'La traducción es un procedimiento para escribir y escribirse.'[257] Translation is a playground, a laboratory – first in the songs, and then in the self-translations with Renata Treitel to be analysed in Chapter 4 – but translation is also a refuge, a place for silence that still allows for some form of expression.

[257] Dellutri, 'Thénon y Rilke', 106.

Part I: Comparative Coda

What does close analysis of a poet's translations reveal about their own poetics? Comparing and contrasting Pizarnik and Thénon's translations highlights the role of translation in honing poetic expression. Assessing the processes involved in translation – motivation, selection of authors, curation of texts, and translation strategy – reveals how Pizarnik and Thénon approached poetry more broadly, and offers insight into their personal poetics. Reading literary translations alongside archival and published materials establishes for both Pizarnik and Thénon what María Constanza Guzmán calls a 'translator's archive'.[258]

These translators' archives reveal that Pizarnik and Thénon engaged deeply with translation on a conceptual level, remaining committed to translation throughout their careers. However, their motivations for practising translation vary; translation is primarily a form of literary labour for Pizarnik, and a space for experimentation for Thénon. Pizarnik published more translations and discussed the practice far more than Thénon. Early in Pizarnik's career, translating poets like Bonnefoy for magazines was a strategic move to boost her literary reputation, a recurrent concern throughout her life. Pizarnik's poetry is preoccupied with the work of writing – as suggested by the title of *Los trabajos y las noches* (1965) – and translation serves as a mechanism of affiliation, attaching her name to more prominent authors and publications. Pizarnik was frequently concerned with what she considered the limitations of her social class and background – raised by Jewish migrants in Buenos Aires province – and from a young age felt alienated from cultural life in the city of Buenos Aires. However, translation allows her to place herself firmly at the centre of the literary scene, associated with important names. Following her acclaimed

[258] Guzmán, 'Translation North and South: Composing the Translator's Archive', 172.

collection *Árbol de Diana*, her translations increasingly reflect her personal taste and poetic affinities, as with Artaud and Hölderlin.

By contrast, Thénon appears to have viewed translation less as work and more as play. She did not publish her translations in magazines, and only published one book-length translation, instead focusing on more experimental forms like the photo-translation exhibition at the Instituto Goethe. Social and class differences between Pizarnik and Thénon are likely relevant here: Thénon, as the daughter of prominent psychologist Jorge Thénon, was less isolated from Buenos Aires' literary and cultural scenes, and Victoria Alcala notes that 'los Thénon gozaban de una buena posición económica'.[259] Thénon does not seem unconcerned with the financial implications of poetry publishing: the comedic poem 'Te detiene alguien que te conoce pero no puede recordar tu nombre' jokes about the lack of money in a poetry career, although the poetic subject does not actually confess to needing to work.[260] This suggests Thénon did not use translation for income, and instead prioritised the creative and generative possibilities of her eclectic translation practice. Translation remains a place for experimentation, whether these are irreverent translations into hybrid Latin, or verbal and visual translations of Rilke's poetry.

Comparing their strategies, however, reveals that translation functions as a kind of laboratory for both poets: a place to test out different forms of expression. Pizarnik's affiliative strategies are shaped by her own preferences, and often reveal a desire to adopt other voices. For a poet who so famously struggles with language – to name one example of many, 'ayúdame a escribir palabras / en esta noche, en este mundo' – translation offers Pizarnik the opportunity to appropriate other poetic voices, temporarily relieving her of the

[259] Alcala, *Susana Thénon*, 42.
[260] *LMI* II, 103.

obligation to 'invent' her own language.[261] Some of her most famous themes are born through translation: the motif of the garden and the refrain 'sólo vine a ver el jardín' find their origins in the Spanish translation of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*.[262] Furthermore, after translating others' French poetry, she eventually translates her own French compositions, turning self-translation into a mode of poetic production. Translation allows Pizarnik to experiment with a plurality of voices.

Thénon shares this anxiety about the possibilities of poetic expression, although this manifests differently in her work. When poetry feels difficult, translation allows Thénon to express herself through the selection and translation of Rilke's poetry. The song translations and the Rilke project offer a way to approach poetry through the words and voice of another, when personal expression is fraught. Where Pizarnik sought to attach her own name to prominent figures – thereby gaining visibility – Thénon opts for a strategic invisibility, where translation allows her to quietly work through concerns that eventually emerge in her own poetry. The Rilke project occurs at a pivotal period in Thénon's career, before the multi-voiced texts, multilingual poems, and heterogeneous discourses of her 1980s poetry. Translation, rather than being a tool for boosting literary reputation or income, remains a playground for literary experimentation, and leads to some of Thénon's most acclaimed work.

It becomes clear that for both Pizarnik and Thénon, translation is not derivative – as some traditional translation theory would have it – but generative. Relatively unconcerned with traditional questions of 'fidelity', both poets focus on the subtle work and creative potential of poetry translation. Establishing the basis of their engagement in translation – literary translation – allows us to consider other kinds of translation in greater

[261] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 400.
[262] Ibid., 431.

depth. Parts II and III of this thesis turn to the impact of translation on their own poetry, through self-translation and visual translation. Part I reveals that literary translation, with its inherent multiplicity of voices, is a powerful space for literary exploration that leads them to play with different voices, discourses, and languages. But Pizarnik and Thénon do not only translate the works of others. As developed in Part II, intriguing things happen to poetic language and voice when they translate themselves.

Part II: Self-Translation

Chapter 3 – Alejandra Pizarnik: Poetry as Translingual Editing

Introduction

How might translation generate 'original' poetry? Part I analysed practices of literary translation: examining choices of author and text, and considering the translation strategies that emerge in the process. These translations raise questions of voice, accent, literary labour, and expression; and reveal strategies of affiliation, ventriloquism, silence, and play. With these concerns in mind, Part II of this thesis examines how translational techniques emerge in Pizarnik and Thénon's own poetry. Having analysed the subtleties of their translation strategies, the following chapters examine how translational approaches shape their poetic production in possibly unexpected ways. Through the practice of self-translation, translation becomes a critical and reflexive tool that transforms their approach to poetry.

Self-translation is possible in Pizarnik's work thanks to the existence of her own French-language poetry, written while she lived in Paris from 1960 to 1964. Pizarnik's French poetry is an example of literary translingualism, defined by Steven Kellman as 'the phenomenon of authors who write in more than one language or at least in a language other than their primary one.'[263] While translingualism can be difficult to define – it may be hard to establish a 'primary' language for some writers – Kellman's definition offers a useful basis for discussion, given that Pizarnik is best known as a Spanish-language poet, and her French poems therefore move beyond her usual language of composition.

Pizarnik did not publish her French poetry in her lifetime, instead publishing fragments in self-translation in the later collections *Extracción de la piedra de locura* (1968) and *El infierno musical* (1971). With the exception of 'L'obscurité des eaux' – as

[263] Kellman, *The Translingual Imagination*, 8.

published in the anthology *Nombres y figuras* (1969) – which is credited as an original French composition, this process of self-translation is rarely if ever acknowledged by Pizarnik, or by critics of her work. Even in *Nombres y figuras*, Pizarnik does not explicitly use the word 'translation', only noting: 'Este poema fue originalmente escrito en francés'.[264] While Pizarnik is coy about her poetic techniques, translation clearly comes to play an important role in the composition of her own poetry.

While translation is sometimes criticised as a lesser form of creativity (what Kate Briggs calls a 'little art'), establishing a hierarchy between source and translation, or author and translator, appears more difficult in cases of self-translation.[265] This blurring of traditional categories challenges the reductive (and increasingly unpopular) reading of translation as derivative, and instead points to the creativity of translation. In suggesting that translation may be a source or generator of poetry – rather than a product that stems from an 'original' text – Pizarnik offers new ways of understanding originality and authenticity, which not only affect her poetry, but her relationship to language.

In the titular poem from *Extracción de la piedra de locura*, Pizarnik asks herself: '¿Qué significa traducirse en palabras?'[266] Both translingualism – raising the question of which language to write in – and self-translation – a reflexive activity, as indicated by the Spanish 'traducirse' – lead to a questioning of both *lengua* and *lenguaje*. Through translingualism and self-translation, Spanish emerges not as an unquestioned or unproblematised 'mother tongue', but as a site of interaction for different languages and discourses. Pizarnik reflects critically on language, the poet's primary tool, by taking the invitation to 'traducirse' quite literally.

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[264] APP Box 9, Folder 29 includes a copy of Pizarnik's *Nombres y figuras* (La Esquina, 1969).
[265] Briggs, *This Little Art*, 268.
[266] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 253.

The *Poemas franceses*: A Translingual Practice

Without archival work, Pizarnik's French poetry would have remained out of sight. Pizarnik gathered together a series of manuscripts under the title 'poemas franceses 1962' – written on a page torn from a French poetry book – which are now held in the Pizarnik Papers at Princeton.[267] At least 50 years after Pizarnik first collected her drafts together, Patricio Ferrari compiled and translated the poems into Spanish for the Chilean edition, *Poemas franceses*, and co-translated them into English with Forrest Gander for the US edition, *The Galloping Hour*.[268] While Pizarnik's note on the cover suggests they were composed in 1962, one typed poem is dated to December 1961, and Ferrari dates their composition to between 1962 and 1963.[269] All of the French poems in the folder were written during Pizarnik's time in Paris. Beyond Ferrari's work, there has been little critical engagement with Pizarnik's French poetry, even though Ferrari highlights that 'lo cierto es que por lo menos seis de los textos franceses […] darán origen a algún título, texto o parte de texto' elsewhere in Pizarnik's published poetry.[270] Despite this, there are few studies of the French poetry, and virtually no critical engagement with self-translation. Analysing the French poems, and subsequent stages of self-translation and translingual editing, reveals translation's vital role in Pizarnik's poetic process.

The presence of French poetry in Pizarnik's archive gives rise to a number of questions: in particular, her motivations for writing in French in the first place. There appear to be three main factors: firstly, the context of her living in Paris; secondly, aesthetic curiosity; and thirdly, her concerns with language more broadly. It seems logical

[267] APP Box 6, Folder 28.
[268] Pizarnik, *Poemas franceses*; and Pizarnik, *The Galloping Hour: French Poems*. I will primarily cite *The Galloping Hour*, as it includes a wider selection of works, except for archival information which was exclusively published in *Poemas franceses*.
[269] Pizarnik, *Poemas franceses*, 37.
[270] Ibid., 39.

that Pizarnik may have experimented with writing in French while living in Paris; her time in France was an opportunity to improve her language skills, and she was dedicated to speaking French. Her archive reveals she corresponded with several writers entirely in French, and her letters indicate a desire to improve her linguistic skills. In a 1962 letter to Bona de Mandiargues, wife of the French Surrealist André Pieyre de Mandiargues, she writes: 'Pardonnez-moi ma nouvelle rhétorique mais j'ai voulais [sic] te montrer mes progrès en français'.[271] Despite some confusion with the past tenses, Pizarnik is clearly eager to improve her French. In this context, writing poetry in French may have represented another development of her linguistic ambition.

A secondary motivation for Pizarnik is to explore the aesthetics of the French language. This might be why these are 'poemas franceses', rather than 'poemas en francés': it is not simply a case of changing the language of composition, but also the style or form. Alice Loda and Antonio Viselli highlight the aesthetic dimensions of translingual poetry, and the importance of 'immersion in and dialogue with other—sometimes distant— traditions, opening unprecedented spaces of rhythmical and lexical encounters'.[272] Pizarnik's interest in French literature and culture is well-known, exemplified by her translations of French poetry and her *palais de vocabulaire* notebooks, which frequently cite French literature. Writing French poetry then represents a further depth of immersion in the language, and opens up possibilities unique to the sounds of French.

Loda and Viselli note that translingualism often involves 'rethinking the very qualities of poetic language', often through 'accelerated contact with the sound and shape

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[271] 'Forgive my new rhetoric but I wanted to show you my progress in French.' Translation my own. Alejandra Pizarnik and André Pieyre de Mandiargues, *Alejandra Pizarnik & André Pieyre de Mandiargues: Correspondance Paris-Buenos Aires, 1961-1972*, ed. by Mariana Di Ció (Ypsilon Éditeur, 2018), 36.
[272] Alice Loda and Antonio Viselli, 'Translingualism and Poetry' in *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translingualism*, ed. by Natasha Lvovich and Steven G. Kellman (Routledge, 2022), 19.

of words.'[273] For example, Pizarnik's French poems create rhymes and sound patterns that would be hard to achieve in another language, as in Poem 9: 'à toi / le toit / à moi / les mois / mémoire / armoire de gloire / sale salle de sel'.[274] Pizarnik's Spanish poetry rarely features this level of experimentation with rhyme, assonance, or sound patterning, which suggests her interest in French writing reflects a curiosity about the material and sonic possibilities of the language. At times Pizarnik appears to explore a kind of free association based on sound: paralleling on a sonic level the automatic writing technique espoused by the Surrealists.

The third possible motivation for translingualism relates to Pizarnik's concerns with language and expression. Alongside the use of sound patterning, the French poems are also written in prose, and are much longer than anything Pizarnik published while in Paris. *Árbol de Diana* (1962), one of her most acclaimed collections, features poetic vignettes that feel almost fragmentary in their brevity. This difference in form could be attributed to their unpublished nature; the poems are often edited through self-translation before publication. Fiona Mackintosh has observed that Pizarnik's 'aesthetic of the publishable' creates a work that 'must be an object from which (almost) all traces of the speaking subject as an individual self are erased, almost asphyxiated'.[275] These draft texts might not show the same signs of erasure, but thematically they remain deeply concerned with silence. It is therefore significant that Pizarnik's translingualism also involved experimenting with different poetic styles, as well as a different language. How does translingualism challenge her poetics, or even her relationship to language?

[273] Loda and Viselli, 'Translingualism and Poetry', 25.
[274] 'To you / the roof / to me / the months / memory / wardrobe of glory / dirty room of salt'. Translation my own. Pizarnik, *The Galloping Hour*, 36.
[275] Mackintosh, 'Self-Censorship', 525.

Literary translingualism is a phenomenon that appears to unsettle critics. While Steven Kellman offers a useful and straightforward definition in *The Translingual Imagination* – that of the writer using a language other than their primary one – he also displays a certain anxiety about the practice: 'There seems something not only painful but unnatural, almost matricidal, about an author who abandons the Muttersprache.'[276] There are many reasons it may appear natural for a writer to work in another language – the question of migration, for example, is relevant for Pizarnik – but Kellman associates translingualism with the abandon of the mother tongue. The idea of a 'Muttersprache' or a stable mother tongue is assumed, echoing the language of the nuclear family; abandoning the mother tongue is therefore presented as cold and unnatural. This anxiety reveals a great deal about latent attitudes towards language: principally, the assumption that we all have – or are able to identify – a single mother tongue, and that this is the natural language for literary expression.

This assumption conforms to what Yasemin Yildiz calls the postmonolingual paradigm: the rise of monolingualism as the primary way of understanding the individual's relationship to language.[277] Originally a phenomenon that occurred in late eighteenth-century Europe, this assumed monolingualism displaced the multilingual norm of previous centuries. Yildiz's comments elucidate Kellman's anxieties about abandonment: she notes that 'individuals and social formations are imagined to possess one "true" language only, their "mother tongue," and through this possession to be organically linked to an exclusive, clearly demarcated ethnicity, culture, and nation.'[278] Our current moment can be characterised as 'postmonolingual' in that we exist in a world where monolingualism is

[276] Kellman, *The Translingual Imagination*, 13.
[277] Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (Fordham University Press, 2012).
[278] Ibid., 2.

presented as the norm, but the endurance of multilingualism calls this into question.[279] In this landscape, translingualism is unsettling as it challenges the monolingual paradigm, and the forms of belonging promoted by the 'mother tongue' discourse: familial, ethnic, cultural, and national.

When considering Pizarnik's translingualism, even this brief overview of how translingualism unsettles certain presuppositions about language is revealing. Pizarnik's relationship to language – both *lenguaje* and *lengua* – is notoriously complex, and establishing this monolingual paradigm in her biography is challenging. Spanish was not Pizarnik's mother's tongue, as Russian and Yiddish were spoken at home, and furthermore, Pizarnik's relationship with Spanish often appears fraught. Alongside orthographic errors in her manuscripts and inconsistent use of *rioplatense* Spanish in her diaries, she also writes in negative terms about the Spanish language. One memorable diary entry recounts her visceral response to Calderón de la Barca:

> Un ensayo sobre Pedro Salinas me reconcilia con el idioma español. Ayer, después de haber leído *La vida es sueño* sentí un dolor increíble al pensar que *ésa es mi lengua*. Mi actitud será infantil. Lo es, sin duda. Pero mi sufrimiento era real y casi decido «olvidarme» del español y comenzar a escribir en francés.[280]

Pizarnik's comments recall Kellman's anxieties around abandonment, with her suggestion that she forget Spanish and begin writing in French. Nevertheless, she does acknowledge that her remarks are a little extreme – or 'infantil' – and begins the anecdote with her reconciliation with the Spanish language. Furthermore, the word 'español' is also ambiguous: in this example, Pizarnik refers to two writers from Spain, so it is unclear whether this represents her attitude to peninsular Spanish, or the Spanish language more broadly. As early as 1959, Pizarnik emphasises the scale of her literary ambition by criticising writers from Argentina, writing in her diary: 'Y pensar que yo debiera ser la más

[279] Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 5.
[280] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 505.

grande poeta en lengua castellana. Esto lo digo por la carencia de buenos poetas. En el país de los tuertos...'.[281] Adapting the popular expression 'en el país de los ciegos, el tuerto es rey', Pizarnik clearly connects her literary ambition to writing in Spanish.

Spanish is Pizarnik's literary language of choice, but her relationship to the language rejects the 'mother tongue' discourse of monolingualism. In terms of a language connoting 'ethnic' belonging, as Yildiz's monolingual paradigm suggests, Pizarnik often notes in her diaries that she feels she belongs to Europe – as the home of her Jewish ancestors – rather than Argentina. She also occasionally argues that her Jewish identity exists in opposition to her Argentine one: 'No soy argentina. Soy judía'.[282] This is not a consistent attitude: at other moments in her diaries, she refers to herself as Argentine. But this unease with national belonging affects her attitude towards her *idioma*, further complicated by Pizarnik's relationship to *lenguaje*. This is widely recognised within Pizarnik scholarship: quoting Pizarnik's own diary, Fiona Mackintosh describes 'her trademark and categorizable mode, that of the "poeta lírico amenazado por lo inefable y lo incomunicable" (*Diarios*, 413)'.[283]

The ineffable, in particular, is an important motif for Pizarnik. In the late poem 'En esta noche, en este mundo', Pizarnik frames it in relation to discourses around the mother tongue:

> la lengua natal castra
> la lengua es un órgano de conocimiento
> del fracaso de todo poema
> castrado por su propia lengua
> que es el órgano de la re-creación[284]

[281] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 311.
[282] Ibid., 772.
[283] Mackintosh, 'Self-Censorship', 509.
[284] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 398.

The 'lengua natal' or mother tongue is framed in strongly negative terms, presented as a castrating force or source of failure. This is linked to an understanding of language as referential rather than creative: it offers a 're-creación', not 'creación' itself. The poet laments the gap between the sign and the signified – 'si digo agua ¿beberé? / si digo pan ¿comeré?'[285] The absence connoted by the presence of the word, but not its referent, is described as an absolute betrayal. In this sense, Pizarnik further develops her Romantic ideal of language, reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's pure language: an impossible language that would encapsulate all desired expression.[286] In comparison to this ideal, the language that we do possess is seen to be lacking.

While it is possible to read this poem in terms of failure, Pizarnik also foregrounds the possibility of the attempt: after all, she does not abandon linguistic expression when criticising language. Jack Halberstam, in *The Queer Art of Failure*, argues that 'failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world.'[287] Even when Pizarnik reads her poetry in terms of failure, she continues to question language using the tools of language: through the creative act of producing a poem. At the end of the poem, she even asks for help: 'ayúdame a escribir palabras / en esta noche en este mundo'.[288] Critical studies that favour ineffability mean that Pizarnik's repeated attempts at literary expression are not always paid sufficient attention.

As such, highlighting translingualism not only challenges discourses around the mother tongue, but also the prevailing image of Pizarnik's poetic persona. Rather than the typical figure of the silenced poet, Pizarnik is revealed to be a prolific writer in both

[285] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 399.
[286] Rendall, 'The Translator's Task', 163.
[287] Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Duke University Press, 2011), 2–3.
[288] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 400.

Spanish and French; Pizarnik's papers at Princeton include a wealth of material across 10 boxes, including at least 17 poems or poetic fragments initially written in French. Translingualism can be considered as one of several strategies applied by Pizarnik in attempting to find poetic expression. A narrative of proliferation and abundance emerges, instead of an exclusive focus on silence or self-censorship. As she notes in her diary: 'Mi proyecto de escribir voces es inteligente pues denota algún conocimiento de mí. Si tuviera una sola voz no escribiría' [emphasis in original].[289] This polyphony is central to Pizarnik's poetics, and a focus on translingualism highlights this alternative reading of her work.

Translingualism is therefore a productive concept for approaching Pizarnik's work. It challenges and destabilises the possibly restrictive concept of an 'authentic' mother tongue, and it casts Pizarnik in a new light, as a poet committed to the work of writing. The existence of self-translations into Spanish enhances this interpretation, particularly the challenge to 'authenticity'. Jerry Won Lee notes that translingual texts can trouble discourses around 'originality':

> While what is encountered may not be 'authentic' per se, if we are able to trouble the very conditions and premises of originality and to approach the problem instead as a spatial and semiotic consideration, then the presumed transposability between the 'authentic' and the 'derivative' […] can itself be approached from a continuously evolving vantage point.[290]

Pizarnik's French might not be 'authentic' in the conventional sense, but it would be unreasonable to call her own work 'derivative'. While translingualism is sometimes framed in translational terms – i.e., the translingual writer must always be thinking in their original language in their mind, and then translating it onto the page – that is neither a necessary nor helpful assumption. Pizarnik's translingualism troubles ideas of 'original

[289] APP Box 2, Folder 7.
[290] Jerry Won Lee, *Locating Translingualism* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 4.

language', 'native language', and 'mother tongue', and the subsequent self-translation troubles the idea of an 'original' text.

Experiments in Self-Translation: From the Archive

The story of these translingual poems does not end with their composition; they went on to provide Pizarnik with material for experiments in self-translation. While 'Le sexe, la nuit' was first translated into Spanish in Saint-Paul-de-Vence in December 1962, most of the poems remained untranslated until 1967.[291] Back in Buenos Aires, Pizarnik notes her intention to translate them, in a diary entry from 2 June 1967: '*Libro*: Ver poemas viejos. *Phrases*. Traducir poemas en prosa franceses'.[292] There appear to be a few factors that inspire the act of self-translation: her increasing interest in literary translation, evidenced by the publication of Bonnefoy's *Poemas* that same year; and a search for poetic inspiration. In the context of a to-do list in her diary, translating her French prose poems suggests a search for material for her new book.

It seems likely that these self-translations were motivated by a search for inspiration. After Pizarnik's departure from Paris in 1964, she repeatedly refers to the city in idyllic terms: a poetic paradise that she can no longer reach. In 1968, Pizarnik expresses anxiety around her writing routine, associating Paris with her most productive years: 'Me temo que no sea posible codificar el quehacer poético. Pero en París podía. Pero tal vez allí estaba en perpetuo estado de poesía.'[293] In describing poetry as 'el quehacer poético,' Pizarnik seems to understand poetry less as divine inspiration, and more as sustained craft and poetic labour. If poetry is work, Paris is romanticised as the site of poetic productivity.

[291] Pizarnik, *Poemas franceses*, 38.
[292] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 756.
[293] Ibid., 798.

It seems likely, then, that her French texts are imbued with the sense of poetic possibility associated with Paris. As her 'combate con las palabras' continues, the French poetry offers her some pre-existing words with which to experiment.[294]

The archival *poemas franceses* reveal the rewriting that took place in self-translation.[295] Included with the French poems are a series of Spanish translations: most are typed on blue paper with handwritten annotations in both pencil and pen, suggesting they were translated around the same time, with further translations typed on white paper and one handwritten draft of 'Toute la nuit'. These self-translations were never published in this form, although a few were revised substantially for publication as original Spanish poems. This suggests a three-part process: firstly, the composition of the translingual French poems; secondly, the first attempts at self-translation; thirdly, the translingual editing that leads to the creation of 'new' published poems. Before focusing on the poetry that Pizarnik published, it is worth analysing these early drafts of the self-translations. In manuscript format, Pizarnik's additions, excisions, comments, and annotations offer insight into her workings as a translator, that go beyond what can be seen in her published translations. These traces reveal Pizarnik's poetic instincts, and show her at work as an editor of her own poetry.

In *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals*, Karen Emmerich theorises translation as a process of 'translingual editing': as one intervention of many in a text's editorial history.[296] Given the effects of varied editorial processes, it often becomes difficult to identify a stable 'original' that is the basis for the translation. Countering the essentialised binary of original/translation, Emmerich argues that '"originals," too, are

[294] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 158.
[295] APP Box 6, Folder 28.
[296] Emmerich, *Literary Translation*, 2.

shaped by generic conventions and a nearly infinite list of ghostly "sources".'[297] This produces the idea of an unstable original, which is of particular relevance for the Pizarnik archive, as it is often difficult to identify an 'original' or 'first' draft of a text. For example, there are two drafts of 'Le sexe, la nuit' in Box 6, Folder 28: one handwritten, one typed. The handwritten nature of the first suggests it might be an initial version of a poem, but the typed nature of the second – with very few annotations – suggests it might be more definitive. Identifying a 'first' or 'original' translation of the French poems is also challenging. While not all French poems were translated, there are generally at least two versions of the poems that were translated. 'Toute la nuit' was revisited by Pizarnik over and over again, with at least seven iterations in the archive.[298]

For Emmerich, translation is just another stage in the life of the unstable original. Translation becomes translingual editing, where translating and editing are 'mutually implicated processes whose points of divergence are also points of contact'.[299] As such, translation is simply the 'further textual extension of an already unstable literary work'.[300] This definition of translation is particularly productive for self-translation, where the poet, translator, and editor are one and the same. Occupying subtly different roles – and in Pizarnik's case, separated in space and time – the poet-translator-editor participates in the creation of poetry by rewriting and transforming their idea of the 'original,' itself difficult to identify. In the case of the *poemas franceses*, both the draft self-translations and the published poems represent processes of translingual editing. After the first stage of translingualism, the second stage of 'initial translation' already begins to incorporate

[297] Emmerich, *Literary Translation*, 13.
[298] APP Box 6, Folder 28 includes one handwritten and one typed version of the translation. Lines reappear in 'Sous la nuit' (Box 6 Folder 36), 'En un principio fueron mis muertos' (Box 6 Folder 39), 'Texta' (Box 5 Folder 13), 'Linterna sorda' (Box 4 Folder 6), and a draft translation from 14 June 1967 in the back of a notebook (Box 2 Folder 5).
[299] Emmerich, *Literary Translation*, 13.
[300] Ibid., 14.

editorial processes, as Pizarnik translated into Spanish in a creative fashion, or what Ferrari calls 'transcreación'.[301] It is easy to imagine that by the third stage of self-translation, Pizarnik herself 'translated' without an 'original' in mind.

For the purposes of this thesis, the texts in the 'Poemas franceses' folder can be considered definitive – or as close to definitive as can be established for an 'inherently unstable "original"' – as it seems that Pizarnik gathered them together herself and labelled them as such.[302] Following this curatorial gesture, it is worth looking at the drafts of the self-translation gathered in this folder. They are likely to be the first drafts of the translation, or to represent her efforts at a systematic self-translation project. Comparing the draft French poems with these translations reveals emerging translational and poetic strategies.[303] If translation is a series of decisions, these textual traces show the process of deciding what to maintain, what to alter, or what to remove altogether.

In the typescript translations, Pizarnik generally completes a word-for-word translation. Only once the first draft is complete does she return with a pen or pencil to remove entire lines, cross out words and replace them with alternatives, or occasionally adjust line breaks or syntax. Many of these decisions bring the style of the longer French poems closer to Pizarnik's style in Spanish, although by the late 1960s Pizarnik was also publishing longer prose poems in Spanish. The Spanish becomes more oblique and less personal in translation, a tendency that is exacerbated in the poetic compositions created through translingual editing. In what follows, I will analyse the first translations of four poems. 'Nue', 'Tout le long du jour', and 'Toute la nuit' all reappear in translation in her published poetry. 'Le sexe, la nuit' is the source for one unpublished poem featured in

[301] Pizarnik, *Poemas franceses*, 39.
[302] APP Box 6, Folder 28.
[303] In what follows, references to French poems are generally taken from the archival drafts (APP Box 6, Folder 28).

Pizarnik's *Poesía completa*, and is also of interest as it displays what Fiona Mackintosh has called Pizarnik's 'anxious self-editing, which—particularly as regards sexuality—shades into self-censorship'.[304] Tracing the stages of this translation process offers insight into Pizarnik's strategies for poetic composition.

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Figure 3.1 Translation of 'Nue', APP Box 6, Folder 28

[304] Mackintosh, 'Self-Censorship', 509.

'Desnuda' is close to a word-for-word version of the French 'Nue', although several lines have been removed: 'On m'avait promi[s] [sic] un silence' ('They had promised me a silence') and 'Comme j'aimerai[s] te tuer—' ('How I'd like to kill you—').[305] It is interesting that the first line is removed from this draft, because the Spanish 'Me habían prometido un silencio' occurs elsewhere in Pizarnik's later poems. It appears in 'Estado de alerta' (APP Box 6, Folder 24) and 'Signos' from *El infierno musical*: 'Me habían prometido un silencio como un fuego, una casa de silencio.'[306] The second absent line is written in a different ink in the original French manuscript, so it is possibly a later addition that Pizarnik chose not to include. It also introduces a melodramatic figure with violent agency, in contrast to the rest of the poem, which includes no first-person verbs. By removing this line from the poem, Pizarnik reduces repetition and also makes the poem less personal and less violent.

Pizarnik also crosses out the translated line 'Estás aún más lejos que yo'. This might be for its lack of rhythmic or poetic effect: the addition of 'aún' in pen suggests an effort to rebalance the line. The verb 'está' is also removed from the line 'Tu rostro ~~está~~ más cerca de mí que mi rostro', making the phrase more concise. And the final line – the translation of 'on aimerais [sic] tuer' ('one/we would like to kill') – is revised considerably. Given the dramatic nature of this desire to kill, Pizarnik ponders several options, starting with 'Se preferiría matar' and also proposing 'Hay deseos' or 'Hay un deseo de matar'. These options all favour the passive voice or an impersonal construction, making the sentence much less personal, and the abstraction of 'Hay un deseo de matar' generates a sinister effect. Even the fairly limited changes to the translation of 'Nue' start

[305] APP Box 6, Folder 28.
[306] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 276.

to reveal certain tendencies in Pizarnik as translator-editor: especially her preference for concision and abstraction.

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Figure 3.2 Translation of ‘Tout le long du jour’, APP Box 6, Folder 28

‘Tout le long du jour’ gains a new French title in translation, which eventually names a similar published poem. The note next to the title – ‘Ver Bachiller’ – seems to

refer to a notebook, suggesting Pizarnik was inspired to continue the drafting process elsewhere. While the published 'L'obscurité des eaux' is much shorter than this translation, there are already interesting omissions and changes at this stage. The omissions generally seem to be for the sake of concision. At the beginning of the poem, Pizarnik does not translate the end of this phrase:

> Tout le jour je dorme [sic] en pleurant pendant que les mots tombent comme l'eau dechirée, […][307]
>
> Todo el día duermo sollozando mientras las palabras caen, […]

This refusal to translate 'comme l'eau dechirée' ('like torn water') simplifies the imagery in Spanish. The image of torn water is somewhat illogical and repetitive, given that the poem makes constant reference to water and falling. Removing this simile makes the poem more impactful and concise. Elsewhere, the questions 'Où est ton ancien savoir ? – on me demande. Où est ton silence ?' ('Where is your ancient knowledge? they ask me. Where is your silence?') are not attributed to anyone in Spanish. While in French the poet is pursued by strangers' questions, the shift to rhetorical questions in Spanish makes this conflict internal, related to matters of self-doubt.

Elsewhere, another reference to language – specifically 'la palabra' – leads Pizarnik to edit the French text in translation:

> […] à toute heure j'attende [sic] que le mot obscène sert à former ton visage.[308]
>
> […] en todo instante espero que la palabra visceral pueda configurar tu rostro.

The verb 'attendre' ('to wait') is translated as 'esperar', but with the following verb in the subjunctive, Pizarnik emphasises hope rather than waiting. The poetic subject awaits (or hopes for) language in the form of words to create a face, but in French the word is 'obscene', whereas in Spanish it is 'visceral'. The etymology of 'visceral' connects language more specifically to the body and its viscera, making the imagery more intense.

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[307] APP Box 6, Folder 28.
[308] APP Box 6, Folder 28.

Pizarnik's translation choices often affect the intensity of the poetic imagery, although sometimes she aims to make the poem less melodramatic. For example, 'oiseau affolé' is initially translated as 'pájaro enloquecido', but Pizarnik scribbles out the adjective to simplify the image.

In 'L'obscurité des eaux', many of the handwritten annotations relate to the first-person subject of the poem. Sometimes – but not always – Pizarnik removes the 'yo' from her translation, which is possibly a remnant from a word-for-word translation approach. French requires the subject whereas Spanish does not and, in her earlier collections, Pizarnik avoids it all together. As Cecilia Rossi notes, 'this absence of "yo" in her first collection is possible thanks to the use of "sujeto tácito" in Spanish'.[309] This does not mean Pizarnik's poetry is not self-centred: it often concerns the self and demonstrates what Fiona Mackintosh calls 'poetic solipsism'.[310] But in her drafts, the decision whether to maintain or remove the 'yo' suggests a concern with not only poetic rhythm, but also how much the lyric subject should insist on its own presence. When she inserts the reflexive 'me' into the phrase 'yo me hablo con tu voz', there is greater willingness to confront the subjectivity of the poem.

[309] Cecilia Rossi, 'Alejandra Pizarnik's Poetry: Translating the Translation of Subjectivity' in *Árbol de Alejandra: Pizarnik Reassessed*, ed. by Fiona J. Mackintosh and Karlo Posso (Boydell & Brewer, 2007), 136.
[310] Mackintosh, 'Alejandra Pizarnik as Translator', 45.

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Figure 3.3 Translation of ‘Toute la nuit’, APP Box 6, Folder 28

There are both typed and handwritten drafts of the translation of ‘Toute la nuit’ in the ‘Poemas franceses’ folder, without a fixed title in Spanish. The handwritten version appears to be composed in one attempt, with almost no corrections or annotations, but the typed version shows Pizarnik’s decision-making at work. In the margins, comments of ‘sí’, ‘no’ and ‘?’ indicate poetic approval, rejection or indecision. At the bottom of the page, Pizarnik generates lists of synonyms to support her translation. The first two columns represent her thoughts on translating the noun ‘bruit’ (meaning ‘noise’ or ‘sound’). In the

end, Pizarnik favours a verb over a noun, with ‘resonar’ marked with an ‘x’ and underlined as a clear favourite. The process suggests a consideration of both the sounds and semantics of each word, for synonyms rarely mean the exact same thing: however, they provide Pizarnik with creative options for her translation.

The Spanish translation is shorter than the French text, with several repetitive or meandering phrases left untranslated in the typescript version, or crossed out. Furthermore, references to personal emotion and madness are removed: ‘me deliro buscando’ becomes ‘busco’, and another reference to ‘me delira’ is crossed out entirely. The conflict with the presence of ‘yo’ continues, and it only remains where necessary for emphasis: ‘sé que el abandono soy yo, que la sola voz que ~~llora~~ habla soy yo.’ Explicit references to the first and second person are generally removed or rewritten. The final couplet is transformed by annotation:

> Toda la noche ~~te~~ pregunto por qué.
> Toda la noche me dice~~s~~n no.

Crossing out the object pronoun ‘te’ and the second-person verb ‘dices’ removes the insinuation of a simple interpersonal conflict – between the poet and another, or two sides of the poet’s self – and potentially expands the scale of the conflict, rendering the penultimate line more contemplative. In the final line, the passive voice of ‘me dicen’ creates a sense of mystery: we know the poet is being denied knowledge or information, but not who denies them, creating the impression of a stranded and isolated poetic subject.

There is one interesting addition to the Spanish text: the French ‘le vent dément’ becomes ‘el viento demente me desmiente’. The French phrase ‘le vent dément’ also appears in ‘Souvenir près de l’oubli’, a poem mostly consisting of rhyming word associations in French, but here Pizarnik unlocks further potential to the wordplay.[311] It is

[311] Pizarnik, *The Galloping Hour*, 42.

unclear whether Pizarnik knew that the Spanish verb ‘desmentir’ has a close equivalent in French (‘démentir’), but the Spanish allows for an interesting case of variation and repetition. In translating between two languages with connected etymologies and histories, wordplay in one language can inspire further wordplay in another.

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Figure 3.4 Translation of ‘Le sexe, la nuit’, APP Box 6, Folder 28

‘Le sexe, la nuit’ is the clearest example of self-censoring tendencies in Pizarnik’s translation. Many of her choices make the poems more concise, more oblique, less personal, and less melodramatic, but in ‘Le sexe, la nuit’, several passages do not make it

into the typewritten Spanish translation, possibly due to their sexual nature. As Fiona Mackintosh notes regarding Pizarnik's late prose works: 'There is a clear struggle going on here between the "acceptable" aesthetic of the published poetry, and the "nueva Poética" (*Prosa*, 153) in which sex will become as insistent a presence as it was previously absent or latent.'[312] 'Le sexe, le nuit', composed in December 1961, is a very early instance of sexuality appearing in Pizarnik's poetic works, although the translated text barely features in the published Spanish poetry: only one (non-sexual) line emerges in the unpublished poem 'Alguien cae', included in *Poesía completa*.[313] Interestingly, there are traces of the poem 'Nue' in 'Signos' (from *El infierno musical*) and 'Memorial fantasma' (published in *Papeles de Son Armadans*), but never with reference to female nudity, suggesting a certain reticence regarding sexuality when it came to publishing excerpts from the self-translations.[314]

Even in the unpublished manuscript, Pizarnik does not translate the full French text:

> J'étais ivre et j'ai fait l'amour toute la nuit, comme une chienne, exactement comme une chienne malade.[315]

While the rest of the poem is broadly in keeping with the aesthetic of the *poemas franceses* – with themes of solitude, the night, and silence – the sexual nature of this passage is jarring in contrast. It is easy to imagine that Pizarnik might have considered this passage too vulgar or mundane to include in any translation that could later be repurposed for her published poetry. This is not the only moment where explicit reference to sex is removed – towards the end of the poem, 'le sexe' is translated as 'el deseo' in the typed version:

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[312] Mackintosh, 'Self-Censorship', 516.
[313] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 446.
[314] Ibid., 276 and 352.
[315] 'I was drunk and I made love all night, like a dog, exactly like a sick dog/bitch.' Translation my own. APP Box 6, Folder 28.

> Je parle d'une découverte : avoir sentie [sic] le moi dans le sexe, le sexe dans le moi.[316]
>
> Hablo de un descubrimiento: haber sentido el yo en el deseo, el deseo en el yo.

While 'le sexe dans le moi' could simply be a direct reference to sexual intercourse, Pizarnik refuses to translate this into Spanish. Desire replaces sex, and while desire can of course have sexual connotations, the term 'desire' is less specific. Pizarnik's translation rewrites her French poem to make it less explicit, and the pencil annotations emphasise this: she considers rephrasing it as 'haber sentido el alma en los deseos', or 'haber sentido el alma en el cuerpo'. Once again excising the reference to the 'yo', the mention of the soul adds a spiritual dimension, and denies the sexual body entirely.

The question of sexual orientation subtly emerges in a more sexual line that is not edited out:

> Uno grita, uno gime, mi miedo, mi alegría más horrible que mi miedo, […]

The masculine 'uno', however, is annotated with an 'a' on top. While neither option is crossed out, the possibility of both 'uno' and 'una' could refer to a heterosexual relationship, a homosexual relationship, or the female poetic subject alone. Pizarnik had a decidedly ambiguous relationship to lesbian sexuality in her writings, even though she had sexual and romantic relationships with women throughout her life. Sylvia Molloy describes her attitude as 'both honouring and defacing the sapphic monument'.[317] While the translation of 'Le sexe, la nuit' excises all explicit references to sexual desire, this annotation is less a case of self-censorship: the 'a' indicates an openness to possibility without the need to decide on a fixed identity. Ben Sifuentes-Jáuregui notes that Spanish 'both opens up and exacerbates the notion of gender almost literally to a *letter*, thus setting

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[316] APP Box 6, Folder 28.
[317] Sylvia Molloy, 'From Sappho to Baffo: Diverting the Sexual in Alejandra Pizarnik' in *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, ed. by Daniel Balderston and Donna Guy (New York University Press, 1997), 250.

certain the limits or possibilities of subject formation'.[318] However, the unfinished nature of the archival manuscript – the ability to oscillate between -o and -a – means that, for at least a brief moment, Pizarnik contemplated a more open sense of possibility.

Reviewing these drafts, Pizarnik's decisions reveal the poetic stakes of self-translation. Sometimes this might have meant self-censorship in line with her 'aesthetic of the publishable'; at other times, this meant editing with poetic rigour.[319] There are patterns that recur throughout her translation strategy, even as she takes a word-for-word approach. Poems are made shorter and more concise. She often enhances her imagery, replacing more common or everyday language with a word that expresses greater intensity. By contrast, exaggerated imagery is toned down, or references to the first person are removed, to render the poems less personal and less revealing. While Pizarnik's strategies are not always consistent, there are certain key motifs and trends.

At the drafting stage – well before the creation of a publishable or published text – Pizarnik's poetics emerge in the subtle choices she makes. When revising her own poetry in Spanish, Pizarnik often talks of correcting her work, but in a diary entry from 30 July 1966, her own process frustrates her:

> Mi método de corregir desemboca en la seca y árida poesía pura y a la vez me impide ir aprendiendo a escribir una frase. Si quiero escribir en prosa, *tout est là*: la sabia manera de configurar una frase.
> No obstante, no acepto como finalizado un poema en prosa –por extenso que sea– hasta que no haya pasado por la prueba de fuego de mi duro, lánguido y terrible "método" inventado por mí para martirizarme. Por otra parte, ¿para qué diablos la perfección? Si el precio es matar mi voz, mi urgencia, mi premura, si es sólo plasmar y demorar hasta que cada frase es una lápida.[320]

The verb 'corregir' is significant, implying errors or mistakes that have to be corrected. While this process results in 'poesía pura', this poetry is dry and arid, and prevents

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[318] Ben Sifuentes-Jáuregui, *Transvestism, Masculinity and Latin American Literature. Genders Share Flesh* (Palgrave, 2002), 96–7.
[319] Mackintosh, 'Self-Censorship', 525.
[320] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 749.

Pizarnik from writing. By contrast, prose is seen as a place to escape this excessive rigour – as a place where language flows – and so translating the French prose poems may have offered a greater sense of freedom. But regardless, the prose poetry is put through this 'prueba de fuego', in an editing process that is described as one of suffering or martyrdom. Pizarnik doubts the efficacy of her approach, if it kills the voice and living spirit of the poem.

While the first stage of this translation process does not display the intensity of these corrections, the more subtle signs of translingual editing suggest a tendency towards the 'poesía pura' she both aspired to and struggled with. These French poems, written at the same time that *Árbol de Diana* was published, are looser and more free-flowing texts, with none of the restraint and control that came to characterise Pizarnik's earlier published work. In the first draft of the translation, they still retain their spontaneity, but they also begin to show traces of being worked upon. They are less confessional and more crafted. By the time they are published in collections and magazines, Pizarnik has reworked them substantially: as if they were fragments collaged together. If these translations are the product of translingual editing, so too is Pizarnik's 'original' poetry.

Poetry as Translingual Editing

The four translations featured above all reappear to varying extents in Pizarnik's own poetry. Analysing the poems included in Ana Becciú's *Poesía completa*, at least ten poems include phrases derived from the French poems. 'Nue' corresponds to both 'Signos' from *El infierno musical* and 'Memorial fantasma', published in *Papeles de Son Armadans* in May 1970. Further compositions in *El infierno musical* have sources in self-translation: the Spanish poem 'L'obscurité des eaux' connects to 'Tout le long du jour'. 'Toute la nuit'

contributes lines to multiple poems from *Extracción de la piedra de locura*: 'Linterna sorda', 'En la otra madrugada' and 'El sueño de la muerte'. It also originates 'Sous la nuit', sent to the editor of *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos* in August 1972, and the unpublished composition 'En un principio fueron mis muertos'. Possibly as a result of its more sexual content, only the opening line of 'Le sexe, la nuit' appears in a Spanish poem: the unpublished single-line poem 'Alguien cae en su primera caída'.[321]

The extent to which Pizarnik's poetry has sources in self-translation is surprising, and little acknowledged by critics. However, it is clear that translingual editing is a dominant poetic practice for both *Extracción de la piedra de locura* and *El infierno musical*. Pizarnik's reputation as a citational poet is well known, but she also cites and appropriates her own French writing for her Spanish-language publications. Some poems are drawn entirely from her self-translations, while others incorporate lines or longer fragments, effectively collaging them together into new compositions. This is where the *editing* of translingual editing comes in: Pizarnik appears to consider the self-translations as raw material for her later poems.

Pizarnik's appropriation of existing words, phrases, or even whole texts has been well noted by critics. Pizarnik's *La condesa sangrienta* began as a review of Valentine Penrose's *La Comtesse sanglante*, but culminated in what Karl Posso describes as 'effectively the second most celebrated and oddly absolved case of plagiarism in Argentinian literature after the works of Borges's Pierre Menard'.[322] Fiona Mackintosh highlights how these magpie-like practices have been assessed in negative terms 'as parasitic, plagiarising, ventriloquizing or palimpsesting'.[323] Nevertheless, it is unlikely that

[321] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 446.
[322] Karl Posso, 'The Tormenting Beauty of Ideals: A Deleuzian Interpretation of Alejandra Pizarnik's *La condesa sangrienta* and Franz Kafka's "In the Penal Colony"', in *Árbol de Alejandra*, ed. by Mackintosh and Posso, 60.
[323] Mackintosh, 'Alejandra Pizarnik as Translator', 53.

Pizarnik herself saw plagiarism in a negative light, given that she described writers she admired as plagiarisers. Riffing on T.S. Eliot's notion that 'immature poets imitate; mature poets steal',[324] Pizarnik writes that 'Julio [Cortázar] es, antes que un gran escritor, un gran lector. También, como Eliot, es un gran plagiador'.[325] She points to literary models that consider plagiarism a necessary creative practice – where it is not a case of outright theft, but instead a form of imaginative rewriting. Delfina Muschietti employs the innovative metaphor of the phagocyte, a cell that ingests foreign particles, to observe that 'una gran obra como la de Pizarnik no hace sino fagocitar sus lecturas.'[326] The study of Pizarnik's self-translation reveals a process of not only 'fagocitar … lecturas' but 'fagocitar escrituras.'

'Nue' appears to originate the motif 'On m'avait promis un silence', which appears as 'Me habían prometido un silencio' in the poem 'Signos' from *El infierno musical*.[327] However, phrases and lines from 'Nue' also make up the entirety of 'Memorial fantasma', published in *Papeles de Son Armadans*.[328] The poem takes its title from the French line 'Mémoire fantôme', although with a slight adjustment: 'mémoire' simply means 'memory', while the Spanish title refers to a memorial. This may be to improve the cadence of the line, avoiding the repetitive -a at the end of both words. The poem itself rearranges key lines sourced from the French:

> Noche ciegamente mía. Sueño del cuerpo transparente como un árbol de vidrio.
> Horror de buscar tus ojos en el espacio lleno de gritos del poema.[329]

While certain moments feel like word-for-word translations from French, the Spanish poem takes on a life of its own. For example, the French 'sommeil' translates to 'sleep',

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[324] T. S. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', *Selected Essays* (3rd ed., Faber, 1999), 206.
[325] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 785.
[326] Delfina Muschietti, 'Las tres caras de Alejandra Pizarnik,' *Página/12*, July 2001 <www.lainsignia.org/2001/julio/cul_077.htm> [accessed 26 March 2026].
[327] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 276.
[328] Ibid., 352.
[329] Ibid., 352.

but the Spanish 'sueño' is more ambiguous, and here seems more likely to translate as 'dream'. A number of subtle adaptations demonstrate how Pizarnik is less interested in translating from her original French composition, and instead in drawing out resonances in Spanish. In French, the lyric subject is horrified in their search for another – 'Horreur de te chercher' – but in Spanish, 'buscar tus ojos' makes more explicit the poem's concern with vision, emphasised by the adverb 'ciegamente' and adjective 'transparente'. The Spanish poem tends to be more oblique or abstract: in contrast to the specificity of 'mon poème' in French, the 'gritos del poema' refer to poetry more broadly.

'Tout le long du jour' is the source for every line of 'L'obscurité des eaux' from *El infierno musical*, in the clearest case of self-translation leading to a new poetic composition. However, the published poem differs in a number of ways from Pizarnik's first self-translation. The poem is once again made shorter, and several elements are eliminated: 'L'obscurité des eaux' only uses the phrase 'Toda la noche' twice, and almost all references to 'tú' are excised, except for '(dices)', now in parentheses, and 'corres desolada'.[330] Significantly, 'desolada' is now the only explicit reference to emotional distress, toned down in comparison to the tears and sobs of the French poem. By removing the majority of references to the second person, the poem is more self-centred, with the poetic subject concerned with their own struggles with language. Comparing the first self-translation and 'L'obscurité des eaux', this becomes clearer:

> […] en todo instante espero que la palabra visceral pueda configurar tu rostro.[331]
>
> Toda la noche espero que mi lenguaje logre configurarme.[332]

The final Spanish poem transforms the scale of the French poem. While in the first translation it was a single word that had the task of forming another's face, in 'L'obscurité

[330] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 285.
[331] APP Box 6, Folder 28.
[332] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 285.

des eaux' the speaker hopes that language will give herself form. This is characterised as something to be achieved with the use of the verb 'lograr', and suggests a stronger sense of poetic ambition, rather than a struggle to describe another. The poet hopes that language will shape her sense of self or identity. The process of translingual editing, in this case, creates a poem that is less melodramatic than the French source that inspired it, and more concerned with the poet's struggle with language.

'Toute la nuit' is the French poem that inspires the most compositions in Spanish. At least five poems in *Poesía completa* include similar phrases, particularly the refrain 'Toda la noche'. This is a moment where translation and self-translation come together: it seems no coincidence that Pizarnik and Ivonne Bordelois co-translated a poem by Yves Bonnefoy called 'Toda la noche' for *Poesía=Poesía* in 1964.[333] There are two poems from *Extracción de la piedra de locura* that interpolate Pizarnik's French poem specifically: 'Linterna sorda' and 'En la otra madrugada'. For both poems, translingual editing crafts a kind of poetic response to the original French poem, rather than a straightforward translation. Both poems are substantially shorter than 'Toute la nuit', almost fragmentary in nature: but despite their brevity, they develop certain themes further. 'Linterna sorda' primarily takes phrases from the fifth section of the French poem:

> Los ausentes soplan y la noche es densa. La noche tiene el color de los párpados del muerto.
>
> Toda la noche hago la noche. Toda la noche escribo. Palabra por palabra yo escribo la noche.[334]

The first two sentences correspond to phrases from the French poem, although with a subtle difference: 'l'absence' or 'absence' in French becomes 'los ausentes', personifying this feeling of lack. The second sentence is much briefer than its equivalent in French,

[333] Yves Bonnefoy, 'Toda la noche', trans. by Alejandra Pizarnik and Ivonne Bordelois, *Poesía=Poesía*, 19 (1964), 12.
[334] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 215.

showing how editing often leads Pizarnik to concision. However, what is more significant is the new material included in the second part of 'Linterna sorda'. While the 'Toda la noche' refrain marks its commonality with 'Toute la nuit', Pizarnik incorporates new phrases as part of the editing process. These concepts may have been excluded from the original composition as they rhyme very strongly in French: one possible translation would be 'Toute la nuit je fais la nuit. Toute la nuit j'écris. Mot par mot j'écris la nuit'. This features a level of sound patterning rarely seen in Pizarnik's work, which may have dissuaded her from featuring these lines in French: however, the different sounds of Spanish open up other possibilities.

Furthermore, the new phrases explicitly connect the dark and foreboding atmosphere of the night with writing. Writing is portrayed as a powerful creative force, with the poet able to construct the night through writing it. The use of 'yo' makes the poetic voice's subjectivity both visible and emphatic. Overall, the poem exemplifies how Pizarnik uses the translingual editing process to bring her older compositions into conversation with her ongoing literary concerns. Even if Paris is idealised retrospectively as a site of poetic productivity, the poems she wrote then might not speak to the kind of poetry she wished to produce in the late 1960s. Through translingual editing, she is able to address her current sense of writer's block by rewriting older material.

'En la otra madrugada' also incorporates new themes into Pizarnik's older work. Certain phrases are lifted from 'Toute la nuit', but otherwise it is a markedly different composition:

> Veo crecer hasta mis ojos figuras de silencio y desesperadas. Escucho grises, densas voces en el antiguo lugar del corazón.[335]

[335] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 220.

The first sentence adapts a line from the fourth section of the French poem. The 'regard' or 'mirada', as it is rendered in the first translation, becomes 'mis ojos', an important motif in Pizarnik's work. However, the 'figuras de silencio y desesperadas' are entirely new, and do not correspond directly to either the French poem or Pizarnik's first translation. Instead, they personify what in the draft translation was abstract: 'algo de una materia silenciosa que hace un ruido de alguien que llora'.[336] The 'figuras de silencio y desesperadas' represent a condensed image that prioritises visuality, in contrast to the draft translation's focus on 'ruido'. The concern with sound is instead transmitted in the second sentence, which finds a source for the adjectives 'grises' and 'densas', along with the phrase 'el antiguo lugar del corazón', in the French poem.

However, 'Toute la nuit' only names one voice to be heard, while 'En la otra madrugada' mentions the plural 'voces'. This is in keeping with Pizarnik's poetics of the period, featuring greater interest in polyphony. *Extracción de la piedra de locura* is her first published collection to feature the long prose poems that dominate her later work, and it increasingly raises questions of voice: the titular poem recalls Bonnefoy's accent in its reference to 'tu voz apenas coloreada por un acento'.[337] Subtle revisions made during the translingual editing process allow the published poem to reflect Pizarnik's developing poetic concerns.

'Toute la nuit' has a long afterlife in Pizarnik's Spanish-language poetry, beyond the two poems above. Its themes and concerns clearly resonated with Pizarnik, with three more unpublished poems drawing on motifs from 'Toute la nuit'. Perhaps the most significant of these is 'Sous la nuit', a Spanish-language poem despite its French title. While unpublished, the poem is particularly interesting because of the date of the

[336] APP Box 6, Folder 28. See Figure 3.4.
[337] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 251.

manuscript: it was sent to Félix Grande of *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos* in August 1972. The poem bears a dedication to Pizarnik's father, who passed away in 1966, meaning that Pizarnik returned to 'Toute la nuit' a decade later in search of poetic material to commemorate him.

Most of the lines find their source in 'Toute la nuit', but the poem shares its final line with 'Linterna sorda'. The resulting composition is therefore an interesting mix, combining a fairly literal translation with other lines inspired by the French poem. The translingual editing is illuminating, particularly with regard to enumeration:

> je ne veux pas savoir autre chose que ce gémissement perpétuel, que ce bruit dans la nuit, cette lenteur, cette infamie, cette poursuite, cette inexistence.[338]
>
> no quiero saber otra cosa que este clamor, este resonar en la noche, esta errancia, este no hallarse.[339]

The shift from 'inexistence' to 'no hallarse' – from a noun to a verb acting as a noun – is significant. Instead of focusing on a fixed state, the verb implies an ongoing process, a perpetual 'no hallarse' that affects the poet: for while inexistence implies that no self exists, 'no hallarse' suggests that the self might exist, but cannot be easily located. As with other poems composed through translingual editing, there is a heightened sense of mystery, and a very subtle sense of possibility in an otherwise fatalistic world.

After tracing the archival history of only four of Pizarnik's French poems, it is clear that translingual editing contributed significantly to Pizarnik's later poetry. While some of the published poems resemble the archival self-translations, there are also marked differences. The composition process appears to begin with word-for-word translations that are made more concise: as with 'Memorial fantasma' or 'L'obscurité des eaux'. However, translingual editing also involves expanding upon fragments of the self-

[338] Pizarnik, *The Galloping Hour*, 24.
[339] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 420.

translations in unexpected ways. In the case of 'Linterna sorda', an excerpt from the self-translation is developed and extended. While the composition remains brief, in strong contrast to the style of the French poems, Pizarnik nevertheless elaborates certain motifs or themes.

Considering these compositions thematically, the translingual editing process alters not only the style and form but also the theme of the poems. Pizarnik as editor makes the poems more oblique and mysterious, and less concerned with interpersonal relationships: the first- and second-person pronouns often disappear. Instead, Pizarnik adapts fragments from her older compositions to respond to more current poetic concerns. Following the processes of self-translation and translingual editing, these poems are more explicitly metaliterary: concerned with poetry and writing itself. To some extent, this reflects Pizarnik's anxiety around her changing poetics at the time, with *Extracción de la piedra de locura* and *El infierno musical* exploring prose poetry and a plurality of voices. This questioning appears repeatedly in the poems themselves. The final lines of *El infierno musical*, from 'Los poseídos entre lilas', are a series of anxious rhetorical questions: '¿Y cuándo vendrá lo que esperamos? ¿Cuándo dejaremos de huir? ¿Cuándo ocurrirá todo esto? ¿Cuándo? ¿Dónde? ¿Cómo? ¿Cuánto? ¿Por qué? ¿Para quién?'[340] While Pizarnik's poems rarely answer the questions they pose – after all, what *does* it mean to translate oneself into words? – the process of translingual editing reveals the poet's quest to find an answer.

[340] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 296.

Conclusion

A close study of Pizarnik's French poems reveals the extent to which self-translation and translingual editing became techniques for poetic production. This insistent reworking of similar material makes genetic criticism difficult, and at times appears obsessive. As readers and critics, how can we make sense of the iterative and even repetitive nature of Pizarnik's late poetry? Her own critical writings suggest one possible answer. In the 1967 text 'El poema y su lector', Pizarnik affirms a triangular view of poetry, with three participants: 'yo; el poema; el destinatario.'[341] The reader is described as responsible for the meaning of the poem, in a series of comments that recalls Thénon's conception of the reader as architect.[342]

> Pizarnik reflects on her own process:
>
> Cuando termino un poema, no lo he terminado. En verdad lo abandono, y el poema ya no es mío o, más exactamente, el poema existe apenas.[343]

The poet describes finishing a poem as a decision to abandon it, in an act of neglect or even surrender. This might seem like a fatalistic approach to poetry composition. However, even if the poet cannot finish a poem, the reader can:

> Únicamente el lector puede terminar el poema inacabado, rescatar sus múltiples sentidos, agregarle otros nuevos. *Terminar* equivale, aquí, a dar vida nuevamente, a re-crear.[344]

Written around the same time that Pizarnik translated her French poems, these insights are vital for understanding these iterative and translingual compositions. Pizarnik essentially becomes the reader of her own past work: able to rescue multiple meanings and add new ones. As a self-translator, Pizarnik takes on the role of reader and the responsibility of

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[341] Pizarnik, *Prosa*, 300.
[342] *PDN*, 82.
[343] Pizarnik, *Prosa*, 300.
[344] Ibid., 300.

finishing the ‘poema inacabado’. But finishing the poem is a creative act, a re-creation as opposed to a simple copy or reproduction.

Consequently, self-translation and translingual editing become vital strategies for a poet who remains dedicated to poetic expression, or at least to the attempt. With these iterative poems in mind, the critical consensus around Pizarnik’s devotion to silence seems exaggerated. Instead, Pizarnik’s creative rewriting shows resilience in the face of her self-confessed periods of writer’s block, and challenges the myth of a poet snuffed out by the failures of language. Self-translation represents a form of non-plagiaristic appropriation: Pizarnik finds inspiration and innovation by returning to her compositions in another language. She does not simply produce direct translations of her earlier poems, but adapts them to her contemporary poetics by excising elements and adding new ideas. This collage-like approach to her self-translations reveals another layer to this strategy of resilience. In Part III on visual translation, Chapter 5 reveals how Pizarnik moves from the visual practice of collage to the literary practice of collage: joining together texts and appropriating lines from a plurality of voices.

Chapter 4 – Susana Thénon: Poetry as Rewriting and Resisting Translation

Introduction

Thénon wrote the vast majority of her poetry in Spanish, with the exception of the Hispanicised Latin used in her song translations and some archival poems. However, this does not mean her work was strictly monolingual: her poetry taps into the multilingual potential of the Spanish language in all its forms. Thénon incorporates translation and other languages into her later work, most obviously in compositions like 'Poema con traducción simultánea español-español' from *Ova completa*. Translation becomes increasingly prominent in Thénon's work after her involvement in the English-language version of *distancias*, translated by Renata Treitel: a Swiss-born poet, translator, and university professor who was educated in Italy, Argentina and the USA.[345] From the foreword to the published translation, released by Sun & Moon Press in 1994, we know that Thénon and Treitel first met in 1978 in Buenos Aires. From as early as 1982, they were discussing the translation of the book that would be published as *distancias* in 1984: specifically, what Treitel called 'the growing number of problems of interpretation'.[346]

Thénon engaged with the translation process so deeply that *distances* could be described as a collaborative self-translation, or what Hanne Jansen and Anna Wegener call a 'multiple translatorship': a concept that highlights the role of readers, editors, and other uncredited agents responsible for elements of the translation.[347] Recent uncatalogued additions to the Fondo Thénon reveal the extent of Thénon's interventions. Alongside

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[345] Susana Thénon, *distancias / distances*, trans. Renata Treitel (Sun & Moon Press, 1994), 118.
[346] Ibid., 9.
[347] Hanne Jansen and Anna Wegener, 'Multiple Translatorship', in *Authorial and Editorial Voices in Translation 1: Collaborative Relationships Between Authors, Translators, and Performers*, ed. by Jansen and Wegener (Éditions québécoises de l'œuvre, 2013), 1.

published letters and interviews featured in Thénon's collected works, this archival discovery makes clear that not only did Treitel translate Thénon, Thénon also translated herself. Translation takes place in the acts of explaining, rewriting, and elucidating the poems of *distancias*, and these acts come to shape both Thénon's understanding of translation, and the poetry she produces afterwards.

Some poems from *distancias* were shaped by the translation process, which began before the collection was published in 1984. For example, in a 1985 essay, Treitel reveals how translation transformed the final version of poem 31, 'aborto de poema en oficina pública':

> In line 16, Thénon changed the original *invier no* to *infier no*, when I pointed out to her its possibilities in English as opposed to the deadlock of the literal translation. By now I had become adept at her own games.[348]

Treitel appears aware of the difficulty of translating distancias – and the constraints of an excessively literal approach – in her mention of 'deadlock'. The change described makes for an easier translation: '*infier no'* becomes '*infer no'*, rather than '*invier no'* translating to 'winter', which would lose the wordplay with 'no'. It also enhances the poem's catastrophic feel, and the sense that the poetic subject has arrived in a bureaucratic hell. The anecdote gives a sense of the working relationship – or multiple translatorship – that Thénon and Treitel developed, indicating a shared poetic understanding.

This chapter begins with Thénon and Treitel's collaboration. Drawing on archival material and published letters and interviews, it becomes clear that Thénon engaged in self-translation, a process which influenced her understanding of poetry and translation. While not without conflict, the debates and discussions that arose from the translation process gave Thénon poetic clarity. This can be seen in the poetry that Thénon produced after the experience of self-translation, with the emergence of a changed poetics in *Ova*

[348] Treitel, 'Translating Susana Thénon', 26.

completa, her most multilingual and translational collection. *Ova completa* is shaped by translation in terms of form and style – which some critics have noted – but also theme. Some poems were inspired by the form of Thénon's 'aclaraciones' to Treitel, and while translation can be a source of humour and play, it also induces anxiety. Published only three years after Thénon's return to poetry following a seventeen-year hiatus, *Ova completa* reveals latent concerns about categorisation, anthologisation, and canonisation, and the way women poets are read, remembered – and translated.

Aclaraciones: Collaborating on Self-Translation

Thénon began the series of poems that became *distancias* in the late 1960s. She sent Ana María Barrenechea four 'distancias' as early as February 1968,[349] and in a 1983 interview with Treitel, Thénon clarifies that 'la empecé en el 67 y la terminé en el 81, con baches de tiempo donde no escribía nada'.[350] In this intervening decade, marked by writer's block, Thénon dedicated herself to photography (the subject of Chapter 6) and experimented with poetry translation (as discussed in Chapter 2). Some time after meeting in 1978, Thénon and Treitel began collaborating on the translations of *distancias*, which appears to be one of the factors that prompted Thénon to complete the collection. Treitel is thanked in the introduction to *distancias* as one of the three women who 'apuntalaron la construcción de este libro'.[351] In the acknowledgement, Thénon notes that Treitel 'por pura convicción ha traducido estos poemas al inglés, sorteando con enorme talento numerosísimas dificultades'.[352] Similarly, in her afterword to the English edition, Treitel devotes several pages to explaining various challenges:

[349] *LMI* II, 187.
[350] *PDN*, 83.
[351] *LMI* I, 101.
[352] Ibid., 101.

> the difficulty of translating *distancias* becomes apparent when one considers that Susana Thénon compounds the natural problems of translation by submitting both language and poetical form to unbelievable deformations.[353]

The difficulty is twofold in Treitel's characterisation: beyond the 'natural problems of translation', the form and language of Thénon's poetry present further challenges.

Most readers would agree that *distancias* is a challenging collection, given its formally inventive use of spacing on the page, and its disruption of norms of syntax. George Steiner, in 'On Difficulty', identifies various kinds of poetic difficulty of relevance to *distancias*. These invite different responses:

> *Contingent* difficulties aim to be looked up; *modal* difficulties challenge the inevitable parochialism of honest empathy; *tactical* difficulties endeavor to deepen our apprehension by dislocating and goading to new life the supine energies of word and grammar.[354]

distancias is certainly a challenge on all fronts, posing problems of contingency, mode, and tactics. Thénon often uses niche and specific language – drawing on her training in classics – or invents new words to create contingent difficulties. Treitel clearly faced modal difficulties – whether her interpretation fell short or felt insufficient – and Thénon's experiments with syntax pose tactical difficulties.

It is easy to see how translating such a text would be difficult. As a result, Thénon and Treitel exchanged many letters on the topic of the poems and their potential interpretation. This includes a four-page document from Thénon called 'aclaraciones de distancias', with detailed explanations of words or phrases across the cycle of *distancias*.[355] These explanations are not exhaustive, suggesting that Thénon was responding to specific questions from Treitel. The *distancias* are numbered in the document, but this does not correspond to the numbers in the published edition, so it is

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[353] Thénon, *distancias / distances*, 111.
[354] George Steiner, 'On Difficulty', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 36.3 (1978), 273.
[355] The 'aclaraciones', and other photocopies of correspondence between Thénon and Treitel (held at the University of Tulsa) have recently entered the Fondo Thénon, but are currently uncatalogued.

clear that the final order of the poems in the collection was decided at some point during the translation process.

The 'aclaraciones' represent a form of monolingual self-translation, where Thénon rewrites, clarifies, and explains her own poetry. She translates the oblique and elliptical Spanish of *distancias* into a more formal Spanish that is marked by a gently didactic tone. The 'aclaraciones' include straightforward definitions of words or phrases; suggested translations into English; grammatical explanations, such as the subject of a verb or whether a word is a verb or noun; definitions of neologisms; and her own cautious interpretations of the poetry itself. The resulting document is a highly detailed investigation into her own poetry.

Thénon's clarifications are most useful when she coins – or believes she has coined – a new word. For example, the second line of poem 18 reads 'lube sobre agua'. She clarifies: 'mezcla de luna y nube, como si fuera una entidad formada indisolublemente por las dos cosas.'[356] As such, Treitel coins the word 'cloon' to complete the phrase 'cloon on water':

> In translating this word, it was important to preserve the long vowel sound /oo/ of *luna* which the word moon conveniently provided and the liquid sound of /l/ which, by accident, is present in the cluster /cl/ of cloud. By using these two sounds at the beginning of the translated word, I felt I was coming very close to the original.[357]

Thénon's explanation is clear, and Treitel's commentary makes clear that she prioritised sound in her own new coinage 'cloon'. But 'cloon on water' lacks the plosives of 'lube sobre agua', so while some sounds are prioritised, other effects are lost. 'Cloon' also has an unfortunate resemblance to the word 'clown'. While translating wordplay necessarily

[356] Fondo Thénon, 'aclaraciones de distancias', uncatalogued material.
[357] Thénon, *distancias / distances*, 113–14.

involves compromise, the focus on the neologism leads to the neglect of imagery: the picture of a hazy moon obscured by clouds, and dim moonlight glinting off water.

Elsewhere, Thénon believes she has created a new word in poem 9 – 'velarios me impiden' – only to find another definition:

> "velarios": yo creía haber inventado esta palabra. No es así. Significa "toldo que en lo antiguo cubría los anfiteatros para defenderse del calor y del agua". No está mal. El significado "mío" es: cortinas o velos que impiden distinguir el sueño, la realidad y el recuerdo.[358]

While 'velario' does not appear in the *Diccionario de la lengua española*, making it a kind of invention, Thénon draws her definition from the Latin word 'velarium'. Given the quotation marks around the definition, it seems Thénon used the dictionary for her explanation, much as a translator would. In another comment on the same poem, she gives a definition of 'paralaje' – parallax – 'según el diccionario'.[359] But just as Treitel may have found dictionaries insufficient for dealing with *distancias*, a dictionary definition is not sufficient for Thénon either. Her personal sense of language is clearly vital when she refers to 'el significado "mío"'. Language is never under any singular control, especially when it comes to poetry, and words will have multiple meanings beyond those listed in a dictionary. As she comments in her 'Notas sobre poesía', written between 1967 and 1968: 'Hay palabras que no son ya las mismas, desde que el cuerpo de un poema las nutre.'[360] Poetry – and poetry translation – expand the possibilities of language beyond the guidelines of grammars and dictionaries.

Poem 6 includes another invented verb, 'hidrar', which sounds similar to 'hidratar', sharing the same root. But Treitel instead translates this word based on its

[358] Fondo Thénon, 'aclaraciones de distancias', uncatalogued material.
[359] Ibid.
[360] *PDN*, 75.

resemblance to the noun ‘hidra’. Thénon’s commentary is written in clear response to an enquiry from Treitel:

> “el viento hidraba”: las dos cosas que sugerís: como una hidra y arrastrando agua. Sería como si el viento soplara agua.[361]

Thénon gives her blessing to Treitel’s interpretation, and as such, the English translation incorporates both ideas:

> Rather than coining a new word in the manner of Susana Thénon, i.e., “to hydre,” I preferred to transfer the excess of her verbal form to the noun, hence “the hydra-wind,” and reinforce the meaning with the verb “to howl.”[362]

While the logic seems clear, the result is less elegant than in Thénon’s poem. ‘The hydra-wind was howling’ is significantly longer than ‘el viento hidraba’, and loses the watery liquidity of Thénon’s invented verb. In this case, it seems that Thénon’s involvement in the translation – both in explaining every nuance, and giving authorial validation to specific interpretations – can result in a more convoluted English.

From the ‘aclaraciones’, it is unclear how precise Thénon’s command of English is. English is occasionally used in Thénon’s explanations, often for literal self-translations, to mixed effect. She clarifies for poem 6:

> “tu sueño”: sleep. La otra voz acaba de decir “duermo”, y esta voz que habla le contesta “leo tu sueño”.[363]

While ‘sueño’ is ambiguous in Spanish – meaning both ‘sleep’ and ‘dream’ – Thénon’s choice of ‘sleep’ for the phrase ‘leo / tu sueño’ is perplexing, given that in English we usually speak of interpreting (or reading) dreams. Following the verb ‘dormir’, ‘sleep’ makes some sense, but ‘I read your sleep’ is an unusual construction, and it is unclear if Thénon is sensitive to that level of nuance. Interestingly, Treitel disregards Thénon’s advice, translating the full phrase in the published translation as: ‘here i read / your

[361] Fondo Thénon, ‘aclaraciones de distancias’, uncatalogued material.
[362] Thénon, *distancias / distances*, 114.
[363] Fondo Thénon, ‘aclaraciones de distancias’, uncatalogued material.

dream'.[364] The word 'sueño' appears several times in the 'aclaraciones', and Treitel normally seems to follow Thénon's guidance. However, the translator diverges from the poet in this case, suggesting that Thénon's English was not always of benefit to the final translation.

Thénon does seem to have a poetic command of English, however, occasionally employing English words in her own compositions. Poem 16 from *distancias*, 'anunciación', includes the following line: 'antiguo landscape orificio a Gante'.[365] This is one of the earliest uses of English in Thénon's poetry; prior to *distancias*, the English spelling of 'zombie' titles a poem in *Edad sin tregua*, and an English quotation from T.S. Eliot serves as epigraph to *De lugares extraños*. Thénon explains her word choice:

> "landscape": va en inglés porque en general los libros y reproducciones están en inglés. Quiero dar una idea de lejanía, aparte de la ironía obvia.[366]

Poem 16 mocks a 'donante banquero famoso' who appears in an image with 'una virgen algo estrábica', suggesting his attempt to garner divine favour for his 'devoción y obras / pías' is undermined by this flawed cross-eyed figure.[367] The ironic tone is apparent throughout the poem, and the word 'landscape' reinforces this 'ironía obvia'. As Thénon notes, it also has the effect of distancing a Spanish-speaking reader from the text, and highlights the dominance of English in art history (and indeed other cultural disciplines). Treitel's translation chooses to prioritise this 'lejanía' by translating 'landscape' into German: 'ancient *Landschaft* opening on Ghent'.[368] The use of italics for '*Landschaft*' foreignises the word more than 'landscape', written in normal type. Furthermore, the specific weight of the hegemony of English – and the subsequent irony – is lost, and the sexual connotations of 'orificio' are also disregarded. While multilingual texts always pose

[364] Thénon, *distancias / distances*, 29.
[365] *LMI* I, 114.
[366] Fondo Thénon, 'aclaraciones de distancias', uncatalogued material.
[367] *LMI* I, 114.
[368] Thénon, *distancias / distances*, 51.

challenges for the translator – destabilising the idea of the 'source language', singular – Thénon's explanations do not necessarily make this task easier. The translator is still required to make decisions and interpretations of her own.

The question of interpretation recurs throughout the 'aclaraciones'. While Thénon's comments are often didactic, they also reveal authorial uncertainty. For example, Thénon ponders the unusual spelling of 'claridad' in poem 34:

> D. 15: "claridá": esta ortografía la usa Borges, aunque no sé con qué fin. Yo lo hago porque ensambla mejor con la palabra que sigue. Además, se me ocurre que la palabra gana en fuerza y violencia, que es lo que quiero expresar en este verso.[369]

Thénon claims not to know why Borges spells the word 'claridá', although this accentuation reflects the spoken stress of the word in Argentine Spanish, in keeping with Borges' *criollo* nationalism of the 1920s. Thénon's reasoning for using this spelling is for sound and flow, as 'ensambla mejor con la palabra que sigue': 'claridá rabiosa'.[370] Treitel is unable to replicate such effects in English, translating it as 'violent clarity'. Nevertheless, the act of explanation seems valuable for Thénon: the phrase 'se me ocurre' suggests that new understandings emerge through the translation process.

However, Thénon sometimes refuses to offer explanations altogether. Referring to poem 1, she says that the adjective 'cónico' 'no se refiere a nada en especial […] Está suelto, por así decirlo'. In her comments on the same poem, she also permits ambiguity:

> "silbó … apuntó": no sé quién es el sujeto. Es algo innominado. Puede ser un dios, un destino, una voz interior o el mar. Es una presencia súbita y no humana que desencadena una catástrofe. *¿It?*[371]

The subject of the verbs 'silbar' and 'apuntar' is left vague, with four suggested but none selected. Thénon only clarifies the subject's effects, triggering the catastrophe. This is in

[369] Fondo Thénon, 'aclaraciones de distancias', uncatalogued material.
[370] *LMI* I, 126.
[371] Fondo Thénon, 'aclaraciones de distancias', uncatalogued material.

keeping with the ambivalent approach that she outlines in conversation with Treitel. Describing the reader as 'el arquitecto', she notes:

> Ahora, la interpretación que le dé es válida. Yo no impongo. Es evidente que yo en algo he pensado cuando escribía las cosas, pero yo no doy esa interpretación fácilmente, salvo para una traducción.[372]

Thénon describes her own poetic understanding as an interpretation, and presents herself as open to readerly ideas, suggesting that she does not impose any fixed reading of the text.

In some ways, this appears an ideal attitude for a poet to take to translation. However, when reading the 'aclaraciones', the comment 'Yo no impongo' rings a little hollow. While it appears that Thénon was responding to specific queries from Treitel, her explanations often feel didactic or unnecessary. It is hard to know whether this is a case of an uncertain translator or an over-eager poet, or something in-between. While the commentary would have been beneficial for the 'problems of interpretation' that Treitel identifies in her introduction, there are possible benefits to ambiguity for both the poet and her translator.[373] At times, the didactic commentary detracts from the sense of disorientation and mystery central to *distancias*. With the existence of this documentation – although it remains unpublished – Thénon appears less open to external interpretation than she suggests. Self-translation, for Thénon, seems to be a process of rewriting and rephrasing, of elucidation and clarification, of transparency rather than opacity. This clarity runs counter to the aesthetic of *distancias* as a whole, with its focus on incomprehension and fragmentation.

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[372] *PDN*, 82.
[373] Thénon, *distancias / distances*, 9.

A Changing Poetics: Responses from the Archive

The 'aclaraciones' show Thénon as a poet eager to control her self-translation, despite declarations to the contrary. But as the process of explaining herself comes to an end, the archive shows how Thénon's understanding of poetry was transformed. The 'aclaraciones' are necessarily one-sided; the documentation at the Fondo Thénon – focused on archiving Thénon – does not include Treitel's questions. But considering both published and unpublished material from the archive, it becomes clear that the process of (self-)translation was revelatory. Translation makes Thénon reconsider her relationship to language, and her attitude towards both Spanish and English. Thénon also has a sense of humour about the process: in particular, the absurdity of explaining poetry. If self-translation is responsible for transforming her attitudes to language and poetry, it is Treitel she has to thank. She refers to the 'aclaraciones' in a letter to Treitel on 22 February 1982:

> Me vino muy bien hacer este trabajo: me ayudó a puntualizar innumerables cosas en un lenguaje diferente, racional. […] Nunca había hecho una cosa así (me negaba a hacerlo) y ahora me doy cuenta de que fui muy tonta. Todo esto me enriquece y te lo agradezco muchísimo.[374]

Beyond her interest in the translation process, Thénon also identifies benefits for her own writing: particularly her newfound ability to use rational language. Despite what appears to have been resistance on her part – '(me negaba a hacerlo)' – the advantages are now clear. Participating in the translation process is described as enriching, as it gives Thénon access to new forms of language and expression.

In another letter to Treitel from 10 December that same year, Thénon highlights her unique relationship with her translator:

> Aquí entre nosotras, te cuento que un día se puso [Ana María Barrenechea] celosa, porque en todos estos años jamás accedí a darle ninguna explicación sobre los poemas: la dejé que se arreglara solita. […] Por eso es que jamás (hasta que te conocí) logró nadie sacarme una palabra. En realidad, todo lo que te aclaro es pensando en la traducción. Pienso que si todo se aclarara con notas, no tendría

[374] *LMI* II, 211.

> ningún sentido escribir como escribo. No me refiero a las aclaraciones de tipo histórico, bíblico, etc., sino a esas otras donde trato de explicar lo inexplicable. Lo que pasa es que las *distancias* son lo inexplicable, lo indecible, lo imposible.[375]

Here, Thénon establishes a kind of intellectual intimacy with Treitel. It is only translation that motivates her to review her own work and re-engage with her poetic aims: to explain the unexplainable, say the unsayable. Thénon is right to observe that 'si todo se aclarara con notas, no tendría ningún sentido escribir como escribo'. An essay or commentary can spend many pages trying to explain what a poem has already done in just a few lines. Returning to Steiner's poetic difficulties, *distancias* confronts us with the most metaliterary of them all: ontological difficulties, which 'cannot be looked up'.[376] *distancias* cannot be explained as it tackles those 'blank questions about the nature of human speech, about the status of significance, about the necessity and purpose of the construct which we have, with more or less rough and ready consensus, come to perceive as a poem.'[377] If the task of poetry is to grapple with these fundamental questions about language and meaning, to simply answer these questions would be to undermine poetry's purpose.

The irony of the 'aclaraciones' is not lost on Thénon. Her role in the self-translation or multiple translatorship produces what Rebekah Smith (the translator of *Ova completa*) calls the 'tension between clarity and obscurity'.[378] However, this tension at the heart of most poetry translation is productive for Thénon. In the essay 'Rueda de mujeres', about the three women to whom *distancias* is dedicated, Paola Cortés Rocca highlights the influence of each discipline they represent: literary criticism, translation, and dance. Translation imparts many valuable lessons to Thénon: Cortés Rocca identifies translation's contribution as 'la persistencia en el trabajo con la palabra, el tesón, la disciplina, el

[375] Cited in Smith, 'Let Their Eyes Adjust to Us', 48–49.
[376] Steiner, 'On Difficulty', 273.
[377] Ibid., 273.
[378] Smith, 'Let Their Eyes Adjust to Us', 49.

método.'[379] The question of (self-)translation as method is significant. By examining a series of poems from Thénon's archive – later published in Thénon's collected works – it is clear that translating *distancias* affected Thénon's relationship to the English language, and to poetic language more broadly.

Even after beginning the translation process, Thénon displays an ambivalent attitude towards English. The prose poem 'Traslaciones', dated 15 September 1982 – the same year as the above letters to Treitel – describes a fundamental disconnect between the poetic subject and the English language. After claiming that 'aprendí el idioma inglés de golpe',[380] the poet has another sudden revelation:

> En Esmeralda y Paraguay supe: inglés es *todo* aquel idioma que ignoro por completo. Para nombrar a un perro argentino en inglés deberé trasladarme a Inglaterra y adyacencias, decirle perro a un perro inglés y será todo lo que pueda hacer con la mayor voluntad: un saludo cordial en español a dos perros extranjeros entre sí. Mas no una traducción.[381]

On a busy street corner in Buenos Aires, the poetic subject is struck by the realisation that she is incompatible with the English language – to the extent that to learn English, all she could do is move to England and speak Spanish in an English context. A geographical movement or 'traslación' would be possible – but a 'traducción' would not be. There are geopolitical undercurrents to this linguistic incompatibility; later, 'una voz atiplada le pide al Señor que la guerra no le sea indiferente (a la voz, no al Señor)'.[382] The mention of war, while oblique, comes just a few months after the Malvinas / Falklands War ended in June 1982. English is associated to England (as opposed to, for example, Treitel's home of the USA), presented as an incomprehensible place with an incomprehensible language.

[379] Cortés Rocca, 'Rueda de mujeres'.
[380] *LMI* II, 74.
[381] Ibid., 74.
[382] Ibid., 74.

However, the emphasis on English being '*todo* aquel idioma que ignoro por completo' suggests the English language represents a more profound sense of misunderstanding or lack. Given the reported difficulty of the translation process, Thénon may have felt alienated from the language. The poem also implicitly reinforces a sense of Argentine belonging. In an assertive letter to Treitel, Thénon explains that she believes the language we speak shapes our thinking, affirming a tenet of Lacanian psychoanalysis: 'Pensamiento y lenguaje son una sola cosa. La llamada "forma" es la manifestación visual, oral, táctil, auditiva del pensamiento'.[383] While Thénon frames this in terms of *lenguaje* and not necessarily *idioma*, the emphasis on the materiality of language suggests she is talking about her own idiom. Argentine Spanish is implied to be her language, one that shapes her thinking entirely. What Thénon describes is an essentialising relationship with language. In contrast to Pizarnik, whose relationship to language is defined by alienation, for Thénon there is no possible alternative: our thoughts are conditioned by the language we speak.

If English is anathema to Thénon as a poet and a person, why does it feature so frequently in *Ova completa*? This perceived conflict is productive in that it forces Thénon to define her poetics in the face of another language. This can be seen in Thénon's correspondence with Treitel, which includes some of the clearest explanations of her poetics. And while these secondary materials are not themselves poetic achievements, she produces *Ova completa* with this clarity of purpose. In that same letter to Treitel, she defines 1984 as the arrival of 'un cambio mayúsculo'.[384] Her previously unpublished poems were suppressed, she writes, due to 'miopía and una dosis masiva de "educación" castrante', but 'me enfrentaba a una nueva demolición para dar lugar a todo lo que no

[383] *LMI* II, 214.
[384] *LMI* II, 215.

había encontrado aún su espacio'.[385] It appears that in the struggle to find a new language in self-translation – to define herself in English – Thénon was able to articulate her own poetics more clearly.

'Escoliosis', dated 16 December 1986, is dedicated to Treitel, and demonstrates how the 'aclaraciones' became a personal poetic genre. The poem's title, referring to a twisted spine, is perhaps a play on the contorted explanations that make up the poem itself. Thénon dedicates 'Escoliosis' to both Treitel and herself:

> A Renata Treitel –poeta, mártir de la docencia, tana-porteña-norteamericana, traductora y amiga– con mi cariño y perversidad característicos.
>
> A mí misma, por la risa que me causo cuando intento explicar.[386]

Thénon can seem combative in letters to Treitel, but 'Escoliosis' is a display of affection. The translation process is described as a form of explanation, although these explanations are not necessarily successful; instead, they are a source of humour. As in the 'aclaraciones', the poetic subject explains each and every word of a short poem, itself hidden within the structure of the text. The Thénon of the 'aclaraciones' is pedantic, but also self-aware, exaggerating this tone to comic effect. 'Yo' is described emphatically as a 'pronombre personalísimo', and when the same word is defined repeatedly, Thénon draws attention to it: '*te*: ya te lo dije / *daré*: también te lo dije'. If the poet seems oblivious to her redundant explanations in the 'aclaraciones', here she embraces them. She seems aware of the ridiculousness of the attempt to control the translation process: '*hermosa*: su adjetivo correspondiente pretty beautiful / vos sabrás en lo tuyo no me meto'. The irony, of course, is that the poet is very much meddling in the translation process.

The poem to be translated, marked in italics, reads: '*yo te daré te daré niña hermosa te daré una cosa que empieza con perón*'. The humour of the poem is twofold:

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[385] *LMI* II, 215.
[386] Ibid., 127.

along with a punchline about Peronism, Thénon also jokes about what we might call a 'domesticating' translation strategy:

> *perón*: apellido de un presidente del
> paraguay de mí con interpretación abierta
>
> si la creatividad te lleva a poner lincoln
> dale nomás todo es indecidible[387]

The poetic subject refers to Perón's exile in Paraguay but refuses to cast judgement, suggesting an 'interpretación abierta': an openness in stark contrast to the attempt to define every word of the poem. The domesticating strategy – of replacing an Argentine president with a North American one, just because their surnames nearly rhyme – is clearly playful. There is an openness to creativity and an acknowledgment of the difficulty of decision-making, showing that Thénon has learnt a great deal about the realities of translation. But rather than a functional didactic explanation, Thénon starts to have fun.

Among the archival poems collected in *Paraíso de nadie*, Thénon makes playful reference to discourses around translation, while also adopting an iterative drafting process that is reminiscent of the act of translation itself. She produces four poems clearly derived from the same concept: 'Traslación (primer año) prueba sorpresa', 'Traslación (primer año) primera corrección de prueba', 'Traslación (primer año) segunda corrección de la prueba', and 'Nota y documentos previos al texto ofrecido para traducir'.[388] 'Traslación' appears to be Thénon's translation of the very word 'translation', but also a reference to the fleeting circulation of a text. All poems mention a poet who writes in public places, and a fragile text written on a 'servilleta'. The final stanzas of each poem describe this poet who cultivated a public image of being a writer, who was seen to be writing, but in fact is not as brilliant as they appear.

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[387] *LMI* II, 127.
[388] *PDN*, 280–83.

Thénon interpolates discourses around translation and its evaluation in each: in the three poems titled 'Traslación', she refers to 'una traducción / buena mala o regular / del italiano',[389] 'una versión / buena mala o mediocre / de la lengua italiana',[390] and 'una versión, seguro, / buena mala o pasable / del italiano'.[391] The final poem in the cycle, 'Nota y documentos previos al texto ofrecido para traducir', is more metatextual, opening with an introductory note before a poem – more or less similar to the previous three 'Traslaciones' – appears in quotation marks. The 'nota' reads: 'el texto de la traducción se ha perdido y se ignora su lengua original'.[392] In a Borgesian gesture, any sense of the original – language or text – has been completely lost, and we are left with only ephemera – a note about the napkin where the translation began. The 'texto ofrecido para traducir' is lost, but significantly, the 'nota y documentos' are transformed into poetic material. This strategy – of representing or mimicking translational processes, but not necessarily translating directly – inspires a number of poems in Thénon's final collection, *Ova completa*.

These texts from the archive reveal that translation clarifies Thénon's relationship to language: specifically, her belief that language shapes and defines the possibilities of our thought. This changes her attitude towards Spanish: the Argentine vernacular style of 'Escoliosis' prefigures her experiments with different forms of Spanish in *Ova completa*. The sustained contact with English also leads to reflections on what the English language represents, and considerations of how languages differ in their aesthetic and political uses; English becomes a language that her Spanish can be defined against. Translation also shapes the form of Thénon's poetic output: the 'aclaraciones' provide a framework that

[389] *PDN*, 280.
[390] Ibid., 281.
[391] Ibid., 282.
[392] Ibid., 283.

Thénon uses to humorous effect in 'Escoliosis', and the rewriting and editing involved in translation is mimicked to the point of absurdity in the iterative 'Traslaciones'. Translation, then, is both instructive and playful, productive and subversive. It shapes these archival texts both in theme and form, and lays the groundwork for the poetic innovations of *Ova completa*.

***Ova completa*: A Translational Work**

Some poems in *distancias* show subtle traces of the literary translation process that shaped them before publication, but *Ova completa* is obviously marked by translation. After the typographic experiments of *distancias*, *Ova completa* is more interested in the possibilities of the verbal. If *distancias* signals different voices through visual means, by splicing sentences and injecting spaces into the line, *Ova completa* breaks with various orthographic, grammatical, and stylistic conventions of the Spanish language. The poems of *Ova completa* are multilingual: not only referencing Latin, English, Greek, Arabic, and French, but expanding our understanding of Spanish. There is an elevated, poetic, more neutral Spanish; Argentine vernacular, including *lunfardo*, an Italian-derived slang spoken around the Río de la Plata region; and pastiches of colonial Spanish. Variously true and false etymologies of Spanish words connect the language to its histories involving Arabic, Latin and Greek. There are poems that mimic accents: from the biting satire directed at the invented North American professor Petrona Smith-Jones in 'La antología', to the dubious rendering of a Chinese accent in 'Secuencia occidental horrorosa con final chino ecuánime' that Rebekah Smith describes as 'problematic' to translate.[393] *Ova completa*

[393] Thénon, *Ova Completa*, trans. by Rebekah Smith, 137.

seeks to break language into its constituent parts, unravel its inner workings, and reassemble it into something new.

The evidence of this attempt to redefine our relationship to language comes from the title itself. *Ova completa* is defined in the poem of the same name:

> OVA: sustantivo plural neutro latino. Literalmente huevos.
>
> COMPLETA: participio pasivo plural neutro latino en concordancia con huevos. Literalmente colmados. Variantes posibles: rellenos, repletos, rebosantes, henchidos.[394]

The title of the collection has drawn much attention, not least because it puns on the 'obra completa': the attempt to define, canonise and 'complete' a poet's work. Bernard McGuirk describes Thénon's poetic strategy as 'disruptive and playful, respecting neither strict etymologies nor restrictive plenitudes', and identifies the gendered nature of the pun.[395] 'Tener los huevos llenos' or 'las bolas llenas' is a crude idiom, meaning to be fed up. While many critics have picked up on the feminist undertones, this pun is also clearly modelled on the structure of Thénon's 'aclaraciones' to Treitel. There is nothing technically inaccurate about Thénon's translation from Latin. However, in the definition, the excessive enumeration of adjectives – particularly the visceral 'henchidos' – makes the humour clear.

The false etymology of 'filosofía' that opens the poem also recalls Thénon's 'aclaraciones':

> Filosofía significa 'violación de un ser viviente'.
> Viene del griego *filoso*, 'que corta mucho',
> y *fia*, 3ª persona del verbo *fiar*, que quiere decir
> 'confiar' y también 'dar sin cobrar *ad referendum*'.[396]

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[394] *LMI* I, 155.
[395] Bernard McGuirk, *Latin American Literature: Symptoms, Risks, and Strategies of Post-Structuralist Criticism* (Routledge, 1997), 208.
[396] *LMI* I, 155.

While we could describe this as an etymology, it also mimics Thénon's writing to Treitel. But employing this strategy in poetry allows Thénon to challenge and transcend the fixed definitions of words. Here, Thénon attacks a certain kind of philosophy – presumably Western European, given the reference to German philosopher Max Scheler in the third stanza – and its clinical dissection of human life. Scheler was a phenomenologist known for his work on love and sympathy, but the world of 'Ova completa' is a loveless one. The word 'violación' echoes the gendered violence of *Ova completa*'s opening poem, '¿por qué grita esa mujer?'. The reference to sexual violence is even more explicit in the second stanza with the language of consummation: 'Una vez consumada la filosofía'.[397] Philosophy, rather than the love of wisdom, becomes an act of violence. This epistemological challenge is only possible through the dissection of the word 'filosofía' itself; while the etymology might be invented, the new meaning of the word rings true.

'Filoso' underscores the physical violence of the 'violación', and while 'fia' does not correspond to the 'ser viviente', it is derived from those who 'ejercen esta actividad': 'los llamados *friends* / o "Cofradía de los Sonrientes", / los fiadores'.[398] The presence of money and credit in the poem is significant: the 'fiadores' would be those who give, but always expect something in return. 'Fiar' is defined in the *Diccionario de la lengua española* as: 'asegurar que otra cumplirá lo que promete o pagará lo que debe, obligándose, en caso de que no lo haga, a satisfacer por ella.'[399] Financial precarity and exploitation are recurring themes of the collection; those who exert the violence of 'filosofía' are looking to settle their debts, and the 'fiadores' are described in ominous terms throughout. The use of the English word 'friends' jars in contrast to the Spanish, and

[397] *LMI* I, 155.
[398] Ibid., 155.
[399] 'Fiar', *Real Academia Española: Diccionario de la lengua española*, n.d. <https://dle.rae.es/fiar?m=form> [accessed 26 March 2026].

suggests a suspiciously false friendliness, underscored by the qualifying adjective 'llamados'. English here is a sign of deception and artifice: when these men are described as the 'Cofradía de los Sonrientes', their business is understood to be no laughing matter.

Thénon also draws on the Arabic origins of the Spanish word 'ojalá' in her description of the 'fiadores':

> los que de veras tienen la manija y los que creen tenerla
> en la descomunal mezquita de Oj-Alá.[400]

There is something unsettling about her description of these men who either have 'la manija' – Argentine slang for power and control – or believe they have it. Either way, their sense of belief is enough to represent a threat. 'Ojalá', from the Arabic meaning 'y Dios ha querido', is a common expression of hope or desire in contemporary Spanish.[401] Thénon draws on the multilingual heritage of Spanish and highlights the religious connotations of this word in referencing the 'mezquita'. However, there is no true god here: any belief the 'fiadores' have is in their own 'manija'. The adjective 'descomunal', which can also be translated as 'monstrous', undermines any pretence of community in the 'Cofradía'.

The poem ends with three phases enumerating what appears following 'filosofía' – that is, following the violation of a living being. The first phase includes a series of nouns referring to proceedings after a crime: 'el forense el abogado de oficio el reportero gráfico'. Then the poet lists a miscellany of beings: '1 indiferente 1 sádico 1 calcomaníaco de Racing' – a reference to the football club from Avellaneda – and the final phase leads to the emergence of the remnants of language:

> el recuerdo de una frase famosa el olvido de esa
> frase famosa al que sigue el olvido de todo lo
> famoso y lo que no lo es salvo tu culo[402]

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[400] *LMI* I, 155.
[401] 'Ojalá', *Real Academia Española: Diccionario de la lengua española*, n.d. <https://dle.rae.es/ojal%C3%A1?m=form> [accessed 26 March 2026].
[402] *LMI* I, 156.

Oblivion is the only hope following the poem's version of 'filosofía': all that is not forgotten following this dissection of the human body is a vulgar fragment, 'tu culo'. The opening line of the poem is repeated as the penultimate stanza, insisting that this false etymology is in fact truth. The final cryptic couplet refers to a historic suffering condoned 26 years later, and the necessity of returning to this twisted form of 'filosofía': 'retomás su ejercicio o te lo ejercen'. In the poem's grim depiction of human existence, a mistranslation is appropriated and twisted to justify this brutal view of reality. It is perhaps an understatement to say that the poetic subject is fed up, as the definition of 'ova completa' suggests. The contortions of language – once seen as humorous in 'Escoliosis' – take a darker turn in justifying violence.

Translation is most visible in 'Poema con traducción simultánea español-español', where translation, understood as rewriting, leads to humorous wordplay, although – as in 'Ova completa' – with ominous undertones. A 'traducción simultánea español-español' is an apt definition of Thénon's 'aclaraciones', and in this poem, Thénon plays with two markedly different variants of Spanish. Both voices are humorously exaggerated: the voice on the left is marked by peninsular Spanish, with a form of diction that recalls Golden Age literature, and narrates the colonisation of the Americas. The voice on the right (in parentheses) reinterprets this in a multilingual colloquial vernacular and alludes throughout to the Malvinas / Falklands War. The poem's epigraph cites Rubén Darío's *Canto a la Argentina*, a neocolonial ode that sanitises and whitewashes Argentina's history, and erases the existence of its Indigenous peoples, in celebrating European migration to the country. Darío celebrates the supposed 'vínculo íntimo' between 'la raza anglosajona' and 'la latinoamericana'; it quickly becomes clear that Thénon does not share Darío's view.[403]

[403] *LMI* I, 152.

The opening lines are reminiscent of Thénon's translation commentary, in their repetitive language and clarificatory tone:

> Cristóforo
> (el Portador de Cristo)
> hijo de un humilde cardador de lana
> (hijo de uno que iba por lana sin cardar)[404]

Thénon uses Christopher Columbus' Italian name – Cristóforo – to begin her account of the colonisation of the Americas. The first parenthesis makes Columbus' evangelical mission evident, with religious imagery employed and often undermined throughout the poem. The second couplet reveals a little-known fact about Christopher Columbus's family: he was indeed the son of a wool-weaver. While the repetitive nature of the following line in parentheses can seem redundant, the explanation (or translation) is never simply a rephrasing. The phrase 'iba por lana sin cardar' suggests a quest for primary resources to process: recalling the colonial resource extraction that continues to this day.

The absurdity of the poem escalates when 'Su Majestad la Reina / Isabel la Católica', reinterpreted by the second voice, becomes 'Her Royal Highness die Konigin Chabela la Logística'.[405] The name 'Isabel' translates to 'Elizabeth' in English, allowing Thénon to make a connection between Spanish colonisation during the reign of Isabel la Católica and the actions of Britain under Elizabeth II's rule: namely the Malvinas / Falklands War. The poem names both 1492 – the year of the so-called 'discovery' of the Americas – and 1982 to make this parallel clear. The way Thénon refers to Elizabeth II is humorously oblique yet obvious. For example, the German phrase 'die Konigin' ('the queen') alludes to the British royal family's German heritage: their surname was changed during World War I in response to anti-German sentiment. And Chabela, a nickname for Isabel – the same nickname that Perón gave his third wife Isabelita – becomes an absurd

[404] *LMI* I, 152.
[405] Ibid., 152.

and humorous way to refer to Elizabeth II and the neo-colonial situation that parallels the colonisation of the Americas. The reference to logistics, a military science, emphasises the context of war.

As the poem narrates the colonisers landing in the Americas, the rewriting in parentheses becomes more ominous. The verb 'desembarcar' is reinterpreted as 'pisar', a more explicitly disrespectful verb that can also mean to humiliate. The differing forms of violence become clear:

> Cristóforo gatilló el misal
> (Christopher disparó el misil)[406]

Columbus now bears his English name, Christopher, in a reference to the British army's arrival in the Malvinas. 'Gatillar' – to trigger – is an unusual verb to pair with 'el misal', but reinforces the violence of Catholic evangelism in the Americas. By changing just one letter and transforming this religious object into 'el misil', Thénon draws parallels between the colonial violence of the 'reyes católicos' and their armies, and British military technology in the Malvinas War.

The closing couplets reveal how colonial attitudes have persisted over time:

> coño
> (fuck)
> ved aquí nuevos mundos
> (ved aquí estos inmundos)
> quedáoslos
> (saqueadlos)
> por Dios y Nuestra Reina
> (por Dios y Nuestra Reina)
> AMÉN
> (O M E N)[407]

As the voice on the left narrates Spanish colonialism and the voice on the right narrates English colonialism, the Spanish obscenity 'coño' – rather than an Argentine obscenity – is

[406] *LMI* I, 153.
[407] Ibid., 153.

translated into English. The 'vosotros' form of the imperative, more commonly used in Spain, marks a linguistic difference. While Thénon's earlier collections employ 'vosotros' as a more classically lyrical form of address, 'vosotros' is marked as foreign and non-Argentine in the colloquial language of *Ova completa*. The poem narrates colonial attitudes with more honesty and frankness than the euphemism of 'nuevos mundos' – which implies a false narrative of 'discovery' – instead using the derogatory 'estos inmundos'. 'Inmundo', literally meaning filthy, may also refer to the sad state of Argentine conscripts: recruited to fight in the Malvinas, they were treated poorly and left in miserable conditions. It becomes clear that the forces that motivate both colonial movements are the same, when both voices mention 'por Dios y Nuestra Reina'. Almost 500 years have passed between 1492 and 1982, but very little has changed. The translation of 'AMÉN' to '(O M E N)' better reflects the reality of the situation; rather than divine salvation, something more ominous awaits.

While this poem's structure is reminiscent of *distancias*, its presentation as a translation subtly alters the poem's effects. Thénon translates from a Spanish that mocks the traditions of Golden Age Spain – marked by the 'vosotros' verb form and Spanish colloquialisms – into an ambiguous Spanish marked by multilingualism. While the voice on the right sometimes rewrites the voice on the left, at other times it incorporates multilingual jokes using English words. For example, Thénon refers to 'días y días de mascar Yorkshire pudding / y un pingüino de añadidura los domingos':[408] a parody of Don Quijote's diet, who eats 'algún palomino de añadidura los domingos'.[409] This makes the allusion to Golden Age Spanish clear, but Thénon substitutes 'palomino' for 'pingüino' to refer to the native fauna of the Malvinas. The voice on the right is neither Argentine nor

[408] *LMI* I, 153.
[409] Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*, ed. by Luis Andrés Murillo, 2 vols (Castalia, 2010), II, 69.

obviously British, but clearly represents the British role in the Malvinas conflict in 1982, while the voice on the left narrates the colonisation of the Americas. The 'traducción simultánea' is linguistic, between two different Spanishes, but also refers to the translation or 'traslación' of colonial actions that took place in different places and times.[410] The Spanish 'traducción' is often used more metaphorically than the English 'translation', and Thénon fully exploits its possible meanings in this poem.

If translation gives Thénon a heightened awareness of the multiplicity of the Spanish language, she exploits this throughout *Ova completa*. 'Mefítico oís vosotros' plays with Golden Age Spanish, repeating 'vosotros' as a mode of address and using antiquated vocabulary. Thénon argues that words coerce us into using certain forms of language:

> mefítico oís vosotros
> si digo "mefítico" no tengo
> más remedio que añadir
> "oís vosotros"
> es mester de finura
> es galanura ¿oís vosotros?[411]

From the very beginning, Thénon suggests that we do not necessarily choose the language we write in: instead, certain words condition our options, and language conditions us. 'Mefítico' is a word of Latin origin: literally translated as mephitic, denoting something noxious or with a very bad smell. But choosing this word coerces Thénon into using a more antiquated Spanish: not only the peninsular Spanish 'vosotros', but phrases like 'mester de finura' and 'galanura'. The rhyme underscores the flourish of these phrases that are so far from the Argentine vernacular.

Thénon examines the false promise of synonyms in the following lines, suggesting they cannot truly replace the word 'mefítico':

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[410] The plural 'Englishes' is increasingly used in multilingualism studies to characterise the multiplicity of the English language. For example, see Suresh Canagarajah, *Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations* (Routledge, 2013).
[411] *LMI* I, 145.

yo no os puedo decir
"apestoso oís vosotros"
ni "con olor a mufa oís vosotros"
y menos "con una spuzza que volteaba oís vosotros"[412]

'Apestoso', a more common word, does not have sufficient grandeur: nor does 'mufa', Argentine slang for damp. 'Spuzza', derived from the *lunfardo* 'sputza' – meaning stink or stench – is presented as the least compatible option of the three.[413] Thénon even translates the phrase 'mefítico oís vosotros' into Argentine Spanish:

sería contraproducente exclamar:
"¡mete las rosas en el búcaro ché!"
se llama conciencia de lengua
intransgresión[414]

While 'búcaro' is an old word for a vase, the rest of the phrase is clearly marked by Argentine Spanish. If the 'vos' form did not make it clear enough, Thénon uses the common – even stereotypical – Argentine interjection 'ché' (although 'che' today no longer has an accent). Translation has trained Thénon's 'conciencia de lengua', which she now manipulates to poetic effect. Nevertheless, the word 'intransgresión' points to the danger of breaking the rules, and the mention of the 'lobotomía frontal' suggests extreme consequences to challenging the 'Monumento' of the Spanish language. Given the gendered and racialised history of the use of lobotomies as a cure for supposed madness, there are specific risks for women poets who take their chances with language.

Here, the absurd repetition and transformation of the phrase 'mefítico oís vosotros' leads Thénon to reflect critically on the respectability afforded to different variants of Spanish. The poet takes on a combative tone:

¿véis?
arriesgarse con "choto" o "chacabuco"
es pasaporte a la marginación
¿queréis ser presa de antólogos chiflados?

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[412] *LMI* I, 145.
[413] Adolfo Enrique Rodríguez, 'Sputza', *Diccionario lunfardo*, n.d. <https://www.todotango.com/comunidad/lunfardo/termino.aspx?p=sputza> [accessed 27 March 2026].
[414] *LMI* I, 145.

¿tener una verruga en el currículum?
¿que Erato os fulmine?[415]

'Choto' – Southern Cone slang for 'penis' or a decrepit old man – and 'chacabuco' – *lunfardo* for 'sick' – are employed for their Argentineness (and alliterative qualities).[416] Using Argentine language, according to the poet, is 'pasaporte a la marginación', prompting a reflection on the kind of Spanish that is acceptable to use in literary or poetic contexts. Prior to *Ova completa*, there is little to no use of the Argentine vernacular in Thénon's poetry: perhaps a product of the 'dosis masiva de "educación" castrante' that she mentioned to Treitel.[417] The absence of this vernacular – and the extent to which it is embraced in *Ova completa* – points to a desire to transgress literary norms. However, this is not without danger: the poet risks becoming the 'presa' – either 'prisoner' or 'prey' – of anthologists. Erato, the Greek muse of lyric poetry, might even strike down this wayward poet. This implies that challenging the norms of language has negative consequences.

The poet criticises the desires of her reading public:

¿qué boñiga queréis?
reglas preceptos leyes
reglas preceptos leyes queréis
reglas preceptos leyes queréis tenéis
y decoro pecunia seguridad[418]

Thénon asks if her readers want 'boñiga' – literally, manure – or a regimented poetry without innovation. The repetition of the tricolon 'reglas preceptos leyes' gives a strong sense that poetic tradition is shoved down the throat, with rewards reserved for those who do not threaten the status quo: 'decoro pecunia seguridad'. 'Pecunia', a Latinate term for money, suggests that financial stability is reserved only for this old world of hegemonic poetry. The final lines suggest a losing battle between 'ellos' – presumably Argentine or

[415] *LMI* I, 145.
[416] Adolfo Enrique Rodríguez, 'Chacabuco', *Diccionario lunfardo*, n.d. <https://www.todotango.com/comunidad/lunfardo/termino.aspx?p=chacabuco> [accessed 27 March 2026].
[417] *LMI* II, 215.
[418] *LMI* I, 145–46.

otherwise subversive poets – who 'mueren chotos'; whereas 'vosotros' have the luxury of dying magnificently in old age, with resplendent language narrating their end: 'vosotros fenecéis vetustos'.[419]

It is significant that Thénon fears the stereotyping of Argentineness, and particularly its effects on a literary career. This is a possible danger of translation, which launches writers into international contexts where their reception will be uncertain. In a letter to Treitel, she has a devil-may-care attitude:

> ¿Que no me entenderán en Europa, en Asia, en Oceanía? Esta es una preocupación de otros tiempos. Porque en realidad: ¿Cuándo me entendieron? ¿Y cuándo los entendí yo a ellos? ¿Se trata de esto, en realidad? Además, al final *sí* te entienden, aunque no necesariamente te acepten.[420]

Does understanding really matter? Thénon believes it is an impossible goal, and at any rate, mutual understanding does not guarantee respect or acceptance. But Thénon articulates her fears about the broader implications of her circulation in translation. In the 1980s, when English was asserting its status as a hegemonic global language – replacing the dominance that French had previously enjoyed in the cultural sphere, particularly in the Argentine imaginary – there are clear material and career advantages to being translated into English. Translation, particularly into English, is today seen as a metric of literary success; author biographies often mention if a writer has been translated into one or multiple languages. But if Thénon fears the control of an 'obra completa', so too does she fear the stereotyping of obsessive 'antólogos chiflados'.[421]

'La antología' dramatises this anxiety to hilarious effect. While Thénon and Treitel seem to have had a positive relationship, evidenced by their continued collaboration, the depiction of the invented North American professor who seeks to anthologise Thénon's

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[419] *LMI* I, 146.
[420] *LMI* II, 215.
[421] *LMI* I, 145.

work is far from flattering. In this case, the Spanish seems accented, or written as if it were translated from or otherwise marked by the speaker's English:

> ¿tú eres
> la gran poietisa
> Susana Etcétera?
> mucho gusto
> me llamo Petrona Smith-Jones
> soy profesora adjunta
> de la Universidad de Poughkeepsie
> que queda un poquipsi al sur de Vancouver[422]

The patronising tone is clear from the start: not least by the misspelled 'poetisa', long considered a patronising term for female poets by feminists. The anthologist gets the poet's name wrong, with 'Etcétera' making clear that Susana is just one insignificant poet among many. The double-barrelled name of Petrona Smith-Jones makes clear that we are dealing with a decidedly Anglophone woman – perhaps to establish a clear contrast with Treitel, who is identified in 'Escoliosis' as 'tana-porteña-norteamericana'.[423] Thénon invents a university – the best-known institution in Poughkeepsie is Vassar College – and deliberately disregards its geography (on the east coast of North America, whereas Vancouver is on the west). The anthologist is not presented in literary terms: Smith-Jones' embarrassingly trite pun ('Poughkeepsie' and 'poquipsi') does not inspire poetic confidence.

Smith-Jones' mission of cultural extractivism – to make an anthology – becomes clear. She is 'becada / por la Putifar Comisión', presumably a reference to the Fulbright Commission, which operated in both the US and Argentina at the time.[424] It awarded grants to a number of writers, including Thénon's peers: Pizarnik received a Fulbright

[422] *LMI* I, 182.
[423] *LMI* II, 127.
[424] *LMI* I, 182.

scholarship to attend the Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1971 (although she was unable to travel). Smith-Jones' planned anthology is devoted to women writers of all types:

> de escritoras en vías de desarrollo
> desarrolladas y también menopáusicas
> aunque es cosa sabida que sea como fuere
> todas las que escribieron y escribirán en Argentina
> ya pertenecen a la generación del 60[425]

Parodying the language of international development, these women writers are developing, developed, or even menopausal. However, their status as individual poets does not matter – all women writers already belong to the 'generación del 60'. The generation is generally considered an inadequate label, not least because it is such a vast category that includes both Pizarnik and the politically committed writers of 'El Pan Duro'. Thénon herself was seen as a solitary poet who did not belong to any poetic school; Barrenechea and Negroni's blurb for *La morada imposible* describes her as 'una vox sola'.[426] Smith-Jones' characterisation of Argentine poetry is therefore generalising and lacking in nuance.

After some vague questions about the content of Thénon's poetry – speculating in a nebulous way about 'todas las mujeres' and their use of the 'ícono' – Smith-Jones makes clear that she does not care about the content of Thénon's work.[427] All that matters is the poet's identity:

> lo que a mí me interesa
> es no solo que escriban
> sino que sean feministas
> y si es posible alcohólicas
> y si es posible anoréxicas
> y si es posible violadas
> y si es posible lesbianas
> y si es posible muy muy desdichadas[428]

[425] *LMI* I, 182.
[426] Ibid., back cover.
[427] Ibid., 182.
[428] Ibid., 182–3.

The anaphora highlights an absurd list of adjectives that stereotype and limit women's writing to questions of biography and identity. And while some of these labels could be applied to the poet – feminist, lesbian – Thénon rejects the idea that her poetry could be reduced to these tropes, or that art would ever be a matter of identity. Petrona Smith-Jones, in short, serves as a warning for all Anglophone critics of Thénon's work. These are the risks of anthologisation: to label, categorise, and generalise is to elide any nuance or specificity. Smith-Jones insists that this is 'una antología democrática', alluding to the (generally Anglophone) critical obsession with democracy and dictatorship in Argentina – and Latin America more broadly – that only depicts the region in terms of conflict and crisis. But inclusion in the anthology is far from a democratic process, as Smith-Jones pleads: 'por favor no me traigas / ni sanas ni independientes'.[429]

'La antología' does not specifically name translation as part of the process, but if a North American professor is compiling an anthology, translation will presumably take place. In an interview with Victoria Alcala, Treitel comments that 'quería dedicarme a la traducción de obras escritas por mujeres'.[430] Based on their correspondence and interviews, Treitel was a careful and thoughtful reader of Thénon's work, even if she might have approached her as part of a search for women writers. The translation experience appears positive for Thénon; she thanks Treitel in the dedication to *distancias*, engages in the translation process at length, and their collaboration continued after *distancias*, as Treitel began to translate poems from *Ova completa* for magazines. Nevertheless, there is clearly something unsettling about the process of commodification that translation can entail. Even if Thénon did not experience this directly, she was alert to its risks, and to the

[429] *LMI* I, 183.
[430] Alcala, *Susana Thénon*, 90.

reductive ways that Argentine and Latin American literature can be perceived overseas, particularly in the English-speaking world.

'Mohammed Kafka librero' also addresses questions of international circulation. Constructed as an absurdist dialogue between the eponymous bookseller and a client, the poem satirises the book market and the commodification of literary niches. The bookseller's Borgesian name gives a sense of his cultural pedigree: Mohammed – presumably after the prophet – and Kafka after the author. The use of English indicates the bookseller's cosmopolitan airs:

> –¿cómo hago con *Cowself*?
> –o porno complutense
> siglo XII *you know*[431]

The knowing aside of '*you know*' points to the false camaraderie that Mohammed Kafka *librero* seeks to establish between himself and his client. The bookseller is obsessed with making a sale, listing increasingly obscure titles – including 'porno' from the Universidad Complutense – and even offering an assortment of household objects: 'dos peines de bolsillo un sacacorcho una / estampita de Lutero'.[432] Enumeration is one of Thénon's favourite comic devices, and while its effects here are not particularly sophisticated, the poem critiques Mohammed Kafka's pseudo-cosmopolitanism – or perhaps pseudo-intellectualism. The bookseller is depicted as English-speaking and well-versed in obscure literary traditions, but he frequently makes nonsensical statements, such as suggesting that Coptic and Quebecois are similar languages. The true focus of the conversation is the potential sale, and it becomes clear that marginality is only valued for its commercial viability. Thénon satirises the marketing of a book purely for its obscurity, which is reminiscent of the anxieties around marginality in 'La antología'.

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[431] *LMI* I, 178.
[432] Ibid., 178.

While renowned for its satire, *Ova completa* could also be defined by its anxiety. Several poems ruminate on being understood: 'And so are you' plays with misunderstandings derived from the English language. The poem is a dialogue – or perhaps an argument – between two Argentine voices, marked by the use of 'vos' and orthographical changes that mimic the Argentine accent (the 'll' of 'pillar' is written '*pishar*'). They discuss a poet who is silent throughout:

> vos sos poeta ¿no?
> *o Sappho made in Shitland*
> poetisa
> ¿no ves que es mujer?[433]

In these lines that recall 'La antología', the poet appears fed up with the insistence of classifying poetic output by gender. '*Sappho made in Shitland*' is an innovative phrase that expresses exasperation at labels, as well as the insistence on Sappho as a necessary precursor for a lesbian poet. 'Made in Shitland' takes up the commercial language of product labels, while emphasising derogatory attitudes towards Argentina.

The spectre of commerce looms throughout, with 'dólares' mentioned twice. The English language is presented as useful, presumably in a commercial or capitalist sense:

> pero el inglés es más práctico
> te ingeniás en todas partes
> *verbigracias en las pudendas*
> *do it don't*
> y aunque pronuncies mal
> igual te entienden[434]

English is described as practical, establishing itself as the international language that the poet needs to know. The poet is coaxed into learning it, and her genius is praised, although this becomes a joke about sexual prowess, with the reference to '*las [partes] pudendas*'. However, it appears mastery is not necessary; the poet should accept her bad accent for the sake of communication or comprehension. This is contrary to Thénon's attitude: as seen in

[433] *LMI* I, 141.
[434] Ibid., 141.

her letter to Treitel, she does not care about being accepted or understood. But the voices in the poem insistently coerce her with the English imperatives 'do' and 'don't'. The concluding lines depict the forced acceptance of the English language: 'vieras cómo te arreglas / cómo aprendés a *do it* / cómo *don't* te acostumbrás'.[435] Written in the present tense, this process is depicted not as possibility but as inevitable fact.

As Thénon ponders her translation into English – and questions the consequences of being available in the English-speaking world – questions of literary prestige and reputation emerge. 'Según pasan los años (Gozque te ipsum)' depicts a poet's struggle with their reputation. The poem is a second-person address (in the Argentine 'vos') to an unnamed poet who is changing, but 'no como Stearns': they do not have the security of a canonical Anglophone poet like T.S. Eliot. Instead, their future is uncertain:

> te vas volviendo joven
> peludo
> ——— (llenalo vos)
> y podés convencerte y divulgar
> "Yo soy Yo y mis Periféricos"[436]

In a gesture that recalls Thénon's insistence that the reader can create the meaning of the poem, here the poet is literally invited to fill in the blank. The reflexive 'te vas volviendo' suggests a process of evolution beyond the poet's control, which is underscored as they are told they might be able to convince themselves of their own identity: the capitalised 'Yo'.

As if to underscore the sense of lost control, the speaker reassures the poet:

> (si no te gusta calmate
> PODÉS ELEGIR TODAVÍA […])[437]

While the sense of free choice is emphasised by the capitalised text – as if the speaker is shouting – this is undermined by the limited options presented in the next stanza. The

[435] *LMI* I, 141.
[436] Ibid., 148.
[437] Ibid., 148.

'Periféricos' are marginal and replaceable, but only by a series of increasingly random objects: such as the English 'Kits' and 'Gadgets', spare parts, other adornments and trinkets, or even 'Agorafobios'. The subject acknowledges that Socrates was not subjected to the same fate as the poet, but reassures the poet that they do not necessarily have to be like the famous philosopher. Instead they have the freedom to recognise that he was 'un cabal idiota / (véase el griego *idiótes* 'ciudadano')'.[438] The Greek word – which means 'private' but can also refer to a 'private citizen' – became derogatory as it described someone who had abdicated their social or public responsibilities.[439] Here, Thénon identifies the multilingual heritage of the Spanish language to playfully insult a founding father of philosophy.

The poet's fate becomes increasingly unclear in the next stanza:

> te vas volviendo
> miedo
> valor
> confuso
> abatatada
> conservador
> inédita
> injustamente olvidado
> o recordada
> hasta revolucionaria te vas volviendo[440]

As if to emphasise confusion – or to make clear the universal lack of control over poetic reception – Thénon alternates the gender of her chosen adjectives and nouns. The question of legacy becomes key, especially as to whether a poet is 'inédita' or 'injustamente olvidado / o recordada'; it might be an injustice to be remembered as well as forgotten. Ultimately, the poet has no real say. The anaphora of 'según' in the final lines suggests that it is 'el camino', 'el canon', or the passing of time (as suggested by the title) that

[438] *LMI* I, 149.
[439] *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon*, ed. by James Diggle (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 702.
[440] *LMI* I, 149.

determines the poet's fate. So much depends on external factors that it might be best to follow the suggestion in the parentheses of the title: 'gozque te ipsum', another instance of Hispanicised Latin that loosely translates to 'enjoy yourself'.

Reviewing *Ova completa* in its entirety, such questions of joy and play are fundamental to its poetics. There is anxiety around translation, international reception, and canonisation, but Thénon uses humour to subvert these concerns. This is evident in 'Los fondos del Tesoro', a less anxious poem that shows the 'Tesoro' fighting back against those who seek to disturb it. The poem might refer to a treasury, but feels more reminiscent of literary archives, like the 'Sala del Tesoro' at the Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno in Buenos Aires. The 'Tesoro' can be read as a metaphor for any poet who is annoyed about their inclusion – often in marginalia, or 'addenda' – and wishes they could be left alone. The final stanzas appear to address researchers directly:

> soy el Tesoro
> un animal fabuloso
> no me toquen
> dedíquense al ahrte[441]

The imperative instructs the addressee to leave 'el Tesoro' alone: they should focus on 'ahrte' instead, in a misspelling that evokes Julio Cortázar's mocking of linguistic norms in *Rayuela*.[442] Researchers can do as they wish – 'filosofen / archiven / cuelguen ajos' – but they ought to leave the 'Tesoro' out of it.[443] Once again, philosophy is the object of Thénon's criticism, as is the instinct to canonise, anthologise, or archive poets. The reference to hanging garlic suggests that these first two activities are just as foolish and superstitious. The final line – 'déjenme en paz' – recalls the earlier threat to those who disturb 'el Tesoro': 'que me dejen en paz / si quieren paz / pero si quieren otra cosa / la

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[441] *LMI* I, 160.
[442] See, for example, 'Heste Holiveira siempre con sus hejemplos.' Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela* (Penguin Random House, 2016), 530. First published 1963.
[443] Ibid., 161.

tendrán en abundancia'.[444] In a biting riposte to those who dedicate themselves to literary study, Thénon asks that they focus on art and leave the person alone. One solution to the harmful games of canonisation, anthologisation, and archiving might be to steer clear.

Conclusion

The question remains: how should scholars approach Thénon's work? 'Los fondos del Tesoro' would suggest that the 'Tesoro' is best left out of it. 'La antología' has not always been read as a warning to critics or translators of Thénon's work, but it establishes some clear guidelines. By focusing on her poetic language through the prism of translation, I have outlined an approach that aims not to stereotype Thénon or her production, but instead remains open to multiplicity and ambiguity. Throughout *Ova completa*, there are clear traces of translation both in form and theme. Translation comes to be defined by an act of repetition that nevertheless produces something new; rather than a product, it is best understood as an iterative process that allows for multiple and simultaneous possibilities.

In *Ova completa*, poems are formally influenced by the mechanisms of self-translation. Thénon's experience of self-translation – its difficulties and its unexpected joys – leads to an enhanced understanding of the labour of translation, and its iterative nature encourages Thénon to iterate in her own work. It makes her more sensitive to the different discourses that language contains, and the different kinds of Spanish that can be subsumed under a monolithic idea of the language. Translation allows her to subvert language, but she employs that subversion to both humorous and political ends. Thénon's poetry remains concerned with serious questions, but she adopts a more ironic approach. While translation

[444] *LMI* I, 160.

is far from the only influence on *Ova completa*, comparing these poems to her translational 'aclaraciones' reveals a similarity in both form and style.

Translation also becomes the subject of poetry. If translation forced Thénon to explain herself, and provided greater clarity on the purpose of her poetry, then it also created further concerns. The multilingual poems of *Ova completa* seem designed to resist translation, to resist the idea that 'Thénon' – a stereotyped idea of the poet – can easily be labelled, categorised, or summarised in another language. Anxieties about translation and circulation – a possible entry into anthologies, or into the contested global space of 'world literature' – provide ample material for poetic satire. A surprising number of the poems in the collection include reflections on reception and poetic legacy. It seems that after being translated, Thénon began to consider her own reception, not just in English but in Spanish too. These poems revolve around variations on the same theme: how am I translated? How am I represented? How might I be remembered? Do I want to be remembered at all? Responding to all manner of literary anxieties, translation becomes a poetic methodology and poetic concern. *Ova completa* would not exist in its published form if the experience of translation had not sparked this new avenue of inquiry. Thénon responds to her own questions by inventing multilingual, multi-voiced, and translational forms.

Part II: Comparative Coda

In strikingly different ways, self-translation allows Pizarnik and Thénon to explore the creative potential of translation. Whether through translingual editing or collaborative translation, translating themselves alters their approach to poetic composition. The poems written following engagement with self-translation differ significantly from their earlier compositions, and show how the process of translation – considering each word, choosing its translation, or defining its meaning – changes their use of poetic language. In both cases, self-translation also facilitates a return to poetry after a period of difficulty or silence.

In Pizarnik's case, self-translation represents a resilient strategy for continued expression when poetry fails to materialise. Literary translingualism may have initially represented a playful or non-restrictive form of expression for Pizarnik, but as she struggles with language in the late 1960s, returning to these earlier compositions offers new possibilities. From drafting the first self-translations through to the transformations of translingual editing, Pizarnik's French poems are rewritten into a variety of new Spanish compositions. Not only does this lend insight into her process, but offers an important challenge to the prevailing image of Pizarnik that continues to circulate today. Rather than a poet forced into poetic silence, self-translation opens up a space for iteration and re-creation that allows Pizarnik to continue writing. The final poem of Ana Becciú's *Poesía completa* suggests that the last poem Pizarnik wrote ended with the following lines: 'no quiero ir / nada más / que hasta el fondo'.[445] This placement has overdetermined the interpretation of 'fondo', but I argue that this 'fondo' can be read as the limits of poetic possibility, in line with César Aira's observation that 'la glosa y la reescritura se volvieron

[445] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 453.

entonces un modo de seguir escribiendo después del final'.[446] Glossing and rewriting represent ways to keep writing beyond the end, as do self-translation and translingual editing.

Thénon also struggled with poetic expression, as evidenced by her seventeen-year hiatus from poetry publishing, although this is less explicitly thematised in her work. But collaboratively translating the poems from *distancias* with Renata Treitel brings a variety of poetic concerns to light. The task of explaining *distancias*, a collection written amidst political and personal uncertainty, reveals both the challenge of translation and the futility of explaining yourself. Thénon's detailed engagement with translation makes her an important agent of this multiple translatorship, and ultimately leads her to question the point of a poem that could be simply rewritten for clarity. As a result, the poems written after translation – namely, *Ova completa* – are poems that cannot simply be explained. They rely on the multiplicity and materiality of the Spanish language, and thematise anxieties and concerns about translation, international circulation, and the process of canonisation. At times, the poems of *Ova completa* seem to be written against the possibility of being translated into English altogether. Self-translation allows Thénon to question her poetic purpose, and she chooses to turn away from the explicable or understandable, and towards the playful and ironic.

Comparing and contrasting the poems produced through self-translation, Pizarnik and Thénon's translational poetics begin to emerge. Self-translation involves writing and rewriting, creating and recreating, elucidating meaning and rejecting explanation. But while self-translation might imply poetic individualism, solipsism, or repetitive concerns, Pizarnik and Thénon's poetry instead becomes more expansive in translation. Pizarnik

[446] César Aira, *Alejandra Pizarnik* (Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 1998), 81.

incorporates poetic ideas from her past and present, revising her past compositions but also adding elements in translation. Thénon decides to grow her repertoire of voices and styles, writing in a Spanish that is decidedly aware of its multilingual history. Self-translation becomes a reflexive activity, as indicated by the Spanish *traducirse*. Translating the self, rather than repeating past work or ideas, becomes a critical tool for expanding possibilities of poetic expression.

Part III: Visual Translation

Chapter 5 – Alejandra Pizarnik: Poetry and Collage

Introduction: On Visual Translation

What happens when the idea of translation is taken to its limit? Translation is generally considered to be a linguistic activity, focused on written language. As Matthew Reynolds notes, the most common understanding of the practice is that 'translation can seem to turn one written or printed text into another', although this can extend into moving 'between sign language and spoken language, between pictograms and alphabetic words, and between print and digital multimedia formats'.[447] Translation is generally considered to be the transposition of a text from one language into another. The first two sections of this thesis, considering literary translation and self-translation, broadly correspond to this common understanding.

However, translation can be applied to contexts beyond the realm of verbal language alone, and both Pizarnik and Thénon use the words 'traducir' and 'traducción' respectively to relate language and image, making it impossible to ignore this use of 'translation' in a full account of the relationship between poetry and translation in Pizarnik and Thénon's work. Translation comes to represent an analogous but different process of transfer – not only between codified verbal languages or discourses, but between different media or modes of expression. The definition of the 'languages' that the translator moves between is increasingly expansive.

Jerry Won Lee describes this as the 'translingual turn' within the study of language: an attuning 'to the reality that the very notion of "language" inherently limits our understanding of the diverse possibilities for communicative practice across cultural and

[447] Reynolds, *Translation: A Very Short Introduction*, 10.

linguistic difference worldwide.'[448] Pizarnik and Thénon both interrogate what their language is. Whether it is Pizarnik's criticisms of 'español' with regard to Calderón's *La vida es sueño*, or Thénon's 'traducción simultánea español-español', the boundaries of the term 'español' are tested, seeming more restrictive than 'castellano'. As they examine the limits of their own national language, both poets are also interested in the different ways that poetic language might make meaning: including through visual forms. This is not to say that the idea of 'language' should become overly broad or vague; Lee argues that this 'translingual orientation to language' is not simply a case of 'accentuating the fluidity and negotiability of linguistic boundaries'.[449]

Alastair Pennycook also suggests that 'we cannot merely add more semiotic items to our translinguistic inventories, but need instead to seek out a way of *grasping the relationships among a range of forms of semiosis*' [my emphasis].[450] Both Pizarnik and Thénon conceive of the relationship between image and language – two distinct forms of semiosis, or the making of meaning – as a kind of translation. This recalls Roman Jakobson's 1959 taxonomy of translation, contemporary to Pizarnik and Thénon, and his idea of intersemiotic translation, which is the 'interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems.'[451]

Contemporary critics have developed theories as to whether this can be called 'translation', especially when images are involved. In their volume *Translation and Multimodality*, Monica Boria and Marcus Tomalin identify emerging taxonomies that seek

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[448] Lee, *Locating Translingualism*, 6. Lee uses the term 'translingual' with regard to language studies, not literary studies (see Chapter 3 and Steven G. Kellman, *The Translingual Imagination* for the term's use in literary studies). Here, the term 'translingual' is used in relation to 'translanguaging': engaging in a variety of linguistic repertoires without codifying any of them exclusively as a language system.
[449] Lee, *Locating Translingualism*, 11.
[450] Alastair Pennycook, 'Translanguaging and Semiotic Assemblages', *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 14.3 (2017), 271, doi:10.1080/14790718.2017.1315810.
[451] Jakobson, 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation', 147.

to codify multimodal translation, with some critics arguing that 'these distinct transferences deserve a more fine-grained analytical vocabulary.'[452] However, while 'translation' may risk vagueness, it remains important for this study as the term used by both poets. As such, the possibilities of the term 'translation' guide the next two chapters, with a particular focus on translation from image to language, and the effect of visual translation on their poetry.

In this chapter, I examine the interactions between language and image in the work of Alejandra Pizarnik. Intermediality is a field of increasing interest for scholars of Pizarnik, and within Argentine literary studies more widely, particularly following the Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno's exhibition 'Alejandra Pizarnik: entre la imagen y la palabra' and corresponding catalogue published in 2022.[453] However, the relevance of translation to the mediation between language and image has not been fully explored: particularly the possibilities of translation between language and image for poetry production. The chapter begins by exploring Pizarnik's ideas regarding the relationship between language and image, providing a theoretical foundation for her artistic and poetic practice. I then analyse her visual production, with a particular focus on the practice of collage, where we begin to see the combination of visual and textual elements, and the possibilities of multimodal or intermedial production. The final section turns to the idea of poetry as collage, with a particular focus on Pizarnik's later poetry from 1968 onwards. Collage represents the possibility of translating Pizarnik's inner and outer worlds onto the page: transforming experience and materiality into writing.

[452] Boria and Tomalin, 'Introduction', 5.
[453] *Alejandra Pizarnik: entre la imagen y la palabra*, ed. by Guillermo David (Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno, 2022).

Escribir es traducir: Between Language and Image

As discussed in Chapter 1, Pizarnik appears to share the belief of Octavio Paz, Maurice Blanchot, and others that all writing is a kind of translation from the mind to the page. To quote the diary entry from 11 April 1963 at length, Pizarnik analyses her issues with writing:

> Los problemas que me plantea el escribir. El primero, mi exilio del lenguaje. Dada mi espontaneidad y mis fuerzas debiera arrojarme sobre quinientas hojas en blanco y «escribir como siento». Ahora bien: sucede que yo no *siento* mediante un lenguaje conceptual o poético sino con imágenes visuales acompañadas de unas pocas palabras sueltas. O sea que escribir, en mi caso, es traducir.[454]

Pizarnik is clear that this translation from mind to page is not a process that happens uniquely within the realm of verbal language. As Fiona Mackintosh notes, Pizarnik's poetry is 'framed in terms of visual translation, and infused with verbal translation'.[455] Visual translation in fact appears to be more dominant, in comparison with the 'pocas palabras sueltas'.

The importance of visual translation is intensified in a rewriting of this diary entry. In 1962, while still in Paris, Pizarnik reworked some excerpts from her diaries for publication in periodicals, such as the Colombian magazine *Mito*[456] and Argentine magazine *Poesía=Poesía*, which published 'Fragmentos de un diario' alongside her poetry.[457] In a notebook entitled 'Resumen de varios diarios', written between 1962 and 1964, the 'escribir es traducir' motif reappears with more explicit reference to the visual arts, and a stronger sense of the impossibility of writing:

> Exilio del lenguaje. Exceso de imágenes plásticas imposibles de transmutar en palabras. Escribir es traducir.[458]

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[454] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 580.
[455] Mackintosh, 'Alejandra Pizarnik as Translator', 44.
[456] '"Fragmentos de un diario", *Mito*, no. 35/36, Colombia, 1962.' Publication information from APP Box 4, Folder 2.
[457] Alejandra Pizarnik, 'Fragmentos de un diario', *Poesía=Poesía*, 11/12/13 (1962), 5.
[458] APP Box 2, Folder 3.

In rewriting an extended passage from her diaries – implying a more explicitly literary focus, given some of these rewritings were published – Pizarnik condenses the imagery of the original entry. In a series of alliterative phrases, Pizarnik insists on her exile from language and juxtaposes this directly with the 'imágenes plásticas', that appear more troubling in their excess, and are positioned as directly opposed to language. These images, rather than a form of thinking or sensing, are characterised as impossible to express in words, creating a double bind. In this rewriting, visual translation is not simply one component of writing – alongside verbal translation – but an essential process if writing is to take place.

In both versions of this diary entry, Pizarnik's mind is described first and foremost as being populated by visual images, along with a few words. This has significant implications for understanding Pizarnik's poetry as a form of visual translation, as it intensifies the poet's sense of alienation from language. María Negroni relates visual and spatial questions to the issue of voice in Pizarnik's later poetry:

> la voz en Pizarnik nunca es unívoca […]. Hay también "nombres y figuras" que vienen a complicar la escena, a saturar el espacio interior […] componiendo cuadros que se reproducen de un libro a otro.[459]

Negroni identifies the polyphony of voices in Pizarnik's later work, but these voices are not the only presence in her poems: the space of the poem also takes on a visual and physical dimension. The poem is described in artistic and even theatrical terms – in relation to 'la escena', 'el espacio interior', and 'cuadros' – and populated by 'nombres y figuras'.

These 'nombres y figuras' appear in the prose poem of the same name, published in *El infierno musical*:

[459] Negroni, *El testigo lúcido*, 79.

> Lo que quiero es honorar a la poseedora de mi sombra: la que sustrae de la nada nombres y figuras.[460]

The poetic subject is unusually configured here. Not only is it not 'unívoca', as Negroni suggests, but it could be divided into two: the 'yo' and the 'poseedora de mi sombra'. The poem develops the concept of a polyphonic subject from the beginning, with 'el tesoro de los piratas enterrado en mi primera persona del singular'. The evocation of piracy suggests an act of theft or appropriation, but this plurality is subsumed into an apparently singular grammatical subject. But by the third paragraph of the prose poem, the first-person singular cedes to the first-person plural. Even if the final paragraph returns to the grammatical singular, it retains a sense of doubling: the dual identity of the 'yo' and the alter ego of the 'poseedora de mi sombra'. This shadow self seems to be the true source of poetry, able to conjure poetry out of 'nada': nothingness, or even an existential abyss. Even if they cannot locate poetry, they might at least extract the 'nombres y figuras' that might make poetry possible.

In 'L'obscurité des eaux', these 'nombres y figuras' are rewritten into another form:

> A mí me han dado un silencio pleno de formas y visiones (dices).[461]

As discussed in Chapter 3, 'L'obscurité des eaux' is one of the poems that emerges through self-translation and self-editing. The French poem only mentions 'formes',[462] but in this Spanish version, the 'formas' are accompanied by 'visiones' that fill the silence given to the poet, although this is ironically undercut by the comment in parentheses: '(dices)'. In both 'Nombres y figuras' and 'L'obscurité des eaux', there is a sense of absence or lack – 'la nada' and 'un silencio' – contrasted with the presence of a sign – 'nombres y figuras', 'formas y visiones' – but not language. In the first poem, these 'nombres y figuras' seem

[460] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 272.
[461] Ibid., 285.
[462] Pizarnik, *The Galloping Hour*, 22.

to be stolen, while in the second, they appear to be a gift. But in either case, it is not clear that the presence of the sign is able to fill the sense of lack. Language and poetry appear stubbornly out of reach. In these variations on the key theme of 'imágenes visuales' and 'palabras sueltas', there is a clear sense of incompatibility. Even when 'nombres' and 'palabras' appear, they are disjointed, single signs that do not appear to belong to any system of language. Poetic language appears impossible, although the poet insists on attempting with words, rather than resorting to the image. Given Pizarnik's lifelong dedication to poetry, a purely visual solution to problems of expression seems unlikely.

Elsewhere in Pizarnik's writings, the verbal and visual are presented as having different expressive possibilities. Pizarnik's archive at the Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno in Buenos Aires includes a short text on the relationship between poetry and drawing, and her CV notebooks in the Princeton archive suggest it was written as an introduction to *Signo y unidad*, a 1965 poetry collection by Beatriz Eichel, featuring lithographs by César Cofone.[463] In the text, Pizarnik suggests that a union between the two forms is not necessarily possible, but that her interest lies elsewhere:

> Al unirse las artes plásticas con la poesía, no se realizan las nupcias del sol y de la luna ni, mucho menos, acontece el casamiento del cielo y del infierno. En verdad, ni siquiera se unen, y está bien que así sea pues la verdadera cuestión es otra. Se trata de *un dulce contrapunto* un suave acompañarse por la zona vertiginosa de la página en blanco *que significa* ausencia de mundo; ~~se trata de un dulce contrapunto; se trata~~ de un colmar el puro silencio mediante voces calladas ~~y mediante~~ *seguidas de* formas, líneas, colores. Se trata, *en suma*, de una contribución ~~ del poeta, del artista plástico~~ a que lo blanco sea menos blanco, a que lo blanco sea más puro, quiero decir, lleno de trazos del hombre.[464]

The opening lines use binary oppositions to make clear the contrast between art and poetry: they are as different as sun and moon, or heaven and hell. However, as Pizarnik explains, their difference is precisely the point; the positive effect of their juxtaposition is

[463] APP Box 4, Folder 2.
[464] Fondo Pizarnik, Caja 1 Carpeta 1, AP 17. Italics and strikethroughs replicate additions to the original manuscript.

highlighted in the musical references of 'dulce contrapunto' or 'suave acompañarse'. Both are praised for their ability to overcome silence and absence, or fear of the empty page. Silence, in this instance, is filled through the 'voces calladas seguidas de formas, líneas, colores', in another iteration of the 'nombres y figuras'. It is vital that the page is not left empty, and that it can communicate a pure artistic truth, or at least an attempt at that expression.

Across a number of Pizarnik's texts, the struggle for expression is framed through the combination of two modes: writing and imagery. This multiplicity seems vital, and might explain why Pizarnik maintained both a literary and artistic practice throughout her life. Importantly, the practice of collage allowed Pizarnik to bring together these two forms of expression. Her papers indicate a sustained interest in collage, with the term referenced in what appear to be study notes on various writers, artists, and concepts:

> *<u>Collage.</u> - a pour objet de réaliser "l'accouplement de deux réalités en apparence inaccouplables sur un plan qui en apparence ne leur convient pas". (M. Ernst)*[465]

The above is taken from Surrealist artist Max Ernst's landmark essay 'Beyond Painting', first published in French in 1936. Ernst describes collage as a uniquely potent artistic force: it has the ability to unite seemingly irreconcilable realities on a single plane, despite the apparent impossibility of this task.

Born in Germany, Ernst settled in France and became one of the foremost figures of Dada and then Surrealism, pioneering collage as a Surrealist mode. Collage's ability to juxtapose and synthesise contrasting realities has a clear Surrealist appeal: it allows the artist to challenge preconceived ideas and create new associations through the deceptively simple act of combination. Ernst names several literary sources for his conceptualisation of

[465] 'Collage. – has as its aim to achieve "the coupling of two realities that appear impossible to couple together on a plane that appears not to suit them."' Translation my own. APP Box 8, Folder 15.

collage, all of whom are familiar to Pizarnik: Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Éluard, Lautréamont, and André Breton. In particular, Ernst references 'the celebrated Lautréamont quotation, "Beautiful as the chance meeting upon a dissecting table of a sewing-machine with an umbrella"', and Breton's idea of super-reality, which 'must in any case be a function of our will to put everything completely out of place'.[466] Collage is what allows artists to construct this chance meeting, to put everything out of place; Ernst notes that, thanks to the adoption of collage, 'nearly all the surrealists, painters as well as poets, have since its discovery been led from surprise to surprise.'[467]

The inclusion of poets is significant. While collage is often imagined literally as a cut-and-paste job, Ernst sees it as more expansive: 'If it is the plumes that make the plumage it is not the glue that makes the gluing (ce n'est pas la colle qui fait le collage).'[468] Punning on the etymology of the term – 'la colle' meaning 'glue' in French – Ernst highlights that glue is not the vital component of collage. For example, he includes René Magritte as a collage artist whose 'pictures are collages entirely painted by hand'.[469] As Elza Adamowicz notes in her survey of Surrealist collage, 'the term collage covers a wide range of iconographic and verbal procedures': from 'Hans Arp's torn papers and Joan Miró's pasted papers', to 'Max Ernst's *romans-collages* [collage-novels] and George Hugnet's *poèmes-découpages* [cut-out poems]'.[470]

While these are classic Surrealist definitions of collage, Adamowicz cautions against an excessive 'diversity' to any definition, which could risk confusing it for

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[466] Max Ernst, 'Inspiration to Order', trans. by Dorothea Tanning, in Ernst, *Beyond Painting, and Other Writings* (Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948), 21.
[467] Ernst, 'Inspiration to Order', 21.
[468] Max Ernst, 'Beyond Painting', trans. by Dorothea Tanning, in Ernst, *Beyond Painting, and Other Writings*, 13.
[469] Ernst, Beyond Painting', 17.
[470] Elza Adamowicz, 'Collage', in *Surrealism*, ed. by Natalya Lusty (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 177.

intertextuality or other citational practices: 'any mode of aesthetic construction involving a combinatory process, whether material, syntactic, or iconographic, could be subsumed'.[471] Instead, Adamowicz defines collage specifically by its use of 'preexisting iconic or verbal elements', and identifies three key stages in the process of assembling a collage: first, selection of materials, then bringing those materials together, and lastly the creation of new configurations.[472] In this sense, collage can be a literary process, rather than purely visual or material.

Surrealist writing is often associated with one major technique: automatism or automatic writing, a free-flowing state designed to tap into the creative energies of the unconscious mind. However, while Pizarnik is often associated with the emergence of Surrealism in Argentina, and the French Surrealists were a significant source of inspiration, critics have struggled to identify her writing style as explicitly Surrealist: Melanie Nicholson puts it succinctly when she refers to Pizarnik's 'controlled automatism'.[473] While passages of Pizarnik's diaries and her later prose works give the impression of automatic writing, Pizarnik the editor is often at work.

If Pizarnik was unable to embrace automatic writing – a practice that even the Surrealists disagreed over – then collage represents a Surrealist technique which she could employ. Adamowicz notes that for first-wave Surrealist writers, collage was as important as automatism: 'Whereas after 1924 collage was momentarily overshadowed in Breton's programmatic texts by automatism, it was widely practiced throughout the 1920s and 1930s in its verbal and visual forms, alongside experimentation in automatism.'[474] For Pizarnik, the practice of collage becomes increasingly important, particularly in her later

[471] Adamowicz, 'Collage', 177.
[472] Ibid., 178–79.
[473] Nicholson, *Surrealism in Latin American Literature*, 181.
[474] Adamowicz, 'Collage', 180.

works. Pizarnik is known for her citational approach which intertwines her reading with her writing, but her use of collage as a literary technique shows the extent to which her writing can be literally made up of her reading. As poetic expression becomes increasingly challenging, Pizarnik draws on all literary and artistic tools available to continue writing – including collage. In this sense, while Nicholson does not refer explicitly to collage, it is true that 'Pizarnik is also arguably the Argentine poet who most successfully applied surrealist techniques to her own creative vision.'[475]

To illustrate this, I will examine the productive coexistence of visual and verbal elements in Pizarnik's works from the 1960s and 1970s. While the Surrealist techniques of juxtaposition and combination are always present, in its early iterations it cannot be seen as collage in the strictest sense (although Pizarnik was likely operating with a more generalised definition, in line with Ernst's approach). However, collage increasingly emerges as a vital technique of Pizarnik's visual production. Following analysis of a series of Pizarnik's visual compositions, in the final section of this chapter I examine her last poetic compositions, which translate the techniques of visual collage to her literary practice. Collage-poems become a way to continue writing – even if they perhaps also suggest the failure of translation between image and language.

From Mind to Page: Visual Compositions

Throughout her life, Pizarnik produced an eclectic array of artworks using a variety of media and styles. While she briefly studied painting with Argentine Surrealist artist Juan Batlle Planas, drawing is the dominant technique displayed in the artworks that survive, along with other more informal and spontaneous forms of mark-making. Some of

[475] Nicholson, *Surrealism in Latin American Literature*, 163.

Pizarnik's artworks are housed with her other papers at Princeton University, while others belong to private collections and were only seen by the public following the Biblioteca Nacional's exhibition in 2022, *Alejandra Pizarnik: entre la imagen y la palabra*. A number of these works, to no surprise, reflect Pizarnik's obsession with language.

What appear to be Pizarnik's earliest works are broadly illustrative in nature, with imagery that corresponds fairly directly to the text. *The Galloping Hour* includes a selection of drawings, and while these are undated, their French captions suggest they were made during Pizarnik's stay in Paris. The drawings are in a naïve, illustrative style – possibly reminiscent of Surrealist automatism – where the image explains or corresponds to the text in fairly direct fashion. While a number of common Pizarnikian motifs appear – young girls, birds, and so on – there is an early prefiguring of sex and sexuality as a theme, long before it appears in Pizarnik's written work.

[The images originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.]

Figures 5.1 and 5.2, *The Galloping Hour*, 81 and 84.

For example, the captions ‘jeune chienne’ and ‘étrangement sexuel’ – and the illustration accompanying the latter – are more explicitly sexual than almost anything in Pizarnik’s poetic work, and are much more in keeping with her later prose. They also prefigure the explicitly naïve and childlike style of her later drawings, featuring hybrid characters with thin spidery limbs and eerie circular eyes, that resemble Julio Cortázar’s *cronopios*. Pizarnik wrote an admiring review of Cortázar’s *Historias de cronopios y de famas* for the Venezuelan *Revista Nacional de Cultura*, praising the combination of poetry and humour; it is a possible source of inspiration for the style and comedy of these drawings.[476]

The combination of illustration and caption also appears in a drawing published in *Zona prohibida*, a posthumous anthology of Pizarnik’s poetry that includes four drawings by the poet. Published in Mexico in 1982, the foreword notes that most of the drawings were sent to Mexico by Octavio Paz ‘hace ya cuatro lustros’, dating the illustrations to 1962 at the latest, while Pizarnik was in Paris.[477] In contrast to the illustrations in *The Galloping Hour*, only one of these drawings contains text:

[476] Pizarnik, *Prosa,* 197–201.
[477] Pizarnik, *Zona prohibida* (Universidad Veracruzana, 1982), 5.

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Figure 5.3 *Zona prohibida*, 33.

The caption is drawn from 'El despertar', a poem from the 1958 collection *Las aventuras perdidas*: 'la jaula se ha vuelto pájaro / y se ha volado'.[478] The illustration corresponds to these lines, with a cage and bird both clearly identifiable, but the artwork has more dynamism, reflecting a sense of flight. The central body of the cage-bird is curved and distorted, suggesting a process of physical metamorphosis, with two wing-like appendages. On the left, however, a bird remains trapped within one cage-wing, so the

[478] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 92.

cage remains a place of imprisonment. The composition is defined by strong expressive lines and dynamic curves, giving a sense of movement and flight. The drawing gives new depth to Pizarnik's surprising imagery: while the line 'la jaula se ha vuelto pájaro' might imply a complete transformation, the illustration suggests a more hybrid mode of being. In that sense, the image 'translates' Pizarnik's poetic imagery, with perhaps more precise results than a verbal description alone.

Other works from this period are less illustrative, but share a similar expressiveness and dynamism:

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Figure 5.4 APP Box 9, Folder 22.

While undated, the piece shares a similar signature to 'La jaula se ha vuelto pájaro'. The signature and French caption suggest this is another composition from Pizarnik's Paris years. The piece is a dramatic, abstract composition in black and white with a base layer of

lilac paint; the delicate colour underneath is hidden with broad strokes of black paint that have been scratched away. The paint is expressive and appears to have been applied with vigorous movements, while the scratched texture suggests an act of destruction. The composition is reproduced in *The Galloping Hour* and described as an etching or *grattage*: a Surrealist painting technique where wet paint is scratched with a sharp blade.[479] The technique reveals the layers beneath: when rotated, figurative elements that resemble eyes and faces come into focus.

While the painting evokes emotional turmoil, the accompanying text initially appears more serene:

> Je me rappelle le vert, le lilas, le gris, le parfum, la chanson et le vent, mais je ne me rappelle pas ce qui a dit l'ange.[480]

The text does not illustrate the image, although the colours grey and lilac do appear in the composition. Instead, the lines are a meditative reflection on past events that appear blurred or confused: the repetition of the verb 'remember' emphasises the important of memory. The initial enumeration is sensory and almost synaesthetic: it begins in a painterly fashion with abstract colours, followed by a scent and two sounds. Impressions of a scene are conjured, but nothing is clear until the final word: 'l'ange' ('the angel'). What appears at first painterly and evocative is transformed into a misremembered or forgotten dialogue with a heavenly being. Given the charged emotion of the visual composition, the act of forgetting is imbued with a sense of failure: an inability to understand the divine. The synaesthetic enumeration, when paired with the image, now

[479] Pizarnik, *The Galloping Hour*, 89.
[480] 'I remember the green, the lilac, the grey, the perfume, the song and the wind, but I do not remember what the angel said'. Translation my own. Pizarnik, *The Galloping Hour*, 89. The transcription in *The Galloping Hour* reads 'le vent' ('the wind') instead of 'le vert' ('green'), but the handwriting differs sufficiently from the second line to suggest Pizarnik is referring to a series of colours.

seems disjointed, fragmentary, and even chaotic, suggesting an overwhelmed subject who is unable to grasp details.

In the final composition from Pizarnik's Paris years (dated 11 January 1962), language is increasingly integrated into the image:

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Figure 5.5 APP Box 9, Folder 22.

A mostly abstract drawing in pen and ink, ink blots are incorporated into the composition to indicate a sense of failure and destruction. In a composition reminiscent of Jean-Michel Basquiat's paintings, text and image share the same space. The viewer is not presented with a clear caption, as in previous compositions, but instead must decipher the words half-hidden among ink blots, scratchy lines, and haunting body parts: faces, arms, and genitalia. Arresting eyes and gaping mouths are drawn with repetitive, frantic lines. It is difficult to decipher the phrases scattered across the page:

CHAU alejandra
espero que no dejen parar la pantera
la hoja en blanco es un gran invento
pido el silencio
este viaje fue un error

The calligraphy is loose and expressive, suggesting emotional turmoil, and the content of the phrases reflects this turbulence. The phrase 'pido el silencio' recalls common Pizarnikian themes, while the final line feels more autobiographical: 'este viaje fue un error'.

Pizarnik's diary entry from the same date is calmer in tone, but reflects a similar sentiment:

> Esfuerzos por reconstruirme. Mi empleo peligra. Es decir, mi estadía en París. El deseo de ir a Buenos Aires es, en mí, sinónimo del deseo de no dejar de ser una niña.[481]

Pizarnik reflects on her financial precarity, following troubles with the job she needs to afford her life in Paris. This is connected to her ability to continue with her poetic project: Paris is a place of work, but also of poetic freedom, whereas Buenos Aires is the site of childhood, a place where responsibilities can be avoided. Her difficulties result in a fragmented sense of self, such that she needs 'esfuerzos por reconstruirme'. This fragmentation is increasingly visible in her visual work. What she describes as the 'imágenes visuales' and 'pocas palabras sueltas', rather than being translated into lyric poetry, come apart in fragments on the page.[482] This idea of piecing oneself together prefigures the collage practice that Pizarnik goes on to develop.

One phrase could synthesise Pizarnik's creative concerns from the period: 'la hoja en blanco es un gran invento'. The concept of the blank page occurs repeatedly in

[481] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 387.
[482] Ibid., 580.

Pizarnik's writings; in her preface to Beatriz Eichel's collection, it represents a kind of peril: 'la zona vertiginosa de la página en blanco'.[483] It is a cliché of writer's block to speak of fearing the blank page, but in the illustration, it is described as an invention or construct. While there may be a humorous reference to the ink blots and stains that soak the page – and which may have inspired the composition, spontaneous as it is in style – the pure white page seems as fleeting and elusive as silence. The desire for poetic and artistic expression is in flux; both the blank page and silence seem impossible, but the latter (and possibly the former) are increasingly pursued by the poet.

Following Pizarnik's return to Buenos Aires in 1964, the relation between language and image continues to develop. In 1966, she was invited to participate in a joint exhibition called 'Poetas pintores – Pintores poetas', shown at the Galería La Ruche in Buenos Aires from 28 November to 17 December.[484] The artists responsible for 'textos poéticos' included Roberto Aizenberg, Osvaldo Borda, Mina Gondler, Kenneth Kemble, and Lea Lublin, while the poets who produced 'dibujos', 'collages', and 'pinturas' included Pizarnik's friends and acquaintances: Manuel Mujica Láinez, Enrique Molina, and Olga Orozco. The exhibition poster names some of the most innovative and respected artists and writers in 1960s Argentina. Significantly, while Pizarnik's early visual experiments seem to be solitary activities, a more collaborative approach to art emerges once she returns to Argentina. There is little record of the exhibition itself, but the title suggests the complementary nature of language and image, and even the possibility of moving – or translating – between the two media.

While Figures 5.1 to 5.5 show Pizarnik introducing language into her visual practice, another striking tendency is the increasing presence of visual or graphic elements

[483] Fondo Pizarnik, Caja 1 Carpeta 1, AP 17.
[484] Fondo Pizarnik, Caja 1 Carpeta 2, AP 39.

within her own writing. In an early diary entry from 1962, Pizarnik explicitly compares poetry composition to a 'cuadro':

> Mientras leía el libro de los trovadores "perfeccioné" una "máquina de escribir poemas" que inventé a los dieciocho años. Máquina que no es maquinal sino que permite tratar al poema como si fuera un cuadro. Recién hoy comprendo que la rima y la métrica tienen sentido pues defienden del terror a los grandes espacios.[485]

Pizarnik changes her approach to the blank page by seeing it not as the home for fixed and regular lines, but as something closer to an artwork where the full page can be used for both poetic and visual effect. Surveying the Princeton archive, Pizarnik often drafted poems on loose-leaf paper, rather than in notebooks: the paper is a physical support for poetic compositions, just as canvas might be for painterly ones. Evelyn Galiazo describes this as Pizarnik's 'esfuerzo por anular la distancia entre texto e imagen.'[486] Although Pizarnik's diary entry contemplates a number of tactics to tackle writer's block, including rhyme and versification, visual methods appear dominant.

Furthermore, by the early 1970s, Pizarnik appears increasingly interested in the visuality of language itself. Words or letters come to be seen as individual signs with their own materiality: echoing in some ways the very history of written language. Pizarnik's attitude has a precedent in Anglophone modernists like Ezra Pound, who were interested in languages developed from pictograms and visual symbols: from Chinese characters to Egyptian hieroglyphs. Haun Saussy, writing on Pound's use and misuse of Chinese characters, notes that an essay by Ernest Fenollosa was influential: 'Pound took from the "Chinese Written Character" the idea of an "ideogrammic" way of writing and thinking'.[487] The ideogram referenced here is a symbol that encapsulates an idea.

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[485] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 511.
[486] Galiazo, 'Alejandra Pizarnik o leer lo visible y contemplar lo legible', 138.
[487] Ernest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry: A Critical Edition*, ed. by Haun Saussy and others (Fordham University Press, 2009), 4.

Pizarnik seems to desire this for Latin script, or at least seeks to find it in a drawing from 1 June 1972:

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Figure 5.6 APP Box 9, Folder 22.

In one of Pizarnik's last drawings, the word 'ojo' inspires a series of doodles that blur the boundary between language and image. 'Ojo' in Spanish means 'eye', and in Argentine Spanish can also be a warning or caution. While 'ojo' is a textual sign that points to a referent – eyes – Pizarnik seeks to have the word not only refer to, but also represent that referent. There is a clear sense of humour as she adapts her calligraphy to sketch out eyes and noses; the faces are solemn, smiling, or suggestive. Pizarnik includes a number of sexualised doodles and some *cronopio*-style birdlike figures, as well as individual letters in the top right corner whose function is transformed. The letter M appears to shelter a small girl, while the letter T becomes an umbrella, an arrow, and a mountain. With the 'ojo',

Pizarnik appears to be blurring the boundary between language and what it represents, but she also seeks to return language to its visual function: that of the symbol or sign.

Pizarnik develops the concept of individual letters having their own meaning in a 1970 piece for *La Nación*:

[The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.]

Figure 5.7 Fondo Pizarnik – Caja 1, Carpeta 2, AP 27. Image from *Alejandra Pizarnik: entre la imagen y la palabra*, ed. by Guillermo David, 70–71

The article profiles writers who are visual artists, including Manuel Mujica Láinez and Joaquín Gómez Bas. Pizarnik appears unique among contributors in actively seeking to blur the boundary between language and image:

> La letra B me pareció en la infancia una letra llorosa, pero yo, precavida, me apresuré a dibujarle encima una niña con un paraguas más alto que un árbol.[488]

[488] Fondo Pizarnik – Caja 1, Carpeta 2, AP 27.

While individual letters in Latin script do not traditionally carry any symbolic weight, Pizarnik ascribes sadness to the 'llorosa' letter B. The letter B then becomes an image, as Pizarnik responds with a drawing; the picture sounds Surrealist in nature, with its unexpected characterisation of a 'paraguas más alto que un árbol' challenging our normal sense of scale. It is unclear whether the image reproduced in *La Nación* is the illustration described: there is no identifiable letter B.

In the accompanying interview, Pizarnik reflects on her emotional response to drawing:

> Cuando dibujo ~~descubro que~~ estoy llena de alegría.[489] La hoja en blanco es un lugar en el que todo se vuelve posible y desde donde uno se defiende con máscaras, con palacios de un milímetro, con pajaritos y sobre todo con paraguas. Pero el reforzar los emblemas con una palabra, con un verso, o con un poema entero, es una mera señal de que no se puede vivir únicamente de alegrías.[490]

Drawing is described in euphoric terms, and the terrifying 'hoja en blanco' here becomes a space of possibility, to be populated with emblems. However, this joy is fleeting; Pizarnik speaks of 'reforzar los emblemas con una palabra', as if the image alone is insufficient. It seems language must always make itself present, even if she alludes obliquely to the suffering it may entail.

Pizarnik created one of her few surviving collages this same year. Her notebooks incorporate collage techniques, but *En un pueblo pequeño: OJOS ALBA* is one of the few formal collage artworks uncovered by researchers. It returns to the theme of eyes, but this time the collage is purely figurative:

[489] Pizarnik herself crossed out the words 'descubro que'. This is a trend across her manuscripts; she tends to edit her work and words, even after they have been published.
[490] Fondo Pizarnik – Caja 1, Carpeta 2, AP 27.

[The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.]

Figure 5.8 *En un pueblo pequeño: OJOS ALBA*, 1970, colección Graciela Maturo. Image from *Alejandra Pizarnik: entre la imagen y la palabra*, ed. by Guillermo David, 8–9

The collage reflects a grand theatrical space – possibly a stage with red curtains, or a royal court – populated by cut-out figures engaged in various physical activities: walking, horse riding, throwing objects, dancing, sword fighting, rolling along. The hand-drawn characters with thin spindly limbs recall figures in Pizarnik's earlier illustrations. At the centre of the image, a figure sits on a throne, but their face has been obscured; atop the throne stands a bird-like figure with long legs, whose body resembles an eye. A series of parallel lines and triangles seem to emanate from this bird, who appears to be the centre of power. The collage does not necessarily have a clear symbolic meaning, but the cut-out characters reflect both dynamism and chaos, seemingly governed by the mysterious figures in the centre. The composition is reminiscent of Salvador Dalí's Surrealist paintings with long-limbed creatures, or Hieronymus Bosch's 'Garden of Earthly Delights'. Bosch was a

creative influence for Pizarnik, inspiring the title of her penultimate collection, *Extracción de la piedra de locura*.

While it is possible that the catalogue image has been cropped, the absence of language is striking in *En un pueblo pequeño: OJOS ALBA*. This becomes more significant considering Pizarnik's purported interest in combining visual and verbal forms, and it is unclear whether this represents a deliberate abandonment of written language. However, visual expression is also shown to have its constraints. In *El infierno musical*, the prose poem 'El deseo de la palabra' highlights the poet's desire for language:

> Caen niñas de papel de variados colores. ¿Hablan los colores? ¿Hablan las imágenes de papel? Solamente hablan las doradas y de ésas no hay ninguna por aquí.[491]

The 'niñas de papel', considered alongside her visual production, evoke the art that Pizarnik made around this time. The questions, along with the anaphoric repetition of 'hablan', suggest the lyric subject is interrogating herself about the expressive possibilities of visual images. While colours often have symbolic associations – blue for sadness, red for love and passion – do they speak? These lyric questions are only half-answered: perhaps some golden images do speak, but they are not to be found.

As the poem progresses, the subject turns her attention to language, in a line reminiscent of Pizarnik's diary entries: 'Imposible narrar mi día, mi vía.'[492] Neither language nor image seem to offer solutions. But the final section expresses poetic possibility through the subjunctive:

> Ojalá pudiera vivir solamente en éxtasis, haciendo el cuerpo del poema con mi cuerpo, rescatando cada frase con mis días y con mis semanas, infundiéndole al poema mi soplo a medida que cada letra de cada palabra haya sido sacrificada en las ceremonias del vivir.[493]

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[491] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 269.
[492] Ibid., 269.
[493] Ibid., 269–70.

In the interview with *La Nación*, 'alegría' was not enough for creation, but 'éxtasis' might be: an interesting choice, given that the etymology of the word means to be outside or beside oneself. Embodiment becomes increasingly important as a means of poetic production, emphasised by 'el cuerpo', which refers to both the poem and the speaker's body. There are echoes of Artaud in the reference to 'mi soplo', which recalls Pizarnik's praise of his 'impronta respiratoria'.[494] The poetic ideal presented here would be to synthesise written language – 'cada letra de cada palabra' – with lived reality and materiality, in these 'ceremonias del vivir'.

For a poet whose work often suppresses the 'yo' or sense of self, this desire for breath and embodiment might come as a surprise. But Pizarnik's creative works reveal that neither language nor image is enough; in some ways, the promise of intermedial translation fails. Language alone cannot translate the images that populate Pizarnik's mind, but at the same time, images do not suffice for an artist dedicated to the craft of poetry. Therefore, a more embodied, physical practice might allow Pizarnik to create the kind of poetry to which she aspires: something lived in. In that sense, the cut-and-paste and material approach of collage has a clear appeal. In the final section of this chapter, we will see how Pizarnik's collage poems allow her to surpass the limitations of a simple translation between image and language; instead, the techniques of visual collage are 'translated' into the medium of language.

Cut and Paste: Towards Collage Poetry

While Pizarnik's diaries, interviews, and other writings suggest the importance of collage to her literary approach, this has been little noted by critics, who have tended to focus on

[494] Pizarnik, *Prosa*, 273.

her citational or even plagiaristic practices. Carlota Caulfield is one of the few to mention the influence of collage on Pizarnik's poems, although primarily in terms of their imagery, not their formal composition. For example, Caulfield notes the presence of a 'collage de imágenes, como el que encontramos en "Cantora nocturna"', and observes that many of Pizarnik's texts 'tienen el sello del collage'.[495] Collage, however, is more than a purely visual process, as outlined by Surrealists and their critics. Adamowicz highlights a number of forms of textual collage, including 'portmanteau words', poems made from 'ready-made materials' such as newspaper clippings, or collaborative works assembled from 'fragments of automatic texts'.[496] If Ernst coined the 'collage novel' to describe his compositions, we could reframe Pizarnik's citational practices as 'collage poems'.

Throughout the 1960s, Pizarnik increasingly describes writing poetry in terms of collage: understood broadly as the synthesis and coexistence of linguistic and visual elements in a poetic composition. In the prologue to *La antología consultada de la joven poesía argentina*, cited as being written in Paris in 1962, Pizarnik discusses her poetic process:

> En cuanto a la inspiración, creo en ella ortodoxamente, lo que no me impide, sino todo lo contrario, concentrarme mucho tiempo en un solo poema. Y lo hago de una manera que recuerda, tal vez, el gesto de los artistas plásticos: adhiero la hoja de papel a un muro y la *contemplo*; cambio palabras, suprimo versos. A veces, al suprimir una palabra, imagino otra en su lugar, pero sin saber aún su nombre. Entonces, a la espera de la deseada, hago en su vacío un dibujo que la alude. Y este dibujo es como un llamado ritual. (Agrego que mi afición al silencio me lleva a unir en espíritu la poesía con la pintura; de allí que donde otros dirían instante privilegiado yo hable de espacio privilegiado.)[497] [emphasis in original]

Pizarnik describes the moment of poetic composition in a painterly way, stressing the importance of sight and contemplation. Rather than the writer's desk, the poem occupies the wall, and words and lines are assessed visually, instead of sonically or metrically.

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[495] Caulfield, 'Entre la poesía y la pintura', 5.
[496] Adamowicz, 'Collage', 180–81.
[497] Pizarnik, *Prosa*, 299–300.

Words morph into beings: hence the strange and seemingly contradictory statement that a word can be imagined 'sin saber aún su nombre'. At this moment, images come to illustrate a concept or thought that cannot yet be articulated: recalling Pizarnik's broadly psychoanalytical belief in the pre-linguistic. This process of uniting poetry and painting is evoked in relation to Pizarnik's love of silence. Traditionally lyric poetry is connected to music through the lyre, but for Pizarnik, both poetry and painting are visual processes that take place in quiet contemplation: poetry is not an event in time but in space, the 'espacio privilegiado' of the poem.

Pizarnik does not explicitly connect her poetry to collage, but this sense of seeking language recurs throughout her writing, recalling Surrealist collage's preference for found materials. In a 1972 interview with Martha Isabel Moia, Pizarnik returns to the relationship between poetry and painting:

> Me gusta pintar porque en la pintura encuentro la oportunidad de aludir en silencio a las imágenes de las sombras interiores. Además, me atrae la falta de mitomanía del lenguaje de la pintura. Trabajar con las palabras, o, más específicamente, buscar *mis* palabras, implica una tensión que no existe al pintar.[498] [emphasis in original]

Once again, Pizarnik connects her appreciation of different forms to her quest for silence, although this time she characterises writing more negatively, implying it is a language laden with 'mitomanía': compulsive lying or even delusions of grandeur. Words are deceptive, as expressed in 'En esta noche, en este mundo': '(todo lo que se puede decir es mentira) / el resto es silencio / sólo que el silencio no existe'.[499] This creates a tension when expressing herself through language, and she describes writing in unusual terms: firstly, as 'trabajar', and secondly, as 'buscar *mis* palabras'. The sense that words are something to be found or sought, rather than naturally spoken, implicitly evokes Pizarnik's own practice of literary collage, as well as her wider difficulties with language.

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[498] Pizarnik, *Prosa*, 314.
[499] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 398.

In time, Pizarnik explicitly identifies collage as a technique of composition. In a June 1968 diary entry, she discusses her process:

> En cuanto a mí, tengo que hacer un *collage* con J. B., con cartas no enviadas, con poemas que me obseden, con el material en bruto que debo fraccionar e ir corrigiendo de a uno.[500]

Collage is characterised as a three-stage process. Firstly, it involves the selection of materials from Pizarnik's personal archive; in a previous entry from 13 June 1968, J. B. is described as one of 'tres series de escritos'.[501] It seems these texts are mostly written by Pizarnik herself, but it is unclear whether these 'poemas que me obseden' are written by Pizarnik or others. After the selection comes the 'cut' of collage's 'cut-and-paste'; and the last stage is correcting or editing these fragments. Strikingly, in contrast to collage's usual focus on existing materials, Pizarnik does not consider these fragments to be complete: instead, they are 'material en bruto' which needs to be processed.

The idea of 'correction' becomes increasingly prominent in Pizarnik's diary entries. One year later, on 3 June 1969, Pizarnik sees the promises and pitfalls of collage:

> La idea del *collage* me sobrecoge y me desampara. La unión de los fragmentos vale la pena si cada fragmento es válido de por sí. Quiero decir: si los fragmentos son válidos aisladamente, la tarea de reunirlos es muy fácil. Nada más difícil, por el contrario, que reunir *fragmentos en borrador*.[502]

In the face of writer's block, collage appears to offer a solution – to recycle existing works. Gathering fragments becomes key to Pizarnik's conception of collage, and this is played out materially in her archive. The Pizarnik Papers at Princeton include envelopes of individual words – some handwritten and others cut out from existing works – categorised into groups.

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[500] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 785.
[501] Ibid., 784.
[502] Ibid., 867.

[The images originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.]

Figures 5.9 and 5.10, APP Box 10, Folder 6.

Envelopes for ‘sust[antivos]’, adjectives, verbs, prepositions, and even entire ‘frases’ reveal that collage was not merely an imaginative exercise, but a physical practice. The nouns are evocative, conjuring both the mythologised image of Pizarnik – ‘espejo’, ‘infancia’, ‘muñeca’, ‘memoria’ – and the polyphonic, surrealist and sexualised Pizarnik of the later works – ‘voces’, ‘perro’, ‘hermafrodita’. The possibilities of poetry are fragmented into constituent parts, and it becomes a combinatorial art. As Galiazo identifies, Pizarnik offers ‘una concepción de la literatura como juego combinatorio y del artista como bricoleur intelectual’.[503]

However, Pizarnik remains selective, given her concern with the ‘fragmentos en borrador’. The diary entry questions the validity of the fragments she brings together, becoming drafts that need ‘correcting’. This perfectionism causes problems for Pizarnik, as she notes a month later on 1 July 1969:

[503] Galiazo, ‘Alejandra Pizarnik o leer lo visible y contemplar lo legible’, 144.

> El sábado Susana me dijo "debieras *no* corregir como disciplina". Se trata de un problema sin solución.[504]

This could be advice from Thénon, who was in touch with Pizarnik at this time, after collaborating as an editor on Pizarnik and Bordelois' translation of Bonnefoy. The advice given does not doubt Pizarnik's literary discipline; instead, Susana advocates for a less rigid approach. Collage is a possible solution to this struggle; by reworking existing material, Pizarnik is able to continue producing literature, even if she feels she cannot write anything 'new'. While some of her restrictive and self-editing tendencies remain, collage offers possibility and opportunity; as Galiazo proposes, Pizarnik 'deconstruye el mito de la originalidad pura y apuesta por el *collage* de fragmentos.'[505]

A number of Pizarnik's late poems bear the hallmarks of collage, or evidence of 'collage's citational strategies'.[506] There are two major instances of collage leading to the genesis of a series of poems: firstly, the poems that rework a fragment by Kafka; and secondly, the *Textos de Sombra*. Kafka's importance for Pizarnik is widely recognised by critics: Karl Posso compares Kafka's 'In The Penal Colony' and *La condesa sangrienta*,[507] and Carolina Romero Saavedra and Romina Magallanes name Kafka alongside Virginia Woolf as major influences on Pizarnik's diaries.[508] Kafka was a great source of inspiration for Pizarnik, and at times her diary entries strongly resemble passages from his own. On 2 June 1969, one day before her reflection on the difficulty of collage and 'reunir *fragmentos en borrador*',[509] Pizarnik copies out a line from Kafka's diaries:

> "¿Qué has hecho con el don del sexo?" – Kafka[510]

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[504] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 881.
[505] Galiazo, 'Alejandra Pizarnik o leer lo visible y contemplar lo legible', 144.
[506] Adamowicz, 'Collage', 181.
[507] Posso, 'The Tormenting Beauty of Ideals', in *Árbol de Alejandra*, ed. by Mackintosh and Posso, 60–76.
[508] Carolina Romero Saavedra and Romina Magallanes, *¡Escribirás y escribirás!: Un ensayo sobre escrituras diarísticas* (Universidad Industrial De Santander, 2020), 108.
[509] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 867.
[510] Ibid., 866.

This is taken from an entry from 18 January 1922, in which a forty-year-old Kafka berates himself for an inability to remain in the present, and reflects on his fear of looking back – leading him to ask: 'What have you done with the gift of sex?'[511] or 'Was hast Du mit dem Geschenk des Geschlechtes getan?'[512] While not the most obviously Kafkaesque quotation, it seems to have resonated with Pizarnik and her literary inquiries into her own sexuality. Perhaps it is the surprising nature of this quotation – so different from what is normally associated with Kafka – that speaks to Pizarnik, whose sexuality is at times precluded from the stereotypically Pizarnikian public figure.

As several critics have noted, Pizarnik's later works, particularly in prose, explore the topic of sex. These were generally unpublished, although as Julio Prieto notes, some were published in Pizarnik's lifetime: 'El textículo de la cuestión' and 'La pájara en el ojo ajeno' were published in 1970 and 1971 respectively.[513] However, rather than attributing this interest in sexuality to a late-stage madness that might reinforce the Pizarnikian suicide-poet myth, Prieto emphasises the poet's interest in the materiality of the text:

> En lo ilegible del erotismo desaforado y malhablado lo que emerge es lo demasiado visible que se suele ocultar, lo obsceno de la materialidad del amor y del lenguaje: lo carnal de los cuerpos y la carne de la palabra, lo radicalmente sin sentido ligado al goce sexual y –literalmente, en términos de un placer del texto– a un "desarreglo razonado de todos los sentidos" (1924: 54), como diría Rimbaud, ese poeta tan amado por Pizarnik.[514]

As in 'El deseo de la palabra', where the poet speaks of 'haciendo el cuerpo del poema con mi cuerpo', an erotic poetics emerges in these collage poems that is explicitly linked to the materiality of both language and the world.[515] While the poems that repurpose Kafka's line are not as nonsensical as some of the prose texts, it is important to connect Pizarnik's

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[511] Franz Kafka, *Diaries*, trans. by Ross Benjamin (Penguin Classics, 2024), 468.
[512] Franz Kafka, *Tagebücher. Band 3: 1914-1923*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994), 199.
[513] Julio Prieto, 'El *eros* de lo ilegible: obscenidad y glosolalia en la escritura última de Alejandra Pizarnik', *Cuadernos LIRICO*, special issue, published online 2 October 2023, doi:10.4000/lirico.14135.
[514] Ibid.
[515] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 269.

curiosity regarding Kafka's question – 'what have you done with the gift of sex?' – to her interest in collage and materiality.

This quotation mutates throughout her published and unpublished work of the 1970s. It appears fairly directly – only changed from the present perfect to the preterite – in 'En esta noche, en este mundo', first published in the Venezuelan magazine *Árbol de Fuego* in December 1971:

> los deterioros de las palabras
> deshabitando el palacio del lenguaje
> el conocimiento entre las piernas
> ¿qué hiciste del don del sexo?
> oh mis muertos
> me los comí me atraganté
> no puedo más de no poder más[516]

Beyond inserting this uncredited line from Kafka's diaries, there is a strong impression of collage in this stanza. The first six lines appear in pairs; the couplets are internally logical but seem unconnected to what follows. The first couplet evokes the breakdown of words who abandon their glorious home, language; the second wonders about carnal or embodied knowledge; and the third suggests a cannibalistic approach to the dead. The final line is repetitive and almost tautological in its exaggerated depiction of giving up.

This associative but non-linear structure appears central to collage. As Cristina Rivera Garza identifies in a critical essay included within *La muerte me da*, a novel which incorporates fragments of Pizarnik's writing: 'La estructura que congrega a estas partículas textuales responde más a las yuxtaposiciones espaciales de un collage que a las sucesiones temporales o lógicas de un relato.'[517] While Rivera Garza focuses on Pizarnik's prose works, this structure also appears in her poetry from this period, and corresponds to the 'conocimiento entre las piernas'. The poet comes to value a kind of knowledge that she

[516] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 399–400.
[517] Cristina Rivera Garza, *La muerte me da* (Tusquets Editores, 2007), 184.

believes she used to have – an embodied, material, carnal knowledge – in an apparent rejection of more rational approaches. This is enacted both thematically and formally, as the lyric voice becomes more disjointed and fragmentary.

'Sala de psicopatología' is an explicitly citational poem, collaging together Friedrich Nietzsche, August Strindberg, Paul Éluard, Karl Marx, Arthur Rimbaud, and Kafka. Pizarnik also cites her previous work: the response to Éluard, for example, references 'vegetación lujuriosa', a phrase that appears in 'Continuidad' from *Extracción de la piedra de locura*.[518] The lyric subject in 'Sala de psicopatalogía' is both virtuosic and unravelling, entering into dialogue with her past self and other literary voices on the topics of motherhood, sexuality, sanity, psychotherapy, and language. This culminates with an interpolation of Kafka, named alongside Lichtenberg, Kierkegaard, and Dostoevsky as writers Pizarnik would have loved:

> Y sobre todo a Kafka
> a quien le pasó lo que a mí, si bien él era púdico y casto –«¿Qué hice del don del sexo?» –y yo soy una pajera como no existe otra;
> pero le pasó (a Kafka) lo que a mí:
> *se separó*[519]

Kafka is described as the most important of the figures named, and the lyric subject identifies fully with his predicament, transforming it into a first-person question. There are significant differences between Kafka and the poetic subject – Kafka is 'púdico y casto' while the poet is 'una pajera', Argentine slang for a masturbator – but they share the same problem: '*se separó*'. While this appears related to loneliness and isolation, this separation from self is a major theme of the poem: earlier, the subject debates the possibility of 'reunirme con el *migo* de *conmigo*', a playful pun on the 'migo' or crumb hidden inside the word that nevertheless reflects a divided self.[520] 'El don del sexo' appears to be

[518] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 235.
[519] Ibid., 416.
[520] Ibid., 414.

connected to self-knowledge, in both mind and body; but this gift has been lost, and now the poetic subject is isolated from herself.

'Sala de psicopatología' was not published in Pizarnik's lifetime, and 'En esta noche, en este mundo' was published in magazines but not included in a collection. Reviewing Pizarnik's published collections, the phrase '¿Qué hice del don del sexo?' appears in 'Los poseídos entre lilas' from *El infierno musical*, but with a key difference:

> –¿Qué hice del don de la mirada?[521]

The question is transformed by the reference to the 'mirada'. While no longer attributed to Kafka, the line is marked as dialogue, as are all the lines in part I of 'Los poseídos entre lilas', enhancing the sense of polyphony. Other collage poems, especially from *Textos de Sombra*, are also structured in the form of quasi-theatrical dialogues; for example, 'Los poseídos entre lilas' includes the stage directions '(*En tono vengativo*)' and '(*En tono fatigado*).'[522] One effect of collage, beyond this engagement with materiality, is an increased sense of multivocality and a lack of an identifiable poetic subject.

Significantly, the gift has now changed to the 'mirada'. The 'mirada' is a longstanding concern in Pizarnik's work, linked to the issues with language and image that lead her to experiment with collage in the first place. The 'mirada' here is presented in different terms to poem 23 from *Árbol de Diana*:

> una mirada desde la alcantarilla
> puede ser una visión del mundo
>
> la rebelión consiste en mirar una rosa
> hasta pulverizarse los ojos[523]

The first couplet portrays the gaze of a kind of *poète maudit*, looking up from the gutter. However, the depersonalised third-person perspective reinforces the impression of an act

[521] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 293.
[522] Ibid., 293–94.
[523] Ibid., 125.

of pure objectivity, with no poetic subject seen or heard. The second couplet immediately subverts the ideas of the first, describing an act of resistance, moving between extreme ends of perspective. The gaze is turned away from the macrocosm of the world towards the microcosm of the rose, a traditional image of beauty in lyric poetry. But the second couplet contradicts the first not only in terms of the object of the gaze, but in the gaze's desired effect. The first couplet links sight with understanding the world – even from a marginal position – but looking at a rose is not linked with mastery, but with self-annihilation, in a powerful image of bodily destruction. Rebellion is not simply looking at something different, but refusing to look at all, destroying one's ability to do so in the process.

In *Árbol de Diana*, the 'mirada' is seen as deceptive, offering a false promise of mastery over the world that the poet rejects. But in *El infierno musical*, the 'mirada' is understood to be a gift that the speaker once possessed, but now seems to have lost or squandered. The end of part I of 'Los poseídos entre lilas' – 'Se ha cerrado una puerta' – sounds like an opportunity lost.[524] And the end of part IV, with its series of rhetorical questions, depicts a first-person plural poetic subject set adrift, wracked by doubt and uncertainty.[525] It seems the poet of *Árbol de Diana* was happy to destroy something that the poet of *El infierno musical* now seeks.

Returning to the poem 'El deseo de la palabra', also from *El infierno musical*, the poet again interpolates Kafka to explain what she has done with her gifts:

> He malgastado el don de transfigurar a los prohibidos (los siento respirar adentro de las paredes.[526]

The gift has returned, but instead of appearing in the form of a question, the speaker declares that this gift has been wasted, or poorly spent. It is unclear who the 'prohibidos'

[524] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 294.
[525] Ibid., 296.
[526] Ibid., 269.

are, but they seem to be the source of '[p]asos y voces del lado sombrío del jardín'.[527] The poem's title expresses a desire for words and language, so 'los prohibidos' could even be a version of the 'nombres y figuras' that the lyric subject once could have turned into poetry. However, given that the process of collage has transfigured the same line by Kafka and repurposed it in four different poems, Pizarnik is able to employ a variety of strategies to write poetry in a different way: one that does not depend so much on this gift.

The second poetic cycle that employs collage is *Textos de Sombra*, a posthumous collection edited by Olga Orozco and Ana Becciú and published in 1982. These ambiguous texts blur the boundaries between prose fiction, theatre, and prose poetry. They clearly apply collage techniques: the first poem, titled 'Un jardín', is prefaced by a quotation from Kafka, and employs a series of unattributed quotations, as well as several lines that recall Pizarnik's other works. The fragment 'la luz es tentación y promesa',[528] for example, adapts and translates a line of Pizarnik's French poetry: 'le silence est tentation et promesse,'[529] which also appears in 'Fuga en lila' from *El infierno musical*, as '[s]i silencio es tentación y promesa'.[530]

> Dialogue markers and italics indicate a series of collaged phrases:
>
> *–Sólo quería ver el jardín*.
> *–Soy mi propio espectro.*
> *–No hay que jugar al espectro porque se llega a serlo.*
> […]
> *–Ils jouent la pièce en étranger*.
> *–Sinto o mundo chorar como lingua* [sic] *estrangeira*.
> *–Das ganze verkehrte Wesen fort*.
> *–Another calling: my own words coming back…*[531]

[527] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 269.
[528] Ibid., 401.
[529] 'Silence is temptation and promise'. Translation my own. *The Galloping Hour*, 18.
[530] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 277.
[531] Ibid., 401–02.

Here collage is multilingual, presenting a series of phrases loosely connected by questions of ghosts, foreignness, strangeness, and language. Some phrases are translated into Spanish (such as the opening line, taken from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*), or presented in their original language (as in the final four lines, in French, Portuguese, German, and English). These lines mostly correspond to entries in Pizarnik's *palais de vocabulaire* notebooks. In order, these are: Lewis Carroll, Henri Michaux, the Kabbalah, Michaux again, Cecilia Meireles, Bertolt Brecht, and Sidney Keyes.[532]

The materiality of Pizarnik's collage approach is visible in a typescript included in the Princeton archive:

[The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.]

Figure 5.11 APP Box 7, Folder 46.

[532] Some sources found in APP Box 4, Folder 9. Ana Becciú confirms the sources of the last four lines in a footnote in *Poesía completa* (401).

The brown tape marks show that Pizarnik, as well as typing up existing fragments by other writers, also cut and pasted these quotations to create new compositions. Some of the same quotations are also used in the unpublished poem 'Del silencio', included in *Poesía completa* as a file that Pizarnik gave the poet Perla Rotzait in 1971.[533]

Alongside quotations from Meireles and Michaux, 'Del silencio' includes two further quotes by Carroll, and part II includes subtly adapted lines from Karl Krolow and Blaise Cendrars, first copied down in the *palais de vocabulaire*.[534] 'Todo es anaranjado' is a direct quotation from Elvio E. Gandolfo's translation of Cendrars' poem 'Journal': 'Tout est orangé.'[535] 'No hay quien pinte con colores verdes'[536] adapts Richard Klatovsky's translation of 'Ya no hay quien pinte / con colores azules el monumento de las caricias', corresponding to Krolow's 'Es gibt niemanden mehr, / Der die Denkmäler der Zärtlichkeit / Mit blauer Farbe anstreicht.'[537] Significantly, both poems thematise painting, and were published in Spanish translation in the Rosario magazine *El lagrimal trifurca*, no. 2 in 1968, suggesting a clear source for part of Pizarnik's composition.[538] Pizarnik went on to contribute poems to the following double issue.[539] Here, the collage is more striking for being entirely unattributed; this, of course, is where collage can verge on plagiarism. In extreme cases, as Adamowicz suggests, 'collage collapses into pastiche', especially if the source of the material is clear.[540]

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[533] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 357.
[534] APP Box 4, Folder 9.
[535] Blaise Cendrars, *Du monde entier : poésies complètes, 1912-1924* (Gallimard, 1967), 69.
[536] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 358.
[537] Karl Krolow, *Gesammelte Gedichte*, 3 vols (Suhrkamp, 1965-1985), I, 167.
[538] *El lagrimal trifurca*, 2 (1968) <https://ahira.com.ar/ejemplares/el-lagrimal-trifurca-no-2/> [accessed 27 March 2026].
[539] *El lagrimal trifurca*, 3-4 (1968/1969) <https://ahira.com.ar/ejemplares/el-lagrimal-trifurca-no-3-4/> [accessed 27 March 2026].
[540] Adamowicz, 'Collage', 181.

Collage compositions also allow Pizarnik to offer a pastiche of her own poetry. 'Presencia de Sombra', in draft form, is initially called 'Collage de Sombra':

[The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.]

Figure 5.12 APP Box 7, Folder 46.

The draft poem makes use of dialogue markers to suggest these lines have been lifted from elsewhere. The poem evokes common images and themes from across Pizarnik's work; the first line is reminiscent of her French poetry, with the third person 'Alguien' recalling the repeated use of 'quelqu'un'. The second line appears verbatim in 'En esta noche, en este mundo', and the character of the 'reina loca' appears in the titular poem of *Extracción de la piedra de locura*.[541] The poem includes the non-sequiturs and juxtapositions characteristic of collage poetry, although here it appears that the collage elements are taken primarily from Pizarnik's own work. In the drafting process, the title 'collage' is crossed out and replaced with 'presencia'. This title is used by Becciú in *Poesía completa*,

[541] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 248.

therefore obscuring the text's collage origins. However, the manuscript makes explicit collage's role in the creation of poetry. Thematically, the poem addresses questions of silence and writing:

> Ella escribe como una lámpara que se apaga, ella escribe como una lámpara que se enciende.[542]

The poet flickers into view like the lamp itself. An overly biographical and fatalistic reading could focus on the 'lámpara que se apaga' and the end of writing – but some hope remains. The lamp still lights, and the female figure – revealed to be a fairytale 'hija de los reyes' – continues walking forward in silence, 'hacia la profundidad'.[543] While the mood of the poem is ambivalent, marked by contradiction, there remains a sense of progress; the poet goes on, and so does poetry.

Conclusion

Returning to the question of visual translation, it is unclear whether Pizarnik was able to succeed in her goal of translating the images and words of her mind into poetic language. The strategies examined here – illustration and collage – instead strive to synthesise the visual and the verbal, allowing these different forms to coexist. Visual translation holds great promise for a poet torn between language and image, and while it may not be possible to translate, strictly speaking, between the two, Pizarnik found a number of innovative ways to bypass the failure of this translation. The works analysed – spanning all of the 1960s and the start of the 1970s – instead reveal an attempt to restore visuality and materiality to written language. Whether by considering individual letters or words as

[542] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 407.
[543] Ibid., 407.

symbolic in their own right, or treating poetic composition as a form of visual composition, Pizarnik aims to mediate and translate between these forms of expression.

Collage, ultimately, emerges as the most successful way of translating Pizarnik's visual thinking into language. Collage allows her to synthesise the visual and semantic elements of language: a way to continue with these 'imágenes plásticas imposibles de transmutar en palabras.'[544] In fact, it appears that a significant number of poems composed between 1969 and 1972 – published in *El infierno musical*, in magazines, or collected as posthumous collections like *Textos de Sombra* – employ collage as a poetic technique. In a diary entry from 24 November 1969, Pizarnik explicitly states a desire to return to her earlier drafts:

> *El infierno musical*: no sólo las prosas del 65 sino las otras que yacen abandonadas y que son anteriores y posteriores a diciembre de 1965.[545]

This strategy allows Pizarnik to overcome her earlier perfectionism, and to see the value of her existing work; if writing something utterly new seems difficult, collage provides the opportunity to reinterpret existing material while incorporating additional elements. As a collage poet, Pizarnik draws from a wide variety of sources – her favourite poets, translations, notebooks, and the *palais de vocabulaire* – to create compositions that are recycled yet strikingly new. In a similar way to self-translation, analysed in Chapter 3, collage creates possibilities for poetry even when 'original' writing has stalled. The vocabulary palace, in particular, offers significant riches which the collage poet can access.

As Pizarnik's ideas around poetry and epistemology transform, collage allows her to enact some of her poetic dreams in unexpected ways. In a diary entry from February 1963, Pizarnik ponders the difficulties of language and describes a specific desire:

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[544] APP Box 2, Folder 3.
[545] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 916.

> Ahora sé por qué sueño con escribir poemas-objetos. Es mi sed de realidad, mi sueño de materialismo dentro del sueño.[546]

Collage is an embodied and physical technique, where composition takes place with words rendered material. Scissors and paper become the poet's tools, not only the typewriter or the pen. Collage allows for a materialist poetics, with the senses at its core. In 'Against Interpretation', Susan Sontag criticises interpretation for taking 'the sensory experience of the work of art for granted'.[547] Instead, she argues that '[i]n place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art'.[548] Pizarnik's experiments with collage are related to her exploration of sexuality; the physicality of collage allows Pizarnik to put into practice her ideas around embodiment and bodily knowledge. An erotics of poetry emerges, not only in theme but in form.

Ultimately, collage represents a place of possibility for Pizarnik. It allows her to be citational, visual, multi-voiced, dialogic, in contact with the materiality of the text. It allows her to translate between language and image. It allows her to test the limits of her own poetics; the lyric voice seems to collapse, to no longer recognise itself as unitary. If self-translation allows Pizarnik to speak not only 'con mi voz sino con mis voces', collage takes this further still – and furthermore, both techniques are often employed at the same time.[549] Collage represents a non-lyric mode of writing, ripe with possibility. While the suicide-poet myth suggests that poetic language fails at the end of Pizarnik's life, this phase of Pizarnik's work instead shows her at her most ambitious and resilient. When the lyric voice appears to falter, Pizarnik finds other ways to keep writing: to translate this impossibility into language.

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[546] Pizarnik, *Diarios*, 570.
[547] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (Vintage, 1994 [1964]), 13.
[548] Ibid., 14.
[549] Pizarnik, *Poesía*, 266.

Chapter 6 – Susana Thénon: Poetry and Photography

Introduction

For Thénon, as observed by her friend Ana María Barrenechea, 'toda su vida ha estado marcada por prácticas diversas de la actividad traductora'.[550] These diverse practices include translation between poetry and photography, making Thénon's approach more ambitious than that of many other poet-translators. The two arts have very different forms and associations, but Thénon repeatedly insists on the possibility of translating between them. Her provocation – that 'se puede pensar a la fotografía también como una traducción de la poesía, y viceversa' – is the point of departure for this chapter, uniting two disciplines that coexist in unexpected ways in Thénon's work.[551]

Thénon's involvement with photography began in the early 1970s, and the art form remained her dominant creative mode throughout the decade. As discussed in Chapter 2, a devotion to photography and the repressive politics of the period are major factors in Thénon's poetic silence during this time. However, during her hiatus, Thénon maintained a relationship with poetry through photography, as evidenced by the translations of Rilke she produced for the Instituto Goethe exhibition in 1979. The exhibition marked her first public engagement with poetic form since 1967's *De lugares extraños*: the first step on a journey which eventually led to a return to poetry with the publication of *distancias* in 1984.

In the foreword to *distancias*, Thénon dedicates the collection to three women: Barrenechea, her translator Renata Treitel, and the dancer Iris Scaccheri. The final and longest dedication is to Scaccheri, whom Thénon thanks emphatically for providing the

[550] Barrenechea, 'El texto poético como parodia del discurso crítico', 256.
[551] Thénon, Rosenberg, and Bellessi, 'Susana Thénon: maquillando el caos', 4.

'visión definitiva' to complete the collection, which threatened to become 'interminable'.[552] The choice of visual language implicitly evokes Thénon's photographs of Scaccheri, and suggests that the visual questions Thénon explored through photography are vital to *distancias*. As a result, photography is associated not only with Thénon's abandonment of poetry, but also her eventual return to the form. For Thénon, photography and poetry were not mutually exclusive practices: she continued exhibiting and publishing her photographs throughout the 1980s, alongside her poetic career. Instead of suggesting that these art forms are in competition with one another, I argue that the act of translating between photography and poetry is a generative exercise that inspires Thénon to expand the possibilities of her own poetry. *distancias*, for example, is deeply concerned with visual questions of space that reflect Thénon's photographic concerns.

This chapter considers the motivations for Thénon's return to poetry through the lens of photography. The chapter begins with Thénon's reflections on the possibility of translating between photography and poetry. I then analyse her photography career, beginning with the 'translational' photographs included in the exhibition *Rainer Maria Rilke: Palabra e imagen* in 1979, and then turning to her portraits of Iris Scaccheri – featured in the 1988 photobook *Acerca de Iris Scaccheri* – which Thénon credits with inspiring her return to poetry. The final section of this chapter considers the possibility of translation 'viceversa' – from photography to poetry – by examining a selection of the poems in *distancias*. Just as an unconventional approach to self-translation inspires the creativity of *Ova completa*, *distancias* is shaped by the experience of visual translation.

[552] *LMI* I, 101.

Towards Fusion: Theories of Visual Translation

Thénon first raises the possibility of translating between poetry and photography in the Rilke exhibition catalogue:

> La fusión de poesía y fotografía ofrece un desafío apasionante: sintetizar en una imagen lo que el poeta desarrolla en el tiempo. […] La poesía de Rilke se adelantó a su época y vaticinó realidades objetivas y subjetivas hoy vigentes. Nada mejor que un arte de este siglo para traducirlas.[553]

Thénon uses the concepts of fusion, synthesis, and translation to characterise the relationship between poetry and photography. Her opening suggestion – that the image synthesise what the poet develops in time – returns to a long-standing debate in the history of aesthetics. While Horace famously argued that 'in poetry as in painting', implying a commonality between the two forms, Thénon – and other critics – perceive a marked difference between the verbal and the visual arts.[554] Thénon characterises this possible fusion as 'un desafío apasionante', emphasising a sense of excitement but also difficulty.

The reference to 'el tiempo' echoes older arguments in aesthetic theory. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's 1766 essay *Laocoön* examines the relationship – and perceived fundamental difference – between poetry and painting. In *Laocoön*, Lessing argues that 'succession of time is the domain of the poet, as space is the domain of the painter', affirming that each medium has restrictions that make them better suited to chronicling different elements of experience.[555] By associating time with poetry, Thénon repeats Lessing's gesture. While she does not reference the space of the image explicitly at this stage, spatiality becomes an important poetic concern in *distancias*, as this chapter will develop. Furthermore, Thénon is not as strict as Lessing in dividing the domains of the verbal and visual; instead, the challenge is seen as a provocative and fascinating

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[553] *LMI* I, 213.
[554] Horace, *Satires; Epistles; the Art of Poetry*, 443.
[555] Gotthold E. Lessing, *Laocoön*, trans. by Robert Phillimore (Macmillan, 1874), 171.

opportunity. One likely appeal of photography is the possibility of synthesis via a single image: what Susan Sontag calls 'a neat slice of time, not a flow', or 'a thin slice of space as well as time'.[556] Sontag suggests that photography has some kind of mastery over both space and time, even if that time is frozen, recalling Thénon's ambitions of fusion.

In the second sentence of the foreword, Thénon outlines what this translation between poem and image might look like. The idea that the photograph may 'dialogar muchas veces con el texto', rather than simply describing it, resonates with the format of the exhibition.[557] The handheld catalogue makes it easy to imagine the reader-spectator's eye flitting back and forth between poem and image to establish connections. The photographs are also described as being in the service of poetry to describe a 'clima poético', suggesting that the photograph's atmosphere is also important.[558] This implies that the photographs, rather than being descriptive or illustrative compositions that isolate elements from the poems, are evocative and atmospheric compositions that invite readers and spectators to form their own impressions.

The foreword highlights Thénon's belief in the possibility of visual translation, and the exhibition is clearly a milestone in her career. Almost a decade later, interviewed for the 1988/1989 edition of *Diario de Poesía*, she reflects on the exhibition and returns to the language of visual translation:

> Después de todo, se puede pensar a la fotografía también como una traducción de la poesía, y viceversa. Son dos artes contrapuestas, sin embargo, porque el transcurso del tiempo en la fotografía es casi nulo, a diferencia del caso de la poesía, más emparentado con el de la música, ya que ambas deben necesariamente transcurrir en el tiempo.[559]

[556] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Penguin Modern Classics, 2008), 21–22.
[557] *LMI* I, 213.
[558] Ibid., 213.
[559] Thénon, Rosenberg, and Bellessi, 'Susana Thénon: maquillando el caos', 4.

Thénon's attitude is remarkably consistent with her comments in the exhibition catalogue, although she expresses the difference between poetry and photography more clearly, describing them as 'dos artes contrapuestas'. She returns to the question of time, more explicitly aligned with Lessing in her belief that time does not pass in the photograph, whereas poetry is compared to music given 'ambas deben necesariamente transcurrir en el tiempo'. In the 1980s, Thénon often draws comparisons between music and poetry, especially with regard to *distancias*: in the same interview she notes that the collection 'es prácticamente una partitura'.[560]

Thénon is clear on the apparent incompatibility between photography and poetry: photography is presented as a phenomenon that freezes a moment in time, whereas poetry is concerned with the flow of time. However, the language of translation appears to represent the possibility of mediating between these two forms. Thénon avoids terms like description or illustration, instead establishing a new kind of relation between photography and poetry. The etymology of 'traducir' – 'to bring across' – is consequently reflected in Thénon's focus on dialogue or exchange. A close comparative analysis of the works in the Rilke exhibition highlights both the creative potential and limitations of visual translation. This project will be analysed in relation to Thénon's later photographs, particularly of the dancer Iris Scaccheri. As Thénon grapples with the constraints of her respective practices – poetic and photographic – dance photography appears to offer a revelation: one that leads her to publish *distancias*.

[560] Thénon, Rosenberg, and Bellessi, 'Susana Thénon: maquillando el caos', 3.

Thénon and Photography: Limits and Possibilities

Thénon included 37 excerpts of Rilke in the 1979 exhibition at the Instituto Goethe, but the corresponding photographs are largely unknown. Selected photographs are available in volume I of *La morada imposible*, with most of Thénon's photographic work absent from her archive.[561] However, the labels indicate that each excerpt was accompanied by a photograph. This involved a dual curation on Thénon's part, selecting both poetic fragments and photographs to include in the exhibition. Poetry seems to have been the driving force for the selection; in a 1979 interview with *La Nación*, Thénon notes:

> Primero se me ocurrió ilustrar poesía. […] El proyecto lo lancé en octubre del año pasado. A mediados de enero empecé con las fotografías y en junio con las traducciones.[562]

Thénon describes how the photographs followed the initial concept for the exhibition, suggesting the images were taken and developed explicitly for the exhibition. She also refers to a number of technical processes in the interview, like polarisation in the dark room and the use of mirrors and lenses, and describes the process as a 'mezcla de cocina, magia y química'. However, the idea of 'illustrating' poetry is revealing, as it differs substantially to the language of the exhibition foreword, where Thénon speaks of dialogue or translation. This reference to illustration reflects how Thénon often latches onto an image or key theme from Rilke's poetry.

In the retrospective interview with *Diario de Poesía*, Thénon reframes her ambition: 'La intención, de hecho, no era ilustrar los poemas sino dar una versión.'[563] If illustration is understood as a descriptive process, then Thénon aspires to something different. 'Dar una versión' highlights the subjectivity involved, and Thénon's role

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[561] The location of the Rilke exhibition photos is currently unknown, as they are not held in the Fondo Thénon in Buenos Aires. Anecdotal evidence suggests they were misplaced.
[562] Fondo Thénon, uncatalogued material. 'Instantáneas: Rilke a través de una argentina', *La Nación*, 21 October 1979.
[563] Thénon, Rosenberg, and Bellessi, 'Susana Thénon: maquillando el caos', 4.

becomes significant. She presents her own version of the poem through photography, and in turn the photographs invite the reader to form their own interpretation; while they often evoke a related or similar atmosphere, the photographs do not simply mimic the poem.

Comparing Thénon's photographs with her literary translations, it becomes possible to discern a visual translation strategy, where the photograph evokes specific elements of the poem, as well as a broader atmosphere. For example, Poem 1 '¿Por qué me arrancáis de mis horas […]?' is accompanied by a photo of a dim room:

[The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.]

Figure 6.1, Poem 1 '¿Por qué me arrancáis de mis horas […]?'[564]

[564] *LMI* I, 229.

> Por qué me arrancáis de mis horas pálidas y azules
> hacia el confuso resplandor
> del remolino?
> No deseo ver más vuestro delirio.
> Como un niño a solas en su cuarto de enfermo,
> con íntima sonrisa, dulcemente,
> quiero construir días y sueños.[565]

In the poem, the lyric subject describes how, like 'un niño a solas en su cuarto de enfermo', they wish to construct days and dreams. The room pictured could well be a child's sickroom, with a small chair placed to the left of a tall birdcage. The enclosed and even claustrophobic environment of the 'cuarto de enfermo' is reflected by the dimly lit room, in contrast to the 'confuso resplandor del remolino' that appears to shine beyond the curtain. In this sense, Thénon's composition reflects key elements of the poem, but she also develops her own atmosphere. The seemingly empty birdcage and vacant chair in the shadows create an almost eerie sense of calm. However, read in the context of Rilke's rejection of the outside world, and his desire to turn away from external chaos, the quiet ambience of the photo gains additional meaning. The photograph evokes its own atmosphere, but the translation between poetry and photography brings themes of isolation and introspection to the fore.

[565] *LMI* I, 227.

[The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.]

Figure 6.2, Poem 5 ‘Presentimiento’[566]

Soy como una bandera circuida de distancias.
Adivino los vientos que se acercan, debo vivirlos
mientras abajo nada se altera todavía:
las puertas se cierran suavemente, hay quietud en las chimeneas,
las ventanas no vibran y el polvo es aún pesado.

Entonces yo conozco las tormentas y me encrespo como el mar.
Y me ensancho y me repliego
y me arrojo y estoy del todo solo
en la inmensa tempestad.[567]

[566] *LMI* I, 233.
[567] Ibid., 230.

The poem ‘Presentimiento’ introduces a strong lyric voice, anchored in the first person, who is immensely aware of their own solitude and interiority. Significantly, this is first presented through the language of ‘distancias’, the eventual title for Thénon’s next collection: the ‘bandera circuida de distancias’ evokes a poetic subject surrounded not by presence but by absence, by these ‘distancias’. The poem describes an external world full of activity while the domestic interior remains silent. But even when the poet is thrust into the energetic motion of nature, he remains ‘solo / en la inmensa tempestad’.

This is reflected by Thénon’s photograph: a composition with strong contrast that shows signs of manual editing. There is a lone silhouetted figure, reflecting the sense of solitude in the poem, and it is surrounded by a glowing outline that visually enacts the idea of being ‘circuida de distancias’. The figure remains in the background, while blades of grass loom in the foreground. While not as intense as the ‘tormentas’ and ‘tempestad’, Thénon manipulates the scale of the composition to reflect the inner tension and profound solitude at the heart of Rilke’s poem.

[The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.]

Figure 6.3, Poem 7 ‘De una noche de tormenta’[568]

En tales noches crece mi hermanita,
que vivió y murió muy pequeña, antes de que yo fuera.
Desde entonces pasaron muchas noches semejantes:
Ya debe ser hermosa. Alguien, muy pronto,
pedirá su mano.[569]

[568] *LMI* I, 235.
[569] Ibid., 232.

Rilke's poem is melancholic, as the lyric subject reflects on his sister's death before he was born. The temporality of the poem is unusual, referring to the 'hermanita' in the present tense although she is long dead: suggesting she continues to exist in a kind of afterlife. This extract from a longer poem, while brief, reflects the emotion – and even delusions – of grief, by affirming the sister's future on the grammatical level. Hope remains, even when illogical. Thénon's photograph reflects this strange temporality in an effective way, by combining two different scenes in one image. The image is technically skilful, and could even be the result of two exposures on one frame, given the contrast in light between the upper half of the image – depicting the silhouette of what appears to be a cemetery – and the lower half of the image, which shows a nude torso.

The image depicts a woman's torso, although the figure has been effectively beheaded by the camera. In the context of Thénon's discretion regarding her sexuality, and possible taboos around a female photographer producing nude imagery of women, this photographic gesture has two effects. Firstly, the subject remains anonymous, and secondly, the headless image corresponds to the imagery of death in the poem. While it is perhaps an unusual choice to translate a poem about fraternal grief with a nude image, it is similarly unusual to reflect on the beauty and romantic prospects of a long-dead sister. Furthermore, the symbolic beheading of the subject undermines the sexuality of the nude, and juxtaposed with the cemetery in the distance, the solemnity of the poem's atmosphere remains dominant. On balance, however, this example reflects the non-illustrative nature of visual translation: the photograph, interpreted on its own, appears at first to be quite different to the poem it translates.

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Figure 6.4, Poem 18 ‘Todo será de nuevo’[570]

Todo será de nuevo grande y vigoroso.
Las tierras simples y las aguas onduladas,
los árboles gigantes y los muros diminutos,
y en los valles, fuerte y múltiple,
un pueblo de pastores y labriegos.

Y no más iglesias que cerquen a Dios
como un fugitivo, y luego lo compadezcan
como a un animal apresado y herido,
casas acogedoras para todos los que llamen
y un sentido de ofrenda inagotable
en toda obra, en ti y en mí.

No esperar el más allá ni mirar la otra orilla,
solo el afán de no degradar la muerte
y servir, adiestrarse en lo terrestre
para no ser nuevos en sus manos.[571]

[570] *LMI* I, 243.
[571] Ibid., 241.

While the other poetic fragments highlight Rilke's solipsism or pessimism, this visual translation offers some hope. Rilke's poem critiques religious institutions and the idea of waiting for a future salvation; instead, the lyric subject envisions a 'pueblo de pastores y labriegos' who embrace 'lo terrestre'. The future tense of the opening line – 'todo será de nuevo grande y vigoroso' – promises renewal, and the second and third lines offer balanced and harmonious descriptions of nature.

Thénon's photograph incorporates this imagery by showing a solitary figure bent over among trees, seemingly at work in nature. Rilke's poem opens with natural imagery, only introducing human figures at the end of the first stanza, and the photograph offers a similar gesture through perspective: foregrounding the forest and a line of trees – the 'árboles gigantes' of the poem – while the worker appears tiny in comparison. However, his form is highlighted through effective use of contrast that emphasises his importance, and imitates the harmony in the poem between the natural environment and the 'labriegos' who work there. In contrast to the other Rilke poems, where a strong lyric subject dominates, this poem only refers once to 'mí' in conversation with 'ti', and Thénon reflects this by foregrounding the landscape rather than the human figure.

Considering these visual translations, it is clear that 'traducir' for Thénon is equivalent to 'dar una versión', rather than 'ilustrar'. While the photographs incorporate certain named elements in the poems, it is rare for the photograph to literally depict or stage what the poem describes. Instead, the photographs seem to respond to the themes and ideas of the poems: occasionally in a direct way, or sometimes in a more subtle manner. There are clear motifs that appear to be illustrated by the photographs – whether it is Thénon's inclusion of solitary silhouettes, or the 'árboles gigantes' of the final example –

but then the photographs contribute their own atmosphere that does not neatly match the corresponding poem.

Returning to Thénon's comment that 'se puede pensar a la fotografía también como una traducción de la poesía, y viceversa', the back-and-forth of 'viceversa' appears crucial.[572] The exhibition presented photographs on the walls, with a bilingual catalogue including Rilke's poems in German and Spanish.[573] The viewer therefore translates between the photograph and the poem, with the sense of the 'original' or 'source' destabilised: the photographs, displayed on the wall, may appear dominant, but then it is Rilke who is named in the exhibition title and used to justify the exhibition's presence in the Goethe. Did the translations of Rilke come first, or the photographs? While so much of translation criticism often returns to this question of 'originality', the format of the exhibition makes it unclear. Thénon may have sought poetic fragments from Rilke that corresponded to her photographs, or produced a visual composition with his poetry in mind. Translation flows in both directions: the reader-spectator is invited to move from photograph to poem and from poem to photograph, and to establish their own correspondences. Visual translation may have been an enriching experience for Thénon, allowing her to attempt to synthesise her interests in poetry and photography, but it also encourages the audience to produce their own version of that synthesis.

The Rilke exhibition came at a time of poetic silence for Thénon, and represented the beginning of her return to poetry. It is possible that the synthesis of poetry and photography energised her, as a form of creative experimentation that opened up new possibilities. However, Thénon's understanding of the relationship between the two forms

[572] Thénon, Rosenberg, and Bellessi, 'Susana Thénon: maquillando el caos', 4.
[573] Fondo Thénon, 'Catálogo "Rainer Maria Rilke: palabra e imagen, exposición fotográfica de Susana Thénon"', AR IIAC 03-2-2-001.

often remained fraught. The poem ‘Primera fotografía (Odi et amo)’ explores ambivalent attitudes to photography, and is written in the same Hispanicised Latin as Thénon’s song translations. The opening stanzas present a castrated lyric subject:

> compañeri compañeri
> audite
> audite ac videte
>
> castrata
> castrata sum
>
> videte
>
> castrata de manu
> de oju
> de amicitia
>
> audite compañeri
> castrata de photu
> plena mediocritatis[574]

Calling to her ‘compañeri’, she invites them to listen to and see her – appealing to both sound and image – as she repeats ‘castrata / castrata sum’. The Latin ‘castrata’ is the feminine form of ‘castratus’, connecting the term to eunuchs in the classical period. Given the initial focus on listening, and the later repetition of the word ‘cano’ – Latin for ‘I sing’ – Thénon is clearly interested in subverting the figure of ‘castrato’, the male singer whose voice remains high following castration. The term also riffs on psychoanalysis: it is possible that Thénon might have read Germaine Greer’s 1970 feminist text *The Female Eunuch*, and the insistence on castration and the sense of ‘lack’ recalls both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis.

The power of the word ‘castrata’ comes from this initial subversion of gendered expectations, but it becomes more complex as the speaker is ‘castrata de manu / de oju / de amicitia’. The Latin verb ‘castrō’ can also mean ‘to cut off’ or ‘to purge’, suggesting that the speaker has lost her hands, her eyes – like Oedipus – and even her friendships. This is

[574] *PDN*, 285.

developed further in the following stanza, with the photograph the last thing to be lost. The term ‘mediocritatis’ is provocative. It suggests the speaker’s mediocrity, although the Latin origins of the term are not necessarily so negative: it can refer to finding a middle ground or path, or even moderation.

The title of the poem refers to two extremes: ‘(odi et amo)’. The parenthesis is striking, using the defective verb ‘ōdisse’ – common in classical literature – in the past form ‘I hated’ followed by the present form of ‘amare’, ‘I love’. The stark oppositions – between hate and love, and past and present – suggest a journey of transformation with regard to the poet’s relationship with photography. While the poetic subject appears to have lost everything – body parts, friendships, photography – the following stanzas develop a kind of possibility, perhaps through the mediation of ‘mediocritatis’:

> cano
> cano vobiscum
> audite
> mentulam non habeo
> castrata
> de lingua
> cano cum corpore
> eviscerato
> pecunia vincit
> videte
> cano castrata gratis[575]

The speaker has lost almost everything, but insists on singing with her eviscerated body, in her castrated state – although the speaker does not have ‘mentulam’ (vulgar Latin slang for ‘penis’) to begin with. The repetitive ‘cano’ is insistent, as is the repetition of ‘audite’ and ‘vidite’: the subject does not want to be alone, noting that ‘cano vobiscum’ (‘I sing with you’). Material matters no longer concern her, whether it is the lack of money referred to in the final line, or the state of her body: she is committed to expression as a ‘castrata’.

[575] *PDN*, 285–86.

The poem is a remarkable piece of wordplay that moves between Spanish and Latin, and photography and song, while examining gendered expectations. The title clearly connects the emotions of the poem to the 'primera fotografía', and the visceral response it provoked. Photography could be seen as the underlying motivation for the castration, the source of all this loss. But not everything is lost, because the speaker has retained her voice. In this feminist joke mocking the fears of psychoanalysis, this perceived sense of lack nevertheless leads her to insist on singing. The doubts and insecurities generated by photography come to represent an aesthetic renewal. While the poem is undated, it is likely to come from the 1970s or early 1980s, when Thénon was most devoted to photography but had yet to return to poetic expression in Spanish. Verbal communication remains challenging – one possible reason for the poem's composition in Hispanicised Latin – but the poet is stubbornly committed to her voice.

Photography, then, prompts a reckoning with poetic expression. But there appears to be one specific experience as a photographer that leads Thénon to return to poetry: her collaboration with Argentine dancer Iris Scaccheri. The full dedication to Scaccheri in *distancias* emphasises her role:

> Y muy en especial a Iris Scaccheri, quien sin saberlo me infundió con su danza la visión definitiva para reelaborar y completar esta obra, cuya duración lindaba peligrosamente con lo interminable.[576]

Scaccheri's dancing gives Thénon 'la visión definitiva' to finish *distancias*, explicitly linking the collection to visual concerns. Thénon references time in an interesting way: the word 'interminable' evokes writer's block, but also suggests the collection was somehow never-ending. If time is the domain of the poet, what happens if time threatens to be infinite? The 'visión definitiva' of Scaccheri's dance – or the photographs that Thénon took of her – may offer one solution.

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[576] *LMI* I, 101.

Iris Scaccheri (1949–2018) was an unusual and striking dancer, and one of the great talents of her generation. Marcelo Isse Moyano's oral history of modern dance, *La danza moderna argentina cuenta su historia*, names Scaccheri as one of the leading figures in establishing modern dance in Argentina. Isse Moyano references Scaccheri's collaborations with other renowned dancers like Ana Kamien, Susana Zimmermann, and Marilú Marini, who 'compartieron los principios basados en la ruptura con la danza que las precedía, creando un lenguaje nuevo e irreverente.'[577] This language of rupture situates Scaccheri within the vanguard of modern dance, and Scaccheri performed at important modern and classical theatres in Argentina and abroad: Thénon's photographs depict performances in the UK, Germany, and France.

Scaccheri did not dance in an established or traditional style, but was a great innovator of modern dance. Juan Ignacio Vallejos describes Scaccheri as 'an icon of the "new Argentinian woman"', and includes testimonials from those who witnessed her perform: the Argentine choreographer Diana Szeinblum notes that 'it looked as if Scaccheri did not dance for the public but against the public', and had 'the impression she was merely the receiver of a force that overwhelmed her'.[578] Scaccheri's performances appear to have offered audiences a visceral and transcendent experience, akin to what Gilles Deleuze describes as the 'force' of Francis Bacon's paintings. The 'force' of Scaccheri's dance is what evokes 'sensation' in the spectator.[579] This concept of 'sensation' becomes important for Thénon's aspirations for her poetry, as inspired by Scaccheri's dance. Florencia Garramuño charts the development of sensation in Latin American poetry in the late twentieth century, noting the existence of 'una poesía en la que impera ya no la

[577] Marcelo Isse Moyano, *La danza moderna argentina cuenta su historia* (Artes del Sur, 2006), 17.
[578] Juan Ignacio Vallejos, 'Subverting Precariousness: Work, History, and Aesthetics in Contemporary Dance in Buenos Aires', *Dance Research Journal,* 51 (2019), 37.
[579] Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon : Logique de la sensation* (Editions de la Différence, 1984), 39.

experiencia o las percepciones, sino el sentir, y el sentir en sus dos acepciones diferentes: sentir como sensación y sentir como sentimiento', drawing on Deleuze to highlight the possibility of a new poetics.[580]

Thénon was clearly struck by Scaccheri's performances, and in conversation with Renata Treitel, she reflects on Scaccheri's influence:

> Es decir, lo que esta mujer me mostró y lo que yo experimenté a través de la cámara, yo creo que nunca, en todos los años de fotografía que llevo hechos, lo he sentido. Y tuve que dominar mi emoción para poder traducirla a la fotografía, porque si no, la fotografía hubiera salido una cosa completamente banal.[581]

Thénon does not use the word 'force' at any point, but she clearly shares Szeinblum's sense of 'emoción'. While Thénon is never explicit in suggesting this is an infatuation or obsession, and there has never been any confirmation of a romantic relationship between Thénon and Scaccheri, Thénon's frankness is significant.[582] Despite the possible implications of Thénon admiring a woman so openly, she shows no reticence or shyness. She is instead insistent on the artistry of their collaboration, and Scaccheri's immense talent. Furthermore, Thénon returns to the verb 'traducir', this time to describe translating her emotions to photography. Translation appears to offer Thénon language to articulate the relationship between experience and image, as well as between image and language.

In 1988, Thénon published her only photobook, *Acerca de Iris Scaccheri*, featuring portraits of the dancer. The book begins with a poem that emphasises the relationship of dance to (poetic) truth:

> El espacio giró a su alrededor.
> El espacio era un ser de infinitas dimensiones que despertaba y bailaba a su conjuro.
> Entonces comprendí que me había encontrado con la danza.
> Era más, mucho más que la belleza.

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[580] Garramuño, *Mundos en común*, 84.
[581] *PDN*, 98.
[582] In an interview with Victoria Alcala, Scaccheri's nephew suggests 'una relación profesional' between Thénon and Scaccheri, while Silvia Mazar – a friend of Thénon – comments that 'Susana sufrió mucho por Iris y que estaba muy pendiente de ella'. See Alcala, *Susana Thénon*, 104.

Era la verdad pura.
Me alegré de estar viva y nunca la abandoné.[583]

Dance transforms the relationship between space and the body: rather than the body moving within space, the body instead influences space and our perception of it. This imagery mirrors what José Gil describes as the 'space of the body': 'the dancer does not move *in* space; rather, the dancer secretes, creates space with his [sic] movement'.[584] The irregular line lengths represent Thénon playing with space as the dancer does. While she employs heptasyllables and hendecasyllables in certain lines, the prosaic nature of other lines creates the sense of something constantly in flux. Dance has an almost magical quality in its ability to conjure 'un ser de infinitas dimensiones', and dance's powers are evoked as going beyond beauty to invoke a pure truth. There is a playful indeterminacy to the closing phrase 'nunca la abandoné' – while the pronoun likely refers to 'la danza' or 'la verdad', it could mean Scaccheri too – but it clearly emphasises Thénon's sense of devotion.

Acerca de Iris Scaccheri offers one of the few records of Scaccheri's ephemeral performances; as Jodi Roberts comments, 'to study the history of performance art is also, in many instances, to study photography.'[585] They illustrate what Thénon saw – possibly 'la verdad pura' – and evidence Thénon's increasing technical skill. The photographs that capture Scaccheri in mid-air reflect the dynamism of the performance.

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[583] *LMI* I, 201.
[584] José Gil, 'Paradoxical Body', *TDR*, 50.4 (2006), 21.
[585] Natalia Brizuela, Jodi Roberts, and Lisa Blackmore, *The Matter of Photography in the Americas* (Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University and Stanford University Press, 2018), 120.

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Figure 6.5 ‘Iris Scaccheri, Carmina Burana, Beethoven Hall, Bonn, Germany’, from Thénon, *Acerca de Iris Scaccheri* (photobook comprised of unnumbered leaves)

[The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.]

Figure 6.6. ‘Iris Scaccheri, La muñeca, Schauspiel, Frankfurt, Germany’, from *Acerca de Iris Scaccheri*

Figure 6.7, showing Scaccheri's version of *Carmina Burana*, has a similar effect. The camera is positioned on the floor, looking up at Scaccheri, suggesting Thénon was in the orchestra pit. From the camera's perspective, the dancer's body appears to defy gravity.

[The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.]

Figure 6.7 'Iris Scaccheri, Carmina Burana, Beethoven Hall, Bonn, Germany', from *Acerca de Iris Scaccheri*

While these photographs appear to be simple portraits, their ability to capture Scaccheri's rapid movements indicates Thénon's technical skill – requiring quick exposures and light-sensitive film – as well as a creative form of spectatorship.

By photographing these performances, Thénon takes an active and creative role in Scaccheri's dance. Audience participation is a phenomenon that Scaccheri celebrates,

writing in her memoir that 'el espectador es siempre partícipe'[586] and exclaiming: '¡Cuánta gente que bailó conmigo y quizá no lo sepa!'[587] This recalls Jacques Rancière's understanding of the emancipated spectator. Destabilising the equivalence of looking as passivity, Rancière argues that 'looking is also an action that confirms or modifies that distribution [of the visible], and that "interpreting the world" is already a means of transforming it, of reconfiguring it.'[588] He calls for 'spectators who are active interpreters, who render their own translation, who appropriate the story for themselves, and who ultimately make their own story out of it.' Photography can be regarded as Thénon's form of emancipated spectatorship, as a way of rendering her own translation of the performance.

Thénon's photographs represent one 'translation' of Scaccheri's dance. However, these performances inspired further creation by motivating Thénon to return to poetry and finish *distancias*. This nevertheless invites the question: what specifically about dance photography inspired Thénon to return to poetry, if photography more broadly was a significant motivation for her hiatus? In the interview with *Diario de Poesía*, Thénon suggests that photography simply slowed her down:

> Lo que ocurrió fue que no lo consideraba terminado, y además, más o menos en el '71 empecé con la fotografía y ese entrecruzamiento demoró el proceso poético, pero yo sabía que iba a seguir. […] Para mí ese libro es el más importante.[589]

Here photography and poetry are presented as intertwined arts. This 'entrecruzamiento' is something that slows down the poetic process, but does not necessarily stop it. *distancias* is described as hard to finish, such that Thénon 'no lo consideraba terminado', but the effort was apparently worth it: she describes the work as her most important achievement.

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[586] Iris Scaccheri, *Brindis a la danza* (Leviatán, 2011), 47.
[587] Ibid., 49.
[588] Jacques Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', *Artforum*, 45.7 (2007) <https://www.artforum.com/print/200703/the-emancipated-spectator-12847> [accessed 27 March 2026].
[589] Thénon, Rosenberg, and Bellessi, 'Susana Thénon: maquillando el caos', 3.

However, the timing of Thénon's return to poetry is significant. Not only was *distancias* published one year after Argentina's return to democracy, but it was also published in the context of her work with Scaccheri. While Thénon was not new to portraiture, as her photographs suggest, I argue that dance photography represents an important turning point in her career. It allows her to reconcile two pressing concerns that recur throughout her discussions of poetry, photography, and dance: space and time. When Thénon describes poetry and photography as incompatible, her comments align with Lessing's theory – that photography works with space, and poetry works with time – but dance photography destabilises this binary. It forces her to capture a photographic still of choreographic movement: as Sontag notes, the photograph is 'a thin slice of space as well as time', and the dance photograph must reconcile both.[590] Furthermore, Scaccheri inspires poetic composition, as seen in the explicit praise of the preface to *Acerca de Iris Scaccheri*.

distancias represents Thénon's attempts to explore poetic space, while examining the stagnation of poetic time. Space is central to the collection, as its title suggests: Thénon argues that it reveals 'la distancia que hay entre uno y el otro, y entre uno y uno mismo, pero no temáticamente sino mediante la sintaxis'.[591] Distance becomes Thénon's way of understanding relations between self and other, and the others contained within the self, and she executes this by transferring spatiality onto the page in the form of disrupted syntax. *distancias* is a marked break in form and style; while also written in free verse, Thénon's earlier collections are generally composed in complete and grammatical sentences, with conventional capitalisation and relatively little reliance on punning, wordplay, or humour. The poems of *distancias* are generally written all in lowercase, with

[590] Sontag, *On Photography*, 22.
[591] Thénon, Rosenberg, and Bellessi, 'Susana Thénon: maquillando el caos', 3.

capitalisation used for dramatic or comedic effect; lines are italicised, broken in two, or separated by parentheses.

Photographing Scaccheri was clearly important for Thénon's understanding of space. 'El espacio' is a key motif of the photobook's poem/preface, and even its title – *Acerca de Iris Scaccheri* – contains the word 'acerca', which means 'in relation to', and also evokes the verb 'acercar', to bring closer. Furthermore, Scaccheri's influence was such that she appears on the front cover of *distancias* itself. The original cover of *distancias* was a photograph of Scaccheri, arms thrown back, ready to ascend a staircase.

[The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.]

Figure 6.8 Cover of Susana Thénon, *distancias* (Torres Agüero Editor, 1984), from Cortés Rocca, 'Rueda de mujeres'

Paola Cortés Rocca observes that 'la escalera de la imagen, agudizada por el diseño de la tapa, tematiza el título del libro: escaleras y puentes son elementos que de manera

emblemática, acortan las distancias y también las subrayan'.[592] The space of the photograph is laden with symbolic meaning, especially when it becomes the cover for a work called *distancias*.

distancias: A Visual Poetics

distancias is shaped by Thénon's experiences of visual translation, most explicitly in its attempt to address her concerns with poetic space and poetic time. In appearance alone, it is a strikingly visual collection, with the titular *distancias* transforming the shape of the poem. Lines are spliced open, broken apart, scattered across the page, and this is apparent from the very beginning. There are 39 poems in *distancias*, and the first and last poems are identical, creating a closed loop or 'rueda' within which the collection operates. The poem begins with the phrase 'la rueda se ha detenido', which recalls the structural logic of the collection: 'la rueda' representing the cycle of the poems, with the reflexive verb indicating that it brings itself to a stop. The collection opens and closes with the exact same poem, and the poem itself opens and closes with the same lines:

> la rueda se ha detenido se ha deteni-
> dos tres dos tres dos la rueda
> se ha detenido[593]

The different definitions of 'la rueda' are ambiguous, opening up distinct networks of meaning from the very beginning; 'la rueda' represents repetition, as in musical rounds, but also a circular movement through space. In conversation with Renata Treitel, Thénon also mentions *Carmina Burana* and 'la rueda de la fortuna'[594] – making another connection with Scaccheri, as Thénon photographed Scaccheri performing to that music.

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[592] Cortés Rocca, 'Rueda de mujeres'.
[593] *LMI* I, 105.
[594] *PDN*, 90.

The 'rueda' also evokes Thénon's circular decision to begin and end the collection with the same poem, and to begin and end this poem with the same lines. By employing this structural gesture, Thénon appears interested in creating a closed circuit, a cycle of poetry that ends with its own beginning. Recalling Thénon's concern with time and space, and the dedication revealing a concern with the work 'cuya duración lindaba peligrosamente con lo interminable', this endlessness is resolved by creating a circle which could repeat indefinitely, but also has a decisive moment of closure.[595]

The poem plays with poetic time, and also manipulates poetic space to productive effect. Unlike Thénon's early works, the poems of *distancias* play with patterning and spacing on the page. In 'la rueda se ha detenido', the physical spaces through the middle of the page encourage the reader to separate the poem into left- and right-hand columns, with the right-hand side coming to represent a second voice within the poem, whose interventions seem to interrupt the voice on the left. The use of parentheses introduces further disruptions that offer asides or interpretations of the text, creating a sense of polyphony. This physical structure encourages a creative approach from the reader, inviting a variety of interpretations.

To characterise this visual approach to poetry composition, Thénon employs analogies from other artistic disciplines: primarily dance and music. Following the collaboration with Scaccheri, a number of critics have analysed the influence of dance: Juanita Cifuentes-Louault, for example, conceives a theory of Thénon's 'poésie chorégraphique' or choreographic poetry.[596] Cifuentes-Louault primarily draws on depictions of dance in Thénon's early poetry, but does not cite the following 1984 letter from Thénon to Barrenechea that explicitly mentions choreography:

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[595] *LMI* I, 101.
[596] Cifuentes-Louault, 'La poésie chorégraphique de Susana Thénon'.

> Y todavía ando dando vueltas alrededor de una 'y' que no sé si agregar o no. Es que más que un poema es casi una coreografía y como tal debe ser rigurosísimo.[597]

Thénon employs the language of physical movement in the phrase 'ando dando vueltas', with a certain musicality created by the internal rhyme. She describes her composition process as analogous to choreography, and suggests that it requires intense rigour to be successful. Tracing the etymology of the word 'coreografía' – a similar exercise to Thénon's investigation of 'filosofía' in the titular poem of *Ova completa* – reveals important insights. Choreography is derived from *choros*, the Greek for chorus: a circular group dance that includes collective voices in unison. The suffix -graphy links this explicitly to the act of writing. Consequently, the visual element to Thénon's composition is made more complex: 'choreography' suggests the orchestration of physical motion in space, while its etymology points to the importance of a chorus or collective of voices. The musicality of the chorus recalls Thénon's description of *distancias* as a 'partitura' or score.[598]

The emphatic 'rigurosísimo' implies the poetic challenge of this mode, highlighted in another letter to Barrenechea that same year. Thénon writes of the difficulty of composing poems in this style, with reference to a poem not included in *distancias*, 'Plegaria y boda': 'lo terrible fue "diagramarlo" para que pueda ser leído –además de la manera usual– por sectores verticales, cruzados, o de abajo para arriba'.[599] This constructs an intriguing relationship between the poem and its textual existence: instead of a poem that flows chronologically, Thénon seeks to construct multidirectional poems that can even be read in reverse.

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[597] *LMI* II, 203.
[598] Thénon, Rosenberg, and Bellessi, 'Susana Thénon: maquillando el caos', 3.
[599] *LMI* II, 199.

As a result, the poems of *distancias* challenge their reader through their visual nature. The diagram, in particular, brings concerns with space to the fore. Thénon injects space into the line, splicing it and at times exploding traditional syntax entirely. The poem manipulates both space and time, where the rules and order of syntax do not need to be obeyed. Thénon suggests as much to Treitel:

> Lo que hace Oliverio Girondo con las palabras yo estoy haciéndolo con la sintaxis. Yo estoy estirando el lenguaje, rompiéndolo, llevando al máximo todas las posibilidades que puede ofrecerme el español […].[600]

Here Thénon refers to the wordplay at the heart of the avant-garde Argentine poet's collection *En la masmédula*. For Thénon, this break with normal syntax invites a distinct mode of both composing and reading poetry, at times making the poems themselves appear impenetrable. In a letter to Barrenechea, Thénon describes the poems of *distancias* as '"escritura sigilosa", en su doble sentido de "callado" y "sellado"', and the disruption of typical syntax further enhances this impression. [601] It unravels conventional ways of constructing meaning, wrapping the poem within itself by using cyclical structures to create a sense of being hermetically sealed.

Considering the interplay of poetic space and time, these openings in space encourage the reader to pause in time. This is where Thénon's experience of performance influences her approach to poetry:

> El sistema de pausas que hay en *distancias*, por ejemplo, funciona como silencios musicales, las tipografías implican voces, ritmos.[602]

Thénon describes the spaces or interruptions in the middle of lines as a form of pause that invites silence, while the use of italics and brackets suggest different voices or rhythms. Her visual approach to poetry is not merely about transforming her attitude towards poetic

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[600] *LMI* II, 217.
[601] Ibid., 199.
[602] Thénon, Rosenberg, and Bellessi, 'Susana Thénon: maquillando el caos', 3.

space, although she does use the page differently; the flowing time of the poem is disrupted, and any sense of a singular lyric voice is destabilised.

Returning to the opening poem of *distancias*, this cyclical poem uses space to achieve the effects that Thénon describes. She plays with run-on lines from the very beginning, cutting off the final word of the first line to interrupt it: 'se ha deteni- / dos tres dos tres dos'.[603] This abrupt change is startling to the reader, as the numbers are not explained elsewhere in the text, but the shift to sharp monosyllables introduces an element of uncertainty. The numbers recall the rhythm of a waltz, but the poem then proceeds to develop unexpectedly violent images, dashing any hopes of positive association. Flying birds become 'pájaros / homicidas bajo el puente', their flight and fall underscored by the line break which announces a violent death. The poet becomes the augur interpreting their movements. The poem's internal repetitions, such as the repetition of 'arda' in the eighth line, build a sense of urgency.

Thénon often uses visual formatting to emphasise violent imagery, as illustrated by the anaphora midway through the poem:

y silbó y dijo	criatura barro
y dijo y rió	trompa de vena
y rió apuntó	carne temblada
y disparó	bulto
	zapatos
	carne[604]

The space inserted in the middle of each line not only invites the reader to pause, but stages an apparent dialogue, with the nouns on the right either corresponding to or interrupting the verbs on the left. The anaphora of 'y' becomes insistent, and the stressed syllables of the preterite tense quicken the pace until it is disrupted by the violence of 'disparó'. The 'carne temblada' of the previous line paints an image of an execution,

[603] *LMI* I, 105.
[604] Ibid., 105.

anticipated with dread – but the human element is diminished, an amorphous 'bulto' that is reduced to the mere flesh of 'carne', and only personified by 'zapatos'. The absence of verbs in the left-hand column creates an empty space where action had once been, making this tricolon more sinister and emphatic.

The poem also employs other visual cues, such as parentheses, to intensify the sense of disruption and interruption. The poem appears to describe an anonymous figure's attempt to open a door, and the atmosphere is decisively sinister: there are 'hachas de sol (ante la puerta con llave)', and the voice enclosed in parentheses repeatedly insists '(no)'.[605] By the end of the poem, with the return of the same three phrases that open the poem, the act of repetition transforms their meaning. The wheel stopping represents the violent disruption of the normal flow of time, marked by the ominous images of death that prevail throughout. In the final words before the refrain, the poem alludes to the 'encuentro de los pasos', but refuses to elaborate: the return of the beginning feels not only like an interruption, but an act of secrecy in its refusal to recount what seems to be an inevitably fatal end.

The first poem of *distancias* reveals a desire to expand poetic space, and to interrupt poetic time. But why does Thénon focus on poetic space and let poetic time stall? One motivation, beyond her engagement with photography, might be political. The usual flow of time is repeatedly denied in a gesture that seems influenced by the politics of the period. And while this is never made explicit – the poems of *distancias* are often deliberately oblique – recurring themes of violence, death, and darkness point to the aftermath of Argentina's last dictatorship. The idea of dictatorship is introduced just once in the collection, in one of three longer poems. Poems 1, 13, 26 and 39 (the repetition of 1)

[605] *LMI* I, 105.

are the longest of the collection, and serve as pillars that divide *distancias* into three equal parts. Each pillar poem develops pivotal themes, and in Poem 26, Thénon writes:

> desventaja
> dictador vieja chiste
> pregunta pregunta
> sala de estar mueca simposio
> clan abrigo sopa suerte
> dictador[606]

Thénon uses the space of the page emphatically: the absence above the second occurrence of the noun 'dictador' draws the reader's eye towards this space. Furthermore, 'dictador' is the final line of the stanza, suggesting that the chaotic enumeration of nouns has built up to this point; once the word 'dictador' is uttered a second time, the poetic voice is briefly stunned into silence. As well as the repetition of 'dictador', Thénon elsewhere uses the noun 'cerco', the nickname among the left for Juan Perón's inner circle following his return in 1972, forging another political connection. The poem is defined by two key elements: the poetic subject's explicit confusion, as highlighted by the refrain 'no entiendo'; and the enumeration of nouns, generally grouped in threes. Taken together, these elements evoke a disoriented poetic voice, presumably destabilised by the presence of the 'dictador'.

There are political implications to Thénon's disruption of poetic time. In Poem 13, another pillar poem, the poetic subject seeks to protect while lacking protection herself: 'amparo desamparada'.[607] The opening stanza offers images of fragility and subsequent destruction, from the 'delicada combustible' to 'pólvora niña'. While the poem itself does not incorporate radical typographic effects, line breaks and stanza breaks are used potently to emphasise key concepts. The figure of the girl returns in the penultimate stanza:

> la muchacha infutura

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[606] *LMI* I, 119.
[607] Ibid., 111.

bebe su nombre idiota[608]

The girl, at first dust, reappears, and this time she is characterised as future-less. She is sustained only by her name, which is hidden from the reader but described as 'idiota', creating a potent image of political infuturity. 'Idiota' is the final line before the stanza break, and the following emptiness makes the adjective more resonant. Younger generations, represented by the figure of the child, are left without a future, nourished only by language, which is inadequate in its idiocy. The condition of childhood should promise a future adulthood, but no future is possible. In this way, Thénon's depiction of the girl resonates with queer theory's interest in futurity, as outlined in Lee Edelman's *No Future*.[609] The poetic subject is brooding in the final stanza over nothing but a lack, in an image of failed maternity: the 'grieta / cómplice amarga', implying a physical divide as well as a political one.

Given the timing of the collection's publication, and its violent imagery, it is hard not to interpret this as a form of response to the military junta's actions during the dictatorship. The political landscape has left the poet unable to imagine a viable future – time has failed to move forward, 'la rueda se ha detenido', and the poetic subject is stuck in the present, futureless. Thénon only uses the future tense four times in the collection, in poems 4, 31, 37, and 38, and the future is almost always invoked negatively, with images of destruction, death, or war. One way to interpret Thénon's fascination with the titular *distancias*, or the idea of injecting space into the poem, is as an alternative to time, the flow of which has failed – both in the poem and in Argentine politics.

In conversation with her translator Treitel, Thénon does suggest that context shapes her poetry, although she does not reference the dictatorship explicitly:

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[608] *LMI* I, 112.
[609] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Duke University Press, 2004).

> Ahora, ¿hasta dónde ha influido en esto la vida que hacemos y el lugar donde vivo? Yo no lo puedo medir, pero sin duda alguna ha influido totalmente. Es decir, nosotros vivimos de una manera infernal. Desde hace demasiados años. Entonces se hace un poco difícil ponerse a hablar de la rosa.[610]

Thénon shies away from the explicit and affirmative, and avoids attributing too much to Argentina's recent history: instead evoking a longer history of political turbulence. Nevertheless, even her oblique comments are revealing. For example, the phrase 'hablar de la rosa' names the rose, a traditional image of lyric poetry. But by referencing the difficulty of producing poetry in this mode, Thénon suggests that normal lyric poetry might be made impossible – especially given the 'manera infernal' in which they live.

Thénon's insistence on opacity is significant, especially as *distancias* represents a stronger challenge to comprehension than the later *Ova completa*. The collection is marked by confusion, likely for the reader, and certainly for the poetic 'yo'. Returning to Poem 26 – which names a 'dictador' – confusion is foregrounded by the refrain 'no entiendo'. A visual intervention in italics, in the middle of the poem, emphasises this further:

> *no entiendo (no entiende)*
> *no puedo (no puede)*
> *entender (no puede entender)*[611]

Space divides the lines in two, suggesting the presence of two voices. The parentheses further enhance this impression of a second voice mimicking the first, with the only change being a shift from first to third person. These visual gestures physically isolate the two voices, who seem to have no sense of companionship: they are condemned to repeat themselves or echo each other, lost in their lack of understanding. Thematically, this disorientation aligns with the collection's latent political themes of despair and existentialism: talking to Treitel, Thénon describes the three sections of *distancias* as a

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[610] *PDN*, 90.
[611] *LMI* I, 119.

descent into hell, 'el infierno en la resignación del infierno'.[612] This thematic concern is also reflected formally, in these poems that challenge poetic space and time.

The different subjects encountered throughout the collection – for it is difficult to identify any singular, stable 'yo' – are all lost in space and time, in 'la distancia que media entre lo que uno ve y oye y no toca, no alcanza, no llega.'[613] Readers may seek interpretations, but Thénon refuses to provide them. Jonathan Culler argues that it is a recent academic tendency to seek definitive interpretations of poetic works: in the past, Culler suggests, 'readers appreciated poems much as we do songs. We listen to songs without assuming that we should develop interpretations.'[614] The comparison to music recalls Thénon's own approach to *distancias*, shaped by her photographic experience of performance. In correspondence with Treitel, Thénon turns to musical analogies to describe the multi-voiced nature of the text: referring to '"coros" o "dúos", una voz se desdobla en un dúo.'[615] She also insists on musicality as a way of understanding the non-sense of *distancias*: 'Se van acercando al arte musical estos poemas [traducidos], porque no hay que comprenderlo como el arte verbal. Yo no puedo decir que entiendo a Beethoven o a otro.'[616]

Poetry, for Thénon, is not something to understand, but rather to experience, like Scaccheri's dance through the camera's lens. Interpretation is a logical act, but *distancias* explores the horrific meaninglessness of dictatorial violence. As a result, understanding *distancias* is hardly the point: as Treitel observes to Thénon, 'lo que querés es impactar por lo poético al lector sin necesariamente llegar a su razón.'[617] This recalls Thénon's

[612] *PDN*, 84.
[613] Ibid., 89.
[614] Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 5.
[615] *LMI* II, 212.
[616] Ibid., 217.
[617] *PDN*, 85.

comments on Beethoven, as well as Culler's remarks on the history of engagement with lyric poetry. Poetry goes beyond comprehension or understanding: its effects are more complex.

Susan Sontag, in 'Against Interpretation', warns that interpretation can render art 'manageable, comfortable'.[618] Sontag instead advocates for an approach that pays attention to form, rather than a utilitarian sense of function or meaning. If 'interpretation takes the sensory experience of the work of art for granted, and proceeds from there', then she argues for a criticism that does not take the senses for granted, instead prioritising the form of a work.[619] The same can be seen in Thénon's approach to poetry in *distancias*. By experimenting with typography and spacing on the page, destabilising a singular poetic subject, and disrupting the flow of poetic time, Thénon creates poetry that generates meaning on multiple levels: with regard to language, sound, and image.

The simultaneity of this approach is exemplified in 'aborto de poema en oficina pública', Poem 31 of *distancias*. The poem is visually striking, playing with capitalisation and italics, and while the title grounds us in reality – giving us a setting for the scene that unfolds – violence is also implied by the 'aborto'. Recalling the imagery of failed maternity in Poem 13, 'aborto' can refer to either a voluntary termination of pregnancy or miscarriage, and Thénon evokes both. The poet gives up by the end, shouting 'NADAH': the additional silent H visually emphasises the poet's sense of surrender, and also recalls Cortázar's games with spelling. The poem works with both image and sound, and some elements of the poem only become apparent through reading it aloud. For example, 'mano

[618] Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 8.
[619] Ibid., 13.

umano' becomes 'mano humano', encouraging us to reinterpret the solitary 'u' on the previous line.[620]

Other readings only become evident through paying attention to the typography:

sumitad infier *vuelva mañana* no
más u no ya
¿sí?
NADAH[621]

The italicised voice is visually distinct to the standard lettering, constructing the voice of a 'funcionario' or bureaucrat. Some of the non-italicised words seem to respond to the italicised voice directly – 'no' and 'NADAH' – but they also knit themselves together to create a different sentence, 'su mitad infierno', with the 'u no' separation recalling the play with 'umano' ('humano') in the opening lines. Consciously working with sound, meaning, typography, and image, Thénon writes in a markedly different way to her earlier poetry. The scene is banal, painting a portrait of frustrating 'funcionarios' in an office. But, to use Thénon's word, it is 'diagrammed' in such an unusual way that the poem creates an unconventional form of realism that feels truer to the chaos of modern life. Considering the civic-military character of Argentina's dictatorship, the hell of bureaucracy takes on a more sinister aspect.

This engagement with poetic space – as learnt from photography – has a significant effect on poetic form, challenging Thénon's relationship to lyric poetry. While Thénon describes her third collection *De lugares extraños* as being 'mucho más dentro de lo que tradicionalmente se podría llamar la poesía lírica', *distancias* undoubtedly marks a break with that form.[622] One of Jonathan Culler's working definitions for the lyric is that 'the unity of the poem is provided by [the lyric poet's] subjectivity'.[623] But *distancias* works to

[620] *LMI* I, 124.
[621] Ibid., 124.
[622] Thénon, Rosenberg, and Bellessi, 'Susana Thénon: maquillando el caos', 3.
[623] Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 2.

sow discord and confusion within the poem, rather than unity, and its polyphonic structures disregard the idea of a singular subjectivity. Thénon, as a scholar of classics, is deeply influenced by the traditions of the lyric, but at times reacts against it. In leaving her poetic subject adrift amid a sea of other voices, she operates in a non-lyric mode. In hellish times, a single lyric voice that moves smoothly through time seems an impossibility. Instead, Thénon adopts a non-lyric and highly visual approach to poetry that expands poetic space and disrupts poetic time, in order to address her aesthetic and political concerns.

Conclusion

Thénon's belief in the possibilities and difficulties of visual translation opened this chapter. Language and image are occasionally presented as irreconcilable, with time the domain of poetry, and space the domain of photography. But Thénon's photographic and poetic practices point to her recurrent desire to bring them together: whether through fusion or conversation. Thénon first strives to unite them in the Rilke exhibition, and to celebrate the strengths of each artistic mode. Then dance photography appears to bring them closer together: dance being a spatial and visual phenomenon that is also experienced in time, through the movement of the body and the sounds of the accompaniment. It is worth noting that Scaccheri did not only dance to music, but also set her movements to poetry: she performed a dance set to poems by Thénon, Pizarnik, and others – 'Iris Scaccheri con los poetas' – at the Teatro Municipal General San Martín in 1990.[624] Through dance photography, Thénon disrupts the binary of space and time that characterises her own and Lessing's approaches to aesthetics. W. J. T Mitchell observes in relation to *Laocoön*:

[624] Scaccheri, *Brindis a la danza*, 117.

'works of art, like all other objects of human experience, are structures in space-time', and 'the interesting problem is to comprehend a particular spatial-temporal construction, not to label it as temporal *or* spatial'.[625]

The poem, then, can be a construction in both space and time, and *distancias* represents Thénon's efforts at uniting her distinct aesthetic interests on the page of the poem. Thénon therefore produces what can be called non-lyric poetry, in the sense that 'poetry is configured as a space with permeable borders'.[626] Burghard Baltrusch and Isaac Lourido describe the non-lyric not in terms of negation, but instead as an expansive and disruptive vision of what poetry can be: highlighting 'the disintegration of the *work* as a finished, coherent, communicable and even translatable product'.[627] Thénon's poetry destabilises the lyric subject – the voices in her work are rarely identifiable or attributable to a subject or character – and challenges received ideas of the poem as product of a singular lyric voice. Instead, she prioritises a plurality of voices, with the poem operating in space and time. In *distancias*, this aesthetic achievement also permits Thénon to explore – albeit obliquely – the aftermath of Argentina's dictatorship. In extreme circumstances, one voice alone might not be enough.

While the poems of *distancias* are not themselves visual translations, they apply the lessons learnt through visual translation, dating back to the 1979 Rilke exhibition. Translation repeatedly recurs throughout Thénon's work as a motif for understanding difference, whether linguistic or aesthetic. As such, translation represents one way for Thénon to overcome – even indirectly – the titular *distancias*. To cross between languages,

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[625] W. J. T. Mitchell, 'The Politics of Genre: Space and Time in Lessing's *Laocoön*', *Representations,* 6 (1984), 104.
[626] Burghard Baltrusch and Isaac Lourido, 'Sketching Non-Lyrical Discourses in Contemporary Poetry', in *Non-Lyric Discourses in Contemporary Poetry*, ed. by Baltrusch and Lourido (Martin Meidenbauer, 2012), 13.
[627] Ibid., 16.

art forms, and modes of expression, to shorten or simply understand the distances that shape our lives. The act of translation – to exchange, to transfer, to move between – inspires Thénon to take the lessons of photography across to her poetics. The lyric may be challenged by the process of translation, which introduces voices, accents, and instability; but a translational poetics remains possible, through the 'permeable borders' of non-lyric poetry.

Part III: Comparative Coda

Visual translation represents an intriguing possibility for Pizarnik and Thénon, although they feel differently about whether such translation is possible. Nevertheless, the word 'translation' offers both poets useful terminology for describing the relationship between language and image, and visual concerns come to the fore in their later poetry. In both cases, non-lyric modes emerge in an attempt to unite visual and literary forms of expression. Pizarnik and Thénon's earliest collections both belong comfortably within the category of lyric poetry, but visual questions encourage them to fragment the poetic subject, penning multi-voiced compositions that explore the surface of the page.

Pizarnik characterises writing as a form of visual translation, from the loose words and images of her mind onto the page. This interest in translation as a form of transfer manifests throughout her visual practice, with words and images coexisting in her illustrations. However, it is the Surrealist practice of collage that encourages her to see words as material objects or visual images. Collage moves from being a purely visual practice to an innovative technique of literary composition. As her poetry becomes increasingly polyphonic, and explicitly concerned with questions of embodiment and voice, collage offers Pizarnik a material and physical practice to channel these concerns. Pizarnik wrestles with the word through collage, concerned with both its semantic meaning and physical appearance on the page. While her idealised translation from mind to page might not truly be possible, collage allows her to approximate that translation: to move between mind and page, word and image.

Thénon seems more hopeful about the possibility of visual translation. While her interest in photography seems to draw her away from poetry, it is the hope of translation that encourages her to unite these distinct practices. In the Rilke exhibition, Thénon aspires

to the fusion of poetry and photography – and even if such a union might not be possible, the two forms come together and exist in dialogue with each other. In contrast to Pizarnik's more fatalistic approach – where the image stands in for the failures of language – Thénon sees the respective strengths of each form. This comes most clearly into view through dance photography, where Thénon observes that time and space are not competing aesthetic concerns, but rather elements that can coexist in a single work. Her experience of visual translation and photography therefore encourages her to experiment with both poetic space and time in *distancias*, her most formally innovative collection.

Both Pizarnik and Thénon draw on experiences of visual translation for their later collections, as they turn away from the lyricism of their earlier work. In different ways, introducing visual elements into poetry allows them to continue writing despite difficulty: whether that is Pizarnik's existential concern with language, or Thénon's prolonged writer's block. The apparent stability or unity of the lyric voice appears disconcerting, but through translational techniques, Pizarnik and Thénon produce more visual compositions that destabilise the lyric. Burghard Baltrusch and Isaac Lourido describe non-lyric modes not through a pure negation of the lyric, but instead as 'alternative models' that 'reexamine orality, give specific semantics to the body, aspire to establish links between poetic work and action on the social and political planes, or incorporate, among other aspects, dialogism, heteroglossia, polyphony and hybridization'.[628] All of these features could characterise the poems that Pizarnik and Thénon produced after visual translation: interested in embodiment, concerned with politics, and produced with polyphony in mind. Translation, as a way of mediating between language and image, deprioritises the focus on

[628] Baltrusch and Lourido, 'Sketching Non-Lyrical Discourses in Contemporary Poetry', 15.

a singular lyric voice, and encourages both Pizarnik and Thénon to pursue non-lyric poetry.

Conclusion – Beyond the Lyric: Towards a Translational Poetics

This thesis has examined three different forms of translation and the ways they shape Alejandra Pizarnik and Susana Thénon's poetics. Beginning with literary translation and moving towards more creative approaches like self-translation and visual translation, translation itself is revealed to be an expansive and generative practice. Part I revealed how creativity is already in play in the most common definition of translation, as Pizarnik and Thénon negotiate between languages to achieve poetic expression. As examined in Chapter 1, literary translation offers Pizarnik the possibility to establish new affiliations, boosting her career by expanding her literary network. It also allows her to experiment with questions of voice: while translating lyric poetry often implies the mingling of the poet and translator's voices, Pizarnik's strategies express a desire to speak *through* translated works and authors in an act of ventriloquism.

For Thénon in Chapter 2, translation also offers the possibility of speaking through another's voice: whether it is to adopt the swagger and braggadocio of tangos and boleros, queering them in the process; or to express through translation that which has been silenced. In a gesture reminiscent of Josefina Ludmer's 'tretas del débil', Thénon makes strategic use of the translator's invisibility during Argentina's last dictatorship by curating Rilke in translation.[629] Translation is therefore a subtle but powerful political tool that Thénon employs to potent effect, and further studies could consider the potential subversiveness of translation in times of political censorship. For both poets, the processes of selection, curation, and translation allow them to experiment with their poetics, adopting different voices and styles.

[629] Ludmer, 'Tretas del débil', 189–98.

This approach to literary translation also offers a methodological contribution of benefit beyond the scope of this thesis. Translations are often seen to be marginal within an author's body of work, but here I have granted them central importance. As a result, the focus has not been solely on so-called 'original' works, but on the full breadth of a writer's creative activity. Pizarnik's commitment to translation shows her dedication to literary expression, and in particular the labour involved in crafting her poetic voice(s) and persona. Thénon's poetic hiatus reveals the role of translation in seeking alternative forms of expression. Considering translations as part of a writer's oeuvre has clear advantages, and I hope the analysis here – encompassing each poet's theories of translation, their motivations and strategies – will be applied to other poet-translators in future. This approach is particularly valuable within Latin American literary studies, where the practice of translation is widespread.

Translation emerges as a powerful tool in the quest to hone a poetic voice – or voices. Self-translation, the topic of Part II, introduces a form of doubling, where Pizarnik and Thénon are both authors and translators of their own work. The roles of poet and translator merge and intertwine in their later collections, where rewriting – through translation – is not simply a derivative or plagiaristic act, but instead a generative one. In Chapter 3, I have offered the first detailed study of Pizarnik's French-language poetry to date, revealing translingual self-translation as the source of some of her later compositions. While Pizarnik has long been considered a citational poet, the extent of her appropriative practices has been underestimated, given that her own poems come to represent source material for new compositions. Self-translation is one of two literary strategies identified in this thesis that allow her to overcome writer's block (the second being collage, addressed in Chapter 5). Pizarnik's dedication to writing through rewriting demonstrates

resilience and a commitment to language that counteracts the pervasive 'suicide-poet' myth that continues to shape her reception.

Thénon's unconventional approach to self-translation adds nuance to our understanding of the practice in Chapter 4. Essentially working as Renata Treitel's co-translator through her 'aclaraciones', Thénon translates herself and changes her approach to poetic composition as a result. Self-translation involves rewriting, but not necessarily repetition, and Thénon embraces the specificities of languages and discourses in her playful compositions. An interest in – and resistance to – translation comes to shape her final collection, *Ova completa*, and represents how contact with translation can thoroughly transform a poetic approach. Thénon's example also reveals how self-translation can take experimental and unexpected forms. It becomes difficult, or at times impossible, to identify the 'source' text of the translation, but it is evident that some form of translation has taken place.

Part III, on visual translation, has explored how translational approaches can extend beyond verbal language, with a particular focus on the power of the image. Incorporating visual translation not only allows for a fuller reflection on the multiple meanings of the Spanish 'traducir' and 'traducción', but also reveals how some kinds of translation can destabilise common ideas of language. Lyric poetry is particularly challenged by the possibilities of visual translation, and both Pizarnik and Thénon pursue what Burghard Baltrusch and Isaac Lourido call 'non-lyric' modes of production.[630] For Pizarnik, an obsession with the image – whether drawn, painted, or found – leads her to collage in Chapter 5, a technique that represents a natural extension of her citational practices. Pizarnik invites us to reconsider the limits and possibilities of appropriation, in

[630] Baltrusch and Lourido, 'Sketching Non-Lyrical Discourses in Contemporary Poetry', 11–26.

some ways anticipating the turn to disappropriation in twenty-first-century Latin American studies, which argues that citational practices can bring hidden histories and silenced voices to the fore by writing through the archive. Cristina Rivera Garza, a key theorist of the idea, makes use of the full range of Pizarnik's work in her own hybrid novel, *La muerte me da* – suggesting that Pizarnik's collage practices have enduring relevance for writers and critics. Collage represents the mingling of voices and physical fragments, offering Pizarnik an embodied technique for poetic composition.

While photography is a more ephemeral and less material practice than collage, Chapter 6 has revealed how it can also disrupt the lyric mode. Thénon's photography career initially challenges her belief in poetic language, but it is only by understanding the respective advantages of her two crafts – poetry's approach to time, and photography's use of space – that she is able to combine them. Her experience of dance photography – specifically her portraits of Iris Scaccheri – coincides with this realisation, and so Thénon pursues a form of choreography on the page in *distancias*, arranging voices across the space of the page and disrupting the flow of poetic time. While Pizarnik and Thénon pursued very different visual art forms, their shared attentiveness to the image leads them both to pursue non-lyric modes of poetic expression.

What, then, characterises a translational poetics? Translation can represent a movement between languages, between texts, between voices. Even in its most common definition – the transfer of meaning from one language to another – translation already blurs the idea of the lyric voice. The lyric feels less stable, less identifiable in translation. Poetry translation might be the meeting of two voices – ostensibly, the poet and the translator – or, in Yves Bonnefoy's iteration, the lending of an accent to another's voice.[631]

[631] Bonnefoy, 'Trasponer o traducir Hamlet', 67.

However, this presumes an identifiable or stable voice in the original poem. Instead, the experience of translation as a process – the attention to different tones, discourses, registers, styles – destabilises the supposed single voice of lyric, encouraging non-lyric modes of poetry.

Whether translation is an act of ventriloquism, an opportunity to rewrite your own voice, or an invitation to share the page with a collage of voices, a translational poetics creates a chorus of voices. This polyphony ends up being essential for Pizarnik and Thénon's most innovative poetic works. It is not a coincidence that their later poetry – for example, Pizarnik's *Textos de Sombra* and Thénon's *Ova completa* – shares a similar concern with humour, irony, and voice. Both poets are transformed by their experiences with translation. They are shaped by a translator's sensibility: increasingly attuned to the limits and capabilities of poetic voice and language. When they seek to break boundaries in their own work – whether it is Pizarnik rebelling against her own poetic persona, or Thénon interrogating contemporary neocolonial politics in a poem like 'Poema con traducción simultánea español-español' – translation offers ideas and answers.

Translation invigorates the possibilities of poetry, as Pizarnik and Thénon's respective trajectories demonstrate. By comprehensively charting their definitions and practices of translation, and its impact on their poetry, this thesis offers a relevant framework for future research. Within translation studies, there is increasing interest in the subjectivity and agency of the translator, and the methodology used here can be applied to demonstrate the creativity of the translator in action. It also offers a template for considering translation's role within the creation of 'original' literary production, moving beyond narrow questions of influence or genealogy to assess the possibilities of translational approaches.

This thesis also has important implications for how we read Pizarnik and Thénon: as individuals, in comparison, and in the context of Argentine and Latin American poetry. Translation offers a valuable lens for reassessing Pizarnik, whose poetic reception risks being calcified by the pervasive myth of the suicide-poet. Rather than a poet silenced by the failures of language, Pizarnik the poet-translator appears as a worker of words, committed to poetic expression until the end. Parallels to Kafka emerge both in her insistence on the impossibility of writing, and in doing it anyway. There remains more to explore by analysing her other translations – and the different strategies she applies to other poets. By analysing Thénon as a translator, it becomes clear that so many of her acclaimed qualities – her irony, her satire, her wit – are born from translation. Her sharp awareness of the multiplicities of the Spanish language – its history and etymologies, its different forms and variations – is a product of her contact with other languages. I have focused on her later works, given that these follow chronologically from her experience with translation, but the translational quality of her earlier poetry merits further attention.

There is clear value to reading Pizarnik and Thénon together, moving beyond a limiting approach that addresses these poets in isolation, especially when they have so often been interpreted as solitary or unique figures. Women poets are still often studied on the sidelines, or alternatively chosen for their marginality. By placing Pizarnik and Thénon in conversation with each other, they form the centre of this discussion, and merit further attention in debates around poetry and translation in Argentine literature. The comparison between them is productive, not only because of their similarities: playing off their differences illustrates the myriad ways translation can shape a poetics, and sets their approaches in the context of broader tendencies within Argentine and Latin American literature.

This thesis focuses on Pizarnik and Thénon, in part to highlight an underappreciated kinship between their work. Nevertheless, there is room for future studies to apply this lens to other poet-translators of their generation, including Juana Bignozzi, Roberto Juarroz, and others. As well as their Argentine contemporaries, there is substantial scope to expand this study both geographically and temporally: to consider the role of poetry translation in Latin American poetics of the period, and more widely. This could also take the form of a chronology of poet-translators, examining the continued role of translation in Argentine poetry and beyond: thinking of Nicanor Parra's translations of Shakespeare, or Ernesto Cardenal's engagement with Ezra Pound.

A key element of this thesis has been establishing Pizarnik and Thénon as translators, and constructing the 'translator's archive', to return to María Constanza Guzmán's concept.[632] This work has been possible thanks to existing poets' archives held across the Americas in Buenos Aires and Princeton, as well as additional archival research. Just as Pizarnik's practice of collage expressed a desire for a more embodied poetics, archival research makes an embodied approach to translation possible, where the materiality of manuscripts carries a physical trace of the labour of translation.

Looking to the future, I hope not only that Pizarnik and Thénon's translator archives grow, but that other translator archives come into existence. To this day translation often remains hidden as creative work, relegated to brief credits on copyright pages, and when translation is acknowledged, it is too often in relation to the influence and power of the source, rather than the potency of the translation process. In the field of poetry, translation remains poetic creation's silent twin. The term 'poet-translator' should become an unnecessary distinction, because translation should be recognised as poetic

[632] Guzmán, 'Translation North and South: Composing the Translator's Archive', 172.

work. *Escribir es traducir*, and translation is writing. It is a labour and a practice and a process. It is sometimes analogous to poetry, as Octavio Paz suggested, but it also *is* poetry. And if two markedly different poets can be brought together by translation, what other connections might translation make possible? There are other translational poetics to uncover.

Appendix – Poems and Translations

Yves Bonnefoy, translated by Alejandra Pizarnik and Ivonne Bordelois

Yves Bonnefoy, 'Veneranda; Siempre la misma voz; La imperfección es la cima', trans. by Alejandra Pizarnik and Ivonne Bordelois, *Sur*, 278 (1962), 8–11, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5110806628/GDSC?u=oxford&sid=bookmark-GDSC&xid=2622f38c&pg=1> [accessed 29 March 2026].

Figure 1.1 'Veneranda', 8–9.

Veneranda

L'orante est seule dans la salle basse très peu claire,
Sa robe a la couleur de l'attente des morts,
Et c'est le bleu le plus éteint qui soit au monde,
Ecaillé, découvrant l'ocre des pierres nues.
L'enfance est seule, et ceux qui viennent sont obscurs,
Ils se penchent avec des lampes sur son corps.
Oh, dors-tu? Ta présence inapaisable brûle
Comme une âme, en ces mots que je t'apporte encor.

Tu es suele, tu as vieilli dans cette chambre,
Tu vaques aux travaux du temps et de la mort.
Voix pourtant, il suffit qu'une voix basse tremble
Pour que l'aube ruisselle aux vitres du temps mort.

/

Veneranda

Está la orante solitaria en la estancia baja y en sombra,
Vestida del color con que esperan los muertos,
Y es el azul más suave que existe en el mundo
Mostrando entre jirones el ocre de las piedras desnudas.
Está sola la infancia, y los que vienen son oscuros.
Se inclinan con lámparas sobre su cuerpo.
¿Duermes? Tu presencia inextinguible arde
Como un alma, en estas palabras que aún te abandono.

Estás sola, has envejecido en esta pieza,
Atenta a los trabajos del tiempo y de la muerte.
Y sin embargo, mira: basta que tiemble una voz grave
Para que fluya el alba en los cristales del tiempo muerto.

Figure 1.2 ‘Siempre la misma voz’, 8–9.

La même voix, toujours

Je suis comme le pain que tu rompras,
Comme le feu que tu feras, comme l’eau pure
Qui t’accompagnera sur la terre des morts.

Comme l’écume
Qui a mûri pour toi la lumière et le port.

Comme l’oiseau du soir qui efface les rives,
Comme le vent du soir soudain plus brusque et froid.

/

Siempre la misma voz

Soy como el pan que partirás,
Como el fuego que harás, como el agua pura
Que te seguirá en la tierra de los muertos.

Como la espuma
Que maduró la luz y el puerto para ti.

Como el pájaro de la noche que aleja a las orillas,
Como el viento de la noche súbitamente más brusco y frío.

Figure 1.3 ‘La imperfección es la cima’, 10–11.

L’imperfection est la cime

Il y avait qu’il fallait détruire et détruire et détruire,
Il y avait que le salut n’est qu’à ce prix.

Ruiner la face nue qui monte dans le marbre,
Marteler toute forme toute beauté.

Aimer la perfection parce qu’elle est le seuil,
Mais la nier sitôt connue, l’oublier morte,

L’imperfection est la cime.

/

La imperfección es la cima

Sucede que había que destruir y destruir y destruir:
Sucede que sólo así puede ganarse la salvación.

Arrasar el rostro desnudo que sube desde el mármol,
Triturar toda forma, toda belleza.

Amar la perfección porque ella es el umbral,
Pero negarla apenas conocida; muerta, olvidarla,

La imperfección es la cima.

Antonin Artaud, translated by Alejandra Pizarnik

Antonin Artaud, 'Poemas', trans. by Alejandra Pizarnik, *Sur*, 294 (1965), 40–55 <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5110832003/GDSC?u=oxford&sid=bookmark-GDSC&xid=289412c9&pg=1> [accessed 29 March 2026].

Figure 1.4 'Poema', 40–41.

Poème

Il fait très froid
comme quand
c'est
Artaud
le mort
qui
souffle

/

Poema

Hace mucho frío
como cuando
es
Artaud
el muerto
quien
sopla

Figure 1.5 ‘Post-scriptum de “Le théâtre de la cruauté”’, 54–55.

Post-scriptum de “Le théâtre de la cruauté”

Qui suis-je ?
D’où je viens ?
Je suis Antonin Artaud
et que je le dise
comme je sais le dire
immédiatement
vous verrez mon corps actuel
voler en éclats
et se ramasser
sous dix mille aspects notoires
un corps neuf
où vous ne pourrez
plus jamais
m’oublier.

/

Post-scriptum de “Le théâtre de la cruauté”

¿Quién soy?
¿De dónde vengo?
Soy Antonin Artaud
y apenas yo lo diga
como sé decirlo
inmediatamente
verán mi cuerpo actual
estallar
y recogerse
bajo diez mil aspectos notorios
un cuerpo nuevo
en el que ustedes no podrán
nunca jamás
olvidarme.

Figure 1.6 ‘Poema’, 42–45.

Poème

J’étais vivant
et j’étais *là* depuis *toujours*
Mangea-je ?

Non
mais quand j’avais faim je reculai avec mon corps et ne me
mangeai pas moi-même
mais tout cela s’est décomposé
une opération étrange avait lieu
je n’étais pas malade
je reconquerrais la santé
toujours par la rentrée en arrière du corps
mon corps me trahit
il ne me connaissait pas encore assez
manger c’est porter en avant ce qui doit rester en arrière

Dormè-je ?

Non, je ne dormais pas
il faut être chaste pour savoir ne pas manger
Ouvrir la bouche, c’est s’offrir aux miasmes
Alors, pas de bouche !
Pas de bouche
pas de langue
pas de dents
pas de larynx
pas d’œsophage
pas d’estomac
pas de ventre
pas d’anus

Je reconstruirai l’homme que je suis

/

Poema

Yo estaba vivo
y estaba *allí* desde *siempre*
¿Comía yo?

No
pero cuando tenía hambre yo retrocedía con mi cuerpo y no me
comía a mí mismo
pero todo esto se ha corrompido
una operación insólita se efectuaba

yo no estaba enfermo
yo reconquistaba la salud
siempre por un retorno hacia atrás del cuerpo
mi cuerpo me traicionó
él no me conocía bien aún
comer es llevar adelante aquello que debe quedar atrás

¿Dormía yo?

No, no dormía
hay que ser casto para saber no comer
Abrir la boca, es ofrecerse a las miasmas
Entonces ¡nada de boca!
Nada de boca
nada de lengua
nada de dientes
nada de laringe
nada de esófago
nada de estómago
nada de vientre
nada de ano

Yo reconstruiré al hombre que soy

Figure 1.7 'Fragmento de "Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu"', 50–53.

"Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu"
(Variantes. Premier projet)

Qui a mal aux os comme moi
n'a qu'à penser à moi
il ne me rejoindra pas en esprit par la route des espaces.
Car à quoi bon rejoindre un être en esprit
et ne pas le rejoindre en corps ?
Rejoindre un être en esprit
c'est encore plus s'éloigner de le rejoindre un jour en corps.
Mais qui a mal aux os comme moi
et qui pense intensément à moi
ne voit pas
quelle maison tombe,
quel arbre brûle
sur son chemin
mais la maison tombe,
et l'arbre brûle
et un jour il s'en apercevra ;
qui a mal aux gencives comme moi
et qui pense à moi
l'espace qui nous séparait poudroie,
il s'amenuise et devient plus petit,
et c'est lui

l’espace
qui devient aveugle
et non moi ;
et un jour il s’en apercevra ?
Qui ?
Qui ?
    mais l’espace qui se sentira plus petit,
les muscles garottés et aux abois ;
qui a mal à toutes ses dents,
à toutes ses dents *absentes* comme moi
il ne se verra pas tout d’un coup à côté de moi
mais c’est l’espace qui se sentira loin de lui et de moi ;
et qui aura honte d’exister et d’être,
d’être l’espace quand nous sommes là !

/

Fragmento de “Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu”
(Variantes. Primer proyecto)

Quien siente dolor en los huesos como yo
no tiene sino que pensar en mí
no me alcanzará en espíritu por el camino de los espacios
pues ¿para qué alcanzar a un ser en espíritu
y no alcanzarlo en cuerpo?
Alcanzar a un ser en espíritu
es alejarse aún más de alcanzarlo en cuerpo algún día.
Pero quien siente dolor en los huesos como yo
y piensa intensamente en mí
no ve
qué casa cae
cuál árbol se incendia
en su camino
pero la casa cae
y el árbol se incendia
y un día lo advertirá;
quien siente dolor en las encías como yo
y piensa en mí
el espacio que nos separaba se pulveriza,
adelgaza y se vuelve más pequeño,
y es él
el espacio
quien se vuelve ciego
y no yo;
¿y lo advertirá algún día?
¿Quién?
¿Quién?
        pues el espacio que se sentirá más pequeño,
los músculos agarrotados y en las últimas;
quien siente dolor en todos sus dientes,

como yo en todos sus dientes *ausentes*
no se encontrará de repente a mi lado
pero es el espacio quien se sentirá lejos de él y de mí;
y quien tendrá vergüenza de existir y de ser,
¡de ser el espacio cuando nosotros estamos allí!

Friedrich Hölderlin, translated by Alejandra Pizarnik

German text: Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hölderlin: Selected Verse*, trans. by Michael Hamburger (Anvil Press Poetry, 1986)

Spanish translation: Friedrich Hölderlin, 'Mitad de la vida' and 'Canto del destino', trans. by Alejandra Pizarnik, *El cielo*, 2 (1968), <https://ahira.com.ar/ejemplares/2-4/> [accessed 29 March 2026].

Figure 1.8 'Hälfte des Lebens', *Hölderlin: Selected Verse*, 242; 'Mitad de la vida', *El cielo*, 23.

Hälfte des Lebens

Mit gelben Birnen hänget
Und voll mit wilden Rosen
Das Land in den See,
Ihr holden Schwäne,
Und trunken von Küssen
Tunkt ihr das Haupt
Ins heilignüchterne Wasser.

Weh mir, wo nehm' ich, wenn
Es Winter ist, die Blumen, und wo
Den Sonnenschein,
Und Schatten der Erde?
Die Mauern stehn
Sprachlos und kalt, im Winde
Klirren die Fahnen.

/

Mitad de la vida

Con amarillas peras
Y llena de rosas salvajes,
Se suspende la tierra en el lago.
Vosotros, cisnes maravillosos,
Ebrios de besos
Sumergís la cabeza
En el agua sagrada y calma.

¡Ay de mí! ¿Dónde buscar,
Cuando venga el invierno, las rosas?

¿Dónde la luz del sol
Con las sombras de la tierra?
Los muros se elevan mudos y fríos
Y en el viento rechinan las banderas.

Figure 1.9 'Hyperions Schicksalslied', *Hölderlin: Selected Verse*, 25–26; 'Canto del destino'. *El cielo*, 23.

Hyperions Schicksalslied

Ihr wandelt droben im Licht
Auf weichem Boden, selige Genien!
Glänzende Götterlüfte
Rühren euch leicht,
Wie die Finger der Künstlerin
Heilige Saiten.

Schicksallos, wie der schlafende
Säugling, atmen die Himmlischen;
Keusch bewahrt
In bescheidener Knospe,
Blühet ewig
Ihnen der Geist,
Und die seligen Augen
Blicken in stiller
Ewiger Klarheit.

Doch uns ist gegeben,
Auf keiner Stätte zu ruhn,
Es schwinden, es fallen
Die leidenden Menschen
Blindlings von einer
Stunde zur andern,
Wie Wasser von Klippe
Zu Klippe geworfen,
Jahrlang ins Ungewisse hinab.

/

Canto del destino

Vosotros avanzáis levemente allá arriba en la luz
Por un tierno suelo, genios venturosos.
Fulgurantes vientos divinos
Ligeramente os pulsan,
Igual que a unas cuerdas sagradas
Los dedos de la inspiradora.

Sin destino, como el niñito

Que duerme, respiran las celestes divinidades.
Castamente guardado en modesta corola
Siempre florece para ellos el espíritu,
Sus ojos felices miran
En la apacible
Claridad inmortal.

Pero a nosotros, a nosotros jamás nos fue dado
Encontrar reposo en parte alguna.
Cae y desaparece el hombre doliente
Ciegamente, de hora en hora,
Como agua de un escollo
Arrojada o otro escollo,
A través de los tiempos, en lo incierto,
Hacia abajo.

Figure 1.10

Friedrich Hölderlin, trans. by Alejandra Pizarnik, ‘Mitad de la vida’ and ‘Canto del destino’, *El cielo*, 2 (1968), 23.


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Rainer Maria Rilke, translated by Susana Thénon

All figures from the Fondo Thénon, 'Catálogo "Rainer Maria Rilke: palabra e imagen, exposición fotográfica de Susana Thénon"', AR IIAC 03-2-2-001.

Figure 2.1

1

Was reisst ihr aus meinen blassen, blauen
Stunden mich in der wirbelnden Kreise
wirres Geflimmer?
Ich mag nicht mehr euren Wehnsinn schauen.
Ich will wie ein Kind im Krankenzimmer
einsam, mit heimlichem Lächeln, leise,
leise – Tage und Träume bauen.

aus „Erste Gedichte"

/

1

Por qué me arrancáis de mis horas pálidas y azules
hacia el confuso resplandor
del remolino?
No deseo ver más vuestro delirio.
Como un niño a solas en su cuarto de enfermo,
con íntima sonrisa, dulcemente,
quiero construir días y sueños.

De "Primeros poemas"

Figure 2.2

9

Da neigt sich die Stunde und rührt mich an
mit klarem, metallenem Schlag:
mir zittern die Sinne. Ich fühle: ich kann -
und ich fasse den plastischen Tag.

Nichts war noch vollendet, eh ich es erschaut,
ein jedes Werden stand still.
Meine Blicke sind reif, und wie eine Braut
kommt jedem das Ding, das er will.

Nichts ist mir zu klein und ich lieb es trotzdem
und mal es auf Goldgrund und gross,
und halte es hoch, und ich weiss nicht wem
löst es die Seele los…

aus "Das Stunden-Buch" (vom mönchischen Leben)

/

9

La hora se inclina y me toca
con claro golpe metálico:
vibran mis sentidos. Siento: soy capaz
de abarcar el día plástico.

Nada estaba acabado antes de que lo viera,
todo devenir permanecía estático.
Mis miradas son maduras, y como una novia
le llega a cada uno lo que desea.

Nada me es muy pequeño y sin embargo lo amo
y lo pinto sobre un gran fondo de oro
y lo mantengo en alto, e ignoro a quién
le libere el alma…

de “Libro de Horas” (de la vida monástica)

Figure 2.3

25
Schlaflied

Einmal wenn ich dich verlier,
wirst du schlafen können, ohne
dass ich wie eine Lindenkrone
mich verflüstre über dir?

Ohne dass ich hier wache und
Worte, beinah wie Augenlider,
auf deine Brüste, auf deine Glieder
niederlege, auf deinen Mund.

Ohne dass ich dich verschliess
und dich allein mit Deinem lasse
wie einen Garten mit einer Masse
von Melissen und Stern-Anis.

aus “Neue Gedichte”

/

25
Cantar para el sueño

Cuando te pierda,
podrás dormir
sin que sobre ti yo murmure
como una corona de tilos?

Sin que aquí vele
y pose palabras casi como párpados
sobre tus sanos, sobre tus miembros,
sobre tu boca?

Sin que te encierre
y te deje sola con tu mundo
como a un jardín grávido
de anís estrellado y de toronjil?

de “Nuevos poemas”

Figure 2.4

20

Da leben Menschen, weisserblühte, blasse,
und sterben staunend an der schweren Welt.
Und keiner sieht die klaffende Grimasse,
zu der das Lächeln einer zarten Rasse
in namenlosen Nächten sich entstellt.

Sie gehn umher, entwürdigt durch die Müh,
sinnlosen Dingen ohne Mut zu dienen,
und ihre Kleider werden welk an ihnen,
und ihre schönen Hände altern früh.

aus “Das Stunden-Buch” (von der Armut und vom Tode)

/

20

Ahí viven hombres, agotados, pálidos,
y mueren azorados del mundo que los agobia.
Y nadie ve la hendida mueca en que se torna
la sonrisa de una raza delicada
durante noches indecibles.

Circulan denigrados por la pena
de servir sin coraje a cosas sin sentido,
y sus ropas se ajan
y sus bellas manos envejecen pronto.

de “Libro de Horas” (de la pobreza y de la muerte)

Figure 2.5

32

O Seligkeit der k l e i n e n Kreatur,
die immer b l e i b t im Schoosse, der sie austrug;
o Glück der Mücke, die noch i n n e n hüpft,
selbst wenn sie Hochzeit hat: denn Schooss ist Alles.
Und sieh die halbe Sicherheit des Vogels,
der beinah beides weiss aus seinem Ursprung,
als wär er eine Seele der Etrusker,
aus einem Toten, den ein Raum empfing,
doch mit der ruhenden Figur als Deckel.
Und wie bestürzt ist eins, das fliegen muss
und stammt aus einem Schoos. Wie vor sich selbst
erschreckt, durchzuckts die Luft, wie wenn ein Sprung
durch eine Tasse geht. So reisst die Spur
der Fledermaus durchs Porzellan des Abends.

aus “Duineser Elegien”, VII

/

32

Oh dicha de la p e q u e ñ a criatura
que siempre p e r m a n e c e en la entraña que la ha parido!
Oh ventura del mosquito que todavía salta a d e n t r o,
aún en su boda! Porque la entraña es todo.
Y observa la media seguridad del pájaro
que casi sabe ambas cosas por su origen,
como si fuera un alma de los etruscos,
de un muerto al que acogió un espacio,
pero cuya silueta reposa como una tapa.
Y qué turbado está aquel que debe volar
y proviene de una entraña! Como espantado
de sí mismo surca el aire, tal una grieta
en una taza. Así la huella
del murciélago rasga la porcelana de la tarde.

de “Elegías de Duino”, VIII

Figure 2.6

26

Requiem - Für eine Freundin

Ich habe Tote, und ich liess sie hin
und war erstaunt, sie so getrost zu sehn,
so rasch zuhaus im Totsein, so gerecht,
so anders als ihr Ruf. Nur du, du kehrst
zurück; du streifst mich, du gehst um, du willst
an etwas stoßen, daß es klingt von dir
und dich verrät.

Komm her ins Kerzenlicht. Ich bin nicht bang,
die Toten anzuschauen. Wenn sie kommen,
so haben sie ein Recht, in unserm Blick
sich aufzuhalten, wie die andern Dinge.

/

26

Requiem – A una amiga

Yo tengo muertos y los dejé irse,
y me asombraba verlos tan confiados,
tan rápidamente a sus anchas en la muerte, tan justos,
tan diferentes de su fama. Solo tú, tú regresas,
tú me rozas, andas rodando, quieres
chocar con algo para que suene por ti
y te delate.

Ven aquí, a la luz de la vela. No tengo miedo
de mirar a los muertos. Cuando vienen
tienen derecho a permanecer
en nuestra mirada, como las otras cosas.

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