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CAROL MAIER

Love Unfaithful but True: Reflections on Amor infiel. Emily Dickinson por Nuria Amat

In "Translating North American Poets," a poem by Polish poet Julia Hartwig, the speaker begins by noting that North American poets in translation "might not care for such a change of place-," or they might even "rebel against this uncalled-for move." Almost immediately, though, the speaker addresses the poets themselves, reassuring them that "it's not you but your poems that have wandered over to us," and reporting that their poems were met with "a warm welcome" (15). Nothing in Hartwig's lines suggests that Emily Dickinson was one of the poets Hartwig had in mind as she wrote her poem, but it's hard not to think of Dickinson as one reads Hartwig's poem. "The world," whose lack of response Dickinson lamented in her lifetime, has written to Dickinson frequently since her death, and some of its most creative responses have taken the form of translations. It is impossible to know, of course, whether Dickinson would find pleasing the numerous changes of place, time, and guise those translations have involved, but many of her readers in English would no doubt find them troubling. I would argue, however, that even some of the changes that seem most radical, at times perhaps more radical than one can easily explain, much less justify, arise from a deep understanding of Dickinson's work and offer a singular, provocative perspective on the consciousness-altering impact that she has had on so many readers.

I. Emulation

One of those readers, and a reader whose response might impress other Dickinson readers as controversial, is Nuria Amat. Born in 1950 and a native of Barcelona, where she lives, Amat is best known for her novels, which have received various honors, her short stories, and her literary essays, but she has

also published a biography of Mexican writer Juan Rulfo and work in poetry and drama. In addition, she holds a master's degree in literature and a PhD in Library and Information Science; she has taught library and information science in Spain, and studied, traveled, lectured, and read from her work throughout the world. Deeply concerned about the role of the writer in "confused/confusing times" ("Escribir en tiempos confusos"), she contributes frequently to the Spanish press, and she is a strong advocate for a definition of Catalan literature that includes work, like her own, written in Castilian (Spanish) as well as Catalan. Her work has been translated into several languages; the translations into English include her novel *Reina de América* (translated as *Queen Cocaine*), a selection from her novel *El país del alma* [Country of the Soul], and an essay, "The Language of Two Shores," which appeared in *PMLA*. In 2004, she published *Amor infiel* ("Faithless Love" or "Love Unfaithful"—I will return to the difference below), a collection of translations with the subtitle of *Emily Dickinson por Nuria Amat*.

Those translations arose from a conversation between Amat and her translator Peter Bush. At the time, as she notes in her afterword to Amor infiel, she was experiencing an acute crisis with respect to her writing; Reina de América had recently been published and, immersed in work on the Rulfo biography, she feared she might be suffering from the same "problems of creative sterility" that tormented Rulfo (396). Aware of her fondness for Dickinson's work, Bush suggested that she translate some of Dickinson's poems. At first, as Amat explains in the epilogue to Amor infiel, she felt daunted: what she most admires and finds especially moving about Dickinson's poems is the sense that, despite their apparent simplicity, they "hide an enigma" that translators, led perhaps by excessive respect for the text or by a fear of revealing its "mystery," often fail to decipher (396). Ironically, though, that failure on the part of Dickinson's Spanish translators provided Amat with an additional impetus to create an Emily of her own, because she found the translations available in Spanish unsatisfactory. Either "too abstract" or "too close" (394), she believed that they left Spanish readers with an Emily Dickinson who was not "well translated" (22 June 2005).

That Amat would be led to make such comments about Dickinson's work in Spanish translation is not surprising. Dickinson has been translated into Spanish by numerous translators, including two highly accomplished poets—Argentine Silvina Ocampo, praised by Jorge Luis Borges as her country's greatest poet (Borges 12), and Juan Ramón Jiménez, the Spanish poet who won the Nobel Prize in 1956 and who was probably the first person to translate Dickinson into Spanish (Figueira 2). Ocampo's versions, however, are literal, to an extent that Amat might

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well have considered detrimental to their success as poems, as Borges seems to nave implied in the rather ambiguous prologue he wrote for Ocampo's work with Dickinson (Borges 12);1 and Jiménez, although his translations might well have pleased Amat, seeing that he worked as much or more as poet than translator, translated only three short poems (Pérez Romero 153). As a group, however-I generalize here and must note that I have not been able to consult every one of the translations and that not all of the translators have commented on their methodologies-Dickinson's Spanish translators in effect describe themselves as admiring, affectionate servants. Those sentiments are often coupled with an insufficient trust in their own creativity to write translations that can stand alone as poems. Consequently, the introductions and afterwords they write to their work almost invariably include apologies and admissions of failure, as well as skeptical or even negative comments about the work of other translators. Margarita Ardanz, for example, who has published a sizeable selection of Dickinson's poetry, states that she would define as "almost immoral" the efforts of Dickinson's previous translators: although Dickinson did not leave definitive versions of her poems, her translators have dared "to fix in another language the words of the unclosed units ["unidades no cerradas"] that can only erroneously be called poetry" (41).

Amat, however, was not plagued by such scruples as she undertook her translations. On the contrary, she believes that it is only because of "betrayals" or "lapses of conscience" that literature "grows" (2 Nov. 2005), and it is precisely the enigmatic, daunting "untranslatability" of Dickinson's work that, from her perspective, invites "re-writing" (Amor 395). Even as she reads Dickinson, whom she "had the audacity to think of as an older sister or mother" (2 Nov. 2005), Amat explains, she experiences a strong, "rebellious" impulse to write on (or over) Dickinson's words (Amor 401). At the same time, however, she has also described this "writing on" as "four-handed, collaborative writing" (22 June 2005). It is as if, by covering Dickinson's words with her own, her re- or de-formation is not defiling them but emulating them, in the true sense of that verb, striving not only to equal but also to surpass them.2 This might be seen as a wounding that heals, and one reminiscent of the integral relation crucial to Amat's own work between interiority, language and languages, words, especially written words, and wounds. For so often in her work the "letra," or letter, is wounded, although here "letter" signifies not missive ("carta") but written character or, more frequently, handwriting and, by extension, writing that is lost or repudiated. For example, the narrator of Amat's novel Deja que la vida llueva en mí [Let Life Rain on Me], yearns for the letters of her deceased mother, not so much for what they might say as for the access

they would give her to her mother's hand (12); a young librarian discussed in an essay titled "La letra herida" ("The Wounded Letter/Handwriting") abandons an incipient career as a novelist to write a dissertation about literary theory and become a professor; Catalan is a language banned during the Franco years but now, ironically, one that questions—wounds, as it were—the authenticity of work by Catalan writers who, like Amat, write in Castilian, although often for complex, painful reasons.

Each of the three woundings mentioned above is, or can be, healed, at least to some extent, by writing, and each of them is intimately related to Amat's own life. She was born into a Catalan family, but from an early age, her relation to her mother tongue was conflicted: she was deprived of that language in a very immediate way by the death of her mother when she was a young child and, despite being raised by a highly literary father and spending much of her childhood and adolescence in his huge library filled with books in Catalan, she also lived in a world dominated by Castilian—the woman who cared for her and her two brothers spoke Castilian and she was educated in Castilian. The latter is the language of the literature in which she would rebel against her father, despite the identification of Castilian with the Franco regime and its oppression of Catalan, a language which Amat also speaks and with which she identifies as well. Consequently, her use of Castilian was, and continues to be, an act of will and resistance, just as writing was a secret, transgressive activity for her as a librarian who was also a young novelist in a profession that, she found, looked askance at such creative work.

Writing, then, for Amat, was at once a source of wounding and a way of wounding back, as it were, but it was also a way to grow—to use with respect to writing itself (as an act) the verb she has used with respect to literature. It is a role for writing not so distant as might first appear from the "writing on" on Dickinson's part that would follow T. W. Higginson's instruction, should he be willing to "set" an inner fracture (L268). After all, as Kay Ryan has pointed out with respect to the solitude and subjectivity of Dickinson's life, it is not the wound but the wounding that binds, since we all "have our own precipices inside" (45). In this context Amat's persistent probing of the "wounded letter" suggests Richard Howard's discussion of Kierkegaard's "wound of the negative" with respect to Dickinson's "enterprise" and her seeming awareness that such a wound, if kept open, "is sometimes the condition for a cure" (25).

What Amat wanted to do, then, was to "reinvent Emily" by keeping open both Dickinson's inner wound and her own. From the beginning, it was clear to her that she was not writing conventional translations, although most of the time she refers to her work as translation: "What I'm looking to do is to rewrite the original," she explains, "but in my own poetic language. As if it were only my voice meeting up in the dark with the echo of her poem" (Amor 401). Consequently, in a brief "advertencia" (forward or warning) on the first page, she tells her readers that the poems they are about to read are "similar but not identical" to Dickinson's. Neither there nor in her afterword does she actually refer to them as versions, but on the title page (although not on the cover), the contents are described as a "selection of free versions of poems by ED and fragments from her letters." The title of Amor infiel was suggested by her friend, Catalan writer Ana María Moix, and it seemed appropriate to Amat, although she herself makes no reference to fidelity or its absence, merely saying that she has departed from Dickinson's poems in order to follow them more closely. She also provides an internet address for readers who want to read the original English online—it is not given in her volume, but each poem is accompanied by the number in Dickinson's oeuvre to which it corresponds (both Johnson's and Franklin's).

She had already included a few "timid and scattered" homages to Dickinson in several of her books and essays (395); for example, "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" (Fr340) serves as the epigraph for her *El país del alma*. However, this work would be very different, since she would explicitly be entering and rewriting Dickinson's words. At first, feeling less than confident of her English, she worked collaboratively with a friend who was a native speaker of English. She also enlisted her two daughters (one aged twelve, who was studying English at school and lived at home, the other a young adult living in London). Once launched, however, the project became Nuria's alone, and she translated intensely, completing over two hundred poems chosen "arbitrarily" on the basis of her response to them—the ones that called to her (22 June 2005). Her approach was intrepid. Dickinson's punctuation would not necessarily be followed (399), and she would eschew Dickinson's use of the dash, perhaps, like Hayden Carruth, finding that particular usage so eccentric and so singular that, as Carruth commented, "it signifies next to nothing to all readers who have not heard the poems in her voice, i.e., all of us" (51).

In addition, most of the poems would be titled, as a way of "explaining my feeling about them" (22 June 2005). Amat's selections would include both poetry and prose, with the prose presented as prose poems or aphorisms formed from the "sublime phrases" in Dickinson's letters (22 June 2005). As Amat notes, the difference between Dickinson's letters and her poetry is "almost minimal . . . she had the habit of turning paragraphs of her letters into poems . . . and many letters contain the draft or outline of a poem" (*Amor* 399-400)—a lead that Amat

followed by writing a poem ("Estrellas" ["Stars"]) of her own on the basis of the five-line stanza ("Go thy great way") included in Dickinson's 1885 letter (L967) to Benjamin Kimball (*Amor* 316-17). The book would be divided into sections, with the selections grouped according to themes (for example, love, death, writing, solitude and exile, friendship and lovers, insanity); some of them correspond to the subject heading in Johnson's index, but many of them do not, and refer instead to Amat's own reading of Dickinson.

II. Error/Eros

When I first read Amat's translations, I found myself disapproving of them—and of her. That response puzzled me: I had never been a particularly devoted reader of Dickinson's poetry, I admired translators or poets who wrote what they or others referred to as versions or adaptations, and I was well aware that the difference between translations and versions was more a question of degree than definition, but Amat's versions disappointed, even annoyed me at first. Despite the admiration that she professed for Dickinson and her declared intention to adhere closely to the spirit of the original poems, even when she used them as points of departure for her own poems in Spanish, I sensed far more infidelity than love. How, I asked myself, could she speak of writing with Dickinson when her poems resembled Dickinson's so little? Not only had she titled the poems—something that Dickinson never did—she had used neither the dashes nor the capitalization that mark Dickinson's poetry, and she explained that her knowledge of English was quite limited. At times, I questioned whether she had thoroughly understood the poems, much less the aesthetics within which they arose.

Why my reading did not stop at annoyance and distrust, I'm not sure. Perhaps it was because of my friendship with Peter Bush, who asked my opinion of the translations, but I felt curious about Amat's work in spite of myself, and it occurred to me that I might probe through translation the love she professed for Dickinson's poems. I wondered what I might learn about Amat's bond with Dickinson if I translated some of her versions into English—not as an exercise in back translation, as a way of testing their accuracy, but as a way of finding out what she was up to, in an endeavor to discover whether she had indeed written poems in their own right. What might I learn if I thought of Amat's love as unfaithful but not faithless? What if her rewritings forced one to reconsider the meaning of "faith" in the context of both literature and translation?

I chose at random several poems and began to rough them out, at first deliberately ignoring Dickinson's originals, except occasionally and inadvertently,

when a well-known line or phrase came to mind unbidden. What I learned was that I had made an error about the ability of Amat's poems to spark a response in me. For as I began to translate, I experienced what Elaine Scarry, in On Beauty and Being Just, has called "a revisionary moment" (12) or "a correction" in one's perception with respect to beauty (13). According to Scarry, people often remember precisely times when they realize they have made an error, either by learning that "something held to be beautiful no longer deserves to be so regarded" (12), or by suddenly seeing beauty where they had not. Amat cites both a poem by Dickinson, in which Dickinson experiences a correction of the first type or "genre" (14), and also an instance of her own altered perception, in which she sees as beautiful an object in which she had not before perceived beauty. As Amat explains, instances such as the one she cites from her own experience prompt a physical response, in that they compel one to participate in beauty, to recreate it in some way, even if only by looking again and again. Often, however, the response involves far more than a repeated gaze, and Scarry cites examples of many forms of sensory response and physical gestures that bring imitations of beauty into being (4).

In my case, it would be impossible for me to identify an exact moment at which my disenchantment with Amat's poems was transformed to an appreciation that goaded me into persisting with my versions in English. I do, though, remember the context of my first translations, and I remember the physical sensation that accompanied my experience and how it contrasted with the setting in which it occurred. I was in Barcelona, in a rather shabby hotel room. Since I wanted to discuss Amat's work with Peter Bush, I picked up some photocopies of her poems that I had taken along with the thought of trying a few translations. The papers were spread out in front of me and, almost without thinking, as I read, I began to write. As I wrote, and I remember this clearly, I began to recognize and experience the tension in Amat's work that results from her interaction with Dickinson, and I realized that I was being led to respond to the poems, to reproduce them in some way-by rereading them, studying them, recreating them in English. Scribbling rapidly, I found myself recognizing subtleties that I'd not seen before: the predominance of o; the use of space instead of dashes; concision and stripped, simplified language, although in ways different from those in Dickinson's poems. Like Dickinson's poems, Amat's were often puzzling, and as I puzzled over them, it was hard to remain seated, so strong was the surge of energy released as I wrote-energy that I would refer to as erotic.

It's not easy to describe that energy, but for years I've thought about it often, and in recent years my thought has been centered most specifically in the context

of my work with Spanish writer Rosa Chacel.⁵ In Chacel's work, the erotic—as opposed to eroticism—is linked to what she calls the "hot zone" of writing (Porlán 71). In that zone, she explains, the confrontation with something that surpasses the limits of the human (which she refers to as "the superhuman") sparks "momentos genésicos" ("generative moments") that literally as well as figuratively move one both to think in a different way and to create—and that leads Chacel to define herself as an "erotic novelist" (71). Chacel's comments also resonate for me with other, more contemporary writers whose work I admire, for example, North American poet Anne Lauterbach. Like Chacel, Lauterbach has spoken of her desire for "a certain dumbstruck quality . . . where you are so surprised and thrown that things come unstuck in your own ways of being able to understand . . . linguistic events that sit on the edge between comprehension and incomprehension" (qtd. in Peterson). She says that her goal is to create that quality, which she refers to as "pleasure," or "a kind of erotics" - not "sexuality" - "that thing of being called, of being compelled" and, again like Chacel, she produces work that could be described as generative in the sense of both rethinking and acting on that thought-in fact, Lauterbach's images have been linked to "a process of thinking [itself] as eros" (Peterson).

I've quoted the passages about Chacel and Lauterbach because they fit well with my own experience and the articulation of that experience with respect to the effect that translation can have on me, and, I believe, on others. So that - and I want to stress this—whatever constitutes eros is a sort of energy, physical energy, an inner tension, a pulsing not unrelated to rhythm. In fact, ever since I began to translate expressive texts, I've experienced the drive to translate in terms of a physical sensation that represents (or images) itself in terms of blood, of veins. I'm reminded here that North American poet Diann Blakely speaks of a "musical language or verbal music" that "can be triggered by images . . . accompanied by the . . . blood-noise of our own hearts" (366), and I believe that she is writing about this same experience. Blakely's description, however, seems limited to me because I'm afraid that it might stop at the metaphorical. It has been my experience that the blood-noise of eros-and I am not speaking figuratively here, at least to the extent that it's possible not to speak figuratively about such things—is an inner dis-ease (remember that, although noise is not necessarily unpleasant, the root of "noise" is "nausea"). This blood-noise of eros is an often violent sensation (to use that word as Gilles Deleuze uses it with respect to Francis Bacon [34-35]) that prompts, forcibly, the responses to or imitations of beauty that Scarry describes.

III. Exercise

As I've worked with the "beauty" I learned to appreciate in Amat's translations, I've often recalled a comment I read about Amat's ability to discern and respond quickly "to form and the odd word she could identify on the page," even without necessarily knowing the language (Adams), and I've recognized the accuracy of that comment: Amat had indeed discerned something "formal," about Dickinson's work, but what she sensed and responded to involved form less in a literal sense than in the sense of an inner conformation to which Amat's work corresponded closely. Yes, the outward signs of formal correspondence such as the dashes or use of slant rhyme were absent, but the prevalence of assonance, in particular the prevalence of o; the use of blank space; the concise, stripped language; the aphoristic concision, often gave rise to intriguing and moving poems - poems closely related to Dickinson's, despite the lack of readily apparent similarity. Consider, for example, her translation of the words "wild nights" in "Wild nights - Wild nights!" (Fr269), which other translators have rendered as "noches tempestuosas" or "noches salvajes." Neither of those translations could be deemed inaccurate, but both suggest more about the outer than the inner weather condition. Amat, however, has written "noche loca," using two onesyllable words whose paired o's remind one of the paired i's in "wild nights" and whose referent is more than likely the speaker's inner experience, a wildness or abandon—the intensity of which is increased here, not diminished, by Amat's use of it in the singular, since it heightens the effect of assonance. Additional examples would include Amat's masculine death (muerte) in her translation of "Because I could not stop for Death - " (Fr479), in accordance with the English masculine personification as opposed to the Spanish death, which is a feminine; or "Dolor" ("Pain") and "Depresión" ("Depression"), her two very different, and differently titled versions of "Pain - has an Element of Blank - " (Fr760); and her two poems that share the same name ("Muerte en vida" [Death in Life]), one of which arose from Dickinson's "The first Day that I was a Life" (Fr823) and the other from her "I've dropped my Brain - My Soul is numb - " (Fr1088).

The ambiguity and multiplicity of versions in those last examples call to mind Adrienne Rich's observation that "wherever you take hold of her [Dickinson], she proliferates" (44), an observation that I've corroborated repeatedly as I've worked on my English versions of Amat's Spanish Dickinson. About those versions themselves, I'll make little or no comment, preferring to present them as examples of an exercise still in progress. I do, though, want to add a few words about "Lesion" ("Herida"), to explain its origin and what I believe is its significance as a sort of

ars poetica for Amat. One of the prose poems in *Amor infiel*, "Herida" appears in the section titled "Escribir" ("Writing"), which includes poems and prose poems, the latter based on Dickinson's correspondence with T. W. Higginson, related to the work of becoming a poet. Like all the prose poems, "Herida" is titled, but its source is not given. I chanced upon it, however, one afternoon while reading a letter written to Higginson in July 1862. "Men do not call the surgeon, to commend the Bone," Dickinson tells him, "but to set it, Sir, and fracture within, is more critical. . . . Perhaps you smile at me. I could not stop for that - My Business is Circumference" (L268).

At that last dash, the immediate resemblance between Dickinson's letter and Amat's prose poem ends. Or the resemblance seems to end, because the gap between Dickinson's "My Business is Circumference" and Amat's "I'll keep writing" may not be as great as it first appears, seeing that the principal purpose of Dickinson's letter is to request Higginson's instruction, in the belief that it will "take away" the affliction of her ignorance.6 In Amat's prose poem, that affliction or fracture has become "herida," or "wound," which Amat has stressed graphically by wounding or fracturing the word itself, as if cracking it open, rubbing in a bit of salt, as it were, might make possible an intensification of its rawness, draw out the meaning. In Amat's terms, this would be "writingwounded" (letraherida), and it suggests "writing" as both noun and verb, as an action performed in a state of affliction.7 In Dickinson's terms, it would be seen as a will to "Circumference," the "Business" of a poet who knows that circumference is acquired, if indeed it is acquired, through painful revision, the gradual soldering of an inner break that in this instance requires not one quick cure but the initiation of and commitment to a long process of realignment.

To represent in English Amat's representation of that realignment in Spanish, my choice has been "lesion," not only because "wound" cannot be wounded (split into smaller particles) without rendering it meaningless, but also because the change for rhetorical purposes reflects Amat's selection of "herida" as opposed to "fractura," a word that would have been more accurate in the conventional sense but would lack the ties to the complex network of allusions she establishes with "herida." "Lesion" will not permit that resonance in a translation of Amat's poems into English, but such resonance can be established in other ways. To force "identity" in translation is to risk the richer web of identifications to which translation can give rise if one accepts and affirms the method of working "slant" that Dickinson herself suggests in so many contexts. Consequently, the exercises below are presented as a provisional—and I want to stress that adjective—effort

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not to evaluate or explain Amat's emulative response to Emily Dickinson but to exemplify her "amor infiel" as an affectionate allegiance that is not lacking in faith.⁸ After all, as she might say, you can't love unfaithfully without having or having had some sort of faith, any more, whether writer, translator, or re-translator, than you can be overly respectful if you want to grow.

Translation Excercises

. . . for I had rather wince, than die. Men do not call the surgeon, to commend - the Bone, but to set it, Sir, and fracture within, is more critical. And for this, Preceptor, I shall bring you - Obedience - the Blossom from my Garden, and every gratitude I know. Perhaps you smile at me. I could not stop for that - My Business is Circumference - (L268)

Herida

Prefiero el dolor a la muerte.

Las personas no van al medico para que éste les alabe el cuerpo sino para que lo cure. La herida interna es la más peligrosa.

Tal vez te burles de mí. Pero no me importa. Seguiré escribiendo.

Lesion

I'd rather suffer than die.

People don't ask a doctor to praise their bodies but to heal them. The lesion within is the most dangerous.

You might laugh at me. I can't care. I'll keep writing.

There's a certain Slant of light, Winter Afternoons -That oppresses, like the Heft Of Cathedral Tunes -

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us -We can find no scar, But internal difference -Where the Meanings, are -

None may teach it - Any 'Tis the Seal Despair An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air -

When it comes, the Landscape listens -Shadows - hold their breath -When it goes, 'tis like the Distance On the look of Death -

(Fr320)

Tardes de invierno

Veo una luz rota en ciertas tardes de invierno que con su peso oprime anuncios de miseria. Herida celeste esparce sin rastro de metralla, pues sólo el alma es capaz de apreciar la diferencia interna de las cosas, nadie puede enseñarla ni explicarla, porque es melancholía, dolor lujoso que nos envía el aire. Cuando llega, pone al paisaje oído, sin respirar apenas, la sombra ya lo avisa; cuando se va, es una despedida que lleva en sí la mirada de la muerte.

Winter Afternoons

Splintered light I see

certain winter afternoons seems heavy, oppressively heralds unhappiness. A lesion celestial it spreads, leaving no trace of shrapnel, since only the soul discerns in things difference internal. of it no one can teach or tell, for this is melancholy, sublime sorrow sent of the air. When it comes. it has the landscape listening, breath bated, the shadow forewarns; when it goes, the farewell bears, deep, the look of death.

Heart! We will forget him! You and I - tonight! You may forget the warmth he gave -I will forget the light!

When you have done, pray tell me That I may straight begin! Haste! lest while you're lagging I remember him!

(Fr64)

Global Translation and Reception

Amor no correspondido Love Unrequited Love, we'll forget him, you'll see, Amor, vas a ver, lo olvidaremos, tú y yo, you and I, esta noche, tonight, tú you, his warmth. su calor, yo, his light. su luz. Cuando eso oscura, When that happens, Dímelo, tell me so immediately I too; y acto seguido lo haré yo: date prisa, hurry, I'm afraid pues temo que si tardas if you delay vuelva a acordarme de él. I'll remember.

> Pain - has an Element of Blank -It cannot recollect When it begun - Or if there were A time when it was not -

It has no Future - but itself -It's Infinite contain It's Past - enlightened to perceive New Periods - Of Pain.

(Fr760)

Dolor

Se parece el dolor a un gran espacio en blanco sin memoria de inicio ni rastro de huída.
Es presente y es futuro, contiene su infinito y su pasado, al saber que pronto han de llegar otros dolores huecos.

Pain

Pain seems a space vast and blank lacking memory of onset or trace of its flight. Pain is present and is future, holds its infinity and its past, knowing that soon must come more pains, hollow too.

Depresión

El dolor tiene algo blanco que recordar no puede cuando emezó, o si hubo un tiempo en el que dolor no había.

Futuro no tiene, sino ser siempre el mismo en su infinito espacio: es su pasado una liz capaz de distinguir dolores venideros.

Depression

There's a blank in pain. It cannot recall when pain began, or if once upon a time pain there was not.

No future for pain, to be ever unchanged, in its infinite space: pain's past enlightens, it can perceive pains to come.

Tell all the truth but tell it slant Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind -

(Fr1263)

Dime la verdad

Di toda la verdad, pero dila a medias: el efecto descansa en lo indirecto, la excesiva sorpresa de la verdad alumbra en damasía el ánimo medio enfermo.

Como el rayo se explica con un trueno, con sencilla claridad,

Tell Me the Truth

Tell truth whole, but just halfway: effect rests on the indirect, truth, with excessive surprise shines too strong for a soul half heartsick.

Lightning explains with a clap, its clarity simple,

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así la verdad debe alumbrarse poco a poco o quedas ciego. thus must truth shine its light bit by bit or you're left blind.

Notes

For my work on the impact that Emily Dickinson's poetry and prose has had on Nuria Amat, I am grateful to Kent State University's Research Council and Institute for Applied Linguistics, whose support helped make it possible for me to meet personally with Amat on several occasions and to present versions of this essay at meetings of the American Literary Translators Association and the MLA. I am also grateful to Indiana University's Lily Library and to Breon Mitchell for an invitation to discuss my work there and to the audiences at each presentation; their responses, even when skeptical, were invariably valuable to my thinking.

- For further discussion of Spanish-language translations of Dickinson's work, see Lisa Bradford, Marta Dahlgren, Fiona Mackintosh, Carmen Pérez Romero, and Harriet S. Stevens.
- 2. Annie Finch's gradual move from a relationship to Dickinson as mother to the "combination of intimacy and separation, respect and challenge" that she defines as "father" (36) is not dissimilar from what I have termed emulation on the part of Amat. It is also interesting to note in this context that Dickinson too practiced a sort of emulative translation of "printed passages from Swinburne, Emerson, and Herbert into her own 'peculiar handwriting,'" a practice that "attested both to her desire to stay inside the source and to sign the work as her own" (Werner 50).
- Marta E. Altisent (151) describes Amat's pieces as glosas (glosses), but I don't find that term appropriate, except perhaps in the cases of a few of Amat's "translations."
- Although the stanza in Dickinson's letter also figures in the Collected Poems (Fr1673), Amat has worked with it as a prose poem, which she has not associated with one of the poems.
- See for example, my own "Translating as a Body" and my introduction to Dream of Reason.
- 6. Amat does work with "My Business is Circumference," in the prose poem that precedes "Herida," titled "Curación" ("Treatment" or "Cure"). It opens with the line "Mi problema es circunferencia" ("My problem is circumference"), with "problem" suggesting, provocatively, both affliction and the endeavor to overcome or surpass it, since the speaker suffers from a lack of knowledge or skill that she thinks learning to write might remedy or cure.
- 7. In her discussion of Amat's fiction, which I read after writing my comments about "Herida" and an 1885 letter of Dickinson's (L967), Nuria Capdevillla-Argüelles describes letraherida as "a privileged, and also damned, creative state and literary pulse" (64) of "continuous refererentiality" (63). This description seems apt to me with respect to Amat's fiction and, in particular, the essays in her Letra herida. In her translations of Dickinson, however, which were written more recently, Amat has pushed her exploration of that state further, enacting it as well as explaining it.
- This essay, in the sense of both article and attempt, is part of a larger project still in progess, and the "translations" of Amat's work are included as similarly tentative examples of my work with hers.

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