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The limitless kinds of love which form the backbone of Abelló's body of poetry since the publication of *Vida diària* (Everyday Life, 1963), by way of *El blat del temps* (The Wheat of Time, 1986), *Foc a les mans* (Fire in my Hands, 1990), *L'arrel de l'aigua* (The Root of Water, 1995) and *Són màscares que m'emprovo...* (They are Masks I Try on..., 1995), through to *Dins l'esfera del temps* (Inside the Sphere of Time, 1998), *Memòria de tu i de mi* (Memory of You and Me, 2006) and *El fred íntim del silenci* (The Intimate Cold of Silence, 2009), are recovered and rewritten in *Fifty Love Poems* (2014).

In pages of development attached firmly to a double self, the concepts of fidelity and freedom flow with impunity. The uninhibited voices of the poet and the translator are on a journey where they coincide and consciously come face to face in this anthology, which not only draws in cultures but also comes in close contact with the double and indissociable intellectual activity which the author carried to the limit throughout her life.

A fifty-year journey dedicated to writing is a good many years. Most of a lifetime. The book *Fifty Love Poems* is, to my understanding - I shall try to map it out in this way - the culmination of a passion for words. There are fifty poems (neither more nor less) which Montserrat Abelló wanted to collect in what is her only complete volume translated into English. To be precise, this collection of poems can be considered a reflection on relationships which exist between writing, creation and translation: it's an act of rereading, rewriting, transference, a journey.

Permit me to return to the title, the numerical reference of which should not go unnoticed. I in no way believe that the number of poems gathered is a chance or accidental component of the book. Abelló, with her honing instinct, curious eye and methodical character, scrutinised every last detail of her whole body of work. The titles of her collections and those of her translated works, as well as every word written, are selected with sharpness and rigour. Here is each of all the years lived with pen in hand, reunited in these pages of fifty compositions, which recall the memory of and welcome the varied, intense and paradoxical experience of love.

In fact, here the voice of Montserrat Abelló recaptures a cluster of verses written during a given time, published between 1963 and 2009, the majority gathered in *Al cor de les paraules. Obra poètica 1963-2002* (At the Heart of Words. Poetical Works 1963-2002, 2002). At the same time, though, she revitalises them. She gives them a new life in another language. This is why it is a unique and relevant book. Poetry which she herself translates into English; a language which, like life, she has made her own. However, translating means having the ability and legitimacy to carry it out. And the author from Tarragona was fully aware of her ability. There is no doubt that in this case the self-translator has the privilege of allowing herself the freedom to rake and (re)elaborate her own writing.

From the outset, let's remember that we are indebted to her for translations into Catalan of authors of the stature of Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Margaret Atwood and Adrienne Rich, to name a few. With the anthology *Cares a la finestra. Vint dones poetes de parla anglesa del segle xx* (Faces at the

Window. *Twenty English-Speaking Women Poets of the Twentieth Century*, 1993), she not only brings a breath of fresh air to Catalan literature and endows it with new and subversive foreign feminine voices. She also initiates a dialogue with *the other woman*, or, more accurately, *other women*. She translates them to open up her space to *the other woman*, to let herself be impregnated by the stories of *the other women*; in short, to reinscribe the individual spaces of so many foreign women in her own territory. So now, in this collection of love poems, the crossover to another language is perpetuated by the same author.

Therefore, self-translation becomes an exercise in introspection which is complex and intimate but also extraordinary and which, in the case of Montserrat Abelló, reaches the highest point of expectations and challenges of creation by the poet-translator or translator-poet. Within the framework of translation studies, the phenomenon that is the recent collection of Abelló's self-translations offers us new territories of identity to explore. With these verses self-translated into English, we witness as much an act of rewriting, as an incarnation of individual meaning and identity. That is, a reformulation and readjustment and a reconciliation with the original and true self. By translating her own work, the poet can reread it with the benefit of perspective and, as a result, can regenerate her own writing.

If the sphere of poetry is a blind and absolute land, confined by the imaginary and the irrational, where words contain no more passion than the inexpressible, then I wonder what the poet-translator seeks - what Montserrat Abelló seeks - when she decides to self-translate? Poetry has been defined as that which *is lost* in translation. Here we have the reformulation of this maxim which gives us, perhaps only partially, the solution to the puzzle. Today we know that for Abelló poetry is, to a large degree, that which *is found* in self-translation. If we accept that poetry is the most conscious facet of writing, and that it is the text or poem which defines the poet, we should concede, in turn, that it is the translator who writes and controls the translation. With *Fifty Love Poems*, Abelló embarks on a new journey of creative self-analysis. A textual journey of self-discovery.

This bilingual edition brings the poet and translator face to face. The original and the translation on facing pages. Two spaces within the same space; that of creation, ultimately. The verses in Catalan and the self-translations in English engage in dialogue and play a game of mirrors. Reading them in the two languages, firstly in one and then in the other, the sensation is both the same and different. Each poem is a variant of the other which it complements. Two voices merge at a crossroads of exchanges, stand-offs and negotiations. For we cannot lose sight of the fact that translation is a space of possibility and welcome, but also of contradiction. Echoes, repetitions, duplications, divisions... which transcend the original and break the boundaries and limits of context and, on the rebound, defy the status of text, of context, of the reader and of the author. Montserrat Abelló establishes a magnificent intertextual, interlinguistic and intercultural dialogue with herself. As I said, the limits become blurred on paper and only the words are distinguished - whether original or translated - as the conductor wire of love.

When all is said and done, the voice or voices of Montserrat Abelló are carried through these verses by the words. Through words she has written and translated her existence. Mario Benedetti states that it is through feelings, but thanks to and by means of words, that we become conscious of ourselves: "Los sentimientos nos otorgan nombre, y con ese nombre somos lo que somos" / "Feelings grant us a name, and with this name we are what we are", - says the Uruguayan writer. Both poet and translator shed themselves of all that is unnecessary, entangle themselves in seemingly simple words, and in images which depict the complexity of desire and the paradox of being unable to speak without the presence of the loved one. The words and translated words of the Catalan author carry folds where stories hide: they jangle, drag out sediments, come loaded with tenderness, musicality, fears, release smells and tastes of interior spaces they have inhabited and of places through which they have passed. Abelló lives in words. She loves them so strongly because words have allowed her

to love life. And, above all, because words, as she has often reminded us, have a heart and beat like life itself.

Translated by Anna Barlow Ferrater