A Shelleyan story about incest: a translational study of Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*

El incesto en la obra de Mary Shelley: un estudio traductológico de Mathilda

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ABSTRACT

Mary Shelley's Mathilda is a profoundly personal work. It features incest as the central theme, a subject that remains vastly understudied within the field of translation studies. This article seeks to fill the gap in scholarly studies by analysing the lexical depiction of incest through a corpus-based methodological approach. By utilising tools from corpus linguistics, we aim to investigate the vocabulary used in both the source English text and the selected target language translation, which is Spanish, to identify the linguistic challenges that Shelley's emotionally charged language presents for translators. Furthermore, our wish is to contribute to the interdisciplinary conversation at the intersection of lexical semantics, corpus studies, and translation studies, offering new insights into the translation of controversial topics in literature and understudied literary works.

KEYWORDS: translation studies; corpus studies; incest theme; lexical semantics.

RESUMEN

Mathilda, de Mary Shelley, es una obra con un profundo bagaje personal. Presenta como tema central el incesto, que cuenta con escasos estudios dentro de la disciplina de la traducción. Este artículo busca contribuir a la investigación académica al analizar la representación léxica del incesto con un enfoque metodológico basado en el uso de corpus. Al usar herramientas de la lingüística de corpus, nuestro objetivo es evaluar el vocabulario empleado en el texto original en inglés y en el texto meta en español para identificar los desafíos lingüísticos que el lenguaje de Shelley presenta para quien traduce. En última instancia, buscamos contribuir a la discusión interdisciplinaria que existe en la intersección entre la semántica léxica, los estudios de corpus y los estudios de traducción, ofreciendo nuevas perspectivas sobre la traducción de temas provocativos y de obras literarias poco estudiadas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: estudios de traducción; estudios de corpus; incesto; semántica léxica.

1. Introduction

There are few literary themes that evoke as much unease in the reader as incest. Although the reader is aware of its presence in both literature and history (a notable example being Tutankhamun's marriage), the likelihood of it happening is sufficiently unappealing. While it certainly is not a literary theme that has gone unexploited, its reception has never been, nor is ever, favourable.

An example of this case is Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* (1959/2005). This Romantic work (Rajan, 1994: 53; Bunnell, 1997: 93) was the result of multiple incest-themed literary pieces that intrigued the author. Todd (1991: xxii) points specifically at Byron's *Manfred* (1817), Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam* (1818) and *The Cenci* (1819), and Alfieri's *Mirra* (1792). Whereas these works by other authors had received considerable fame and attention, the public's view of *Mathilda*, or rather, the lack of attention to it, ultimately rendered the story uninteresting: splendidly written, yes, but featuring a rather unpleasant and unnatural theme (Gisborne & Edwards, 1951: 43-44). Even though the incest theme was not new (Himes, 1997: 115-116), the story's editor, William Godwin, decided against publishing it. Harpold (1989: 63-66) conjectured that Godwin recognised himself and Shelley in the incestuous story, father and daughter as they were. This mirroring and its connotations could have been part of the reason why Godwin discarded the story for publication (Chatterjee, 2007: 37), as well as why he categorised it as "disgusting and detestable", and required a "preface to prepare the minds of the readers" (Gisborne & Edwards, 1951: 44), should it ever be published.

Mary Shelley never ceased in her quest to have *Mathilda* returned to her, asking Gisborne, the family friend who had sent the copy to Godwin, to mediate for her on several occasions (Marshall, 2011: 360). Mary Shelley and William Godwin, her editor, and father, would never fully agree, and, after time and tragedies, Shelley lost interest in publishing this novella. We use the term 'novella' to refer to *Mathilda*, not only as its length is greater than a short story that does not reach the extension of a novel (Scofield, 2006: 4), but also due to its intensity, foreshadowing, and its novelty character, which is presented to the reader through a "detailed method" (Good, 1977: 209-211). Although she would not reject it, she would lament the story's foreshadowing of her own life (Shelley, 1987: 442). Two centuries later, however, the tale has

at last achieved the recognition its creator sought. Written between 1819 and 1820, the novella had to endure over a hundred years before being published, garnering only a few reviews during Shelley's lifetime from close friends and family. The genuine reviews came only after its eventual publication in 1959 by Elizabeth Nitchie.

This article will focus on *Mathilda* and its translation into Spanish. First, we will delve into the literary tradition surrounding the incest theme and the linguistic depiction of this theme as presented in Shelley's narrative, as well as a brief comment on the Spanish translation of the text, published under the same title by Editorial Cátedra in Madrid in 2018, by Juan Antonio Molina Foix. Second, we will elaborate on the requirements that the Spanish translation had to meet in order to be considered for this analysis. After that, we carry out a comparative analysis of the vocabulary related to this theme that appears in the original text and in the chosen translation. This analysis aims to determine how the incest theme of the novella has been translated into Spanish. Lastly, we will identify the differences between the English and Spanish terms from a quantitative perspective. In other words, we will focus on the potential loss of thematic language by using statistics and numerical results, rather than assessing the qualitative aspects of the translation.

The goal of this study is to determine whether any incest-related terminology has been lost during the translation process, considering both individual linguistic representatives (i.e. specific words) and contextual connotations associated with the theme. To accomplish this, we will analyse the similarities and differences between the incest-themed corpus of the source text (ST onwards) and that of the target text (TT onwards).

2. Research questions

In this article, we will analyse the original text (ST) and its translation (TT), aiming to create a corpus with both texts. This corpus will compile terms associated with the story's theme, that is, incest. We will examine the representation of the incest theme in detail through the story's lexical elements and the manner in which these have been translated to assess if any thematic language has been lost during the translation process.

We ought to examine the three initial research questions that arise before the analysis: (i)

Does the compilation of a glossary with the lexical terms related to the theme and extracted from the corpus showcase the incest that the author implies?; (ii) Does the Spanish translation from Molina Foix accurately convey this literary theme as seen from the corpus analysis?; and (iii) What insights can we gather from comparing the two texts of the corpus? These are the questions that we will address in this article. The first steps we must take are to provide context for the story, speaking from both a historical and literary perspective of the original text and its theme. Regarding the translated text, we will examine the circumstances under which it was published.

The primary objective is to analyse the corpus regarding the incest-related language, to discuss the similarities and differences between the two texts. Once these have been examined, we will measure the presence of this theme in the ST and TT. From a quantitative perspective, the analysis results will be presented using statistics and the number of occurrences. Subsequently, we will comment on specific lexical elements associated with the theme.

3. The story at hand

Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* is a controversial work. It sparked debate upon its initial editing, when William Godwin, Shelley's father, editor, and the work's first reviewer and critic, declared it unfit for publication. The debate intensified further upon its release and has remained contentious for years since. It is therefore not unexpected that its theme could spark debate in academic disciplines, such as translation studies.

The novella displays themes that spark debate like incest, solitude, suicide, and savagery. The first theme, incest, is startling, and it may have been even more so for William Godwin, who prevented the publication of the novella for many years. Shelley and Godwin's father-daughter bond has been compared to the story's filial relationship as if it were a letter dedicated to the parent, an echoing that Nitchie (Shelley, 1959/2005: 11) explains in the introduction to her edition of *Mathilda*. Nonetheless, he recognised that it was not a novel subject in literature, as he hailed from the Age of Enlightenment and had studied classics like *Elektra* (ca. 420–410 B.C.E./2008) and *Oedipus* (ca. 429/1984). We ask ourselves whether he felt intimidated by the public's reaction, and if he was concerned about both their reputations. As noted by Kinnucan (2011: para. 6), this thematic feature "places the agent too close to the victim", in a forced

proximity that decidedly made Godwin cautious.

Thus, the book stayed unpublished for more than a hundred years. Shelley would not reencounter this manuscript for the remainder of her life. However, in the initial months following its creation, she inquired repeatedly about the publishing status of *Mathilda*, as the work appeared to be in a state of uncertainty with her father (Marshall, 2011: 340). Nevertheless, years later she would come to regret crafting what she perceived was an ominous tale (Shelley, 1987: 442); a story that not only included such sombre themes but also served as an outlet for her sorrowful, grieving heart following the loss of her two children, and that would always be associated with the passing of her husband, which occurred months after the novella was completed. Her remorse must have been immense, and she ultimately ceased requesting her father's return or the release of the novella. Even though she had felt a sense of pride regarding this work for a period, it also served as a significant reminder of the tragedies in her life.

In 1959, one hundred and thirty-nine years after its completion, *Mathilda* was at last published, far away from the places where it was crafted and edited, as well as the nation that was meant to witness its release. Alongside a critical introduction to the piece, Elizabeth Nitchie edited and published the story under the University of North Carolina Press.

3.1.   Juan Antonio Molina Foix's 2018 Spanish translation

The Spanish translation of *Mathilda* suffered the same long-awaited release as the original did. Before the writing of this paper and the linguistic analysis involved in it, the common assumption was that there existed only a single Spanish translation of *Mathilda*. However, following further investigation in online bibliographic sources, the real number of Spanish translations increased. These only started to emerge recently, during the 2010s.

Within the Spanish-speaking community, the translation of underrecognised narratives remains largely unexplored. In some instances, the works may be translated soon after their release, within the first few years following publication, or, conversely, this could happen many years later, as an attempt by a student or researcher to rekindle interest in the author. This is the case for *Mathilda*. We can find a professional translation into Spanish by Anne-Marie Lécouté, published in 2011 by Nórdica, which has been reissued multiple times; the most recent

edition was published in August 2023. Additionally, a translation from 2022 was carried out by university students (Helena Bailach Adsuara, Carla Fonte Sánchez, Lorena González de la Torre, and Susana López Millot). JPM Ediciones published this translation under the guidance of Josep Marco Borillo, a Translation Studies professor at the Universitat Jaume I in Castellón, Spain. The translation we will be analysing here is the latest professional translation available at the time of our research, which was Juan Antonio Molina Foix's, published in Madrid by Editorial Cátedra in 2018. The two criteria that the translation needed to fulfil to be eligible for this paper were (a) to have been carried out by a professional and (b) to be contemporary with the start of this study, which was November 2022.

The chosen translation may have been an effort to revive an unpopular story that, following its English release, might have faced further neglect from the audience. Juan Antonio Molina Foix, the translator for the 2018 Spanish version, offers a comprehensive explanation in the opening sections about the publication of the original text, the challenges faced by Nitchie, the editor of the 1959 version, and the texts that influenced the translator's Spanish text (2018: 9-60). An extensive investigative effort by Molina Foix, the translation he presents following this introduction paved the way for future projects related to this novella in the Spanish publishing market.

4. The incest theme in literature

To understand impact of incest in the public sphere and in Shelley's work, we must first examine the historical evolution of incest as a literary theme or device across different historical eras. One is the literary era of Ancient Greece and Rome, characterised by their mythological tradition, and with far more depictions of this theme than any other period until Shelley's time; the other is contemporary literature from the 14th century through to Shelley's creations. The distinction into periods has a straightforward reasoning: works more distant in time from Shelley would certainly influence her narrative, but not to the same extent as those nearer to her era.

While we lack direct evidence that Shelley read Greek tragedies in her youth, she was probably aware of their existence due to the extensive library her father had access to, which she also benefited from (Vargo, 2016: 26). In the first era, we can locate Greek mythical works that feature incest. The list of works with this feature is quite extensive. For example Zeus, the

god of sky and thunder, frequently engaged in this behaviour with his divine relatives. However, a divine element is present in these narratives, which is absent in *Mathilda.* That is why we will refer to Greek tragedies that involve incestuous ties, such as the aforementioned *Elektra* (ca. 420–410 B.C.E./2008), in her modern reinvention (Olive, 2019), and *Oedipus*, especially in Sophocles' set of plays (ca. 429/1984), which will provide us with a more accurate assessment of human nature. These are the most well-known stories from the Greek tradition that feature incest, with the first being father-daughter or brother-sister, and the second mother-son. The impact of these tragedies on literature is quite enduring; yet, they are not the only depictions, as lesser-known works like *Phaedra* (Seneca, ca. 1 C.E./2017) and *Thyestes* (Seneca, ca. 1 C.E./2022) also explore incest. Himes (1997: 116-118) identifies Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (ca. 8 C.E./2004) as another significant source of Roman heritage for Shelley's *Mathilda*: Shelley's protagonist's and Ovid's Myrrha's father-daughter relationships are described as unnatural. The main focus during the narration falls on to the aftermath of the incestuous love rather than the upcoming event, unlike Alfieri's *Mirra* (1792).

Moving forward in time, and considering that there is no certainty regarding her connection to Greek works in her youth, we find sufficient evidence that she was aware of Greek myths and Roman works in her adulthood (Marshall, 2011: 111), becoming thus acquainted with the myth's reinterpretation in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (ca. 1320–1321/2009), as well as Alfieri's *Mirra*, both of which were popular during Shelley's time in continental Europe. Additionally, she translated several of these adaptations (Marshall, 2011: 221), which made her well-versed about the narratives and the themes. Out of other contemporary literature to her times, Todd (1991: xvi) mentions one narrative that stands out exceptionally, despite the absence of the incest motif in it: *The Cave of Fancy* (2020), written by none other than Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft. As noted by Thorslev (1961: 41-58), other incest-themed works released around the same period as Shelley's tale include her spouse's works, as well as Walpole's *The Mysterious Mother* (1768/1791). Nonetheless, we must keep in mind a minor but relevant aspect that sets Shelley's work apart from previous incest-themed pieces. *Mathilda* portrays an unfulfilled and implied incestuous relationship; however, the protagonist neither acknowledges, addresses, nor condones it.

5. Wording on incest and its translation: mentions of trauma

Some view Shelley's language as eccentric, full of literary devices that draw the readers into the story while simultaneously distancing them from the author. This is what Barbour (1997: 111) suggests when she states that Shelley's writing is a medley of various literary techniques and plots, which, consequently, render the language unsuitable for non-native English speakers. Allen (1997: 183) also supports the notion that non-English speakers may often misinterpret Shelley's language, criticising that her works have been translated in excess. Concerning this assessment, and mainly due to the complexities of Shelley's language, Schönfelder (2013: 164) claims that *Mathilda* specifically "demands a multi-layered approach that moves the critical emphasis from biographical to textual levels". This argues that the language in *Mathilda* poses challenges not only for those unfamiliar with the Anglophone tradition but also for researchers, who require thorough examination of the text prior to translation due to the literary and non-literary aspects that may confuse both the reader and the translator.

Schönfelder highlights another element of Shelley's language concerning this novella, namely its connection to trauma. The presence of trauma transforms the language Shelley employs into a melancholic outpour, blending fictional and non-fictional elements, as previously observed due to the biographical circumstances that influenced the creation of this piece. Thus, trauma affects the readability of the text, not only from the incestuous events that Mathilda experiences, but also from the traumatic events that shaped how Shelley narrates the story (Carlson, 2008: para. 8), as the impact of those experiences altered how Shelley chose the language and the connotations that it carried. Mathilda's decision to narrate her experiences works as an uncovering of her trauma (Winckles & Rehbein, 2017: 267), exteriorizing her thoughts to the reader, analysing the events and realising then the negative implications of her father's declaration. Schönfelder goes further on to describe that Shelley uses specific terms that evoke the trauma that lingers in the background of the tale, such as "unnatural" or "unspeakable", also mentioned by Ford (1995: 66). These terms perfectly reflect the unnatural and unspeakable trauma of the central theme, incest, and in a sense, the unspeakable trauma of losing close family members, another experience that Shelley and Mathilda share. This language poses challenges for the translator, as the translation process for trauma involves reliving such experiences, in a bid to reconstruct the identity or as a medium to transmit experiences (Logie,

2020: 20). Therefore, the translator is situated in a compromising position, whence the choice is to become either involved with or distanced from the traumatic events (Pagni, 2020: 35). These are valid positions towards the translation of trauma, as long as the message reaches the audience. The translator might transfer the message in the way it was intended, by their active implication in the events, or might diminish the weight of the traumatic story by choosing to separate their neutral voice from the author's traumatic voice. More on this topic can be found in Savchenkova's work (2024).

5.1. The analysis

The first step of the linguistic study has been the extraction of terms with any regard to the incest theme, or even family terms with incest undertones, from both the source text (ST) and the translated text (TT). Therefore, we have first extracted what we refer to as "family-related language", moving from a bigger to a smaller lexical category, which undoubtedly aided in reaching any, as referred in this analysis, "incest-related language". To achieve this, we have utilised Sketch Engine, an online tool that provides a comprehensive range of analytical options for text processing. By using Sketch Engine, we have been able to extract terms in a word list format, which has allowed us to select and study the most frequently used and repeated terms. All to examine the texts from a quantitative perspective, which, as Chesterman and Williams (2002: 65) point out, has the aim to study the generality of a feature and the regular or irregular character it may possess.

Image 1. Example of the ST's word list provided by Sketch Engine

24	him	194		74	die	60		124	take	36		174	lovely	27	
25	this	187		75	come	60		125	world	36		175	under	27	
26	all	187		76	before	59		126	few	35		176	idea	27	
27	by	176		77	its	58		127	many	35		177	part	26	
28	when	171		78	death	57		128	thought	35		178	desire	26	
29	her	168		79	than	55		129	let	35		179	form	26	
30	which	151		80	make	54		130	soul	35		180	away	26	
31	your	144		81	become	54		131	passion	35		181	thus	26	
32	will	140		82	time	52		132	like	35		182	another	26	
33	would	135		83	some	52		133	any	34		183	sympathy	26	
34	do	135		84	despair	52		134	first	34		184	indeed	26	
35	no	134		85	upon	51		135	voice	33		185	among	25	
36	if	125		86	again	51		136	about	33		186	seek	25	

As this is part of a more exhaustive study, terms have been included in the resulting corpus through a series of lots. This means that the texts have been processed multiple times to extract all terms. After the extraction and assessment of terms, we needed to compute them by word families to accurately count the total frequency, as standalone terms from the same word family would appear on the list at different intervals, and our interest lied in all terms stemming from the same lemma. For example, *passion* (*pasión*) and *passionately* (*apasionadamente*), the first appearing at the very beginning of the word list, and the second several pages later, although both are from the same word family, and in the case of the novella, they are sometimes related to the incestuous love in the story.

Image 2. Two terms from the same word family at different levels of the ST's word list

This issue can also be found in the TT, with an added difficulty. Sketch Engine does not recognize the accentuation of words, which is characteristic in Spanish. Thus, the task of finding terms stemming from the same lemma in this language had to be mindful of the accentuation, so as not to miss the inclusion of any terms.

Image 3. Two terms from the same word family at different levels of the TT's word list

The next step in studying the language Shelley uses involves a detailed examination of the language related to incest. Upon obtaining the word lists from Sketch Engine containing all the terms, we needed to filter them by their connotation and significance to the theme. Therefore, we filtered out any lemma, or standalone term, which lacked connection to the incest theme. The first categorisation of family-related language helped in identifying some terms, although, as will be discussed further on in the article, not all terms and word families in the incest-related language derive from the family-related language, as the cases of *passion* and *passionately* have

helped in exemplify.

An example of this filtering process would be the lemma of *child*, which appears 29 times in the ST, but it is not always associated with the underlying incest theme. This happens half of the time, meaning 15 times. Therefore, while the lemma pertains to family *and* incest, we only examine the prevalence of incest-suggestive meaning. When does this take place? In the case of *child*, the term stemming from that lemma, some of these statements occur as Mathilda's father confesses his hidden romantic intentions toward Mathilda herself: "If I enjoyed […] a rapture usually excluded from the feelings of a parent towards his child, yet no uneasiness, no wish, no casual idea awoke me to a sense of guilt" (Shelley, 1959/2005: 70). As the context presents, Mathilda's father is aware that his emotions for her should have instilled in him guilt, as the feelings he held towards her were not ordinary. The term *child* here has been tainted with the incestuous love that Mathilda's father has developed.

In the case of the TT, the *child* lemma carries an incestuous connotation a total of 9 times out of the 20 instances it appears in the text. The primary issue here is that these findings may not be conclusive due to the interchangeable use of terms such as *daughter* and *child*, which in Spanish are *hija* and *niña*. The exchangeability of these two terms, especially in the TT case, reflects less of a familial relationship, and more of a patronising relationship when the term *niña* is employed. To quote the same instance, in the TT appears: "si disfrutaba de […] un éxtasis que normalmente se excluye de los sentimientos de un padre hacia su hija, sin embargo, ninguna inquietud, ningún deseo, ninguna idea fortuita, despertaban en mí el menor sentimiento de culpabilidad" (Shelley, 2018: 180). As can be observed, the translator has chosen the term *hija* here, while later on we read: "Si después de esta vida se me permite volver a veros, niña mía, si la pena puede purificar el corazón, el mío estará limpio" (Shelley, 2018: 181), whereas the ST reads: "My child, if after this life I am permitted to see you again, if pain can purify the heart, mine will be pure" (Shelley, 1959/2005: 72). In this case, Mathilda's father is referring to a possibility to return to their familial bonds, pure from the tainted nature of his newfound love. For that, in the TT, the term *niña* implies a sweetness to his words and a return to the power dynamics of a relative, and not of a lover. These quotes exemplify how, in the ST, an in-depth analysis is required to establish if the incestuous connotation is there, and how in the TT, the translator has chosen to differentiate this connotation for the reader.

Regardless of which translation has been chosen for each ST term, if we contrast *child* and *daughter* with *niña* and *hija,* we can also determine that there is a slight loss of appearance in the TT, that is, a reduction in appearance, as shown in table 1 below. This would require an in-depth analysis of this reduction, on the context in which it occurred, and on the potential reasoning behind it, while also looking into other possible instances within the texts; nonetheless, this is an additional step not covered in this article for lack of space, though it is promising for future investigations.

Table 1. Number of appearances of two different incest-related terms in the ST and the TT

	ST number of appearances		TT number of appearances	
	Child lemma	Daughter lemma	Niña lemma	Hija lemma
Incest-related language	15	9	9	13

Once we successfully filtered out the lexical elements related to the incest theme, we totalled the frequencies, which we then converted into percentages for a clearer understanding of the importance this topic holds in the text. In doing so, we can assess the weight of family-related language and incest-related language, from the ST and the TT, and compare the results. The percentages of this family-related language are: in the ST, 1.70% out of the whole text for terms related to family, while in the TT, it holds a mere 1.21%. In the case of the incest-related language, we found a 1.04% in the ST and 0.40% in the TT.

Table 2. Percentage of appearance of family-related language in the ST and the TT

	ST	TT
Family-related	1.70%	1.21%
Incest-related	1.04%	0.40%

The first observation is that there is no doubt that an underlying and soft-spoken theme in the story is incest. Moreover, the language employed is so surreptitious that it hardly leaves a trace. The author discusses incest with profound caution, perhaps to prevent a poor reception of the novella. However, despite its presence, it decidedly remains a linguistically-evasive and

hidden topic. The second observation is the evident significant difference in appearance between the ST and the TT, which makes us wonder and opens new possibilities of study on where the incest-related language that is lost in the translation has gone.

Notwithstanding these results, there is an essential step to undertake, namely, the additional processing of the texts. Even though the texts underwent processing in the programme multiple times, we need to refrain from assuming that the initial results are the outcomes. Further reading, particularly in context, is necessary to uncover underrecognised incest-related language, as it has been proven here.

5.2.   Exploring further thematic elements in the translation

As mentioned before, not all terms in the incest-related language derive from the family-related language. Some terms belong to the incest-related language as they characterise the trauma, the romantic declaration, or the suicidal results. Therefore, their connection to family is none. Right from the summary of the Spanish translation, which serves as the first exposure to the TT, we can already discern some of these terms that evoke the incest theme of the novella but are not related to the family language:

> Novela melancólica por antonomasia (lluvia, desesperación, sueños, muerte, pasiones, soledad en un brezal yermo), 'Mathilda' explora la naturaleza del pesar, el poder del amor, la destrucción como consecuencia de desafiar a la naturaleza, el perverso poder del deseo. (Shelley, 2018: back cover). [A rather characteristic gloomy novella (we find rain, despair, dreams, death, passion, loneliness in the barren heaths), 'Mathilda' explores the nature of sorrow, the power of love, ruin as a consequence of defying nature, the perverse power of desire]

Upon examining the corpus of the TT, the terms that appear within the parentheses in the previous quote prove to be used frequently by the author in the novella. Perhaps, the most relevant terms associated with the incest theme that are present in the quote are *naturaleza* and *deseo*.

Image 4. Number of appearances of standalone terms *naturaleza* and *deseo* in the TT word list

| 219 naturaleza | 19 ••• | 352 deseo | 11 ••• |

Notwithstanding these numbers, we must remember that not all occurrences will have an incestuous connotation. For example, in the case of the lemma of *deseo*, its final number of occurrences is thirty-seven in the TT (the lemma for *desire*, on the ST, totals to twenty-six occurrences). However, only ten occurrences are related to the incest theme in the TT (conversely, twenty in the ST). The incest-related connotation of the *deseo* term stemming from the *deseo* lemma can be seen in this excerpt from the novella where Mathilda's father voices the turn of his feelings from merely paternal to incestuous: "¿Era censurable mi amor? Si lo era, lo ignoraba; solo deseaba aquello que poseía" (Shelley, 2018: 180). In the ST, we read "Was my love blameable? If it was I was ignorant of it; I desired only that which I possessed" (Shelley, 1959/2005: 70). As can be observed, in the TT the unlawful love the father feels towards the daughter is not represented in *deseaba*, as there is no incestuous connotation in that verb itself. Rather, it is the *censurable* and *poseía*. The first word reveals that the father has started to question if his fatherly love might be unnatural, while the second word, *poseía*, showcases the obsessive and possessive feelings he has developed for Mathilda. In the ST, *blameable* reveals a sense of guilt not present in the TT, as well as an absence of that questioning of the nature of his love which *censurable* possesses. Therefore, the cases where *deseo* and *desire* carry an incestuous connotation are those wherein the context must be analysed as well.

Deseo, or *desire*, is the main theme in this novella—pure, simple, pristine desire for a family that Mathilda has never had. Mathilda and Mary Shelley both yearn for better family circumstances, yet both face rejection. Whereas Shelley's desire ends unfulfilled due to her family's early demise, Mathilda's desire for family incites an unprecedented and immoral desire from her sole close relative. Her childhood yearning for a calm life beside a resurgent parent is violently disrupted by an unnatural and incestuous desire from that very figure she longed for. The resulting desire left in Mathilda is more straightforward: to be left in peace, to be left alone. No longer with family, she must endure the solitude she has brought upon herself and the desire for peace and closure. Her need for familial love changes into a longing for death following the tragic events.

Naturaleza (*nature*) evokes the warm embrace the novella's protagonist occasionally experiences, which at times transforms into a cold prison. This nature is ever-present, characterised not just in its simplest forms, but also in a familial relationship, rather than a

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missing mother figure: Edelman-Young (2002: 143) notes that it symbolises both Nature and Diana, the protagonist's deceased mother, and thus, Mother Nature. Shelley and Mathilda experience similar beginnings in life: solitude following their mothers' deaths and an absent parent, as Molina Foix (2018: 13-14) points out in the introduction to the Spanish translation, resulting in a persistent yearning for family companionship. At times, this nature comforts and nurses Mathilda, a lonely child, while at other times it chastises her for her incestuous and innocent desire.

Pesar is another interesting term related to the theme as well. *Pesar* is no other than sorrow or regret. Shelley would speak about this feeling after writing the novella, as it would never leave her: with the deaths of her children, and soon after of her husband Percy, Shelley would unequivocally fall into a sorrowful, long existence. "The eternity of my *sorrow* is a pledge of our reunion" (Shelley, 1987: 442; my emphasis), she says to Percy, months after his death. This reunion would not be complete without their children, and Mary would endure this solitude from her family for almost three decades.

6. Conclusions

To conclude, we must make a few observations and thus answer the research questions we posed at the beginning of the article. Concerning the first question, we can observe in the corpus that the story's theme is distinctly illustrated in both the ST and the TT, showing a promising number of occurrences of terms related to incest. Although this number is rather small at the moment of this analysis, we must remember that this is part of ongoing research, which not only requires further processing of the texts into Sketch Engine, but also that the occurrences are examined in their contexts, to verify the hidden meaning Shelley gave to the terms. The percentages showcasing the weight of the incest-related language (1.04% for the ST and 0.40% for the TT) are not negative results, as it is probable these numbers will increase with future analysis.

Regarding the second question, we believe that the key takeaway from these findings is that there is only a small difference in the percentages between ST and TT, meaning that the theme, emotions, and story are largely preserved, and nothing crucial to the theme at hand is missing. Although the story's theme and feelings are challenging to replicate, as they evoke diverse

connotations, the Spanish translator has successfully conveyed this. The translator's work has proven to consider the importance of such thematic language in the translation process. The incest-related language of the ST will grow as the analysis of our study progresses, and we are positive that it will be the case for the TT's incest-related language as well. This goes hand in hand with the third research question. Further investigation is needed to a) determine if the slight difference between the percentages of the incest-related language in ST and TT relates to the polysemantic character of Spanish and b) to conclude whether the hard to trace incest-related language in the ST has been diminished in the TT, thus intensifying the subliminality of the theme in the translation. The historical and literary evolution of the incest theme in Spain is another area of interest, and it might be significantly related to the loss of language. Furthermore, it would be quite intriguing to investigate *why* it has been reduced.

Incest as a literary theme or device has frequently appeared throughout history and literature, and it was particularly prominent during Shelley's lifetime. Incest has been a recurring theme in literature since the Greek tradition and continues to appear in modern literature. Shelley discovered that she was among the Romantics exploring themes of incest. While it initially satisfied her, it ultimately yielded no fruitful outcomes, as *Mathilda* remained unpublished for many decades. Nonetheless, *Mathilda* has gradually and consistently established its position not only among readers captivated by this tale but also among scholars intrigued by the numerous intricacies present in its allusions and context. The unnatural and illogical shadow represented by the incest theme within the family-related and incest language is always present. While the narrative centres on a tragic father-daughter bond, the sorrowful consequences of the incestuous confession carry greater significance in the text than the sinful proclamation. Translations like that of Molina Foix's, which are introduced by a commentary on the translation process, help in understanding the hidden intentions of an author, as well as in obtaining a new perspective when reading the work.

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