

# The Winnipeg: The Poem that Crossed the Atlantic

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**Abstract:** This article is a reflection on the creative process of the artistic research project *The Winnipeg: The Poem that Crossed the Atlantic* which I presented at the "Other Codes / Cóid Eile: Digital Literatures in Context" conference at the National University of Ireland, Galway, and at the ELO 2017: "Electronic Literature: Affiliations, Communities, Translations" conference at the University Fernando Pessoa, in Porto, Portugal. This creative work is accessible online and consists of the website *The Winnipeg: The Boat of Hope*, where the reader can engage with the poetic space of *The Poem that Crossed the Atlantic*, an interactive, transatlantic and multilinguistic poetic narrative.

**Keywords:** Winnipeg, Neruda, multi-linguistic, translation, narrative, poetic/aesthetic space, collaboration, biographical, historical memory, migration.

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## THE WINNIPEG: THE POEM THAT CROSSED THE ATLANTIC

The main inspiration for *The Winnipeg: The Poem that Crossed the Atlantic* has been a personal story rooted in historical events of the Spanish Civil War, and Spanish and Chilean Historical Memory, interconnected with the involvement of the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda in the evacuation and rescue of 2,200 Spanish Civil War exiles, including my own grandfather, from French concentration camps to Valparaíso (Chile), on the cargo ship *Winnipeg* in 1939 (Figure 1).

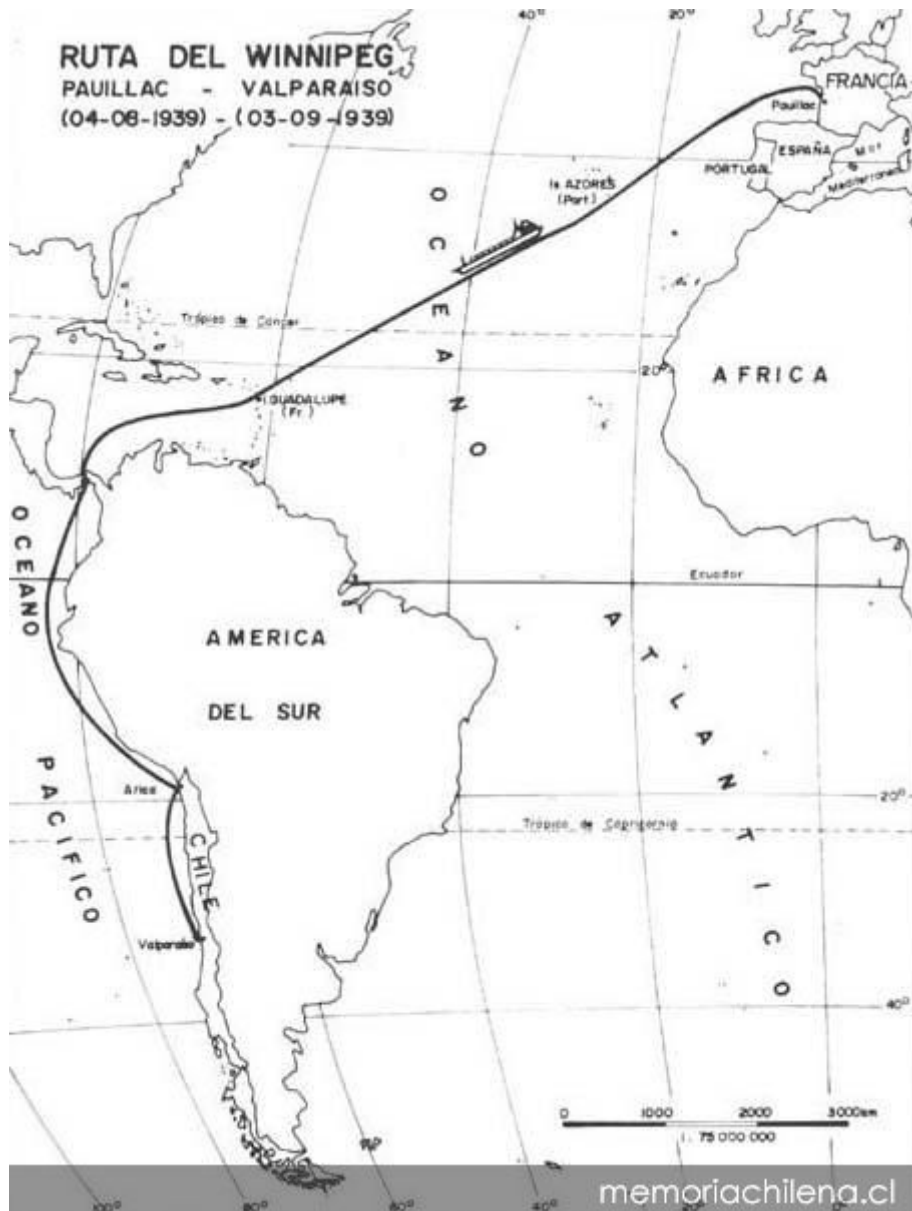


Figure 1. The Winnipeg itinerary. Screenshot.

The website of *The Winnipeg: The Boat of Hope* contains background information about the interdisciplinary research project: user generated content with stories submitted by relatives, names of passengers, the e-poem, Neruda's poems and information on his intervention in this cause, credits and historical references.

*The Poem that Crossed the Atlantic* (hereafter *The Poem*) is a multi-linguistic sea of networked, interactive poetic narratives fed by the stories gathered on the website through uploaded posts. The interlacing of the stories increases with the number of posts, resulting in an ongoing community-based poem at the heart of the work. The stories the contributors upload have been translated into different languages (from Spanish into French and English).

Through interdisciplinary practice-based artistic research methodologies, including archival historical research, visual research, and oral history research, the gathered data and personal stories are explored as cultural material, offering a way to instigate new poetic forms and online communication to discuss social

and political issues, and to raise awareness about historical events through hybrid forms of visual art, language, and technological advances. Concurrently, this work reflects on pertinent critical issues of migration, displacement, and the search for survival, also apparent in current worldwide events.

The study of the production of meaning in multimodal textualities (the spaces between image, sound, and text) and in hybrid digital multilingual poetics has been one of the focal points explored through my creative practice since I started working in the field of e-poetry in the year 2000, with works such as *Another Kind of Language* (2001) and *Birds Singing Other Birds' Songs* (2001). These projects bring up themes of foreignness, translation, and multilingualism. The exploration of the hybrid "linguistic textualities" is carried through the use of phonetics from different languages to create multilingual soundscapes together with animated gifs of the visual representation of languages, and through the transcriptions of birds' songs with visual typographical animated birds, respectively. These themes evolved towards more poignant issues of displacement and human relocation with projects like *Cityscapes: Social Poetics/Public Textualities* (2005) and *Connected Memories* (2009-10).

*The Poem* is a continuation of these explorations, bringing up most of the aspects already explored in the above projects. In addition, it has been used as case study to address the problem of translating digital multimodal works in the research project *A Transatlantic Take on Translating Electronic Literature*. This area was also discussed in the article "Electronic Literature Translation: Translation as Process, Experience and Mediation" (Mencía, Pold, and Portela) and will be further addressed at the end of this essay.

Translation is a frequent characteristic of my work, whether it is trans-linguistic, trans-medial, trans-coding, or trans-creative (Mencía, Pold, and Portela). This work raises questions about how these different levels of "translation" and "migration" perform in relation to memory, personal stories and histories, and in conjunction with language, code, digital aesthetics and poetics.

In 2013 I started a project under the umbrella title *Visual Navigations: Data Visualisation Poetics* with the online piece *Gateway to the World* (2013-16), in which I used open data from the maritime database and explored data visualization as a creative methodology to visualize the routes of the vessels arriving to and leaving from different ports in Europe. As the vessels move, they act as writing tools to reveal a string of text, creating calligrammatic forms of information, pulled from Wikipedia entries on the names of the vessels. These texts are predominantly in English, but also in Spanish and Catalan (Mencía, *The Winnipeg* website, n.p.). Geographical movement, ships, the sea, and water are all central elements in the visualization of the movement of the boats, which is, yet again, another translation process.

Hence, in doing research for a site-specific work relevant to Buenos Aires for the E-Poetry Festival 2015 in Argentina, I noticed this city also had a large port, which made me think of creating another adaptation of the *Gateway to the World*. However, I knew my grandfather Francisco Mencía Roy had lived in Argentina, and through an identity card I had found in an old suitcase at my mother's house I discovered he had lived in Comodoro, Rivadavia. We knew he had to flee Spain after the Civil War from France to Argentina. What we didn't know was the story I discovered when I did a Google search with his name and the city of Rivadavia.

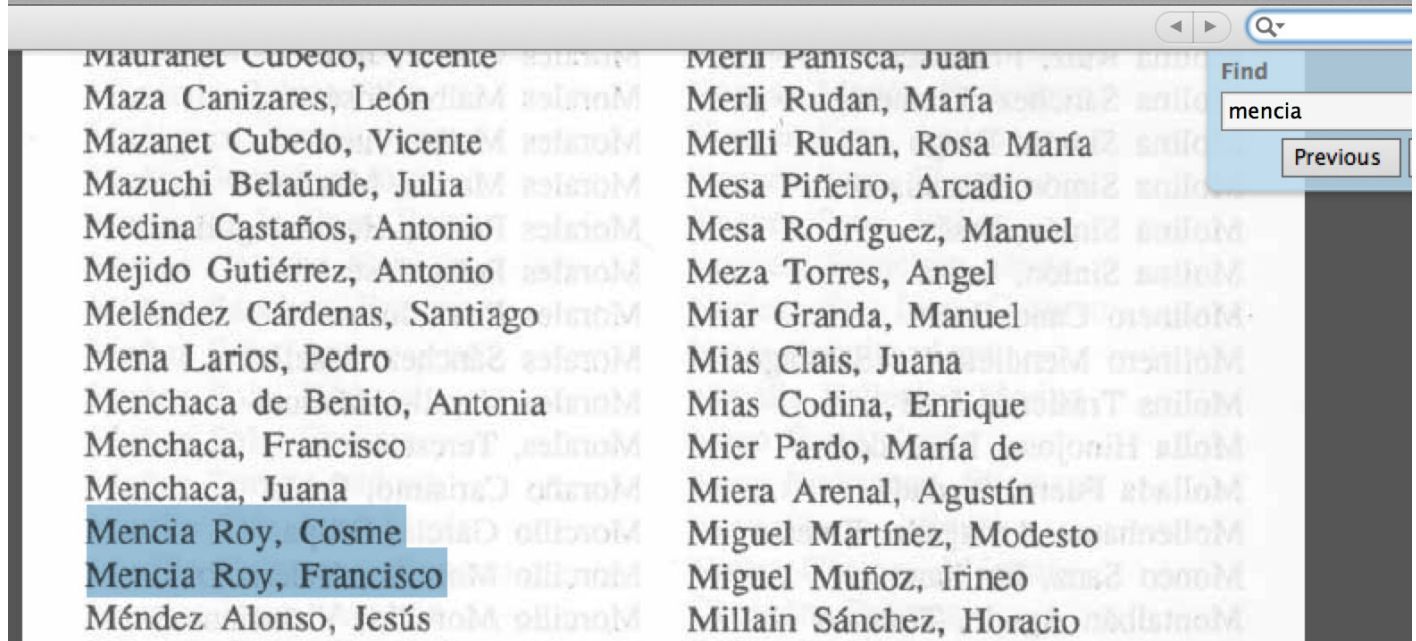


Figure 2. List of passengers found online from the book *Los Españoles del Winnipeg* by Jaime Ferrer Mir. Screenshot.

Through the search I found my grandfather and his brother, Cosme Mencía Roy, on the passenger list of the cargo ship *Winnipeg*, on a journey organized by the poet Pablo Neruda, departing from the Port of Trompeloup-Pauillac, France, to Valparaíso, Chile, on 4 August, 1939 (Figure 2). This story was unknown to my family, we had never heard of the *Winnipeg* and it clearly seemed to belong to that part of the Spanish “hidden” history that is only known to specialists in the subject and has come to light during the last few years with the study of the country’s Historical Memory. My research revealed that there is not even a memorial plaque, or merely a very small one, in some of the concentration camps in France. According to Amélie Florenchie “it is known that the French government took many years to recognize its errors in relation to the Spanish Civil War and the reception of exiled Republicans” (Guilhem, and Peschanski, qtd. in Florenchie 8). Due to this personal and historical discovery, the project took a different turn: although still addressing the themes of travelling, vessels, stories, and data visualization, the visual navigations and the data collection are gathered from the *Winnipeg*, its personal stories and its historical memory. Thus, this essay is a reflection of the creative process, the research carried out on a personal and historical event, and the questioning of the poetic space through design, artistic and translation methodologies.

#### THE RESEARCH PROCESS: THE MEETING OF PERSONAL, HISTORICAL, AND POETIC INVESTIGATIONS

Searching for the personal story to locate my voice and my story took me not only to autobiographical revelations but also to historical, literary, poetic, and collaborative interdisciplinary practices. I travelled to Argentina and Chile, and visited historical archives, cultural centres, museums, and Neruda’s houses. I contacted libraries, presented the work at conferences and exhibited it, and talked to a great number of people.

#### TO BUENOS AIRES

I travelled to Argentina for the E-Poetry Festival 2015, and while at the opening of the e-poetry exhibition at the National Museum of Immigration and Contemporary Art Centre (*Museo Nacional de la Inmigración y Centro de Arte Contemporáneo*—MUNTREF), I found some astonishing news. According to their digitized records, my grandmother and four of her children, excluding my father, had passed by this Museum, which

in the 1940s had been the Immigrants' Hotel, *Hotel de los Immigrantes*.<sup>[1]</sup> The record stated they had arrived in Buenos Aires, supposedly to see my grandfather, on 12 February 1951. This revealed yet another part of my own personal story to add to the "construction of history."<sup>[2]</sup> It is difficult to separate story and history. There are several studies on how family narratives and individual experiences (as discussed by Rickett) contribute to the making of history. On the one hand, this particular story forms a part of the bigger picture of how around 500,000 Spanish refugees left Spain after the Spanish Civil War to settle in places in Latin America where they were welcomed, such as Mexico, Chile, and Argentina. But also, it is a part of an autobiographical discourse, further clarifying why I was born in Caracas, Venezuela, as my parents also travelled, later on in life, across the Atlantic to visit their brothers and sisters, and settled down in Caracas. To "find" my grandfather on the Internet, my grandmother at the opening of the e-poetry exhibition, and Neruda as being responsible for saving my grandfather's and his brother's lives, was a wonderful discovery that made me better understand my (hi)story, and my sense of place, or of "no place." It also explained my interest in and concern for issues of displacement, foreignness, and multilingualism explored in my creative practice. ("How My Grandfather Became Part of this Story" n.p.)

#### TO CHILE

The research took me to Santiago de Chile, Valparaiso, and to the house of Pablo Neruda on Isla Negra, where there is a museum focusing on the *Winnipeg*. The Chilean Memory website ([memoriachilena.cl](http://memoriachilena.cl)) had already been a great point of departure, providing valuable information about the Chileans' identity and history. Visiting the place in Santiago pointed me to the National Library, the Spanish Cultural Center (*El Centro Cultural de España*), The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*El Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores*), and the National Archive where I found valuable records on the *Winnipeg* and its passengers. Through these archives, I discovered there had been an exhibition titled *El Replotamiento del Winnipeg*, curated by Juan José Santos in *La Casa de la Ciudadanía Montecarmelo* in Santiago in 2013. I was fortunate to visit the place and talk to the director of the cultural centre who provided me with more records and contacts to further my research. In Santiago, I visited The Museum of the Historical Memory and Human Rights (Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos) which contains striking artworks exposing the terrifying human rights violations and events that occurred in Chile during the military dictatorship (1973-90).

The website tells how "Our memory is present in every story, object and archive that the museum presents" ("Museo de la Memoria" n.p.). On one web page people are invited to participate by sharing their testimonies, and thus to become a part of Chile's historical memory ("Memorias de Exilio"). This is a similar concept and process of gathering testimonies as the one used in *The Poem*, with the difference that the stories of the *Winnipeg* become a part of *The Poem* and are spread along the poetic space of the Atlantic Ocean.

At the entrance of the museum we find a significant statement about art and the museum: "The museum is a school, the artist learns to express herself/himself: the public learns to make connections." This is an important aspect to bring up in any artwork and with this work, I take the opportunity to expose issues that can motivate the reader to investigate, explore, and establish such connections, and to continue developing the work outside the museum (the gallery, the network) in a state of co-creation.

As you enter the museum, a neon artwork reads: "People are from places and bring their country with them." This sentence highlights clearly the feeling of the descendants of exiles, including the families of the *Winnipeg*. Outside the museum grounds there was a stairway to board or exit an aircraft, with no aeroplane to board into; on its side you can read the words *ASILO / EXILIO* ("ASYLUM / EXILE").

These few artworks present a context for *The Poem*, as they reflect similar sentiments to those found in its stories. For instance, Jaime Cardona Jansenwirth coordinates the Facebook page *El Winnipeg: El Barco de la Esperanza*, where these stories are left by the descendants of the passengers of the *Winnipeg*. Jansenwirth has been researching and gathering information about the origins of the passengers for many years, and he also found records about my grandfather. He was 35-6 years old, his profession was *practicante* ("nurse-doctor"), which we knew, and he had been imprisoned in the concentration camp of Barcarés. It seems like his brother married in Santiago and there are some descendants still living there.

In this same social media group, I also met Raquel Valero, one of the family members of the passengers of the *Winnipeg*. She sent me information about her uncle Ovido Oltra Alonso. Recently, when visiting Valencia, Spain, I contacted her and we met with Fernando Llagaria Vázquez, the son of José Llagaria Jimenez, another passenger. This was an affectionate gathering to exchange stories as granddaughters, nieces, and sons of the passengers, covering different generations. In her story included in *The Poem*, Raquel writes:

I think that all of us who write here [on the Facebook page], share in one way or another, a common past or common roots. It wasn't until the beginning of this century that I started looking for mine. One of the most important steps in that direction was my trip to Chile in 2003. I then wondered: "where am I exiled from?" Since I was born in Spain, you would think that I would be Spanish (...) Yet, for many years, I longed and ached for Chile. I'm now well settled here, especially in Valencia, where my family always wished to return and for which I always felt a pang of nostalgia; yet I still can't tell where I'm from. Maybe, as Sylvia [another member of the Facebook group] said, I'm half from Santiago and half from Valencia. I always say that I am "Chilean-Valencian," in some ways, Spain feels further away, even if I live here, perhaps because of politics and because of this flag that I did not know, and still do not know today...

I have also included excerpts from the memories of Fernando Llagaria Vázquez published in the magazine *Copihue Rojo*, from the Chilean House in Valencia, Spain. Fernando lives in Andaya, Valencia, and was born in Linares, Chile, in 1957. He has lived as a privileged witness of the most intense moments of our contemporary history in Chile and Spain. He writes:

In Chile I was *el gringito* and here in Spain, I am for my friends “the Chilean.” I feel that both here and there they call me these names with all their affection, they know that I am the fruit of one of those thousands of Spaniards who suffered exile to escape the dictatorship of Franco and then of Pinochet. Those who made the world their homeland and that they went from here to there looking for a corner where to save their life, away from so much scoundrel with immense power. We are the children of the Winnipeg: The boat of hope, that took more than two thousand refugees to Chile (...) Never forget where your roots are. I was born in Linares and there lived seventeen years (...) We travel to Spain with the consideration of repatriates. (...) It was a trip full of emotional contradictions. I left behind my best friends (...) They were moments of great anxiety. We ignored how destiny would treat us and we did not even have the security that we could leave the country (Chile). Finally at 11 o'clock in the morning of September the 3rd we left. I never imagined that I would experience in my own flesh a similar experience to the one that brought my father to Chile. In the same way as 35 years before, my father embarked in the port of Valparaíso to repeat the same journey, but in reverse. The coincidence could not be more macabre: the same repression, the same defeat, the same pier, the same month and the same day, September 4th. From the other side of the planet, from the other hemisphere of history. Life is like a mirror; it smiles at you if you look at her smiling. (Llagaria Vázquez 18)

Stories like the above (I prefer calling them stories rather than testimonies as they are a part of an e-narrative/poem) form a part of *The Poem*, and bring up questions of migration, exile, and displacement, questioning issues related to a place of origin and the longing for a place.

In addition, very influential and foundational for this study and collection of stories and memories has been the book *Los Españoles del Winnipeg* (“The Spanish of the Winnipeg”) by Jaime Ferrer Mir. It contains the list of passengers, used in the index page of the website, and many stories from the passengers, some of which have now become a part of the textural narratives and poetic voices of *The Poem*. Since I created the work I have learned that there were more passengers on the *Winnipeg* than those included on the list by Ferrer Mir. Rosario Miranda left a message on the *Winnipeg* Facebook page to Mr. Miguel Millán: “This is an incomplete list taken from Jaime Ferrer’s first book. Many names are missing from it like my mother and nine children” (Miranda n.p.). Important figures also include Julio Gálvez Barraza, the author of the books *Neruda y España* and *Winnipeg: Testimonios de un Exilio*, in which he presents a thorough documentation of interviews, archives, letters, and contributions by intellectuals and artists to Chilean society. Among them we find Ovidio Oltra, Raquel’s uncle, who later on became the founder and president of the Winnipeg Association.

I included this quote about arriving to Valparaíso in *The Poem*, because the city still looks as described:

We arrived in Valparaiso on a starry night, which filled us with an immensurable impression. To see the whole bay surrounded by multicolored lights. That is the impression that many will always keep. I stayed, like many others, until very late, watching. We had not set foot on solid ground from Bordeaux and that was going to be our firm ground. That feeling would be recorded forever. When I went to sleep it was late, and I almost couldn't sleep. The next day, very early, I started listening people, on all corridors, leaving with their trunks and suitcases in a great confusion, and I also got up and went to the deck. Down there was a huge crowd waiting for the order to leave. This memory I will never forget. (Oltra Alonso 4)

Oltra Alonso also mentions how well received they were:

In the port of Valparaiso we were expecting [sic] by a large crowd of Chilean and Spanish sympathizers, along with them Chilean political authorities and members of CCHARE (Chilean Committee of aid to Spanish refugees), who had planned the placement in Valparaiso and its surroundings of about 200 passengers and also a special train for the transfer of the rest to Santiago, who would be received with dinner at the Catalan and Basque Republican Centres. (Oltra Alonso 3)

Consequently, the above quotes and passengers' extracts, the research on artworks, the gathering of documents, photographs, oral histories, the *Winnipeg's* records of passengers, and official documents (Pablo Neruda's negotiations) have all helped to shape the artwork, to bring these stories up to light, and to create awareness about an event that remains unfamiliar to many people. It is another step forward to contribute to Spanish and Chilean collective memory and thus to these countries' history. In the transition from dictatorship to democracy, with the purported aim of looking into the future, many memories were suppressed, and politicians would encourage people to forget the past. But, as Rafael Escudero Alday points out, the horrifying memories and any human rights violations during the Franco regime needed to come to light. "The victims of this repression—born of the premeditated plan of extermination that accompany [sic] the coup d'état of July 18, 1936 and prolonged during the 40 years of dictatorship—have recognized a series of rights that according to international Law must be guaranteed by the Spanish State" (Escudero 2-3).

It is now more than 40 years since the democracy in Spain was established and it wasn't until 2007 that the *memoria histórica*, officially known as "Ley 52/2007," was established to recognize citizens' rights and to establish measures in favour of those who suffered persecution or violence during the Civil War and the dictatorship. Escudero believes that this law hasn't yet fully helped to repair the dignity of the victims of the Franco repression. He does, however, see its value for the future: "The recovery of the historical memory is also a political instrument for the future, that aims to contribute to the formation of a civic-social identity and a citizenship that respects the culture of legality, democracy and human rights" (Escudero 3).

THE WINNIPEG AND PABLO NERUDA

The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda had been consul in Madrid and Barcelona from 1934 to 1937. He was very moved by the tragic situation of the Spanish republicans in the concentration camps in France. Thus, when he returned to Chile, with his love and solidarity for Spain, in his role as Consul Immigration Officer he managed to persuade Pedro Aguirre Cerda, the Chilean President at the time, to organize the evacuation of these Spanish exiles. ("Nuestro" n.p.) In the following I have included a note about the word "Winnipeg," a



poem about the passengers, and a comment/poem in relation to the farewells before the *Winnipeg* departed. They are all written by Neruda and had have been taken into account in the concept and realization of the digital work, both the website and the poem itself.

“WINNIPEG”: A WINGED WORD

Here is Neruda’s note on the word “Winnipeg,” and his description of his feelings about this word:

From the beginning I liked the word Winnipeg. Words have wings or they don’t. The rough ones stick to the paper, to the table, to the earth. The word Winnipeg is “winged.” I saw it flying for the first time in a dock of steamers near Bordeaux. It was a beautiful old ship, with that dignity given by The Seven Seas, over time. The truth is that the cargo vessel had never taken more than 70 or 80 people on board. The rest was cacao, sacks of coffee and rice, minerals. Now it was destined for a different kind of cargo: that of hope. (Neruda jacket blurb)

The depth of thought and feeling, of worrying and hope at once, found in the above quote highlights the trust of the artist in his art. In this case the poet Neruda, with his words as his artistic medium, gives a great significance to the word “Winnipeg,” even when he is engaged in an enormous service to humanity in rescuing more the 2,000 exiles from concentration camps. It seems as if by focusing on the meaning carried by the word “Winnipeg” he wanted to put the perils of the trip, on this cargo ship, aside, and find reassurance that these passengers, full of hope, would be safe, because the *Winnipeg* is not only a boat but also a word with wings. It can even fly.

“MISIÓN DE AMOR”

One of Neruda’s poems in connection to the *Winnipeg*, “Misión de amor”—I think the best translation for this title is “A labour of love”—is included in his book *Memorial de Isla Negra*. It describes the moment when he calls the passengers to board the *Winnipeg*, and Neruda compares them to seeds scattered over the sea and directed to peace. (Mir 57-8)

“EL POEMA IMBORRABLE” (“THE INDELIBLE POEM”)

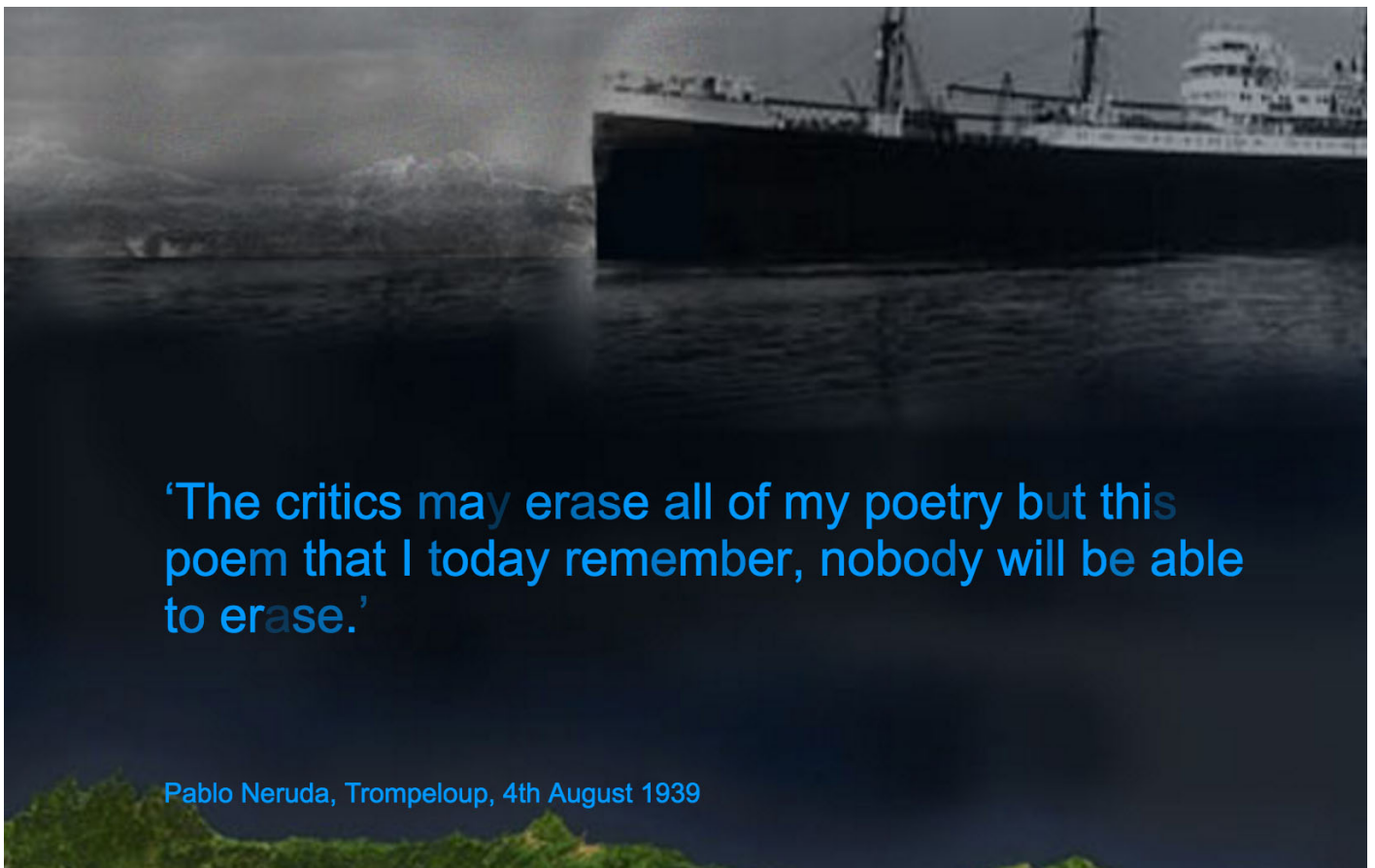


Figure 3. "El Poema Imborrable" on The Winnipeg website. Screenshot.

It is said that when the *Winnipeg* was about to depart, Pablo Neruda was so touched by the emotional atmosphere created by the farewells at the port that to keep this memory alive, he wrote: "The critics may erase all of my poetry. But this poem, that I today remember, nobody will be able to erase" (Neruda 296). This quote, as explained later in the context of the design process of the work, is included in the *Winnipeg: The Boat of Hope* website on the page with the image of Neruda and the *Winnipeg* (Figure 3). The farewells, stories, and hopes transported by the *Winnipeg* are his big poem, the moving boat-poem sailing towards peace with the multiple stories interlaced and left at sea, as we can see in the interactive poetic narrative. Ideas, research, and design come together through the production of the work; they are explored and questioned. The research feeds into the work, and the work feeds into the research in a cyclical manner. Florenchie, in her analysis of the work, highlights the many discourses co-existing within it:

What stands out is the “multitrans” character of the work. In addition to the discourses (text, image, animation), the Internet user is faced with a work that openly mixes literary and non-literary genres: the autobiographical discourse (the artist tells part of the story of her family), historiographic (elaborates a “history” of the *Winnipeg*), metaliterary (it explains the genesis of the work), but also the historical discourse (through the “stories”) and the poetic discourse, through the poem. History becomes poetry and vice versa. Beyond this possible fusion / confusion of two discourses, we are facing an unidentified discursive / literary / artistic object as it is often the case when one begins to go through the spaces of digital creation. It is clear that the analytical tools available to us are not enough to grasp the complexity of such an object. What can be affirmed is that such an original approach is possible only through transmediality and digital technology; never the narrative of the memory that is now published in Spain will be able to reach such levels of innovation. (Florenchie 8)

For me, autobiographical elements, collective memory, and history all come together in *The Winnipeg: The Poem that Crossed the Atlantic*, and fuse under artistic interdisciplinary discourse. This is what practice-based artistic research involves: an interlacing and exploration of discourses through making.

#### THE DESIGN PROCESS: *THE WINNIPEG: THE POEM THAT CROSSED THE ATLANTIC*

This process started with a prototype website for the presentation in Argentina, followed by the production of a website. I needed to work with a programmer to develop this part of the poem and this is when I met Alexandre Dupuis-Belin, also by chance, like I encountered my grandfather and his story. Alexandre suggested that I use the WordPress platform, and moved everything to a parallel website. We had many deliberations about whether to produce a website for mobile or desktop platforms, finally opting for desktop for a better experience of the poem. In the process we have learned many things and concluded that it would have been better to stick to the original design in HTML5 and CSS for various reasons, one of them being that we wanted to allow for an easy updating and hosting of the website.

After this ground research, the aim was to create a multi-linguistic and interactive online poetic narrative, and *The Poem* became rooted in this personal story, with all the many interconnected stories of the journey of the *Winnipeg* and an accompanying website.

#### TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF THE WORK

The development of the academic and autobiographical research, the application of concepts, and the visual design and realisation of the website and the poem were initiated by myself, while Alexandre focused on how to develop my vision by using different programming languages. For the archiving system and web page, we used PHP / WordPress content management system and MySQL (database engine). For the front-end web, we used HTML, CSS, and JavaScript (for the passengers’ animation). *The Poem* uses JavaScript, WebGL (Graphics Application Programming Interface), and the JavaScript library Three.js (3D framework).

In this exchange I introduced to Alexandre my previous works to provide him with an understanding of what I wanted in terms of design, colour, and interactivity. We discussed the earthy colour for the names of passengers, the silvery and blue shades for the colours of the textual sea, and the movements and interfaces. I provided him with the images, stories, and design for the website and the background of the story, and we started to move on from there. I had a prototype of the passengers already developed with my previous programmer Pascal Auberson, and Alexandre very quickly and creatively provided examples. We

discussed the possibility of moving the work into mobile platforms but after a deep look into the implications of this “transferral” we opted for leaving the work as it was, that is, programmed for desktops. Alexandre was an excellent programmer to work with because he is also interested in art and was thus able to provide possibilities for the aesthetic aspects of the sea through programming; this is his area of expertise and he really enjoys it. I would have liked to explore deeper the trans-coding aspects of the project in connection to the aesthetics of the wave movements and code, but this was an area where Alexandre was in charge and, unlike academics, I find programmers want to complete their projects and this was the end of the road. A work like this requires a lot of hours and once it is finished, it is a relief to see it complete and functioning.

#### THE WINNIPEG: THE BOAT OF HOPE WEBSITE

The visitor to the website can scroll down or through the menu options which take them to seven tabs. It contains background information about the research project and invites readers to add stories to the archive which then become part of the text in the interactive poetic ocean.

The “Winnipeg” page is the interface of the home page (Figure 4). It consists of a global historical map with the Atlantic Ocean as its focal point, and a list of passengers' names from the *Winnipeg* appear as a string of animated text delineating the ship's route as the wake of the ship, from Trompeloup – Pauillac, France, to Valparaiso, Chile. This animation of earthy coloured names against the blue ocean plays with visual metaphors or what could be understood as literary tropes in electronic literature. A menu is set up against this background, with connection to the following pages: “Winnipeg,” “Neruda,” “Background,” “Archive,” “Add story,” “The Poem,” “Credits,” “Spanish,” “English,” and “French,” with an introduction to the project in these three languages.



Figure 4. *The Winnipeg: The Boat of Hope*, index page with names of passengers. Screenshot.



Florenchie metaphorically compares the animated list of passengers' names crossing the Atlantic from France to Chile to an umbilical cord which interconnects the displaced passengers with the foreign lands they will inhabit. She writes: "In this sense, the chain of names can only symbolize the link, the umbilical cord that unites the individual 'displaced' to the spaces through which he/she moves or is displaced and no longer necessarily to a 'native' land" (Florenchie 10). I would also like to add that this interlaced chain of names is representative of the emotional bond (or connection or affinity; *enlace, conexión, afinidad*) found among and even embedded in the descendants of the Spanish exiles of the *Winnipeg*.

The page "Neruda" depicts a landscape with the *Winnipeg* departing, with an image of Neruda's face and an interactive animation of Neruda's indelible poem, "El Poema Imborrable," in which the poem states: "The critics may erase all of my poetry. But this poem, that I today remember, nobody will be able to erase" (Neruda 296). The interactive poem of animated letters, impossible to erase, is another example of the use of literary tropes in electronic literature with the aim of inviting the reader to erase the text, unsuccessfully, as it comes back to life and is thus impossible to erase (Figure 5).

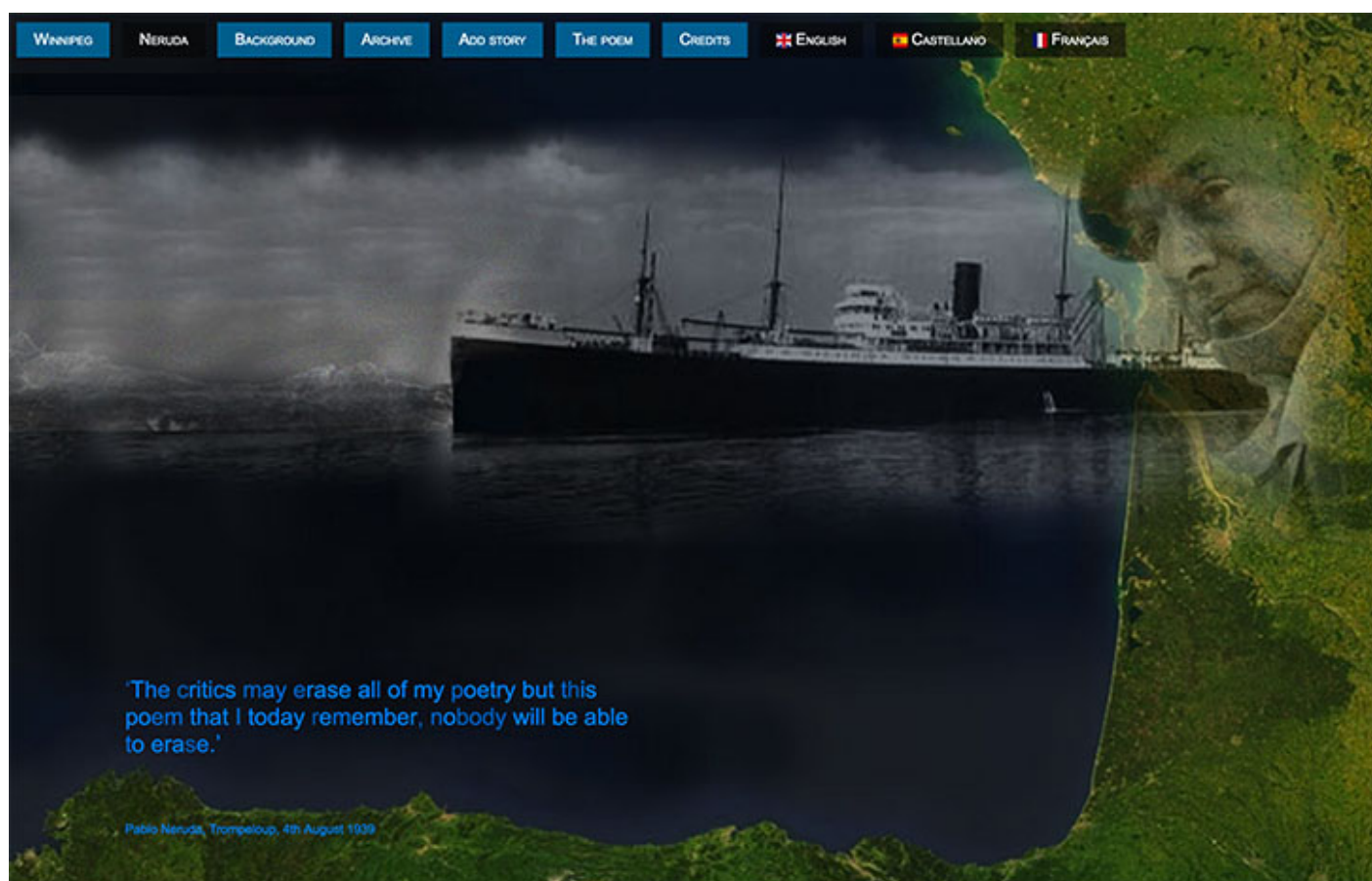


Figure 5. Screenshot of the page with the *Winnipeg* parting.

The "Background" page presents the origin of the work. Here I engage in a process of author's self-translation from Spanish into English and vice versa. A second translator has also been used for the French version and the pages "Add story," "Archive," and "Credits" all use linguistic translation between Spanish, English, and French.

The “Add story” page is the source for *The Poem* as it feeds it with the stories uploaded by the participants. It is a user-generated page, inviting the reader to add content by contributing with their stories and thus participate in the creation of the ongoing collaborative poem. The submissions include stories about the passengers, the journey of the *Winnipeg*, Neruda’s poems, his intervention in the cause, and historical event. The interlacing of stories increases with the number of posts. Although the content is predominantly in Spanish due to its specific cultural context, it also incorporates English and French translations which will evolve over time.

The “Archive” page also allows the reader to access these stories in a more linear way. In this way the website combines the possibility of exploring the narratives through interaction and interconnections with the option of reading and researching them through the archive. The “Credits” page has useful references that informed the research.

Finally, everything comes together in the page of *The Poem* where the reader is invited to “immerse” themselves in the exploration of the poetic space.

## **THE POEM**

### POETIC SPACE: THE SURFACE AND THE DEPTH OF THE OCEAN

This poetic space originates from my interest in visual and concrete poetry, sound poetics and their remediation from analogue platforms (print or sonic media) to the digital domain with the aim of exploring digital poetics. It questions the “meaning production” in the poetic “Visual-Concrete-Material” space of what the concrete poets Augusto and Haroldo de Campos together with Décio Pignatari called “linguistic materiality” (sound, writing, visual patterns). I have described such an approach to language and space as follows:

Language is always the material of my creative practice; interconnecting the visual, aural, and semantic meaning of language in order to explore notions of the linguistic (the transparent, the legible), the visual materiality of language (the language surface, the illegible), and the aural multilingual soundscapes. This creates an in-between space where the legible/illegible and intelligible/unintelligible meet in a form of symbiosis to create new landscapes of expression and new meanings. (Mencía, “Transient Self-Portrait” 190)

This in-between space is explored in *The Poem*: not only is there a geographical space between the countries and the transnational communities presented in the poem, but there is also a trans-linguistic text formed by a collection of fluid and fragile narratives that break and disappear. This is a sea of personal memories, poems and history.

The reader can access the personal memories and material from the archive but they can be explored better through the surface and the depth of the hypertextual Atlantic Ocean, through interaction with the words to make connections and build meaning. Similarly to my previous works, these narratives blend two kinds of meaning together: the communicative content of the legible stories, and the meanings emerging through the generative narratives, which trigger visual texts engaging the reader in an aesthetic and poetic experience of visual and abstract language. Clicking on key words like “Winnipeg” or a name of one of the passengers—which retain the same spelling in the three languages in which the poem is translated—can take the reader across the stories in these languages (Spanish, English, and French).



The research questions addressed as a part of the production process of the work can be relevant to understanding other works of e-literature from the following perspectives: the translinguistic dimension, or translation between natural languages, the most usually understood sense of translation; the transmedial dimension, or translation between medial and semiotic modalities (e.g. text, sound, visuals); and transcreation, which is translation as a creative compositional process and a shared creative practice of co-creation.

In the conceptualization of the work, visual layers participate in the creation of the meaning of the text, in some cases as visual metaphors or literary tropes; form and semantic aspects come together in this poetic expression. The “Visual-Concrete-Material-Linguistic” poetic space, described earlier, of abstract and transparent ocean texts has been understood through translation as a process and form of critical enquiry in practice-based research. An interesting precedent of translation as intersemiotic recreation can be found in the visual translations by Augusto de Campos (Portela, “Untranslations and Transcreations”), as what could also be understood as visualizations of the concept embodied in the text. Again, the shift from the textual to the visual brings up that understanding of the poetic space.

In *The Poem*, the dimension of transcreation as a methodology for creative practice and thinking through making has functioned as an umbrella concept encompassing the work’s other dimensions. As a compositional creative process, transcreation participates in the concept-realization of the work by interweaving content, methods, and technology. It gathers and archives stories, visual research, and design practices. In this process, in its transcoding dimension, there is an ongoing sharing between the creative director and the creative programmer, bringing together the initial concept with code, interface design, and interaction aesthetics.

The translinguistic dimension is apparent in the translations in the three natural languages on the website (Spanish, English, and French). However, this brought up more interesting questions about whether these three languages should be kept separate on their respective webpages to create *The Poem*, or whether they should be allowed to create a cross-fertilization of languages in the hybrid poetic space of the ocean that forms *The Poem*—and if so, whether they should all emanate from the same source (the archive). The latter option was more in tune with the author’s previous interests in multilingual poetics, and the multi/interlinguistic text was chosen as a way to bring up multiple translations together to create a global language (Mencia, *Another Kind of Language*). The archive of stories serves as the source for the inter-linguistic narratives and, at a programmable level, in collaboration with Alexandre, many questions were addressed regarding the creation of the visual appearance of the work, the interconnection of stories through word recognition for generation of text and user interaction, and immersion in the visual-linguistic ocean.

In addition, the translation of natural languages involved, as noted above, the author’s engagement in a process of “self-translation” from her mother tongue Spanish into her professional language English, and vice-versa. This process of self-translation was employed to rethink the text, and to develop a new level of awareness resulting from transferring from one linguistic system into another.

Equally important is the function of the transmedial dimension, which relates to the multimodal relationship between images, animations, text, code, and visual metaphors/literary tropes, i.e. the animation of the passengers’ geographical move, their travelling from one country to another, the interactive indelible



poem, and the stories found in the water as splashes and waves. And, underneath it all, there is a layer of translation at a cultural level: between countries, geographical textual modes, and stories from families and historical memories. (Mencía, Pold, and Portela)

## CONCLUSION

Exploring and creating *The Winnipeg: The Poem that Crossed the Atlantic* through translation as a process and practice-based methodology, and using the above dimensions as guidelines, has enabled me to understand the processes and medial connections which could subsequently serve as a model for critical analysis and contribute to new knowledge and understanding of translating works of electronic literature and media art.

To explore an intimate and personal story as a part of the collective memory of a historical and social conflict—still so relevant to our times, with crises like the Syrian War—has been an enriching personal and academic process. These interconnected stories of the passengers and families carried by this cargo ship, with their feelings, hopes, and farewells, are now represented in the sea of the World Wide Web together with the poems by Pablo Neruda and relevant information about this event, with the aim of rendering an emotional tribute to those who had to flee. As Florenchie nicely observes: “This is an artistic work that redefines the boundaries between art and citizen commitment, between literature and history” (Florenchie 10). She highlights the importance of the work being translated into three different languages and published online to attract a wider readership. My aim in disseminating the work online and making it multilinguistic has been to encourage people to make connections and reflect such important issues as exile, the refugee crisis, and family loss on the one hand, and, on the other, to consider the importance of spreading awareness about these issues through works of e-literature, e-poetry, and art.

## NOTE

Émilie Barbier, English to French translator. My translations: Works from the Museum of Historical Memory and Human Rights, Raquel Valero, Fernando Llagaria, Ovidio Oltra, Rafael Escudero, Pablo Neruda and Amélie Florenchie.

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## NOTES

1. The Museum, built in 1974, occupies a pavilion of the old Immigrants' Hotel. This museum highlights the historical, cultural, social, and economic importance of immigration and is located in the former *Hotel de los Immigrantes*, which functioned as such between 1911 and 1953. The exhibitions contain historical documents, photographs, films, contemporary testimonies and relics. One of the most striking pieces of his heritage are the registration books of all immigrants who arrived in the country including my family. Being this part of their patrimony. (*Turismo Buenos Aires* n.p.)
  2. If interested in this topic, see Rosy Rickett's doctoral thesis *Refugees of the Spanish Civil War and those left behind: personal testimonies of departure, separation and return since 1936*. Her study "foregrounds the role of the individual in both experiencing and constructing history [...] It seeks to intervene in the historiography of the Spanish Civil War and republican exile by highlighting the ways in which individual experiences and narratives both strengthen and weaken categories such as: political, a-political, refugee and exile." (Rickett 8)
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## BIO

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