

Meeting in the Middle Ages

Interview with Dr. Dana Delibovi, 10/01/2025

Will: [00:04]

I'm Will Beattie.

Ben: [00:06]

And I'm Ben Pykare.

Will: [00:07]

And we're two members of the Medieval Institute of the University of Notre Dame.

Ben: [00:11]

We're here to speak with students and scholars of the Medieval Ages about what they do and how they came to do it.

Will: [00:17]

So, who have we got today, Ben?

Ben: [00:20]

Today we're sitting down with Dana Delibovi, a poet, essayist, translator, and recent author of the new book, *Sweet Hunter: The Complete Poems of St. Teresa of Ávila*.

Will: [00:31]

Let's go and meet her in the Middle Ages.

Ben: [00:36]

Good morning. Thank you so much for taking the time to sit down with us. We're excited about this new book that you've brought and that just came out a couple weeks ago, *The Complete Poems of St. Teresa of Ávila*. But before we get to St. Teresa, we'd love to hear a little bit about you and your journey to the Middle Ages.

A question we usually start with: As you're going through life and you meet a new person and they ask you, maybe about "What do you do? What are your interests?" How do you typically answer that question?

Delibovi: [01:09]

Well, thanks, Ben. It's really my pleasure to be here. And how I typically answer that question today, is I just tell people that I'm a writer.

Ben: [01:17]

Great.

Delibovi: [01:18]

And I don't usually elaborate too much, but if people ask me a few more questions, I tell them that I also translate poetry, and that I have a book of translations of St. Teresa Ávila. And, other than that, I'm a retired advertising copywriter.

Ben: [01:37]

And how was that transition from that career into your journey as a writer?

Delibovi: [01:44]

Well, in one way, it was a sharp transition, and another, it was not, because I wrote advertising since I was 19 years old. I started when I was in college. I was writing advertising part-time while I was going to Barnard, and it kind of just stuck as a way to make money. But I was writing, and I always had an interest in poetry and translations, in essays, in creative work, and I kind of dabbled around the edges for my whole 46-year-career in advertising. I never completely left creative life.

Ben: [02:23]

That's great.

Delibovi: [02:24]

But there wasn't a lot I could do, because when you're writing advertising, when you're in an agency, it's very, very busy, and you work crazy long hours—14-hour days. And even after I switched to being an independent consultant in 1999, I was still working the old 50-hour weeks kind of thing in advertising. Plus, I had two kids in 2003. So, that complicated things. But then, in 2019 ... I wasn't sure when I was going to retire from advertising ... But about ... to the day, three months before the first opportunity I had to collect Social Security, I woke up in the morning and I said, *I'm doing it*. It was just, *I can't. I can't anymore. I have to go—*

Ben: [03:12]

That is over.

Delibovi: [03:13]

I have to go find my real life. My life that I have delayed and delayed and delayed. So, I filed for Social Security. Three months later, I started collecting it. I cut way back on my advertising work, and I started writing. And I started translating Teresa's poetry like the first week I was retired.

Will: [03:34]

Wow. Really?

Delibovi: [03:36]

Yeah. So, that was the process that got me here, and I've actually gotten a lot done, I think, in those years. I applied a lot of energy to it, and here I am.

Ben: [03:49]

That is fantastic. So, if you're week one, translating Teresa of Ávila, how long has her work been meaningful to you, and how long has the idea for this project been percolating inside?

Delibovi: [04:08]

Well, percolating is really the word, because I really do have, I've noticed, a stream of unconscious creativity that I don't even know was there, and it bubbles up occasionally.

[04:23] I loved Teresa Ávila since I was an undergraduate. I had heard about her in a history of philosophy course 'cause I was a philosophy major. We didn't study her, but in passing she was mentioned and I thought, *Wow, woman philosopher? I'm on this.* So, I started reading her. I read *Interior Castle*, which is her philosophical and theological work. And I didn't, at that time, read anything else. I hadn't read her *Life*; I hadn't read *The Way of Perfection*; I hadn't read her big prose works. But I was a big fan of *Interior Castle*.

[05:01] Well, fast forward a few years. I'm in graduate school. I'm at Columbia. It's not going well. It's really not going well. I'm not paying attention. I'm working 30 hours a week in advertising. I'm not sure I wanna be an academic. I'm not sure I wanna leave New York to go pursue my career. I'm really not. And I'm having a lot of emotional problems too, on top of it. It's not just that I was really questioning my life; I was really kind of falling apart, to tell you the truth. And Richard Kuhns, who was a professor at Columbia, called me into his office and he said ... and it was helpful, honestly, some people might think that this is sexist, but I didn't take it that way.

[05:49] He said, "Why are you never here?"

I said, "Because I'm working 30 hours a week in advertising."

He goes, "What are you doing in advertising?"

I said, "Well, I write advertising."

He goes, "They pay you to write?"

I said, "Yeah, they pay me to write."

And he goes, "Young lady, if they're paying you to write, and you really don't wanna be here that much, why don't you go let them pay you to write?" And it was hard, but it was the truth.

[6:16] So, I left Columbia. I transferred to NYU, where I studied with Peter Unger, and I finished at the Master's, because they just had a terminal master's. And then, I devoted myself to advertising. But I was still falling apart. And in the dark hours of this, I turned back to *Interior Castle*.

Ben: [06:40]

Wow.

Delibovi: [06:41]

Not as an intellectual work anymore, but as a work that tells you how to pray and tells you how to go inside and find God. And so, it was part of a return to Catholicism for me. It was a return to spirituality that I had pretty much left as a high school student. So, Teresa's work became personal, and over the years, I read her other prose works and maintained my interest. I read some biographies. I was always tapping into Teresa. So, I had her in my mind.

[07:17] And I happened, the first week of retirement, to be looking through the web for things to translate, because really my translation project at that time was not to do a book or to publish. It was to get my Spanish back to where it was. And I found her poetry, and I didn't even know she wrote poems. I didn't even know. It's like, *whoa*. And so, I started translating. And a friend of mine said to me ... I told him I was translating her poetry, and he said, "Why are you bothering with that?"

[07:52] I said, "I don't know. I'm just liking it." I didn't plan to do a book, but I started publishing some translations. I started publishing some essays, and the book kind of emerged in a very sure-footed way. That's all I can say about that.

Will: [08:10]

I noticed that, in your introduction, you talk about that anecdote. And it seemed, as I was reading, that this has been something, I suppose, percolating, bubbling inside you for a while, and there's almost this compulsion to write these translations. There are so many other questions I ... before we dig into the book, there are a couple of questions I'd love to explore about that story.

[08:34] But I'd start by just saying, it's so interesting that ... you talk about how you then came back to Teresa in an almost personal, transformative kind of way. And I was reading—just this week, actually—an essay in the Chronicle of Higher Education about the state of the humanities and how we're always talking about dwindling numbers and the fact that departments are closing, and it's a real problem. And some of these professors were speaking at a roundtable, and one of the things that was mentioned was that it's not enough to go to students and say, "Come and learn English. Come and learn philosophy, because of the skills that you will be able to apply professionally." You have to tell them how it will change their life. And students want to be transformed. They want to go to university and have their lives changed—their inner lives, perhaps. And it's so interesting that that's something you experienced, that you were able to reconnect, in a sense, with scholarship, with the academic sort

of world by reorientating your own relationship with a work, moving from a classroom setting into something far more personal. At least that's, that's how I read this.

Delibovi: [09:43]

Yes, and that's really how it was. When I was in college and early graduate school, first looking at Teresa's work, I approached it as a philosophical work, as a philosophical problem. At that time ... you know, it's funny, I loved philosophy in high school. I was lucky enough to go to a high school where they taught philosophy ... and at that time, it was a personal, emotional thing. I just enjoyed it. I have a vivid memory of my little high school hand reaching up in the library to a volume of Nietzsche and pulling it down. That was my first touch of philosophy. And it was emotional and personal. *Wow, I'm just interested, and I feel like this is good for me.* But you know, after a few years of college and graduate school, I'd become a little jaded. And I approached her work in a distant way. I also didn't personally have faith anymore.

[10:37] But you know, a little time went by, and you get a few humiliations, and life doesn't go your way, and you kind of bomb out, as I did. And then, you know, you start looking. Like, you realize you need more help than just sort of an intellectual exercise. And, you know, I feel like, with college ... having taught at the college level as an adjunct for 10 years, I do agree with what you said, Will, that students come in with a real hunger. You know, these younger students—freshmen—come in with a real hunger for something meaningful in their life. And it's really our job not to beat it out of them, but to encourage it and foster it.

Will: [11:16]

Absolutely. I suppose it's about striking a balance. You want to be able to tell them how to engage with the text, critically—intellectualize it—but without losing that personal connection, without losing whatever it is that makes that text so ... eternal, perhaps.

[11:33] I'm curious as well about that shift from Columbia to NYU. So, if I understand rightly, you were doing a PhD program at Columbia and then you decided you were going to go down a different path, and you then moved to NYU to complete the terminal Master's. Now, was that purely because you couldn't do a terminal Master's at Columbia, or was there something else?

Delibovi: [11:54]

I could do a terminal Master's at Columbia if I wanted to. But, as I mentioned, I was having a lot of emotional problems at that time, and I did have some relationships there that were not relationships that I considered to be positive—mostly my fault, to tell you the truth. And I thought ... you know, after I left Columbia, I took a couple of years of quiet time and just worked. And when I wanted to go back and finish the master's—which I started in '82 and finished in '84—I wanted a fresh start. I really did. I also ... you know, it was funny. I was really interested in going to study with Thomas Nagel, who's at NYU. But, when I got there ... because I have a huge interest in metaphysics, it's my favorite

thing ... And I found out what Peter Unger was working on. It was like, *no, that's who I want for my advisor.*

Ben: [12:51]

And speaking about just this personal dimension, it's been often noted that St. Teresa's work is deeply ... it's a deeply personal strain of mysticism. There's, of course, many different kinds of mysticism. But at the time, there was a popular strain of Catholic mystical tradition among, especially, Dominicans—especially, like, the Rhineland and such—that was much more intellectual, much more rationalistic, much more systematic.

[13:24] But then, there's this alternative tradition sometimes called the affective tradition, in which Teresa stands, which is violently personal. She isn't speaking about things like prayer in an abstract way of what's happening between the communicant and the divine. She's speaking about herself, and about *her* inner life. And with that ... kind of inviting the reader, right, to delve to God within themselves.

[13:55] So, if you mentioned to someone that you're working on a translation of these poems of Teresa of Ávila, and they asked the natural question, “Oh, who is Theresa of Avila?” And you have a couple minutes, how would you briefly introduce her to someone who doesn't know?

Delibovi: [14:10]

Well, I would first of all say that she was a mystic, a philosopher, a theologian, a prose stylist, a memoirist, a poet, an administrator, a reformer, and a marketer in 16th-century Spain, in the Siglo de Oro. And then I would say ... before I got into the details of her bio ... that she was a Carmelite nun, who reformed her order, and she lived in a time of unbridled patriarchy and yet was a public intellectual in her time ... because she was canonized in 1622, which is not that long after she died in 1587, because she was known, her work was understood, she had been commissioned to write books in Spain during her life She never seemed to have a problem being recognized and playing in the big leagues in that society. And whenever I think about how she could have achieved that ... I mean, she must have been a force of nature. That's all I can say. To have to have pulled that off at that time.

Will: [15:36]

To establish, what, 14 convents?

Delibovi: [15:38]

16.

Will: [15:39]

16 convents—sorry—across Spain, in her lifetime. I mean ...

Delibovi: [15:43]

Just that ... And remember, the Carmelites are a cloistered order. They live behind steel grates, and they can only talk to the outside world through those grates, almost like prison bars—although it's keeping the world away from them.

[16:01] And yet somehow, living in that kind of a cloister, she was able to do all of this and travel, because she did leave to go to her different convents. She would go from Ávila to another convent, get behind the grid again, and she'd be there and whoever intellectuals of the time, or friends, or whoever she had, would just come talk to her there. So, it's pretty ... it's a pretty incredible story.

Ben: [16:29]

When you have this list of very interesting titles, jobs, things that Teresa of Ávila did ... with your background in advertising, my interest has peaked when I hear you mention that she was a marketer. I would love to hear you describe her kind of reform, monastic movement and the pushback she got from that and, yeah, and how she had to pitch what she was doing.

Delibovi: [16:54]

Right. Well, she had to pitch ... her original pitch was to found a new convent, right in Ávila. I mean, she was in a convent. She was in the Encarnación, and she wanted to found a St. Joseph convent, and she got a tremendous amount of pushback from that. She almost had to get it ready in secret, because people were very opposed to this.

[17:15] But then, once she had that one, she teamed up with people. I mean, she wasn't averse to that. Of course, her most famous collaborator is St. John of the Cross, who she collaborated with while he became the reformer of the Carmelite priest, the brothers, the male monks. And she reformed the sisters.

[17:36] And what was the reform like? Well, this was a hard sell too, because this reform was really back to basics. Convent life, in the Carmelites, before Teresa Reformed the order, was about social climbing and hierarchy and bringing in a gigantic dowry that you could donate to the order, and being addressed by a noble title—if you were noble—while you were in there, and maybe having a servant or two with you in the convent. It was a hierarchical system, and it wasn't very ... Well, shall we say, it didn't fulfill the vows that Teresa thought were important, which were obedience, chastity, poverty.

[18:25] So, she was out to do that. And the reason her order, her reform, is called the Discalced Carmelites—Discalced means shoeless—because they had nothing. They were supposed to be poor. And there's a poem in my book, which is a call and response poem of Teresa and her nuns, and the nuns are complaining, "Why do we have to wear this lice-ridden sackcloth?" And her response is, "Hey, Jesus died on the cross for you, and you're complaining about lice and your sackcloth? Come on."

[19:00] So, that was sort of her mission. How did she market this? She marketed ... a lot of her marketing through her writing. She wrote a book called *The Way of Perfection*, which was a commissioned book about how a nun in her convent ought to behave. But, of course, it has ramifications for all people. She traveled widely. She spoke to many, many people. She fought back when she needed to—or, subtly wiggled away when she needed to. There's a scholar, Weber—Alison Weber—who believes that Teresa was investigated by the Spanish Inquisition five times.

Will: [19:43]

I mean, I was pretty struck when I read that in the book. And do we know why? What was it that she was doing that really got their nose out of joint?

Delibovi: [19:51]

It was three things. Her writing, especially her memoir, *The Life*, which is very emotional and has a lot of very sensual visions in it. So, her writing was checked over very carefully. *The Life* didn't get published in her lifetime. There was that. Her visions were troubling. The Spanish Inquisition was not ... they were not fans of people who had visions. That wasn't the kind of Catholicism they wanted.

[20:21] And the other thing was ... and I just learned this recently, I didn't include it in the book, but I was at a conference, actually, at St. Mary's College here in Notre Dame. And Lori Cassidy talked about how ... she's another scholar ... talked about how Teresa fought to allow women in that time to pray silently, because the church frowned on that ... because we women were the devil's playground. We women couldn't be trusted inside our own heads. We were dumb and venal. And so, we couldn't pray silently. We had to say set prayers aloud. And she fought for the right of the women in her convents to do what she was doing, which was praying silently.

Will: [21:10]

At the time, in Spain, were men praying silently? Was this something which ... forgive me, I'm asking entirely out of ignorance here ... was this something which really did apply only to women? Or she was arguing for it from this perspective, saying, "This is important for the women under my care"?

Delibovi: [21:30]

You know, I'm a little out of my league on that, because I have just learned about this, and I personally haven't researched it. But my sense is that men could do what they want, and it was only women that had the prohibition. But I think I'll have to follow up with you on that.

Ben: [21: 47]

Yeah, no, for sure, and we can follow up on that as well.

Will: [21:49]

Yes, absolutely.

Ben: [21:51]

And part ... I mean, I don't know if this is connecting dots that shouldn't be connected, but she does have an emphasis on quiet and on, again, the meditative silence and the impact on that as one is, again, seeking to perfect a union with the divine.

[22:14] That, again, she has this richness of text that speak about in quietness and silence and the whole tradition. So, yeah, it makes sense that she would push for that. But, and at the same time, it is interesting that people are worried about “What are you thinking? What are you writing? What are you doing?” And how do you have this direct, unique connection with God, not through the systems that have been put in place. Right? Like there's a way to connect with God and it's through us. She doesn't need it apparently. She has all these fascinating personal experiences all on her own, and that's a threat. But she's able to beat the charges. You know, she's savvy enough to get out of all these inquisitions and then be sainted. So yeah, I like that branding of her as a marketer, as able to defend herself.

[23:14] If we've established a little bit about who she was and some of the major things she did, I'd, love to hear you talk a little bit about her thought. Again, she stands in the history of philosophy. Rene Descartes is said to have kind of built upon—perhaps just kind of copied—some of her ideas into his famous works. What do you see as kind of the core philosophical, theological thought of Teresa of Ávila?

Delibovi: [23:47]

I think I have to answer that from the perspective of what is the core *for me*. What speaks to me most powerfully in her work? And also, what speaks through the poetry, because that's really the area where I'm most comfortable talking at this point. And, overwhelmingly, the part of her philosophical work that is most important to me is the idea that God is present within our souls, and it's our job, really, as people of faith, to take this interior journey toward God, who is in our soul. Now that is a beautiful thought, I think, aesthetically and in terms of a faith feeling. But in Teresa, I also feel that it's an important philosophical point, and it ties into the idea of consciousness and self-consciousness.

[24:52] In *Interior Castle*, chapter one, she introduces this idea, right? My soul ... I imagine my soul as a diamond, or a crystal castle, and God is inside the many facets or rooms of this castle, waiting there for me to travel in. But, you know, her logic is pretty good. And she goes ... a few paragraphs in, she says, “Now you probably think I'm talking nonsense, because if the soul is a castle, that means my soul is a castle. It's in me. How can I travel in to what I already am? I can't go *in* to what I *am*, right? It's either me or it's something outside me that I would travel to.” And she says, “Okay, wait a minute. Wait a minute. When somebody says, ‘go deep within in prayer,’ this is what they're talking about.” It's essentially self-consciousness. It's essentially the idea that I, as a human being, have this very interesting faculty that philosophers still have trouble with. We still bat this around of, on the one hand, having a self, and on the other hand, being conscious of that self and being able to understand that self. It's kind of weird, and she picked up on that.

[26:36] Now, you can see the Cartesian element here of there being an ego—you know, *within*—that is the core of everything. I think with her, though, that ego is something that, while it's capable of doubt, the goal is different. The goal ... How can I say it? The goal is not to practice this sort of systematic doubt. The goal is to keep suspending it ... suspend it, suspend it, suspend it. Try one more step. See if you can get a little bit deeper in there. And I feel like, for me, that is the most important thing.

[27:24] Now, she has a poem. One thing I love about Teresa's poetry is her attitude was like, "If you don't have time to read my book, Sister, you can read a poem." And she has a poem called "Soul Seek Yourself in Me" that basically is *Interior Castle* in a poem.

Ben: [27:41]

Wow. That's very cool.

Delibovi: [27:43]

And I can read it if you like.

Ben: [27:45]

Please, I would love to hear a reading.

Delibovi: [27:48]

Okay, I've got it.

"Soul, Seek Yourself in Me."

Soul, seek yourself in me,
and through me, seek me in yourself.

How lucky, cherished soul,
to design yourself in me.
No painter, however skilled,
could imprint with so much delicacy,
the image that is you.

I crafted you in love,
beautiful and fine.
If you get lost inside
my tinted caverns, treasured soul,
then seek yourself in me.

What I know: Your portrait hangs
around my heart,
and when you see the life
drawn so deathly there,
you will find rest.

And if you haven't known before
where to find me, well,
don't walk from here to there.
If you want to find me, look inside,
look for me in you
—because you are my chamber,
my dwelling, and my house.
So I will knock at any hour
if I discover that your thoughts
become a bolted door.

Outside of you, there is no
search for me. To find me,
it's enough for you to call me,
and I'll come to you without delay.
To find me, seek me in yourself.

[29:08] That's *Interior Castle*. God's in there. The search for the self is also the search for God. It's this weird doubling of this ... the soul is the self, and the self can look into the soul. God is there, and the soul is essentially God's house. And that's, I think, everything you-need to know in a nutshell about what she's saying in *Interior Castle* and that search.

[29:46] And she does that in a lot of places. I mean, she's got another poem where her very famous vision of being speared by an angel, like, "Oh, he got me in the entrails, and he's pulling them out. It feels *so good*." She has a poem about it.

Will: [29:57]

One of the poems talks about being shot with a poisoned arrow, but the poison is, I think, God's love. I find her way of writing so fascinating because even in this example you read, "Soul, Seek Yourself in Me," it just seems to be constantly shifting—There's no moment, I feel, at least, when she's sitting ... she's settling on a particular answer. She talks about the soul seeking itself in her, but then also the soul is *her* chamber, *her* dwelling, *her* house. So, she's seeking herself in the soul as well, in a sense. I suppose, as you said—

Delibovi: [30:32]

That is the self-consciousness.

Will: [30:33]

Right. And the soul is God's house. It's complicated.

Delibovi: [30:37]

It is that weird human ability to know and then *to know that we know*. Self-consciousness, a reflective self-consciousness is what she's talking about here. And, I mean, she adds to that the other part that, as we go there, what we find is God. And in this poem, I think she's also hinting that, if you want to know yourself, know God, because you're all together in there. You are not separate.

Will: [31:10]

Yeah. It's powerful.

Ben: [31:13]

It is. It is.

I wanted to ask about the process of translation. We are big ... we are big believers of translation. A large reason why I began to pursue medieval studies, was I read a very good translation of *The Revelations* of Brigitta of Sweden that were brought into English in the 2010s.-And that recent translation was, for me, a gateway into this whole world and why I'm here at Notre Dame.

[31:40] So, thank you for being part of that very important work, which is not only helpful for people thinking about the Middle Ages; It's helpful for people not thinking about early modern at all. Or it could be someone's gateway into this whole exciting world.-And it's great for scholars alike who maybe have expertise in other languages, but not in Spanish, you know, of that period. So, it's very important work, but also very, very tricky, because you are not just translating a foreign text. You are translating *poetry* in another language. So, I'd love to hear a little bit about your philosophy as a translator, your process and the melding of the creative and the ...

Will: [32:32]

Analytical?

Ben: [32:33]

Yes. The creative and the analytical labor of bringing poetry from one language and one time—a Spanish of the 16th century—into our 21st century English. I'd love to hear about that.

Delibovi: [32:46]

Well, as a translator of poetry ... I start with poetry, because I am a poet, and that is my first genre really. And I do translate modern poets. I'm actually working with a poet in Mexico right now, Rocío Cerón, who has a book. And I'm working for her on her book to get it into English. I translated Alaíde

Foppa, who is a Guatemalan-Mexican poet, who actually disappeared in Guatemala in 1980. And I translated, actually, an associate of hers, someone who was very young when Alaíde Foppa was, you know, getting on in years. I translated Francesca Gargallo. She's Italian but living in Mexico. So, she is a plain double L, not a Spanish double L.

[33:37] And so, that's where I'm coming from, because I have been translating modern Spanish poetry, mainly for my own edification now to work with others. And I've been writing my own poetry for years ... years and years and years I've been writing poetry. So, that's the point where I come from. I come from that genre. And one of the things that I noticed about other translations of Teresa's poetry was that it wasn't that poetic a lot of the time. So, I wanted to make it more like poetry, so that was my starting point.

[34:15] But you know, as I was ... and I think you probably guys have both had this experience talking with other translators or trying it yourself ... there comes a point in translation after fooling with the work, after playing with the puzzle ... because translation's kind of a fun puzzle. Let's face it. There's a ... there's a puzzle aspect to it.

Will: [34:34]

It's fun when you're not being graded.

Delibovi: [34:39]

There comes a point where you say, "I have to do research here. I have to learn about the time. I have to learn more about the person. I have to learn more about how these poems were used. I have to learn more about what the scholarship is on these poems. And maybe I have to learn about what literary critics think about translation generally. And I certainly looked into a lot of work by Walter Benjamin, Derrida, and actually Tagore, the Bengali poet, because he writes about translation too. And one of the things all three of them say, in one way or another, is that, if you're a good translator and you're doing it right, you are giving the work an afterlife. You are ... you're like rebirthing it.

Ben: [35:29]

Yeah.

Delibovi: [35:31]

Tagore calls it a reincarnation.

Ben: [35:32]

Yes.

Delibovi: [35:33]

You are not just literally decoding that poem.

Ben: [35:37]

It's impossible.

Delibovi: [35:39]

Right. If you're doing a good job, you're making it a new work of art that lives on. And once I kind of had that charge from reading those people, I felt like I really needed to do a lot of studying. And I did. And actually, the five essays in the book come out of that. Because I wasn't planning to write essays originally. I was just going to translate these poems, and I was going to publish a few. Like, I published a few in US Catholic. I had one in Presence. I had poems in a few translations in a few places, and that was all I was going to do, and maybe publish a few essays in other places.

[36:15] But once I started doing this research, it's like, I see these poems falling into five different groups, and I see the scholarship marrying up with that, and I see my own emotions marrying up with that. Because, as an essayist, I really don't like to write just a dry essay if there's no ... maybe because I'm a philosopher, and philosophers use "I" in their essays a lot ... I can't stand writing an essay where I'm not there.

Will: [36:40]

Yeah, that's an interesting observation. I think that's true. I've noticed that here with philosophy—and theology too. It's a very different way of writing an essay to what I'm used to, which is essentially as a literary student, trying to totally divorce yourself and say, *I'm going to treat the work by itself, as though I'm not even here*, which, of course, is a lie, because everything has to be mediated through my own filter, my own subjectivity.

[37:08] So, I think it's so interesting that you've added these essays because I think that it's more honest. It brings you as translator into the work in a way which is unavoidable, but sometimes it's easy to maybe hide behind the translation as though you are doing a one-to-one, *I'm just repeating what Teresa said in her own words, and now you can understand it*. But, of course, that's never the case. You are always going to have to make some choices. You are inevitably going to bring your own perspective, what words you think are the best English standards for the Spanish, things like that. So, yeah, it was ... it's interesting to me that you began with the poetry and then moved to the essays, rather ... and so, it seems like that was almost a kind of journey of discovery, I suppose, for you as translator.

Delibovi: [37:57]

Yeah, it was.

Let's go back to 2019. I found these online at a site called Ciudad Seva, which is wonderful. It has all the public domain Spanish literature you can get your hands on. It's a great site. And I found these poems, and, of course, that was a huge surprise. Like, *she wrote poetry? What?* Because I had never owned the complete works. I had only owned individual books of *Interior Castle*, *The Way of Perfection*, the autobiography. So that was a big surprise.

[38:29] So, I started translating the poetry because my goal was not to be a translator of her poetry. My goal was to work on my Spanish. That was a goal I had for retirement. That was a bucket list. And I got a teacher and I started doing language exchange, but my goal was really to speak Spanish better. But I started translating the poetry.

[38:50] Well, in a couple of years, things had morphed, and I'd been publishing a few, and I'd been doing all this research, and, like any creative process, I can't tell you the moment where I said, *Oh, I'm going to write these essays*. But I do feel like there was a few-month period there where I started ... after doing all this research and really looking at the concept of afterlives and poetry and looking at all the history ... reading a wonderful essay by C. Brian Morris—who was absolutely the north star of this project, who I corresponded with—about her poetry and how robust it was.

[38:28] Doing all that kind of work—reading, Spanish scholarship on her work—there was a period of a few months where suddenly the poems arranged themselves into the topic areas that are in the book, which is different than the classical arrangement. But they arranged themselves into these topic areas. And then, once they were in those areas, it was like, *Well, I've done all this work, and there's all this good scholarship, and a lot of it hasn't been collected in one place. What if I try to write some essays?*

Ben: [39:58]

Tie it all together...

Delibovi: [40:00]

To tie it ... to explain why I bucketed these poems into these four groups this way.

Will: [40:05]

And these groups are: “Many Mansions,” “Oh, Sisters,” “Their Flocks by Night,” and then, finally, “Made Flesh.”

Delibovi: [40:11]

Yes.

Will: [40:12]

Right. Sorry, I just wanted to add that there.

Delibovi: [40:15]

Yes, those are the groups. And the first group is a very metaphysical group, “Many Mansions.” It’s all the poetry that in any way relates to her concept of the soul—and I will say, in a modern vernacular, personal identity, the concept of self. And then, the second batch of poems, “Oh, Sisters,” are really didactic poems, because she devoted a lot of ink to teaching those nuns how to do a good job.

[40:45] And the next group, “Their Flocks by Night,” that is a specific set of nativity poems. And I’ll tell you, that was the group that I felt most needed an essay, because those are poems that, when you read them to a modern reader, many of them are not that appealing. You know, she’s got quite a gory poem about Christ’s circumcision. Full of bull fighting terms. There’s images there ... there’s an image. But it isn’t really to the modern taste. So, I felt that that section needed an essay very much.

[41:21] And then, the last section is really about Jesus as a man. Christ, Christ’s flesh, Christ on the cross. So, somehow in there, in the period of a few months, seeing how the poems broke out, inspired me to do the essays. That’s sort of how it worked.

Will: [41:40]

And were the titles for each section also inspired by the poems?

Delibovi: [41:45]

By the poems. And they came as naturally as can be. Those were the first section titles I came up with, and I never changed them, because they just felt right to me. As a poet ... sometimes as a poet you write something, it’s like, *I’m never changing that, because that’s right the first time, and if I fool with it, I’m going to mess it up.*

Ben: [42:04]

Yeah. That’s a great feeling, when you’re like, *I did that. That sentence, that title is done. That is ... that is what it is supposed to be.*

Before we end our time, I would love to hear a little bit about how you began your work on this path right toward the academy. You were able to keep this passion for teaching and these creative pursuits alive through an alternative career. And now here you are, back in early modern, late medieval Spanish poetry, and beyond. We’re excited for all that’s next. How has that ... how has that journey been? How has the ... how have the turns surprised you?

Delibovi: [42:47]

Yeah, it’s been a great journey, and looking back on it, I’ll say this. I don’t think I could have done it any other way. I got to Barnard in 1975. Long time ago, right? I was a full-scholarship student. My parents were working class. My dad was a boat builder. My mom worked at the hospital. The only people in my family ... my family thought, if you went to college, you were a doctor or a lawyer. That was it, because those are the only college-educated people I know.

[43:18] So, here I am. I go to Barnard, right. I like it. I love it. I’m really enjoying it. It’s hugely stressful for me, because I don’t have a social skillset that matches up. I just don’t. And then I go to graduate school. I get a fellowship. But you know, money’s a real issue for me, like a *giant* issue. My mother gave me \$600 when I started college and she said, “I’ll never be able to give you any more. That’s it.” I had to work all during college and all during graduate school, and I was at a point where I was kind of like,

you know, I just need to be a person that earns a living, here—like, seriously. And a living was presented to me in advertising.

[44:03] At the time, emotionally, I also didn't want to leave the New York area. I felt uncomfortable leaving my family. I felt uncomfortable with the idea that I might've moved to Idaho to be an assistant professor of philosophy. That just didn't compute for me. Emotionally, I was very fragile. My father had died recently. My mom was having a lot of problems. I was having a lot of emotional problems. I was very lonely. There was a lot going on. I think I needed to go to work in business. I think I needed to be in that environment. I think I needed to show that myself ... that I could support myself well, that I could be independent, and that I could also ... I also, I think, benefited at the time from being in an environment like advertising, which was full of people like me. It just was. It was more my people.

[45:05] Every time I thought of leaving, there was something that pulled me back—usually some money issue. We used to call it the golden handcuffs-because you get used to earning a certain amount. You get used to doing a certain amount. You get a certain amount of praise and validation. I got a lot of validation in advertising. I did. A lot of validation. And I just had to kind of stick with it. I never lost my interest in the arts. I kept at it. I wrote poetry. I wrote essays sometimes. Sometimes I publish something. 10 years go by, I wouldn't publish anything—that's just how it was.

[45:41] Something happened 10 years before I retired that was a total fluke. Remember the financial crisis of 2008, 2009? Well, I was a consultant. I was self-employed, right? I had no work. I had no work. I had two little kids. My husband was unemployed. So, I was like, *huh, I got to get a job here*. So, I signed up to be a substitute teacher in the school district, which I still do. I'm never giving that job up.

Ben: [46:07]

That's great.

Delibovi: [46:10]

And I tried to become an adjunct professor of English, to teach composition at the community college. Well, they turned me down because I don't have a master's in English. But the philosophy department—

Ben: [46:21]

Just ... just a career writing in advertising.

Delibovi: [46:23]

Right. I only wrote advertising.

Ben: [46:25]

You only wrote ... you only were paid to write for decades. No biggie. Sorry.

Delibovi: [46:30]

Right. No biggie.

They heard about me ... the people at Lindenwood University, the philosophy department, heard about me through the people at the community college, and they contacted me, and they said, "You are exactly what we want. You're exactly the person we want as an adjunct." So, I started working as an adjunct. I loved it. I loved it so much. It is fun to be an adjunct when you don't need the money.

Ben: [46:58]

That's a great statement.

Delibovi: [47:00]

Right. That is the truth of adjuncting. It's really fun when you don't need the money. Now, when I started, I needed the money. But within a few months, I had advertising work again. It picked back up.

Okay. So, it became fun. And I did that for 10 years, and they let me do so much. I got to do a metaphysics seminar. I got to design a critical thinking course. I designed and gave the first online philosophy course that they had. I ... They let me do, like, what a professor does. Really. They were wonderful.

Ben: [47:33]

That's great.

Delibovi: [47:35]

And the only reason I stopped was, true to form, they made it so that philosophy and religion were no longer requirements at that school. And guess who stopped taking philosophy and religion? Everybody. Because it was a kind of school, too, where people ... a lot of business majors, a lot of education majors, people like that.

Ben: [47:56]

The humanities get cut.

Delibovi: [47:58]

Right. They don't even have a separate philosophy department there anymore. It's just "the humanities department."

Ben: [48:02]

That's happening across the board.

Delibovi: [48:05]

So that's the only reason I stopped is they just didn't need any adjuncts anymore. And I figured that was a fluke, because I only have a master's. I probably wouldn't be able to get an adjunct job anywhere else. So, I haven't even looked.

Ben: [48:15]

You might ... I mean, with, with this publication and your work ... and again, you have now a history of a successful teaching career that ... you know ... 10 years. And I'm sure ... yeah, I'm sure those were great experiences with students. And now we all get to be your students ... through this book. Tying it back in.

Will: [48:38]

Talk about advertising.

Ben: [48:40]

But I do want to ... we will include in our episode description links to accessing your work, and as well as your personal website. Is there anywhere else online you would want to direct our listeners to hear more about your work?

Delibovi: [48:55]

Yes, they can go to sweethunter.org, which is the website about my book. They can go to Monkfish Publishing, who's the publisher of my book, and they can go to my personal website—of course, Dana Delabovi—and that's a WordPress site.

Will: [49:11]

Thank you so much, Dana, for talking to us today, and thank you all for listening. And we will see you next time in the Middle Ages.