

Hablad por mis palabras, Speak through my words:

Pablo Neruda's *Las Alturas de Macchu Picchu* in six English translations

by

Elizabeth Anne Bender

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I examine six English translations of Pablo Neruda's poem *Las Alturas de Macchu Picchu*, the second of fifteen poems that make up his book, *Canto General*. I argue that the source poem and these translations are revelatory case studies for translation issues in general, and also for the dynamic that exists between North and South American literatures. I define the key translation terms that I will use throughout the thesis. I discuss the importance of historical, political, social, and thematic contexts to translation in general, and to these six translations. This leads to analyses of each translation's interpretation of the source's structure, syntax, tone and message, and the ways in which each translation is an entirely new text in itself.

In Chapter One, I describe Pablo Neruda's literary and political life, and show why the latter is important to the study of his works. I then provide a brief history of Macchu Picchu. Summaries of *Canto General* and *Las Alturas de Macchu Picchu* follow.


In Chapter Two, I begin my analysis of the translations with a comparison between Waldeen's 1950 translation and Jack Schmitt's 1990 text. I establish Waldeen's as a politically minded text and provide close readings as support. Then, I identify Schmitt's as a literal and relatively unemotional translation.

Chapter Three compares Nathaniel Tarn and John Felstiner's translations. The former, from 1966, serves as an example of free, or paraphrastic, translation, while the latter's 1980 text exemplifies the literal translation approach.

In Chapter Four, I use three free texts to provide further definition of this genre. Tarn's and Waldeen's reappear alongside James Wright's 1971 translation. I outline each translation's position in the spectrum of free translation in order to show the wide variety of messages that free translations can produce from a single source text.

The fifth chapter details literal translation through the examination of three texts: Felstiner's, Mark Eisner's, and Schmitt's. Like the free translations, each of these literal texts has a more specific identity; I describe these identities and demonstrate their effect on Neruda's poem.

To conclude, I discuss the importance of English translations to the study of English literature in the twentieth-century United States. I propose the relevance of Neruda's poetry, and this poem in particular, to translation and its study, as well as to cultural development in the U.S. and in the American continent. Finally, I state my hope for the enthusiastic continuation of the dynamic translation process.



a pablo

a matilde

a vuestra chile

a nuestra américa.

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Short Titles

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Chapter One

1. *All poets, the poet:*¹ *A brief Neruda biography*

Pablo Neruda was born Ricardo Eliecer Neftalí Reyes Basoalto on July 12, 1904 in Southern Chile. As a young man, he published some poetry in local papers and student magazines, and changed his name in 1920 so that his father (who, by most accounts, was a homophobe and disapproved of his son undertaking such an unmanly hobby) would not discover how serious he had become in his writings. Neruda moved to the capital city of Santiago at age 18 to study to become a French teacher. He sold all of his belongings in order to publish his first book, *Crepusculario*, in 1923. *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada*, a poetry collection, came out in 1924; this work would make him famous across the Spanish-speaking world (Eisner, "Biography").

Shortly after his writing career began to flourish, Neruda took on the first of many political obligations: he became a consul to Rangoon in 1927, which then led to positions in Colombo and later, Singapore. While in Asia, he wrote *Residencia en la tierra*, his first major book of poetry. Neruda was named consul to Buenos Aires in 1932 (where he met the poet Federico García Lorca, then to Barcelona in 1934, and Madrid in 1935 (Eisner, "Biography"). Once in Madrid, Neruda dove headfirst into the fervor of Spanish intellectual and artistic activity. His "discovery of the mother country gave Neruda what he had lacked in Chile...: a deeply rooted sense of his language and its classics, along with a community of poets who, under the republic, felt in touch with their people...Spain was the high point of his life until then" (Felstiner, 104). In 1935,

¹ From the title of Salvatore Bizzarro's book.

Federico García Lorca published a “Homage to Pablo Neruda from the Spanish Poets,” in which appeared several of Neruda’s works alongside a “eulogy of the ‘young and noteworthy American writer’ whose work ‘does honor to the Castilian language’” (Felstiner, 104).

Neruda’s first foray into translation occurred while he was in Spain as well. He published translations of Joyce’s *Chamber Music* in 1933, then in 1934 tackled Blake’s *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* and “The Mental Traveller [sic]”. Later that year he published “three sections from Walt Whitman’s *Song of Myself* (Felstiner, 104). When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, he was as affected as the Spanish poets and authors he had befriended while staying in Madrid. The Civil War marked a turning point in Neruda’s political life; after its outbreak, he became much more active, and his work after this point reflects this change in interest.

Neruda was discharged from the consulship shortly after the war began, and organized a congress of artists against fascism that took place in 1937. He returned that year to Chile and continued his political activism. In 1940 he was made consul to Mexico, where coincidentally, many of Spain’s refugee intellectuals and artists fled to escape Franco’s regime. During this time, Neruda joined the “Committee to Aid the Russian War Effort, and wrote many lines of political poetry, including his ‘New Love Song to Stalingrad’” (Eisner, “Biography”). Neruda’s continued support of Stalin spurred international criticism both of him and of his poetry (Eisner, “Biography”). When his time in Mexico ended, he traveled to Macchu Picchu and wrote *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* shortly thereafter; it was published in Chile in 1944.

Neruda joined the Communist Party of Chile in 1945, and endured various attacks for his political affiliation and outspoken disagreement with the Chilean government during the next few years. In 1947, after he delivered an angry letter to the anti-leftist Chilean President Gabriel González Videla, the President ordered Neruda's arrest, but the poet devised a plan to take him out of the country and into Argentina for hiding (Eisner, "Biography"). He continued to travel throughout Europe and Latin America, writing poetry with an increasing political bent (with several exceptions, like *odas elementales*) (Schmitt).

In 1950, after falling ill at the World Council for Peace at the American Continental Peace Congress in Mexico City, he met Matilde Urrutia, who helped nurse the bed-ridden Neruda back to health; they would later marry and become an icon of romance and political activism. Also in 1950, *Canto General*, of which *Las Alturas de Macchu Picchu* is the second installment, was published around the world – except in Chile, where it was officially banned, but where the Communist Party distributed it clandestinely (Eisner, "Biography").

In 1952, Chile's political climate changed in favor of Neruda's leftist ideals, so he returned home. While there, he participated actively with the Communist Party and continued to travel around the world, reading poetry and giving political speeches. In 1966, Arthur Miller invited Neruda to New York to give a reading. The U.S. government at first denied him a visa, but through the united action of poets putting pressure on the State Department, he was finally permitted to enter the country. He traveled to Berkeley, California on this same trip, and while there said that he "learned on the spot that the North American enemies of our peoples were also enemies of the North American

people” (Eisner, “Biography”).

In 1971, Neruda received the Nobel Prize for Literature. Mark Eisner’s biography of Neruda describes the event:

The presenter tried to sum up Neruda by saying “Neruda is like catching a condor with a butterfly net. Neruda, in a nutshell, is an unreasonable proposition: the kernel bursts the shell. Nevertheless, one can do something to describe this kernel. What Neruda has achieved in his writing is community with existence. In his work, a continent awakens to consciousness.” (Eisner, “Biography”)

This high point in Neruda’s literary life came just as his political career was reaching its zenith as well. In 1970, his good friend and colleague Salvador Allende’s presidential campaign ended with a democratically-elected victory. Their triumph, however was short lived. On September 11, 1973, a military coup overturned the Allende regime (due in no small part to the CIA of the United States’ support of the opposition leader, Pinochet, and his militaristic regime); Allende died during the seizure of *La Moneda*, the presidential building (Eisner, “Biography”). Neruda was devastated, and died just days later, on September 23rd. Though he had been battling prostate cancer for over a year, it is as good as fact for most Chileans that he died of a broken heart and spirit, and the fact that the new government would not allow a public funeral for the poet only reinforced his already-legendary status (Schmitt, 2-6).

2. “The womb of America:”² *A tale of Macchu Picchu*

Las Alturas de Macchu Picchu is a poem about the act of translation. It begs the reader to go back in time, to learn another language, to understand a culture of which precious little remains today. Neruda’s last line – “*hablad por mis palabras y mi sangre,*” “speak through my words and my blood” – encapsulates the duty of the poem and of its reader: to approach an utterly foreign culture’s message and absorb it in every way possible, passing its on so that the cultural erasure that the poem describes never happens again. In order to complete that duty, it is necessary to know what Macchu Picchu is.

Current theory states that Macchu Picchu was built around 1440 by the Inca ruler Sapa Inca Pachacuti, and that it was inhabited until the Spanish arrived in Cuzco, the Inca capital, in 1532.³ “Archeological evidence shows that Macchu Picchu was not a conventional city,” as people originally thought, “but a country retreat town for Inca nobility” (Wikipedia). The contemporary world learned of Macchu Picchu in 1911 when North American explorer Hiram Bingham happened upon it while hiking the overgrown Inka Trail near Cuzco, Peru. Bingham described the site as “an untouched forest,” “partly covered with trees and moss, the growth of centuries, but in the dense shadow, hiding in bamboo thickets and tangled vines, appeared here and there walls of white granite ashlar carefully cut and exquisitely fitted together” (Felstiner, 139). “Untouched”

² Shortly after he completed *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*, Neruda is quoted as having said, “for me, Peru has been the womb of America, an arena encircled by high and mysterious stones” (Felstiner, 136).

³ “Cuzco” is Quechua (the language of the Inca as well as that of the enslaved people that share its name) for “navel.” Even centuries before this poem appeared, in a culture that Neruda never experienced, in a language he did not speak, there existed a sense that this place was one of origination and life, of connection to that which came before. This poem, and *Canto General*, shares this belief.

was exactly the right word: thanks to its isolated location, Macchu Picchu, unlike the ruins that lay closer to Cuzco at the time of the conquistadors arrival, remained “free of Spain’s colonial, Catholic settlement” (Felstiner, 141). The fact that there is no written reference to the place in Spanish colonial records suggests that the conquistadors did not even know that it existed. The site was left untouched by the Inca, as well; evidence suggests that the site was abandoned completely right around the time that the Spanish conquered the nearby urban capitol of Cuzco. Apparently, word traveled from Cuzco along the empire-wide Inca Trail via foot messengers, and whoever was living there (or still building it– some theorists believe that the site’s construction was never completed) fled.

All this is to say that, since no record of Macchu Picchu exists in Spanish, Neruda had to plumb his own modern language to describe a place and a people who may have never even heard it spoken, and surely did not speak it themselves. Furthermore, when Neruda visited the site, at least four centuries had passed since Macchu Picchu had been inhabited by anybody. In order to make his poem accessible to contemporary readers, Neruda would have to translate that which was relevant to a nearly-extinct culture, in a time largely unimaginable today, into words and concepts that would resonate despite these disconnects. In order to do that, he had to first understand the place himself, translating the site’s mysterious stones and enigmatic inhabitants into meaningful structures and relatable people, both with stories to tell. Thus, long before it fell into the hands of any translator, *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* embodied the task of cross-cultural translation and the obstacles it presents.

3. "Before the wig and the dress coat:"⁴ *Neruda's Canto General*

Alturas de Macchu Picchu, though it is published frequently as a free-standing poem, is the second chapter of a much larger work, entitled *Canto General*. The *Canto* has fifteen chapters in all, and they progress in loose chronological order from *La lámpara en la Tierra* (*The Lamp on Earth*) to *Yo Soy* (*I Am*). *Lámpara* describes the pre-historic identity of America:

Before the wig and the dress coat
there were rivers, arterial rivers:
there were cordilleras, jagged waves where
the condor and the snow seemed immutable:
there was dampness and dense growth, the thunder
as yet unnamed, the planetary pampas.

Man was dust, earthen vase, an eyelid
of tremulous loam, the shape of clay –
he was Carib jug, Chibcha stone,
imperial cup or Araucanian silica.
Tender and bloody was he, but on the grip
of his weapon of moist flint,
the initials of the earth were

⁴ From the first line of *Canto General*.

written.

No one could
remember them afterward: the wind
forgot them, the language of water
was buried, the keys were lost
or flooded with silence or blood.

(Schmitt, 13-14).

The focus on what existed “before the wig and dress coat” shows the importance of pre-conquest history to Neruda. That he places *Alturas* immediately after this chapter about ancient peoples and geography shows that the historical context of Macchu Picchu itself, as well as of his poem that shares its name, is the ancient world, not the modern one; it shows that the cultural context of the site is that within which “America” was a single land mass that spanned two hemispheres and many cultures, and not the contemporary context, where trade agreements and illegal immigration are the closest we may come to continental unity.

The *Canto* describes the Spanish conquest of Latin America, its subsequent and gradual liberation, Chilean history, contemporary political issues, and ends with a section of introspection that includes lines like, “Comrades, bury me in Isla Negra/ facing the sea that I know,” and “You have made me indestructible because with you I do not end in myself,” which comes from a section of *I Am* entitled “To My Party,” an ode to his Communist colleagues (Schmitt 397, 399). The size and span of this work are nothing short of awesome, and *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* is its crown jewel.

4. *And so I scaled the ladder of the earth/...up to you, Macchu Picchu*⁵

Alturas de Macchu Picchu is twelve sections of rich description, personal journey, myth-making, and social commentary (Appendix A). The speaker begins the poem with a desperate search for identity, both on behalf of mankind and for himself. After four sections of questing, he arrives at Macchu Picchu, a “high citadel of terraced stones” (Schmitt, 33). Once there, he relates the history of the ancient people whose lives still echo among the enormous, mysterious stones, channeling their toil and misery. In the tenth section, the search for man intensifies: “Stone upon stone, and man, where was he?/ Air upon air, and man, where was he?/ Time upon time, and man, where was he?” (Schmitt, 38). Finally, in the twelfth section, the speaker makes the powerful invocation: “Give me silence, water, hope./ Give me struggle, iron, volcanoes./ Cling to my body like magnets./ Speak through my words and my blood,” propelling the reader forward into the *Canto*’s next chapter and into a new relationship with this ancient culture (Schmitt, 42).

⁵ From section VI, lines one and three of Jack Schmitt’s translation.

Chapter Two

"Alone she is fighting, alone she will win:"¹
Waldeen and Jack Schmitt struggle towards "America" in Section I, Stanza Two

In 1950, *Masses & Mainstream*, a New York-based Communist magazine and publication house, published a book entitled *Let the Rail Splitter Awake*. Its title comes from one of the poems in *Canto General*, and it is a collection of Neruda's poetry, heavy on translations by someone who calls herself simply, "Waldeen." She was "a professional dancer living in Mexico City when Neruda arrived there as a Communist exiled from Chile," and her translation of *Alturas* exemplifies how politically-driven translations emphasize those themes and images that are supportive of their politics, and de-emphasize those that are not so sympathetic (Felstiner, 9). In Waldeen's case, this message is one of Communist solidarity and support, as well as anti-U.S. hegemony, and it demonstrates the "social function of translating" that developed during the early part of the twentieth century (*Reader*, 13). The energy that Waldeen's text brings to its "social function" gives it a fervent emotional dynamism that echoes the passion that Neruda's voice conveys in the source.

Jack Schmitt, on the other hand, published his translation in 1991, when Neruda's political relevance had taken a decidedly backseat role to his status as a literary giant, and when his audience in the United States was much larger than it had been in 1950. Thus, the sort of political light that Waldeen's translation casts over the poem would have been completely inappropriate. Schmitt's translation concerns itself with a literal interpretation of the source text and with avoiding over-personification. This adherence

¹ From José Martí's book, *Our America: Writings on Latin America and the Struggles for Independence*: "Where is America going, and who will unite her and be her guide? Alone and as one people she is rising. Alone she is fighting. Alone she will win" (79).

echoes Nabakov's and Felstiner's translation approaches², but the consistent effort to make things seem more inanimate than perhaps they are in the original is something new. This tactic makes the translation feel at times less emotional than Neruda's text, and this creates an academic, objective tone. There are moments, like when the word "remains" appears for "*muertos*," when the seemingly calculated absence of human elements makes the translation feel more like a textbook account of precolumbian peoples than a poem charged with emotion. And in a way, this is not a terribly far-fetched thing for *Alturas* to be. One of this poem's central purposes is to inform the reader about the past; the fact that it does this in poetry instead of prose does not mitigate its historical mission. These de-personalizing moments help reinforce the factuality of the poem's message by elucidating that which might otherwise be clouded by poetic devices and romantic phrasing. While Waldeen's translation drags the reader to a political rally to propagandize, Schmitt's places him firmly at a school desk to give him a history lesson.

At times, Schmitt's and Waldeen's texts differ so much that it seems impossible that they are translations of the same poem. This is certainly a function of the forty-one years that elapsed between Waldeen's publication and Schmitt's. It is also a product of the possible audiences and purposes for Neruda's voice at the time of each translation. Waldeen, in 1950, was translating for *Masses & Mainstream*'s readers, whose political leanings were openly – fervently – Communist. Certainly, subscribers to the magazine and buyers of *Let the Rail Splitter Awake* were not paying merely to read beautiful literature. They wanted their political fires to be stoked by what *Masses* produced.³

² I discuss these in detail in Chapter Three.

³ The small, black and white magazine published Neruda's poetry alongside pieces like "The Miners: A Battle Report," "War is Cannibalism," and "Soviet Culture: Reply to Slander." In January of 1950, while

According to Neruda translator and scholar Mark Eisner, almost no “non-intellectual non-political mainstream readers” knew of Neruda at this time; his United States audience was restricted to “leftists and people really into poetry.”⁴ *Masses* readers fell into the former category, and Waldeen’s translation reflects the revolutionary sentiments that they had probably come to expect from the Neruda to whom *Masses* had introduced them.

Waldeen’s translation also contains several linguistic oddities whose effects on the poem’s meaning are too extreme for me to consider them stylistic gestures; they are simply oversights and mistakes. Waldeen’s diction, in Section II, departs curiously from the source’s when it replaces “*números*” with “tale.” “*Números*” means, with considerable certainty, “numbers,” and any reader who is familiar with English-Spanish cognates would notice this (*Larousse*). The beginning of Section VII in Waldeen’s translation begins with an eight-line question, whereas the source is a nine-line statement. This conversion betrays the lack of intimacy between Waldeen’s English text and the source’s Spanish. A similar oddity appears in the second stanza of the first section, the focus of this chapter. “*Días de fulgor vivo*” becomes “I live radiant days,” which, despite its large departure from Neruda, follows a visible logic: “*vivo*” is the first-person singular conjugation of the verb “*vivir*,” “to live.” It is, however, also the masculine singular adjective form: “alive,” “live,” or “vivid” (*Larousse*).⁵ Waldeen’s “I live radiant days” conflicts with the tense of the only other first person verb that appears before it: “*iba yo*,” in the source text, or “I went.” In addition, despite the greater flexibility of Spanish sentence sequence compared with English, “*Días de fulgor vivo*” would be a very

the magazine was struggling financially, the editor, Samuel Sillen, appealed to readers to support the magazine and its role in “the critical struggle against fascism and war.”

⁴ I will cite my electronic correspondence with Mark Eisner as “Eisner, electronic correspondence, date.” Eisner, electronic correspondence, 11 Jan 2006.

⁵ Schmitt’s translation provides “vivid;” John Felstiner’s and Nathaniel Tarn’s use “live.”

awkward way for Neruda to express what Waldeen's text interprets. Waldeen's translation of this line exemplifies the moments of hastiness, and even carelessness, that appears throughout the larger work and betrays the urgency that this translation's political purpose demanded of Waldeen. Her *Alturas* feels more like a campaign speech than an artful poem, and such things are usually written under deadlines, with little time for revision; it stands to reason, then, that simple grammatical mistakes remain uncorrected, while the left-leaning message rings clear as a bell. These two elements most characterize Waldeen's *Alturas*, and the effect is that her text appears more single-mindedly political than the source poem is. Her Neruda concerns himself with a specific political movement – Communism – at a distinct moment in history – 1950. Of course, the source includes certain political elements as well (Neruda's repetition of “*rojo*” [“red”] is no coincidence), but the historical and cultural importance of its subject, Macchu Picchu, takes center stage. Waldeens' text demands that Communism share, even steal, the limelight.

Schmitt's *Alturas* creates a different space and voice for Neruda in the United States of the late twentieth century: one that informs objectively and unifies with hope. His is a translation that makes the reader feel as though he or she has spent too much time thinking about his or her identity as a citizen of the United States, and too little time reading Neruda and developing a sense of his or her role in a much larger, hemishperic community. Schmitt's work demands that the reader remember *Alturas*' role as the second chapter of *Canto General*, the second chapter of the poetic history of Neruda's people – people that Schmitt's translation includes in “American” history as much as it includes people in the United States. This trans-cultural inclusion gains strength in

Schmitt's decision to publish the English translation without the Spanish on the facing page.⁶ To be sure, there is an element of publication practicality at work here – his book is already 407 pages long. However, this presentation has the (perhaps incidental) function of appealing to, instead of potentially intimidating, English-only audiences. Schmitt has taken a large amount of the foreignness out of the text while still producing a fairly literal and poetic translation, and this makes its message appear to a United States audience, if only superficially, like a poem that was written to define their own “America.” This format eases the reader into thinking about “America” in a way to which he or she may not be accustomed. This is precisely what Neruda's poem asks of its reader, whatever his or her nationality; Schmitt's translation undertakes it on a smaller, more focused scale, challenging his fellow Americans to look southward with him, and to contemplate the fabricated nature of the borders they see.

The stanza I have chosen as the basis for this chapter – the second one in the poem's first section (see Appendix B) – contains several fascinating moments where the translations approach the source text in ways that exemplify Waldeen's text's frequent distance from the source, and Schmitt's contrasting literalness. The two nouns that end the first line in each translation, Waldeen's “storm” and Schmitt's “inclemency,” form a contrast that defines both translations, in relation to each other and to the source. Neruda's “*intemperie*” indicates “the elements,” as in their capacity for damage (*Larousse*). “Inclemency” means “severity of weather,” which, while perhaps not an exact translation, is still more general than Waldeen's “storm,” which means it preserves more of Neruda's connotation (*OED*). A storm is a particular type of bad weather,

⁶ Waldeen's translation does not feature facing-page Spanish either, and the effect on reader-friendliness is the same.

certainly, but it is not the only kind. Thus, Waldeen's translation adds a certain element of specificity to this line, but it also makes it more colloquial, and thus more approachable and meaningful for the reader. Schmitt's translation is from 1991, making it current enough for me to feel comfortable saying that "inclemency" was not the most common way for English speakers to express bad weather at the time of publication. It is, however, very close in meaning and sound to Neruda's "*intemperie*," closer than "storm" is, at any rate. What "inclemency" loses in everyday usage, it gains in poeticism.

The next line's "*cuerpos*" brings another fruitful disagreement between the translations. Waldeen's "bodies" denotes something very different from Schmitt's "corpses." Interestingly, "*cuerpos*" can imply both meanings with equal reasonability, which makes the question of literal translation irrelevant here (*Larousse*). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "bodies" and "corpses" can be similes, although "bodies" has the added definition of the "material frame of man," that is, of a living man. "Corpses," in contrast, precludes this in a very definite way. So the real difference between these translations is that Waldeen's allows at least the connotation, however faint and short-lived in the mind of the reader, of human life, while Schmitt's establishes its absence, without doubt or hesitation. In Waldeen, these "*cuerpos*" are what remains of the lives that once inhabited them; they are a physical memory. In Schmitt, they are simply physical reality itself.

Later, in section VII of *Alturas*, these translations differ in a very similar way over the word "*muertos*": in Waldeen, it becomes "dead," whereas in Schmitt it is "remains." "Dead" implies that the subjects could once have been called "living," again implying the

human life that preceded this state. “Remains,” however, simplifies the scene into one of physical destruction; it suggests that the bodies are mangled, decayed, or otherwise unidentifiable – they are not even bodies, perhaps. This implies either that the bodies in this mass grave met with incredible destruction, or that they are so old that their resemblance to any human form is long gone. The first option speaks to the important role of violence in the history of Macchu Picchu and its inhabitants. The second makes clear the immense amount of time that has passed since these “remains” were live human beings. Both are clear indications of the violent history of Macchu Picchu. This moment demonstrates the historical tone of Schmitt’s translation, which often appears in the form of the depersonalization of things that Waldeen’s treats as distinctively human.

In the fifth and final line of the sample stanza, Neruda writes of “*estambres agredidos de la patria nupcial*,” and Schmitt tells of “beleaguered stamens of the nuptial land.” *Larousse* defines the verb “*agredir*” as “to attack,” so “*agredidos*” would mean “attacked,” whose meaning is close to Schmitt’s word choice. Waldeen, however, chooses “embattled strands of the nuptial fatherland.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “embattled” as “drawn up in battle array, marshaled for fight.” This reflects something much deeper than “attacked.” It is as though Waldeen does not want to assign any connotation of victimization to the “fatherland” in the poem. “Fatherland” more than likely suggested Chile to Waldeen, and since *Masses* had spoken out openly against the abuse of Chile by the United States⁷, perhaps she was eager for any opportunity to

⁷ *Let the Rail Splitter Awake* opens with an introduction by *Masses & Mainstream*’s editor, Sam Sillen, called “A Note on Neruda:”

Walt Whitman once wrote that the great poet enlisted in a people’s cause ‘can make every word he speaks draw blood.’ This is true of Pablo Neruda. He is a poet-in-arms. He creates living art in the struggle against a dying society. And the blood he draws is that of an imperialism which hired

redeem the reputation of Chile's people by making it sound stronger and more aggressive than Neruda's words suggest. Describing it as "embattled" as opposed to "assaulted" contributes to this goal, and demonstrates the trend in Waldeen's translation to make bellicose that which does not appear overtly so in Neruda.

Another example of this tendency appears in section IV. Waldeen writes:

I wanted to swim through the broadest lives,
 in the freest river mouths,
 and when little by little man refused me
 and began closing ranks and doors so that
 my flowing hands could not touch his wounded inexistence
 then I went from street to street and river to river.

The phrase "closing ranks" in the fourth line of this stanza means, "to bring those composing them into close order so as to leave no gaps or lack parts" (*OED*). This is relatively close in meaning to Schmitt's "blocking path and door;" they both express a closing off, a tightening of some avenue. The original reads "*fue cerrando paso y puerta*," to which Schmitt produces a tight equivalent. However, Waldeen's use of "rank," while not literally altering the meaning of the line, adds a militant connotation that changes the line's tone in a huge way. The *OED* lists "rank" as "a number of soldiers drawn up in line abreast," among other definitions - a connotation that "*paso y puerta*" and "path and door" do not have. This connotation is in keeping with the battle-

the executioners of his native Chile and which now threatens to plunge the entire world into a catastrophic war (*Rail Splitter*, 5).

ready tone that characterizes much of this translation, and is so absent from Schmitt's in comparison.

As the examples from Waldeen's text that appear in this chapter show, the emphasis that this translation places on militant, forceful imagery makes the poem's subjects – the people of the American continent, and, more specifically to her text, the leftists among them – seem equally strong. On one hand, the obviously political aspect of this translation suggests that this strong "America" is any one other than that which the capitalist United States government promotes. Communism's unpopularity at the time of publication meant that Waldeen and *Masses & Mainstream* would have been under anti-red scrutiny, just as Chile and Neruda were. What the original poem said to Communists in Chile, this translation would have said to their compatriots in the United States. Both are calls to arms for the oppressed minority, and both advocate for more than just peaceful protest to make themselves heard, much like Jose Martí describes in his book, *Our America*. In order to support his separatist view of the American continent, Martí maintains that "North America was born of the plow, Spanish America of the bulldog" (74). He distinguishes unmistakably the United States of America, its people, and its culture, from the world just south of it, whose history and future are wholly separate and, with luck, completely independent of the influence of its neighbor to the north. When he wrote *Alturas*, Neruda himself "was gradually redefining his own Americanness apart from the powerful neighbor to the north," which suggests the parallel trajectories of himself and Martí (Felstiner 129). A Martí-esque reading of *Alturas* might produce the message that there is a subversive force lying just across the Panama Canal, and that Neruda is doing all he can to provoke and ignite it. In this same separatist spirit,

Waldeen's translation creates and speaks to an "America" whose borders intersect countries and continents to create a nation of like-minded, battle-ready revolutionaries fighting for an ideal society. In *Let the Rail Splitter Awake's* title poem, also a translation by Waldeen, there is a passage that encapsulates the "America" whose identity pervades *Alturas* as well:

I also go beyond your lands, America,
there I make my wandering home, flying, traveling, singing
and conversing throughout the days.
and in Asia, in the U.S.S.R., in the Urals I pause
and expand my soul permeated with solitude and resin.
I love whatever man has created in space
by blow of struggle and love. (26)

This translation's "America" goes "beyond [its] lands" to include ideologies, politics, and revolution.

Schmitt's translation serves as a temporal and thematic counterpoint to Waldeen's, and represents an effort to unify America, not politically, not even culturally, but rather on the basis that we are all inhabitants of the same continent who suffer together an unfortunate lack of cohesion. Schmitt's "America" is reminiscent of the "America" in Allen Ginsberg's 1956 poem of that title:

America I've given you all and now I'm nothing.
America two dollars and twentyseven cents January 17, 1956.
...When will you be worthy of your million Trotskyites
America why are your libraries full of tears? (Ginsberg, 269)

Ginsberg's is an America of disillusionment, fatigue, disenchantment, ignorance, and shame. Schmitt's text uses this description as a starting point for improvement via the creation of a shared hemispheric identity and a trans-continental environment of honesty in which urgent questions like Ginsberg's are first answered, and then made obsolete. It demonstrates that "the very impulse to seek a community abroad suggests that the translator wishes to extend or complete a particular domestic situation, to compensate for a defect in the translating language and literature, in the translating culture" (*Reader*, 469).

Where Waldeen's sets up an opposition between the adherents to the U.S. government's anti-left ideals and their oppressed but politically enlightened neighbors to the south, Schmitt's recognizes the cultural and political borders that separate America, yet hopefully advertises their permeability. From 1950 to 1991, through the hands of these two translators, Neruda's words have spoken volumes to U.S. citizens, asking them first to create political boundaries, and then to ignore them, but all in an effort to create a new, better "America" than that which the subjects of *Alturas* knew.

Chapter Three

"A logic usually underlies what he says:"
Section VIII, Stanza Six in John Felstiner and Nathaniel Tarn

John Felstiner believes that "it is well to trust rather than to paraphrase Neruda, for a logic usually underlies what he says" (165). This trust is evident in his text's almost unfailingly literal approach to the form and diction of the original, and his translation feels and sounds, in many places, eerily similar to Neruda's poem. Tarn's piece, however, is surprisingly full of moments of unnecessarily complex syntax, cumbersome vocabulary, and utterly odd, invented words. Not only does this mask the real flavor of the original, it is at times so distracting that it clouds the greater message of the work.

The possible explanations for Tarn's sometimes jaw-dropping, eyebrow-furrowing choices in this translation are as plentiful as they are unimportant; one could guess for eternity as to why a friend of Neruda's, who claims in his acknowledgments to have consulted Neruda himself on "a number of problems of interpretation," would choose to mangle so badly the source text. What is notable, however, is the effect that his choices have on the poem's sound, feel, and meaning. A side-by-side comparison of Tarn's and Felstiner's translations shows these differences, because whereas Tarn takes as much liberty as seems possible, Felstiner almost always demonstrates a tenaciously literal approach to Neruda's voice.

In the late 1950's, Willard Van Orman Quine developed a concept of "radical translation" that included the idea that a "foreign text is rewritten according to the terms and values of the receiving culture" (*Reader*, 68). This theory would allow Tarn the freedom to choose whichever word, phrase, tense, strange hyphenate or first-person

plural pronoun he thought best, as long as he could argue that his choice was in keeping with said “terms and values” of his culture. I, a twenty-two-year-old United States citizen, unfortunately cannot attest to what those terms and values may have been for Tarn’s first audience, in 1966 Great Britain. Even if I could, Quine’s theory implies that any criticism I might make of Tarn’s work could very reasonably be met with the answer that his approach is a reflection of the “unintelligible...incommensurable... different standards [that can be used] to evaluate translations” (*Reader*, 67). Quine’s theory became popular in the half-decade before Tarn began his translation of *Alturas*, so it stands to reason that Tarn’s work reflects the relative freedom that Quine espoused.

Vladimir Nabakov was another important figure in translation theory when Tarn began work on *Alturas*; his work on Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* is “close to the Russian, devoid of Anglo-American poetic diction, and heavily annotated.” He saw “national literatures as sites of international influence...that demand from the translator an ‘ideal version,’ ultimately unattainable” (*Reader*, 68). His is a kind of translation that appeals to an “elite minority: an academic readership who might want a literal translation that combines native proficiency in the foreign language, historical scholarship in the foreign literature, and detailed commentary on the formal features of the foreign text” (*Reader*, 68). However, as Venuti points out, Nabakov’s particular brand of loyalty to the foreign text was not the norm at this time:

[F]ew English-language literary translators at the time follow[ed]

Nabakov’s uncompromising example. The dominant trend favor[ed] just

the sort of “poetical language” he detest[ed], free versions that seek to

produce poetic effects in the translating language, usually deploying standard usage and canonical styles. (*Reader*, 68)

Tarn's is one of these "free versions," a translation of a poem that takes as its inspiration the foreign text and inserts spontaneous flourishes that define it as something altogether new. Dudley Fitts, who also translated Neruda, spoke in firm opposition to Nabakov, saying that "we need something at once less ambitious and more audacious [than a strictly literal translation]: a new poem" (*Reader*, 69). Tarn provides us with just that. What results is a jarring interpretation of a message that should go down easy, which is to say that Neruda's language in the source text not only flows with a musical smoothness, but also that its musicality earns the reader's trust and support from the outset. The Tarn translation does not woo the reader this way, and the message suffers as a direct consequence. As the previous chapter shows, Waldeen's and Schmitt's pieces deliver very specific interpretations about the "America" of *Alturas*. Tarn's seems largely devoid of a similar effort. There is no hint of political fervor or continental unity. This is a forced poetry, and its lack of fluidity shortchanges the reader by not challenging her to really think about its content. The words, like the trees, obscure the expansive forest of *Alturas*' meaning, and somewhere in there, "America" is lost, too.

Felstiner, on the other hand, adheres much more to Nabakov's example. Even readers who do not understand Spanish can glance at the original text – published on the opposite page – and see that his syntactical structure almost always proceeds in the same way as Neruda's. (Interestingly, Tarn's translation, for all its deviations from the source, features this same dual-language format). One of his text's most notable departures from Neruda, as I discuss later in this chapter, is a mere triviality of punctuation: he adds a

hyphen after “lightning” in stanza six’s second line in order to better follow the syntax of the original (see Appendix C). The last line of the chosen excerpt is the only moment where a significant syntactical difference suggests something other than an utterly literal approach to the Spanish: Neruda’s reads, “*en el carbón de la geología*,” Felstiner’s, “in geologic coal.” Again, even the reader who cannot read Spanish will note the difference in the number and order of words in each line. The most literal translation here would be “in the coal of geology,” but Felstiner’s sequence and sound are more familiar to the ears of an English reader. Felstiner’s version remains true to the meaning at which Neruda seems to be aiming; he sacrifices syntactical order in the name of comprehensibility. Rather than attempting his own rendition of an existing poem, Felstiner’s translation embraces the framework that the original has set up already. The lyrical Spanish comes through in the English that Felstiner chooses, and the steady pace of the former guides the latter as well. Felstiner, like Nabakov before him, demonstrates a “deep, nostalgic investment” in both the language of the original and the original itself, and this investment is evident throughout the entirety of his translation (*Reader*, 68).

In the still-unfolding translated life of *Alturas*, perhaps Tarn’s translation can act as the rebellious teenage phase, when the poem is trying desperately, even violently, to locate itself in relation to its own environment. Fourteen years later, when Felstiner publishes his piece, things have ceased to be so dramatic, and a certain peace has evolved between source and translation. From “harried scintillations” to “tormented flashings,” from “dead-heading blossom eyelids” to “clipping floral eyelids,” the translated poem has reconciled its differences with its parent, its inspiration, its partner – its source.

Tarn's diction in his first line of this selection exemplifies perfectly the verbal rebelliousness that is so prevalent in his translation. The source text does not suggest anything close to what Tarn has written here. "Harried" and "scintillations" both distract the reader from the power of the line, since they are so far out of the vernacular that the reader recoils from their peculiarity before he or she can attempt to complete and understand the line. The *Oxford English Dictionary* does not even have an entry for "harried;" it comes, apparently, from the verb "harr," which is listed as "obsolete," and incidentally is not recognized by my spell-check function either. "Scintillation" is just as unreasonably flowery for this line's purpose, and the phonetic similarity to "titillation" adds a connotation of physical and/or sexual pleasure that is absent from the source. Neruda's simple question, "What do your harassed flashings say?," becomes at once linguistically unapproachable and laden with innuendo in Tarn's version.

This already obscure line ends with the verb "whisper," an interesting translation of Neruda's, "*dicen*," or "say." While some Spanish-to-English verb translations leave considerable wiggle room in which a translation can very reasonably go one way or the other, the word "*decir*" is both common and straightforward, and none of its possible meanings include "whisper" (*Larousse*). Rather than assign a voice to the "scintillations" he created earlier in the line, Tarn endows them with only the ability to whisper. This adds faintness and debility to the line, and the "scintillations," which ought to connote brightness and light, are suddenly dull and meek. Furthermore, "whisper" connotes a secrecy that does not have roots in the source either. Thus, this line delivers a triple-whammy of obfuscation: an archaic adjective, a cumbersome noun, and a verb that changes drastically the action of the entire line. And for what purpose? This line does

not deepen in any way the overall message or tone of the poem or Tarn's translation; it is verbose simply for the sake of being verbose. Instead of a cohesive message, there are words, standing like sentries outside a palace: proud, but alone, and diminished in power by their singularity.

Interestingly, the next line of Tarn's translation does not stray nearly so far from the original text. Though Tarn and Felstiner differ markedly in their renditions, and thus produce lines that feel substantially unrelated, both translations reflect a certain level of literalness. Once again, however, Felstiner's is a more literal reading of Neruda, due to its manipulation of English punctuation to emulate the syntax of the Spanish question. The dash allows the speaker to deliver the line in the same syntactical order that Neruda does with as little added punctuation as possible. Tarn, on the other hand, chooses to place a comma between his two adjectives ("sly, rebellious"), and then must also insert one after "once." While his question ends up being more grammatically correct than perhaps Felstiner's is, and also closer to the speech patterns of a native English speaker, it erases completely the cadence that Neruda created in his own line, and that Felstiner's wrestles to maintain. Furthermore, Tarn neglects to carry the alliteration of "*relámpago rebelde*" in his line, whereas Felstiner's "secret insurgent" makes a valiant, and successful, effort to do so. Tarn's lines do not flow at the same clip as Neruda's and Felstiner's do, which is unfortunate, since the urgency of this moment is one of its most rich and defining characteristics. Tarn's meter feels bogged down with inflexible vocabulary and syntax that do not resonate with Neruda's simple and straightforward voice.

This stanza's final, four-lined question shows fewer differences between the translations, probably because much of the source text is a list of noun-adjective phrases whose translation is more straightforward than other grammatical structures. They do differ, however, on the verb that opens the question – Felstiner uses “goes on” and Tarn uses “wanders.” Neruda's “*iba*” can easily indicate both, but Tarn's “wanders” connotes a movement without much direction or purpose, whereas Felstiner's “goes on” indicates perseverance during a long journey, as well as continuation of action. Again, it is hard to decide which meaning is closer to the source, since both have a direct correlation to Neruda's verb. However, I think that the randomness associated with “wanders” is out of place this far into the poem. It is more at home in the first and second sections, where the speaker describes himself as “blind” and first engages in his vague journey for “the eternal, unfathomable/ truth's filament” (Tarn, 17,19). Now, eight sections into the poem, the speaker has fleshed out a much more specific purpose for himself and for this work, and there seems to be very little room for wandering. He is not, in fact, wandering; he is going on with a quest, and quite purposefully.

Tarn's vocabulary is equally vague in the next line, where he describes “fathomless mouths.” Felstiner's translation reads “bottomless mouths,” and the “*bocas profundas*” of the source means, “deep mouths.” “Fathomless” captures both Felstiner's and Neruda's meaning, but goes on to add something more, an incomprehensibility that has hints of intimidation. The *OED* lists “a metaphorical abyss” as one definition for “fathomless.” While “bottomless mouths” is also a metaphor, the metaphorical function ends at the fact that these mouths are never full; “fathomless” attributes to them the inability to be understood. That quality would negate, in a way, this poem's purpose,

which is to ascend Macchu Picchu and acquire a deeper understanding of its story and its people. If these people's mouths – the source of their speech, which the speaker invokes in the poem's final lines – are unfathomable, there is not much hope for the close bond that the poem aims to construct across time, across language, and through impermeable stone.

Tarn's translation of the next stanza begins with a phrase that catches the reader as much off guard as the earlier "harried scintillations:" "Who goes dead-heading blossom eyelids?" (223). Though the verb "dead-head" does appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary* – it is the removal of a faded flower head, as one might guess from Tarn's context – it sounds not a little ridiculous. The source word, "*cortando*," is a perfectly commonplace Spanish verb whose role in the line is to express simply the action of cutting, or "clipping," in Felstiner – not to be linguistically innovative. By replacing an everyday word with some obscure hyphenate, Tarn complicates this originally uncomplicated line.

His next odd replacement, the noun "blossom" for the adjective "*florales*," changes the structure and flow of the line even more. "*Párpados florales*," or "floral eyelids," are something that the reader can attempt to picture in his or her mind. True, it may not be easy to picture them – are they eyelids of flowers? Or human eyelids with flowers on them? – but the standard adjective-noun structure that Felstiner uses is closer to the way English syntax frequently works, as opposed to Tarn's noun-noun sequence. These two flowery word choices do not come from a close adherence to either the source's linguistics or its structure. They come, it seems, from some other voice, some entity that wishes to place its personal mark on the poem during the process of

translation. This voice might be Tarn's, and it might not be; its identity seems inconsequential, however, since all that matters is that it is not Neruda's, or that of the *Alturas* he wrote.

The boldest move in this stanza is in the next line, where Tarn adds a first-person perspective to his translation. The source provides only the verb, "*mirar*," "to look at" (*Larousse*); there is no object of the action. Tarn's addition is doubly important because it alters the grammar of the line and it gives an active voice to the poem's speaker where it does not exist in Neruda's. The source poem progresses meticulously from the very introspective first stanza, where "Neruda draws us right into his life," to the very "public" last, where "a kind of adhesive fellow-feeling" expresses the poet's desire that the "flesh and blood" of the "forgotten workers" of Macchu Picchu be "transfused into him" (Felstiner, 153, 198; Tarn, 13). The long journey unfolds geographically and historically while the poet reveals himself and his own role just as gradually; moments where the speaker uses the first-person are calculated and purposeful. Inserting "us" where the original does not is an interruption in this process, this revelation, that characterizes and is one of the most tantalizing parts of this poem. In this one word, Tarn's translation states very clearly that literalness is not a priority, and that some other design is at work. The "far" that he adds to describe "earth" supports this as well, since it has no equivalent in Neruda.

The final offense in this stanza – and "offense" really feels like the correct word – is Tarn's negligence to maintain the obviously purposeful repetition of "*desgranar*," "to thresh" or "to shell" (*Larousse*). The infinitive and its adjective form appear in the same line, separated by only two words. Neruda is not a careless poet; this is not an accident.

It is, for the translator, a cheat sheet, an explicit instruction on the exact literary device that should be used at this moment. It is a chance for the translator to relax, just for a moment, and search for only one word instead of two. It is a freebie. Yet Tarn, ever-enigmatic, decides to take the road not traveled and use two different terms. “To bed their own disintegration here” does not sound or look similar to “*a desgranar su noche desgranada*,” even to the non-Spanish-speaking members of his audience. In an added act of defiance, Tarn leaves out “*noche*” (“night”) completely, replacing it with “here.” He changes a specific temporal word to a vague spatial one, and once again there appears to be little gained by the switch except a considerable departure from the meaning and cadence of Neruda’s line.

For the immediate purposes of this thesis, Felstiner and Tarn can function as ad hoc endpoints on the spectrum from free to literal translation, at once embodying moments in history and the evolving process of translation itself. The following chapters explore in more detail the characteristics of both translation approaches.

Chapter Four

"An Active Site of Conflict:"¹ Waldeen, Wright and Tarn Tackle Section III

These three translations together create a spectrum of freedom in translation.

Waldeen's text, as chapter one of this thesis describes, makes a considerable number of important departures from the original in order to create a much more political tone than the original contains. Interestingly, at those moments where there is no fodder for politicization, Waldeen's text takes a word-for-word literal approach. This fascinating contrast yields a translation that is verbally literal, yet thematically free. This chapter's focus stanza shows her text's literal side as against its overall freedom. Tarn's, on the other hand, serves its own artistic purpose, often disregarding completely the ideas that the original conveys. Wright's 1962 translation, with its baseless additions and omissions of meaning, falls into the same category as Tarn's, and often surpasses it in its perplexing lack of relation with the source text. All three infuse something new into Neruda's voice, which is the first step in a process whose necessary completion is that the source's message loses something.

In Waldeen's case, this loss manifests itself in the narrowness of the message; her translation's pro-Communist tone is so strong that it overshadows the continental unity that is one of the source's trademarks. However, of these free translations, hers feels the closest to Neruda's because of both its literalism and its inclusion of this message of unity on at least some level. While her grammatical oversights are sometimes laughably

¹ From Gayatri Spivak's article "Translating into English": "I wish translation could be...irreducibly taken for granted. The impossibility of translation is what puts its necessity in a double bind. It is an active site of conflict, not an irreducible guarantee." Spivak's description corresponds with the struggle for meaning that the reader encounters, to different degrees, in each of these three versions of Neruda.

careless, the spirit of the source is, without doubt, present in her words. The loss in Tarn's translation is due to its being ornate to the point of cumbersomeness. It makes the reader fumble to understand individual words and phrases, which in turn prevents an understanding of the larger work. Wright's text shares this problem, but exacerbates it by being even less literal, and even less concerned with thematic literalism, than Tarn's. There are very few moments in Wright's text that invoke Neruda's tone, which is something that even Tarn's manages from time to time. In his translation, so much is added that it seems more accurate to label it a new poem, but not entirely in the sense that Fitts promotes (see Chapter Three). His is a new poem in the sense that it derives and conveys almost nothing of the source's vocabulary, tone, or message. It adds so much, and in turn takes away almost everything.

What, then, can be said for free translation? Walter Benjamin writes this in its defense:

Fidelity in the translation of individual words can almost never fully reproduce the meaning they have in the original. For sense in its poetic significance is not limited to meaning, but derives from the connotations conveyed by the word chosen to express it. We say of words that they have emotional connotations. A literal rendering of the syntax completely demolishes the theory of reproduction of meaning and is a direct threat to comprehensibility...meaning is served far better...by the unrestrained license of bad translators. (*Reader*, 21).

Calling Waldeen, Tarn and Wright "bad translators" adds little to this investigation, though it is tempting to do so. They are without doubt free translators, which is to say, at

the very least, that they are in some way not literal. Waldeen combines many instances of “translation of individual words,” yet with a definite penchant for exploiting their political potential. This at times causes her text to stray from “a literal rendering of the syntax,” which, by Benjamin’s account, should somehow bring it closer again to Neruda. On a micro level, it often achieves such closeness; on a macro level, it does not, just as Tarn’s and Wright’s wanderings do not arrive at the source’s significance. Thus, at least in the case of these free translations of *Alturas*, the source text’s meaning is best served by some degree of literalness. This is not to say that free translations do not have their place. As Benjamin rightly states, sometimes a certain level of liberty with the source is necessary to achieve clarity in the receiving language; the three literalist translations that appear in the next chapter all demonstrate occasional freedoms that enhance their ability to say in English what Neruda does in Spanish. They walk the fine line between necessary and capricious translational freedom. Waldeen, Wright, and Tarn attempt to walk this same line, but with much less success.

The third line of this chapter’s focus section (III.1.iii) is an ideal point to measure literalness, because the source’s language is so concrete: three of the seven words are numbers, the translation of which should be unmistakable. However, Waldeen’s is the only translation that includes the same numbers that Neruda’s lists. Tarn’s translation includes a different set of numbers altogether that have a definite connotation for its audience: “nine to five, to six” makes the reader recall immediately the traditional workday schedule and the tiresome feeling of having to work beyond it.² There is certainly a tone of exhaustion and frustration in the source text, but the numbers in this

² Apparently, Tarn wrote to Neruda asking him about the meaning of the numbers in this line and if they were “about the workday”; unfortunately, Neruda’s response is nowhere to be found (Eisner, electronic correspondence, 10 Mar 2006).

line could easily refer to the “*acontecimientos*” in the previous line, as well as to “cada uno” that appears in the next. Tarn’s translation of this line is further off the mark because it modernizes the poem’s context. The modern workday is exactly that – modern – and the focus of this stanza, and the poem to this point, is decidedly ancient.

Wright takes a step further and omits the numerical references altogether, choosing instead to wax philosophical on the “edge of endurance, and beyond.” In addition to disregarding the precise wording of the original, this line conveys uncertainty and limitlessness where Neruda’s is concrete and finite. Wright’s hyperbolic rendition creates a much larger temporal space for the “human soul” than Neruda’s does, and this changes the scope of the stanza’s action. To go “beyond” “endurance” suggests, and very readily, to go beyond human ability, human life – to die. And while the line that immediately follows this one describes the “many deaths” that “came to each [man],” the rest of this stanza describes the *lives* of these men. Moribund, defeated, and even “waiting for death,” these men are still alive; they have not gone “beyond” their lives’ endurance at all. Furthermore, the next stanza of this poem begins with the speaker’s admission that death has approached even him many times (“*muchas veces*”). This speaker is the strongest symbol of life in the entire poem, especially at its end, when he begs his deceased audience to speak through him. That death has come close to, but not overtaken, him shows that death’s proximity is not necessarily an indication of its power over man or mankind. Similarly, as the end of this stanza shows, it seems that even those men who await death might not be able to coax it close enough to become overpowered by it. This stanza’s meaning depends on that double-sided corollary: if the reader assumes, as Wright’s line urges him to, that these men were pushed “beyond” their own

endurance, then the image of death that recurs in the rest of the stanza takes on a decidedly literal meaning – one that Neruda’s works hard to avoid.

In the fifth and sixth lines of this stanza, the source describes a lamp that puts itself out (“*lámpara/ que se apaga*”); each translation chooses a different verb to illustrate the action, and their choices follow their overall diction patterns. Waldeen’s text, in accordance with its fairly literal treatment of the source on a word-for-word basis, uses “extinguished,” whose definition (“to put out, quench”) straightforwardly conveys Neruda’s wording (*OED*). It also suggests that the “lamp,” whose specific identity (eg., floor, fire, table, etc.) is unknown, is in fact a flame. This image lends a feeling of antiquity to the line by recalling a time before electricity, a feeling that aligns with the retrospective tone of the poem.

Tarn’s does not treat the source so delicately. His “drenched” is too extreme for the action that the source implies. Neruda wishes for a lamp to go out, not for a downpour. This word choice dramatizes significantly the Spanish image, a not surprising move within this free translation.

Wright’s text borrows from each of these translations, but somehow ends up even further off the mark than Tarn’s. His speaker describes a “light/ flicked off,” which delivers the same basic action imagery as Waldeen’s: a light source ceasing to give light. However, in contrast with Waldeen’s conscientious respect for the poem’s temporal setting, Wright’s forces a decidedly modern context that conflicts with the source. The subjects of Neruda’s poem did not “flick off” lights with the touch of a finger as we do today. Furthermore, the harshness of “flick off” (“to throw off with a jerk”) is in discord with the source (*OED*). These breaches makes Wright’s line the freest of the three.

Wright's translation continues to stump those who look for a link between source and translation with the word "rag-picker" in the last line of this section's first stanza. "*Roedor*" means simply, "rodent," and Waldeen's and Tarn's texts write it as such (though Tarn's adds "wanderer," a discussion of which follows) (*Larousse*). Using "rag-picker" does nothing to create the vibrant image of a rat or other vermin crowding the streets ("*roedor de las calles espesas*"), a loss which in turn breaks the connection between this line and lines five six before it, which describe a "worm" and a "small death with coarse wings" ("*gusano*," "*pequeña muerte de alas gruesas*"). The source stanza literally crawls with tiny, disgusting beasts, but Wright's does not deliver the same hair-raising sensation.

Tarn's translation of this line changes the stanza's meaning in a similar way. He adds "wanderer" to "rodent," which adulterates the baseness of "*roedor*" by assigning it a possibly human quality. Tarn's speaker, in the previous section, states that he "had no place in which my hand could rest," which suggests that he is wandering (see Appendix D). Thus, giving this stanza's "rodent" the same qualities as the speaker personifies "rodent" to a certain extent. This makes the rodent much less eerie, and the line therefore fails to make the reader as squeamish as Neruda's does. Tarn's personification embodies the separate logic that his entire translation follows, and the change that results in this line is a microcosm of a poem-wide problem.

This stanza closes with a line of especially rich imagery: it describes the subjects' daily weakening, their daily approach to death, as a black cup that they drank, trembling. Waldeen's text is once again literal here; the placement of "trembling" in the middle of the line is the only moment where the translation does not mirror the source's text

exactly. I think the line loses some fluidity as a result, but this verbal do-si-do does not change its overall effect. Tarn's and Wright's, on the other hand, continue their trends of exaggerating the source text's imagery and obfuscating its meaning. The former translates "*bebían*" as "drained," which redefines the action: no longer merely drinking something, the subjects now drink it to the last drops (*OED*). Merely thirsty in the source text, the subjects are now parched; taking their cups' contents in at an undefined pace in Spanish, the English finds the drinkers approaching their ration ravenously. These connotations bring desperation and overindulgence after deprivation to the line, whereas Neruda's creates an image that is no less bleak, but much subtler, even flatter, than Tarn's. The source text describes trembling and drinking, and noticeably little else. The power of Neruda's line lies in its simplistic hopelessness, so Tarn's connotative complication constitutes the generation of an entirely new poem, which is the crux of free translation (*Reader*, 69).

Wright's final line exemplifies free translation as well, only through different diction. His addition of "with their hands shaking" introduces something – the subjects' hands – and thereby takes away something else – the sense that it is in fact their entire bodies, their entire community, their entire lives – that are trembling. Rather than leave the reader to come to the latter realization, Wright provides him with the former imagery, effectively stopping any process that would have eventually brought the reader closer to Neruda's stronger, more disturbing meaning.

These free translations all redefine various matrices of Neruda's poem in an effort to achieve their own ideal version of *Alturas*. These idealizations are important because of their effects on the source text, and also because they mark an important moment in

the history of translation. Rather than follow the “literalism of German translation,” these free translators “spurn the letter and follow the spirit” of the source,” however they may choose to define that spirit (*Reader*, 13). These works are a reaction to rigidity, a response to repression, in the same way that Neruda reacted and responded to the same, both in his life and in his poetry. His political activism demonstrates his desire to abandon the stability of the capitalist, conservative system that many western governments were adopting in the post-World War II era (Halperín Donghi, 226, 273; Bizzarro, 46); his poem shows his wish that the American continent attempt to reshape its identity in a cross-cultural way. In this way, these free translations, despite their apparent literal and technical vulnerabilities, represent a valid reply to the conversation that Neruda’s poem began: the conversation of change.

Chapter Five

The text, "the whole text, and nothing but the text:"¹ Literal translations of Section X, Stanza Three by Schmitt, Mark Eisner, and Felstiner

These three translations are the three newest ones, and they are the most valiant efforts to convey Neruda's words as literally as possible. Their likeness in approach means that there is great syntactical and grammatical proximity between them. Because of these similarities, those moments where they do differ become especially fascinating and help to characterize their individual identities, messages, and overall effects on Neruda's text. Felstiner's is literal, but its focus on the sensuality that appears in Neruda's earlier works gives it what I call a "thematic consciousness." Eisner approaches the source literally as well, but with several grammatical and syntactical acrobatics in order to convey something more than a word-for-word literal translation would yield; I call his translation "creatively literal." Finally, Schmitt's text, whose characterization depends heavily on its inclusion in a translation of the entire *Canto General*, aims at painting a historical picture for the reader; his is a "literal historicization."

Felstiner's translation is fluid and coherent, with none of the head-scratching additions that dot Tarn's and Wright's like linguistic land mines. The poeticism of the translation allows Neruda's message to shine through in a way that is honest and gripping. However, there are moments in Felstiner's text where sexuality plays a larger role than it does in Neruda's. Individually, these instances might have little effect on the

¹ From Vladimir Nabakov's article "'Onegin' in English:" "The person who desires to turn a literary masterpiece into another language, has only one duty to perform, and this is to reproduce with absolute exactitude the whole text, and nothing but the text. The term 'literal translation' is tautological since anything but that is not truly a translation but an imitation, and adaptation or a parody" (*Reader*, 77).

meaning of the greater work. As a group, though, they cast a subtly sexualized glow on the text that speaks more to Neruda's earlier poetry than to the flavor of *Alturas*. His *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada*, written in 1924, includes the following poem, entitled *Cuerpo de mujer* (*Body of woman*):

*Cuerpo de mujer, blancas colinas, muslos blancos,
te pareces al mundo en tu actitud de entrega.*

*Mi cuerpo de labriego salvaje te socava
y hace saltar el hijo del fondo de la tierra.*

Pero caela hora de la venganza, y te amo.

Cuerpo de piel, de musgo, de leche ávida y firme.

Ah los vasos del pecho! Ah los ojos de ausencia!

Ah las rosas del pubis! Ah tu voz lenta y triste!

Body of woman, white hills, white thighs,
you look like the world in your attitude of surrender.
My savage peasant body plows through you
and makes the son surge from the depths of the earth.

But the hour of vengeance strikes, and I love you.

Body of skin, of moss, of ardent, constant milk.

Ah the chalices of the breasts! Ah the eyes of absence!

Ah the roses of the pubis! Ah your voice slow and sad!

(Eisner, *Essential*, 3)

The “womb” in the last line of Felstiner’s translation of section X, stanza three echoes the sensual femininity in this earlier work, and thus introduces sexuality by alluding to thematic elements that already characterize Neruda’s poetry (see Appendix E). Felstiner himself worked intimately with many of Neruda’s texts before translating *Alturas*, so it stands to reason that the latter would reflect elements of the former. To be sure, such references would be lost on readers who are unfamiliar with Neruda’s early writings. Even without this context, though, the word “womb” still carries enough connotative weight to add significant color to this line. The original “*entraña*” (“entrails”) conjures up images of decay, death, destruction – quite the opposite of the reproductive vitality and protective warmth that “womb” communicates (*Larousse*). The effect is that Felstiner’s text (“scrape in the womb”) makes a clear reference to a living woman, and to the speaker’s desperation to rend it apart until he can “touch man.” There is violence in this line, just like in *Cuerpo de mujer*’s line, “My savage peasant body plows through you.” This violence is sexualized once because it occurs within a womb, and again because, inside that womb, there is a “man.” The juxtaposition of the sexes within the very space on which their procreation depends speaks directly to the act of sex. This line, to which Eisner’s translation is virtually identical, urges the reader to read sexuality into it regardless of their previous exposure to Neruda. For those familiar with Neruda’s earlier poetry (and *Veinte Poemas* is one of his most popular works, so it is entirely feasible that a reader of *Alturas* translations may have read translations of *Veinte Poemas* as well), it recalls the sensuality of days gone by, before Neruda’s poetry took on its more political pallor; for them, this translation recalls this earlier eroticism and brings it to *Alturas*. To those who have not read Neruda before, it provides a taste of his other

poems, even if the reader does not realize it. This bleeding-over of themes from previous works in Neruda's corpus is the one element of Felstiner's translation that forces me to qualify its "literal" characterization with the term, "thematically conscious."

Throughout his piece there are other moments like this one where images carry a shade more sexuality than the source does. The third stanza in Felstiner's first section ends with the lines, "I plunged my turbulent and gentle hand/ into the genital quick of the earth" (*"hundí la mano turbulenta y dulce/ en lo más genital de lo terrestre"*) (see Appendix E). Leaving aside the obvious connotations of "genital," whose appearance does not give us pause because of its equivalent in the source, the words "plunged" and "gentle" impart sexuality that Neruda's does not warrant.

First, "plunged." For all six of the featured English translations of this poem, the verb "*hundir*" makes for fascinatingly different interpretations. *Larousse* provides five definitions for it: "to sink", "to bury", "to devastate", "to ruin", and "to dent". The first two are the most popular among this set of translations, along with several other words that *Larousse* does not list – namely, "plunge" and "dig." The *OED* defines "plunge" as "to put violently, thrust, cast into," so this word choice adds a clear connotation of violence. In general, I think that "plunge" is a very harsh, exaggeratory translation for "*hundir*," and its appearance as such perplexes me every time. This line especially makes me cringe because of its reference to genitalia and the earth. The commonality of the term "mother earth," along with the speaker's placing (whether sinking, plunging, etc.) a hand into that earth, suggests very strongly that the earth is feminine. Thus, when translations juxtapose "plunge" with "genital" and "earth," there is, for me, an undeniably violent, even abusive image; I read in these lines the rape of the earth. Though it is not

an explicit theme of *Alturas* or *Canto General*, rape is an ever-present and important element of any story of conquest, not least of all the one that Neruda's *Canto General* tells. The standard use of the phrase "rape and pillage" in reference to besieged places and peoples proves the centrality of rape as a tool of conquest, and the image in Felstiner's translation recalls the horror of this invasion of corporal autonomy; in doing so, he evokes also the much more obviously sexual poetry of Neruda's earlier works.

The word "gentle," which only appears in Felstiner's translation, suggests the speaker's trepidation, as though he is nervous to be touching the earth in this way. It suggests a first sexual encounter between two lovers, which again echoes the Neruda of the '20's and '30's that *Cuerpo de mujer* embodies. Such colorations persist throughout Felstiner's text and work like magnets, pulling the Neruda-familiar reader back to previous works, and tempting the Neruda newcomer to associate this poem, and the poet, with sensual language and sexually-charged imagery. Felstiner's intimate work with pre-*Alturas* Neruda colors his translation, forcing his Neruda into a box out of which he had begun to grow by the time *Alturas* appears in 1950.

Eisner's translation echoes closely Felstiner's wording in both of the key lines that I explicate above. That Eisner cites Felstiner as a contributor to his translation helps to explain this similarity, and there are many such agreements between the texts. However, there are other moments when Eisner's differs from Felstiner's in ways that contradict the sexualizing efforts of the latter, thus removing from it much of the "thematic consciousness" that appears in Felstiner's. The translation seems to struggle with how to express sexuality or sexualized images, and in these moments, it takes

surprising steps away from Neruda's words, thus separating itself, slightly but firmly, from the source.

For example, the final two words of stanza I.3 form a curious incident of repetition for which there is no discernable inspiration in the source text: "terrestrial territory" (see Appendix E). To be sure, the Spanish line "*en lo más genital de lo terrestre*" is a monster to translate into English: "*lo*" is an amazingly multi-purposed pronoun that means, in this case, "that which is" – not the most poetic of phrases. But "terrestrial territory" is so alliterative that it becomes burdensome, and is therefore a small and doubtful improvement over what "that which is" would have done in its place. Eisner's text, however, accomplishes another goal by not allowing this part of the line to flow as if well-oiled: it diverts a great deal of attention away from the squeamish "genital" that precedes it. Furthermore, including "territory," defined as "the land or district lying round a city or town," makes it very clear that the earth in Eisner's text is not overtly personified, and even less overtly feminized (*OED*). It is, first and foremost, "land," and the explicit definition of it as such relieves the line of a lot of its sexual connotation. Still, the text maintains the proximity of "genital" and "terrestrial," which in turn preserves, albeit subtly, the link that the original makes between the earth and reproduction, sexuality, and pleasure. In its own way, Eisner's text has managed to deliver much the same feeling in these lines that the original does, and in doing so exemplifies the "creative literalism" that characterizes the rest of the translation.

For example, in this same stanza, Eisner's translation uses "sunken" in line two (I.3.ii), even though *Larousse* defines the source's "*enterrada*" as "buried." The presence of "sink," even in its adjective form, and in such close proximity to where "*hundir*"

appears in Neruda, ensures that the Spanish verb's connotation and flavor are not completely lost on the reader. This moment in Eisner's text exemplifies the sometimes circuitous, but always rewarding, route that his translation often takes to arrive at a tone that conveys as much of Neruda's connotation as possible.

The other important type of deviation that Eisner's translation makes is to replace some of the source's infinitive verbs with their present progressive forms. This happens twice in this chapter's focus stanza, in the final two lines: "*subir*" becomes "climbing, and "*rascar*" becomes "scratching." This technique appears elsewhere in the translation as well, and the cumulative effect is that the poem's overall action feels much more present to the reader. Rather than restrict its speaker to the present moment as Schmitt and Felstiner do at these moments ("ascend" and "scrape;" "climb" and "scrape"), Eisner's creates a sensation of continued movement, which in turn makes the poem's other actions feel prolonged as well. The action in Eisner's translation seems so full of momentum that it feels certain that it will continue after the poem's conclusion. This momentum brings *Alturas'* subject matter into the present, and propels it into the future.

In corresponding with Mr. Eisner, I learned that his study of Neruda's life and poetry has not only become his life's work when he is at home in San Francisco, it often sends him to Neruda's Chile to do research as well. Thus, his translation developed within a context of ongoing dedication to Neruda's message, a dedication whose end is not remotely in sight. This context manifests itself in the energetic forward propulsion that the present progressive lends to *Alturas'* message. The translation of these verbs is only three letters away from being completely literal, but those three letters imbue it with a momentum that Neruda's individual verbs do not imply directly. However, this

momentum captures the desperate hope for a different, better future for America that is so present in the source. Thus, these altered verb tenses embrace Neruda's message in a non-literal way, and exemplify the creative literalism of Eisner's translation.

Schmitt's text represents another vein of literal translation: that which emphasizes the historical importance of the text's subject matter and its relevance to modern readers. His "literal historization," which I discuss in Chapter Two, aims at a Nerudized America, as against an Americanized Neruda; his text is less concerned with the aesthetic elements that might thrill U.S. readers than it is with challenging those readers to enjoy such elements without losing sight of the greater value of the poem as a an educating, unifying text.

His literal rendering of this stanza has an element of depersonalization like that in Chapter Two, and also of explicit, even violent imagery that refer the reader back to the gory history that the poem describes. First, his literalness: down to the diminutive "*-ito*" that attaches to "*palo*," producing "little stick," his text mirrors the source's syntax and grammar almost exactly. Where Felstiner writes "stone stamens," an Anglicization of "*estambres de piedra*," Schmitt leaves "stamens of stone." The retention or loss of meaning in either translator's choice is debatable; Schmitt's line would carry much the same message if he had followed Felstiner's streamlined example. It is simply that his text opts for grammatical literalness wherever possible, a practice that shows the secondary role that aesthetics play in this translation.

The second two lines of this stanza demonstrate many kinds of literalism – syntactical, grammatical, visual. Line two includes a hyphen that does not appear in the

source, but its purpose – to create a pause which allows the line to make sense – is more utilitarian than artistic, in accordance with the theme of the text.

The last line's "innards" continues the depersonalization and frankness that make Schmitt's text feel similar to a textbook. Rather than romanticize "*entrañas*" like Felstiner and Eisner do, Schmitt brutalizes the line with "innards," the "vulgar alteration" of the word "inwards" (*OED*). This word has a stronger animal implication than "entrails" would; it recalls the Thanksgiving Day gizzard extraction with which most U.S. citizens are familiar. It thus debases the body from which the "innards" come from by suggesting that it might just as easily be a turkey as a human. The reader does not invest himself emotionally with the body from which these innards come because he is too busy recoiling from the innards themselves. The line is thoroughly depersonalized.

Furthermore, the gory image that the word "innards" evokes recalls the bloody story of conquest that both Neruda's and Schmitt's texts recount. This harsh reminder of how much blood was shed reinforces the history lesson in Schmitt's translation.

Those moments that are relatively non-literal also flesh out the translation's historicist position. Its opening, "I want to know," deviates from "*Yo te interrogo*" ("I interrogate/question you"), removing the second person singular object. This move eliminates to some degree the relationship between the speaker and the "salt of the roads," thus depersonalizing the line. By reducing this conversation to a monologue, Schmitt's text replaces a human-earth partnership with an introspective rhetoric that occurs within the speaker's mind, instead of out loud, and thus somewhat out of his control. Neruda's line is a dialogue, but Schmitt's is a statement that does not require a response from the "salt of the roads." It functions in a relatively static state, where its

own existence is a freestanding event worthy of a line of poetry; it simply states its aim, whereas Neruda's interrogates, demands an answer. Much like a history textbook, this line states what is, what is fact, and, without pause for elaboration, moves on to the next topic.

Line four introduces another small but important variation from the source: "rungs" for "*escalones*." *Larousse* lists both "steps" (Felstiner chooses this) and "rungs," and Schmitt's choice of the latter reinforces the translation's overall message: that its English-speaking readers need to begin the difficult work of broadening their definition of "America." This manifests itself best in a comparison between the two translations that *Larousse* provides. A "step" is "something on which to place the foot in ascending or descending" (*OED*). They are the building blocks of a staircase, as in the spiraling one that a woman in a flowing dress descends when her suitor comes to call. Their function is to make it easier for humans to ascend a steep grade; without the steps, this ascent would still be possible, just more difficult. They are, in this way, a kind of luxury. In Felstiner's translation, they are something more: "climb every step of air until I read the void" conjures up an image of someone rising steadily in the sky, on some celestial staircase, towards heaven or some other peaceful, postmortem resting place. Thus, a "step" has a twofold positive connotation: it is an invention that represents mankind's constant self-improvement, and a move towards the kind of afterlife for which so many hope and pray.

A "rung," on the other hand, as the smallest element of a ladder, is not nearly so glamorous (*OED*). In contrast with the step's facilitation of something that was once difficult, a rung makes possible that which was impossible before. To reach the topmost

clapboard while painting a house, the painter can do nothing but climb a ladder. A ladder and its rungs, then, are indispensable to the jobs they perform. They are also much more difficult to ascend than a staircase is. Ladders require balance, strength, confidence, and all four limbs, whereas steps require nothing more than a pair of legs (or one leg and a set of crutches) and mobility. Schmitt's "rungs," therefore, are both necessary and challenging, in the same way that his text's demands of its readers are. Climbing rungs is something to which one must devote considerable resources; so is redefining one's identity. The factual tone throughout Schmitt's text seems to acknowledge this mission's difficulty while all the time insisting on its necessity. This paradoxical nature makes its tone very similar to the source's. It is both encouraging and demanding, both depressed by past events and hopeful for future ones. It laments the violent disappearance of the "America" that existed five hundred years ago, criticizes subtly the "America" that chooses to ignore the modern continuation of that violence, and proposes a new path, towards a new "America" whose unified spirit was Neruda's vision fifty years before.

Conclusion

“Speak to me in a language I can hear:”¹

Our desperate need for translation

Translation into English – complicated, political, difficult, and/or unsatisfactory – is an act essential to the study of English literature in the twentieth-century, especially in this, our melting pot of a nation. In every English literature course that I have taken at this University, there has been at least one translation on the syllabus. The fast-increasing permeability of the world’s physical barriers has brought with it a disintegration of communication obstacles as well, with the result that the English reader’s cache of knowledge, experience and expression has grown to include works by foreign artists, in foreign styles, in foreign languages. I am delighted and grateful that my own horizons have stretched to first accommodate, and then for a time, to revolve around, Pablo Neruda’s life and works. Living in Chile and studying his poetry there were, for me, the real-life equivalents of the ultimate act of translation: taking a source – me – and demanding of it that it express itself in another language and place. This thesis has brought that experience full circle by affording me the opportunity to relate the poet’s exquisite talent, depth, and passion. I feel that I have done what little I can to allow Neruda to speak through my words, for he is certainly in my blood.

However, I refuse to entertain the notion that this thesis will ever really reach its completion. Translation is a constant process whose end is not only unimaginable, it is anathema to the kind of greater social purpose that it ought to serve. Near the beginning

¹ From the song “Thirty-three” by the Smashing Pumpkins.

of his book, *Translating Neruda*, John Felstiner begs the reader, “Let us admit that to really translate a poem is impossible – impossible yet fascinating – and start from there.” It is “impossible” because of the unique “blend of sounds and rhythms, of tones and overtones” that make a poem a poem, and a language a language (Felstiner, 27). Neruda comments on this impossibility in his response regarding into what language his poems translate best:

Italian, because there’s a similarity of values between the two languages. English and French...do not correspond to Spanish – neither in vocalization, nor in the placement, color, or weight of the words. This means that the equilibrium of a Spanish poem...can find no equivalent in French or English. It’s not a question of interpretive equivalents, no; the sense may be correct, indeed the accuracy of the translation itself, of the meaning, may be what destroys the poem. That’s why I think that Italian comes closest. (Felstiner, 26)

For me, as well as for the six translators that this thesis features, the only possible reaction to Neruda’s comments is a defiant “hmp.” Maybe Italian is the best. And it could be that Portuguese comes next, followed by Hebrew, Mandarin Chinese, Swahili, Sanskrit...with English coming in dead last. But really, all of this is joyfully unimportant, because English translations of Neruda exist, have readership, and, in one way or another, manage to express Neruda and some version of his American message. The translations I present here show those purposes that Neruda translations, and translation(s) in general, can serve, many of which are broader and more complicated than the expression of a single poem’s meaning. Political environments, artistic volition,

and socio-cultural development are some of the most influential of these purposes, but there are as many translation goals as there are translations. These purposes, like Waldeen's Communist message and Felstiner's thematically conscious sexualization, are as rich and interesting as the translations they accompany, and it is my hope that my work demonstrates the equal necessity of seeking out a translation greater contextual purpose and absorbing its apparent textual value.

A fellow thesis writer asked me once if it were true that one cannot read Neruda except in Spanish, that it just doesn't come through; someone had told him that once. I was stumped to silence for a moment. "I hope not," I replied eventually, over the din of the bar, "or else my entire thesis would be kind of senseless, wouldn't it?" Neruda says too much, paints images too beautiful, is just too good NOT to be translated. And how selfish of those who could translate him not to do so. I often wonder about the people that steal famous paintings from museums: shouldn't we try them for crimes against humanity, for robbing the world of something that belongs to everybody? Neruda is like those paintings: he belongs to us all, because he speaks to us all. Those fortunate enough to experience that ownership in the source language owe their companions who are unable to do so an attempt, any attempt, at expressing Neruda in a language they can hear.

In the case of Neruda translations in the United States, the ownership, the expression, and the hearing are exceptionally necessary. The call for unity in *Alturas* is evident, both in the source and in the various translations. While inspiring, it is a microcosm of what makes Neruda so vital to the literary canon of the United States of America.

Every translation occurs within, and is itself, a unique historical moment; this is what makes translation the continual process that it is. This thesis, too, occurs within a unique historical context: that within which my interest in Latin American translations grew. While traveling throughout Latin America over the past year, I witnessed over and again the genuine kindheartedness of a genuinely exploited community, and it was no secret, to those I met or to myself, that the exploiter was, in too many cases, the United States government. Neruda's Chile, "more than any other South American country...has been the object of deep US involvement in...the last three decades" (Sigmund, 8). This involvement included the "repression of the labor movement and the Communist party" by the anti-union, North American-owned copper mines in the middle of the century, as well as the CIA's aid to the militaristic Pinochet regime that committed a hostile takeover of Chile's government in 1973, and the subsequent years of massive kidnappings of its leftist dissidents (Klubock, 270; Eisner, "Biography"; Smith, 4).² Henry Kissinger once summed up the United States government's opinion of the pepper-shaped nation, saying that Chile is a "dagger pointed at the heart of Antarctica" (Sigmund, 9). Today, there is, and ought to be, bad blood between our government and the people who suffered these abuses. It feels both right and required that we, as fellow citizens of the American continent in Neruda's *Alturas* and *Canto General*, begin to make efforts to acknowledge and apologize for past abuses, and to move towards a set of international dynamics that ensures against their recurrence. However, my naiveté is not such that I anticipate this.

² "Missing," a 1982 film by Costa-Gavras, tells the story of one of the thousands of "*deaparecidos*" who were tortured, murdered, or simply disappeared during Pinochet's 17-year dictatorship. The 2004 film "Machuca," by Andrés Wood, gives a fresh and poignant account of life immediately before and after the coup. "Voces Inocentes," by Luis Mandoki, also from 2004, describes the U.S.-aided guerrilla warfare that plagued El Salvador throughout the 1980's.

So, instead, I propose translation. As a means for literary expression, it suffices. As a means for cross-cultural understanding, it is essential. And as an ambassador for translation's importance in creating a cross-continental definition of America, there is nobody better than Pablo Neruda.

Appendix A
The Heights of Macchu Picchu
 translated by Jack Schmitt

I.

From air to air, like an
 empty net

I went between the streets and atmosphere, arriving and departing,
 in the advent of autumn the outstretched coin
 of the leaves, and between springtime and the ears of corn,
 all that the greatest love, as within a falling
 glove, hands us like a long moon.

(Days of vivid splendor in the inclemency
 of corpses: steel transformed into acid silence:
 nights frayed to the last flour:
 beleaguered stamens of the nuptial land.)
 Someone awaiting me among the violins
 discovered a world like an entombed tower
 spiraling down beneath all
 the harsh sulphur-colored leaves:
 farther down, in the gold of geology,
 like a sword sheathed in meteors,
 I plunged my tender and turbulent hand
 into the genital matrix of the earth.

I put my brow amid the deep waves,
 descended like a drop amid the sulphurous peace,
 and, like a blind man, returned to the jasmine
 of the spent human springtime.

II.

If the loft germ is carried from flower to flower
 and the rock preserves its flower disseminated
 in its hammered suit of diamond and sand,
 man crumples the petal of light which he gathers
 in determinate deep-sea springs
 and drills the quivering metal in his hands.
 And all along, amid clothing and mist, upon the sunken table,
 like a jumbled quantity, lies the soul:
 quartz and vigilance, tears in the ocean
 like pools of cold: yet he still
 torments it under the habitual rug, rips it
 in the hostile vestments of wire.

No: in corridors, air, sea or on roads,

who guards (like red poppies) his blood
 without a dagger? Rage has extenuated
 the sad trade of the merchant of souls,
 and, while at the top of the plum tree, the dew
 has left for a thousand years its transparent letter
 upon the same branch that awaits it, O heart, O brow crushed
 between the autumn cavities.

How many times in the wintry streets of a city or in
 a bus or a boat at dusk, or in the deepest
 loneliness, a night of revelry beneath the sound
 of shadows and bells, in the very grotto of human pleasure
 I've tried to stop and seek the eternal unfathomable lode
 that I touched before on stone or in the lightning unleashed by a kiss.

(Whatever in grain like a yellow tale
 of swollen little breasts keeps repeating a number
 perpetually tender in the germinal layers,
 and which, always identical, is stripped to ivory,
 and whatever in water is a transparent land, a bell
 from the distant snows down to the bloody waves.)

I could grasp nothing but a clump of faces or precipitous
 masks, like rings of empty gold,
 like scattered clothes, offspring of an enraged autumn
 that would have made the miserable tree of the frightened races shake.
 I had no place to rest my hand,
 which, fluid like the water of an impounded spring
 or firm as a chunk of anthracite or crystal,
 would have returned the warmth or cold of my outstretched hand.
 What was man? In what part of his conversation begun
 amid shops and whistles, in which of his metallic movements
 lived the indestructible, the imperishable, life?

III.

Like corn man was husked in the bottomless
 granary of forgotten deeds, the miserable course of
 events, from one to seven, to eight,
 and not one death but many deaths came to each:
 every day a little death, dust, maggot, a lamp
 quenched in the mire of the slums, a little thick-winged death
 entered each man like a short lance,
 and man was driven by bread or by knife:
 herdsman, child of the seaports, dark captain of the plow,
 or rodent of the teeming streets:

all were consumed awaiting their daily death, their daily ration of death:
and the ominous adversity of each day was like
a black glass from which they drank trembling.

IV.

Mighty death invited me many times
it was like the invisible salt in the waves,
and what its invisible taste disseminated
was like halves of sinking and rising
or vast structures of wind and glacier.
I came to the cutting edge, to the narrows
of the air, to the shroud of agriculture and stone,
to the stellar void of the final steps
and the vertiginous spiraling road:
but, wide sea, O death! you do not come in waves
but in a galloping nocturnal clarity
or like the total numbers of the night.
You never rummaged around in pockets, your visit
was not possible without your red vestments:
without an auroral carpet of enclosed silence:
without towering entombed patrimonies of tears.

I could not love in each being a tree
with a little autumn on its back (the death of a thousand leaves)
all the false deaths and resurrections
without land, without abyss:
I've tried to swim in the most expansive lives,
in the most free-flowing estuaries,
and when man went on denying me
and kept blocking path and door so that
my headspring hands could not touch his wounded inexistence,
then I went from street to street and river to river,
city to city and bed to bed,
my brackish mask traversed the desert,
and in the last humiliated homes, without light or fire,
without bread, without stone, without silence, alone
I rolled on dying of my own death.

V.

It was not you, solemn death, iron-plumed bird,
that the poor heir of these rooms
carried, between rushed meals, under his empty skin:
rather a poor petal with its cord exterminated:

an atom from the breast that did not come to combat
 or the harsh dew that did not fall on his brow.
 It was what could not be revived, a bit
 of the little death without peace or territory:
 a bone, a bell that died within him.
 I raised the bandages dressed in iodine, sank my hands
 into the pitiful sorrows killed by death,
 and in the wound I found nothing but a chilling gust
 that entered through the vague interstices of the soul.

VI.

And so I scaled the ladder of the earth
 amid the atrocious maze of lost jungles
 up to you, Macchu Picchu.
 High citadel of terraced stones,
 at long last the dwelling of him whom the earth
 did not conceal in its slumbering vestments.
 In you, as in two parallel lines,
 the cradle of lightning and man
 was rocked in a wind of thorns.

Mother of stone, sea spray of condors.

Towering reef of the human dawn.

Spade lost in the primal sand.

This was the dwelling, this is the site:
 here the full kernels of corn rose
 and fell again like red hailstones.

Here the golden fiber emerged from the vicuña
 to clothe love, tombs, mothers,
 the king, prayers, warriors.

Here man's feet rested at night
 beside the eagle's feet, in the high gory
 retreats, and at dawn
 they trod the rarefied mist with feet of thunder
 and touched lands and stones
 until they recognized them in the night or in death.

I behold vestments and hands,
 the vestige of water in the sonorous void,
 the wall tempered by the touch of a face

that beheld with my eyes the earthen lamps,
 that oiled my hands the vanished
 wood: because everything – clothing, skin, vessels,
 words, wine, bread –
 is gone, fallen to earth.

And the air flowed with orange-blossom
 fingers over all the sleeping:
 a thousand years of air, months, weeks of air,
 of blue wind, of iron cordillera,
 like gentle hurricanes of footsteps
 polishing the solitary precinct of stone.

VII.

O remains of a single abyss, shadows of one gorge –
 the deep one – the real, most searing death
 attained the scale
 of your magnitude,
 and from the quarried stones,
 from the spires,
 you tumbled as in autumn
 to a single death.
 Today the empty air no longer weeps,
 no longer knows your feet of clay,
 has now forgotten your pitchers that filtered the sky
 when the lightning's knives emptied it,
 and the powerful tree was eaten away
 by the mist and felled by the wind.
 It sustained a hand that fell suddenly
 from the heights to the end of time.
 You are no more, spider hands, fragile
 filaments, spun web:
 all that you were has fallen: customs, frayed
 syllables, masks of dazzling light.

But a permanence of stone and word:
 the citadel was raised like a chalice in the hands
 of all, the living, the dead, the silent, sustained
 by so much death, a wall, from so much life a stroke
 of stone petals: the permanent rose, the dwelling:
 this Andean reef of glacial colonies.

When the clay-colored hand
 turned to clay, when the eyelids closed,
 filled with rough walls, brimming with castles,

and when the entire man was trapped in his hole,
 exactitude remained hoisted aloft:
 this high site of the human dawn:
 the highest vessel that has contained silence:
 a life of stone after so many lives.

VIII.

Rise up with me, American love.

Kiss the secret stones with me.
 The torrential silver of the Urubamba
 makes the pollen fly to its yellow cup.
 It spans the void of the grapevine,
 the petrous plant, the hard wreath
 upon the silence of the highland casket.
 Come, minuscule life, between the wings
 of the earth, while – crystal and cold, pounded air
 extracting assailed emeralds –
 O, wild water, you run down from the snow.

Love, love, even the abrupt night,
 from the sonorous Andean flint
 to the dawn's red knees,
 contemplates the snow's blind child.

O, sonorous threaded Wilkamayu,
 when you beat your lineal thunder
 to a white froth, like wounded snow,
 when your precipitous storm
 sings and batters, awakening the sky,
 what language do you bring to the ear recently
 wrenched from your Andean froth?

Who seized the cold's lightning
 and left it shackled in the heights,
 dispersed in its glacial tears,
 smitten in its swift swords,
 hammering its embattled stamens,
 borne on its warrior's bed,
 startled in its rocky end?

What are your tormented sparks saying?
 Did your secret insurgent lightning
 once journey charged with words?
 Who keeps on shattering frozen syllables,

black languages, golden banners,
 deep mouths, muffled cries,
 in your slender arterial waters?

Who keeps on cutting floral eyelids
 that come to gaze from the earth?
 Who hurls down the dead clusters
 that fell in your cascade hands
 to strip the night stripped
 in the coal of geology?

Who flings the branch down from its bonds?
 Who once again entombs farewells?

Love, love, never touch the brink
 or worship the sunken head:
 let time attain its stature
 in its salon of shattered headsprings,
 and, between the swift water and the walls,
 gather the air from the gorge,
 the parallel sheets of the wind,
 the cordilleras' blind canal,
 the harsh greeting of the dew,
 and, rise up, flower by flower, through the dense growth,
 treading the hurtling serpent.

In the steep zone – forest and stone,
 mist of green stars, radiant jungle –
 Mantur explodes like a blinding lake
 or a new layer of silence.

Come to my very heart, to my dawn,
 up to the crowned solitudes.
 The dead kingdom is still alive.

And over the Sundial the sanguinary shadow
 of the condor crosses like a black ship.

IX.

Sidereal eagle, vineyard of mist.
 Lost bastion, blind scimitar.
 Spangled waistband, solemn bread.
 Torrential stairway, immense eyelid.
 Triangular tunic, stone pollen.
 Granite lamp, stone bread.

Mineral serpent, stone rose.
 Entombed ship, stone headspring.
 Moonhorse, stone light.
 Equinoctial square, stone vapor.
 Ultimate geometry, stone book.
 Tympanum fashioned amid the squalls.
 Madrepore of sunken time.
 Rampart tempered by fingers.
 Ceiling assailed by feathers.
 Mirror bouquets, stormy foundations.
 Thrones topped by the vine.
 Regime of the enraged claw.
 Hurricane sustained on the slopes.
 Immobile cataract of turquoise.
 Patriarchal bell of the sleeping.
 Hitching ring of the tamed snows.
 Iron recumbent upon its statues.
 Inaccessible dark tempest.
 Puma hands, bloodstained rock.
 Towering sombrero, snowy dispute.
 Night raised on fingers and roots.
 Window of the mists, hardened dove.
 Nocturnal plant, statue of thunder.
 Essential cordillera, searoom.
 Architecture of lost eagles.
 Skyrope, heavenly bee.
 Bloody level, man-made star.
 Mineral bubble, quartz moon.
 Andean serpent, brow of amaranth.
 Cupola of silence, pure land.
 Seabride, tree of cathedrals.
 Cluster of salt, black-winged cherry tree.
 Snow-capped teeth, cold thunderbolt.
 Scored moon, menacing stone.
 Headdresses of the cold, action of air.
 Volcano of hand, obscure cataract.
 Silver wave, pointer of time.

X.

Stone upon stone, and man, where was he?
 Air upon air, and man, where was he?
 Time upon time, and man, where was he?
 Were you too a broken shard
 of inconclusive man, of empty raptor,
 who on the streets today, on the trails,

on the dead autumn leaves, keeps
tearing away at the heart right up to the grave?
Poor hand, foot, poor life...
Did the days of light
unraveled in you, like raindrops
on the banners of a feast day,
give petal by petal of their dark good
to the empty mouth?

Hunger, coral of mankind,
hunger, secret plant, woodcutter's stump,
hunger, did the edge of your reef rise up
to these high suspended towers?

I want to know, salt of the roads,
show me the spoon – architecture, let me
scratch at the stamens of stone with a little stick,
ascend the rungs of the air up to the void,
scrape the innards until I touch mankind.

Macchu Picchu, did you put
stone upon stone and, at the base, tatters?
Coal upon coal and, at the bottom, tears?
Fire in gold and, within it, the trembling
drop of red blood?
Bring me back the slave that you buried!
Shake from the earth the hard bread
of the poor wretch, show me
the slave's clothing and his window.
Tell me how he slept when he lived.
Tell me if his sleep was
harsh, gaping, like a black chasm
worn by fatigue upon the wall.
The wall, the wall! If upon his sleep
each layer of stone weighed down, and if he fell beneath it
as beneath a moon, with his dream!
Ancient America, sunken bride,
your fingers too,
on leaving the jungle for the high void of the gods,
beneath the nuptial standards of light and decorum,
mingling with the thunder of drums and spears,
your fingers, your fingers too,
which the abstract rose, the cold line, and
the crimson breast of the new grain transferred
to the fabric of radiant substance, to the hard cavities –
did you, entombed America, did you too store in the depths
of your bitter intestine, like an eagle, hunger?

XI.

Through the hazy splendor,
 through the stone night, let me plunge my hand,
 and let the aged heart of the forsaken beat in me
 like a bird captive for a thousand years!
 Let me forget, today, this joy, which is greater than the sea,
 because man is greater than the sea and its islands,
 and we must fall into him as into a well to emerge from the bottom
 with a bouquet of secret water and sunken truths.
 Let me forget, great stone, the powerful proportion,
 the transcendent measure, the honeycombed stones,
 and from the square let me today run
 my hand over the hypotenuse of rough blood and sackcloth.
 When, like a horseshoe of red elytra, the frenzied condor
 beats my temples in the order of its flight,
 and the hurricane of cruel feathers sweeps the somber dust
 from the diagonal steps, I do not see the swift brute,
 I do not see the blind cycle of its claws,
 I see the man of old, the servant, asleep in the fields,
 I see a body, a thousand bodies, a man, a thousand women,
 black with rain and night, beneath the black squall,
 with the heavy stone of the statue:
 Juan Stonecutter, son of Wiracocha,
 Juan Coldeater, son of a green star,
 Juan Barefoot, grandson of turquoise,
 rise to be born with me, my brother.

XII.

Rise to be born with me, my brother.

Give me your hand from the deep zone of your disseminated sorrow.
 You'll not return from the bottom of the rocks.
 You'll not return from subterranean time.
 Your stiff voice will not return.
 Your drilled eyes will not return.
 Behold me from the depths of the earth,
 laborer, weaver, silent herdsman:
 tamer of the tutelary guanacos:
 mason of the defied scaffold:
 bearer of the Andean tears:
 jeweler with your fingers crushed:
 tiller trembling in the seed:
 potter spilt in your clay:

bring to the cup of this new life, brothers,
all your timeless buried sorrows.
Show me your blood and your furrow,
tell me: I was punished here,
because the jewel did not shine or the earth
did not surrender the gemstone or kernel on time:
show me the stone on which you fell
and the wood on which you were crucified,
strike the old flintstones,
the old lamps, the whips sticking
throughout the centuries to your wounds
and the war clubs glistening red.
I've come to speak through your dead mouths.
Throughout the earth join all
the silent scattered lips
and from the depths speak to me all night long,
as if I were anchored with you,
tell me everything, chain by chain,
link by link, and step by step,
sharpen the knives that you've kept,
put them in my breast and in my hand,
like a river of yellow lightning,
like a river of buried jaguars,
and let me weep hours, days, years,
blind ages, stellar centuries.

Give me silence, water, hope.

Give me struggle, iron, volcanoes.

Cling to my body like magnets.

Hasten to my veins and to my mouth.

Speak through my words and my blood.

(29-42)

Appendix B
Section I, Stanza Two

Neruda:

*(Días de fulgor vivo en la intemperie
de los cuerpos: aceros convertidos
al silencio del ácido:
noches deshiladas hasta la última harina:
estambres agredidos de la patria nupcial.)
(27)*

Waldeen:

(I live radiant days amid the storm
of bodies: steel converted
into silence of acid:
nights unraveled to their last dust-grain:
embattled strands of the nuptial fatherland.)
(75)

Schmitt:

(Days of vivid splendor in the inclemency
of corpses: steel transformed
into acid silence:
nights frayed to the last flour:
beleaguered stamens of the nuptial land.)
(29)

Appendix C
Section VIII, Stanza Six

Neruda:

*Tu secreto relámpago rebelde
antes viajó poblado de palabras?
¿Quién va rompiendo sílabas heladas,
idiomas negros, estandartes de oro,
bocas profundas, gritos sometidos,
en tus delgadas agues arteriales?*

*¿Quién va cortando párpados florales
que vienen a mirar desde la tierra?
¿Quién precipita los racimos muertos
que bajan en tus manos de cascada
a desgranar su noche desgranada
en el carbon de la geología?*
(34)

Felstiner:

What do your tormented flashings say?
Your secret insurgent lightning – did it
once travel thronging with words?
Who goes on crushing frozen syllables,
black languages, banners of gold,
bottomless mouths, throttled shouts,
in your slender arterial waters?

Who goes clipping floral eyelids
that come to gaze from the earth?
Who hurls the dead stalks down
that drop in your cascading hands
to thresh their threshed-out night
in geologic coal?
(223)

Tarn:

What do your harried scintillations whisper?
Did your sly, rebellious flash
go travelling once, populous with words?
Who wanders grinding frozen syllables,

black languages, gold-threaded banners,
fathomless mouths and trampled cries
in your tenuous arterial waters?

Who goes dead-heading blossom eyelids?
come to observe us from the far earth?
who scatters dead sea clusters

dropping from your cascading hands
to bed their own disintegration here
in coal's geology?
(33)

Appendix D
Section III

Neruda:

*El ser como maíz se desgranaba en el inacabable
granero de los hechos perdidos, de los acontecimientos
miserables, del uno al siete, al ocho,
y no una muerte, sino muchas muertes llegaba a cada uno:
cada día una muerte pequeña, polvo, gusano, lámpara
que se apaga en el lodo del suburbia, una pequeña muerte de las alas gruesas
entraba en cada hombre como una corta lanza
y era el hombre asediado del pan o del cuchillo,
el ganadero: el hijo de los puertos, o el capitán oscuro del arado,
o el roedor de las calles espesas:*

*todos desfallecieron esperando su muerte, su corta muerte diaria:
y su quebranto aciago de cada día era
como una copa negra que bebían temblando.*
(29)

Waldeen:

The human being like maize was threshed in the interminable granary of lost deeds,
of miserable events, from the first to seven, to eight,
and not one death but many deaths came to each:
every day a small death, dust, worm, lamp extinguished
in the mud of suburbs, a small thick-winged death
entered every man like a short lance:
and whether assailed by bread or knife,
the drover, son of sea-ports, dark captain of the plow,
or rodent of cluttered streets:
all grew listless awaiting death, their brief daily death:
and the sad crumbling of their days was a black cup from which trembling they drank.
(78)

Tarn:

Being like maize grains fell
in the inexhaustible store of lost deeds, shoddy
occurrences, from nine to five, to six,
and not one death but many came to each,
each day a little death: dust, maggot, lamp,
drenched in the mire of suburbs, a little death with fat wings

entered into each man like a short blade
 and siege was laid to him by bread or knife:
 the drover, the son of harbours, the dark captain of ploughs,
 the rodent wanderer through dense streets:

all of them weakened waiting for their death, their brief and daily death –
 and their ominous dwindling each day
 was like a black cup they trembled while they drained.

(21)

Wright:

The human soul was threshed out like maize in the endless
 granary of defeated actions, of mean things that happened,
 to the very edge of endurance and beyond,
 and not only death, but many deaths, came to each one:
 each day a tiny death, dust, worm, a light
 flicked off in the mud at the city's edge, a tiny death with coarse wings
 pierced into each man like a short lance
 and the man was besieged by the bread or by the knife,
 the cattle-dealer: the child of sea-harbors, or the dark captain of the plough,
 or the rag-picker of snarled streets:

everybody lost heart, anxiously waiting for death, the short death of every day:
 and the grinding bad luck of every day was
 like a black cup that they drank, with their hands shaking.

(71)

Section II, Stanza Six

Neruda:

*No tuve sitio donde descansar la mano
 y que, corriente como agua de manantial endadenado,
 o firme como gruno de antracita o crystal,
 hubiera devuelto el calor o el frío de mi mano extendido.*

(28)

Tarn:

I had no place in which my hand could rest –
 no place running like harnessed water,
 firm as a nugget of anthracite or crystal –
 responding, hot or cold, to my open hand.

(21)

Appendix E
Section X, Stanza Three

Neruda:

*Yo te interrogo, sal de los caminos,
muéstrame la cuchara, déjame, arquitectura,
roer con un palito los estambres de piedra,
subir todos los escalones del aire hacia el vacío,
rascar la entraña hasta tocar el hombre.*
(37)

Felstiner:

I question you, salt of the roads,
show me the trowel; architecture, let me
grind stone stamens with a stick,
climb every step of air up to the void,
scrape in the womb till I touch man.
(231)

Eisner:

I question you, salt of the roads,
show me the spoon; architecture, let me
gnaw stone stamens with a stick,
climbing up the staircase of air until the void,
scrapping away at the womb until I touch man.
(85)

Schmitt:

I want to know, salt of the roads,
show me the spoon – architecture, let me
scratch at the stamens of stone with a little stick,
ascend the rungs of air up to the void,
scrape the innards until I touch mankind.
(39)

Section I, Stanza Three

Neruda:

*Alguien que me esperó entre los violins
encontró un mundo como una torre enterrada
hundiendo sue spiral más abajo de todas
las hojas de color de ronco azufre:
más abajo, en el oro de la geología,
como una espada envuelta en meteoros,
hundí la mano turbulenta y dulce
en lo más genital de lo terrestre.*

(27)

Felstiner:

Someone expecting me among violins
met with a world like a buried tower
sinking its spiral deeper than all
the leaves the color of rough sulfur:
and deeper yet, in geologic gold,
like a sword sheathed in meteors
I plunged my turbulent and gentle hand
into the genital quick of the earth.

(203)

Eisner:

Someone waiting for me among the violins
found a world like a sunken tower
digging its spiral deeper than all
the leaves the color of hoarse sulfur:
and deeper still, into geologic gold,
like a sword sheathed in meteors,
I plunged a tender and turbulent hand
into the most genital terrestrial territory.

(69)

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