

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
SANTA CRUZ

**“Huerto nuestro que nos hizo extraño”:  
Poetics of (un)translatability in Chilean literature across the Americas**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LITERATURE

by

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June 2016

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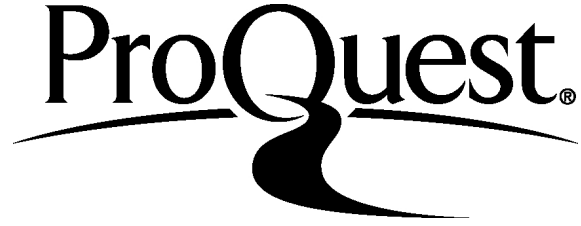
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## **Abstract**

Mark Jones

*“Huerto nuestro que nos hizo extraño”:  
Poetics of (un)translatability in Chilean literature across the Americas*

This dissertation engages with the fields of translation studies and 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Latin American literature in order to explore sites of encounter and hybridization both represented and enacted by literary texts. I argue for a theory of reading, which is also a theory of translation, that situates subjects and texts as spaces of contact and intermingling between languages and cultures. By investigating the travels and travails of readers, authors, and texts, this dissertation develops a multilingual, transnational approach to the study of literature; by using literature to make the case for a more nuanced, non-homogenizing understanding of language and culture, it also argues for the potential of difficult, “thick” translations. Such translations provide the specificity necessary for such nuance, and, through their estrangement of readers from their domestic habitat, activate the transformative capacity of poetic language.

This project centers on the texts of four Chilean authors whose work has been significantly transnational. The first chapter takes an intertextual approach in reading the literary relationship between Roberto Bolaño (1953-2003) and Pablo Neruda (1904-1973). In doing so, this chapter begins to formulate my project’s theory of reading and translation by drawing a connection between reading and travel, substantiated by an exploration of the central tropes of detective fiction, a genre with which Bolaño enters into an extended dialogue. The second chapter continues to build

upon this theory by proposing that reading be understood as language learning, supported by further reading of Neruda (specifically, his *Canto General*) as well as his predecessor, Gabriel Mistral (1889-1957), examining source texts as well as various translations into English. Translations of poetry are further examined, and further complicated, in the third and final chapter, which examines the treatment of historical and political context(s) in and around *Purgatorio* (1979) and *Anteparaíso* (1982) by Raúl Zurita, works written under conditions of military dictatorship in Chile.

## Acknowledgements

My work on this dissertation would not have been possible but for the enthusiastic support of my advisor, Norma Klahn, throughout my time in Santa Cruz. Her knowledge and passion for literature has been a valued source of guidance and encouragement. My time as a graduate student was enriched by a number of faculty who have stimulated my intellectual development, beginning with my readers: Wlad Godzich, who led my graduate proseminar in the Fall of 2009 and who forever changed my view of translation and scholarship in general; and Juan Poblete, whose emphasis on society was always present to remind me that literature does not exist in a vacuum. Other faculty in the Literature Department, whose seminars helped broaden my understanding, also merit heartfelt thanks: Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Jody Greene, Jordi Aladro-Font, Richard Terdiman, and Susan Gillman. The focus on language learning and multilingualism that eventually became a central part of this project's argument grew out of experience teaching introductory Spanish at UCSC. For this opportunity, and for the insights gained in the process, I want to thank members of the Education and Languages and Applied Linguistics Departments, in particular George Bunch and Zsuzsanna Abrams for their courses in language pedagogy, and Eve Zyzik and Mark Amengual for their guidance as mentors.

Finally, my acknowledgements would be incomplete without mention of my family, Randy, Susana, and Michael, and my wonderful, generous, and infinitely patient wife, Sasha, who have stood by me during this long process.

## Introduction

The study of translation, in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, has acquired greater prominence in academic institutions; Mary-Louise Pratt, for instance, writes of “...a renaissance of translation studies and the use of translation as a point of departure or metaphor for analyzing intercultural interactions and transactions” (“Traffic in Meaning,” 25). For literary studies, the reasons for this increased prominence have been located by some critics in both theoretical and material developments; Emily Apter, for instance, writes of a wide-ranging interdisciplinary confluence in which

Translation has emerged as a catalyst for disparate yet coherent pedagogies because it effectively conjugates classical and Renaissance traditions of philosophy, philology, humanism, and *translatio studii* with exilic humanism (associated canonically with the work of Leo Spitzer, Erich Auerbach, and Edward Said); with post-Sputnik intellectual developments in linguistics, machine translation, and deconstruction; and with cultural translation (advanced by Lawrence Venuti, Jill Levine, Tejaswini Niranjana, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Mary Louise Pratt, Lydia Liu, and Robert Young, among others).

“Translation as Critical Pedagogy,” 50.

A significant portion of translation studies has centered on the role of translation in pedagogy, which is Apter’s focus in the piece cited above. This is in no small part due to what scholars have described as the “worlding” of literature.<sup>1</sup> The effect of such worlding is felt in supposedly monolingual programs, like English departments, with (for instance) the obvious realization

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, *The Worlding Project*, eds. Rob Wilson and Christopher Connery, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that “far more translations entered the classroom,” the rate for



that, in the words of Wittman and Windon, “many of these English-language texts have their basis in non-English works, and are therefore inextricably tied to an international literary tradition” (450). But for comparative literature, it has perhaps been more keenly felt:

In the 1960s and much of the 1970s, comparative literature still focused almost exclusively on a historical study of the major European literatures. These were read, whenever possible, in the original language. But in the later twentieth century, thanks in large part to new interest in cultural studies and postcolonial studies and responding to changes in the material world as well, the field extended its geolinguistic reach. Its emphasis on language learning did not decrease. But with its growing investment in languages, literatures, and cultures from many parts of the globe, far more translations entered the classroom.

Sandra Berman, “Teaching in – and about – translation,” 83

Told this way, the increased presence of translations in comparative literature comes as a result of placing increased importance on texts that students (or teachers) cannot read in the original language. Although Berman is careful to note that the “emphasis on language learning did not decrease,” ignorance of languages is precisely the problem – for which translation theory is sometimes proposed as the solution.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that “far more translations entered the classroom,” the rate for translation, and in particular literary translation, in the United States is nothing short of abysmal. Venuti, in *The Translator’s Invisibility*, cites the following figures: in 1995, 2.85% of books published in the U.S. were translations; in 2004, 2.07. Venuti also notes the trade imbalance that these numbers reveal; other countries publish more translations. He cites the figures for numerous European countries: France in 1985, 9.9%; Italy in 1989, 25.4%; Germany in 1990, 14.4%. The majority of these translations are from English, which dominates the numbers worldwide: in 2000, more than twice as many books were translated from English than French, German, Italian, and Spanish combined (43,011 from English versus 6670 from French, 6204 from German, 2432 from Italian, 1973 from Spanish).

My project seeks to complicate prevailing notions in literary studies that translation serves as a potential substitute for a direct engagement with the native language of texts. I will instead show how common concepts in translation theory – such as the contact zone or translatability – can be used to augment scholars’ understanding of the historical and linguistic specificities of literary texts. Doing so will entail confronting stereotypes in the translational process, expanding the paradigm of how translations are conceptualized and used by readers; for this reason, much of my work in this matter attempts to deconstruct what is referred to as “domestic audience” for translation by focusing on sites of encounter.

Although much work in translation studies has been preoccupied with the domestic inscription of translations,<sup>3</sup> this scholarly focus separates source from target in ways that limit our conceptualization of the ability of readers to move between

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The University of Rochester’s Translation Database – named “Three Percent” after the most commonly cited statistic for translations published in the U.S. – which maintains a useful catalogue of all new translations published in the U.S., puts the percentage for literary fiction and poetry at 0.7% of books published.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, Gideon Toury (1978/1995) proposes a target-oriented approach in order to study the interaction of norms with translation in “socio-culturally relevant settings.” While his articulation of how to work with these norms – for example, his separation of norms into “textual” and “extra textual,” and his gradated distinction between norms in terms of intensity and the total range of tolerated behavior – allows for a relatively nuanced analysis, his approach is ultimately restricted to researching the domestic culture, and does not successfully account for cross-cultural contact.

Toury’s target-oriented approach follows Eugene Nida’s (1964) concept of “dynamic equivalence,” which seeks to reproduce the “impact” of the original text upon its “intended audience.” It should also be noted that Nida’s field of interest is Biblical translation; in this respect, he continues a tradition that dates back to St. Jerome (395 C.E.): “in Scripture one must consider not the words, but the sense” (“Letter to Pammachius”).

them, and languages/cultures in general. For a prominent example, Lawrence Venuti (a contemporary translator and translation theorist whose work greatly informs my own) writes

Seen as domestic inscription, never quite cross-cultural communication, translation has moved theorists towards an ethical reflection wherein remedies are formulated to restore or preserve the foreignness of the foreign text. Yet an ethics that counters the domesticating effect of the inscription can only be formulated and practiced primarily in *domestic* terms, in domestic dialects, registers, discourses, and styles.

“Translation, Community, Utopia,”<sup>483</sup>

But then, he appears to subvert this emphasis on the domestic by noting at the end of the same paragraph that “A translator may find that the very concept of the domestic merits interrogation for its concealment of heterogeneity and hybridity which can complicate existing stereotypes, canons, and standards applied in translation.” It is this interrogation that my dissertation seeks to perform, by arguing that it is precisely the presence of heterogeneity and hybridity that, by necessity, allows the restitution of foreignness in translation.

For that reason, I further argue that translations of literary texts should provide a way for the reader to travel to the source. To make this argument, I make use of a theoretical framework derived from translation theories that demonstrates how reading provides a site for contact and a transformation of the subject, a space capable of resisting the zoning of languages as separate. In the course of demonstrating the tenuousness of the domestic within literary texts, my work ultimately performs that same departure from translation to source, showing both the poetic and pedagogical

value of this mode of reading.

Due to the conceptual and pragmatic importance of reading for my project, and in this respect drawing on the work of Walter Mignolo in *Local Histories / Global Designs*, my dissertation views texts as sources of knowledge in their own right: situated in zones of contact between conflicted national-domestic environments and the currents through which literature becomes global, the work of the authors I have chosen is shown to be responsive to heterogeneity and hybridity of both audience and influence.<sup>4</sup> Chosen so as to maximize the intersection of global and local, the authors that are the focus of my dissertation – Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, Roberto Bolaño, and Raúl Zurita – are writers that operated internationally while simultaneously engaging with and representing their country of birth – Chile – with intense interest.

The choice of Chile as a common attribute of these authors seeks to highlight the complication of national literary tradition, showing how these texts have operated across national and linguistic borders. Chile is an illuminating case because of the way it has often seen itself as separate from the rest of the continent: geographically isolated from its neighbors by the highest mountain range outside of Asia (the Andes) and the driest desert in the world (the Atacama), it is also the home of a proud literary culture, having obtained more Nobel Literature Prizes than any other country in the

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to his treatment of texts as potential subjects for theoretical and embodied knowledge, I have also benefitted from the analysis of what Mignolo has called “border thinking” or “border gnosis,” which he relates to the double-thinking produced by colonialism and bilingualism. He takes numerous examples from Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands / La Frontera*, which has likewise influenced my thinking about the plurality that is present in presumably domestic spaces.

Americas apart from the United States. Nevertheless, the authors I have chosen (which include both of Chile's Nobel laureates, Mistral and Neruda) traveled widely during their lives, with some (Mistral and Bolaño) spending a majority of their lifetimes and dying outside of Chile; though the four of them have attained iconic status in their country of birth, they also share a great deal of international recognition, both in the form of prestigious awards and distinguished (or at least, relatively abundant) translations.<sup>5</sup> But most importantly, I contend that these transnational positions are already inscribed in the texts these authors produced, and that to translate these texts effectively, conceptualization of domestic equivalence must take this into account – something they cannot do if fluency is maintained as a priority.

Rather than simply validating or falsifying particular theories, the reading of

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<sup>5</sup> Gabriela Mistral was the first Spanish-language woman to win a Nobel Prize (in 1954), as well as the first Latin American to win the prize for literature; among the many *honoris causa* appointments she received during her lifetime, it is worthwhile for my project to note those from Mills College in Oakland and UCLA. Pablo Neruda also received a Nobel Prize, in 1971, and, among many other awards, was also the recipient of the USSR's State Stalin Prize in 1953. Bolaño, among others, has won the Premio Herralde de Novela (Spain), the Premio Rómulo Gallegos (Venezuela), the Premio del Consejo Nacional del Libro de Chile, and the National Book Critics Circle Award (United States). Those obtained by Zurita feature prominently a Guggenheim grant, the Premio Pablo Neruda and the Premio Nacional de Literatura (both from Chile), and the Casa de las Américas Award for Poetry (Cuba).

The two Nobel laureates have seen their work translated by a number of writers who are famous in their own right: Mistral has been translated by Langston Hughes and, more recently, Ursula K. LeGuin, while Neruda has been translated by William Carlos Williams, W.S. Merwin, and others. While Bolaño's and Zurita's translators have not been as famous, it is still relevant to note that a great deal of their work – in Bolaño's case, nearly all of it – has been translated into English and published in the U.S., which is significant in light of the relatively low volume of translations (see note, above).

literature is positioned in my work to add nuance and complexity to our thinking about translation, especially those ways that privilege the open-endedness of semiotic processes; meanwhile, using concepts from translation theory – such as the contact zone, translatability, and others explained below – alongside studying actual translations serves to bring into prominence features of texts that otherwise go unexamined or become, as the commonplace goes, “lost in translation.” For an example from the second chapter, when Mistral uses an abundance of Quechua words and borrowings in the poem “Canción Quechua,” which, as part of the “Canciones de cuna” (Cradle Songs), presents itself as a lullaby, the inscription of contact and translatability becomes a signifying aspect of the text; how then will a translator choose to handle this text, which is not only in one language but which records a particular history of encounter, and which is already, in an important sense, “in translation”?

The principle behind this methodology is not singular, but has been formed as a negotiation between a linguistics of contact and conflict, and the concept of translatability. I outline these and my use of them, along with a number of ancillary concepts, below.

### **The Contact Zone:**

Mary Louise Pratt uses the term “contact zone” to refer to “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as

they are lived out in many parts of the world today.” In “Arts of the Contact Zone,” she introduces the term by describing a twelve hundred page bilingual (Quechua/Spanish) letter written in Cuzco, Peru by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, addressed to King Philip III of Spain; her interest in this case is as a remarkable example of writing and literacy that poses a challenge to Benedict Anderson’s model of communities imagined to be homogenous and monolingual. She builds on this example by extending it to the classroom in calling for a “pedagogical arts of the contact zone” that can benefit from a heterogeneous community, one that can “work in the knowledge that whatever one said [is] going to be systematically received in radically heterogeneous ways.”

One such contact zone examined in this dissertation is the one produced by Raúl Zurita’s “La Vida Nueva,” a poem written in the sky above New York City in 1982.<sup>6</sup> The poem begins, “MI DIOS ES HAMBRE MI DIOS ES NIEVE MI DIOS ES NO” and continues until concluding, “MI DIOS ES MI AMOR DE DIOS.” My work examines how language and position create political meaning that can retain its significance across historical transition and national borders, by being able to address a multitude of readers that would otherwise diverge: not only a Chilean audience both in Chile and New York City, but other Latin Americans displaced by dictatorships, as well as U.S. Spanish speakers.

Pratt’s concept of the contact zone provides a strong alternative to the concept of the domestic by providing a way to conceptualize the hybridities that Zurita’s poem

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<sup>6</sup> Not to be confused with *La Vida Nueva*, a book by Zurita published in 1994.

activates. Building from Pratt's interests in languages and literacy, my work is framed by a series of encounters (described in the chapter summaries below), in the context of which the meeting of reader and text provides an entrance into the conflicts that produce literary, linguistic, and political meaning. Furthermore, the practice of reading itself provides a contact zone – a space for a plurality of perspectives that produces (in Pratt's words) "rage, incomprehension, and pain" as well as "exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom." The texts I study therefore both represent the conflicts that brought them and their language into being, as well as generate new antagonisms for the time and place of their reception. I want to read literature from this place of friction for the ways in which it serves to estrange readers from a domesticity reinforced by homogeneous language, which is a purpose central to the Russian Formalists' concept of *ostranenie* as well as – more centrally to my project – translation.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Translation Zone**

Emily Apter's concept of the translation zone (from the book of the same title)

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<sup>7</sup> The concept of *ostranenie*, which has been variously translated as "defamiliarization," or "estrangement," was developed by Viktor Shklovsky in "Art as device" (1917, also translated as "Art as technique") to differentiate between everyday and literary (or poetic) language. By defamiliarizing objects, relations, and perceptions, literary language disrupts the "automatization" of pre-established ways of being in the world, drawing attention to itself as art and thus fostering critical distance through reading.

As Vicky Unruh in *Latin American Vanguards* points out, this strategy of distance is not unlike other developments in modern art, and she draws connections between *ostranenie* and Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect), José Ortega y Gasset's "dehumanization" of art, and Peter Bürger's nonorganic art.



shares a number of features with Pratt's contact zone. The most general of these is that of the translation zone's plurality, insofar as it is a site "belonging to no single, discrete language or single medium of communication" (6). Apter's translation zone is also, like Pratt's contact zone, a site of conflict: she calls it a "war zone," and acknowledges the traumatic experience of war – specifically, her presence in New York City on September 11, 2001 – as instrumental in shaping her work. But most importantly for my project, she finds a transformative capacity in translation's potential to undomesticate and defamiliarize:

Cast as an act of love, and as an act of disruption, translation becomes a means of repositioning the subject in the world and in history; a means of rendering self-knowledge foreign to itself; a way of denaturalizing citizens, taking them out of the comfort zone of national space, daily ritual and pre-given domestic arrangements.

*The Translation Zone, 6*

My dissertation uses Viktor Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie* to align the defamiliarization produced by poetic language with that which may emerge from translation zones, which serves to distinguish product-oriented, information-based semantic transfer from literature and literary translation. Doing so allows my project to speak to how both literature and literary translation can serve to not merely denaturalize the domestic but to provide an alternative.

An example of what this might look like can be found in in Celia and Louis Zukofsky's homophonic rendering of Catullus' poetry.<sup>8</sup> By attempting to mimic the sound of the source texts' Latin while still trying to preserve sense and syntax, they

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<sup>8</sup> This example is examined at length in Lawrence Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility*, pp. 186-194.

produced a remarkable translation that remarks upon the foreignness of Catullus through a heterogeneous English idiom. Below is an example of the original Latin, followed by the Zukofskys' translation

Nulli se dicit mulier mea nubere malle  
quam mihi, non si se Iuppieter ipse petat.  
dicit: sed mulier cupido quod dicit amanti,  
in vento et rapida scribere oportet aqua

Newly say dickered my love air my own would marry me all  
whom but one, none see say Jupiter if she petted.  
Dickered: said my love air could be o could dickered a man too  
in wind o wet rapid a scribble reported in water.

The foreignizing effect of this difficult translation unsettles the reader's perceptions of the relationship of translation to source, bringing to light their interrelatedness as well as their difference.

### **Translatability**

The effect of defamiliarization, common to translation zones and contact zones, also appears prominently in Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator." Calling it "the best comment on the theory of translation that has been published in Germany," Benjamin cites Rudolf Pannwitz at length writing, "Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English.... The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue."

(82).

For Benjamin, the task of the translator is not simply the translation of works from one language to another, but to bring into prominence features of language that do not exist in any one language, “the central reciprocal relationship between languages” (77). My dissertation argues that the defamiliarization produced by the coexistence of multiple languages in a single text is one way – and perhaps the most effective way – to operate in that space of what he calls “pure language.” Following Benjamin, this applies to both source texts and their translations, since “to some degree all great texts contain their potential translation between the lines....The interlinear version of the Scriptures is the prototype or ideal of all translation” (83).

### **The Translator’s Invisibility**

The process of defamiliarization that my work argues is central to the reading of literature is, in literary translation, often undermined by what Venuti calls “the translator’s invisibility.” In his book by the same name, Venuti explains that current standards of acceptability – judged by “most publishers, reviewers, and readers” – deem good translations as those which read fluently, “when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer’s personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text – the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the ‘original’” (1). The possibility of a translation that distances the reader and disrupts their comfort, or in Apter’s words “denaturalizes” them, is

foreclosed by the standard of fluency. For this reason, my project will trace the inconsistencies and incongruities that surface when translators must negotiate with the imposition of fluency on a source text (and context) that resists it.

### **Thick Translation**

Following Clifford Geertz' notion of "thick description," Kwame Anthony Appiah has coined the term "thick translation" to propose a type of literary translation that varies from the current norm: rather than "a translation that aims itself to be a literary work," Appiah argues for the importance of "translation that aims to be of use in literary teaching" (399). Though he admits that what constitutes a thick translation would be highly context-dependent, it most importantly "meets the need to challenge ourselves and our students to go further, to undertake the harder project of a genuinely informed respect for others" – that is to say, a translation that "face[s] up to difference" (399). Although Appiah does not make an explicit reference how this type of translation effects a disruption of the domestic (such as Apter calls for), it is implicit in his insistence on "the need to extend the American imagination...beyond the narrow scope of the United States" (399). Such a connection is made explicit, however, by Theo Hermans, writing that thick translation, "as a form of translation studies, has the potential to bring about a double dislocation: of the foreign terms and concepts, which are probed by means of an alien methodology and vocabulary, and of the describer's own terminology, which must be wrenched out of its familiar shape to accommodate both alterity and similarity" ("Cross-Cultural Translation Studies as

Thick Translation,” 386).

### Chapter summaries

My project focuses on the work of four so-called Chilean authors who, taken collectively, represent most of the twentieth century. I show that their work is joined by similar preoccupations regarding their inscription into literary systems that move past literary and linguistic borders by speaking from a heterogeneous nexus of traditions (as for example, in Mistral’s work, the intersection of indigenous and colonial cultures in her native Elqui valley in the north of Chile) and addressing a continental or global audience – a scope of address that mirrors their own wide-ranging bodily displacements. These numerous contact zones that motivate and inform their work pose a challenge for translations, which – because of the demands for domesticating fluency described by Venuti – have difficulty in reproducing the disruptions of the domestic performed by their originals.

The first chapter draws an equivalence between reading, travel, and translation on the basis of their “constitutive alterability,” that is to say, they are only fully realized when the subject (be it traveller, reader, or text) becomes other than what it was. Building from the explicit and implicit correspondence between reading and travelling in the work of Roberto Bolaño (with special attention to *Los detectives salvajes* (1998), *Los sinsabores del verdadero policía* (2011), and “Carnet de baile” from *Putas asesinas* (2001)) this chapter works in and around the contact zone generated through his dialogue with and refraction of the writing and celebrity of

Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. Gaining insight and motivation from Bolaño's defamiliarizing reading of this very familiar poet, the chapter follows this trail to examine the ways both travel and translation directed the development of Neruda's own poetic corpus to uncover aspects of (in Bolaño's words) "the unknown Neruda that deep down he really is."

Bolaño's attempt to defamiliarize Neruda comes in the context of the latter's immense popularity, to the extent that he has become a household name not only in Chile but globally. Some scholarly work, like the volume edited by Teresa Longo, *Pablo Neruda and the U.S. Culture Industry*, has moved to consider the impact of this type of transnational literary celebrity; the essays contained therein locate his presence in places as varied as the Barnes and Noble café, movies like *Patch Adams*, or a mother's recorded reading brought back and forth from Guatemala.

In turn, Bolaño has increasingly received similar treatment, as his transnational position has been the subject of scholarly interest in ways that move beyond his biography, for the global reach of his texts is a phenomenon unto itself. Having received such accolades as "the most important writer to emerge from Latin America since Gabriel García Márquez," (San Francisco Chronicle), his inscription (particularly in the U.S. market) as somehow representative of the whole of Latin American literature has solicited and received examination from a variety of sources. Wilfredo H. Corral's *Bolaño traducido: nueva literatura mundial* is an in depth and nuanced look at Bolaño's reception, which in Corral's analysis reveals a great deal about the status of Latin American literature globally; Hector Hoyos' *Beyond Bolaño:*

*the global Latin American novel*, seeks to intervene on similar grounds, trying to reconcile the disputes between ‘Latin Americanism’ and ‘World Literaturism’ by proposing that “Latin Americanizing world literature” is a way of both “politicizing that paradigm [of world literature] and bringing it closer to the texts themselves” (10); finally pieces like Sarah Pollack’s “Latin America Translated (Again): Roberto Bolaño’s *The Savage Detectives* in the United States” – although mostly speculative – attempt to answer the question of why, exactly, Bolaño should be so popular for English readers in the United States.

My work with Bolaño adds a more explicit consideration of theories of translation (as opposed to work like Pollack’s, which is entirely descriptive and analyzes the market more than the literary text). While my work has benefitted greatly from their insights, my reading of Bolaño is focused less on what his recent popularity means for the field of world/comparative/Latin American literature, but rather seeks to expand on previous analyses by developing how his texts provide a theory of the movement of texts and readers that asks us to think of translation as a part of common literary practices.

The second chapter expands upon the conjunction of reading and travelling presented in the first chapter by arguing for a conceptualization of reading as language learning. Working from the contact zones created by dual-language translations of poetry and other instances of heterogeneous language (such as the use of loanwords), the chapter articulates the problems with translation’s program of “remaking the source in another language” in light of the translator’s invisibility,

which is shown to be operative even when the source is present. By studying and contrasting the translations of Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral, I find that a substantial number of their poems – particularly the ones that speak of “America” – carry the weight of colonial and post-colonial contact and conflict forward to the future by serving a pedagogical function. It is by working “backwards,” from translation to source, that the full extent of these continental dynamics – which are still active – becomes known.

A great deal of scholarly work has gone into analyzing – and deconstructing – Gabriela Mistral’s national inscription in Chile as, in the words of Fernando Alegría, “a walking educational mission.” Critics like Grínor Rojo have rightly pointed out how Mistral’s lifelong work in education was appropriated by the ideological state apparatus (to use to Athusserian vocabulary Rojo employs) in the reproduction of gender roles and “las relaciones patriarcales de opresion” (67). This is also the subject Licia Fiol-Matta’s important book, *A Queer Mother for the Nation: the State and Gabriela Mistral*, where she writes that “Although Mistral became the living embodiment of the race/sex/gender politics at the heart of Latin Americanism, after her death in 1957 her stature and work were neglected, obscured, and virtually forgotten. This can be credited to the national narrative that elevated her as the ‘Schoolteacher of America’, an epithet indicating Mistral’s consecration as a celibate, saintly, and suffering heterosexual national icon” (xiv).

My work on Mistral seeks to intervene in this discussion by re-focusing attention



on the poems rather than the poet,<sup>9</sup> and arguing that a significant number of poems – particularly those that deal with her displaced relationship to Chile and the Americas – demonstrate an instructional quality that is separate from the national narrative of Mistral as a teacher. By creating a relationship between speaker and other that is motivated by the imparting of knowledge, Mistral’s poetry presents a paradigm in which the reader is conceived of as a learner. This insight is then applied to an examination of literary translation to note the ways in which translations, by attempting to re-create a product rather than a process, lose touch with the instructional value of poetry.

To complement this argument, I look again at Neruda in this chapter, this time to the ways he has been translated into the United States. Noting the way he also conceives of poetry as instructional – particularly those works that deal, once again, with the American continent, such as his *Canto General* – I find that this task has been routinely ignored by translators such as Robert Bly and John Felstiner,<sup>10</sup> even when Neruda presents a U.S. poet, Walt Whitman, as one of his most visible poetic mentors.

Centering on the work of Raúl Zurita during the Chilean military regime of 1973-

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<sup>9</sup> A task facilitated by the editorial work of Jaime Quezada in collecting and publishing previously unpublished or disorganized work.

<sup>10</sup> That said, Felstiner’s *Translating Neruda* is a significant work that makes it a point to convey the entire process of translation, rather than presenting a translation as a finished product. It is also instrumental in uncovering the preconceptions with which Felstiner, along with other poet-translators of his generation, conceive of their intended audience: as readers with broad backgrounds in English-language Modernist, Symbolist, and Romantic poetry, but very little acknowledgement of world literatures in other languages.

1990, the third chapter examines the function of context (both linguistic and historical) in political and literary ways of reading poetry. I argue that, while poetry alone is not sufficient to carry across this context (and thus necessitates translation through refractory instruments such as introductions and explanatory notes), it provides necessary conditions for the enduring relevance of that context. By evaluating the semantic properties of Zurita's written work alongside those of his performative work (produced, during the military regime, in collaboration of the Colectivo Acciones de Arte, or CADA), I address the neo-avant garde motivation of his life's-work along the lines of its negotiations with (un)translatability, which is brought into greater visibility through viewing this praxis with a transcontinental and intergenerational scope.

By situating Zurita as Janus-faced, facing both a national context and an international one, I have benefitted greatly from scholarship (such as Marcelo Pellegrini's piece about the relationship of Zurita's poetry with the transitional government of Chile) that elaborates upon the complexities of his domestic position.<sup>11</sup> My analysis builds from this work by noting the ways this context gets simplified in translation to the United States, and arguing that this approach neutralizes the tension

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<sup>11</sup> Another common approach in Zurita scholarship, especially prominent during the dictatorship years but still prevalent today, deals with the messianic posturing of his work; see for instance Scott Weintraub, "Messianism, Teleology, and Futural Justice in Raúl Zurita's *Anteparáiso*," or Mario Rodríguez Fernández, "Raúl Zurita o la crucifixion del texto."

An approach I find more useful to my work is that exemplified by Carmen Foxley's linguistic analyses of Zurita's language, such as in "La propuesta autorreflexiva en *Anteparáiso*." In my third chapter, I examine Zurita's reflexive language in relation to the other functions of language as described by Roman Jakobson, in particular the referential and poetic functions.

generated by the “untranslatable” aspects of Zurita’s work – such as burning his own cheek, an action that is represented by and incorporated into the text of *Purgatorio*.

Taken as a whole, my dissertation shows how notions of domestic audience and context are complicated by the presence of translational forces in literature, such as a heterogeneity and plurivocality occasioned by contact zones, or the struggle with translatability that animates poetry’s reflexivity. By proposing conceptual models with which we may understand readers and reading – as travelling and language-learning – the chapters that follow argue for a continued engagement with canonical authors through a way of translating that may better serve the transformative potential common to both literature and translation.

## Chapter 1

### Leer y viajar, tal vez la misma cosa: the reader of Roberto Bolaño and Pablo Neruda

Roberto Bolaño's commonly ascribed status as Chilean is questionable. Though born in Chile in 1953, he moved to Mexico during his adolescence, in 1968; about ten years later as a young adult he would move away again, this time for Spain, where he would remain until his death at the age of 50. Asked directly on the issue during his last interview – “¿Usted es chileno, español o mexicano?” – Bolaño responded broadly, “Soy latinoamericano” (*Entre paréntesis* 331). In other places, however, he speaks as a Chilean, as when he writes (when comparing Chilean poetry to different types of dogs) “Así nos va a los chilenos, ésa parece ser nuestra suerte y nuestra singular suntuosidad” (88).

His relationship with Chilean literature is even more questionable, as well as a source of controversy, having personally incurred the animosity of his many of his contemporaries such as Diamela Eltit<sup>12</sup> and never missing the opportunity to poke fun at Isabel Allende, a current favorite in Chilean letters.<sup>13</sup> In the interview cited above,

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<sup>12</sup> This particular quarrel was precipitated by the publication of “El pasillo sin salida aparente” in *Ajoblanco* (1999), in which Bolaño recounts a dinner at Jorge Arrate's house, Eltit's husband.

<sup>13</sup> Isabel Allende is considered the world's most read living Spanish-language writer, and is the winner of the prestigious Chilean national prize for literature in 2010; she and her writing have deep ties to Chile, though she, like Bolaño, is significantly transnational, having been born in Peru and being a naturalized U.S. citizen living in California.

when asked “¿Qué es la literatura chilena?”, Bolaño gave a difficult answer: “Probablemente las pesadillas del poeta más resentido y gris y acaso el más cobarde de los poetas chilenos: Carlos Pezoa Véliz, muerto a principios del siglo XX, y autor de sólo dos poemas memorables” (332). By citing this example – a poet who died young and whose poetry was not published until after his death, someone who was almost forgotten – Bolaño signals his own anxieties over his ascription as Chilean and the endurance of his work, a motif visible in other works as well. But he also addresses the national literary system and the marginality of Chilean literature, as well as, perhaps, its pettiness. This view is in stark contrast with that which many, Chilean or otherwise, would take: as the birthplace of two Nobel laureates in literature (more than any other country in Latin America) as well as some of the most globally popular writers of the Twentieth Century,<sup>14</sup> Chile holds a position of privileged visibility in world literature – at least, relative to its neighbors.

Bolaño himself is no marginal writer: the recipient of numerous awards and at the top of best-seller lists internationally, he is also the subject of wide-ranging critical attention.<sup>15</sup> Yet throughout his work, as well as in interviews, his attention is

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<sup>14</sup> Isabel Allende’s popularity was mentioned above, while Pablo Neruda (among other similar achievements) read in front of what was likely the largest crowd ever assembled for a poet, reading in front of 100,000 people in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

<sup>15</sup> Bolaño was the recipient of prestigious international awards such as the Venezuelan Rómulo Gallegos Prize (1999) and the U.S. National Book Critics Circle Award. His work is frequently the object of study, especially in the field of comparative and global literature; for example, see Héctor Hoyos, *Beyond Bolaño. The Global Latin American Novel*. Furthermore, given the transnational position of his work, the qualities of his work in translation has also been studied; see, for instance, Wilfredo H. Corral, *Bolaño traducido: nueva literatura mundial*. Madrid,

captivated by the underrepresented, those who might have been forgotten; and even in his treatment of canonical writers such as Neruda, he seeks to read against the grain of consensus.

This chapter begins considering these aspects of Bolaño and his work – his mixed stances between Chilean and transnational, his outsider relation to Chilean literature, and his affinity for people and places at the margins of history – in order to present the argument that they may be understood as a semiotics of contact, one which is situated at a nexus of travel and reading. I further argue that the equivalence between travel and reading – drawn implicitly and explicitly throughout Bolaño’s work, but also present in the work he locates as his precursors – can be understood with a view toward translation, which deals with the contact between languages and cultures that give reading and travel their sense of adventure and permits the denaturalizing of both text and subject. Doing so not only enriches the reading of Bolaño and his precursors, but also stands to benefit translation studies by emphasizing the heterogeneity of source material, an aspect of texts too frequently neutralized by the domesticating tendency of translation. As an alternative, it will be argued that translation has the same potential that reading and traveling do: to defamiliarize by providing contact with the strange.

This chapter will begin by illustrating Bolaño’s preference for the unseen and dispossessed by examining his treatment of his most monumental precursor – Pablo

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Ediciones Escalera, 2011; Sarah Pollack, “Latin America Translated (Again): Roberto Bolaño’s *The Savage Detectives* in the United States” *Comparative Literature* 61:3.

Neruda – noting how the use of intertextuality and fictionalization lay bare the mechanisms by which literary authority is generated, while at the same time destabilizing the presence of Neruda in such a way as to encourage new approaches to his work. Neruda’s residences in civil-war era Spain and British Colonial Southeast Asia and the poetry produced through these travels will be read using concepts from translation studies (such as the contact zone and translatability), noting how the concept of a life journey – both of authors and of books – destabilizes the mapping of author and nation and situates the poems as already in translation. The correspondence between reader and traveller will then be developed in reference to the similar semiotic issues raised by detective fiction, a genre with which Bolaño enters into substantial dialogue. On the basis of detective fiction – in which the figures of the reader and the traveller are crucially developed – the connection with translation is established as a way of understanding the dis-placement activated by each. This chapter ends by concluding with the importance of noting how texts conceptualize reading – the full implications of which will continue to be developed in subsequent chapters.

### **Literary Authority**

In the story titled “Carnet de Baile,” published in *Putas Asesinas* (2001), Roberto Bolaño presents a meditation on the presence of Pablo Neruda in literature and in life. Taking the form of a numbered list, the story begins by detailing his introduction to

Neruda through his mother,<sup>16</sup> who used to read to “them” (presumably, he and his sister) from *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada*. The book is described with bibliographic accuracy: “Editorial Losada, Buenos Aires, 1961,” bearing a drawing of Neruda on the cover and announcing itself as a commemorative edition celebrating one million copies in print. Bolaño continues to describe the volume that signaled his exposure to Neruda as it becomes inscribed with a life story: his mother’s name is written on the second page, and he wonders whose hand wrote it; relating how the book came into his possession, having first been given to his sister and then passed on to him when she moved to Mexico, among other books that he liked better; and recounting how the book has “recorrido un largo camino”<sup>17</sup> through numerous towns in the south of Chile, several houses in Mexico D.F., and three cities in Spain (207). The story then takes a brief detour to tell of the Zen master in Mexico who attempted to discipline the author with a wooden rod only to be struck back in self-defense; the author concludes that the master was “nerudiano en la ingenuidad”<sup>18</sup> (209). This formulation becomes a motif: it is first used to represent a personal

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<sup>16</sup> Such an experience is hardly unique: Marcos McPeck Villatoro’s anecdotal account, in *Neruda and the US Culture Industry*, details the experience of learning of Neruda – as well as reconnecting with his Spanish-language heritage, his mother-tongue – through his mother’s reading of the *Veinte Poemas*: “As a teenager I had heard of Neruda through his love poetry that my mother, helping me resurrect my Spanish, recited through a cassette tape” (164). Significantly in this context of Neruda in the U.S. – which can be considered a further extension of the popularity that discomforts Bolaño – Cristina García, in her introduction to the 2004 Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition of W.S. Merwin’s translation, also details a similar experience of being seduced by the language back to the mother-tongue: “Neruda’s poems also made me want to reclaim Spanish, the language of my childhood, after a long, sad silence” (xvi).

<sup>17</sup> “travelled a long road.” All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

<sup>18</sup> “Nerudian in naivete”



genealogy – “Mis bisabuelos... fuer[o]n nerudianos en la desmesura; mi abuelo... fue nerudiano en el blanco y en el azul; mis abuelos paternos... fueron nerudianos en el paisaje y en la laboriosa lentitud”<sup>19</sup> – and then expanded to describe the “dance” of affiliation in a literary system: “Parejas de baile de la joven poesía chilena: los nerudianos en la geometría con los huidobrianos en la crueldad, los mistralianos en el humor con los rokhianos en la humildad, los parrianos en el hueso con los lihneanos en el ojo”<sup>20</sup> (212-213).

This short story is but one instance in Bolaño’s work where Neruda’s presence occupies a disquieting place; furthermore, Neruda is but one of many canonized writers that appear throughout, in addition to scores of minor and marginal artists. In order to elaborate upon how Bolaño uses this configuration to create a space for the reading of his own work, I understand Bolaño’s representations of Neruda in particular – especially in light of Neruda’s status as a monumental writer – as a specific type of “refraction.”

André Lefevere, in “Mother Courage’s Cucumbers: Text, System and Refraction in a Theory of Literature” uses the general term “refraction” within his systemic approach to translation studies to refer to “the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work.” This of course includes translations, but also criticism, commentary,

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<sup>19</sup> “My great-grandparents... were nerudian in lack of moderation; my grandfather... was nerudian in white and blue; my paternal grandparents... were nerudian in the landscape and laborious slowness”

<sup>20</sup> “Dance partners of young Chilean poetry: the nerudians in geometry with the huidobrians in cruelty, the mistralians in humor with the rokhians in humility, the parrians in the bone with the lihniens in the eye”

historiography, teaching, anthologizing, and the production of plays. But while Lefevere's analysis of this process maps how specific inter-lingual translations may assist or deter the cross-cultural institutionalization of particular authors (the cited article's case study is Brecht), my use of the concept seeks to reveal how Bolaño's inclusion of Neruda is not only an intervention in canon-formation, but also the purposeful distortion of a monumental image: a way of undermining the institutionalized Neruda so that, in the cracks of that edifice, new space is opened up for divergent readings of the predecessor's work. This distortion is accomplished principally through extensive fictionalization and intertextuality, which, along with ubiquitous representations of readers – in a universe where reading is explicitly associated with travel – demonstrates an intense self-reflexivity (a common attribute of detective fiction). By using language reflexively, attention is brought to bear on the code of the text, which in this case involves not only different dialects of literary and non-literary Spanish, but also literary conventions and their attendant historical contexts.<sup>21</sup>

*Carnet de baile* provides a succinct example of Bolaño's preoccupation with the monumentalizing of authors and books by developing, in a numbered series, a young writer's relationship with authors, authority and authorization. The title can point in this direction: a *carnet de baile*, or "dance card," is a written sequence of dance partners and music that encodes relationships in a static way, which can serve as a program for performance, a way of accounting for potential suitors, but also as a

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<sup>21</sup> The connection between reflexive language and the communicative code is elaborated upon in Roman Jakobson's theory of the functions of language.

memento of an event. But it is worth noting, however, the Chilean *carnet* is a national identity card that all residents (foreign or otherwise) must possess, while the *baile* directly refers to the passage cited above, and more generally the trope of the “dance” in its frequent application to symbolic, cultural, and political activity. If one were inclined to translate the story into English, this title could be rendered as “License to Dance,”<sup>22</sup> rather than “dance card.”<sup>23</sup> Such an impression is immediately consolidated by Neruda’s introduction via the credentials that the 1961 Losada edition of the *Veinte poemas*<sup>24</sup> is said to present on its cover – a portrait of the poet’s iconic aquiline visage, as well as the declaration of the edition’s “commemorative” status. Bolaño’s first reaction is to wonder whether the figure of a million copies refers to the entirety of Neruda’s published work or just the *Veinte poemas*, and finds both possibilities disquieting (it is the latter). Such anxiety (proceeding to acquire genealogical dimensions) book-ends the story, which concludes with the image of Ugolino about to eat his children in the dungeon known as “Neruda’s Work,” and the reverie that “Cuando nuestros nombres ya nada signifiquen, su nombre [Neruda] seguirá brillando, seguirá planeando sobre una literatura imaginaria llamada *literatura*

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<sup>22</sup> Such a title in English would release a rather absurd comparison to the concept of a “license to kill,” and the film by the same name; however, such a comparison might be justified by Bolaño’s own brutal juxtaposition of literary culture and the ubiquitous stories of torture following the coup of 1973, an inseparable context to his (and the book’s) life-story.

<sup>23</sup> “Dance card” is Chris Andrew’s choice, published in *Last Evenings on Earth & Other Stories*, the title Bolaño’s *Putas Asesinas* (Killer Whores) has been given in English.

<sup>24</sup> This particular edition, in fact, presents no less than three portraits: the aforementioned drawing on the cover, a small photograph of the poet in middle-age (above a brief biography) on an interior flap, and a full-page photograph of Neruda as a young adult on the verso side of the title page.

*chilena*<sup>25</sup> (216)<sup>26 27</sup>. Participation in the field of “Chilean literature” is thus both authorized and ultimately subsumed/consumed by figures like Neruda, who are (as in Foucault’s meditation on authorship<sup>28</sup>) not merely authors of works, but founders of discourses that organize future thought. In Bolaño’s image, however, unlike Foucault’s, such the author must eat their own offspring to stay alive, “¡Sólo porque tiene hambre y ningún deseo de morirse!”<sup>29</sup> (215).

The theme of authorization in the story extends beyond the literary realm when Bolaño narrates his brief participation in the construction of Chilean socialism and subsequent detainment on the grounds that “mi acento, mis dólares, la marca de mi camisa y de mis pantalones”<sup>30</sup> marked him as a foreign terrorist (211). Unable to present appropriate documentation, he is only able to verify his identity through a fortuitous coincidence: the agents charged with his interrogation happen to be former classmates. In fact, stories of bodily violence, betrayal, and state terror frequently erupt, seemingly without warning, into the narrative – an effect amplified by the fragmented form of the numbered list. The “ubiquity” of these stories – the term chosen by the narrative to describe their most important characteristic – creates a

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<sup>25</sup> “When our names no longer mean anything, his name will continue shining, will continue gliding over an imaginary literature called *Chilean literature*”

<sup>26</sup> cf. Iñaki Echevarne’s account of “el viaje de la literatura,” (*Detectives* p.484) which will be discussed later in greater detail.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Winks refers to this passage to illustrate the “suffocating presence of Neruda” when reviewing Ilan Stavans’ *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*.

<sup>28</sup> Such “founders of discourses” are exemplified in Foucault’s text by Marx and Freud; identifying as a “Freudian,” for instance, in matters that exceed the scope of Freud’s specific work refers to one’s positioning within a discursive field.

<sup>29</sup> “Just because they are hungry and have no desire to die!”

<sup>30</sup> “My accent, my dollars, the brand of my shirt and of my pants”

disconcerting parallel with Neruda's presence in the story, in the lives of Bolaño and his fellow writers, and in the fields of Chilean as well as global literature; it seems that, at least within the frame of the author's life, one cannot be spoken of without the other.

This does not mean that Neruda authorized the coup or the violence it brought – the regime actively sought to suppress the presence of the poet due to his outspoken socialist commitments, and very likely poisoned him – but it does call attention to how cultural authority and political power are intertwined. Such complicity is the principal theme of Bolaño's *Nocturno de Chile*, in which Neruda makes a brief but significant appearance.<sup>31</sup> That novel is narrated by “Sebastián Urrutia Lacroix,” a fairly transparent avatar for José Miguel Ibañez Langlois (also known by his pseudonym “Ignacio Valente”), one of Chile's most visible literary critics during the twentieth century. In the novel, he is introduced to Neruda by his mentor, “Farewell”<sup>32</sup> (historically, Hernán Díaz Arrieta, known as “Alone,” and also a prominent and influential critic) during a dinner at a private country estate. Despite their ostensible political differences – the two critics were fervent anti-communists –

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<sup>31</sup> A number of additional points may present ways in which Neruda's presence is further encoded into this text: the narrator on a number of occasions makes use of phrases that are reminiscent of Neruda's writing (such as “todo era naufragio,” or “las estrellas que titilaban allá a lo lejos,” which echo the “Canción desesperada” and “poema 20,” respectively); and the name Urrutia, though somewhat common in Chile, also happens to be the name of Neruda's third (and final) wife.

<sup>32</sup> “Farewell” also happens to be title of the best-known poem of Neruda's first major work, *Crepusculario*, the publication of which Díaz Arrieta is said to have funded; Bolaño describes that poem in “Carnet de baile” as a poem that “encarnaba el colmo de los colmos de la cursilería, pero por el cual siento una inquebrantable fidelidad” (210).

the companionship of poet and critics is possible due to the apparent apolitical qualities of shared literary space, where Neruda and Farewell can exchange verses by Rubén Darío while seated at the dinner table of the latter's *latifundio*. But that illusion is brutally disabused by the revelation that the house of "Maria Canales," where Urrutia Lacroix would regularly attend prestigious literary soirées, was also used by her husband "Jimmy Thompson" to torture and execute suspected dissidents.<sup>33</sup>

At stake with associating Neruda in particular, and literary culture more generally, with state violence is the steadily mounting impression that reading is dangerous, that the book puts the reader into contact and complicity with a bloodied history too horrible to speak of but always looming behind the shadow of words. In a telling passage, the narrator of "Carnet de baile" recounts how, for a time, he would see Hitler roaming the halls of his home at night; after fifteen days, Hitler disappears, and he expects Stalin to follow. But it is Neruda who takes Hitler's place, and he "intentó hablar, no pudo, manoteó su impotencia y finalmente, antes de desaparecer con las primeras luces del día, me sonrió (¿como diciéndome que toda comunicación es

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<sup>33</sup> As is common in Bolaño, this story contains important grains of truth: "Maria Canales" refers to Mariana Callejas, a prominent writer and agent of the DINA (the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional, Chile's secret police during the first years of the military regime) who was involved in a number of extrajudicial murders, including the assassination of General Carlos Prats and his wife in Buenos Aires; her husband was Michael Townley, a U.S. citizen and agent of both the CIA and the DINA, who was likewise involved in several murders, including the bombing of Orlando Letelier in Washington D.C., and who currently resides in the United States under the witness protection program. The house where literature and torture coexisted is also real and is located in the Lo Curro neighborhood of Santiago, Chile.

imposible pero que, sin embargo, se debe hacer el intento?)”<sup>34</sup> (214).<sup>35</sup> The juxtaposition is richly suggestive, and incorporates another presence ubiquitous in Bolaño’s work: the specter of Hitler, in the form of Nazis, former Nazis, and neo-Nazis, appears in nearly every one of his published novels, and figures prominently in several (*La literatura nazi en América* and *2666*, for two notable examples). One might imagine a plausible future history of the twentieth century in which Hitler and Neruda both appear as representative figures, but their iconic status alone does not explain their presence together. Rather, both Neruda and Hitler are presented as empty signifiers, which gain significance purely through juxtaposition: the value of this strange and disturbing union, which is unexplainable using conventional literary history, is found precisely in the discomfort and disorientation it produces in the reader – disorientation being one of the most notable effects of a contact zone.

### **Neruda, unknown**

I understand the disorientation produced by the juxtaposition of Neruda and Hitler – as well as the story generally – partly as an attempt to evoke, through the process of refraction, what I call the “untranslated” Neruda as an alternative to his mainstream image, which has become domesticated to the point of cliché. As with much of

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<sup>34</sup> “attempted to speak, couldn’t, gestured his impotence and finally, before disappearing with the first light of day, smiled at me (as if telling me that all communication is impossible but that, nevertheless, the attempt must be made?)

<sup>35</sup> That Neruda should be unable to speak is particularly ironic given his immense literary productivity, as well as his invocation throughout the *Canto General* for the voiceless to speak through him (e.g. “Hablad por mis palabras y mi sangre,” the last line of *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*).

Bolaño's work, this image is an amalgam of history and possibility; in this particular instance, Bolaño encourages a consideration of historical circumstances as a means of imagining a Neruda that never was, but could have been: "Si Neruda hubiera sido cocainómano, heroinómano, si lo hubiera matado un cascote en el Madrid sitiado del 36, si hubiera sido amante de Lorca y se hubiera suicidado tras la muerte de éste, otra sería la historia. ¡Si Neruda fuera el desconocido que en el fondo verdaderamente es!"<sup>36</sup> (215). Both the destruction of Neruda's house in Madrid by nationalist forces during the Spanish Civil War and his important friendship with Federico García Lorca are well-documented, including by Neruda himself in the famous poem of his politicization, "Explico algunas cosas" from *España en el corazón*.<sup>37</sup> These circumstances are often referenced in publications of the poem, and Neruda's conversational tone might encourage a biographical reading. Bolaño counters such self-fashioning in "Carnet de baile" by hijacking the events and names referenced by Neruda<sup>38</sup> and converting them into grounds for a what-if. The struggle between author and precursor intensifies given that "Carnet de baile" is the most

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<sup>36</sup> "If Neruda had been a cocaine addict, a heroin addict, if he had been killed by rubble in the besieged Madrid of '36, if he had been Lorca's lover and had committed suicide after the other's death, the story would be another one. If Neruda was the unknown person that deep down he really is!"

<sup>37</sup> Less well known is Neruda's dependency on alcohol and possibly opium while a young diplomat in Asia. See Edmundo Olivares Briones, *Pablo Neruda: Los caminos de oriente*.

<sup>38</sup> In addition to García Lorca, Neruda also mentions Rafael Alberti and Raúl González Tuñón by their first names.



autobiographical text of an author already prone to fictionalizing his personal history.<sup>39</sup>

Despite that Bolaño writes, as a counterpoint to the image of Ugolino's infantiphagia, that "hay que matar a los padres, el poeta es un huérfano nato"<sup>40</sup> (210), I do not agree with Grínor Rojo's assessment that the figure of Pablo Neruda in the story "acabará transformándose...en el emblema de una rebeldía antigua, literariamente impostada, moralmente culpable y políticamente inefectiva"<sup>41</sup> – or rather, I do not agree that this is the *end* of Bolaño's transformations (or translations) of Neruda (Grínor Rojo 206).

Allow me to supplement the characterization of Bolaño's treatment of Neruda by providing a related example from *Los detectives salvajes*. The passage I want to mention stages another inter-generational encounter, this time between young "visceral realist" poets – among them, "Arturo Belano" – and the well-known Mexican *estridentista* Manuel Maples Arce. Their meeting is tense and awkward; although Maples Arce hopes Belano will visit again – if he does, he says, "estaré justificado"<sup>42</sup> – the young poet does not return, leading Maples Arce to say that "Todos los poetas, incluso los más vanguardistas, necesitan un padre. Pero éstos eran

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<sup>39</sup> Grínor Rojo, for instance, has written that the story resembles a "borrador para las memorias que nunca escribió," (a draft for the memoir he never wrote) noting how it provides supplementary details to stories told elsewhere, such as *Los detectives salvajes*, *Nocturno de Chile*, and *Amuleto*. ("Bolaño y Chile." *Anales de la literatura chilena*. Diciembre 2004.)

<sup>40</sup> "One must kill one's parents, the poet is a natural orphan."

<sup>41</sup> "Ends up transforming...into an emblem of old rebellion, a literary imposture, morally culpable and politically ineffective"

<sup>42</sup> "I will be justified"

huérfanos de vocación”<sup>43</sup> (177). The tropes of literary genealogies and orphans examined in “Carnet de baile” are also present here, in almost the same terms; but here, owing to the plethora of narrators in *Los detectives salvajes*, we get to witness the same event from multiple perspectives. The segment that follows Maples Arce’s is told by “Bárbara Patterson,” one of the visceral realists that paid the older poet a visit. I quote some of her reaction to the meeting at length in order to contextualize what Rojo calls the unfair treatment of Neruda in “Carnet de baile”:

Viejo puto mamón de las almorranas de su puta madre, le vi la mala fe desde el principio, en sus ojillos de mono pálido y aburrido, y me dije este cabrón no va a dejar pasar la oportunidad de escupirme, hijo de su chigada madre....Y luego va el viejo puto y dice que no le gusta el magnetófono, con lo que me costó conseguirlo, y los lambiscones dicen okey, no hay problema, redactamos aquí mismo un cuestionario, señor Gran Poeta del Pleistoceno, señor, en vez de bajarle los pantalones y meterle el magnetófono por el culo. Y el viejo se pavonea y enumera a sus amigos (todos medio muertos o muertos del todo) y se dirige a mí llamándome señorita, como si así pudiera arreglar la guacarada....y cuando nos marchamos de su casa, una mansión, yo diría, ¿y de dónde salió el dinero, puto jodedor de ratas muertas, de dónde sacaste el dinero para comprarte esta casa? (177-178)<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> “All poets, even the most avant-garde, need a parent. But these were orphans by vocation”

<sup>44</sup> “Motherfucking hemorrhoid-licking old bastard, I saw the distrust in his pal, bored little monkey eyes right from the start, and I said to myself this asshole will take every chance he get to spit on me, the motherfucking son of a bitch....And then the old bastard comes right out and says he doesn’t like tape recorders, never mind how hard it was for me to get this one, and the ass kissers say okay, no problem, we’ll write up a question sheet right here, Mr. Great Poet of the Pleistocene, yes sir, instead of pulling down his pants and shoving the tape recorder up his ass. And the old guy struts around listing his friends (all of them dead or practically dead), and he keeps calling me miss, as if that could make up for the puke....and when we left his house, which was a mansion, I said so where did the money come from, you dead-rat-fucking bastard, where did you get the money to buy this house?” Translation Natasha Wimmer.

While the vitriol here easily exceeds whatever is found in “Carnet,” the description that Rojo ascribes to its representation of Neruda is even more applicable here; it may be useful to note that, while the subtitle of *Urbe* – one of the books of his poetry that he offers the young poets – was “super-poema bolchevique en 5 cantos,”<sup>45</sup> he, like Neruda, went on to hold numerous government positions (Neruda himself had no fewer than three houses in Chile, all of them large enough to qualify as small “mansions” and now turned into museums). What is important here, however, is not so much the “selling-out” that comes with becoming part of the establishment, but the question of what becomes of that “rebeldía antigua” over time and/or with fame.<sup>46</sup> This question is central to *Los detectives salvajes*, but the novel’s narrative structure and its open ending ensure that there are no clear answers, only a lingering sense of disquiet: the type of intellectual precariousness felt when meanings and foundations become tenuous.

With this context and intertext informing our views about intergenerational contact in Bolaño’s work, let us return to *España en el corazón* to further elaborate upon the characteristics of Bolaño’s divergent reading of the poem in “Carnet de

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<sup>45</sup> “Bolshevik super-poem in 5 cantos,” translated into English as “Metropolis” by John Dos Passos (1929).

<sup>46</sup> In the *Manifiestos Estridentistas* that Maples Arce helped author, the exaltation of the present moment – along with the valorization of youth and the espousal of breaking from tradition – is a recurring theme, for example when he writes that “Cuando los medios expresionistas son inhábiles o insuficientes para traducir nuestras emociones personales – única y elemental finalidad estética--, es necesario, y esto contra la fuerza estacionaria y afirmaciones rastacueras de la crítica oficial, cortar la corriente y denunciar los ‘swichs’” (Osorio 102). Elsewhere, he writes, “Todo arte, para serlo de verdad, debe recoger la gráfica emocional del momento presente.” (158).

baile.” Above, I wrote about the (legitimate) tendency to read these poems with the poet’s biography – and through biography, historical circumstance – in mind. When the book was first published in 1937, with the Spanish Civil War still raging, it would have been impossible to ignore the political stance the book was taking; even Hernán Díaz Arrieta (Alone), whose ability to separate Neruda’s poetry from his politics became well-known, could not do it. In a review of *España en el corazón* published in *La Nación* on December 5, 1937, Alone focuses on the “desbordamiento”<sup>47</sup> of the work’s intense denouncement of nationalist forces (e.g., “chacales que el chacal rechazaría”), writing that the poet’s love for Spain and the hymn he produced for its people at war “traducen, sobre todo, un formidable odio al enemigo, una furia frenética e insultante, un desprecio desatado.”<sup>48 49</sup>

This, for Alone, is not a good thing for a poem to do, precisely because it gestures outside of itself, and in doing so renders itself ineffective, generating the following doubts:

¿Por qué Pablo Neruda se vino de España en peligro? Es un hombre joven, lleno de salud; no le faltan brazos ni piernas. ¿Por qué se vino de España para insultar desde tan lejos a los enemigos? El odio en ese grado ya no puede limitarse a las palabras. Si ese odio fuera verdadero y tan feroz como se pinta, no se contentaría con lanzar imaginariamente a Franco a los infiernos y

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<sup>47</sup> “overflowing,” or “overwhelming,” exceeding its limits.

<sup>48</sup> “Translate, above all, a formidable hatred of the enemy, an insulting and frantic fury, an uncontrolled disdain”

<sup>49</sup> Taken from Salerno, Nicolás. “Alone y Neruda.” *Estudios Públicos* 94 (Otoño 2004). Alternate source:

[http://sicpoesiachilena.cl/docs/critica\\_detalle.php?critica\\_id=758](http://sicpoesiachilena.cl/docs/critica_detalle.php?critica_id=758). Accessed 10/17/2013.

echarle encima sangre como lluvia, un río de ojos cortados. Procuraría matarlo por su mano, combatiría por el pueblo con el pueblo.<sup>50</sup>

For *Alone*, the hatred contained in the poem overflows its boundaries as a literary text and demands corporeal action; the fact that Neruda did not personally participate as a soldier in the fighting renders that hatred, and therefore the poem, inauthentic, “llena de aire, de un terrible aire hueco.”<sup>51</sup> However, there is no contradiction here with *Alone*’s aesthetic judgment that “la poesía lírica...no vive sólo del aire y en el aire trabaja únicamente con palabras, nace del corazón y cuando es sincera y fuerte mueve la voluntad con energía”<sup>52</sup> – in other words, that lyric poetry should emerge from emotion and move others through it. Nor does it contradict his position as a critic that literature should perform a social function, which, as Salerno notes, coincides with Neruda’s own social commitments: “Para el *Alone* cronista, así como para el Neruda cronista de *Canto General*, la literatura debía ser portadora no sólo de belleza ornamental, sino también, de valores humanos fundamentales”<sup>53</sup> (Salerno 303). There is no contradiction because the values and emotions that *Alone* considers appropriate

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<sup>50</sup> “Why did Pablo Neruda come from threatened Spain? He is a young man, full of health; he is not missing arms or legs. Why did he come from Spain to insult enemies from a distance? Hatred in that degree can no longer limit itself to words. If that hatred were true and as fierce as it’s presented, he would not content himself with imagining throwing Franco down to hell and pouring on him blood like rain, a river of sliced eyeballs. He would attempt to kill him with by his own hand, he would fight for the people with the people.”

<sup>51</sup> “Full of air, a terrible hollow air.”

<sup>52</sup> “Lyric poetry...does not live only on air and in the air work only with words, it is born of the heart and when it is sincere and strong moves the will with energy”

<sup>53</sup> “For *Alone* as a *cronista*, like for Neruda as a *cronista* in the *Canto General*, literature should be a bearer not only of ornamental beauty, but also of fundamental human values.”

for poetry correspond to an ideology of reason, order, and moderation<sup>54</sup> that prohibits the intensity reflected in *España en el corazón*; while poetry should come from the head and the heart, there is no mention of those other organs of emotion, the genitals, the spleen, the gut.

This is in contrast to the position held by Bolaño's "visceral realists," who hold a much more radical and amoral view of poetry's relationship to the body and the social, and whose praxis includes heckling poets at readings, defecating on books, lots of masturbation, and the occasional attempted kidnapping. The question of the extent to which literature can (or should) be something lived, crucial to the avant-gardes,<sup>55</sup> is also necessary in understanding the presence of Neruda in "Carnet de baile." A carnet, in serving as an emblem for authorized identity, functions to mediate one's passage into a space or field, which in the story is the field of literature. That

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<sup>54</sup> Alone will later acknowledge that (particularly with regard to his criticism of the *Veinte poemas* and the *Residencias*) that at that time he was "seducido y un poco tiranizado por el espíritu francés, pensaba por aquel tiempo que, fuera de la claridad, la sencillez y el orden, no había salvación." *Los Cuatro Grandes de la Literatura Chilena durante el Siglo XX*.

<sup>55</sup> The idea that art should be joined to life corresponds in practice to modern art's interest in non-representational forms or distancing effects that seek to remake habitual perspectives, as with *ostranenie*. Vicky Unruh notes, for instance, that "the distancing quality in modern art that Ortega called dehumanization turns the public toward, not away from, lived experience" (22). Such an interest is expressed when, for instance, Jorge Luis Borges writes in "Al margen de la moderna estética" (1920) of the premise to "considera[r] las palabras no como puentes para las ideas, sino como fines en sí" (Osorio 74). Or when Vicente Huidobro writes, in "La poesía" (1921), of language becoming poetic through breaking with convention, "Uno es el lenguaje objetivo que sirve para nombrar las cosas del mundo sin sacarlas fuera de su calidad de inventario; el otro rompe esa norma convencional y en él las palabras pierden su representación estricta para adquirir otra más profunda y como rodeada de un aura luminosa que debe elevar al lector del plano habitual y envolverlo en una atmósfera encantada" (89).

one should need such a form of mediation renders the authorized dance antithetical to the forms of expression (forms that, as Vicky Unruh notes, were essentially performative)<sup>56</sup> supposedly sought by the vanguards. In this context, Neruda and the dance does become, as in Rojo's words, "literariamente impostada." Like Alone ironized, Neruda wouldn't walk the talk. But, in *The Savage Detectives*, Bolaño takes the performances of the avant-garde one step further, representing the vanguards in ways that, while self-referential, are also always mediated, situated as something reached-for but never grasped. In "Carnet de baile," there is a comparable doubling-down: the story doesn't merely point out the structure of literary authorization and then cast Neruda as a gatekeeper; the story also puts that structure into operation by presenting the presence of Neruda in the author's life as a credential to the reader. The reader allows the story to pass into the realm of literature because it offers something recognizable – but the reader (probably) does not really know Neruda. So what the story is really talking about when it talks about the name of "Neruda" is not the biographical figure (as Rojo seems to think), but the Neruda that survives: the book.

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<sup>56</sup> As she writes in her introduction to *Latin American Vanguards, The Art of Contentious Encounters*, "My approach to Latin American vanguardism as a form of activity rather than simply a collection of experimental texts exhibiting certain common features underscores the fact that vanguardists themselves often conceptualized art and intellectual life as action or doing." Later, she goes on to add how "a reflexive engagement of art with life" based upon tactics of defamiliarization and confrontation is crucial to avant-garde activity, since "it is precisely through the 'dehumanization' that alters perceptions by calling attention to the Orteguian windowpane that the avant-gardes forced artistic recipients to think about the idea of art itself and its relationship to life" (3, 22).

## Books that travel

The first Nerudian book present in “Carnet de baile,” particularly the well-travelled edition of the *Veinte poemas* that joins the speaker’s family together, serves as a point of departure for the narrative because it is a dancing partner that author and reader have shared. As such, it serves as the first of many contact zones: Bolaño’s affectionate yet irreverent treatment of it is polemical, and is sure to upset and estrange some readers. But this makes the dance interesting: by turning the meeting with the reader into a potentially contentious encounter, reading becomes “a form of activity” in the sense used by Unruh, and the *Veinte poemas* continues its afterlife.

The life of the book may resolve the split between life and art in a way that the author’s life cannot. The fact that people age and die is an obvious truth that Bolaño does not ignore, and “Carnet” presents the image of something Neruda could have been, one of “los veteranos de la Brigadas Internacionales [que] visitan España, viejitos que bajan de los autocares con el puño en alto. Fueron 40.000 y hoy vuelven a España 350 o algo así”<sup>57</sup> (215). But there is also the issue of what happens to a person’s name, the process of fame that subsumes the person’s life into a biography.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> “Veterans of the International Brigades that visit Spain, little old men that get off of buses with their fists raised. They were 40,000 and today something like 350 return to Spain.”

<sup>58</sup> This process is reflected on also by Jorge Luis Borges in “Borges y yo”: “Hace años yo traté de librarme de él y pasé de las mitologías del arrabal a los juegos con el tiempo y con lo infinito, pero esos juegos son de Borges ahora y tendré que idear otras cosas. Así mi vida es una fuga y todo lo pierdo y todo es del olvido, o del otro.” [Years ago I tried to free myself from him and passed from the mythologies of the slums to games with time and with the infinite, but those games are Borges’ now and I will have to think of other things. So my life is an escape and I lose everything and everything is oblivion’s, or the other’s”]



In *Los detectives salvajes*, anger at this process of “selling out” fuels Bárbara Patterson’s diatribe against Maples Arce; and it is a type of appropriation that the young visceral realists attempt to avoid by locating their literary precursor in an all-but-forgotten poet who disappeared into the Sonora desert. However, the novel holds their success in that endeavor in doubt when, twenty years later, the visceral realists have themselves become an object of study. The same may even be said to hold true for Bolaño himself, who, after many years as a marginal poet, attained critical and commercial success in prose (and then died at his height). But while Matías Ayala writes that “el infrarrealismo es más literario que real, o, más bien, se volvió real en la medida en que fue ficcionalizado [como real visceralismo],”<sup>59</sup> the fictionalization that Bolaño frequently employs has the effect of heightening the tension between art and life, not resolving it (93).

The way in which a book can begin to take on its own life can be illustrated by returning to Alone’s assessment of *España en el corazón*, a book which is, among other things, emblematic of travel and encounter. In a limited sense, Alone was correct: the book does overflow its boundaries, in that it seems inextricable from a specific historical moment because it seeks to affect not only that moment but also the historical perception of it (if this seems like circular reasoning, I attribute it to the poem’s successful historical participation). But rather than judge the book of poems in reference to the authenticity of the feelings that purportedly produced it (as Alone seems to do), we could judge it through the actions it produced (as Alone seems to

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<sup>59</sup> “*Infrarrealismo* is more literary than real, or rather, became real to the extent that it was fictionalized [as visceral realism]”

suggest one should do). In this light, one may say: Neruda did not participate in the war, but the book did. The first edition, which Alone reviewed, was published in Santiago by Ercilla; its publication may have helped draw attention to what was already an international conflict.<sup>60</sup> More significant, however, is its later reprinting in Spain by the Ejército del Este in two separate runs (in 1938 and 1939) during critical times in the war. The 1938 edition bears this dedication:

El gran poeta Pablo Neruda, (la voz más profunda de América desde Rubén Darío, como dijo García Lorca), convivió con nosotros los primeros meses de esta guerra. Luego en el mar, como desde un destierro, escribió los poemas de este libro. El Comisariado del Ejército del Este lo reimprime en España. Son Soldados de la República quienes fabricaron el papel, compusieron el texto y movieron las máquinas. Reciba el poeta amigo esta noticia como dedicatoria.<sup>61</sup>

That the book was produced entirely by soldiers during wartime provides an indication of its perceived importance to the outcome of the conflict; yet this detailing of the circumstances of production – made by bodies in struggle – gives the book the aura of a living thing.

It is relevant to the earlier discussion of literary authority that the dedication in this edition also introduces the author by providing names that vouch for the book's affiliations: the comparison to Rubén Darío (who is credited with revolutionizing

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<sup>60</sup> A fact made explicit by the book in the poem “Llegada a Madrid de la Brigada Internacional.”

<sup>61</sup> “The great poet Pablo Neruda (the most profound voice of America since Rubén Darío, like García Lorca said) lived with us during the first months of this war. Then at sea, as if from exile, he wrote the poems of this book. The commissary of the Eastern Army reprints it in Spain. Soldiers of the Republic made the paper, composed the text and moved the machines. Let our friend the poet receive this news as a dedication”

Spanish language poetry at a time when it was stagnant) voiced by García Lorca (who is at the time not only an acclaimed writer and dramatist but actually a martyr of the conflict addressed by the book). But it is more important to the central considerations of my project to note the mention of the circumstances of composition: the fact that the book was written between nations, on the high seas, “como desde un destierro.”

Situating the composition of the book in a no-man’s-land to some degree reflects the conditions of Spain itself: what is known as the Spanish Civil War was an international conflict centered in Spain, with Franco (who invaded from Spanish Africa) backed by Hitler and Mussolini, and the Republicans supported (less strongly) by Stalin and Lázaro Cárdenas in addition to the international brigades mentioned by Bolaño and Neruda. Spain had become a violent contact zone where the arguments of empires spoken in the languages of Europe and beyond are joined by the sound of indiscriminate bombings. Neruda’s verse becomes visibly fragmented:

### **Bombardeo**

¿Quién?, por caminos, quién,  
quién, quién? en sombra, en sangre, quién?  
en destello, quién,  
quién? Cae  
ceniza, cae  
hierro  
y piedra y muerte y llanto y llamas,  
quién, quién, madre mía, quién, ¿a dónde?<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> **Bombing** // Who? on paths, who / who, who? in shadow, in blood, who? / in flashes, who / who? Falling / ash, falling / iron / and stone and death and cries and flames, / who, who, my mother, who, where?

Each question, repeated, seems to fall like a bomb, destroying past structures that served as shelter (like Neruda's house in Madrid, or like the alexandrine); the appeal to the mother in the last line only heightens the effect of helpless uncertainty. Curiously, then, shortly thereafter the speaker is able to manifest the militant confidence of "Explico algunas cosas." Beginning, "Preguntaréis: ¿Y dónde están las lilas? / ¿Y la metafísica cubierta de amapolas? /... / Os voy a contar todo lo que me pasa," the poem situates itself as both an eye-witness account of the situation in Spain for audiences abroad and as a poetic manifesto: the place of convergence for these stanzas is "todo lo que me pasa," which puts the speaker at the center. And finally, the last poem of the volume, "Oda solar al ejército del pueblo," makes no reference to the speaker, but is instead addressed to (as the title says) the people's army – a group united in diversity, comprised of "Fotógrafos, mineros, ferroviarios, hermanos / del carbón y la piedra, parientes del martillo / ... / guerrilleros, mayores, sargentos, comisarios políticos, / aviadores del pueblo, combatientes nocturnos, / combatientes marinos" – and ending on a message of hope: "tu luz organizada...establece los nuevos ojos de la esperanza." The trajectory of the book thus moves from sites of fragmentation and destruction, to personal pathos (the type of anger referred to by Alone), and finally to collective agency and hope for the future.

But in an important sense, this trajectory begins before this book. Much of the style of *España en el corazón*, particularly the imagery, is reminiscent of the first two

*Residencias*, which were published together in Spain in 1935.<sup>63</sup> Phrases like “El rostro seco de Castilla / como un océano de cuero,”<sup>64</sup> or “un tintero pálido entre las merluzas”<sup>65</sup> use unexpected juxtaposition to heighten the impact of the image. The similarities to Neruda’s previous work, however, also underscore significant differences. Perhaps most evidently, the imagery – although generated through a similar mechanism of juxtaposition – is much more concrete (more image-able or imaginable) than lines like “Como cenizas, como mares poblándose”<sup>66</sup> (“Galope muerto”) or “como un relincho en medio de la espuma y la sangre”<sup>67</sup> (“Barcarola”); furthermore, the technique of enumeration is no longer chaotic (“sólo quiero no ver establecimientos ni jardines, / ni mercaderías, ni anteojos, ni ascensores,”<sup>68</sup> from “Walking around”) but ordered naturally (sal, pan, aceites, pescados, patatas, tomates).<sup>69</sup>

At the level of grammar, *España en el corazón* also marks the emergence of the *vosotros* form (the informal second person plural, which is rarely used in Chile, but common in Spain). Previously, Neruda’s use of the second person had been limited to the informal singular *tú*: poems addressed to a single other, almost always the

<sup>63</sup> The first *Residencia*, which covers the years 1925-1935, was first published by Nacimiento in Santiago in 1933. The run was very small (100 copies) and was printed as a luxury edition priced at \$50 Chilean, when the price for most books was between \$2 and \$5; see Edmundo Olivares Briones, *Los caminos de oriente*, for more details.

<sup>64</sup> “The dry face of Castile / like an ocean of leather”

<sup>65</sup> “A pale inkwell among the hakes”

<sup>66</sup> “Like ashes, like seas populating themselves”

<sup>67</sup> “Like a whinny in the midst of foam and blood”

<sup>68</sup> “I just want to not see establishments nor gardens / nor merchandise, nor eyeglasses, nor elevators”

<sup>69</sup> Salt, bread, oils, fish, potatoes, tomatoes.

beloved, which positioned the lyric as speech overheard and the reader as a bystander or voyeur.<sup>70</sup> Now, the speaker's audience has broadened, and the poem's language appears to withhold less. In addition to more concrete images, there is more narrative structure and description ("Yo vivía en un barrio...Mi casa era llamada... Todo era... Y una mañana todo estaba ardiendo"<sup>71</sup>) as well as an expansion in the use of exclamation and the command form ("venid a ver la sangre / por las calles!"<sup>72</sup>). The poem will "contar" instead of "cantar"<sup>73</sup>: the communicative aspects of language are heightened and the poems overall seem more transparent, as if being bombed broke open the opacity and *ensimismamiento* of the *Residencias*.

### **A traveling poet: *Residencias en la Tierra* (I & II)**

But the bombs, for Neruda, are not "todo lo que me pasa." Having spent the better part of the last decade traveling the world, his residency in Spain marks more than just the exposure to a dramatic and significant political conflict, but also represents the culmination of his early life's literary ambitions. Like many artists and writers of

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<sup>70</sup> A couple of notable exceptions from the first two *Residencias* might be "Oda a Federico García Lorca" and "Alberto Rojas Giménez viene volando," which also use the *tú* form. However, the main exception is "No hay olvido (sonata)," which uses a similar structure to "Explico algunas cosas" but is much more enigmatic: "Si me preguntáis en dónde he estado / debo decir 'Sucedé' / ... / Si me preguntáis de dónde vengo tengo que conversar con cosas rotas." ["If you ask me where I've been / I should say 'it happens' / ... / If you ask me where I come from I must talk to broken things"] These poems are from *Residencia II* and were written (according to Hernán Loyola's chronology) in 1934-1935, after Neruda had arrived in Spain.

<sup>71</sup> "I lived in a neighborhood....My house was called...Everything was...And one morning everything was burning."

<sup>72</sup> "Come see the blood / on the streets!"

<sup>73</sup> A stance that will be repeated in the first poem of the *Canto General*: "Yo estoy aquí para contar la historia." ["I am here to tell the story"]

the Americas at the time, Neruda longed to go to Europe, preferably Paris; he writes in his memoirs:

...la vida cultural de nuestros países en los años 20 dependía exclusivamente de Europa, salvo contadas y heroicas excepciones. En cada una de nuestras repúblicas actuaba una 'elite' cosmopolita y, en cuanto a los escritores de la oligarquía, ellos vivían en París. Nuestro gran poeta Vicente Huidobro no sólo escribía en francés, sino que alteró su nombre y en vez de Vicente se transformó en Vincent. Lo cierto es que, apenas tuve algún rudimento de fama juvenil, todo el mundo me preguntaba el la calle:  
--Pero, qué hace usted aquí. Usted debe irse a París<sup>74</sup>

The pressure to leave Chile led Neruda (following the example of Gabriela Mistral before him) to use what little influence he had to obtain a Consular position that he hoped could someday result in one of the coveted appointments to Europe. But for this to occur, he would first need to travel across the globe, to Rangoon in Burma, a journey during which publishing in Spain emerges as his “mayor deseo.”<sup>75</sup>

Writing *España en el corazón* “como desde un destierro” therefore poses a departure away from what was perceived by Neruda to be the center of Spanish-

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<sup>74</sup> *Confieso que he vivido*, Ed. Planeta, 1988, p.92. [“The cultural life of our countries in the twenties depended exclusively on Europe, save numbered and heroic exceptions. In every one of our republics a cosmopolitan ‘elite’ operated and, as far as writers of the oligarchy went, they lived in Paris. Our great poet Vicente Huidobro not only wrote in French, but changed his name and instead of Vicente transformed himself into Vincent. What’s true is that, as soon as I had the smallest amount of young fame, everyone would ask me on the street: But, what are you doing here. You should go to Paris”]

<sup>75</sup> From a letter dated October 24, 1929, addressed to Héctor Eandi: “Voy a decirle, mi mayor deseo es editar en España, Argentina me parece aún provincial, Madrid es bien diferente. Pero, cómo?” *Correspondencia durante Residencia en la tierra*. ed. Margarita Aguirre. Editorial Sudamericana, Buenos Aires 1980 p.48 [“I’ll tell you, my greatest desire is to find a publisher in Spain, Argentina to me seems still provincial, Madrid is very different. But, how?”]

language culture; but the voyage to Burma (and then later Sri Lanka, Java, and Singapore) that preceded and precipitated his time in Spain was a move outside of postcolonial Latin America to places still under British colonial rule. So while it is tempting (and not altogether incorrect) to understand the drastic change of style between the first two *Residencias* and *España en el corazón* as a shift in Neruda's poetic praxis brought about by new political commitments formed due to the people and events encountered in Spain,<sup>76</sup> it is also important to note that Neruda's exposure to contact zones did not begin here. Remembering the diverse spaces that served as the ground for the composition of these poems is important because, as with Bolaño (who led us to consider these facts), Neruda early in life assumed a position that is paradoxically both within and outside of the Chilean literary (and political) landscape. This conflicted origin is difficult to translate because it situates the texts as already, in a significant way, in translation: the poems of both the *Residencias* and *España*, produced in spaces of transition and encounter, encode the poet's voice as it splits off from itself.

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<sup>76</sup> As late as 1933, after the first *Residencia* had been published, Neruda wrote his friend Eandi, "Una ola de marxismo parece recorrer el mundo, cartas que me llegan me acosan hacia esa posición, amigos chilenos. En realidad, políticamente no se puede ser ahora sino comunista o anticomunista.... Pero creo que mi punto de vista de intelectual romántico no tiene importancia. Eso sí, le tengo odio al arte proletario, proletarizante. El arte sistemático no puede tentar, en cualquier época, sino al artista de menor cuantía. Hay aquí una invasión de odas a Moscú, trenes blindados, etc. Yo sigo escribiendo sobre sueños." Neruda/Eandi, *Correspondencia*, p.118. ["A wave of marxism seems to travel the world, letters that reach me harass me toward that position, and Chilean friends. In reality, politically one cannot be but communist or anticomunist.... But I think that my romantic intellectual's point of view has no importance. That said, I hate proletarian, proletarianizing art. Systematic art cannot tempt, in any era, anyone but the artist of least significance. Here there is an invasion of odes to Moscow, armored trains, etc. I keep writing about dreams."]



The seven years that Neruda served as Chilean consul to these British colonies in Asia may count as some of the least prolific of his life: the seven years (1925-1932) that the first *Residencia* encompasses produced 33 finished published poems; in contrast, the two years of the second *Residencia* (1933-1935) – spent in Chile, Argentina, and Spain – resulted in 24 poems published. While the economic hardships that Neruda endured in Asia may have affected his ability to write, he was no stranger to poverty, having published several books (including the *Veinte poemas*) as a half-starved student in Santiago.

No doubt, Neruda's isolation and loneliness played a large part in the composition of the first *Residencia*; Neruda writes in his memoirs – trying to distance himself from that book and the person that wrote the poems – that “No creo, pues, que mi poesía de entonces haya reflejado otra cosa que la soledad de un forastero trasplantado a un mundo violento y extraño” (*Confieso* 120-121).<sup>77</sup> In the study produced by Edmundo Olivares Briones, this loneliness was an important characteristic not only of Neruda's travel, but also of the poetic thought that runs through the *Residencias*; Olivares Briones writes that the poet “necesitó de todos estos viajes para afirmar su voz y expresar su solitario pensamiento” (127)<sup>78</sup>. And yet, noting that the first *Residencia* was actually begun in Chile,<sup>79</sup> Olivares Briones also

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<sup>77</sup> “I don't believe that my poetry from then has reflected anything but the solitude of a foreigner transplanted into a strange and violent world”

<sup>78</sup> “Needed all these journeys to affirm his voice and express his solitary thought”

<sup>79</sup> Namely, the poems “Madrigal escrito en invierno,” “Serenata” (from 1925), “Galope muerto,” “Alianza (sonata),” “Fantasma,” “Débil del alba” (from 1926), “Unidad,” “Sabor,” “Caballo de sueños” (from the first half of 1927).

adds that “Ahora que se ha visto trasplantado de Santiago a Rangoon, poco es lo que realmente ha cambiado” (128).<sup>80</sup>

This does not mean that a place months away by ship had little to offer by way of difference, but that Neruda’s bodily translation across the globe had found equivalents for the “ostracismo, pobreza y soledad”<sup>81</sup> that characterized his life as an adolescent and young adult (261). Such equivalents are possible through the affinity of relationships between two separate systems: so while the specific conditions of Neruda’s poverty were different between his time as a student and his time as a consul, little had changed in the sense that the terms that defined the relationship of this poverty to his work (such as solitude) retained the same signifying structure.

The language difference, however, appears to challenge the idea that Burma, Sri Lanka and Singapore could have provided equivalent conditions for Neruda’s writing – similar to how language difference in literary translation precludes exact equivalence. It is significant to note that, if his correspondence provides any indication, the language that surrounded him was English; his occupation as consul in British colonies made it the language of his profession, and he busied himself reading “estos nuevos escritores ingleses: Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley” (Neruda/Eandi 59).<sup>82</sup> If Neruda in Chile, as a student studying to become a French teacher, had been constantly reminded of his peripheral position by the refrain,

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<sup>80</sup> “Now that he sees himself transplanted from Santiago to Rangoon, little has really changed”

<sup>81</sup> “Ostracism, poverty and solitude”

<sup>82</sup> “These new English writers”

“Usted debe irse a París,”<sup>83</sup> that sentiment could only be redoubled now that he was marginalized by language as well. The contact of Neruda’s Chilean Spanish (an especially marginal dialect) with the English of the literature and politics that surrounded him was an asymmetrical relation of power that doubtless contributed to his isolation – to say nothing of the multitude of native languages he could not understand.

These relationships of geography and power are not clear-cut, however, and Neruda’s impression that publishing in Argentina is “aún provincial” can be elaborated upon by contrasting his position to that of his most famous contemporary, Jorge Luis Borges. Years later, Borges – that escritor “en las orillas”<sup>84</sup> (in Beatriz Sarlo’s words) of Argentine and Global literature – considers the position of apparently peripheral cultures, such as Argentina, to the traditions of Europe in “El escritor argentino y la tradición.” Borges claims that Argentine and South American writers in general – analogously to Jewish and Irish writers – are both a part of European culture and apart from it, a dual stance that allows them to “manejar todos los temas europeos, manejarlos sin supersticiones, con una irreverencia que puede tener, y ya tiene, consecuencias afortunadas.”<sup>85</sup>

Neruda’s amicable disagreements with Borges were many, and this view of culture is the basis for some of them. For Neruda, Borges’ position is too abstract, not sufficiently material, not embodied. From Colombo in 1929, he writes to Eandi:

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<sup>83</sup> “You should go to Paris”

<sup>84</sup> “On the edges”

<sup>85</sup> “Handle all European themes, handle them without supersticion, with an irreverence that can have, and has had, fortunate consequences”

“Borges, que usted me menciona, me parece más preocupado de problemas de la cultura y de la sociedad, que no me seducen. A mí me gustan los grandes vinos, el amor, los sufrimientos, y los libros como consuelo a la soledad” (Olivares Briones 185). No amount of engagement with and rewriting of traditional and canonical texts, and no amount of correspondence, can overcome the separation between his body and the bodies of other writers (and lovers), as well as the organs of institutionalization and publication. Their disagreement is a disagreement over translatability: the “irreverencia” that Borges understands as the strength of a peripheral position is the capacity to translate without “fidelity” to the source, a style that embraces the creative potential of contact, randomness, and intermixture.<sup>86</sup> Meanwhile, Neruda – especially in the context of his travels – understands translation as something different: words, like books and bodies, must traverse real space, and separation is painful. The refrain that echoes throughout the “Canción desesperada” that ends the *Veinte poemas* – “Es la hora de partir. Oh abandonado” – marks a moment of crisis and desolation. Throughout that book, which preceded *Residencia en la tierra*, Neruda’s attention to the paradoxes of sensual language desire makes him keenly aware of the space that separates bodies and words, instilling an intense consciousness that some of what departs will never arrive – “A veces van mis besos en esos barcos graves / que corren por el mar hacia donde no llegan”<sup>87</sup> (Poema18) – and that (as Bolaño imagines

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<sup>86</sup> Borges’ appraisal of the translators of *The 1001 Nights* uses a similar vocabulary to his discussion of irreverence in “El escritor argentino”: “Su infidelidad, su infidelidad creadora y feliz, es lo que nos debe importar.” (From *La historia de la eternidad*.)

<sup>87</sup> “Sometimes my kisses go on those serious ships / that run over the sea to where they never arrive”

Neruda trying to say) true communication may be impossible: “Entre los labios y la voz, algo se va muriendo”<sup>88</sup> (Poema 13). One cannot help but to think that his time as a consul in Asia was an actualization of these fears.

While working as a consul, in conditions that very much resembled “un destierro,” the hope of publishing in Spain therefore became Neruda’s maximum ambition. We can interpret this desire simply as the aspiration for fame, but with the benefit of retrospect – namely, the knowledge of the radical poetic shift that would occur after that ambition was realized – we might say that fame included something more. By publishing in Spain, Neruda does not only translate himself into the center of Spanish-speaking culture, but furthermore in doing so becomes translatable. He is finally able to speak directly to other people, many other people, and rest on the assumption that he is being understood; the language has been mastered for his purposes and is no longer a source of obstruction and anxiety.<sup>89</sup>

### **Traveling detectives**

Bolaño, in “Carnet de baile,” dreams of the Neruda who couldn’t speak, aiming to recapture the young marginal poet by making the fame that followed a source of disquiet – the stuff of nightmares, even. There is a strong element of self-consciousness in this move: while the Older Neruda mentions his youth briefly and

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<sup>88</sup> “Between the lips and the voice, something goes dying”

<sup>89</sup> Janice Jaffe mentions the perception of the “Protean” nature of Neruda’s poetry among his translators (such as Bellit, Bly, Merwin, and Felstiner) in “Speak through my words: the poetics and politics of translating Neruda” *Pablo Neruda and the US Culture Industry*.

then only to distance himself from it, the Older Bolaño writes and re-writes his youth almost obsessively. When Bolaño refers to Neruda as “el desconocido que en el fondo verdaderamente es”<sup>90</sup> he is gesturing to the untranslatable Neruda by invoking something other than fame; but he is also eliciting the presence of his own ghost, the image of the young marginal Bolaño who has survived largely due to the efforts of Critics and Readers, in a process he conceptualizes as analogous to travel.

*Los detectives salvajes*, in a segment spoken by “Iñaki Echevarne” – an avatar for Bolaño’s friend, editor, and later, literary executor – presents a rather Borgesian model of literature in time, imagined as a voyage:

Durante un tiempo la Crítica acompaña a la Obra, luego la Crítica se desvanece y son los Lectores quienes la acompañan. El viaje puede ser largo o corto. Luego los Lectores mueren uno por uno y la Obra sigue sola, aunque otra Crítica y otros Lectores poco a poco vayan acompañándose a su singladura. Luego la Crítica muere otra vez y los Lectores mueren otra vez y sobre esa huella de huesos sigue la Obra su viaje hacia la soledad. Acercarse a ella, navegar a su estela es señal inequívoca de muerte segura, pero otra Crítica y otros Lectores se le acercan incansables e implacables y el tiempo y la velocidad los devoran. Finalmente la Obra viaja irremediamente sola en la Inmensidad. Y un día la Obra muere, como mueren todas las cosas, como se extinguirá el Sol y la Tierra, el Sistema Solar y la Galaxia y la más recóndita memoria de los hombres. Todo lo que empieza como comedia acaba como tragedia. (484)<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> “The unknown person that deep down he truly is.”

<sup>91</sup> “For a time, Criticism travels with the Work, the Criticism vanishes and it’s the Readers travel alongside. The trip can be long or short. Then the Readers die one by one and the Work continues on alone, although another Criticism and other Readers gradually begin to fall into the rhythm of its pace. Then Criticism dies again and the Readers die again and the over that trail of bones the Work continues on its journey toward solitude. To close the distance to the work, to sail in its wake, is an unequivocal sign of certain death, but another Criticism and other Readers approach tirelessly and relentlessly and are devoured by time and velocity. Finally the Work travels irremediably alone in the Vastness. And one day the Work dies, like all things

The final image echoes the image presented at the end of “Carnet de baile,” where Neruda’s name continues to shine after all others have dimmed. Yet the distinction between Readers and Criticism made in *Los detectives salvajes* is not so evident in the short story: instead, the story is populated by different types of “Nerudians” (or Huidobrians, or Mistralians, etc.), who may or may not be readers of Neruda. To be “Nerudian,” may refer to a particular affiliation within a discursive field or an attribute determined by this field, and is applied by Bolaño to his great-grandparents (who surely pre-date Neruda) as well as young Chilean poets. In *Los detectives salvajes*, the field of literature is imagined as a journey through time: “el viaje puede ser largo o corto.”<sup>92</sup> This figure permits the conceptualization of literary relationships as not only positional but as changing through time, a characteristic also gestured toward by the figure of the dance. In the context of *Los detectives salvajes*, Iñaki Echevarne’s model of literature provides an important perspective for interpreting the novel’s narrative structure, which is composed of over 50 narrators spread across 20 years, because it brings into relief the position of readers. Generating this type of self-awareness is significant since the process of reading the central portion of the novel becomes a pursuit of the protagonists through the disordered testimonies each narrator provides, an effort that resembles detective work.

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die, like the extinguishing of the Sun and the Earth and the Solar System and the Galaxy and the most distant and remote of man’s memory. Everything that begins as comedy ends as tragedy.”

<sup>92</sup> “The trip can be long or short”

The effect of detective work is compounded by Bolaño's fictionalization of real events and people, and the pervasive intertextual web between his novels (in the sense that the same characters and events reappear and are retold), both of which encourage investigative and interrogative strategies on behalf of the reader. Iñaki's model of the survival (and eventual death) of literature has the work traversing over a "huella de huesos" over time, which almost sounds like an ominous clue; one might be inclined to think of another novel, *2666*, where the desert landscape is strewn with bones, with its descriptions of gruesome murders that were taken almost verbatim from *Huesos en el desierto* by Sergio González Rodríguez – who is also a character in that novel. While this is but one tenuous example, Bolaño's work is replete with traces that lead to other works and the violent realities that surround them. The ubiquity of such *huellas* – a trace, a path, a footfall, an imprint, an index or allusion – actually pushes a reader's capacity for interpretation to its limit, forcing the question of what is even legible in the text and in reality, producing the effect of estrangement central to Shklovsky's (and others') understanding of literature. *Los detectives salvajes* ends like this, with a square drawn with a broken line and the question, "¿Qué hay detrás de la ventana?"<sup>93</sup> Detective fiction, as an allegory of interpretation, is metafiction.<sup>94</sup>

In order to better characterize Bolaño's use of detective fiction, it is worthwhile to spend some time reviewing its development in the work of Borges, who Bolaño cites

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<sup>93</sup> "What is behind the window?"

<sup>94</sup> Heta Pyrhönen, in *Murder from an academic angle*, writes that "the detective genre itself comprises its own first level of criticism" because of its "self-reflexive understanding of its own ingredients" (2). Elsewhere, she adds that "its self-conscious reflexivity extends also to an equally self-aware mirroring of intertextuality" (35).



(along with Poe and Cortázar) as some of his strongest influences. Moreover, the presence of similar problematics of reading and travel in stories like “La muerte y la brújula” (1942), combined with Borges’ writing on translation and culture, provides an additional approach vector for the concerns of this chapter: how reading presents a semiotics of contact, and how to understand the nexus of travel and reading.

Ricardo Piglia writes that “una de las mayores representaciones modernas de la figura del lector es la del detective privado (private eye) del género policial”<sup>95</sup> (77). His analysis of “La muerte y la brújula” by Borges discerns two types of readers: Erik Lönnrot, the detective – and victim – of the story, who “cree en lo que lee”; and his nemesis, Red Scharlach, “un lector displicente, que usa lo que lee para sus propios fines” and who “tergiversa y lleva lo que lee a lo real (como crimen),” functioning as a type of “hermeneuta salvaje” (35).<sup>96</sup> One of the keys to this story is the way that reading intersects with real space and time: on the basis of the clues he reads throughout the story, Lönnrot is able to triangulate the location of the final murder and predict the date, but all without realizing that the clues were placed to ensnare him and that the final murder is his own. Thus, it would seem that Lönnrot’s downfall is partially due to his ignorance of the consequences and dangers of reading: his insistence that one’s engagement with reality must abide by aesthetic criteria (that

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<sup>95</sup> “One of the greatest modern representations of the figure of the reader is that of the private detective of the detective genre”

<sup>96</sup> “believes what he reads”; “a disrespectful reader, that uses what he reads for his own ends”; “misuses and brings what he reads to the real (as crime)”; “savage interpreter.”

hypotheses must be interesting and not tolerate randomness) blinds him to the violent system he is operating within and the actual contact to which he is exposed.

Scharlach's exploitation of the processes of correspondence between reading and reality hinges upon the extent to which his reader is able to translate abstract clues – such as the page reading “La primera letra del Nombre ha sido articulada”<sup>97</sup> that was left in the typewriter at the scene of the first murder – into information that can be plotted on a map, and then further translate himself to the represented location; it presupposes that Lönnrot will be able to decode the text and then act upon it. These two types of translation carry meaning between different semiotic systems<sup>98</sup> but also between reality and its representations. In addition to the map, Lönnrot uses “un compás y una brújula”<sup>99</sup> to verify the symmetry of the pattern he perceives: one is a tool of geometrical abstraction, and the other indexes the map to the earth's real space. These tools could stand as figures for the two metatextual reading techniques Lönnrot employs, intertextuality (the perception that the typewritten note at the scene of the first murder corresponds to the other notes and books that follow) and fictionalization (his insistence on “explicaciones rabínicas”<sup>100</sup> as the most appropriate). If one is willing to inflect the story with a view to what it says specifically about translation (and not merely reading in general), then it would place the faithful translations of Lönnrot against the creative manipulations of Scharlach. In

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<sup>97</sup> “The first letter of the Name has been enunciated.”

<sup>98</sup> Roman Jakobson provides a tripartite model of translation: translation between languages – which Jakobson calls interlinguistic – is situated between intralinguistic translation (or paraphrase) and intersemiotic translation (or adaptation).

<sup>99</sup> “A pair of compasses and a compass rose”

<sup>100</sup> “Rabbinical explanations”

this arrangement, intertextuality and fictionalization become ways to create a model that translates reality, but also a structure that can trap the reader. The conclusion seems to impart a lesson similar to Borges' analysis of translation as well as his meditation on tradition: success requires a degree of irreverence.

Borges' story itself uses intertextuality and fictionalization to translate itself into particular discursive fields. It takes place in a "Buenos Aires de sueños"<sup>101</sup> where the names of streets are French – a technique also employed by Edgar Allen Poe in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," which the author claims stays faithful to the "essential...facts of the real murder of Mary Rogers" in New York.<sup>102</sup> And while Poe's Dupin stories, like the story by Borges, have their plot advanced by the act of reading, Borges contributes to and complicates established generic conventions by removing the reader/detective from the study and the crime of the closed room and putting the action out on the street:<sup>103</sup> Lönnrot "se creía un puro razonador, un Auguste Dupin, pero algo de aventurero había en él y hasta de tahúr"<sup>104</sup> (157).<sup>105</sup> The

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<sup>101</sup> "Buenos Aires of dreams"

<sup>102</sup> In fact, Poe's assertions of veracity go so far as to sound fantastical when he claims that the confessions of two separate people, after the story was written, confirmed "in full, not only the general conclusion, but absolutely *all* the chief hypothetical details by which that conclusion was attained" (27).

<sup>103</sup> A move that Mempo Giardinelli refers to as the "salida a la calle" (15).

<sup>104</sup> "Believed himself to be a pure reasoner, an Auguste Dupine, but in him there was something of an adventurer and even a cardsharp"

<sup>105</sup> To further substantiate the intertextual relationship here, might also be worth mentioning that Poe's trio of Dupin stories – "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842-43), and "The Purloined Letter" (1844) – were answered by Borges with a trio of his own – "El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan," (1941), "La muerte y la brújula" (1942), and "Ibn Hakkan al-Bokhari, muerto en su laberinto" (1951) – which were timed to coincide with the centennial of

mention of the detective as adventurer might distance one from the usual model of the analytic detective story, and incline one to think of the “hard-boiled” detective stories exemplified by the writing of Raymond Chandler.<sup>106</sup>

While the extent to which hard-boiled fiction had a direct effect on Borges’ work is arguable, reading Borges after Bolaño – who claims Poe, Borges, and Chandler as precursors – refracts the work in light of subsequent text. While maintaining the metafictional interest in interpretation exhibited by the analytical detective story, Bolaño’s work also includes the brutal, violent adventures of the hard-boiled genre. In doing so, he elaborates upon the detective genre’s representations of readers by providing an additional figure for the interrogation of interpretation: the traveler.

One of Bolaño’s posthumous novels, *Los sinsabores del verdadero policía*, explains what the protagonist, Oscar Amalfitano (who also has his own chapter of 2666), has taught his students:

Comprendieron que un libro era un laberinto y un desierto. Que lo más importante del mundo era leer y viajar, tal vez la misma cosa, sin detenerse nunca....Que la principal enseñanza de la literatura era la valentía, una valentía rara, como un pozo de piedra en medio de un paisaje lacustre, una valentía semejante a un torbellino y a un espejo. Que no era más cómodo leer que escribir. Que leyendo se aprendía a dudar y a recordar. Que la memoria era el amor.<sup>107</sup> (146)

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Poe’s stories (the lapse of the third story is noted and explained by Borges in a preface).

<sup>106</sup> For more on the distinction between analysis and adventure in the detective story, and a much more extended consideration about the intertextual links between Poe and Borges, see John T. Irwin, *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytical Detective Story*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1994.

<sup>107</sup> “They understood that a book was a labyrinth and a desert. That the most important thing in the world was to read and travel, maybe the same thing, without ever stopping....That literature’s main lesson was bravery, a weird bravery, like a

This passage brings together several motifs that are common in Bolaño's work and lets them speak to each other. Imagining the book as a labyrinth and a desert seems like a figure taken from Borges; yet, it is an extremely appropriate characterization of some of Bolaño's larger works, especially *Los detectives salvajes* and *2666*, whose labyrinthine narratives lead to the Sonora desert (where *Los sinsabores* takes place as well). But more importantly, the connection between literature and bravery that Bolaño emphasizes thematically in his novels and explicitly in interviews and commentary<sup>108</sup> is placed alongside a potential equivalence between reading and writing. Both reading and traveling share a taste for adventure, a willingness to step outside of the comfort afforded by pre-established domestic and semantic relationships. And if reading teaches doubt and remembrance, travel can teach the same: both can be loving and disruptive acts that, if done properly – without ever stopping to become fossilized – require a subject not only to come into contact with others, but also to part with themselves in the process by which languages and bodies impart knowledge. This sense of becoming through becoming-other is at the core of reading and travel's transformative capacities, and is a potential they share with

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stone well in the middle of a lakeside landscape, a bravery resembling a whirlwind and a mirror. That it was not more comfortable to read than to write. That reading one learned to doubt and to remember. That memory was love.”

<sup>108</sup> For example, in, “Consejos sobre el arte de escribir cuentos,” (collected in *Entre paréntesis*) Bolaño writes that “un cuentista debe ser valiente. Es triste reconocerlo, pero es así.” [“A storyteller should be brave. It's sad to acknowledge, but that's the way it is.”]

translation; it is at the core, furthermore, of Bolaño's theory of reading and literary history.

### **(TRAVEL + READING) / LANGUAGE = TRANSLATION**

If reading and travel partake in parallel courses, then their journey is joined by translation, which makes both possible; translation directly references the movement from one physical or semantic space to another that gives reading and travel their sense of adventure. As such, translation figures prominently in both reading and traveling, with similar results:

Cast as an act of love, and as an act of disruption, translation becomes a means of repositioning the subject in the world and in history; a means of rendering self-knowledge foreign to itself; a way of denaturalizing citizens, taking them out of the comfort zone of national space, daily ritual, and pre-given domestic arrangements (Apter 6)

Remarkably similar to the description of the effects of Amalfitano's teaching, Emily Apter's description of the abilities of translation is applicable to both reading and traveling. They share a demand for a sense of adventure because displacement, in its various forms, is a desired outcome – much like the *ostranenie* esteemed by Russian Formalists like Shklovsky was meant to achieve the displacement of habitual modes of perception. Bolaño's "translations" of Neruda, then – which are accomplished largely by focusing on the act of reading and by exposing the journeys of the author and his work – can be understood as an act of love and disruption that seeks to defamiliarize not only the name and fame of Neruda, but also the reader's

preestablished position within the field of literature. “Carnet de baile” doesn’t just describe a figurative dance with authors, but attempts to stage one.

To further conceptualize the link between translation, travel, and reading, I would like to elaborate upon the linguistic element of travel. In Samuel Weber’s reading of the work of Walter Benjamin, the “linguisticity” of language is to be found in its “impartibility.” Though Benjamin’s *Mitteilung* is most frequently translated as “communication,” Weber chooses the word “impart” to reflect the sense of “partitioning with” present in the root, highlighting the action of parting with itself that is crucial to language’s ability to move across time, space, and subjectivity. Language can therefore be conceptualized as “something that splits off from itself, takes leave of itself, *parts with* what it was to become something else, to be transposed, transmitted, or translated into something else” (Weber 42). Of course, to impart shares a crucial morpheme with to *depart*, and it is a commonplace to say that a journey inevitably causes the traveler to become someone else: they are separated from the “comfort zone of national space, daily ritual, and pre-given domestic arrangements” and are repositioned in relation to the world, thereby parted with the subject-position they previously occupied. The relationship between these concepts is even more evident in Spanish, which is how Bolaño and Neruda would have thought of them. To depart is simply *partir*, which also denotes division and rupture, and is not only echoed by *impartir* but also *repartir* (to distribute) and *compartir* (to share) – which are two additional functions of language.

The impartability of language permits the survival of texts by establishing alterability as a constitutive characteristic; by parting with itself through various types of refractions – of which translation is paradigmatic – a work during its afterlife continues to grow and change. This is the field where Bolaño’s fictionalization of his own (and Neruda’s) biography operates, and is moreover the source of his interest in the *vanguardias*, as an attempt to answer the question: if life and art are one, what would death and afterlife (or even middle-age) mean for the avant-guard? In Iñaki Echevarne’s description of the lifespan of a work, the journey that literary works take through time is partially formed through the successive birth and death of critics and readers; a similar dynamic is at work in Lawrence Venuti’s analysis of the different translations of Camus’ *L’Étranger*, which – despite employing a direct and unadorned style typical of U.S. writers such as Ernest Hemingway – had to wait nearly half a century before the French existentialism that informs it gained sufficient recognition in the United States for a translation into this same style of English could be possible. In this case, *L’Étranger* had to become other than it was, through the effort of readers and critics (and translators), for it to acquire a form that released the latent possibilities present in the text – namely, its presence, as Borges would write, “*después de una literatura,*” in a translation that acknowledges “*un rico proceso anterior.*”<sup>109</sup>

Michel de Certeau is also among those that use the figure of travel to describe reading: he writes that “readers are travelers; they move across lands belonging to

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<sup>109</sup> “In the wake of a literature” / “A rich prior process.” Translated by Esther Allen. From *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Venuti. Routledge, 2004.



someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write” (174). His figure of criminalized, unauthorized behavior – “poaching” – aligns with Piglia’s analysis of Scharlach’s “savage” way of reading, and signals the relationships of power and authority with which both reading and traveling must negotiate, and in doing so, expose. The analogy between reading and spatial displacement is further elaborated by Certeau in the inverse direction when analyzing the paths taken by inhabitants as a semiotic act. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Certeau describes the “*migrational*, or metaphorical” city as a space that “slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city,” where people’s movement “constitutes a ‘wandering of the semantic’ produced by the masses that make some parts of the city disappear and exaggerate others, distorting it, fragmenting it, and diverting it from its immobile order”(Certeau 93, 103). A population’s movement becomes an issue of legibility because it over-writes the proscriptive text of zoning and signage.

Collecting the various strands of thought presented so far: the affinity between travel and reading is present in the development of specific literary genres,<sup>110</sup> such as detective fiction, that focus on conflicts of legibility and seek to represent the act of interpretation; this affinity is also present in the characteristics of language that permit communication, transmission – and translation. Bolaño, more than simply remarking upon this affinity, uses it as a productive literary theory, one that he describes and applies in order to fashion a re-reading of one of the most widely-read (and -written

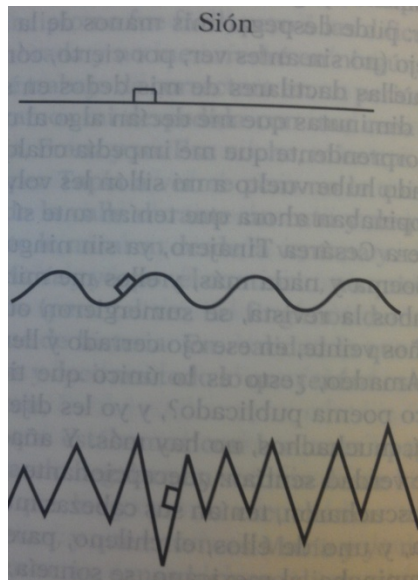
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<sup>110</sup> Another genre in which this becomes evident is travel writing. See, for example, Mary Louise Pratt. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992.

about) writers of the twentieth century. But by invoking the “unknown” Neruda, the mechanism of authority that Bolaño applies in order to position himself within the field is used to undermine the dominance of the author’s name; instead, Bolaño’s theory of literature, through its self-reflexivity, sides with the savage reader.

### Reading readers

The work of readers in determining the afterlife of works is a major concern in *Los detectives salvajes*. The two protagonists of the novel, Arturo Belano and Ulysses Lima, are poets, but we never have the opportunity to read what they write; they are also detectives, but rather than looking for the author of a crime, they are searching for the author of their movement, the lost poet Cesárea Tinajero who disappeared some thirty or forty years previously. Their search, like Lönnrot’s in “La muerte y la brújula,” is a search of and for texts; it leads them eventually to finding the only existing copy of Cesárea’s only published poem, which reads like this:



This, in the words of the young visceral realists, is “una broma que encubre algo muy en serio.”<sup>111</sup> (376). Among other things, this clue encodes a reference to Borges’ story, and stages its disruption. In his final moments, Lönnrot attempts to have the last word over Red Scharlach by revising the rhomboidal net his nemesis has woven: “Your labyrinth has three lines too many,” the detective tells the criminal, and goes on to explain:

En su laberinto sobran tres líneas... Yo sé de un laberinto griego que es una línea única, recta. En esa línea se han perdido tantos filósofos que bien puede perderse un mero *detective*. Scharlach, cuando en otro avatar usted me dé caza, finja (o cometa) un crimen en A, luego un segundo crimen en B, a 8 kilómetros de A, luego un tercer crimen en C, a 4 kilómetros de A y de B, a mitad de camino entre los dos.<sup>112</sup>

For the savage detectives, the rationalized simplicity of Lönnrot’s line is turned into a swarming ocean that sets the detective adrift, a jagged terrain that does not permit a direct approach; the horizon has changed.

The inclusion of this “poem” highlights our inability to read certain parts of the text, or more specifically, its apparent simplicity mocks the illusion of transparency. What does the poem mean? Do poems need to mean anything? Does reality? The metatextual questions that arise around the poem allow the detectives to demonstrate their particular skill at reading in much the same way that the verbatim inclusion of

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<sup>111</sup> “A joke that covers up something very serious.”

<sup>112</sup> “I know of a Greek labyrinth that is a single straight line. In that line so many philosophers have been lost that a mere detective could easily lose himself. Scharlach, when you hunt me in another form, stage (or commit) a crime at A, then a second crime at B, 8 kilometers from A, then a third crime at C, 4 kilometers from A and B, half way between the two. Wait for me then at D, 2 kilometers from A and C, again half way. Kill me at D, as you are now going to kill me at Triste-le-Roy.”

newspaper copy works in Poe's Dupin stories, and in the way that the quotations of cabbalistic commentary work in Borges, but with a crucial difference: the process of reading for the savage detectives does not involve the analytical faculty, does not involve the use of compasses and maps to make the text say something about the real, but rather relies on dreams, dreams of these lines which actually precede the reading of them, in which the jagged final line is felt as "una rajadura que empezaba en el vientre pero que pronto experimentaba también en la cabeza y en la garganta y de cuyo dolor sólo era posible escapar despertando, aunque el despertar no era precisamente fácil"<sup>113</sup> (400). The poem's truth is felt on a level that is not rational and non-semiotic,<sup>114</sup> as pain in a dream; the very sign of disruption, as rupture. Unlike language, the body does not easily part with itself.

The jagged line also finds an analogue in the novel's disruption of a linear narrative, and signals the ways in which Bolaño's *Savage detectives* complicates our reading practices. The case examined above – Cesárea Tinajero's poem "Sión" – could be thought of as an example, by suggesting the presence of non-analytical forms of reading and understanding, confronting its readers (both inside and outside the novel) with a text that calls for deciphering by means that are both linguistic and non-linguistic: while the lines could be understood as a separate semiotic system, wherein each line acquires its meaning through a differential relation with the others,

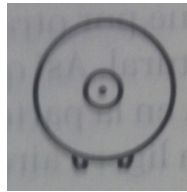
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<sup>113</sup> "a tear that began in the belly but which was soon felt in the head and the throat and from whose pain it was only possible to escape by waking, although waking wasn't easy"

<sup>114</sup> See, for example, Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*: "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it" (4).

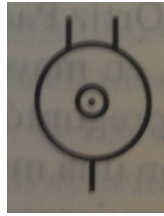
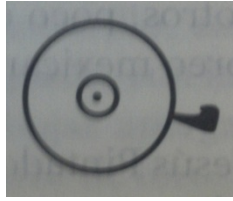
the title operates on the linguistic levels of reference (“Zion”), morphemic deconstruction (the Spanish “-sión” or “-ción” is roughly equivalent to the English “-tion,” and often serves a nominalizing function) and pun (one of the characters of the novel reads “Simón,” which in Mexican Spanish means something like the affirmative “yup”). The multiple approaches that are simultaneously present suggest a plurivocality that cannot be resolved – and yet the poem also mocks our complexity of approach by its incredible simplicity, like a riddle we can’t quite get.

Cesárea’s poem is not the only instance of this type of cipher. In a later part of the novel, the poet García Madero – author of the diary that bookends the narrative – offers his friends (and by extension, the reader) a series of visual riddles, with the question: what is this?

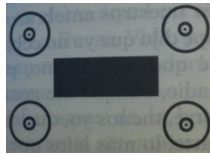


The riddle is bound to have a familiar answer to many readers (in fact my childhood friends and I used to amuse ourselves with similar variations), but interestingly enough the other two poets in his company haven’t been exposed to this one before; Lupe, the only one who knows the answer – and she is not a poet, but a teenage prostitute – “doesn’t want to play” (574). Again, if the reader doesn’t know the answer already, one is mocked by apparent simplicity: a Mexican seen from above.

A sequence of over a dozen more of these follows, with the picture being shown before a response is reached in dialogue:

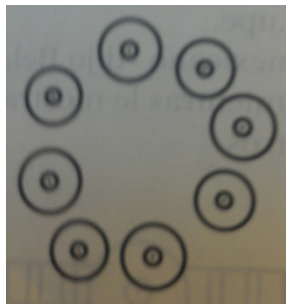


The reader is asked to play along in the game of deciphering; but, despite its somber conclusion,



[four Mexicans at a wake]

these clues do not advance the plot of the narrative. The riddles are for entertainment, a way to kill time on a roadtrip through the desert. They are jokes: but jokes that hide something serious.



Eight Mexicans talking. Eight Mexicans sleeping. Eight Mexicans watching an invisible cockfight. The riddle is without a real referent, and with each answer just as valid as the last, the most interesting hypothesis is the one the reader likes the best. The openness with which Bolaño portrays the act of reading – as well as the openness with which he confronts the reader of his own work – undermines authority and acknowledges the agency of the reader.

The reflexivity and estrangement through which the acknowledgement of reader agency is accomplished is a key attribute of texts like *Los detectives salvajes* or “Carnet de baile.” Yet it may pose a challenge to interlingual translation: current standards of acceptability for translations – which, according to Lawrence Venuti, prize fluency and readability – obfuscate this agency by concealing the work of the translator. What Venuti calls “the translator’s invisibility,” in attempting to achieve a maximally readable rendering, simplifies the potential complexities of the source text, like Bolaño’s and Neruda’s use of different dialects of Spanish. Furthermore, by favoring a style that positions the reader as a passive consumer, by producing translations that do not (as Apter writes) take readers out of their comfort zones, fluent translations neutralize the correspondence between travel and reading that allows literature to be a source of knowledge and transformation.

But this not need be the case. The next chapter will examine in greater detail how the translator’s invisibility hinders the transmission of textual features that privilege the reader’s autonomy. By presenting another way the reader may be conceptualized by literary texts and translation – this time, as a language learner – through reference to the work of Neruda and Gabriela Mistral, the next phase of my project continues to argue against overly domesticating translation.

## Chapter 2

### The Reader as a Language Learner: Poetry, Translation, and Teaching

In the previous chapter, I made the argument that Pablo Neruda constructs an image of the poet as a traveller, one who journeys across geographical space as well as history (the combination of which is best exemplified by the mission of *Canto General*, but which is present throughout his body of work). Roberto Bolaño, for his part, expands upon this theme in Neruda (but which is also ubiquitous in other vanguardist writers such as Vicente Huidobro and which, in all honesty, can be traced back to the *Odyssey*) by shifting our attention to the reception of texts, imagining the reader as a traveller and a detective, and the detective as a reader and a traveller. I further argued that these figures, which rest on a dynamic of becoming through becoming-other, are analyzable using translation theory: dealing with the constitutive alterability of language as well as the contact zones of literary and cultural systems, theories of translation situate texts themselves as travellers, and readers follow these texts into linguistic and cultural borderlands and situations of estrangement.

In this chapter, I will expand upon these connections by adding *language-learner* to the ways that one may usefully conceptualize the reader. Doing so is intended to emphasize the inherent pedagogical function of literary translation. To substantiate the notion of the reader as a language learner, I make use of a conceptual framework in which all reading of literature – by operating as a contact zone – need not function comfortably within the confines of a single language, but can instead work to



defamiliarize pre-established semiotic relationships with the world. Combining this approach (which is not new, but takes much from the concept of *ostranenie*)<sup>115</sup> with that of translation studies yields a twofold aim: first, to read translations with an eye to whether they de-naturalize the reader's linguistic habitat or reinforce it; and second, to read source texts and determine where they fall on the spectrum between seeking to impart something through language (be it a story, an image, or a feeling) with making language use itself the focus – tendencies that may powerfully affect a literary text's relationship to language learning.<sup>116</sup> Though texts, more often than not, attempt to do both at the same time, the manifestos of the avant-garde and modernism – and the subsequent reactions to them – employ discourses that frequently privilege one over the other, making the distinction useful when analyzing an author's position with respect to literary systems.

I will begin by exploring the properties of what Lawrence Venuti calls “the translator's invisibility” when read through dual-language editions, a format that has become common for single-volume translations of poetry from Spanish into English (and which is visible, in various partial ways, in almost every other genre). Arguing that features that generate an illusion of transparency in translation directly

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<sup>115</sup> My thought here is indebted to the work of Russian formalists such as Viktor Schlovsky, but also recent scholarship in translation studies, such as Emily Apter when she writes “Cast as an act of love, and as an act of disruption, translation becomes a means of repositioning the subject in the world and in history; a means of rendering self-knowledge foreign to itself; a way of denaturalizing citizens, taking them out of the comfort zone of national space, daily ritual, and pre-given domestic arrangements” (6).

<sup>116</sup> The binary of form versus content has in the past been highly visible in writing on translation, which has often (and not unproblematically) opposed renderings that prioritize “word for word” or “sense for sense”.

undermine a text's capacity to function as an instructional artifact, I will then illustrate the problems of transparent approaches to translation by examining the difficulties and contradictions that occur when handling forms of cultural and linguistic contact that happen in polyglot spaces, focusing on loanwords in particular as a prominent example. Finally, I will move on to a literary analysis of texts' own treatment of multilingual cultures. Focusing on a number of poems by Chilean poets and Nobel laureates Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda, my work will show how these authors destabilize their inscription within a particular domestic sphere by referencing multiple languages and literary systems. At the same time I will show how translations of these polyvalent works may fall short of meeting the demands of multiple registers.

Latin American literature can regionally attribute its languages and language-mixes to a long history of encounter between indigenous and colonial cultures (both of which were extremely heterogeneous to begin with), to which are presently added changing currents of immigration and the prevalence of global English.<sup>117</sup> The

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<sup>117</sup> Walter Mignolo, in *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, makes the argument that the classical revival of the European Renaissance was inseparable from the conquest and colonization of the Americas, in which the dissemination of Antonio de Nebrija's Spanish (Castilian) grammar played a pivotal role in colonization. In a different but (perhaps) complementary analysis, Serge Gruzinski in *The mestizo mind* examines the Spanish colonizers' aborted attempts to teach Latin (aborted because the students threatened to surpass their teachers, thereby destabilizing the knowledge economy).

Meanwhile, Néstor García Canclini's *Culturas híbridas* uses the discourse of hybridity to talk about the processes of globalization in Latin America, including "neohispanoamericanización" (to refer the acquisition of key industries such as telecommunication and banking by companies based in Spain) and – more relevant to my particular project – what he calls "fusión interamericana," referring to "el

currents of language throughout the literature of the Americas can thus lend themselves to modes of analysis that consider translation alongside language use, language mixing, and language learning: both the recovery of indigenous or autochthonous cultures<sup>118</sup> and the struggle to craft or deconstruct universalist discourses<sup>119</sup> are projects that operate on grounds of translatability.

The goal here is to take advantage of the translator's unique status as a reader<sup>120</sup> to reveal the mechanisms by which the processes of meaning-making, and not just information, can be conveyed across languages – specifically with regard to the complicated and equivocal demand that the translation of a poem should function as a poem. To do so, however, requires that attention be paid to the polyglot agents and spaces that make such transfer possible; in other words, to work against the translator's invisibility.

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conjunto de procesos de 'norteamericanización' de los países latinoamericanos y la 'latinización' de Estados Unidos" (xv).

<sup>118</sup> Visible in the primary texts by Neruda and Mistral studied in this chapter, but a wide ranging thematic visible in the works of writers as stylistically and geographically varied as (for example) Carmen Bullosa and José María Arguedas.

<sup>119</sup> Likewise wide-ranging, my project takes Jorge Luis Borges' *El escritor Argentino y la tradición* as the preeminent example, although this theme is also present in the works of contemporary writers of globalization such as Alberto Fuguet and Jorge Volpi. Critically, my understanding of Borges' negotiation with global literature is informed by the work of Beatriz Sarlo.

<sup>120</sup> Gayatri Spivak, in "The politics of translation" (from *Outside in the teaching machine*, and also cited in Venuti's anthology), structures her argument along two opposing approaches: "translation as reading" and "reading as translation." For the first, she writes that "the translator must surrender to the text. She must solicit the text to show the limits of its language.... Unless the translator has earned the right to become the intimate reader, she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text," whereas the second is "precisely not a surrender but a friendly learning by taking a distance" (372, 384).

## The Translator's Invisibility

A translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers, and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text – the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the 'original'....What is so remarkable here is that this illusory effect conceals the numerous conditions under which the translation is made, starting with the translator's crucial intervention in the foreign text. (*Invisibility 1*)

Theories of translation frequently employ figures of vision and optics when conceptualizing the function of translation, as when, for instance, Lefevere writes of “refraction.”<sup>121</sup> Lawrence Venuti adds another optic metaphor: invisibility.

### *Invisibility and Poetry*

The standard of fluency by which translations are judged readable is further problematized by its application to poetry, which is first among linguistic forms in opposing transparency by specifically functioning to solicit close attention to its shape, syntactic construction, formal characteristics, etc., often making tension with transparency a significant (and signifying) aspect of the text. A translation seeking foremost to be fluently readable is likely to level the poem's rhetoric, annihilating poetic operation by equalizing the tension with the strange – a tension, according to

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<sup>121</sup> To recall an earlier note, Lefevere describes refraction as “the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work.”

Viktor Shklovsky and the Russian Formalists after him, at the very root of all literature.

Venuti's history of translation explains the marginalization of modernist literary techniques (such as those theorized by the Russian Formalists) on the grounds of their resistance to fluency. Although the poetry and prose of modernist writers such as James Joyce or Marianne Moore have long been canonized in Anglo-American literary circles, the experimentation that characterized this literature, along with the attendant innovations in theory and translation "continue to be marginal, seldom actually implemented in an English-language translation, seldom recommended in theoretical statements by translators or others" (*Invisibility* 187).

The principal example that Venuti uses is the work of and reaction to Ezra Pound, an archetype of modernist translation and an extremely influential poet in his own right – although the extent and effect of this influence is varied. Pound's translations – with sources ranging from Provençal and medieval Italian to Anglo-Saxon, Chinese, and Egyptian hieroglyphics – are variously termed as "accompaniment" or "interpretive"<sup>122</sup> and employ a spectrum of foreignizing and archaicizing techniques, with the general effect of "avoid[ing] the transparent discourse that has dominated

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<sup>122</sup> José Emilio Pacheco shares the same vocabulary regarding translations; his reasoning behind his "aproximaciones" – the name he has given his translations, which perhaps most famously include Eliot's *Four Quartets* – is based on the untranslatability of poetry, which forces a translation to function as a poem in its own language; he has said that "Todo poema es intraducible y juega de [*sic*] su lengua madre, solo puede ser representado por un texto semejante y distinto, esto es una aproximación a su original" (<http://www.informador.com.mx/fil/2009/159455/6/aproximaciones-el-exitoso-adios-de-jose-emilio-pacheco.htm>).

English-language translation since the seventeenth century,” opting, instead of “fluently foregrounding the signified,” to “increase the play of the signifier” by making use of “inverted or convoluted syntax, polysemy, archaism, nonstandard dialects, elaborate stanzaic forms and sound effects” (203).<sup>123</sup> The result is a text that is, in various senses, difficult to read; by the early 1950s, however, decreasing numbers of people retained the faith in modernist experimentation required to make the effort involved in opposing the fluent strategies that, although now seriously challenged, remained dominant. Although some of Pound’s and modernism’s influence are still apparent, for example, in the “assertion of the aesthetic independence of the translation,” the demand for precision, the use of “contemporary English,” and even the discarding of rhyme in favor of a free-verse form, the experimentation and innovation that specifically challenged transparent fluency has been largely marginalized, with adherents finding their work “dismissed as an aberration of little or no cultural value” (210, 214).

Venuti’s thrust here is that Modernists like Pound got something right about translation: by providing multiple translations in different registers ranging from archaic to vernacular, their work made the translator anything but invisible. But in doing so – by holding readers to a higher standard of comprehension than transparent renderings do – this type of work also enhanced the visibility of the source text and

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<sup>123</sup> In this respect, Modernist experimentation in translation assumes bilingualism on the part of the reader (or, at least, does not assume monolingualism); Venuti notes that “The translation of accompaniment required bilingual publication. It signified the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text by deviating from current English usage and thereby sending the reader across the page to confront the foreign language” (*Invisibility* 168).

the specific qualities of its particular language, acknowledging the work of the translator as a partial interpretation, and the role of the translator as one interlocutor in a larger conversation. In other words, the focus on language for which the modernists are known produced, in their translations, exactly that: a focus on the language.

The position of Robert Bly, one of the most prominent early translators of Neruda's work, specifically repudiates the poetry of Pound and other American Modernists (he names Eliot, Pound, Moore, and Williams) in his 1963 essay titled "A Wrong Turning in American Poetry." This is not particularly interesting in and of itself – after all, in Borges' words, "diferir: tal es la norma que le impone su precursor." For the purposes of my project, however, what is more significant is the central dichotomous contrast Bly uses to construct his argument: to Modernist American poetry, which "resembles a group of huge spiral arms whirling about in space....moving away at tremendous speeds....rushing away from its own center," Bly opposes "Modern Spanish poetry" (putting Antonio Machado at the center) which he describes (using the words of Rilke) as a poetry of "turning inward" (17, 22) – a recourse to the foreign in order to effect a domestic renewal, which, as we shall see, functions not as a neat division but rather a zone of contact.

Bly's argument here is directed toward the field of "American" (Anglophone U.S. and maybe Canadian) poetry, and the Spanish-language poems are completely stripped of their context. There is no mention of either the often-controversial

interactions between or the reception of Neruda, Vallejo, “Jiminez”<sup>124</sup> [sic] and Lorca; despite being presumably about what “our poetry” might learn from Spanish-language poetry, there is no Spanish in the piece, only partial translations cited transparently. The only line that he admits may be difficult to translate is from Rilke.

But while Bly here has nothing to say about translation, thinking about translation can illuminate how his argument makes use of the translator’s invisibility to sustain itself against the demands of language. Bly uses “inwardness” as a synonym for “the signified”; his problem is not so much with the abundance of “things” in Modernist poetry,<sup>125</sup> but their insistence on the materiality of language itself. Pound’s focus on the signifier is one of the traits that inclined him (and other modernists) to struggle with translation, and to recommend translation to younger poets as a way to hone their craft.<sup>126</sup> Bly doesn’t want poems to deal with language; he wants them to deal with “passion” and “the unconscious,” and seems to find what he is looking for in Spanish – as well as in French, German, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Hindi, other languages in which he would find source texts for his translations.

In *Neruda and Vallejo: Selected Poems* (for which Bly serves as editor and translator), first published the year before “A Wrong Turning,” Bly relies heavily on the illusion of transparency to bolster his intervention in English-language US

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<sup>124</sup> Meaning Juan Ramón Jiménez, one of Neruda’s most prominent antagonists.

<sup>125</sup> As he writes when creating a contrast with Williams, “Lorca’s poems [also] have many things in them.” See Denise Levertov “O taste and see” for an English-language treatment of things contemporaneous to Bly’s critique. Though Bly does not mention her or this poem (despite her connection to some of his antagonists like WCW or Charles Olsen), it serves on its own as a succinct rebuttal to much of Bly’s argument.

<sup>126</sup> Including W.S. Merwin, who became a prominent translator of Neruda, and particularly known for his version of the *Veinte Poemas*.



poetics. The editorial material Bly provides is almost entirely biographical, without a word about Neruda's place in Latin American literature (he calls the *Residencia* "surrealist," and what little comparative work there is compares him to French poets) or, more importantly, his own method of translation. Later editions of the book further reinforce the myth of conveying (in Venuti's words) "the foreign writer's personality or intention" by including an interview of Neruda (from 1966), and an additional introduction (from 1993) titled "Reading Neruda and Vallejo in the 1990s," which begins: "Why is it important to read Pablo Neruda now? Because after twelve years of Reagan and Bush we find in him a well of compassion" (xi). Never mind that the 1980s and 90s were a time of widespread "Official English" language legislation,<sup>127</sup> a political situation in which stressing the signifier (Spanish) should have become increasingly relevant. Instead we see that strategies that render Spanish invisible in both literature and politics function to prop up the impossible expectations of a domestic homogeneity – after all, who is this "we" on whose behalf Bly claims to speak?

It may seem odd to claim that the editor of a bilingual edition encourages invisibility when he writes of Neruda's poetry, a practice that can foreclose the reader's engagement with the source text and language. And despite how closely Bly's treatment of poetry in translation reflects the standards of acceptability that

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<sup>127</sup> California, the most populous of the United States (and the state with the highest percentage of speakers of languages other than English at home, at 44%), passed proposition 63 in 1986, which amended the state's Constitution to make English its official language. Proposition 227, passed in 1998, made English-only education mandatory in California public schools. Many other states passed similar legislation during this same period.

Venuti describes, this early volume of disparate translations nevertheless disrupts the illusion of transparency in the simplest and most obvious way possible: by including the source-text on a facing page. Still, though it is difficult to claim that a translation stands in for its original when they are standing next to each other, the presence of the foreign in translation can serve various purposes, and may in certain contexts reinforce invisibility rather than challenge it. On its own, inclusion of the source is not enough – what’s important to my project is not so much what’s written on the verso or the recto as their contact in between, the struggles of the reader in the process of learning language through literature.

### *The Translator’s Invisibility in the Presence of the Source Text*

The inclusion of the full source-text is much more common in poetry than it is in other genres of literature. Although it is clear that material constraints on publishing have been a reason for this,<sup>128</sup> there are also theoretical and aesthetic reasons why this is the case.

The semantic density of poetry means that the formal, metrical, and phonetic levels of meaning are often jettisoned in translation, usually in favor of what can be more transparently rendered in a different language (such as imagery); here, the dual-language format often stands as an acknowledgement of such limitations, particularly when readers are encouraged by the translator’s preface to “sound it out” for themselves. Obviously, this encouragement works better for some languages than

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<sup>128</sup> The emergence and popularization of electronic publishing, however, appears to not have significantly changed the status quo (yet?).

others. A dual-language translation from Russian, for instance, would require familiarity with the Cyrillic alphabet to even begin to attempt it; but to “sound out” even a phonemically and orthographically simple language like Spanish requires significant knowledge of phonetic differences (the most conspicuous being the silent “h,” the “j,” the “r,” and “ll,” and the addition of “ñ”) in order to approximate what the source sounds like to a native reader. A reader with the ability or desire to sound out the source text is already a language learner.<sup>129</sup>

Numerous translators recognize that translations, particularly in a dual-language format, can encourage learning a language and serve as a scaffold to do so.<sup>130</sup> Doris Dana’s translations of Gabriela Mistral were contemporaneous with Bly’s translations of Neruda, but the editions are quite different in terms of what paratextual materials are included. While, like in Bly’s edition, there is some biographical material included, the biographical description does not stand in for an explanation of how

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<sup>129</sup> From Doris Dana’s translator’s note: “If this book helps to bring Gabriela Mistral’s poetry to your attention, and if it contributes in any way to your desire to read more of her work, preferably in the original, I shall have accomplished my purpose. / This volume is bilingual because I earnestly hope you will want to read the original Spanish. In his introduction to that remarkable book *The Poem Itself*, Stanley Burnshaw says, ‘The instant [the reader] departs from the words of the original, he departs from *its* poetry. For the words are the poem. An English translation is always a different thing: it is always an *English* poem.’ For this reason I urge you to refer back to the original as much as possible, and to read it aloud even if you don’t know Spanish. For the poem is also the sound, and that simply cannot be translated.” (xxvii) It is to her credit, however, that she entreats the reader to sound it out as a last resort, as will be shown.

<sup>130</sup> As Pound wrote, defending his form of “accompaniment”: “As to the atrocities of my translation, all that can be said in excuse is that they are, I hope, for the most part intentional, and committed with the aim of driving the reader’s perception further into the original than it would without them have penetrated” (cited in Anderson, *Pound’s Cavalcanti* 221).

Mistral's poetry relates to a Latin American literary milieu,<sup>131</sup> an analysis of diction,<sup>132</sup> the tracing of influence,<sup>133</sup> or an exploration of the main themes,<sup>134</sup> all of which are grounded in the source text or its literary system rather than the story of the poet's life.<sup>135</sup> Such attention on biography, as Venuti (cited above) points out, is one

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<sup>131</sup> Francisco Aguilera's Foreword explains that "In this first book [*Desolación*] her versification did not differ radically from the metrical structure, rhyme, and stanza forms of these great Spanish American writers [Rubén Darío, Amado Nervo, and Leopoldo Lugones]. But unlike them, her work did not reflect the influence of the French Parnassians and Symbolists" (xii). In contrast, Bly omits other Spanish-language poets and compares Neruda directly to "the French poets" (mentioning Aragon and Breton).

<sup>132</sup> Margaret Bates' Introduction includes reference to numerous analyses that foreground the Spanish language: "Guillermo de Torre, in accordance with the distinction Leo Spitzer made between the meaning of *habla* ("speech") and *lengua* ("language"), affirmed that it was *habla* and not *lengua* that Gabriela spoke, for speech to her was an individual act of will and intelligence. Marcel Bataillon, author of *Erasme et L'Espagne*, considered Gabriela 'one of the greatest Spanish poets of our time,' and said that he had found even more reasons to love the Spanish language after reading Gabriela, 'whose skill as a poet, a maker of words in the true sense, had once again proved the infinite possibilities of expression Spanish had in the hands of great artists'" (xx).

<sup>133</sup> From Bates: "Her roots are nourished by the first waters of the Hispanic tradition, *el pueblo*, by the Bible, and by the classics of her language. Her *patria* is that great spiritual fatherland which speaks the language of Saint Teresa, Góngora, and Azorín. In this selection of authors, all are included. Azorín, at one extreme, declares that the three essentials the good writer must possess are 1) naturalness, 2) naturalness, 3) naturalness; Góngora, at the other extreme, abandons naturalness for a tortured worked style; Saint Teresa stands for the unique – for Saint Teresa alone" (xxi). While I tend to disagree with a lot of what Bates writes (here and elsewhere), I nevertheless respect her commitment to the Spanish language in her scholarship.

<sup>134</sup> Bates again: "This theme of Divine Immanence is perhaps the most persistent trait of her religious thought. Throughout her work there is a constant lingering on the thought of death, on immortality, and an acute awareness of the perishableness of the flesh" (xxv).

<sup>135</sup> Compare the previous treatments of Mistral with parts of Bly's introduction: "When Neruda was twenty-three, he was recognized as a poet, and the Chilean government gave him a post in the consular service in the Far East. During the next five years, he lived in turn in Burma, Siam, China, Japan, and India. Neruda remarks in the interview printed later in this book that those years were years of great isolation

of the principal ways in which the illusion of transparency – the illusion that the reader receives the text’s absolute meaning directly from the poet’s mind without mediation – is generated. But most important in combating transparency is the inclusion of an actual translator’s prologue, which explains (in general terms) the translator’s methodology and how poems were selected, and furthermore, why the volume is bilingual: “This volume is bilingual because I earnestly hope you will want to read the original Spanish” (xxvii). This way of understanding the relationship between source text and translation attempts to resist the standard of invisibility by not letting the translation stand for the original; instead, the English text is conceived as a way into the Spanish. The same position is echoed decades later in a translation of another Chilean poet/teacher, Nicanor Parra, where Liz Werner adds, at the end of her translator’s note, “Parra said to tell you that ‘the best thing would be for them to learn Spanish.’ *Lo mejor sería aprender el español*” (xiv).<sup>136</sup>

In these instances, the task of the translator is conceived as that of a teacher that points the way, rather than as a dogmatic pedagogue: the idea is that the meaning of a text, in one language or many, is not simply given but arrived at, worked for, and that this process is constitutive of meaning, rather than meaning being product-oriented. The translator’s invisibility is the opposite of this: by providing an interpretation of

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and loneliness. Many of the poems that appear in the first two books of *Residencia En La Tierra* were written during those years” (7).

<sup>136</sup> Here, by referring to Mistral and Parra as poet/teachers, I mean only that they worked as teachers; it is my intention, later in this chapter, to analyze how this stance is manifested in poetry.

the source that is meant to take its place, a translation that reads too fluently risks turning poetry into prose,<sup>137</sup> and literature into Cliff's Notes.<sup>138</sup>

A facing-page edition helps bring the work of translation into visibility. While it doesn't make all of the work visible – both texts are presented as final products that eclipse their processes of interpretation and composition – the translation is not standing over the original but beside it. The arrangement allows readers to move back and forth between languages, taking from both texts what they want; even if a reader has had no previous exposure to the source language, the space encourages the type of idiosyncratic meandering present in Certeau's analogy of reading and walking, encourages the curiosity that makes that space one's own.

Yet a good translator is capable of so much more than simply including the source and leaving readers to their own devices. Cultural and historical differences, of which the reader-turned-language-learner may have neither knowledge nor resources for elucidation, factor into the work of translation just as surely as lexical meaning does. How these differences are dealt with in translation – whether resistant to or complicit with the illusion of transparency – will be the subject of the following section.

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<sup>137</sup> Not that there is anything necessarily wrong with turning poetry into prose: when the source is present and the translation is visible as translation, a "literal" prose translation of poetry can hew more closely to the poem's lexical meaning and serve as an effective crib for approaching the source text.

<sup>138</sup> George Steiner, describing the final stage of the hermeneutic motion of translation, which is "the enactment of reciprocity" with the source, writes that to do so, "Where it falls short of the original, the authentic translation makes the autonomous virtues of the original more precisely visible....Where it surpasses the original, the real translation infers that the source-text possess potentialities, elemental reserves as yet unrealized by itself" (197).

### *Types of Dual-Language Translations*

Although the inclusion of the source text in the same volume as its translation is one of the most significant translational and editorial decisions that can be made, dual-language editions may vary greatly from each other in terms of how much of the source is included, and how it is presented. While my primary interest in this chapter remains facing-page translations of poetry, it is useful for both the sake of comparison and the theoretical framework I am presenting to take a look at a few other forms.

Probably the most common form in which the source appears – especially in prose texts – is within the context of an explanatory note, usually just a word or two at a time. In literary fiction, these appear as footnotes or endnotes, but technical, theoretical, and philosophical texts frequently include significant terms in the original language in line with the translation, sometimes set apart with parentheses and/or italics (e.g., *différance*). Such practices facilitate the “loaning” or “borrowing” of words into a language or lexicon (the implications of which will be developed below).

Explanations that stand outside the body of a text represent a limit of translation. But not in the way one might suppose: such explanations are necessary not because the term or phrase in question is untranslatable,<sup>139</sup> but because the translation’s fluency cannot be maintained. For example, two recent translations of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (Grossman 2003, and Montgomery 2009) leave the name Rocinante in

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<sup>139</sup> As Roman Jakobson writes, “All cognitive experience and its classification is conveyable in any existing language. Whenever there is deficiency, terminology may be qualified and amplified by loan-words or loan-translations, neologisms or semantic shifts, and finally, by circumlocutions” (140).

Spanish, and explain the name's meaning in a note.<sup>140</sup> Rutherford (2000), on the other hand, remains more committed to the fluency of his translation when he translates Rocinante as "Hackafore" rather than including a note – but only when the famous horse is first introduced. For the rest of the novel he is simply Rocinante.

So even supposedly single-language translations that seek to maximize the illusion of transparency can often not help but be partially bilingual, at least when it comes to monumental texts like *Don Quixote*. If the source is new or relatively obscure, it may be correspondingly more vulnerable to domesticating appropriation and a total elision of foreign-language difference.<sup>141</sup> In the case of Rocinante, the fame of *Don Quixote* has facilitated its recognition as a proper noun in English. The case of Neruda in English, despite his fame, is substantially different. Early translations of his work were faulted by later poets for being too "literal," written by "non-poet[s]"; that is to say, they did not meet the acceptable standards for a poem translated into English, a standard that, as argued by Venuti, has been largely determined by a translation's ability to function transparently.<sup>142</sup> This failure of

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<sup>140</sup> Grossman: "*Rocín* means 'nag'; *ante* means 'before,' both temporally and spatially." Montgomery: "The Spanish *rocín* means 'nag,' and *ante* (from *antes*) has two meanings in the present context: 'formerly' and 'foremost.'"

<sup>141</sup> However, John Felstiner, in *Translating Neruda*, suggests the opposite: "possibly the early stage of translating a poet is inevitable marked by too much fealty: word-for-word or sense-for-sense rendering that stop short of exploiting the translator's own tongue" (16-17).

<sup>142</sup> John Felstiner, in *Translating Neruda*, considers Neruda's early obscurity in North America at some length, suggesting that "the hazard of having a non-poet as translator" bears some of the responsibility. He writes that "In Angel Flores' bilingual edition, the transit from a Spanish to an English poem tends to stall midway, failing to reactivate Neruda's palpable surprises. What results is a hybrid idiom that flattens and rationalizes Neruda's strangest creations," and goes on to find fault with Flores'



transparency is sometimes cited as a reason for Neruda's relative obscurity in English during the 40s and 50s,<sup>143</sup> a time when he was enjoying widespread international acclaim – and the same time period that Venuti gives for the emergence of “the regime of fluency.”

I would like to think that Neruda's subsequent fame has created an environment where translators (or rather, their publishers) are more inclined toward new renderings, more willing to take risks on a defamiliarizing style that estranges readers from their domestic linguistic comforts, but this has not proven to be the case. Perhaps the situation is similar to that of the King James Bible or Homer, where readers' familiarity with one particular rendering functions as a limit to future iterations, but I do not think so.<sup>144</sup> Given the low rates for publishing literary translations into English in the United States and the even lower rate for translations of poetry,<sup>145</sup> the most likely reason for lack of innovation in translation is a lack of

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“plain rephrasing” (15, 16). This analysis faults Flores' translations with not being sufficiently poetic in English, but nothing is mentioned of the fact that it was published as a bilingual edition, and the different stance toward the source that this might presuppose – wherein “stall[ing] midway” may be exactly the point. It is telling, then, in regards to translations that teach, that Felstiner ends his critique of Flores with the admission that “In any case, I have in fact learned from studying Flores and benefited from his initiative” (16).

<sup>143</sup> Felstiner also attributes the difficulties of Neruda's circulation in the US during the 1950s to Neruda's outspoken politics.

<sup>144</sup> For the Bible, see Willis Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation* and his *Restored New Testament*. For Homer, compare the introductions of Robert Fagles and Richmond Lattimore regarding the transliteration and restoration of Greek names.

<sup>145</sup> The translation database project at the University of Rochester estimates that only about 0.7% of books published in the US are literary fiction or poetry in translation, and 21 of the 166 translations published so far in 2015 are classified as poetry, 92 of 587 in 2014; this works out to about 15% of 0.7%, or just over 0.1% -- one book out of every thousand.

interest in it, which itself points to the endurance of the translator's invisibility as a norm.

Nevertheless, even large anthologies, such as that compiled by Ilan Stavans, can in places push back against this norm. In his selection of Neruda's work (*The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*, 2005), only a handful of the Spanish poems are included; Stavans explains in the introduction that "A fully bilingual edition was unfortunately beyond reach. To compensate partially for this limitation, I have seeded the book with examples of Neruda's original poems throughout. And since here and elsewhere I have emphasized the magic of translation, on half a dozen occasions more than one version is offered. The purpose is purely comparative" (xxxviii). By asking the reader to do this comparative work (or at least providing the materials to make it possible), the anthology draws attention to the partial and interpretive character of translation.

Stavans' emphasis, however – at least in this prologue – differs from Doris Dana's: rather than directly entreating the reader to approach the original, Stavans wants to foreground, as he puts it, "the magic of translation." In the context of an introduction to a substantial volume of translated poetry, this emphasis means to intervene in the conceptual conditions that have made the translator's invisibility possible – he is, after all a translator and a theorist of translation, having produced, among other works, a Spanglish rendering of *Don Quixote*<sup>146</sup> – and counteracts some

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<sup>146</sup> While using Spanglish, Stavans needs no explanatory note for the name Rocinante: "Finalmente hinteó el de Rocinante, un nombre that lo impresionó as being sonoro y al same time indicativo of what el caballo had been cuando era de segunda, whereas ahora no era otra cosa que el first y foremost de los caballos del mundo."

of the risks incurred by emphasizing the poet's "personality or intention." Yet emphasizing the language of the original – unlike a focus on the writer's biography – also resists the translator's invisibility; but it does so precisely by presenting limits to "the magic of translation," pointing instead to the materiality of words and things that can't or won't magically transubstantiate themselves and instead remain mired in a zone of contact.

Such an approach, though admirable for its progressive negotiation with norms that elide the work done by translators, may run the risk of fetishizing translation due to the lack of explicit attention to foreign language difference, of falling too uncritically into the belief that "everything is translatable."<sup>147</sup> Nevertheless, Stavans mitigates these risks by providing a wealth of bibliographical annotation, which reference not only the source material that Stavans had wanted to include but also a significant number of critical works in both English and Spanish. Situating itself in a dense web of intertext, such an approach acknowledges a range of linguistic and literary competence among its audience and seeks to encourage further learning – unlike Bly's anthology, which includes no bibliography to speak of. So despite Bly's consistent inclusion of source-texts, Stavans' anthology grants the reader more

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<sup>147</sup> Venuti, citing Alasdair MacIntyre, writes that the loss of foreign language differences occurs "because in any 'tradition-bearing community' the 'language-in-use is closely tied to the expression of the shared beliefs of that tradition,' and this gives a 'historical dimension' to languages which often fails to survive the translating process. MacIntyre argued that this problem of untranslatability is most acute with 'the internationalized languages-in-use in late twentieth century modernity,' like English, which 'have minimal presuppositions in respect of possible rival belief systems' and so will 'neutralize' the historical dimension of the foreign text" (Venuti, "Translation, Community, Utopia," 486).

agency, using intertext to obstruct fluid reading, and for that reason presents its translations as less transparent than those that Bly provides, despite Bly's inclusion of the full Spanish-language text.

The reason why Stavans' edition may be more effective as a teaching tool than Bly's is because these strategies situate the reader in a contact zone, appealing to them as a co-producer of meaning; and it is in contact zones – which are spaces neither domestic nor foreign – that language is learned. Yet these in-between spaces wherein multiple languages and registers coexist and even cooperate can be difficult for translations to deal with (as either source or target) if the task of translation is understood as bringing a message from one language to another rather than a process of language learning. The next section will illustrate this point by examining the problems posed by a common example of “in-between” language: loanwords and linguistic “borrowing.”

### **Loanwords**

For English and Spanish in the Americas, a great number of words have entered the lexicon through the dynamic of colonialism: the indigenous names of things that were unlike European things were kept or minimally adapted, such as tomato (tomatl) and coyote (coyotl).<sup>148</sup> Given the geographical scope of the conquest of the Americas, there are numerous differences in dialect: the word “avocado” comes from the Spanish “aguacate” (from ahuacatl), though the same fruit in the Southern Cone is

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<sup>148</sup> Both of these examples have their origin in Náhuatl, the governing language of the Aztec empire.

known as “palta” – derived from Quechua, the macrolanguage adopted by the Incan Empire. More recently, Spanish (along with many other languages) has seen the influx of borrowings or adaptations from English, particularly with sports (fútbol, béisbol, tenis) and technology.<sup>149</sup>

At first glance, one might surmise that the presence of loanwords would be a boon for translation; after all, you say tomato and I say tomate, but we are referring to the same thing. But the problem is, we might not be: while the object is the same, its place within a cultural system of signification may not be. In “Oda al tomate,” Neruda writes

La calle  
se llenó de tomates,  
mediodía,  
verano, la luz  
se parte  
en dos  
mitades  
de tomate,  
corre  
por las calles  
el jugo.  
En diciembre  
se desata  
el tomate,  
invade  
las cocinas,  
entra por los almuerzos  
...llena las ensaladas  
de Chile.

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<sup>149</sup> To list only one prominent example, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has made English the language for pilots and air traffic controllers globally.

This (along with many of the *Odas Elementales*) is the type of Neruda poem that translators love to render transparently because of its apparent simplicity. But removing it from its clear localization in Chile in order to bring it to North America leaves out knowledge that the poem takes for granted. For example, would the translator add an explanatory note explaining that December is a summer month? Or would they risk the possibility of interpretations such as this one: “the opening lines of the poem describe summer time, how the tomatoes have just been harvested and they are plentiful. Then the setting switches to winter time, when the canned tomatoes come off the shelf”? (BookRags).<sup>150</sup> The translator’s invisibility makes such failures of comprehension possible. Yet it is just as important to remember that English is not restricted to the Northern Hemisphere. The question then becomes, what does it mean when the translation is required to sound like a poem written in English – whose English, where?

What makes loanwords a fruitful feature to focus on, then, is that the tension that created them continues to operate because languages continue their contact – and this relationship, as Emily Apter and others remind us, is fraught with struggle and strife. Because of this tension, the examination of loanwords can render the mechanics of invisibility visible, revealing both foreign and domestic positioning. For the purposes of my project, the manner in which loanwords are dealt with in translation is indicative of whether or not the reader is conceptualized as a language learner – a

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<sup>150</sup> <http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-pablo-neruda/chapanal073.html> Accessed February 2015.

category that I argue disrupts, at the fundamental level of linguistic competence, the stereotypes with which a “domestic” audience is most generally conceived.

In the case of “Oda al tomate,” the poem is perhaps not very translatable. It does not, for instance, make it into Stavans’ anthology, whose criteria for selection were “diversity, representation, and translatability.” Most of the *Odas Elementales* included in his anthology are ones on subjects less rooted to a region (or more suited to Stavans’ purpose of advancing the magic of translation): Odes to the Atom, to Criticism, to Numbers, to Sadness, to the Dictionary, to Walt Whitman, and to an Aged Poet, to name a few. The only one to name food is “Oda a la alcachofa,” which does not share in the cultural specificity of “Oda al tomate” – but even so, it is one of the few for which Stavans chooses to include the source as well as alternate translations, which may indicate a perception that the poem pushes against the limits of translatability.<sup>151</sup>

Loanwords, rather than encouraging bilingualism, can often present an illusion of transparency and false equivalence between languages, an illusion that may be used to promote monolingualism as a viable educational strategy. An example of the domesticizing processes that might adhere to loanwords can be found in Stavans’ anthology, in the last section which is titled “Homage: Fourteen Other Ways of Looking at Pablo Neruda.”<sup>152</sup> These translations are grouped by translator, and not

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<sup>151</sup> In passing, I would also like to note that “alcachofa,” like many other Spanish words beginning in al-, has its roots in Arabic.

<sup>152</sup> The domestic remainder released by the title of this section, which to my ears sounds like a riff on Wallace Steven’s “Thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird,” signals the strong domesticating movement of these translations.

according to the volume in which their sources were published, as the rest of the anthology is organized. This organization grants these translators a greater presence as poets in their own right, and also signals that these translations might move closer to “imitation” than the rest of the volume; it is where, for instance, Bly’s and James Wright’s translations are placed.

Galway Kinnel’s translation of “Explico algunas cosas” is worth looking at briefly for its rendering of two words in the source – “barrio” and “bandidos” – with the same word in English, which occurs consistently where the words are used throughout the poem.<sup>153</sup> For “barrio,” the Spanish reads “Yo vivía en un barrio / de Madrid,” and then names “mi barrio de Argüelles.” Kinnell renders these lines as “I lived in a barrio / of Madrid,” and “my barrio of Arguelles.” The problem with this is that while “barrio” in Spanish means simply neighborhood or borough (Argüelles is a district that has been administratively defined by the municipality of Madrid), “barrio” in U.S. English is a specifically Spanish-speaking urban area usually in the inner city, often synonymous with a Latino “ghetto.”<sup>154</sup> Similarly, the word “bandido” in English has acquired a meaning that is distinct from its meaning in Spanish.

Neruda, building the pathos of the poem with anaphora, writes “Bandidos con aviones y con moros, / bandidos con sortijas y duquesas, / bandidos con frailes negros bendiciendo.” Kinnell renders these lines as “Bandidos with planes and Moors, / bandidos with rings, and duchesses, / bandidos with black friars signing the cross.”

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<sup>153</sup> There are in addition other notable examples of domestication in this translation that do not pertain to loanwords: the elision of the accent mark in Raúl, and the omission of most of the poem’s exclamation marks.

<sup>154</sup> A word with its own significant history of translation and transference.



While the Spanish poem conveys the sense of betrayal present in the RAE's definition of the word ("persona perversa, engañadora o estafadora"), the English translation gives only the meaning of Mexican outlaw, making it seem more like a foreign invasion (or a spaghetti western) than a civil war perpetrated by "generales / traidores".

For the reader as a language learner, the problem with Kinnell's use of loanwords is similar to the problem caused by false cognates or "false friends": similarity of the signifier obscures difference between the languages. The appearance of familiarity in this case hinders the acquisition of the language of the poem in translation, and may lead to a lack of comprehension – for learners of both English and Spanish, but perhaps especially the former. The problem with Kinnell's translation may arise from the supposition that inclusion of a foreign language is enough to renovate poetic language in the United States, when in reality "barrio" and "bandido" – although superficially Spanish words – are not actually foreign, and are in fact already part of a U.S. domestic idiom. Such an error stems first and foremost, it seems to me, from an Anglocentric idea of who reads translated poetry in the United States, even to the point of ignoring (or blithely reproducing) the history of contact and contention that constitutes the English language in the first place. Kinnell was poet laureate for the state of Vermont from 1989 to 1993, and that appears to be the extent of his imagined audience.

The borrowing of object names, as we have seen with examples like "tomato" and "barrio," removes them from the social and cultural system that gives them their

meaning, and imparts a new set of circumstances and connotations that refer more to the process of contact between signifying systems rather than the original meaning. The borrowing of words for concepts, however, appears to be more translatable; or, more precisely, the borrowing of a concept is better able to bring with it part of the original signifying system. However, the ability of readers in the target language to make use of foreign signifiers is still tied to standards of acceptability, which change over time and also between fields and discourses. So when Esther Allen decides to leave the word *mestizo* in her translation of José Martí's "Nuestra América" (it had previously been translated as "half-breed," and *criollo* as "Creole"),<sup>155</sup> she takes for granted the reader's knowledge of Spanish-language identity politics in the Americas: by leaving the word untranslated, she attempts to bring over the baggage that *mestizo* has accumulated over the course of centuries. This is less because the word *mestizo* has attained widespread acceptability<sup>156</sup> but because she (reasonably) assumes that her readership brings this knowledge with them to the text – and if not, well, now's as good a time as any to begin to learn.

But borrowings do not always take such a direct path through languages. The case of translating borrowings from indigenous languages is not always so straightforward as avocados and tomatoes; borrowings that result from the contact between other

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<sup>155</sup> "The native half-breed has conquered the exotic Creole" for "El mestizo autóctono ha vencido al criollo exótico." From *Our America*, ed. Philip S. Foner, trans. Elinor Randall (1977).

<sup>156</sup> Although *mestizo* is listed in both the OED and Merriam-Webster, its use is hindered by a conceptual weight that object-borrowings – burrito, barrio, bodega – do not have, which means it may be unrecognizable (and thus judged as unacceptable) by most native speakers.

cultures travel less easily when there is less common ground. Ursula Le Guin's translation of Mistral's "Canción Quecha," for example, is difficult to read because it leaves so much untranslated. Words like "Tihuantisuyo," "puna," "Amautas," "Coyas," and "Pachacamac" are left as they are in the source, which are proper names or words that are Quechua in origin.

These words were specifically chosen by LeGuin to keep, since other Quechua words, like "quena," are translated<sup>157</sup> (rather flatly as "flute," when it in fact more closely resembles a recorder than a Western transverse flute), while still another uses a borrowing that has made its way to English: "llama" is rendered as "llama" (although the mention in the previous stanza of "dos mil fuegos vivos" would support the interpretation of "llama" as "flame" rather than the camelid animal).<sup>158</sup> This decision to translate some words and not others may manifest a particular interest in the untranslatability of social structures and mythology – for example "coya" is title for the wife of the Incan emperor, "amauta" the title for teachers – but there is no explicit reasoning given or external resources that may be consulted to scaffold the reader's learning. The only explanatory note provided by LeGuin is a (mis)translation of Mistral's own note to the poem, which details its genesis in the citation of "a

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<sup>157</sup> Interestingly, LeGuin chooses to leave "quena" untranslated (but in italics) in her translation of "Dos himnos" – perhaps simply to rhyme with "hosanna" (her rendering of "alabanza").

<sup>158</sup> Elsewhere, LeGuin bemoans the fact that "the descriptions of landscapes, plants, and creatures are often full of words with no English equivalent" (328).

Quechua woman's oral text" found in an edition of (Élisée and Elías) Reclus' *Geografías* that the poet read in New York.<sup>159</sup>

The main question of acceptability that reviewers would ask of this translation – does it sound like a poem written in English? – seems especially in this context to miss the point of “Canción Quechua.” But let us ask the same question of Mistral's poem: does it sound, despite the prevalence of Quechua, as if it were written in Spanish? The rhyme scheme is regular with enough variation to keep it from seeming forced, and consonance is in abundance. Though a Chilean reader might, depending on what part of Chile they were from, struggle with the Quechua vocabulary, its mellifluousness alone is enough to have it read as a poem; or more precisely, a song.

### **Poetry that Teaches**

Its inscription as a song is relevant, for the poem appears in *Ternura*, as part of the “Canciones de cuna” (Cradle songs) and other “poems that teach” (Dana 40). The aural structures of these poems are an essential part of the contact between text and reader, as well as between readers. This section will show how certain features of a poem – features which, moreover, do not translate fluidly, such as the aurality of Mistral's poems, and Neruda's use of genre – situate the act of reading as a ground for language-learning.

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<sup>159</sup> Probably referring to the *Géographie Universelle*, translated into Spanish in 1906 by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, and into English in 1878 by A.H. Keane; Le Guin gives the author as “los Reclus.”

“Canción Quechua,” by announcing itself explicitly (through the author’s note) as an act of recovery, attempts to re-transmit an imagined yet still living setting to children and adults alike. While it is perhaps a mild exaggeration to say, as Doris Dana does, that “To this day in every classroom throughout Latin America, wherever little children learn to read and write, their voices haltingly pronounce the syllables of these verses,” Mistral’s poetry has served – not unproblematically – many different pedagogical ideals, including those of literacy (41).<sup>160</sup>

Although the *Canciones de Cuna* as a whole do not situate themselves explicitly or consistently as a project of cultural recovery in the manner of “Canción Quechua,”

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<sup>160</sup> Licia Fiol-Matta notes, in her introduction to *A Queer Mother for the Nation: the State and Gabriela Mistral*, that, having been called “a walking educational mission” by Fernando Alegría and “a uterus birthing children for the motherland” by Diamela Eltit, views of Mistral’s work have often been informed less by her educational mission than the politics of nation-building and its accompanying ideologies; she adds that “Although Mistral became the living embodiment of the race/sex/gender politics at the heart of Latin Americanism, after her death in 1957 her stature and work were neglected, obscured, and virtually forgotten. This can be credited to the national narrative that elevated her as the ‘Schoolteacher of America’, an epithet indicating Mistral’s consecration as a celibate, saintly, and suffering heterosexual national icon” (xiv).

A similar point about the interactions between ideology and education is raised by Grínor Rojo when he invokes Althusser to write about the use of Mistral (presumably both her celebrity as well as her poetry) in constructing womanhood and the “papel de madre” (mother’s role) in Chile and beyond: “puesto que en el pensamiento althusseriano la tarea de los ‘aparatos ideológicos de Estado’ es colaborar en la reproducción de las relaciones sociales de producción, esto es, en la reproducción de las relaciones capitalistas de explotación, es comprensible que ese ‘aparato ideológico de Estado’ colabore también – y con la misma autosatisfacción eficaz – en la reproducción de las relaciones asimétricas entre los sexos, en otras palabras, en la reproducción de las relaciones patriarcales de opresión” (“Mistral en la historia de la mujer latinoamericana,” 67).

While these refractions of Mistral are important to bear in mind when speaking of her role in education, particularly within the national context of Chile, my primary intention here is to determine the extent to which her poems – and not her image – function as instructional artifacts, potentially outside of institutionalized education.

the persistent presence of indigeneity is woven throughout Mistral's work, and serves as a basis for the her poetry's recognition that domestic spaces are sites of heterogeneity and contention.<sup>161</sup> Overall, the relatively simple diction, strong rhyme scheme, short lines with regular meter, and abundant repetition of words and phrases make the poems of *Canciones de Cuna* excellent candidates for oral transmission (and with it, the scaffolding of basic literacy). The poem "Meciendo," which is first in this series, joins the central action of the poem – "mezo a mi niño," repeated at the end of each four line stanza – with the same action at an elemental or cosmic level by means of repetition, rhyme, and rhythm: the sea "mece, divino" a multitude of waves; the wind "mece a los trigos"; and God "mece sin ruido" a thousand worlds.

This repetition, so essential for the auralty of a song, also generates the poem's hidden meanings. The first two stanzas establish the speaker's (who is also, significantly in the context of transmission, a hearer) distanced relationship to love and lovers: "Oyendo a los mares amantes / mezo a mi niño," and then again, "Oyendo a los vientos amantes, / mezo a mi niño." But in the translation from the worldly elements (the sea and the wind) to the cosmic and spiritual (God), the mode of sensation changes: "Sintiendo su mano en la sombra / mezo mi niño." The move from hearing to feeling brings God closer, situating "Dios padre" (given the prior iterations of "amantes") as the speaker's partner – a closeness interrupted by the presence of shadow at the end of the line, "la sombra," which removes the sense of presence once

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<sup>161</sup> For an example in "Hallazgo," the opening of *Poema de Chile*, Mistral writes "Naciste en el palmo último / de los Incas, Niño-Ciervo, / donde empezamos nosotros / y donde se acaban ellos."

again and casts expands on the significance of “sentir” (which covers a range of corporeal and spiritual sensations and affects). In light of these dynamics of sense and presence, coupled with the poem’s formal and phonetic attributes, the poem may be read as a self-reflexive mediation on the capacities of what is heard and read to be felt and to move the reader or listener. The poem thus sets the tone for the rest of the *Canciones de Cuna* by creating a space where something supposedly lowly like a lullaby can carry the thematic depth and semantic density of poetry; it can serve as material for both teaching how to read, and how to read poetry.

In a manner similar to Mistral’s “Canción Quechua,” Neruda’s poetry often also situates itself as an act of recovery, particularly in *Canto General* – much of which seems inspired by sources like the *Géographie Universelle*, as well as assorted bestiaries and chronicles of discovery and conquest (including, of course, Alonso de Ercilla’s *La Araucana*, an epic poem that recounts the conquest of Chile).<sup>162</sup> Like much of Mistral’s work, this poetry can also be said to operate in relation to a pedagogical project that (as with Mistral’s) struggles to be legible in translation, although for different reasons.

Enrico Mario Santí locates the genealogy of Neruda’s use of naming and enumerations throughout *Canto General* in Latin American predecessors rather than (as Bly does) in Whitman. He writes that, “Lo que los une a Neruda y a ellos [Andrés Bello, Rubén Darío, José Santos Chocano] no es, desde luego, la forma enciclopédica

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<sup>162</sup> Neruda noted in “Algo sobre mi poesía y mi vida” (1954) that his three main sources for *Canto General* were *Las aves de Chile* by Goodall, Johnson, and Philippi (1946), an anonymous “hispanic american encyclopedia” and Diego Barros Arana’s *Compendio de historia de América* (1865).

por sí sola, sino el propósito implícito en todo enciclopedismo: la educación del lector” (Santí 66). Neruda’s project, along with Bello’s, understood how a specifically Americanist encyclopedia could use a pedagogic form to produce a reading across national (and perhaps even linguistic) boundaries to promote the continental unification that motivated much of their work.

Yet calling Neruda’s *Canto General* “encyclopedic” in nature does not mean that it presents a normative or sanctioned narrative. Felstiner notes that part of the problem in translating Neruda to North America during the Cold War was the political content of the poetry and the political positioning of the author; this would be especially the case for works such as the *Canto General*. But part of this political untranslatability is actually attributable to difference in genre and its attendant conventions and expectations.

Bly writes, for example, that *Canto General* is “a geological, biological, and political history of South America” (*Neruda and Vallejo*, 9); Felstiner for his part writes that “Neruda’s historical imagination” works in tandem with the epic poem’s “political overtones” and Neruda’s own “nationalist persuasion” (41). What both of them miss, however, is how their concept of history can be compatible (or not) with the plurality of voices Neruda invokes throughout the length of the poem. As Mario Santí writes in his detailed introduction to the Cátedra edition of the *Canto General*, the narrative mode of the book is not history, but a genre without a precise English-language equivalent: *la crónica*.

...no es la historia, por tanto, lo que concede unidad a todo el libro sino la *crónica*. La diferencia es sutil, pero importante. Historia es lo



que suele llamarse la narración homogénea de una sucesión de eventos....La crónica, en cambio, es todo aquel material heterogéneo anterior a esa elaboración....Por eso la crónica es la fuente, muchas veces no-reconocida, de la historia. (Santí 15)

In addition to the catalogues of species, the descriptions of geographies, and the vast number of names, the plurality of voices that Neruda's work claims to speak for also represents this literary tradition, and they exist without the need to put forth a consensus. Yet Neruda lets them speak together through the voice and body of poetry: "Apegadme los cuerpos como imanes. / Acudid a mis venas y a mi boca. / Hablad por mis palabras y mi sangre."<sup>163</sup> These famous lines at the end of "Las alturas de Macchu Picchu" present a turn that is less an image of an all-encompassing ego and more of a disjointed body that stands in correlation to the vast diversity and heterogeneity of the Americas, a difference that is difficult to recognize when ideas of history restrict such plurality.

In the work of both Mistral and Neruda, the recognition that the poetry speaks to and from zones of contact is vital to their ability to function as poems that teach. This function, however, suffers in translation under the "regime of fluency," since part of what characterizes fluent translation is its deployment of a domestic idiom that, by virtue of endeavoring to not appear strange to readers, in effect resolves the tension created by conditions that appear to be (and often are) contradictory; or on the other hand (as we saw with LeGuin's translation of "Canción Quechua,") the

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<sup>163</sup> Neruda's poetic speaker in the *Canto General* speaks as an amalgam of voices not only in "Alturas de Macchu Picchu," but in other sections as well, such as "La tierra se llama Juan," a collection of 26 poems detailing the lives of workers, spoken from their perspective.

incomprehensible other may be left in a condition of otherness, without much effort made to establish conditions for meaningful contact, and reduced to a type of “local color.”

The next section will further describe how notions of the domestic are complicated by intertextual relationships at the intersection of literary systems. By looking at the invocation of Walt Whitman in Pablo Neruda’s poetry, I will show how the translator’s invisibility, and the domestic positioning this presupposes, may conceal a broader scope present in the original. Doing so seeks to further characterize the learning processes that inhere in reading by drawing a connection, in Neruda’s poetry, between poetry that teaches and the politicization of an audience.

### **Whitman and Neruda**

Although Neruda mentions Whitman’s influence on numerous occasions in poetry, memoirs, and interviews, the relationship between them is also conditioned by a number of secondary sources – such as translation and criticism – through a process André Lefevere terms “refraction.”<sup>164</sup> Yet when these refractions are traced – particularly in translation – the relationship between these two monumental male poets begins to collapse inward on itself and lose important aspects of its meaning. The invisibility of translation plays no small part in this. Let us see why.

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<sup>164</sup> In “Mother Courage’s Cucumbers: Text, System and Refraction in a Theory of Literature” (*Modern Language Studies* 12.4, 1982), Lefevere uses the general term “refraction” within his systemic approach to translation studies to refer to “the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work.”

The narrative of Whitman's re-translation into U.S. literature, if told by Bly, goes something like this: poetry in the U.S. has become stagnant and too academic, and no one reads Whitman except the Spanish poets (i.e. Neruda); let us translate them to North America so that we may refamiliarize ourselves with inwardness and emotion, and be able to read Whitman once again. Felstiner seems to agree with this dynamic, writing of Galway Kinnel, James Wright, and Robert Bly that "their venturous idiom learned partly from Neruda, creat[ed] a general readiness for hearing him in this country [the U.S.]...By the late fifties, a more open poetic environment for Neruda existed in the United States" (22). In this version, the process of translating Neruda gave these poets the new idiom they needed and which, becoming popularized in their domestic sphere, made their translations of Neruda legible. It is a dance with numerous steps, but not difficult to follow.

These maneuvers become obfuscated, however, when the role of translation is omitted, such as when Bly writes that "Neruda's poetic master in the *Residencia* poems is not a European but the American, Walt Whitman. He looked deeply into Whitman. Whitman wrote: I see the workings of battle.... Neruda writes: I look at ships..." (*Neruda & Vallejo* 4). The invisibility of translation in this instance makes it impossible to separate Neruda from Whitman because the translator's domestic idiom is a refraction of Whitman's, received through Neruda. What we have here, in other words, is equally an imitation of Whitman as it is a translation of Neruda; this effect of self-reference is heightened when we consider that the translator is (almost

certainly) none other than Bly himself, who puts forth these examples to substantiate the claim of their relationship.

But Neruda himself substantiates Whitman's influence on his work in a way that extends beyond the enumeration of things that are seen, and into what this seeing means. When, in the interview included in *Neruda and Vallejo*, Bly poses the question of Whitman's influence, Neruda responds (in what language?),

“Everything has been painted in Europe, everything has been sung in Europe. But not in America. In that sense, Whitman was a great teacher. Because what is Whitman? He was not only intensely conscious, but he was open-eyed! He had tremendous eyes to see everything – he taught us to see things...he taught us about poetry and many other things” (156).

The trope of seeing captivates Bly, and he spends a significant portion of his introduction to Neruda writing about the extraordinary images found in the *Residencia* poems. But for Neruda, seeing is but the first step: Whitman's poetry does not simply transmit what is seen by his “tremendous eyes,” but, in teaching the reader “about poetry and many other things,” imparts a knowledge of how to see.

The figure of Whitman as a teacher runs throughout a significant portion of Neruda's poetry. In Neruda's “Oda a Walt Whitman,” the role of Whitman as a teacher is part of understanding how to be American,<sup>165</sup> and associates (as in the interview cited above) reading with learning, seeing, and being in the world. He writes,

tú  
me enseñaste  
a ser americano,

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<sup>165</sup> Or, in Greg Simon's translation, “americano.”

levantaste  
mis ojos  
a los libros,  
hacia el tesoro  
de los cereales

The association of literacy with the natural fertility and productivity of grain and (immediately after the cited segment) the expansiveness of the continent repeats some of the encyclopedic and pedagogical preoccupations of *Canto General* without repeating the magnitude of that form; instead, the reference to what Whitman has shown and taught produces its own specific yet widespread enumerations.

The specific mention of “los cereales” also recalls another line where Neruda mentions Whitman, from the “Que despierte el leñador” section of *Canto General*. Alongside an enumeration of other U.S. authors such as Herman Melville, Edgar Allen Poe, Theodore Dreiser, Thomas Wolfe, and others, “Whitman innumerable / como los cereales” makes a brief appearance (444). But it is not until later in this section – when the speaker journeys “más allá de tus tierras, América,” to the Soviet Union – that Whitman makes his full appearance:

Walt Whitman, levanta tu barba de hierba,  
mira conmigo desde el bosque,  
desde estas magnitudes perfumadas.  
Qué ves allí, Walt Whitman?  
Veo, me dice mi hermano profundo,  
veo cómo trabajan las usinas,  
en la ciudad que los muertos recuerdan,  
en la capital pura,  
en la resplandeciente Stalingrado.  
[...]

Dame tu voz y el peso de tu pecho enterrado,  
Walt Whitman, y las graves  
raíces de tu rostro  
para cantar estas reconstrucciones!<sup>166</sup>

Here, Neruda uses Whitman in order to speak to U.S. audiences about a situation that, due to Cold War rhetoric, had become difficult to read; he uses a refraction of Whitman's democratic, populist spirit to connect the plight of workers and "el pueblo" globally across national and linguistic boundaries, addressing "Que despierte el leñador" as a whole to the people of the United States: "Mi hermano Juan vende zapatos / como tu hermano John, / mi hermana Juana pela papas, / como tu prima Jane, / mi sangre es minera y marinera / como tu sangre, Peter."

The politicization of Whitman here is not an isolated coincidence, but rather a recurring turn that occurs whenever Neruda mentions Whitman: the "Oda" cited above, for instance, soon moves to speaking of

Nuevos  
y crueles años en tu patria:  
persecuciones,  
lágrimas,  
prisiones,  
armas envenenadas  
y guerra iracundas,  
no han aplastado  
la hierba de tu libro,  
el manantial vital  
de su frescura.

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<sup>166</sup> Neruda had written of Stalingrad before, in "Canto de amor a Stalingrado" and "Nuevo canto de amor a Stalingrado" (later included as part of the *Tercera Residencia*). These two earlier poems refer to the city's defense against the Nazi army during the Second World War; neither mentions Walt Whitman.

Here, the imperialist and oppressive policies of the United States are placed in opposition to the vital “American spirit” that Whitman represents, destabilizing the association of a government with its people. But though Whitman is used in the previous examples (and especially in “Que despierta el leñador”) to directly address a U.S. audience, Neruda will also use Whitman to address the social and political conditions in Chile – which include, of course, U.S. intervention. One of Neruda’s final works, *Incitación al Nixonicidio y alabanza de la revolución chilena* (1973), invokes Whitman at the beginning of the opening poem titled “Comienzo por invocar a Walt Whitman”:

Es por acción de amor a mi país  
que te reclamo, hermano necesario,  
viejo Walt Whitman de la mano gris,

para que con tu apoyo extraordinario  
verso a verso matemos de raíz  
a Nixon, Presidente sanguinario.

Sobre la tierra no hay hombre feliz,  
nadie trabaja bien en el planeta  
si en Washington respira su nariz.

The poem is a classic *denuncia*, yet it is not without humor. The rhyme is strong but not static, and – like Mistral’s *Canciones de cuna* – the poem’s aural quality serves a pedagogical aim; here, however, the goal is political literacy – *concientización* – and the poem seems meant to be recited, or chanted, at a rally or other mass action rather than in a classroom.

This poem's scope is global, using the figure of Whitman to denounce U.S. intervention in what the poem calls the Chilean Revolution (Salvador Allende's socialist government, which lasted from 1970-1973), as well as elsewhere across the planet. But the transnational function of Neruda's poetry here and elsewhere appears to escape Bly's attention when he writes, for instance, that *Canto General* is a "history of South America," when it in fact concerns a great deal of North American history as well. Though Bly benefits from Neruda's transnational refraction of Whitman, he does so in a way that ignores the historical context that makes this refraction powerful and popular.

The original's transnational vision is effectively narrowed by the domesticating tendencies of translation, which are particularly strong when the translation holds fluency as an objective; Bly, for example, directs his work at U.S. poetry, his own domestic milieu, rather than attempting to match Neruda's global form of address. But even when some fluent strategies are rejected – as seen previously in LeGuin's translation of "Canción Quechua" – the effect of holding on to the foreign as local color can be equally limiting for the target audience. Neither of these approaches to translation do justice to the pedagogical function of the poems just studied, which is a function of the original language's ability to move past boundaries of nation and class.

The translational and transnational position of Mistral and Neruda's poetry – and of the poets themselves – also provides an opposite force: though much of their poetry is on global subjects, much of it is also about Chile. This poetry about the



nation, almost always written at a distance, can serve as an outsider's perspective that may reconceptualize domestic spaces through the trope of "returning home."

### **Returning to America**

I have endeavored to show in this chapter how conceptualizing the reader as a language learner is not only a useful strategy for translation, but also useful for approaching texts in the original language, especially (as is the case with Mistral and Neruda) when they operate with a view toward a broader scope not limited by nation or language. This section will show how this type of international scope also lends its energy to the treatment of domestic subjects, which is linked to an instructional task that seeks to impart knowledge of ways of being in the world.

In the work of both Mistral and Neruda, the continental and pedagogical motivations that lead them to speak of the Americas and the world also become involved with the theme of return – a subject with especially personal significance for these life-long travellers. This theme is an especially prevalent preoccupation of Mistral's, who kept a greater distance from her country of birth than Neruda.<sup>167</sup> The greatest example of this is probably her *Poema de Chile*, which was unfinished at the time of her death. In the order in which Jaime Quezada presents the collection, the first poem "Hallazgo" initiates a journey through geographical and psychological space that plays on presence. Like the *Canciones de Cuna*, the strong aural quality of the poem, along with the simplicity of its diction, makes it a poem meant to be recited,

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<sup>167</sup> Echoes of exile and return can be found, for example, in "País de la ausencia," "Dos himnos" and "Agua" from *Tala*.

and more, remembered. This privileged place in memory coincides with the popular and heterogeneous stories that keep *la crónica* distinct from history, and primes it for oral transmission, which is less controlled and less normative than the printed word.<sup>168</sup>

The poem shares figurative similarities with *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*,<sup>169</sup> most visibly the trope of descent. Mistral writes, at the beginning of “Hallazgo,”

Bajé por espacio y aires  
y más aires, descendiendo,  
sin llamado y con llamada  
por la fuerza del deseo,  
y a más que yo caminaba  
era el descender más recto

Neruda begins *Alturas* in a similar manner of air-travel (but, very typically, with streets added): “Del aire al aire, como una red vacía, / iba yo entre las calles y la atmósfera, llegando y despidiendo.” The world then becomes “como una torre enterrada / hundiendo su espiral más abajo de todas,” wherein the speaker proceeds to “[hundir] la mano turbulenta y dulce / en lo más genital de lo terrestre.”

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<sup>168</sup> LeGuin’s translation turns Mistral’s “hallazgo” into something more literate even though she attempts to retain some of the aural features; in doing so, however, she turns it into a poem ripe with foreignized vocabulary, such as using “fatherland” for “patria”.

<sup>169</sup> Mary-Louise Pratt’s analysis in “Gender, Race, and Nation in Poema de Chile” from *Women, Culture, and Politics in Latin America*, opposes these poems on the grounds that *Poema de Chile* does not participate in the same nation-building project as *Canto General*. She writes, “There is no imagined community in Mistral’s poem, only the national territory naturalized as an ecological entity” (69). Furthermore, she also notes that, while the poems share the motion of descent, Neruda’s is a descent into “death, self-disintegration, and absence of desire, from which the poet emerges...recover[ing] the traditional promontory stance in the heights of the Incaic ruins” (68).

Both poems are phrased as a descent, motivated by desire, and both poems are also staged as a return. Neruda writes, “descendí como gota entre la paz sulfúrica, / y, como un ciego, regresé al jazmín / de la gastada primavera humana.” His is a return to the past, his descent a descent into the underworld.<sup>170</sup> Although death is likewise present in Mistral’s return, as when the speaker says “aunque ya no lleve nombre / ni dé sombra caminando, / no me oigan pasar las huertas / ni me adivinen los pueblos,” Mistral also provides a heightened sense of geographical extension: rather than plunging down into one place, Mistral’s speaker moves obliquely, inwards and downwards and then across, “cruza-cruzando.” She writes, “O fue loca mi partida / o es loco ahora el regreso,” where the previous mention of “Patria” (as well as its inclusion as the opening poem of *Poema de Chile*) promotes the interpretation that the descent is also the image of a mapped movement from North to South along the extensive length of Chile; she walks across

bajíos, cuestras, senderos,  
gracia tímida de hierbas  
y unos céspedes tan tiernos  
que no quisiera doblarlos  
ni rematar este sueño  
de ir sin forma caminando  
la dulce parcela, el reino  
que me tuvo sesenta años  
y me habita como un eco.

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<sup>170</sup> Sulfur is commonly associated with the underworld, and the speaker’s reference to blindness recalls that of Tiresias, who is the first to greet Odysseus when he calls up the spirits of the dead in book XI of the *Odyssey*.

The claim to be walking without form synthesizes with the kingdom that inhabits her to give the poem the form of an echo – the afterlife of a sound after the source is silent, a refraction of air instead of light, something spoken split from itself and returned. The speaker’s relationship with her travelling companion, the “Niño-Ciervo” invoked in the next stanza, is one in which imparting knowledge through the departures of language enter into a feedback loop: “y ahora que tú me guías / o soy yo la que te llevo / ¡qué bien entender tú el alma / y yo acordarme del cuerpo.” This apostrophe, overheard by the reader (or listener), mirrors their journey alongside the poem; yet, unlike the use of the apostrophe in Romantic odes, which frequently address an absent object or person forever out of reach, the presence of the niño-ciervo – given the pedagogical aims of much of Mistral’s poetry – seems potentially actualizable. As Mary-Louise Pratt writes, “The speaker’s project in many of the poems [of *Poema de Chile*] is to pass on her everyday knowledge of Chilean nature to her offspring, a mentoring activity quite distinct from both romantic self-expression and scientific classification” (68). Yet the poem itself makes clear that knowledge flows both ways: who leads the way here is unclear, and ultimately not important, since the knowledge in question – the interweaving of body and soul, which may serve as an analogue for poetic language – is co-constructed by the speaker and the Niño-Ciervo.

The educational objectives of Mistral’s and Neruda’s poetry, though different in terms of intended contexts and consequences, find common ground in the American continent. Furthermore, the poets’ international work and status as lifelong travellers

(independent of their specific relationship to the nation of Chile) frequently manifests itself in their poetry not just in representation but also as an ongoing negotiation between the applicability of a colonial language to the specificity of the Americas – naturally, geographically, and politically. This negotiation with language and its attendant literary histories has produced the variety of poetic and literary forms, as well as the disparity of voices, that their work includes.

Poetry, which works at the limits of language, poses a challenge to translations that seek to render it transparently and fluently, without taking the same risks. Nicanor Parra’s suggestion to the reader – *aprender el español* – is in line with his (like José Emilio Pacheco’s) belief that translation is “impossible,” and coincides with the playfully serious iconoclasm of his “antipoetry” and his later “artefactos,” which on occasion employ multilingualism and ungrammaticality to renew the field of poetry by desacralizing it. Here is the first poem of *Poemas y antipoemas* (1954), cited in full:

“Sinfonía de cuna”

Una vez andando  
Por un parque inglés  
Con un angelorum  
Sin querer me hallé.

Buenos días, dijo,  
Yo le contesté,  
Él en castellano,  
Pero yo en francés.

Dites moi, don ángel,  
Comment va monsieur.

Él me dio la mano,  
Yo le tomé el pie  
¡Hay que ver, señores,  
Cómo un ángel es!

Fatuo como el cisne,  
Frío como un riel,  
Gordo como un pavo,  
Feo como usted.

Susto me dio un poco  
Pero no arranqué.

Le busqué las plumas,  
Plumas encontré,  
Duras como el duro  
Cascarón de un pez.

¡Buenos con que hubiera  
Sido Lucifer!

Se enojó conmigo,  
Me tiró un revés  
Con su espada de oro,  
Yo me le agaché.

Ángel más absurdo  
Non volveré a ver.

Muerto de la risa  
Dije good bye sir,  
Siga su camino,  
Que le vaya bien,  
Que la pise el auto,  
Que la mate el tren.

Ya se acabó el cuento,  
Uno, dos y tres.

The rhyme and rhythm of the poem fits the pattern of a lullaby much in the same way that Misral's *Canciones de cuna* do; yet, in calling itself a "symphony," signals a move beyond a single voice to a conjoining of multiple instruments.<sup>171</sup> The poem enacts its title by being a conjunction of three languages (four if we include the Latin word "angelorum," being used ungrammatically); it also combines its irreverent reference to the biblical Jacob's struggle with the angel with a similar irreverence for literary *modernismo* ("fatuo como el cisne")<sup>172</sup> and modernity ("Que la pise el auto / Que la mate el tren"). Further adding to the irreverence of the poem, there is a distinct possibility that the adjectives used to describe the angel – "fatuo," "frío," "gordo," "feo" – can find their referent in Pablo Neruda.<sup>173</sup>

To conclude this chapter, I want to suggest that the irreverence that Nicanor Parra displays (in this poem and throughout his work) disrupts the domesticating inscription of texts in a way that (as we have seen) synergizes with its potential for instruction, which is in turn bolstered by a multilingual approach to literature and literary

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<sup>171</sup> It should be noted that, while Nicanor Parra is not a musician himself, his immediate family includes a great number of distinguished artists, writers, and musicians, the most famous of which was his sister, Violeta Parra.

Furthermore, Parra has used music as a figure to conceptualize literary translation; speaking of his adaptation of *King Lear* for the stage, he explains that "Lear está escrito en un instrumento que es el idioma inglés, entonces, yo quisiera ser el transcriptor de esta composición a otro instrumento que es el idioma español."

<sup>172</sup> The swan is a recurrent presence in the poetry of Rubén Darío, who is known as the "padre del modernismo"; one of these poems, "Los Cisnes" (published in *Cantos de vida y esperanza* in 1905, the same volume that contains his famous "A Roosevelt"), expresses a fear that U.S. imperialism will impose the English language on Latin America.

<sup>173</sup> The poem's irreverence and irony, as well as its use of multiple languages, could be also read as directed toward a highly-visible predecessor text, Vicente Huidobro's *Altazor* (1931), parts of which were simultaneously published in Spanish and French periodicals.

translation. Although shifting of standards of acceptability may mean that what was once disruptive becomes mainstream, the presence of other languages in the text generates the distance necessary to solicit critical attention. Parra, when referring to his adaptation of Shakespeare into Spanish, speaks directly of the value of including the foreign language:

Hay una superstición que consiste en creer que el teatro tiene que dar la sensación de que la obra que se representa en un idioma fue escrita en ese idioma. Se gana al decidirnos a recordarle al público en todo momento que lo que oye es una ficción, que la obra fue escrita en otro idioma. Es positivo dar la sensación, de cuando en cuando, de cual es ese idioma original. Al descubrir este subterfugio, resolví dejar en inglés todo lo que sea posible: los nombres de los personajes, los saludos, palabras que conoce todo el mundo. Así, estamos operando en los dos planos del lenguaje. (Cited in Hurtado).

Parra thus uses the inclusion of English specifically to combat the illusion of transparency in translation, characterized in the citation above as a superstition and a fiction. The benefit of doing so is to remind the audience of their mediated relationship to the work in question, which produces a distance similar to Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, generating the conditions necessary for critical thought.

Despite the positive effects of disrupting the expectations and conventions of domestic standards of acceptability – among which are the benefits it lends to the instructive capacities of texts – these disruptions should be based in relevant context; though (for example) translations like Pound's and Pacheco's – as “accompaniment” or “approximation” – may lead the reader to form deeper insights into the original poem, they can just as easily lead a reader astray. The subject of how relevant context



becomes translated as part of a poem, however, requires a rather in-depth response:  
this will be the task of the next chapter.

### Chapter 3

#### The Code and Context of Raúl Zurita's *Purgatorio* and *Anteparaiso*

The exploration of loanwords in the previous chapter left a lingering question that should continue to haunt translators because of its problematization of linguistic boundaries: how much can be borrowed from the foreign language? In comparing the mestizo word “tomato” – which has come to English through Spanish from Nahuatl – to the word “mestizo,” I suggested that words denoting concepts may be better able to bring over their native signifying context, while object borrowings tended to deracinate the thing in question, encouraging domestic meanings.

Yet the question of language mixture extends beyond individual words. The process of refraction that has occupied my interest affects not only the conditions for the reception of a translation but also what happens to the “local” or “source” context (if it could be called that) in anticipating and reacting to these refractions, alongside questions regarding whether such considerations are judged to be relevant or not. When, for instance, Pablo Neruda (as was seen in the previous chapter) re-introduces Walt Whitman to U.S. readers – and does so knowingly, with political motivations – the notion of a work’s context becomes impossible to talk about within the confines of one language or culture, thereby making reference to translation and translatability a necessity.

Considering the place of this “source context” – which includes the material and social conditions in which the text was produced – is common when studying the development of a text within a given language. Introductory biographical sketches,

historical annotations, variorum editions: all manifest a desire to locate the text at its origin. Even studies of literary influence share that motive in trying to reconstruct a genealogy and the gestation of their object of study. And as refractions – work that seeks to influence how literature is read – this type of study participates in the contact zones through which a text encounters a reader – thereby reflecting, through distortion, the tension through which a work comes to acquire social meaning.

For this reason, this chapter will analyze the construction of a text’s “source context” with a view toward what conflicts are enacted or obscured, in order to answer how what is perceived as relevant<sup>174</sup> to the national and international circuits of a text functions within multiple and heterogeneous domestic spaces. To do so, this chapter will look at literary work in a particular zone of contact and conflict – Chile under military government during 1973-1990 – in its attempts to address a highly polarized national audience under the constraints of censorship, and the effects of that negotiation when translated to readers in the United States.

Currently, the most well recognized Chilean poet of this period is Raúl Zurita (b.1950, Santiago, Chile). Winner of the Chilean National Prize for Literature in 2000 and the recipient of numerous other national and international awards,<sup>175</sup> Zurita – who received training as an engineer – began to publish his work in the early years of

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<sup>174</sup> Derrida uses this word, which “floats between several languages,” as the center of a talk on translation, construing it as that which must define “the essence of translation”: “The question, What is a relevant translation? would return to the question, What is a translation? or, What should a translation be? And the question, What should a translation be? implies, as if synonymously, What should the best possible translation be?” (430).

<sup>175</sup> Including, but not limited to, a Guggenheim grant (1984), the Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry (1988), and the Casa de las Américas Prize for Poetry (2006).

Augusto Pinochet's military government, which during the coup on September 11, 1973 had detained and tortured him for his involvement with the Chilean Communist Party while Salvador Allende was President. During this time in the mid-1970s, he helped form the *Colectivo Acciones de Arte* (Art Actions Collective, or CADA), a multidisciplinary performance art group that was part of the Chilean neo-avant garde, the *Escena de Avanzada*, and which attempted through various media and forms of popular engagement to re-conceptualize the role of art in social life and destabilize its confinement within institutional spaces.<sup>176</sup>

Based on readings of Raúl Zurita's *Purgatorio* (1979) and *Anteparaiso* (1982) alongside their translations and a number of related performative projects and paratextual material, I will argue that the tension between translatability and untranslatability is not only crucial to Zurita's negotiation with a domestic sphere engaged in violent conflict with itself, but also crucial to the work's attempted intervention in the unforeseen global spaces of the future. I will further argue that this tension between translatability and untranslatability, due to its emergence from a conflicted – and thus necessarily undecided – context, risks being neutralized by translations that do not seek to actively disrupt their own domestic inscription.

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<sup>176</sup> Created in 1979 by Zurita, the writer Diamela Eltit, visual artists Lotty Rosenfeld and Juan Castillo, and the sociologist Fernando Balcells, CADA operated within the conditions of Pinochet's dictatorship, using multiple registers to reemphasize "the avant-garde call to bridge and fuse the domains of art, politics, and society" (Richard *Insubordination* 25).

Additionally, Zurita's relationship with Eltit was especially close during the time during which *Purgatorio* and *Anteparaiso* were written: they were married from 1974 until the mid-80s, and had a son together about the time that *Purgatorio* was published.

I will begin by introducing the primary concerns of this chapter through a literary text that opens a space for the discussion of contact zones and the estrangement of domestic space through language. This example provides a point of departure for an examination of the characteristics of Zurita's poetic idiom and its intertextual grounding in both Chilean (Pablo Neruda, Andrés Bello) and universal (Dante, the Hebrew Bible) literary spheres, noting how the presentation of the primary referent of Zurita's first two books – the landscape of Chile – can be said to simultaneously elide and emphasize political and bodily contexts. The ability of Zurita's work of this period to speak to different audiences, and in different registers, is analyzed as a tension activated by a conscious engagement with national and transnational contact zones, a trajectory motivated by the work's negotiation with its translatability as a result of its struggle to speak amidst pain. These issues of contact and context are then shown to be active, and even augmented, in translation to U.S. English, illustrated in part by the struggles apparent in Jack Schmitt's translation of *Anteparáiso* (*Anteparadise*, 1986) and its earnest but simplistic attempts to render both the language and the historical context of Zurita's poetry accessible to U.S. audiences. I conclude the chapter by offering a different alternative to Schmitt's attempts at domesticating translation, one that – by maximizing knowledge of cultural and linguistic context, and dispensing with the demand for fluidity – I argue is especially apt for translations of literature intended for a public that is linguistically and culturally heterogeneous.

## Introduction: Skywriting

On June 2, 1982, five airplanes in a line formation wrote the text of Raúl Zurita's "La vida nueva"<sup>177</sup> in dot-matrix style in the sky above New York City. It was presented in Spanish and recorded by video artist Juan Downey; later that same year, it was published as a series of photographs in Zurita's *Anteparáiso*, which continues the cycle begun by *Purgatorio* in 1979,<sup>178</sup> and which was translated into English by Jack Schmidt and published in a bilingual edition in 1986.

Though commonly transcribed as a series of lines ("MI DIOS ES HAMBRE / MI DIOS ES NIEVE / MI DIOS ES PAMPA / MI DIOS ES NO")<sup>179</sup>, the video – the entirety of which is freely available on YouTube<sup>180</sup> – shows the text written as one continuous, gently arcing line. The video also shows the text gradually dissipating over time: by the time the last word is written, the beginning has disappeared entirely, with the rest quickly becoming illegible. Some of the pictures from *Anteparáiso* attempt to convey this aspect of the skywriting by presenting close-ups of letters and words after they had been transformed by the wind into amorphous clouds, in the moment of diffusion rather than creation. The impermanence of the cloud text is presented as a crucial feature: transcriptions of "La vida nueva," both in authorized and unauthorized forms,

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<sup>177</sup> The title of this poem, "La vida nueva," should not be confused with Zurita's book of the same name, which closes the poetic cycle begun by *Purgatorio* and *Anteparáiso*, and which was published in 1994 during the time of the transitional government.

<sup>178</sup> Translated into English by Anna Deeny in 1985.

<sup>179</sup> For instance, this is the format used in Jack Schmidt's translation.

<sup>180</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xyMY1ZAZsQM>. Accessed June, 2015. Posted by the Fundación Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes. Other sources, like NYU's Hemispheric Institute Digital Video Library, provide a shorter, black-and-white version.

include some variation of the subtitle given in *Anteparáiso*: “—escrito en el cielo—/ Nueva York – Junio 1982.”

Zurita’s skywriting serves to introduce the central concerns of this chapter. Its textual supports inscribe it into a linguistic contact zone, where its transnational visibility in the sky above New York City destabilizes the mapping of language onto nation, speaking to heterogeneous reading communities on both sides of the Americas, but addressing in particular the significant number of Chilean exiles (and other politicized Latin Americans<sup>181</sup>) who had fled violent repression. Appearing in several forms, the textual supports of “La vida nueva” also inscribe it into an intertextual and multimedia array made of mediated representations of the event – a structure that emphasizes its attachment to a particular time in place, but also its translatability (or lack thereof).

For an example of how the work problematizes its translatability through its deployment of different temporalities, we may look at the characteristic impermanence of the text written with clouds: for those who were there, then, – Zurita’s close associates and the circumstantial audience who happened to have a view of the NYC sky during that half-hour – the apparent contiguity of the film media to that event induces nostalgia. For those that weren’t there, the effect produced is the sensation of having “missed it,” a sensation that is similar to that caused by lyric poetry’s frequent posturing as an utterance overheard. In both cases, the text inscribes itself at an ever-increasing distance from the reader, seemingly always receding into

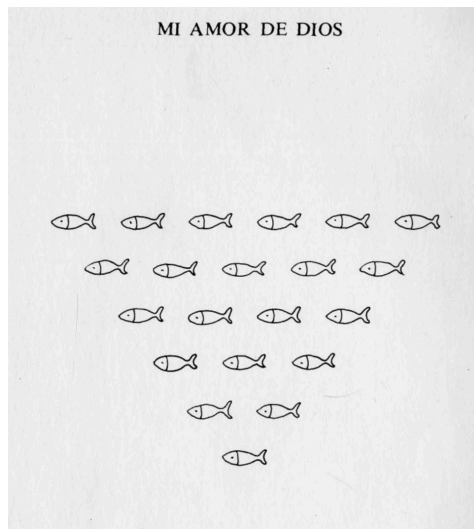
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<sup>181</sup> “MI DIOS ES CHICANO,” l.8 of “La vida nueva.”

the past. Yet in doing so, it anticipates future audiences, locating itself as a space of encounter between multiple perspectives of what has passed.

### Language and Literature

But let us examine, first, how the “La vida nueva” constructs its own past. Initially, it is a type of self-citation, bordering on obsessive repetition: within the corpus of Zurita’s work, the title of “La vida nueva” is prefigured by its use in *Purgatorio*, where it precedes several pages of the poet’s EEG printout,<sup>182</sup> as well as anticipating the title of Zurita’s subsequent work, *La Vida Nueva* (1994). The last verse of the sky-writing, “Mi amor de Dios,” also appears in *Purgatorio*, at the head of an inverted triangle of simple fish:



More broadly speaking, these are not the only times *Anteparaiso* repeats the content of *Purgatorio*: the similarity of the dedications (which Zurita calls “Devoción”) to his

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<sup>182</sup> This record is itself introduced by a reproduction of a handwritten letter from Zurita’s psychologist, which explains that the EEG was used to investigate a possible diagnosis of epileptic psychosis.



then-spouse Diamela Eltit, the repetition of settings (the Chilean landscape), and the use of a logical-philosophical presentation wherein verses are numbered and give the appearance of prepositions and syllogisms are just a few of the most visible ways in which *Anteparaíso* situates itself as a continuation of *Purgatorio*. The progression this relationship implies is crucial to their inscription in a contact zone that is not only geographic but also historical.

If we may put the examination of paratextual and performative materials (such as the above-mentioned EEG record) as well as its intertextual dialogue with prior authors aside for the time being, the landscape of *Anteparaíso* admits very little sense of history. The book's use of axiomatic form and deductive diction (the predominance of connectors such as "Porque," "Para que," "Por eso," "Entonces") encourages the type of decontextualization that abstract formulations are intended to produce. Further enhancing this impression, the obsessive repetition of other words and phrases, as well as the self-citation of lines from other places in the same volume, enhances the text's hermetic qualities, making it (apart from a few citations of foundational texts such as Genesis and the Popol Vuh) appear self-contained. The poems of *Anteparaíso* further their appearance of self-contained logical propositions through their use of the page: though of differing lengths, the text of each poem is set and spaced to occupy the full page. Yet even the shorter poems ruminate upon their own language to the point where the relationship between subject and object is made unclear:

### Las Playas de Chile III<sup>183</sup>

Veánlas mecidas bajo el viento:  
Chile entero resurgía como una  
línea de pasto en el horizonte

- i. Chile entero resurgía como una línea de pasto por el horizonte
- ii. Por eso las playas parecían mecerse como espigas frente a ellos lejanas esparciéndose en el aire
- iii. En que ni sus sueños supieron del resurgir de toda la patria donde nosotros somos apenas una línea de pasto meciéndose en el horizonte como espejismos ante Usted por estos aires besando la costa que Chile entero esparció iluminada bajo el viento

(p.23)

The poem presents the liminal space of Chile's beaches from an undetermined perspective with the imperative "veánlas," as if all of them, along with "Chile entero," could be seen at once; yet the distance that makes this sight possible, which turns all of Chile into a far-away "línea de pasto en el horizonte," causes the vision to tremble and shift into other things: the beaches "parecían mecerse como espigas," "como espejismos." The repetition of phrases with slight variations are the linguistic equivalent of the vibrating vision of a mirage: Chile as "una línea de pasto" goes from being "en el horizonte" to "por el horizonte"; the beaches go from "esparciéndose"

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<sup>183</sup> While I have attempted to reproduce some of the text's most prominent formatting, some features are missing in this citation. A digitized copy of the first edition is available at <http://www.memoriachilena.cl/archivos2/pdfs/MC0011215.pdf>; the bilingual edition published by the University of California Press reproduces this source's Spanish text (if only on one side of the page).

themselves to being scattered and disseminated by “Chile entero”; and the “línea de pasto” that is at the limit of the vision goes from being the nation to “nosotros.” Overall, the “resurgir de toda la patria” that the poem insists upon is tied to the scattering and seeding of the beaches turned “espigas”: the hope seems to be that the fertility of scattered language can remake the landscape.

The language here is almost identical to that seen in *Purgatorio*:

EL DESIERTO DE ATACAMA II<sup>184</sup>

Helo allí      Helo allí  
suspendido en el aire  
El Desierto de Atacama

i. Suspendido sobre el cielo de Chile diluyéndose  
entre auras

ii. Convirtiendo esta vida y la otra en el mismo  
Desierto de Atacama áurico perdiéndose en el  
aire

iii. Hasta que finalmente no haya cielo sino Desierto  
de Atacama y todos veamos entonces nuestras propias  
pampas fosforescentes carajas encumbrándose en  
el horizonte

(p.33)

The rhythm of the poem is the same, with a three-line introduction to three numbered “propositions” of increasing length; Zurita repeats this general template, with some variation, throughout both *Purgatorio* and *Anteparaíso*. The imagery is

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<sup>184</sup> As with my citation of “Las Playas de Chile III,” I have attempted to preserve some of the formatting, such as spacing, though the reproduction is not exact.

also very similar: as in “Playas de Chile III,” here also the landscape appears to dissolve into air, an effect enhanced by the repetition of words and sounds (cIElo, DesIErto, diluYÉndose-convirtIEndo-perdIEÉndose). Although the poem’s predominant action of dissolution may seem opposed to the movement of resurgence that motivates “Las Playas de Chile III” (which is appropriate considering the implied movement from “purgatory” to “anteparadise”), “El Desierto de Atacama II” likewise suggests a sense of rising not only through its building rhythm but also through its focus on the sky and the final image of “pampas...encumbrándose”: an image of a violent geologic process common to Chile, a radical transformation in the landscape only possible through subduction or volcanic eruption.

In working towards a “new life,” the book’s engagement with the constitutive features of Chile’s geography – beaches, mountains, desert, fertile valleys – frequently refers to itself as idyll or pastoral, as in the sequence of poems titled “Pastoral de Chile,” which begins: “Chile está cubierto de sombras / los valles están quemados, ha crecido la zarza” (103). This scarred landscape houses no shepherds, nor does there appear to be a contrast (implicit or explicit) with urbanization.<sup>185</sup> The landscape, replete with pain and wounds and cold, could hardly be said to be idyllic or idealized. However, it could be said, that, like an idyll, the landscape is being “resemantizado” (Pérez Villalobos 57). In Carlos Pérez Villalobos’ analysis, *Anteparáiso*’s apparent detachment from history makes such “resemantization”

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<sup>185</sup> My thinking here is informed by the different types of pastoral literature defined by Terry Gifford in his book *Pastoral*, which are three: the first dealing with country life (as in Hesiod); the second with the presentation of the country in contrast with urban spaces; and the third is the pejorative use of pastoral.

possible; in the book, “Tanto la naturaleza como el cuerpo poetizados respondían a una mirada premoderna, inocente de su espesor de mediaciones sociales y discursivas, y para la cual la historia como producto dialéctico del trabajo humano...está completamente ausente” (56). In combination with *Purgatorio*’s and *Anteparáiso*’s language – which is, for Mario Pellegrini, something “nunca antes visto en la tradición nacional” (47), and, for Carmen Foxley, “arduo y difícil” (88) – these decontextualizable aspects of the text allow it to stand apart from its national literary tradition and present itself as a foundational text.<sup>186</sup>

Roman Jakobson’s theory of the functions of language is helpful in understanding the multiple thrusts of Zurita’s language here, particularly in making sense of the conspicuous absence of history, but also its ubiquitous mentions of Chile. Jakobson divides the act of communication into six factors, which in turn are the target of each of the functions: the referential function targets the context, and is the domain of

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<sup>186</sup> A foundational text that, through the subject of Chile, indexes other foundational texts. Zurita himself later explained his insistence on the landscape of Chile as a type of resistance to the appropriation of the concept of the nation by the military regime, or in other words a resemantization to resist official discourse: “Antes del Golpe, como todo joven intelectual vanguardista, sentía un profundo desprecio por la palabra ‘patria’, era una cosa vieja. Pero cuando vino el Golpe, lo primero que hicieron en ese tiempo fue gritar ‘Chile, Chile’, pero el Chile de los militares. Yo sentí que nunca me había fijado en eso, en los emblemas patrios, y que nunca me había importando. Entonces cuando los fascistas nombraban tanto Chile, la canción nacional, entonces sentí como una lucha por preservar los verdaderos contenidos de la palabra. Recobró su sentido, y eso era algo que me importaba muchísimo. O sea la palabra que ellos mismos usaran tomaba allí su verdadero sentido. Y aquí hay dos peleas, o sea una lucha grande: o el Chile de los militares, o el viejo Chile de Pablo Neruda, de los poetas. Entonces la poesía chilena había abandonado también toda referencia nacional, por así decirlo. Y siento que el *Anteparáiso* retoma todo eso desde la historia de la poesía” (Santini 217-218).

descriptive statements; the emotive or expressive function corresponds to the speaker, and regards the affective content of the utterance, while the conative function targets the listener and can be exemplified best by imperatives. The phatic function serves to simply establish or disengage the channel of communication, and is exemplified by utterances such as “hello” and “uh huh” but also by small talk. The last two – which are the most useful for my reading of Zurita – are the poetic and metalinguistic functions, which correspond to the message and the code respectively. It is important to note, finally, that all these functions interact with each other, though one may prove dominant: so for example, the statement “It’s cold outside” is referential but, depending on the circumstances, can also deploy the emotive (“I am upset at the discomfort the cold has caused me”) or conative (“Close the window”) functions as its primary meaning – or the speaker may be singing, “Baby it’s cold outside,” which, absent other intentions, would correspond to the poetic function.

Using this model, we might say that Zurita’s text is indeed poetic: for example, the sibilance present in the first section of “El Desierto de Atacama II,” as well as the internal rhymes mentioned above, brings the materiality of the language and the disconnected pleasure of vocalization into consciousness. But more interesting than this is Zurita’s use of the metalinguistic function: unlike the poetic function, which focuses on the message – the language as used by text – the metalinguistic function focuses on the code, the language that is not only in but around, and prior to, the text. The metalinguistic function is the dominant motivation of Zurita’s new, unusual, and difficult language, as it calls into attention the language’s variation from conventional

literary practices – which, of course, form part of the code of any work of literature.<sup>187</sup>

This is how, by making “Chile” the object of his poetry, Zurita’s work invokes a national literary tradition, even as it appears to attempt to swerve away. Though referring directly to emblems of universal literature<sup>188</sup> it uses the metalinguistic function to dialogue with a much more historically contiguous interlocutor than Dante’s *Divine Comedy*: Pablo Neruda’s *Canto General*. While Zurita’s reasons for not explicitly mentioning Neruda in the work may be similar to Bolaño’s reasons for mentioning him ubiquitously,<sup>189</sup> the Adamic stance that Zurita assumes in re-semanticizing the geography of Chile is prefigured by Neruda’s need to compass the continent with language. Of course, the “naturaleza ahistórica y sacramental” (Pérez Villalobos) of Zurita’s writing contrasts sharply with Neruda’s interest in specifically including historical events and people as subjects; but they nevertheless share the literary lineage of Andrés Bello, who, as mentioned in the previous chapter, sought continental unity through the teaching of a common language. This lineage is visible in shared subjects (for example, Bello and Neruda both have poems titled after the Bío Bío river in Chile, whereas Zurita will name this same river in his “Cantos de los ríos que aman” from *La Vida Nueva*) as well as themes: as, when writing of the

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<sup>187</sup> Carmen Foxley’s paper, “La propuesta autorreflexiva de en *Anteparáiso*,” traces the operation of metalinguistic function – sometimes called “reflexive” language – in detail, taking into account both Zurita’s self-citation and pervasive intertextuality.

<sup>188</sup> Dante is the most noticeable, but there are citations and retellings of other works such as the *Popol Vuh* and the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>189</sup> In “Carnet de Baile,” which I read in the first chapter of this project, the narrator presents Neruda as a looming, terrifying, silencing, and enduring presence, forever gliding over “una literatura imaginaria llamada *literatura chilena*” (216)

fertility of nature, Bello writes, at the beginning of *La Agricultura de la Zona*

*Tórrida,*

¡Salve, fecunda zona,  
que al sol enamorado circunscribes  
el vago curso, ¡cuanto ser se anima  
en cada vario clima  
acariciada de su luz, concibes!

While Neruda, in “Vegataciones,” (from the “Lámpara en la tierra” section of the *Canto General*) writes

A las tierras sin nombres y sin números  
bajaba el viento desde otros dominios,  
traía la lluvia hilos celestes,  
y el dios de los altares impregados  
devolvía las flores y las vidas.

And finally Zurita, in “Los valles de la malquerida,” from *Anteparaíso*:

Porque ni siquiera en sueños se verían de nuevo tendiéndose  
sobre el valle sino apenas un cielo amarillo arrasado tras  
los pastos inmundo abierto gimiéndoles la malquerida

Despite clear differences in language and poetic structure, each of these selections engage with the fertility of the land by personifying – and sexualizing – natural processes; and though of the examples given, Neruda’s is the only to mention it explicitly, all three deploy the metalinguistic function by appealing to the Edenic, prelinguistic mythos of the continent, a “New World.” Such a move serves to open an uncontested space for the poetry by obscuring the language the precedes it.

But although Zurita’s new and disruptive language activates the metalinguistic function, the question remains whether or not its defamiliarization of both poetic



language and the concept of the domestic (“Chile”) can remain active as what is thought of as “domestic” itself changes (whether through translation or historical transition). To answer this question, however, we must place the metalinguistic function alongside the others – and in particular, the referential and emotive functions – in order to address the different meanings that translators and editors choose to carry across. In the next section, we will see how these functions – in the form of social and bodily context – appear in the work, and how they generate tension with the language.

### **Body and Nation**

Though we have just seen how the language of *Anteparáiso* is nearly identical to its predecessor volume, they are distinct in one very obvious way: *Anteparáiso* does not include the same non-verbal references to the poet’s body as *Purgatorio*, which ends with a reproduction of an EEG graph and begins with a photograph of the poet with a self-inflicted burn to his cheek (the Editorial Universitaria edition has an additional extreme close-up of the unbandaged wound on the cover). In fact, the only direct reference to such a thing appears in a strangely mediated form, as the photo-reproduction of a typewritten paragraph signed by Diamela Eltit where she recounts Zurita’s attempt to blind himself with ammonia. In contrast with *Purgatorio*, which contains pictures and indices of the body, handwritten correspondence, and various non-verbal artifacts such as the fish-triangle reproduced above, the content of *Anteparáiso* is rather more traditional, despite its continued use of unconventional

verbal forms. The progression signaled by that shift coincides with a movement from purgatory to the waiting-room of paradise: while both books relate their share of pain, the pain of the first is more silent and physical; the second book, at nearly three times the length, displays a greater need – or compulsion – to verbalize and contain that pain in poetic forms (a form that had become established by Zurita in *Purgatorio* three years prior).

Elaine Scarry, in *The Body in Pain*, writes that “physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it” (4); she also contrasts physical pain with psychological pain, particularly with regards to their representation in art:

The rarity with which physical pain is represented in literature is most striking when seen within the framing fact of how consistently art confers visibility on other forms of distress. *Psychological suffering...is so habitually depicted in art that, as Thomas Mann’s Settembrini reminds us, there is virtually no piece of literature that is not about suffering* (11).

Zurita’s work and performance complicates the distinction between these two, however, considering his deployment of physical pain as an expression of both psychological pain, and pain at an ideological/national level.

In interviews, Zurita has described these instances of self-harm part of his poetic work. “Desde el momento en que hago eso [quemarse la mejilla en el año 75], me ubico de este lado de la comunicación, y ahí empieza mi obra. Empiezo a poder expresar algo, a poder comunicar” (cited in Gandolfo, 3). Breaking the institutional limits between life and art is a central motivation of the (neo-)avant-garde, and Zurita aligns himself with this project not only in the statement above, but also with his

involvement with the Colectivo de Acciones de Arte (CADA). This motivation is visible in one of CADA's principal works, "Para no morir de hambre en el arte," (1979), which simultaneously combined distributing milk to an impoverished population of Santiago, an advertisement in a popular magazine, a multilingual text delivered to the United Nations building in Santiago, and the symbolic closure of the art museum by draping a white sheet in front of the entrance. Another, titled "Ay Sudamérica," (1981) involved dropping 400,000 leaflets by plane over Santiago, which included the statement, "Nosotros somos artistas, pero cada hombre que trabaja por la ampliación, aunque sea mental, de sus espacios de vida es un artista."<sup>190</sup> CADA's actions here seek to denaturalize the distinction between life and art by disrupting their designated zones, shuttering institutional spaces and opening up everyday zones of encounter and contact; the heterogeneousness of the audience is reinforced, once again, by the accessibility determined by words borne by aircraft and the mixing of various media and material.

This recognition of a plural audience worked for Zurita. The combination of the historical and social embeddedness of Zurita's work with the decontextualizability of its language proved to be expedient for its domestic reception. Pellegrini writes that

los lectores de ese momento difícil y trágico de la historia del país vieron en Zurita, por un lado, la redención de una pasión dolorosa (metáfora de los tiempos que se estaban viviendo) y, por otro, la aparición de un discurso poético aparentemente

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<sup>190</sup> The thought that underlies this statement can be attributed to Nietzsche, who influenced the thought of José Ortega y Gasset, and, by extension, the Latin American Vanguards. See "El hombre selecto como artista en Ortega y Gasset y en Nietzsche," by Howard Giskin, *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, 1985/1985.

ajeno a los avatares de la historia inmediata (para los que no gustaban de un arte comprometido con la contingencia opositora a la dictadura) (48).

In this manner, *Purgatorio* and *Anteparaiso* have been able to simultaneously appeal to seemingly mutually exclusive audiences: readers wanting a poetic manifestation of national pain, as well as readers who seek refuge from domestic conflict. Products of a specific historical moment, Zurita's work in and around these two books functions to engage with national literary tradition and attempts to access a universal register – which, by its very character as “universal,” is abstracted from specific context, Zurita himself acknowledging that “Dante, Rimbaud, Shakespeare... Son textos atemporales” (Santini 212). That Zurita has successfully inscribed himself within a national literary tradition can be attested to by his reception in Chile, which, despite some measure of controversy, has been very positive: Ignacio Valente, the most established literary critic in late twentieth-century Chile, called him “el delfín de la poesía chilena,” and aided Zurita with the publication and promotion of his early work.<sup>191</sup> However, his work's ability to negotiate with these two simultaneous registers becomes strained as its historical context becomes refracted through time (for example, the change in Chile from military government, to the so-

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<sup>191</sup> Recalling Bolaño's interest in Chilean letters here, it is relevant to note Valente's appearance as the narrator of *Nocturno de Chile*. The reason for Bolaño's extensive satire here is due to Valente's entrenchment within the literary establishment as the official literary critic of the right-wing newspaper *El Mercurio*, who acted as a gatekeeper during the dictatorship. Also pertinent to note, given the religious content of Zurita's work, is Valente's position as an ordained priest of the Opus Dei (which has a history of participation with right-wing authoritarian governments).

called transitional government, to democracy<sup>192</sup>), space (its movement internationally), and language (what Jakobson would call, “translation proper”).

The first of these – the question of the conditions of the work’s endurance over time – needs to be addressed because of how prevalently it appears as a theme in Zurita’s work. I mentioned above, in my initial approach to Zurita, how the impermanence of the skywriting of “La vida nueva” occasions multiple modes of recollection (video, still photography, transcription) and therefore, multiple audiences. Though these audiences may overlap, each mode carries different implications regarding how the text is to be read. This plurality of perspectives is part of the text’s signifying process, or what it means for something to be written in the sky.

To the impermanence and accessibility provided by the sky-writing, Zurita will later offer a counterpoint. In 1993, during the period known as the “transition to democracy” and with the support of the Chilean government, Zurita headed a project that bulldozed the words “ni pena ni miedo” into the Atacama desert about 50 kilometers south of Antofagasta in northern Chile.<sup>193</sup> At over 3 kilometers in length, the words can only be read *from* the sky; owing to its support (an arid salt flat), the writing is relatively permanent. Published as an aerial photograph at the end of *La*

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<sup>192</sup> Despite being generally recognized as a democracy, as of the time of this writing, Chile’s constitution is still the one written by the military government in 1980.

<sup>193</sup> The coordinates, -24.037724,-70.440034, can be viewed with freely available satellite imaging services such as those provided by Google.

*vida nueva* (1994), these words continue the poetic cycle begun by Zurita burning his own cheek in 1975 and the publication of *Purgatorio* in 1979.<sup>194 195</sup>

Mario Pellegrini, in his analysis of *La vida nueva*, comes to the conclusion (along with Valente) that *Anteparaíso* had exhausted the language that *La vida nueva* continues to use, despite the fact that it “obedece a otro tiempo y a otra situación verbal” (53). Writing of *Anteparaíso*, Ignacio Valente wrote that “el esquema básico de *Anteparaíso* – la arquitectura verbal y visual de un teorema, de una hipótesis científica con enunciados múltiples – quedó ya agotada en ese libro: maravillosamente exprimida, pero no apta para repetirse,” and Pellegrini reads this as a warning that Zurita did not heed: instead, *La vida nueva* does not offer a new language, but “repite hasta la saciedad los modos verbales ya conocidos en el poeta,” reproducing a style that “se ha transformado en copia de sí mismo (54, 60).

For Pellegrini, the problem with this is the monumental position that Zurita consciously pursues, which, in the case of *La vida nueva*, is at odds with the poetic

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<sup>194</sup> These two art-actions (the skywriting and the geoglyph), along with their presence in photographs and other media, also occupy a prominent place in Geneviève Fabry’s analysis of the sublime in Zurita’s work. In passing, she comes to a similar interpretation about the role of Zurita’s forever-expanding self-citation and his self-harm, that “a contrapelo del discurso represivo dominante, la poesía de Zurita opera una resemantización del ‘yo’ y de la comunidad nacional a partir del sufrimiento compartido y de la ternura, pero sin que se llegue a fijar esta resemantización en un signo estable” (241).

<sup>195</sup> Although Zurita’s use of machinery in order to accomplish the skywriting and the geoglyph is reminiscent of the futurist’s esteem of modern technology, it exists without the disruptive value that was key to the futurists, and is thus vulnerable to the same critique that Nelly Richard levels against *Ni pena ni miedo*: “The work reissues CADA’s transgeneric crossings, but without the aggressive anti-institutionality of a gesture that sought to fracture the artistic-literary system” (*Insubordination of Signs* 35).

task of probing the limits of language; Pellegrini concludes that it serves as an artistic corollary for the transitional period, “conciliador...optimista y complaciente” (63). Zurita himself has acknowledged that “ni pena ni miedo” was intended to memorialize a specific historical moment: in October of 2013, when part of a project to “rescatar” the geoglyph (which included the proposed construction of a sort of visitor’s center), he said that the piece “se escribió en un momento en que en Chile lo que más había era pena y miedo; hoy esta frase representa para mí un enorme legado que se perpetuará en el tiempo como testimonio del momento que nos tocó vivir.” Yet it seems that for many, including Pellegrini, the conciliatory gesture made by the phrase “ni pena ni miedo” does not do justice to its own time, that it in fact forgets the past by wanting to move past it with optimistic consensus. In this way, the language that had disrupted previously held conceptions of the domestic during conditions of dictatorship became stagnant, reinforcing an increasingly homogenized domesticity through each successive iteration, attempting to control – or even forget – its original context of conflict.

In offering this case as an example, my interest is not to present a judgment of Zurita’s work but to note how the temporal gestures of *Purgatorio-Anteparaíso-La vida nueva* condition not only their immediate domestic reception but also that of the future; by inscribing itself as a testimony of pain, a text like “ni pena ni miedo” is both a manifestation of the pain that produced it and an attempt to regulate future discourse around the memory of that pain, which it places in the past rather than something ongoing. As a “testimonio del momento que nos tocó vivir,” the text waits

for future hearings; it addresses the community that lived through those times, the community that was part of its production, but it is also, to use Venuti's words, "filled with the anticipation that a community will be created around that text" (498). This anticipation situates the work in a contact zone, a space of encounter in which what was written struggles to find meaning among heterogeneous and conflicted contexts.<sup>196</sup>

For these reasons, one of the central tensions of Zurita's project is that of translatability: its gestures toward universal literature and abstract logic are counteracted by its historical and bodily attachments, and its ambivalence in this respect means that it presents itself as both "translatable" and "untranslatable." Such tension was itself, to some extent, determined by a context of pain and repression: as critics such as Nelly Richard have pointed out, the members of CADA, and Zurita and Diamela Eltit in particular, attempted to use language and performance in such a way so as not to be appropriated by the military regime, while at the same time evading censorship.<sup>197</sup> The goal, it would seem, was to create an untranslatable text,

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<sup>196</sup> Scott Weintraub's reading of *Anteparaiso* interprets a resistance to "the egocentric, self-messianistic visions that otherwise seem to characterize Zurita's work," where, although the text appears to await the future, this future is always deferred, a "necessarily postponed 'paradise-to-come'" (214, 216). He uses Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, and also Derrida's *Rogues* to build his argument that "in 'Las utopías,' the incessant, transformative flux of identity continually displaces any notion of the empirical present in favor of what 'could not be,' 'what could have been,' and 'what will be,' by grammatically emphasizing the past tense (X pudo no ser Y), the conditional perfect (X podría haber sido Y), and the future tense (X será Y)" (232).

<sup>197</sup> See Nelly Richard in *Residuos y metáforas* (1998) and *La insubordinación de los signos* (1994).



one that – through the signifier’s play or its semantic density, or the unspeakableness of the body – could not be paraphrased into the language of the regime’s institutions.

That the tension of translatability is built into Zurita’s work of this period is further supported by the choice of venue for both the skywriting and the geoglyph, which are indices of globalization and translation. New York is of course one of the paradigmatic global cities,<sup>198</sup> but the Atacama desert is also a contact zone: as a battlefield for the fight for the ownership of the nitrate and copper industries, it was the focal point for the Guerra del Pacífico (1879-1883) between Chile and allied Bolivia and Peru, as well as the fight for the nationalization or privatization of those industries (which constitute a large proportion of the country’s GDP and exports); as such, the Atacama has served as an important center for the labor movement during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup>, as well as an enduring source of political tension between Chile and Bolivia. The Atacama is, furthermore, a place known globally for its unearthliness, since owing to its extreme aridity it is host to a number of prominent international observatories, and also a site suitable for the testing of Mars rovers. But for Pinochet’s dictatorship, the Atacama was a site for the disappearance of many political prisoners, and thus encodes the enduring pain of people still searching for those loved ones who were lost.<sup>199</sup> The characteristic of being other than what it is, as mentioned earlier, is also part of Zurita’s resemantization of the landscape: in

*Purgatorio*, this resemantization is performed, like translation, through its becoming

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<sup>198</sup> I use the term “global city” after Saskia Sassen’s *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (1991).

<sup>199</sup> Patricio Guzman’s documentary, *Nostalgia de la Luz* (2010), draws parallels between the task of astronomers and those who still search for their lost relatives.

other than what it is, detached from the signifier: “i. Los desiertos de atacama son azules / ii. Los desiertos de atacama no son azules ya ya dime lo que quieras” (34).

### **Zurita in Translation**

Although the tension of translatability in Zurita’s project is separate from questions regarding its actual translation,<sup>200</sup> the transnational aspects of the work under consideration require that attention also be given to the characteristics of the books’ movement across languages and historical/cultural context. As Zurita’s art-actions during this period problematize their historical refractions during a time of transition, examining them when even further removed from their source context likewise elaborates upon tensions present in his project.

An important source of this tension can be found in Zurita’s negotiation between national and international audiences and spaces. At first glance, both of these books read as very Chilean: in *Anteparáiso*, by far the lengthier volume, a mention of “Chile” appears in nearly every poem, often multiple times and frequently as the title, while mention of the names of other nations is completely non-existent; the only exception is the paratextual mention (on the front flap) of New York City as the site of the skywriting of “La Vida Nueva.” If we were to compare it to Neruda’s *Canto General*, we would find them very different in this respect; even the “Canto General de Chile” mentions “América” as a whole, and some poems position the speaker

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<sup>200</sup> Walter Benjamin, in “the task of the translator,” insists that “the translatability of linguistic creations ought to be considered even if men should prove unable to translate them” (76). The *-ability* that marks this distinction is the subject of Samuel Weber’s book, *Benjamin’s -abilities*.

outside of the country, like “Quiero volver al sur (1941),” which begins, “Enfermo, en Veracruz, recuerdo un día / del Sur, mi tierra” (386).

However, the “Introductory Note” signed by Zurita and included in Jack Schmitt’s bilingual edition presents a different vision by situating his locus of enunciation as originating from “all those open spaces to the south of the Río Bravo”; Jack Schmitt furthers this continental scope in his afterward, writing that

The idea of America as the Promised Land has persisted in literature on both sides of the border. Raúl Zurita’s dream can also be interpreted as a metaphor of the struggle of millions of people in America (and elsewhere) who have yet to see the promise of a better life fulfilled. His dream is a visionary and generous gift to humankind everywhere, and I shall cherish forever the opportunity to share this glimmer of the New Life with my brethren to the north of the Río Bravo (212)

Although Schmitt here appears to localize language in a way that is problematic (in which the “Río Bravo” seems to function as a linguistic border as well as one that is geographical and political)<sup>201</sup>, Zurita shows himself to be better aware than his translator of how languages travel when he writes, of the Spanish text of “La vida nueva” in the sky above New York City, that it was “composed as a homage to minority groups throughout the world and, more specifically, to the Spanish-speaking people of the United States.”

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<sup>201</sup> The name “Río Bravo” is generally used in Mexico to refer to what is known in the United States as the Rio Grande, but it is also the name of a river in the Patagonia region of Chile, in the extreme south of the Americas. Schmitt is likely referring (somewhat blithely) to the former, but the Pan-American notion of brethren expressed by keeping the latter in mind is relevant, if also fortuitous.

Yet, no such acknowledgment accompanies the first edition of *Anteparáiso*, which includes the photographs of the skywriting as part of its poetic text, and which was printed later that same year (1982) in Chile. This apparently small distinction can be read as significant in light of the work's position between the national and the international: Zurita could not have thought that Spanish speakers in the U.S. wouldn't read his work in Spanish, especially given the number of Chilean exiles present in the United States. The inclusion of such an explanation, in English, is directed at English readers, to remind them not only of linguistic difference but also of the people that live and speak in the context of those differences. This important reminder serves as a supplement to his introduction of the context of the work, which includes, of course, the notice that "this work was written under conditions common to Latin America: a military dictatorship and the tragedies that always follow in (its) wake"; yet even here Zurita does not provide national specifics, does not mention Allende or Pinochet or September 11, 1973, instead opting to enhance the work's translatability by presenting it as the product of a shared continental destiny.

Above, I cited Mario Pellegrini in saying that Zurita's work of this period could be read as either a metaphor for a time of suffering or an abstract poetic discourse, thereby appealing to both readers who wanted art to engage with its contemporary political situation as well as those who wanted to escape from it. Though its readership is of course different, the paratextual materials provided by the 1986 translation are similarly Janus-faced: both Zurita's introduction and Schmitt's

afterword combine an inscription in history and politics with a prophetic discourse of transcendent pain that does not admit specific contexts.

A further example of how the Chilean context translates comes from an event in 2011, when Zurita (alongside Anna Deeny, translator of *Purgatorio*) gave a reading in Chicago hosted by the Poetry Foundation at their newly opened headquarters. The reading and its space were engaged with by activists unfurling two banners: the first, reading “What would have happened if Emily Dickinson had been prescribed Prozac?” protested the massive funding (\$200 million) received from Eli Lilly heiress Ruth Lilly, which made them the largest poetry organization in the U.S. (and paid for the very sober building Zurita was reading in); the second read simply “Viva CADA.”

The reference to CADA by the Croatoan Poetic Cell (as the activists call themselves) brings with it a reminder that the “acciones de arte” that Zurita and his milieu once undertook – Eltit reading in a brothel, and Zurita’s public masturbation in an art gallery, to name a few famous ones – are in stark contrast with the bourgeois stuffiness of the reading in Chicago.<sup>202</sup> Having waited for Zurita’s reading to finish, the CPC’s action was not a critique of the poet but rather a critique of the space he was reading in, as well as an endorsement of disruption itself as a poetic action; they also passed out leaflets protesting the arrest of one of their comrades at the inaugural open-house of the same location a few weeks earlier for “having too much fun”

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<sup>202</sup> In an interesting confluence of masturbation and self-promotion, Zurita in *Zurita* (published in 2011, and likely the book he was promoting with the reading), refers to his own past actions as “Ese pajeo del arte en dictadura y bla bla bla” (Cited in *La Tercera*, “Raúl Zurita: ‘Lo que tenía que hacer ya lo hice. Estoy en blanco’.” June 18, 2011). “Pajeo” in Chilean Spanish refers to masturbation, both literally and figuratively.

(spilling wine, undressing, and public displays of affection). Such tactics are of course nothing new, but in the context of tension over gentrification in Chicago, and with the Occupy protests in the background across the country, they nevertheless managed to surprise and even upset a number of people, and garner some media attention.

But, when looking for a literary parallel, rather than mention Zurita's own masturbation-performance, or his arrest for stealing and selling books, the *Salon.com* piece that covered the incident two months later called the CPC "startlingly reminiscent of Roberto Bolaño's novel 'The Savage Detectives'" – although the actions of the *real visceralistas* (such as heckling the instructors of creative-writing workshops, selling marijuana to finance their poetry journal, and conspiring to kidnap Mexican Nobel laureate Octavio Paz) make those of the CPC seem positively benign. The piece then goes on to defend the right of bourgeois audiences to attend readings unmolested and to predict that the CPC "like their namesake... will disappear into a footnote." The irony here is that the disappearance of marginal poets like Cesárea Tinajero *because of* their resistance to institutionalization is precisely what drives the novel's protagonists (to eventually disappear themselves into a footnote).<sup>203</sup> But that

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<sup>203</sup> As mentioned in the first chapter, the fate of the *real visceralistas* in the novel is to become the object of study for a minor academic at the "Universidad de Pachuca," who says "Probablemente yo soy el *único* que se interesa por este tema. Ya casi nadie los recuerda. Muchos de ellos han muerto. De otros no se sabe nada, desaparecieron" (550).

The further irony is that what was "disappeared into a footnote" – the flight of the English colonists at Roanoke to the nearby island of Croatoan, now known as Hatteras Island – is a contact zone that produced offspring of mixed European and

an event at one of Zurita's readings should become refracted through Bolaño's representations of the neo-avant garde in Mexico suggests the ahistorical and decontextualized character of these translations into the United States and into English.

In contrast to the *Salon* piece, the report of Zurita's reading in the Chilean newspaper *La Tercera* quotes the poet's reaction to the young activists, which is affectionate and sympathetic without being specific: "Sentí una profunda ternura al ver a estos chicos, porque supe que era el signo de una lucha mucho más profunda, de la poesía contra los poderes de un orden avergonzante" (García). Nostalgia aside, the invocation of CADA is, for Zurita, a universalizable appeal to poetry's resistance of existing power structures, but he does not mention upon whom or what the shame should fall. Without a specific referent, Zurita's support of the action is a support of action in poetry, and poetry as action – in general terms, the old idea of eliminating the enforced separation of art and life. The problem is, however, that without a referent and without context, art actions may be just as capable of reproducing this "orden avergonzante" as resisting it; in this light, the translatability of CADA may become something worrisome.

Zurita's evil double in skywriting, Carlos Wieder – the protagonist of Bolaño's *Estrella Distante* – serves as an extreme example of the collusion of art actions with military and state power. Like Zurita, Wieder, also known as Alberto Ruiz-Tagle, is praised by a literary critic in *El Mercurio* as "el gran poeta de los nuevos tiempos"

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Indigenous heritage, a fact that is deliberately omitted from the U.S. origin mythos, which calls Roanoke a "lost colony."

(45) who “va a revolucionar la poesía chilena” with “la [poesía] que él va a *hacer*” (24-25, emphasis in original); though, unlike Zurita, Wieder is a military aviator who writes his own verses in the sky, these verses read as a parody of Zurita’s own skywriting: in addition to writing verses from the book of Genesis in Latin (“IN PRINCIPIO...CREAVIT DEUS...COELUM ET TERRAM” p.36) Weider also writes aphoristic statements that strongly recall Zurita’s by substituting “Mi Dios es...” with “La muerte es...”: “*La muerte es amistad...La muerte es Chile...La muerte es responsabilidad...La muerte es amor...La muerte es crecimiento...La muerte es comunión...La muerte es limpieza...La muerte es mi corazón.*” (89-91). But the zenith of Wieder’s artistic career is photographic exhibition of the men and women (but mostly women) he had maimed and murdered, extending part of the logic of self-harm into transgression against others.

But to consider the refraction of CADA produced by the neo-Croatoans is to consider only half of the story. When put into conversation with the issue of pathologizing certain types of behavior (through the CPC’s mention of Prozac and Emily Dickinson), the translation of Zurita’s self-harm becomes more difficult. Though the *Salon* piece, along with many others that need to offer such historical summary, refer to Zurita’s attempt at self-blinding with ammonia exclusively as a “protest against the Pinochet regime,” it was also the expression of psychological pain, the pathological aspects of which are alluded to by Zurita’s inclusion of psychiatric documentation in *Purgatorio*. These transfers of pain and affect raise multiple questions of translatability. For instance, the translation of psychological



pain into neurological activity that is measured by an EEG; or the inscription of the body with the pain of ideology; or the semantization of these into poetry: these various transfers between systems of meaning that cannot be directly spoken problematize language's capacity to signify.<sup>204</sup> When these questions are ignored – such as when actions of self-harm are allowed to stand transparently for something else – the tension of (un)translatability is rendered invisible, and the text loses meaning. If Zurita's situation (and Chile's) was so dire he had to resort to bodily transgressions and difficult language in order to express it, subsequent refractions hardly do the context justice with their naive confidence to summarize it in a sentence or two.

Zurita's response to the "Prozac" aspect of the CPC's action, "¿Qué hubiera pasado si a Pablo de Rokha le hubieran recetado Prozac?" might also constitute a counterargument: de Rokha, considered one of Chile's greatest poets, killed himself shortly after his son's own suicide in 1968. Zurita's response also problematizes the CPC's selection of Emily Dickinson instead of another, less domestic poet: for the unvoiced question, one that Zurita surely could not help but feel, is, what would have happened if *Zurita* had been prescribed Prozac?

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<sup>204</sup> Ricardo Yamal, in "La cordura poética y la locura visionaria en la poesía de Raúl Zurita," writes that the inclusion of material like the EEG graph serves specifically to highlight the failure of communication: "El empleo de fotos y diagramas en 'Mi amor de Dios' no sirve para lograr una comunación trascendente del narrador personaje hablante, finalmente, sino que se usa para 'comunicar el abismo que se ha abierto'" (31)

To answer that question we must resort to speculation, but to merely ask it is also to note how this particular refraction presents an aspect of Zurita's work that may otherwise have gone unnoticed due to the consensus around viewing his self-harm as solely a protest. The (relatively) recent introduction of SSRIs and other antidepressants, and the controversies surrounding them, allow us to ask this question that was always there, since ways of normalizing behavior – and art's challenge of them – have existed long before Prozac.

### **Pain, protest, poetry**

In addition to disrupting an oppressive domesticity that had become unbearable, Zurita's self-harm also forms part of his struggle with the untranslatability of experience. In the introduction to the bilingual edition of *Anteparáiso*, he writes, "When we are witness to so much unnecessary pain, all history seems to fail, and with it all the great models for making poetry, art, literature." If we take Zurita at his word, this statement justifies not only his own work's abstraction from history as well as its "new language," but also the rhetoric of rupture – and the performance of that rhetoric – that has been characteristic of the avant-garde. That this message is meant to be generalizable, applicable to all art and not just his own, is established by the opening sentence of this introduction: "A Pledge: I won't dwell on the subject, but the fact is, we make literature, art music, only because we're not happy.... We have not been happy."

Zurita's statement is aligned with what Elaine Scarry writes of the relationship of psychological suffering and art (cited above); yet, his insistence elsewhere that his actions of self-harm serve as the origin of his artistic expression and his ability to communicate complicate Scarry's description of the unspeakability of physical pain. However, I do not see a contradiction here: for, rather than attempting to express physical pain, Zurita uses physical pain as a mode of poetic expression, causing it to function as a signifier. That Scarry should understand physical pain as fundamentally characterized by its "unsharability" can also be understood as a form of untranslatability – a characteristic that pain has in common with poetry, due to its attachment to the signifier. This is not to say that physical pain is like language, but that Zurita translates psychological suffering into the untranslatable form of pain, with the aim of "not simply resist[ing] language but actively destroy[ing] it," unmaking preexisting models of poetry and art in order to create a space for his artistic project (Scarry 4).

If we consider then, still following Scarry's thought, that "physical pain – unlike any other state of consciousness – has no referential content," it becomes increasingly problematic to label Zurita's attempt at self-blinding and the burning of his cheek as simply "protests against the Pinochet regime;" though they did serve as such, they did so through the untranslatability generated by their refusal of referential content, which granted Zurita's work the ability to function poetically and politically in the context

of an actively repressive environment.<sup>205</sup> That such tension should be resolved – that writers can, in brief introductory sketches intended for a vaguely conceived general public, refer to Zurita’s physical pain as simply a protest – moves away from the tension that makes Zurita’s work artistic and into a realm of consensus more befitting of a monument.

In a park in the district of Maipú in Santiago, Chile, there is a small monolith commemorating Eduardo Miño Pérez, with no indication of when the man lived or died, with only the inscription of the words “Mi alma que desborda humanidad, ya no soporta tante injusticia.” Though the stone is weathered, the man it stands for lived recently. On Friday, November 30, 2001, Eduardo Miño went to the plaza in front of the Palacio de La Moneda, the seat of the President of Chile; inside, Michelle Bachelet (at that time Minister of Health, and who would later go on to serve twice as President, but not before serving also as Minister of Defense) was participating in a

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<sup>205</sup> Mario Rodríguez Fernández, writing on *Purgatorio* and *Anteparaiso* during the dictatorship (in 1985) for the *Revista Chilena de Literatura*, reads the inclusion of Zurita’s self-harm in those volumes as a type of “crucifixion del texto” and “escritura flagelada” that employs paradox and a “sujeto equívoco” to generate multiple levels of meaning that “se puede leer a través o detrás de la tachadura” (117). Rodríguez’s reading does not ascribe to Zurita’s work the quality of protest, but does note how both his writing and his self-harm are conditioned by censorship: “En el contexto donde aparece *Anteparaiso* la censura no es solamente un sistema de prohibiciones *explicitas* y de autorizaciones *implícitas* que deviene en un privarse de hablar, por temor a una sanción, sino que el hecho mismo de asumir la lengua, el decir, es un castigo” (120).

This last interpretation is substantiated in various interviews (cited in the bibliography) as well as writings by Zurita, such as ‘Literatura, Lenguaje, y Sociedad,’ which, in Ricardo Yamal’s reading, “Raúl Zurita plantea el conflicto que sufre el lenguaje bajo el sistema militar en Chile desde 1973 en adelante. Señala cómo en una sociedad represiva la lengua misma viene a ser otra instancia de la represión, ejercer la lengua ya es un castigo.” (99)

conference for World AIDS Day. There, Miño distributed a letter to passersby, stabbed himself in the abdomen, and lit himself on fire with flammable liquid; though quickly extinguished and hospitalized, he died of his wounds the next day.

Here is the text of his letter, reproduced in full:

A la opinión pública:

Mi nombre es Eduardo Miño Pérez, CI: 6.449.449-K, militante del Partido Comunista.

Soy miembro de la Asociación Chilena de Víctimas del Asbesto. Esta agrupación reúne a más de 500 personas que están enfermas y muriéndose de asbestosis. Participan las viudas de los obreros de la industria Pizarreño, las esposas y los hijos que también están enfermos solamente por vivir en la población aledaña a la industria.

Y han muerto más de 300 personas de mesotelioma pleural que es el cáncer producido por aspirar asbesto.

Hago esta suprema protesta denunciando:

- 1.- A la industria Pizarreño y su holding internacional, por no haber protegido a sus trabajadores y sus familias del veneno del asbesto.
- 2.- A la Mutual de Seguridad por maltratar a los trabajadores enfermos y engañarlos cuanto a su salud.
- 3.- A los médicos de la mutual por ponerse de parte de la empresa Pizarreño y mentirle a los trabajadores, no declarándoles su enfermedad.
- 4.- A los organismos de Gobierno, por no ejercer su responsabilidad fiscalizadora y ayudar a las víctimas.

Esta forma de protesta, última y terrible, la hago en plena condición física y mental como una forma de dejar en la conciencia de los culpables el peso de sus culpas criminales.

Esta inmolación digna y consecuente la hago extensiva también contra:

- Los grandes empresarios que son culpables del drama de la cesantía que se traduce en impotencia, hambre y desesperación para miles de chilenos.

- Contra la guerra imperialista que masacra a miles de civiles pobres e inocentes para incrementar las ganancias de la industria armamentista y crear la dictadura global.
- Contra la globalización imperialista hegemonizada por Estados Unidos.
- Contra el ataque prepotente, artero y cobarde contra la sede del Partido Comunista de Chile.

Mi alma, que desborda humanidad, ya no soporta tanta injusticia.

Eduardo Miño.

Though this text, like *Purgatorio*, is inextricable from the action of self-harm to which it refers, there is an important distinction to be made: while Miño's letter is well articulated, even moving, it is not poetry nor does it present itself as such. And unlike *Purgatorio* or *Anteparaiso*, it specifically names itself (and the self immolation) as a protest.

A large part of the difference between Zurita's and Miño's writing is that the latter's language stresses what Roman Jakobson calls the referential function: that is to say, the message is oriented toward the context, which in this case is both the specific and general conditions of injustice that have resulted in the suffering of many. But although a referential use of language may seem expedient politically, this may not prove to be the case. While the letter's reference of specific issues – namely, the mention of Pizarreño's use of asbestos and its mistreatment of workers – can serve to convey this information, it is by the same token easily addressed: after Miño's death, Pizarreño simply released a statement saying that they had been in compliance with all laws and that Miño had never been their employee; the government responded by saying that a law prohibiting asbestos in Chile had been

signed the previous July. As for the second half of the letter, in which Miño generalizes his protest against neoliberal policies, imperialist war, and US hegemony, Lautaruo Carmona, who would a few years later become the General Secretary of the Chilean Communist Party, could only express a sense of incomprehensibility:

“cuando una persona de entre nosotros adopta un mecanismo de dar la vida en esta forma de autodestrucción, es que hemos llegado a un nivel que sobrepasa toda barrera desde el punto de vista de la comprensión, de parte de la inteligencia de la gente de lo que está pasando en Chile.”<sup>206</sup> The context in this case seems so all-inclusive, so overwhelming, that its referent is only acknowledged as emotive, and this is the function that finally stands in for the rest: “Mi alma, que desborda humanidad, ya no soporta tanta injusticia.”

This is not to say that poetry cannot be political or that it cannot make ample use of the referential function of language; we need only look as far as Neruda’s *Canto General*, as well as much of his other poetry, to find a distinguished example. Yet it is likely that Neruda’s relatively straightforward *denuncias* and *alabanzas* served as examples of what Zurita should not (or could not) have done. Neruda had been, and still is, strongly criticized for the referential political content of his poetry, and as Felstiner mentions, it was one of the most visible factors in limiting his poetry’s translation into English;<sup>207</sup> furthermore, in addition to being aware that writings like

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<http://www.emol.com/noticias/nacional/detalle/detallenoticias.asp?idnoticia=72625>

<sup>207</sup> Felstiner writes that “before [Neruda] had had a decent hearing [in the United States], international politics set him apart. . . . The Marxist monthly *Masses and Mainstream* began publishing him regularly, and in 1950 issued a translation of

Neruda's praises of Stalin hadn't aged well,<sup>208</sup> Zurita in the 1980s – despite his international actions like the skywriting of “La vida nueva” – was having his work published in Chile. In that context, could Zurita have written of Pinochet as Neruda wrote of Videla without committing himself (as the older poet did) to exile?

*Gabriel González Videla. Aquí dejo su nombre,<sup>209</sup>  
para que cuando el tiempo haya borrado  
la ignominia, cuando mi patria limpie  
su rostro iluminado por el trigo y la nieve,  
más tarde, los que aquí busquen la herencia  
que en estas líneas dejo como una brasa verde,  
hallen también el nombre del traidor que trajera  
la copa de agonía que rechazó mi pueblo. (366)*

Like Zurita, Neruda is also speaking to his present and the future; yet, his speech is significantly more confident in its translatability – both that it would be published and read in the moment, as well as in posterity. Neruda thus uses the referential function

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*Alturas de Macchu Picchu* by ‘Waldeen,’ a professional dancer living in Mexico City when Neruda arrived there as a Communist exiled from Chile....As if to bring out its political drift, the text was published in company with various explicitly militant poems by Neruda and a 1949 speech. The whole collection was entitled *Let the Rail Splitter Awake and Other Poems*, thus giving *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* a partisan stamp that attracted some readers and put off others” (19).

<sup>208</sup> The risk here is that poetry perceived as both referential and political – in other words, “outspoken” (as if poetry should be above all polite) – is easily derided as “propaganda”: Ilan Stavans recalls how “I’m of a generation that came of age with a Neruda who was more about propaganda than about the inner search for truth” (xxxiv), while Robert Bly writes of the *Canto General*, “Some of the pieces are crude propaganda, others fresh and generous poems” (110). Neruda himself admits, in his *Memorias*, that “Yo había aportado mi dosis de culto a la personalidad en el caso de Stalin” (331). But, I think that, when Neruda writes, in “Catástrofe en Sewell,” “Stalin dijo: ‘Nuestro mejor tesoro / es el hombre’, / los cimientos, el pueblo. / Stalin alza, limpia, construye, fortifica, / preserva, mira, protege, alimenta, / pero también castiga,” that there is more than propaganda or personality cult at work.

<sup>209</sup> The Cículo de lectores edition prints “dejo” without the accent, while the Cátedra edition prints it as “dejó.” Though I favor the first, I mention the discrepancy because of the potential shift of agency from the poetic speaker to the object (Videla), as well as the shift from present to past, that the second conjugation denotes.



freely in his militant poetry, naming people, events, species, places, as is characteristic of epic poetry, the genre that informs much of the motivation of the *Canto General*.<sup>210</sup>

That Zurita's writing should shy away from the referential function of language is not to say what he did was not a protest. One should note, however, that – at least within *Purgatorio* and *Anteparáiso* – Zurita leaves the explanation of his self-harm up to others. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, *Purgatorio* begins with “mis amigos creen que / estoy muy mala / porque quemé mi mejilla,” while *Anteparáiso* ends with a letter signed by Diamela Elitit: “El 18 de Marzo de 1980, el que escribió este libro atentó contra sus ojos, para cegarse, arrojándose amoníaco puro sobre ellos. Resultó con quemaduras en los párpados, parte del rostro y sólo lesiones menores en las córneas; nada más me dijo entonces, llorando, que el comienzo del Paraíso ya no iría” (161). Though Zurita will of course discuss these events in interviews and later writing, his speech of them in these books comes across as distanced and disoriented – an effect heightened by unexpected gendering (for example the use of “mala” cited above, or “hecho un madre” toward the end of *Anteparáiso*) and the instability of the speaker's persona (in *Purgatorio*, the speaker refers to themselves in the beginning as “Raquel,” and later writes over the patient's name in the psychologist's report with “Violeta,” “Dulce Beatriz,” “Rosamunda,” and “Manuela”).

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<sup>210</sup> The epic qualities of the *Canto General* can be contrasted with the strongly lyrical voice of his earlier poetry, in particular *Veinte poemas de amor* and the first two *Residencias* (which he later repudiated as too pessimistic, opting instead to support socialist realism).

Unlike Zurita's injured body, or the wounded nation that was its partner, the disruption of the speaking subject accomplished through language has the ability to remain active as long as it has readers. But even as the contested context that surrounds the text becomes pacified or even falls away entirely, it is the text's translations that have the ability to renovate its afterlife – not by updating its language to a more current, hipper domestication, but by re-engaging with the context and code in ways that are strange and estranging. For texts need not encounter their readers on amicable terms: when it comes to literature, as is clear from our examination of Zurita's work in and around the dictatorship, more is to be gained in conflict than consensus.

But how could a translation produce a forceful encounter with a reader? In the next section I will present, as a form of closure, an alternative mode of translation that would maintain the tension of context and code this chapter has treated.

### **Conclusion: Thick Translation**

Translating the disorientation of the subject proves a particular challenge, especially owing to its realization through the disruption of grammatical gender, a feature that English does not share with Spanish. Both Deeny and Schmitt explain this lack of equivalence between the languages through their inclusion of explanatory notes at the end of the volume, acknowledging that this represents a disruption of “traditional poetic diction in Spanish” (Schmitt 213). Yet both also attempt to domesticize these constructions in their English rendering: Deeny, repeatedly, simply

adds “woman” to mark the feminine gender, producing constructions such as “my friends think / I’m a sick woman” (for “mis amigos creen que / estoy muy mala”) and later “a sainted woman” (for “una santa”) and “this enlightened woman” (for “esta iluminada”); meanwhile Schmitt provides an even more domesticized dialectical equivalent in writing “like a muther” for the masculinization in “hecho un madre.”

Because of these domestications, neither Deeny’s nor Schmitt’s translation brings across Zurita’s disruptions of language or subject. Their explanatory notes, moreover, are quite scant: a mere three pages by Deeny, and five by Schmitt. As such, their work operates almost exclusively within the confines of a conventional domestic sphere they do not seek to problematize. In short, their translations do not function as literature, and neither do they serve as the most effective tools to teach literature.

As an alternative, I want to imagine a different type of translation, which might go by different names. After Vladimir Nabokov and his famed translation of Pushkin’s *Onegin*, “I want translations with copious footnotes, footnotes reaching up like skyscrapers to the top of this or that page so as to leave only the gleam of one textual line between commentary and eternity” (127). Later, Kwame Anthony Appiah will echo Nabokov’s desire: rather than “a translation that aims itself to be a literary work,” he has in mind “a different notion of literary translation; that, namely, of translation that aims to be of use in literary teaching; and here it seems to me that such ‘academic’ translation, translation that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context, is eminently worth doing” (399). He calls this mode “thick translation,” a type of

translation that, through its very obtrusiveness and disruption of fluency, “meets the need to challenge ourselves and our students to go further.”

In the case of Zurita, one aspect of the poetry that could benefit from thick translation (and which has been largely neglected by translators) is the pervasive and complicated deployment of messianic tropes and imagery,<sup>211</sup> – a theme important enough to be the basis for numerous titles<sup>212</sup> – which many readers who are not culturally Roman Catholic are unfamiliar and even uncomfortable with. Including such information in glosses or notes would only enrich interpretations of protest in Chile and Latin America.

I will close this chapter with a reflection on a work that might be seen as “untranslatable,” but only if we refuse to translate “thickly”: Cecilia Vicuña’s *PALABRARmas* (1984).<sup>213</sup> Vicuña, like Zurita, is known for her performance and material work, creating installations she calls “precarios” made of fragile biodegradable materials that disintegrate over time. She is also known for her advocacy of indigenous groups and spaces, and is the editor of a remarkable trilingual volume of translated indigenous poetry, *Ül: Four Mapuche Poets: An Anthology* (1998).

The difficulties inherent in translating *PALABRARmas* are visible from the very title: a neologism formed by turning “palabra” into a verb, causing it to contain labor

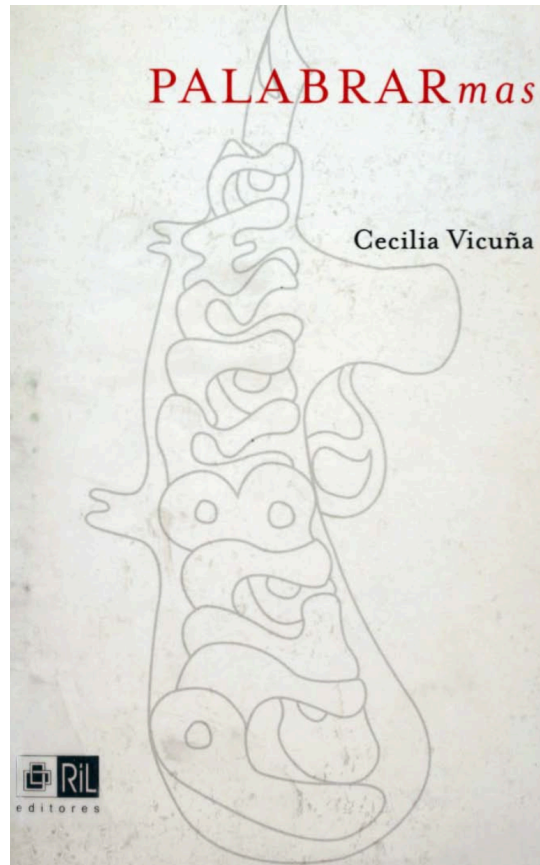
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<sup>211</sup> See Mario Rodríguez Fernández for an exemplary reading of these figures in *Purgatorio* and *Anteparaíso*.

<sup>212</sup> Not only in the Dante-inspired trilogy of *Purgatorio* – *Anteparaíso* – *La Vida Nueva*, but also for works like *El paraíso está vacío* (1984) and *INRI* (2003).

<sup>213</sup> The title of the book is also written by Vicuña as “Palabrarmas”.

(*labrar*) and become weapons (*armas*), or in Vicuña's explanation, "labrar palabras como quien labra la tierra es la única arma permitida" (18). This word mixture is wonderfully expressed by Vicuña's cover illustration, which she drew a decade before the book was published, and in which the uninterrupted line used to draw the words becomes an image of itself:



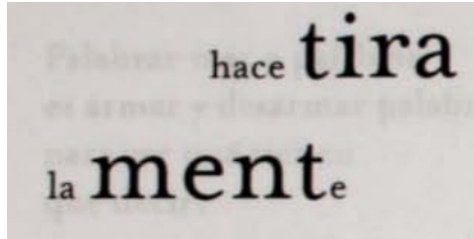
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The poems in the book exhibit the same type of linguistic play present in the title, even taking the form of riddles or "adivinanzas" ("la palabra es la adivinanza / y adivinar / es averiguar lo divino"). For example, "¿el amante del día? / *el diamante*," or, ¿el nido del son? / *el sonido*" or (my personal favorite) "¿qué está solito y

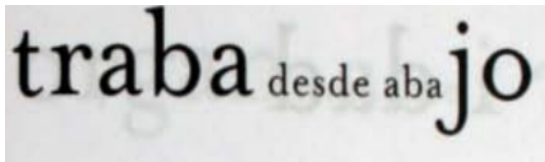
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<sup>214</sup> The picture included is of the book's reprinting in 2005

guardado en el interior? / *lo insólito*”. Some of these even jump between languages, such as “¿qué planeta nos ve desnudos en francés? / *Venus*,” and “¿cuál es el auto inglés alimentado? / *el carcomido*” Other poems rely on typography for their multiple meanings, such as



and



Though these poems might be termed “untranslatable,” I insist that they are not: while there are no exact equivalents (and there never really are), the lexical meanings of each component can be explained. For example, I might produce an interlinear translation with notes that looks something like

### **traba** desde abaj**o**

*impede\* from below*  
**w o r k**

**\*note:** “trabar” (v.tr.), used here in its informal imperative/third-person present indicative form, has a range of different meanings, which include to lock in place, to jam or impede the movement of a person or thing or the normal function of an activity, and also connotes difficulty speaking (a tongue-twister is called a “trabalenguas”) as well as conflict and contention. The word originates from “traba,” a wooden instrument used to accomplish some of these actions, and which has its roots in the Latin “*trabis*.” The *Trabis* was used

to construct the Late Latin “*tripalium*,” an instrument of torture made from three wooden rods; *tripalium* was then modified to the Vulgar Latin *tripaliāre*, meaning “to torture,” and is, in turn, part of the etymology of “trabajo,” or “work” in Spanish. Source: Real Academia Española.

A translation of this sort leads readers of other languages directly to an engagement with Spanish text, while also serving those fluent in Spanish with etymological information they may not be aware of. The commentary provided need not restrict itself to explication of the language however, since a great part of the distance that a text needs to travel – as we saw with translations of Zurita – is historical and cultural as well as linguistic; though clearly, what information is deemed relevant would be highly context-dependent. A translation such as that provided above would disrupt domestic conventions most visibly through its interlinear form, which impedes fluid reading, as well as through its literalness. But most importantly, thick translation (whether interlinear or not) would be more effective at dispelling a homogeneous conception of the receiving language and culture (in addition to those of the source), since these rely heavily on stereotypes that are inevitably problematized when more contextual information is provided, and as more “untranslatable” texts are able to be brought over. Given the abysmally low rates for translation of poetry into the U.S., readers have nothing to lose with this approach, and a world of literature to gain.

## **Conclusion: Translation and Multilingualism**

The process of globalization that makes homogenous conceptions of language and culture untenable did not begin with the 20th Century, nor did it begin with the conquest and colonization of the Americas. Language, and its codification into literature – though frequently used to promote unifying paradigms of identity, such as the nation – has always worked through differentiation and contact with the strangeness of otherness, a fact attested to by sources such as the myth of Babel and the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, in addition to the translational concepts (contact zones, impartibility, and others) reviewed throughout this project. To argue for the increased visibility of non-homogenous reading communities, as my project ultimately does, is also to argue that theories of literature and translation, along with criticism, should take sites of hybridity into account – not merely as objects of study, but as producers of knowledge.

In the first chapter, I examined the potential applications of Roberto Bolaño's theories of literature. Of particular interest was the association of reading with traveling, which Bolaño develops through the ruminations of his characters (one a philosopher, the other a literary critic) as well as through technique, in the extensive deployment of fictionalization, reflexivity, and intertextuality – strategies that require the reader to move back and forth between texts, and between text and reality. The productivity of Bolaño's theories was then demonstrated when applied to a re-reading of literary icon Pablo Neruda and his work, which prompted new potential readings behind the empty signifier of Neruda's famous visage. Encouraged by Bolaño's



reflexivity, these theories were also deployed to produce a reading of Bolaño's own writing, and especially his engagement with detective fiction and its own tradition of theorizing reading and readers.

The discussion of Neruda's fame, as well as Bolaño's engagement with the legacies of detective fiction, posed the question of the afterlife of texts, which Benjamin calls part of the "vital connection" between texts and their translations (76). The chapter briefly considered aspects of literary afterlife with a recounting of the publication history of Neruda's "España en el corazón" and its later incorporation into his *Tercera Residencia*, a volume wherein the language and content varied substantially from its two immediate predecessors – books which were later repudiated by Neruda when he refused to allow their translation into Hungarian, arguing that their pessimism would have deleterious effects for that country's revolutionary struggle.

The examination of literary afterlives continued in the two subsequent chapters of this dissertation. The second chapter contrasted Neruda's fame with that of Gabriela Mistral by reviewing a history of their translations into the United States, noting the way these translations were positioned to intervene in domestic discussions particular to the translator's immediate purposes – thus breaking off from the translatability inherent in the source. Further analysis showed how the limitations of these domestic (and domesticizing) purposes revealed themselves through an inability to conceptualize a non-homogenous audience, laying bare the self-perpetuating cycle that renders the foreignness and strangeness of texts invisible.

The third chapter, through its analysis of the production and reception of Raúl Zurita's *Purgatorio* and *Anteparáiso* – texts written and published under Pinochet's military regime in Chile – considered the role of such visible historical context in the establishment of the text's afterlife. In particular, the legibility of a political referent for Zurita's poetry was put into dialogue with the texts' reflexive language and their inclusion of indices to Zurita's suffering body, such as the photograph of Zurita's burnt cheek on the cover of *Purgatorio*. This analysis revealed a tension between the specificity of these signifiers and attempts (on behalf of Zurita as well as his translator) to make their referents generalizable.

Analysis of the afterlives of texts is one aspect of literary criticism in which concepts provided by translation theories show themselves to be of use. The translatability of texts, a feature that precedes any actual translation, was shown to be a constitutive aspect of poetic tension, as when Zurita tries to speak with his pain about unsayable conditions, or when Mistral incorporates Quechua into an elemental lullaby about the passage of the past. The movement of space and time to which the text is subjected – adventures to other geographies with different traditions, political transitions and upheavals, and of course, being imparted to other languages – may bring this tension into greater relief through the conflicts it provokes, or may neutralize the poetic strangeness of the text through consensus. Close attention to translation provides the critical reflexivity necessary to tell the difference.

Careful consideration of literary afterlives also stands to benefit theories of translation. For example, theories of equivalence in translation, such as Eugene

Nida's distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence, have not sufficiently engaged with the cultural and linguistic phenomena of contact zones, preferring instead to keep source and target separate. Analysis of textual afterlife – which studies of translation do, albeit partially, by studying histories of a text's translation – brings to light moments of intersection and encounter.

Such a story can be told by Cecilia Vicuña's recent book of poetry, *El Zen Surado* (2013). The book has its origins in Vicuña's ill-fated first book of poetry, titled *Sabor a mí*, which was never published in the form that was originally intended. At that time Vicuña was working on her "precarious," ephemeral installations meant to intervene in a particular time and place, though the book was never intended share their fate. A contract for its publication was signed with Ediciones Universitarias de Valparaíso in 1972, and the manuscript circulated among Vicuña's friends and associates – Raúl Zurita claims to remember reading it – but before going to press the military took control and the book was disappeared. In London, Vicuña was able to publish another *Sabor a mí* as a bilingual volume titled *Saborami* (Beau Geste Press, 1973) which contained some of the poems intended for the Chilean *Sabor a mí*, but with a very different emphasis. Rather than being a collection of revolutionary-erotic poetry written and published during the heyday of the continent's first democratically elected Marxist government, the book was transformed, in London, into "the very first howl of pain to emerge from the rubble under which Chile's conscience lies stunned," or "el primer aullido de la consciencia creativa chilena, apareciendo a escasos dos meses de haber sido violado el presente y el futuro chileno" (Felipe

Ehrenberg, from his bilingual introductions to *Saborami*); the English title – *Saborami* – was left untranslated and nonsensical to reflect the “no-lenguaje del dolor” (Juliet Lynd).

The publication of *El Zen Surado*, by printing poems written by Vicuña between 1965 and 1972 – the majority of which were previously unpublished and, according to Vicuña’s acknowledgements page, “encontr[ados] en el fondo de un cajón” – is a conscious attempt to recover that revolutionary spirit, suppressed by a decades-long mourning of what almost was. The book seeks to strike a resonance with the ongoing Chilean student movement begun in 2011, which opposes the neoliberal policies that encourage the privatization of education and have made Chile one of the most expensive countries in which to pursue a university education.<sup>215</sup> The book is dedicated to these students (“Dedico este libro a las estudiantes que marchan desnudas o vestidas por la justicia. La poesía y el futuro dependen de ellas”), and prints photos of their protest; the book’s informative introduction, by Juliet Lynd, remarks upon the uncanny precognitions that Vicuña’s poetry seemed to have, such as a poem about kissing as a revolutionary activity (“Misión”) seeming to anticipate the highly-publicized “Besatón” of July 2011, in which hundreds of kissing protesters staged an occupation of Santiago’s Plaza de Armas (an action then repeated in solidarity by the students of Mexico’s UNAM).

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<sup>215</sup> According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “Chile has the smallest share of public expenditure in tertiary education of all OECD countries: the proportion of private expenditure is about three-quarters (76%), against an OECD average of less than one-third (31%).” (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2014).

I concluded the third chapter of this dissertation by presenting Vicuña's *PALABRARmas* as an example of a text that required what Kwame Anthony Appiah calls "thick translation," a text which, because of its exploitation of the signifier through puns and other language-specific techniques, requires extensive glossing and annotation to bring across to another language. Here, I'm using another work of Vicuña's to underscore the necessity for thick translation's rich descriptions of the cultural and linguistic contexts of literary texts: not only do readers need thick translations to appreciate the differences at stake, but also to stage the types of encounters that generate textual afterlife.

By making reading difficult and discomfoting, thick translations activate zones of contact that inscribe the reader into the process of travel in which their life has met the book's afterlife. Appiah writes that such translations aim to be of use in literary teaching; but given the increasingly common inclusion of translation studies into the curriculums of literature programs, it is worth mentioning that thick translation has the potential to serve the teaching of translation theory as well. If only by calling attention to its status as a translation through its resistance to standards of fluency (inherent in the need for challenge that Appiah calls for), thick translation can illuminate not only the foreign context of literary production, but domestic contexts as well. To meet Appiah's demand that readers "face up to difference" requires the type of double thinking and border gnosis that Mignolo finds in globalized and colonized subjects.

This dis-orientation of the reading subject's position, and the opportunities for the doubling and partition of self and perspective provided by estranging modes of reading, erode the boundaries between language and culture that translation is supposed to overcome; some scholars have pointed out how, paradoxically, it would seem that the (utopian) effect of thick translation is to make translation unnecessary. Mary Louise Pratt writes that "the idea of cultural translation bears the unresolvable contradiction that in naming itself it preserves the distances it works to overcome"; as an alternative, she writes that "we need to refer to other linguistic operations and metaphors...above all multilingualism, translation's mother but thus also, in crucial ways, its definitive other" ("Translation, Infiltrations, Contagion" 34-35). She adds that, though people who are multilingual are capable of translating, the act of translation is not essentially related to multilingualism: "To be multilingual is above all to live in more than one language, to be one for whom translation is unnecessary. The image for multilingualism is not translation, perhaps, but *desdoblamiento* ('doubling'), a multiplying of the self" (35).

If there were only two languages in the world, if contact zones were sites for dichotomous encounters, then this would be true. But even this dissertation, which has had the major limitation of treating texts only in the two most visible languages of the Americas, could not avoid addressing – through translation – the presence of other languages: just within the narrow confines of my project, these range from the influence of indigenous languages like Quechua and Nahuatl on different dialects of Latin American Spanish, to the incursion of other literary systems and traditions in

the presence of languages like French and Latin. Living in more than one language does not eliminate the need for translation, and no one language can be sufficiently mastered so as to make translation unnecessary.

But the value of Pratt's observation comes in its deployment of multilingualism as a figure, or "image,"<sup>216</sup> that serves to interrogate translation as a paradigm for a field of study. Though the products of translation seem to reinforce borders, the process of translation is performed by conflicted subjects in hybrid spaces. Further investigation into these apparent paradoxes is worth doing: a greater awareness of the stakes of multilingualism for both literature and translation studies is necessary to understand borderland subjectivities and polyglot texts.

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<sup>216</sup> Wlad Godzich has offered the alternative of "meme" to describe Pratt's treatment of multilingualism, as it is not yet stabilized to admit a definitive description.

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