

GAPS, TRANSLATIONS,
LOADED WORDS:
Poetics and Current Neruda Criticism

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- EL PENSAMIENTO POÉTICO DE PABLO NERUDA.* By ALAIN SICARD. Translated by Pilar Ruiz Va. (Madrid: Gredos, 1981. Pp. 648.)
- PABLO NERUDA: THE POETICS OF PROPHECY.* By ENRICO-MARIO SANTÍ. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982. Pp. 256. \$19.50.)
- TRANSLATING NERUDA: THE WAY TO MACCHU PICCHU.* By JOHN FELSTINER. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1980. Pp. 284. \$18.50.)
- EARTH TONES: THE POETRY OF PABLO NERUDA.* By MANUEL DURÁN and MARGERY SAFIR. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981. Pp. 200. \$22.50.)

Since Pablo Neruda's death on 23 September 1973, which was precipitated by the Chilean military coup, his readers have gained access to a number of opera posthuma and other texts that enlarge the canon. Eight books of verse were first published commercially by Losada in Buenos Aires in late 1973 and 1974.¹ In the latter year, Neruda's memoirs first appeared in book form, updated to the point of including a final section that interprets the death of Salvador Allende in the storming of the Moneda Palace, which occurred only twelve days before the poet himself died.² From the other extremity of Neruda's career, his wife Matilde Neruda chose and Jorge Edwards edited a selection of youthful writings.³ The biographical record of the twenties and thirties has been brought into sharper focus with the release of the poet's love letters to Albertina Rosa Azócar and his correspondence with the Argentine writer Héctor Eandi, which records Neruda's attitudes during the time he was writing *Residencia en la tierra*.⁴ Despite the considerable interest that these publications have aroused, perhaps none of these addenda in themselves will radically alter the critical perception of a canon that took shape over a period of more than fifty years and embarked on a recognizable "late period" in 1958. Nor are they likely to amend significantly the biographical record, which was thoroughly established in the sixties by

the poet (in the series of memoirs that appeared in the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *O Cruzeiro* and forms the basis of the 1974 book) and his biographers, Margarita Aguirre and Emir Rodríguez Monegal.⁵

Predictably, Neruda criticism has thrived in the ten years following that fatal September of 1973, as evidenced by the publication of collective and individual volumes and many articles.⁶ While the posthumous works and those of the late period in general have received attention, most critical interest still focuses on the major works of the early and middle years. In the last decade (actually since 1972), one neglected important text finally has been given some productive readings. Neruda's most purely "avant-garde" book, *Tentativa del hombre infinito* (1926), waited nearly half a century to be situated in the traditions of the Baudelairian voyage poem and of surrealism (Jaime Alazraki), within the development of the Nerudian speaker (Hernán Loyola), and in the context of stylistic analysis (René de Costa and Luis F. González-Cruz).⁷ With its nocturnal and cosmic setting, its disjunct articulation, and its fusion of self-reflexive, erotic, and transcendental motifs, *Tentativa* will continue to elicit fresh interpretations, but recent critical activity provides useful groundwork.

So far as the posthumous poetry is concerned, the critics have produced mostly surveys of the lot.⁸ By and large, they have discerned in these works singular confirmation of certain previously set directions of the Neruda canon and a marked development of its private and "dark" regions. These last poems were written mostly under the shadow of Neruda's terminal illness. They tend to discourse on dying and sometimes look back at the world from a postmortem perspective. The discourse can be poignant and nostalgic, cryptic, mordantly satirical, or even bitter in tone. In addition, and in keeping with the meditation on mortality, these books develop specific features seen elsewhere in the late Neruda and before, such as the unanswered question (*Libro de las preguntas*), apocalypse (2000), and metaphors relating the speaker with death and the return to nature (*El mar y las campanas*). *Estravagario*, the book that critical consensus believes to have initiated the late period in 1958, undertook to temper Neruda's public voice of the preceding two decades (*Tercera residencia*, written between 1935 and 1945 and published in 1947; *Canto general*, 1950; *Las uvas y el viento*, 1954; and *Odas elementales*, 1954–56). A new insistence reclaimed the private rights of the speaker and renewed attention was paid to areas of poetic experience that the socialist realism of the fifties particularly could not explore. These tendencies were pursued in many of the pages that Neruda subsequently published, and in the last books, the old partisan optimism often recedes in the recognition of the age and illness of the speaker and his century.

Alain Sicard, however, insists that by no means is Neruda's "historical consciousness" absent either from the posthumous works or from

his other writings after 1958. In the course of *El pensamiento poético de Pablo Neruda*, a translation of his lengthy French doctoral thesis, Sicard discusses the entire canon and cites the posthumous books with some frequency. His primary concern is to show their conformity to an overall text that, in his reading, is built essentially on the themes of time and history and that is marked decisively after *Residencia en la tierra II* (1935) by the poet's accession to historical consciousness. While Sicard admits the presence of the maverick tone so often audible from *Estravagario* on, he marshals the powers of dialectical reason, the logical model of contradiction, to retain Neruda within the bounds of Marxist—really communist—ideological propriety. Sicard contends that it is incorrect to postulate an authentic Neruda—say, the voice of *Residencias I* (1933) and *II*—who hid behind a mask of commitment from the Spanish Civil War to the end of the Stalinist period and emerged again in the late fifties, to put on the mask only occasionally thereafter in such works as *Canción de gesta* (1960, devoted to the Cuban Revolution) and *Incitación al nixonicidio y alabanza de la revolución chilena* (1973, written to support the left in the Chilean parliamentary elections of early 1973). For Sicard, the dialectical coherence of the Neruda text reveals not only a sustained play between contraries—collective and individual consciousness, being and non-being, light and darkness—but also a dynamic change produced over the diachronic unfolding of the canon. The seven large sections of *El pensamiento poético* are not organized strictly chronologically, but Sicard does produce a chronological sense of the canon along dialectical lines. He traces the move from avant-garde spatialization, the bid to eternalize the moment in *Tentativa*, to various later stages oriented toward a materialist view of time and history. In *Residencia II*, the speaker's posture as somber witness (“y el testimonio extraño que yo sostengo / . . . es la forma de olvido que prefiero”) points up the impossibility of seizing totality in the dull temporal flow evoked in the book. At most, in the “Tres cantos materiales” of *Residencia II*, a kind of negative eternity is produced, an eternity of inert matter. In the periods of *Tercera residencia* and *Canto general*, practice and historical consciousness (Sicard's terms for Neruda's communism) bring the subject of the poems to conceive of his personal discontinuity, his mortality, in terms of the collective continuity of peoples. After 1958, Sicard finds a dialectical resolution. Looking back on the massive crimes of the Stalin era, Neruda recognizes the “evil continuity” in history, but the resultant pessimism ends up giving a new basis for hope. Impatience with history drives the Nerudian subject to immerse himself in the solitude of the natural world, only to find confirmation there of his material origins.

The return to nature, says Sicard, is effected through the fictional setting of *lo deshabitado*, a world without human presence that the speaker paradoxically enters. The southern Chile of Neruda's childhood

and the ocean are the privileged spaces of *lo deshabitado*, and they reveal the continuity of nature that, according to Sicard, is the later Neruda's substitute for personal discontinuity. Sicard's section on *lo deshabitado*, the longest of the book's seven parts, offers interesting perceptions of the role of nature in Neruda and plausible comparisons drawn from many of the books. True to dialectical form, Sicard takes pains to demonstrate that the fiction of the uninhabited does not stop at being a formula for escape. History once again looms as the cognitive and vital goal of the Nerudian quest. Acknowledging itself as a fiction, *lo deshabitado* ultimately serves as a locus for "understanding history in the complexity of its process."⁹ The older Neruda's view of history differs from that represented in the *Canto general*, his historical text par excellence. Doubt and derision in the face of death, tones especially characteristic of the posthumous books, are raised into a renewed consciousness of history. This final dialectical sublation comes hard but does come, in Sicard's reading. For example, in the apocalyptic *Fin de mundo* (1969) and *2000*, two of the most pessimistic volumes, Sicard discerns a hopeful final stage of their dialectical structure. His conclusion in this regard exemplifies his use of the logic of contradiction:

At the end of a century whose record fills him with bitterness and grief, the poet of *Fin de mundo* and *2000* places his hope in the objective need for change. Notably, it is in the anguished proximity of his own death . . . when he finds the confirmation of that need: it progressively adopts the very appearance of that fatality that will tear him from the human world. By associating with his own unavoidable negation the negation—necessary for the movement of history—of all the negative things that this century contains, Neruda transforms the sense of death into a dimension of historical consciousness. It is a paradoxical procedure: history, perceived by the subject from the fictitious space of his disappearance into matter, becomes naturalized, or, to use a Nerudian expression, "becomes uninhabited." But that uninhabited nature, which in itself is pure presence, does not amount to a rejection or a negation of history. On the contrary, it is the means by which Nerudian materialism reaffirms history: an act of faith, beyond all despair, in its inexhaustible continuity. (P. 455)

Sicard's analysis often swells to such edifying conclusions, in which a certain kind of historical consciousness informed by Neruda's political practice resolves the dialectical flux of the late texts. On more occasions than the one quoted, Sicard portrays Neruda as something like the model militant, who subordinates the awareness of his personal mortality to the larger destiny of history. Even eros fits into this austere pattern. At the end of his section on love, Sicard presents *La espada encendida* (1970) as a synthesis of Neruda's thought. The poem's narration of the triumph over an evil god by an Edenic pair, survivors of a nuclear holocaust, looks forward symbolically to a new beginning for the human race. The love of Rhodo and Rosía is equated with knowledge, and their prime knowledge, in Sicard's reading, is of history: "Love is a discovery

by man of his freedom as a manifestation of necessity. It is history apprehended on the most intimate level of human experience. If love, which always has occupied considerable room in Neruda's poetry, is in the forefront from 1958 on, this is due to its function as catalyst of historical consciousness" (p. 547). Sicard's section on Nerudian love is somewhat subtler than this conclusion lets on. Besides the chapter on love and history, he devotes a whole chapter to love and time, highlighting Neruda's explicit theme of love as a force against individual death in such books as *Cien sonetos de amor* (1960). Nevertheless, in the quoted passage, he pushes his argument for the primacy of historical consciousness over the brink. The model militant with his *deberes* (Neruda's often repeated term) continues as a persona through the late works, but there are more personae than Sicard would have us believe.

Similarly, the reader of introspective books such as *Geografía infructuosa* (1972), the playful but enigmatic *Libro de las preguntas*, and the contemplative *Jardín de invierno* or *El mar y las campanas* may well find it hard to reconcile Sicard's optimistic dialectical resolutions with the ambiguous nature of these late meditations. Often Sicard fails to account for their cryptic language because he is so concerned with abstracting their conceptual content. In his introduction, he apologizes for his decision to attend principally to poetic thought and not to language, a decision possibly made at the beginning of the long gestation period of Sicard's study (1960–77), when poetic thought was a more respectable category than it is today. In any case, the resulting methodology falls into the traditional (Marxist) procedure of refusing to look at language as a material factor that has the power to condition or determine other levels of behavior or experience.¹⁰ By representing language basically as a vehicle for the communication of Neruda's ideas, Sicard in effect presupposes the substantiality of the poetic subject instead of accounting for the process by which that subject is constituted. This approach allows him to reedit to some extent the long-standing confusion (certainly encouraged by the Neruda text itself) of the Nerudian speaker with the biographical Neruda. There is a need for analysis of Nerudian sincerity, of the conversational or confidential voice that is represented particularly in the poetry from 1958 on but also earlier, the voice that Sicard and so many others call "the poet." What are the mechanisms and masks of this representation? To what extent is this voice the figure of a tenacious ideology of the subject and to what extent is it not? Is Neruda's poetics materialist solely because it refers to the material world and the material base of history, or because it places in the foreground the materiality of language, the basic matter of poetry? Sicard is too concerned with conceptual analysis to give much systematic attention to these material questions of poetic representation and language, but they undoubtedly affect what may be abstracted from the text as poetic thought.

While one may doubt that Sicard's critical method and his assumptions about poetic language are themselves materialist, he actively polemicalizes with those Neruda critics whom he labels as idealist: Jaime Alazraki, Emir Rodríguez Monegal, and Saúl Yurkiévich.¹¹ The Marxist critic objects to any shrinking of the historical dimension in Neruda and points to a pattern in these critics' readings that emphasizes an ahistorical version even of works such as *Canto general*. The idealists, Sicard says, depreciate Neruda's commitment to history, preferring that poetry not speak of history, and by postulating a prophetic constant for the canon (Monegal), or a mythic one (Yurkiévich), they also tend to deny that Neruda's poetry itself has a history of changing emphases.

It is true that although the three critics mentioned give considerable due to the historical and ideological reference in Neruda's poetry, none of them is concerned with promoting its instrumental political message in the way that Sicard is. They either propose a different center of gravity for the poetry or insist on a plural poetics, such as Yurkiévich's coupling of the mythic and the historical as equally important bases of *Canto general*. If by associating the three, Sicard somewhat effectively points to a common strain of resistance to a Marxist reading of Neruda, the only one of the three who comes out looking particularly idealist is Alazraki. Rereading him in the light of Sicard's characterization, one may object to Alazraki's normative dependence on Vedic and Borgesian principles in his identification of pantheistic elements in Neruda.¹² But Sicard's dialectical privileging of the historical vision can seem excessively monothematic and idealist in its own way.

In rejecting Rodríguez Monegal's identification of prophecy as Neruda's basic "system," Sicard argues that this interpretation limits Neruda's poetic thought to idealist and religious notions that were already on the wane in *Residencia I*, despite the allusion to "lo profético que hay en mí" as the source of inspiration in the poem "Arte poética" and despite the reference to prophecy in the letters to Eandi (571–72). What is already foreseen in the *Residencias*, Sicard says, is a "demystified" view of poetry as labor and an assumption by the speaker of the attitude of witness rather than prophet. Sicard in this way can represent Neruda's move, beginning in the *Residencias*, away from irrationalism and onto the surer rational ground of historical consciousness. Sicard does not elaborate much on the distinction between the irrational visionary and the mode of witness, however, and he misses the opportunity of tracing changes in the visionary and prophetic voice over the spread of the Neruda canon.

This line of inquiry, which was begun by Rodríguez Monegal, has been richly developed by Enrico-Mario Santí in *Pablo Neruda: The Poetics of Prophecy*. If Sicard exemplifies the most comprehensive and most balanced reading of Neruda from a traditional Marxist commitment, Santí

works at the frontier of current North American academic criticism, combining refined rhetorical analysis with a broad awareness of biblical, Romantic, and other Western literary modes, as well as some deconstructive notions and procedures. His stated general goal in studying Neruda's prophetic strain, which is also compatible with Monegal's criticism, is to relate the poetry to the Western tradition under the supposition that Latin American writing always involves a dialogue with that tradition. This approach is not an imperialist attempt to hustle Neruda under the umbrella of metropolitan literary culture. It takes two to dialogue, and Santí manages to discern the differences between Neruda and his Western others. Santí's sensitive and theoretically grounded analyses of the major prophetic texts, his comparative readings, and his achieved purpose of restoring "a sense of distance to the criticism of Neruda" produce a long-needed redefinition of Neruda's poetics that subsequent studies will have to take into account.

By prophecy, Santí means not "its occasional connotation of augury or prediction but rather its more precise sense of knowledge by vision or revelation . . . not simply the predictive posture that one normally associates with the figure of the biblical prophet, but the more general and less specialized figure of the poet in the act of articulating significant and sometimes absolute knowledge." Santí's interest bears on "the *representation* of that knowledge and not the poet's actual thought" (pp. 14–15). That representation emerges in Santí's readings from a heightened sense of the artifice inherent in the "textual theater." Such an approach to representation contrasts sharply with Sicard's category of poetic thought, which implies a sovereign subject. While Sicard does not distinguish often enough between "the poet" and his textual representation, Santí attends scrupulously to the distinction, thereby freeing his reading from biographical explanation and from the proprietary claims by Neruda to the interpretation of his "own" works, claims that are found throughout the poetry itself and in speeches and articles. Sicard leans on Neruda's programmatic statements to corroborate his version of "Nerudian Poetics" (the seventh and last section of *El pensamiento poético*), but Santí takes the trouble to lay out a circumspect definition of poetics that avoids dependence on authorial statements:

The nature of a poetics, not unlike the nature of ideology itself, is that it remains always partially hidden to both poet and reader, much as the structure of a language remains unthought by its native speakers. Poetics, then, is not simply the answer to the question that the poem poses, but the space where the poet's desire plays itself out—the trace of an origin whose loss the poem dramatizes. . . . As prophecy describes a lack in the speaking subject by locating the origin of his message outside of him, so poetics assumes the kind of reading that exposes the discordance of intention and origin that underlies all poetic discourse. (P. 19)

Sicard effectively views the poetic word as loaded with meaning by the poet, in a conscious process of poetic labor. Santí, recognizing the gap between conscious intention and the linguistic and unconscious elements that deflect or unseat intention, can read the poems in greater freedom and against the poet's declarations when such a reading is called for.

Several of Santí's analyses must be counted among the subtlest and most coherent available. No one has explained the structure of *Residencia I* and *II* more convincingly. Typical commentaries have tended to break down into discussions of individual poems and the overall existential ambience of the two books, without accounting for the sequence of the poems or the differences between the two books. In two substantial chapters, Santí expounds the journal structure of these *Residencias*, traces the "dramatic evolution of a prophetic speaker" in them, and logs the vicissitudes of poetic vision. In the first volume, the speaker begins by seeking accommodation with his negative vision of the ravages of time ("Galope muerto"). Surrounded by the whirl of material experience, the subject is then forced to resort to other strategies that are intended to produce atemporal presence: the (failed) experience of love in "Alianza (Sonata)" and the vision of dream in "Caballo de los sueños." The outcome in the first book is an awakening to failure ("Débil del alba") in which the subject sees his image in a world of "derangement, isolation and formlessness" (p. 56). Santí's analysis does not remain on the level of theme, but continually highlights textuality to show how writing conditions the world of the *Residencias*. The journal structure explains why the poetry so constantly evokes common objects and occurrences

as if wishing to fill the vacuum of aimless temporal succession with the dross and regularity of daily experience. Yet writing fills the vacuum not with things, as critics have mistakenly argued, but only with words. . . . Instead of allowing the subject to integrate with the object—or, in temporal terms, to attain the experience of infinity—the poem partially temporalizes that object and that goal and removes both from immediate consumption. . . . It is the counterpoint of expressive commitment and ironic demystification that causes the dissonance we encounter at every step between the speaker's desire for presence, on the one hand, and his experience of difference—historical or linguistic time—on the other. (P. 58)

Santí, like Sicard, finds a definite failure of vision in *Residencia II*. Neither critic sees any real solution to the problem of time and presence in the poem "Entrada a la madera" ("soy yo con mis lamentos sin origen / llegando a tu materia misteriosa"). Sicard notes the absence of any element of historical consciousness in the subject's entry into matter and argues that the poem is a dead end because of the recurrent figures of death that dominate it. For Sicard, historical consciousness is produced

by a virtual break occurring in *Tercera residencia* and *Canto general*. He appeals to biography, citing the “lessons of praxis”—the Spanish Civil War and Neruda’s affiliation with the Communist party of Chile—as the cause of this break (pp. 258–303). Santí portrays the move as more of a transition than a break. He emphasizes the poetic, rather than biographical, process of conversion that from “Entrada a la madera” on dramatizes the new terms of vision. Santí borrows the formula of conversion from Dantean studies, quoting John Freccero and Giuseppe Mazzotta. This formula stresses the key role of retrospection in the conversion poem: the subject must look back on the past from a position of “self-understanding” and “ontological coherence.” Here it may seem that Santí’s theoretical sources threaten to take over his analysis. He devotes little space to *Tercera residencia* because in lacking abundant retrospection, it does not meet the dramatic requirements of the conversion formula. This opinion is debatable. Taken on its own terms, *Tercera residencia* looks back repeatedly (“Reunión bajo las nuevas banderas,” “Explico algunas cosas”) and the vision of contemporary history dramatizes the urgency of the speaker’s new outlook (“Venid a ver la sangre por las calles,” in the poem “Explico algunas cosas”). Santí, however, is describing a diachronic process in the canon, and he contends convincingly that the “inchoate attempts” of *Tercera residencia* lead to Neruda’s definitive setting of conversion, *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* (1946). Santí’s short discussion of *Tercera residencia* does conform to his salutary practice of carefully detailing the act of representation in Neruda.

Alturas is important to Santí’s argument not only because it represents conversion fully, but because it announces the new mode of prophecy that is developed in *Canto general*. The chapter on *Alturas*, entitled “Prophecy of Writing,” is the centerpiece of his book. It expounds the conversion structure, the poem’s dialogue with Western tradition and the implications of this dialogue for the poem’s ambition to stand as a truly American cultural monument, and finally, the metaphor of writing proposed in *Alturas*. Along the way, an unusually coherent account emerges of the formal design of the poem, although formal analysis serves the points under discussion rather than becoming an end in itself.

In a departure from much previous criticism, Santí does not treat *Alturas* as a poem that simply summons the presence of the Inca ruins and of Latin American history. He shows where Neruda’s writing (like writing in general) marks the distance between word and thing. The idiosyncratic spelling “Macchu,” which adds a *c* sanctioned by no Quechua dictionary and underscores the nonreferential status of the poem’s ruins, is one mark of this difference. Another is the list of seventy-two epithets that make up Canto IX (“Aguila sideral, viña de bruma / Bastión perdido, cimitarra ciega”), which becomes a linguistic construct displacing the physical ruins and subordinating them to the purposes of

the poem. For Santí, the final three cantos round out the metaphor of writing and underscore its consequences. In Canto X, the ruins are demystified. Abandoning archaeology, the speaker repeatedly invokes the hunger and poverty that lay at the base of the splendid Andean city. In the final two cantos, the resurrection of Macchu Picchu workers takes place as a “trick of vision”: not an idealized return of the dead, but their rebirth through writing. “Neither an elegy nor a mystic poem, *Alturas* . . . is an allegory that asserts a negative knowledge as part of its statement on history and culture” (p. 170). It is impossible to summarize here the intricate reasoning that leads to Santí’s conclusions. Some of that reasoning may surprise the readers for whom Neruda is the poet of presence, but the chapter persuasively shows that *Alturas* contains its own deconstruction of that problematic category and also the category of a wholly separate Latin American cultural identity. No clearer exposition of the scene of writing in *Alturas* has been made, and after decades of obvious interpretations of the poem’s solidarity with the workers, Santí’s graphocentric reading illuminates the density and complexity of the text that always remain as enigmatic supplements after one reads those obvious interpretations.

Santí entitles his chapter dealing with *Canto general* “The Politics of the Book.” True to his focus on poetics, he does not elaborate on the content of Neruda’s political message, but shifts the stress from the *politics* of the book to the politics of the *Book*, the strategies and ideological gestures involved in creating a major work that stands as a Marxist analogue to the Bible. Keeping a critical distance from ideology that Sicard would not take, Santí argues that “far from being at odds with Neruda’s Marxist politics, the rhetoric of biblical prophecy confirms an affinity with Marxism, which is heir to the prophetic tradition” (p. 22). After making his case for the primacy of biblical rhetoric in the book, Santí notes its lack of an apocalypse. In his remaining chapter, Santí portrays Neruda as needing an apocalypse after *Canto general*. It finally came in late books, especially *La espada encendida*, which Santí shows to be modeled on Blake’s apocalypse. Reading *La espada* through *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which he conclusively shows to be Neruda’s model, Santí argues the coherence and importance to the canon of a complex book that a casual reading might dismiss as too subservient to traditional rhetoric.¹³

Santí’s exclusion of a good share of the canon does not lessen the significance of his book. The exclusion permits concentration and unhurried development of the analyses that do appear. Santí does not claim that prophecy informs all of Neruda’s poetry, but readers will see its pertinence to many texts that Santí does not consider “major.” If his analyses tend toward intricacy and even abstraction (as in the chapters on *Residencia en la tierra*), this tendency is in response to the textual

intricacy of the poetry and the phenomenological nature of the story it tells. Santí's *Pablo Neruda* is the strongest and most provocative reading published on the subject since the poet's death.

Both of the critical books presented thus far "translate" Neruda's text into a conceptual scheme that is called a reading. Interpretation is a form of translation involving a rewriting in analytical language of the "original" or object-text.¹⁴ The converse—that translation is a form of interpretation—may never have been so suggestively and thoroughly shown as in John Felstiner's *Translating Neruda: The Way to Macchu Picchu*. If not the first, this book is one of the first to document in detail the genesis of a major translation.¹⁵ Nor does Felstiner limit himself to an empirical description of his efforts in rendering *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*. He also produces "an essay on the practice and theory of translation—an essay whose chief instance is a new verse rendering of Neruda's major poem" (p. 2). In addition, he actively demonstrates how interpretation goes into and comes out of translation. The book succeeds well in these various goals, not to speak of the high quality of the poems it offers: the outstanding full translation of *Alturas* that appears in bilingual format at the end of the volume and the strong English versions of several key texts from the earlier part of Neruda's career. These translations illustrate the three middle chapters of the five that precede the *Alturas* text.

Neruda's persistent figure of the journey, used by commentators to characterize the poet's life and text, serves as a structuring principle of Felstiner's book. It applies to Neruda, to Felstiner himself, and even to his reader. Part of Felstiner's story is the autobiographical account of how a poet nursed on New Criticism and T. S. Eliot at Harvard in the 1950s made his way to *Macchu Picchu* and Neruda. The account includes a mid-sixties trip to the Peruvian ruins with *Alturas* as a guide as well as the intellectual and emotional voyage from Eliot and the ideology of irony to Neruda's more expansive humanitarian and activist stance. In the late fifties and sixties, Felstiner (and other North American poets such as Robert Bly and James Wright) were struck by Neruda's intense political commitment, which as Felstiner notes had virtually no parallels in English-language poetry of the twentieth century. Felstiner does not depict the move from Eliot to Neruda as an absolute turnabout, however. He finds grounds for comparison of the two poets' meditations on historical monuments. Both of them (and a number of North American poets whom Felstiner cites) work with a concept that Felstiner, with his New Critical roots, calls *dynamic form*. The most notable difference lies in the spiritualization that dominates Eliot's work with time. Neruda "aims at a secular rebirth and makes himself the agent of it," unlike Eliot, who "would never play the healing or suffering servant of humanity" (pp. 166–67). The advantage in Felstiner's reading Neruda through Eliot as

well as Whitman and William Carlos Williams is to naturalize aspects of Neruda and to mark those aspects that remain outside the coordinates of English-language poetry. The Anglo-American reader can begin or continue a journey toward Neruda in empathy with this account of Felstiner's move.

Felstiner likens his own passage to Neruda's transition from the earlier poetry to *Alturas*, the watershed of the canon. He chronicles Neruda's journey from the twenties to the mid-forties in biographical detail and literarily in the poet's "translating" experience into verse. "Galope muerto," the first poem of *Residencia I*, is the locus classicus of this translative operation, which culminates in *Alturas*. Seen from the point of view of translation, the striving of language in "Galope muerto" need not seem a failure of poetic form, as it did from Amado Alonso's stylistic platform in his pioneering book on Neruda of 1940.¹⁶ Felstiner suggests a kinship between the tentative movement of "Galope muerto" and his own act of translating the poem, observing that "any job of translation proceeds experimentally, trying whatever word, image, phrase, sound, or rhythm will take the new version where it needs to go. . . . But when the original itself sounds as though Neruda were translating from inchoate, unworded notions into a form of verbal comprehension, then his translator will have a similar mimesis to go through" (p. 63). The somber title of "Galope muerto," combining movement and death, and the group of apposite negative images that begin the poem give way to a somewhat contrasting closure with the urgent natural image of squash plants "stretching their poignant stems." Whether or not this movement prefigures Neruda's own in later years from the vision of death to the vision of urgent human political necessity (as Felstiner also suggests, following Jaime Concha's *Neruda: 1904–36*), Felstiner's depiction of the poem's speaker as translator effectively underscores the prophetic or visionary mode of "Galope muerto" and anticipates the speaker's role as translator of the record of the ruins in *Alturas*.¹⁷

The main log of Felstiner's journey to Neruda is the fifty-page chapter entitled "Translating *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*," a virtual line-by-line commentary on the problems and perceptions involved in rewriting in English a poem that is in itself a monument. Felstiner's criteria of translation steer a course between the shoals of excessive literalism and overingenious elaboration on the Spanish text, bearing prudently toward the literal. He recognizes that rhythmic equivalents are nearly as important as lexical ones, and his observations on this problem of translation say much about Neruda's acoustics and about the rhythmic contrast between the two languages. However unfashionable it may be in some circles to value voice over script, Felstiner paid special attention to three recordings of Neruda reading *Alturas*. This source helped guide him in

plotting his own rhythms, for “to get from the poet’s voice into another language and into a translator’s own voice is the business of translation. It depends on a moment-by-moment shuttle between voices, for what translating comes down to is listening—listening now to what the poet’s voice said, now to one’s own voice as it finds what to say” (p. 151). While there are modern poets about whom such a statement would be mostly metaphorical, the vocal mimesis of most of the text of *Alturas* and Neruda’s poetry in general justifies Felstiner’s approach.

The *Alturas* chapter also deals at length with the lexical transfer, shuttling moment by moment between discussion of Neruda’s heightened, ceremonial diction, Felstiner’s English choices, and those of previous translations.¹⁸ As translator, Felstiner attends carefully to the repetition of words and images; and his cross-references sensitively display the texture of the poem. Considering Canto IX (that long verb-free series of epithets for Macchu Picchu), for example, he observes a precise level of the writing process: “Because many of these words have occurred before in contexts closer to narrative—eagle, mist, lost, blind, bread, torrential, ladder, pollen, stone—their reappearance here in set formulas shows Neruda gathering fragments that were dispersed, so as to sustain and maybe even reconstruct the city with his words” (p. 180). The chapter is filled with such aperçus. Besides yielding many insights into the theory and practice of translation, Felstiner’s detailed observations about the Neruda text constitute a unique model of “close reading.”

Santí begins his book by stating, “There is no longer any need to introduce Pablo Neruda to the English-speaking world. Years before he received the Nobel Prize in 1971, translations of his major poetry had made his work familiar to readers in this country and abroad” (p. 13). Such a declaration frees Santí from the obligations of rehearsing the biographical chronology or making perfunctory reference to works that do not display the prophetic mode. Several other English-writing critics and their publishers, however, have assumed a need for book-length critical introductions in the years since Neruda’s death. Of these, Manuel Durán’s and Margery Safir’s *Earth Tones: The Poetry of Pablo Neruda* most effectively addresses what its authors term in the preface “the general reading public.”¹⁹

Durán and Safir do not expect their general reader to be familiar with Neruda. They provide a generous narrative of his life as context for their presentations of all periods of the work. The overall sense is that poetry is expression, and the titles of the first four chapters reinforce this model: The Erotic Poet, The Nature Poet, The Public Poet, The Personal Poet. Fusing poet and speaker in analysis is more justifiable in a guide than in specialized studies, and to their credit, Durán and Safir use these chapters to trace a versatile itinerary based not simply on chronology, but

on Neruda's thematic diversity and continuity. The nature poet, for example, is studied not only in the obvious places from *Crepusculario* (1923) to *Las piedras de Chile* (1970), but against the cosmic backdrop of *Tentativa del hombre infinito* and the menacing cityscapes of *Residencia de la tierra*. Both the variety of natural settings and the persistence of Neruda's concern with external environment come through here in clear detail, and the picture is framed with applicable comparisons to the literary context.

The fifth and final chapter on "The Posthumous Poetry" is one of the more perceptive surveys available, and the first of its kind in English. It also contains some of the first translations of these texts into English. Throughout the book, translation figures importantly in the authors' strategy for naturalizing Neruda. Their general reader does not necessarily read Spanish, so quotations are monolingual, and readable quotations they are. The poet Durán provides a generous supply of extracts in his own verse translations, which compare favorably with the renderings typically included in English-language books of criticism and even with some of the work in volumes of translation.²⁰ In both the translations and the analyses of *Earth Tones*, the general reading public should find much more than a utilitarian introduction to Neruda.

NOTES

1. *La rosa separada* and *El mar y las campanas* were both published in 1973; *Jardín de invierno*, 2000, *El corazón amarillo*, *Libro de las preguntas*, *Elegía*, and *Defectos escogidos* were all published in 1974. According to Emir Rodríguez Monegal, Neruda planned to publish the first seven of these books to celebrate his seventieth birthday, which would have occurred in 1974. See *Neruda: el viajero inmóvil* (Caracas: Monte Ávila, 1977), pp. 237–38.
2. *Confieso que he vivido: memorias* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1974); translated as *Memoirs* by Hardie St. Martin (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977).
3. Neruda, *El río invisible: poesía y prosa de juventud* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1980). Matilde Neruda and Miguel Otero Silva have edited prose pieces from different stages of Neruda's career, many of which had not previously appeared in book form, in *Para nacer he nacido* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1977).
4. *Cartas de amor de Pablo Neruda*, edited by Sergio Fernández Larraín (Madrid: Rodas, 1974). Pablo Neruda and Héctor Eandi, *Correspondencia durante "Residencia en la tierra,"* edited by Margarita Aguirre (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1980). Another volume of correspondence contains Neruda's letters to his sister: *Cartas a Laura* (Madrid: Cultura Hispánica, 1978).
5. Margarita Aguirre, *Las vidas de Pablo Neruda* (1967; 2nd rev. ed. Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1973). Rodríguez Monegal, *Neruda: el viajero inmóvil* (1st ed., 1967; 2nd ed. cited). Jaime Concha has contributed a sociologically oriented study of the early life and works in *Neruda: 1904–36* (Santiago de Chile: Universitaria, 1972). A biographical curiosity in the tradition of anti-Neruda diatribes is Jurema Yary Finamour, *Pablo e Dom Pablo* (Rio de Janeiro: Nórdica, 1975).
6. Notable books and bibliographies published since Neruda's death (not cited elsewhere in this essay) include the following collective volumes: *Aproximaciones a Pablo Neruda*, edited by Ángel Flores (Barcelona: Ocnos, 1974); and *Simposio Pablo Neruda: actas*, edited by Isaac Jack Lévy and Juan Loveluck (New York: Las Américas, 1975). Individual volumes include: Eduardo Camacho Guizado, *Pablo Neruda: naturaleza, historia y poética* (Madrid: Sociedad General Española de Librería, 1978); Luis Rosales,

- La poesía de Neruda* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1978); Gastón Soublette, *Pablo Neruda: profeta de América* (Santiago de Chile: Nueva Universidad, 1980); and Juan Villegas, *Estructuras míticas y arquetipos en el "Canto general" de Neruda* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1976). Bibliographies are Horacio Jorge Becco, *Pablo Neruda: Bibliografía* (Buenos Aires: Casa Pardo, 1975); and Enrico-Mario Santi, "Fuentes para el conocimiento de Pablo Neruda, 1964-74," in *Simposio Pablo Neruda*, cited in note 4, pp. 355-82.
7. Jaime Alazraki, "El surrealismo de *Tentativa del hombre infinito*," *Hispanic Review* 40 (1972): 31-39; Hernán Loyola, "*Tentativa del hombre infinito*: 50 años después," *Acta Litteraria Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 17 (1975): 111-23; René de Costa, *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 41-57; Luis F. González-Cruz, *Neruda: de "Tentativa" a la totalidad* (New York: Abra, 1979).
 8. A rare extended treatment of a single posthumous book is Eliana Rivero, "Análisis de perspectivas y significación de *La rosa separada* de Neruda," *Revista Iberoamericana* 42 (1976): 459-72.
 9. Sicard, *El pensamiento poético*, p. 413. Subsequent references to this and the other books under review will be found in the text. English translations from Sicard are mine. They are translations of the generally reliable Spanish translation from the French original by Pilar Ruiz Va. Sicard's thesis was presented to Université de Bordeaux III and published in Lille in 1977.
 10. For a somewhat trendy, but reasoned, discussion of the need to integrate Marxist thought with current linguistic and philosophical theory, see Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977). A poststructuralist view of these issues is Michael Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982).
 11. Three texts by these critics that Sicard cites may be consulted in the collective volume *Pablo Neruda*, edited by Emir Rodríguez Monegal and Enrico-Mario Santi (Madrid: Taurus, 1980): Alazraki, "Para una poética de la poesía póstuma de Pablo Neruda"; Rodríguez Monegal, "El sistema del poeta"; and Yurkiévich, "Mito e historia: dos generadores del *Canto general*."
 12. Alazraki, "Poética de la penumbra en la poesía más reciente de Pablo Neruda," *Revista Iberoamericana* 82-83 (1973): 263-91.
 13. See my own early short review of *La espada encendida*, *Books Abroad* 45 (1971): 669.
 14. I have discussed the affinity between interpretation and translation in "Vallejo Interpreted, Vallejo Traduced," *Diacritics* 8, no. 4 (1978): 16-27.
 15. Smaller-scale accounts do exist: Ben Belitt, *Adam's Dream: A Preface to Translation* (New York: Grove, 1978); Clayton Eshleman's various writings on translating César Vallejo, especially his preface to his and José Rubia Barcia's edition of Vallejo, *The Complete Posthumous Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Octavio Paz, "El Soneto en ix [of Mallarmé]," in Paz's *El signo y el garabato* (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1973).
 16. Alonso, *Poesía y estilo de Pablo Neruda: interpretación de una poesía hermética* (2nd ed. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1968).
 17. Here and at other points, Felstiner and Santi complement each other. Santi builds on Felstiner when he observes a "poetics of translation" in the final cantos of *Alturas* (pp. 155-56). The prime difference in their accounts of *Alturas* is marked by Santi's more cautious view of the poem's ideological project.
 18. Other English translations of *Alturas* cited by Felstiner include an early version by Ángel Flores in *The World's Best*, edited by Whit Burnett (New York: Dial, 1950); Ben Belitt's, which Felstiner characterizes as overingenious, in *Selected Poems of Pablo Neruda* (New York: Grove, 1961); and Nathaniel Tarn's *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*, of which Felstiner has much good to say, despite reservations about Tarn's reinforcement of Christian imagery and some of his other lexical and rhythmic solutions.
 19. Other guides in English include Salvatore Bizzarro, *Pablo Neruda: All Poets the Poet* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1979), useful for the transcriptions of the author's interviews with Delia del Carril and Matilde Urrutia de Neruda, women important in the poet's life; and René de Costa, *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*, a guide to major works through *Estravagario* (see note 7).

20. Literary critics do not always take much care in composing or editing their illustrative translations. René de Costa's otherwise thoughtful guide offers "plain prose translations," which would be more serviceable with fewer errors (see especially the quotations to the useful chapter on *Tentativa del hombre infinito*).