

# NERUDA IN ENGLISH: WALDEEN'S "LOST" TRANSLATIONS FROM *CANTO GENERAL*

Jonathan Cohen



Waldeen in the country outside of Mexico City, about 1950

Waldeen, thank you, for your poems  
of my poems, which are better than mine.  
—Pablo Neruda, trans. Asa Zatz

Waldeen von Falkenstein (1913–93)—known professionally by her first name alone—was a dancer born in Texas, raised in California, and ultimately made a Mexican citizen. She became not only the celebrated founder of modern dance in Mexico during the 1940s but also an important translator of the poetry of Pablo Neruda; specifically, his *Canto general*. She created dance for more than half a century. While her work as a prima ballerina and choreographer is well described,<sup>1</sup> her work as a translator, largely obscured by time, has not received much attention.

Its recovery is essential to inter-American letters. Her translations from *Canto general* published in the early 1950s, including her 1948 publication of the poem "Let the Rail Splitter Awake" that became part of the epic, introduced many to the genius and "expansiveness," as Allen Ginsberg put it, of Neruda's voice.<sup>2</sup> Waldeen, however, has yet to gain the recognition she deserves for her significant contribution, through translation, to American poetry.

As the originator of a new form of modern American ballet, and as the first to translate a substantial body of Neruda's *Canto general* into English, Waldeen boldly expanded the bounds of speech in both dance and poetry, two different but sister arts. They are deeply connected by music and the rhythmic phrasing, or measure, inherent in their respective artistic languages. Ezra Pound makes this connection in his *ABC of Reading*: "Music rots when it gets *too far* from the dance. Poetry atrophies when it gets too far from music."<sup>3</sup> Waldeen's translations of Neruda are distinguished by her understanding of the essential relationship between poetry and music and their common root in dance.

In early 1939, at the age of 26, Waldeen's career as a dancer led her to Mexico City. She moved there from New York City at the request of the Mexican Ministry of Education, which had invited her to create a national ballet and school of modern dance under the auspices of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (Fine Arts Department). It was a good time for her to go to Mexico, where her dance was much admired. The arts were flowering: The muralist movement was at its peak, and in music and literature Mexico was coming into its own as well. Her circle of friends would include the leading writers and artists of the so-called Mexican Renaissance. And it was in Mexico that Waldeen met Neruda soon after he arrived, in 1940, as Chile's consul general (until 1943). He naturally joined her social world, and the two of them became lifelong friends.

Waldeen enjoyed several major triumphs in Mexico as both a dancer and choreographer. Her most famous ballet, perhaps, is *La coronela* (The lady colonel), first performed in 1940. This satiric ballet, which focused thematically on Mexico's Revolution of 1910, was based on the popular engravings of José Guadalupe Posada, and it marked the beginning of a truly Mexican form of ballet. She achieved what she demanded of dancers: an honest success, the slowly constructed, soundly complex, aesthetically fresh art form capable of arousing enthusiasm in universal audiences through its inspiration, beauty, and humanity. In Neruda's words, her contribution to dance formed "un luminoso ejemplo de cómo, sin desprenderse de las realidades del mundo, se puede llevar el arte a su flor esencial" (a shining example of how, without being cut off from the world's realities, art can bear its essential flower).<sup>4</sup>

During an extended sojourn to pursue dance in New York City in the late 1940s, after having worked in Mexico for more than six years, Waldeen started translating poems that would form part of Neruda's *Canto general*. Her friend Luis Enrique Délano, a Chilean writer and diplomat who had served in Mexico with Neruda as vice consul, asked her to translate "Que despierte el leñador" ("Let the Rail Splitter Awake"), originally composed in the spring of 1948.<sup>5</sup> Her creative energy was boundless: after long days of teaching dance and doing choreography she would head home, close to midnight, to work on her Neruda. Her translation made its debut appearance that year in the October issue of *Masses and Mainstream*, with a special fanfare by the editors of this new monthly magazine of the Communist Party. Waldeen was also making translations of Neruda's other new poems. But her experience in New York was less than ideal. She was still very much at odds with the dance establishment (i.e., the cold, angular style of Martha Graham). Meanwhile, her dancers in Mexico were writing to ask her to return. And so, in August 1948 she went back to Mexico, reforming her school and choreographing for a new group, Ballet Nacional, with which she would travel into remote regions of the country, dancing in rural schools, village plazas, stadiums, and fields.

In the fall of 1949 Waldeen performed a dance adaptation/translation of “Let the Rail Splitter Awake” at the closing session of the six-day American Continental Congress for World Peace, held in Mexico City. Her elaborate ballet featured a dozen dancers wearing costumes and masks, accompanied by a recorded dramatic reading of her translation. This reading had been arranged for three voices by Asa Zatz—her colleague (lighting designer and veteran of Stage for Action) and husband (1948–54, they stayed friends for life). The three readers were the Mexican actress Rosaura Revueltas, the Bolivian painter Roberto Berdecio, and Neruda himself. The recording of the translation was intercut with original music written for her ballet by Hershy Kay—the now well-known New York orchestrator—based on North American folk songs documented in Alan Lomax’s work and featuring a guitar, cello, trombone, clarinet, and percussion.

Waldeen’s translations of selected poems from *Canto general* were published the following year in the chapbook *Let the Rail Splitter Awake and Other Poems*.<sup>6</sup> The original Spanish of the entire epic appeared in print the same year—the fruit of twelve years’ labor by Neruda. When he first read her translations in manuscript, he was deeply moved and wrote to her: “Gracias, Waldeen, por tus poemas de mis poemas, que superan a los míos” (Waldeen, thank you, for your poems of my poems, which are better than mine).<sup>7</sup> Neruda knew Waldeen’s own poetry and liked it; in fact, he had wanted to do with her a bilingual book of their poetry, for which he would translate her poems into Spanish, but the collaboration never came about. In September 1950, six months after the publication of *Canto general*, Neruda gave Waldeen his formal written permission to enable her to publish her translation of the entire work. That book project, although not completed, was for a time one of her many creative ventures. Had a publisher been interested, the book in her translation might well have been done.

The widely distributed chapbook, which went through several subsequent printings in the early 1950s, featured an essay by Neruda (“Our Duty toward Life”) along with five poems from *Canto general*—all but “The Dead in the Square” translated by Waldeen—plus two more poems (“Song for Bolivar” and “To Howard Fast”). Its reissue in 1989 by International Publishers received little attention. New York-based Masses and Mainstream, the original publisher of the chapbook, was a well-known source of Marxist literature at the time of the first publication, and Neruda was no stranger to its audience. Leftist readers were drawn to it, along with so-called Beats.

Composed when the poet was in exile from Chile—he was forced to escape as an outlaw in early 1948, crossing the Andes on horseback by night with the manuscript of *Canto general* in his saddlebag—“Let the Rail Splitter Awake” invokes the figure of Lincoln as a freedom-loving hero of the Americas. It is in many ways an appeal for world peace as well as a petition to the United States for pan-American harmony during the early years of the Cold War. Neruda celebrates the common people of North America who, like the common people of South America, must struggle against the hateful policies of multinational corporations. The chant of the penultimate fifth section builds to a vision of modern America revitalized by Lincoln’s democratic spirit:

Let the Rail Splitter awake.  
 Let Abe come with his axe  
 and his wooden plate  
 to eat with the farmers.  
 Let his head like tree-bark,  
 his eyes like those in wooden-planks  
 and oak-tree boles,  
 turn to look on the world  
 rising above the foliage

higher than the sequoias.  
 Let him buy something in a drugstore  
 let him take a bus to Tampa  
 let him bite into a yellow apple  
 and enter a moviehouse to converse  
 with all the simple people.<sup>8</sup>

Through the force of its verbal dance and music, the translation made by Waldeen successfully brings into American English, with accurate equivalents, the colloquial image-driven language of Neruda's verse. Her rendering of the two final sections of "Let the Rail Splitter Awake" was freely adapted by Allen Ginsberg (with poet and playwright Sidney Goldfarb) some thirty years later, titled "Adapted from Neruda's 'Que Dispierte [sic] el Leñador,'" and was included in his collection *Plutonian Ode and Other Poems, 1977–1980*.<sup>9</sup> Ginsberg, who had first read Waldeen's translation in the early 1950s when he was a young poet, was clearly moved by her Neruda with his modern bardic voice and his vision of hard realities. Ginsberg's adaptation is a fitting tribute to Waldeen as well as an expression of gratitude for her translation.

Waldeen offered only a glimpse of the range of Neruda's immense *Canto general* in the 1950 Masses and Mainstream publication. In addition to "Let the Rail Splitter Awake," her translation of Neruda's masterpiece, "The Heights of Macchu Picchu," introduced his poetry at its best. This sequence would later receive much critical acclaim. Her translation was among the first in English (H. R. Hays published his version in 1948 in *The Tiger's Eye*, and Angel Flores published his in 1950 in *The World's Best*); the sequence has been published in later renderings by Nathaniel Tarn (1967), John Felstiner (1980), Jack Schmitt (1991), and Stephen Kessler (2001), among others.<sup>10</sup>

Waldeen's re-creation of the dance of Neruda's poetic language, together with fidelity to the literal meaning of his words, gives her translation its distinctive voice, as illustrated by the opening stanza compared with the Spanish:

Del aire al aire, como una red vacía,  
 iba yo entre las calles y la atmósfera, llegando y despidiendo,  
 en el advenimiento del otoño la moneda extendida  
 de las hojas, y entre la primavera y las espigas,  
 lo que el más grande amor, como dentro de un guante  
 que cae, nos entrega como una larga luna.<sup>11</sup>

From air to air like an empty net  
 I went between streets and the atmosphere,  
 through autumn's advent with its arrival  
 and departure of new-coined leaves,  
 between spring and the tasselled wheat  
 as if inside a falling glove,  
 where the greatest of loves gives us  
 what is like a long moonrise.<sup>12</sup>

The closing lines of the Macchu Picchu sequence, which form a statement of Neruda's commitment to creating a voice for Latin America's peoples, past and present, reflects Waldeen's commitment to the same artistic mission:

Give me silence, water, hope.  
Give me struggle, iron, volcanoes.  
Cling to me, bodies, like magnets.  
Resort to my veins and my mouth.  
Speak through my words and my blood.<sup>13</sup>

Her translations of other parts of *Canto general* appeared in the now-defunct *California Quarterly*.<sup>14</sup> They remained the only published English rendering of major parts of the *Canto* until 1991, when the first translation of the entire epic—long overdue—was issued; translated by Schmitt, it is the only complete text in English.

Most of Waldeen's Neruda did not make its way into print in the United States for another reason, for she actually translated one-third of *Canto general* (some 500 pages long) and published only a fraction of what she had composed. The political climate in the United States during the years of the Cold War made publication of this work difficult, to say the least. Neruda, after all, had joined the Communist Party in 1945. The poetry that followed his experience in the Spanish Civil War, written after the famous love poems of his youth and the masterpieces of his surrealist verse from the early 1930s, was often marked by its partisan stamp. Neruda charged *Canto general* with his politics. "Let the Rail Splitter Awake," for instance, surely alienated many people in the United States with its romantic passages in praise of Stalin and the Soviet Union. In addition to the poem itself being considered offensive, it earned Neruda the 1950 International Peace Prize of the Communist-affiliated World Peace Council—shared with Paul Robeson and Pablo Picasso—and Neruda's acceptance further kept the poet at odds with both the literary establishment and the government of the United States. Deemed "subversive," Waldeen herself was blocked from entering the United States by the notorious 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, as was Neruda.

Waldeen's unpublished translations from *Canto general* languished in a file folder for decades. She didn't know what to do with them, and her work in dance had upstaged them. In 1989 she sent them to the present author, who attempted to publish them in magazines on her behalf, but with no luck. At the time, other English-language translators of Neruda's work were active with their own Neruda translations: Ben Belitt, Robert Bly, W. S. Merwin, Alastair Reid, Nathaniel Tarn, Donald Walsh, and John Felstiner, among many others.

Now, with the relatively new, growing interest in the transnational literature of the Americas (i.e., inter-American literature) in which translation figures prominently, the time has come to present a selection of Waldeen's "lost" translations from *Canto general*.<sup>15</sup> It is her intimacy with Neruda himself, with the Spanish of Latin America, with American English, and with dance as it informs the essential nature of his poetry that, together, distinguish her rendering of these poems from his epic, published here for the first time—for the record of her achievement, and for the poetic success of her work, as a translator.

Waldeen's translations of Neruda are a brilliant demonstration of the mid-twentieth-century flourishing of Latin American poetry in English. They fit squarely in the decade of interest in this vibrant literature that occurred in the United States during and immediately after the Second World War, but that the proponents of the Cold War (anticommunists) and the New Criticism (formalist academics/critics) largely rejected for both political and literary motives. The study of inter-American literature requires an appreciation of its history, dating back to the early nineteenth century, and of the distinct cycles of interest in Latin American poetry in translation

that finally established itself in the wake of the so-called Boom of the late twentieth century and the significant parallel growth of the Hispanic population of the United States. Waldeen's work, long ignored, merits attention now for its effective translation poetics that derive vitality from verbal music and dance and for its influence on the new American poetics that slowly developed in the 1950s and then exploded in the 1960s, constituting a successful literary revolution against New Criticism strictures—a sweeping revolution in the very definition of poetry.

Neruda's poetry in translation, in fact, became a significant part of the literary scene in the United States during this period, although in the 1960s Waldeen's published translations all but faded into obscurity because of the profusion of more contemporary translations of Neruda. Hers were ahead of their time. Anne Sexton, in an interview in 1970, emphasized the point about Neruda's impact: "We [U.S. poets] are being influenced now by South American poets, Spanish poets, French poets. We are much more image-driven as a result. Neruda is the great image-maker. The greatest colorist . . . That's why I say you have to start with Neruda."<sup>16</sup>

Waldeen's translations present Neruda's images with clarity, directness, and simplicity, using for the most part colloquial language, like his, that is melodic and sensual in keeping with the Spanish, much like the language, or style, of the modern dance she created that made her famous in Mexico. She well understood the physicality of the language of his poetry, and how palpably the experience of reading it, or hearing it, is determined by sounds and rhythms. Not only that, Waldeen's translations received Neruda's direct approval (he knew English well enough to read it, even to translate Whitman and Shakespeare into Spanish) as representing with accuracy his poetic voice in English. In an interview in 1970 Neruda himself observed the challenge of translating his poetry into English: "It seems to me that the English language, so different from Spanish and so much more direct, often expresses the meaning of my poetry but does not convey its atmosphere."<sup>17</sup> In this regard, in terms of conveying both the literal meaning and the poetic atmosphere of *Canto general*, Waldeen's translations do succeed admirably, with great aplomb and flair.

## Vegetation

Upon nameless numberless lands  
 wind descended from other domains,  
 rains brought celestial strands,  
 and gods of impregnated altars  
 restored lives and flowers.

Time expanded in the midst of fertility.

The jacaranda uplifted foam  
 of transmarine splendor,  
 the araucaria of bristling spears  
 was magnitude against snow,  
 the primeval mahogany tree  
 distilled blood from its top,  
 and to the South of larch pines,  
 the thunder tree, the red and thorny  
 trees, the mother tree, vermilion  
 ceiba, the gum tree, were earthly  
 amplitude, sound,  
 were terrestrial entities.

A new aroma was engendered  
 filling the interstices of earth,  
 converting breath into smoke and fragrance:  
 wild tobacco lifted its rosebush  
 of imaginary air.

Like a spear ending in flame  
 corn appeared, and its stature  
 was threshed and grew anew,  
 its grain disseminated, dead  
 were laid beneath its roots,  
 then from its cradle it beheld  
 the emergence of vegetal gods.

In crevice and extension, the wind's seed  
 scattered over plumes of the cordillera,  
 dense radiance of the germinal sprout and stalk,  
 blind dawn suckled by earthy balms  
 of relentless rain-drenched latitudes,  
 of close streaming nights,  
 of matutinal pools.

And still upon the plains  
 like laminas of the planet  
 beneath a fresh hamlet of stars,  
 the *ombú* tree, king of grasslands  
 halted the free air in its murmurous flight,

mounted and subdued the pampa  
with its reins and roots of branches.

Wild grove of America,  
thicket between seas,  
from pole to pole you balanced  
your green treasure, your dense luxuriance.  
The night germinated within cities  
of buckthorn shrubs, in resounding  
woods, spreading leaves that covered  
the germinal stone, the births.  
Green uterus, seminal American coverlet,  
abundant storehouse, a branch  
was born like an island, a leaf  
took the form of a sword,  
a flower became lightning and Medusa,  
a cluster circumscribed its own sum,  
a root descended into darkness.



**Some Beasts**

It was nightfall of the iguana.

From rainbow crest  
its dart-like tongue  
sank into verdure,  
monastic ant-hills  
trode the forest  
on melodious feet,  
the guanaco, rare as the oxygen  
on vast dun-colored heights  
went shod in boots of gold,  
while the llama opened candid  
eyes amid the delicacy  
of a dew-filled world.

Monkeys wove a chain  
interminably erotic  
along the shores of dawn,  
demolishing walls of pollen  
and startling the violet flight  
of Muzo butterflies.

It was night of alligators,  
night pure and swarming  
of jaws upthrusting from the mire  
and from somnolent marshes  
the dense clamor of scales  
returned to its earthly origin.

The jaguar brushed leaves  
with his phosphorescent absence,  
the puma speeds through bracken  
like devouring fire  
aglow with the alcoholic eyes  
of the jungle.

Badgers scratch the feet of rivers,  
sniff at nests whose pulsing delight  
they attack with reddish teeth.

And on the floor of massive water  
like the very circle of earth,  
lies the giant anaconda  
covered with ritual clay,  
religious and all-devouring.

**Orinoco**

Orinoco, let me be on your shores  
of that hour without hour:  
let me go naked, as then,  
enter your baptismal mists.  
Orinoco of scarlet water,  
let me dip my hands so they may return  
to your maternity, to your course,  
river of races, motherland of roots,  
your wide murmur, your savage lamina  
come from where I come, from the poor  
and imperious solitudes, from a secret  
like a blood stream, from a silent  
clay mother.

**Tequendama**

Tequendama, do you remember  
your solitary passage along the heights  
without witness, thread  
of solitude, slender willfulness,  
celestial line, platinum arrow,  
do you remember step by step  
opening walls of gold  
until tumbling from the sky onto  
the earthbound theater of vacant stone?

### The Impaled Head

Balboa, you brought death and claw  
to the corners of the gentle  
midlands, and among hounds  
of the chase, yours was your soul:  
lion cub of bloody nether lip  
who caught the fleeing slave,  
sank Spanish fangs into pulsing  
throats, and martyr's flesh  
hung from canine nails  
while jewels fell into bags.

Cursed be man and dog,  
the infamous howling in virginal  
forest, the prowling footstep  
of iron and bandit.  
Cursed be the spiky crown  
of wild blackberry bush  
that leapt not like a hedgehog  
to defend its ravaged cradle.

But among the bloodthirsty captains  
there arose in the shadows  
justice of daggers,  
the harsh branch of envy.

And upon your return, astride  
your path stood the name Pedrarias  
like a hangman's rope.

They judged you amid barking  
of savage Indian dogs.  
Now that you are dying, do you hear  
the pure silence riven  
by your goaded greyhounds?

Now that you are dying at hands  
of the vicious captains  
do you feel the golden breath  
of the sweet ravaged realm?

When they cut off Balboa's head  
it was impaled upon a stick.  
The lightning of his dead eyes  
decomposed and descended the lance  
like a splash of abomination  
that disappeared into the earth.

### The Rain (Rapa Nui)

No, may the Queen never recognize your face,  
 it is sweeter thus, my love, far from effigies,  
 the weight of your hair on my hands, do you remember  
 the Mangareva tree whose blossoms fell upon your  
 hair? These fingers resemble not those white petals:  
 look at them, they are like roots, like stone  
 carvings over which lizards glide. Fear not,  
 let us wait for the rain to fall, naked both,  
 the rain, the same that falls over Manu Tara.

While water hardens its traces on stone,  
 it falls over us carrying us softly  
 towards darkness, far below the river-mouth  
 of Ranu Raraku. Because of this  
 disregard the fisherman and his water-jar. Bury  
 your breasts of twin fire in my mouth,  
 and let your hair be my own small night,  
 a blackness whose moist perfume covers me.

At night I dream that you and I are two plants  
 that uprose together, roots entwined,  
 and that you know earth and rain as you know my mouth,  
 because we are made of rain and earth. At times  
 I believe that in death we will sleep below,  
 in the hollows of the idol's feet, watching  
 the ocean that brought us to build and to love.

My hands were not harsh when they knew you, the waters  
 of another sea slipped through them like a net; now  
 water and rock contain secrets and seeds.

Love me asleep and naked, be like an island  
 to the shore: your confused love, your startled  
 love, hidden in the cavern of dreams,  
 is like movement of the sea surrounding us.

And when I too fall asleep within your love,  
 naked, let my hand lie  
 between your breasts so it may palpitate  
 at one with your nipples glistening in the rain.<sup>18</sup>

**The Sling-Thrower (1919)**

Love, perhaps love tentative, insecure:  
 nothing but blow of honeysuckle against the mouth,  
 nothing but braids whose movement rose  
 into my solitude like a black bonfire,  
 and then the rest: nocturnal river,  
 sky signals, brief moist springtime,  
 the lonely lunatic brow, desire  
 lifting its cruel tulips in the night.  
 I stripped constellations, wounding me,  
 sharpened my fingers by contact with stars,  
 threading strand by strand the icy fabric  
 of a castle without doors,  
   oh starlit loves  
 whose jasmine retains its transparency in vain,  
 oh clouds that on a day of love flow  
 like a sob among hostile grasses,  
 naked solitude bound to a shadow,  
 to an adored wound, an indomitable moon.  
 Call me, I may have said to the rose-trees:  
 to them perhaps, shadows of confused ambrosia;  
 each tremor of the world knew my footsteps,  
 the most secret corner awaited me, and the sovereign  
 statue of a prairie tree:  
 all crossroads converged at my delirium  
 scattering my name throughout the Spring.  
 And then, lovely face, sunburnt day lily,  
 you who slept not within my sleep, untamed,  
 medallion pursued by a shadow, beloved  
 without name, framework of pollen texture,  
 of all the wind ablaze above impure stars:  
 oh love, disentangled garden that consumes itself,  
 in you my dreams uprose and spread  
 like the leaven in tenebrous bread.



Now, cup of my love, I hardly name you,  
 adored title of my days, and in space  
 you occupy like the day, all  
 the light of the universe.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jonathan Cohen** specializes in the U.S. tradition of inter-American poetry and has published numerous studies on the English translations of Pablo Neruda's work. His translations of contemporary Spanish-American poets are widely acclaimed. His latest book as editor is William Carlos Williams's *By Word of Mouth: Poems from the Spanish, 1916–1959* (New Directions, 2011).

## NOTES

1. Cohen, "Waldeen and the Americas" (see also the revised and expanded version at <http://www.uhmc.sunysb.edu/surgery/waldeen.html>); Delgado Martínez, *Waldeen*; Smith, "Waldeen"; Smith, *Terpsichore's Daughter*.
2. Spoken conversation with author, May 11, 1978.
3. Pound, *ABC of Reading*, 61.
4. As quoted in Delgado Martínez, *Waldeen*, 120.
5. Waldeen said Déano had asked her to translate Neruda's poetry before she met him, according to Smith, *Terpsichore's Daughter*.
6. The collection includes "Let the Rail Splitter Awake," "The Fugitive," "To Miguel Hernandez," and "The Heights of Macchu Picchu," translated by Waldeen, along with other work by Neruda translated by various translators. Bernstein et al., *Let the Rail Splitter Awake and Other Poems*.
7. Neruda, personal communication with Waldeen, as quoted in Diego Rivera, "Waldeen," trans. Asa Zatz from *Novedades*, <http://www.uhmc.sunysb.edu/surgery/wald-riv.html> (accessed March 10, 2013).
8. Bernstein et al., *Let the Rail Splitter Awake and Other Poems*, 37–38.
9. Ginsberg, *Plutonian Ode and Other Poems*, 35–38.
10. Here is the Spanish of the opening stanza of "Alturas de Macchu Picchu," followed by the translations of it made by Hays, Flores, Tarn, Felstiner, Schmitt, and Kessler:

Del aire al aire, como una red vacía,  
 iba yo entre las calles y la atmósfera, llegando y despidiendo,  
 en el advenimiento del otoño la moneda extendida  
 de las hojas, y entre la primavera y las espigas,  
 lo que el más grande amor, como dentro de un guante  
 que cae, nos entrega como una larga luna. (Neruda, *Canto general*, 25)

In and out of air, like an empty net,  
 I walked among streets and atmosphere, arriving and departing.  
 At the coming of autumn the coins of the leaves  
 are spread out and, between spring and the wheatears,  
 something greater than love, as if within a falling  
 glove, delivers us, like a long moon. (Hays, "The Heights of Macchu Picchu," 112)



From air to air, like an empty net,  
 between the streets and the atmosphere, I arrived and bade farewell,  
 with the advent of autumn, to the lengthened coin  
 of the leaves, and, between the spring and the tassels,  
 to that which the greatest love, as if within a glove,  
 delivers us in falling like a long moon. (Flores, "Summits of Macchu Picchu," 356)

From air to air, like an empty net,  
 dredging through streets and ambient atmosphere, I came  
 lavish, at autumn's coronation, with the leaves'  
 proffer of currency and—between spring and wheat ears—  
 that which a boundless love, caught in a gauntlet fall,  
 grants us like a long-fingered moon. (Tarn, *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*, 3)

From the air to the air, like an empty net,  
 I went on through streets and thin air, arriving and leaving behind,  
 at autumn's advent, the coin handed out  
 in the leaves, and between spring and ripe grain,  
 the fullness that love, as in a glove's  
 fall, gives over to us like a long-drawn moon. (Felstiner, "Heights of Macchu Picchu," 203)

From air to air, like an  
 empty net  
 I went between the streets and atmosphere, arriving and departing,  
 in the advent of autumn the outstretched coin  
 of the leaves, and between springtime and the ears of corn,  
 all that the greatest love, as within a falling  
 glove, hands us like a long moon. (Schmitt, *Canto General*, 29)

From air into air, like an empty net,  
 I wandered between the streets and the atmosphere, arriving and saying good-bye,  
 in the coming of autumn with its scattered coins  
 of leaves, and between spring and the ripe wheat,  
 what the greatest love, as inside a falling  
 glove, hands over to us like endless moonlight. (Kessler, "Heights of Machu Picchu," 29)

Together, these various translations reveal the range of possibilities of bringing Neruda's verse, in particular the subjective surreal imagery that distinguishes it, into English. Comparison with the Spanish and with these translations by others demonstrates that Waldeen produced an effective poetic paraphrase in which her English re-creates with greater accuracy the literal meaning and the natural colloquial speech of the original Spanish and, at once, the lyricism and flowing cadence that shape the poetry.

11. Neruda, *Canto general*, 25.
12. Bernstein et al., *Let the Rail Splitter Awake and Other Poems*, 75.
13. *Ibid.*, 91.
14. In 1952 (Waldeen, "Lamp in the Earth," Canto I, sections 1, 4, and 6) and in 1954 (Waldeen, "The Conquistadores," Canto III, sections 1–3, 7, 8, 10–12).

15. Not included here are Waldeen's unpublished section 3 of "Lamp in the Earth" (Canto I) and sections 4–6 and 13 of "The Conquistadores" (Canto III).
16. Sexton, "Craft Interview," 11–12.
17. Guibert, *Seven Voices*, 36.
18. Comparison of Waldeen's translation of the closing stanzas of "La lluvia (Rapa-Nui)" with the original Spanish and with Anthony Kerrigan's rendering of them shows a striking difference in the two translations that, perhaps, may derive in part from the gender difference of the translators:

Amame dormida y desnuda, que en la orilla  
eres como la isla: tu amor confuso, tu amor  
nombrado, escondido en la cavidad de los sueños,  
es como el movimiento del mar que nos rodea.

Y cuando yo también vaya durmiéndome  
en tu amor, desnudo,  
deja mi mano entre tus pechos para que palpite  
al mismo tiempo que tus pezones mojados en la lluvia. (Neruda, *Canto general*, 386)

Sleeping and naked, love me: on the shore  
you are like the island: your love confused, your love  
astonished, hidden in the cavity of dreams,  
is like the movement of the sea around us.

And when I too begin falling asleep  
in your love, naked,  
leave my hand between your breasts so it can throb  
along with your nipples wet with rain. (Kerrigan, "Rain [Rapa Nui]," 239)

In her translation of the final stanza Waldeen not only shows a greater awareness of the female body as depicted by Neruda but she also maintains a greater fidelity to the telluric texture of the verse in Spanish, using polysyllabic Latinate versus Anglo-Saxon English where indicated; that is, "palpitate" (hers) versus "throb" (his). In this way, her word choice facilitates the conveyance of both the meaning and atmosphere of the poetry.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BERNSTEIN, JOSEPH M., ROBERT BRITAIN, ISABEL, A. L. LLOYD, and WALDEEN, trans. *Let the Rail Splitter Awake and Other Poems*. By Pablo Neruda. New York: Masses & Mainstream, 1950.
- COHEN, JONATHAN. "Waldeen and the Americas: The Dance Has Many Faces." *American Voice* 16 (1989): 58–73.
- DELGADO MARTÍNEZ, CÉSAR. *Waldeen: La coronela de la danza mexicana*. Mexico City: Escenología, 2000.
- FELSTINER, JOHN, trans. "Heights of Macchu Picchu." By Pablo Neruda. In *Translating Neruda: The Way to Macchu Picchu*, 203–42. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980.
- FLORES, ANGEL, trans. "Summits of Macchu Picchu." By Pablo Neruda. In *The World's Best*, edited by Whit Burnett, 356–67. New York: Dial, 1950.
- GINSBERG, ALLEN. *Plutonian Ode and Other Poems, 1977–1980*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1982.

- GUIBERT, RITA. *Seven Voices: Seven Latin American Writers Talk to Rita Guibert*. Translated by Frances Partridge. New York: Knopf, 1973.
- HAYS, H. R., trans. "The Heights of Macchu Picchu." By Pablo Neruda. *Tiger's Eye* 1, no. 5 (1948): 112–21.
- KERRIGAN, ANTHONY, trans. "Rain (Rapa Nui)." By Pablo Neruda. In *Selected Poems*, 236–39. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990.
- KESSLER, STEPHEN, trans. "Heights of Machu Picchu." By Pablo Neruda. In *Machu Picchu*, 29–115. Boston: Bulfinch, 2001.
- NERUDA, PABLO. *Canto general*. Mexico City: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1950.
- POUND, EZRA. *ABC of Reading*. New York: New Directions, 1960.
- RIVERA, DIEGO. "Waldeen." In "México en la cultura," supplement. *Novedades*, July 29, 1956: 4.
- SCHMITT, JACK, trans. *Canto General*. By Pablo Neruda. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- SEXTON, ANNE. "Craft Interview." *New York Quarterly* 3 (1970): 8–12.
- SMITH, DEBORAH. *Terpsichore's Daughter*. Kindle edition. N.p.: Kindle Direct Publishing, 2011.
- . "Waldeen." In *International Dictionary of Modern Dance*, edited by Taryn Benbow-Pfalzgraf, 803–7. Detroit: St. James, 1998.
- TARN, NATHANIEL, trans. *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*. By Pablo Neruda. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967.
- WALDEEN, trans. "The Conquistadores." By Pablo Neruda. *California Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (1954): 56–63.
- . "Lamp in the Earth." By Pablo Neruda. *California Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (1952): 3–9.