TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

I first encountered the poetry of Jorge Teillier in late 1971, in the bookstore of the Universidad de Chile on the Avenida Bernardo O'Higgins in downtown Santiago. As part of my project for the 1971-1972 Fulbright Study Grant which brought me to Chile, I had proposed to undertake translation of work by contemporary Chilean poets. Just before my departure from the United States, I had acquired a small, representative volume, Chile: An Anthology of New Writing (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1970), edited by Miller Williams, which contained a few translated poems by each of several younger Chilean poets. Professor Hugo Montes of the Universidad Católica, who was teaching a course in Latin American literature which I audited in late 1971, had suggested some additional names. Once every week or ten days, armed with these two lists, I haunted the dusty display tables of the Librería Universitaria. On one of these visits, I brought away a bright blue paperback copy of Muertes y maravillas, Teillier's volume of new and selected poems, recently published by the Editorial Universitaria in its "Letras del sur" series.

Pablo Neruda had just won the Nobel Prize for Literature a few weeks earlier. The morning after the announcement, windows of every bookstore in Santiago were plastered with banners proclaiming "PABLO NERUDA PREMIO NOBEL 1971"—and the prices of all volumes by Neruda had doubled. (Neruda himself was in Paris, as Cultural Attaché for the Chilean Embassy to France; he did not return to Chile until after I had departed.) Despite guaranteed publisher interest for any volume of Neruda translation, I had already seen enough of these, by various renowned translators, dominating the Poetry-in-Translation shelves of bookstores back home. This was just at the beginning of the "Boom," as critics called it: the sudden surge, in North America and Europe, in the popularity of Latin American literature in translation. If Neruda was already overrepresented even before winning the Nobel Prize, I thought, how many more translators would now descend upon the body of his work? I did not want to find myself unknowingly duplicating the efforts of several others.

Gabriela Mistral—now the other Chilean winner of the Nobel

Prize for Literature, despite having received her award in 1945, twenty-six years before Neruda—was also suggested to me. Her work had been translated, but so far not extensively. For my birthday in July 1971, my mother had given me a lovely volume, the Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1971), a bilingual edition translated and edited by Doris Dana. with woodcut illustrations by Antonio Frasconi. I was impressed by Mistral's profound spirituality and love for humanity, by the depth of sorrow in her majestic and lonely verses, by their complex and subtle patterns of rhyme and meter. I had even made a pilgrimage of sorts, in October 1971, to the village of Montegrande in the Elqui Valley where she had spent her childhood. But I was not ready to tackle such spare and solitary verses: it would have been like trying to translate Emily Dickinson into Spanish. Besides, Mistral's work already had a highly knowledgeable advocate in translator Doris Dana, the late poet's devoted friend and literary executrix.

I resolved to find a living Chilean poet, whose work was substantial but not yet well represented in English translation, a poet whose idiom was contemporary and compatible with my own. My own poetry writing was in its fledging phase, and I wanted to translate the work of someone from whom I could learn more about the writing of poetry—much as I did from simply reading Neruda or Vallejo or the contemporary North American poets—and someone with whom I might be able to correspond. I pored through the collections I purchased at the Librería Universitaria.

Perhaps because his number was listed in the Santiago telephone directory, I simply rang up poet Enrique Lihn one morning, introduced myself in my still-halting, overly correct Spanish, and told him I was impressed with his poetry and interested in translating a selection for publication in the United States. He seemed to assent to my request, because we made an appointment to meet at the same Librería where I had purchased his books—an appropriately literary and neutral place, I thought. I don't recall anyone's giving me Lihn's number, or recommending to me that I contact him. It would not have occurred to me to ask Professor Montes or any of my handful of intellectual acquaintances to mention my name to Lihn, or to arrange an introduction. At twenty-two, having barely emerged from undergraduate studies in which I viewed poets as cultural colossi—more like Corinthian columns than accomplished but fallible fellow human beings—I had no idea how to comport myself in the grown-up world of literary networking. My audacity, born of ignorance, was a glaring exception to my usual shyness around anyone over thirty. Sr. Lihn may have sensed some of this, and I should not have been surprised when he failed to show up for our appointment.

At least, I think he failed to show up. As I drifted between the tables and shelves, through dust motes swirling in the lateafternoon shafts of light falling from the high windows, I did not ask any of the clerks if they espied poet Enrique Lihn. I did not approach any of the few over-thirty male browsers to enquire if one of them was the gentleman in question. None of these browsers appeared to be looking around curiously for a young gringa Fulbright Scholar. Several hours after the time of our supposed appointment, I slunk home. My brief moment of boldness having passed, I did not call Sr. Lihn to reschedule, nor did I ever translate any of his poems. That was also the end of my attempts to meet the poets whose books I was acquiring. I spent the rest of my time in Chile traveling, studying lithography and copper-plate etching, listening to the musicians of the New Song movement at the folk club "La Peña de los Parra." reading Latin American novels and poetry in the original Spanish and—later—Portuguese, and becoming as close to bilingual in Chilean Spanish as I could.

It was in the fall of 1973, while I was at Syracuse University working on a master's degree in Creative Writing, that I first translated a Teillier poem, "Para hablar con los muertos," which would subsequently give this collection its title. The recent coup in Chile had sent me back to my boxes of Chilean books: I realized that many of these volumes, published by the Universidad de Chile and other pro-Allende houses, had no doubt been destroyed or "disappeared" within Chile. Although I had not contacted Teillier and did not know what his situation was, I felt that translation of his work would be one small act of preservation. The dreamlike, small-town, rainy ambience of his Muertes y maravillas poems appealed to me, a young poet from Seattle whose earliest influences were the works of Madeline DeFrees, Richard Hugo, Carolyn Kizer, Theodore Roethke, William Stafford, David Wagoner, and others of the Northwest school. And my own travels to the South of Chile-to Puerto Montt, the Lake Llanquihue region, Concepción, Arauco, and Temuco, which were all regions similar in geography and atmosphere to my native Pacific Northwest—made Teillier's poetic world very familiar. So I was pleased when some of my earliest translation efforts were published in the Malahat Review and a few other magazines; and I included a group of these early Teillier translations in the manuscript of my master's thesis.

In 1977 and 1978, under Dr. Daniel Testa of Syracuse University's Department of Romance Languages, I worked on more of these

translations as part of an independent project for the Doctor of Arts in Creative Writing. But then the demands of examinations, dissertation preparation, and—after the degree—several short-term teaching positions, caused me to put Teillier's poems aside until a 1980–1981 Writing Fellowship took me to the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts, where I was able to resume this work. By the late spring of 1984, after living for several months in New Orleans, I had finished most of the translations I intended to do from *Muertes y maravillas*. While on a short reading tour of Long Island, I had the good fortune to get an address for Teillier in Chile from Professors Jaime Giordano and Pedro Lastra of the Romance Languages Department of SUNY at Stony Brook, both of whom encouraged me to contact the poet and to complete a volume of translations of his poems.

I wrote to the address given, and was cheered to receive an enthusiastic and detailed response from Teillier, commenting on the examples of work I had sent, and giving me wholehearted permission to pursue the project and to publish the translations both in magazines and in book form. This was the beginning of a two-year correspondence, in which Teillier made many valuable suggestions, clarified the meanings of several regional terms—as well as his own private meanings for some words—and kept me informed of his addresses, which were changing almost as often as my own was. While on a visiting appointment at Whitman College in 1984-1985, I obtained a copy of Para un pueblo fantasma, by then out of print, through interlibrary loan. When it was published in 1985, Teillier sent me a copy of his most recent book, Cartas para reinas de otras primaveras. He also provided me with photocopies of a few of his poems which had been published in 1968 in Triquarterly, in translations by Margaret Sayers Peden. During a five-week residency at Yaddo that year, I completed drafts of most of the rest of the poems included here, revised my earliest efforts from the 1970's, and resumed submission of these efforts to literary journals. They appeared in American Poetry Review, American Voice, Black Warrior Review, Graham House Review, Iowa Review, Seneca Review, and other magazines in rather rapid succession.

By 1986, I had almost completed *In Order to Talk with the Dead* to my satisfaction; but a 1986–1987 Indo-U.S. Subcommission Fellowship took me to Calcutta, India, on an altogether different undertaking—the study and translation of work by contemporary Bengali women poets and writers. During this time, I lost contact with Teillier. There was no reply to the letters I sent in the months before departing for India, but when I returned home, I determined to try

again. After spending nearly two years in Calcutta, and while anticipating departure on a Fulbright Research Grant to Bangladesh the following year, I knew it was "now or never" that I had to fulfill my commitment to Teillier's poetry. I revised the remaining drafts from the later books, and continued my attempts to communicate with the poet.

By happy chance, a family friend, Rosa Parra Mendoza, was planning a visit in March 1989 to her relatives still in Chile, and she was able to carry letters and a copy of the completed manuscript with her. These she delivered to Teillier's address in Santiago, after finding a directory listing and speaking with him by telephone. Although his voice was very faint, she told me later, he sounded pleased about the manuscript. Unfortunately, he would be away for several days, he said, so she was not able to meet him on the day she brought the packet to his house. Nevertheless, I was glad to learn that "the elusive Sr. Teillier" was still in favor of the project, and that a copy of the working manuscript was now in his possession.

While continuing to send groups of translations to literary magazines, I had begun to submit the completed manuscript, by the fall of 1988, to publishers. I was already in Dhaka, Bangladesh, occupied with the second phase of the Bengali translation project, when I received the long-distance call on Christmas Eve 1989 from my family, informing me that the University of Texas Press had accepted In Order to Talk with the Dead.

In this collection, I have tried to provide a generous representative selection of Teillier's poetry, from his earliest to most recent periods. Included are many of the shorter lyrical poems from Muertes y maravillas, from his series entitled "To the Inhabitants of the Land of Nevermore"—a body of lyrical work in the Romantic tradition that is probably definitive now, as his style has evolved toward the "exteriorist" mode, especially in the longer and more anecdotal narrative poems. I have also translated a number of these longer poems, such as the early "Story of a Prodigal Son" and "Night Trains," in which the poet's voice still evokes the lyrical mode and takes as subject matter his recollections from the lost domain of his childhood. From his two most recent books, Para un pueblo fantasma and Cartas para reinas de otras primaveras, I have included a number of shorter poems in a lyrical mode, as well as longer narrative works such as "Clinical Landscape," "Notes on the Author's Last Journey to the Town of His Birth," "Now That Once Again," and "No Sign of Life." These poems are arranged according to their sequence in the volumes in which they originally appeared, under section headings derived from the original volumes' titles and sections. The only difficulty with this method of organization was that the "Libro de homenajes" (Book of Homages) section appeared twice: in Muertes y maravillas, and also in Para un pueblo fantasma, with some omissions (such as "Portrait of My Father, Militant Communist") and the addition of several new poems in the later book. I decided to place this section according to its sequence in Para un pueblo fantasma, with "So Long" (which is included in both books) as the final poem in the section, as it appeared in the 1978 volume. This arrangement does take "Portrait of My Father, Militant Communist" out of its original sequence, but Teillier gave the poem a composition date of 1961, which anchors it firmly in the chronology of his poetic development. The composition date may also indicate that its initial appearance in Muertes y maravillas was already out of sequence with respect to Teillier's oeuvre, since it was written so much earlier, but not published until the 1971 volume. I also felt that including the "Book of Homages" section with the Para un pueblo fantasma poems would give this book a betterbalanced arrangement, especially since the poet himself saw fit to reprint the section in an expanded form in his 1978 collection.

I have elected not to translate some of his longest, most anecdotal poems (such as "Crónica del forastero" and "Treinta años después" from Muertes y maravillas; "Cosas vistas" and "El osario de los inocentes" from Para un pueblo fantasma; and "Paseos con Carolina" and "Viaje de invierno" from Cartas para reinas de otras primaveras for reasons of space. Moreover, many of the cultural and historical allusions which Teillier makes in these poems are so particularly Chilean that the English-speaking, non-Chilean reader would feel excluded from any immediate grasp of their import. Although a few of the poems published here warranted some notes as background for the reader of English, I have tried to avoid excessive footnoting. There are, however, another dozen poems which I had translated from the two most recent books and which I hoped to include in this collection. Unfortunately, because of the immense difficulties involved in corresponding with the Chilean publishers, and technicalities in the way permission to reprint was obtained, I have had to exclude these poems from the present volume. Nevertheless, this collection as it stands is meant to serve as a comprehensive, definitive introduction to Teillier's selected poems in English translation, to give exposure to all phases of his poetic development.

My goal in translation has been to create English renderings which are both faithful to the original Spanish and successful as poems in English—as if they had been written in English in the first

place. I have tried to respect the original diction, syntax, and integrity of line—as well as the mood—of each poem, and also achieve a natural quality in the target language, English. Fortunately, with Teillier's work these effects have not been too difficult to achieve, because his imagery tends to be quite concrete, his phrasing lends itself readily to American English, and the realm of European and American literature and popular culture from which he draws many of his allusions will be familiar to most readers of English. For terms and usages that are specifically Chilean, unique to the *frontera*, or peculiar to the poet himself, I am grateful to Sr. Teillier for his comments and suggestions, as I am for his permission and encouragement for this project.

Note. The translations in this volume are derived from Teillier's anthology of new and selected work, Muertes y maravillas (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria de Chile, 1971), and from his two most recent collections, Para un pueblo fantasma (Valparaíso: Ediciones Universitarias de Valparaíso, 1978) and Cartas para reinas de otras primaveras (Santiago: Ediciones Manieristas, 1985). As of this writing, all of these books are out of print.

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