

LORINE NIEDECKER IN SPAIN

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Who was Lorine Niedecker? To pose this question among readers of poetry in Spain would produce few answers, just as Niedecker's question "Who was Mary Shelley" anticipated few answers. Since Niedecker asked her question in the early 1960s, Mary Shelley and her writing have become widely known. We can allow ourselves to hope and even expect that the same recognition awaits Niedecker. My 2018 Spanish translation of Niedecker in a bilingual volume *Y el lugar era agua: Antología poética*, published by Eolas Editions is part of a trend in Spain since the 1990s to translate Anglo-American poetry into Spanish. Alongside this is the widespread interest in Spain in discovering new women writers. Where the experimental character of Niedecker's poetry might have discouraged readers and publishers, now a number of small

independent publishers have established themselves and in the last two decades have discovered a growing interest in reading and circulating foreign, non-mainstream poetry in books and magazines, printed or online.

The translator's job is a rare and privileged one. Working word by word with poems in their original language, thinking about their intentions, about the way the formal elements of a language are manipulated, about the nuances that must be preserved and ways to remain faithful to them in the context of another language brings one into rare and intimate contact with the poet and the poems. This particular translation project has led me to a deep respect for the skill and sensibility of Lorine Niedecker.

My decision to translate Lorine Niedecker has been purely personal. Familiar with my previous translations, the editor of Eolas Ediciones asked me to present a proposal for translating a contemporary American poet, preferably a woman. As a matter of fact, I had discovered Niedecker's poetry while I was translating Rae Armantrout's poetry for a collection of American Studies from the University of Valencia, a few years ago; although she is not a prolific essayist, Armantrout's brief reflections on "difficult" poets are among the most enlightening and compelling sources I have come across and have, without fail, drawn me to the very authors she herself admires, Lorine Niedecker being one of them. So, when Sánchez Santiago asked me to choose an author, my mind had already been made up for me.

Translating poetry has become my life-long addiction. In this particular case, the main reward for having translated Lorine Niedecker's poetry into Spanish is the task itself, both while in progress and in its finished form. Translator Antonio Rivero Taravillo is right to say that "there is no better way of understanding a poem than translating it." Since many poetry translators are also poets,

they are sometimes asked whether it is worth devoting time to translating other authors instead of working on their own poetry. Apart from the linguistic benefits of the discipline of translation there is also the larger-than-life experience of engaging with another identity. Lending one's voice to the poetry of someone else, that is to say, to the deepest world of another self, provides an existential abode that leaves no translator indifferent or unaffected.

We emerge from poetry translation turned into "others," or into larger, more complex versions of ourselves. The resonance of successive authors accumulates within our own sense of selfhood. A trace of our temporary alignment with our most recently translated poet remains floating in the air, untranslatable, exactly like that unintelligible part of the poetry or traces of words that the poem contains, that we must try to translate against all odds.

It's worth noting that the prevailing views about translating poetry have moved on from Robert Frost's gloomy adage that "poetry is what is lost in translation" and been replaced by an open acknowledgement of the difficulties and an active engagement with the challenges. Among Spanish professionals, the poet and translator Carlos Jiménez Arribas believes, for example, that "the trace of the untranslatable is the most translatable part of a poem."¹ This line of thought is appropriate for the challenging register of Lorine Niedecker's poetry, namely, the awareness of the untranslatable "estrangement" inherent in all poetry and in avant-garde poetry in particular; a kind of estrangement that turns each poet's style into a language in itself.

1 All the philologists and poet-translators mentioned in this essay (Carlos Jiménez Arribas, Jordi Doce, Miguel Casado, Antonio Rivero Taravillo) are well-known and respected professionals in Spain. Their reflections about poetry translation have been taken from the page "Monstruos en su laberinto: Poesía y traducción" (http://www.dvdediciones.com/monstruos_poesiaytraduccion.html).

With this in mind, the poetry translator's task is to try to open up spaces in the target language (in this case, Spanish) for the inexpressible, or the unintelligible, latent in the source text (here, the original English). Always fluctuating between the two extremes of either keeping the foreign aspects visible or immersing them in the Spanish context, most poetry translators see their activity as "a variant or extension of literary creation" that reveals "the impossibility of translating in the full sense of the term," as Jordi Doce says. Furthermore, translators agree that the translation should *sound* like poetry within the limits imposed by the source language.

In the case of the Niedecker translations, Anglophone material, rhythm and sound patterns must be translated into Spanish, a Romance language that bases its poetry traditions on syllabic meter and consonant/assonant rhyme instead of on beats and alliteration.

Walter Benjamin wrote in 1923 that "the fundamental error of the translator is that he holds fast to the state in which his own language happens to be rather than allowing it to be put powerfully in movement by the foreign language." Bearing this in mind, my translation of Niedecker has constantly sought for natural Spanish equivalences in sound and rhythm while trying to keep the tone of strangeness that a more literal approach to the translation would give.

One example of this double strategy lies in the visual/aural impact of the poems. In a large number of them, Niedecker uses the long dash as a resource for joining and separating words/clauses/realities all at once. This delays the flow of the poem for a second then it lets the lines flow unexpectedly in a different direction. In email exchanges with poet Bob Arnold, literary executor of Lorine Niedecker's works, he suggested that her dash operates almost as a word, since it impacts the structure of the stanza, as well as the tone and appearance. At first, I was reluctant to use a punctuation mark

that does not have a clear equivalence in Spanish, but he persuaded me to keep it. The following poem, whose content is entirely drawn from the journals of Linnaeus, is one of many examples:

Linnaeus in Lapland

Linneo en Laponia

*Nothing worth noting
except an Andromeda
with quadrangular shoots—
the boots
of the people*

*Nada que destacar
excepto una Andrómeda
y en cuadrángulo sus brotes—
las botas
de la gente*

*wet inside: they must swim
to church thru the floods
or be taxed—the blossoms
from the bosoms
of the leaves*

*mojadas por dentro: han de nadar
hacia la iglesia en la riada
o ser clasificados—los renuevos
de los senos
de las hojas*

In this poem, Linnaeus' scientific notes appear juxtaposed to the poet's awareness of her closest reality, with certain terms (shoots/brotes) flowing naturally from the scientific to the quotidian (blossoms/renuevos). This flow, or displacement of meaning, begins in the first stanza where the dash signals a change from the botanical observation to the observation of local people wading through water towards the church. The episode continues in the second stanza where, again, the dash marks another change or displacement: "be taxed" can refer both to people having to pay taxes, and to the famous botanist's taxonomic classification of species.

As far as the translation is concerned, notwithstanding the unfamiliar presence of the dash in Spanish, the visual effect is similar to that of the original version. In the first stanza where "shoots" and "boots" are tensely separated by the dash while joined

by sound, the same occurs with “brotos” and “botas” where sound similarity is based on alliteration rather than rhyme. Alliteration is a less common resource than rhyme in Spanish poetry and, therefore, its use instils a feeling of strangeness. The same can be said, in the second stanza, with the sound pairing between “blossoms” and “bosoms” in the original, and “renuevos” and “senos” in the translation: here, with assonance in “e-os” and alliteration in “n.” The sound-patterned transfer of meaning occurs here as it does in the Niedecker original.

In contrast, the multiple meanings of “be taxed,” cannot be reproduced in Spanish. In my first draft, I translated it in its economic/punitive sense, which was right for “the people” but not for “the blossoms”; on second thoughts, I opted for the “classification” nuance because, even though obliquely (and with the help of an endnote), it could contain a hint for both contexts. All in all, the cadence of the translation runs smoothly, mainly thanks to the recurrence of the liquid phoneme /r/ and the alternation of the open vowel sounds /a/ and /o /.

As for the first line—and Niedecker seems more than conscious of the sound effects her poem openings produce—the threefold trochaic beat (“Nóthing/wóρθ/nóting”), reinforced by the alliterative phonemes /n/, /i/ and nasal /ŋ/, is attenuated in the translation, although alliteration is also present in the invariable Spanish /a/ sound: “Nada que destacar.” I should note that the Spanish language has only five vowel sounds, corresponding to the five vowel letters. That is the main reason why English pronunciation is so difficult for Spanish learners, as English has thirteen different vowel sounds and, consequently, there is no direct relationship between sounds and letters. In compensation, a rhythmic impact is produced by the proximity of two long words whose stress falls on the third-from-last syllable, “An/dró/me/da” and “cua/drán/gu/lo.” This type of stress is

the least frequent in Spanish and its sounding is always powerful and immediately perceived. Its use in poetry is very striking.

Another example of the difficulty of literal translation of English poetry occurs with compound words where Spanish cannot hyphenate two words to form a compound. This is evident, among many instances, in the following lines from “Lake Superior”:

*Sault Sainte Marie—big boats
coal-black and iron-ore-red
topped with what white castlework*

*Sault Sainte Marie—grandes barcos
negros como el carbón y rojos como la mena del hierro
coronados de qué blanca torre almenada*

The translation keeps the dash but cannot incorporate the hyphenated constructions “coal-black” and “iron-ore-red.” Instead, those two compound adjectives have to be paraphrased with the help of the particle “como” (like), forming a much longer line than the original. A translating practice which is less popular now than decades ago, would probably have opted for splitting such a long line into two. In contrast, I prefer to keep the same number of lines, since Spanish poetry allows for such long lines without losing rhythm; furthermore, the parallel expression marked by the repetition of “como,” together with the predominance of two-syllable words stressed in the first syllable (“grán/des”, “bár/cos”, “né/gros”, “ró/jos”, “mé/na”, “hié/rro”, “blán/ca”, “tó/rre”), make the lines fit better into the stanza, as well as in relation to the rest of elements.

Paraphrase as a kind of amplification (from the Latin *amplificatio*, that is, increase or addition) is the translating solution in the following poem as well:

*Popcorn-can cover
screwed to the wall
over a hole
so the cold
can't mouse in*

*La tapa del tarro de palomitas
a la pared se atornilló
y el boquete tapó
para que el frío no se cuele
como un ratón*

As we know, this and other five-line poems represent Niedecker's way of evoking the haiku. On the sound level, the rhyme or near-rhyme of "wall," "hole" and "cold" is transferred to "atornilló," "tapó" and—in the last line—"ratón" (mouse), thus reproducing the playful tone of the poem, easily identifiable in the Spanish version (several Spanish nursery rhymes play with the word "ratón" and the repetition of the terminal "on": "debajo de un botón-tón-tón ... había un ratón-tón-tón ..."). To that end, the past participle form "screwed to" has been changed by the simple past forms "atornilló" and "tapó," which rhyme in assonance with "ratón."

The unexpected element in Niedecker's poem is the use of the noun "mouse" as if it were a verb "mouse in." This change in the word category sneaks into the poem as a real mouse would sneak into a room. The translation misses this crucial nuance because the Spanish language doesn't allow for such a twist of word category; the alternative could be literally translated as "so that the cold cannot sneak in / like a mouse." In compensation, the displacement of the rhyme from "frío" (cold) to "ratón" (mouse), not by chance the last word in the Spanish version, leaves an arresting final impression on the reader, not far from the stealthy surprise factor in the original. The translation remains aware of the philosophy behind the composition of haiku with its simple—though hard to achieve—combination of image and movement at the same time that it catches the childish air implied from the very beginning by the term "pop-corn," even more childish-sounding in the Spanish term "palomitas."

In relation to homophony—the language phenomenon of two words that look different but sound exactly the same—another five-line poem presents an interesting case:

Hear
where her snow-grave is
the You
 ah you
of mourning doves

Oíd ahí
donde está su tumba de nieve
el Tú
 ah tú
de las tristes builotas

Niedecker starts her poem with “Hear” while the term simultaneously evokes the adverb of place, “here.” In Spanish, there is not such homophony between the equivalent terms. However, the imperative “hear” in the second person plural form (“Oíd”) and the adverb of place “there” (“ahí”) are very similar in sound.² In this case, therefore, the two words together emphasize the double resonance of the original. In contrast, the word “here” is translated in a different way in the first stanza of the following poem:

Cricket-song—
What’s in The Times—
 your name!
 Fame
here

La canción del grillo—
¿Qué viene en The Times?—
 ¡tu nombre!
 Renombre
aquí

Unlike the poem “Hear / where her snow-grave is” now the adverb “here” is literally translated as “aquí;” it does not try to evoke the “hear” implicit in the original version. The double-word choice of the previous example (“oíd ahí”) could have been incorporated in this poem and for the same reasons. However, in this second case, the result sounds unnecessarily contrived in Spanish. To compensate for the loss of resonance, then, the second and final stanza of the translated poem reproduces the frequency of the /i/ sound that

2 The Spanish /h/ sound is always mute, in contrast to the English aspirated sound. As a result, the sounds of the two-syllable words with the stress on the second syllable “oíd” and “ahí” (/o-íd/ and /a-í/ respectively) sound very similar to the ear.

serves as onomatopoeia for the cricket song (the matching sounds are underlined):

on my doorstep
—an evening seedy
quiet thing.

It rings
a little.

en mi umbral
—un misero chirrido vespertino
con sigilo.

Chirría
un poquito.

The last line, “un poquito,” literally means “a little bit” (“a little” would be translated as “un poco”). Opting for “un poquito” helps reproduce the /i/ sound at the same time that it emphasizes the importance of this final line for the correct reading of the poem.³

Going back to the poem “Hear / where her snow-grave is,” clearly related to Niedecker’s mother’s passing, it is interesting to note how the name of the “mourning dove” with its inherent reference to the sad cooing sound and, by means of homophony, to the time of day (mourning / morning), cannot be directly translated. The Spanish version uses the American bird species common noun “huilota” and, once more, resorts to amplification by introducing the adjective “triste” (i.e. sad, mournful), in agreement with the mood of the poem. The mourning dove appears in another, earlier poem, but in this case the supplementary information is different, as the poem’s subject demands:

3 According to Rae Armantrout, in this poem probably written after a review in *The New York Times* of Zukofsky’s *Some Time*, we do not learn whether the poet is pleased with the review or not: “Is it fame itself that is ephemeral—ringing only “a little,” as Niedecker puts it with her dry wit? Or is it her evening which, in contrast to fame, is a seedy, quiet thing, but one which rings with cricket-song? In either case, her own life and the life of the famous person are held within the brackets the phrase “a little” deftly constructs” (66).

Mourning Dove

Huilota

*The sound of a mourning dove
slows the dawn
there is a dee round silence
in the sound.*

*El lamento temprano de la huilota
demora el alba
hay un zureo de silencio
en el sonido.*

In this poem, Niedecker refers to the mourning dove's particular way of cooing twice: the first time, simply as "sound;" the second time, as a "dee round silence / in the sound," where "dee" works as the onomatopoeia both of the bird's coo and the musical key, thus emphasizing the paradoxical quality in the association of "silence" with "sound."⁴ The difficulty of translating "mourning dove" into Spanish in regard to the "mourning" nuance leads me once more to the solution of amplification: "lamento temprano" (literally, early mourn). These two terms replace the much simpler "sound" while conveying the double nuance of "early" in relation to "mo(u)rning" and "dawn" (the line "demora el alba" is accurately rendered from "slows the dawn") and also to a mournful sound.

As for the "dee sound," it is translated by the prepositional phrase "zureo de silencio;" "zureo" is a noun that describes the cooing sound of any dove. This is not a frequent word in Spanish, though quite powerful in its resonance. Concretely, it forces the reader to pay attention to it in the middle of the line, producing an effect analogous to "dee," equally singled out as a "rare" element in the original poem. Obviously, there is no semantic literal translation in this choice. However, my thorough search for a sound equivalence has led me to a translation of the resonance of the dove's "utterance" that the poem aims to transmit.

4 It must be highlighted that the dove's cooing sound has various different notes. Niedecker refers to the D tuning note to evoke the dove's song in a general sense.

Finally, compensating for the omission of “sound” in its first appearance in the translation, in its second appearance “sound” is placed prominently at the end of the stanza. In regard to this decision, it seemed crucial to highlight the rhythmic part in the closing, together with its phonic relation with “silence.” This time, there are no obstacles to the exact translation: silencio-silence / sonido-sound. Furthermore, and even though Spanish stress patterns do not correspond to beats, there is a natural tendency to read these final lines in the English rhythmic-patterned mode; the result differs from Niedecker’s original but, to a certain extent, it corresponds to the intended effect of quiet closure, as can be appreciated in the stressed words and syllables signaled in the following lines:

*there is a dée / róund / silence
in the sóund*

*háy un / zuréo de / siléncio
en el sonído*

A corollary to the previous comments is to be found in the following poem. Here, the two techniques of trying to make the poem sound natural in Spanish at the same time that its experimental nature is exposed converge, this time for the sake of visual display on the page:

March

Marzo

*Bird feeder’s
snow-cap
sliding
off*

*El gorro de nieve del
comedero de aves
resbalando-
se*

In this example, the Spanish version takes up more space than the original but this can’t be avoided because the Spanish language has fewer monosyllabic words than English. In addition, the absence of the possessive structure “apostrophe + s” in Spanish makes

it necessary to use the preposition of possession “de” (of). All of this reduces the visual force of the poem. Nevertheless, the descending-scale structure crucial to the poem’s identity is preserved.

The two last lines pose another problem: there are no verbs in Spanish formed by two words, such as “slide off.” In contrast, reflexive verbs such as “wash oneself” / “lavarse” (formed from “wash” / “lavar”) are quite common, and the case is applicable here: “resbalando-se.” The implicit nuance is that the bird feeder’s snow cap slides because of the very weight of the snow itself, without any external help. I have, therefore, replaced a prepositional particle by a reflexive pronoun particle.

At this stage, the visual arrangement requires further work: on the one hand, the pronoun cannot be separated from the stem verb; on the other hand, in Spanish verse it is allowable to split up parts of a word between the end of a line and the following one, as long as they belong to different syllables. This separation should always be hyphenated, as is in prose. To split the verb into two in this poem, following the rules at the same time that we respect the literal translation i.e. focusing the attention on the act of sliding off by the position of the verb itself on two different lines, finally enables us to achieve an eloquent fidelity to the original poem, not only in its visual display but also in the perception of the gentle movement that is produced, once more, in a haiku-like manner.

The weight of alliteration (specifically, the repetition of initial consonants in words) as a source of communication through sound instead of merely through semantic meaning is of course inherent to all poetry in English, and a powerful resource in Niedecker’s poems. Its translation into Spanish relies, to a certain extent, on looking for alternative repetitions of initial consonants. The strategy is visible in the memorable opening of “Paean to Place,” one of her most important compositions:

Fish

fowl

flood

Water lily mud

My life

in the leaves and on water

My mother and I

born

in swale and swamp and sworn

to water

Pez

pájaro

pantano

lodo de nenúfares

Mi vida

en las hojas y sobre el agua

Mi madre y yo

nacimos

en marjal y marisma y amarradas

al agua

The sound impact of this opening is the main criterion for translation, even more than the direct rendering of meaning. This priority requires a certain semantic displacement. For the fricative /f/ sound of “fish/fowl/flood” to become the plosive /p/ of “pez/pájaro/pantano,” a free translation of “flood” is necessary (“pantano” meaning “swamp” or “marsh”). With the /sw/ phonic group of “swale/swamp/sworn”, the /m/ and /a/ sounds in “marjal/marisma/amarradas” also involve a readjustment in meaning (“amarradas” means “tied up” or “moored”). This is a clear example of keeping the strangeness of the language, on the one hand, because sound repetition through alliteration is not a common strategy in Spanish where end-rhyme is the usual procedure. On the other hand, subordinating meaning to sound is a way of keeping the result as natural as possible, using the old technique of direct transposition of one word for another, where both words belong to the same grammatical category.

An important goal in the translation and composition of this book has been to create a sustained tone throughout the whole collection. This is particularly relevant in the selection of poems for

the Spanish anthology from the book *New Goose*, where traditional rhyme patterns associated with folklore mesh with experimental procedures. Since direct translation of rhymed sounds is impossible, I have resorted to several solutions. A paradigmatic case can be

*Remember my little granite pail?
The handle of it was blue.
Think what's got away in my life—
Was enough to carry me thru.*

*¿Recuerdas mi pequeño balde esmaltado?
El asa que llevaba era azul.
Piensa en cuánto he perdido en lo vivido—
Para no desfallecer esto ha bastado.*

found in the well-known piece from *New Goose*:

Some critics have compared this poem with Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow." True to the spirit of Objectivism, life's losses are visualized through a common object, and a very solid one, thus resisting the temptation for a more subjective, self-pitying mode of expression. This is a constant trait in Niedecker's poetry, which never indulges in sentimentalism and faces life's setbacks and constraints not with meek resignation, but in a matter-of-fact mood. In these four lines, and apparently dealing with an ordinary utensil in a plain, brief poetic form resembling a nursery rhyme, the poet takes a philosophical stance in regard to time and existence. For translation to be effective, the main challenge is to render the poem in the same unadorned way while not allowing it to fall short of its connotations. The risk is twofold: the poem can either sound too solemn or too trivial in its message.

All this requires close attention to the sounds, of course, but also to the choice of words in terms both of meaning and resonance. To start with, the end-rhyme has been located in lines 1 and 4 in the Spanish, instead of in lines 2 and 4 as in the original. A more accurate solution is hard to find. However, it seemed crucial to keep the rhyme at the end of the last line, because the closing of the poem relies on it not emphatically, but as a firm conclusion anyway.

The rhyme transference works in combination with vocabulary adjustments: “has got away” is turned into “he perdido” (I have lost), whereas “to carry thru” becomes “no desfallecer” (not giving up). In the first case, the translation incorporates a personal subject that does not appear in the original version, though in its implicit form (“yo” he perdido); in the second one, the object pronoun “me” is transformed into the impersonal verb phrase “ha bastado” (it has been enough), as a compensation.

The main reason for these changes is related to rhythm: poems in *New Goose* must sound like folk song and are, consequently, constrained by meter. In fact, it is the combination of rhythm, rhyme, plain style, everyday context and deep resonance (almost as an understatement), that turns them into unique pieces at the crossroads of experimentalism and tradition. In the translation, formal constraints constitute a kind of advantage because the elements at play are reduced.

An account such as this of my experience of translating Niedercker must also describe its failures or problems for which I have found no satisfactory solution. These are mostly due to the intrinsic nature of Spanish and English and, more specifically, to sound-meaning associations that are impossible to reproduce. This occurs in a poem like “Tradition:” “Life / Thy will be done / Sun,” where the biblical style offers a pun on words with the homophony of “sun” and “son.” The Spanish translation in this case is simply “sol” (sun), plus an endnote explaining the pun. A similar problem is posed by the line “clause of claws” in “Foreclosure.” The alternative chosen is to keep the meaning (“cláusula feral”) at the expense of sound, because the nuance of depicting the world of money and banks as a wild one seemed more important in this particular case.

Likewise, in “Paean to Place” it was impossible to keep alliteration in the group “sublime / slime- / song,” nor the homophonic/

pun that “new dead / leaves” triggers (the implicit oxymoron “dead/lives”). And in “My Life by Water,” a perfect equivalent to the homophony between “letters” and “lettuce,” which places both terms at the same level of material and metaphysical importance through sound resemblance, could not be achieved. In all these examples, it was preferable to accept the frustration of not being able to go farther, rather than produce alternatives too far-fetched in relation to the poet’s choice. These shortcomings are usually compensated for a general, balanced tone that may leave the reader with a compelling impression of the whole text, notwithstanding specific defects. The translation of the closing stanza of “Paeon to Place,” for instance, has been praised for the beautiful serenity it conveys, thus contributing to the final impression it leaves in English as well. Curiously enough, this is an example of an almost word-by-word translation, since no more complex strategies were needed:

*Sobre esta corriente
mi memoria de noche de luna
limpia de carencias
lleva sus gabarras
hasta el estuario*

*del río
Pescaban en belleza
No siempre fue así
En Caladeros
el rojo Marte*

*ascendente
recorre las ciénagas y esclusas
de mi mente
con las personas
en el filo*

An involuntary rhyme between “ascendente” (rising) and “mente” (mind) occurs, involving the smoothness of nasal and vowel sounds. As in the original version there is a recurrent /ai/ diphthong sound (rising/rides/mind), it becomes a natural alternative for the sound cadence that undoubtedly transmits the calmness of a successfully finished task: that of word, place, and memory coalescing in brilliant poetic synthesis.

It goes without saying that all these translation proposals are far from definitive; another translator could come up with equally valid and perfectly grounded alternatives. In all cases, Spanish poetry readers are already accustomed to experimental poetry in their mother tongue and in foreign languages. Consequently, it is not unreasonable to assume that they will easily decode the grammatical, visual and phonic clues that the translator has identified in the source text, as well as the ways she has chosen to render them in Spanish by means of her own language tools and resources.

Oscillating between the two extremes of making a poem sound natural in the translation at the same time that its linguistic strangeness is exposed ultimately depends on what a certain instinct, or common “poetic” sense, dictates. Together with translation theory, this instinct contributes to the final golden rule of translation: the invisibility of the translator that must, by definition, preside over any translation task, so that the reader does not notice the finely tuned process that has taken place. In fact, it will be the Spanish readers who decide whether this principle has been thoroughly respected or not. As for the translator, the main satisfaction lies in the possibility he or she has had to blend linguistic strategies and poetic intuition in a single task, while neither betraying the source text nor underestimating the potential readers of the translated version. It is this ‘in-between’ nature of this task that makes the challenge such a fascinating one, in spite of its evident limitations.

My gratitude to Lorine Niedecker's poetry is expressed through the elegiac poem I wrote after reading about her second husband, Al Millen. I give her back my devotion in the person of the only man who told her that he loved her. It is my way of dealing with the actual version of this exchange: while I seemed to be bestowing my time on Niedecker's work, it was she who was enriching the deepest aspects of my own. Whereas the poem speaks about Niedecker through Millen, it is written in Spanish with the title in English: another example of how translation opens capricious criss-crossed paths between languages, between lives, and even between the living and the dead.

HUSBAND OF LORINE NIEDECKER, 1904-1981

Obrero, pintor de brocha gorda, divorciado,
“bebía demasiado.”

Nunca entró

en el críptico mundo
—surrealista, objetivista—
de su segunda esposa,
esa menuda* mujer con gafas
y voz infantil a los 60
a la que visitaban poetas y editores
en su pequeña isla de Wisconsin,

austera y líquida y rica en sonidos
como sus propios poemas.

Murió

en 1970, y la enterraron
en la tumba familiar
en un cementerio de Fort Atkinson.

Once años después, bajo su nombre
y fuera del recuadro, como
pidiendo permiso
para acomodarse,
se grabó: “Millen.” Y luego,
en una pequeña
lápida

sobre un gran cuerpo: *Albert O. Millen*
 1904-1981
 Esposo de
 Lorine Niedecker

* “Menuda” means “of small stature.” In exclamations, “menuda mujer” can also be translated as “What a woman!” always used with admiration for an exceptional person. The double-meaning is lost in translation.

HUSBAND OF LORINE NIEDECKER, 1904-1981

*A builder and a painter, a divorced man,
"he drank too much."*

*He never entered
the cryptic world
—surrealist, objetivist—
of his second wife,
that tiny spectacled woman
with a girlish voice in her sixties
visited by poets and editors
in her small island of Wisconsin,*

*austere and liquid and rich in sounds
like her own poems.*

*She died
in 1970, and was buried
in the family grave
in a Fort Atkinson cemetery.*

*Eleven years later, under her name
and outside the square, as if
asking permission
to fit in,
they engraved: "Millen." And then,
on a small
tombstone
over a huge body:*

Albert O. Millen
1904-1981
Husband of
Lorine Niedecker

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WHAT REGION?

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I sent University of Wisconsin Milwaukee a copy of T&G way back in Sept. A few days ago I wrote: Did you fail to receive? They answer they've placed it with regional materials. I should ask: What region—London, Wisconsin, New York?

—LN in her December 7, 1969 letter to Cid Corman

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