

Twenty Poems of Pablo Neruda



ZAMORA

PABLO NERUDA
TWENTY POEMS

translated by

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REFUSING TO BE THEOCRITUS

Poets like St. John of the Cross and Juan Ramón Jiménez describe the single light shining at the center of all things. Neruda does not describe that light, and perhaps he does not see it. He describes instead the dense planets orbiting around it. As we open a Neruda book, we suddenly see going around us, in circles, like herds of mad buffalo or distracted horses, all sorts of created things; balconies, glacial rocks, lost address books, pipe organs, fingernails, notary publics, pumas, tongues of horses, shoes of dead people. His book, *Residencia En La Tierra*, (*Living On Earth* – the Spanish title suggests being at home on the earth), contains an astounding variety of earthly things, that swim in a sort of murky water. The fifty-six poems in *Residencia I* and *II* were written over a period of ten years – roughly from the time Neruda was twenty-one until he was thirty-one, and they are the greatest surrealist poems yet written in a western language. French surrealist poems appear drab and squeaky beside them. The French poets drove themselves by force into the unconscious because they hated establishment academicism and the rationalistic European culture. But Neruda has a gift, comparable to the fortune-teller's gift for living momentarily in the future, for living briefly in what we might call the unconscious present. Aragon and Breton are poets of reason, who occasionally throw themselves backward into the unconscious, but Neruda, like a deep-sea crab, all claws and shell, is able to breathe in the heavy substances that lie beneath the daylight consciousness. He stays on the bottom for hours, and moves around calmly and without hysteria.

The surrealist images in the *Residencia* poems arrange themselves so as to embody curious and cunning ideas. In "La Calle Destruída," for example, he calls up injustice, architecture exploding, massive buildings weighing us down, exhausted religions, horses of pointless European armies – all of these things, he says, are acting so as to eat life for us, to destroy it, to disgust us so we will throw life away like old clothes. The poems give a sense of the ferocity and density of modern life.

Neruda's poetic master in the *Residencia* poems is not a European

poet but the American, Walt Whitman. He looked deeply into Whitman. Whitman wrote:

I see the workings of battle, pestilence, tyranny, I see martyrs
and prisoners,
I observe a famine at sea, I observe the sailors casting lots who
shall be kill'd to preserve the lives of the rest,
I observe the slights and degradations cast by arrogant persons
upon laborers, the poor, and upon negroes, and the like...
I hear bravuras of birds, bustle of growing wheat, gossip of flames,
clack of sticks cooking my meals,
I hear the sound I love, the sound of the human voice,
I hear all sounds running together, combined, fused or following...
I hear the violincello ('tis a young man's heart's complaint,)
Hear the Key'd cornet, it glides quickly in through my ears,
It shakes mad-sweet pangs through my belly and breast.

Neruda writes:

I look at ships,
I look at trees of bone marrow
bristling like mad cats,
I look at blood, daggers and women's stockings,
and men's hair,
I look at beds, I look at corridors where a virgin is sobbing,
I look at blankets and organs and hotels.

I look at secretive dreams,
I let the stragglings days come in,
and the beginning also, and memories also,
like an eyelid held open hideously
I am watching.

And then this sound comes:
a red noise of bones,
sticking together of flesh
and legs yellow as wheatheads meeting.
I am listening among the explosion of the kisses,

I am listening, shaken among breathings and sobs.
I am here, watching, listening,
with half of my soul at sea and half of my soul on land,
and with both halves of my soul I watch the world.

And even if I close my eyes and cover my heart over entirely
I see the monotonous water falling
in big monotonous drops.
It is like a hurricane of gelatin,
like a waterfall of sperm and sea anemones.
I see a clouded rainbow hurrying.
I see its water moving over my bones.

He shows what it is like, not to be a poet, but to be alive. The *Residencia* poems, however, differ from *Song of Myself* in one fundamental way. The *Residencia* poems are weighed down by harshness, despair, loneliness, death, constant anxiety, loss. Whitman also wrote magnificently of the black emotions, but when Neruda in *Residencia* looks at the suicides, the drowning seamen, the blood-stained hair of the murdered girl, the scenes are not lightened by any sense of brotherhood. On the contrary, the animals and people on all sides isolate him still further, pull him down into his own body, where he struggles as though drowning in the stomach and the intestines.

It so happens I am sick of being a man...

I don't want to go on being a root in the dark,
full of fears, getting larger, shivering in my sleep,
going down, into the moist guts of the earth,
taking in and thinking, eating every day...

I don't want so much misery.
I don't want to go on as a root and a tomb,
alone under the ground, a warehouse full of corpses...

Pablo Neruda was born on July 12th, 1904, in a small frontier town in Southern Chile, the son of a railroad worker. The father was killed in a fall from his train while Neruda was still a boy. He said, "My father is buried in one of the rainiest cemeteries in the world." He described his childhood in Temuco in an essay called "Childhood and Poetry," printed as a preface to his *Collected Poems*. His given name was Neftali Beltran, and his pseudonym was taken very young out of admiration for a 19th century Czech writer.

In 1920, when he was sixteen, Neruda was sent off to Santiago for high school. His poem "Friends on The Road" is written about those days. He was already composing poems, a poetry of high animal spirits and enthusiasm. At nineteen, he published a book called *Twenty Poems of Love and One Ode of Desperation*, which is still loved all over South America.

I remember you as you were in that ultimate autumn.
 You were a gray beret and the whole being at peace.
 In your eyes the fires of the evening dusk were battling,
 And the leaves were falling in the waters of your soul.

He said later that "love poems were sprouting out all over my body."

Body of a woman, white slopes and white thighs,
 You resemble the world in your attitude of surrender.
 My body, savage and peasant, undermines you
 And makes a son leap in the bottom of the earth.

In the preface to a short novel he wrote at this time, he said: "In my day to day life, I am a tranquil man, the enemy of laws, leaders, and established institutions. I find the middle class odious, and I like the lives of people who are restless and unsatisfied, whether they are artists or criminals."

The governments of South America have a tradition of encouraging young poets by offering them consular posts. When Neruda was twenty-three, he was recognized as a poet, and the Chilean

government gave him a post in the consular service in the Far East. During the next five years, he lived in turn in Burma, Siam, China, Japan, and India. Neruda remarks in the interview printed later in this book that those years were years of great isolation and loneliness. Many of the poems that appear in the first two books of *Residencia En La Tierra* were written during those years.

Neruda came back to South America in 1932, when he was 28 years old. For a while he was consul in Buenos Aires; he met Lorca there, when Lorca came to Argentina on a lecture tour. *Residencia I* was published in 1933. In 1934 he was assigned to Spain.

The Spanish poets had already known his wild poems for several years, and greeted him with admiration and enthusiasm. The house in Madrid where Neruda and his wife Delia lived soon became overflowing with poets – Lorca and Hernández especially loved to come. *Residencia II* was published in Spain in 1935. Lorca, Hernández and many others published their surrealist poems in Neruda's magazine *Caballo Verde por la Poesía* (Green Horse for Poetry). Spain had been for fifteen years in a great period of poetry, the most fertile for Spanish poetry since the 1500's. This period was brought to an end by the Civil War.

On July 19th, 1936, Franco invaded from North Africa. Neruda, overstepping his power as consul, immediately declared Chile on the side of the Spanish Republic. After being retired as Consul, he went to Paris, where he raised money for Spanish refugees, helped by Breton and other French poets, and by Vallejo. Neruda's poetry now became seriously political for the first time. Neruda had come to love Spain, living there, and he shared the shock of the Spanish poets, which was the shock of losing their country to the right wing. The growth of political energy in his poetry was probably inevitable in any case. In *Residencia I* and *II*, the outer world is seen with such clarity, and with such a sense of its suffering, that the later development of political poetry does not come as a surprise. He returned to America in 1940, and served as Chilean consul to Mexico during 1941 and 42. The poems he had written about the Spanish Civil War were incorporated into *Residencia*, under the title of *Residencia III*.

In 1944, the workers from Antofogasta, the nitrate mining section of Chile, asked Neruda to run for Senator from their district. He did, and was elected. He now found himself in his country's Senate, as Yeats had. He took a keen interest in Chilean politics. Several years later he described in a long poem written to the Venezuelan poet, Miguel Otero Silva, how happy the Senators would have been if he had remained a love poet:

When I was writing my love poems, which sprouted out from me everywhere, and I was dying from depression, nomadic, abandoned, gnawing the alphabet, they said to me: "What a great man you are, Theocritus!" I am not Theocritus: I took hold of life, and faced her, and kissed her until I subdued her, and then I went through the tunnels of the mines to see how other men live.

And when I came out, my hands stained with depression and garbage,

I held up my hands, and showed them to the generals, and said, "I do not take responsibility for this crime."

They started to cough, became disgusted, left off saying hello, gave up calling me Theocritus, and ended by insulting me and assigning the entire police force to arrest me, because I did not continue to be occupied exclusively with metaphysical subjects.

Neruda's experience as a Senator ended, as he mentions, with his pursuit by the Secret Police. It came about in this way: in 1948, González Videla, a right-wing strong man supported by United States interests, took over as dictator. Six months later Neruda, as Senator, attacked him for violations of the Chilean constitution. Videla responded by charging Neruda with treason. Neruda did not go into voluntary exile, as expected, but attacked Videla once more, and Videla ordered him arrested. Neruda went underground; miners and working people, to save his life, passed him from one house to another at night, first in Chile, later in other South American coun-

tries. He moved about for several months. Finally he crossed the Andes on horseback, and made it to Mexico; from there he flew out of the continent to Paris. All this time he was working on his new book, which he called *Canto General*; it was finished in February of 1949.

The title suggests a poetry that refuses to confine itself to a specific subject matter or kind of poem. Neruda worked on the book for fourteen years. It is the greatest long poem written on the American continent since *Leaves of Grass*. It is a geological, biological and political history of South America. The book contains 340 poems arranged in fifteen sections. The fertility of imagination is astounding. Not all of the poems, of course, are of equal quality. In some, especially those written while Neruda was being hunted by the Chilean secret police, the anger breaks through the container of the poem. We are very slow about translating poetry in the United States, so it may be fifteen or twenty years before we have a translation of this book. For that reason, I have added in this small selection, along with the poems translated from *Canto General*, a very brief description of each section of *Canto General*, to give the reader some idea of the content and movement of the book.

The book as a whole gives a depressing picture of the relations between the U. S. State Department and South American governments. Neruda's *Canto General* is not a great favorite of U. S. cultural organs dealing with Pan American relations. North Americans, both in universities and in the U. S. I. S., who know Neruda's work often say quite soberly that since Neruda became interested in politics, he has not written a poem of any value.

Neruda went from Paris to Russia for the 150th Anniversary celebration of Pushkin's birth, and then back to Mexico, where the first edition of *Canto General* was published in 1950.

When González Videla's government fell, Neruda returned to Chile. Since 1953 he has lived on Isla Negra, a small island off the coast near Santiago; in recent years he has spent part of his time in Valparaiso also.

There was a considerable change in style from the inward, surrealist poems of *Residencia I* and *II* to the narrative, historical poems

of *Canto General*. However, the style of his poetry has changed several more times since then. Both the *Residencia* and *Canto General* poems used, for the most part, the long loping line into which he could put so much power. In the middle 1950's he began writing odes using willowy lines only two or three words long. They were *Odas Elementales*, or Odes to Simple Things. He wrote an ode to a wrist-watch, which Jerome Rothenberg has translated very well, an ode to air, to his socks, to fire, to a watermelon, to printing, to salt. Book after book of these odes came out until he had published a hundred or so odes in three or four years. More recently he has embarked on a book of autobiographical poems called *Memorial to Isla Negra*.

At the moment, Neruda entirely dominates South American poetry. I heard a young South American poet complain of Neruda's abundance. He said that whenever a new idea appears in the air, and some younger poet manages to finish a poem on it, Neruda suddenly publishes three volumes! But, he said, "How can we be mad at Pablo? The poems continue to be good – that's the worst part of it!"

III

In "Childhood and Poetry", Neruda speculates on the origin of his poetry.

"One time, investigating in the backyard of our house in Temuco the tiny objects and miniscule beings of my world, I came upon a hole in one of the boards of the fence. I looked through the hole and saw a landscape like that behind our house, uncared for, and wild. I moved back a few steps, because I sensed vaguely that something was about to happen. All of a sudden a hand appeared – a tiny hand of a boy about my own age. By the time I came close again, the hand was gone, and in its place there was a marvellous white sheep.

The sheep's wool was faded. Its wheels had escaped. All of this only made it more authentic. I had never seen such a wonderful sheep. I looked back through the hole but the boy had disappeared. I went into the house and brought out a treasure of my

own: a pine cone, opened, full of odor and resin, which I adored. I set it down in the same spot and went off with the sheep.

I never saw either the hand or the boy again. And I have never again seen a sheep like that either. The toy I lost finally in a fire. But even now, in 1954, almost fifty years old, whenever I pass a toyshop, I look furtively into the window, but it's no use. They don't make sheep like that any more.

I have been a lucky man. To feel the intimacy of brothers is a marvellous thing in life. To feel the love of people whom we love is a fire that feeds our life. But to feel the affection that comes from those whom we do not know, from those unknown to us, who are watching over our sleep and solitude, over our dangers and our weaknesses – that is something still greater and more beautiful because it widens out the boundaries of our being, and unites all living things.

That exchange brought home to me for the first time a precious idea: that all of humanity is somehow together. That experience came to me again much later; this time it stood out strikingly against a background of trouble and persecution.

It won't surprise you then that I attempted to give something resinous, earthlike, and fragrant in exchange for human brotherhood. Just as I once left the pine-cone by the fence, I have since left my words on the door of so many people who were unknown to me, people in prison, or hunted, or alone.

That is the great lesson I learned in my childhood, in the backyard of a lonely house. Maybe it was nothing but a game two boys played who didn't know each other and wanted to pass to the other some good things of life. Yet maybe this small and mysterious exchange of gifts remained inside me also, deep and indestructible, giving my poetry light."

This curious and beautiful story, which Neruda carefully links to the origins of his own poetry, is a conscious rejection of the connection between poetry and sickness, so often insisted on by Europeans. What is most startling about Neruda, I think, when we compare him to Eliot or Dylan Thomas or Pound, is the great affection that accompanies his imagination. Neruda read his poetry for the first

time in the U. S. in June of '66 at the Poetry Center in New York, and it was clear from that reading that his poetry is intended as a gift. When Eliot gave a reading, one had the feeling that the reading was a cultural experience, and that Eliot doubted very much if you were worth the trouble, but he'd try anyway. When Dylan Thomas read, one had the sense that he was about to perform some magical and fantastic act, perhaps painting a Virgin while riding on three white horses, and maybe you would benefit from this act, and maybe you wouldn't. Pound used to scold the audience for not understanding what he did. When Neruda reads, the mood in the room is one of affection between the audience and himself.

IV

We tend to associate the modern imagination with the jerky imagination, which starts forward, stops, turns around, switches from subject to subject. In Neruda's poems, the imagination drives forward, joining the entire poem in a rising flow of imaginative energy. In the underworld of the consciousness, in the thickets where Freud, standing a short distance off, pointed out incest bushes, murder trees, half-buried primitive altars, and unburied bodies, Neruda's imagination moves with utter assurance, sweeping from one spot to another almost magically. The starved emotional lives of notary publics he links to the whiteness of flour, sexual desire to the shape of shoes, death to the barking sound where there is no dog. His imagination sees the hidden connections between conscious and unconscious substances with such assurance that he hardly bothers with metaphors – he links them by tying their hidden tails. He is a new kind of creature moving about under the surface of everything. Moving under the earth, he knows everything from the bottom up (which is the right way to learn the nature of a thing) and therefore is never at a loss for its name. Compared to him, most American poets resemble blind men moving gingerly along the ground from tree to tree, from house to house, feeling each thing for a long time, and then calling out "House!" when we already know it is a house.

Neruda has confidence in what is hidden. The Establishment respects only what the light has fallen on, but Neruda likes the unlit just as well. He writes of small typists without scorn, and of the souls of huge, sleeping snakes.

He violates the rules for behaviour set up by the wise. The conventionally wise assure us that to a surrealist the outer world has no reality – only his inner flow of images is real. Neruda's work demolishes this banality. Neruda's poetry is deeply surrealist, and yet entities of the outer world like the United Fruit Company have greater force in his poems than in those of any strictly "outward" poet alive. Once a poet takes a political stand, the wise assure us that he will cease writing good poetry. Neruda became a Communist in the middle of his life and has remained one: at least half of his greatest work, one must admit, was written after that time. He has written great poetry at all times of his life.

Finally, many critics in the United States insist the poem must be hard-bitten, impersonal and rational, lest it lack sophistication. Neruda is wildly romantic, and more sophisticated than Hulme or Pound could dream of being. He has few literary theories. Like Vallejo, Neruda wishes to help humanity, and tells the truth for that reason.

from

RESIDENCIA EN LA TIERRA

I AND II

1925-1935

SOLO LA MUERTE

Hay cementerios solos,
tumbas llenas de huesos sin sonido,
el corazón pasando un túnel
oscuro, oscuro, oscuro,
como un naufragio hacia adentro nos morimos,
como ahogarnos en el corazón,
como irnos cayendo desde la piel al alma.

Hay cadáveres,
hay pies de pegajosa losa fría,
hay la muerte en los huesos,
como un sonido puro,
como un ladrido sin perro,
saliendo de ciertas campanas, de ciertas tumbas
creciendo en la humedad como el llanto a la lluvia.

Yo veo, solo, a veces,
ataúdes a vela
zarpar con difuntos pálidos, con mujeres de trenzas muertas,
can panaderos blancos como ángeles,
con niñas pensativas casadas con notarios,
ataúdes subiendo el río vertical de los muertos,
el río morado,
hacia arriba, con las velas hinchadas por el sonido de la muerte,
hinchadas por el sonido silencioso de la muerte.

A lo sonoro llega la muerte
como un zapato sin pie, como un traje sin hombre,
llega a golpear con un anillo sin piedra y sin dedo,

NOTHING BUT DEATH

There are cemeteries that are lonely,
graves full of bones that do not make a sound,
the heart moving through a tunnel,
in it darkness, darkness, darkness,
like a shipwreck we die going into ourselves,
as though we were drowning inside our hearts,
as though we lived falling out of the skin into the soul.

And there are corpses,
feet made of cold and sticky clay,
death is inside the bones,
like a barking where there are no dogs,
coming out from bells somewhere, from graves somewhere,
growing in the damp air like tears or rain.

Sometimes I see alone
coffins under sail,
embarking with the pale dead, with women that have dead hair,
with bakers who are as white as angels,
and pensive young girls married to notary publics,
caskets sailing up the vertical river of the dead,
the river of dark purple,
moving upstream with sails filled out by the sound of death,
filled by the sound of death which is silence.

Death arrives among all that sound
like a shoe with no foot in it, like a suit with no man in it,
comes and knocks, using a ring with no stone in it, with no
finger in it,

llega a gritar sin boca, sin lengua, sin garganta.
Sin embargo sus pasos suenan
y su vestido suena, callado, como un árbol.

Yo no sé, yo conozco poco, yo apenas veo,
pero creo que su canto tiene color de violetas húmedas,
de violetas acostumbradas a la tierra,
porque la cara de la muerte es verde,
y la mirada de la muerte es verde,
con la aguda humedad de una hoja de violeta
y su grave color de invierno exasperado.

Pero la muerte va también por el mundo vestida de escoba,
lame el suelo buscando difuntos,
la muerte está en la escoba,
es la lengua de la muerte buscando muertos,
es la aguja de la muerte muscando hilo.

La muerte está en los catres:
en los colchones lentos, en las frazadas negras
vive tendida, y de repente sopla:
sopla un sonido oscuro que hincha sábanas,
y hay camas navegando a un puerto
en donde está esperando, vestida de almirante.

comes and shouts with no mouth, with no tongue, with no
throat.

Nevertheless its steps can be heard
and its clothing makes a hushed sound, like a tree.

I'm not sure, I understand only a little, I can hardly see,
but it seems to me that its singing has the color of damp violets,
of violets that are at home in the earth,
because the face of death is green,
and the look death gives is green,
with the penetrating dampness of a violet leaf
and the somber color of embittered winter.

But death also goes through the world dressed as a broom,
lapping the floor, looking for dead bodies,
death is inside the broom,
the broom is the tongue of death looking for corpses,
it is the needle of death looking for thread.

Death is inside the folding cots:
it spends its life sleeping on the slow mattresses,
in the black blankets, and suddenly breathes out:
it blows out a mournful sound that swells the sheets,
and the beds go sailing toward a port
where death is waiting, dressed like an admiral.

R.B.

MELANCOLÍA EN LAS FAMILIAS

Conservo un frasco azul,
dentro de él una oreja y un retrato:
cuando la noche obliga
a las plumas del buho,
cuando el ronco cerezo
se destroza los labios y amenaza
con cáscaras que el viento del océano a menudo perfora,
yo sé que hay grandes extensiones hundidas,
cuarzo en lingotes,
cieno,
aguas azules para una batalla,
mucho silencio, muchas
vetas de retrocesos y alcanfores,
cosas caídas, medallas, ternuras,
paracaídas, besos.

No es sino el paso de un día hacia otro,
una sola botella andando por los mares,
y un comedor adonde llegan rosas,
un comedor abandonado
como una espina: me refiero
a una copa trizada, a una cortina, al fondo
de una sala desierta por donde pasa un río
arrastrando las piedras. Es una casa
situada en los cimientos de la lluvia,
una casa de dos pisos con ventanas obligatorias
y enredaderas estrictamente fieles.

Voy por las tardes, llego
lleno de lodo y muerte,

MELANCHOLY INSIDE FAMILIES

I keep a blue bottle.
Inside it an ear and a portrait.
When the night dominates
the feathers of the owl,
when the hoarse cherry tree
rips out its lips and makes menacing gestures
with rinds which the ocean wind often perforates –
then I know that there are immense expanses hidden from us,
quartz in slugs,
ooze,
blue waters for a battle,
much silence, many ore-veins
of withdrawals and camphor,
fallen things, medallions, kindnesses,
parachutes, kisses.

It is only the passage from one day to another,
a single bottle moving over the seas,
and a dining-room where roses arrive,
a dining room deserted
as a fish-bone; I am speaking of
a smashed cup, a curtain, at the end
of a deserted room through which a river passes
dragging along the stones. It is a house
set on the foundations of the rain,
a house of two floors with the required number of windows,
and climbing vines faithful in every particular.

I walk through afternoons, I arrive
full of mud and death,

arrastrando la tierra y sus raíces,
y su vaga barriga en donde duermen
cadáveres con trigo,
metales, elefantes derrumbados.

Pero por sobre todo hay un terrible,
un terrible comedor abandonado,
con las alcuzas rotas
y el vinagre corriendo debajo de las sillas,
un rayo detenido de la luna,
algo oscuro, y me busco
una comparación dentro de mí:
tal vez es una tienda rodeada por el mar
y paños rotos goteando salmuera.

Es sólo un comedor abandonado,
y alrededor hay extensiones,
fábricas sumergidas, maderas
que sólo yo conozco,
porque estoy triste y viajo,
y conozco la tierra, y estoy triste.

dragging along the earth and its roots,
and its indistinct stomach in which corpses
are sleeping with wheat,
metals, and pushed-over elephants.

But above all there is a terrifying,
a terrifying deserted dining-room,
with its broken olive oil cruets,
and vinegar running under its chairs,
one ray of moonlight tied down,
something dark, and I look
for a comparison inside myself:
perhaps it is a grocery store surrounded by the sea
and torn clothing from which sea water is dripping.

It is only a deserted dining-room,
and around it there are expanses,
sunken factories, pieces of timber
which I alone know
because I am sad, and because I travel,
and I know the earth, and I am sad.

R. B. and J. W.

SONATA Y DESTRUCCIONES

DESPUÉS de mucho, después de vagas leguas,
confuso de dominios, incierto de territorios,
acompañado de pobres esperanzas
y compañías infieles y desconfiados sueños,
amo lo tenaz que aún sobrevive en mis ojos,
oigo en mi corazón mis pasos de jinete,
muerdo el fuego dormido y la sal arruinada,
y de noche, de atmósfera oscura y luto prófugo,
aquel que vela a la orilla de los campamentos,
el viajero armado de estériles resistencias,
detenido entre sombras que crecen y alas que tiemblan,
me siento ser, y mi brazo de piedra me defiende.

Hay entre ciencias de llanto un altar confuso,
y en mi sesión de atardeceres sin perfume,
en mis abandonados dormitorios donde habita la luna,
y arañas de mi propiedad, y destrucciones que me son queridas,
adoro mi propio ser perdido, mi substancia imperfecta,
mi golpe de plata y mi pérdida eterna.
Ardió la uva húmeda, y su agua funeral
aún vacila, aún reside,
y el patrimonio estéril, y el domicilio traidor.
Quién hizo cermonia de cenizas?

Quién amó lo perdido, quién protegió lo último?
El hueso del padre, la madera del buque muerto,
y su propio final, su misma huída,
su fuerza triste, su dios miserable?

SONATA AND DESTRUCTIONS

After so many things, after so many hazy miles,
not sure which kingdom it is, not knowing the terrain,
travelling with pitiful hopes,
and lying companions, and suspicious dreams,
I love the firmness that still survives in my eyes,
I hear my heart beating as if I were riding a horse,
I bite the sleeping fire and the ruined salt,
and at night, when darkness is thick, and mourning furtive,
I imagine I am the one keeping watch on the far shore
of the encampments, the traveller armed with his sterile defenses,
caught between growing shadows
and shivering wings, and my arm made of stone protects me.

There's a confused altar among the sciences of tears,
and in my twilight meditations with no perfume,
and in my deserted sleeping rooms where the moon lives,
and the spiders that belong to me, and the destructions I am
fond of,

I love my own lost self, my faulty stuff,
my silver wound, and my eternal loss.
The damp grapes burned, and their funereal water
is still flickering, is still with us,
and the sterile inheritance, and the treacherous home.
Who performed a ceremony of ashes?

Who loved the lost thing, who sheltered the last thing of all?
The father's bone, the dead ship's timber,
and his own end, his flight,
his melancholy power, his god that had bad luck?

Acecho, pues, lo inanimado y lo doliente,
y el testimonio extraño que sostengo,
con eficiencia cruel y escrito en cenizas,
es la forma de olvido que prefiero,
el nombre que doy a la tierra, el valor de mis sueños,
la cantidad interminable que divido
con mis ojos de invierno, durante cada día de este mundo.

I lie in wait, then, for what is not alive and what is suffering,
and the extraordinary testimony I bring forward,
with brutal efficiency and written down in the ashes,
is the form of oblivion that I prefer,
the name I give to the earth, the value of my dreams,
the endless abundance which I distribute
with my wintry eyes, every day this world goes on.

R.B.

CABALLERO SOLO

Los jóvenes homosexuales y las muchachas amorosas,
y las largas viudas que sufren el delirante insomnio,
y las jóvenes señoras preñadas hace treinta horas,
y los roncros gatos que cruzan mi jardín en tinieblas,
como un collar de palpitantes ostras sexuales
rodean mi residencia solitaria,
como enemigos establecidos contra mi alma,
como conspiradores en traje de dormitorio
que cambiaran largos besos espesos por consigna.

El radiante verano conduce a los enamorados
en uniformes regimientos melancólicos,
hechos de gordas y flacas y alegres y tristes parejas:
bajo los elegantes cocoteros, junto al océano y la luna,
hay una continua vida de pantalones y polleras,
un rumor de medias de seda acariciadas,
y senos femeninos que brillan como ojos.

El pequeño empleado, después de mucho,
después del tedio semanal, y las novelas leídas de noche en
cama,
ha definitivamente seducido a su vecina,
y la lleva a los miserables cinematógrafos
donde los héroes son potros o príncipes apasionados,
y acaricia sus piernas llenas de dulce vello
con sus ardientes y húmedas manos que huelen a cigarrillo.

Los atardeceres del seductor y las noches de los esposos

GENTLEMAN WITHOUT COMPANY

The homosexual young men and the love-mad girls,
and the long widows who suffer from a delirious inability to
sleep,
and the young wives who have been pregnant for thirty hours,
and the hoarse cats that cross my garden in the dark,
these, like a necklace of throbbing sexual oysters,
surround my solitary house,
like enemies set up against my soul,
like members of a conspiracy dressed in sleeping clothes
who give each other as passwords long and profound kisses.

The shining summer leads out the lovers
in low-spirited regiments that are all alike,
made up of fat and thin and cheerful and sullen pairs;
under the elegant coconut palms, near the sea and the moon,
there is a steady movement of trousers and petticoats,
and a hum from the stroking of silk stockings,
and women's breasts sparkling like eyes.

The small-time employee, after many things,
after the boredom of the week, and the novels read in bed at
night,
has once and for all seduced the woman next door
and now he escorts her to the miserable movies,
where the heroes are either colts or passionate princes,
and he strokes her legs sheathed in their sweet down
with his warm and damp hands that smell of cigarettes.

The evenings of the woman-chaser and the nights of the hus-
bands

y las horas después del almuerzo en que los jóvenes estudiantes
y las jóvenes estudiantes, y los sacerdotes se masturban,
y los animales fornican directamente,
y las abejas huelen a sangre, y las moscas zumban coléricas,
y los primos juegan extrañamente con sus primas,
y los médicos miran con furia al marido de la joven paciente,
y las horas de la mañana en que el profesor, como por descuido,
cumple con su deber conyugal y desayuna,
y más aún, los adúlteros, que se aman con verdadero amor
sobre lechos altos y largos como embarcaciones:
seguramente, eternamente me rodea
este gran bosque respiratorio y enredado
con grandes flores como bocas y dentaduras
y negras raíces en forma de uñas y zapatos.

come together like two bed-sheets and bury me,
and the hours after lunch, when the young male students
and the young women students, and the priests are masturba-
ting,
and the animals are riding each other frankly,
and the bees have an odor of blood, and the flies buzz in anger,
and cousins play strange games with their girl-cousins,
and doctors look with rage at the husband of the young patient,
and the morning hours, when the professor, as if absentminded,
performs his marital duty, and has breakfast,
and still more, the adulterers, who love each other with true
love
of beds high and huge as ocean liners,
this immense forest, entangled and breathing,
hedges me around firmly on all sides forever
with huge flowers like mouths and rows of teeth
and black roots that look like fingernails and shoes.

R.B.

Rodando a goterones solos,
a gotas como dientes,
a espesos goterones de mermelada y sangre,
rodando a goterones,
cae el agua,
como una espada en gotas,
como un desgarrador río de vidrio,
cae mordiendo,
golpeando el eje de la simetría, pegando en las costuras del
alma,
rompiendo cosas abandonadas, empapando lo oscuro.

Solamente es un soplo, más húmedo que que el llanto,
un líquido, un sudor, un aceite sin nombre,
un movimiento agudo,
haciéndose, espesándose,
cae el agua,
a goterones lentos,
hacia su mar, hacia su seco océano,
hacia su ola sin agua.

Veo el verano extenso, y un estertor saliendo de un granero,
bodegas, cigarras,
poblaciones, estímulos,
habitaciones, niñas
durmiendo con las manos en el corazón,
soñando con bandidos, con incendios,
veo barcos,
veo árboles de médula
erizados como gatos rabiosos,

SEXUAL WATER

Rolling down in big and distinct drops,
in drops like teeth,
in heavy drops like marmalade and blood,
rolling down in big drops, the water
is falling,
like a sword made of drops,
like a river of glass that tears things,
it is falling, biting,
beating on the axle of symmetry, knocking on the seams of the
soul,
breaking abandoned things, soaking the darkness.

It is nothing but a breath, more full of moisture than crying,
a liquid, a sweat, an oil that has no name,
a sharp motion,
taking shape, making itself thick,
the water is falling
in slow drops
toward the sea, toward its dry ocean,
toward its wave without water.

I look at the wide summer, and a loud noise coming from a barn,
wine shops, cicadas,
towns, excitements,
houses, girls
sleeping with hands over their heart,
dreaming of pirates, of conflagrations,
I look at ships,
I look at trees of bone marrow
bristling like mad cats,

veo sangre, puñales y medias de mujer,
y pelos de hombre,
veo camas, veo corredores donde grita una virgen,
veo frazadas y órganos y hoteles.

Veo los sueños sigilosos,
admito los postreros días,
y también los orígenes, y también los recuerdos,
como un párpado atrocemente levantado a la fuerza
estoy mirando.

Y entonces hay este sonido:
un ruido rojo de huesos,
un pegarse de carne,
y piernas amarillas como espigas juntándose.
Yo escucho entre el disparo de los besos,
escucho, sacudido entre respiraciones y sollozos.

Estoy, mirando, oyendo,
con la mitad del alma en el mar y la mitad del alma en la tierra,
y con las dos mitades del alma miro el mundo.

Y aunque cierre los ojos y me cubra el corazón enteramente,
veo caer un agua sorda,
a goterones sordos.
Es como un huracán de gelatina,
como una catarata de espermas y medusas.
Veo correr un arco iris turbio.
Veo pasar sus aguas a través de los huesos.

I look at blood, daggers and women's stockings,
and men's hair,
I look at beds, I look at corridors where a virgin is sobbing,
I look at blankets and organs and hotels.

I look at secretive dreams,
I let the straggling days come in,
and the beginnings also, and memories also,
like an eyelid held open hideously
I am watching.

And then this sound comes:
a red noise of bones,
a sticking together of flesh
and legs yellow as wheatheads meeting.
I am listening among the explosion of the kisses,
I am listening shaken among breathings and sobs.

I am here, watching, listening,
with half of my soul at sea and half of my soul on land,
and with both halves of my soul I watch the world.

And even if I close my eyes and cover my heart over entirely,
I see the monotonous water falling
in big monotonous drops.
It is like a hurricane of gelatin,
like a waterfall of sperm and sea anemones.
I see a clouded rainbow hurrying.
I see its water moving over my bones.

J.W.

ENTIERRO EN EL ESTE

Yo trabajo de noche, rodeado de ciudad,
de pescadores, de alfareros, de difuntos quemados
con azafrán y frutas, envueltos en muselina escarlata:
bajo mi balcón esos muertos terribles
pasan sonando cadenas y flautas de cobre,
estridentes y finas y lúgubres silban
entre el color de las pesadas flores envenenadas
y el grito de los cenicientos danzarines
y el creciente monótono de los tamtam
y el humo de las maderas que arden y huelen.

Porque una vez doblado el camino, junto al turbio río,
sus corazones, detenidos o iniciando un mayor movimiento
rodarán quemados, con la pierna y el pie hechos fuego,
y la trémula ceniza caerá sobre el agua,
flotará como ramo de flores calcinadas
o como extinto fuego dejado por tan poderosos viajeros
que hicieron arder algo sobre las negras aguas, y devoraron
un aliento desaparecido y un licor extremo.

FUNERAL IN THE EAST

I work at night, the city all around me,
fishermen, and potters, and corpses that are burned
with saffron and fruit, rolled in scarlet muslin:
those terrifying corpses go past under my balcony,
making their chains and copper flutes give off noise,
whistling sounds, harsh and pure and mournful,
among the brightness of the flowers heavy and poisoned,
and the cries of the dancers covered with ashes,
and the constantly rising monotony of the drum,
and the smoke from the logs scented and burning.

For once around the corner, near the muddy river,
their hearts, either stopping or starting off at a greater speed,
will roll over, burned, the leg and the foot turned to fire,
and the fluttering ashes will settle down on the water
and float like a branch of chalky flowers,
or like an extinct fire left by travellers with such great powers
they made something blaze up on the black waters, and bolted
down
a food no longer found, and one finishing drink.

R.B.

Entre sombra y espacio, entre guarniciones y doncellas,
dotado de corazón singular y sueños funestos,
precipitadamente pálido, marchito en la frente
y con luto de viudo furioso por cada día de mi vida,
ay, para cada agua invisible que bebo soñolientamente
y de todo sonido que acojo temblando,
tengo la misma sed ausente y la misma fiebre fría
un oído que nace, una angustia indirecta,
como si llegaran ladrones o fantasmas,
y en una cáscara de extensión fija y profunda,
como un camarero humillado, como una campana un poco ronca,
como un espejo viejo, como un olor de casa sola
en la que los huéspedes entran de noche perdidamente ebrios,
y hay un olor de ropa tirada al suelo, y una ausencia de flores
– posiblemente de otro modo aún menos melancólico –,
pero, la verdad, de pronto, el viento que azota mi pecho,
las noches de substancia infinita caídas en mi dormitorio,
el ruido de un día que arde con sacrificio
me piden lo profético que hay en mí, con melancolía
y un golpe de objetos que llaman sin ser respondidos
hay, y un movimiento sin tregua, y un nombre confuso.

THE ART OF POETRY

Between shadows and clearing, between defenses and young
girls,
having inherited an original heart, and funereal imagination,
suddenly pale, something withered in my face,
in mourning like a desperate widower every day of my life,
for every drop of invisible water I drink
in my sleepy way, and for every sound I take in shivering,
I have the same chilly fever, and the same absent thirst,
an ear coming into the world, an oblique anxiety,
as though robbers were about to arrive, or ghosts,
inside a sea shell with great and unchangeable depths,
like a humiliated waiter, or a bell slightly hoarse,
or an aged mirror or the smell of an empty house
where the guests come in hopelessly drunk at night,
having an odor of clothes thrown on the floor, and no flowers,
– in another sense, possibly not as sad –
still, the truth is, the wind suddenly hitting my chest,
the nights with infinite substance fallen into my bedroom,
the crackling of a day hardly able to burn,
ask from me sadly whatever I have that is prophetic,
and there are objects that knock, and are never answered,
and something always moving, and a name that does not come
clear.

R.B.

NO HAY OLVIDO (SONATA)

Si me preguntáis en dónde he estado
debo decir "Sucede".

Debo de hablar del suelo que oscurecen las piedras,
del río que durando se destruye:

no sé sino las cosas que los pájaros pierden,
el mar dejado atrás, o mi hermana llorando.

Por qué tantas regiones, por qué un día
se junta con un día? Por qué una negra noche
se acumula en la boca? Por qué muertos?

Si me preguntáis de dónde vengo, tengo que conversar con
cosas rotas,

con utensilios demasiado amargos,
con grandes bestias a menudo podridas
y con mi acongojado corazón.

No son recuerdos los que se han cruzado
ni es la paloma amarillenta que duerme en el olvido,
sino caras con lágrimas,

dedos en la garganta,
y lo que se desploma de las hojas:
la oscuridad de un día transcurrido,
de un día alimentado con nuestra triste sangre.

He aquí violetas, golondrinas,
todo cuanto nos gusta y aparece
en las dulces tarjetas de larga cola
por donde se pasean el tiempo y la dulzura.

THERE IS NO FORGETFULNESS (SONATA)

If you ask where I have been
I have to say, "It so happens..."
I have to talk about the earth turned dark with stones,
and the river which ruins itself by keeping alive;
I only know about objects that birds lose,
the sea far behind us, or my sister crying.
Why so many different places, why does one day
merge with another day? Why all these people dead?

If you ask where I come from I have to start talking with broken objects,
with kitchenware that has too much bitterness,
with animals quite often rotten,
and with my heavy soul.

What have met and crossed are not memories,
nor the yellow pigeon that sleeps in forgetfulness;
but they are faces with tears,
fingers at the throat,
anything that drops out of the leaves:
the shadowiness of a day already passed by,
of a day fed with our own mournful blood.

Look and see violets, swallows,
all those things we love so much and can see
on the tender greeting-cards with long tails
where time and sweetness are sauntering.

Pero no penetremos más allá de esos dientes,
no mordamos las cáscaras que el silencio acumula,
porque no sé qué contestar:
hay tantos muertos,
y tantos malecones que el sol rojo partía,
y tantas cabezas que golpean los buques,
y tantas manos que han encerrado besos,
y tantas cosas que quiero olvidar.

But let's not go deeper than those teeth,
nor bite into the rinds growing over the silence,
because I don't know what to say.

There are so many people dead
and so many sea-walls that the red sun used to split,
and so many heads that the boats hit,
and so many hands that have closed around kisses,
and so many things I would like to forget.

R.B.

from

CANTO GENERAL

1950

ALGUNAS BESTIAS

Era el crepúsculo de la iguana.
Desde la arcoirisada crestería
su lengua como un dardo
se hundía en la verdura,
el hormiguero monacal pisaba
con melodioso pie la selva,
el guanaco fino como el oxígeno
en las anchas alturas pardas
iba calzando botas de oro,
mientras la llama abría cándidos
ojos en la delicadeza
del mundo lleno de rocío.

Los monos trenzaban un hilo
interminablemente erótico
en las riberas de la aurora,
derribando muros de polen
y espantando el vuelo violeta
de las mariposas de Muzo.
Era la noche de los caimanes,
la noche pura y pululante
de hocicos saliendo del légamo,
y de las ciénagas soñolientas
un ruido opaco de armaduras
volvía al origen terrestre.

El jaguar tocaba las hojas
con su ausencia fosforescente,
el puma corre en el ramaje
como el fuego devorador
mientras arden en él los ojos

SOME BEASTS

It was the twilight of the iguana.
From the rainbow-arch of the battlements,
his long tongue like a lance
sank down in the green leaves,
and a swarm of ants, monks with feet chanting,
crawled off into the jungle,
the guanaco, thin as oxygen
in the wide peaks of cloud,
went along, wearing his shoes of gold,
while the llama opened his honest eyes
on the breakable neatness
of a world full of dew.

The monkeys braided a sexual
thread that went on and on
along the shores of the dawn,
demolishing walls of pollen
and startling the butterflies of Muzo
into flying violets.

It was the night of the alligators,
the pure night, crawling
with snouts emerging from ooze,
and out of the sleepy marshes
the confused noise of scaly plates
returned to the ground where they began.

The jaguar brushed the leaves
with a luminous absence,
the puma runs through the branches
like a forest fire,
while the jungle's drunken eyes

alcohólicos de la selva.
Los tejones rascan los pies
del río, husmean el nido
cuya delicia palpitante
atacarán con dientes rojos.

Y en el fondo del agua magna,
como el círculo de la tierra,
está la gigante anaconda
cubierta de barro rituales,
devoradora y religiosa.

PART I describes South America before the Europeans arrived: the plants and trees, birds, rivers and minerals, and the Aztec priests coming down the temple stairs looking like “brilliant pheasants.” There are eleven poems in this section; we have chosen the second poem, about the animals.

burn from inside him.
The badgers scratch the river's
feet, scenting the nest
whose throbbing delicacy
they attack with red teeth.

And deep in the huge waters
the enormous anaconda lies
like the circle around the earth,
covered with ceremonies of mud,
devouring, religious.

J.W.

ALTURAS DE MACCHU PICCU, III

El ser como el maíz se desgranaba en el inacabable granero de los hechos perdidos, de los acontecimientos miserables, del uno al siete, al ocho, y no una muerte, sino muchas muertes llegaba a cada uno: cada día una muerte pequeña, polvo, gusano, lámpara que se apaga en el lodo del suburbio, una pequeña muerte de alas gruesas entraba en cada hombre como una corta lanza y era el hombre asediado del pan o del cuchillo, el ganadero: el hijo de los puertos, o el capitán oscuro del arado, o el roedor de las calles espesas:

todos desfallecieron esperando su muerte, su corta muerte diaria:
y su quebranto aciago de cada día era como una copa negra que bebían temblando.

PART II, called The Heights of Macchu Picchu is made up of twelve poems suggested by a visit Neruda made in 1943 to the old ruins of Macchu Picchu, high in the Andes.

THE HEIGHTS OF MACCHU PICCHU, III

The human soul was threshed out like maize in the endless granary of defeated actions, of mean things that happened, to the very edge of endurance, and beyond, and not only death, but many deaths, came to each one: each day a tiny death, dust, worm, a light flicked off in the mud at the city's edge, a tiny death with coarse wings pierced into each man like a short lance and the man was besieged by the bread or by the knife, the cattle-dealer: the child of sea-harbors, or the dark captain of the plough, or the rag-picker of snarled streets:

everybody lost heart, anxiously waiting for death, the short death of every day: and the grinding bad luck of every day was like a black cup that they drank, with their hands shaking.

J.W.

LA CABEZA EN EL PALO

Balboa, muerte y garra
llevaste a los rincones de la dulce
tierra central, y entre los perros
cazadores, el tuyo era tu alma:
Leoncico de bello sangriento
recogió al esclavo que huía,
hundió colmillos españoles
en las gargantas palpitantes,
y de las uñas de los perros
salía la carne al martirio
y la alhaja caía en la bolsa.

Maldito sean perro y hombre,
el aullido infame en la selva
original, el acechante
paso del hierro y del bandido.
Maldita sea la espinosa
corona de la zarza agreste
que no saltó como un erizo
a defender la cuna invadida.

Pero entre los capitanes
sanguinarios se alzó en la sombra
la justicia de los puñales,
la acerba rama de la envidia.

Y al regreso estaba en medio
de tu camino el apellido
de Pedrarias como una soga.

THE HEAD ON THE POLE

Balboa, you brought death and claws
everywhere into the sweet land
of Central America, and among those hunting dogs
your dog was your soul:
with his blood-stained jowls Lioncub
picked up the slave escaping,
sank his Spanish teeth
into the panting throats;
pieces of flesh slipped from
the dogs' jaws into martyrdom
and the jewel fell in the pocket.

A curse on dog and man,
the horrible howl in the unbroken
forest, and the stealthy
walk of the iron and the bandit.
And a curse on the spiny crown
of the wild thornbush
that did not leap like a hedgehog
to protect the invaded cradle.

But the justice of knives,
the bitter branch of envy,
rose in the darkness
among the bloody captains.

And when you got back, the man
named Pedrarias stood
in your way like a rope.

Te juzgaron entre ladridos
de perros matadores de indios.
Ahora que mueres, oyes
el silencio puro, partido
por tus lebreles azuzados ?
Ahora que mueres en las manos
de los torvos adelantados,
sientes el aroma dorado
del dulce reino destruído ?

Cuando cortaron la cabeza
de Balboa, quedó ensartada
en un palo. Sus ojos muertos
descompusieron su relámpago
y descendieron por la lanza
en un goterón de inmundicia
que desapareció en la tierra.

PART III turns to the European discoverers of South America, and the conquistadors. One poem describes Columbus' first arrival in 1493, and his later arrival at Mexico in 1519. Cortez, Balboa and Ximenez de Quesada have their own poems; Neruda describes the death of Atuhualpa, and the careers of Valdivia and Magellan. The picture he gives of these men is often very different from the images of them in American history books. We have translated the ninth poem of thirty-three, on the fall and death of Balboa.

They tried you surrounded by the barkings
of dogs that killed Indians.
Now you are dying, do you hear
the pure silence, broken
by your excited dogs?
Now you are dying in the hands
of the stern authorities,
do you sense the precious aroma
of the sweet kingdom smashed forever?

When they cut off Balboa's
head, it was stuck up
on a pole. His dead eyes
let their lightning rot
and descended along the pole
as a large drop of filth
which disappeared into the earth.

R.B.

PART IV, called "The Liberators" concerns the gradual liberation of South America from the various European nations. This section is the longest in the book, with over fifty poems. We have chosen the twenty-eighth poem, on the liberator of Haiti. There are fine poems also on O'Higgins, Lautaro, San Martin, Bolivar, Jose Marti and others.

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE

Haití de su dulzura enmarañada,
extrae pétalos patéticos,
rectitud de jardines, edificios
de la grandeza, arrulla
el mar como un abuelo oscuro
su antigua dignidad de piel y espacio.

Toussaint L'Overture anuda
la vegetal soberanía,
la majestad encadenada,
la sorda voz de los tambores
Y ataca, cierra el paso, sube,
ordena, expulsa, desafía
como un monarca natural,
hasta que en la red tenebrosa
cae y lo llevan por los mares
arrastrado y atropellado
como el regreso de su raza,
tirado a la muerte secreta
de las sentinas y los sótanos.
Pero en la Isla arden las peñas,
hablan las ramas escondidas,
se transmiten las esperanzas,
surgen los muros del baluarte.
La libertad es bosque tuyo,
oscuro hermano, preserva
tu memoria de sufrimientos
y que los héroes pasados
custodien tu mágica espuma.

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE

Out of its own tangled sweetness
Haiti raises mournful petals,
and elaborate gardens, magnificent
structures, and rocks the sea
as a dark grandfather rocks
his ancient dignity of skin and space.

Toussaint L'Ouverture knit together
the vegetable kingdom,
the majesty chained,
the monotonous voice of the drums
and attacks, cuts off retreats, rises,
orders, expels, defies
like a natural monarch,
until he falls into the shadowy net
and they carry him over the seas,
dragged along and trampled down
like the return of his race,
thrown into the secret death
of the ship-holds and the cellars.
But on the island the boulders burn,
the hidden branches speak,
hopes are passed on,
the walls of the fortress rise.
Liberty is your own forest,
dark brother, don't lose
the memory of your sufferings,
may the ancestral heroes
have your magic sea-foam in their keeping.

J.W.

Cuando sonó la trompeta, estuvo
todo preparado en la tierra,
y Jehová repartió el mundo
a Coca-Cola Inc., Anaconda,
Ford Motors, y otras entidades:
la Compañía Frutera Inc.
se reservó lo más jugoso,
la costa central de mi tierra,
la dulce cintura de América.
Bautizó de nuevo sus tierras
como "Repúblicas Bananas,"
y sobre los muertos dormidos,
sobre los héroes inquietos
que conquistaron la grandeza,
la libertad y las banderas,
estableció la ópera bufa:
enajenó los albedriós
regaló coronas de César,
desenvainó la envidia, atrajo
la dictadura de las moscas,
moscas Trujillos, moscas Tachos,
moscas Carías, moscas Martínez,
moscas Ubico, moscas húmedas
de sangre humilde y mermelada,
moscas borrachas que zumban
sobre las tumbas populares,
moscas de circo, sabias moscas
entendidas en tiranía.

THE UNITED FRUIT CO.

When the trumpet sounded, it was
all prepared on the earth,
the Jehovah parcelled out the earth
to Coca Cola, Inc., Anaconda,
Ford Motors, and other entities:
The Fruit Company, Inc.
reserved for itself the most succulent,
the central coast of my own land,
the delicate waist of America.
It rechristened its territories
as the "Banana Republics"
and over the sleeping dead,
over the restless heroes
who brought about the greatness,
the liberty and the flags,
it established the comic opera:
abolished the independencies,
presented crowns of Caesar,
unsheathed envy, attracted
the dictatorship of the flies,
Trujillo flies, Tacho flies,
Carias flies, Martinez flies,
Ubico flies, damp flies
of modest blood and marmelade,
drunken flies who zoom
over the ordinary graves,
circus flies, wise flies
well trained in tyranny.

Entre las moscas sanguinarias
la Frutera desembarca,
arrasando el café y las frutas,
en sus barcos que deslizaron
como bandejas el tesoro
de nuestras tierras sumergidas.

Mientras tanto, por los abismos
azucarados de los puertos,
caían indios sepultados
en el vapor de la mañana:
un cuerpo rueda, una cosa
sin nombre, un número caído,
un racimo de fruta muerta
derramada en el pudridero.

PART V, "The Sand of Treason," concentrates on the men who allowed South American nations to fall back to colonialism, this time to the financial colonialism of the United States, and on the men who support United States' interests today. He mentions the pressure from U.S. companies to keep wages low. He describes especially events in the year 1946, while he was a Senator in Chile. We have chosen one of the poems in the center of the section, on the United Fruit Company.

Among the blood-thirsty flies
the Fruit Company lands its ships,
taking off the coffee and the fruit;
the treasure of our submerged
territories flow as though
on plates into the ships.

Meanwhile Indians are falling
into the sugared chasms
of the harbors, wrapped
for burial in the mist of the dawn:
a body rolls, a thing
that has no name, a fallen cipher,
a cluster of dead fruit
thrown down on the dump.

R.B.

LOS DICTADORES

Ha quedado un olor entre los cañaverales:
une mezcla de sangre y cuerpo, un penetrante
petalo nauseabundo.

Entre los cocoteros las tumbas están llenas
de huesos demolidos, de estertores callados.

El delicado sátrapa conversa
con copas, cuellos y cordones de oro.

El pequeño palacio brilla como un reloj
y las rápidas risas enguantadas

atraviesan a veces los pasillos

y se reúnen a las voces muertas

y a las bocas azules frescamente enterradas.

El llanto está escondido como una planta
cuya semilla cae sin cesar sobre el suelo
y hace crecer sin luz sus grandes hojas ciegas.

El odio se ha formado escama a escama,
golpe a golpe, en el agua terrible del pantano,
con un hocico lleno de légamo y silencio.

PART VI, called "America, I Do Not Call On You In Vain," is made of eighteen curious and oblique poems. The long flowing narratives we have become used to in *Canto General* disappear, and we find instead sudden instants the poem holds back in order to look deep into them. The language is resonant and fragrant. The poems describe an instant on horseback in winter, an instant aware of hunger in the coal mines, an instant aware of the mad frustration of Central America, a meeting with some seamen in Valparaiso, an instant in Patagonia with the seals. We have chosen the ninth poem, with its powerful, oblique language describing Latin-American dictators.

THE DICTATORS

An odor has remained among the sugar cane:
a mixture of blood and body, a penetrating
petal that brings nausea.
Between the coconut palms the graves are full
of ruined bones, of speechless death-rattles.
The delicate dictator is talking
with tophats, gold braid, and collars.
The tiny palace gleams like a watch
and the rapid laughs with gloves on
cross the corridors at times
and join the dead voices
and the blue mouths freshly buried.
The weeping cannot be seen, like a plant
whose seeds fall endlessly on the earth,
whose large blind leaves grow even without light.
Hatred has grown scale on scale,
blow on blow, in the ghastly water of the swamp,
with a snout full of ooze and silence.

R.B.

CRISTÓBAL MIRANDA

(Palero-Tocopilla)

Te conocí, Cristóbal, en las lanchas anchas
de la bahía, cuando baja
el salitre, hacia el mar, en la quemante
vestidura de un día de Noviembre.
Recuerdo aquella extática apostura,
los cerros de metal, el agua quieta.
Y sólo el hombre de las lanchas, húmedo
de sudor, moviendo nieve.
Nieve de los nitratos, derramada
sobre los hombros del dolor, cayendo
a la barriga ciega de las naves.
Allí, paleros, héroes de una aurora
carcomida por ácidos, sujeta
a los destinos de la muerte, firmes,
recibiendo el nitrato caudaloso.
Cristóbal, este recuerdo para ti.
Para los camaradas de la pala,
a cuyos pechos entra el ácido
y las emanaciones asesinas,
hinchando como águilas aplastadas
los corazones, hasta que cae el hombre,
hasta que rueda el hombre hacia las calles,
hacia las cruces rotas de la pampa.
Bien, no digamos más, Cristóbal, ahora
este papel que te recuerda, a todos,
a los lancheros de bahía, al hombre
ennegrecido de los barcos, mis ojos

CRISTOBAL MIRANDA

(Shoveller at Tocopilla)

I met you on the broad barges
in the bay, Cristobal, while the sodium nitrate
was coming down, wrapped in a burning
November day, to the sea.

I remember the ecstatic nimbleness,
the hills of metal, the motionless water.
And only the bargemen, soaked
with sweat, moving snow.

Snow of the nitrates, poured
over painful shoulders, dropping
into the blind stomach of the ships.
Shovellers there, heroes of a sunrise
eaten away by acids, and bound
to the destinies of death, standing firm,
taking in the floods of nitrate.

Cristobal, this memento is for you,
for the others shovelling with you,
whose chests are penetrated by the acids
and the lethal gases,
making the heart swell up
like crushed eagles, until the man drops,
rolls toward the streets of town,
toward the broken crosses out in the field,
Enough of that, Cristobal, today
this bit of paper remembers you, each of you,
the bargemen of the bay, the man
turned black in the boats, my eyes

van con vosotros en esta jornada
y mi alma es una pala que levanta
cargando y descargando sangre y nieve,
junto a vosotros, vidas del desierto.

PART VII, called "Canto General of Chile," was evidently the seed of the whole book, and contains some of the earliest poems written for the volume. Neruda touches on the geography and history of Chile here in a way he was later to do for all of South America. It is a sort of ode of praise to Chile, a homesick poem, written from abroad. The poem "Ocean", often translated, is from this section. The poems in PART VIII are centered about people, usually ordinary or "unknown" Chileans. At times the Chileans themselves talk, telling their stories, at other times Neruda describes their lives. Several of the monologues contain descriptions of torture. The poems vary in quality. We have chosen the first poem of the fourteen, about a shoveller Neruda met in the nitrate works.

are moving with yours in this daily work
and my soul is a shovel which lifts
loading and unloading blood and snow
next to you, creatures of the desert.

R.B.

QUE DESPIERTE EL LEÑADOR

Al oeste de Colorado River
hay un sitio que amo.
Acudo allí con todo lo que palpitando
transcurre en mí, con todo
lo que fui, lo que soy, lo que sostengo.
Hay unas altas piedras rojas, el aire
salvaje de mil manos
las hizo edificadas estructuras:
el escarlata ciego subió desde el abismo
y en ellas se hizo cobre, fuego y fuerza.
América extendida como la piel de búfalo,
aérea y clara noche del galope,
allí hacia las alturas estrelladas,
bebo tu copa de verde rocío.

Sí, por agria Arizona y Wisconsin nudoso,
hasta Milwaukee levantada contra el viento y la nieve
o en los enardecidos pantanos de West Palm,
cerca de los pinares de Tacoma, en el espeso
olor de acero de tus bosques,
anduve piesando tierra madre,
hojas azules, piedras de cascada,
huracanes que temblaban como toda la música,
ríos que rezaban como los monasterios,
ánades y manzanas, tierras y aguas,
infinita quietud para que el trigo nazca.

Allí pude, en mi piedra central, etender al aire
ojos, oídos, manos, hasa oír

I WISH THE WOOD-CUTTER WOULD WAKE UP

West of the Colorado River

there's a place I love.

I take refuge there with everything alive

in me, with everything

that I have been, that I am, that I believe in.

Some high red rocks are there, the wild

air with its thousand hands

has turned them into human buildings.

The blind scarlet rose from the depths

and changed in these rocks to copper, fire, and energy.

America spread out like a buffalo skin,

light and transparent night of galloping,

near your high places covered with stars

I drink down your cup of green dew.

Yes, through acrid Arizona and Wisconsin full of knots,

as far as Milwaukee, raised to keep back the wind and the snow

or in the burning swamps of West Palm,

near the pine trees of Tacoma, in the thick odor

of your forests which is like steel,

I walked weighing down the mother earth,

blue leaves, waterfalls of stones,

hurricanes vibrating as all music does,

rivers that muttered prayers like monasteries,

geese and apples, territories and waters,

infinite silence in which the wheat could be born.

I was able there, in my deep stony core, to stretch my eyes,

ears, hands,

far out into the air until I heard

libros, locomotoras, nieve, luchas,
fábricas, tumbas, vegetales, pasos,
y de Manhattan la luna en el navío,
el canto de la máquina que hila,
la cuchara de hierro que come tierra,
la perforadora con su golpe de cóndor
y cuanto corta, oprime, corre, cose:
seres y ruedas repitiendo y naciendo.

Amo el pequeño hogar del *farmer*. Recientes madres duermen
aromadas come el jarabe del tamarindo, las telas
recién planchadas. Arde
el fuego de mil hogares rodeados de cebollas.
(Los hombres cuando cantan cerca del río tienen
una voz ronca como las piedras del fondo:
el tabaco salió de sus anchas hojas
y como un duende del fuego llegó a estos hogares.)
Missouri adentro venid, mirad el queso y la harina,
las tablas olorosas, rojas como violines,
el hombre navegando la cebada,
el potro azul recién montado huele
el aroma del pan y de la alfalfa:
campanas, amapolas, herrerías,
y en los destartalados cinemas silvestres
el amor abre su dentadura
en el sueño nacido de la tierra.
Es tu paz lo que amamos, no tu máscara.
No es hermoso tu rostro de guerrero.
Eres hermosa y ancha Norte América.
Vienes de humilde cuna como una lavandera,
junto a tus ríos, blanca.
Edificada en lo desconocido,
es tu paz de panal lo dulce tuyo.

books, locomotives, snow, battles,
factories, cemeteries, footsteps, plants,
and the moon on a ship from Manhattan,
the song of the machine that is weaving,
the iron spoon that eats the earth,
the drill that strikes like a condor,
and everything that cuts, presses, sews:
creatures and wheels repeating themselves and being born.

I love the farmer's small house. New mothers are asleep
with a good smell like the sap of the tamarind, clothes
just ironed. Fires are burning in a thousand homes,
with drying onions hanging around the fireplace.
(When they are singing near the river the men's voices
are deep as the stones at the river bottom;
and tobacco rose from its wide leaves
and entered these houses like a spirit of the fire.)
Come deeper into Missouri, look at the cheese and the flour,
the boards aromatic and red as violins,
the man moving like a ship among the barley,
the blue-black colt just home from a ride smells
the odor of bread and alfalfa:
bells, poppies, blacksmith shops,
and in the rundown movies in the small towns
love opens its mouth full of teeth
in a dream born of the earth.
What we love is your peace, not your mask.
Your warrior's face is not handsome.
North America, you are handsome and spacious.
You come, like a washerwoman, from
a simple cradle, near your rivers, pale...
Built up from the unknown,
what is sweet in you is your hive-like peace.

Amamos tu hombre con las manos rojas
de barro de Oregón, tu niño negro
que te trajo la música nacida
en su comarca de marfil: amamos
tu ciudad, tu substancia,
tu luz, tus mecanismos, la energía
del Oeste, la pacífica
miel, de colmenar y aldea,
el gigante muchacho en el tractor,
la avena que heredaste
de Jefferson, la rueda rumorosa
que mide tu terrestre oceanía,
el humo de una fábrica y el beso
número mil de una colonia nueva:
tu sangre labradora es la que amamos:
tu mano popular llena de aceite.

Bajo la noche de las praderas hace y a tiempo
reposan sobre la piel del búfalo en un grave
silencio las sílabas, el canto
de lo que fuí antes de ser, de lo que fuimos.
Melville es un abeto marino, de sus ramas
nace una curva de carena, un brazo
de madera y navío. Whitman innumerable
como los cereales, Poe en su matemática
tiniebla, Dreiser, Wolfe,
frescas heridas de nuestra propia ausencia,
Lockridge reciente, atados a la profundidad,
cuántos otros atados a la sombra:
sobre ellos la misma aurora del hemisferio arde
y de ellos está hecho lo que somos.
Poderosos infantes, capitanos ciegos,
entre acontecimientos y follajes amedrentados a veces,

We love the man with his hands red
from the Oregon clay, your negro boy
who brought you the music born
in his country of tusks: we love
your city, your substance,
your light, your machines, the energy
of the West, the harmless
honey from hives and little towns,
the huge farmboy on his tractor,
the oats which you inherited
from Jefferson, the noisy wheel
that measures your oceanic earth,
the factory smoke and the kiss,
the thousandth, of a new colony:
what we love is your workingman's blood:
your unpretentious hand covered with oil.

For years now under the prairie night
in a heavy silence on the buffalo skin
syllables have been asleep, poems
about what I was before I was born, what we were.
Melville is a sea fir, the curve of the keel
springs from his branches, an arm
of timber and ship. Whitman impossible to count
as grain, Poe in his mathematical
darkness, Dreiser, Wolfe,
fresh wounds of our own absence,
Lockbridge more recently, all bound to the depths,
how many others, bound to the darkness:
over them the same dawn of the hemisphere burns,
and out of them what we are has come.
Powerful foot-soldiers, blind captains,
frightened at times among actions and leaves,

interrumpidos por la alegría y por el duelo,
bajo las praderas cruzadas de tráfico,
cuántos muertos en las llanuras antes no visitadas:
inocentes atormentados, profetas recién impresos,
sobre la piel del búfalo de las praderas.

De Francia, de Okinawa, de los atolones
de Leyte (Norman Mailer lo ha dejado escrito),
del aire enfurecido y de las olas,
han regresado casi todos los muchachos.
Casi todos... Fué verde y amarga la historia
de barro y sudor: no oyeron
bastante el canto de los arrecifes
ni tocaron tal vez sino para morir en las islas, las coronas
de fulgor y fragancia:

sangre y estiércol
los persiguieron, la mugre y las ratas,
y un cansado y desolado corazón que luchaba.
pero ya han vuelto,

los habéis recibido
en el ancho espacio de las tierras extendidas
y se han cerrado (los que han vuelto) como una corola
de innumerables pétalos anónimos
para renacer y olvidar.

(1948)

PART IX returns to a consideration of the United States. It opens with the vivid poem printed here, and then goes on to ask why it is the U.S. is always on the dictators' side, and consistently attempts to destroy risings anywhere in the world. Neruda warns the U.S. not to invade South America, and wishes that "Abraham Lincoln would wake up." This entire section, translated as "Let the Rail Splitter Awake" was printed as a pamphlet by *Masses And Mainstream*. Some of the pieces are crude propaganda, others fresh and generous poems.

checked in their work by joy and by mourning,
under the plains crossed by traffic,
how many dead men in the fields never visited before:
innocent ones tortured, prophets only now published,
on the buffalo skin of the prairies.

From France, and Okinawa, and the atolls
of Leyte (Norman Mailer has written it out)
and the infuriated air and the waves,
almost all the men have come back now,
almost all... The history of mud and sweat
was green and sour; they did not hear
the singing of the reefs long enough
and perhaps never touched the islands, those wreaths of
brilliance and perfume,
except to die:

 dung and blood
hounded them, the filth and the rats,
and a fatigued and ruined heart that went on fighting.
But they have come back,
 you have received them
into the immensity of the open lands
and they have closed (those who came back) like a flower
with thousands of nameless petals
to be reborn and forget.

(1948)

R.B.

LAS ENIGMAS

Me habéis preguntado qué hila el crustaceo entre sus patas de oro

y os respondo: El mar lo sabe.

Me decís qué espera la ascidia en su campana transparente?

Qué espera?

Yo os digo, espera como vosotros el tiempo.

Me preguntáis a quién alcanza el abrazo del alga *Macrocostis*?

Indagadlo, indagadlo a cierta hora, en cierto mar que conozco.

Sin duda me preguntaréis por el marfil maldito del narwhal, para que yo os conteste

de qué modo el unicornio marino agoniza arponeado.

Me preguntáis tal vez por las plumas alcionarias que tiemblan en los puros orígenes de la marea austral?

Y sobre la construcción cristalina del pólipo habéis barajado, sin duda

una pregunta más, desgranándola ahora?

Quereis saber la eléctrica materia de las púas del fondo?

La armada estalactita que camina quebrándose?

El anzuelo del pez pescador, la música extendida en la profundidad como un hilo en el agua?

Yo os quiero decir que esto lo sabe el mar, que la vida en sus arcas

es ancha como la arena, innumerable y pura

y entre las uvas sanguinarias el tiempo ha pulido

la dureza de un pétalo, la luz de la medusa

y ha desgranado el ramo de sus hebras corales

desde una cornucopia de nacar infinito.

THE ENIGMAS

You've asked me what the lobster is weaving there with his golden feet?

I reply, the ocean knows this.

You say, what is the ascidia waiting for in its transparent bell?

What is it waiting for?

I tell you it is waiting for time, like you.

You ask me whom the Macrocostis alga hugs in its arms?

Study, study it, at a certain hour, in a certain sea I know.

You question me about the wicked tusk of the narwhal, and I reply by describing

how the sea-unicorn with the harpoon in it dies.

You enquire about the kingfishers' feathers,

which tremble in the pure springs of the southern tides?

Or you've found in the cards a new question touching on the crystal architecture

of the sea anemone, and you'll deal that to me now?

You want to understand the electric nature of the ocean spines?

The armoured stalactite that breaks as it walks?

The hook of the angler fish, the music stretched out in the deep places like a thread in the water?

I want to tell you the ocean knows this, that life in its jewel boxes

is endless as the sand, impossible to count, pure,

and among the blood-colored grapes time has made the petal hard and shiny, made the jellyfish full of light

and untied its knot, letting its musical threads fall

from a horn of plenty made of infinite mother-of-pearl.

Yo no soy sino la red vacía que adelanta
ojos humanos, muertos en aquellas tinieblas,
dedos acostumbrados al triángulo, medidas
de un tímido hemisferio de naranja.

Anduve como vosotros escarbando
la estrella interminable,
y en mi red, en la noche, me desperté desnudo,
única presa, pez encerrado en el viento.

PART X, *The Fugitive*, was written during the months Gonzalez Videla's police were pursuing him. It is a poem of thanks to those who took him in and helped him escape from Chile. In Part XI, he describes a visit he made to Punitaqui and its gold mine. It is an area of drought and cactus; the poems are about poverty. Part XII is made up of five long poems written to friends. All five friends, at great sacrifice to themselves, had fought against business and the right wing. Among the friends are Miguel Hernández and Rafael Alberti. Part XIII is a New Year's greeting to Chile for January 1st, 1949, written after Neruda had succeeded in getting to Europe. He talks of the many South American countries still under dictatorship, "dancing with the sharpened teeth of the night-time alligators." In view of the limited space in this book, Neruda suggested we concentrate on the other sections of the book; we will add poems from the missing five sections of *Canto General* in the second edition. Part XIV, called "The Immense Ocean", is a great poem to the Pacific Ocean, its islands and creatures. Many of the poems have a richness like the *Residencia* poems. "The Enigmas" is the seventeenth of the twenty-four poems in this section.

I am nothing but the empty net which has gone on ahead
of human eyes, dead in those darkneses,
of fingers accustomed to the triangle, longitudes
on the timid globe of an orange.

I walked around as you do, investigating
the endless star,
and in my net, during the night, I woke up naked,
the only thing caught, a fish trapped inside the wind.

R.B.

COMPAÑEROS DE VIAJE

(1921)

Luego llegué a la capital, vagamente impregnado de niebla y lluvia. Qué calles eran ésas?

Los trajes de 1921 pululaban

en un olor atroz de gas, café y ladrillos.

Entre los estudiantes pasé sin comprender,

reconcentrando en mí las paredes, buscando

cada tarde en mi pobre poesía las ramas,

las gotas y la luna que se habían perdido.

Acudí al fondo de ella, sumergiéndome

cada tarde en sus aguas, agarrando impalpables

estímulos, gaviotas de un mar abandonado,

hasta cerrar los ojos y naufragar en medio

de mi propia substancia.

Fueron tinieblas, fueron

sólo escondidas, húmedas hojas del subsuelo?

De qué materia herida se desgranó la muerte

hasta tocar mis miembros, conducir mi sonrisa

y cavar en las calles un pozo desdichado?

Salí a vivir: crecí y endurecido

fuí por los callejones miserables,

sin compasión, cantando en las fronteras

del delirio. Los muros se llenaron de rostros:

ojos que no miraban la luz, aguas torcidas

que iluminaba un crimen, partimonios

de solitario orgullo, cavidades

llenas de corazones arrasados.

Con ellos fuí: sólo en su coro

FRIENDS ON THE ROAD

(1921)

Then I arrived at the capital, vaguely saturated
with fog and rain. What streets were those?
The garments of 1921 were breeding
in an ugly smell of gas, coffee, and bricks.
I walked among the students without understanding,
pulling the walls inside me, searching
each day into my poor poetry for the branches,
the drops of rain, and the moon, that had been lost.
I went deep into it for help, sinking
each evening into its waters, grasping
energies I could not touch, the seagulls of a deserted sea,
until I closed my eyes and was shipwrecked in the middle
of my own body.

Were these things dark shadows,
were they only hidden damp leaves stirred up from the soil?
What was the wounded substance from which death was
pouring out
until it touched my arms and legs, controlled my smile,
and dug a well of pain in the streets?

I went out into life: I grew and was hardened,
I walked through the hideous back-alleys
without compassion, singing out on the frontiers
of delirium. The walls filled with faces:
eyes that did not look at light, twisted waters,
lit up by a crime, legacies
of solitary pride, holes
filled with hearts that had been condemned and torn down.
I walked with them: it was only in that chorus

mi voz reconoció las soledades
donde nació.

Entré a ser hombre
cantando entre las llamas, acogido
por compañeros de condición nocturna
que cantaron conmigo en los mesones,
y que me dieron más de una ternura,
más de una primavera defendida
por sus hostiles manos,
único fuego, planta verdadera
de los desmoronados arrabales.

PART XV, the final section, is called "I Exist." It contains thirty-eight autobiographical poems, of which we have chosen the fourth, describing his school days in Santiago when he was 17. The first poem of the section touches on the frontier in the year he was born, and the last records the day, February 5th, 1949, when *Canto General* was finished, "a few months before the 45th year of my age."

that my voice refound the solitudes
where it was born.

I finally became a man
singing among the flames, accepted
by friends who find their place in the night,
who sang with me in the taverns,
and who gave me more than a single kindness,
something they had defended with their fighting hands,
which was more than a spring,
a fire unknown elsewhere, the natural foliage
of the places slowly falling down at the city's edge.

J.W. and R.B.

from

ODAS ELEMENTALES

1954-57

ODA A LOS CALCETINES

Me trajo Maru Mori
un par
de calcetines
que tejió con sus manos
de pastora,
dos calcetines suaves
como liebres.
En ellos
metí los pies
como en
dos
estuches
tejidos
con hebras del
crepúsculo
y pellejo de ovejas.
Violentos calcetines,
mis pies fueron
dos pescados
de lana,
dos largos tiburones
de azul ultramarino
atravesados
por una trenza de oro,
dos gigantescos mirlos,
dos cañones:
mis pies
fueron honrados
de este modo
por

ODE TO MY SOCKS

Maru Mori brought me
a pair
of socks
which she knitted herself
with her sheep-herder's hands,
two socks as soft
as rabbits.
I slipped my feet
into them
as though into
two
cases
knitted
with threads of
twilight
and goatskin.
Violent socks,
my feet were
two fish made
of wool,
two long sharks
seablue, shot
through
by one golden thread,
two immense blackbirds,
two cannons,
my feet
were honored
in this way
by

estos
celestiales
calcetines.
Eran
tan hermosos
que por primera vez
mis pies me parecieron
inaceptables
come dos decrepitos
bomberos, bomberos,
indignos
de aquel fuego
bordado,
de aquellos luminosos
calcetines.

Sin embargo
resistí
la tentación aguda
de guardarlos
como los colegiales
preservan
las luciérnagas,
como los eruditos
coleccionan
documentos sagrados,
resistí
el impulso furioso
de ponerlos
en una jaula
de oro
y darles cada día
alpiste

these
heavenly
socks.
They were
so handsome
for the first time
my feet seemed to me
unacceptable
like two decrepit
firemen, firemen
unworthy
of that woven
fire,
of those glowing
socks.

Nevertheless
I resisted
the sharp temptation
to save them somewhere
as schoolboys
keep
fireflies,
as learned men
collect
sacred texts,
I resisted
the mad impulse
to put them
in a golden
cage
and each day give them
birdseed

y pulpa de melón rosado.
Como descubridores
que en la selva
entregan el rarísimo
venado verde
al asador
y se lo comen
con remordimiento,
estiré
los pies
y me enfundé
los
bellos
calcetines
y
luego los zapatos.

Y es ésta
la moral de mi oda:
dos veces es belleza
la belleza
y lo que es bueno es doblemente
bueno
cuando se trata de dos calcetines
de lana
en el invierno.

and pieces of pink melon.
Like explorers
in the jungle who hand
over the very rare
green deer
to the spit
and eat it
with remorse,
I stretched out
my feet
and pulled on
the magnificent
socks
and then my shoes.

The moral
of my ode is this:
beauty is twice
beauty
and what is good is doubly
good
when it is a matter of two socks
made of wool
in winter.

R.B.

ODA A LA SAL

Esta sal
del salero
yo la ví en los salares.
Sé que
no
van a creerme,
pero
canta,
canta la sal, la piel
de los salares,
canta
con una boca ahogada
por la tierra.
Me estremecí en aquellas
soledades
cuando escuché
la voz
de
la sal
en el desierto.
Cerca de Antofagasta
toda
la pampa salitrosa
suena:
es una
voz
quebrada,
un lastimero
canto.

ODE TO SALT

I saw the salt
in this shaker
in the salt flats.
I know
you
will never believe me,
but
it sings,
the salt sings, the hide
of the salt plains,
it sings
through a mouth smothered
by earth.
I shuddered in those deep
solitudes
when I heard
the voice
of
the salt
in the desert.
Near Antofagasta
the entire
salt plain
speaks:
it is a
broken
voice,
a song full
of grief.

Luego en sus cavidades
la sal gema, montaña
de una luz enterrada,
catedral transparente,
cristal del mar, olvido
de las olas.

Y luego en cada mesa
de este mundo,
sal,
tu substancia
ágil
espolvoreando
la luz vital
sobre
los alimentos.
Preservadora
de las antiguas
bodegas del navío,
descubridora
fuiste
en el océano,
materia
adelantada
en los desconocidos, entreabiertos
senderos de la espuma.
Polvo del mar, la lengua
de ti recibe un beso
de la noche marina:
el gusto funde en cada
sazonado manjar tu oceanía
y así la mínima,
la minúscula

Then in its own mines
rock salt, a mountain
of buried light,
a cathedral through which light passes,
crystal of the sea, abandoned
by the waves.

And then on every table
on this earth,
salt,
your nimble
body
pouring out
the vigorous light
over
our foods.
Preserver
of the stores
of the ancient ships,
you were
an explorer
in the ocean,
substance
going first
over the unknown, barely open
routes of the seafoam.
Dust of the sea, the tongue
receives a kiss
of the night sea from you:
taste recognizes
the ocean in each salted morsel,
and therefore the smallest,
the tiniest

ola del salero
nos enseña
no sólo su doméstica blanca,
sino el sabor central del infinito.

wave of the shaker
brings home to us
not only your domestic whiteness
but the inward flavor of the infinite.

R.B.

THE LAMB AND THE PINE CONE

(An interview with Pablo Neruda by Robert Bly.)

A great river of images has flowed into your poetry, as well as into the poetry of Lorca, Aleixandre, Vallejo, and Hernández – an outpouring of poetry from the very roots of poetry. Why has the greatest poetry in the twentieth century appeared in the Spanish language?

I must tell you it is very nice to hear such a thing from an American poet. Of course we believe in enthusiasm too, but still we are all modest workers – we must not make too many comparisons. I must tell you two different things about poetry in Spanish. In the 16th and 17th centuries Spanish poetry was great – you had such giants as Góngora, Quevedo, Lope de Vega, and many, many others. Then, for three centuries after that, no poetry – a very, very small poetry. Finally, the generation of Lorca, Alberti, and Aleixandre wrote a large poetry again – they rose up against this small poetry. How, and why? We should remember that this generation of poets is coincident with the political awakening of Spain as a republic, the awakening of a great country that was asleep. Suddenly they had all the energy and strength of a man waking. I told about that in my poem, “How Spain Was,” which I am sure you remember from our reading at the Poetry Center last night. Unfortunately, you see what happened. The Franco revolt. It sent into exile and to death so many of the poets. That happened with Miguel Hernández, Lorca, and Antonio Machado, who was really a classic of the century.

Poetry in South America is a different matter altogether. You see there are in our countries rivers which have no names, trees which nobody knows, and birds which nobody has descri-

bed. It is easier for us to be surrealistic because everything we know is new. Our duty, then, as we understand it, is to express what is unheard of. Everything has been painted in Europe, everything has been sung in Europe. But not in America. In that sense, Whitman was a great teacher. Because what is Whitman? He was not only intensely conscious, but he was open-eyed! He had tremendous eyes to see everything – he taught us to see things. He was our poet.

Whitman has clearly had much more influence on the Spanish poets than on the North American poets. Why didn't the North American poets understand him? Was it because of the influence of England?

Perhaps, perhaps the intellectualist influence of England. Also many of the American poets just following Eliot thought that Whitman was too rustic, too primitive. But he is not so simple – Whitman – he's a complicated man and the best of him is when he is most complicated. He had eyes open to the world and he taught us about poetry and many other things. We have loved him very much. Eliot never had much influence with us. He's too intellectual perhaps, we are too primitive. And then everyone has to choose a road – a refined and intellectual way, or a more brotherly, general way, trying to embrace the world around you, to discover the new world.

In his essays, Eliot directed attention toward tradition. But the suggestion you made seems to be that really South America has no tradition – America has no tradition – and admitting this lack of tradition has opened up things.

That is an interesting thing. We do have to mention that in some South American poets you can see the trace of very old

ways of thought and expression, Indian ways of thought in Vallejo, for instance. Cesar Vallejo has something that comes from very deep in his country, Peru, which is an Indian country. He is a wonderful poet, as you know.

As for a literary tradition, what tradition could we have? The Spanish poetry of the 19th century was a very poor poetry – rhetorical and false – post-romantic in the worst way. They never did have a good romantic poet. They had no Shelley, no Goethe. Nothing of the sort. No, no. Rhetorical and empty.

Your poetry presents a vision of affection between people, an affection between man and animals, compassion for plants and snakes, and a certain give and take between man and his unconscious. Most modern poets present a very different vision. How do you feel about that?

Well, I make a distinction between kinds of poetry. I am not a theoretician, but I do see as one kind of poetry the poetry which is written in closed rooms. I'll give as an example Mallarmé, a very great French poet. I have sometimes seen photographs of his room – they were full of little beautiful objects... “abanicos”... fans – he used to write beautiful poems on fans. But his rooms were stuffy, all full of curtains, no air. He is a great poet of closed rooms and it seems that many of the new-world poets follow this tradition: they don't open the windows and you not only have to open the window but come through the windows and live with rivers and animals and beasts. I would say to young poets of my country and of Latin America – perhaps this is our tradition – to discover things, to be in the sea, to be in the mountains, and approach every living thing. And how can you not love such an approach to life, that has such extravagant surprises?

I live by a very rough sea in Isla Negra – my house is there –

and I am never tired of being alone looking at the sea and working there. It is a perpetual discovery for me. I don't know, maybe I am a foolish 19th century nature lover like your great writer Thoreau, and other contemplative writers. I am not contemplative, but I think that is a great part of a poet's life.

You have fought many political battles, fighting seriously and steadily like a bear, and yet you have not ended up obsessed with political matters like Tolstoy, or embittered. Your poetry seems to become more and more human, and affectionate. Now how do you explain that?

You see, I come from a country which is very political. Those who fight have great support from the masses. Practically all the writers of Chile are out to the left – there are almost no exceptions. We feel supported and understood by our own people. That gives us great security and the numbers of people who support us are very great. You see the elections in Chile are won by one side or the other by few votes only. As poets we are really in touch with the people, which is very rare. I read my poems everywhere in my country – every village, every town – for years and years, and I feel it is my duty to do it. It is a tiresome thing, but partly from that has come my attachment to politics. I have seen so much the misery of my country. The poverty I see – I cannot get away from that.

Only in recent years have the people in the United States begun to realize what South American literature is. They still know very little about it.

I think the problem here is a matter of translation. We need to have more North American writers translated into Spanish

and South American poetry and literature translated into English. The delegation of the P.E.N. Club of Chile have shown me a list of books they have drawn up. The list contains one hundred basic works in South American literature which could be read by all the North American people. They intend to look for support for this project and plan to present it as a motion during the P.E.N. Congress. That is a good idea. I don't know if the P.E.N. Club can support it, but someone should support the project. The whole problem of translation is a great and serious one. Imagine – that Vallejo's work has never been published in the United States! Only the twenty poems published by your Sixties Press.

I know you have come to believe that among the many enemies mankind has are gods. I think you said you first felt this in Rangoon. But don't the gods come from the unconscious of men, just as poems do? In what sense then are they enemies?

In the beginning gods help like poems. Man makes gods who help men. But afterward men overpower gods and then bankruptcy.

I have a good question for you. Do you think you have ever lived before?

I don't know... I don't think – I will try to inquire!

Tolstoy said a new consciousness was developing in humanity, like a new organ, and that the governments had set themselves to stop the growth of this new consciousness. Do you think this is true?

In general, you see, governments have never understood anywhere in the world the spirit of writers and poets. That is the general thing which we are going to cure. How? Producing and

writing. You poets are doing a wonderful thing in the United States which I have seen from your lectures in public and all that. You are awakening a new thing since you are defending this spirit you are talking about.

Cesar Vallejo, after struggling through or plunging into a long period of surrealism (The Trilce Poems), came out into a very human simplicity in Poemas Humanos. You also passed through a long period of surrealist poetry in Residencia En La Tierra and then came out into the simplicity of Odas Elementales. Isn't it strange you have both followed the same path?

I love Vallejo. I always admired him, we were brothers. Nevertheless, we were very different. Race especially. He was Peruvian. He was a very Peruvian man and to me Peruvian man is something interesting. We came from different worlds. I have never thought about what you tell me. I like very much the way you approach us – that you bring us near each other in our work worlds. I never thought of it. I like it.

What was Vallejo like when you were in a room with him? Was he excitable, or calm and broody?

Vallejo was usually very serious, very solemn, you see, with great dignity. He had a very high forehead and he was small in stature, and he kept himself very much aloof. But among friends – I don't know if he was this way with others but he was with us – I have seen him jumping with happiness, jumping. So I knew at least these two sides of him.

People often talk of the "Indian element" which they see in much Latin American poetry and fiction. What is this "Indian element" exactly?

In Vallejo it shows itself as a subtle way of thought, a way of expression that is not direct, but oblique. I don't have it. I am a Castillian poet. In Chile we defend the Indians and almost all South Americans have some Indian blood, I do too. But I don't think my work is in any way Indian.

In Residencia your poems dug deeper and deeper into despair, like a man digging into black earth. Then you turned away in another direction, and your poetry moved more and more toward a simplicity. Did this come about partly because the Spanish Civil War made it absolutely clear how much the people needed help?

You say that very well – it is true. You see, when I wrote *Residencia One and Two* I was living in India. I was 21, 22, 23 years old. I was isolated from the Indian people, whom I didn't know, and also from the English people whom I didn't understand, nor did they understand me, and I was in a very lonely situation. I was in an exciting country which I couldn't penetrate, which I couldn't understand well. They were lonely days and years for me. In 1934 I was transferred as consul to Madrid. The Civil War did help me and inspire me to live more near the people, to understand more and to be more natural. For the first time I felt that I belonged to a community.

Have your opinions of Rilke and the "Poetas Celestes" (Divine Poets) changed at all since the poem you wrote attacking them?

Yes, I must say I have been mistaken many times in my life. I was dogmatic and foolish. But the trend of my ideas is as it was. Only in my exaggeration I was mistaken, because he is a great poet, just as Kafka is a great writer. Excuse me, but the contradictions – one sees them only when life rolls on, one sees one has been mistaken.

Many people feel that the quality of literary work being done now shows a decline from the work being done thirty years ago? Do you think so?

No, no. I think the creativity is strong. I see so many new forms in poetry now in the young poets I have never seen before. There is no more fear of experience. Before there was a great fear of breaking the mold and now there is no more of this fear. It is wonderful.

How come you don't have that fear of experience?

It took me a lot of time to have no fear. When I was a young poet I was full of fear like a real rat in a corner. When I was a very young poet I was afraid to break all the laws which were enforced on us by the critics. But now there is no more of this. All the young poets come in and say what they like and do what they like.

In one of your essays you described something that happened to you as a boy which you thought has had a great influence on your poetry. There was a fence in your backyard. Through a hole in it one day a small hand passed through to you a gift – a toy lamb. And you went into the house and came back and handed back through the hole the thing you loved most – a pine cone.

Yes, that boy passed me a lamb, a woolen lamb. It was beautiful.

You said that somehow this helped you to understand that if you give something to humanity you'll get something else back even more beautiful.

Your memory is wonderful, and this is exactly right. I learned much from that in my childhood. This exchange of gifts – mysterious – settled deep inside me like a sedimentary deposit.

*The interview took place
June 12th, 1966, in New York.*

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