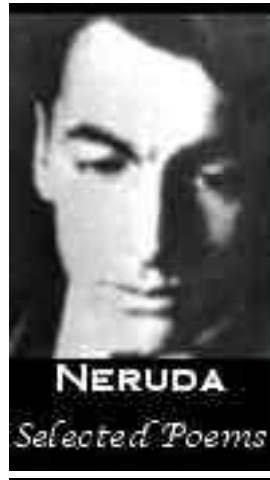


# **Pablo Neruda**



## **Selected Poems in Translation**

A. S. Kline ©2001 All Rights Reserved

This work may be freely reproduced, stored, and transmitted, electronically or otherwise, for any non-commercial purpose.

## Contents

‘One time more, my love, the net of light extinguishes’ .....	6
The Wide Ocean .....	7
‘Unclothed, you are true, like one of your hands’ .....	10
Fable of the Mermaid and the Drunks.....	11
‘The light that climbs from your feet to your hair,’ .....	12
‘Leave me a place underground,’ .....	13
‘I do not love you as if you were brine-rose, topaz,’ .....	14
‘Lost in the woods I snapped off a dark branch’ .....	15
‘March days return with their covert light’ .....	16
Poetry.....	17
‘Who ever desired each other as we do?’ .....	20
Enigmas .....	21
Ode to a Naked Beauty .....	24
‘In the wave-strike over unquiet stones’ .....	27
‘I can write the saddest lines tonight’ .....	28
‘Leaning into the afternoon’ .....	31
The Eighth of September .....	32
‘Perhaps not to be is to be without your being.’ .....	33
‘Carnal apple, Woman filled, burning moon,’ .....	34
‘The tree is here, still, in pure stone’ .....	35
Your hands.....	36
Enigma with Flower.....	38
‘I like you calm, as if you were absent’ .....	39
‘Tie your heart at night to mine, love,’ .....	40
‘You will recall the gorge of capricious waters’ .....	41
‘Oh love, oh mad light-beam, threat of violet’ .....	42
‘For you to hear me....’ .....	43

El Lago de los Cisnes.....	44
‘From the archipelago you have hair of larch fibres,’ .....	46
‘The little girl made of timber didn’t arrive by walking:’ ..	47
Walking Around .....	48
‘Not for the desert lands alone where the rock-salt’ .....	51
‘Already, you are mine. Rest with your dream inside my dream.’ .....	52
‘O Southern Cross, O clover of scented phosphorus,’ .....	53
‘Day breaks: the whole of yesterday went falling’ .....	55
‘Through the mountains you pass like the breeze’ .....	56
‘It’s good to feel you are close to me in the night, love,’ ..	57
Plenary Powers .....	58
‘Three birds of the ocean, three rays, three shears,’ .....	61
‘Glorious Mind, bright daemon’ .....	62
‘Amor, Amor, the clouds in the sky’s tower’ .....	63
A Memory.....	64
The Word.....	65
Too Many Names .....	69
‘The heavy rain of the south falls over Isla Negra’ .....	72
‘My love, at the shutting of this door of night’ .....	73
Night Sea .....	74
Ode to Clothes .....	79
‘Misfortunes of the month of January’ .....	82
I Explain a Few Things.....	83
Discoverers of Chile .....	87
Oh Earth, wait for me .....	88
‘And this word, this paper written’ .....	89
Poor Creatures! .....	90
The Stroke.....	92
Lone Gentleman.....	93
Ode to The Tomato.....	95

To a Ship's Figurehead (Elegy) .....	98
The Tides .....	103
The Bees (I) .....	104
The People .....	107
'At the centre of the Earth I'll split apart' .....	115
Index of First Lines.....	116

**‘One time more, my love, the net of light  
extinguishes’**

*LXXXIV From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’*

One time more, my love, the net of light extinguishes  
work, wheels, flames, boredoms and farewells,  
and we surrender the swaying wheat to night,  
the wheat that noon stole from earth and light.

The moon alone in the midst of its clear page  
sustains the pillars of Heaven’s Bay,  
the room acquires the slowness of gold,  
and your hands go here and there preparing night.

O love, O night. O cupola ringed by a river  
of impenetrable water in the shadows of Heaven,  
that raises and drowns its tempestuous orbs,

until we are only the one dark space  
a glass into which fall celestial ashes,  
one drop in the flow of a vast slow river.

## **The Wide Ocean**

*From: 'Canto General'*

Ocean, if you were to give, a measure, a ferment, a fruit  
of your gifts and destructions, into my hand,  
I would choose your far-off repose, your contour of steel,  
your vigilant spaces of air and darkness,  
and the power of your white tongue,  
that shatters and overthrows columns,  
breaking them down to your proper purity.

Not the final breaker, heavy with brine,  
that thunders onshore, and creates  
the silence of sand, that encircles the world,  
but the inner spaces of force,  
the naked power of the waters,  
the immoveable solitude, brimming with lives.  
It is Time perhaps, or the vessel filled  
with all motion, pure Oneness,  
that death cannot touch, the visceral green  
of consuming totality.

Only a salt kiss remains of the drowned arm,  
that lifts a spray: a humid scent,  
of the damp flower, is left,  
from the bodies of men. Your energies  
form, in a trickle that is not spent,  
form, in retreat into silence.

The falling wave,

arch of identity, shattering feathers,  
is only spume when it clears,  
and returns to its source, unconsumed.

Your whole force heads for its origin.  
The husks that your load threshes,  
are only the crushed, plundered, deliveries,  
that your act of abundance expelled,  
all those that take life from your branches.

Your form extends beyond breakers,  
vibrant, and rhythmic, like the chest, cloaking  
a single being, and its breathings,  
that lift into the content of light,  
plains raised above waves,  
forming the naked surface of earth.

You fill your true self with your substance.  
You overflow curve with silence.

The vessel trembles with your salt and sweetness,  
the universal cavern of waters,  
and nothing is lost from you, as it is  
from the desolate crater, or the bay of a hill,  
those empty heights, signs, scars,  
guarding the wounded air.

Your petals throbbing against the Earth,  
trembling your submarine harvests,  
your menace thickening the smooth swell,

with pulsations and swarming of schools,  
and only the thread of the net raises  
the dead lightning of fish-scale,  
one wounded millimetre, in the space  
of your crystal completeness.

**‘Unclothed, you are true, like one of your hands’**

XXVII From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’

Unclothed, you are true, like one of your hands,  
lissome, terrestrial, slight, complete, translucent,  
with curves of moon, and paths of apple-wood:  
Unclothed you are as slender as a nude ear of corn.

Undressed you are blue as Cuban nights,  
with tendrils and stars in your hair,  
undressed you are wide and amber,  
like summer in its chapel of gold.

Naked you are tiny as one of your fingertips,  
shaped, subtle, reddening till light is born,  
and you leave for the subterranean worlds,

as if down a deep tunnel of clothes and chores:  
your brightness quells itself, quenches itself, strips itself  
down  
turning, again, to being a naked hand.

## **Fable of the Mermaid and the Drunks**

*From: 'Estravagario'*

All those men were there inside,  
when she came in totally naked.  
They had been drinking: they began to spit.  
Newly come from the river, she knew nothing.  
She was a mermaid who had lost her way.  
The insults flowed down her gleaming flesh.  
Obscenities drowned her golden breasts.  
Not knowing tears, she did not weep tears.  
Not knowing clothes, she did not have clothes.  
They blackened her with burnt corks and cigarette stubs,  
and rolled around laughing on the tavern floor.  
She did not speak because she had no speech.  
Her eyes were the colour of distant love,  
her twin arms were made of white topaz.  
Her lips moved, silent, in a coral light,  
and suddenly she went out by that door.  
Entering the river she was cleaned,  
shining like a white stone in the rain,  
and without looking back she swam again  
swam towards emptiness, swam towards death.

**‘The light that climbs from your feet to  
your hair,’**

**XXIII From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’**

The light that climbs from your feet to your hair,  
the mantle enveloping your delicate form,  
are not sea’s nacre, or frozen silver:  
you are bread, bread, dear to the fire.

The grain built its silo around you, and rose,  
increased by a golden age,  
while its wheaten surge recreated your breasts,  
my love was an ember labouring in earth.

Oh, bread of your forehead, your legs, and your mouth,  
bread I consume, born each day with the light,  
dear one, the bake-houses’ banner and sign:

the fire taught your blood its lessons,  
you learnt sacredness from grain,  
and your language, your perfume are bread.

**‘Leave me a place underground,’**  
**XXVI From: ‘Las Piedras del Cielo’**

Leave me a place underground, a labyrinth,  
where I can go, when I wish to turn,  
without eyes, without touch,  
in the void, to dumb stone,  
or the finger of shadow.

I know that you cannot, no one, no thing  
can deliver up that place, or that path,  
but what can I do with my pitiful passions,  
if they are no use, on the surface  
of everyday life,  
if I cannot look to survive,  
except by dying, going beyond, entering  
into the state, metallic and slumbering,  
of primeval flame?

**'I do not love you as if you were brine-rose, topaz,'**

**XVII From: 'Cien sonetos de amor'**

I do not love you as if you were brine-rose, topaz,  
or barbed carnations thrown off by the fire.  
I love you as certain hidden things are loved,  
secretly, between night and soul.

I love you like the flower-less plant  
carrying inside itself the light of those flowers,  
and, graced by your love, a fierce perfume  
risen from earth, is alive, concealed in my flesh.

I love you without knowing how, whence, when.  
I love you truly, without doubts, without pride,  
I love you so, and know, no other way to love,

none but this mode of neither You nor I,  
so close that your hand over my chest is my hand,  
so close they are your eyes I shut when I sleep.

**‘Lost in the woods I snapped off a dark  
branch’**

*VI From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’*

Lost in the woods, I snapped off a dark branch  
and, lifted its murmur, in thirst, to my lips:  
perhaps the weeping voice of the rain,  
a shattered bell, or a broken heart.

It came to me, something out of far distance,  
deeply concealed, and hidden by Earth,  
a cry, defeated by immense autumns,  
by half-opened moistness of shadowy leaves.

But waking out of the wood’s dream there,  
that hazel branch sang under my tongue,  
and its vagrant perfume rose to my mind

as if suddenly roots I had long abandoned  
searched me, the lost domains of childhood,  
and held me, wounded by wandering fragrance.

**‘March days return with their covert  
light’**

*LXXXVIII From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’*

March days return with their covert light,  
and huge fish swim through the sky,  
vague earthly vapours progress in secret,  
things slip to silence one by one.

Through fortuity, at this crisis of errant skies,  
you reunite the lives of the sea to that of fire,  
grey lurchings of the ship of winter  
to the form that love carved in the guitar.

O love, O rose soaked by mermaids and spume,  
dancing flame that climbs the invisible stairway,  
to waken the blood in insomnia’s labyrinth,

so that the waves can complete themselves in the sky,  
the sea forget its cargoes and rages,  
and the world fall into darkness’s nets.

## **Poetry**

*From: 'Memorial de Isla Negra'*

And it was at that time... Poetry came  
to find me. Don't know, don't know from where,  
it leapt, winter or the river.  
Don't know how or when  
no, not words, not  
voices, not silence,  
but I was called from the street,  
from the branches of the night,  
suddenly, from the others,  
in violent flames,  
or coming back alone,  
I, without a face,  
it touched me.

I did not know how to say, my mouth  
no names,  
my eyes  
were blind,  
and something began in my soul,  
fever or lost wings,  
and I made it alone,  
deciphering,  
that fire,  
and I wrote the first, vague line,  
vague, without a body, pure  
nonsense,  
pure knowledge,  
of he who knows nothing,

and suddenly saw  
the sky  
unlock  
and open,  
planets,  
pulsating spaces,  
perforated shadows,

riddled  
with fires, flowers, flights,  
the revolving night, the universe.  
And I the smallest thing,  
made drunk by the great void,  
starred,  
in the image, likeness  
of mystery,  
felt myself pure part  
of abyss,  
turned with the starlight,  
my heart broken loose in the wind.

**‘Who ever desired each other as we do?’**

*XCV From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’*

Who ever desired each other as we do? Let us look  
for the ancient ashes of hearts that burned,  
and let our kisses touch there, one by one,  
till the flower, disembodied, rises again.

Let us love that Desire that consumed its own fruit  
and went down, aspect and power, into the earth:  
We are its continuing light,  
its indestructible, fragile seed.

That Desire, interred in time’s deep winter,  
by snows and spring-times, absence and autumns,  
bring to it the apple’s new light,

that freshness disclosed by a strange wound,  
like that ancient Desire that journeys in silence  
through submerged mouths’ eternities.

## **Enigmas**

*From: 'Canto General'*

You ask what the crab offers, between its claws of gold,  
and I say: The sea will tell you.  
You ask what the sea-squirt hopes for in its translucent bell.  
What can it hope for?  
I say that it waits on its time, as you do.  
You question for whom the algal *Macrocystis* offers its  
embraces.  
Unloose it, unloose it, in a certain ocean, and a certain time,  
that I know.  
Though you turn, for my answer to the narwhal's malicious  
ivory,  
I say that you wait for a darker reply,  
how the sea-unicorn suffered the lance.  
It may be you question the halcyon's plumage,  
tremoring,  
in the pure womb of the southern seas?  
Now, on the crystalline house of the polyp you twine  
new demands, threshing it to the husk?  
You want to know the matter electric, caught on the forks  
of the deep?  
The stalactite's armour that extends as crystal?  
The spear of the angler-fish, the music stretched-out  
in the gulf, like a thread amongst waters?

I say to you that the ocean knows it, the life  
of its circlings vast as the sands, pure and innumerable,  
and between the red vine-clusters, time has brightened

the stone of the petals, the light of medusas,  
and the branches are threshed in the web of the corals,  
from the flowing horn's infinite nacre.

I am the empty net that hangs,  
beyond men, rendered dead by the shadowy waters,  
fingers grown used to the triangle, measured  
by the shy hemisphere of orange-flowers.

I came, like you, penetrating  
the interminable starlight,  
in the net of the self, in the night, and found naked self,  
the sole catch, the fish noosed in the wind.

## **Ode to a Naked Beauty**

With chaste heart, and pure  
eyes  
I celebrate you, my beauty,  
restraining my blood  
so that the line  
surges and follows  
your contour,  
and you bed yourself in my verse,  
as in woodland, or wave-spume:  
earth's perfume,  
sea's music.

Nakedly beautiful,  
whether it is your feet, arching  
at a primal touch  
of sound or breeze,  
or your ears,  
tiny spiral shells  
from the splendour of America's oceans.  
Your breasts also,  
of equal fullness, overflowing  
with the living light  
and, yes,  
winged  
your eyelids of silken corn  
that disclose  
or enclose  
the deep twin landscapes of your eyes.

The line of your back  
separating you  
falls away into paler regions  
then surges  
to the smooth hemispheres  
of an apple,  
and goes splitting  
your loveliness  
into two pillars  
of burnt gold, pure alabaster,  
to be lost in the twin clusters of your feet,  
from which, once more, lifts and takes fire  
the double tree of your symmetry:  
flower of fire, open circle of candles,  
swollen fruit raised  
over the meeting of earth and ocean.

Your body – from what substances  
agate, quartz, ears of wheat,  
did it flow, was it gathered,  
rising like bread  
in the warmth,  
and signalling hills  
silvered,  
valleys of a single petal, sweetnesses  
of velvet depth,  
until the pure, fine, form of woman  
thickened  
and rested there?

It is not so much light that falls  
over the world  
extended by your body  
its suffocating snow,  
as brightness, pouring itself out of you,  
as if you were  
burning inside.

Under your skin the moon is alive.

**'In the wave-strike over unquiet stones'**

**IX From: 'Cien sonetos de amor'**

In the wave-strike over unquiet stones  
the brightness bursts and bears the rose  
and the ring of water contracts to a cluster  
to one drop of azure brine that falls.

O magnolia radiance breaking in spume,  
magnetic voyager whose death flowers  
and returns, eternal, to being and nothingness:  
shattered brine, dazzling leap of the ocean.

Merged, you and I, my love, seal the silence  
while the sea destroys its continual forms,  
collapses its turrets of wildness and whiteness,

because in the weft of those unseen garments  
of headlong water, and perpetual sand,  
we bear the sole, relentless tenderness.

**'I can write the saddest lines tonight'**

XX From: 'Veinte poemas de amor'

I can write the saddest lines tonight.

Write for example: 'The night is fractured  
and they shiver, blue, those stars, in the distance'

The night wind turns in the sky and sings.

I can write the saddest lines tonight.  
I loved her, sometimes she loved me too.

On nights like these I held her in my arms.  
I kissed her greatly under the infinite sky.

She loved me, sometimes I loved her too.  
How could I not have loved her huge, still eyes.

I can write the saddest lines tonight.  
To think I don't have her, to feel I have lost her.

Hear the vast night, vaster without her.  
Lines fall on the soul like dew on the grass.

What does it matter that I couldn't keep her.  
The night is fractured and she is not with me.

That is all. Someone sings far off. Far off,

my soul is not content to have lost her.

As though to reach her, my sight looks for her.  
My heart looks for her: she is not with me

The same night whitens, in the same branches.  
We, from that time, we are not the same.

I don't love her, that's certain, but how I loved her.  
My voice tried to find the breeze to reach her.

Another's kisses on her, like my kisses.  
Her voice, her bright body, infinite eyes.

I don't love her, that's certain, but perhaps I love her.  
Love is brief: forgetting lasts so long.

Since, on these nights, I held her in my arms,  
my soul is not content to have lost her.

Though this is the last pain she will make me suffer,  
and these are the last lines I will write for her.

**‘Leaning into the afternoon’**

**VII From: ‘Veinte poemas de amor’**

Leaning into the afternoon, I cast my saddened nets,  
towards your oceanic eyes.

There, in the highest fire, my solitude unrolls and ignites,  
arms flailing like a drowning man’s.

I send out crimson flares across your distant eyes,  
that swell like the waves, at the base of a lighthouse.

You only guard darkness, far-off woman of mine,  
from your gaze the shore of trepidation sometimes  
emerges.

Leaning towards afternoon, I fling my saddened nets,  
into the sea, your eyes of ocean trouble.

The night-birds peck at the early stars,  
that glitter as my soul does, while it loves you.

The night gallops, on its mare of shadows,  
spilling blue silken tassels of corn, over the fields.

## **The Eighth of September**

*From: 'Versos del capitán'*

This day, Today, was a brimming glass.  
This day, Today, was an immense wave.  
This day was all the Earth.

This day, the storm-driven ocean  
lifted us up in a kiss  
so exalted we trembled  
at the lightning flash  
and bound as one, fell,  
and drowned, without being unbound.

This day our bodies grew  
stretched out to Earth's limits,  
orbited there, melded there  
to one globe of wax, or a meteor's flame.

A strange door opened, between us,  
and someone, with no face as yet,  
waited for us there.

**‘Perhaps not to be is to be without your being.’**

**LXIX From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’**

Perhaps not to be is to be without your being,  
without your going, that cuts noon light  
like a blue flower, without your passing  
later through fog and stones,

without the torch you lift in your hand  
that others may not see as golden,  
that perhaps no one believed blossomed  
the glowing origin of the rose,

without, in the end, your being, your coming  
suddenly, inspiringly, to know my life,  
blaze of the rose-tree, wheat of the breeze:

and it follows that I am, because you are:  
it follows from ‘you are’, that I am, and we:  
and, because of love, you will, I will,  
We will, come to be.

**‘Carnal apple, Woman filled, burning moon,’**

**XII From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’**

Carnal apple, Woman filled, burning moon,  
dark smell of seaweed, crush of mud and light,  
what secret knowledge is clasped between your pillars?  
What primal night does Man touch with his senses?

Ay, Love is a journey through waters and stars,  
through suffocating air, sharp tempests of grain:  
Love is a war of lightning,  
and two bodies ruined by a single sweetness.

Kiss by kiss I cover your tiny infinity,  
your margins, your rivers, your diminutive villages,  
and a genital fire, transformed by delight,

slips through the narrow channels of blood  
to precipitate a nocturnal carnation,  
to be, and be nothing but light in the dark.

**‘The tree is here, still, in pure stone’**

XVI: From: ‘Las Piedras del Cielo’

The tree is here, still, in pure stone,  
in deep evidence, in solid beauty,  
layered, through a hundred million years.  
Agate, cornelian, gemstone  
transmuted the timber and sap  
until damp corruptions  
fissured the giant’s trunk  
fusing a parallel being:  
the living leaves  
unmade themselves  
and when the pillar was overthrown  
fire in the forest, blaze of the dust-cloud,  
celestial ashes mantled it round,  
until time, and the lava, created  
this gift, of translucent stone.

## **Your hands**

*From: 'Versos del capitán'*

When your hands leap  
towards mine, love,  
what do they bring me in flight?  
Why did they stop  
at my lips, so suddenly,  
why do I know them,  
as if once before,  
I have touched them,  
as if, before being,  
they travelled  
my forehead, my waist?

Their smoothness came  
winging through time,  
over the sea and the smoke,  
over the Spring,  
and when you laid  
your hands on my chest  
I knew those wings  
of the gold doves,  
I knew that clay,  
and that colour of grain.

The years of my life  
have been roadways of searching,  
a climbing of stairs,  
a crossing of reefs.  
Trains hurled me onwards  
waters recalled me,  
on the surface of grapes  
it seemed that I touched you.  
Wood, of a sudden,  
made contact with you,  
the almond-tree summoned  
your hidden smoothness,  
until both your hands  
closed on my chest,  
like a pair of wings  
ending their flight.

## **Enigma with Flower**

Victory. It has come late, I had not learnt  
how to arrive, like the lily, at will,  
the white figure, that pierces  
the motionless eternity of earth,  
pushing at clear, faint, form,  
till the hour strikes: that clay,  
with a white ray, or a spur of milk.  
Shedding of clothing, the thick darkness of soil,  
on whose cliff the fair flower advances,  
till the flag of its whiteness  
defeats the contemptible deeps of night,  
and, from the motion of light,  
spills itself in astonished seed.

**'I like you calm, as if you were absent'**

**XV From: 'Veinte poemas de amor'**

I like you calm, as if you were absent,  
and you hear me far-off, and my voice does not touch you.  
It seems that your eyelids have taken to flying:  
it seems that a kiss has sealed up your mouth.

Since all these things are filled with my spirit,  
you come from things, filled with my spirit.  
You appear as my soul, as the butterfly's dreaming,  
and you appear as Sadness's word.

I like you calm, as if you were distant,  
you are a moaning, a butterfly's cooing.  
You hear me far-off, my voice does not reach you.  
Let me be calmed, then, calmed by your silence.

Let me commune, then, commune with your silence,  
clear as a light, and pure as a ring.  
You are like night, calmed, constellated.  
Your silence is star-like, as distant, as true.

I like you calm, as if you were absent:  
distant and saddened, as if you were dead.  
One word at that moment, a smile, is sufficient.  
And I thrill, then, I thrill: that it cannot be so.

**‘Tie your heart at night to mine, love,’**

**LXXIX From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’**

Tie your heart at night to mine, love,  
and both will defeat the darkness  
like twin drums beating in the forest  
against the heavy wall of wet leaves.

Night crossing: black coal of dream  
that cuts the thread of earthly orbs  
with the punctuality of a headlong train  
that pulls cold stone and shadow endlessly.

Love, because of it, tie me to a purer movement,  
to the grip on life that beats in your breast,  
with the wings of a submerged swan,

So that our dream might reply  
to the sky’s questioning stars  
with one key, one door closed to shadow.

**‘You will recall the gorge of capricious waters’**

**IV From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’**

You will recall the gorge of capricious waters  
from which throbbing perfumes climbed,  
and a bird, from time to time, clothed  
with liquid slowness: winter plumage.

You will recall the gifts of the earth:  
hot scents, clay of gold,  
scrub grasses, mad roots,  
bewitched thorns like swords.

You will recall the branch you bore,  
branch of shadow and water of silence  
branch like a stone of spume.

And that time was as never and always:  
we go there where nothing does not await us,  
and find all that is waiting there.

**‘Oh love, oh mad light-beam, threat of  
violet’**

XXXVII From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’

Oh love, oh mad light-beam, threat of violet,  
you visit me, and climb, by your cool stairway  
the tower that time has crowned with mist,  
the ashen walls of an enclosed heart.

No one will know it was grace alone,  
constructed crystals strong as citadels  
and blood opened desolate tunnels  
without its sovereignty dispelling winter.

So, love: your mouth, skin, light, sorrows,  
were the bequest of life, the sacred  
gifts of the rainfall, and of nature

that receives and lifts the weight of seed,  
the hidden tumult of wine in casks,  
the blaze of wheat under the ground.

**‘For you to hear me....’**

*V From: ‘Veinte poemas de amor’*

For you to hear me  
my words  
thin themselves out, at times,  
like the trails of gulls on the shore.

A necklace of bones, a crazed rattle  
for your fingers smooth as grapes.

And I look at my words from a distance.  
More than mine they are yours.  
Like tendrils they climb my ancient suffering.

They climb, like this, inside damp walls.  
It is you the guilty one in this blood-wet round.

They are escaping from my dark covert.  
You pervade everything, you, pervade everything.

They live, before you, in the solitude you enter,  
and are accustomed, more than you, to my sadnesses.

Now I want them to say what I want them to tell you,  
for you to hear as I want you to hear me.

The winds of misery may still bring them down.  
Hurricanes of dream may still make them tumble.  
You attend other voices, in my voice of pain,

Cries, of ancient mouths: blood, of ancient pleas.  
Love me. Don't leave me, friend. Follow me.  
Follow me, friend, in this wave of misery.

They go on being miserly, with your love, my words.  
You enter everything, you, enter everything.

I make, out of all this, an infinite necklace,  
for your white fingers, smooth as grapes.

### **El Lago de los Cisnes**

*From: 'Memorial de Isla Negra'*

Lake Budi, sombre, dark heavy stone,  
unburied water between high forest,  
there you opened, like a subterranean door,  
near the solitary sea at the end of the Earth.  
We galloped over the infinite sands  
joined to the flowing richness of spume,  
not a house, not a man, not a horse,  
only time going by, and that green and white shore,  
that ocean.

Then towards hills, and, of a sudden,  
the lake, a solid, secretive water,  
compact light, gem of an earthly ring.  
A flight, white and black: swans being banished,  
long necks of nocturnal darkness, webs of scarlet skin,  
and the clear snow flying over the world.

O flight from water's meaning,

thousand bodies destined to beauty unshaken  
like the lake's pellucid permanence.  
Suddenly, the whole, was a rush over water,  
motion, sound, turrets of full moon,  
and then wild wings making order from whirlwind,  
a grandeur, flying, a beating,  
and then, absence, white tremor of void.

**‘From the archipelago you have hair of larch fibres,’**

XXX from: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’

From the archipelago you have hair of larch fibres,  
flesh that was realised by aeons of time,  
veins that have known oceans of timber,  
green blood dropped from the sky into memory.

No one can recapture my heart, lost  
among so many roots, in the bitter cool  
of the sun’s rays multiplied by seething of waters:  
there lives the shadow that does not depart with me.

So you rose out of the South like an islet,  
crowned, populated, by plumage and timber,  
and I sensed the fragrance of wandering woodland.

I found the dark honey I knew in the forest,  
and touched at your hips the petals of shadow  
that were born with me and that formed my soul.

**‘The little girl made of timber didn’t arrive by walking:’**

*LXVIII From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’*  
*(Figurehead from a ship)*

The little girl made of timber didn’t arrive by walking:  
there she was, all of a sudden, sitting among the cobbles,  
ancient flowers, of the sea, were a coronet on her forehead,  
her gaze was filled by deep rooted sadness.

There she rested, gazing, at our empty existence,  
the doing, and being, and going, and coming, all over  
Earth,  
and day was discolouring its measure of petals.  
She watched us, without seeing, the girl-child of timber.

The girl-child who was crowned by the ancient waters,  
sat there gazing, with eyes overwhelmed:  
she knew we are living in a distant trawl-net,

of time, and water, and waves, and sounds, and rain,  
and don’t know if we’re beings, or if we are her dreaming.  
This is the fable of the girl who’s made of timber.

## **Walking Around**

*From: 'Residencia en la tierra II'*

It so happens I'm tired of being a man.  
It so happens I enter clothes shops and movie-houses,  
withered, impenetrable, like a swan made of felt  
sailing the water of ashes and origins.

The smell of a hairdresser's has me crying and wailing.  
I only want release from being stone or wool.  
I only want not to see gardens and businesses,  
merchandise, spectacles, lifts.

It so happens I'm tired of my feet and toenails,  
my hair and my shadow.  
It so happens I'm tired of being a man.

Still it would be a pleasure  
to scare a lawyer with a severed lily  
or deal death to a nun with a poke in the ear.  
It would be good  
to go through the streets with an emerald knife  
and shout out till I died of cold.

I don't want to go on being just a root in the shadows,  
vacillating, extended, shivering with dream,  
down in the damp bowels of earth,  
absorbing it, thinking it, eating it every day.

I don't want to be so much misfortune,  
I don't want to go on as a root or a tomb,  
a subterranean tunnel, just a cellar of death,  
frozen, dying in pain.

This is why, Monday, the day, is burning like petrol,  
when it sees me arrive with my prison features,  
and it screeches going by like a scorched tire  
and its footsteps tread hot with blood towards night.

And it drives me to certain street corners, certain damp  
houses,  
towards hospitals where skeletons leap from the window,  
to certain cobbler's shops stinking of vinegar,  
to alleyways awful as abysses.

There are sulphur-coloured birds and repulsive intestines,  
hanging from doorways of houses I hate,  
there are lost dentures in coffee pots  
there are mirrors  
that ought to have cried out from horror and shame,  
there are umbrellas everywhere, poisons and navels.

I pass by calmly, with eyes and shoes,  
with anger, oblivion,  
pass by, cross through offices, orthopedic stores,  
and yards where clothes hang down from wires:  
underpants, towels, and shirts, that cry  
slow guilty tears.

**‘Not for the desert lands alone where the rock-salt’**

**LXIII From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’**

Not for the desert lands alone where the rock-salt  
is like a rare rose, the flower interred by the sea,  
my journey, but also for banks of rivers carving through  
snow.

The bitter heights of the Cordilleras knew my footsteps.

Sibilant, tangled, regions of my wild country,  
creepers whose mortal kiss chains itself to the forest,  
moist lament of the bird that surges up, shedding cool  
quavers:

oh, country of lost sorrows and pitiless tears!

Not only the poisonous skin of copper,  
or the nitrate spread like a frieze, a snowy deposit,  
but the vine, the cherry prized by the spring

are mine, and I belong like a dark atom  
to the arid lands and the autumn light of the grape,  
to this country of metal lifted in towers of snow.

**‘Already, you are mine. Rest with your dream  
inside my dream.’**

*LXXXI From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’*

Already, you are mine. Rest with your dream inside my  
dream.

Love, grief, labour, must sleep now.

Night revolves on invisible wheels

and joined to me you are pure as sleeping amber.

No one else will sleep with my dream, love.

You will go we will go joined by the waters of time.

No other one will travel the shadows with me,

only you, eternal nature, eternal sun, eternal moon.

Already your hands have opened their delicate fists

and let fall, without direction, their gentle signs,

you eyes enclosing themselves like two grey wings,

while I follow the waters you bring that take me onwards:

night, Earth, winds weave their fate, and already,

not only am I not without you, I alone am your dream.

**‘O Southern Cross, O clover of scented  
phosphorus,’**

*LXXXVI From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’*

O Southern Cross, O clover of scented phosphorus,  
with four kisses this day penetrated your beauty  
and traversed my hat and the shadows:  
the moon went turning round a coldness.

Then, with my love, and my beloved, oh diamonds  
of blue frost, serenity of Heaven,  
mirror, you appeared, and night filled itself  
with your four vaults of trembling wine.

O palpitating silver of fish, pure and polished,  
emerald cross, parsley of the radiant shadows,  
glow-worm nailed to the unity of Heaven,

rest in me, let us close our eyes, yours and mine.  
Sleep with Man’s darkness for an instant.  
Light, inside me, your four constellated numbers.

Note: The four main Stars of Crux, the Southern Cross,  
represent the four unifying and moral Cardinal Virtues:  
Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude, in Catholic  
tradition. They are ‘numbered’ by the first four letters of  
the Greek alphabet ( $\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta$ ) clockwise in the sky, and **also**  
represent here both the alphabet, **and** the outstretched  
hands and feet of the ‘divine’ man or woman (See the  
closing verses of Dante’s Divine Comedy, and the drawing

by Leonardo Da Vinci, of a human figure in the circle of the sun. See also William Blake.), and therefore **also** the outstretched body of the beloved. Neruda brilliantly combines the **four** concepts. Note also the structure of four verses, and the repetition of clusters of four metaphors, particularly in verse 3.

**‘Day breaks: the whole of yesterday went  
falling’**

XLIX From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’

Day breaks: the whole of yesterday went falling  
among fingers of light and eyes of dream,  
tomorrow will arrive with green footsteps:  
no one holds back the river of dawn.

No one holds back the river of your hands,  
the eyes of your dream, beloved.  
You are the tremor of time that runs  
between light on end and darkened sunlight.

And the sky closes over you its wings  
lifts you and brings you to my arms  
with exact, mysterious courtesy.

For this I sing to the day and the moon,  
to the sea, to time, to every planet,  
to your diurnal voice, to your nocturnal flesh.

**‘Through the mountains you pass like the breeze’**

*XVIII From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’*

Through the mountains you pass like the breeze  
or the sudden quickening that falls from the snow,  
or your hair, throbbing with light, confirms  
the high glittering of sun in the thicket.

All the light of the Caucasus falls on your body  
as though into a little vase of glass, infinite,  
where the water transforms itself, by dressing, by singing  
at every transparent move of the river.

Through the mountains the ancient road of warriors  
and below it seething, shines like a sword,  
water between ramparts of mineral hands,

until you receive from the woods, in a moment,  
the branch or lightning flash of some blue flower  
and the unknown arrow of a wild fragrance.

**'It's good to feel you are close to me in the night,  
love,'**

**LXXXIII From: 'Cien sonetos de amor'**

It's good to feel you are close to me in the night, love,  
invisible in your sleep, intently nocturnal,  
while I untangle my worries  
as if they were twisted nets.

Withdrawn, your heart sails through dream,  
but your body, relinquished so, breathes  
seeking me without seeing me perfecting my dream  
like a plant that seeds itself in the dark.

Rising, you will be that other, alive in the dawn,  
but from the frontiers lost in the night,  
from the presence and the absence where we meet  
ourselves,

something remains, drawing us into the light of life  
as if the sign of the shadows had sealed  
its secret creatures with flame.

## **Plenary Powers**

*From: 'Plenos Poderes'*

For the sun's pure power, I write, for the full sea,  
for the full and open road, wherever I can I sing,  
only the vagrant night detains me  
but I gain space in that interruption,  
I gain shadow for lengths of time.

Night's black wheat grows  
while my eyes measure the field.  
I forge keys from dawn to dusk:  
I search for locks in the darkness  
and I go throwing open ruined gates to the sea  
until the wardrobes are full of foam.

I never tire of going and returning,  
death does not stop me with its stone,  
I never tire of presence and absence.

Sometimes I ask myself if it was from  
my father or my mother or the mountains  
I inherited these mineral tasks,

veins of a burning ocean,  
and I know I go on, and go on to go on,  
and I sing to sing on, and to sing.

Nothing explains what happens  
when I close my eyes and circle

as if between two undersea channels,  
one lifts me up to die in its branches  
and the other sings so I might sing.

So then, I am composed of absence  
and akin to the sea that assaults the reef  
with its briny globules of whiteness

and takes back the stone into the wave.  
So that whatever of death surrounds me  
opens in me the window on life  
and in the full paroxysm I am sleeping.  
To the full light I go on through the shadow.

**‘Three birds of the ocean, three rays, three  
shears,’**

*LXXXVII From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’*

Three birds of the ocean, three rays, three shears,  
crossed the cold sky towards Antofagasta,  
so that the air was left shivering,  
everything shivered like a wounded flag.

Solitude, grant me the sign of your eternal origin,  
the barest track of the cruel birds,  
and the tremor that without doubt comes before  
the honey, the music, the sea, the birth.

(Solitude, sustained by a changeless face  
like a heavy flower continually spreading  
until it embraces the pure seethe of the sky.)

They flew, cold wings of the ocean, of the Archipelago  
towards the sand of Northeast Chile.  
And the night bolted home its heavenly bolt.

Note: Antofagasta is the mountainous desert province of  
North-central Chile, Northeast of the southern Archipelago.

**‘Glorious Mind, bright daemon’**

**LIV From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’**

Glorious Mind, bright daemon  
of absolute clusters, of honest noon,  
here we are at last, without solitude and alone,  
far from the delirium of the savage city.

When the pure line surrounds its dove  
and the fire honours peace with its fuel  
you and I exalt this heavenly outcome.  
Mind and Love live naked in this house.

Furious dreams, rivers of bitter certainty,  
decisions harder than the sleep of a hammer  
fell into the double glass of the lovers,

until the Twins, Mind and Love,  
were lifted on the scale like two wings.  
Like this the Transparency built itself.

**‘Amor, Amor, the clouds in the sky’s  
tower’**

**XXIV From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’**

Amor, Amor, the clouds in the sky’s tower  
mounted like triumphant purifying fountains,  
and all glowed blue, all was star-like:  
sea, boat, day, fused and banished.

Come and see the cherries of water that appeared,  
and the whole scale of the swift universe,  
come and touch the fire of the blue instant,  
come before its petals are consumed.

Nothing here lacks light, number, clusters,  
space opened up by the wind’s virtues,  
until it delivers the sea-foam’s last secret.

And among so many blues, celestial, submerged,  
our eyes are lost barely divining  
the powers of air, the underwater gushers.

## **A Memory**

*From: 'Las manos de dia'*

Memory, in the wheat-field's centre  
one purple poppy  
even more silken than silk  
and with a snake's aroma.  
The rest was the roughness  
of cut and golden wheat.

I have been tangled there, more than once  
beside a thresher  
with a wild apple  
opened by sex and sudden  
and in the threshed straw remained  
an odour of semen and moon.

## **The Word**

*From: 'Plenos poderes'*

It was born  
in blood, the word  
grew in the dark body, beating  
and flew through the lips and the mouth.

Further, and nearer  
still, still it came  
from dead fathers, nomadic races,  
from lands made of stone,  
that were tired of their wretched tribes,  
because when pain set out on the way  
the villages walked and arrived  
and new earth and water joined again  
to sow their words anew.  
And so this is the legacy:  
this is the air which connects us  
to the dead man and the dawn  
of new beings not yet woken.

The atmosphere still trembles  
with the first word  
formed  
in panic and moans.  
It rose  
from the shadows  
and even now no thunder

yet thunders with the clang  
of that word  
the first  
word spoken:  
perhaps it was only a sigh, a drop,  
and yet its cascade falls and falls.

Then sense fills the word.  
The word was made pregnant and filled with lives.  
It was all births and cries:  
affirmation, clarity, force,  
negation, destruction, death:  
the verb assumed all those powers  
and merged existence and essence  
in the electricity of her beauty.

Word, human, syllabic, pelvis  
of wide light and solid silver,  
hereditary cup that receives  
the communication of blood:  
here is where silence was fused  
in the total human word  
and not to speak is to be dying among beings:  
language springs from the roots of the hair,  
the mouth talks without the lips moving:  
the eyes of a sudden are words.

I take the word and traverse it  
as if it were solely human form,  
its lineaments delight me and I fly  
through each resonance of language:  
I pronounce and I am and I reach without speech  
the silence at the end of words.

I drink to the word, lifting  
a word or a glass of crystal,  
in it I drink  
the wine of language  
or the interminable waters  
maternal fount of words,  
and glass and water and wine  
originate my song  
because the verb is the origin  
and the living channel: it is blood  
the blood that speaks its substance  
and so is ready to flow:  
giving crystal to crystal, blood to blood  
and giving life to life, the words.

Note: Verse 4. *Claridad* was a student revolutionist review published in Santiago. Neruda wrote articles for it weekly during the 1920's. Chile's political situation was in turmoil at the time. Arturo Alessandri Palma became President of the Republic, which defused his revolutionary politics. Luis Emilio Recabarren, a working-class leader and organizer, set up union centers, and workers' newspapers etc. There was massive unemployment throughout Chile. Neruda writes that from then on, politics became a part of his poetry and his life.

## **Too Many Names**

*From: 'Estravagario'*

Monday entangles itself with Tuesday  
and the week with the year:  
time cannot be severed  
with your weary shears,  
and all the names of the day  
the water of night clears.

No man can call himself Peter,  
no woman Rose or Mary,  
we are all sand or dust,  
we are all rain in the rain.  
They have told me of Venezuelas,  
Paraguays and Chiles,  
I don't know what they're talking about:  
I know the skin of the Earth  
and I know that it has no name.

When I lived among roots  
they delighted me more than flowers,  
and when I talked to a stone  
it echoed like a bell.

It is so slow the spring  
that lasts the winter long:  
time has lost his shoes:  
one year's four centuries.

When I go to sleep each night  
what am I called, not called?  
And when I wake up, who am I  
if it wasn't 'I' who was sleeping?

This is to say that as soon as we  
are thrust out into life,  
that we come newly born,  
that our mouths are not filled  
with all these dubious names,  
with all these mournful labels,  
with all these meaningless letters,  
with all this 'yours' and 'mine',  
with all this signing of papers.

I think to confound things  
mingling them, hatching them new,  
seeing through them, stripping them naked,  
until the light of the earth  
has the unity of the ocean,  
a generous integrity,  
a crackle of starched perfume.

**‘The heavy rain of the south falls over Isla  
Negra’**

*LXVII From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’*

The heavy rain of the south falls over Isla Negra  
like a solitary drop transparent and weighty:  
the sea opens its cool leaves to receive it:  
the earth learns the wet fate of the glass.

My soul, grant me in your kisses the briny  
water of these months, the honey of the region,  
the fragrance moistened by the sky’s thousand lips,  
the sacred patience of the sea in winter.

Something calls us: all the doors open by themselves,  
the water tells a great story to the window-panes,  
the sky extends down to touch the roots,

and like this the day weaves and unweaves its celestial net  
with time, salt, murmurs, growth, pathways,  
a woman, a man, and winter on the Earth.

**'My love, at the shutting of this door of night'**

*LXXXII From: 'Cien sonetos de amor'*

My love, at the shutting of this door of night  
I ask of you, love, a journey through a dark pound:  
shut out your dreams: enter with your sky my eyes:  
stretch out in my blood as if in a wide river.

Goodbye, goodbye, cruel clarity that was dropped  
into the bag of every day of the past:  
goodbye to every gleam of clocks or oranges:  
welcome oh shadow, periodic friend!

In this boat, or water, or death, or new life,  
one more time we unite, slumbering, resurrected:  
we are the marriage of the night in the blood.

I don't know who lives or dies, sleeps or wakes,  
but it is your heart that delivers,  
to my chest, the gifts of the dawn.

## **Night Sea**

*From: 'Canto general'*

Night sea, statue of white and green  
I love you: sleep with me. I travelled all  
the roads, calcined and dying,  
nature grew with me, Man  
overcame his ashes, prepared himself  
for rest, surrounded by the Earth.

Night fell so that your eyes  
could not see his miserable slumber:  
needing nearness, he opened his arms  
protected by beings and walls,  
and fell into the sleep of silence, sinking  
with his roots into the funereal earth.  
I, night ocean, to your open form,  
to your expanse that Aldebaran guards,  
to the wet mouth of your song  
came with the love that builds me.

I saw you, night of the sea, when you were born  
beaten into infinite nacre:  
I watched the starry threads woven,  
and the electricity at your waist,  
and the blue motion of the sounds  
that hound your devoured sweetness.

Love me without love, flagrant wife.

Love me with space, with the river  
of your breathing, with the increase  
of all your overflowing diamonds:  
love me without respite from your aspect,  
grant me the honesty of your breakers.

Beautiful, you are, beloved night, beautiful:  
you keep the tempest like a bee  
slumbering among your agitated stamens,  
dream and water tremble in the hollows  
of your breasts, harassed by slopes.

Nocturnal love, I followed what you raised,  
your eternity, the trembling tower  
that assumes the stars, the measure  
of your wavering, the villages  
that the spume raises on your flanks:  
I am fastened to your throat  
and to the lips that you bruise on the sand.

Who are you? Night of the seas, tell me  
whether your heights of hair cover  
all solitude, whether it is infinite  
this space of blood and prairies.  
Tell me who you are, full of boats,  
full of moons the wind crushes,  
mistress of all metals, rose  
of the depths, rose drenched  
by the harsh weather of naked love.

Earth's tunic, green statue,  
grant me a wave like a bell,  
grant me a wave of furious orange blossom,  
the crowd of bonfires, the boats  
of the sky's capital, the water where I sail

the crowds of celestial fire. I want one  
moment of expansiveness, and more than  
all dreams, your remoteness:  
all the purples you measure, your grave  
pensive, constellated system:  
all your hair touched  
by darkness, and the dawn you prepare.

I want to contain your simultaneous brow,  
unfurling it within me, to be born  
on all your shores, to go now  
with all the secrets breathed,  
with your shadow lines kept safe  
in me like blood or flags,  
carrying these secret measures  
to the sea of every day, to the battles  
in every gateway – loves and threats –  
that live slumbering.

But then

I will enter the city with as many eyes  
as you, and I will bear the garment  
with which you invested me, and may I be moved  
to the furthest reaches of measureless water:  
by purity and rage against every deathliness,  
remoteness that cannot be exhausted, music  
for those who slumber and those who wake.

## **Ode to Clothes**

*From 'Odas elementales'*

Every morning you wait,  
clothes, over a chair,  
to fill yourself with  
my vanity, my love,  
my hope, my body.  
Barely  
risen from sleep,  
I relinquish the water,  
enter your sleeves,  
my legs look for  
the hollows of your legs,  
and so embraced  
by your indefatigable faithfulness  
I rise, to tread the grass,  
enter poetry,  
consider through the windows,  
the things,  
the men, the women,  
the deeds and the fights  
go on forming me,  
go on making me face things  
working my hands,  
opening my eyes,  
using my mouth,  
and so,  
clothes,  
I too go forming you,

extending your elbows,  
snapping your threads,  
and so your life expands  
in the image of my life.  
In the wind  
you billow and snap  
as if you were my soul,  
at bad times  
you cling  
to my bones,  
vacant, for the night,  
darkness, sleep  
populate with their phantoms  
your wings and mine.  
I wonder  
if one day  
a bullet  
from the enemy  
will leave you stained with my blood  
and then  
you will die with me  
or one day  
not quite  
so dramatic  
but simple,  
you will fall ill,  
clothes,  
with me,  
grow old  
with me, with my body  
and joined

we will enter  
the earth.  
Because of this  
each day  
I greet you  
with reverence and then  
you embrace me and I forget you,  
because we are one  
and we will go on  
facing the wind, in the night,  
the streets or the fight,  
a single body,  
one day, one day, some day, still.

**‘Misfortunes of the month of January’**

*XLI From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’*

Misfortunes of the month of January when indifferent  
noon establishes its equation in the sky,  
a solid gold like wine in an overflowing glass  
fills the earth to its blue limits.

Misfortunes of this time, appearing like tiny grapes  
that bunch together in green bitterness,  
confused, secret tears of the days,  
until the elements divulge their clusters.

Yes, seeds, grief, everything that pulses  
terrified, in the crackling light of January,  
will ripen, ferment, as the fruit ferments.

The sorrows will be divided: the soul  
give a gasp of air, and the dwelling-place  
will be left clean, with fresh-made bread on the table.

## **I Explain a Few Things**

*From: 'Tercera Residencia'*

You will ask: 'And where are the lilacs?  
And the metaphysics covered with poppies?  
And the rain that often beat down  
filling its words  
with holes and birds.'

To you I am going to tell all that happened to me.

I lived in a quarter  
in Madrid, with bells  
with clocks, with trees.

From there could be seen  
the dry face of Castille  
like a sea of leather.

My house was named  
the house of the flowers, because everywhere  
geraniums exploded: it was  
a beautiful house  
with dogs and little children.

Raúl, you agree?

You agree, Rafael?

Federico, you agree

beneath the earth,  
you agree about my house with balconies where  
the light of June drowned flowers in your mouth?

Brother, brother!

All

was loud voices, salt of wares,  
agglomerations of pulsating bread,  
the markets of my quarter of Argüelles with its statue  
like a pallid inkwell amongst the hake:  
the olive oil flowed into spoons  
a deep pounding  
of feet and hands filled the streets,  
metres, litres, sharp  
essence of life, stacked fish,  
the build of roofs with a cold sun on which  
the weathervane tires,  
the fine frenzied ivory of potatoes,  
tomatoes multiplied down to the sea.

And one morning all of that burned  
and one morning the bonfires  
leapt from the earth  
devouring beings,  
and from that moment fire  
gunpowder from that moment,  
and from that moment blood.  
Thugs with planes, and the Moors,  
thugs with signet rings, and duchesses,  
thugs with black friars blessing  
came through the sky to slaughter children,  
and through the streets the blood of the children  
flowed easily, like the blood of children.

Jackals that the jackal would drive away,

stones that the dry thistle would bite and spit out,  
vipers that the vipers would hate!

Opposed to you I have seen the blood  
of Spain rise up  
to drown you, in a single wave  
of pride and knives!

Generals

traitors:

consider my dead house,

consider Spain, broken:

but from every dead house burning metal flows  
in place of flowers,

but from every hollow of Spain

Spain rises,

but from every dead child rises a gun with eyes,

but from every crime are born bullets

that will find you one day in the house  
of the heart.

You will ask why his poetry

has nothing of the earth, of the leaves,

of the grand volcanoes of his native country?

Come and see the blood through the streets,

come and see

the blood through the streets,

come and see the blood

through the streets!

Note. Federico is Federico Garcia Lorca, the poet,  
assassinated in the early days of the Spanish Civil War,  
whom Neruda knew. Rafael is the poet Rafael Alberti.

## **Discoverers of Chile**

*From: 'Canto General'*

From the North Almagro brought his train of scintillations.  
And over the territories, between explosion and subsidence,  
he bent himself day and night as if over a map.  
Shadow of thorns, shadow of thistle and wax,  
the Spaniard joined to his dry shape,  
gazed at the ground's sombre strategies.  
Night, snow and sand make up the form of  
my narrow country,  
all the silence is in its long line,  
all the foam rises from its sea beard  
all the coal fills it with mysterious kisses.  
Like a hot coal the gold burns in its fingers,  
and the silver lights like a green moon  
its hardened form of a gloomy planet.  
The Spaniard seated next to the rose one day,  
next to the oil, next to the wine, next to the ancient sky,  
did not conceive of this place of furious stone  
being born from under the ordure of the sea eagle.

**Oh Earth, wait for me**

*From: 'Memorial de Isla Negra'*

Turn me oh sun  
towards my native destiny,  
rain from the ancient forest,  
return to me the fragrance and the swords  
that fall from the sky,  
the solitary peace of field and rock,  
the moisture at the margins of the river,  
the scent of the larch,  
the wind, alive like a heart  
beating among the remote flock  
of the great araucaria.

Earth, return to me your pure gifts  
the towers of silence that rose  
from the solemnity of their roots:  
I want to return to being what I have not been,  
learn to return from such depths  
that amongst all the things of nature  
I could live or not live: no matter  
to be one more stone, the dark stone,  
the pure stone that is carried by the river.

**‘And this word, this paper written’**

*XCVIII From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’*

And this word, this paper written  
by the thousand hands of a single hand  
does not rest in you, does not serve for dreams.  
It falls to the earth: there it continues.

No matter that light or praise  
were spilled and rose from the glass  
if they were a tenacious tremor of wine,  
if your mouth was dyed amaranthine.

It no longer needs the lagging syllable  
that which the reef brings and withdraws  
from my memories, the incensed spume,

It no longer needs a single thing but to write your name.  
And even though my sombre love silences it  
much later the spring will speak it.

## **Poor Creatures!**

*From: 'Estravagario'*

What it takes on this planet  
to love each other in peace:  
all the world examines the sheets,  
all of them trouble your love.

And they say terrible things  
about a man and a woman  
who, after lots of vacillations,  
and lots of deliberations,  
do something incomparable,  
fall together into one bed.

I ask myself if the frogs  
stake out, sneeze at, themselves,  
whether they whisper in ponds  
against the outlaw frogs  
against the joy of spawn.  
I ask myself if the birds  
make bird enemies  
and if the bull listens to oxen  
before he pays court to the cows.

Now the streets have eyes,  
the parks have police,  
the hotels have their spys,  
the windows note down names,  
troops and guns are sent out

resolute against love,  
working incessantly  
the throats and the ears,  
and a guy and his girl  
are forced to burst into flower  
while fleeing on a bike.

## **The Stroke**

*From: 'Las Manos del Dia'*

Ink that entrances me  
drop by drop  
and goes guarding the trail  
of my reason and unreason  
like a large scar that's barely  
seen when the body's asleep  
in its discourse of dissolution.

Better perhaps if  
all your essence  
were to have emptied in one drop  
and thrown itself on a single page  
stained it with a single green star  
and that only that stain  
were to have been all  
I had written in the whole of my life,  
without alphabet or interpretations:  
a single dark stroke  
without words.

## **Lone Gentleman**

*From: 'Residencia en la tierra, I'*

The gay young men and the love-sick girls,  
and the abandoned widows suffering in sleepless delirium,  
and the young pregnant wives of thirty hours,  
and the raucous cats that cruise my garden in the shadows,  
like a necklace of pulsating oysters of sex  
surround my lonely residence,  
like enemies lined up against my soul,  
like conspirators in bedroom clothes  
who exchange long deep kisses to order.

The radiant summer leads to lovers  
in predictable melancholic regiments,  
made of fat and skinny, sad and happy pairings:  
under the elegant coconut palms, near the ocean and the  
moon,  
goes an endless movement of trousers and dresses,  
a whisper of silk stockings being caressed,  
and women's breasts that sparkle like eyes.

The little employee, after it all,  
after the week's boredom, and novels read by night in bed,  
has definitively seduced the girl next door,  
and carried her away to a run-down movie house  
where the heroes are studs or princes mad with passion,  
and strokes her legs covered with soft down  
with his moist and ardent hands that smell of cigarettes.

The seducer's afternoons and married peoples' nights  
come together like the sheets and bury me,  
and the hours after lunch when the young male students  
and the young girl students, and the priests, masturbate,  
and the creatures fornicate outright,  
and the bees smell of blood, and the flies madly buzz,  
and boy and girl cousins play oddly together,  
and doctors stare in fury at the young patient's husband,  
and the morning hours in which the professor, as if to pass  
the time,  
performs his marriage duties, and breakfasts,  
and moreover, the adulterers, who love each other truly  
on beds as high and deep as ocean liners:  
finally, eternally surrounding me  
is a gigantic forest breathing and tangled  
with gigantic flowers like mouths with teeth  
and black roots in the shape of hooves and shoes.

## **Ode to The Tomato**

*From: 'Odas elementales'*

The roadway  
is full of tomatoes,  
midday,  
summer,  
the light  
splits itself  
in two  
halves  
of tomato,  
runs  
down the roads  
as juice.  
In December  
it goes wild  
the tomato,  
invades  
kitchens,  
infiltrates lunches,  
settles itself  
quietly  
on sideboards,  
among glasses,  
butter-dishes,  
blue salt-shakers.  
It has  
its own light,  
gentle authority.

Sadly we have to  
murder it:  
sinking,  
the knife  
in its living pulp,  
it is a red  
heart,  
a fresh  
sun,  
deep,  
inexhaustible,  
filling the salads  
of Chile,  
is happily wedded  
to the clear onion,  
and to celebrate  
oil  
lets itself  
pour,  
essential  
child of the olive,  
over its half-open hemispheres,  
the peppers  
add  
their fragrance,  
salt its magnetism:  
it's a stylish  
wedding,  
parsley  
lifts  
little flags,

the potatoes  
boil with vigour,  
the roast  
knocks  
on the door  
with its aroma,  
it's time!  
come on!  
and on to  
the table, in the middle  
of summer,  
the tomato,  
earth-star,  
star  
repeated  
and fecund,  
shows us  
its convolutions,  
its channels,  
the famous fullness  
and plenty  
delivers up  
without stone  
without rind  
without scales or spines  
the gift  
of its fiery colour  
and the whole of its freshness.

## **To a Ship's Figurehead (Elegy)**

*From: 'Canto general'*

From the sands of Magellan we salvaged you, exhausted  
voyager, immobile  
beneath the storm your sweet twofold breast so many times  
defied dividing itself between your nipples.

We lifted you again over the Southern waters, but now  
you were the passenger in darkness, of angles, one  
with the wheat and the metal you guarded  
on the wide water, enveloped by oceanic night.

Today you are mine, goddess whom the giant albatross  
grazed with its wingspan extended in flight,  
like a cloak of music conducted in rain  
by your blind wandering eyelids of timber.

Rose of the sea, bee more pure than dream,  
almond-woman who from the roots  
of a holm-oak peopled with cantos  
made yourself form, force of the nest-filled foliage,  
mouth of tempests, delicate sweetness,  
that could go conquering the light with its thighs.

When the angels and the queens born with you,  
covering themselves with moss, slumbered, fated  
to the immobility the dead guard with honour,  
you climbed to the narrow prow of the ship

and angel and queen and wave, you were the earth's  
tremor.

Man's shudderings climbed to your  
noble tunic with its apple-wood breast.  
while your lips oh sweetness! were moistened  
by other kisses worthy of your wild mouth.

Beneath strange nights your waist let  
fall the pure burden of the ship into the waves  
cutting a path through the sombre extent  
of overturned flame, of phosphorescent honey.  
The wind opened its bag of tempests,  
the unbound metal of its groans,  
and the light at dawn received you trembling  
in the ports, kissing your moist diadem.

Sometimes the trembling vessel heeled  
when you halted your path through the sea,  
like a heavy fruit that breaks off and falls,  
a dead mariner whom the spume,  
and the pure motion of time and ship, receive.  
And you alone among all the faces  
submerged by menace, plunged into barren sadness,  
received the scattered salt-brine on your mask,  
and your eyes retained the salty tears.  
More than one wretched life slipped from your arms  
into an eternity of funereal waters,  
and the touch of the dead and the living  
wore away your heart of ocean timber.

Today we have salvaged your form from the sand.  
Finally you were destined for my eyes.  
You slumber, perhaps, a slumberer, perhaps you are dead, a  
dead one:  
your motion has finally forgotten the sighing  
and the wandering splendour has ceased its journey.  
Anger of ocean, blows of the heavens have circled

your proud head with cracks and fissures,  
and your face rests like a conch,  
with wounds that mark your swaying brow.

For me your beauty holds all of the perfume,  
all of the wandering corrosion, all its dark night.  
And in your raised breast of lamp or of goddess,  
swelling turret, immobile love, life lives.  
Salvaged, you sail with me, until that day  
in which they let fall what I am into the spume.

## **The Tides**

*From: 'Memorial de Isla Negro' 'III El Cruel Fuego'*

I grew, drenched by nature's waters,  
like a mollusk in ocean phosphor:  
in me shattered brine reverberated,  
and laid down my proper skeleton.  
How to explain? Almost without movement  
of azure and bitter breath,  
one by one the waves repeated  
what I gave out, and throbbed,  
till brine and juice formed me:  
the disdain, the desire of a wave,  
the green rhythm that from the hidden bulk  
lifted up a translucent edifice,  
that secret, it clasped to itself, and so  
I sensed that I might pulse as it did:  
that my song might grow with the waters.

## **The Bees (I)**

*From: 'Fin de Mundo'*

What was I to do, I, born  
when the gods were dead,  
and my insufferable youth  
spent searching between cracks?  
It was my role, and because of it  
I felt so desolate.

One bee plus one bee  
does not make two bees of light  
or two bees of darkness:  
it makes a solar system,  
a house of topaz,  
a dangerous caress.

The first concern of amber  
is two golden bees  
and tied to those same bees  
each day's sun travels:  
I rage at revealing so many  
of my ridiculous secrets.

They go on chasing me questioning  
my relationship with cats,  
how I found the rainbow's arc,  
why the worthy chestnuts  
show themselves as hedgehogs,  
and above all for me to say

what the toads think of me,  
the creatures hidden  
beneath the wood's fragrance  
or in the bubbles of concrete.

The truth is that among the knowers  
I owned to a unique ignorance  
and among those who might know less  
I was always a little less knowing  
and so little was my knowledge  
that I learned wisdom.

## **The People**

*From: 'Plenos poderes'*

I recall that man and not two centuries  
have passed since I saw him,  
he went neither by horse nor by carriage:  
purely on foot  
he outstripped  
distances,  
and carried no sword or armour,  
only nets on his shoulder,  
axe or hammer or spade,  
never fighting the rest of his species:  
his exploits were with water and earth,  
with wheat so that it turned into bread,  
with giant trees to render them wood,  
with walls to open up doors,  
with sand to construct the walls,  
and with ocean for it to bear.

I knew him and he is still not cancelled in me.

The carriages fell to pieces,  
war destroyed doors and walls,  
the city was a handful of ashes,  
all the clothes turned to dust,  
and he remains to me,  
he survives in the sand,  
when everything before  
seemed imperishable but him.

In the going and coming of families  
at times he was my father or kinsman  
or perhaps it was scarcely him or not  
the one who did not return to his house  
because water or earth swallowed him up  
or a tree or an engine killed him,  
or he was the saddened carpenter  
who went behind the coffin, without tears,  
someone in the end who had no name,  
except those that metal or timber have,  
and on whom others gazed from on high  
without seeing the ant  
for the anthill  
and so that when his feet did not stir,  
because the poor exhausted one had died,  
they never saw what they had not seen:  
already there were other feet where he'd been.

The other feet were still his,  
and the other hands,  
the man remained:  
when it seemed that now he was done for  
he was the same once more,  
there he was digging again at the earth,  
cutting cloth, minus a shirt,  
there he was and was not, like before,  
he had gone down and was once more,  
and since he never owned graveyards,  
or tombs, nor was his name carved  
on the stone he sweated to quarry,

no one knew he had come  
and no one knew when he died,  
so that only when the poor man could  
he returned to life once more, without it being noted.

He was the man, no doubt of it, without heritage,  
without cattle, without a flag,  
and he was not distinguished from others,  
the others who were him,  
from the heights he was grey like the subsoil,  
tanned like the leather,  
he was yellow reaping the wheat,  
he was black down in the mine,  
he was the colour of stone on the fortress,  
in the fishing boat the colour of tuna,  
and the colour of horses in the meadow:  
how could anyone distinguish him  
if he was inseparable, elemental,  
earth, coal or sea vested in man?

Where he lived whatever  
a man touched grew:  
the hostile stones,  
quarried  
by his hands,  
took on order  
and one by one formed  
the right clarity of a building,  
he made bread with his hands,  
moved the engines,  
the distances peopled themselves with towns,  
other men grew,  
bees arrived,  
and by man's creating and breeding  
spring walked the market squares

between bakeries and doves.

The maker of loaves was forgotten,  
he who quarried and journeyed, beating down  
and opening furrows, transporting sand,  
when everything existed he no longer existed,  
he gave his existence, that's all.  
He went elsewhere to labour, and at last  
he was dead, rolling  
like a stone in the river:  
death carried him downstream.

I, who knew him, saw him descend  
till he was no longer except what he left:  
roads he could scarcely know,  
houses he never ever would live in.

I turn to see him, and I await him

I see him in his grave and resurrected.

I distinguish him among all  
who are his equals  
and it seems to me it cannot be,  
that like this we go nowhere,  
that to survive like this holds no glory.

I believe that this man  
must be enthroned, rightly shod and crowned.  
I believe that those who made such things  
must be the masters of all these things.  
And that those who made bread should eat!

And those in the mines must have light!

Enough now of grey men enslaved!

Enough of the pale 'missing ones'!

Not another man passes except as a king.

Not a single woman without her crown.

Golden gauntlets for every hand.

Fruits of the sun for all the unknowns!

I knew that man and when I could,  
when he still had eyes in his head,  
when he still had a voice in his mouth  
I searched for him among tombs, and I said  
grasping his arm that was not yet dust:

'All will be gone, you will live on,

You ignite life.

You made what is yours.'

So let no one trouble themselves when  
I seem to be alone and am not alone,  
I am with no one and speak for them all:

Some listen to me, without knowing,  
but those I sing, those who do know  
go on being born, and will fill up the Earth.

**‘At the centre of the Earth I’ll split apart’**

C From: ‘Cien sonetos de amor’

At the centre of the Earth I’ll split apart  
the emeralds to catch a sight of you  
and you’ll be copying down the ears of wheat  
like a message-taking plume of water.

What a world! What depths of parsley!  
What a sailboat sailing in the sweetness!  
And you perhaps and I perhaps of topaz!  
There’ll be no more dissonance in the bells.

There’ll be no more than the free air,  
the apples taken by the wind,  
the juicy volume in among the branches,

and there where the carnations breathe  
we will start a garment to last out  
the eternity of a victorious kiss.

## **Index of First Lines**

One time more, my love, the net of light extinguishes.....	6
Ocean, if you were to give, a measure, a ferment, a fruit....	7
Unclothed, you are true, like one of your hands, .....	10
All those men were there inside,.....	11
The light that climbs from your feet to your hair,.....	12
Leave me a place underground, a labyrinth, .....	13
I do not love you as if you were brine-rose, topaz, .....	14
Lost in the woods, I snapped off a dark branch.....	15
March days return with their covert light,.....	16
And it was at that time... Poetry came.....	17
Who ever desired each other as we do? Let us look.....	20
You ask what the crab offers, between its claws of gold, .	21
With chaste heart, and pure.....	24
In the wave-strike over unquiet stones.....	27
I can write the saddest lines tonight. ....	28
Leaning into the afternoon, I cast my saddened nets,.....	31
This day, Today, was a brimming glass.....	32
Perhaps not to be is to be without your being, .....	33
Carnal apple, Woman filled, burning moon,.....	34
The tree is here, still, in pure stone, .....	35
When your hands leap.....	36
Victory. It has come late, I had not learnt .....	38
I like you calm, as if you were absent,.....	39
Tie your heart at night to mine, love, .....	40
You will recall the gorge of capricious waters.....	41
Oh love, oh mad light-beam, threat of violet, .....	42
For you to hear me .....	43
Lake Budi, sombre, dark heavy stone, .....	44

From the archipelago you have hair of larch fibres,.....	46
The little girl made of timber didn't arrive by walking:....	47
It so happens I'm tired of being a man.....	48
Not for the desert lands alone where the rock-salt .....	51
O Southern Cross, O clover of scented phosphorus, .....	53
Day breaks: the whole of yesterday went falling .....	55
Through the mountains you pass like the breeze .....	56
It's good to feel you are close to me in the night, love, ....	57
For the sun's pure power, I write, for the full sea, .....	58
Three birds of the ocean, three rays, three shears, .....	61
Glorious Mind, bright daemon.....	62
Amor, Amor, the clouds in the sky's tower .....	63
Memory, in the wheat-field's centre .....	64
It was born .....	65
Monday entangles itself with Tuesday.....	69
The heavy rain of the south falls over Isla Negra.....	72
My love, at the shutting of this door of night.....	73
Night sea, statue of white and green .....	74
Every morning you wait,.....	79
Misfortunes of the month of January when indifferent.....	82
You will ask: 'And where are the lilacs? .....	83
From the North Almagro brought his train of scintillations.	
.....	87
Turn me oh sun .....	88
And this word, this paper written.....	89
What it takes on this planet.....	90
Ink that entrances me .....	92
The gay young men and the love-sick girls,.....	93
The roadway .....	95
From the sands of Magellan we salvaged you, exhausted.	98
I grew, drenched by nature's waters, .....	103

What was I to do, I, born.....	104
I recall that man and not two centuries .....	107
At the centre of the Earth I'll split apart.....	115