
Pablo Neruda

CHILE

[*Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto*]

1904-1973

The child who was to become the most popular, best-known, and arguably the most influential poet of Latin America, "Pablo Neruda" was born Neftalí Reyes Basoalto in the seaside village of Parral, in south-central Chile, during the summer rainy season. His mother died within a month of his birth. (Several biographers have associated this early loss of maternal affection with Neruda's sometimes obsessive poetic images of rain, sea, femininity, and emotional integrity.) He was raised at home and educated in the public schools of Temuco, where Gabriela Mistral, then in her early twenties, was teaching elementary school. He began to write poems at an early age, even though his family—especially his father, a railroad worker— forbade him. By late adolescence, Neftalí Reyes Basoalto was writing emotionally capacious poems of surrealist intensity. Apparently in part to avoid his father's disapproval, he restyled himself "Pablo Neruda," choosing a working-class

first name and a surname that recalled the nationalistic Czech historical novelist Jan Neruda (1834-1891).

After *Crepusculario* (*Twilight Book*, 1923), Neruda's first major publication was *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* (*Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, 1924 in Santiago), which introduced a meditative young poet of Romantic intensity and confident lyricism. When he joined the diplomatic corps and was stationed in Burma in 1927, Neruda's lyrical inclination responded to the solitude of his life there and to the humid exotic reality that in its fecundity seemed to border on the surreal. The poems of his *Residencia en la tierra, 1925-1931* (*Residence on the Earth*, 1st ed. 1933) immersed the lyrical perceiver in a welter of images suggesting the turbulence of this physical world, with which the mediating consciousness must contend. Neruda counters the richness of that external world with a correspondingly inventive verbal lushness, in "dynamic forms" that enact the poems' emotions of disintegration, despair, claustal ennui, and sexual tumult. The poems of the *Residencias* (1933, 1935, 1947), claims Julio Cortázar, effected a "radical mutation of our deepest speech." Although the theories behind the form of those poems owe something to Vicente Huidobro's "creationism," the difference lodges in the world's external truths that inform Neruda's dynamic syntax. Still, it is a world of "primordial dough," as Octavio Paz characterizes the timeless and placeless spatiality of the poems of *Residencia*: "It is a mythical geography . . . a planet that is fermenting, rotting, germinating."

Transferred to Barcelona in 1934 and later located in Madrid, Neruda came into contact with pre-civil war politics and with some of the most important poets of the Spanish "Generation of '27," including Federico García Lorca, Rafael Alberti, and Miguel Hernández. Under the influence of those writers, and responding to the tumultuous politics of Spain on the verge of the civil war, once again Neruda transformed his aesthetic. He enlarged the field of his poems' concerns to include political and social arguments, and there he found a wealth of possibilities within the tones of sympathy and difficult joy that were to characterize much of his best work for the rest of his life. (Some readers, like John Felstiner, have demonstrated how the formal concomitants of these changes, such as Neruda's ability to sustain an argument by counterpointing systematic metaphors derived from an essentially private mythology, in fact preceded the political application of those formal possibilities.) Critics have called this apparent shift an evolution, even a conversion; certainly the change involved a double transformation, both a turning *from* the subjectivity of his early poems and a turning *toward* the collective struggle. "The world has changed, and my poetry has changed," Neruda explained, claiming that his earlier poems, beginning with *Residencia*, had been "saturated with pessimism." Neruda's new tones of sympathy differed from the more personal tenderness of César Vallejo (although Vallejo later suggested that only he and Neruda wrote in a mode Vallejo called *verdadismo*, "truthism"). In *España en el corazón* (*Spain in My Heart*, 1937), a tribute both to the Spanish Republic and to his friend Vallejo, Neruda's poems were more prophetic and more rhetorically directive, like the poems of Blake and Whitman that he loved and translated. In fact, Roberto González Echevarría has suggested that Neruda later chose the title of his *Canto general* (*General Song*, 1950) to distinguish his new tones of outwardness and collectivity from those of Whitman's "Song of Myself"—and implicitly from Whitman's democratic naivete—while still paying indirect homage to Whitman's generalizing energies.

Returning to the Americas on the eve of World War II, Neruda served as ambassador to Mexico and—on his way back to Chile in 1943—visited Macchu Picchu, the "lost" city of the Incas,

in Peru. That trip occasioned the most important and resonant single poem of Latin America, Neruda's *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* (*The Heights of Macchu Picchu*). That majestic meditation on the nature of American reality—with its Whitmanian sympathies, its moving imaginative addresses to the vanished human realities that survive in the ruins among the rock and plants of the Andes, its realization of the survival of human work in the stones of the ruined city—marks Neruda's emergence as a major poet of Latin American essences, a poet who inscribed Latin American experience into the world's conscience. Written on Isla Negra in 1945, *Macchu Picchu* was published as a section of the longer sequence *Canto general*, which located those essences in the context of other historical meditations and personal addresses to the vistas, flora, and human customs of the continent (including the Araucanian Indian traditions of southern Chile). This new "impure poetry," Neruda insisted, should open itself to the landscape and drama and conditions of the New World. Paradoxically, Neruda's experiences in Spain both confirmed him as a poet in the language of Spain and reoriented him toward Latin America.

By the late 1940s Neruda had declared himself a communist. Although his incessant preoccupation with immediate realities flavored his political allegiances, his overt political commitment helped Neruda to contextualize several of his obsessive concerns: the material conditions of the Americas, registered in the *Odas elementales* (*Elemental Odes*, 1954, 1955, 1957, 1963, 1964); the ironically Whitman-like resistance to North American imperialist attitudes vis-à-vis Latin America; an endearingly limpid attention to the local and the particular, in *Memorial de Isla Negra* (*Remembrance of Isla Negra*, 1964). Throughout this period, Neruda enacts his identification with the democratic individual in surprisingly accessible poems carried by a personal mythology and by repetitive, personally encoded symbols. Neruda wrote several poems in praise of Stalin, traveled to the Soviet Union, and accepted the Stalin Prize for poetry in 1953. He later tried to repudiate some of the excesses of the Stalinist regime. Charles Tomlinson, among other critics, has pointed out not only the political compromises this admiration for the Soviet system after World War II required, but also how many of Neruda's later poems rely on a tone of almost "coercive" smugness, a "sinisterly autistic" oversimplification of political realities. According to Tomlinson, the attitude sometimes takes the form of direct invective and at other times the form of a startling intimacy with his readers, whom the poem conceives, sentimentally but coercively, as both "you" and "the masses."

Neruda's later love poems, addressed to his third wife Matilde Urrutia, surprised his readers by their passion, their clarity, and their submergence of public themes into private and domestic affections (*Los versos del capitán* [*The Captain's Verses*, 1953] and *Cien sonetos de amor* [*One Hundred Love Sonnets*, 1959]). In an important sense, these late poems come full circle, returning Neruda to the image-rich affection of his *Veinte poemas de amor*.

In 1970 Neruda declared himself a candidate for the presidency of Chile. After ascertaining the depth of the support for the Socialist candidate, Salvador Allende Gossens, he withdrew from the race, as planned, and threw his support to Allende's Popular Front. Neruda won the Nobel Prize in 1971 while he was living in Paris, serving as the Chilean ambassador to France. Already suffering from cancer, he died of a heart attack two weeks after the CIA-backed coup in 1973 that toppled Allende's democratically elected government.

Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada

I. CUERPO DE MUJER

Cuerpo de mujer, blancas colinas, muslos blancos,
te pareces al mundo en tu actitud de entrega.
Mi cuerpo de labriego salvaje te socava
y hace saltar el hijo del fondo de la tierra.

Fui solo como un túnel. De mí huían los pájaros,
y en mí la noche entraba su invasión poderosa.
Para sobrevivirme te forjé como un arma,
como una flecha en mi arco, como una piedra en mi honda.

Pero cae la hora de la venganza, y te amo.
Cuerpo de piel, de musgo, de leche ávida y firme.
Ah los vasos del pecho! Ah los ojos de ausencia!
Ah las rosas del pubis! Ah tu voz lenta y triste!

Cuerpo de mujer mía, persistiré en tu gracia.
Mi sed, mi ansia sin límite, mi camino indeciso!
Oscuros cauces donde la sed eterna sigue,
y la fatiga sigue, y el dolor infinito.

VII. INCLINADO EN LAS TARDES

Inclinado en las tardes tiro mis tristes redes
a tus ojos oceánicos.

Allí se estira y arde en la más alta hoguera
mi soledad que da vueltas los brazos como un náufrago.

Hago rojas señales sobre tus ojos ausentes
que oleán como el mar a la orilla de un faro.

Sólo guardas tinieblas, hembra distante y mía,
de tu mirada emerge a veces la costa del espanto.

Inclinado en las tardes echo mis tristes redes
a ese mar que sacude tus ojos oceánicos.

Los pájaros nocturnos picotean las primeras estrellas
que centellean como mi alma cuando te amo.

Galopa la noche en su yegua sombría
desparramando espigas azules sobre el campo.

Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair

I. BODY OF A WOMAN

Body of a woman, white hills, white thighs,
you look like a world, lying in surrender.
My rough peasant's body digs in you
and makes the son leap from the depth of the earth.

I was alone like a tunnel. The birds fled from me,
and night swamped me with its crushing invasion.
To survive myself I forged you like a weapon,
like an arrow in my bow, a stone in my sling.

But the hour of vengeance falls, and I love you.
Body of skin, of moss, of eager and firm milk.
Oh the goblets of the breast! Oh the eyes of absence!
Oh the roses of the pubis! Oh your voice, slow and sad!

Body of my woman, I will persist in your grace.
My thirst, my boundless desire, my shifting road!
Dark river-beds where the eternal thirst flows
and weariness follows, and the infinite ache.

VII. LEANING INTO THE AFTERNOONS

Leaning into the afternoons I cast my sad nets
towards your oceanic eyes.

There in the highest blaze my solitude lengthens and
flames,
its arms turning like a drowning man's.

I send out red signals across your absent eyes
that wave like the sea or the beach by a lighthouse.

You keep only darkness, my distant female,
from your regard sometimes the coast of dread emerges.

Leaning into the afternoons I fling my sad nets
to that sea that is thrashed by your oceanic eyes.

The birds of night peck at the first stars
that flash like my soul when I love you.

The night gallops on its shadowy mare
shedding blue tassels over the land.

XX. PUEDO ESCRIBIR LOS VERSOS.

Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche.

Escribir, por ejemplo: "La noche está estrellada,
y tiritan, azules, los astros, a lo lejos."

El viento de la noche gira en el cielo y canta.

Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche.
Yo la quise, y a veces ella también me quiso.

En las noches como ésta la tuve entre mis brazos.
La besé tantas veces bajo el cielo infinito.

Ella me quiso, a veces yo también la quería.
Cómo no haber amado sus grandes ojos fijos.

Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche.
Pensar que no la tengo. Sentir que la he perdido.

Oír la noche inmensa, más inmensa sin ella.
Y el verso cae al alma como al pasto el rocío.

Qué importa que mi amor no pudiera guardarla.
La noche está estrellada y ella no está conmigo.

Eso es todo. A lo lejos alguien canta. A lo lejos.
Mi alma no se contenta con haberla perdido.

Como para acercarla mi mirada la busca.
Mi corazón la busca, y ella no está conmigo.

La misma noche que hace blanquear los mismos árboles.
Nosotros, los de entonces, ya no somos los mismos.

Ya no la quiero, es cierto, pero cuánto la quise.
Mi voz buscaba el viento para tocar su oído.

De otro. Será de otro. Como antes de mis besos.
Su voz, su cuerpo claro. Sus ojos infinitos.

Ya no la quiero, es cierto, pero tal vez la quiero.
Es tan corto el amor, y es tan largo el olvido.

Porque en noches como ésta la tuve entre mis brazos,
mi alma no se contenta con haberla perdido.

Aunque éste sea el último dolor que ella me causa,
y éstos sean los últimos versos que yo le escribo.

1924

XX. TONIGHT I CAN WRITE

Tonight I can write the saddest line:

Write, for example, "The night is shattered
and the blue stars shiver in the distance."

The night wind revolves in the sky and sings.

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

Through nights like this one I held her in my arms.
I kissed her again and again under the endless sky.

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

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.
To think that I do not have her. To feel that I have lost her.

To hear the immense night, still more immense without her.
And the verse falls to the soul like dew to the pasture.

What does it matter that my love could not keep her
The night is shattered and she is not with me.

This is all. In the distance someone is singing. In the
distance.

My soul is not satisfied that it has lost her.

My sight searches for her as though to go to her.
My heart looks for her, and she is not with me.

The same night whitening the same trees.
We, of that time, are no longer the same.

I no longer love her, that's certain, but how I loved her.
My voice tried to find the wind to touch her hearing.

Another's. She will be another's. Like my kisses before.
Her voice. Her bright body. Her infinite eyes.

I no longer love her, that's certain, but maybe I love her.
Love is so short, forgetting is so long.

Because through nights like this one I held her in my arms
my soul is not satisfied that it has lost her.

Though this be the last pain that she makes me suffer
and these the last verses that I write for her.

trans. W. S. Merwin

Galope muerto

Como cenizas, como mares poblándose,
 en la sumergida lentitud, en lo informe,
 o como se oyen desde el alto de los caminos
 cruzar las campanadas en cruz,
 teniendo ese sonido ya aparte del metal,
 confuso, pesando, haciéndose polvo
 en el mismo molino de las formas demasiado lejos,
 o recordadas o no vistas,
 y el perfume de las ciruelas que rodando a tierra
 se pudren en el tiempo, infinitamente verdes.

Aquello todo tan rápido, tan viviente,
 inmóvil sin embargo, como la polea loca en sí misma,
 esas ruedas de los motores, en fin.
 Existiendo como las puntadas secas en las costuras
 del árbol,
 callado, por alrededor, de tal modo,
 mazclando todos los limbos sus colas.
 Es que de dónde, por dónde, en qué orilla?
 El rodeo constante, incierto, tan mudo,
 como las lilas alrededor del convento,
 o la llegada de la muerte a la lengua del buey
 que cae a tumbos, guardabajo, y cuyos cuernos
 quieren sonar.

Por eso, en lo inmóvil, deteniéndose, percibir,
 entonces, como aleteo inmenso, encima,
 como abejas muertas o números,
 ay, lo que mi corazón pálido no puede abarcar,
 en multitudes, en lágrimas saliendo apenas,
 y esfuerzos humanos, tormentas,
 acciones negras descubiertas de repente
 como hielos, desorden vasto,
 oceánico, para mí que entro cantando,
 como con una espada entre indefensos.

Ahora bien, de qué está hecho ese surgir de palomas
 que hay entre la noche y el tiempo, como una
 barranca húmeda?
 Ese sonido ya tan largo
 que cae listando de piedras los caminos,
 más bien, cuando sólo una hora
 crece de improviso, extendiéndose sin tregua.

Adentro del anillo del verano
 una vez los grandes zapallos escuchan,
 estirando sus plantas conmovedoras,
 de eso, de lo que solicitándose mucho,
 de lo lleno, oscuros de pesadas gotas.

Dead Gallop

Like ashes, like oceans swarming,
 in the sunken slowness, in what's unformed,
 or like high on the road hearing
 bellstrokes cross by crosswise,
 holding that sound just free of the metal,
 blurred, bearing down, reducing to dust
 in the selfsame mill of forms far out of reach,
 whether remembered or never seen,
 and the aroma of plums rolling to earth
 that rot in time, endlessly green.

All of it so quick, so livening,
 immobile though, like a pulley idling on itself,
 those wheels that motors have, in short.
 Existing like dry stitches in the seams of trees,
 silenced, encircling, in such a way,
 all the planets splicing their tails.
 Then from where, which way, on what shore?
 The ceaseless whirl, uncertain, so still,
 like lilacs around the convent,
 or death as it gets to the tongue of an ox
 who stumbles down unguarded, and whose horns want
 to sound.

That's why, in what's immobile, holding still, to perceive
 then, like great wingbeats, overhead,
 like dead bees or numbers,
 oh all that my spent heart can't embrace,
 in crowds, in half-shed tears,
 and human toiling, turbulence,
 black actions suddenly disclosed
 like ice, immense disorder,
 oceanwide, for me who goes in singing,
 as with a sword among defenseless men.

Well that what is it made of—that spurt of doves
 between night and time, like a damp ravine?
 That sound so drawn out now
 that drops down lining the roads with stones,
 or better, when just one hour
 buds up suddenly, extending endlessly.

Within the ring of summer,
 once, the enormous calabashes listen,
 stretching their poignant stems—
 of that, of that which urging forth,
 of what's full, dark with heavy drops.

trans. John Felstiner

Walking around

Sucede que me canso de ser hombre.
 Sucede que entro en las sastrerías y en los cines
 marchito, impenetrable, como un cisne de fieltro
 navegando en un agua de origen y ceniza.

El olor de las peluquerías me hace llorar a gritos.
 Sólo quiero un descanso de piedras o de lana,
 sólo quiero no ver establecimientos ni jardines,
 ni mercaderías, ni anteojos, ni ascensores.

Sucede que me canso de mis pies y mis uñas
 y mi pelo y mi sombra.
 Sucede que me canso de ser hombre.

Sin embargo sería delicioso
 asustar a un notario con un lirio cortado
 o dar muerte a una monja con un golpe de oreja.
 Sería bello
 ir por las calles con un cuchillo verde
 y dando gritos hasta morir de frío.

No quiero seguir siendo raíz en las tinieblas,
 vacilante, extendido, tiritando de sueño,
 hacia abajo, en las tripas mojadas de la tierra,
 absorbiendo y pensando, comiendo cada día.

No quiero para mí tantas desgracias.
 No quiero continuar de raíz y de tumba,
 de subterráneo solo, de bodega con muertos,
 aterido, muriéndome de pena.

Por eso el día lunes arde como el petróleo
 cuando me ve llegar con mi cara de cárcel,
 y aúlla en su transcurso como una rueda herida,
 y da pasos de sangre caliente hacia la noche.

Y me empuja a ciertos rincones, a ciertas casas
 húmedas,
 a hospitales donde los huesos salen por la ventana,
 a ciertas zapaterías con olor a vinagre,
 a calles espantosas como grietas.

Hay pájaros de color de azufre y horribles intestinos
 colgando de las puertas de las casas que odio,
 hay dentaduras olvidadas en una cafetera,
 hay espejos
 que debieran haber llorado de vergüenza y espanto,
 hay paraguas en todas partes, y venenos, y ombligos.

Walking Around

It so happens I'm tired of just being a man.
 I go to a movie, drop in at the tailor's—it so happens—
 feeling wizened and numbed, like a big, wooly swan,
 awash on an ocean of clinkers and causes.

A whiff from a barbershop does it: I yell bloody murder.
 All I ask is a little vacation from things: from boulders
 and woolens,
 from gardens, institutional projects, merchandise,
 eyeglasses, elevators—I'd rather not look at them.

It so happens I'm fed up—with my feet and my fingernails
 and my hair and my shadow.
 Being a man leaves me cold: that's how it is.

Still—it would be lovely
 to wave a cut lily and panic a notary,
 or finish a nun with a left to the ear.
 It would be nice
 just to walk down the street with a green switchblade
 handy,
 whooping it up till I die of the shivers.

I won't live like this—like a root in a shadow,
 wide-open and wondering, teeth chattering sleepily,
 going down to the dripping entrails of the universe
 absorbing things, taking things in, eating three squares
 a day.

I've had all I'll take from catastrophe.
 I won't have it this way, muddling through like a root or
 a grave,
 all alone underground, in a morgue of cadavers,
 cold as a stiff, dying of misery.

That's why Monday flares up like an oil-slick,
 when it sees me up close, with the face of a jailbird,
 or squeaks like a broken-down wheel as it goes,
 stepping hot-blooded into the night.

Something shoves me toward certain damp houses, into
 certain dark corners,
 into hospitals, with bones flying out of the windows;
 into shoe stores and shoemakers smelling of vinegar,
 streets frightful as fissures laid open.

There, trussed to the doors of the houses I loathe
 are the sulphurous birds, in a horror of tripes,
 dental plates lost in a coffeepot,
 mirrors

aguda de la vida,
 pescados hacinados,
 textura de techos con sol frío en el cual
 la flecha se fatiga,
 delirante marfil fino de las patatas,
 tomates repetidos hasta el mar.

Y una mañana todo estaba ardiendo
 Y una mañana las hogueras
 salían de la tierra
 devorando seres,
 y desde entonces fuego,
 pólvora desde entonces,
 y desde entonces sangre.
 Bandidos con aviones y con moros,
 bandidos con sortijas y duquesas,
 bandidos con frailes negros bendiciendo
 venían por el cielo a matar niños,
 y por las calles la sangre de los niños
 corría simplemente, como sangre de niños.

Chacales que el chacal rechazaría,
 piedras que el cardo seco mordería escupiéndolo,
 víboras que las víboras odiaran!

Frente a vosotros he visto la sangre
 de España levantarse
 para ahogarnos en una sola ola
 de orgullo y de cuchillos!

Generales
 traidores:
 mirad mi casa muerta,
 mirad España rota:
 pero de cada casa muerta sale metal ardiendo
 en vez de flores,
 pero de cada hueco de España
 sale España,
 pero de cada niño muerto sale un fusil con ojos,
 pero de cada crimen nacen balas
 que os hallarán un día el sitio
 del corazón.

Preguntaréis por qué su poesía
 no nos habla del sueño, de las hojas,
 de los grandes volcanes de su país natal?

Venid a ver la sangre por las calles.
 venid a ver
 la sangre por las calles,
 venid a ver la sangre
 por las calles!

measure of life,
 stacked-up fish,
 the texture of roofs with a cold sun in which
 the weather vane falters,
 the fine, frenzied ivory of potatoes,
 wave on wave of tomatoes rolling down to the sea.

And one morning all that was burning,
 one morning the bonfires
 leapt out of the earth
 devouring human beings—
 and from then on fire,
 gunpowder from then on,
 and from then on blood.
 Bandits with planes and Moors,
 bandits with finger-rings and duchesses,
 bandits with black friars spattering blessings
 came through the sky to kill children
 and the blood of children ran through the streets
 without fuss, like children's blood.

Jackals that the jackals would despise,
 stones that the dry thistle would bite on and spit out,
 vipers that the vipers would abominate!

Face to face with you I have seen the blood
 of Spain tower like a tide
 to drown you in one wave
 of pride and knives!

Treacherous
 generals:
 see my dead house,
 look at broken Spain:
 from every house burning metal flows
 instead of flowers,
 from every socket of Spain
 Spain emerges
 and from every dead child a rifle with eyes,
 and from every crime bullets are born
 which will one day find
 the bull's eye of your hearts.

And you will ask: why doesn't his poetry
 speak of dreams and leaves
 and the great volcanoes of his native land?

Come and see the blood in the streets.
 Come and see
 the blood in the streets.
 Come and see the blood
 in the streets!

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
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 barros rituales,
devoradora y religiosa.

Alturas de Macchu Picchu

V

Entonces en la escala de la tierra he subido
entre la atroz maraña de las selvas perdidas
hasta ti, Macchu Picchu.

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
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.

The Heights of Macchu Picchu

VI

Then up the ladder of the earth I climbed
through the barbed jungle's thickets
until I reached you Macchu Picchu.

Alta ciudad de piedras escalares,
por fin morada del que lo terrestre
no escondió en las dormidas vestiduras
En ti, como dos líneas paralelas,
la cuna del relámpago y del hombre
se mecían en un viento de espinas.

Madre de piedra, espuma de los cóndores.

Alto arrecife de la aurora humana

Pala perdida en la primera arena.

Esta fué la morada, éste es el sitio:
aquí los anchos granos del maíz ascendieron
y bajaron de nuevo como granizo rojo.

Aquí la hebra dorada salió de la vicuña
a vestir los amores, los túmulos, las madres,
el rey, las oraciones, los guerreros.

Aquí los pies del hombre descansaron de noche
junto a los pies del águila, en las altas guaridas
carniceras, y en la aurora
pisaron con los pies del trueno la niebla enrarecida,
y tocaron las tierras y las piedras
hasta reconocerlas en la noche o la muerte.

Miro las vestiduras y las manos,
el vestigio del agua en la oquedad sonora,
la pared suavizada por el tacto de un rostro
que miró con mis ojos las lámparas terrestres
que aceitó con mis manos las desaparecidas
maderas: porque todo, ropaje, piel, vasijas,
palabras, vino, panes,
se fué, cayó a la tierra.

Y el aire entró con dedos
de azahar sobre todos los dormidos:
mil años de aire, meses, semanas de aire,
de viento azul, de cordillera férrea,
que fueron como suaves huracanes de pasos
lustrando el solitario recinto de la piedra.

X

Piedra en la piedra, el hombre, dónde estuvo?
Aire en el aire, el hombre, dónde estuvo?
Tiempo en el tiempo, el hombre, dónde estuvo
Fuiste también el pedacito roto

Tall city of stepped stone,
home at long last of whatever earth
had never hidden in her sleeping clothes.
In you two lineages that had run parallel
met where the cradle both of man and light
rocked in a wind of thorns.

Mother of stone and sperm of condors.

High reef of the human dawn

Spade buried in primordial sand

This was the habitation, this is the site
here the fat grains of maize grew high
to fall again like red hail.

The fleece of the vicuña was carded here
to clothe men's loves in gold, their tombs and mothers,
the king, the prayers, the warriors.

Up here men's feet found rest at night
near eagles' talons in the high
meat-stuffed eyries. And in the dawn
with thunder steps they trod the thinning mists,
touching the earth and stones that they might recognize
that touch come night, come death.

I gaze at clothes and hands,
traces of water in the booming cistern,
a wall burnished by the touch of a face
that witnessed with my eyes the earth's carpet of tapers,
oiled with my hands the vanished wood:
for everything, apparel, skin, pots, words,
wine, loaves, has disappeared,
fallen to earth.

And the air came in with lemon blossom fingers
to touch those sleeping faces:
a thousand years of air, months, weeks of air,
blue wind and iron cordilleras—
these came with gentle footstep hurricanes
cleansing the lonely precinct of the stone.

trans. Nathaniel Tarn

X

Stone upon stone, and man, where was he?
Air upon air, and man, where was he?
Time upon time, and man, where was he?
Were you too then the broken bit

de hombre inconcluso, de águila vacía
 que por las calles de hoy, que por las huellas,
 que por las hojas del otoño muerto
 va machacando el alma hasta la tumba?
 La pobre mano, el pie, la pobre vida...
 Los días de la luz deshilachada
 en ti, como la lluvia
 sobre las banderillas de la fiesta,
 dieron pétalo a pétalo de su alimento oscuro
 en la boca vacía?

Hambre, coral del hombre,
 hambre, planta secreta, raíz de los leñadores,
 hambre, subió tu raya de arrecife
 hasta estas altas torres desprendidas?

Yo te interrogo, sal de los caminos,
 muéstrame la cuchara, déjame, arquitectura,
 roer con un palito los estambres de piedra,
 subir todos los escalones del aire hasta el vacío,
 rascar la entraña hasta tocar el hombre.

Macchu Picchu, pusiste
 piedra en la piedra, y en la base, harapo?
 Carbón sobre carbón, y en el fondo la lágrima?
 Fuego en el oro, y en él, temblando el rojo
 goterón de la sangre?
 Devuélveme el esclavo que enterraste!
 Sacude de las tierras el pan duro
 del miserable, muéstrame los vestidos
 del siervo y su ventana.
 Dime cómo durmió cuando vivía.
 Dime si fue su sueño
 ronco, entreabierto, como un hoyo negro
 hecho por la fatiga sobre el muro.
 El muro, el muro! Si sobre su sueño
 gravitó cada piso de piedra, y si cayó bajo ella
 como bajo una luna, con el sueño!

Antigua América, novia sumergida,
 también tus dedos,
 al salir de la selva hacia el alto vacío de los dioses,
 bajo los estandartes nupciales de la luz y el decoro,
 mezclándose al trueno de los tambores y de las lanzas,
 también, también tus dedos,
 los que la rosa abstracta y la línea del frío, los
 que el pecho sangriento del nuevo cereal trasladaron
 hasta la tela de materia radiante, hasta las duras cavidades,
 también, también, América enterrada, guardaste en lo
 más bajo,
 en el amargo intestino, como un águila, el hambre?

of half-spent humankind, an empty eagle, that
 through the streets today, through footsteps,
 through the dead autumn's leaves,
 keeps crushing its soul until the grave?
 The meager hand, the foot, the meager life...
 Did the days of unraveled light
 in you, like rain
 on pennants at a festival,
 give off their dark food petal by petal
 into your empty mouth?

Hunger, coral of humankind,
 hunger, hidden plant, root of the woodcutter,
 hunger, did your reef-edge climb
 to these high and ruinous towers?

I question you, salt of the roads,
 show me the trowel; architecture, let me
 grind stone stamens with a stick,
 climb every step of air up to the void,
 scrape in the womb till I touch man.

Macchu Picchu, did you set
 stone upon stone on a base of rags?
 Coal over coal and at bottom, tears?
 Fire on the gold and within it, trembling, the red
 splash of blood?
 Give me back the slave you buried!
 Shake from the earth the hard bread
 of the poor, show me the servant's
 clothes and his window.
 Tell me how he slept while he lived.
 Tell me if his sleep
 was snoring, gaping like a black hole
 that weariness dug in the wall.
 The wall, the wall! If every course of stone
 weighed down his sleep, and if he fell underneath
 as under a moon, with his sleep!

Ancient America, sunken bride,
 your fingers too,
 leaving the jungle for the empty height of the gods,
 under bridal banners of light and reverence,
 blending with thunder from the drums and lances,
 yours, your fingers too,
 those that the abstract rose and the rim of cold, the
 bloodstained body of the new grain bore up
 to a web of radiant matter, to the hardened hollows,
 you too, buried America, did you keep in the deepest part
 of your bitter gut, like an eagle, hunger?

trans. John Felstiner

XII

Sube a nacer conmigo, hermano.

Dame la mano desde la profunda
zona de tu dolor diseminado.
No volverás del fondo de las rocas.
No volverás del tiempo subterráneo.
No volverá tu voz endurecida.
No volverán tus ojos taladrados.

Mírame desde el fondo de la tierra,
labrador, tejedor, pastor callado:
domador de guanacos tutelares:
albañil del andamio desafiado:
aguador de las lágrimas andinas:
joyero de los dedos machacados:
agricultor temblando en la semilla:
alfarero en tu greda derramado:
traed a la copa de esta nueva vida
vuestros viejos dolores enterrados.
Mostradme vuestra sangre y vuestro surco,
decidme: aquí fuí castigado,
porque la joya no brilló o la tierra
no entregó a tiempo la piedra o el grano:
señaladme la piedra en que caísteis
y la madera en que os crucificaron,
encendedme los viejos pedernales,
las viejas lámparas, los látigos pegados
a través de los siglos en las llagas
y las hachas de brillo ensangrentado.

Yo vengo a hablar por vuestra boca muerta.

A través de la tierra juntad todos
los silenciosos labios derramados
y desde el fondo habládme toda esta larga noche,
como si yo estuviera con vosotros anclado.

Contadme todo, cadena a cadena,
eslabón a eslabón, y paso a paso,
afilad los cuchillos que guardasteis,
ponedlos en mi pecho y en mi mano,
como un río de rayos amarillos,
como un río de tigres enterrados,
y dejadme llorar, horas, días, años,
edades ciegas, siglos estelares.

Dadme el silencio, el agua, la esperanza.

Dadme la lucha, el hierro, los volcanes.

Apegadme los cuerpos como imanes.

Acudid a mis venas y a mi boca.

Hablad por mi palabras y mi sangre.

1945/1950

XII

Rise up, brother, be born with me.

Give me your hand from the deep
territory seeded with your griefs.
You won't come back from the depths of the rock.
You won't come back from underground time.
No coming back for your roughened voice.
No coming back for your drilled eyes.
Look at me from the depths of the earth,
farmer, weaver, quiet shepherd;
trainer of sacred llamas;
mason on a risky scaffold:
water-bearer of Andean tears:
jeweller with bruised fingers:
farmer trembling among seedlings:
potter among spilled clay:
bring to the cup of this new life
your ancient buried sorrows.
Show me your blood and your furrows,
say to me: Here I was whipped
because a jewel didn't shine or the earth
hadn't yielded its grain or stone on time.
Pick out the stone on which you stumbled
and the wood on which they crucified you,
kindle the old flints for me,
the old lamps, the whips
that stuck to the wounds through the centuries,
and the bright axes stained with blood.
I come to speak for your dead mouth.
You silent scattered lips,
come join throughout the earth
and speak to me from the depths of this long night
as if we were anchored here together,
tell me everything, chain by chain,
link by link and step by step,
sharpen the knives you hid,
put them in my chest and into my hand,
like a river of yellow lightning,
like a river of buried jaguars,
and let me cry, hours, days, years,
blind ages, stellar centuries.

Give me silence, water, hope.

Give me struggle, iron, volcanoes.

Fasten your bodies to mine like magnets.

Come into my veins and into my mouth.

Speak through my words and my blood.

trans. David Young

La United Fruit Co.

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 albedríos
 regaló coronas de César,
 desvainó 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.
 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.

1950

América, no invoco tu nombre en vano

América, no invoco tu nombre en vano.
 Cuando sujeto al corazón la espada,

United Fruit Co.

When the trumpet blared everything
 on earth was prepared
 and Jehovah distributed the world
 to Coca-Cola Inc., Anaconda,
 Ford Motors and other entities:
 United Fruit Inc.
 reserved for itself the juiciest,
 the central seaboard of my land,
 America's sweet waist.
 It rebaptized its lands
 the "Banana Republics,"
 and upon the slumbering corpses,
 upon the restless heroes
 who conquered renown,
 freedom and flags,
 it established the comic opera:
 it alienated self-destiny,
 regaled Caesar's crowns,
 unshathed envy, drew
 the dictatorship of flies:
 Trujillo flies, Tacho flies,
 Carías flies, Martínez flies,
 Ubico flies, flies soaked
 in humble blood and jam,
 drunk flies that drone
 over the common graves,
 circus flies, clever flies
 versed in tyranny.

Among the bloodthirsty flies
 the Fruit Co. disembarks,
 ravaging coffee and fruits
 for its ships that spirit away
 our submerged lands' treasures
 like serving trays.

Meanwhile, in the seaports'
 sugary abysses,
 Indians collapsed, buried
 in the morning mist:
 a body rolls down, a nameless
 thing, a fallen number,
 a bunch of lifeless fruit
 dumped in the rubbish heap.

*trans. Jack Schmitt**America, I Do Not Call Your Name without Hope*

America, I do not call your name without hope.
 When I hold the sword against the heart,

cuando aguanto en el alma la gotera,
 cuando por las ventanas
 un nuevo día tuyo me penetra,
 soy y estoy en la luz que me produce,
 vivo en la sombra que me determina,
 duermo y despierto en tu esencial aurora:
 dulce como las uvas, y terrible,
 conductor del azúcar y el castigo,
 empapado en esperma de tu especie,
 amamantado en sangre de tu herencia.

1956

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
 estos
 celestiales
 calcetines.
 Eran
 tan hermosos
 que por primera vez
 mis pies me parecieron

when I live with the faulty roof in the soul,
 when one of your new days
 pierces me coming through the windows,
 I am and I stand in the light that produces me,
 I live in the darkness which makes me what I am,
 I sleep and awake in your fundamental sunrise:
 as mild as the grapes, and as terrible,
 carrier of sugar and the whip,
 soaked in the sperm of your species,
 nursed on the blood of your inheritance.

trans. Robert Bly

Ode to My Socks

Maru Mori brought me
 a pair
 of socks
 which she knitted herself
 with her sheepherder'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
 sea-blue, shot
 through
 by one golden thread,
 two immense blackbirds,
 two cannons:
 my feet
 were honored
 in this way
 by
 these
 heavenly
 socks.
 They were
 so handsome
 for the first time
 my feet seemed to me

inaceptables
 como 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
 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.

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
 into a golden
 cage
 and each day give them
 birdseed
 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 sock:
 made of wool
 in winter.

trans. Robert Bly

Oda a César Vallejo

A la piedra en tu rostro,
Vallejo,
a las arrugas
de las áridas sierras
yo recuerdo en mi canto,
tu frente
gigantesca
sobre tu cuerpo frágil,
el crepúsculo negro
en tus ojos
recién desenterrados,
días aquellos,
bruscos,
desiguales,
cada hora tenía
ácidos diferentes
o ternuras
remotas,
las llaves
de la vida
temblaban
en la luz polvienta
de la calle,
tú volvías
de un viaje
lento, bajo la tierra,
y en la altura
de las cicatrizadas cordilleras
yo golpeaba las puertas,
que se abrieran
los muros,
que se desenrollaran
los caminos,
recién llegado de Valparaíso
me embarcaba en Marsella,
la tierra
se cortaba
como un limón fragante
en frescos hemisferios amarillos,
tú
te quedabas
allí, sujeto
a nada,
con tu vida
y tu muerte,
con tu arena
cayendo,
midiéndote
y vaciándote,
en el aire,

Ode to César Vallejo

The stone in your face,
Vallejo,
the creases
of the dry sierras:
I recollect them in my song:
your enormous
forehead
above your delicate body,
the black twilight
in your eyes,
freshly unearthed,
those harsh
unstable
days,
each hour held
different acids
or distant
gentlenesses,
the keys
of life
trembled
in the powdery light
of the street,
you returned
from a slow
journey, from under the earth,
and in the heights
of the scarred mountain-ranges
I pounded on the doors,
to make the walls
open,
to make the roads
unroll,
just arrived from Valparaiso
I disembarked at Marseille,
the earth
broke open
like a fragrant lemon
in fresh yellow hemispheres,
you
stayed
there, subject
to nothing,
with your life
and your death,
with your sand
dropping,
measuring you
and draining you,
in the air,

en el humo,
 en las callejas rotas
 del invierno.
 Era en París, vivías
 en los descalabrados
 hoteles de los pobres.
 España
 se desangraba.
 Acudíamos.
 Y luego
 te quedaste
 otra vez en el humo
 y así cuando
 ya no fuiste, de pronto,
 no fue la tierra
 de las cicatrices,
 no fue
 la piedra andina
 la que tuvo tus huesos,
 sino el humo,
 la escarcha
 de París en invierno.

Dos veces desterrado,
 hermano mío,
 de la tierra y el aire,
 de la vida y la muerte,
 desterrado
 del Perú, de tus ríos,
 ausente
 de tu arcilla.
 No me faltaste en vida,
 sino en muerte.
 Te busco
 gota a gota,
 polvo a polvo,
 en tu tierra,
 amarillo
 es tu rostro,
 escarpado
 es tu rostro,
 estás lleno
 de viejas pedrerías,
 de vasijas
 quebradas,
 subo
 las antiguas
 escalinatas,
 tal vez
 estés perdido,
 enredado
 entre los hilos de oro,

in the smoke,
 in the defeated alleys
 of the winter.
 You were in Paris, living
 in the wounded
 hostels of the poor.
 Spain
 was bleeding.
 We left.
 And again
 that time
 you remained, in the smoke,
 so that when
 suddenly you just *weren't* any longer,
 it was not the earth
 with its scars,
 it was not
 the stone of the Andes
 that held your bones
 but the smoke,
 the frost,
 of Paris in winter.

Exiled twice,
 my brother:
 from the earth and the air
 from life and death,
 exiled
 from Peru, from your rivers,
 absent
 from your clay soil.
 I never missed you in life,
 only in death.
 I search for you
 drop by drop,
 dust by dust,
 in the earth,
 your face is
 yellow,
 your face is
 craggy,
 you are full
 of old jewels,
 of broken
 pots,
 I climb
 the ancient
 terraces,
 maybe you have
 gotten lost,
 caught netted
 in threads of gold,

cubierto
 de turquesas,
 silencioso,
 o tal vez
 en tu pueblo,
 en tu raza,
 grano
 de maíz extendido,
 semilla
 de bandera.
 Tal vez, tal vez ahora
 transmigras
 y regresas,
 vienes
 al fin
 de viaje,
 de manera
 que un día
 te verás en el centro
 de tu patria,
 insurrecto,
 viviente,
 cristal de tu cristal, fuego en tu fuego,
 rayo de piedra púrpura.

1954

Oda a la pereza

Ayer sentí que la oda
 no subía del suelo.
 Era hora, debía
 por lo menos
 mostrar una hoja verde.
 Rasqué la tierra: "Sube,
 hermana oda
 —le dije—
 te tengo prometida,
 no me tengas miedo,
 no voy a triturarte,
 oda de cuatro hojas,
 oda de cuatro manos,
 tomarás té conmigo.
 Sube,
 te voy a coronar entre las odas,
 saldremos juntos, por la orilla
 del mar, en bicicleta."
 Fue inútil.

Entonces,
 en lo alto de los pinos,

covered
 with turquoise,
 silent,
 or maybe
 in your village,
 in your race,
 a grain
 of corn spread wide,
 seed
 of a flag.
 Maybe, maybe now
 you are transmigrating,
 and you are returning,
 you are coming
 to the end
 of the journey,
 so that
 one day
 you will find yourself in the middle
 of your homeland,
 insurgent,
 alive,
 crystal of your crystal, flame in your flame,
 beam of purple stone.

trans. Stephen Tapscott

Ode to Laziness

Yesterday I felt this ode
 would not get off the floor.
 It was time, I ought
 at least
 show a green leaf.
 I scratch the earth: "Arise,
 sister ode
 —said to her—
 I have promised you,
 do not be afraid of me,
 I am not going to crush you,
 four-leaf ode,
 four-hand ode,
 you shall have tea with me.
 Arise,
 I am going to crown you among the odes,
 we shall go out together along the shores
 of the sea, on a bicycle."
 It was no use.

Then,
 on the pine peaks,

la pereza
 apareció desnuda,
 me llevó deslumbrado
 y soñoliento,
 me descubrió en la arena
 pequeños trozos rotos
 de sustancias oceánicas,
 maderas, algas, piedras,
 plumas de aves marinas.
 Busqué sin encontrar
 ágatas amarillas.
 El mar
 llenaba los espacios
 desmoronando torres,
 invadiendo
 las costas de mi patria,
 avanzando
 sucesivas catástrofes de espuma.
 Sola en la arena
 abría un rayo
 una corola.
 Vi cruzar los petreles plateados
 y como cruces negras
 los cormoranes
 clavados en las rocas.
 Liberté una abeja
 que agonizaba en un velo de araña,
 metí una piedrecita
 en un bolsillo,
 era suave, suavísima
 como un pecho de pájaro,
 mientras tanto en la costa,
 toda la tarde,
 lucharon sol y niebla.
 A veces
 la niebla se impregnaba
 de luz
 como un topacio,
 otras veces caía
 un rayo de sol húmedo
 dejando caer gotas amarillas.

En la noche,
 pensando en los deberes de mi oda
 fugitiva,
 me saqué los zapatos
 junto al fuego,
 resbaló arena de ellos
 y pronto fui quedándome
 dormido.

laziness
 appeared in the nude,
 she led me dazzled
 and sleepy,
 she showed me upon the sand
 small broken bits
 of ocean substance,
 wood, algae, pebbles,
 feathers of sea birds.
 I looked for but did not find
 yellow agates.
 The sea
 filled all spaces
 crumbling towers,
 invading
 the shores of my country,
 advancing
 successive catastrophes of the foam.
 Alone on the sand
 spread wide
 its corolla.
 I saw the silvery petrels crossing
 and like black creases
 the cormorants
 nailed to the rocks.
 I released a bee
 that was agonizing in a spider's net.
 I put a little pebble
 in my pocket,
 it was smooth, very smooth
 as the breast of a bird,
 meanwhile on the shore,
 all afternoon
 sun struggled with mist.
 At times
 the mist was steeped
 in thought,
 topaz-like,
 at others fell
 a ray from the moist sun
 distilling yellow drops.

At night,
 thinking of the duties of my
 fugitive ode,
 I pulled off my shoes
 near the fire;
 sand slid out of them
 and soon I began to fall
 asleep.

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.

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

Ode to Salt

This salt
in the saltcellar
I once saw in the salt mines.
I know
you won't
believe me,
but
it sings,
salt sings, the skin
of the salt mines,
sings
with a mouth smothered
by the earth.
I shivered in those
solitudes
when I heard
the voice
of
the salt
in the desert.
Near Antofagasta
the nitrous
pampa
resounds:

broken
voice,
a mournful
song.

In its caves
the salt moans, mountain
of buried light,
translucent cathedral,
crystal of the sea, oblivion
of the waves.

And then on every table
in the world,
salt,
we see your piquant
powder
sprinkling
vital light
upon
our food.
Preserver
of the ancient
holds of ships,
discoverer

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

on
 the high seas,
 earliest
 sailor
 of the unknown, shifting
 byways of the foam.
 Dust of the sea, in you
 the tongue receives a kiss
 from ocean night:
 taste imparts to every seasoned
 dish your ocean essence;
 the smallest,
 miniature
 wave from the saltcellar
 reveals to us
 more than domestic whiteness;
 in it, we taste infinitude.

1957

*trans. Margaret Sayers Peden**Cien sonetos de amor**One Hundred Love Sonnets*

V

No te toque la noche ni el aire ni la aurora,
 sólo la tierra, la virtud de los racimos,
 las manzanas que crecen oyendo el agua pura,
 el barro y las resinas de tu país fragante.

I did not touch your night, or your air, or dawn:
 only the earth, the truth of the fruit in clusters,
 the apples that swell as they drink the sweet water,
 the clay and the resins of your sweet-smelling land.

Desde Quinchamalí donde hicieron tus ojos
 hasta tus pies creados para mí en la Frontera
 eres la greda oscura que conozco:
 en tus caderas toco de nuevo todo el trigo.

From Quinchamalí where your eyes began,
 to the Frontera where your feet were made for me,
 you are my dark familiar clay: touching your hips,
 I touch the wheat in its fields again.

Tal vez tú no sabías, araucana,
 que cuando antes de amarte me olvidé de tus besos
 mi corazón quedó recordando tu boca

Woman from Arauco, maybe you didn't know
 how before I loved you I forgot your kisses.
 But my heart went on, remembering your mouth—and
 I went on

y fui como un herido por las calles
 hasta que comprendí que había encontrado,
 amor, mi territorio de besos y volcanes.

and on through the streets like a man wounded,
 until I understood, Love: I had found
 my place, a land of kisses and volcanoes.

XVI

XVI

Amo el trozo de tierra que tú eres,
 porque de las praderas planetarias
 otra estrella no tengo. Tú repites
 la multiplicación del universo.

I love the handful of the earth you are.
 Because of its meadows, vast as a planet,
 I have no other star. You are my model
 of the multiplying universe.

Tus anchos ojos son la luz que tengo
 de las constelaciones derrotadas,

Your wide eyes are the only light I know
 from extinguished constellations;

tu piel palpita como los caminos
que recorre en la lluvia el meteorito.

De tanta luna fueron para mí tus caderas,
de todo el sol tu boca profunda y su delicia,
de tanta luz ardiente como miel en la sombra

tu corazón quemado por largos rayos rojos,
y así recorro el fuego de tu forma besándote,
pequeña y planetaria, paloma y geografía.

XCII

Amor mío, si muero y tú no mueres,
amor mío, si mueres y no muero,
no demos al dolor más territorio:
no hay extensión como la que vivimos.

Polvo en el trigo, arena en las arenas,
el tiempo, el agua errante, el viento vago
nos llevó como grano navegante.
Pudimos no encontrarnos en el tiempo.

Esta pradera en que nos encontramos,
oh pequeño infinito! devolvemos.
Pero este amor, amor, no ha terminado,

y así como no tuvo nacimiento
no tiene muerte, es como un largo río,
sólo cambia de tierras y de labios.

your skin throbs like the streak
of a meteor through rain.

Your hips were that much of the moon for me,
your deep mouth and its delights, that much sun;
your heart, fiery with its long red rays,

was that much ardent light, like honey in the shade.
And so I pass across your burning form, kissing
you—compact and planetary, my dove, my globe.

XCII

My love, if I die and you don't—,
My love, if you die and I don't—,
let's not give grief an even greater field.
No expanse is greater than where we live.

Dust in the wheat, sand in the deserts,
time, wandering water, the vagrant wind
swept us like a sailing seed.
We might not have found one another in time.

This meadow where we find ourselves,
O little infinity!: we give it back.
But, Love, this love has not ended:

just as it never had a birth,
it has no death: it is like a long river,
only changing lands, and changing lips.