

Classic Poetry Series

Pablo Neruda

- poems -

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Pablo Neruda (1904-1973)

Pablo Neruda was born in Parall, Chile. He studied in Santiago in the twenties. From 1927 to 1945 he was the Chilean consul in Rangoon, in Java, and then in Barcelona. He joined the Communist Party after the Second World War. Between 1970 and 1973 he served in Allende's Chilean Government as ambassador to Paris. He died shortly after the coup that ended the Allende Government.

A Dog Has Died

My dog has died.
I buried him in the garden
next to a rusted old machine.

Some day I'll join him right there,
but now he's gone with his shaggy coat,
his bad manners and his cold nose,
and I, the materialist, who never believed
in any promised heaven in the sky
for any human being,
I believe in a heaven I'll never enter.
Yes, I believe in a heaven for all dogdom
where my dog waits for my arrival
waving his fan-like tail in friendship.

Ai, I'll not speak of sadness here on earth,
of having lost a companion
who was never servile.
His friendship for me, like that of a porcupine
withholding its authority,
was the friendship of a star, aloof,
with no more intimacy than was called for,
with no exaggerations:
he never climbed all over my clothes
filling me full of his hair or his mange,
he never rubbed up against my knee
like other dogs obsessed with sex.

No, my dog used to gaze at me,
paying me the attention I need,
the attention required
to make a vain person like me understand
that, being a dog, he was wasting time,
but, with those eyes so much purer than mine,
he'd keep on gazing at me
with a look that reserved for me alone
all his sweet and shaggy life,
always near me, never troubling me,
and asking nothing.

Ai, how many times have I envied his tail
as we walked together on the shores of the sea
in the lonely winter of Isla Negra
where the wintering birds filled the sky
and my hairy dog was jumping about
full of the voltage of the sea's movement:
my wandering dog, sniffing away
with his golden tail held high,
face to face with the ocean's spray.

Joyful, joyful, joyful,
as only dogs know how to be happy

with only the autonomy
of their shameless spirit.

There are no good-byes for my dog who has died,
and we don't now and never did lie to each other.

So now he's gone and I buried him,
and that's all there is to it.

Translated, from the Spanish, by Alfred Yankauer

Pablo Neruda

A Lemon

Out of lemon flowers
loosed
on the moonlight, love's
lashed and insatiable
essences,
sodden with fragrance,
the lemon tree's yellow
emerges,
the lemons
move down
from the tree's planetarium

Delicate merchandise!
The harbors are big with it-
bazaars
for the light and the
barbarous gold.
We open
the halves
of a miracle,
and a clotting of acids
brims
into the starry
divisions:
creation's
original juices,
irreducible, changeless,
alive:
so the freshness lives on
in a lemon,
in the sweet-smelling house of the rind,
the proportions, arcane and acerb.

Cutting the lemon
the knife
leaves a little cathedral:
alcoves unguessed by the eye
that open acidulous glass
to the light; topazes
riding the droplets,
altars,
aromatic facades.

So, while the hand
holds the cut of the lemon,
half a world
on a trencher,
the gold of the universe
wells
to your touch:
a cup yellow
with miracles,

a breast and a nipple
perfuming the earth;
a flashing made fruitage,
the diminutive fire of a planet.

Pablo Neruda

A Song of Despair

The memory of you emerges from the night around me.
The river mingles its stubborn lament with the sea.

Deserted like the dwarves at dawn.
It is the hour of departure, oh deserted one!

Cold flower heads are raining over my heart.
Oh pit of debris, fierce cave of the shipwrecked.

In you the wars and the flights accumulated.
From you the wings of the song birds rose.

You swallowed everything, like distance.
Like the sea, like time. In you everything sank!

It was the happy hour of assault and the kiss.
The hour of the spell that blazed like a lighthouse.

Pilot's dread, fury of blind driver,
turbulent drunkenness of love, in you everything sank!

In the childhood of mist my soul, winged and wounded.
Lost discoverer, in you everything sank!

You girdled sorrow, you clung to desire,
sadness stunned you, in you everything sank!

I made the wall of shadow draw back,
beyond desire and act, I walked on.

Oh flesh, my own flesh, woman whom I loved and lost,
I summon you in the moist hour, I raise my song to you.

Like a jar you housed infinite tenderness.
and the infinite oblivion shattered you like a jar.

There was the black solitude of the islands,
and there, woman of love, your arms took me in.

There was thirst and hunger, and you were the fruit.
There were grief and ruins, and you were the miracle.

Ah woman, I do not know how you could contain me
in the earth of your soul, in the cross of your arms!

How terrible and brief my desire was to you!
How difficult and drunken, how tensed and avid.

Cemetery of kisses, there is still fire in your tombs,
still the fruited boughs burn, pecked at by birds.

Oh the bitten mouth, oh the kissed limbs,

oh the hungry teeth, oh the entwined bodies.

Oh the mad coupling of hope and force
in which we merged and despaired.

And the tenderness, light as water and as flour.
And the word scarcely begun on the lips.

This was my destiny and in it was my voyage of my longing,
and in it my longing fell, in you everything sank!

Oh pit of debris, everything fell into you,
what sorrow did you not express, in what sorrow are you not drowned!

From billow to billow you still called and sang.
Standing like a sailor in the prow of a vessel.

You still flowered in songs, you still broke the currents.
Oh pit of debris, open and bitter well.

Pale blind diver, luckless slinger,
lost discoverer, in you everything sank!

It is the hour of departure, the hard cold hour
which the night fastens to all the timetables.

The rustling belt of the sea girdles the shore.
Cold stars heave up, black birds migrate.

Deserted like the wharves at dawn.
Only tremulous shadow twists in my hands.

Oh farther than everything. Oh farther than everything.

It is the hour of departure. Oh abandoned one!

Pablo Neruda

Bird

It was passed from one bird to another,
the whole gift of the day.
The day went from flute to flute,
went dressed in vegetation,
in flights which opened a tunnel
through the wind would pass
to where birds were breaking open
the dense blue air -
and there, night came in.

When I returned from so many journeys,
I stayed suspended and green
between sun and geography -
I saw how wings worked,
how perfumes are transmitted
by feathery telegraph,
and from above I saw the path,
the springs and the roof tiles,
the fishermen at their trades,
the trousers of the foam;
I saw it all from my green sky.
I had no more alphabet
than the swallows in their courses,
the tiny, shining water
of the small bird on fire
which dances out of the pollen.

Pablo Neruda

Brown and Agile Child

Brown and agile child, the sun which forms the fruit
And ripens the grain and twists the seaweed
Has made your happy body and your luminous eyes
And given your mouth the smile of water.

A black and anguished sun is entangled in the twigs
Of your black mane when you hold out your arms.
You play in the sun as in a tidal river
And it leaves two dark pools in your eyes.

Brown and agile child, nothing draws me to you,
Everything pulls away from me here in the noon.
You are the delirious youth of bee,
The drunkenness of the wave, the power of the heat.

My somber heart seeks you always
I love your happy body, your rich, soft voice.
Dusky butterfly, sweet and sure
Like the wheatfield, the sun, the poppy, and the water.

Pablo Neruda

Canto XII from The Heights of Macchu Picchu

Arise to birth with me, my brother.
Give me your hand out of the depths
sown by your sorrows.
You will not return from these stone fastnesses.
You will not emerge from subterranean time.
Your rasping voice will not come back,
nor your pierced eyes rise from their sockets.

Look at me from the depths of the earth,
tiller of fields, weaver, reticent shepherd,
groom of totemic guanacos,
mason high on your treacherous scaffolding,
iceman of Andean tears,
jeweler with crushed fingers,
farmer anxious among his seedlings,
potter wasted among his clays--
bring to the cup of this new life
your ancient buried sorrows.
Show me your blood and your furrow;
say to me: here I was scourged
because a gem was dull or because the earth
failed to give up in time its tithe of corn or stone.
Point out to me the rock on which you stumbled,
the wood they used to crucify your body.
Strike the old flints
to kindle ancient lamps, light up the whips
glued to your wounds throughout the centuries
and light the axes gleaming with your blood.

I come to speak for your dead mouths.

Throughout the earth
let dead lips congregate,
out of the depths spin this long night to me
as if I rode at anchor here with you.

And tell me everything, tell chain by chain,
and link by link, and step by step;
sharpen the knives you kept hidden away,
thrust them into my breast, into my hands,
like a torrent of sunbursts,
an Amazon of buried jaguars,
and leave me cry: hours, days and years,
blind ages, stellar centuries.

And give me silence, give me water, hope.

Give me the struggle, the iron, the volcanoes.

Let bodies cling like magnets to my body.

Come quickly to my veins and to my mouth.

Speak through my speech, and through my blood.

Pablo Neruda

Cat's Dream

How neatly a cat sleeps,
sleeps with its paws and its posture,
sleeps with its wicked claws,
and with its unfeeling blood,
sleeps with all the rings--
a series of burnt circles--
which have formed the odd geology
of its sand-colored tail.

I should like to sleep like a cat,
with all the fur of time,
with a tongue rough as flint,
with the dry sex of fire;
and after speaking to no one,
stretch myself over the world,
over roofs and landscapes,
with a passionate desire
to hunt the rats in my dreams.

I have seen how the cat asleep
would undulate, how the night
flowed through it like dark water;
and at times, it was going to fall
or possibly plunge into
the bare deserted snowdrifts.
Sometimes it grew so much in sleep
like a tiger's great-grandfather,
and would leap in the darkness over
rooftops, clouds and volcanoes.

Sleep, sleep cat of the night,
with episcopal ceremony
and your stone-carved moustache.
Take care of all our dreams;
control the obscurity
of our slumbering prowess
with your relentless heart
and the great ruff of your tail.

Translated by Alastair Reid

Submitted by Jen

Pablo Neruda

Clenched Soul

We have lost even this twilight.
No one saw us this evening hand in hand
while the blue night dropped on the world.

I have seen from my window
the fiesta of sunset in the distant mountain tops.

Sometimes a piece of sun
burned like a coin in my hand.

I remembered you with my soul clenched
in that sadness of mine that you know.

Where were you then?
Who else was there?
Saying what?
Why will the whole of love come on me suddenly
when I am sad and feel you are far away?

The book fell that always closed at twilight
and my blue sweater rolled like a hurt dog at my feet.

Always, always you recede through the evenings
toward the twilight erasing statues.

Pablo Neruda

Drunk as Drunk

<i>Translated from the Spanish by Christopher Logue</i>

Drunk as drunk on turpentine
From your open kisses,
Your wet body wedged
Between my wet body and the strake
Of our boat that is made of flowers,
Feasted, we guide it - our fingers
Like tallows adorned with yellow metal -
Over the sky's hot rim,
The day's last breath in our sails.

Pinned by the sun between solstice
And equinox, drowsy and tangled together
We drifted for months and woke
With the bitter taste of land on our lips,
Eyelids all sticky, and we longed for lime
And the sound of a rope
Lowering a bucket down its well. Then,
We came by night to the Fortunate Isles,
And lay like fish
Under the net of our kisses.

Pablo Neruda

Enigmas

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

I reply, the ocean knows this.

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

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

You ask me whom the *Macrocystis* alga hugs in its arms?

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

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

how the sea unicorn with the harpoon in it dies.

You enquire about the kingfisher's feathers,
which tremble in the pure springs of the southern tides?

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

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

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

The armored stalactite that breaks as it walks?

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

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

is endless as the sand, impossible to count, pure,
and among the blood-colored grapes time has made the
petal

hard and shiny, made the jellyfish full of light
and untied its knot, letting its musical threads fall
from a horn of plenty made of infinite mother-of-pearl.

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

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

Translated by Robert Bly

Pablo Neruda

Fable of the Mermaid and the Drunks

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.

Pablo Neruda

Fleas interest me so much

Fleas interest me so much
that I let them bite me for hours.
They are perfect, ancient, Sanskrit,
machines that admit of no appeal.
They do not bite to eat,
they bite only to jump;
they are the dancers of the celestial sphere,
delicate acrobats
in the softest and most profound circus;
let them gallop on my skin,
divulge their emotions,
amuse themselves with my blood,
but someone should introduce them to me.
I want to know them closely,
I want to know what to rely on.

Pablo Neruda

From – Twenty Poems of Love

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.

Pablo Neruda

from The Book of Questions

III.

Tell me, is the rose naked
or is that her only dress?

Why do trees conceal
the splendor of their roots?

Who hears the regrets
of the thieving automobile?

Is there anything in the world sadder
than a train standing in the rain?

Pablo Neruda

Gentleman Alone

The young maricones and the horny muchachas,
The big fat widows delirious from insomnia,
The young wives thirty hours' pregnant,
And the hoarse tomcats that cross my garden at night,
Like a collar of palpitating sexual oysters
Surround my solitary home,
Enemies of my soul,
Conspirators in pajamas
Who exchange deep kisses for passwords.
Radiant summer brings out the lovers
In melancholy regiments,
Fat and thin and happy and sad couples;
Under the elegant coconut palms, near the ocean and moon,
There is a continual life of pants and panties,
A hum from the fondling of silk stockings,
And women's breasts that glisten like eyes.
The salary man, after a while,
After the week's tedium, and the novels read in bed at night,
Has decisively fucked his neighbor,
And now takes her to the miserable movies,
Where the heroes are horses or passionate princes,
And he caresses her legs covered with sweet down
With his ardent and sweaty palms that smell like cigarettes.
The night of the hunter and the night of the husband
Come together like bed sheets and bury me,
And the hours after lunch, when the students and priests are masturbating,
And the animals mount each other openly,
And the bees smell of blood, and the flies buzz cholericly,
And cousins play strange games with cousins,
And doctors glower at the husband of the young patient,
And the early morning in which the professor, without a thought,
Pays his conjugal debt and eats breakfast,
And to top it all off, the adulterers, who love each other truly
On beds big and tall as ships:
So, eternally,
This twisted and breathing forest crushes me
With gigantic flowers like mouth and teeth
And black roots like fingernails and shoes.

Translated by Mike Topp

Pablo Neruda

I Crave Your Mouth, Your Voice, Your Hair

DON'T GO FAR OFF, NOT EVEN FOR A DAY
Don't go far off, not even for a day, because --
because -- I don't know how to say it: a day is long
and I will be waiting for you, as in an empty station
when the trains are parked off somewhere else, asleep.

Don't leave me, even for an hour, because
then the little drops of anguish will all run together,
the smoke that roams looking for a home will drift
into me, choking my lost heart.

Oh, may your silhouette never dissolve on the beach;
may your eyelids never flutter into the empty distance.
Don't leave me for a second, my dearest,

because in that moment you'll have gone so far
I'll wander maziily over all the earth, asking,
Will you come back? Will you leave me here, dying?

Pablo Neruda

I Do Not Love You Except Because I Love You

I do not love you except because I love you;
I go from loving to not loving you,
From waiting to not waiting for you
My heart moves from cold to fire.

I love you only because it's you the one I love;
I hate you deeply, and hating you
Bend to you, and the measure of my changing love for you
Is that I do not see you but love you blindly.

Maybe January light will consume
My heart with its cruel
Ray, stealing my key to true calm.

In this part of the story I am the one who
Dies, the only one, and I will die of love because I love you,
Because I love you, Love, in fire and blood.

Translated by ???

Submitted by Venus

Pablo Neruda

If You Forget Me

I want you to know
one thing.

You know how this is:
if I look
at the crystal moon, at the red branch
of the slow autumn at my window,
if I touch
near the fire
the impalpable ash
or the wrinkled body of the log,
everything carries me to you,
as if everything that exists,
aromas, light, metals,
were little boats
that sail
toward those isles of yours that wait for me.

Well, now,
if little by little you stop loving me
I shall stop loving you little by little.

If suddenly
you forget me
do not look for me,
for I shall already have forgotten you.

If you think it long and mad,
the wind of banners
that passes through my life,
and you decide
to leave me at the shore
of the heart where I have roots,
remember
that on that day,
at that hour,
I shall lift my arms
and my roots will set off
to seek another land.

But
if each day,
each hour,
you feel that you are destined for me
with implacable sweetness,
if each day a flower
climbs up to your lips to seek me,
ah my love, ah my own,
in me all that fire is repeated,
in me nothing is extinguished or forgotten,
my love feeds on your love, beloved,
and as long as you live it will be in your arms

without leaving mine.

Pablo Neruda

I'm Explaining a Few Things

You are going to ask: and where are the lilacs?
and the poppy-petalled metaphysics?
and the rain repeatedly spattering
its words and drilling them full
of apertures and birds?
I'll tell you all the news.

I lived in a suburb,
a suburb of Madrid, with bells,
and clocks, and trees.

From there you could look out
over Castille's dry face:
a leather ocean.
My house was called
the house of flowers, because in every cranny
geraniums burst: it was
a good-looking house
with its dogs and children.
Remember, Raul?
Eh, Rafel? Federico, do you remember
from under the ground
my balconies on which
the light of June drowned flowers in your mouth?
Brother, my brother!
Everything
loud with big voices, the salt of merchandises,
pile-ups of palpitating bread,
the stalls of my suburb of Arguelles with its statue
like a drained inkwell in a swirl of hake:
oil flowed into spoons,
a deep baying
of feet and hands swelled in the streets,
metres, litres, the sharp
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 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'll 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!

Pablo Neruda

In My Sky At Twilight

In my sky at twilight you are like a cloud
and your form and colour are the way I love them.
You are mine, mine, woman with sweet lips
and in your life my infinite dreams live.

The lamp of my soul dyes your feet,
the sour wine is sweeter on your lips,
oh reaper of my evening song,
how solitary dreams believe you to be mine!

You are mine, mine, I go shouting it to the afternoon's
wind, and the wind hauls on my widowed voice.
Huntress of the depth of my eyes, your plunder
stills your nocturnal regard as though it were water.

You are taken in the net of my music, my love,
and my nets of music are wide as the sky.
My soul is born on the shore of your eyes of mourning.
In your eyes of mourning the land of dreams begin.

Pablo Neruda

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 smell 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.

Pablo Neruda

Lost in the forest...

Lost in the forest, I broke off a dark twig
and lifted its whisper to my thirsty lips:
maybe it was the voice of the rain crying,
a cracked bell, or a torn heart.

Something from far off it seemed
deep and secret to me, hidden by the earth,
a shout muffled by huge autumns,
by the moist half-open darkness of the leaves.

Wakening from the dreaming forest there, the hazel-sprig
sang under my tongue, its drifting fragrance
climbed up through my conscious mind

as if suddenly the roots I had left behind
cried out to me, the land I had lost with my childhood---
and I stopped, wounded by the wandering scent.

Pablo Neruda

Love

What's wrong with you, with us,
what's happening to us?
Ah our love is a harsh cord
that binds us wounding us
and if we want
to leave our wound,
to separate,
it makes a new knot for us and condemns us
to drain our blood and burn together.

What's wrong with you? I look at you
and I find nothing in you but two eyes
like all eyes, a mouth
lost among a thousand mouths that I have kissed, more beautiful,
a body just like those that have slipped
beneath my body without leaving any memory.

And how empty you went through the world
like a wheat-colored jar
without air, without sound, without substance!
I vainly sought in you
depth for my arms
that dig, without cease, beneath the earth:
beneath your skin, beneath your eyes,
nothing,
beneath your double breast scarcely
raised
a current of crystalline order
that does not know why it flows singing.
Why, why, why,
my love, why?

Pablo Neruda

Magellanic Penguin

Neither clown nor child nor black
nor white but verticle
and a questioning innocence
dressed in night and snow:
The mother smiles at the sailor,
the fisherman at the astronaut,
but the child child does not smile
when he looks at the bird child,
and from the disorderly ocean
the immaculate passenger
emerges in snowy mourning.

I was without doubt the child bird
there in the cold archipelagoes
when it looked at me with its eyes,
with its ancient ocean eyes:
it had neither arms nor wings
but hard little oars
on its sides:
it was as old as the salt;
the age of moving water,
and it looked at me from its age:
since then I know I do not exist;
I am a worm in the sand.

the reasons for my respect
remained in the sand:
the religious bird
did not need to fly,
did not need to sing,
and through its form was visible
its wild soul bled salt:
as if a vein from the bitter sea
had been broken.

Penguin, static traveler,
deliberate priest of the cold,
I salute your vertical salt
and envy your plumed pride.

Pablo Neruda

Nothing But Death

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Death is inside the folding cots:
it spends its life sleeping on the slow mattresses,
in the black blankets, and suddenly breathes out:
it blows out a mournful sound that swells the sheets,

and the beds go sailing toward a port
where death is waiting, dressed like an admiral.

Translated by Robert Bly

Pablo Neruda

Ode to a Large Tuna in the Market

Among the market greens,
a bullet
from the ocean
depths,
a swimming
projectile,
I saw you,
dead.

All around you
were lettuces,
sea foam
of the earth,
carrots,
grapes,
but
of the ocean
truth,
of the unknown,
of the
unfathomable
shadow, the
depths
of the sea,
the abyss,
only you had survived,
a pitch-black, varnished
witness
to deepest night.

Only you, well-aimed
dark bullet
from the abyss,
mangled
at one tip,
but constantly
reborn,
at anchor in the current,
winged fins
windmilling
in the swift
flight
of
the
marine
shadow,
a mourning arrow,
dart of the sea,
olive, oily fish.
I saw you dead,
a deceased king
of my own ocean,

green
assault, silver
submarine fir,
seed
of seaquakes,
now
only dead remains,
yet
in all the market
yours
was the only
purposeful form
amid
the bewildering rout
of nature;
amid the fragile greens
you were
a solitary ship,
armed
among the vegetables
fin and prow black and oiled,
as if you were still
the vessel of the wind,
the one and only
pure
ocean
machine:
unflawed, navigating
the waters of death.

Pablo Neruda

Ode to Maize

America, from a grain
of maize you grew
to crown
with spacious lands
the ocean foam.
A grain of maize was your geography.
From the grain
a green lance rose,
was covered with gold,
to grace the heights
of Peru with its yellow tassels.

But, poet, let
history rest in its shroud;
praise with your lyre
the grain in its granaries:
sing to the simple maize in the kitchen.

First, a fine beard
fluttered in the field
above the tender teeth
of the young ear.
Then the husks parted
and fruitfulness burst its veils
of pale papyrus
that grains of laughter
might fall upon the earth.
To the stone,
in your journey,
you returned.
Not to the terrible stone,
the bloody
triangle of Mexican death,
but to the grinding stone,
sacred
stone of your kitchens.
There, milk and matter,
strength-giving, nutritious
cornmeal pulp,
you were worked and patted
by the wondrous hands
of dark-skinned women.

Wherever you fall, maize,
whether into the
splendid pot of partridge, or among
country beans, you light up
the meal and lend it
your virginal flavor.

Oh, to bite into
the steaming ear beside the sea

of distant song and deepest waltz.
To boil you
as your aroma
spreads through
blue sierras.

But is there
no end
to your treasure?

In chalky, barren lands
bordered
by the sea, along
the rocky Chilean coast,
at times
only your radiance
reaches the empty
table of the miner.

Your light, your cornmeal, your hope
pervades America's solitudes,
and to hunger
your lances
are enemy legions.

Within your husks,
like gentle kernels,
our sober provincial
children's hearts were nurtured,
until life began
to shuck us from the ear.

Pablo Neruda

Ode to Sadness

Sadness, scarab
with seven crippled feet,
spiderweb egg,
scramble-brained rat,
bitch's skeleton:
No entry here.
Don't come in.
Go away.
Go back
south with your umbrella,
go back
north with your serpent's teeth.
A poet lives here.
No sadness may
cross this threshold.
Through these windows
comes the breath of the world,
fresh red roses,
flags embroidered with
the victories of the people.
No.
No entry.
Flap
your bat's wings,
I will trample the feathers
that fall from your mantle,
I will sweep the bits and pieces
of your carcass to
the four corners of the wind,
I will wring your neck,
I will stitch your eyelids shut,
I will sew your shroud,
sadness, and bury your rodent bones
beneath the springtime of an apple tree.

Pablo Neruda

Ode to Salt

This salt
in the salt cellar
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:
a
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
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 finitude.

Pablo Neruda

Ode to the Book

When I close a book
I open life.
I hear
faltering cries
among harbours.
Copper ignots
slide down sand-pits
to Tocopilla.
Night time.
Among the islands
our ocean
throbs with fish,
touches the feet, the thighs,
the chalk ribs
of my country.
The whole of night
clings to its shores, by dawn
it wakes up singing
as if it had excited a guitar.

The ocean's surge is calling.
The wind
calls me
and Rodriguez calls,
and Jose Antonio--
I got a telegram
from the "Mine" Union
and the one I love
(whose name I won't let out)
expects me in Bucalemu.

No book has been able
to wrap me in paper,
to fill me up
with typography,
with heavenly imprints
or was ever able
to bind my eyes,
I come out of books to people orchards
with the hoarse family of my song,
to work the burning metals
or to eat smoked beef
by mountain firesides.
I love adventurous
books,
books of forest or snow,
depth or sky
but hate
the spider book
in which thought
has laid poisonous wires
to trap the juvenile

and circling fly.
Book, let me go.
I won't go clothed
in volumes,
I don't come out
of collected works,
my poems
have not eaten poems--
they devour
exciting happenings,
feed on rough weather,
and dig their food
out of earth and men.
I'm on my way
with dust in my shoes
free of mythology:
send books back to their shelves,
I'm going down into the streets.
I learned about life
from life itself,
love I learned in a single kiss
and could teach no one anything
except that I have lived
with something in common among men,
when fighting with them,
when saying all their say in my song.

Pablo Neruda

Ode To Wine

Day-colored wine,
night-colored wine,
wine with purple feet
or wine with topaz blood,
wine,
starry child
of earth,
wine, smooth
as a golden sword,
soft
as lascivious velvet,
wine, spiral-seashelled
and full of wonder,
amorous,
marine;
never has one goblet contained you,
one song, one man,
you are choral, gregarious,
at the least, you must be shared.
At times
you feed on mortal
memories;
your wave carries us
from tomb to tomb,
stonecutter of icy sepulchers,
and we weep
transitory tears;
your
glorious
spring dress
is different,
blood rises through the shoots,
wind incites the day,
nothing is left
of your immutable soul.
Wine
stirs the spring, happiness
bursts through the earth like a plant,
walls crumble,
and rocky cliffs,
chasms close,
as song is born.
A jug of wine, and thou beside me
in the wilderness,
sang the ancient poet.
Let the wine pitcher
add to the kiss of love its own.

My darling, suddenly
the line of your hip
becomes the brimming curve
of the wine goblet,

your breast is the grape cluster,
your nipples are the grapes,
the gleam of spirits lights your hair,
and your navel is a chaste seal
stamped on the vessel of your belly,
your love an inexhaustible
cascade of wine,
light that illuminates my senses,
the earthly splendor of life.

But you are more than love,
the fiery kiss,
the heat of fire,
more than the wine of life;
you are
the community of man,
translucency,
chorus of discipline,
abundance of flowers.
I like on the table,
when we're speaking,
the light of a bottle
of intelligent wine.
Drink it,
and remember in every
drop of gold,
in every topaz glass,
in every purple ladle,
that autumn labored
to fill the vessel with wine;
and in the ritual of his office,
let the simple man remember
to think of the soil and of his duty,
to propagate the canticle of the wine.

Pablo Neruda

Poetry

And it was at that age ... Poetry arrived
in search of me. I don't know, I don't know where
it came from, from winter or a river.
I don't know how or when,
no they were not voices, they were not
words, nor silence,
but from a street I was summoned,
from the branches of night,
abruptly from the others,
among violent fires
or returning alone,
there I was without a face
and it touched me.

I did not know what to say, my mouth
had no way
with names,
my eyes were blind,
and something started in my soul,
fever or forgotten wings,
and I made my own way,
deciphering
that fire,
and I wrote the first faint line,
faint, without substance, pure
nonsense,
pure wisdom
of someone who knows nothing,
and suddenly I saw
the heavens
unfastened
and open,
planets,
palpitating plantations,
shadow perforated,
riddled
with arrows, fire and flowers,
the winding night, the universe.

And I, infinitesimal being,
drunk with the great starry
void,
likeness, image of
mystery,
felt myself a pure part
of the abyss,
I wheeled with the stars,
my heart broke loose on the wind.

Pablo Neruda

Poor Fellows

What it takes on this planet,
to make love to each other in peace.
Everyone pries under your sheets,
everyone interferes with your loving.
They say terrible things about a man and a woman,
who after much milling about,
all sorts of compunctions,
do something unique,
they both lie with each other in one bed.
I ask myself whether frogs are so furtive,
or sneeze as they please.
Whether they whisper to each other in swamps about illegitimate frogs,
or the joys of amphibious living.
I ask myself if birds single out enemy birds,
or bulls gossip with bullocks before they go out in public with cows.
Even the roads have eyes and the parks their police.
Hotels spy on their guests,
windows name names,
canons and squadrons debark on missions to liquidate love.
All those ears and those jaws working incessantly,
till a man and his girl
have to raise their climax,
full tilt,
on a bicycle.

Pablo Neruda

Puedo Escribir

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 cuando la quise.
Mi voz buscaba el viento para tocar su oído.

De otro. Seré; 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.

Pablo Neruda

Saddest Poem

I can write the saddest poem of all tonight.

Write, for instance: "The night is full of stars,
and the stars, blue, shiver in the distance."

The night wind whirls in the sky and sings.

I can write the saddest poem of all tonight.
I loved her, and sometimes she loved me too.

On nights like this, I held her in my arms.
I kissed her so many times under the infinite sky.

She loved me, sometimes I loved her.
How could I not have loved her large, still eyes?

I can write the saddest poem of all tonight.
To think I don't have her. To feel that I've lost her.

To hear the immense night, more immense without her.
And the poem falls to the soul as dew to grass.

What does it matter that my love couldn't keep her.
The night is full of stars and she is not with me.

That's all. Far away, someone sings. Far away.
My soul is lost without her.

As if to bring her near, my eyes search for her.
My heart searches for her and she is not with me.

The same night that whitens the same trees.
We, we who were, we are the same no longer.

I no longer love her, true, but how much I loved her.
My voice searched the wind to touch her ear.

Someone else's. She will be someone else's. As she once
belonged to my kisses.
Her voice, her light body. Her infinite eyes.

I no longer love her, true, but perhaps I love her.
Love is so short and oblivion so long.

Because on nights like this I held her in my arms,
my soul is lost without her.

Although this may be the last pain she causes me,
and this may be the last poem I write for her.

Pablo Neruda

Some Beasts

It was the twilight of the iguana:

From a rainbowed battlement,
a tongue like a javelin
lunging in verdure;
an ant heap treading the jungle,
monastic, on musical feet;
the guanaco, oxygen-fine
in the high places swarthed with distances,
cobbling his feet into gold;
the llama of scrupulous eye
the widens his gaze on the dews
of a delicate world.

A monkey is weaving
a thread of insatiable lusts
on the margins of morning:
he topples a pollen-fall,
startles the violet-flight
of the butterfly, wings on the Muzo.

It was the night of the alligator:
snouts moving out of the slime,
in original darkness, the pullulations,
a clatter of armour, opaque
in the sleep of the bog,
turning back to the chalk of the sources.

The jaguar touches the leaves
with his phosphorous absence,
the puma speeds to his covert
in the blaze of his hungers,
his eyeballs, a jungle of alcohol,
burn in his head.

Pablo Neruda

Sonata

Neither the heart cut by a piece of glass
in a wasteland of thorns
nor the atrocious waters seen in the corners
of certain houses, waters like eyelids and eyes
can capture your waist in my hands
when my heart lifts its oaks
towards your unbreakable thread of snow.

Nocturnal sugar, spirit
of the crowns,
ransomed
human blood, your kisses
send into exile
and a stroke of water, with remnants of the sea,
neats on the silences that wait for you
surrounding the worn chairs, wearing out doors.

Nights with bright spindles,
divided, material, nothing
but voice, nothing but
naked every day.

Over your breasts of motionless current,
over your legs of firmness and water,
over the permanence and the pride
of your naked hair
I want to be, my love, now that the tears are
thrown
into the raucous baskets where they accumulate,
I want to be, my love, alone with a syllable
of mangled silver, alone with a tip
of your breast of snow.

Pablo Neruda

Sonnet LXXXI

And now you're mine. Rest with your dream in my dream.
Love and pain and work should all sleep, now.
The night turns on its invisible wheels,
and you are pure beside me as a sleeping amber.

No one else, Love, will sleep in my dreams. You will go,
we will go together, over the waters of time.
No one else will travel through the shadows with me,
only you, evergreen, ever sun, ever moon.

Your hands have already opened their delicate fists
and let their soft drifting signs drop away; your eyes closed like two gray
wings, and I move

after, following the folding water you carry, that carries
me away. The night, the world, the wind spin out their destiny.
Without you, I am your dream, only that, and that is all.

Pablo Neruda

Sonnet VIII

If your eyes were not the color of the moon,
of a day full [here, interrupted by the baby waking -- continued about 26
hours later]
of a day full of clay, and work, and fire,
if even held-in you did not move in agile grace like the air,
if you were not an amber week,

not the yellow moment
when autumn climbs up through the vines;
if you were not that bread the fragrant moon
kneads, sprinkling its flour across the sky,

oh, my dearest, I could not love you so!
But when I hold you I hold everything that is --
sand, time, the tree of the rain,

everything is alive so that I can be alive:
without moving I can see it all:
in your life I see everything that lives.

Pablo Neruda

Sonnet XI

I crave your mouth, your voice, your hair.
Silent and starving, I prowl through the streets.
Bread does not nourish me, dawn disrupts me, all day
I hunt for the liquid measure of your steps.

I hunger for your sleek laugh,
your hands the color of a savage harvest,
hunger for the pale stones of your fingernails,
I want to eat your skin like a whole almond.

I want to eat the sunbeam flaring in your lovely body,
the sovereign nose of your arrogant face,
I want to eat the fleeting shade of your lashes,

and I pace around hungry, sniffing the twilight,
hunting for you, for your hot heart,
like a puma in the barrens of Quitratue.

Pablo Neruda

Sonnet XVII

I do not love you as if you were salt-rose, or topaz,
or the arrow of carnations the fire shoots off.
I love you as certain dark things are to be loved,
in secret, between the shadow and the soul.

I love you as the plant that never blooms
but carries in itself the light of hidden flowers;
thanks to your love a certain solid fragrance,
risen from the earth, lives darkly in my body.

I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where.
I love you straightforwardly, without complexities or pride;
so I love you because I know no other way

than this: where I does not exist, nor you,
so close that your hand on my chest is my hand,
so close that your eyes close as I fall asleep.

Pablo Neruda

Sonnet XXXIV (You are the daughter of the sea)

You are the daughter of the sea, oregano's first cousin.
Swimmer, your body is pure as the water;
cook, your blood is quick as the soil.
Everything you do is full of flowers, rich with the earth.

Your eyes go out toward the water, and the waves rise;
your hands go out to the earth and the seeds swell;
you know the deep essence of water and the earth,
conjoined in you like a formula for clay.

Naiad: cut your body into turquoise pieces,
they will bloom resurrected in the kitchen.
This is how you become everything that lives.

And so at last, you sleep, in the circle of my arms
that push back the shadows so that you can rest--
vegetables, seaweed, herbs: the foam of your dreams.

Translated by Stephen Tapscott

Pablo Neruda

The Dictators

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

Pablo Neruda

The Light Wraps You

The light wraps you in its mortal flame.
Abstracted pale mourner, standing that way
against the old propellers of the twilight
that revolves around you.

Speechless, my friend,
alone in the loneliness of this hour of the dead
and filled with the lives of fire,
pure heir of the ruined day.

A bough of fruit falls from the sun on your dark garment.
The great roots of night
grow suddenly from your soul,
and the things that hide in you come out again
so that a blue and palled people
your newly born, takes nourishment.

Oh magnificent and fecund and magnetic slave
of the circle that moves in turn through black and gold:
rise, lead and possess a creation
so rich in life that its flowers perish
and it is full of sadness.

Pablo Neruda

The Night in Isla Negra

Ancient night and the unruly salt
beat at the walls of my house.
The shadow is all one, the sky
throbs now along with the ocean,
and sky and shadow erupt
in the crash of their vast conflict.
All night long they struggle;
nobody knows the name
of the harsh light that keeps slowly opening
like a languid fruit.
So on the coast comes to light,
out of seething shadow, the harsh dawn,
gnawed at by the moving salt,
swept clean by the mass of night,
bloodstained in its sea-washed crater.

Pablo Neruda

The Question

Love, a question
has destroyed you.

I have come back to you
from thorny uncertainty.

I want you straight as
the sword or the road.

But you insist
on keeping a nook
of shadow that I do not want.

My love,
understand me,
I love all of you,
from eyes to feet, to toenails,
inside,
all the brightness, which you kept.

It is I, my love,
who knocks at your door.
It is not the ghost, it is not
the one who once stopped
at your window.
I knock down the door:
I enter your life:
I come to live in your soul:
you cannot cope with me.

You must open door to door,
you must obey me,
you must open your eyes
so that I may search in them,
you must see how I walk
with heavy steps
along all the roads
that, blind, were waiting for me.

Do not fear,
I am yours,
but
I am not the passenger or the beggar,
I am your master,
the one you were waiting for,
and now I enter
your life,
no more to leave it,
love, love, love,
but to stay.

Pablo Neruda

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and this may be the last poem I write for her.

Pablo Neruda

The Song of Despair

You swallowed everything, like distance.
Like the sea, like time.
In you everything sank!
It was the happy hour of assault and the kiss.
The hour of the spell that blazed like a lighthouse.
Pilot's dread, fury of a blind diver,
turbulent drunkenness of love,
in you everything sank!

Pablo Neruda

The Weary One

The weary one, orphan
of the masses, the self,
the crushed one, the one made of concrete,
the one without a country in crowded restaurants,
he who wanted to go far away, always farther away,
didn't know what to do there, whether he wanted
or didn't want to leave or remain on the island,
the hesitant one, the hybrid, entangled in himself,
had no place here: the straight-angled stone,
the infinite look of the granite prism,
the circular solitude all banished him:
he went somewhere else with his sorrows,
he returned to the agony of his native land,
to his indecisions, of winter and summer.

Pablo Neruda

The White Mans Burden

Lost in the forest, I broke off a dark twig
and lifted its whisper to my thirsty lips:
maybe it was the voice of the rain crying,
a cracked bell, or a torn heart.

Something from far off it seemed
deep and secret to me, hidden by the earth,
a shout muffled by huge autumns,
by the moist half-open darkness of the leaves.

Wakening from the dreaming forest there, the hazel-sprig
sang under my tongue, its drifting fragrance
climbed up through my conscious mind

as if suddenly the roots I had left behind
cried out to me, the land I had lost with my childhood---
and I stopped, wounded by the wandering scent

Pablo Neruda

Tonight I Can Write

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.

Write, for example, 'The night is starry
and the stars are blue and 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 starry 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 tries to find her as though to bring her closer.
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. As she was before my kisses.
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.

translated by W.S. Merwin

Pablo Neruda

Tonight I can write the saddest lines

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.

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, and 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.

Pablo Neruda

Tower Of Light

O tower of light, sad beauty
that magnified necklaces and statues in the sea,
calcareous eye, insignia of the vast waters, cry
of the mourning petrel, tooth of the sea, wife
of the Oceanian wind, O separate rose
from the long stem of the trampled bush
that the depths, converted into archipelago,
O natural star, green diadem,
alone in your lonesome dynasty,
still unattainable, elusive, desolate
like one drop, like one grape, like the sea.

Pablo Neruda

Walking Around

It so happens I am sick of being a man.
And it happens that I walk into tailorshops and movie
houses
dried up, waterproof, like a swan made of felt
steering my way in a water of wombs and ashes.

The smell of barbershops makes me break into hoarse
sobs.
The only thing I want is to lie still like stones or wool.
The only thing I want is to see no more stores, no gardens,
no more goods, no spectacles, no elevators.

It so happens that I am sick of my feet and my nails
and my hair and my shadow.
It so happens I am sick of being a man.

Still it would be marvelous
to terrify a law clerk with a cut lily,
or kill a nun with a blow on the ear.
It would be great
to go through the streets with a green knife
letting out yells until I died of the cold.

I don't want to go on being a root in the dark,
insecure, stretched out, shivering with sleep,
going on down, into the moist guts of the earth,
taking in and thinking, eating every day.

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

That's why Monday, when it sees me coming
with my convict face, blazes up like gasoline,
and it howls on its way like a wounded wheel,
and leaves tracks full of warm blood leading toward the
night.

And it pushes me into certain corners, into some moist
houses,
into hospitals where the bones fly out the window,
into shoeshops that smell like vinegar,
and certain streets hideous as cracks in the skin.

There are sulphur-colored birds, and hideous intestines
hanging over the doors of houses that I hate,
and there are false teeth forgotten in a coffeepot,
there are mirrors
that ought to have wept from shame and terror,
there are umbrellas everywhere, and venoms, and umbilical
cords.

I stroll along serenely, with my eyes, my shoes,
my rage, forgetting everything,
I walk by, going through office buildings and orthopedic
shops,
and courtyards with washing hanging from the line:
underwear, towels and shirts from which slow
dirty tears are falling.

Translated by Robert Bly

Pablo Neruda

Water

Everything on the earth bristled, the bramble
pricked and the green thread
nibbled away, the petal fell, falling
until the only flower was the falling itself.
Water is another matter,
has no direction but its own bright grace,
runs through all imaginable colors,
takes limpid lessons
from stone,
and in those functionings plays out
the unrealized ambitions of the foam.

Pablo Neruda

We Are Many

Of the many men whom I am, whom we are,
I cannot settle on a single one.
They are lost to me under the cover of clothing
They have departed for another city.

When everything seems to be set
to show me off as a man of intelligence,
the fool I keep concealed on my person
takes over my talk and occupies my mouth.

On other occasions, I am dozing in the midst
of people of some distinction,
and when I summon my courageous self,
a coward completely unknown to me
swaddles my poor skeleton
in a thousand tiny reservations.

When a stately home bursts into flames,
instead of the fireman I summon,
an arsonist bursts on the scene,
and he is I. There is nothing I can do.
What must I do to distinguish myself?
How can I put myself together?

All the books I read
lionize dazzling hero figures,
brimming with self-assurance.
I die with envy of them;
and, in films where bullets fly on the wind,
I am left in envy of the cowboys,
left admiring even the horses.

But when I call upon my DASHING BEING,
out comes the same OLD LAZY SELF,
and so I never know just WHO I AM,
nor how many I am, nor WHO WE WILL BE BEING.
I would like to be able to touch a bell
and call up my real self, the truly me,
because if I really need my proper self,
I must not allow myself to disappear.

While I am writing, I am far away;
and when I come back, I have already left.
I should like to see if the same thing happens
to other people as it does to me,
to see if as many people are as I am,
and if they seem the same way to themselves.
When this problem has been thoroughly explored,
I am going to school myself so well in things
that, when I try to explain my problems,
I shall speak, not of self, but of geography.

Pablo Neruda

XVII (I do not love you...)

I do not love you as if you were salt-rose, or topaz,
or the arrow of carnations the fire shoots off.
I love you as certain dark things are to be loved,
in secret, between the shadow and the soul.

I love you as the plant that never blooms
but carries in itself the light of hidden flowers;
thanks to your love a certain solid fragrance,
risen from the earth, lives darkly in my body.

I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where.
I love you straightforwardly, without complexities or pride;
so I love you because I know no other way

than this: where I does not exist, nor you,
so close that your hand on my chest is my hand,
so close that your eyes close as I fall asleep.

Translated by Stephen Tapscott

Anonymous Submission

Pablo Neruda

XXXIV (You are the daughter of the sea)

You are the daughter of the sea, oregano's first cousin.
Swimmer, your body is pure as the water;
cook, your blood is quick as the soil.
Everything you do is full of flowers, rich with the earth.

Your eyes go out toward the water, and the waves rise;
your hands go out to the earth and the seeds swell;
you know the deep essence of water and the earth,
conjoined in you like a formula for clay.

Naiad: cut your body into turquoise pieces,
they will bloom resurrected in the kitchen.
This is how you become everything that lives.

And so at last, you sleep, in the circle of my arms
that push back the shadows so that you can rest--
vegetables, seaweed, herbs: the foam of your dreams.

Translated by Stephen Tapscott

Submitted by Hen

Pablo Neruda

Your Feet

When I cannot look at your face
I look at your feet.
Your feet of arched bone,
your hard little feet.
I know that they support you,
and that your sweet weight
rises upon them.
Your waist and your breasts,
the doubled purple
of your nipples,
the sockets of your eyes
that have just flown away,
your wide fruit mouth,
your red tresses,
my little tower.
But I love your feet
only because they walked
upon the earth and upon
the wind and upon the waters,
until they found me.

Pablo Neruda

Your Laughter

Take bread away from me, if you wish,
take air away, but
do not take from me your laughter.

Do not take away the rose,
the lance flower that you pluck,
the water that suddenly
bursts forth in joy,
the sudden wave
of silver born in you.

My struggle is harsh and I come back
with eyes tired
at times from having seen
the unchanging earth,
but when your laughter enters
it rises to the sky seeking me
and it opens for me all
the doors of life.

My love, in the darkest
hour your laughter
opens, and if suddenly
you see my blood staining
the stones of the street,
laugh, because your laughter
will be for my hands
like a fresh sword.

Next to the sea in the autumn,
your laughter must raise
its foamy cascade,
and in the spring, love,
I want your laughter like
the flower I was waiting for,
the blue flower, the rose
of my echoing country.

Laugh at the night,
at the day, at the moon,
laugh at the twisted
streets of the island,
laugh at this clumsy
boy who loves you,
but when I open
my eyes and close them,
when my steps go,
when my steps return,
deny me bread, air,
light, spring,
but never your laughter
for I would die.

Pablo Neruda