

P A B L O  
N E R U D A

LATE AND POSTHUMOUS

P O E M S:

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EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY BEN BELITT

INTRODUCTION BY MANUEL DURAN



B I L I N G U A L E D I T I O N

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*Poems: Late and Posthumous, 1968-1974*



# PABLO NERUDA

## LATE AND POSTHUMOUS POEMS

1968-1974

Introduction by Manuel Duran

Edited and translated by  
Ben Belitt



GROVE PRESS

NEW YORK

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## Translator's Preface

It is characteristic of Neruda's abundance that his death on September 23, 1973, should constitute not an absence but a presence—a very palpable presence—in the continuity of poetry in our time. His passing left a Mayan void of temples, pyramids, playing fields, and priestly enclaves stretching away on all sides, platform over platform, whose sudden abandonment astonishes like the megaliths of Uxmal and Palenque. What shocks, in the eight posthumous volumes intended for publication on Neruda's seventieth birthday, is the simultaneity and multiplicity of his personae—books of questions, riddles, prophecies, political diatribes, celebrations of stones, fires, and flesh, sacerdotal and sensual by turns, ranging from meditations on prehistoric mysteries like the profiles of Easter Island to jeremiads postdated 2000 A.D. The canon of scholarly musings on Neruda's politics, his poetics, his semiotic and conceptual allegiances in a world of shifting critical vogues and vendettas, is by now almost unreckonable; yet his availability in English remains truncated and desultory. Fifteen years after his death, the labor of recovering whole books like *Canto general*, *Estravagario*, and *Memorial de Isla Negra* inches along, hobbled by publishing protocol and self-serving disputes over acceptable translating procedure, in this country and in England; though the publication of his posthumous poems is already under way in scrupulous translations by William O'Daly recently published by Copper Canyon Press of Port Townsend, Washington (1984, 1985, 1986).

This selection of "late and posthumous" poems will not serve as either a terminal or a compensatory Neruda. Its function, after more than a decade of silence, is to redirect attention away from a retrospective reading of the Neruda canon, fixed mesmerically upon half a dozen "classics" monotonously rescrutinized by Hispanists throughout the world, to an ongoing Neruda who took no

notice of middle or later or terminal chronicity. As the fifth and final anthology in a library of more than forty-five volumes of verse published between the years 1923 and 1974—half a century of Homeric wanderings, wars, exiles, restorations, prophecies, perfidies, and Odyssean labors in the councils of his countrymen—it concludes my attempt to record and construe what moved me most in an epic of unprecedented plenty. My choices remain personal, like my mode of translation, in the belief that time will have the last word in all the languages and all the anthologies still to come. Though my title calls for a “late and posthumous” Neruda, it will be clear that the collection as a whole bears witness to an omnipresent Neruda for all seasons. For of course, poets are not horizontally and longitudinally zoned like a weather map, or divided into degrees like the face of a clock or a sundial. They do not have an absolute geometry of quantification—those are conveniences of the critic and the historian. For poets like Neruda, who took the world for his audience and spoke to it as both a contemporary and a custodian of his predecessors—Quevedo, Whitman, Darío, Lautréamont, Proust, Rimbaud—it is often high noon at a quarter to four in the morning. He is summery, wintry, autumnal, according to equinoxes from within, without regard for the sequences of the almanac.

As an anthologist confronted with a cache of volumes reflecting a multiple Neruda, I have tried to disclose the persistence of a single Protean identity leavening the lump. Since my previous collection *New Poems* (1972) represents a “late” Neruda (*Las manos del día, Fin de mundo, Las piedras del cielo*) in considerable depth, the emphasis of the present anthology has been made to fall on a “last” and “posthumous” Neruda. For Neruda himself, busy to the end at a vast loom on which no less than eleven volumes interpenetrated in a long weave of coexistent motifs, the priorities were doubtless inseparable. The garment of his elegiac preoccupations, for all its shuttlings of textures and biases, seems curiously seamless—a web of holistic contradictions in which an imagination under sentence of death by cancer spins the bobbins in a continuous premonitory design. Bibliographers will have to take notice of

a chronology in which a *Geografía infructuosa* (*Barren Terrain*) was actually the last major volume published by Neruda a year prior to his death in a Chile destined for sudden devastation. They will ponder the datelessness of a posthumous collection whose title ominously assigns it to the year 2000, and remember a prior collection similarly devoted to the omens and dooms of a *fin de mundo* (*End of the World*, published in 1969). Readers today, however, need not scruple unduly over late, last, and posthumous. The eddying of titles and dates remains what it always was—Heraclitean in its momentum and resurgences, like that Ocean whose simultaneity Neruda touched with the point of his pen year after year and volume after volume, from his bastion in Isla Negra:

The wave, giving way  
in a bow of identity, explosion of feathers,  
a trifle of spindrift, expends itself headlong  
and returns to its cause, unconsumed.

—“The Ocean”

BEN BELITT  
Bennington College, 1988



## Introduction

Though there has been no lack over the last decades of useful and reputable essays and books on Pablo Neruda, it is fair to state that Neruda's vast output has not yet been analyzed in depth or placed in its proper perspective within the framework of twentieth-century world poetry. We have been underachievers in our effort to grasp how and why Neruda's poetry continues to defy the law of diminishing returns that levels reputations, reverses the accomplishment of a lifetime, and, reaching out to the very highest echelons of contemporary letters, turns public esteem into posthumous apathy. A skeptical generation of readers and critics always stands poised to undo the judgment of its predecessors when a famous writer disappears; these younger voices are audible offstage clamoring for a chance to be heard. Fashions change: overnight, the vogues formerly celebrated seem to become obsolescent and opaque. One recalls the posthumous eclipse of Tennyson in England, of Victor Hugo in France, of Gabriele D'Annunzio in Italy, or of W. H. Auden in our own day. Fifteen years after his death, however, the influence and stature of Pablo Neruda show no generation gap of loyalty, no slippage or diminishment of national taste or multinational prestige. Neruda remains, as before, a "poet for all seasons."

"On our earth," Neruda has said, "before writing was invented, before the printing press was invented, poetry flourished. That is why we know that poetry is like bread; it should be shared by all, by scholars and by peasants, by all our vast, incredible, extraordinary family of man." The poetry he offers us still remains as basic as bread and water. The language of his mature period is no less supple and accessible than before, his thoughts and his feelings are universally available to all who can read or listen. The simplifications of a Cyclopean talent that have won him global acclaim are



innate to his genius. There have been other writers as influential and distinguished as Neruda whose evolution took exactly the opposite turn: they became more abstruse and arcane as they developed. The Joyce of *Dubliners* and *Portrait*, as we all know, is easier to read and understand than the middle Joyce of *Ulysses*, who is in turn easier than the vintage Joyce of *Finnegans Wake*. Eliot's *Waste Land* is less arid, in spite of its title, than the *Four Quartets*.

It is well known that Neruda labored incessantly to expand the multinational provenance of his audience. He honed the public edge of his style and his subjects, widened his scope, enlarged his vision, because he wanted to write in a way that even workers, peasants, the humblest men and women, those who did not have a trade or an acre of land, could understand. It is for posterity to determine whether he succeeded or failed in the venture. Certainly his readers today cannot be called a proletariat of the unlettered; on the contrary, his public constitutes an intellectual vanguard of the elite. Yet the effort had to be made, just as Eliot, as both critic and poet, sought to refine the taste of his generation and endow his selected mentors with a fastidious panache of revaluations. Both attitudes are plausible. It would be impossible to write a history of poetry in our century without placing in the very center of a vast constellation of poets, as twin stars, antipodean as well as indispensable, Neruda and Eliot. Not only do they help us to polarize the other heavenly bodies around their suns, but each wrote with an admiring eye for the ambiance of the other.

But how is it, at any time, that a poet acquires a vast audience? Homer had no trouble reaching his audience—at first, not a large one—because he understood thoroughly the values, the hopes, and the needs of the Greek elite he was addressing. Later readers and more distant listeners learned to venerate the master only because they discovered in him a universal resonance or were overpowered by the charm of the exotic and faraway. For all its derring-do, the Ithaca of Ulysses belonged to the Greece of the craft-minded Odysseus: he could recall the shape of each stone on each sunny beach, as the craft-minded Neruda also remembered the shape of Chile's mountains and the song of Chile's birds.

The poems included in the present anthology were written by Neruda between 1968 and 1973, the year of his death. Internationally loved, and applauded at home and abroad, Neruda is now one of the legendary success stories of our century. A humble railroad worker's son born in an obscure town in southern Chile had become by 1969 a world-famous writer and a candidate for the presidency of his country; and in 1971, while ambassador to France, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was friend to the most admired literary and artistic figures of his times, such as García Lorca, Vallejo, Diego Rivera, Picasso, Alberti, Éluard, Aragon, and Ehrenburg, and came to know many of the political leaders whose will determined the fate of nations and the outcome of battles—Gandhi, Nehru, Mao Tse-tung, Castro, Che Guevara, Salvador Allende. Perhaps no poet since Goethe enjoyed life so fully, as both exemplary man of letters and a man at large in life, as Neruda. To read Neruda's poetry is to touch the quick of a talent and the genius of history.

Many of the poems in this book were written by Neruda in Isla Negra, that marvelous "house on the sand," part refuge, part museum, part Mecca for worshipful Latin Americans. His friends used to say that it resembled a huge flea market full of strange, mysterious, useless objects, overlooking that vast ocean from which he culled so many of his fetishes. Past Neruda's windows swam whales, glaucous whales, sperm whales, on their way to the South Pacific and the tropical islands. As Neruda noted in his *Memoirs*, "I am an amateur of the sea. For years I have been collecting information that is of little use to me because I usually navigate on land. . . . I observe the sea with the complete detachment of a true oceanographer, who knows its surface and its depths, without literary pleasure, but with a connoisseur's relish, a cetacean palate."

Yet Neruda also saw the sea and its creatures with the eyes of a mariner and a scientist. He had acquired a vast number of books about the sea. His collection of seashells was famous, and he adopted as a personal logo the sign of a fish in the encircling quadrants of a globe. To the end of his life, as these poems will

confirm, the sea was an unfailing source of spiritual renewal. Even the narrative prose of his *Memoirs* becomes rhapsodic when Neruda describes his homecoming:

I look at the small waves of a new day on the Atlantic.  
On either side of its bow, the ship leaves a white, blue,  
and sulphuric gush of water, foam, and churned-up  
depths.

The portals of the ocean are trembling.  
Over them soar diminutive flying fish, silver and  
translucent.

I am on my way back from exile.

I gaze at the waters for a long time. I am sailing  
over them to

other waters: the tormented waves of my country.

The sky of a long day covers all the ocean.

Night will come once more to hide the huge green  
palace of

mystery with its shadow.

Afloat or ashore, he wrote his poetry on islands, on trains, in hotel rooms, crossing the Pacific on jet planes or transatlantic liners, in an ambassador's luxurious quarters on 2 Avenue de la Motte-Picquet, in railway stations of provincial towns. Though he owned two other houses on the mainland of Chile, in Santiago and Valparaiso, his "house on the sand" of Isla Negra remained his favorite haven to the end, when it was vandalized by his enemies.

Small wonder that his poetry gives the impression of effortless gliding and soaring, as a wave breaks from its center or a seagull glides and soars through the air. Yet Neruda—an admirer of Góngora and Quevedo, as well as Walt Whitman—was also a prodigious worker who knew that poetry required unstinting attention to detail and command of his craft. A year after his death on September 23, 1973, no less than eight books of his posthumous verse had appeared, published by Losada in Buenos Aires in late 1973 and 1974. In 1974 his *Memoirs* appeared under the title *I*

*Confess I Have Lived*, updated to the last days of the poet's life, and including a final segment describing the death of Salvador Allende during the storming of the Moneda Palace by Pinochet and other generals—an event that occurred only twelve days before Neruda died. To the very last day of his life, Neruda continued to dictate his memoirs and poems until consciousness ebbed from his ailing body and he was one with the sea.

Perhaps the first point to be noted about Neruda's late and posthumous works is that they are more poignantly personal, more somber, moody, full of foreboding, than his books of the fifties, the period of his "Socialist Realism." The turning point of Neruda's mature poetic development came in 1958, with *Estravagario*, the middle phase of his talent, a book full of tensions, surprises, hints—one of Neruda's most piquant and feckless, proving once more that it is impossible ever to take him for granted or relax with him as a monolithic classic. He was destined always to confound and astonish his readers. The three volumes of *Elementary Odes* of the fifties, still favorites among readers today, are the central landmark of a metamorphic imagination. Yet Neruda had more to offer than elementary praises and quixotic enigmas. He was turning inward in a long dialogue with death and infinity.

A poet, Neruda stated in his Stockholm speech of acceptance of the Nobel Prize, is at the same time a force for solidarity and for solitude. The Neruda of the fifties related to everything—mostly to familiar objects, to immediate landscapes, to concrete situations and people. In every instance, the outside world is clearly etched: the reality, weight, and color of natural objects are focused in ode after ode: odes to onions, spoons, salt, to a pair of knitted socks or a pair of scissors or a dead millionaire. No writer bound by the protocol of Socialist Realism can muster a world of collective artifacts comparable to the treasury of the *Elementary Odes*. It is equally obvious that only the genius of Neruda could find anything transcendental to celebrate within the strictures of the system envisaged by Stalin. His was a historic *tour de force*—yet by 1958 it

began to appear that he was tiring of programmatic affirmations. His major works of the sixties and early seventies developed along different lines: they explore private and darker regions; they savor of the malcontent. What happens if we do not find answers to our questions? Neruda asked in the seventies, and wrote a whole book consisting exclusively of questions without answers—one of his most original texts, at the same time childlike and enigmatic, obvious and mysterious. Neruda, long a chronicler of battles and barricades, was engaged in another struggle, a struggle to the death with an invincible antagonist. The battle with cancer, from which he died, lasted many years: we still do not know when precisely he became aware of his illness, but it is obvious that this knowledge is part of the background of his posthumous books and probably some of the “later” books as well.

Death, destruction, apocalypse. It is possible that William Blake (whom Neruda translated in his twenties), conversant with angels and imaginative transfigurations in a “dangerous world,” at once social and solitary in his daily life, may have inspired some of Neruda’s latest and posthumous poems. Not that his pathos during his last years can ever be called solitary in the usual sense of the word. His beloved Matilde was always at his side; he was often called to speak in public; he was internationally famous, constantly traveling between continents for political or diplomatic causes, peace congresses, the Nobel award, endless endeavors, encomiums, distinctions. Yet he was desperately aware of the hazards of a nuclear age in which death is the constant fellow traveler of futurity. He was conscious that his own “residence on earth” was rapidly drawing to an end. The most jovial, optimistic, enthusiastic of modern poets was coming to the fulfillment of his “*deberes*” as a man of letters, and tasted his doom. Readers of the *Residencias* will be aware that death was never remote or unfamiliar to him. In that triad of residences, displacements, alienations, he had smelled death’s stench, felt the wrench and the wounds of decay and disintegration, the anguish of drowning in a world of matter inimical to men. He had struggled to come back from the abyss, had proclaimed the need to accept loneliness and despair as a portion of

a militant foray into the world's deepening melancholy. Even the very earliest Neruda is curiously close to the Lorca of *Poet in New York*, another great poet familiar to Ben Belitt; indeed, Belitt may have been induced to read and translate Neruda's poetry because he had already entered the world of García Lorca.

The present anthology of translations, selected and lovingly turned into English verse by Ben Belitt, starts with *The Hands of Day*, which appeared in 1968, five years before Neruda's death. It is a book that reveals the deep and harrowing conflict in Neruda's mind, a conflict between his public persona and the privacies of a lifetime that was anything but private. In public terms, as everybody knows, Neruda identified with the working class: politically, his goal was unabashed, programmatic, affiliated: to further the cause of the workers, the peasants, the proletariat. Yet *The Hands of Day* makes clear that in his daily life he was intimately aware of the fact that he was an "escritor culto," like Quevedo before him, a "mandarin" who had never been able to construct anything with his hands, who had created only words, sentences, images, paragraphs, poems. A curious, disquieting sense of guilt presides over this book. We are introduced to the poet's unsparing self-reproach from the very beginning. He is surrounded by objects made by human hands. Yet his own hands are capable of dealing only with words. A poet's hands, he reminds us again and again, cannot build bridges or lay track for a railroad. They are incapable of creating even so humble an object as a broom. Words, words, words, issue from the skull of the poet and the skill of his hands. Perhaps, Neruda reflected, the world does not really belong to the poet; perhaps the poet is not totally a child of this earth. Isolate, spacy, reflective, he is only "a child of the moon."

Terse and direct, these are poems written for a large audience, poems in which Neruda apologizes for not being a "common man," a man who works with his hands as craftsmen, peasants, and factory workers habitually do. However much the intellectual may commit himself to the working class, Neruda is saying, he has

defected in the most basic way: he has forfeited the elementary birthright of direct contact with matter, with the physical world, with the savagery of things, transformed through the human mediation of physical labor. There is poetry to spare in the hands of a craftsman who caresses the wood or the metal given him to shape with the magic of his craft. The hand of the poet grasps nothing but paper and pen, and gropes for the words to accommodate his thoughts and feelings. That is another useful and necessary labor, but it is an estranging rather than a gregarious one, a symbolic contact in which the writer works only with words, vocables that cannot be touched, caressed, embraced: signs that remain man-made abstractions rather than palpable objects. A hand can make its signature, it can write a number, invent decimal places. It can multiply ciphers and ideas, chapters and cantos, covering all people, all things, with the mathematician's magic. Yet at this stage in his life, Neruda's principal regret was that he had unwittingly trained his hands in ways that separated them from natural objects.

Yet if poetry was for Neruda a surrogate hand touching the world of nature, the world of trees, birds, sea foam, wood, with semiotic graffiti, the world of human, social, political intercourse was always present, to the end. During the late sixties and early seventies—the years of his terminal illness—Neruda's public responsibilities increased with annihilating density. In 1969 he was the Communist Party candidate for the presidency of Chile. Soon after, the parties of the left agreed to support the candidacy of Salvador Allende, and during 1970 Neruda traveled extensively throughout Chile campaigning for Allende. After Allende's victory Neruda was appointed Chile's ambassador to France. He accepted out of a sense of duty and symbolic compensation, because he wished to erase the humiliations he suffered at the hands of other Chilean ambassadors in the thirties, when, as consul in Paris, he tried to further the cause of Republican Spain. Despite the difficulty of the task, he helped to renegotiate the external debt of his country, the billions owed to European and American banks—no mean accomplishment then or now! In the midst of his triumphs and satisfactions, within months of his arrival in Paris, his health deteriorated. He had

further surgery for cancer, and from that time on, he was never entirely free from physical pain.

There are, so to speak, two Nerudas at work in these latter books, the late and posthumous poems. There is the old Neruda of the fifties, ebullient and optimistic, trying to speak with stentorian self-confidence, and occasionally sweeping all doubts before him. There is also the Neruda who is fully aware that his end is at hand, the "old man in the sun," preoccupied with the theme of solitude, the passing of time, the possibility—or the illusion—of halting for a moment the onrushing flow of history and the course of personal and fratricidal disaster. We are entering now an avowedly terminal cycle whose very titles are, of course, ominous: *World's End* (1969), *Barren Terrain* (1972), *The Separate Rose* (1973), *Winter Garden* (1974), *The Yellow Heart* (1974), *Question Book* (1974).

What we have in these poems, then, is a personal and existential diary. The poet looks into himself, his present and his past—and the precarious future that awaits him—and finds much that he likes, much to deplore and repudiate, both shadow and light, and wonder enough to keep the shadows at bay and sustain a hope for remission. The public Neruda reemerges, as before, to produce a passionate and partisan political pamphlet, *A Call to Nixonicide*, dated in its content and obloquy, which Ben Belitt has wisely ignored in his selection. He is candidate for Chile's presidency, speaker for the cause of Salvador Allende, ambassador to France making headlines and helping to administer the protocol of nations. Yet it is the personal Neruda, the poet as prophet and latter-day sage serenely reflecting on the eternal problems of man's viability, man's meaning, the place of mankind in the cosmos, that inspires the finest texts to be found in his latest and posthumous volumes.

Other factors as well tend to link these posthumous works. With the exception of his Easter Island sequence, they contain, on the whole, short poems of a lyrical rather than an epic nature: nothing that approaches the monumental dimensions of *Canto general* or even the lengthy poems of *Residence on Earth*. A celebrity con-



stantly in transit, yet a man aware of the ebbing of his life, Neruda was seemingly reluctant to undertake an ambitious piece out of scale with his mortality, a masterwork requiring uninterrupted labor and a confident frame of mind.

By and large, the late and posthumous poems strive for a clear, simple, forthright style, as though the idiom of *Estravagario* and the *Elementary Odes* was now joined to a much wider and more complex range of subjects. They are easy to read. In his *Question Book*, we have what could be called the "irreducible minimum": each poem is a series of questions, each question is two lines long: the questioner washes his hands without waiting for an answer, in the Roman manner, or he becomes a precocious child asking a torrent of outrageous trivialities, without interest in solutions:

Why didn't both of us die  
when my infancy died?

Do you hear yellow detonations  
in mid-autumn?

From what does the hummingbird dangle  
its glittering symmetry?

Is 4 always 4 for everybody?  
Are all 7's equal?

What's the name of the flower  
that flies from bird to bird?

In *The Separate Rose*, Neruda no longer approaches the extrinsic world of matter as a manifestation of his own inner life, as he did in the triad of *Residencias*. He abandons the gritty evocation of matter of the *Odes* and strives for an aura of mythification characteristic of *Canto general* and *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*. The difference is one of ends rather than means: in the *Canto* the sensory life of history and things was aggrandized in the interests of a political commitment in which the power and particularity of this world and its protagonists was contrasted with its imperialistic

invasion by conquistadores seen as gods on horseback, of an earlier incarnation. Here, the response is more universalized and directed at the human condition in its totality, without benefit of historicity. Nature as such, once in the keeping of prehistoric archetypes, is opposed to the trivialized curiosity of the globetrotter and the tourist—the polyglot sightseer viewing the great stone noses of a vanished civilization, without benefit of political ideologies.

In this finely wrought work of metaphysical and mythopoeic travels through Easter Island—which may literally be called *chiseled* in “calcareous” (Neruda’s favorite word!) stone—we find all the motifs of the poet’s lifelong preoccupation with his native continent: the city man’s confrontation of Nature; the persisting theme of modern man smothered by conveniences that separate him from Nature; the conception of Nature, at once mythic and individual, as a pure energy formerly in harmony with man but now viewed as alien or hostile; the motif of a vanished Past, a mystery once tutelary and vivid but now forgotten. All these themes, present in varying guises and degrees in *Twenty Poems*, the three *Residencias*, the *Canto general*, *The Stones of Chile*, *Aún* (Nevertheless, 1971), and *Skystones*, come together here, still urgent and contemporaneous, in a pageant of moving metaphors in contexts that are at the same time megalithic, societal, existential, and historical.

Yet a significant difference is at work in *The Separate Rose*. In *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*—generally considered a masterwork of the genre—Neruda was able to achieve a total symbiosis with his “ancestors,” who once lived in intimate union with Nature. Now, in *The Separate Rose*, a tourist “just like the others: the Colombian lady-professor, / the Philadelphian Rotarian, the drummer / from Paysandú who cashed in a bundle / to get here,” Neruda is no longer able to penetrate to the same degree the colossal stone paradigms before him, and identifies “guiltily” with a tourist stereotype of Modern Man, just as the poet in *Nevertheless* is not only one with the herd but insists that “we were the thieves.” In *The Separate Rose*, Neruda documents a familiar despair over the mongrelization of modern man; but now there is a note of compassion for the pathos of the modern predicament, and the poet seems

less and less able to distinguish his stance from that of the "transients" and "trippers" and "deadbeats" about him. Perhaps it is this that leads him finally to opt for solitude, as well as solidarity, in so many of his late works; perhaps it is only in solitude that the poet sees the possibility of recapturing a bond with his "roots."

Most typical of his posthumously published poetry, however, is *Winter Garden*. Here we are at an end of a season and a cycle. No one, Neruda reminds us ominously, "is *there*" in the garden, no one watches. The garden is invaded by ghosts, mists, snow. Nature has been wounded, and however we may concede that death is part of life, we must lament the dearth of exuberance that winter brings us. Yet here, as in the earlier poem of *Canto general*, the fall of one leaf is not a fleeting symbol of death and decay, not an end, but a necessary displacement that will create a space on the branch for the birth of a new leaf.

Seen from above, from far away, from a perspective that only time and space can give us, these poems, we come to sense in the end, are less negative and threatening than a first reading might lead us to believe. Neither winter nor death is a phenomenon to be understood in isolation: both are part of a restorative cycle in the constant renewal of Nature and fulfillment of men.

The lesson is clear: Nature is the dominant force of our world; we must pay attention to its changes and cycles, fit our own human changes and cycles to Nature's, rather than wait on Nature to perform our personal bidding. Each moment of a man's life has its parallel with the forces of Nature, every "expense of spirit" constitutes a restoration of matter. Even solitude has a "smell" that can be compared to "humidity" and to "water." Nature changes incessantly without "dying the death"; so long as we are part of it, the part is reborn with the whole.

The poems from *The Sea and the Bells* that close the present anthology are among the last written by Neruda. Many of Neruda's preoccupations in *Winter Garden* are here restated: man's longing for existence, man's groping for identity and joy while encompassed by loneliness, infinity, mortality. The "sea" continues to predominate as a symbol of duration, dwarfing our transience,

reminding us of our frailty and smallness. The "bells" ring out with their rituals of joy or toll for our death, as in Donne.

It would be tempting to pursue a Homeric analogy to the end—to say that Neruda in his travels, by the timely exercise of cunning, valor, and providential surveillance, "came home." Unlike Ulysses, however, Neruda did not live to defeat his rivals, traitors, and supplanters in glorious battle; there was no magical bow he could bend to take vengeance on his despoilers. It was the usurpers who prevailed in the high places of his own household, who triumphed in Chile's political arena. Bitterness rather than resignation and hope must have overcome Neruda during those final days when his friend Allende was murdered and the generals took power and possession. Yet his poetry makes it equally clear that he died in the knowledge that Nature endures and replenishes through endless changes, that human beings resist disaster and defy death and injustice, that his own poetry was an invulnerable portion of the struggle for survival and abundance.

Ben Belitt, we know, is both a poet and a translator; and as for many another poet, translation on a broad front has served as a kind of apprenticeship to the enlargement of his own poetic franchise. Belitt has stated in *Adam's Dream: A Preface to Translation* that "translation is a kind of jungle gym for the exercise of all the faculties and muscles required for the practice of poetry, even if it doesn't always begin that way—that it serves the calisthenic function of bringing to bear upon what is translated one's total resources and cunning as a poet." It is no disservice to Pablo Neruda to say that Belitt's poetry is intertwined with his translation: that Belitt has gained in depth as a poet and translator by relating his own texts to his awareness of other great texts, the texts he has chosen to translate in numerous anthologies.

Keats's homage to Chapman's Homer is there to remind us that a poet's horizons have a way of expanding as other texts "swim into" the parameters of his "ken." That Belitt is a visionary poet of distinction, as well as a translator of visionary authors such as

Rimbaud and Neruda and Machado, is a happy circumstance for translation. It needs a visionary poet-translator to do justice to the vision of a double enterprise. Ben Belitt is twice fortunate in having encountered texts ideally suited to his sensitivity, his style, his world vision. He has also translated with notable success Lorca's *Poet in New York*; the "apocryphal" poems of Antonio Machado, as well as the enigmatic and philosophical prose poems, epigrams, maxims, memoranda, and memoirs Machado attributed to "Juan de Mairena"; many of the finest poems of Rafael Alberti, including "Concerning Angels"; the metaphysical sequences by Jorge Guillén from *Cántico*; and lyrics by Eugenio Montale, Jorge Luis Borges, Vicente Aleixandre, Alberto Girri, and others. He is aware, as is every major translator of our time, of the life-giving nature of translation, of the relationship between the periphery and the center, the skin and the heart of a poetic text. There is always a double movement, from the center to the periphery and back, in every living being, in every living poem—and Ben Belitt's translations show this movement, almost a heartbeat. As George Steiner has put it so commandingly in *After Babel*:

To a greater or lesser degree, every language offers its own reading of life. To move between languages, to translate, even within restrictions of totality, is to experience the most bewildering bias of the human spirit towards freedom. If we were lodged inside a single "language-skin" or amid very few languages, the inevitability of our organic subjection to death might well prove more suffocating than it is.

We have reason to be grateful—as was Neruda himself—that Ben Belitt's translations are at hand to keep the total vision of Neruda active and influential among English-speaking readers, and to allow us to move bilingually in the double world of the power and the glory of a great poet.

MANUEL DURAN  
Yale University

***Las manos del día* / The Hands of Day  
(1968)**

Todo está aquí viviendo,  
haciendo,  
haciéndose  
sin participación de mi paciencia  
y cuando colocaron estos rieles,  
hace cien años,  
yo no toqué este frío:  
no levantó mi corazón mojado  
por las lluvias del cielo de Cautín  
un solo movimiento  
que ayudara  
a extender los caminos  
de la velocidad que iba naciendo.

Ni luego puse un dedo  
en la carrera  
del público espacial que mis amigos  
lanzaron hacia Aldebarán suntuoso.

Y de los organismos egoístas  
que sólo oyeron, vieron  
y siguieron  
yo sufrí humillaciones que no cuento  
para que nadie siga sollozando  
con mis versos que ya no tienen llanto  
sino energía que gasté en la página,  
en el polvo, en la piedra del camino.

Y porque anduve tanto sin quebrar  
los minerales ni cortar madera  
siento que no me pertenece el mundo:

Everything here is alive,  
working at something,  
fulfilling itself  
without thought of my patience; yet  
when the track was laid down  
a hundred years ago  
I never winced for the cold;  
my heart, soaking in rain  
under the skies of Cautín  
never ventured  
so much as a gesture  
to help  
open the way  
to all that was hurling itself into existence.

I never lifted  
a finger in the public domain  
of the cosmos that my friends  
thrust toward sumptuous Aldebaran.

Among self-serving organisms  
that do nothing but ogle and eavesdrop  
and potter,  
I was humbled in ways I dare not describe  
lest someone cheapen my verse  
to a snivel,  
now I have learned to turn grief  
into energy, lavish my power on a page,  
on the dust, on a stone in the road.

Having managed so long without splitting  
a rock or cutting a plank to its size,  
I feel the world never belonged to me: it is part



que es de los que clavaron y cortaron  
y levantaron estos edificios,  
porque si la argamasa, que nació  
y duró sosteniendo los designios,  
la hicieron otras manos,  
sucias de barro y sangre,  
yo no tengo derecho a proclamar  
mi existencia: fui un hijo de la luna.

of the hewers and hammerers  
who raised up the roofbeams: and  
if the mortar that launched and endured the design's continuity  
was poured by other hands than my own,  
hands black with the mud and the blood of the world,  
I no longer have the right to assert  
my existence: I was a child of the moon.

## INVIERNO

Amigo de este invierno, y del de ayer,  
o enemigo o guerrero:  
frío,  
a pleno sol me toca  
tu contacto  
de arco nevado, de irritada espina.

Con estos dedos, sin embargo,  
torpes, vagos  
como si se movieran en el agua,  
debo desarrollar este día de invierno  
y llenarlo de adioses.

Cómo agarrar en el aire el penacho  
con estos dedos fríos  
de muerto en su cajón,  
y con los pies inmóviles  
cómo puedo correr detrás del pez  
que a nado cruza el cielo  
o entrar en el barbecho  
recién quemado, con zapatos gruesos  
y con la boca abierta?

Oh intemperie del frío, con el seco  
vuelo de una perdiz de matorral  
y con la pobre escarcha y sus estrellas  
despedazadas entre los terrones!

## W I N T E R

Friend of my winter, yesterday's friend,  
fighter or enemy,  
cold contact  
that strikes in broad daylight  
through a rainbow of snow, the thorn's irritation,  
to touch me:

With those very same fingers, however  
torpid or vague  
as though moving through water,  
I must summon a wintery day,  
fill the day with farewells.

How to seize that panache from the air  
with the freeze of those fingers,  
how, with the motionless feet  
of the dead in their boxes,  
match the stride of the fishes  
that float through the sky,  
how to enter the furrows,  
gum-shoed and slack-jawed,  
fresh from the fiery furnace?

O thunderhead in the cold, dry  
partridge's leap from the thicket,  
star-burst of nondescript frost  
pounded to bits in the groundswell!

AL PUENTE CURVO DE LA BARRA  
MALDONADO, EN URUGUAY

Entre agua y aire brilla el Puente Curvo:  
entre verde y azul las curvaturas  
del cemento, dos senos y dos simas,  
con la unidad desnuda  
de una mujer o de una fortaleza,  
sostenida por letras de hormigón  
que escriben en las páginas del río.

Entre la humanidad de las riberas  
hoy ondula la fuerza de la línea,  
la flexibilidad  
de la dureza,  
la obediencia impecable  
del material severo.

Por eso, yo, poeta  
de los puentes,  
cantor de construcciones,  
con orgullo  
celebro  
el atrio  
de Maldonado, abierto  
al paso pasajero,  
a la unidad errante de la vida.

Lo canto,  
porque no una pirámide  
de obsidiana sangrienta,  
ni una vacía cúpula sin dioses,  
ni un monumento inútil de guerreros  
se acumuló sobre la luz del río

TO PUENTE CURVO ON  
THE MALDONADO SPIT IN URUGUAY

Between air and the water, glows Puente Curvo,  
between azure and green, the spans  
of cement, two breasts, two abysses,  
with the nude uniformity  
of a girl or a bastion,  
held by the concrete calligraphy  
that writes on the page of the river.

Between the beaches' humanity, today  
the power of the line ripples forth, the  
flexible  
flintiness,  
the perfect obedience  
of obdurate matter.

Therefore, as poet  
of bridges  
and singer of structures,  
I celebrate  
the pride  
of the porches  
of Maldonado, free  
to the traveler's footstep,  
life's vagrant entirety.

I sing  
because here is no pyramid  
of bloody obsidian;  
no cupola empty of gods  
or expendable barrow for warriors  
climbs into the light of the river—

sino este puente que hace honor al agua  
ya que la ondulación de su grandeza  
une dos soledades separadas  
y no pretende ser sino un camino.

only a bridge to honor the water—  
whose grand undulation  
joins two separate solitudes  
and asks to be only a road.



## CONSTRUCCIÓN A MEDIODÍA

Oh golpe en la mañana  
del edificio irguiendo su esperanza:  
el ruido repetido  
entre el sol y los pinos  
de Febrero.

Alguien construye, canta  
la cantera,  
un cubo cae, el sol  
cruza de mano en mano  
en el relámpago de los martillos  
y en las arenas de Punta del Este  
crece una casa nueva,  
torpe, sin encender y sin hablar,  
hasta que el humo de los albañiles  
que a mediodía comen carne asada  
despliega una bandera  
de rendición.

Y la casa regresa  
a la paz del pinar y de la arena  
como si arrepentida de nacer  
se despidiera de los elementos  
y quedara de pronto convertida  
en un pequeño puñado de polvo.

## MIDDAY CONSTRUCTION

O blow of the building  
thrusting its wish through the morning:  
clamor repeated  
between the February pines  
and the sun!

Someone is building, the quarry  
is singing,  
a bucket drops, the sun  
passes from one hand to the next, crosses over  
in a glitter of hammers  
and on the sand of Punte del Este  
a new house arises  
still without tinder or language, insipid,  
until the smoke of the masons  
(eating *carne asada* at noon)  
breaks out a flag  
of surrender.

And the house returns  
to the peace of the pines and the sand,  
as if to atone for creation,  
says goodbye to the elements  
and is suddenly changed  
into a trivial fistful of sand.

Una mano hizo el número.  
Juntó una piedrecita  
con otra, un trueno  
con un trueno,  
un águila caída  
con otra águila,  
una flecha con otra  
y en la paciencia del granito  
una mano  
hizo dos incisiones, dos heridas,  
dos surcos: nació el  
número.

Creció el número dos y luego  
el cuatro:  
fueron saliendo todos  
de una mano  
el cinco, el seis,  
el siete  
el ocho, el nueve, el cero  
como huevos perpetuos  
de un ave  
dura  
como la piedra,  
que puso tantos números  
sin gastarse, y adentro  
del número otro número  
y otro adentro del otro,  
prolíferos, fecundos,  
amargos, antagónicos,  
numerando,  
creciendo  
en las montañas, en los intestinos,

A hand made a number.  
It joined one little stone  
to another, one thunderclap  
to another,  
one fallen eagle  
to another, one  
arrowhead to another,  
and then with the patience of granite  
the hand  
made a double incision, two wounds  
and two grooves: and a  
number was born.

Then came the numeral two, then  
a four;  
one hand kept making  
them all—  
the five, the six,  
the seven,  
the eight, the nine—zeroes  
like bird's eggs,  
unbreakable,  
solid  
as rock,  
printing the numbers  
without wearing away; and inside  
that number, another,  
and another inside that other,  
teeming, inimical,  
prolific, acerb,  
counting  
and spawning,  
filling mountains, intestines,

en los jardines, en los subterráneos,  
cayendo de los libros,  
volando sobre Kansas y Morelia,  
cubriéndonos, cegándonos, matándonos  
desde las mesas, desde los bolsillos,  
los números, los números,  
los números.

gardens, and cellars,  
falling from books,  
flying over Kansas, Morelia,  
blinding us, killing us, covering all:  
out of wallets, off tables:  
the numbers, the numbers,  
the numbers.

ESTO ES SENCILLO

Muda es la fuerza (me dicen los árboles)  
y la profundidad (me dicen las raíces)  
y la pureza (me dice la harina).

Ningún árbol me dijo:  
*"Soy más alto que todos."*

Ninguna raíz me dijo:  
*"Yo vengo de más hondo."*

Y nunca el pan ha dicho:  
*"No hay nada como el pan."*

THIS IS SIMPLE

Power is mute (the trees tell me)  
and so is profundity (say the roots)  
and purity too (says the grain).

No tree ever said:

*"I'm the tallest!"*

No root ever said:

*"I come from deeper down!"*

And bread never said:

*"What is better than bread!"*



Algo de ayer quedó en el día de hoy,  
fragmento de vasija o de bandera  
o simplemente una noción de luz,  
un alga del acuario de la noche,  
una fibra que no se consumió,  
pura tenacidad, aire de oro:  
algo de lo que transcurrió persiste  
diluido, muriendo en las saetas  
del agresivo sol y sus combates.

Si ayer no continúa  
en esta deslumbrante independencia  
del día autoritario  
que vivimos,  
por qué como un portento de gaviotas  
giró hacia atrás, como si titubeara  
y mezclara su azul con el azul  
que ya se fue?

Contesto.

Adentro de la luz  
circula tu alma  
aminorándose hasta que se extingue,  
creciendo como un toque de campana.

Y entre morir y renacer  
no hay tanto  
espacio, ni es tan dura  
la frontera.  
Es redonda la luz como un anillo  
y nos movemos en su movimiento.

## T O D A Y I S N ' T E V E R Y T H I N G

Something of yesterday clings to today,  
a flag or a potsherd;  
or simply a notion of light,  
the scum on midnight's aquarium,  
an unwithering thread—  
essential tenacity, gold in the air:  
something persists, whatever passes away  
a little diminished, to fall under the arrows  
of the hostile sun and its combats.

Else, why  
in the glowing autonomy  
of the positive day  
that we lived  
did a portent of seagulls  
stay on, circling back as if it would stagger  
the mix of its blue with the blue  
that had vanished?

I tell you:

Inside the light  
your soul makes its circle,  
refining itself to extinction,  
or enlarging its rings like the stroke of a bell.

And between death and rebirth  
the space is less grand  
than we thought, the frontier  
less implacable.  
Light's shape is round as a ring  
and we move ourselves by its movements.

## EL CAMPANERO

Aun aquel que volvió  
del monte, de la arena,  
del mar, del mineral, del agua,  
con las manos vacías,  
aun el domador  
que volvió del caballo  
en un cajón, quebrado  
y fallecido  
o la mujer de siete manos  
que en el telar  
perdió de pronto el hilo  
y regresó al ovario,  
a no ser más que harapo,  
o aun el campanero  
que al mover  
en la cuerda  
el firmamento  
cayó de las iglesias  
hacia la oscuridad  
y el cementerio:  
aun todos ellos  
se fueron  
con las manos gastadas  
no por la suavidad sino por algo:  
el tiempo corrosivo,  
la substancia  
enemiga  
del carbón, de la ola,  
del algodón, del viento,  
porque sólo el dolor enseñó a ser:  
porque hacer fue el destino de las manos  
y en cada cicatriz cabe la vida.

## THE BELL-RINGER

Even the mountaineer came back  
from the mountain, from sand,  
sea, the mineral world, water,  
empty-handed;  
the breaker of horses came back  
unhorsed,  
broken by death  
in a box;  
and the seven-handed woman  
suddenly fumbled the thread  
in the loom  
and went back to the womb,  
no more than a rag;  
even the bell-ringer  
moving  
the sky  
on a cord,  
fell from the church  
through the dark  
of the graveyard;  
even these  
went away  
with hands worn  
by no burnish but some other unspeakable thing:  
corrosive time,  
the inimical  
substance  
of coal, waves,  
cotton, wind:  
because grief taught us to be,  
because the hands' work is a destiny  
and life shapes itself to their scars.

Qué haces tú, casi muerto, si el nuevo día Lunes  
hilado por el sol, fragante a beso,  
se cuelga de su cielo señalado  
y se dedica a molestar tu crisis?

Tú ibas saliendo de tu enfermedad,  
de tus suposiciones lacerantes  
en cuyo extremo el túnel  
sin salida, la oscuridad con su final dictamen  
te esperaba: el silencio  
del corazón o de otra  
víscera amenazada  
te hundió en la certidumbre del adiós  
y cerraste los ojos, entregado  
al dolor, a su viento sucesivo.

Y hoy que desamarrado de la cama  
ves tanta luz que no cabe en el aire  
piensas que si, que si te hubieras muerto  
no sólo no hubiera pasado nada  
sino que nunca cupo tanta fiesta  
como en el bello día de tu entierro.

## SICK MAN IN THE SUN

What would it profit you, now as good as dead, if Monday came  
round again, ripe as a kiss, woven with sun,  
loosened its place in the sky  
and aimed its full force at your worsening crisis?

You rose in your illness  
and the bitter foreknowledge  
at whose end the impassable  
tunnel, dark with its final proscriptions,  
awaits you: your heart's  
silence, or some other  
visceral menace  
that hurts with its certain farewells;  
your eyes closed, you delivered yourself  
to your pain, gust after gust, like a wind.

Today, disinterred from your bed,  
you see such unboundable light in the air  
and you think: yes, should you die on such a day,  
not only would nothing have happened,  
but no festival would ever have equaled  
the measure of this one, the heyday of your burial.

De cuántas duras manos  
desciende la herramienta,  
la copa,  
y hasta la curva insigne  
de la cadera que persigue luego  
a toda la mujer con su dibujo!

Es la mano que forma  
la copa de la forma,  
conduce el embarazo del tonel  
y la línea lunar de la campana.

Pido unas manos grandes  
que me ayuden  
a cambiar el perfil de los planetas:  
estrellas triangulares  
necesita el viajero:  
constelaciones como dados fríos  
de claridad cuadrada:  
unas manos que extraigan  
ríos secretos para Antofagasta  
hasta que el agua rectifique  
su avaricia perdida en el desierto.

Quiero todas las manos de los hombres  
para amasar montañas  
de pan y recoger  
del mar todos los peces,  
todas las aceitunas  
del olivo,  
todo el amor que no despierta aún  
y dejar un regalo  
en cada una de las manos  
del día.

## THE GIFT

From what hardened hands  
the tool comes to us,  
and the cup,  
the notable curve  
of a hip that clings to  
the whole of a woman and prints itself there!

Hands shaping  
the cup to its contour,  
showing the way to the barrel's rotundity,  
the lunar outline of the bell.

I need big hands  
to help me  
change the profile of planets;  
the traveler requires  
triangular stars;  
constellations like dice  
cut into squares by the cold;  
hands that distill  
hidden rivers in Antofagasta  
and restore to the water  
what its avarice lost in the desert.

I want all the hands of mankind  
to knead mountains  
of bread, gather  
all fish in the sea,  
all the fruit  
of the olive,  
all the love still unawakened,  
and leave  
gifts  
in the hands  
of the day.



## A S E N T A R S E

Todo el mundo sentado  
a la mesa,  
en el trono,  
en la asamblea,  
en el vagón del tren,  
en la capilla,  
en el océano,  
en el avión, en la escuela, en el estadio  
todo el mundo sentados o sentándose:  
pero no habrá recuerdo  
de una silla  
que hayan hecho mis manos.

Qué pasó? Por qué, si mi destino  
me llevó a estar sentado, entre otras cosas,  
por qué no me dejaron  
implantar cuatro patas  
de un árbol extinguido  
al asiento, al respaldo,  
a la persona próxima  
que allí debió aguardar el nacimiento  
o la muerte de alguna que él amaba?  
(La silla que no pude, que no hice,  
transformando en estilo  
la naturalidad de la madera  
y en aparato claro  
el rito de los árboles sombríos.)

La sierra circular  
como un planeta  
descendió de la noche  
hasta la tierra.  
Y rodó por los montes

## SITTING DOWN

The whole world seated  
at table,  
on thrones,  
in assemblies,  
in railway compartments,  
in chapels  
and ocean,  
airplanes, stadia, schools,  
a whole world sitting down, or prepared to sit down—  
yet no one will ever have reason  
to remember a chair  
that I made with my hands.

What happened? Why, if my lot  
was (among other things) to be seated,  
was I never allowed  
to fit the four wasted paws  
of a tree  
to the seat of a chair or the rungs of its back  
for the next man  
to sweat out the birth  
or the death of the woman he loved?  
(The chair I could never imagine or build for myself,  
transforming wood's properties  
into an attitude,  
the shadowy rites of a tree  
to a lucid commodity.)

A circular saw  
came down and touched earth  
in the night,  
like a planet.  
It circled the peaks

de mi patria,  
pasó sin ver por mi puerta larvaria,  
se perdió en su sonido.  
Y así fue como anduve  
en el aroma  
de la selva sagrada  
sin agredir con hacha la arboleda,  
sin tomar en mis manos  
la decisión y la sabiduría  
de cortar el ramaje  
y extraer  
una silla  
de la inmovilidad  
y repetirla  
hasta que esté sentado todo el mundo.

of my country,  
passed with no thought for the larvae at work in my door,  
and was lost in a sound.  
Since then, I have walked  
through the smells  
of the forest, holding everything sacred,  
never slashing a tree with a hatchet,  
never forcing  
the wit or the will of my hands  
to cut through the branches  
and retrieve  
from the stillness of things  
one chair,  
repeating it over and over  
till there were chairs enough for a world and everyone sat  
down.

Cuándo me vio ninguno  
cortando tallos, aventando el trigo?  
Quién soy, si no hice nada?  
Cualquier hijo de Juan  
tocó el terreno  
y dejó caer algo  
que entró como la llave  
entra en la cerradura:  
y la tierra se abrió de par en par.

Yo no, no tuve tiempo  
ni enseñanza:  
guardé las manos limpias  
del cadáver urbano,  
me despreció la grasa de las ruedas,  
el barro inseparable de las costumbres claras  
se fue a habitar sin mí las provincias silvestres:  
la agricultura nunca se ocupó de mis libros  
y sin tener qué hacer, perdido en las bodegas,  
reconcentré mis pobres preocupaciones  
hasta que no viví sino en las despedidas.  
Adiós, dije al aceite, sin conocer la oliva,  
y al tonel, un milagro de la naturaleza,  
dije también adiós, porque no comprendía  
cómo se hicieron tantas cosas sobre la tierra  
sin el consentimiento de mis manos inútiles.

## NEGATIVE HANDS

Who ever saw me  
cutting stalks, threshing chaff from the wheat?  
Who is this do-nothing I?  
Some other Joe  
touched ground  
and let fall  
something that turned like a key  
in a lock:  
earth opened wide for him.

Not I: I lacked both the wit  
and occasion to try.  
I kept my fingernails clean  
like an urban cadaver,  
the grease in the wheel-hub disdained me,  
the clay that inheres in pure processes  
went to live somewhere else in the country, without me:  
agriculture never took note of my books,  
and having nothing to do of my own  
I fixed on my feeble obsessions,  
wandered from pillar to post  
and lived only to wave my farewells.  
Goodbye, I said to the oil, without knowing the olive.  
Goodbye to the cask, that natural miracle,  
goodbye, all, goodbye: I never shall know  
how such things were conceived on this earth  
without the entitlement of my ineffectual hands.



***Fin de mundo* / World's End  
(1969)**



Dejo en la nave de la rosa  
la decisión del herbolario:  
si la estima por su virtud  
o por la herida del aroma:  
si es intacta como la quiere  
o rígida como una muerta.

La breve nave no dirá  
cuál es la muerte que prefiere:  
si con la proa enarbolada  
frente a su fuego victorioso  
ardiendo con todas las velas  
de la hermosura abrasadora  
o secándose en un sistema  
de pulcritud medicinal.

El herbolario soy, señores,  
y me turban tales protestas  
porque en mí mismo no convengo  
a decidir mi idolatría:  
la vestidura del rosal  
quema el amor en su bandera  
y el tiempo azota el esqueleto  
derribando el aroma rojo  
y la turgencia perfumada:  
después con una sacudida  
y una larga copa de lluvia  
no queda nada de la flor.

Por eso agonizo y padezco  
preservando el amor furioso  
hasta en sus últimas cenizas.

## THE HERBALIST'S ROSE

I consign to the ship of the rose  
an herbalist's decision:  
whether to honor the rose for its strength,  
or the wound of its odor:  
whether all is intact, as he likes it,  
or stiff as a corpse.

The terse ship will not say  
which death it prefers:  
the prow thrusting itself  
through victorious fire  
crowding its sails and ablaze  
in its clustering beauty,  
or wilting away under its regimen  
of medicinal comeliness.

I am that herbalist: friends,  
flinching from every complaint  
because I can never agree  
how to resolve my idolatry:  
the rose's investiture  
burns love on its banners,  
time flays from its skeleton  
the juice of a scarlet aroma,  
the perfume's tumidity:  
then, with one blow of the weather,  
a great cupful of rain,  
nothing is left of the flower.

Here I am moping and mowing  
to preserve the full fury of love  
till the last ash flickers out.

## A D E N T R O

La cierta luz de un día tiene  
alas tan duras y seguras  
que se derrochan en la rosa:  
parece que van a morir:  
parece que tantos anillos  
sobran a los dedos del día:  
parece que no vuelve a arder  
otro reloj con esta esfera:  
hay demasiada claridad  
para mi pequeño planeta.

No es así, lo sabe la tierra  
en su mojada intimidad.  
Los minerales recibieron  
noticias que reverberaban  
y el átomo cristalizó  
un movimiento de relámpago.

Yo asumo este día delgado  
como una cinta alrededor  
de la tristeza circundante  
y me hago un cinturón, un vaso,  
un buque para transmigrar,  
un océano de rocío.

Vengan a ver sobre la abeja  
una cítara de platino,  
sobre la cítara la miel  
y sobre la miel la cintura  
de mi amorosa transparente.

Me pasé la vida en la dicha  
y en la desdicha me pasé

## I N S I D E

Today's confident light  
squanders the roses  
with hard, unfaltering wings:  
it seems they will never survive it:  
it seems there are too many  
rings for day's fingers:  
as though no other clock will repeat  
all that burning circumference:  
there is too much transparency  
for my little planet.

But that's not how it is: our steamy  
and intimate earth knows it.  
The minerals caught  
the reechoing portents,  
the atom's crystallization  
held the movement of lightning.

I gather this delicate day  
like a ribbon to girdle  
the world's sad encirclement.  
I turn it into a belt or a cup,  
a boat to cross over,  
an ocean of dew.

Come and see it: over the bee  
a platinum zither, over  
the zither, the honey,  
and over the honey the waist  
of my lucent beloved.

I took life as it came—lucky or  
unlucky—this life

toda mi vida y otras vidas,  
por eso en este día azul  
he convidado a todo el mundo.

No me saluden al entrar,  
pero no me insulten tampoco.

Soy un pequeño profesor:  
doy clases de luz a la tierra.

and the others I've lived:  
so I invite the whole world to  
savor with me the blue of today.

Don't wave to me when you enter—and  
conversely, spare me your insults!

I'm a little professor;  
I give classes in light to the earth.

## FÍSICA

El amor como la resina  
de un árbol colmado de sangre  
cuelga su extraño olor a germen  
del embeleso natural:  
entra el mar en el extremismo  
o la noche devoradora  
se desploma el alma en ti mismo,  
suenan dos campanas de hueso  
y no sucede sino el peso  
de tu cuerpo otra vez vacío.

## PHYSICS

Love floods the tree of  
our blood like a sap  
and distills its strange odor from  
the seed of our physical ravishment:  
the sea enters us utterly  
and the ravenous night,  
the soul veers out of plumb, and within you  
two bells sound in the bone  
and nothing remains but your body's  
weight on my own, another time spent.



## B O M B A ( I I )

Yo no estoy seguro del mar  
en este día presuntuoso:  
tal vez los peces se vistieron  
con las escamas nucleares  
y adentro del agua infinita  
en vez del frío original  
crecen los fuegos de la muerte.

Se empeñan en poblar de espanto  
las bruscas mareas del mundo  
y no hay torre que nos ampare  
de tantas olas enemigas.

No se contentan con la tierra.

Hay que asesinar el océano.

Con algunas gotas de infierno  
se mezcla la sal de las olas  
y se descargan al abismo  
los minerales de la cólera,  
hasta batir la tempestad  
en una taza de veneno  
y servir al hombre la sopa  
de fuego de mar y de muerte.

**B O M B ( I I )**

I'm not sure of the sea  
on such a presumptuous morning:  
who's to say—the fish may put on  
their nuclear scales  
and deep in the infinite waters,  
instead of original cold,  
the death-fires are kindling.

The savaging sea piles its fears  
on the shores of the world:  
no tower can deliver us now  
from the enemy wave.

Earth wasn't enough for them.

They had to murder the ocean.

The wave mixes its salt  
with a hellish concoction,  
the void vomits up  
all its mineral fury:  
even the hurricane  
brews us a teacup of venom  
and serves man a birthright of porridge—  
half fire from the sea, and half death.

El lagartijo iridiscente,  
la concha con alas de nácar,  
las hojas de pangué excesivas  
como las manos de Goliat,  
y estos insectos que me siguen  
me cantan y me continúan.

Oh cuántos relojes perversos  
inventó la naturaleza  
para que solidarizara  
cada minuto de mi vida  
y me lo pasara firmando  
mi adhesión a sus invenciones:  
a los cisnes, a las arañas,  
a pájaros y mariposas.

De tanto fulgor refulgí  
como los colores del agua  
y tuve olor a barro negro  
donde se pudren las raíces:  
tuve voz de rana sombría,  
dedos de puma adolescente,  
mirada triste de abejorro,  
pies de pésimo paquidermo,  
testículos de callampa,  
ombbligo serio como el ojo  
de un antiguo caballo tuerto,  
piernas de perro perseguido  
y corazón de escarabajo.

## E A R T H

The lizard's iridescence,  
the conch winged with mother-of-pearl,  
the exorbitant leaves of the *pangue*  
like the hands of Goliath,  
the insects that follow me, singing,  
enlarging my life—

Oh how perverse are the watches  
that nature invents  
to compound our existence, minute by minute,  
and confirm in its passing  
my particular bond with its handiwork:  
the inventions of spiders and swans,  
the birds and the butterflies.

I burned with their brilliance  
like colors in water,  
I smelled of the mud that blackens  
the compost of roots,  
I reechoed the frog's taciturnity  
my fingers were young as a puma's,  
my gaze had a bumblebee's gloom,  
egregious elephant's feet,  
my balls were mushrooms,  
my navel had the grim look  
of a walleyed old brewery horse,  
my feet flew like a dog dodging  
tormentors, and my heart was the heart of a beetle.

## A N D U V E

Solo con árboles y olor  
a sauce mojado, es aún  
tiempo de lluvia en el transcurso,  
en la intemperie de Linares.

Hay un cielo central: más tarde  
un horizonte abierto y húmedo  
que se despliega y se desgarrá  
limpiando la naturaleza:

mas acá voy, desventurado,  
sin tierra, sin cielo, remoto,  
entre los labios colosales  
de la soledad superior  
y la indiferencia terrestre.

Oh antigua lluvia, ven y sálvame  
de esta congoja inamovible!

I W E N T

Just trees and the smell  
of wet willow, and the  
rainy season is with us again,  
the bad weather of Linares.

There's a dominant sky: later  
an open and soggy horizon  
that extends and destroys itself,  
cleansing creation.

I come closer, reluctant,  
lacking earth and a sky, inaccessible,  
between the gargantuan lips  
of the solitude over my head and  
my earthbound indifference.

Come save me, O venerable rain,  
from this anguish of fixity!

Pero debajo de la alfombra  
y más allá del pavimento  
entre dos inmóviles olas  
un hombre ha sido separado  
y debo bajar y mirar  
hasta saber de quién se trata.  
Que no lo toque nadie aún:  
es una lámina, una línea:  
una flor guardada en un libro:  
una osamenta transparente.

El Oliverio intacto entonces  
se reconstituye en mis ojos  
con la certeza del cristal,  
pero cuanto adelante o calle,  
cuanto recoja del silencio,  
lo que me cunda en la memoria,  
lo que me regale la muerte,  
sólo será un pobre vestigio,  
una silueta de papel.

Porque el que canto y rememoro  
brillaba de vida insurrecta  
y compartí su fogonazo,  
su ir y venir y revolver,  
la burla y la sabiduría,  
y codo a codo amanecemos  
rompiendo los vidrios del cielo,  
subiendo las escalinatas  
de palacios desmoronados,  
tomando trenes que no existen,  
reverberando de salud  
en el alba de los lecheros.

OLIVERIO GIRONDO

But under the carpeting,  
past the pavement's end, and  
between two immovable waves  
a man's been removed  
and I've got to go down and see  
for myself who's been lost:  
meanwhile—hands off, all of you!  
Here's a line, a bite in a plate,  
here's a pressed flower in a book,  
a transparent skeleton.

Oliverio, all of a piece, now  
comes together again under my eyes,  
definite as cut-crystal:  
whatever I say or keep to myself,  
whatever I wring from the silence,  
what looms large in my memory,  
death's little keepsake to me  
will be only a stingy reminder,  
a silhouette scissored in paper.

The man I remember and sing of  
glittered with mutinous life;  
I shared in his fireworks,  
his comings and goings and backtrackings,  
his horseplay, his wisdom:  
elbow to elbow we greeted the dawn  
smashing the glass of the sky,  
climbing the terraces  
of mildewing palaces,  
taking trains that never existed,  
raucous with health  
in the milkman's hour of the morning.



Yo era el navegante silvestre  
(y se me notaba en la ropa  
la oscuridad del archipiélago)  
cuando pasó y sobrepasó  
las multitudes Oliverio,  
sobresaliendo en las aduanas,  
solícito en las travesías  
(con el plastrón desordenado  
en la otoñal investidura),  
o cervecando en la humareda  
o espectro de Valparaíso.

En mi telaraña infantil  
sucede Oliverio Gironde.

Yo era un mueble de las montañas.

Él, un caballero evidente.  
Barbín, barbián, hermano claro,  
hermano oscuro, hermano frío,  
relampagueando en el ayer  
preparabas la luz intrépida,  
la invención de los alhelios  
las sílabas fabulosas  
de tu elegante laberinto  
y así tu locura de santo  
es ornato de la exigencia,  
como si hubieras dibujado  
con una tijera celeste  
en la ventana tu retrato  
para que lo vean después  
con exactitud las gaviotas.

Yo soy el cronista abrumado  
por lo que puede suceder  
y lo que debo predecir

I was a seagoing yokel  
(one could see the peninsular  
cloud in my clothing)  
while Oliverio walked  
up and walked over the crowds,  
outsmarting the customs inspectors,  
looking both ways at the crossings  
(his shirtfront askew  
in the wardrobe of autumn),  
tossing down beer after beer in the thick  
of the smoke, wraithlike, in Valparaiso.

In the web of my boyhood  
Oliverio Gironde is what happens.

I was a stick from the mountains.

He was a manifest gentleman.  
Bearded, unflappable, my light brother,  
dark brother, cold brother,  
making yesterday sparkle,  
you rallied the daylight's audacity,  
the inventions of flowering clove,  
the fabulous syllables  
of your elegant labyrinth.  
Your crazy beatitude  
was a jewel of contingency,  
as though you had scratched on a window  
with the point of a heavenly scissors  
your reflection for seagulls  
to trace in its total exactitude.

I'm just a scrivener, overwhelmed  
by the things that can happen  
and the things I was meant to foresee

(sin contar lo que me pasó,  
ni lo que a mí me pasaron,)  
y en este canto pasajero  
a Oliverio Gironde canto,  
a su insolencia matutina.

Se trata del inolvidable.

De su indeleble puntería:  
cuando borró la catedral  
y con su risa de corcel  
clausuró el turismo de Europa,  
reveló el pánico del queso  
frente a la francesa golosa  
y dirigió al Guadalquivir  
el disparo que merecía.

Oh primordial desenfadado!  
Hacía tanta falta aquí  
tu iconoclasta desenfreno!

Reinaba aun Sully Prudhomme  
con su redingote de lilas  
y su bonhomía espantosa.  
Hacía falta un argentino  
que con las espuelas del tango  
rompiera todos los espejos  
incluyendo aquel abanico  
que fue trizado por un búcaro.

Porque yo, pariente futuro  
de la itálica piedra clara  
o de Quevedo permanente  
o del nacional Aragon,  
yo no quiero que espere nadie  
la moneda falsa de Europa,

(not to mention my personal history,  
or the things thrust upon me by others)  
but now my itinerant song  
is for Oliverio Gironde  
and the dailiness of his insolence.

We're talking about the unforgettable.

His indelible sharpshooter's aim  
as he brought down a cathedral,  
grinned like a stallion  
and wiped out the tourism of Europe,  
discovered the cheese's hysteria  
under the finicky French lady's nose,  
zeroed in on Guadalquivir and gave it  
what it deserved with both barrels.

Freewheeling original,  
how we needed  
your iconoclastic excesses!

Sully Prudhomme in his  
lilac Prince Albert and his crass  
geniality still ruled the salons:  
we needed an Argentine  
with the rowel and spurs of a tango  
to kick out the mirrors and fans  
that a flowerpot  
smashed into smithereens.

Kinsman-to-come  
of the luminous marble of Italy,  
the enduring Quevedo  
and the national Aragon,  
I want no man to sweat  
for the counterfeit handouts of Europe—

nosotros los pobres américos,  
los dilatados en el viento,  
los de metales más profundos,  
los millonarios de guitarras,  
no debemos poner el plato,  
no mendiguemos la existencia.

Me gusta Oliverio por eso:  
no se fue a vivir a otra parte  
y murió junto a su caballo.

Me gustó la razón intrínseca  
de su delirio necesario  
y el matambre de la amistad  
que no termina todavía:  
amigo, vamos a encontrarnos  
tal vez debajo de la alfombra  
o sobre las letras del Río  
o en el termómetro obelisco  
(o en la dirección delicada  
del susurro y de la zozobra)  
o en las raíces reunidas  
bajo la luna de Figari.

Oh energúmeno de la miel,  
patriota del espantapájaros,  
celebraré, celebré, celebro  
lo que cada día serás  
y lo Oliverio que serías  
compartiendo tu alma conmigo  
si la muerte hubiera olvidado  
subir una noche y por qué?  
buscando un número y por qué?  
por qué por la calle Suipacha?

least of all, we would-be “Americans”  
scattered every which way in the wind,  
we whose metals lie deepest,  
millionaires with a pick and guitar, we  
who ought never to panhandle,  
or beggar existence.

What I liked in Oliverio was this:  
he didn't change his address,  
but died in his boots by his horse.

I liked the intrinsic good sense  
underneath his compulsive delirium,  
his heaped platter of friendship  
without reservation or stint. So, it's under  
the rug for us all, if need be, my friend,  
or over the River's orthography,  
or into the Obelisk's thermometer  
(or the delicate turn  
of a murmured uneasiness)  
or wherever your roots come together  
under the moon in a canvas by Figari.

O demoniac in the honey,  
patriot of scarecrows,  
I celebrate now, before, and forever  
what the passing days might bring you—  
the Oliverio that might be, if you still  
could share part of your spirit with me,  
if death had forgotten one day  
to climb up the darkness—for what?  
to look up a street number—for what?  
and why on a street called Suipacha?

De todos los muertos que amé  
eres el único viviente.

No me dedico a las cenizas,  
te sigo nombrando y creyendo  
en tu razón extravagante  
cerca de aquí, lejos de aquí,  
entre una esquina y una ola  
adentro de un día redondo,  
en un planeta desangrado  
o en el origen de una lágrima.

Of all the dead I have loved  
you are the only one living.

I've nothing to pledge to your ashes;  
I keep calling you by name, keep believing  
in your reason's flamboyance, wherever you are,  
here under my nose or in some distant part  
of the world, between corners and waves  
in the rondure of daylight,  
or on a planet bled of its powers  
or inside the source of a tear.



## DIABLITOS

He visto cómo preparaba  
su condición el oportuno,  
su coartada el arribista,  
sus redes la rica barata,  
sus inclusiones el poeta.  
Yo jugué con el papel limpio  
frente a la luz todos los días.

Yo soy obrero pescador  
de versos vivos y mojados  
que siguen saltando en mis venas.  
Nunca supe hacer otra cosa  
ni supe urdir los menesteres  
del intrínseco jactancioso  
o del perverso intrigador,  
y no es propaganda del bien  
lo que estoy diciendo en mi canto:  
sino que no lo supe hacer,  
y le pido excusas a todos:  
déjenme solo con el mar:  
yo nací para pocos peces.

## LITTLE DEVILS

I've seen them: the fixers  
setting up their advantages,  
the arriviste's alibis,  
rich cheapskates spreading their nets,  
poets drawing their boundaries;  
but I've played with clean paper  
in the open light of the day.

I'm a journeyman fisherman  
of living wet verses  
that break through the veins;  
it's all I was good for.  
I never contrived opportunities  
out of mere vainglory  
or a schemer's perversity;  
whatever I say in my songs  
is more than benign propaganda.  
True, I did it all clumsily  
and for that I beg pardon:  
now leave me alone with my ocean:  
I was born for a handful of fishes.

## M O R I R

Cómo apartarse de uno mismo  
(sin desconocerse tampoco):  
abrir los cajones vacíos,  
depositar el movimiento,  
el aire libre, el viento verde,  
y no dejar a los demás  
sino una elección en la sombra,  
una mirada en ascensor  
o algún retrato de ojos muertos?

De alguna manera oficial  
hay que establecer una ausencia  
sin que haya nada establecido,  
para que la curiosidad  
sienta una ráfaga en la cara  
cuando destapen la oratoria  
y hallen debajo de los pies  
la llamarada del ausente.

## D Y I N G

How to remove oneself from oneself  
(without unknowing oneself totally):  
open the empty receptacles,  
consign our mobility there,  
the free air, the green wind,  
and not leave for the rest  
only an option of shadows,  
a chance glance in an elevator,  
a picture gone dead in the eyes?

Some protocol must be found  
for establishing absence  
with nothing really established  
—some allowance for the curious among  
us who feel the great gust in their faces  
when the oratorical sound is uncovered,  
and find, just under their boot-soles,  
the absent one blazing back at them.

## CONDICIONES

Con tantas tristes negativas  
me despedí de los espejos  
y abandoné mi profesión:  
quise ser ciego en una esquina  
y cantar para todo el mundo  
sin ver a nadie porque todos  
se me parecían un poco.

Pero buscaba mientras tanto  
cómo mirarme hacia detrás,  
hacia donde estaba sin ojos  
y era oscura mi condición.  
No saqué nada con cantar  
como un ciego del populacho:  
mientras más amarga la calle  
me parecía yo más dulce.

Condenado a quererme tanto  
me hice un hipócrita exterior  
ocultando el amor profundo  
que me causaban mis defectos.  
Y así sigo siendo feliz  
sin que jamás se entere nadie  
de mi enfermedad insondable:  
de lo que sufrí por amarme  
sin ser, tal vez, correspondido.

## CONDITIONS

With these moody negations  
I said goodbye to the mirrors  
and gave up my profession:  
better a blind man in a corner  
singing songs to the world  
without setting eyes on a soul,  
if part of me is so like the others!

Nevertheless I kept trying:  
how to look back at myself  
to wherever it is I sat blinded  
when my total condition was dark?  
There was nothing to show for my singing  
in a blind rabble of singers:  
but the harsher the street sounds became,  
the sweeter I seemed to myself.

Condemned to self-love,  
I lived the exterior life of a hypocrite  
hiding the depths of the love  
my defects had brought down on my head.  
I keep on being happy,  
disclosing to nobody  
my ambiguous malady:  
the grief I endure for self-love,  
who was never so loved in return.

Treinta y dos años entrarán  
trayendo el siglo venidero,  
treinta y dos trompetas heroicas,  
treinta y dos fuegos derrotados,  
y el mundo seguirá tosiendo  
envuelto en su sueño y su crimen.

Tan pocas hojas que le faltan  
al árbol de las amarguras  
para los cien años de otoño  
que destruyeron el follaje:  
lo regaron con sangre blanca,  
con sangre negra y amarilla,  
y ahora quiere una medalla  
en su pechera de sargento  
el siglo que cumple cien años  
de picotear ojos heridos  
con sus herramientas de hierro  
y sus garras condecoradas.

Me dice el cemento en la calle,  
me canta el pájaro enramado,  
me advierte la cárcel nombrando  
los justos allí ajusticiados,  
me lo declaran mis parientes,  
mis intranquilos compañeros,  
secretarios de la pobreza:  
siguen podridos estos años  
parados en medio del tiempo  
como los huesos de una res  
que devoran los roedores  
y salen de la pestilencia  
libros escritos por las moscas.

Thirty-two years to go  
to the new century:  
thirty-two heroic fanfares,  
thirty-two fires to stamp out  
while the world goes coughing up phlegm,  
wrapped in its dreams and atrocities.

The tree of our bitterness  
has come full leaf:  
and the fall of our century  
will carry the foliage away:  
we watered the roots with our white blood  
and yellow and black;  
now our centennial epoch  
after scarring our vision  
with cast-iron hardware  
and armorial claws  
wants medals to pin  
on its sergeant's insignia.

The cement in the street says it,  
a bird whistles it out of the branches,  
the jails with their rosters  
of good men maligned  
make it plain to me; my kin,  
my irascible friends,  
the stewards of poverty,  
put it in so many words:  
the epoch is rotting away,  
stalled at time's center  
like the bones of a cow  
with its predators gnawing within,  
while out of time's pestilence  
comes a literature written by flies.



Lo curioso es que en este siglo  
 Mozart, el suave enlevitado,  
 continuó con su levitón,  
 con su vestido de música:  
 en estos cien años apenas  
 se escucharon otros ruidos,  
 y Fiodor Dostoyevski aún  
 desarrolla su folletín,  
 su dictamen de las tinieblas,  
 su larga cinta con espinas.

Bueno y Rimbaud? Gracias, muy bien  
 contesta el vago vagabundo  
 que aún se pasea solitario  
 sin otra sombra en este siglo.

Yo que llegué desde Parral  
 a conocer este siglo,  
 por qué me dan el mismo frío,  
 el mismo plato, el mismo fuego  
 de los amables abuelitos  
 o de los abuelos amargos?

Hasta cuándo llueve Verlaine  
 sobre nosotros? Hasta cuándo  
 el paraguas de Baudelaire  
 nos acompaña a pleno sol?  
 Queremos saber dónde están  
 las araucarias que nacieron,  
 las encinas del Siglo Veinte,  
 o dónde están las manos, los dedos,  
 los guantes de nuestra centuria.  
 Walt Whitman no nos pertenece,

Odd, that Mozart, the frock-coated  
 dandy, should persist in our century,  
 still flashing his frock-coat  
 in a full dress of music:  
 for the last hundred years, it seems, no  
 other sound has been heard.  
 And Feodor Dostoevski still  
 unwinds his old serial,  
 his mandate of shadow,  
 in long ribbons of thorns.

Well—and Rimbaud? Very well, thank you!  
 a vague vagabond answers,  
 taking his lone constitutional  
 into our century, with none to overshadow him.

And I who came out of Parral  
 to confront my own century—  
 why do they give me the same gooseflesh,  
 the same fever, the same silvery tones,  
 all my little adorable grandfathers  
 or my bitter grandfathers?

How long has it been since Verlaine  
 rained over us? How long since  
 the umbrellas of Baudelaire  
 accompanied us in the glare of the sun?  
 Where are the Araucanian pines  
 in my Chile of yesteryear,  
 the evergreen oaks of the twentieth century,  
 and where are the hands, fingers,  
 the gloves of our century?  
 Walt Whitman doesn't belong to us—

se llama Siglo Diecinueve,  
pero nos sigue acompañando  
porque nadie nos acompaña.  
Y en este desierto lanzó  
el sputnik su polen rojo  
entre las estrellas azules.

El siglo veinte se consume  
con el siglo pasado a cuestas  
y los pálidos escritores  
bajo los gigantes muertos  
hemos subido la escalera  
con un saco sobre los hombros,  
con la pesada precedencia  
de los huesos más eminentes.

Pesa Balzac un elefante,  
Victor Hugo como un camión,  
Tolstoy como una cordillera,  
como una vaca Emile Zola,  
Emilia Bronte como un nardo,  
Mallarmé como un pastelero,  
y todos juntos aplastándonos  
no nos dejaban respirar,  
no nos dejaban escribir,  
no nos querían dejar,  
hasta que el tío Ubú Dada  
los mandó a todos a la mierda.

that's called the nineteenth century!—  
yet he keeps tracking us down  
because no one else cares for our company,  
And now, over that desert, Sputnik  
has scattered the red of its pollen  
between the blue stars.

The twentieth century peters out  
with the century before on its shoulders,  
with all the colorless scribblers  
underneath the moldering giants;  
we have climbed the long stair  
with a sack on our backs:  
the crushing precedence  
of more illustrious bones.

Balzac weighs on us like an elephant,  
Victor Hugo comes on like a truck,  
Tolstoy looms, a horizon of mountains,  
Emile Zola waits, like a cow,  
Emily Brontë, like spikenard,  
Mallarmé, a confectioner—  
all clobber us under their bulk.  
They don't let us breathe  
or go on with our writing,  
they would never have left us alone  
unless old Uncle Ubú Dada spoke up  
and said: Shit on you all! in our name.

Ven acá sombrero caído,  
zapato quemado, juguete,  
o montón póstumo de anteojos,  
o bien, hombre, mujer, ciudad,  
levántense de la ceniza  
hasta esta página cansada,  
destituida por el llanto.

Ven nieve negra, soledad  
da la injusticia siberiana,  
restos raídos del dolor,  
cuando se perdieron los vínculos  
y se abrumó sobre los justos  
la noche sin explicaciones.

Muñeca del Asia quemada  
por los aéreos asesinos,  
presenta tus ojos vacíos  
sin la cintura de la niña  
que te abandonó cuando ardía  
bajo los muros incendiados  
o en la muerte del arrozal.

Objetos que quedaron solos  
cerca de los asesinados  
de aquel tiempo en que yo viví  
avergonzado por la muerte  
de los otros que no vivieron.

De ver la ropa tendida  
a secar en el sol brillante  
recuerdo las piernas que faltan,  
los brazos que no las llenaron,

## T H E W A R S

Come closer, hat in the dust,  
burnt shoe-leather, doll,  
posthumous mountain of eyeglasses;  
better still, rise from your  
ashes—man, woman, city—  
touch this disconsolate page  
riddled with sorrow.

Black snow, waste land  
of Siberian injustice,  
shabby remains of my anguish, come close  
as the chains fall away  
and over the just the inexplicable  
darkness descends in a pillar of clouds.

Toy of the Asians, doll  
scorched by aerial murderers,  
show your blank eyes  
far from the waist of the child  
who fled when you burst into flame  
as every wall blazed  
and death held the rice-fields.

All stripped objects  
heaped by the murdered  
at a time when my life  
was shamed by the dying  
of the others who never survived.

Seeing wash spread  
to dry in a dazzle of sunlight,  
I remember legs lost to them,  
arms that never will fill them,

partes sexuales humilladas  
y corazones demolidos.

Un siglo de zapaterías  
llenó de zapatos el mundo  
mientras cercenaban los pies  
o por la nieve o por el fuego  
o por el gas o por el hacha!

A veces me quedo agachado  
de tanto que pesa en mi espalda  
la repetición del castigo:  
me costó aprender a morir  
con cada muerte incomprensible  
y llevar los remordimientos  
del criminal innecesario:  
porque después de la crueldad  
y aun después de la venganza  
no fuimos tal vez inocentes  
puesto que seguimos viviendo  
cuando mataban a los otros.

Tal vez le robamos la vida  
a nuestros hermanos mejores.

the vandalized sex,  
the heart's mutilation.

A century's shoe-stores  
crammed with the shoes of the world  
while feet were dismembered  
by frostbite or fire  
or gas or the axe!

At times I have cringed  
under the burdens I bear,  
the renewed castigations:  
I've paid dearly to learn how to die  
each man's incomprehensible death  
and accept the remorse  
of the gratuitous criminal:  
after the cruelties, after  
the vengeance that followed, no one  
is innocent, it may be:  
we all go on living  
after the others are murdered:

knowing, perhaps, we have stolen the lives  
of the best of our brothers.



## EL PELIGRO

Sí, nos dijeron: No resbalen  
en los salones encerados  
ni en barro ni en nieve ni en lluvia.  
Muy bien, dijimos, a seguir  
sin resbalar en el invierno.  
Pero qué sucedió? Sentimos  
bajo los pies algo que huía  
y que nos hacía caer.

Era la sangre de este siglo.

Bajó de las secretarías,  
de los ventisqueros saqueados,  
del mármol de las escaleras  
y cruzó el campo, la ciudad,  
las redacciones, los teatros,  
los almacenes de ceniza,  
las rejas de los coroneles:  
la sangre cubría las zanjas  
y saltaba de guerra en guerra  
sobre millones de ojos muertos  
que sólo miraban la sangre.

Esto pasó. Yo lo atestiguo.

Ustedes vivirán tal vez  
resbalando sólo en la nieve.

A mí me tocó este dolor  
de resbalar sobre la sangre.

## THE DANGER

Careful, they said: don't slip  
on the wax of the ballroom:  
look out for the ice and the rain and the mud.  
Right, we all answered: this winter  
we'll live without slippage!  
And what happened? Under our feet  
we felt something give way  
and there we were, flat on our fannies:

in the blood of a century.

It seeped under the typist-stenographers,  
the sweep of the snowdrifts,  
staircases of marble;  
it crossed meadows and cities,  
editors' desks and theaters,  
warehouses of ashes,  
the colonel's grilled windows—  
blood flowed in the ditches,  
spurred from one war to another,  
millions of corpses whose eyes  
saw nothing but blood.

All this happened just as I tell it.

Maybe others will live out their lives with  
no more than an occasional spill on the ice.

I live with this horror; when I tumble,  
I go down into blood.



***Las piedras del cielo* / Skystones  
(1970)**

El cuarzo abre los ojos en la nieve  
y se cubre de espinas,  
resbala en la blancura,  
en su blancura:  
fabrica los espejos,  
se retrata en estratos y facetas:  
es el erizo blanco  
de las profundidades,  
el hijo de la sal que sube al cielo,  
el azahar helado  
del silencio,  
el canon de la espuma:  
la transparencia que me destinaron  
por virtud del orgullo de la tierra.

Quartz opens its eyes in the snow,  
raises its hackles,  
glides over whiteness,  
its very own whiteness,  
making mirrors,  
refracting in facets and pockets—  
a white hedgehog  
that lives in the fathoms,  
child of the salt, climbing heaven,  
an orange tree frozen  
in silence,  
spray's cannonade:  
transparency given me here  
by the pride of earth's providence.

Cuando todo era altura,  
altura,  
altura,  
allí esperaba la esmeralda fría,  
la mirada esmeralda:  
era un ojo:  
miraba  
y era centro del cielo,  
el centro del vacío:  
la esmeralda  
miraba:  
única, dura, inmensamente verde,  
como si fuera un ojo  
del océano,  
ojo inmóvil del agua,  
gota de Dios, victoria  
del frío, torre verde.

#### I V

When all turned to altitude,  
altitude,  
altitude,  
the emerald was waiting for it in the cold:  
an emerald perspective;  
an eye  
whose fixed gaze  
was the center of heaven,  
center of vacancy:  
the emerald  
fastened its gaze:  
anomalous, hard, gigantically green  
like the eye  
of the ocean,  
an immovable eye in the water,  
a drop of the godhead, cold  
triumph, green tower.



Del estallido a la ruptura férrea,  
de la grieta al camino,  
del sismo al fuego, al rodamiento, al río,  
se quedó inmóvil aquel corazón  
de agua celeste, de oro,  
y cada veta de jaspe o sulfuro  
fue un movimiento, un ala,  
una gota de fuego o de rocío.

Sin mover o crecer vive la piedra?

Tiene labios el ágata marina?

No contestaré yo porque no puedo:  
así fue el turbulento génesis  
de las piedras ardientes y crecientes  
que viven desde entonces en el frío.

From the breach to the iron explosion,  
from the break in the stone to the highway,  
from the quake to the flame, the whirlwind, the river,  
that great heart lay still in the  
heavenly water and gold,  
each seam in the jasper and sulphur  
a motion, a wing,  
a dewdrop, a trickle of fire.

Shall the stone live, neither moving nor growing?

Are there lips in the watery agate?

I've no answers to give you, nor power to say it:  
such was the turbulent genesis—  
and the stones have lived  
growing and burning in ice ever since.

## X I I

Yo quiero que despierte  
la luz encarcelada:  
flor mineral, acude  
a mi conducta:  
los párpados levantan la cortina  
del largo tiempo espeso  
hasta que aquellos ojos enterrados  
vuelvan a ser y ver su transparencia.

I want the jailed  
light to awaken: I want  
the mineral flower  
to assist my behavior:  
now eyelids are lifting the curtain  
of time's long opacity  
and the eyes that lay buried  
come to life again, and see their transparency.

Piedra rodante, de agua o cordillera,  
hija redonda del volcán, paloma  
de la nieve,  
descendiendo hacia el mar dejó la forma  
su cólera perdida en los caminos,  
el peñasco perdió su puntiaguda  
señal mortal, entonces  
como un huevo del cielo entró en el río,  
siguió rodando entre las otras piedras  
olvidado de su progenitura,  
lejos del infernal desprendimiento.

Así, suave de cielo, llega al mar  
perfecta, derrotada,  
reconcentrada, insigne,  
la pureza.

## X I V

The stone, toppled by water and mountain,  
the volcano's round daughter, the  
dove in the snow,  
rolled down to the sea and the highway, and left  
the spent wrath of its form;  
the peak lost its jagged design  
of mortality  
and entered the river, an egg rolling out of the sky,  
a stone among other stones,  
its heraldry lost,  
far from the hell of its sundering.

Till, honed by the sky,  
unflawed and demolished,  
rearoused and prodigious,  
purity came to the sea.

**X X I I**

Entré en la gruta de las amatistas:

dejé mi sangre entre espinas moradas:

cambié de piel, de vino, de criterio:

desde entonces me duelen las violetas.

X X I I

I entered the cave of the amethysts:  
left my blood on the violet thorn:  
changed my vintage, my skin, and my cunning:  
and live plagued by the violet ever since.





***Geografía infructuosa* / Barren Terrain  
(1972)**

Contra la claridad de la pradera  
un campanario negro.

Salta desde la iglesia triangular:  
pizarra y simetría.

Mínima iglesia en la suave extensión  
como para que rece una paloma.

La pura voluntad de un campanario  
contra el cielo de invierno.

La rectitud divina de la flecha  
dura como una espada

con el metal de un gallo tempestuoso  
volando en la veleta.

(No la nostalgia, es el orgullo  
nuestro vestido pasajero

y el follaje que nos cubría  
cae a los pies del campanario.

Este orden puro que se eleva  
sostiene su sistema gris

en el desnudo poderío  
de la estación color de lluvia.

Aquí el hombre estuvo y se fue:  
dejó su deber en la altura,

THE BELL TOWER OF AUTHENAY

Against the meadow's transparency,  
a black bell tower.

It leaps from the triangular  
church: symmetry, slate.

A minimal church in a tender extension  
as though a dove prayed.

The pure will of the bell tower  
slashed on a wintry sky.

A divinely ongoing arrow  
hard as a rapier

with a cock's metal flying  
stormily over its vane.

(Pride, not nostalgia,  
our wayfarer's garment

and the leafage which sheltered us  
falls at the bell tower's base.

That pure order bearing aloft its gray system,  
thrusting itself skyward

into the naked dominion  
of its rain-colored stance.

Here man thrived for a time and passed on,  
left his voucher there on the heights

y regresó a los elementos,  
al agua de la geografía.

Así pude ser y no pude,  
así no aprendí mis deberes:

me quedé donde todo el mundo  
mirara mis manos vacías:

las construcciones que no hice:  
mi corazón deshabitado:

mientras oscuras herramientas,  
brazos grises, manos oscuras,

levantaban la rectitud  
de un campanario y de una flecha.

Ay lo que traje yo a la tierra  
lo dispersé sin fundamento,

no levanté sino las nubes  
y sólo anduve con el humo

sin saber que de piedra oscura  
se levantaba la pureza

en anteriores territorios,  
en el invierno indiferente.)

Oh asombro vertical en la pradera  
húmeda y extendida:

una delgada dirección de aguja  
exacta, sobre el cielo.

and went back to the elements,  
the water's geography.

So might I also have lived—yet could not—  
who reckoned my debts differently.

I stood fast where the whole world might see  
my hands' utter emptiness:

the constructions I never perfected,  
my uninhabited heart:

while shadowy implements,  
grizzled arms with shadowy hands,

trued that rectitude, raised  
the bell tower and its arrow.

Alas, whatever I touched upon earth  
I dispatched without bedrock,

I raised nothing but clouds,  
I walked only with smoke

never guessing that out of dark stone  
one might lift up a purity

in a prior terrain,  
an indifferent winter.)

O awe in the meadows, vertical,  
damp, and extensional:

pointing the way with a delicate needle  
exact on the sky—

Cuántas veces de todo aquel paisaje,  
árboles y terrones

en la infinita estrella horizontal  
de la terrestre Normandía,

por nieve o lluvia o corazón cansado,  
de tanto ir y venir por el mundo,

se quedaron mis ojos amarrados  
al campanario de Authenay,

a la estructura de la voluntad  
sobre los dominios dispersos

de la tierra que no tiene palabras  
y de mi propia vida.

En la interrogación de la pradera  
y mis atónitos dolores

una presencia inmóvil rodeada  
por la pradera y el silencio:

la flecha de una pobre torre oscura  
sosteniendo un gallo en el cielo.

how often my eyes probing the whole  
of that landscape, hummocks and trees,

the star's horizontal infinitude,  
the soil that is Normandy,

through snowstorm and rain, or the heart's weariness,  
walking to and fro in the world,

I fastened my eyes  
on that bell tower of Authenay—

will's edifice,  
aloft on earth's scattered dominions,

with no word  
for my personal identity!

A questioning of meadows  
in my sorrow's astonishment,

an immovable presence surrounded  
by the fields in their stillness—

and that shaft on its dark scrap of tower  
lifting a cock toward the sky.



## SUCESIVO

Así pues enseñémonos,  
mostremos cada uno su recodo,  
su canasto con peces:  
aún palpita la plata  
que recoges del agua,  
aún vive el fuego  
encendido en los otros (que es el tuyo):  
examinemos sin tristeza el robo  
que nos hicimos paulatinamente  
y el regalo de todos que nos dimos.

Lo sucesivo que tiene la vida  
es este ir y venir de los iguales:  
*Muerte a la identidad*, dice la vida:  
cada uno es el otro, y despedimos  
un cuerpo para entrar en otro cuerpo.  
Hombres: nos habitamos mutuamente  
y nos gastamos unos a los otros,  
desconocidos e irreconciliables  
como colores que se contradicen  
y se reúnen en la oscuridad.

Oh amamantadora sobresombra,  
arcilla, patria negra  
que reproduce el infinito humano,  
el corazón innumerable, el río  
de individuos con nombre y con corbata,  
con número y congoja,  
latitudes pobladas de caderas,  
compañeros cobrizos, hembras verdes,  
razas hostiles, labios migratorios:  
seres sabrosos para todo el orbe.

## S U C C E S S I O N S

Get used to it then,  
let each show a glimpse of his corner,  
his hopper of fish:  
the silver you drew  
from the water still thrashes the wicker,  
the fire that is you still flashes there  
with the others, and lives:  
only think of the theft that we worked,  
without any nostalgia, little by little,  
and the gift that we all gave each other.

The successions at work in our living,  
that coming and going of equals:  
*Death to identity!* life says to us:  
each of us is the other, goodbye  
to one body in order to enter another!  
Good people: our sojourn is mutual,  
each wastes the other,  
unknowing and irreconcilable,  
a contradictory clashing of colors  
that composes again in the blackness.

O nurturing overshadower,  
black patrimonial clay  
that repeats our human infinitude,  
uncountable heart and river  
of separate identities each with its necktie and name,  
its number and individual anguish,  
cramming the latitudes, hip over hip,  
coppery friends and green women,  
lips setting forth on their journeys, hostile races:  
our being is succulent and provides for the whole of an orb.

## CEREZAS

Sucedió en ese mes y en esa patria.

Aquello que pasó fue inesperado,  
pero así fue: de un día al otro día  
aquel país se llenó de cerezas.

Era recalcitrante  
el tiempo masculino desollado  
por el beso polar: nadie supone  
lo que yo recogía en las tinieblas:  
(metales muertos, huesos de volcanes)  
(silencios tan oscuros  
que vendaban los ojos de las islas)  
y ya entre los peñascos  
se dio por descontado el laberinto  
sin más salida que la nieve  
cuando llegó sin advertencia previa  
un viento de panales que traía  
el color que buscaban las banderas.

De cereza en cereza cambia el mundo.

Y si alguien duda  
pido a quien corresponda que examinen  
mi voluntad, mi pecho transparente,  
porque aunque el viento se llevó el verano  
dispongo de cerezas escondidas.

## C H E R R I E S

It happened this month, in this country.

Unexpectedly: nevertheless, all  
came to pass as I tell it: day after day  
the country brimmed over with cherries.

It was stubborn,  
that masculine weather with its impudent  
kiss of the pole: no one could foretell  
the bounty I bore in the shadows  
(dead metals, the bones of volcanoes)  
(stillnesses so remote  
they bandaged the eyes of the islands):  
then, between boulders and rubble  
that labyrinth diminishing little by little  
till nothing could force its way forward but snow—  
when without any hint of its coming—  
a breath from those honeycombs, bearing  
the color a flag might search out of its folds.

And cherry by cherry, change was wrought in the world.

If anyone doubts this,  
I say to all comers: look into  
my will, at my heart's true transparency,  
for though wind swept the summer away  
I have cherries enough for you all, hidden cherries.

## POSESIONES

El brillo  
del cristal desprendido y sorprendido  
sería un pez moviéndose en el cielo  
si no llegara al establecimiento:  
es bueno el pan o el sol sobre tu mesa:  
hay que tener el mar en una copa:  
la rosa en libertad es mi enemiga.  
Tener palabra y libro, boca y ojos,  
tener razón y luna, hallar  
la silla fresca cuando tienes sombra,  
el agua tuya para tu propia sed.

Yo busqué por los montes y las calles  
las evidencias de mi propiedad  
muchas veces más claras que el rocío,  
otras veces amargamente hostiles:  
con arañas y espigas,  
piedra, fulgor, caderas,  
prodigios forestales o industriales,  
vinos de honor, palomas, bicicletas:  
agrupé los menajes  
de mi sabiduría,  
fui siempre fugitivo y posesivo  
amé y amé y amé lo que era mío  
y así fui descubriendo la existencia,  
uva por uva me fui haciendo dueño  
de todas las ventanas de este mundo.

## POSSESSIONS

The sunburst  
in crystal, unleashed and surprised,  
would pass like a fish in the sky  
if it could not complete its trajectory:  
sunlight or bread are good enough for your table;  
take the sea in a cup:  
the libertarian rose is my enemy.  
Take the book and its word, the eyes and the mouth,  
take the reasoning mind or the moon, find  
a restorative chair when you sit in the shade,  
or water sufficient to slake your personal thirst.

I ransacked the mountains and streets  
for the marks of my property: at times all  
seemed plainer than dew; at others,  
implacably hostile:  
I lived with spiders, with kernels of grain,  
rocks, hips, refulgences,  
the bounty of forests and industries,  
vintage wines, bicycles, doves:  
I crammed all the sticks  
of my wit in one place,  
I was always possessive and fugitive.  
I loved and I loved and I loved every scrap that was mine  
till I came on existence itself,  
grape after grape, till I stood at  
the windows that gave on this world, a householder, home.

Es muy serio el viento del mes de Marzo en el océano:  
sin miedo: es día claro, sol ilustre,  
yo con mil otros encima del mar  
en la nave italiana que retorna a Nápoli.

Tal vez trajeron todos sus infidelidades,  
enfermedades, tristes papeles, deudas, lágrimas,  
dineros y derrotas en los números:  
pero aquí arriba es difícil jugar con la razón  
o complacerse con las desdichas ajenas  
o mantenerse heridos por angas o por mangas:  
hay tal ventolera que no se puede sufrir:  
y como no veníamos preparados  
aun para ser felices, aun y sin embargo  
y subimos puentes y escalas para reflexionar,  
el viento nos borró la cabeza, es extraño:  
de inmediato sentimos que estábamos mejor:  
sin cabeza se puede discutir con el viento.

A todos, melancólicos de mi especialidad,  
los que inútilmente cargamos con pesadumbre propia  
y ajena, los que pensamos tanto en las pequeñas cosas  
hasta que crecen y son más grandes que nosotros,  
a todos recomiendo mi claro tratamiento:  
la higiene azul del viento en un día de sol,  
un golpe de aire furioso y repetido  
en el espacio atlántico sobre un barco en el mar,  
dejando así constancia de que la salud física  
no es mi tema: es el alma mi cuidado:  
quiero que las pequeñas cosas que nos desgarran  
sigan siendo pequeñas, impares y solubles  
para que cuando nos abandone el viento  
veamos frente a frente lo invisible.

March wind on the ocean turns everything solemn.  
 Nothing is frightening: bright daylight, a magnificent sun,  
 I and a thousand just like me facing the sea  
 on a boat out of Italy returning to Naples.

Perhaps each carries his baggage of illnesses,  
 sad papers, debts, infidelities, tears, his quota of  
 bankruptcies, currencies; but, topside, today  
 it's hard to play dialectical games,  
 take comfort in the hard lot of others and  
 bind up one's wounds, willy-nilly. The wind  
 is insufferable. It catches us unprepared; and to keep  
 up our courage each does what he can—we climb bridges  
 and stairways and ponder. Then a gust empties our heads  
 —strange to say—and all of a sudden we feel  
 better. Headless, we can talk with the wind.

To all of that breed, we confirmed melancholiacs  
 uselessly taking the brunt of our private afflictions  
 and borrowing others, brooding too long about  
 trifles till molehills turn into mountains and we shrivel—  
 for all of us malcontents, I've a simple placebo:  
 the blue hygiene of the wind and a day in the sun,  
 a wild volley of air repeated relentlessly  
 on the open Atlantic shipping out in mid-ocean—  
 and yes, that constancy, too, that renders the body's  
 well-being no part of my theme: I speak for the soul.  
 I say: let the trifles that strangle us be seen merely as  
 trifles, remediable inequities. Then when the wind has had its  
 way with us  
 we can see ourselves as we are, face to face with the invisible.



## SIGUE LO MISMO

Es tarde y es temprano a cada hora:  
a cada resplandor, a cada sombra  
nos amanece cada atardecer:  
el tiempo inmóvil  
enmascara  
su rostro inevitable  
y muda sin cambiar su vestidura:  
noche o delgada aurora,  
largo silencio de los ventisqueros,  
manzana arrebolada del estío:  
todo es tan pasajero como el viento:  
el tiempo aguarda, inmóvil,  
sin color ni calor, sin sol ni estrella:  
y es este absolutismo el que nos reina:

adiós! adiós! Y no se altera nada.

## S A M E S T O R Y

This evening, each hour, it grows earlier:  
each splendor, each shadow,  
each twilight, dawns anew on our world:  
immovable time  
masks  
its exigent face  
and changelessly changes its garment:  
each night or in delicate daybreak  
the long silence of glaciers,  
summer's reddening apple:  
all is vagabond as the wind:  
time idles, immobile,  
hueless and heatless, sunless and starless:  
nothing avails but the absolute.

Goodbye and goodbye. Nothing changes.

## TODOS SENTADOS

El hombre caminando hacia la silla:  
desde aquel horizonte hasta esta noche,  
desde más lejos, desde más cerca:  
un paso más hasta llegar a ella,  
a la silla, a sentarse en desconsuelo  
o en la dicha, a sentarse a plena luz  
o a comer entre todos los sentados.

No hay elección como ésta: vive el aire  
sentado en esta silla de la tierra,  
y cada amanecer conduce a todos  
a la postura que te da una silla,  
una sencilla silla de madera.

De tanto ir y romper, de tanta furia  
y de cuanto se vio de amaneceres  
o cazadores despuntando el día  
a plena pólvora y con selva oscura,  
todo termina en silla y ceremonia:  
la parábola se abre para irse  
hasta que se cerró sobre una silla.

No hay nadie más andando en este mundo.

## ALL SEATED

Man approaching his chair:  
from that horizon, tonight as before,  
from whatever direction, nearer or farther,  
a single step more and he's there,  
by his chair, to seat himself, in his luck  
or his misery, seat himself there in broad daylight  
or break bread with the seated.

No option surpasses this: even the air  
seats itself on the chair of the earth  
and daybreak brings all  
to the posture the body assumes on a chair,  
a plain wooden chair.

After such moving and shaking, the furor  
of all that is given us to see in the dawn,  
or hunters rising at daybreak  
in the dust-devil or the dark of a forest,  
all ends in a chair and a ceremony:  
the parabola parts and deploys itself  
and seats itself there on its chair.

And no one is left to walk forth on the world.

## FUGA DE SOL

Hacia países donde crece la mostaza,  
regiones rubias, vegetales, ácidas,  
debemos ir, nosotros, los dormidos,  
a contagiarnos: es hora, Antonieto,  
de cambiar el papel ferruginoso  
que nos impuso el día en que nacimos,  
aquel día de hierro,  
aquella estrella de carbón quemado  
que nos dio nacimientos y dolores:  
ay, hacia el sol picante, hacia la dicha  
llevemos nuestros corazones negros:  
ya es hora de ir descalzos  
a pisar las cebollas,  
los berros, los nenúfares:  
alguna vez hay que dejar de ver  
el mundo con mirada mineral  
y prosternarse ante la sencillez  
de la vida más verde que alcancemos.

Toward countries that ripen the mustard,  
 blond latitudes, acerbic and vegetal,  
 we must go—we, the somnambulists,  
 and spread the contagion: it is time, Antonieto,  
 to change the ferruginous role  
 our birthdays imposed on us,  
 an epoch of iron  
 and the woes that a cindery star  
 bestowed on our cradles:  
 into the sting and the joys of the sun  
 let us bring our black hearts: it is  
 time to walk barefoot into the onions  
 and watercress, midstream into the lilies.  
 Today we must shut out the mineral  
 gaze of the world, kneel to life's utter  
 simplicity, greener now than we ever imagined.

## PRIMER INVIERNO

Yo observo el día como si lo criara,  
como si yo lo hubiera dado a luz  
desde que llega, oscuro, a mi ventana  
como un pájaro negro  
hasta que convertido en nieve y luz  
palpita apenas: vive.

Vive el sol indeciso: es su destino  
aclarar estos árboles desnudos,  
tocar el agua inmóvil,  
gravitar sin medida, sin lenguaje,  
sin peso, hasta que la boca  
del cielo se lo traga  
sin que destellen a la luz del frío  
las plumas que volaron desde ayer  
hasta volver mañana a mi ventana.

## FIRST WINTER

I stare at the day as though I had suckled it,  
brought it into the world  
from the moment it showed at my window  
swart as a blackbird,  
till it turned into snow, a faint tremor  
of light, and took on a life of its own.

But the sun lives uncertainly: its destiny is  
to define a tree's nakedness,  
touch immutable water,  
fall without language or limit,  
weightlessly, and be swallowed into the sky,  
leaving no trace in the freeze and the light  
of the feathers that flew ever since yesterday  
and will be back at my window tomorrow.



## A L F R Í O

Frío en la cara entre árboles sin hojas  
por caminos brillantes  
de hora blanca y escarcha matutina!

Frío de manos puras, corazón salvaje  
gritándome en los ojos  
un grito que no ahoga  
la inmóvil ecuación  
que el cielo y la pradera establecieron:  
la doctrina infinita del invierno:  
luz reprimida en la extensión del día  
blanco como un pez muerto:  
sólo el frío es acción: el frío vive.

Ay, acaricia aún la tierra  
antes que la visita del verano  
imponga su letárgica amapola!  
Saca el cuchillo y que restalle  
tu escalofrío eléctrico  
sobre cuerpos cobardes  
y almas acurrucadas en el sueño!

Oh frío, ala de piedra,  
recóbrame,  
devuélveme  
tu copa de energía y amenaza,  
lo que el placer o la ternura roban:  
tú frente a frente dándome en los ojos,  
vital, mortal, indómito enemigo!

## C O L D

Frozen-faced, by the stripped trees,  
in the road's glare,  
the white hour of matutinal frost.

The cold of my pure hands, my heart's savagery  
crying its confrontational  
cry that can never drown out  
the changeless equation  
the meadow contrives with the sky,  
the infinite doctrine of winter:  
light crowding daylight's extension,  
white as a dead fish.  
Nothing acts but the cold: only cold lives.

How lightly it fondles the earth  
before visiting summer  
imposes the sloth of the poppy!  
Yet a knife is unsheathed—and then, how the hackles  
arise, electric, on cowardly bodies  
and souls huddled away in their dream!

O stone wing of cold,  
deliver me,  
make me  
the cup of your menace and energy,  
restore all that pleasure and tenderness snatched from our  
grasp—  
the stare of the eye-to-eye challenger, the enemy,  
vital, indomitable, mortal.



***La rosa separada* / The Separate Rose  
(Easter Island, 1973)**

## II: LOS HOMBRES

Es la verdad del prólogo. Muerte al romancón,  
al experto en las incomunicaciones:  
soy igual a la profesora de Colombia,  
al rotario de Filadelfia, al comerciante  
de Paysandú que juntó plata  
para llegar aquí. Llegamos de calles diferentes,  
de idiomas desiguales, al Silencio.

## II: THE MEN

The truth of my prologue is this: Down with sleazy  
romanticists!  
with experts in the ineffable!  
I'm just like the others: the Colombian lady-professor,  
the Philadelphian Rotarian, the drummer  
from Paysandú who cashed in a bundle  
to get here. In a mishmash of languages,  
by dissimilar routes we all come upon: Silence.

#### IV: LOS HOMBRES

Somos torpes los transeúntes, nos atropellamos de codos,  
de pies, de pantalones, de maletas,  
bajamos del tren, del jet, de la nave, bajamos  
con arrugados trajes y sombreros funestos.  
Somos culpables, somos pecadores,  
llegamos de hoteles estancados o de la paz industrial,  
ésta es tal vez la última camisa limpia,  
perdimos la corbata,  
pero aun así, desquiciados, solemnes,  
hijos de puta considerados en los mejores ambientes,  
o simples taciturnos que no debemos nada a nadie,  
somos los mismos y lo mismo frente al tiempo,  
frente a la soledad: los pobres hombres  
que se ganaron la vida y la muerte trabajando  
de manera normal o burotrágica,  
sentados o hacinados en las estaciones del metro,  
en los barcos, las minas, los centros de estudio, las cárceles,  
las universidades, las fábricas de cerveza,  
(debajo de la ropa la misma piel sedienta),  
(el pelo, el mismo pelo, repartido en colores).

We transients, we deadbeats: we blunder about  
 with our big feet and our elbows, our pants and our suitcases,  
 from railroads and gangplanks and jets we debark  
 in funereal hats with our clothing in wrinkles,  
 trimmers, transgressors, we arrive  
 from the hotels' stagnation, our industrial doldrums,  
 with our last laundered shirt on our backs  
 and our ties lost somewhere in the shuffle:  
 we come just as we are, rattled and long-faced,  
 circumspect sons of bitches from the very best neighborhoods,  
     or simply  
 serene in the thought that we owe nobody anything—  
 all just alike, or alike in our solitude,  
 facing our lifetimes—poor devils  
 earning a living or dying, sweating it out  
 in the usual manner, bureautragically normal,  
 stacked up on platforms or seated in subways,  
 on shipboard, in reading rooms, prison cells, mines,  
 universities, breweries—  
 (under our clothing, the same thirsty skin)  
 (the same hair, the identical hair in an assortment of colors).



Quando proliferaron los colosos  
y erguidos caminaron  
hasta poblar la isla de narices de piedra  
y, activos, destinaron descendencia: hijos  
del viento y de la lava, nietos  
del aire y la ceniza, recorrieron  
con grandes pies la isla:  
nunca trabajó tanto  
la brisa con sus manos,  
el ciclón con su crimen,  
la persistencia de la Oceanía.

Grandes cabezas puras,  
altas de cuello, graves de mirada,  
gigantescas mandíbulas erguidas  
en el orgullo de su soledad,  
presencias,  
presencias arrogantes,  
preocupadas.

Oh graves dignidades solitarias  
quién se atrevió, se atreve  
a preguntar, a interrogar  
a las estatuas interrogadoras?

Son la interrogación diseminada  
que sobrepasa la angostura exacta,  
la pequeña cintura de la isla,  
y se dirige al grande mar, al fondo  
del hombre y de su ausencia.

Algunos cuerpos no alcanzaron a erguirse:  
sus brazos se quedaron sin forma aún, sellados

## VII: THE ISLAND

When the colossuses multiplied,  
walked upright into their own,  
peopled the isle with stone noses  
and lived to beget their descendants: children  
of lava and wind, grandsons  
of ashes and air, great footsteps  
were heard in the island:  
the hands of the wind,  
the criminal cyclone,  
Oceania's persistency  
never worked with such fury.

The tremendous, pure heads,  
long in the neck and lugubrious,  
with jawbones of giants, erect  
in the pride of their solitude—  
those presences,  
preoccupied,  
arrogant presences.

O lone, pensive dignitaries—  
who would ever presume, who would dare to come close  
with their questions, or challenge  
those questioning images?

They are the spawn of those askers  
who exceeded the narrow constraints  
of the island, moved out, from its minimal waist,  
toward the whole of an ocean—to the  
human beginnings of things, and their absences.

Some of the bodies will never assume their full stature,  
their arms shapelessly locked

en el cráter, durmientes,  
acostados aún en la rosa calcárea,  
sin levantar los ojos hacia el mar  
y las grandes criaturas de sueño horizontal  
son las larvas de piedra del misterio:  
aquí las dejó el viento cuando huyó de la tierra:  
cuando dejó de procrear hijos de lava.

into craters, asleep:  
bedded down in calcareous rose,  
never lifting their eyes to the sea,  
sleeping the leviathan's horizontal sleep,  
stone larvae of mystery,  
they lie now as when flung by the wind when it fled from that  
country  
and the breed of the children of lava was over.

Los rostros derrotados en el centro,  
quebrados y caídos, con sus grandes narices  
hundidas en la costra calcárea de la isla,  
los gigantes indican a quién? a nadie?  
un camino, un extraño camino de gigantes:  
allí quedaron rotos cuando avanzaron, cayeron,  
y allí quedó su peso prodigioso caído,  
besando la ceniza sagrada, regresando  
al magma natalicio, malheridos, cubiertos  
por la luz oceánica, la corta lluvia, el polvo  
volcánico, y más tarde  
por esta soledad del ombligo del mundo:  
la soledad redonda de todo el mar reunido.

Parece extraño ver vivir aquí, dentro  
del círculo, contemplar las langostas  
róseas, hostiles caer a los cajones  
desde las manos de los pescadores,  
y éstos, hundir los cuerpos otra vez en el agua  
agrediendo las cuevas de su mercadería,  
ver las viejas zurcir pantalones gastados  
por la pobreza, ver entre follajes

la flor de una doncella sonriendo a sí misma,  
al sol, al mediodía tintineante,  
a la iglesia del padre Englert, allí enterrado,  
sí, sonriendo, llena de esta dicha remota  
como un pequeño cántaro que canta.

## VIII: THE ISLAND

The faces there at the center, ruinous,  
prostrate, piecemeal, their great noses  
sunk in an island's calcareous crust—  
whom were these giants expecting? Were they pointing to  
nobody?

to a road, a mysterious causeway for giants?  
They were broken apart as they walked, they were toppled,  
and the great burden remained, prodigiously fallen,  
kissing the ash of the sacrifice, returning  
to seminal magma, wounded or bathed  
in the light of the ocean and the tropical squalls,  
the dust of volcanoes—and at last,  
to creation's umbilical solitude,  
the round solitude of the seas gathered into one place.

How strange to see what survives  
in the circle: the roseate  
lobster that falls savagely into its locker  
from the fisherman's hands, the fisher  
vanishing under the water to strike  
through the caves for his merchandise—strange  
to watch matriarchs mending some rags of  
impoverished pants, and see in the thick of the leaves,

that virgin who smiles to herself, like a flower smiling  
into the sun—smiles to the chiming of midday,  
to Father Englert's own little grave-plot and parish—  
smiling brimful of mysterious happiness,  
as a pitcher fills its slight measure and brims over and sings.

## IX: LOS HOMBRES

A nosotros nos enseñaron a respetar la iglesia,  
a no toser, a no escupir en el atrio,  
a no lavar la ropa en el altar  
y no es así: la vida rompe las religiones  
y es esta isla en que habitó el Dios Viento  
la única iglesia viva y verdadera:  
van y vienen las vidas, muriendo y fornicando:  
aquí en la Isla de Pascua donde todo es altar,  
donde todo es taller de lo desconocido,  
la mujer amamanta su nueva criatura  
sobre las mismas gradas que pisaron sus dioses.

Aquí, a vivir! Pero también nosotros?  
Nosotros, los transeúntes, los equivocados de estrella,  
naufregaríamos en la isla como en una laguna,  
en un lago en que todas las distancias concluyen,  
en la aventura inmóvil más difícil del hombre.

We were taught the very same things: respect for the 'church,  
no hawking and spitting on porticos,  
don't soak your socks on the altar—  
but here things are different—life smashes religions  
and only the God of the Winds inhabits this island.  
His is the only true church, the rock of all ages,  
and around it, fornications and deaths come and go.  
On Easter Island, the altar is everywhere,  
all is a smithy for the unknown,  
and mothers suckle their newly born  
on the very same stairways reserved for the feet of the gods.

So prepare to start living! But what of the rest of us?  
We transients, we starry-eyed blunderers,  
we shipwreck on an island like a little lagoon,  
a lake where space comes to an end and we touch the most  
implacable venture that is hardest of all to endure?



Austeros perfiles de cráter labrado, narices  
en el triángulo, rostros de dura miel,  
silenciosas campanas cuyo sonido  
se fue hacia el mar para no regresar, mandíbulas,  
miradas  
de sol inmóvil, reino  
de la gran soledad, vestigios  
verticales:  
yo soy el nuevo, el oscuro,  
soy de nuevo el radiante:

he venido tal vez a relucir,  
quiero el espacio ígneo  
sin pasado, el destello,  
la oceanía, la piedra y el viento  
para tocar y ver, para construir de nuevo,  
para solicitar de rodillas la castidad del sol,  
para cavar con mis pobres manos sangrientas  
el destino.

## XII: THE ISLAND

Those profiles, austere in the mine of the craters,  
triangular noses, hard, honeyed faces,  
stopped bells whose ringing  
sped seaward and never returned, those jawbones and gazes  
under a motionless sun, enormous solitude's  
kingdom, vertical  
vestiges—

I am a latecomer here, the shadowy one  
once more restored to the light

to rekindle a radiance, perhaps:

I want fiery spaces

untouched by the past, Oceania's  
boulders and wind, sparks, scintillations—

I must see all for myself, touch all with my hands, make over  
the chastity of the sun, kneel down, and  
gouge with my poor bloody fists my own destiny.

Oh torre de la luz, triste hermosura  
que dilató en el mar estatuas y collares,  
ojo calcáreo, insignia del agua extensa, grito  
de petrel enlutado, diente del mar, esposa  
del viento de oceanía, oh rosa separada  
del tronco del rosal despedazado  
que la profundidad convirtió en archipiélago,  
oh estrella natural, diadema verde,  
sola en tu solitaria dinastía,  
inalcanzable aún, evasiva, desierta  
como una gota, como una uva, como el mar.

## XVII: THE ISLAND

You pillars of light mournful and beautiful,  
sowing the ocean with statues and necklaces,  
calcareous eye, eidolon of opening water, cry  
of petrel's bereavement, sea tooth, Oceanic  
bride of the wind—O separate rose cut  
from the rose tree, stripped petal by petal  
till a sea change was wrought and all was  
archipelago, green diadem, natural star,  
alone in your dynasty's solitude  
inapprehensible to the last, elusive, abandoned,  
like a waterdrop falling, like a grape, like a sea.

## XVIII: LOS HOMBRES

Como algo que sale del agua, algo desnudo, invicto,  
párpado de platino, crepitación de sal,  
alga, pez tembloroso, espada viva,  
yo, fuera de los otros, me separo  
de la isla separada, me voy  
envuelto en luz  
y si bien pertenezco a los rebaños,  
a los que entran y salen en manadas,  
al turismo igualitario, a la prole,  
confieso mi tenaz adherencia al terreno  
solicitado por la aurora de Oceanía.

## XVIII: THE MEN

Like something washed up by the sea, something naked,  
    invincible,  
with platinum eyelids, crackling with salt,  
seaweed, a rapier drawn, a thrashing of fish,  
apart from the others, alien  
on an alien island, I move  
in a dazzle:  
yet if my lot is to stand with the multitude,  
those who follow the herd in their comings and goings,  
the egalitarian tourist, the swarm of the coven,  
I claim my unchangeable bond with that other  
beneficence: Oceania's daybreak domain.

## XIX: LOS HOMBRES

Volvemos apresurados a esperar nombramientos,  
exasperantes publicaciones, discusiones amargas,  
fermentos, guerras, enfermedades, música  
que nos ataca y nos golpea sin tregua,  
entramos a nuestros batallones de nuevo,  
aunque todos se unían para declararnos muertos:  
aquí estamos otra vez con nuestra falsa sonrisa,  
dijimos, exasperados ante el posible olvido,  
mientras allá en la isla sin palmeras,  
allá donde se recortan las narices de piedra  
como triángulos trazados a pleno cielo y sal,  
allí, en el minúsculo ombligo de los mares,  
dejamos olvidada la última pureza,  
el espacio, el asombro de aquellas compañías  
que levantan su piedra desnuda, su verdad,  
sin que nadie se atreva a amarlas, a convivir con ellas,  
y ésa es mi cobardía, aquí doy testimonio:  
no me sentí capaz sino de transitorios  
edificios, y en esta capital sin paredes  
hecha de luz, de sal, de piedra y pensamiento,  
como todos miré y abandoné asustado  
la limpia claridad de la mitología,  
las estatuas rodeadas por el silencio azul.

We hurry back to resume our awaited commissions:  
the press's annoyances, our bitter disputes, and our  
wars, ferments, infirmities, a battering music  
that strikes at us without letup: we are  
back in the ranks on the barricades:  
though everyone takes us for dead, here we are  
as before, with our counterfeit smiles, flinching,  
we say, at the thought of our looming oblivion,  
there on a palmless plot in the sea  
where noses are chiseled in stone  
like triangles traced in the sunshine and brine—  
on a minuscule navel of ocean,  
denying the spaces, closing our eyes to the ultimate purity,  
the tribes who raised the nude stone and  
the verities none dares to claim as a loving participant.  
That is my cowardice now, the witness I bear:  
I was meant for more tentative edifices.  
Here in a waste without walls, a capital  
hacked out of sunlight and salt, contemplation and stone,  
I look back with the others, a trespasser,  
afraid in myth's limpid perfection, seeing only  
blue silence encircling the statues.



De otros lugares (Ceylán, Orinoco, Valdivia)  
salí con lianas, con esponjas, con hilos  
de la fecundidad, con las enredaderas  
y las negras raíces de la humedad terrestre:  
de ti, rosa del mar, piedra absoluta,  
salgo limpio, vertiendo la claridad del viento:  
revivo azul, metálico, evidente.

## XX: THE ISLAND

From everywhere else (Ceylon, Orinoco, Valdivia)  
I came bearing sponges, lianas, a cornucopia's  
threads or a tangle of vines,  
black roots of terrestrial damp—  
but from you, sea-rose, absolute stone,  
I come without spot, overturning the wind,  
and revive in your clarity, azure, metallic, and manifest.



***Jardín de invierno* / Winter Garden  
(1974)**

## EL EGOÍSTA

No falta nadie en el jardín. No hay nadie:  
sólo el invierno verde y negro, el día  
desvelado como una aparición,  
fantasma blanco, fría vestidura,  
por las escalas de un castillo. Es hora  
de que no llegue nadie, apenas caen  
las gotas que cuajaban el rocío  
en las ramas desnudas del invierno  
y yo y tú en esta zona solitaria,  
invencibles y solos, esperando  
que nadie llegue, no, que nadie venga  
con sonrisa o medalla o presupuesto  
a proponernos nada.

Esta es la hora  
de las hojas caídas, trituradas  
sobre la tierra, cuando  
de ser y de no ser vuelven al fondo  
despojándose de oro y de verdura  
hasta que son raíces otra vez  
y otra vez, demoliéndose y naciendo,  
suben a conocer la primavera.

Oh corazón perdido  
en mí mismo, en mi propia investidura,  
qué generosa transición te puebla!  
Yo no soy el culpable  
de haber huido ni de haber acudido:  
no me pudo gastar la desventura!  
La propia dicha puede ser amarga  
a fuerza de besarla cada día  
y no hay camino para liberarse  
del sol sino la muerte.

## EGOTIST

No one is missed in the garden. Nobody's there:  
only the green and black winter, day  
keeping a ghost's vigil,  
white phantasm, the investiture of the cold  
on the steps of a castle. It is the hour  
for the coming of nobody, winter dew freezes  
the bough without falling.  
You and I in our zone  
of invincible solitude, waiting for no one,  
anticipate no arrivals: no one at all  
with a smile or a medal or a reckoning,  
to offer us anything.

The leaf falls, ground  
fine underfoot:  
it is time—now  
being and non-being divest themselves of the gold and the  
green  
of their source, undo themselves  
and turn into roots again,  
making, unmaking, rearing  
to acknowledge the spring.

O heart lost  
to itself, dressed up in my clothing,  
what lavish transitions replenish you!  
I never enticed or abandoned you:  
no misfortune can wither me!  
Even joy turns to bitterness  
in our daily embrace  
and we free ourselves from the sun  
only by dying.

Qué puedo hacer si me escogió la estrella  
para relampaguear, y si la espina  
me condujo al dolor de algunos muchos.  
Qué puedo hacer si cada movimiento  
de mi mano me acercó a la rosa?  
Debo pedir perdón por este invierno,  
el más lejano, el más inalcanzable  
para aquel hombre que buscaba el frío  
sin que sufriera nadie por su dicha?

Y si entre estos caminos:

—Francia distante, números de niebla—  
vuelvo al recinto de mi propia vida:  
un jardín solo, una comuna pobre,  
y de pronto este día igual a todos  
baja por las escalas que no existen  
vestido de pureza irresistible,  
y hay un olor de soledad aguda,  
de humedad, de agua, de nacer de nuevo:  
qué puedo hacer si respiro sin nadie,  
por qué voy a sentirme malherido?

What can I do if a star singled me out  
for its sparkle, or a nettle  
brought me to grief in its many disguises?  
What can I do if each gesture  
brought my hand nearer and nearer the rose?  
Should I apologize for this winter—  
the farthest removed, the most inaccessible  
of all for a man who sought to move into the cold  
with no one the worse for his choices?

So if between two paths—  
faraway France, the repetitions of snow—  
I come back to the hidden preserve of my personal life:  
a garden apart from the others, a poor commune,  
and this day, like the others, is  
suddenly there on a stairway which never existed  
irresistibly clad in its purity, descending  
in an odor of uttermost solitude,  
reborn in a humid aroma of water—what  
can I do if, with each breath I draw in that loneliness,  
I feel myself mortally wounded?



Un pájaro elegante,  
patas delgadas, cola interminable,  
viene  
cerca de mí, a saber qué animal soy.

Sucede en Primavera,  
en Condé-sur-Iton, en Normandía.

Tiene una estrella o gota  
de cuarzo, harina o nieve  
en la frente minúscula  
y dos rayas azules lo recorren  
desde el cuello a la cola,  
dos líneas estelares de turquesa.

Da minúsculos saltos  
mirándome rodeado  
de pasto verde y cielo  
y son dos signos interrogativos  
estos nerviosos ojos acechantes  
como dos alfileres,  
dos puntas negras, rayos diminutos  
que me atraviesan para preguntarme  
si vuelo y hacia dónde.  
Intrépido, vestido  
como una flor por sus ardientes plumas,  
directo, decidido  
frente a la hostilidad de mi estatura,  
de pronto encuentra un grano o un gusano  
y a saltos de delgados pies de alambre  
abandona el enigma  
de este gigante que se queda solo,  
sin su pequeña vida pasajera.

An elegant bird—  
 delicate claws,  
 interminable tail—  
 edges closer  
 to see what manner of animal I am.

(This happens in Condé-sur-Iton, in Normandy,  
 in Spring.)

A star or a droplet of  
 quartz, snow, farina,  
 dots the minuscule forehead—  
 two blue bars traversing the whole  
 from the neck to the tail feathers,  
 two starry strokes of a turquoise.

He hops minuscule hops,  
 looking up to my patch  
 of green pasture and sky, gives  
 two interrogative signals,  
 eyes nervily fixed  
 like two prying hatpins,  
 two black suspension points, diminutive glintings,  
 that stab through to question me:  
 Are you ready to fly? Where to?  
 Unflappable, dressed  
 like a flower in the fire of his feathers,  
 plainspoken, decisive,  
 confronting the threat of superior inches and feet—  
 till a crumb or a worm catches his eye  
 when he suddenly bounces about on the delicate wires of his feet  
 and abandons the enigma  
 of the giant left to fend for himself  
 with no help from his creaturely bypasser.

Mi perro ha muerto.

Lo enterré en el jardín  
junto a una vieja máquina oxidada.

Allí, no más abajo,  
ni más arriba,  
se juntará conmigo alguna vez.  
Ahora él ya se fue con su pelaje,  
su mala educación, su nariz fría.  
Y yo, materialista que no cree  
en el celeste cielo prometido  
para ningún humano,  
para este perro o para todo perro  
creo en el cielo, sí, creo en un cielo  
donde yo no entraré, pero él me espera  
ondulando su cola de abanico  
para que yo al llegar tenga amistades.

Ay no diré la tristeza en la tierra  
de no tenerlo más por compañero  
que para mí jamás fue un servidor.  
Tuvo hacia mí la amistad de un erizo  
que conservaba su soberanía,  
la amistad de una estrella independiente  
sin más intimidad que la precisa,  
sin exageraciones:  
no se trepaba sobre mi vestuario  
llenándome de pelos o de sarna,  
no se frotaba contra mi rodilla  
como otros perros obsesos sexuales.  
No, mi perro me miraba  
dándome la atención que necesito,

## DEAD DOG

My dog's dead.

I buried him in the garden near the wreck  
of some rusting machinery.

There, neither aboveground  
nor underneath, in due course  
he'll come to my whistle.  
For the present he has taken his fine mop of hair,  
his bad education, his cold nose, somewhere else.  
And I, a materialist, with no faith  
in the sky's apocalyptic promises  
to departed humanity—  
for this dog and the rest of all dogdom I  
believe in heaven: yes, I believe in a heaven  
I will never enter myself—but there he'll be waiting,  
thumping his tail like a fan  
to confirm our old friendship, in the event that I do.

Well—let's not talk of grief here upon earth,  
where I no longer can have a companion  
who was never my flunky.

What we had was a porcupine's friendship  
that kept its own distance,  
the fellowship of a star independently fixed,  
with only a functional intimacy  
that spurned all excesses.

He never pawed over my wardrobe  
or plagued me with dog hairs and mange,  
never rubbed his behind on my knees  
with a dog's sexual obsessions.

No, my dog faced me fairly  
with precisely the attention I needed—

la atención necesaria  
para hacer comprender a un vanidoso  
que siendo perro él,  
con esos ojos, más puros que los míos,  
perdía el tiempo, pero me miraba  
con la mirada que me reservó  
toda su dulce, su peluda vida,  
su silenciosa vida,  
cerca de mí, sin molestarte nunca,  
y sin pedirme nada.

Ay cuántas veces quise tener cola  
andando junto a él por las orillas  
del mar, en el Invierno de Isla Negra,  
en la gran soledad: arriba el aire  
traspasado de pájaros glaciales  
y mi perro brincando, hirsuto, lleno  
de voltaje marino en movimiento:  
mi perro vagabundo y olfatorio  
enarbolando su cola dorada  
frente a frente al Océano y su espuma.

Alegre, alegre, alegre  
como los perros saben ser felices,  
sin nada más, con el absolutismo  
de la naturaleza descarada.

No hay adiós a mi perro que se ha muerto.  
Y no hay ni hubo mentira entre nosotros.

Ya se fue y lo enterré, y eso era todo.

the solicitude due  
a vainglorious man to make clear  
that, being a dog,  
he was wasting his time  
bestowing a gaze that was purer than mine—but nevertheless  
he continued to gaze with a look  
that reserved all its sweetness for me: all that  
hairy existence, that taciturn life  
always close, with no petty annoyances,  
no expectation of benefit.

How I loved to trail after, to  
meander the Black Island beaches  
alongside him in winter's great solitude.  
Overhead, a sky crisscrossed  
by glacial birds, up in front, my dog  
dashing off as he pleased, hirsute, full of  
watery voltage in motion:  
my vagabond, olfactory dog  
spreading his tail like a pennant, aglow  
with the gilded encounter of Ocean and spume.

Happiness, happiness, happiness—  
the dog's doggy felicity  
never more nor less than itself, with the absolute  
fullness of impudent nature.

No goodbyes for a dead dog.  
And no lies. We never lied to each other.

He's gone and I buried him. There's an end of it.

## REGRESOS

Dos regresos se unieron a mi vida  
y al mar de cada día:  
de una vez afronté la luz, la tierra,  
cierta paz provisoria. Una cebolla  
era la luna, globo  
nutricio de la noche, el sol naranja  
sumergido en el mar:  
una llegada  
que soporté, que reprimí hasta ahora,  
que yo determiné, y aquí me quedo:  
ahora la verdad es el regreso.  
Lo sentí como quebrantadura,  
como una nuez de vidrio  
que se rompe en la roca  
y por allí, en un trueno, entró la luz,  
la luz del litoral, del mar perdido,  
del mar ganado ahora y para siempre.

Yo soy el hombre de tantos regresos  
que forman un racimo traicionado,  
de nuevo, adiós, por un temible viaje  
en que voy sin llegar a parte alguna:  
mi única travesía es un regreso.

Y esta vez entre las incitaciones  
temí tocar la arena, el resplandor  
de este mar malherido y derramado,  
pero dispuesto ya a mis injusticias  
la decisión cayó con el sonido  
de un fruto de cristal que se destroza  
y en el golpe sonoro vi la vida,  
la tierra envuelta en sombras y destellos  
y la copa del mar bajo mis labios.

## H O M E C O M I N G S

Two homecomings link my life  
to the dailiness of the sea:  
once I challenged the light and the land  
to gain a provisional peace. The moon  
was an onion, a replenishing  
globe in the night, the sun, an orange  
sinking into the sea—  
an arrival  
I sought and withheld until now,  
a choice that I made for myself: and I stayed where I was.  
Now homecoming is all:  
it falls like a blow,  
as though the nut of a crystal  
had shattered to bits on a rock,  
and there, in a thunderclap, light found its way in—  
the light of the littoral, of a lost sea  
regained, now and for all time to come.

I am that homecoming man—so many  
they cling in a cluster, betrayals,  
goodbyes, in a hazardous journey  
from which there is no arrival:  
returns are my only itinerary.

Even so, with my itch to be off, I dreaded  
to touch sand again, dreaded the splendor  
that wounds and dishevels the sea.  
Though I bowed to injustices, my resolve  
struck back like a crash of  
cut crystal, a glass fruit in splinters,  
and I saw, in the shattering sound, all my life,  
earth shrouded in shadows and a shower of sparks,  
with the cup of the sea just under my lips.



## LA ESTRELLA

Bueno, ya no volví, ya no padezco  
de no volver, se decidió la arena  
y como parte de ola y de pasaje,  
sílaba de la sal, piojo del agua,  
yo, soberano, esclavo de la costa,  
me sometí, me encadené a mi roca.  
No hay albedrío para los que somos  
fragmento del asombro,  
no hay salida para este volver  
a uno mismo, a la piedra de uno mismo,  
ya no hay más estrella que el mar.

S T A R

Good enough: so I never returned. I no longer grieve  
for a vanished return. All things are resolved by the sand—  
and as part of the landscape and waves,  
salt syllable or sea louse,  
I, sovereign and slave to these shores,  
surrender myself, shackle myself to my rock.  
No free will for those of us who exist  
as a piece of appearance,  
no going for those who return  
to themselves, to the rock of their singular being:  
and the only perduring star is the sea.



***El corazón amarillo* / The Yellow Heart  
(1974)**

## O T R O

De tanto andar una región  
que no figuraba en los libros  
me acostumbré a las tierras tercas  
en que nadie me preguntaba  
si me gustaban las lechugas  
o si prefería la menta  
que devoran los elefantes.  
Y de tanto no responder  
tengo el corazón amarillo.

## A N O T H E R

After ranging at large in a region  
unrecorded in books  
I got used to that harsher terrain  
where nobody wanted to know  
if I preferred lettuces  
to the mint of  
the elephant's fodder.  
And by giving no answers  
I have kept my heart yellow.

Tanto se habló de los difuntos  
en la familia de Ostrogodo  
que pasó una cosa curiosa,  
digna de ser establecida.

Hablaban tanto de los muertos  
cerca del fuego todo el día,  
del primo Carlos, de Felipe,  
de Carlota, monja difunta,  
de Candelario sepultado,  
en fin, no terminaban nunca  
de recordar lo que no vivía.

Entonces en aquella casa  
de oscuros patios y naranjos,  
en el salón de piano negro,  
en los pasillos sepulcrales,  
se instalaron muchos difuntos  
que se sintieron en su casa.

Lentamente, como ahogados  
en los jardines cenicientos  
pululaban como murciélagos,  
se plegaban como paraguas  
para dormir o meditar  
y dejaban en los sillones  
un olor acre de tumba,  
un aura que invadió la casa,  
un abanico insoportable  
de seda color de naufragio.

La familia Ostrogodo apenas  
si se atrevía a respirar:

## AN UNTENABLE SITUATION

There was so much talk of the dead  
in the Ostrogodo family  
that a bizarre thing took place  
that needs some explaining.

Day in and day out, the fireside  
talk about corpses was incessant:  
Cousin Carlos, Felipe,  
Carlotta (the dead nun),  
the interment of Candelario  
—in short, the roll call  
of the lately departed was endless.

Then in that house  
of dark courtyards and orange trees  
the dead took possession in force—  
moved into the sitting room with its blackened  
piano, into the sepulchral corridors—  
and made themselves comfortable everywhere.

Bit by bit they overwhelmed everything:  
in the cindery gardens  
they migrated like bats,  
they collected like umbrellas,  
they snoozed and grew pensive  
in the armchairs, they emitted  
the bitter aroma of graves,  
an aura that invaded the whole house—  
an insufferable silk fan  
with the tint of a shipwreck.

The Ostrogodo family hardly  
dared breathe in that house



era tan puro su respeto  
a los aspectos de la muerte.

Y si aminorados sufrían  
nadie les escuchó un susurro.

(Porque hablando de economía  
aquella invasión silenciosa  
no les gastaba los bolsillos:  
los muertos no comen ni fuman,  
sin duda esto es satisfactorio:  
pero en verdad ocupaban  
más y más sitios en la casa.)

Colgaban de los cortinajes,  
se sentaban en los floreros,  
se disputaban el sillón  
de don Filiberto Ostrogodo,  
y ocupaban por largo tiempo  
el baño, puliendo tal vez  
los dientes de sus calaveras:  
lo cierto es que aquella familia  
fue retirándose del fuego,  
del comedor, del dormitorio.

Y conservando su decoro  
se fueron todos al jardín  
sin protestar de los difuntos,  
mostrando una triste alegría.

Bajo la sombra de un naranjo  
comían como refugiados  
de la frontera peligrosa  
de una batalla perdida.  
Pero hasta allí llegaron ellos  
a colgarse de los ramajes,

so complete was their awe  
of the protocol of the dead.

Yet they bore it all so unobtrusively  
not so much as a sigh could be heard.

(And, after all, economically speaking,  
the silent invasion  
never dented their pocketbooks:  
the defunct do not dine or smoke after meals  
—which is certainly gratifying—  
but, truth is, they occupied  
more and more of the space in that house.)

They clustered on draperies,  
sat down on the flowerpots,  
fought for the easy chair  
of Don Filiberto Ostrogodo,  
spent a great deal of time  
in the bathroom—perhaps brushing  
the teeth of their skulls:  
so eventually the rest of the family  
began moving away from the fireplace,  
the bedrooms, the dining room.

Till, with the utmost decorum,  
all were pushed into the garden  
without ever protesting their lot to the dead,  
and preserving a bittersweet posture.

In the orange trees' shade  
they kept eating like refugees  
from the dangerous front  
of a forfeited battle.  
But even here all the serious dead  
circumspectly converged in the foliage

serios difuntos circunspectos  
que se creían superiores  
y no se dignaban hablar  
con los benignos Ostrogodos.

Hasta que de tanto morir  
ellos se unieron a los otros  
enmudeciendo y falleciendo  
en aquella casa mortal  
que se quedó sin nadie un día,  
sin puertas, sin casa, sin luz,  
sin naranjos y sin difuntos.

and assumed a superior air,  
never deigning a conversational  
word with the compassionate Ostrogodos.

Then came a day when the lot of them  
died on their own, joined all the others,  
retreated into themselves, wasted away  
in the house of mortality—  
and the whole house was unpeopled:  
no more house, no more doors, no more light,  
no more orange trees; and no more corpses.

Yo volví del fondo del mar  
odiando las cosas mojadas:  
me sacudí como los perros  
de las olas que me querían  
y de repente me sentí  
contento de mi desembarco  
y únicamente terrestre.

Los periodistas dirigieron  
su maquinaria extravagante  
contra mis ojos y mi ombligo  
para que les contara cosas  
como si yo me hubiera muerto,  
como si yo fuera un vulgar  
cadáver especializado,  
sin tomar en cuenta mi ser  
que me exigía caminar  
antes de que yo regresara  
a mis costumbres espantosas:  
estuve a punto de volver  
a sumergirme en la marea.

Porque mi historia se duplica  
cuando en mi infancia descubrí  
mi depravado corazón  
que me hizo caer en el mar  
y acostumbrarme a submarino.

Allí estudié para pintor,  
allí tuve casa y pescado,  
bajo las olas me casé,  
no me acuerdo ni cuáles fueron  
mis novias de profundidad

## A N O T H E R O N E

I came back from the depths of the sea  
hating wet things:  
I shook out the waves  
that fondled me like a dog  
and suddenly I was happy  
enough with my disembarcation—  
of the earth earthy, again!

The journalists aimed  
their preposterous machinery right  
at my eyes and my bellybutton  
and wanted to know everything,  
as if I were already posthumous—  
a specialized  
vulgar cadaver—  
and took no account of the part of me  
that needed to walk through the world  
before I resumed  
my horrendous proclivities:  
I was just getting ready to  
submerge myself in the ocean again.

History repeats itself, including my own:  
as a mere child I discovered  
my depraved inclinations  
that led me to dunk in the sea  
and accustomed me to the submarine life.

There I worked at my painting,  
had a house and ate fish dinners,  
got married under the waves  
though I don't recall who  
my underseas girlfriends were.

y lo cierto es que todo aquello  
era unã incólume rutina:  
yo me aburría con los peces  
sin incidencias ni batallas  
y ellos pensaron que tal vez  
yo era un monótono cetáceo.

Cuando por imaginación  
pisé la arena de Isla Negra  
y viví como todo el mundo,  
me tocan tanto la campana  
y preguntan cosas idiotas  
sobre los aspectos remotos  
de una vida tan ordinaria  
no sé qué hacer para espantar  
a estos extraños preguntones.

Le pido a un sabio que me diga  
dónde puedo vivir tranquilo.

But this much is certain: all  
dwindled into an insipid routine:  
I got bored with the fishes—  
no battles, no episodes—  
and perhaps the fishes, in turn,  
found me a monotonous crustacean.

When I beachcombed in Isla Negra  
—in my imagination—  
I lived just like everyone else:  
people kept ringing my doorbell  
to ask idiotic questions  
about the unlikely details  
of a life so pedestrian  
I no longer know what to do to shoo  
off the improbable questioners.

Is there a sage around who can tell me  
where a man can live quietly here?





***Libro de preguntas* / Question Book  
(1974)**

I I

Si he muerto y no me he dado cuenta  
a quién le pregunto la hora?

De dónde saca tantas hojas  
la primavera de Francia?

Dónde puede vivir un ciego  
a quién persiguen las abejas?

Si se termina el amarillo  
con qué vamos a hacer el pan?

I I I

Dime, la rosa está desnuda  
o sólo tiene ese vestido?

Por qué los árboles esconden  
el esplendor de sus raíces?

Quién oye los remordimientos  
del automóvil criminal?

Hay algo más triste en el mundo  
que un tren inmóvil en la lluvia?

11

If I'm dead and don't know it  
who'll give me the time of day?

Where does the French spring  
get all those leaves?

Plagued by the bees,  
where can the blind live?

If all the yellow is used up,  
with what shall we make bread?

111

Tell me, is the rose really naked  
or does it just dress that way?

Why do the trees hide  
the splendor of their roots?

Who hears the penance  
of the criminal automobile?

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

v

Qué guardas bajo tu joroba?  
dijo un camello a una tortuga.

Y la tortuga preguntó:  
Qué conversas con las naranjas?

Tiene más hojas un peral  
que Buscando el Tiempo Perdido?

Por qué se suicidan las hojas  
cuando se sienten amarillas?

v i i

Es paz la paz de la paloma?  
El leopardo hace la guerra?

Por qué enseña el profesor  
la geografía de la muerte?

Qué pasa con las golondrinas  
que llegan tarde al colegio?

Es verdad que reparten cartas  
transparentes, por todo el cielo?

What are you hiding under your hump?  
said the camel to the tortoise.

And the tortoise asked:  
What are you gossiping about with the oranges?

Has the pear tree more leaves  
than *Remembrance of Things Past*?

Why do the leaves kill themselves  
as soon as they feel yellow?

## v i i

Is all peace a dove's peace?  
Does the leopard wage wars?

Why does the professor teach  
the geography of the dead?

What happens to the swallows  
when they're tardy for school?

Is it true they spread maps  
you can see through all over the sky?

x

Qué pensarán de mi sombrero  
en cien años más, los polacos?

Qué dirán de mi poesía  
los que no tocaron mi sangre?

Cómo se mide la espuma  
que resbala de la cerveza?

Qué hace una mosca encarcelada  
en un soneto de Petrarca?

x i i

Y a quién le sonrío el arroz  
con infinitos dientes blancos?

Por qué en las épocas oscuras  
se escribe con tinta invisible?

Sabe la bella de Caracas  
cuántas faldas tiene la rosa?

Por qué me pican las pulgas  
y los sargentos literarios?

X

What will the Poles think of my hat  
a hundred years hence?

What will those who have never  
dipped a finger in my blood say of my poems?

How to measure the foam  
that slides down my beer mug?

What does the fly do, jailed  
in a sonnet of Petrarch's?

X I I

At whom is the rice grinning  
with its infinite white teeth?

Why in the shadowy past  
did they write with invisible ink?

Can the Belle of Caracas count  
the petticoats of the rose?

Why am I bitten by fleas  
and literary sergeants?



X V I

Trabajan la sal y el azúcar  
construyendo una torre blanca?

Es verdad que en el hormiguero  
los sueños son obligatorios?

Sabes qué meditaciones  
rumia la tierra en el otoño?

(Por qué no dar una medalla  
a la primera hoja de oro?)

X X

Es verdad que el ámbar contiene  
las lágrimas de las sirenas?

Cómo se llama una flor  
que vuela de pájaro en pájaro?

No es mejor nunca que tarde?

Y por qué el queso se dispuso  
a ejercer proezas en Francia?

X V I

Are the salt and the sugar at work  
building a white tower?

Is it true that, in anthills,  
dreams are obligatory?

Do you know the ruminations  
of earth in the autumn?

(Why not give medals  
to the first golden leaf?)

X X

Is it true that amber contains  
the tears of the sirens?

What's the name of the flower  
that flies from bird to bird?

Isn't never better than later?

And why do the cheeses in France  
tend to boast of their prowess?

X X I V

El 4 es 4 para todos?  
Son todos los sietes iguales?

Cuando el preso piensa en la luz  
es la misma que te ilumina?

Has pensado de qué color  
es el Abril de los enfermos?

Qué monarquía occidental  
se embandera con amapolas?

X X V I

Aquel solemne Senador  
que me atribuía un castillo

devoró ya con su sobrino  
la torta del asesinato?

A quién engaña la magnolia  
con su fragancia de limones?

Dónde deja el puñal el águila  
cuando se acuesta en una nube?

**X X I V**

Is 4 always 4 for everybody?  
Are all 7's equal?

When prisoners think of the light  
is it the same that lights up your world?

Have you wondered what color  
April is to the ailing?

What occidental monarchy  
Makes a flag out of poppies?

**X X V I**

That solemn Senator  
who claimed I had castles—

did he gobble the whole murderer's  
pie with his nephew?

Who's the magnolia kidding  
with its lemon's aroma?

Where does the eagle leave its dagger  
when it rests on a cloud?

X X X I

A quién le puedo preguntar  
qué vine a hacer en este mundo?

Por qué me muevo sin querer,  
por qué no puedo estar inmóvil?

Por qué voy rodando sin ruedas,  
volando sin alas ni plumas,

y qué me dio por transmigrar  
si viven en Chile mis huesos?

X X X I I

Hay algo más tonto en la vida  
que llamarse Pablo Neruda?

Hay en el cielo de Colombia  
un coleccionista de nubes?

Por qué siempre se hacen en Londres  
los congresos de los paraguas?

Sangre color de amaranto  
tenía la reina de Saba?

Cuando lloraba Baudelaire  
lloraba con lágrimas negras?

**X X X I**

Whom can I ask  
what I meant to achieve in this world?

Why do I move without wanting to,  
Why can't I stand still?

Why do I roll around without wheels  
and fly without feathers or wings?

And how can I talk transmigration  
if my bones live in Chile?

**X X X I I**

Is there anything crazier in this life  
than being called Pablo Neruda?

In the sky of Colombia  
is there a collector of clouds?

Why do they always convene  
congresses of umbrellas in London?

Did the Queen of Sheba have  
blood the color of amaranth?

When Baudelaire wept  
did he weep down black tears?

X X X I I I

Y por qué el sol es tan mal amigo  
del caminante en el desierto?

Y por qué el sol es tan simpático  
en el jardín del hospital?

Son pájaros o son peces  
en estas redes de la luna?

Fue adonde a mí me perdieron  
que logré por fin encontrarme?

X X X V

No será nuestra vida un túnel  
entre dos vagas claridades?

O no será una claridad  
entre dos triángulos oscuros?

O no será la vida un pez  
preparado para ser pájaro?

La muerte será de no ser  
o de sustancias peligrosas?

X X X I I I

And why is the sun such a poor friend  
to the wilderness wanderer—

and why so appealing  
in a hospital garden?

Are those fishes or birds  
in the nets of the moon?

Was it just where they lost me  
that I managed to find myself, finally?

X X X V

Won't our life be a tunnel  
between two vague clarities?

Or will it be a clarity  
between two shadowy triangles?

Or maybe life is a fish  
about to turn into a bird?

Will death be made out of non-being  
or some other more dangerous substances?



X X X V I I I

No crees que vive la muerte  
dentro del sol de una cereza?

No puede matarte también  
un beso de la primavera?

Crees que el luto te adelanta  
la bandera de tu destino?

Y encuentras en la calavera  
tu estirpe a hueso condenada?

X X X I X

No sientes también el peligro  
en la carcajada del mar?

No ves en la seda sangrienta  
de la amapola una amenaza?

No ves que florece el manzano  
para morir en la manzana?

No lloras rodeado de risa  
con las botellas del olvido?

X X X V I I I

Can't you think death lives  
in the sun of a cherry?

Couldn't the kiss of the spring  
finish you off just as well?

Do you believe grief advances  
the flag of your destiny?

And do you find in a skull  
your whole species condemned to a bone?

X X X I X

Don't you also feel danger  
when the sea bursts into laughter?

Don't you see menace  
in the bloody silk of the poppy?

Don't you see how the apple tree blossoms  
to die in the apple?

Don't you weep surrounded by laughter  
and oblivion's bottles?

X L

A quién el cóndor andrajoso  
da cuenta de su cometido?

Cómo se llama la tristeza  
en una oveja solitaria?

Y qué pasa en el palomar  
si aprenden canto las palomas?

Si las moscas fabrican miel  
ofenderán a las abejas?

X L I

Cuánto dura un rinoceronte  
después de ser enternecido?

Qué cuentan de nuevo las hojas  
de la reciente primavera?

Las hojas viven en invierno  
en secreto, con las raíces?

Qué aprendió el árbol de la tierra  
para conversar con el cielo?

**X L**

To whom does the raggedy condor  
account for his special commission? .

What's the word for the sadness  
in a single ewe lamb?

And what goes on in the dovecote  
when the doves learn to sing?

If flies fabricate honey  
should the bees be offended?

**X L I**

How long would a rhinoceros last  
if it turned tender-minded?

What do all the leaves recount  
of the oncoming spring?

Do leaves secretly live  
in the roots in the winter?

What did the tree learn of the earth  
to confide to the sky?

X L I V

Dónde está el niño que yo fui,  
sigue adentro de mí o se fue?

Sabe que no lo quise nunca  
y que tampoco me quería?

Por qué anduvimos tanto tiempo  
creciendo para separarnos?

Por qué no morimos los dos  
cuando mi infancia se murió?

Y si el alma se me cayó  
por qué me sigue el esqueleto?

X L V I I

Oyes en medio del otoño  
detonaciones amarillas?

Por qué razón o sinrazón  
llora la lluvia su alegría?

Qué pájaros dictan el orden  
de la bandada cuando vuela?

De qué suspende el picaflor  
su simetría deslumbrante?

**X L I V**

Where is the child that I was—  
inside of me still—or gone?

Does he know I never loved him  
or he, me?

Why did we spend so much time  
growing up, only to grow apart?

Why didn't both of us die  
when my infancy died?

And if spirit has fallen away from me  
why does a skeleton follow me?

**X L V I I**

Do you hear yellow detonations  
in mid-autumn?

Why does the rain weep with joy,  
with or without cause?

What birds determine the order  
of the flock when it flies?

From what does the hummingbird dangle  
its glittering symmetry?

L

Quién puede convencer al mar  
para que sea razonable?

De qué le sirve demoler  
ámbar azul, granito verde?

Y para qué tantas arrugas  
y tanto agujero en la roca?

Yo llegué de detrás del mar  
y dónde voy cuando me ataja?

L X I I

Qué significa persistir  
en el callejón de la muerte?

En el desierto de la sal  
cómo se puede florecer?

En el mar del no pasa nada  
hay vestido para morir?

Cuando ya se fueron los huesos  
quién vive en el polvo final?

L

Who can persuade the sea  
to be reasonable?

What good does it do to demolish  
blue amber, green granite?

Why all those wrinkles  
and holes in the rocks?

I come from the other side of the sea—  
where shall I flee when it attacks?

L X I I

What can it mean to endure  
in death's alley?

How can the salt desert  
put forth a petal?

In the sea of Nothing Doing  
does one dress up for death?

When the bones go,  
who survives in the last dust?



L X V I I

Puedes amarme, silabaria,  
y darme un beso sustantivo?

Un diccionario es un sepulcro  
o es un panal de miel cerrado?

En qué ventana me quedé  
mirando el tiempo sepultado?

O lo que miro desde lejos  
es lo que no he vivido aún?

L X V I I I

Cuándo lee la mariposa  
lo que vuela escrito en sus alas?

Qué letras conoce la abeja  
para saber su itinerario?

Y con qué cifras va restando  
la hormiga sus soldados muertos?

Cómo se llaman los ciclones  
cuando no tienen movimiento?

**L X V I I**

Spelling book, can you love me  
and give me a substantive kiss?

Is a dictionary a grave  
or a honeycomb, sealed?

From what windows did I stand  
staring at dead time?

Is what I glimpse from afar  
only what has not yet come to pass?

**L X V I I I**

When does the butterfly read  
what flies written on its wings?

What letters are spelled by the bee  
to learn its itinerary?

And with what numbers does the ant  
reckon up its dead soldiers?

What's the word for a cyclone  
when its movement is over?

L X X

Cuál es el trabajo forzado  
de Hitler en el infierno?

Pinta paredes o cadáveres?  
Olfatea el gas de sus muertos?

Le dan a comer las cenizas  
de tantos niños calcinados?

O le han dado desde su muerte  
de beber sangre en un embudo?

O le martillan en la boca  
los arrancados dientes de oro?

L X X I I

Si todos los ríos son dulces  
de dónde saca sal el mar?

Cómo saben las estaciones  
que deben cambiar de camisa?

Por qué tan lentas en invierno  
y tan palpitantes después?

Y cómo saben las raíces  
que deben subir a la luz?

L X X

What forced labor  
for Hitler in Hell?

Does he paint corpses or walls?  
Does he breathe in the gas of the holocaust?

Do they feed him on ashes  
of the burnt flesh of children?

Does he drink, since he died,  
from a funnel of blood?

Or do they hammer back into his head  
the gold gouged from the teeth of the dead?

L X X I I

If all rivers are sweet  
where does the sea get its salt?

How do the seasons discover  
it's time to change shirts?

Why are winters so slow  
and the aftermaths, volatile?

How do the roots know  
they must climb toward the light?

Y luego saludar al aire  
con tantas flores y colores?

Siempre es la misma primavera  
la que repite su papel?

And then greet the air  
with such colors and flowers?

Is it always the same spring,  
repeating the same role?



*El mar y las campanas /*  
**The Sea and the Bells**  
**(1973)**



## INICIAL

Hora por hora no es el día,  
es dolor por dolor:  
el tiempo no se arruga,  
no se gasta:  
mar, dice el mar,  
sin tregua,  
tierra, dice la tierra:  
el hombre espera.  
Y sólo  
su campana  
allí está entre las otras  
guardando en su vacío  
un silencio implacable  
que se repartirá cuando levante  
su lengua de metal ola tras ola.

De tantas cosas que tuve,  
andando de rodillas por el mundo,  
aquí, desnudo,  
no tengo más que el duro mediodía  
del mar, y una campana.

Me dan ellos su voz para sufrir  
y su advertencia para detenerme.

Esto sucede para todo el mundo:

continúa el espacio.

Y vive el mar.

Existen las campanas.

## INITIAL

Not hour after hour,  
but grief after grief the day passes:  
time does not shrivel  
or wear thin:  
sea, says the sea,  
without diminution,  
land, says the land:  
and man waits.  
Only  
his bell  
guards the void  
with the others,  
implacably silent  
till stillness divides itself and lifts  
wave after wave from the tongue of the metal.

Whatever I gathered,  
walking the world on my knees,  
naked, at last, in this place  
I have only the hard afternoon  
of the sea, and a bell.

They give me the sound of their sufferance  
and a warning to hold me at bay.

This happens to everyone:

space continues.

The sea lives.

The bells exist as before.

## HOY CUÁNTAS HORAS

Hoy cuántas horas van cayendo  
en el pozo, en la red, en el tiempo:  
son lentas pero no se dieron tregua,  
siguen cayendo, uniéndose  
primero como peces,  
luego como pedradas o botellas.  
Allá abajo se entienden  
las horas con los días,  
con los meses,  
con borrosos recuerdos,  
noches deshabitadas,  
ropas, mujeres, trenes y provincias,  
el tiempo se acumula  
y cada hora  
se disuelve en silencio,  
se desmenuza y cae  
al ácido de todos los vestigios,  
al agua negra  
de la noche inversa.

## T O D A Y H O W M A N Y H O U R S

Today, how many hours will tumble  
into the well, into the net, into time:  
gradual, implacable,  
they cluster together  
like fish, they keep falling  
in fistfuls, like pebbles, like bottles.  
There underneath, hours  
compose into days,  
into months,  
into illegible memories  
and untenable nights,  
into clothing and women and railroads and provinces;  
time gathers,  
hours melt  
into silence  
or crumble away, the acid  
of the ultimate vestiges rains down,  
the black water  
of midnight's inversion.

## PARECE QUE UN NAVÍO

Parece que un navío diferente  
pasará por el mar, a cierta hora.  
No es de hierro ni son anaranjadas  
sus banderas:  
nadie sabe de dónde  
ni la hora:  
todo está preparado  
y no hay mejor salón, todo dispuesto  
al acontecimiento pasajero.  
Está la espuma dispuesta  
como una alfombra fina,  
tejida con estrellas,  
más lejos el azul,  
el verde, el movimiento ultramarino,  
todo espera.  
Y abierto el roquerío,  
lavado, limpio, eterno,  
se dispuso en la arena  
como un cordón de castillos,  
como un cordón de torres.  
Todo  
está dispuesto,  
está invitado el silencio,  
y hasta los hombres, siempre distraídos,  
esperan no perder esta presencia:  
se vistieron como en día Domingo,  
se lustraron las botas,  
se peinaron.  
Se están haciendo viejos  
y no pasa el navío.

## A DIFFERENT SHIP

A different ship will sail by on the sea  
at its particular hour, it appears.  
Not iron with orange  
flags flying:  
no one knows the port of departure  
or the hour:  
but all is in readiness.  
The finest salon in the fleet, with everything  
planned for the passenger's convenience.  
Even the spray is spread fine  
as the pile of a carpet  
with stars in the threads,  
and beyond lies the blue  
and the green, the ultramarine movement.  
Everything waits.  
The reefs open out  
scrubbed clean and eternal:  
they rise from the sand  
like a cordon of castles,  
a cordon of towers.  
All things  
are amenable,  
all silence, welcome:  
even the watchers forget their habitual distractions  
and wait for some presence that must not be missed:  
they are wearing their sabbatical best,  
they have polished their boots,  
and slicked down their hair.  
They grow old as they wait  
and the ship never passes.

## B U S C A R

Del ditirambo a la raíz del mar  
se extiende un nuevo tipo de vacío:  
no quiero más, dice la ola,  
que no sigan hablando,  
que no siga creciendo  
la barba del cemento  
en la ciudad:  
estamos solos,  
queremos gritar por fin,  
orinar frente al mar,  
ver siete pájaros del mismo color,  
tres mil gaviotas verdes,  
buscar el amor en la arena,  
ensuciar los zapatos,  
los libros, el sombrero, el pensamiento  
hasta encontrarte, nada,  
hasta besarte, nada,  
hasta cantarte, nada,  
nada sin nada, sin hacer  
nada, sin terminar  
lo verdadero.

## SEARCH

From the dithyramb to the root of the sea  
a new vacancy opens:  
I desire nothing more, says the wave,  
no more babbling,  
not a hair more to add  
to the bearded cement  
of the city:  
we are alone  
and long to cry out, in the end,  
to piss in the sea,  
see seven birds with identical colors,  
three thousand green seagulls,  
make love in the sand,  
muddy our shoes,  
our books, our hats, and our thinking  
till we come upon: nothing,  
give our kisses to: nothing,  
sing songs to: nothing—  
the quintessence of nothing, less than  
nothing at all, and truth  
is unending again.



## REGRESANDO

Yo tengo tantas muertes de perfil  
que por eso no muero,  
soy incapaz de hacerlo,  
me buscan y no me hallan  
y salgo con la mía,  
con mi pobre destino  
de caballo perdido  
en los potreros solos  
del sur del Sur de América:  
sopla un viento de fierro,  
los árboles se agachan  
desde su nacimiento:  
deben besar la tierra,  
la llanura:  
llega después la nieve  
hecha de mil espadas  
que no terminan nunca.  
Yo he regresado  
desde donde estaré,  
desde mañana Viernes,  
yo regresé  
con todas mis campanas  
y me quedé plantado  
buscando la pradera,  
besando tierra amarga  
como el arbusto agachado.  
Porque es obligatorio  
obedecer al invierno,  
dejar crecer el viento  
también dentro de ti,  
hasta que cae la nieve,  
se unen el hoy y el día,  
el viento y el pasado,

## COMING BACK

I keep so many deaths in reserve  
that I haven't died yet,  
it exceeds my capacity.  
They keep looking, without ever finding me  
so I slip past on my own,  
with my destitute lot  
like a colt  
from the desolate herds  
lost in South America's south:  
the wind smells of iron,  
the trees seem to cringe  
as they grow:  
soon they'll kiss  
the prairie that bred them:  
then, snow,  
the endless assault  
of those thousands of daggers.  
Friday morning,  
and I'm back  
where I started,  
I'm back  
with my bells on:  
I'm planted for good,  
looking for meadows  
and kissing the salt earth,  
stooped like a thornbush.  
One must yield  
with the winter,  
let the wind worsen  
inside and out, if it will,  
till the snow flies  
and the here and the now,  
time past and the wind, are one:

cae el frío,  
al fin estamos solos,  
por fin nos callaremos.  
Gracias.

cold comes  
and at last we are left to ourselves,  
at last we are silent.  
Thanks.

## DE UN VIAJE VUELVO

De un viaje vuelvo al mismo punto,  
por qué?  
Por qué no vuelvo donde antes viví,  
calles, países, continentes, islas,  
donde tuve y estuve?  
Por qué será este sitio la frontera  
que me eligió, qué tiene este recinto  
sino un látigo de aire vertical  
sobre mi rostro, y unas flores negras  
que el largo invierno muerde y despedaza?  
Ay, que me señalan: éste es  
el perezoso, el señor oxidado,  
de aquí no se movió,  
de este duro recinto:  
se fue quedando inmóvil  
hasta que ya se endurecieron sus ojos  
y le creció una yedra en la mirada.

## I COME BACK FROM A JOURNEY

I come back from my journey to my point of departure:  
but why?

Why am I never just where I began—  
streets, countries, continents, islands  
I had or inhabited?

Why was this place the boundary  
that chose me, kept a corner for me  
without lashing back at my face  
through the vertical air, a handful of blackening flowers  
the long winter harrows and mangles?

They beckon me back with a gesture: alas, this is  
the indolent one: my lord of corrosion,  
he does not stir from this place,  
from this hardest recess of them all:  
he was immobile from the very beginning  
till his eyes turned to stone in his head  
and ivy grew out of his gaze.

Pedro es el cuando y el como,  
Clara es tal vez el sin duda,  
Roberto, el sin embargo:  
todos caminan con preposiciones,  
adverbios, sustantivos  
que se anticipan en los almacenes,  
en las corporaciones, en la calle,  
y me pesa cada hombre con su peso,  
con su palabra relacionadora  
como un sombrero viejo:  
a dónde van? me pregunto.  
A dónde vamos  
con la mercadería  
precautoria,  
envolviéndonos en palabritas,  
vistiéndonos con redes?

A través de nosotros cae como la lluvia  
la verdad, la esperada solución:  
vienen y van las calles  
llenas de pormenores:  
ya podemos colgar como tapices  
del salón, del balcón, por las paredes,  
los discursos caídos  
al camino  
sin que nadie se quedara con nada,  
oro o azúcar, seres verdaderos,  
la dicha,  
todo esto no se habla,  
no se toca,  
no existe, así parece, nada claro,  
piedra, madera dura,  
base o elevación de la materia,

## PEDRO IS WHEN

Pedro is the when and the how,  
Clara, the maybe, the doubtless,  
Roberto, the nevertheless:  
all walk with their adverbs,  
prepositions, substantives  
that wait for them in the warehouses,  
the corporations, the streets:  
each weighs me down  
with his qualifying  
word, the old hats:  
where are they off to? I wonder.  
Where are we going  
with our cautionary  
merchandise  
wrapped in insignificant words,  
dressed up in our network of threads?

Athwart us, like rain,  
falls the truth, the awaited solutions:  
streets come and go  
jammed with particulars:  
now we can dangle  
the discourses that fell  
by the wayside  
from balconies, hallways and walls, like carpets,  
connect no one and nothing—  
sugar and gold, authentic existence  
and happiness:  
all the unsayable,  
untouchable things  
that no longer exist: nothing is clear, it would seem—  
the hardwood, the stones,  
the elevation and base of materials,



de la materia feliz,  
nada, ño hay sino seres sin objeto,  
palabras sin destino  
que no van más allá de tú y yo,  
ni más acá de la oficina:  
estamos demasiado ocupados:  
nos llaman por teléfono  
con urgencia  
para notificarnos que queda prohibido  
ser felices.

the happy materials,  
nothing at all—only selves without objects,  
words without destinies  
that never push past the I or the you  
or go beyond their offices.  
The line is busy  
they tell us by telephone,  
the message is urgent,  
notice is served: all happiness  
is strictly forbidden.

## UN ANIMAL PEQUEÑO

Un animal pequeño,  
cerdo, pájaro o perro  
desvalido,  
hirsuto entre plumas o pelo,  
oí toda la noche,  
afebrado, gimiendo.

Era una noche extensa  
y en Isla Negra, el mar,  
todos sus truenos, su ferretería,  
sus toneles de sal, sus vidrios rotos  
contra la roca inmóvil, sacudía.

El silencio era abierto y agresivo  
después de cada golpe o catarata:

Mi sueño se cosía  
como hilando la noche interrumpida  
y entonces el pequeño ser peludo,  
oso pequeño o niño enfermo,  
sufría asfixia o fiebre,  
pequeña hoguera de dolor, gemido  
contra la noche inmensa del océano,  
contra la torre negra del silencio,  
un animal herido,  
pequeñito,  
apenas susurrante  
bajo el vacío de la noche,  
solo.

## SOME CREATURE

Some creature—some  
piglet or bird or stray  
dog—  
something hairy, neither feathers nor fur,  
that I heard all night long,  
something whining and feverish.

In deep night,  
Isla Negra, the sea  
with its thunderclaps, hardware,  
salt barrels, broken windowpanes,  
broke over motionless rock.

The silence was hostile, abject, after  
the blows and the cataracts struck.

My dream stitched itself fitfully  
into the night, thread over thread,  
till the poor, furry thing,  
little bear or sick child,  
succumbed to asphyxia or fever:  
a small bonfire of pain out there, protesting  
the long night of the ocean,  
the black tower of silence,  
a hurt animal,  
some littlest of creatures,  
something less than a sigh  
in night's vacancy,  
alone.

## SE VUELVE A YO

Se vuelve a yo como a una casa vieja  
con clavos y ranuras, es así  
que uno mismo cansado de uno mismo,  
como de un traje lleno de agujeros,  
trata de andar desnudo porque llueve,  
quiere el hombre mojarse en agua pura,  
en viento elemental, y no consigue  
sino volver al pozo de sí mismo,  
a la minúscula preocupación  
de si existió, de si supo expresar  
o pagar o deber o descubrir,  
como si yo fuera tan importante  
que tenga que aceptarme o no aceptarme  
la tierra con su nombre vegetal,  
en su teatro de paredes negras.

## ONE COMES BACK

One comes back to the I, the old house  
with its nails and interstices, yes,  
to a selfhood grown bored with its selfhood,  
a suit full of holes; one  
tries to walk naked in rain,  
a man wants to wet himself down in clean water, in  
elementary wind, but gets only  
as far as the well of his selfhood again,  
the old, piddling obsessions:  
did I really exist? did I know what to say,  
or to pay or to owe or discover?  
—as if my importance were such  
that the world with its vegetal name,  
its black-walled arena,  
had no choice but to accept or deny me.

## ESTA CAMPANA ROTA

Esta campana rota  
quiere sin embargo cantar:  
el metal ahora es verde,  
color de selva tiene la campana,  
color de agua de estanques en el bosque,  
color del día en las hojas.

El bronce roto y verde,  
la campana de bruces  
y dormida  
fue enredada por las enredaderas,  
y del color oro duro del bronce  
pasó a color de rana:  
fueron las manos del agua,  
la humedad de la costa,  
que dio verdura al metal,  
ternura a la campana.

Esta campana rota  
arrastrada en el brusco matorral  
de mi jardín salvaje,  
campana verde, herida,  
hunde sus cicatrices en la hierba:  
no llama a nadie más, no se congrega  
junto a su copa verde  
más que una mariposa que palpita  
sobre el metal caído y vuela huyendo  
con alas amarillas.

## THIS BROKEN BELL

This broken bell  
wants to sing: its  
metal is green: the bell is  
the color of forests,  
the color of water in pools in the woods,  
the color of day in the leaves.

A ruinous green in the bronze,  
the tumbled bell  
sleeps  
in a tangle of creepers;  
the bronze's hard color of gold  
turns frog-colored:  
the touch of the water,  
the wet of the coastland,  
lends green to the metal  
and gentleness to the bell.

This broken bell  
dragged into the gross bramble  
of a garden gone wild,  
this green bell  
settles its wounds and its scars in the grass;  
it summons nobody now; near its green  
chamber nothing assembles—  
only a butterfly, aloft on felled metal,  
its yellow wings fanning,  
flies off.



## EL E M B A J A D O R

Viví en un callejón donde llegaban  
a orinar todo gato y todo perro  
de Santiago de Chile.

Era en 1925.

Yo me encerraba con la poesía  
transportado al Jardín de Albert Samain,  
al suntuoso Henri de Régnier,  
al abanico azul de Mallarmé.

Nada mejor contra la orina  
de millares de perros suburbiales  
que un cristal redomado  
con pureza esencial, con luz y cielo:  
la ventana de Francia, parques fríos  
por donde las estatuas impecables  
—era en 1925—

se intercambiaban camisas de mármol,  
patinadas, suavísimas al tacto  
de numerosos siglos elegantes.

En aquel callejón yo fui feliz.

Más tarde, años después,  
llegué de Embajador a los Jardines.

Ya los poetas se habían ido.

Y las estatuas no me conocían.

## THE AMBASSADOR

I lived on a back street where  
every cat and dog lifted a hind leg  
in Santiago de Chile.

It was 1925.

I locked myself into my poetry  
and flew to the Garden of Albert Samain,  
the sumptuous Henri de Régnier,  
Mallarmé's blue fan.

To charm away urine  
and ward off a million suburbanite dogs  
nothing matches the cunning of crystal, the utter  
quintessence of light and the sky:  
the window of France, the freeze of its parks  
where impeccable statues  
—that was 1925—  
trade marble shirts with each other, like  
skating rinks suave to the touch  
with the passing of elegant centuries.

I lived happily once in that alley.

Later, years later,  
the Ambassador came to the Gardens.

But the poets had gone.

And none of the statues acknowledged me.

## ESPEREMOS

Hay otros días que no han llegado aún,  
que están haciéndose  
como el pan o las sillas o el producto  
de las farmacias o de los talleres:  
hay fábricas de días que vendrán:  
existen artesanos del alma  
que levantan y pesan y preparan  
ciertos días amargos o preciosos  
que de repente llegan a la puerta  
para premiarnos con una naranja  
o para asesinarnos de inmediato.

## LET'S WAIT

Other days still to come  
are rising like bread  
or waiting like chairs or a  
pharmacopeia, or merchandise:  
a factory of days in the making:  
artisans of the soul  
are building and weighing and preparing  
days bitter or precious  
that will knock at your door in due time  
to award you an orange  
or murder you in cold blood where you stand.

## PERDÓN SI POR MIS OJOS

Perdón si por mis ojos no llegó  
más claridad que la espuma marina,  
perdón porque mi espacio  
so extiende sin amparo  
y no termina:  
monótono es mi canto,  
mi palabra es un pájaro sombrío,  
fauna de piedra y mar, el desconsuelo  
de un planeta invernal, incorruptible.  
Perdón por esta sucesión del agua,  
de la roca, la espuma, el desvarío  
de la marea: así es mi soledad:  
bruscos saltos de sal contra los muros  
de mi secreto ser, de tal manera  
que yo soy una parte  
del invierno,  
de la misma extensión que se repite  
de campana en campana en tantas olas  
y de un silencio como cabellera,  
silencio de alga, canto sumergido.

PARDON ME

Pardon me if, to my eyes,  
nothing ever is clearer than sea spray,  
pardon me if my space  
stretches on without refuge  
or limit:  
my song is monotonous,  
my word, a bird in the gloom,  
fauna of ocean and rock, the discontents  
of a wintry planet, incorruptible.  
Forgive this succession of water  
and boulder and spume, the delirium  
of the tides: for such is my solitude:  
a brusque onslaught of brine assaulting the walls  
of my recondite being, making  
me part  
of the winter,  
of the selfsame extension repeating itself  
bell over bell in the waves,  
and part of the silence that lengthens like hair  
in the silence of seaweed, the sunk song.

## FINAL

Matilde, años o días  
dormidos, afebrados,  
aquí o allá,  
clavando  
rompiendo el espinazo,  
sangrando sangre verdadera,  
despertando tal vez  
o perdido, dormido:  
camas clínicas, ventanas extranjeras,  
vestidos blancos de las sigilosas,  
la torpeza en los pies.

Luego estos viajes  
y el mío mar de nuevo:  
tu cabeza en la cabecera,

tus manos voladoras  
en la luz, en mi luz,  
sobre mi tierra.

Fue tan bello vivir  
cuando vivías!

El mundo es más azul y más terrestre  
de noche, cuando duermo  
enorme, adentro de tus breves manos.

FINAL

Matilde, sleeping  
that feverish sleep, a day or a year,  
here or there,  
nailed down  
to my backbone, or breaking it,  
bleeding real blood,  
waking, at times,  
or comatose, lost:  
clinical beds, foreign windows,  
the white uniform of the caretakers,  
that sloth in my feet.

Later, those journeys  
and my ocean again:  
your head on my pillow,

your hands flying  
in light, in my light,  
my terrain.

How lovely it was to live  
while you lived!

The world is bluer, the night  
more terrestrial, while I sleep,  
grown enormous, in the brief clasp of your hands.





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