The word was born
in the blood,
it grew in the dark body, pulsing,
and took flight with the lips and mouth.

Farther away and nearer,
still, still it came
from dead fathers and from wandering races,
from territories that had become stone,
that had tired of their poor tribes,
because when grief set out on the road
the people went and arrived
and united new land and water
to sow their word once again.
And that's why the inheritance is this:
this is the air that connects us
with the buried man and with the dawn
of new beings that haven't yet arisen.

Still the atmosphere trembles
with the first word
produced
with panic and groaning.
It emerged
from the darkness
and even now there is no thunder
that thunders with the iron sound
of that word,
the first
word uttered:
perhaps it was just a whisper, a raindrop,
but its cascade still falls and falls.

Later on, meaning fills the word.
It stayed pregnant and was filled with lives,
everything was births and sounds:
affirmation, clarity, strength,
negation, destruction, death:
the name took on all the powers
and combined existence with essence
in its electric beauty.

Human word, syllable, flank
of long light and hard silver,
hereditary goblet that receives
the communications of the blood:
it is here that silence was formed by
the whole of the human word
and not to speak is to die among beings:
language extends out to the hair,
the mouth speaks without moving the lips:
suddenly the eyes are words.

I take the word and move
through it, as if it were
only a human form,
its lines delight me and I sail
in each resonance of language:
I utter and I am
and across the boundary of words,
without speaking, I approach silence.

I drink to the word, raising
a word or crystalline cup,
in it I drink
the wine of language
or unfathomable water,

maternal source of all words,
and cup and water and wine
give rise to my song
because the name is origin
and green life: it is blood,
the blood that expresses its substance,
and thus its unrolling is prepared:
words give crystal to the crystal,
blood to the blood,
and give life to life.
Poet's Obligation
by Pablo Neruda

To whoever is not listening to the sea
this Friday morning, to whoever is cooped up
in house or office, factory or woman
or street or mine or harsh prison cell;
to him I come, and, without speaking or looking,
I arrive and open the door of his prison,
and a vibration starts up, vague and insistent,
a great fragment of thunder sets in motion
the rumble of the planet and the foam,
the raucous rivers of the ocean flood,
the star vibrates swiftly in its corona,
and the sea is beating, dying and continuing.

So, drawn on by my destiny,
I ceaselessly must listen to and keep
the sea's lamenting in my awareness,
I must feel the crash of the hard water
and gather it up in a perpetual cup
so that, wherever those in prison may be,
wherever they suffer the autumn's castigation,

I may be there with an errant wave,
I may move, passing through windows,
and hearing me, eyes will glance upward
saying "How can I reach the sea?"
And I shall broadcast, saying nothing,
the starry echoes of the wave,
a breaking up of foam and quicksand,
a rustling of salt withdrawing,
the grey cry of the sea-birds on the coast.

So, through me, freedom and the sea
will make their answer to the shuttered heart.

(Translated from the Spanish by Alastair Reid)
Ode To Tomatoes
Pablo Neruda

The street
filled with tomatoes,
midday,
summer,
light is
halved
like
a
tomato,
its juice
runs
through the streets.
In December,
unabated,
the tomato
invades
the kitchen,
it enters at lunchtime,
takes
its ease
on countertops,
among glasses,
butter dishes,
blue saltcellars.
It sheds
its own light,
benign majesty.
Unfortunately, we must
murder it:
the knife
sinks
into living flesh,
red
viscera
a cool
sun,
profound,
inexhaustible,
populates the salads
of Chile...
Ode To a Large Tuna in the Market

PABLO NERUDA

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

All around you
were lettuces,
sea foam
of the earth,
carrots,
grapes,
but
of the ocean
truth,
of the unknown,
of the
unfathomable
shadow, the
depths
of the sea,
the abyss,
only you had survived,
a pitch-black, varnished
witness
to deepest night.
Furrowed motherland, I swear that in your ashes
you will be born like a flower of eternal water
I swear that from your mouth of thirst will come to the air
the petals of bread, the spilt
inaugurated flower. Cursed,
cursed, cursed be those who with an ax and serpent
came to your earthly arena, cursed those
who waited for this day to open the door
of the dwelling to the moor and the bandit:
What have you achieved? Bring, bring the lamp,
see the soaked earth, see the blackened little bone
eaten by the flames, the garment
of murdered Spain.
from *The Book of Questions*

by Pablo Neruda
Translated by William O’Daly
http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/16006

III.

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

Why do trees conceal
the splendor of their roots?

Who hears the regrets
of the thieving automobile?

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

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In these lonely regions I have been powerful
in the same way as a cheerful tool
or like untrammeled grass which lets loose its seed
or like a dog rolling around in the dew.
Matilde, time will pass wearing out and burning
another skin, other fingernails, other eyes, and then
the algae that lashed our wild rocks,
the waves that unceasingly construct their own whiteness,
all will be firm without us,
all will be ready for the new days,
which will not know our destiny.

What do we leave here but the lost cry
of the seabird, in the sand of winter, in the gusts of wind
that cut our faces and kept us
erect in the light of purity,
as in the heart of an illustrious star?

What do we leave, living like a nest
of surly birds, alive, among the thickets
or static, perched on the frigid cliffs?
So then, if living was nothing more than anticipating
the earth, this soil and its harshness,
deliver me, my love, from not doing my duty, and help me
return to my place beneath the hungry earth.

We asked the ocean for its rose,
it's open star, its bitter contact,
and to the overburdened, to the fellow human being, to the wounded
we gave the freedom gathered in the wind.
It's late now. Perhaps
it was only a long day the color of honey and blue,
perhaps only a night, like the eyelid
of a grave look that encompassed
the measure of the sea that surrounded us,
and in this territory we found only a kiss,
only ungraspable love that will remain here
wandering among the sea foam and roots.
Nothing But Death
by Pablo Neruda
Translated by Robert Bly
http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15797

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

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

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

Death arrives among all that sound 
like a shoe with no foot in it, like a suit with no man in it, 
comes and knocks, using a ring with no stone in it, with no finger in it, 
comes and shouts with no mouth, with no tongue, with no throat. 
Nevertheless its steps can be heard 
and its clothing makes a hushed sound, like a tree.

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

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

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

By Pablo Neruda, translated and edited by Robert Bly, and published by Beacon Press in Neruda & Vallejo: Selected Poems. © 1993 by Robert Bly. Used with permission. All rights reserved.
STILL ANOTHER DAY: XVII/MEN
by Pablo Neruda
Translated by William O'Daly
http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmID/16871

The truth is in the prologue. Death to the romantic fool, to the expert in solitary confinement, I’m the same as the teacher from Colombia, the rotarian from Philadelphia, the merchant from Paysandu who save his silver to come here. We all arrive by different streets, by unequal languages, at Silence.
THE SEPARATE ROSE: I
by Pablo Neruda
Translated by William O’Daly
http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/16870

Today is that day, the day that carried
a desperate light that since has died.
Don’t let the squatters know:
let’s keep it all between us,
day, between your bell
and my secret.

Today is dead winter in the forgotten land
that comes to visit me, with a cross on the map
and a volcano in the snow, to return to me,
to return again the water
fallen on the roof of my childhood.
Today when the sun began with its shafts
to tell the story, so clear, so old,
the slanting rain fell like a sword,
the rain my hard heart welcomes.

You, my love, still asleep in August,
my queen, my woman, my vastness, my geography
kiss of mud, the carbon-coated zither,
you, vestment of my persistent song,
today you are reborn again and with the sky’s
black water confuse me and compel me:
I must renew my bones in your kingdom,
I must still uncloud my earthly duties.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How terrible and brief was my desire of you!  
How difficult and drunken, how tensed and avid.
Cemetery of kisses, there is still fire in your tombs,  
still the fruited boughs burn, pecked at by birds.

Oh the bitten mouth, oh the kissed limbs,  
oh the hungering teeth, oh the entwined bodies.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Oh farther than everything. Oh farther than everything.

It is the hour of departure. Oh abandoned one.

From Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair, by Pablo Neruda, translated by W.S. Merwin, published by Chronicle Books. Copyright © 1969 by W.S. Merwin. Reprinted by permission of W.S. Merwin. All rights reserved.
There is something dense, united, settled in the depths, repeating its number, its identical sign. How it is noted that stones have touched time, in their refined matter there is an odor of age, of water brought by the sea, from salt and sleep.

I’m encircled by a single thing, a single movement: a mineral weight, a honeyed light cling to the sound of the word "noche": the tint of wheat, of ivory, of tears, things of leather, of wood, of wool, archaic, faded, uniform, collect around me like walls.

I work quietly, wheeling over myself, a crow over death, a crow in mourning. I meditate, isolated in the spread of seasons, centric, encircled by a silent geometry: a partial temperature drifts down from the sky, a distant empire of confused unities reunites encircling me.
The Me Bird
by Pablo Neruda
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

I am the Pablo Bird,
bird of a single feather,
a flier in the clear shadow
and obscure clarity,
my wings are unseen,
my ears resound
when I walk among the trees
or beneath the tombstones
like an unlucky umbrella
or a naked sword,
stretched like a bow
or round like a grape,
I fly on and on not knowing,
wounded in the dark night,
who is waiting for me,
who does not want my song,
who desires my death,
who will not know I'm arriving
and will not come to subdue me,
to bleed me, to twist me,
or to kiss my clothes,
torn by the shrieking wind.

That's why I come and go,
fly and don't fly but sing:
I am the furious bird
of the calm storm.
If You Forget Me by Pablo Neruda
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

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

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

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

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

But
if each day,
each hour,
you feel that you are destined for me
with implacable sweetness,
if each day a flower
climbs up to your lips to seek me,
ah my love, ah my own,
in me all that fire is repeated,
in me nothing is extinguished or forgotten,
my love feeds on your love, beloved,
and as long as you live it will be in your arms
without leaving mine.
In the night we shall go in
by Pablo Neruda
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

In the night we shall go in,
we shall go in to steal
a flowering, flowering branch.

We shall climb over the wall
in the darkness of the alien garden,
two shadows in the shadow.

Winter is not yet gone,
and the apple tree appears
suddenly changed into
a fragment of cascade stars.

In the night we shall go in
up to its trembling firmament,
and your hands, your little hands
and mine will steal the stars.

And silently to our house
in the night and the shadow,
perfume’s silent step,
and with starry feet,
the clear body of spring.
The weary one, orphan
of the masses, the self,
the crushed one, the one made of concrete,
the one without a country in crowded restaurants,
he who wanted to go far away, always farther away,
didn’t know what to do there, whether he wanted
or didn’t want to leave or remain on the island,
the hesitant one, the hybrid, entangled in himself,
had no place here: the straight-angled stone,
the infinite look of the granite prism,
the circular solitude all banished him:
he went somewhere else with his sorrows,
he returned to the agony of his native land,
to his indecisions, of winter and summer.
O tower of light, sad beauty
that magnified necklaces and statues in the sea,
calcareous eye, insignia of the vast waters, cry
of the mourning petrel, tooth of the sea, wife
of the Oceaniac wind, O separate rose
from the long stem of the trampled bush
that the depths, converted into archipelago,
O natural star, green diadem,
alone in your lonesome dynasty,
still unattainable, elusive, desolate
like one drop, like one grape, like the sea.
The Flight
by Pablo Neruda
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

Hands shading eyes,
I follow the high flight:
honoring heaven, the bird
traverses
the transparency, without soiling the day.
Winging westward, it climbs
each step up to the naked blue:
the entire sky is its tower,
and the world is cleansed by its movement.

Though the violent bird
seeks blood in the rose of space,
its structure is
arrow and flower in flight
and in the light its wings
are fused with air and purity.

O feathers destined
not to tree, meadow, or combat,
or to the atrocious ground
or sweatshop,
but to the conquest
of a transparent fruit!

I celebrate the sky dance
of gulls and petrels
attired in snow
as though I had
a standing invitation:
I participate
in their velocity and repose,
in the pause and haste of snow.

What flies in me is manifest
in the errant equation of those wings.

O wind aside the black condor’s
iron flight in the mist!
Whistling wind that transposed
the hero’s murderous scimitar:
you receive the harsh flight’s blow
like a coat of armor plate,
repeat its menace in the sky
until all becomes blue again.

The flight of a dart,
every swallow’s mission,
flight of the nightingale and its sonata,
the cockatoo and its showy crest.
Hummingbirds flying in a looking glass
stir sparkling emeralds,
and flying through the dew
the partridge shakes
the mint’s green soul.

I, who learned to fly with every flight
of pure professors
in the woods, at sea, in the ravines,
on my back in the sand,
or in dreams,
remained here, tied
to the roots,
to the magnetic mother, the earth,
lying to myself
and flying
only within,
alone and in the dark.

A plant dies and is buried again,
man’s feet return to the terrain,
only wings evade death.

The world is a crystal sphere,
if he does not fly man loses his way---
cannot understand transparency.
That is why I profess
unconfined clarity
and from the birds I learned
passionate hope,
the certainty and truth of flight.
Magellanic Penguin
by Pablo Neruda
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

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

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

the reasons for my respect
remained in the sand:
the religious bird
did not need to fly,
did not need to sing,
and through its form was visible
its wild soul bled salt:
as if a vein from the bitter sea
had been broken.
Penguin, static traveler,
deliberate priest of the cold,
I salute your vertical salt
and envy your plumed pride.
The She Bird
by Pablo Neruda
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

With my little terrestrial bird,
my rustic earthen jug,
I break out singing
the guitar's rain:
alleged autumn arrives
like a load of firewood,
decanting the aroma
that flew through the mountains,
and grape by grape my kisses
were joined to her bunch.

This proves that the afternoon
accumulated sweetness
like the amber process
or the order of violets.

Come flying, passenger,
let's fly with the coals,
live or cold,
with the disorderly darkness
of the obscure and the ardent.

Let's enter the ash,
let's move with the smoke,
let's live by the fire.

In mid autumn
we'll set the table
over the grassy hillside,
flyng over Chillan
with your guitar in your wings.
We are the clumsy passersby
by Pablo Neruda
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

We are the clumsy passersby, we push past each other with elbows, with feet, with trousers, with suitcases, we get off the train, the jet plane, the ship, we step down in our wrinkled suits and sinister hats. We are all guilty, we are all sinners, we come from dead-end hotels or industrial peace, this might be our last clean shirt, we have misplaced our tie, yet even so, on the edge of panic, pompous, sons of bitches who move in the highest circles or quiet types who don't owe anything to anybody, we are one and the same, the same in time's eyes, or in solitude's: we are the poor devils who earn a living and a death working bureaucratically or in the usual ways, sitting down or packed together in subway stations, boats, mines, research centers, jails, universities, breweries, (under our clothes the same thirsty skin), (the hair, the same hair, only in different colors).
I do not love you as if you were salt-rose, or topaz,
or the arrow of carnations the fire shoots off.
I love you as certain dark things are to be loved,
in secret, between the shadow and the soul.

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

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

that this: where I does not exist, nor you,
so close that your hand on my chest is my hand,
so close that your eyes close as I fall asleep.
In the center of the earth...
by Pablo Neruda
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

In the center of the earth I will push aside
the emeralds so that I can see you---
you like an amanuensis, with a pen
of water, copying the green sprigs of plants.
What a world! What deep parsley!
What a ship sailing through the sweetness!
And you, maybe---and me, maybe---a topaz.
There'll be no more dissensions in the bells.

There won't be anything but all the fresh air,
apples carried on the wind,
the succulent book in the woods:

and there where the carnations breathe, we will begin
to make ourselves a clothing, something to last
through the eternity of a victorious kiss.
Lost in the forest...
by Pablo Neruda
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

Lost in the forest, I broke off a dark twig
and lifted its whisper to my thirsty lips:
maybe it was the voice of the rain crying,
a cracked bell, or a torn heart.
Something from far off it seemed
deep and secret to me, hidden by the earth,
a shout muffled by huge autumns,
by the moist half-open darkness of the leaves.

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

as if suddenly the roots I had left behind
cried out to me, the land I had lost with my childhood---
and I stopped, wounded by the wandering scent.
This beauty is soft...  
by Pablo Neruda  
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

This beauty is soft -- as if music and wood,
agate, cloth, wheat, peaches the light shines through
had made an ephemeral statue.
And now she sends her freshness out, against the waves.

The sea dabbles at those tanned feet, repeating
their shape, just imprinted in the sand.
And now she is the womanly fire of a rose,
the only bubble the sun and the sea contend against.

Oh, may nothing touch you but the chilly salt!
May not even love disturb that unbroken springtime!
Beautiful woman, echo of the endless foam,

may your statuesque hips in the water make
a new measure -- a swan, a lily -- as you float
your form through that eternal crystal.
I crave your mouth...
by Pablo Neruda
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

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

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

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

and I pace around hungry, sniffing the twilight,
hunting for you, for your hot heart,
Like a puma in the barrens of Quitratue.
Don’t go far off...
by Pablo Neruda
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

Don’t go far off, not even for a day, because --
because -- I don't know how to say it: a day is long
and I will be waiting for you, as in an empty station
when the trains are parked off somewhere else, asleep.

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

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

because in that moment you'll have gone so far
I'll wander mazily over all the earth, asking,
Will you come back? Will you leave me here, dying?
Two happy lovers...  
by Pablo Neruda  
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm  

Two happy lovers make one bread,  
a single moon drop in the grass.  
Walking, they cast two shadows that flow together;  
waking, they leave one sun empty in their bed.

Of all the possible truths, they chose the day;  
they held it, not with ropes but with an aroma.  
They did not shred the peace; they did not shatter words;  
their happiness is a transparent tower.

The air and wine accompany the lovers.  
The night delights them with its joyous petals.  
They have a right to all the carnations.

Two happy lovers, without an ending, with no death,  
they are born, they die, many times while they live:  
they have the eternal life of the Natural.
You sing, and your voice peels...  
by Pablo Neruda  
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

You sing, and your voice peels the husk of the day's grain, your song with the sun and sky, the pine trees speak with their green tongue: all the birds of the winter whistle.

The sea fills its cellar with footfalls, with bells, chains, whimpers, the tools and the metals jangle, wheels of the caravan creak.

But I hear only your voice, your voice soars with the zing and precision of an arrow, it drops with the gravity of rain,

your voice scatters the highest swords and returns with its cargo of violets: it accompanies me through the sky.
Maybe you'll remember...
by Pablo Neruda
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

Maybe you'll remember that razor-faced man
who slipped out from the dark like a blade
and -- before we realized -- knew what was there:
he saw the smoke and concluded fire.

The pallid woman with black hair
rose like a fish from the abyss,
and the two of them built up a contraption,
ammed to the teeth, against love.

Man and woman, they felled mountains and gardens,
they went down to the river, they scaled the walls,
they hoisted their atrocious artillery up the hill.

Then love knew it was called love.
And when I lifted my eyes to your name,
suddenly your heart showed me my way.
You will remember...
by Pablo Neruda
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

You will remember that leaping stream
where sweet aromas rose and trembled,
and sometimes a bird, wearing water
and slowness, its winter feathers.

You will remember those gifts from the earth:
indelible scents, gold clay,
weeds in the thicket and crazy roots,
magical thorns like swords.

You'll remember the bouquet you picked,
shadows and silent water,
bouquet like a foam-covered stone.

That time was like never, and like always.
So we go there, where nothing is waiting;
we find everything waiting there.
Ode to a Lemon
by Pablo Neruda
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

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

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

Cutting the lemon
the knife
leaves a little cathedral:
alcoves unguessed by the eye
that open acidulous glass
to the light; topazes
riding the droplets,
altars, aromatic
facades.
So, while the hand
holds the cut of the lemon,
half a world
on a trencher,
the gold of the universe
wells
to your touch:
a cup yellow
with miracles,
a breast and a nipple
perfuming the earth;
a flashing made fruitage,
the diminutive fire of a planet.
This salt
in the saltcellar
I once saw in the salt mines.
I know
you won’t
believe me,
but
it sings,
salt sings, the skin
of the salt mines
sings
with a mouth smothered
by the earth.
I shivered in those solitudes
when I heard
the voice of
the salt
in the desert.
Near Antofagasta
the nitrous
pampa
resounds:
a broken
voice,
a mournful
song.

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

And then on every table
in the world,
salt,
we see your piquant
powder
sprinkling
vital light
upon
our food. Preserver
of the ancient
holds of ships,
discoverer
on
the high seas,
earliest
sailor
of the unknown, shifting
byways of the foam.
Dust of the sea, in you
the tongue receives a kiss
from ocean night:
taste imparts to every seasoned
dish your ocean essence;
the smallest,
miniature
wave from the saltcellar
reveals to us
more than domestic whiteness;
in it, we taste infinitude.
House of Odes
by Pablo Neruda
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

Writing
these
odes
in this
year nineteen
hundred and
fifty-five,
readying and tuning
my demanding, murmuring lyre,
I know who I am
and where my song is going.
I understand
that the shopper for myths
and mysteries
may enter
my wood
and adobe
house of odes,
may despise
the utensils,
the portraits
of father and mother and country
on the walls,
the simplicity
of the bread
and the saltcellar. But
that's how it is in my house of odes.
I deposed the dark monarchy,
the useless flowing hair of dreams,
I trod on the tail
of the cerebral reptile,
and set things
-- water and fire -
in harmony with man and earth.

I want everything
to have
a handle,
I want everything to be
a cup or a tool,
I want people to enter a hardware
store through the door of my odes.
I work at cutting
newly hewn boards,
storing casks
of honey,
arranging
horseshoes, harness,
forks:
I want everyone to enter here,
let them ask questions,
ask for anything they want.
I am from the South, a Chilean,
a sailor
returned
from the seas.
I did not stay in the islands,
a king.
I did not stay ensconced
in the land of dreams.
I returned to labor simply
beside others,
for everyone.
So that everyone
may live here,
I build my house
with transparent
odes.
Ode to Sadness
by Pablo Neruda
http://www.public.asu.edu/~nielle/neruda.htm

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

Things get broken
at home
like they were pushed
by an invisible, deliberate smasher.
It’s not my hands
or yours
It wasn’t the girls
with their hard fingernails
or the motion of the planet.
It wasn’t anything or anybody
It wasn’t the wind
It wasn’t the orange-colored noontime
Or night over the earth
It wasn’t even the nose or the elbow
Or the hips getting bigger
or the ankle
or the air.
The plate broke, the lamp fell
All the flower pots tumbled over
one by one. That pot
which overflowed with scarlet
in the middle of October,
it got tired from all the violets
and another empty one
rolled round and round and round
all through winter
until it was only the powder
of a flowerpot,
a broken memory, shining dust.

And that clock
whose sound
was
the voice of our lives,
the secret
thread of our weeks,
which released
one by one, so many hours
for honey and silence
for so many births and jobs,
that clock also
fell
and its delicate blue guts
vibrated
among the broken glass
its wide heart
unsprung.
Life goes on grinding up
glass, wearing out clothes
making fragments
breaking down
forms
and what lasts through time
is like an island on a ship in the sea,
perishable
surrounded by dangerous fragility
by merciless waters and threats.

Let’s put all our treasures together
— the clocks, plates, cups cracked by the cold —
into a sack and carry them
to the sea
and let our possessions sink
into one alarming breaker
that sounds like a river.
May whatever breaks
be reconstructed by the sea
with the long labor of its tides.
So many useless things
which nobody broke
but which got broken anyway.
THE DICTATORS

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

Love, a question
has destroyed you.

I have come back to you
from thorny uncertainty.

I want you straight as
the sword or the road.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Oh magnificent and fecund and magnetic slave  
of the circle that moves in turn through black and gold:  
rise, lead and possess a creation  
so rich in life that its flowers perish  
and it is full of sadness.
It so happens I am sick of being a man. And it happens that I walk into tailor shops and movie houses dried up, waterproof, like a swan made of felt steering my way in a water of wombs and ashes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translated by Robert Bly
WE ARE MANY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Laugh at the night, at the day, at the moon, laugh at the twisted streets of the island, laugh at this clumsy boy who loves you, but when I open my eyes and close them, when my steps go, when my steps return, deny me bread, air, light, spring, but never your laughter for I would die.
What’s wrong with you, with us,
what’s happening to us?
Ah our love is a harsh cord
that binds us wounding us
and if we want
to leave our wound,
to separate,
it makes a new knot for us and condemns us
to drain our blood and burn together.

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

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

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

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

No book has been able
to wrap me in paper,
to fill me up
with typography,
with heavenly imprints
or was ever able
to bind my eyes,
I come out of books to people orchards
with the hoarse family of my song,
to work the burning metals
or to eat smoked beef
by mountain firesides.
I love adventurous
books,
books of forest or snow,
depth or sky
but hate
the spider book
in which thought
has laid poisonous wires
to trap the juvenile
and circling fly.
Book, let me go.
I won’t go clothed
in volumes,
I don’t come out
of collected works,
my poems
have not eaten poems--
they devour
exciting happenings,
feed on rough weather,
and dig their food
out of earth and men.
I’m on my way
with dust in my shoes
free of mythology:
send books back to their shelves,
I’m going down into the streets.
I learned about life
from life itself,
love I learned in a single kiss
and could teach no one anything
except that I have lived
with something in common among
men,
when fighting with them,
when saying all their say in my song.
And because Love battles
not only in its burning agricultures
but also in the mouth of men and women,
I will finish off by taking the path away
to those who between my chest and your
fragrance
want to interpose their obscure plant.

About me, nothing worse
they will tell you, my love,
than what I told you.

I lived in the prairies
before I got to know you
and I did not wait love but I was
laying in wait for and I jumped on the rose.

What more can they tell you?
I am neither good nor bad but a man,
and they will then associate the danger
of my life, which you know
and which with your passion you shared.

And good, this danger
is danger of love, of complete love
for all life,
for all lives,
and if this love brings us
the death and the prisons,
I am sure that your big eyes,
as when I kiss them,
will then close with pride,
into double pride, love,
with your pride and my pride.

But to my ears they will come before
to wear down the tour
of the sweet and hard love which binds us,
and they will say: "The one
you love,
is not a woman for you,
Why do you love her? I think
you could find one more beautiful,
more serious, more deep,
more other, you understand me, look how
she’s light,
and what a head she has,

and look at how she dresses,
and etcetera and etcetera”.

And I in these lines say:
Like this I want you, love,
love, Like this I love you,
as you dress
and how your hair lifts up
and how your mouth smiles,
light as the water
of the spring upon the pure stones,
Like this I love you, beloved.

To bread I do not ask to teach me
but only not to lack during every day of life.
I don’t know anything about light, from
where
it comes nor where it goes,
I only want the light to light up,
I do not ask to the night
explanations,
I wait for it and it envelops me,
And so you, bread and light
And shadow are.

You came to my life
with what you were bringing,
made
of light and bread and shadow I expected
you,
and Like this I need you,
Like this I love you,
and to those who want to hear tomorrow
that which I will not tell them, let them read
it here,
and let them back off today because it is
early
for these arguments.

Tomorrow we will only give them
a leaf of the tree of our love, a leaf
which will fall on the earth
like if it had been made by our lips
like a kiss which falls
from our invincible heights
to show the fire and the tenderness
of a true love.
Canto XII from The Heights of Macchu Picchu

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

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

I come to speak for your dead mouths.

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

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

And give me silence, give me water, hope.
Clenched Soul

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You've asked me what the lobster is weaving there with his golden feet? I reply, the ocean knows this. You say, what is the ascidia waiting for in its transparent bell? What is it waiting for? I tell you it is waiting for time, like you. You ask me whom the Macrocystis alga hugs in its arms? Study, study it, at a certain hour, in a certain sea I know. You question me about the wicked tusk of the narwhal, and I reply by describing how the sea unicorn with the harpoon in it dies. You enquire about the kingfisher's feathers, which tremble in the pure springs of the southern tides? Or you've found in the cards a new question touching on the crystal architecture of the sea anemone, and you'll deal that to me now? You want to understand the electric nature of the ocean spines? The armored stalactite that breaks as it walks? The hook of the angler fish, the music stretched out in the deep places like a thread in the water?

I want to tell you the ocean knows this, that life in its jewel boxes is endless as the sand, impossible to count, pure, and among the blood-colored grapes time has made the petal hard and shiny, made the jellyfish full of light and untied its knot, letting its musical threads fall from a horn of plenty made of infinite mother-of-pearl.

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

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

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

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

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

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