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Translating Neruda: Femininity and Sensuality Domesticated

Pablo Neruda is one of the best-known Latin American poets of the twentieth century. Motifs of love, intimacy, nature, politics, and patriotism pervade his poetry, but his work defies straightforward categorization, having evolved discernibly over the course of his life. His published work spans six decades, but despite starting his writing career in 1924 at the age of twenty and achieving extensive recognition throughout Latin America and much of Europe, he was not widely recognized in the United States until late in his career. In *Translating Neruda: The Way to Macchu Picchu*, John Felstiner argues that there are two reasons that neither he, his students, or his colleagues outside of Hispanic studies were familiar with Neruda by the 1960s: that American anti-communist sentiment alienated Neruda from most of the North American public, and that “the few translations of his work either were out of print by 1966 or were unconvincing as verse in English” (7). The boom in translation of Neruda’s work began after the author’s visits to England and the United States in 1965 and 1966, and grew in the following years. After he received the Nobel Prize in 1971, his status as a poet of renown was incontrovertible, and by that time, his communist political orientation no longer presented quite the barrier that it had previously.

The poetry of Pablo Neruda has now been extensively translated into English, with published versions by thirty-nine different translators (Stavans 946-949). Some of these translations were made near the start of Neruda’s own career, with the earliest published in 1944, and a plenitude of translators continue to be inspired to translate his work to this day. For many readers, these translations shape their approach to Neruda’s
work. As John Felstiner observes, "What has been translated, when, by whom, how well, and which versions are easily obtainable—all these questions intimately qualify the word "Neruda" in English-speaking countries" (13). Apart from a bilingual minority, most residents in these countries will never encounter Neruda outside the scope of translation; for them, the translations, with their inevitable if subtle changes, become Neruda. It is those changes and the Neruda created by English translation that I will be examining in this thesis, offering close readings first of five original poems in Spanish, and then of their translations by an assortment of translators. It can be no surprise that differences abound in a collection of translations by more than three dozen people over a span of nearly seventy years. In each of the translations I examine here, the translator uses some translational strategy that differentiates the English poem from the original text. These strategies generally represent some mode of "domestication," as defined by Lawrence Venuti, and include the use of techniques such as archaism, omission, and bowdlerization. But in a few cases, the English texts are differentiated from the source texts by translators’ attempts to foreignize, which sometimes have the result of changing the meaning of a line or phrase. Changes to what Gerard Genette dubs “paratexts”—the adornments and accompaniments that transform a text into a book or other recognized literary medium—also function in ways that help the text fit physically into the English reader’s conception of how poetry should be, and are key products of the translator’s decision-making process. Because translations are the only form of Neruda’s work that most Americans will read, the changes made by the individual translators have a powerful influence on the way in which Neruda is understood.
In his book *The Translator’s Invisibility*, Lawrence Venuti divides translations into two distinct camps, based on their use of either “domesticating” or “foreignizing” techniques. Venuti argues that the main criterion currently used to judge translations as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ is the idea of ‘fluency’ in English, and that this criterion often results in an emphasis on “prose-meaning and interpretation, and [neglects] the imitation of form and matter” (Cohen 35). He cites J. M. Cohen’s notice of potential losses incurred when working within the criterion of fluency: “the risk of reducing individual authors’ styles and national tricks of speech to a plain prose uniformity,” a risk avoided, Cohen says, by the “best” translations (Cohen 33). But Venuti claims further losses, asserting that this determination of ‘best’ is still inherently tied to English perception, and that “translating for ‘prose-meaning and interpretation,’ practicing translation as simple communication, rewrites the foreign text according to such English-language values as transparency” while ignoring the domestication required to create a ‘fluent’ English version (Venuti 6). He argues that fluent domestication has been “enforced by editors, publishers, and reviewers” because it “results in translations that are eminently readable and therefore consumable on the book market” (Venuti 16). Venuti builds on Friedrich Schleiermacher’s designation of two fundamental methods of translation—“Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him”—to create his own definitions of these two options (Schleiermacher 49). He defines the domesticating method as “an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bringing the author back home,” and the opposite
foreignizing method as “an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad” (Venuti 20).

Using these definitions, we find a plethora of examples of domestication in the translations of Neruda’s poetry. Because “foreignizing translation signifies the difference of the foreign text…only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language,” it can be argued that even choices to restructure a sentence are domesticating to some extent, because they make the text more ‘readable’ in English (Venuti 20). Other changes are the result of working within two specific cultural vocabularies, as when translators choose a word that may not be the most literal translation, but which might make more sense to the intended audience. Adjustments to the paratexts can also be considered domesticating choices. For example, the decision to create titles for the numbered poems in Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada is a move designed to create a final product that fits in with an American conception of the way contemporary poetry should look, and the necessity of a title to somehow indicate the nature of the forthcoming content.

Archaism is another domesticating strategy at work in some English translations of Neruda’s poems. This strategy is one most often associated with the translation of classical works written in the remote past, and as Deborah Roberts writes in her essay “Translating Antiquity,” “the use of archaism underscores the antiquity of the source text relative to its translation, the distance of the original from its modern readers” (263). But Neruda wrote a maximum of eighty years prior to the translators who are attempting to translate him into English, so an extensive use of archaism when translating his poetry could suggest greater temporal distance between the reader and the text than is present
when reading the text in Spanish. For example, when Nathaniel Tarn translates “novia mía” as “betrothed” in his version of “Oda a la tormenta,” he distances the speaker of the poem from the contemporary language of the 1970s when the translation was published. Venuti argues that archaism can be foreignizing, when used as one of “a variety of linguistic resources [deployed] in order to make…translations visible as translations and thus to maintain the foreignness of the source text,” but George Steiner makes an argument for domestication that fits better with the examples seen in translations of Neruda (Roberts 265). He writes,

> The translator labours secure a natural habitat for the alien presence which he has imported into his own tongue and cultural setting. By archaizing his style he produces a déjà-vu. The foreign text is felt to be not so much an import from abroad (suspect by definition) as it is an element out of one’s native past (Steiner 365).

For Steiner, archaism domesticates the foreign text by “exchanging an obtrusive geographical-linguistic distance for a much subtler, internalized distance in time,” a strategy that makes sense when trying to style a communist poet who cares deeply about achieving controversial social change in a way that would appeal to an American audience in the sixties and seventies.

Several translators also domesticate Neruda’s poetry through their use of bowdlerization, that is, by effacing the presence of the erotic. These translators alter the poem, apparently according to their personal sense of propriety, leaving out or altering key words or phrases in a way that diminishes the sexual implication of both individual passages and of whole poems. These changes may have to do with the translator’s understanding of what his readership and the contemporary social values will find acceptable, and as such is a form of domestication. Through their use of expurgation,
these translations misrepresent and mask the role of sexuality in Neruda’s poetry. In “Poema 7,” both Merwin and Previtali work to obscure the sexual implications of the final stanza through their word choice and phrasing, which Neruda uses to allude to heterosexual penetration and insemination. Many translations of “Oda a la madera” lack Neruda’s implied sexuality in their portrayal of the relationship between the speaker and the wood, describing reverence and devotion in a literal way that neglects the erotic and sensual language of the source text.

It is difficult to make conclusive statements about translators’ intentions, because none of the twelve translators I studied include a statement in their publications about what sort of strategies they intended to apply to their work. But looking at each individual’s background can give some sense of where they are coming from as they create their translations. A few of Neruda’s translators are poets in their own right, including W. S. Merwin and Nathaniel Tarn. Angel Flores, Ken Krabbenhoft, and Stephen Mitchell are all established translators from both Spanish and from other languages. Others, like Maria Jacketti and Donald Walsh, have translated a range of Neruda’s poems, but very little by other authors. John Felstiner, Mark Eisner, Krabbenhoft, and Jacketti are all professors who teach some combination of poetry, Spanish, and translation. My research suggests that all of the aforementioned translators speak Spanish, though I was unable to find any information at all on some of the most obscure translators (David Ossman, Carlos Hagen, Carlos Lozano, Giovanni Previtali, whose translations also happen to be some of the least available to the public). I also was unable to determine if any of the translators were working from earlier translations of the same poem.
The diversity of the translators’ backgrounds is reflected in their approaches to translating Neruda. In my readings I have observed widespread and varied use of domesticating strategies, as well as the occasional application of foreignizing techniques. Tarn seems to favor a more old-fashioned approach, choosing words that suggest an earlier moment in the history of spoken English than either the 1930s or the 1950s, when the original poems he translates were published, or the 1970s, when he was actually translating these poems. Krabbenhoft goes for specificity, choosing English words that are common and approachable but which don’t always carry the same meaning. Ossman and Hagen restructure the phrases of their translation as little as possible from Spanish, though sometimes at the cost of coherency or meaning in their text, foreignizing grammatically but domesticating in their attempts to clarify meaning. Felstiner and Jacketti sometimes compromise literal equivalence in their translations for images that fit better with their overall rendering of the poem, which works better in some cases than others. Overall, the domesticating and foreignizing techniques seen in the poems I have selected function very differently, and are dependent on the broader nature of each translation. In the following pages, I explore the ways in which translators’ individual conception of Neruda informs their work, how their use of domestication shapes the reader’s understanding of Neruda, and how this understanding might differ from that which would develop from reading the poet only in his original language.
Nature and Femininity: Looking at Neruda’s Originals

In the five poems I have chosen to examine here, women and the concept of femininity constitute a central theme, though the exact role they play varies between texts. These poems exemplify the intimate relationship between humanity and the natural world that characterizes much of Neruda’s writing, and my selections focus specifically on the way that Neruda portrays the relationship between nature and the poetic voice. In “Poema 7,” from one of Neruda’s earliest publications, Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada, the woman is the subject of a love poem, as the speaker describes both his love and the distance he feels growing between them. In this early work, nature plays a supplementary role as Neruda uses images of water and the natural world to describe the woman addressed by the speaker. My second selection, “Oda a la madera,” comes from Neruda’s next critical success, Residencia en la tierra, and focuses more closely on nature in a sensual ode to wood that uses anthropomorphic language to endow the wood with female characteristics. The next two poems are both from Odas elementales, a collection of tributes to common things published in the middle of the author’s career, celebrating often-forgotten objects and unsung emotions. In “Oda a la cebolla,” Neruda again uses anthropomorphism to associate the life cycle of the onion with different beloved aspects of femininity, creating an environment of greater appreciation and significance than normally surrounds the discussion of onions. “Oda a la tormenta” represents the storm as a woman, perpetuating the trend of anthropomorphism but also revisiting the relationship between women and water that was present earlier on in the poet’s writing career. The latest example of Neruda’s work that I will be examining, “Oceana” comes from Cantos ceremoniales published in 1961, and
features water and the woman in the most intimate relationship seen since “Poema 7,”
	naming the ocean as a feminine entity (despite the masculinity of the Spanish noun, “el

cocéano”) and giving her a fully realized persona and storyline.

*Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* was Neruda’s “first

substantial success, commercial and critical” (Stavans 957). While this was his third

published book of poetry, it was the first to attract public attention, and is his earliest

work that is widely available in English. A collection of twenty untitled but numbered

poems and a final “canción desesperada,” these love poems are direct, sexual, and

intimate, exemplifying what Felstiner terms Neruda’s “erotic love” period (14). The

eroticism of this collection of poems played a key role in defining both North and South

American perception of Neruda, but the full collection was not translated into English

until 1969, and the most widely available translation, by W. S. Merwin, demonstrates a

level of eroticism very different from that found in the originals. The different

translations of this poem are key examples of the bowdlerization and expurgation that I

see at work in the English Neruda. Additionally, they illustrate the specific ways that

translators’ domesticating or foreignizing choices determine the way certain metaphors or

uses of imagery carry over into the target language, relative to the original poems.

“Poema 7” illustrates the relationship between a man and the woman he loves,

drawing heavily on water and darkness as representations of aspects of their relationship,

with an undercurrent of eroticism throughout. The poem revolves around images of the

sea; the opening lines establish the narrator as a metaphorical fisherman in the sea of a

woman’s eyes. It reads, “tiro mis tristes redes / a tus ojos oceánicos,” using the

expansiveness of the ocean to establish the woman’s eyes as immense. In the second
stanza, the speaker’s loneliness is described as “da[ndo] vueltas los brazos como un náufrago,” again inserting the speaker into the landscape of the woman’s eyes which are said to be vast like the ocean. Not only is the speaker alone at sea in the woman’s eyes, but his loneliness itself is also drowning there, a duplication that emphasizes his perceived isolation. By describing the floundering arms of loneliness, Neruda makes the abstract tangible and, more broadly, situates the concept of a relationship within the concrete setting of the sea. In “Agua sexual,” a later poem from Residencia en la tierra, Neruda explores the sexual nature of water, and the similarities between water and other more erotically charged substances, such as sweat and semen. “Poema 7” contains no such explicit comparisons, but the pervasive role of water in the relationship the poem illustrates does suggest a more subtle recognition of the erotic nature of water.

Images of the sea are paired with darkness and night as the relationship between the woman and the speaker is described (“la orilla de un faro,” “guardas tinieblas”), which serves both to reinforce the sensuality of water, as night and darkness are closely associated with sexual intimacy, and to create a correlation between water and uncertainty. The sea that occupies this woman’s eyes is dark and restless, and it is unclear whether it is the darkness or the ocean-like vastness that is creating the distance between the couple. The action of tossing or flinging “redes tristes” into the woman’s “ojos oceánicos,” which both opens the poem and is repeated in the fifth of seven couplets, not only serves to situate the speaker in this marine setting, but also to establish him as in pursuit of something not likely attainable. The abandon with which the speaker describes this motion also suggests the way lovers give themselves with abandon to each other, and the perceived futility of this behavior when the sentiment is not shared equally.
The description of waves and shores similarly suggests an aspect of impermanence in the relationship, with the coming-and-going rhythm of the tides and the waves themselves. If this woman described here is so similar to the ocean, the speaker’s inability to hold on to her is therefore justified and understandable. Just as it is impossible to hold a wave, it is impossible to hold another person just by loving them. The speaker loves this woman so much that his soul shines like stars (lines 11-12), but this love alone is not enough to stave off the night of loneliness.

The final stanza is the poem’s most explicit sexual metaphor: “Galopa la noche en su yegua sombría / desparramando espigas azules sobre el campo.” The two phrases together portray the penetration and insemination phases of sexual intimacy, and increase the overall erotic sense of the poem as a whole, a sense that, as we will see more clearly later on, does not necessarily come through in translation. The act of penetration is represented by the metaphor of night riding a horse, an explicit parallel to the typical male and female roles during sexual intercourse. The second line could be interpreted in a purely agricultural context by reading “desparramar” as meaning “to scatter.” But the word can also mean “to spill” a liquid, and when read thus, the implication of semen is obvious, as the liquid seed from the previously described sexual act which then fosters new growth. The fact that this poem culminates in an abstracted, nature-centric description of a human sexual act exemplifies the way in which Neruda uses nature to define and explore the relationship between the speaker and the woman in this poem.

In Residencia en la tierra, a collection written in three parts from 1925 to 1945 and published between 1933 and 1947, Neruda’s writing makes a marked shift to a greater focus on the physical world in and of itself, rather than just as a way of describing
a human relationship. In “Entrada a la madera,” femininity becomes a lens through which nature is analyzed, as “la madera” is endowed with human, and specifically female, characteristics. In the first stanza, the speaker describes the way he carefully approaches “la madera”: “Con mi razón apenas, con mis dedos, / con lentas aguas lentas inundadas.” This slow and tentative approach resonates with sexuality, and in addition to the intimacy implied with “mis dedos,” the phrase “lentas aguas” brings to mind the word “lengua,” or tongue, which furthers the impression of a sexual relationship with the wood. The speaker then falls under the control of “[el] imperio de los nomeolvides, / […] una tenaz atmósfera de luto, / […] una olvidada sala decaída, / […] un racimo de tréboles amargos.” This susceptibility echoes the experience of powerlessness of being in love, especially when it is not reciprocated, as described in some of the Veinte poemas (see “Poema 4,” “Poema 14”).

The third stanza continues to use images that resonate with human intimacy, but which are slightly transformed. “En tu catedral dura me arrodillo / golpeándome los labios con un ángel” has strong sexual undertones with its references to submission and kissing. The speaker’s action is closely tied to the wood in the descriptions of hardness (“dura”) and the setting in the metaphorical cathedral of the tall and majestic space of an ancient wood, but the intimacy created through the description of the act of kissing is subverted and complicated by the simultaneous implications of violence. Neruda’s reference to the wood in the Spanish intimate second person form of “tu” reinforces the implication of intimacy between the speaker and the wood, which takes the part of the lover. This imposition of sexuality onto a typically chaste interaction between man and
wood complicates the relationship between humanity and nature as represented by Neruda.

In the fourth and fifth stanzas, the repetition of “soy yo ante tu” calls to mind the intimacy of lovers in a bedroom, as the speaker describes identifying characteristics of the wood in detail. Again, this combination of imagery and grammar works to strengthen the sexual tone of the poem. The description in the preceding stanza also ascribes human characteristics to the wood, like “poros, vetas,” “alma,” and “boca,” which support the conceptualization of the wood as a feminine lover. Neruda’s grammar changes towards the end of the poem from the intimate second person to the intimate plural, embracing the multiplicity of wood. Neruda shifts here from talking about the wood as a single entity, endowed with the qualities of a lover, to speaking directly to the many enumerated aspects that make up “la madera” as a whole. But the undertones of Neruda’s verb choice in this segment make up for the loss of intimacy in the grammatical relationship as he uses verbs like “asidme,” “hagamos fuego,” “ardamos,” and “callemos”, all of which offer plentiful sexual connotations and give a sense of the complex relationship between the speaker and the wood. The poet then uses the first person plural to unite the speaker and the wood in action together at the end of the poem, suggesting the consummation of their relationship and representing them as equals.

“Oda a la cebolla” comes from *Odas elementales*, a collection published a decade further into Neruda’s career in 1954. This collection is a key locus of Neruda’s anthropomorphistic practice, which is here enabled in part by the feminine gender of the noun “cebolla” in Spanish. Through the onion, Neruda explores a variety of aspects of human life, illustrating appealing aspects of femininity as well as weightier issues of
social justice and equality. At the beginning, he focuses on uniting human growth with that of the onion. Neruda describes the growth of the onion thus: “pétalo a pétalo / se formó tu hermosura, / escamas de cristal te acrecentaron / y en el secreto de la tierra oscura / se redondeó tu vientre de rocío.” This slow growth mirrors that of an unborn child, emphasized with the use of the word “milagro,” which is strongly connected to notions of birth and new life. As the poem progresses, Neruda describes how “nacieron / tus hojas como espadas en el huerto,” linking plant growth with human birth. By describing the onion leaves as “espadas,” Neruda not only paints a clear picture of the sharp contrast between the newly sprouted plant and the earth it springs from, but also connects this growth to the human pain of giving birth. The stalk of the onion is described as “torpe,” meaning clumsy or awkward, and implying a youthfulness that fits with the narrative of early life. Next, the onion’s emergence from the earth is compared to Aphrodite’s ascension from the ocean, as Neruda describes nakedness and lifted breasts with the allusion to a transition into womanhood. This image of beauty is compounded by the following ascription of planetary radiance and beauty. Then, in an unexpected thematic turn in the poem, the onion is situated firmly within the realm of the poor:

clara como un planeta,
y destinada
a relucir,
constelación constante,
redonda rosa de agua,
sobre
la mesa
de las pobres gentes.

In this description, Neruda suggests that the onion fulfills both masculine and feminine roles in the family. While in the Latin American context, men are typically expected to
be the providers for the family, in reality women are often the ones who ultimately put
food on the table. The description of the onion as the food of the poor is important,
because onions are inexpensive and easy to grow and often function as a last resort even
when there is no other food to be had. The onion can be the salvation of a poor mother
who has nothing else to feed her family, which explains Neruda’s description of it
shining atop an otherwise empty table.

Neruda reiterates the womanliness of the onion in the next stanza, but in a much
more sexual context. Neruda’s description of the cooking of the onion is filled with
sexuality, from the implication of the removal of clothing when the onion “deshaces / tu
globo de frescura,” to the “consumación ferviente de la olla.” The process of cooking,
already culturally associated with femininity, is described in much the way a sex act
might be, redefining the act of frying food as a sensual and intimate experience. The
transformation of the onion from “jirón de cristal,” which sounds cold and sharp, to
“rizada pluma de oro” echoes the perceived beauty of female sexuality. The opposition
here between soft feather and hard gold suggests the multiple personas that both an onion
and a woman can enact. This feminine fertility is again emphasized with the appearance
of the word “fecunda”, used here as a verb affecting “el amor de la ensalada.” Later still,
the onion is described as “hada madrina / envuelta / en delicado / papel,” granting it both
the lightness and the magical properties of a fairy godmother, capable of altering not only
the fortunes of those who encounter her but also herself, undergoing a transformation as a
part of this sexualized act. In between these feminine representations of the onion
Neruda presents a different side of the onion: it “matas el hambre / del jornalero en el
duro camino,” which complicates the implication of a magical rescue with Neruda’s
focus on the very real need for social change. By casting this anthropomorphized onion in a role that is capable of salvation of the poor, a point made earlier on by placing it “sobre / la mesa / de las pobres gentes,” Neruda calls into question humanity’s inaction with respect to the serious global issue of poverty, perpetuated by societal acceptance of paying laborers less than a living wage. Through his multiplicitous representation of the onion, Neruda again uses nature to explore humanity.

“Oda a la tormenta,” also from Neruda’s Odas elementales, is another example of the author’s anthropomorphic approach. In this context, anthropomorphism is used to establish the storm as feminine, and then to create a narrative based on this femininity that moves through a range of intensities as the storm progresses. By giving the storm a female identity, primarily through the use of pronouns, Neruda can structure his narrative around the actions of the storm, which gain a new sense of intentionality when the storm is granted agency. For example, the poem opens, “Anoche / vino / ella,” immediately identifying the storm as a single female entity who arrived independently. The storm’s power is shown through verb choice that assigns the storm responsibility for “barri[endo] selvas, caminos…montes,” “lav[ando] piedras de océano,” and “removi[endo] los pinares / para hacerse su cama.” Through the storm, the abstract concept of a woman is represented as powerful and violent, an “orquesta [de] furia y fuego,” continuing until “ya creíamos / que terminaba el mundo.” The strength of the storm is described using terms of war, with “relámpagos [que]…caían como espadas / de tu cintura guerrera,” but this violence is replaced with “lluvia, / lluvia, / sólo / lluvia,” a calming rain falling across the earth and simulated through the falling shape of the verse on the page. The delicate and temperamental nature of this stage of the storm is reinforced with the description of
“dedos / de música” which first gently lift a leaf, but then give “fuerza a los ríos” and nearly destroy the earth. Again, though, water is depicted as the saving force here, with “lluvia, / lluvia verde, / lluvia llena / de sueños” nurturing the natural world into growth and new life and inspiring the speaker to love.

The very end of the poem reads not so differently from the end of “Entrada a la madera,” as the reader entreats the storm to “cuenta conmigo” and “muéstrame tu camino / para que a ti se junte y cante con tu canto / la decidida voz / tempestuosa de un hombre.” We return here to the relationship of the speaker and the subject-as-lover, again representing love of nature in a very physical, concrete way. But this relationship is complicated by the uncertain role that male and female will play in the uniting of their two voices. On the one hand, it could be an attempt at egalitarianism, with the male speaker suggesting that he will follow the path set out for him by the female storm. But it could also be read as an attempt to regain control over the storm, with his “decidida voz” taking precedence over the voice of the storm.

Neruda further personifies water as a woman and a lover in the multi-part “Oceana,” published as part of Cantos Ceremoniales in 1961. This poem sees a return to the dependent narrator of Neruda’s much earlier work, as in “Poema 7,” who is interestingly positioned opposite not a human woman, but the sea herself, embodied as “Oceana,” a feminine adaptation of the masculine word for ocean, “océano.” Separated into eleven numbered sections, the poem seems to chronicle a story over the passage of time. The very first lines of the first segment situate the ocean in a human situation, calling her “Oceana nupcial.” By placing her “aquí a mi lado” shortly after calling her a bride, the narrator establishes an intimate relationship between the two, and subsequently
enumerates a number of desires (“cántame,” “quiero oír,” “dame el vino secreto”). In the second section, the narrator establishes a past that is subsequently revisited throughout the poem. The repeated use of “entonces” (literally “then,” “back then,” or “in those days”) gives a background like that of a long relationship, but acknowledges that a time existed before the two were together. The narrator describes how he “perdí los días” (Section II), “fui gastando mi sonrisa y cayeron / uno a uno mis dientes en una caja de hierro” (Section IV), emphasizing the way his behavior has changed since getting to know Oceana and implying positive personal growth. His references later change to “desde entonces” (“from now on”) to describe future actions within the context of the relationship, as with “cántame con ojos de guitarra” and “suspirame con uvas de amatista” (Section VII). This implies an anticipated future for the relationship, an expectation which is upset at the conclusion of the poem.

The narrator dreams of being “piedra marina,” so that the ocean can fully encompass him and he can surround himself in “olas ya desaparecidas, / mares que fallecieron con cántico y viajero” (Section VII). But in the very last stanza, the freedom of this ocean woman is reiterated, saying “al fin no vuelvas a tu piedra marina (presumably the narrator)...yo soy, Oceana, sólo alguien que te esperaba / en la torre de un faro que no existe” (Section XI). The narrator seems to acknowledge that the woman is entirely independent of his machinations, and that she need not return to him. He reiterates his devotion to her regardless of her feelings for him, but this behavior is again represented as futile, just like it was in Neruda’s much earlier poems. The last four lines also mark a departure from the abstraction of the rest of the poem with their surprising use of human physical characteristics. The “senos marinos bajo la luz nocturna” and
“ojos oscuros abiertos en el agua” both strongly recall Neruda’s descriptions of women’s bodies in his earliest writing, and give weight to the consideration of this body of water as simultaneously the body of a woman.

As we can see, Neruda’s portrayal of the relationship between femininity and nature evolved greatly over the course of his career, and makes use of a wide variety of techniques in establishing a connection between the two subjects. The consistency with which these themes appear in his work across the decades of his writing gives them a unifying quality that ties together poems written nearly four decades apart. But this unity is complicated when the poems are translated into English, because translators make choices that compromise or alter these themes as fundamental aspects of the poem in Spanish, as they recreate Neruda in English according to their personal translation biases.
Translation Analyses: Creating Neruda in English

The Neruda we encounter in translation has passed through careful analysis and is the result of each translator’s individual choices, which reflect his or her perception of what the English-speaking public values in a translation, and specifically one of poetry. The poetry that emerges reflects these individual readings, and is a tangible representation of their interpretation of Neruda’s writing. As translators make this vision concrete, their choices take the shape of translational strategies that accomplish both domestication and foreignization. As I examine selected translations of the poems I have previously discussed, I make note of these practices and the ways in which they are informed by the translator’s own understanding of the poem.

“Poema 7” presents evidence of several forms of domestication, the most notable of which is the bowdlerization found to some extent in all four versions, and also contains examples of the foreignizing effect of maintaining the Spanish grammatical structure. I examine four translations of this poem: W. S. Merwin’s “Leaning into the Afternoons,” David Ossman and Carlos Hagen’s “Inclinando en las tardes…” Giovanni Previtali’s “Nets of Sorrow,” and Mark Eisner’s “Poema 7: Leaning into the Evenings.” Before the editions by Merwin and by Ossman and Hagen, both published in 1969, the entire collection of poems had never been translated together, although individual poems from Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada had been published as part of collections of selected poems (some of which also included poems by other authors). Giovanni Previtali also translated the entire collection, publishing Twenty Poems of Love and a Sad Song of Hopelessness in 1994, but due to an incredibly small single printing, his translations are largely inaccessible. Mark Eisner’s translation of “Poema 7” is the
most recent (published in 2004), but appears alongside only four of the *Veinte poemas* as a part of a broader collection dubbed *The Essential Neruda*. While for the purposes of this thesis I am not considering this poem within its broader context, it is instructive to note the context that the translators felt was important to the reader’s comprehension of the work. The rest of the poems in *Veinte poemas* serve to reinforce the sexual undertones of this poem, as they appear more explicitly elsewhere within the collection.

The translator’s influence is evident in each of these versions before the poem even begins. Neruda left all of the poems in *Veinte poemas* untitled and merely numbered, but each translator here chooses to give the poem a title of some sort. This seems to be a domesticating decision to make Neruda’s poems conform to what seems to be standard practice for English poems in the twentieth century, with a title at the beginning that gives a general indication of the content to follow. Merwin, Eisner, and Ossman and Hagen each use the first few words of the poem, either in English (Merwin), in Spanish (Ossman and Hagen), or each respective language in Eisner’s side-by-side edition. Previtali instead uses his translation of the second image of the poem, “Nets of Sorrow,” which serves to move the emphasis from the speaker (where it lies with the other three translators’ titles) to the objects the speaker holds. This choice complicates the understanding of the general subject of the poem, drawing the reader’s attention away from the woman who is the object of the speaker’s affection and instead to the metaphors that Neruda uses to demonstrate this sentiment.

Each translator’s approach to the translation of Neruda’s “tardes” has an effect on the development of the narrative of the rest of the poem. The term is somewhat ambiguous, literally referring to “the time of day after noon but before twilight” or “the
last hours of the day,” according to the Real Academia Española, and also tied to the meaning of “tarde” as an adverb, meaning “late.” Merwin is the only translator to embrace the possible earlier temporality of the word, with “leaning into the afternoons.” Previtali’s “leaning forward at eventide” is more archaic and old-fashioned than either “evenings” or “afternoons,” a tone that prevails later with his description of loneliness that “flays out and bursts flaming.” However, it has an effect similar to the other two translators’ translation of “tardes” as “evenings,” which relates the beginning to the growing darkness of the rest of the poem. The melancholy air of the poem, expressed first in the description of “redes tristes,” indicates a troubled relationship from the start of the poem, and if we read the fading of the light as a metaphor for the fading relationship, setting the beginning in evening rather than afternoon seems more appropriate.

In the next stanza, the structural differences between English and Spanish become apparent. Neruda uses a single phrase unbroken by commas, and balances the subject between two sets of actions. English sentence structure requires some alteration, and each translator manages these differently. The unbroken rhythm of the original lines is lost in every translation, and with it goes the sense of powerful urgency in the burning, flailing loneliness. In what can be read as a foreignizing move resisting the domestication of structural change, Ossman and Hagen stay closest to the structure of the original, translating “Allí se estira y arde en la más alta hoguera / mi soledad que da vueltas los brazos como un náufrago” as “There, stretching and glowing in the highest blaze, / my loneliness spins in your arms like a castaway.” But they misappropriate the arms to the subject of the poem, rather than the loneliness itself, and in so doing change the meaning of the phrase. Merwin’s “There in the highest blaze my solitude lengthens
and flames, / its arms turning like a drowning man’s” correctly attributes all action to the
subject, “soledad,” but his choice to translate “soledad” as “solitude” creates a somewhat
different effect than what is present in the Spanish. Although the word can be translated
as either “solitude” or “loneliness,” the meaning changes depending on the context, and
here it seems definitively to mean the latter. The speaker presents loneliness as an entity
unto itself, humanized here as a shipwrecked castaway. Because loneliness is a state of
mind and solitude is a condition, loneliness seems to be a better understanding of this
personification. The “soledad” is also described as something that the speaker suffers
against his will, just as a castaway would not choose to be adrift in the ocean, which fits
with the understanding of loneliness as an unwanted sense of isolation, whereas solitude
could be chosen or desired.

Eisner and Previtali both translate “soledad” as “loneliness” as Ossman and
Hagen do, but shift this subject to the beginning of the sentence, accommodating a
perceived reader preference for Venuti’s concept of “fluency” in English (5). Eisner’s
“There my loneliness stretches and burns in the tallest bonfire, / arms twisting like a
drowning man’s” prioritizes aesthetics and readability in the target language over
faithfulness to the structure of the source text. Previtali’s version, “And, there in your
sight, / my loneliness flays out and bursts flaming / into a towering bonfire, / throwing
about its arms like a man drowning,” is similarly domesticating in the use of grammatical
restructuring, but this passage also offers further insight into what Previtali values in an
English translation. He chooses to make explicit the allusive “there” (“allí”) at the
beginning of the stanza, reiterating the location established at the end of the first stanza:
within the woman’s “ojos oceánicos”. In doing this, he breaks his stanza into four lines
from the original two, an expansionist choice that over the course of the poem results in a text that, at twenty-two lines, is eight lines longer than the original and that abandons Neruda’s phrasing in couplets for a looser poetic structure. His decision throughout the poem to explain images that he reads as vague or indirect indicates a lack of confidence in the reader’s ability to make connections in the text, and results in a “dumbed-down” version of the poem.

The third stanza of this poem presents a challenge common to translating Neruda: the verb “olear” is one of Neruda’s own invention. Its significance is clear, deriving from the word “ola,” for “wave,” as he applies to the motion of the waves to his description of the movement of the woman’s eyes. But the word does not actually exist in Spanish, and it has no clear English equivalent. There is no uniform approach here, as each translator chooses a different word that relates to this described motion. The original “ojos ausentes / que olean como el mar a la orilla de un faro” are represented as eyes that alternatively move, sway, ebb, and lap like the sea (Merwin, Ossman and Hagen, Previtali, and Eisner, respectively). As Felstiner writes, “[Neruda] is difficult to translate for the same reason that an average Chilean has trouble grasping some of his poetry. When Neruda has lit on an image intuitively, the translator must sometimes make an unguided choice” (29). In this stanza, each translator makes his own choice as to how to represent Neruda’s linguistic invention, and in so doing each accomplishes something slightly different, giving credence the oft-repeated assertion that there is no such thing as a definitive translation. Each version manages to successfully convey the motion of the lover’s eyes as Neruda represented it with his invented word, through a different use of English. This emphasizes the way in which each translator’s reading of the poem is his
own interpretation, and each translation is a different understanding of how Neruda can be conveyed in the target language.

The sexuality of the seventh stanza presents most prominently the issue of bowdlerization in the target language. Neruda’s image is very clearly sexual: “Galopa la noche en su yegua sombría / desparramando espigas azules sobre el campo.” Eisner’s decision to assign the night a female gender builds on the female gender of the noun in Spanish, but for once Neruda seems to be ignoring this gender assignment in favor of representing night and darkness in a stereotypical heterosexual framework, with the night itself seeding the shadows with the promise of life. The sexuality of this stanza is the victim of some level of bowdlerization in all of the translations, though it is impossible to tell what of this is intentional and what is the cause of incomprehension on the part of the translator. Both Ossman and Hagen’s and Eisner’s use of “wheat” keeps the connection to nature that Neruda establishes with his use of “espigas,” a word that does not easily translate to English but refers to the tiny sprouts that grow from wheat, and in both cases they maintain the progression from night galloping on a mare to the scattering of wheat, though Eisner’s “wheat stalks” removes the implication of insemination. Merwin’s translation of “shedding blue tassels” works to obstruct the sexual undertones of the original lines by entirely eliminating the connection to nature and new life. Previtali also loses the sexual implication of sowing seeds, with “showering bright blue sparks,” a translation that fixates instead on Neruda’s unusual choice of the adjective “azul” (blue). By choosing not to fully represent the sexuality of this demonstrative example of Neruda’s early use of eroticism, the translators alter the conclusion of the poem and problematize its capacity to accurately represent Neruda’s early writing.
Unlike the situation in “Poema 7,” where the relationship between the speaker and the woman he loves is fairly straightforward and easy to convert into English, the primary translational challenge of “Entrada a la madera” is the conveyance of the intimacy present in the original. For the first six of seven stanzas in this poem, Neruda relies heavily on grammar to establish the relationship between the speaker and his subject, the wood, referring to it as “tu” and always conjugating the verbs describing the wood’s actions in the intimate second person. This presents a serious problem when moving from Spanish into English, since the intimate second person is no longer commonly used in English, and because of this archaic classification it cannot convey the same level of intimacy. The additional association in the United States of “thee,” “thou,” and “thy” with Biblical language would even further distance the meaning from the original. None of the translators choose this archaizing option, which suggests a comprehension of the distancing effect it would have on the reader. The intimate imagery does generally translate even when the grammar does not, and so the intimate tone is not lost. Neruda’s “en mi hundimiento tus pétalos subo” is just as physical and sexual an image as Flores’ “in my sinking I climb your petals.” The sense of longing that comes across so clearly in the Spanish “soy yo con mis lamentos sin origen, / sin alimentos, desvelado, solo, / entrando oscurecidos corredores, / llegando a tu materia misteriosa” is equally evident in Felstiner’s “it is I with my sourceless laments, / unnourished, wakeful, alone, / entering darkened corridors, / reaching your mysterious matter.” The translators’ attempts to establish a similarly intimate relationship in English as in Spanish show a clear acknowledgement of the importance of this tone to the poem as a whole, and do not suggest the inclination to bowdlerization found in the translations of “Poema 7.”
However, there is less explicit sexuality in “Oda a la madera” than in “Poema 7,” and therefore less potential temptation to expurgate material that might offend the contemporary social values of the intended reader.

Certain moments in this poem point specifically to the influence of a translator’s own understanding on the reliability of a translation. While many differences between translations are simply the result of choosing one form of equivalence over another when moving between languages, some reflect an apparent error on the translator’s part. In the fourth stanza here, Nathaniel Tarn translates “tus pálidas espadas muertas” as “your pale dead shoulders.” The word “espadas” means “swords” in English, and the other three translators render it thus. Tarn’s use of “shoulders” could potentially be the result of misreading “espadas” as “espaldas,” which means “backs,” but does not otherwise make sense. It has the result of increasing the corporality of this stanza, however: when followed by “your gathered hearts, / your silent multitude,” Tarn’s translation gives this stanza a more concrete sense of humanity than is present in the original, interrupted as it is with the unnatural image of “dead swords.” This example serves to illustrate how the translator’s own comprehension of the poem is ultimately the primary determining factor in whether or not an image comes across in translation. The abstract nature of Neruda’s images means that this apparent mistake does not sound particularly out of place from the rest of Tarn’s translation. This is one of the great risks of reading translation: the monolingual reader has no choice but to trust that the translator has correctly understood the entirety of the source text.

The subsequent stanza contains another difference between Tarn’s translation and the other three. In Neruda’s “Soy yo ante tu ola de olores muriendo,” the other three
translators read the gerund “muriendo” as referring to the second subject of the sentence, “ola de olores,” whereas Tarn applies it to the first subject, the speaker himself. This passage is ambiguous in Spanish, but it is impossible for it to remain so in English, and the translator’s choice is the only factor determining whether the reader is presented with the speaker “dying under your wave of odours” or “facing your wave of dying fragrances” (Tarn and Walsh). This is only one of many instances in which Neruda’s ambiguous phrasing must be clarified in English because of the difference in language structure, and where the translator’s interpretation transforms the image the reader encounters. When the translator attempts to represent Neruda’s ambiguous phrasing, he is grammatically forced to come down firmly on one side or the other of the ambiguity, and the resulting poem in the target language necessarily lacks a key element that was present in the original.

The translators’ choices in different versions of “Oda a la cebolla” primarily affect the coherence of the poetic narrative and the tone of the poem. Whereas “madera” was extensively represented with the intimacy of a lover-like relationship but never explicitly characterized as feminine in “Oda a la madera,” the femininity of the “cebolla” is key to the structure and narrative of the poem. Early in the poem, Neruda describes how “en el secreto de la tierra oscura se redondeó tu vientre de rocío.” This phrase presents an ambiguity similar to that seen in “Oda a la madera,” where “rocío” could either be read as an adjective describing the “vientre” or the substance that is filling it. The translations are split evenly between these two interpretations, with Jacketti and Krabbenhoft describing a “dewy belly” or “belly of dew,” respectively, while Lozano and Mitchell both describe the belly “swell[ing]” or “[growing] round” with dew. Here again
we see how clarification according to English grammatical rules can result in a loss of or change in meaning from the source text. In addition to this loss of ambiguity, however, is the loss of Neruda’s specific vocabulary choice that works to enhance the sense of femininity in Spanish. He uses the word “vientre,” which has two possible translations. While “belly,” used by all four translators, is an accurate literal translation, this choice neglects the potential extension of the feminine identity of the onion with the alternate meaning, “womb.” This second meaning also fits with the birth narrative in the beginning of the poem, supporting Neruda’s description of the “milagro” of the onion’s development and the birth of the onion’s leaves.

The connotation of certain words, both in Spanish and in English, serves to either build or lessen the femininity of the poem. Neruda’s sexualized description of the cooking process—“deshaces / tu globo de frescura / en la consumación / ferviente de la olla”—is a good example of this. Mitchell’s translation maintains the visceral, physical action of Neruda’s phrase, with “you undo / your globe of freshness / in the fervent consummation / of the cooking pot.” Jacketti maintains the concept of cooking as union with “you break / your fresh globe / in sizzling marriage / with the stew pot,” but “sizzling marriage” lacks the explicit sexuality of the original and refocuses the reader on the culinary aspect of the image with its stovetop connotation. Krabbenhoft directly translates “consumación” as “consummation,” like Mitchell, but again relates it more closely to the culinary realm by choosing “boiling” for “ferviente.” Additionally, his translation of “globo” as “balloon” destroys the sensuality of the phrase by using an overly specific and illogical translation of the word that does not fit with the context of the poem. Finally, Lozano gives us “you undo your bulb of freshness / in the hot
consummation / of the cooking pot,” a very straightforward take on the phrase that does not actively change the meaning, but lacks the passionate connotation of “fervent.” However, beyond its use as a measurement of temperature, the word “hot” has a sexual connotation that brings Lozano’s translation very close to the original, though in a more subtle way.

Nathaniel Tarn’s translation of “Oda a la tormenta” domesticates Neruda’s poem primarily through his use of archaizing language. Throughout the poem, his vocabulary choices hark back to an earlier poetic period, giving his Neruda an old-fashioned tone. Often, his choices seem to clarify a vague or abstract image as a more concrete and specific thing, as when he translates “rompiste / como un lienzo / el silencio inactivo” as “tore / the numbed silence / like a handkerchief.” “Lienzo” literally translates simply to “cloth,” so Tarn’s reference to a handkerchief is not only more old-fashioned, but also a much more specific image. Later, he translates the speaker’s tender and intimate reference to the storm as “novia mía” as “my betrothed,” a choice that again suggests an earlier temporality than the 1950s, when Neruda wrote this poem. Other words, such as “tempest” (at the beginning, for “tempestad”) and “reckon with me” (nearer the end, for “cuenta conmigo”), are words that are still used fairly commonly in English, but maintain connections to their much earlier origins, and nudge the reader further into the past. This suggests the applicability of Steiner’s claim that archaism can be used to domesticate by replacing the geographically distant with temporally distant language. Tarn clearly perceives the need to maintain the sense of Neruda’s distance from his new English-speaking readers, and chooses to do so by implying a different sort of separation from the existing trans-continental one.
Neruda’s verse in this poem is striking because of the humanizing way in which he describes the arc of the storm. This clarity of representation comes through in Tarn’s verse, and the feminine nature of the storm is almost more evident in English, because while the conjugation of Spanish verbs is the same for the third-person masculine or feminine, in English the addition of the feminine pronoun is required. Therefore, every time the storm undertakes an action, such as “quiso,” “llegó,” “quería,” etcetera, in English it is translated as “she wanted,” “she arrived,” “she longed,” and so forth. Certain word choices by Tarn seem to further play up the femininity of the storm, building on the prominence of Greek myth in Western literary tradition. His use of “quiver of fire” in place of Neruda’s “saco de fuego” (“sack of fire”) plays off of the Olympian scene of thrown lightning bolts and calls to mind another famous powerful woman, Diana the Huntress. A similar change later on, from “preparadora de cosechas” (“preparer of harvests”) to “mother of harvests,” similarly echoes back to powerful Greek goddesses, this time to Demeter, Goddess of the Harvest. These allusions are not present in the original text, and can be read as a domesticating attempt both to give the poem a familiar feel to the target audience, and also to legitimize the use of archaic language. By alluding to classical myths in his translations, Tarn also associates his text with those translations of classical texts whose use of archaism is more commonly accepted as it creates a suggestion of “the antiquity of the original work” (Roberts 268).

In Maria Jacketti’s version of “Oceana,” the most visible translational transformation is her alteration of the original punctuation. Many of her changes seem to have a domesticating effect, as they break up some of the longer phrases into shorter, less complicated ideas. This poem is marked in Spanish by continuous and repetitive verse,
as Neruda often moves from one idea to the next without breaking up the flow of the words with commas or other punctuation. This has an effect that calls to mind the driving rhythm of the ocean, illustrating the subject of the poem through its sound. By breaking up the narrative with her extensive use of commas, Jacketti creates images that are less dependent on their textual surroundings, and loses the way Neruda plays with the relationship between sound and meaning. For example, the first four lines of the third stanza all lead fluidly into one another, culminating in a comma: “Oceana, reclina tu noche en el castillo / que aguardó sin cesar pasar tu cabellera / en cada ola que el mar elevaba en el mar / y luego no eras tú sino el mar que pasaba.” But Jacketti breaks this phrase up three times before the final comma, with “Ocean Lady, give your twilight rest in the castle / which faithfully awaited the passage of your lush hair, / in every wave that the sea raised up from its chasm, / and then you weren’t yourself—but instead the fugitive sea.” The push that Neruda derives from his lack of commas and the repetition of “el mar” replicate the insistent power of the ocean, and Jacketti’s translation loses this, when she eliminates the run-on sentence structure.

In other cases, her punctuation choices actually change the meaning of the translation, compared to my understanding of the original. Neruda’s verse reads thus: “cántame caracola, cuéntame la campana, / cántame la paciencia del trigo submarino, / el tembloroso rey coronado de vértebras, / la luna diametral que lloraba de frío.” But in Jacketti’s translation, we are given, “sing to me, snail; speak to me, bell; / sing to me, patience of underwater wheat, / the quivering king, crowned by vertebrae, / the retrograde moon that cried in the cold.” The subject of the second-person commands in the original is somewhat unclear, but I read them to be directed still to Oceana, following the
grammatical phrasing of the rest of the poem, and therefore “caracola,” “la campana,” “la paciencia del trigo submarino,” “el tembloroso rey,” and “la luna” all become the subjects of the story that the narrator wants Oceana to tell, become the song of the sea. Jacketti changes the meaning of the phrase, asking the snail and bell themselves to sing rather than asking Oceana to sing songs about them. Jacketti’s reading here is consistent with a choice she makes in the first line of the poem, translating “cántame los desaparecidos / cantares” as “sing to me, the vanished / songs.” In both of these cases, Jacketti’s translation finds its home in a more standard formation of English than Neruda uses of Spanish. This poem distinguishes itself because of the ways that Neruda plays with the roles of various parts of speech, and in choosing not to structure her translation in a way that breaks the norms of English grammar, Jacketti fails to convey the full effect of the original in the target language.

In Section VIII, the addition of a colon in English clearly serves the intended purpose of maintaining the original Spanish word order, a choice that suggests some level of foreignizing intent, but the result is a slight change in the meaning in English: “tú sabes como sobre la sal ultramarina / en su nave de nieve navega el Argonauta” becomes, “You know the way: over the ultramarine salt / the Argonaut navigates his snow ship.” In Spanish, the phrase means that Oceana knows how the Argonaut moves, implying ancient memory. In the English, the implication is instead of ongoing activity, as though the Argonaut were navigating according to the guidance of Oceana. Even when maintaining a sentence structure closer to the Spanish in order to disrupt English linguistic codes in keeping with Venuti’s definition of foreignizing intent, Jacketti
domesticates by creating a more conversational phrase, bringing the reader closer to the text.

These translations exhibit the inaccuracy of Venuti’s belief, based on that of Schleiermacher before him, that domestication and foreignization are mutually exclusive concepts. Many, if not most, of the translators examined here practice a combination of both methods, and while the difference between the two approaches to translation are noticeable to the discerning critic, the poems do not contain the conflict implied by the combination of these two fundamentally different approaches.
Pablo Neruda’s centrality in the literature of Chile and of Latin America and his status as a Nobel prize-winner have led to his widespread accessibility in translation. But how accessible is he? The translations I have examined here show not only the varying effects of individual interpretations but also the prevailing influence of a tendency towards domestication. This is not surprising, given both the relative ease with which a domesticated translation can be read, and the possible drawbacks of a foreignizing version. As seen in Previtali’s “Nets of Sorrow,” Ossman and Hagen’s “Inclinando a las tardes…” and some parts of Jacketti’s “Ocean Lady,” the foreignizing attempt to retain the Spanish grammatical structure can sometimes result in a translation that says something different from the original text. But even if the correct meaning is retained in English, the process of “disrupting the [prevailing] cultural codes” necessarily creates a phrase that sounds out of place in the target language, as in Carlos Lozano’s “Ode to an onion” and other moments in Jacketti’s “Ocean Lady” (Venuti 20) For the bilingual reader, this may read as a particularly demonstrative aspect of the translation, linking it to the source text by reminding the reader that what they are reading began as something else. But for the English reader who cannot see the parallel structures, this foreignizing step could suggest to the reader that the phrasing was awkward or ungrammatical in the original. The inability to identify where the translator is highlighting “the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text” can inhibit the reader’s comprehension of the text as a whole (Venuti 20).

A domesticated translation is also generally easier to understand. Considering this, it is worth noting that the translations which seemed most resistant to domestication are also the most difficult to find in print. Of the translations of “Poema 7,” Ossman and
Hagen’s maintains the closest connection to the Spanish grammatical structure and makes frequent vocabulary choices that relate directly to the meaning in the source text. But despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that this translation is capable of bringing the English reader closest to the Spanish Neruda, WorldCat documents only 130 copies of this volume held in libraries worldwide, compared to 1,724 copies of six different editions of W. S. Merwin’s translations of Neruda’s *Veinte poemas*, which have also been illustrated by artists as famous as Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol. Merwin’s fame as a poet in his own right may also contribute to the popularity of his translation. Eisner’s domesticating translation of “Poema 7” is part of *The Essential Neruda*, a collection of translations by multiple translators of poems from across Neruda’s career that was only published in 2004, but WorldCat documents 559 copies held worldwide. This vast discrepancy illustrates Venuti’s argument that the publishing world gives preference to more “readable” translations. My analysis of these translations supports his conclusion regarding the inadequacy of domesticating translations, showing that this emphasis on fluency can be detrimental to the English reader’s understanding of Neruda’s work.

Translators’ influence on the representation of Neruda in English cannot be denied, and analyzing this influence gives insight into the kinds of differences that exist between individual readings of the same poem. The Neruda created by each of the translators represented here is slightly different, but by looking at all of them, the comparative reader can develop a cumulative sense of what marks Neruda in Spanish. While the foreignizing moves made by certain translators do not always succeed in portraying both the difference of the source text and its meaning, the few cases where both are accomplished illustrate Venuti’s foreignizing ideal of a translation that actively
speaks to its origins. And although some domesticating attempts create noticeable differences between the target text and the source, they also make it easy to see where the publishing industry’s appreciation for fluency comes from; these translations do read as poetry in the target language. By embracing some level of domestication, with occasional foreignizing touches, each these translators has helped to give the English-speaking reader a Neruda who, through the collective reading of many different translations, emerges as both authentic and beautiful.
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Poema 7
Pablo Neruda, 1924

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

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

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

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

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

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

Galopa la noche en su yegua sombría
desparramando espigas azules sobre el campo.
7: Leaning into the evenings  
Mark Eisner, 2004

Leaning into the evenings I throw my sad nets  
to your ocean eyes.

There my loneliness stretches and burns in the tallest bonfire,  
arms twisting like a drowning man’s.

I cast red signals over your absent eyes  
which lap like the sea at the lighthouse shore.

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

Leaning into the evenings I toss my sad nets  
to that sea which stirs your ocean eyes.

The night birds peck at the first stars  
that twinkle like my soul as I love you.

Night gallops on her shadowy mare  
scattering blue wheat stalks over the fields.
VII: Leaning into the Afternoons
W. S. Merwin, 1969

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

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

I send out red signals across your absent eyes
that move like the sea near a lighthouse.

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

Leaning into the afternoons I fling my sad nets
to that sea that beats on your marine eyes.

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

The night gallops on its shadowy mare
shedding blue tassels over the land.
Inclinando en las tardes
David Ossman and Carlos B. Hagen, 1969

Bending in the evenings I throw my sad nets
into your oceanic eyes.

There, stretching and glowing in the highest blaze,
my loneliness spins in your arms like a castaway.

I make red signals over your absent eyes,
which sway like the sea at the foot of a lighthouse.

You only watch over darknesses, my own distant woman.
From your gaze the menacing coast sometimes emerges.

Bending in the evenings I cast my sad nets
in that sea which pounds in your oceanic eyes.

The night-birds peck out the first stars
which sparkle like my soul when I love you.

The night gallops on its shadowed mare,
scattering ripe blue wheat over the fields.
Nets of Sorrow  
Giovanni Previtali, 1994

Leaning forward at eventide  
I cast my nets of sorrow  
out to your ocean-like eyes.

And, there in your sight,  
my loneliness flays out and bursts flaming  
into a towering bonfire,  
throwing about its arms like a man drowning.

I flash my red lighthouse signals  
into the faraway look in your eyes  
that ebb as the sea  
against the foot of the lighthouse tower.

But you, woman who are steeped in the shadows of darkness,  
you, who are so far away from me and yet so mine.  
Still, at times, the shoreline of fear  
looms up in that look in your eyes.

Leaning forward at eventide  
I cast my nets of sorrow  
out to that sea that buffets your ocean-like eyes.

The birds of night peck at the early stars  
that scintillate as does my soul when I love you.

Night rides at a gallop upon the mare of darkness,  
showering bright blue sparks across the fields.
Entrada a la madera
Pablo Neruda, 1933

Con mi razón apenas, con mis dedos,
con lentas aguas lentas inundadas,
caigo al imperio de los nomeolvides,
a una tenaz atmósfera de luto,
a una olvidada sala decaída,
a un racimo de tréboles amargos.

Caigo en la sombra, en medio
de destruidas cosas,
y miro arañas, y apaciento bosques
de secretas maderas inconclusas,
y ando entre húmedas fibras arrancadas
al vivo ser de substancia y silencio.

Dulce materia, oh rosa de alas secas,
en mi hundimiento tus pétalos subo
con pies pesados de roja fatiga,
y en tu catedral dura me arrodillo
golpeándome los labios con un ángel.

Es que soy yo ante tu color de mundo,
ante tus pálidas espadas muertas,
ante tus corazones reunidos,
ante tu silenciosa multitud.

Soy yo ante tu ola de olores muriendo,
envelopados en otoño y resistencia:
soy yo emprendiendo un viaje funerario
entre tus cicatrices amarillas:
soy yo con mis lamentos sin origen,
sin alimentos, desvelado, solo,
entrando oscurecidos corredores,
 llegando a tu materia misteriosa.

Veo moverse tus corrientes secas,
veo crecer manos interrumpidas,
oigo tus vegetales oceánicos
crujir de noche y furia sacudidos,
y siento morir hojas hacia adentro,
incorporando materiales verdes
a tu inmovilidad desamparada.
Entrance into wood  
John Felstiner, 1980

With scarce my reason, with my fingers,  
with slow waters slow flooded,  
I fall into the realm of forget-me-nots,  
to a mourning air that clings,  
to a forgotten room in ruins,  
to a cluster of bitter clover.

I fall into shadow, the midst  
of things broken down,  
and I look at spiders, and graze forests  
of secret inconclusive wood,  
and I pass among damp uprooted fibers  
to the live heart of matter and silence.

Smooth substance, oh drywinged rose,  
in my sinking I climb your petals,  
my feet weighed down with a red fatigue,  
and I kneel in your hard cathedral,  
bruising my lips on an angel.

Here am I faced with your color of the world,  
with your pale dead swords,  
with your gathered hearts,  
with your silent horde.

Here am I with your wave of dying fragrances  
wrapped in autumn and resistance:  
it is I embarking on a funeral journey  
among your yellow scars:  
it is I with my sourceless laments,  
unnourished, wakeful, alone,  
entering darkened corridors,  
reaching your mysterious matter.

I see your dry currents moving,  
broken-off hands I see growing,  
I hear your oceanic plants  
creaking, by night and fury shaken,  
and I feel leaves dying inwards,  
amassing green materials  
to your desolate stillness.

Pores, veins, circles of smoothness,  
weight, silent temperature,  
arrows cleaving to your fallen soul,  
beings asleep in your thick mouth,  
dust of sweet pulp consumed,  
ash full of snuffed-out souls,  
come to me, to my measureless dream,  
fall into my room where night falls  
and incessantly falls like broken water,  
and clasp me to your life, to your death,  
to your crushed materials,  
to your dead neutral doves,  
and let us make fire, and silence, and sound,  
and let us burn and be silent and bells.
Entrance into wood
Angel Flores, 1946

Scarcely with my reason, with my fingers,
with slow waters slowly inundated,
I fall under the spell of forget-me-nots,
of a tenacious atmosphere of mourning,
of a forgotten decayed salt,
of a bunch of bitter clover.

I fall in shadow, in the midst
of destroyed things,
and watch spiders, and graze in forests
of secret inconclusive wood,
and walk among damp fibers extirpated
from the living being of substance and silence.

Sweet matter, O dry-winged rose,
in my sinking I climb your petals
with feet heavy with red fatigue,
and in your hard cathedral I kneel
striking my lips upon an angel.

It is I who am before your color of world,
before your pallid dead swords,
before your reunited hearts,
before your silent multitude.

It is I before your wave of dying odors
wrapped in autumn and resistance:
it is I undertaking a funeral journey
amid your yellow scars:
it is I with my laments without origin,
without nourishment, without sleep, alone,
Entering darkened corridors,
reaching your mysterious substance.

I see your dried currents moving,
I see your interrupted hands growing,
I hear your oceanic vegetables
rustling with night and fury shaken,
and I feel leaves dying within,
incorporating green materials
to your forsaken immobility.
The Way Into Wood
Nathaniel Tarn, 1970

By the skin of my reason, with my fingers,
with slow waters indolently swamped,
I fall to the imperium of the forget-me-nots,
an unforgiving air of mournfulness,
a decayed, forgotten hall
and a cluster of bitter clovers.

I fall into the shadows, to the core
of shattered things,
and I see spiders, and pasture coppices
of secret, inconclusive timbers,
pacing through soaked, uprooted fibres
at the living heart of matter and silence.

Oh lovely matter, dry-winged rose,
as I drown I climb your petals,
my feet are burning with fatigue,
I kneel down in your hard cathedral
thrashing my lips with an angel.

It is because I am myself faced with your
colour of world,
with your pale dead shoulders,
your gathered hearts,
your silent multitude.

It is I dying under your wave of odours
wrapped in autumn and resistance:
about to take a funeral journey
along the ridges of yellow scars:
I with my lamentations that have no genesis,
hungry, sleepless, alone,
threading darkened corridors,
arriving at your mysterious essence.

I see the course of your petrified currents,
the growth of frozen, interrupted hands,
I hear your oceanic vegetations
rustling by night,
enraged, intractable,
and I feel the leaves dying to the very core,
fusing their green materials
with your abandoned immobility.
Entrance to Wood
Donald D. Walsh, 1973

Scarcely with my reason, with my fingers, with slow waters slow inundated, I fall into the realm of forget-me-nots, into a tenacious atmosphere of mourning, into a forgotten, decayed room, into a cluster of bitter clover.

I fall into the shadow, amid destroyed things, and I look at spiders, and I graze on thickets of secret inconclusive woods, and I walk among moist fibers torn from the living being of substance and silence.

Gentle matter, oh rose of dry wings, in my collapse I climb up your petals, my feet heavy with red fatigue, and in your harsh cathedral I kneel beating my lips with an angel.

I am the one facing your worldly color, facing your pale dead swords, facing your united hearts, facing your silent multitude.

I am the one facing your wave of dying fragrances, wrapped in autumn and resistance: I am the one undertaking a funereal voyage among your yellow scars: I am the one with my sourceless laments, foodless, abandoned, alone, entering darkened corridors, reaching your mysterious substance.

I see your dry currents move, I see interrupted hands grow, I hear your oceanic vegetation rustle shaken by night and fury, and I feel leaves dying inward, joining green substances to your forsaken immobility.
Oda a la cebolla
Pablo Neruda, 1954

Cebolla
luminosa redoma,
pétalo a pétalo
se formó tu hermosura,
escamas de cristal te acrecentaron
y en el secreto de la tierra oscura
se redondeó tu vientre de rocío.
Bajo la tierra
fue el milagro
y cuando apareció
tu torpe tallo verde,
y nacieron
tus hojas como espadas en el huerto,
la tierra acumuló su poderío
mostrando tu desnuda transparencia,
y como en Afrodita el mar remoto
duplicó la magnolia
levantando sus senos,
la tierra
así te hizo,
cebolla,
clara como un planeta,
y destinada
a relucir,
constelación constante,
redonda rosa de agua,
sobre
la mesa
de las pobres gentes.

Generosa
deshaces
tu globo de frescura
en la consumación
ferviente de la olla,
y el jirón de cristal
al calor encendido del aceite
se transforma en rizada pluma de oro.

Tambiém recordaré cómo fecunda
tu influencia el amor de la ensalada
y parece que el cielo contribuye
dándote fina forma de granizo
a celebrar tu claridad picada
sobre los hemisferios de un tomate.
Pero al alcance
de las manos del pueblo,
regada con aceite,
espolvoreada
con un poco de sal,
matas el hambre
del jornalero en el duro camino.
Estrella de los pobres,
hada madrina
envuelta en delicado
papel, sales del suelo,
eterna, intacta, pura
como semilla de astro,
y al cortarte
el cuchillo en la cocina
sube la única lágrima
sin pena.
Nos hiciste llorar sin afligirnos.
Yo cuanto existe celebré, cebolla,
pero para mí eres
más hermosa que un ave
de plumas cegadoras,
eres para mis ojos
globo celeste, copa de platino,
baile inmóvil
de anémona nevada
y vive la fragancia de la tierra
en tu naturaleza cristalina.
Ode to the onion
Maria Jacketti, 1995

Onion,
luminous globe,
petal by petal,
your splendor appeared:
crystal scales multiplied within your essence,
and beneath the secret of the rich earth,
your dewy bely grew round.
The miracle
was born underground,
and when your heavy green stem
appeared, and your leaves were born
like swords in the vegetable patch,
the earth accumulated riches,
exposing your naked transparency,
and as with Aphrodite, the remote sea
imitated the magnolia
by lifting its breasts;
likewise, the earth
created you,
onion,
clear as a planet,
and destined
to shine,
a steadfast constellation,
round sea rose
on
poverty’s table.

Endowed with abundance,
you break
your fresh globe
in sizzling marriage
with the stew pot;
when you touch hot oil,
crystal slivers become
curled feathers of gold.

I will also remember your abundant
and loving influence on salads;
it seems the sky also contributed,
giving you the fine form of hail
in celebration of your diced clarity
when sprinkled over the tomato’s planetary
halves.
But when you reach
the hands of the people,
dappled with oil,
and dusted
with a little salt,
you silence a worker’s hunger
along difficult roads.
Star of the poor,
fairy godmother
sheathed
in airy
paper, you exit the earth,
eternal, untouched, pure:
a star-seed.
And when the kitchen knife
slices you,
a painless tear
is shed.
You made us cry without affliction.
Throughout my days,
I’ve celebrated the onion.
In my eyes
you are more lovely
than a bird with blinding feathers.
In my eyes
you are a celestial globe, a platinum cup,
the quiescent dance
of an anemone in the snow.

And the fragrance of the land lives
within your crystalline nature.
Ode to the onion  
Ken Krabbenhoft, 1994

Onion, shining flask,  
your beauty assembled  
petal by petal,  
they affixed crystal scales to you  
and your belly of dew grew round  
in the secret depth of the dark earth.  
The miracle took place  
underground,  
and when your lazy green stalk  
appeared  
and your leaves were born  
like swords in the garden,  
the earth gathered its strength  
exhibiting your naked transparency,  
and ust as the distant sea  
copied the magnolia in Aphrodite  
raising up her breasts,  
so the earth  
made you,  
onion, as bright as a planet  
and fated  
to shine,  
constant constellation,  
rounded rose of water,  
on  
poor people’s  
dining tables.

Generously  
you give up  
your balloon of freshness  
to the boiling consummation  
of the pot,  
and in the blazing heat of the oil  
the shred of crystal  
is transformed into a curled feather of gold.

I shall also proclaim how your influence livens  
the salad’s love,  
and the sky seems to contribute  
giving you the fine shape of hail  
praising your chopped brightnes  
upon the halves of the tomato.  
But within the people’s  
reach,  
showered with oil,  
dusted  
with a pinch of salt,  
you satisfy the worker’s hunger  
along the hard road home.  
Poor people’s star,  
fairy godmother  
wrapped  
in fancy paper,  
you rise from the soil,  
eternal, intact, as pure  
as a celestial seed,  
and when the kitchen knife  
cuts you  
the only painless tear  
is shed:  
you made us weep without suffering.  
I have praised every living thing, onion,  
but for me you are  
more beautif than a bird  
of blinding plumage;  
to my eyes you are  
a heavenly balloon, platinum cup,  
the snowy anemone’s  
motionless dance.

The fragrance of the earth is alive  
in your crystalline nature.
Ode to An onion  
Carlos Lozano, 1961

Onion,  
luminous flask,  
petal by petal  
was your beauty fashioned,  
crystalline scales your girth increased  
and, hidden in the dark earth,  
your belly swelled with dew.  
Beneath the ground  
occurred the miracle  
and when your awkward, callow shoot  
first peered,  
and when, like swords  
your first leaves pierced the plot,  
earth assembled all her might,  
displaying your translucent nudity.  
And, as the alien sea,  
in swelling the breasts of Aphrodite  
repeated the magnolia,  
so did the earth create you,  
onion,  
pellucid planet  
destined to glow,  
constant constellation,  
sperical water rose,  
upon the table of the poor.  
magnanimous,  
you undo your bulb of freshness  
in the hot consummation  
of the cooking pot;  
and the crystal shred  
in the burning heat of oil  
becomes a feathery golden ring.

Then, too, I shall record as useful  
your influence on the love of salad,  
and even Heaven, it seems,  
in giving you the delicate form of hail,  
proclaims your chopped transparency  
on the tomato’s hemispheres.  
But, within the reach  
of common folk,  
oil-moistened  
and sprinkled  
with a bit of salt,  
you stave off the hunger  
of the laborer along his toilsome way.  
Star of the poor,  
fairy godmother,  
enveloped in delicate paper,  
you emerge from earth  
 eternal, integral, a pure  
celestial offshoot.  
And at the chop  
of the kitchen knife,  
there wells up  
the only tear we shed  
without woe.  
Without afflicting us you made us weep.  
All that is, onion, I have sung,  
but to me, you are  
lovelier than a bird  
of dazzling plumage;  
you are, to me,  
heavenly sphere, platinum goblet,  
motionless dance  
of the snowy anemone.  

And in your crystalline nature  
resides the fragrance of the earth.
Oda a la cebolla
Stephen Mitchell, 1997

Onion,
luminous flask,
your beauty formed
petal by petal,
crystal scales expanded you
and in the secrecy of the dark earth
your belly grew round with dew.
Under the earth
the miracle
happened
and when your clumsy
green stem appeared,
and your leaves were born
like swords
in the garden,
the earth heaped up her power
showing your naked transparency,
and as the remote sea
in lifting the breasts of Aphrodite
duplicating the magnolia,
so did the earth
make you,
onion
clear as a planet
and destined
to shine,
constant constellation,
round rose of water,
upon
the table
of the poor.

Generously
you undo
your globe of freshness
in the fervent consummation
of the cooking pot,
and the crystal shred
in the flaming heat of the oil
is transformed into a curled golden feather.

Then, too, I will recall how fertile
is your influence on the love of the salad,
and it seems that the sky contributes
by giving you the shape of hailstones
to celebrate your chopped brightness
on the hemispheres of a tomato.
But within reach
of the hands of the common people,
sprinkled with oil,
dusted
with a bit of salt,
you kill the hunger
of the day-laborer on his hard path.
Star of the poor,
fairy godmother
wrapped
in delicate
paper, you rise from the
ground
eternal, whole, pure
like an astral seed,
and when the kitchen knife
cuts you, there arises
the only tear without
sorrow.
You make us cry without hurting us.
I have praised everything that exists,
but to me, onion, you are
more beautiful than a bird
of dazzling feathers,
heavenly globe, platinum goblet,
unmoving dance
of the snowy anemone

and the fragrance of the earth lives
in your crystalline nature.
Oda a la tormenta
Pablo Neruda, 1954

Anoche
vino
ella,
rabiosa,
azul, color de noche,
roja, color de vino,
la tempestad
trajo
su cabellera de agua,
ojos de frío fuego,
anoché quiso
dormir sobre la tierra.
Llegó de pronto
recién desenrollada
desde su astro furioso,
desde su cueva celeste,
quería dormir
y preparó su cama,
barrió selvas, caminos,
barrió montes,
lavó piedras de océano,
y entonces
como si fueran plumas
removió los pinares
para hacerse su cama.
Sacó relámpagos
de su saco de fuego,
dejó caer los truenos
como grandes barriles.
De pronto
fue silencio:
una hoja
iba sola en el aire,
como un violín volante,
entonces,
antes
de que llegara al suelo,
tempestad, en tus manos
la tomaste,
pusiste todo el viento
a soplar su bocina,
la noche entera
a andar con sus caballos,
todo el hielo a silbar,
los árboles
salvajes
a expresar la desdicha
de los encadenados,
la tierra
a gemir como madre
pariendo,
de un solo soplo
escondiste
el rumor de la hierba
o las estrellas,
rompiste
como un lienzo
el silencio inactivo,
se llenó el mundo
de orquesta y furia y fuego,
y cuando los relámpagos
cáían como cabellos
de tu frente fosfórica,
cáían como espadas
de tu cintura guerrera,
y cuando ya creíamos
que terminaba el mundo,
tenentes,
lluvia,
lluvia,
sólo
lluvia,
toda la tierra, todo
el cielo
reposaban,
la noche
se desangró cayendo
sobre el sueño del hombre,
agitó agua
del tiempo y del cielo:
un nido abandonado.

Con tus dedos
de música,
con tu fragor de infierno,
con tu fuego
Mueller 56

de volcanes nocturnos,
jugaste
levantando una hoja,
diste fuerza a los ríos,
enseñaste
a ser hombres
a los hombres,
a temer a los débiles,
a llorar a los dulces,
a estremecerse
a las ventanas,
pero,
cuando
ibas a destruirnos,
cuando
como cuchilla
bajaba del cielo la furia,
cuando temblaba
toda la luz y la sombra
y se mordían los pinos
aullando
junto al mar en tinieblas,
tú, delicada
tempestad, novia mía,
furiosa,
no nos hiciste daño:
regresaste
a tu estrella
y lluvia,
lluvia verde,
lluvia llena
de sueños y de géneros,
lluvia
preparatoria
de cosechas,
lluvia que lava el mundo,
lo enjuga
y lo recrea,
lluvia para nosotros
y para las semillas,
lluvia
para el olvido
de los muertos
y para
nuestro pan de mañana,
eso sólo
dejaste,
agua y música,
por eso,
tempestad,
te amo,
cuenta conmigo,
vuelve,
despiértame,
ilumíname,
muéstrame tu camino
para que a ti se junte y cante con tu canto
la decidida voz
tempestuosa de un hombre.
Ode to the Storm
Nathaniel Tarn, 1970

Last night
she
came,
livid,
night-blue,
wine-red:
the tempest
with her
hair of water,
eyes of cold fire—
last night she wanted
to sleep on earth.
She came all of a sudden
newly unleashed
out of her furious planet,
her cavern in the sky;
she longed for sleep
and made her bed:
sweeping jungles and highways,
sweeping mountains,
washing ocean stones,
and then
as if they were feathers,
ravaging pine trees
to make her bed.
She shook the lightning
out of her quiver of fire,
dropped thunderclaps
like great barrels.
All of a sudden
there was silence:
a single leaf
gliding on air
like a flying violin—
then,
before
it touched the earth,
you took it
in your hands, great storm,
put all the winds to work
blowing their horns,
set the whole night
galloping with its horses,
all the ice whistling,
the wild
trees
groaning in misery
like prisoners,
the earth
moaning, a woman
giving birth,
in a single blow
you blotted out
the noise of grass
or stars,
tore the numbed silence
like a handkerchief—
the world filled
with sound, fury, and fire,
and when the lightning flashes
fell like hair
from your shining forehead,
fell like swords from your warrior’s belt
and when we were about to think
that the world was ending,
then,
rain,
rain,
only
rain,
all earth, all
sky,
at rest,
the night
fell, bleeding to death
on human sleep,
nothing but rain,
water
of time and sky:
nothing had fallen
except a broken branch,
an empty nest.

With your musical
fingers,
with your hell-roar,
your fire
of volcanoes at night,
you played
at lifting a leaf,
gave strength to rivers,
taught
men
to be men,
the weak to fear,
the tender to cry,
the windows
to rattle—
but
when
you prepared to destroy us, when
like a dagger
fury fell from the sky,
when all the light
and shadow trembled
and the pines devoured
themselves howling
on the edge of the midnight sea,
you, delicate storm,
my betrothed,
wild as you were,
did us no wrong:
but returned
to your star
and rain,
green rain,
rain full
of dreams and seeds,
mother
of harvests
rain,
world-washing rain,
draining it,
making it new,
rain for us men
and for the seeds,
rain
for the forgetting
of the dead
and for
tomorrow’s bread—
only the rain
you left behind,
water and music,
for this,

I love you
storm,
reckon with me,
come back,
wake me up,
illuminate me,
show me your path
so that the chosen voice,
the stormy voice of a man
may join and sing your song with you.
Oceana
Pablo Neruda, 1961

I
Oceana nupcial, caderas de islas,
aquí a mi lado, cántame los desaparecidos cantares, signos números del río deseado.
Quiero oír lo invisible, lo que cayó del tiempo al palio equinoccial de las palmeras.
Dame el vino secreto que guarda cada sílaba:
ir y venir de espumas, razas de miel caídas
al cántaro marino sobre los arrecifes.

II
Yo no soy, yo perdí los días, porque entonces
me faltaba, Oceana, tu guitarra florida,
y era de madreperla la boca de la aurora:
entraba la marea, con su trueno en las islas
y todo era fulgor, menos mi vida,
menos mi corazón sin azahares.

III
Oceana, reclina tu noche en el castillo
que aguardó sin cesar pasar tu cabellera
en cada ola que el mar elevaba en el mar
y luego no eras tú sino el mar que pasaba,
sino el mar sino el mar y yo qué pude hacer:
era tarde, otro día se abría con mi llave,
una puerta, y el mar continuaba vacío.

IV
Entonces fui gastando mi sonrisa y cayeron
uno a uno mis dientes en la caja de hierro.
Furioso contemplé los santos enlutados,
los ataúdes de ámbar que traía el crepúsculo,
los minerales prisioneros en su abismo
las algas lastimeras meciéndose en la niebla
y sin tocar tus párpados, Oceana amarilla,
Oceana negra, Oceana de manos transparentes,
estiré mis sentidos hasta que sin saberlo
se desató en el mar la rosa repentina.

V
Cántame caracola, cuéntame la campana,
cántame la paciencia del trigo submarino,
etmbloroso rey coronado de vértebras,
la luna diametral que lloraba de frío.
Y si hay alguna lágrima perdida en el idioma
déjala que resbale hasta mi copa.
Bebiéndola sabré lo que no sepa entonces:
cántame lo que fue de labio a labio a labio
haciéndose cantar sin tocar tierra,
puro en el aire puro de los días de miel,
alto en el aire como la palma sempiterna.

VI
Sirena o palma plena, paloma de la espuma,
sosiego de guitarras en lento y alto vuelo,
repítame el cantar que en mi sangre circula
sin que tuviera voz hasta que tú llegaste,
llegaste palpitante de la espuma, peregrina, de
costas que no existen, duramente doradas,
de los cuentos caídos hoja por hoja al agua
y a la tierra poblada por negros regimientos.

VII
Tengo hambre de no ser sino piedra marina,
estatua, lava, terca torre de monumento
donde se estrellan olas ya desaparecidas,
mares que fallecieron con cántico y viajero.
Por eso cuando desde lo que no existe, Oceana,
asomaron tus anchos ojos, y tus pulseras
tintineando en la lluvia me anunciaron
que llegabas, corola de los mares, tardía
mi corazón salió perdido por las calles,
y desde entonces cántame con ojos de guitarra.

Desde entonces suspirame con uvas de amatista
y manzanas y dátiltes estrictamente tiernos,
frutos, frutos recién robados de la aurora,
agredidos aún por balas de rocío.
Y que la cesta de agua contenga peras puras,
mangos desarrollados a dulzura remota,
guanábana copiosas, pomosas, olorosas,
los crímenes radiantes que esconde la granada,
la miel en la barriga de pálidos melones.

VII
Oceana, dame las conchas del arrecife
para cubrir con sus relámpagos los muros,
los Spondylus, héroes coronados de espinas,
el esplendor morado del murex en su roca:
tú sabes como sobre la sal ultramarina
en su nave de nieve navega el Argonauta.

IX
Plumajes! Trae contigo el ave
que enlaza la secreta profundidad y el cielo,
ven envuelta en tu ropa natal de colibríes
hasta que pluma a pluma vuelen las esmeraldas.

X
Recuerda el corazón de pájaro que llevas
en su jaula: el debate de las alas y el canto,
y de tantos violines que vuelan y fulguran
recoge tú, recógeme sonido y pedrería.
Hasta que envueltos en aire y fuego vamos
acompañados por la sonora asamblea
a la cascada de lingotes matutinos.
Y nuestro amor palpite como un pez en el frío.

XI
Al fin, no vuelvas a tu piedra marina,
Oceana, alma mía, ámbar del Sur, donaire.
En nave nuestra, en tierra recibimos
el polen y el pescado de las islas distantes,
oyendo, oyendo lejos, susurro y barcarola,
el rito matinal de los remos perdidos.

Yo soy, Oceana, sólo alguien que te esperaba
en la torre de un faro que no existe,
y éste es un cuento en donde no sube otra marea
que tus senos marinos bajo la luz nocturna.

Y sólo dos verdades hay en esta sonata:
tus ojos oscuros abiertos en el agua.
Ocean Lady
Maria Jacketti, 1996

I
Ocean Lady, bride, hips of the islands,
here, beside me, sing to me, the vanished
songs, signs, numbers from the river of desire.
I want to listen to the invisible, things fallen out of time
onto the equinox’s canopy of palm trees.
Give me the secret wine guarded within each syllable,
the comings and goings of waves, races of honey
fallen into the sea’s bucket, washed up on the reefs.

II
I don’t exist—I lost days because back then,
Ocean Lady, I didn’t embrace your flowery guitar.
The dawn’s mouth glittered like mother-of-pearl.
Like thunder, surf penetrated the islands,
and everything churned to brilliance, except my life,
except my heart, yearning for orange blossoms.

III
Ocean Lady, give your twilight rest in the castle
which faithfully awaited the passage of your lush hair,
in every wave that the sea raised up from its chasm,
and then you weren’t yourself—but instead the fugitive sea,
the sea, the sea, and what could I do?
It was late, another day was opening with my key,
another door, and the sea extended emptiness.

IV
Back then I wandered, wasting my smile.
One by one, my teeth dropped into an iron box.
Furiously, I contemplated saints in mourning,
amber coffins carried by the dawn,
minerals imprisoned in their abyss,
the miserable algae rocking themselves in the fog,
and without touching your eyelids, golden Ocean Lady,
black Ocean Lady, Ocean Lady with transparent hands,
I stretched my senses, until without knowing it,
a sudden rose unfurled, blossoming over the sea.

V
Sing to me, snail; speak to me, bell;
sing to me, patience of underwater wheat,
the quivering king, crowned by vertebrae,
the retrograde moon that cried in the cold.
And if there exists a lost teardrop in the language,
let it slip into my cup.
By drinking it, I will know what I didn’t know then.
Sing to me the essence that traveled
from mouth to mouth to mouth, becoming
song without touching earth,
pure in the pure air of honeyed days,
high in the air like the everlasting palm.

VI
Siren, or lush palm tree, foamy dove,
serenity or guitars in slow, high flight,
repeat to me the song circulating in my blood.
It had no voice until you arrived,
arrived quivering in the sea’s bubbles,
from hard and golden coasts of nonexistence,
from stories, plunged, page by page, into the water,
to Earth, populated by blackened governments.

VII
I yearn only to become the incarnation of marine stone,
statue, lava, a hard, towering monument
where bygone waves explode,
seas that perished with canticles and travelers.
So, Ocean Lady, when from nonexistence,
your wide eyes appeared, and your bracelets,
ingling in the rain, announced your arrival
to me, a languid crown of the sea’s flowers,
my heart exited and got lost in the streets.
Reaching back to that moment: sing to me with guitar-eyes.

From that instant: sigh for me with amethyst grapes,
and apples, and strictly tender dates,
fruits, fruits just stolen from the dawn,
and further wounded by bullets of dew.
And may the wet basket brim with the purest pears,
mangoes ripened to a distant sweetness,
abundant guanbanas, radiant with perfume,
shining crimes hidden by the pomegranate,
the honey in the belly of pale melons.

VIII
Ocean Lady, extend to me the shells of the reef,
to cloak walls with your lightning,
the Spondylus, heroes crowned with thorns,
the empurpled splendor of the murex on its rock.
You know the way: over the ultramarine salt
the Argonaut navigates his snow-ship.

IX
Such feathers! Bring with you the bird
joining the secret depths and heaven,
come wrapped in your newborn nakedness of hummingbirds,
until feather by feather, emeralds fly.

X
Remember: you carry the bird’s heart
in its cage: the debate of wings and song,
so many violins, soaring and flashing.
Gather, gather for me, the sounds and jewels,
until wrapped in air and fire, we voyage
accompanied by the congress of pure harmonies
to a morning’s waterfall of shimmering ingots.
And may our love palpitate like a fish in the cold.

XI
At last, to end, do not return to your sea stone.
Ocean Lady, my soul, southern amber and grace.

On our ship, our earth, we receive
the pollen and fish of distant isles,
listening, listening to the faraway whisper and barcarole,
the sunrise ritual of lost oars.

Ocean Lady, I am just someone who hoped for you
in the tower of an ethereal lighthouse,
and this is the story where only one tide surges…
your aquamarine breasts beneath the night’s radiance.

There are only two truths in this sonata:
your two dark eyes, open in the water.
Bibliography


