

Translated by Donald D. Walsh

Winner of the Nobel Prize

PABLO NERUDA

Residence on Earth

Bilingual

Introduction by JIM HARRISON

P A B L O N E R U D A

R E S I D E N C E
O N
E A R T H

*Residencia
en la tierra*

Introduction by J I M H A R R I S O N

Translated by D O N A L D D . W A L S H



A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK

C O N T E N T S

INTRODUCTION BY JIM HARRISON

RESIDENCIA I / RESIDENCE I (1925-31)

I

Galope muerto / Dead Gallop

Alianza (Sonata) / Alliance (Sonata)

Caballo de los sueños / Dream Horse

Débil del alba / The Dawn's Debility

Unidad / Unity

Sabor / Taste

Ausencia de Joaquín / Joachim's Absence

Madrigal escrito en invierno / Madrigal Written in Winter

Fantasma / Phantom

Lamento lento / Slow Lament

Colección nocturna / Nocturnal Collection

Juntos nosotros / We Together

Tiranía / Tyranny

Serenata / Serenade

Diurno doliente / Daily Mourner

Monzón de mayo / May Monsoon

Arte poética / Ars Poetica

Sistema sombrío / Somber System

Angela adónica / Adonic Angela

Sonata y destrucciones / Sonata and Destructions

II

La noche del soldado / The Night of the Soldier

Comunicaciones desmentidas / Contradicted Communications

El deshabitado / The Uninhabited One

El joven monarca / The Young Monarch

Establecimientos nocturnos / Nocturnal Establishments

Entierro en el este / Burial in the East

III

Cabellero solo / Single Gentleman

Ritual de mis piernas / Ritual of My Legs

El fantasma del buque de carga / The Ghost of the Cargo Boat

Tango del viudo / The Widower's Tango

IV

Cantares / Songs

Trabajo frío / Cold Work

Significa sombras / It Means Shadows

RESIDENCIA II / RESIDENCE II (1931-35)

I

Un día sobresale / One Day Stands Out

Sólo la muerte / Only Death

Barcarola / Barcarole

El sur del océano / The Southern Ocean

II

Walking Around / Walking Around

Desespiciente / Disaction

La calle destruida / The Destroyed Street

Melancolía en las familias / Melancholy in the Families

Maternidad / Maternity

Enfermedades en mi casa / Illnesses in My Home

III

Oda con un lamento / Ode with a Lament

Material nupcial / Nuptial Substance

Agua sexual / Sexual Water

IV TRES CANTOS MATERIALES / THREE MATERIAL SONGS

Entrada a la madera / Entrance to Wood

Apogeo del apio / The Apogee of Celery

Estatuto del vino / Ordinance of Wine

V

Oda a Federico Garcia Lorca / Ode to Federico Garcia Lorca

Alberto Rojas Jimenez viene volando / Alberto Rojas Jiménez Comes
Flying

El desenterrado / The Disinterred One

VI

El reloj caído en el mar / The Clock Fallen into the Sea

Vuelve el otoño / Autumn Returns

No hay olvido (Sonata) / There Is No Oblivion (Sonata)

Josie Bliss / Josie Bliss

TERCERA RESIDENCIA / THIRD RESIDENCE (1935-1945)

I

La ahogada del cielo / The Drowned Woman of the Sky

Alianza (Sonata) / Alliance (Sonata)

Vals / Waltz

Bruselas / Brussels

El abandonado / The Abandoned One

Naciendo en los bosques / Born in the Woods

II LAS FURIAS Y LAS PENAS / FURIES AND SORROWS

III REUNION BAJO LAS NUEVAS BANDERAS / MEETING UNDER NEW FLAGS

IV ESPAÑA EN EL CORAZÓN / SPAIN IN OUR HEARTS

Invocación / Invocation

Bombardeo Maldición / Bombardment Curse

España pobre por culpa de los ricos / Spain Poor Through the Fault of
the Rich

La tradición / Tradition

Madrid (1936) / Madrid (1936)

Explico algunas cosas / I Explain a Few Things

Canto a las madres de los milicianos muertos / Song for the Mothers
of Slain Militiamen

Cómo era España / What Spain Was Like

Llegada a Madrid de La Brigada Internacional / Arrival in Madrid of
the International Brigade

Batalia del río Jarama / Battle of the Jarama River

Almería / Almería

Tierras ofendidas / Offended Lands
Sanjurjo en los infiernos / Sanjujo in Hell
Mola en los infiernos / Mola in Hell
El general Franco en los infiernos / General Franco in Hell
Canto sobre unas ruinas / Song about Some Ruins
La victoria de las armas del pueblo / The Victory of the Arms of the
People
Los gremios en el frente / The Unions at the Front
Triunfo / Triumph
Paisaje después de una batalla / Landscape After a Battle
Antitanquistas / Antitankers
Madrid (1937) / Madrid (1937)
Oda solar al Ejército del Pueblo / Solar Ode to the Army of the People

V

Canto a Stalingrado / Song to Stalingrad
Nuevo canto de amor a Stalingrado / A New Love Song to Stalingrad
Tina Modotti ha muerto / Tina Modotti Is Dead
7 de noviembre: Oda a un día de victorias / 7th of November: Ode to a
Day of Victories
Un canto para Bolivar / A Song for Bolivar
Canto a los ríos de Alemania / Song to the Rivers of Germany
Canto en la muerte y resurrección de Luis Companys / Song on the
Death and Resurrection of Luis Companys
Dura elegía / Harsh Elegy
Canto al ejército rojo a su llegada a las puertas de Prusia / Song to the
Red Army on Its Arrival at the Gates of Prussia

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

INTRODUCTION

by JIM HARRISON

Genius always leaves us wishing the meal could continue. Why didn't that layabout Shakespeare produce twice as much? How grand it could have been if Dostoevsky had written a novel about what happened after he died. We were severely cheated when Caravaggio and Mozart fled earth so early in their lives.

Neruda achieved his full dimensions if any poet did. He led a whole life both publicly and privately. It is boggling to read his *Memoirs* and try to map his exterior and interior voyages, from the rawest perils to the Stockholm ceremony that reminded him oddly of a school graduation, to his transcendent Buenos Aires "poetry slam" with Federico Garcia Lorca which will raise the hairs on your body as if they are throwing off infinitesimal lightning bolts. That evening both poets stood athwart poetry's third rail.

I lost my first copy of Neruda's *Residence on Earth* in Key West in the mid-seventies. I left it in one of a dozen possible bars on a verminish hot night during May tarpon season with the air dense with flowers, overflowing garbage cans, the low tide deliquescing crustaceans, and where, while swimming before dawn off a pier, the moonlight illumined a fatal shark whose face looked like a battered Volkswagen. I retraced my steps the next day but found nothing. I had underlined too much of the book anyway.

At that time back in the twentieth century I was addicted to Spanish-speaking poets such as Neruda, Vallejo, Hernandez, Lorca, Parra, Paz, whenever I could find translations, but also Yesenin, Rilke, and Yeats. What a sacred mishmash. In northern Michigan I was far from a good library but my brother John was a librarian first at Harvard and then at Yale at the time and could send me anything. Naturally I read our own poetry on both sides of the farcical Beat-academic sawhorse, and all of those poets in the Midwestern

middle like myself, but then nationalism in literature is stifling indeed as are our varying fads of poetry. Earlier in my life it was fashionable to spend your life and career not being particularly enthused about anything, and now there is an affectation of artless sincerity where after the high adventure of graduate school poets settle down in a domestic trance. On my rare visits to colleges and universities I keep expecting to see men carrying caskets out of the welter of brown brick buildings. Of course any poet is semi-blind to the ocean of trivialities he swims through and basks in like a nurse shark, the important magazine publications, the books and chapbooks, the readings, the awards, the miniature parades he organizes for himself in the backyard among the flowerbeds and housepets, and then finally on nearing the empty pantry of death he sees clearly the formidable odds against any of his poems surviving. This is all to create the atmosphere in which I continue to read Neruda.

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It's important to offer here what constitutes Neruda's credo:

SOME THOUGHTS ON IMPURE POETRY

It is worth one's while, at certain hours of the day or night, to scrutinize useful objects in repose: wheels that have rolled across long, dusty distances with their enormous loads of crops or ore, charcoal sacks, barrels, baskets, the hafts and handles of carpenter's tools. The contact these objects have had with man and earth may serve as a valuable lesson to a tortured lyric poet. Worn surfaces, the wear inflicted by human hands, the sometimes tragic, always pathetic, emanations from these objects give reality a magnetism that should not be scorned.

Man's nebulous impurity can be perceived in them: the affinity for groups, the use and obsolescence of materials, the mark of a hand or a foot, the constancy of the human presence that permeates every surface.

This is the poetry we are seeking, corroded, as if by acid, by the labors of man's hand, pervaded by sweat and smoke, reeking of urine and of lilies soiled by diverse professions in and outside the law.

A poetry as impure as a suit or a body, a poetry stained by food and shame, a poetry with wrinkles, observations, dreams, waking, prophecies, declarations of love and hatred, beasts, blows, idylls, manifestos, denials, doubts, affirmations, taxes.

The sacred law of the madrigal and the decrees of touch, smell, taste, sight, and hearing, the desire for justice and sexual desire, the sound of the ocean, nothing deliberately excluded, a plunge into unplumbed depths in an excess of ungovernable love. And the poetic product will be stamped with digital doves, with the scars of teeth and ice, a poetry slightly consumed by sweat and war. Until one achieves a surface worn as smooth as a constantly played instrument, the hard softness of rubbed wood, or arrogant iron. Flowers, wheat, and water also have that special consistency, the same tactile majesty.

But we must not overlook melancholy, the sentimentalism of another age, the perfect impure fruit whose marvels have been cast aside by the mania for pedantry: moonlight, the swan at dusk, “my beloved,” are, beyond question, the elemental and essential matter of poetry. He who would flee from bad taste is riding for a fall.

(translated by Margaret Sayers Peden)

How is an ordinary mortal to look at this statement? I am reminded that at the Hard Luck Ranch on the Mexican border where I have a little studio, a number of cows died of thirst several years ago in clear sight of Lake Patagonia across the fence. Neruda ran through every fence he encountered except Stalinism over which he tripped grotesquely. But earlier in his life, in his twenties, when he began *Residence on Earth*, he was trapped in a variety of minor consular posts in the misery of Rangoon and Burma and other remote outposts. It is lucky for us that he hadn't been dispatched to a place he would have loved like Paris. He was lonely well beyond desperation but with an energetic anguish that sent him on the inner voyage of *Residence on Earth*. There was no ballast for him except the next part of this long poem. In every line you trace with great difficulty the bruised consciousness that produced it because, unlike most poetry, it proceeds from the inner to the world outside the poet.

Of course I'm not an astute critic. Perhaps *Residence on Earth* is one of those very rare poems you must drown in. You don't understand it in discursive terms, you experience it. To read *Residence on Earth* is to take a long exhausting swim across the Mindanao trench, which is said to be the deepest part of the world's oceans. In other words, the territory could not be less reassuring or secure. For me the poem is the most palatable and grand of all work immersed in surrealism, lacking as it does the French hauteur of intellect. It always returns to earth.

Once, in my thirties, I thought I had invented a brilliant definition of metaphor but then I misplaced it and decided recently that nothing is worth searching the contents of seventy cartons of papers. Boris Pasternak inferred that metaphor is the shorthand of the gods, those who with overfull mental plates must move in leaps rather than walk like other mortals. When midway through *Residence on Earth* you read "Ode to Federico Garcia Lorca," you are startled to discover that it was written a year before Lorca's execution because the metaphors so perfectly illumine and presage Lorca's death. In the past century there is no poet so profligate and exquisite in the realm of metaphor than Neruda. Neruda haunts our bodies on an actual Earth with the same power that Rilke haunts the more solitary aspects of our minds. Rilke holds no one's hand, while Neruda, like his idol Walt Whitman, attempts to hold everyone's.

There is a troubling matter when we re-read Neruda's apologia in "Some Thoughts on Impure Poetry." In my own lifetime our country had reversed the quotient of seventy percent rural and thirty percent urban. In an interview with Robert Bly in the 1960s, Neruda joked, "Perhaps I am a foolish writer of nature like your Henry David Thoreau." In recent years I have noticed that two Buddhist magazines I read have largely abandoned their traditional dependence on the language of nature in favor of nounless abstractions. It is less pronounced, but I have also noticed this in the language of poetry in my own lifetime. I recall as a teenager in reading Robert Graves' *White Goddess* how young poets under the tutelage of a female Ollave, a witch of poetry, would learn all the names of trees, plants, flowers, birds, and animals. Once in reaction to the anemic MFA programs I've come in contact with, and while being banally prescriptive in the manner of northern Midwesterners, I conceived of a program where poets would work for a year in the country,