

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973)

is a central figure in Chilean literature and one of the most widely read poets of the twentieth century. His work explores love, everyday life, nature, and history through a direct, deeply sensory language that brought Chilean poetry to an international audience.

Published in 1924, *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* revealed an intense and modern poetic voice at an early age: Neruda wrote the book at just nineteen. Now considered one of the most influential works of Spanish-language poetry, it articulates an experience of love marked by desire, absence, and loss, spoken from a voice that is youthful yet remarkably mature.



Pablo Neruda

Through intimate expression and evocative imagery, the book transformed the language of love, moving beyond conventional romanticism to explore the body, memory, and emotional vulnerability. Its lasting relevance lies in this tension between passion and fragility, which continues to resonate across generations.

Created in July 2004 to mark the centenary of Pablo Neruda and first presented at the National Museum of Fine Arts, this exhibition brought together 21 leading Chilean visual artists, each invited to interpret—through the language of painting—the poems of *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*.

Two decades later, the exhibition is presented once again, reaffirming the vitality of a project that fosters an enduring dialogue between poetry and image, and revisits a foundational work of Latin American literature through contemporary painting. Today, the works that make up the exhibition are safeguarded in a private collection.

“*Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* is a painful and pastoral book that contains my most tormented adolescent passions, mixed with the overwhelming nature of the south of my homeland. A river and its mouth helped me to write it: the Imperial River. *Twenty Love Poems* is the romance of Santiago, with its student streets, the university, and the scent of honeysuckle from shared love. The Santiago sections were written between Echaurren Street and España Avenue and inside the old building of the Pedagogical Institute, but the landscape is always the waters and trees of the south. The piers of *The Song of Despair* are the old piers of Carahue and Bajo Imperial.”

— Pablo Neruda, *I Confess That I Have Lived*, 1974

“This book is a collective myth, comparable in its mythical condition only to Gardel’s tangos or to the most popular boleros of the 1930s and 1940s.”

— Jorge Edwards

“In my youth, like almost all Chilean writers of my generation, I lived drunk on Neruda.”

— José Donoso

“On that street in Santiago where my puberty unfolded pleasantly, we students read the *Twenty Love Poems* of the poet Pablo Neruda. The verses spoken on that occasion carved a romantic hollow in my heart.”

— Carmen Berenguer

“A poet closer to death than to philosophy; closer to pain than to intelligence; closer to blood than to ink. A poet full of mysterious voices that, fortunately, he himself does not know how to decipher.”

— Federico García Lorca

“*Twenty Love Poems* is a book that we women must keep in sight, and go through point by point, letter by letter, across that bond called Love.”

— Elvira Hernández



Roser Bru (1923 – 2021)

POEM #1

Body of a Woman Body of a woman, white hills, white thighs,
you look like a world, lying in surrender.
My rough peasant's body digs in you
and makes the son leap from the depth of the earth.

I was alone like a tunnel. The birds fled from me,
and night swamped me with its crushing invasion.
To survive myself I forged you like a weapon,
like an arrow in my bow, a stone in my sling.

But the hour of vengeance falls, and I love you.
Body of skin, of moss, of eager and firm milk.
Oh the goblets of the breast! Oh the eyes of absence!
Oh the roses of the pubis! Oh your voice, slow and sad!

Body of my woman, I will persist in your grace.
My thirst, my boundless desire, my shifting road!
Dark river-beds where the eternal thirst flows
and weariness follows, and the infinite ache.



Jorge Tacla (b. 1958)
POEM #2

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

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

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

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



Sebastián Garretón (b. 1962)

POEM #3

Ah vastness of pines, murmur of waves breaking,
slow play of lights, solitary bell,
twilight falling in your eyes, toy doll,
earth-shell, in whom the earth sings!

In you the rivers sing and my soul flees in them
as you desire, and you send it where you will.
Aim my road on your bow of hope
and in a frenzy I will free my flock of arrows.

On all sides I see your waist of fog,
and your silence hunts down my afflicted hours;
my kisses anchor, and my moist desire nests
in you with your arms of transparent stone.

Ah your mysterious voice that love tolls and darkens
in the resonant and dying evening!
Thus in deep hours I have seen, over the fields,
the ears of wheat tolling in the mouth of the wind.



José Basso (b. 1949)
POEM #4

The morning is full of storm
in the heart of summer.

The clouds travel like white handkerchiefs of good-bye,
the wind, traveling, waving them in its hands.

The numberless heart of the wind
beating above our loving silence.

Orchestral and divine, resounding among the trees
like a language full of wars and songs.

Wind that bears off the dead leaves with a quick raid
and deflects the pulsing arrows of the birds.

Wind that topples her in a wave without spray
and substance without weight, and leaning fires.

Her mass of kisses breaks and sinks,
assailed in the door of the summer's wind.



Gracia Barrios (1927 – 2020)

POEM #5

So that you will hear me
my words
sometimes grow thin
as the tracks of the gulls on the beaches.

Necklace, drunken bell
for your hands smooth as grapes.

And I watch my words from a long way off.
They are more yours than mine.
They climb on my old suffering like ivy.

It climbs the same way on damp walls.
You are to blame for this cruel sport.

They are fleeing from my dark lair.
You fill everything, you fill everything.

Before you they peopled the solitude that you occupy,
and they are more used to my sadness than you are.

Now I want them to say what I want to say to you
to make you hear as I want you to hear me.

The wind of anguish still hauls on them as usual.
Sometimes hurricanes of dreams still knock them over.



You listen to other voices in my painful voice.
Lament of old mouths, blood of old supplications.
Love me, companion. Don't forsake me. Follow me.
Follow me, companion, on this wave of anguish.

But my words become stained with your love.
You occupy everything, you occupy everything.

I am making them into an endless necklace
for your white hands, smooth as grapes.



Ulrich Wells (1925 – 2016)

POEM #6

I remember you as you were in the last autumn.
You were the gray beret and the still heart.
In your eyes the flames of the twilight fought on.
And the leaves fell in the water of your soul.

Clasping my arms like a climbing plant
the leaves garnered your voice, that was slow and at peace.
Bonfire of awe in which my thirst was burning.
Sweet blue hyacinth twisted over my soul.

I feel your eyes traveling, and the autumn is far off:
gray beret, voice of a bird, heart like a house
towards which my deep longings migrated
and my kisses fell, happy as embers.

Sky from a ship. Field from the hills.
Your memory is made of light, of smoke, of a still pond!
Beyond your eyes, farther on, the evenings were blazing.
Dry autumn leaves revolved in your soul.



Rodrigo Cabezas (b. 1961)

POEM #7

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.



Benito Rojo (b. 1950)
POEM #8

White bee, you buzz in my soul, drunk with honey,
and your flight winds in slow spirals of smoke.
I am the one without hope, the word without echoes,
he who lost everything and he who had everything.

Last hawser, in you creaks my last longing.
In my barren land you are the final rose.

Ah you who are silent!

Let your deep eyes close. There the night flutters.
Ah your body, a frightened statue, naked.

You have deep eyes in which the night flails.
Cool arms of flowers and a lap of rose.

Your breasts seem like white snails.
A butterfly of shadow has come to sleep on your belly.

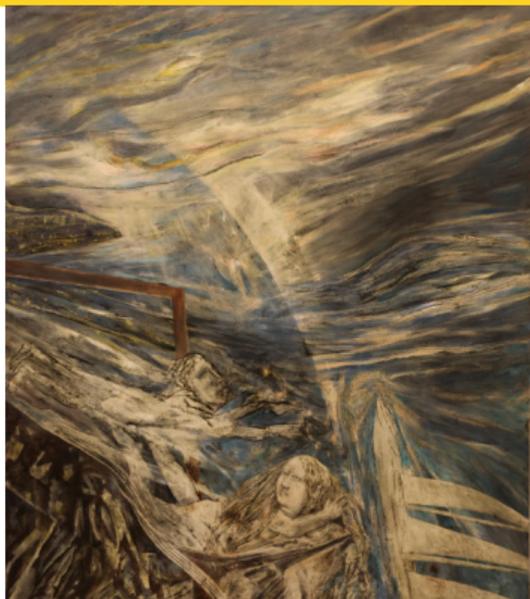
Ah you who are silent!

Here is the solitude from which you are absent.
It is raining. The sea wind is hunting stray gulls.

The water walks barefoot in the wet streets.
From that tree the leaves complain as though they were sick.

White bee, even when you are gone you buzz in my soul.
You live again in time, slender and silent.

Ah you who are silent!



Hugo Marín (1929 – 2018)

POEM #9

Drunk with pines and long kisses,
like summer I steer the fast sail of the roses,
bent towards the death of the thin day,
stuck into my solid marine madness.

Pale and lashed to my ravenous water,
I cruise in the sour smell of the naked climate,
still dressed in gray and bitter sounds
and a sad crest of abandoned spray.

Hardened by passions, I go mounted on my one wave,
lunar, solar, burning and cold, all at once,
becalmed in the throat of the fortunate isles
that are white and sweet as cool hips.

In the moist night my garment of kisses trembles
charged to insanity with electric currents,
heroically divided into dreams
and intoxicating roses practicing on me.

Upstream, in the midst of the outer waves,
your parallel body yields to my arms
like a fish infinitely fastened to my soul,
quick and slow, in the energy under the sky.



Carlos Maturana (Bororo) (b. 1953)

POEM #10

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

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

Sometimes a piece of sun
burned like a coin between my hands.

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

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

The book fell that is always turned to at twilight
and my cape rolled like a hurt dog at my feet.

Always, always you recede through the evenings
towards where the twilight goes erasing statues.



Patricia Israel
(1939 – 2011)

POEM #11

Almost out of the sky, half of the moon
anchors between two mountains.
Turning, wandering night, the digger of eyes.
Let's see how many stars are smashed in the pool.

It makes a cross of mourning between my eyes, and runs away.
Forge of blue metals, nights of still combats,
my heart revolves like a crazy wheel.
Girl who have come from so far, been brought from so far,
sometimes your glance flashes out under the sky.
Rumbling, storm, cyclone of fury,
you cross above my heart without stopping.
Wind from the tombs carries off, wrecks, scatters your sleepy root.

The big trees on the other side of her, uprooted.
But you, cloudless girl, question of smoke, corn tassel.
You were what the wind was making with illuminated leaves.
Behind the nocturnal mountains, white lily of conflagration,
ah, I can say nothing! You were made of everything.

Longing that sliced my breast into pieces,
it is time to take another road, on which she does not smile.

Storm that buried the bells, muddy swirl of torments,
why touch her now, why make her sad.

Oh to follow the road that leads away from everything,
without anguish, death, winter waiting along it
with their eyes open through the dew.



Gonzalo Cienfuegos (b. 1949)

POEM #12

Your breast is enough for my heart,
and my wings for your freedom.
What was sleeping above your soul will rise
out of my mouth to heaven.

In you is the illusion of each day.
You arrive like the dew to the cupped flowers.
You undermine the horizon with your absence.
Eternally in flight like the wave.

I have said that you sang in the wind
like the pines and like the masts.
Like them you are tall and taciturn,
and you are sad, all at once, like a voyage.

You gather things to you like an old road.
You are peopled with echoes and nostalgic voices.
I awoke and at times birds fled and migrated
that had been sleeping in your soul.



Ismael Frigerio (b. 1955)

POEM #13

I have gone marking the atlas of your body
with crosses of fire.
My mouth went across: a spider, trying to hide.
In you, behind you, timid, driven by thirst.

Stories to tell you on the shore of evening,
sad and gentle doll, so that you should not be sad.
A swan, a tree, something far away and happy.
The season of grapes, the ripe and fruitful season.

I, who lived in a harbor from which I loved you.
The solitude crossed with dream and with silence.
Pinned up between the sea and sadness.
Soundless, delirious, between two motionless gondoliers.

Between the lips and the voice something goes dying.
Something with the wings of a bird, something of anguish and oblivion.
The way nets cannot hold water.
My toy doll, only a few drops are left trembling.
Even so, something sings in these fugitive words.
Something sings, something climbs to my ravenous mouth.
Oh to be able to celebrate you with all the words of joy.

Sing, burn, flee, like a belfry at the hands of a madman.
My sad tenderness, what comes over you all at once?
When I have reached the most awesome and the coldest summit
my heart closes like a nocturnal flower.



José Balmes (1927 – 2016)

POEM #14

Every day you play with the light of the universe.
Subtle visitor, you arrive in the flower and the water.
You are more than this white head that I hold tightly
as a cluster of fruit, every day, between my hands.

You are like nobody since I love you.
Let me spread you out among yellow garlands.
Who writes your name in letters of smoke among the stars of the
south?
Oh let me remember you as you were before you existed.

Suddenly the wind howls and bangs at my shut window.
The sky is a net crammed with shadowy fish.
Here all the winds let go sooner or later, all of them.
The rain takes off her clothes.

The birds go by, fleeing.
The wind. The wind.
I can contend only against the power of men.
The storm whirls dark leaves
and turns loose all the boats that were moored last night to the sky.

You are here. Oh, you do not run away.
You will answer me to the last cry.
Cling to me as though you were frightened.
Even so, at one time a strange shadow ran through your eyes.

Now, now too, little one, you bring me honeysuckle,
and even your breasts smell of it.
While the sad wind goes slaughtering butterflies
I love you, and my happiness bites the plum of your mouth.



How you must have suffered getting accustomed to me,
my savage, solitary soul, my name that sends them' all running.
So many times we have seen the morning star burn, kissing our eyes,
and over our heads the grey light unwind in turning fans.

My words rained over you, stroking you.
A long time I have loved the sunned mother-of-pearl of your body.
I go so far as to think that you own the universe.
I will bring you happy flowers from the mountains, bluebells,
dark hazels, and rustic baskets of kisses.
I want to do with you
what spring does with the cherry trees.



**Gonzalo Díaz
(1947 – 2025)**

POEM #15

I like for you to be still: it is as though you were absent,
and you hear me from far away and my voice does not touch you.
It seems as though your eyes had flown away
and it seems that a kiss had sealed your mouth.

As all things are filled with my soul
you emerge from the things, filled with my soul.
You are like my soul, a butterfly of dream,
and you are like the word Melancholy.

I like for you to be still, and you seem far away.
It sounds as though you were lamenting, a butterfly cooing like a dove.
And you hear me from far away, and my voice does not reach you:
Let me come to be still in your silence.

And let me talk to you with your silence
that is bright as a lamp, simple as a ring.
You are like the night, with its stillness and constellations.
Your silence is that of a star, as remote and candid.

I like for you to be still: it is as though you were absent,
distant and full of sorrow as though you had died.
One word then, one smile, is enough.
And I am happy, happy that it's not true.



Samy Benmayor (b. 1956)

POEM #16

This poem is a paraphrase of the 30th poem in Rabindranath Tagore's *The Gardener*.

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

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

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

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



Lorenzo Moya (b. 1967)

POEM #17

Thinking, tangling shadows in the deep solitude.
You are far away too, oh farther than anyone.
Thinking, freeing birds, dissolving images,
burying lamps.

Belfry of fogs, how far away, up there!
Stifling laments, milling shadowy hopes,
taciturn miller,
night falls on you face downward, far from the city.

Your presence is foreign, as strange to me as a thing.
I think, I explore great tracts of my life before you.
My life before anyone, my harsh life.
The shout facing the sea, among the rocks,
running free, mad, in the sea-spray.
The sad rage, the shout, the solitude of the sea.
Headlong, violent, stretched towards the sky.

You, woman, what were you there, what ray, what vane
of that immense fan? You were as far as you are now.
Fire in the forest! Burn in blue crosses.
Burn, burn, flame up, sparkle in trees of light.

It collapses, crackling. Fire. Fire.
And my soul dances, seared with curls of fire.
Who calls? What silence peopled with echoes?



Hour of nostalgia, hour of happiness, hour of solitude,
hour that is mine from among them all!
Hunting horn through which the wind passes singing.
Such a passion of weeping tied to my body.
Shaking of all the roots,
attack of all the waves!
My soul wandered, happy, sad, unending.

Thinking, burying lamps in the deep solitude.

Who are you, who are you?



Arturo Duclos (b. 1959)

POEM #18

Here I love you.
In the dark pines the wind disentangles itself.
The moon glows like phosphorus on the vagrant waters.
Days, all one kind, go chasing each other.

The snow unfurls in dancing figures.
A silver gull slips down from the west.
Sometimes a sail. High, high stars.

Oh the black cross of a ship.
Alone.
Sometimes I get up early and even my soul is wet.
Far away the sea sounds and resounds.
This is a port.
Here I love you.

Here I love you and the horizon hides you in vain.
I love you still among these cold things.
Sometimes my kisses go on those heavy vessels
that cross the sea towards no arrival.
I see myself forgotten like those old anchors.
The piers sadden when the afternoon moors there.
My life grows tired, hungry to no purpose.
I love what I do not have. You are so far.
My loathing wrestles with the slow twilights.
But night comes and starts to sing to me.

The moon turns its clockwork dream.
The biggest stars look at me with your eyes.
And as I love you, the pines in the wind
want to sing your name with their leaves of wire.



Bruna Truffa (b. 1963)
POEM #19

Girl lithe and tawny, the sun that forms
the fruits, that plumps the grains, that curls seaweeds
filled your body with joy, and your luminous eyes
and your mouth that has the smile of the water.

A black yearning sun is braided into the strands
of your black mane, when you stretch your arms.
You play with the sun as with a little brook
and it leaves two dark pools in your eyes.

Girl lithe and tawny, nothing draws me towards you.
Everything bears me farther away, as though you were noon.
You are the frenzied youth of the bee,
the drunkenness of the wave, the power of the wheat-ear.

My somber heart searches for you, nevertheless,
and I love your joyful body, your slender and flowing voice.
Dark butterfly, sweet and definitive
like the wheat-field and the sun, the poppy and the water.



Mario Toral (b. 1934)

POEM #20

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.

Write, for example, "The night is starry
and the stars are blue and shiver in the distance."

The night wind revolves in the sky and sings.

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.
I loved her, and sometimes she loved me too.

Through nights like this one I held her in my arms.
I kissed her again and again under the endless sky.

She loved me, sometimes I loved her too.
How could you not have loved her great still eyes.

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.
To think that I do not have her. To feel that I have lost her.

To hear the immense night, still more immense without her.
And the verse falls to the soul like dew to the pasture.

What does it matter that my love could not keep her.
The night is starry and she is not with me.

This is all. In the distance someone is singing. In the distance.
My soul is not satisfied that it has lost her.

My sight tries to find her as though to bring her closer.
My heart looks for her, and she is not with me.

The same night whitening the same trees.
We, of that time, are no longer the same.

I no longer love her, that's certain, but how I loved her.
My voice tried to find the wind to touch her hearing.

Another's. She will be another's. As she was before my kisses.
Her voice, her bright body. Her infinite eyes.

I no longer love her, that's certain, but maybe I love her.
Love is so short, forgetting is so long.

Because through nights like this one I held her in my arms
my soul is not satisfied that it has lost her.

Though this be the last pain that she makes me suffer
and these the last verses. that I write for her.



Guillermo Núñez (1930 – 2024)

THE SONG OF DESPAIR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Oh farther than everything. Oh farther than everything.

It is the hour of departure. Oh abandoned one!