

EL GRAN OCEANO (THE GREAT OCEAN)

Pablo Neruda

If, Ocean, you could grant, out of your gifts and dooms,
some measure, fruit or ferment for my hands,
I'd choose your distant rest, your brinks of steel,
your furthest reaches watched by air and night,
the energy of your white dialect
downing and shattering its columns
in its own demolished purity.

Not the last wave with its weight of salt
crumbles the coastline and produces
a truce of sand encircling the world:
but tugging gravity, the pull of force,
the far-flung potency of waters
and the still solitude replete with lives.
Time, no doubt, or brimming crucible
of movement, primal unity
that death has left unsealed, green viscerae
of all-consuming oneness.

Of the drowned arm which lifts the water drop
only a kiss of salt remains. A humid fragrance
of drifting flowers clings where humans
bathed along your shores. Your energy
appears to glide away unspent,
seems to return to its original rest.

The wave you part with,
bow of identity, starry feather,
was only foam when it fell to pieces
and returned to be born, unconsumed,
Your whole strength clambers back to its origins.
You surrender nothing but mangled spoils,
husks your carriage swept aside,
the rejects of your abundant labor,
the shreds of afterbirth.

Your statue throws its shadow beyond the furthest wave

Living and co-related like breast and garment
of a single being and the breaths he draws,
in the matter of light haled from the deep
meadows uplifted by the waves
create the naked membrane of the planet.
You fill your own being with your substance.

And fulfill the curvature of silence.

The cup trembles with your salt and honey,
the universal womb of waters,
and nothing is wanting in you, as in the flayed
Crater, the unpolished pit:
desolate summits, scars, adhesions,
protecting the mutilated air.

Your petals throb against the world,
your submarine crops tremble,
the smooth algae brood like a menace,
the schools navigate and propagate
and only the dead lightning of scales
rises to the thread of the fishing nets
a wounded market in the distance
of your crystalline totalities.

From Canto General (1959) Translated by Anthony Kerrigan. Contributed to this web site by Margaret Leinen of the National Science Foundation. "This poem is pretty heavy. But then, sometimes the ocean is as well."

<http://www.visions05.washington.edu/poetry/details.jsp?id=22>