

Ode To Tomatoes

Pablo Neruda

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

happily, it is wed
to the clear onion,
and to celebrate the union
we
pour
oil,
essential
child of the olive,
onto its halved hemispheres,
pepper
adds
its fragrance,
salt, its magnetism;
it is the wedding
of the day,
parsley
hoists
its flag,
potatoes
bubble vigorously,
the aroma
of the roast
knocks
at the door,
it's time!
come on!
and, on
the table, at the midpoint
of summer,
the tomato,
star of earth, recurrent
and fertile
star,
displays
its convolutions,
its canals,
its remarkable amplitude
and abundance,
no pit,
no husk,
no leaves or thorns,
the tomato offers
its gift
of fiery color
and cool completeness.

Ode To Salt

Pablo Neruda

This salt
in the saltcellar
I once saw in the salt mines.
I know
you won't
believe me,
but
it sings,
salt sings, the skin
of the salt mines
sings
with a mouth smothered
by the earth.
I shivered in those solitudes
when I heard
the voice of
the salt
in the desert.
Near Antofagasta
the nitrous
pampa
resounds:
a broken
voice,
a mournful
song.

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

And then on every table
in the world,
salt,
we see your piquant
powder
sprinkling
vital light
upon
our food. Preserver
of the ancient
holds of ships,
discoverer
on

the high seas,
earliest
sailor
of the unknown, shifting
byways of the foam.
Dust of the sea, in you
the tongue receives a kiss
from ocean night:
taste imparts to every seasoned
dish your ocean essence;
the smallest,
miniature
wave from the saltcellar
reveals to us
more than domestic whiteness;
in it, we taste infinitude.

Ode To an Artichoke

Pablo Neruda

The artichoke
of delicate heart
erect
in its battle-dress, builds
its minimal cupola;
keeps
stark
in its scallop of
scales.
Around it,
demoniac vegetables
bristle their thicknesses,
devise
tendrils and belfries,
the bulb's agitations;
while under the subsoil
the carrot
sleeps sound in its
rusty mustaches.
Runner and filaments
bleach in the vineyards,
whereon rise the vines.
The sedulous cabbage
arranges its petticoats;
oregano
sweetens a world;
and the artichoke
dulcetly there in a gardenplot,
armed for a skirmish,
goes proud
in its pomegranate
burnishes.
Till, on a day,
each by the other,
the artichoke moves
to its dream
of a market place
in the big willow
hoppers:
a battle formation.
Most warlike

of defilades-
with men
in the market stalls,
white shirts
in the soup-greens,
artichoke field marshals,
close-order conclaves,
commands, detonations,
and voices,
a crashing of crate staves.

And
Maria
come
down
with her hamper
to
make trial
of an artichoke:
she reflects, she examines,
she candles them up to the light like an egg,
never flinching;
she bargains,
she tumbles her prize
in a market bag
among shoes and a
cabbage head,
a bottle
of vinegar; is back
in her kitchen.
The artichoke drowns in a pot.

So you have it:
a vegetable, armed,
a profession
(call it an artichoke)
whose end
is millennial.
We taste of that
sweetness,
dismembering scale after scale.
We eat of a halcyon paste:
it is green at the artichoke heart.

Ode To a Lemon

Pablo Neruda

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

Delicate merchandise!
The harbors are big with it-
bazaars
for the light and the
barbarous gold.
We open
the halves
of a miracle,
and a clotting of acids
brims
into the starry
divisions:
creation's
original juices,
irreducible, changeless,

alive:
so the freshness lives on
in a lemon,
in the sweet-smelling house of the rind,
the proportions, arcane and acerb.

Cutting the lemon
the knife
leaves a little cathedral:
alcoves unguessed by the eye
that open acidulous glass
to the light; topazes
riding the droplets,
altars,
aromatic facades.

So, while the hand
holds the cut of the lemon,
half a world
on a trencher,
the gold of the universe
wells
to your touch:
a cup yellow
with miracles,
a breast and a nipple
perfuming the earth;
a flashing made fruitage,
the diminutive fire of a planet.

Ode To Wine

Pablo Neruda

Day-colored wine,
night-colored wine,
wine with purple feet
or wine with topaz blood,
wine,
starry child
of earth,
wine, smooth
as a golden sword,
soft
as lascivious velvet,
wine, spiral-seashelled
and full of wonder,
amorous,
marine;
never has one goblet contained you,
one song, one man,
you are choral, gregarious,
at the least, you must be shared.
At times
you feed on mortal
memories;
your wave carries us
from tomb to tomb,
stonecutter of icy sepulchers,
and we weep
transitory tears;
your
glorious
spring dress
is different,
blood rises through the shoots,
wind incites the day,
nothing is left
of your immutable soul.
Wine
stirs the spring, happiness
bursts through the earth like a plant,
walls crumble,
and rocky cliffs,
chasms close,
as song is born.
A jug of wine, and thou beside me

in the wilderness,
sang the ancient poet.
Let the wine pitcher
add to the kiss of love its own.

My darling, suddenly
the line of your hip
becomes the brimming curve
of the wine goblet,
your breast is the grape cluster,
your nipples are the grapes,
the gleam of spirits lights your hair,
and your navel is a chaste seal
stamped on the vessel of your belly,
your love an inexhaustible
cascade of wine,
light that illuminates my senses,
the earthly splendor of life.

But you are more than love,
the fiery kiss,
the heat of fire,
more than the wine of life;
you are
the community of man,
translucency,
chorus of discipline,
abundance of flowers.
I like on the table,
when we're speaking,
the light of a bottle
of intelligent wine.
Drink it,
and remember in every
drop of gold,
in every topaz glass,
in every purple ladle,
that autumn labored
to fill the vessel with wine;
and in the ritual of his office,
let the simple man remember
to think of the soil and of his duty,
to propagate the canticle of the wine.

Ode To Conger Chowder

Pablo Neruda

In the storm-tossed
Chilean
sea
lives the rosy conger,
giant eel
of snowy flesh.
And in Chilean
stewpots,
along the coast,
was born the chowder,
thick and succulent,
a boon to man.
You bring the conger, skinned,
to the kitchen
(its mottled skin slips off
like a glove,
leaving the
grape of the sea
exposed to the world),
naked,
the tender eel
glistens,
prepared
to serve our appetites.
Now
you take
garlic,
first, caress
that precious
ivory,
smell
its irate fragrance,
then
blend the minced garlic

with onion
and tomato
until the onion
is the color of gold.
Meanwhile steam
our regal
ocean prawns,
and when
they are
tender,
when the savor is
set in a sauce
combining the liquors
of the ocean
and the clear water
released from the light of the onion,
then
you add the eel
that it may be immersed in glory,
that it may steep in the oils
of the pot,
shrink and be saturated.
Now all that remains is to
drop a dollop of cream
into the concoction,
a heavy rose,
then slowly
deliver
the treasure to the flame,
until in the chowder
are warmed
the essences of Chile,
and to the table
come, newly wed,
the savors
of land and sea,
that in this dish
you may know heaven.

Ode To Maize

Pablo Neruda

America, from a grain
of maize you grew
to crown
with spacious lands
the ocean foam.

A grain of maize was your geography.

>From the grain
a green lance rose,
was covered with gold,
to grace the heights
of Peru with its yellow tassels.

But, poet, let
history rest in its shroud;
praise with your lyre
the grain in its granaries:
sing to the simple maize in the kitchen.

First, a fine beard
fluttered in the field
above the tender teeth
of the young ear.
Then the husks parted
and fruitfulness burst its veils
of pale papyrus
that grains of laughter
might fall upon the earth.
To the stone,
in your journey,
you returned.
Not to the terrible stone,
the bloody
triangle of Mexican death,
but to the grinding stone,
sacred
stone of your kitchens.
There, milk and matter,
strength-giving, nutritious
cornmeal pulp,
you were worked and patted
by the wondrous hands
of dark-skinned women.

Wherever you fall, maize,
whether into the
splendid pot of partridge, or among
country beans, you light up
the meal and lend it
your virginal flavor.

Oh, to bite into
the steaming ear beside the sea
of distant song and deepest waltz.
To boil you
as your aroma
spreads through
blue sierras.

But is there
no end
to your treasure?

In chalky, barren lands
bordered
by the sea, along
the rocky Chilean coast,
at times
only your radiance
reaches the empty
table of the miner.

Your light, your cornmeal, your hope
pervades America's solitudes,
and to hunger
your lances
are enemy legions.

Within your husks,
like gentle kernels,
our sober provincial
children's hearts were nurtured,
until life began
to shuck us from the ear.

Ode To a Large Tuna in the Market

Pablo Neruda

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

All around you
were lettuces,
sea foam
of the earth,
carrots,
grapes,
but
of the ocean
truth,
of the unknown,
of the
unfathomable
shadow, the
depths
of the sea,
the abyss,
only you had survived,
a pitch-black, varnished
witness
to deepest night.

Only you, well-aimed
dark bullet
from the abyss,
mangled at one tip,
but constantly
reborn,
at anchor in the current,
winged fins
windmilling
in the swift

flight
of
the
marine
shadow,
a mourning arrow,
dart of the sea,
olive, oily fish.

I saw you dead,
a deceased king
of my own ocean,
green
assault, silver
submarine fir,
seed
of seaquakes,
now
only dead remains,
yet
in all the market
yours
was the only
purposeful form
amid
the bewildering rout
of nature;
amid the fragile greens
you were
a solitary ship,
armed
among the vegetables,
fin and prow black and oiled,
as if you were still
the vessel of the wind,
the one and only
pure
ocean
machine:
unflawed, navigating
the waters of death.

Ode To a Chestnut on the Ground

Pablo Neruda

From bristly foliage
you fell
complete, polished wood, gleaming mahogany,
as perfect
as a violin newly
born of the treetops,
that falling
offers its sealed-in gifts,
the hidden sweetness
that grew in secret
amid birds and leaves,
a model of form,
kin to wood and flour,
an oval instrument
that holds within it
intact delight, an edible rose.
In the heights you abandoned
the sea-urchin burr
that parted its spines
in the light of the chestnut tree;
through that slit
you glimpsed the world,
birds
bursting with syllables,
starry
dew
below,
the heads of boys
and girls,
grasses stirring restlessly,
smoke rising, rising.

You made your decision,
chestnut, and leaped to earth,
burnished and ready,
firm and smooth
as the small breasts
of the islands of America.
You fell,
you struck
the ground,
but
nothing happened,
the grass
still stirred, the old
chestnut sighed with the mouths
of a forest of trees,
a red leaf of autumn fell,
resolutely, the hours marched on
across the earth.
Because you are
only
a seed,
chestnut tree, autumn, earth,
water, heights, silence
prepared the germ,
the floury density,
the maternal eyelids
that buried will again
open toward the heights
the simple majesty of foliage,
the dark damp plan
of new roots,
the ancient but new dimensions
of another chestnut tree in the earth.
