Flights of Love

poems by

Peter Cerrato

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Department of Humanities
May 5th, 1983

Certified by ____________________________

Prof. Stephen Tapscott
Thesis Tutor

Accepted by ____________________________

Prof. Travis R. Merritt
Director, Humanities Major Programs
ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of a collection of original poems and translations of Pablo Neruda's *Odas Elementales*. The three sections each contain nine poems or translations, the translations appearing in the second section at the heart of the collection. The *Ode to Hope* introduces the collection.
To my teachers.
Ode to Hope

I.

The Wind In My Heart

To Return Home

Intimate Landscapes: I

The Gates Of Hell

Ana Marie Serves Tea

building cages, breaking through

with our bare hands we dig a tunnel for the sun

Hewitt School Playground At Dusk

What The Grass Knows
II. Translations from Pablo Neruda's

Odas Elementales

Ode to Winter
Ode to a Happy Day
Ode to Bread
Ode to Wine
Ode to Numbers
Ode to Love
Ode to Time
Ode to a Seagull
Ode to a Magnolia
III.

As time goes by,

Returning Home

Love Poem

and blow the candles out.

Volvo

The Brave Always Return

Smoke Signal

Avram,

Autumn
Ode to Hope

An ocean sunset
in the middle
of my life:
the waves like grapes,
solitude of the sky,
you overwhelm
and overflow me:
all the sea,
all the sky,
motion
and space,
the white batallions
of the foam,
the orange earth,
the burning
waist
of the sun in its agony:
so many
gifts and gifts,
birds that return
to their dreams,
and the sea, the sea,
suspended
scent,
chorus of resounding salt!
Meanwhile,
we,
the people,
beside the water,
struggling
and hoping,
beside the ocean,
hoping.

The waves say to the steady shore:
"Everything will be accomplished."
The Wind In My Heart

This is the night of voices, long moans and cries; lovers tossed in the wind, and bathed in hot sand, lovers with paper wings building a nest in the high corner of my room, marching on my sheets, laughing...

A ship comes to my window, masts creaking, sails full of stars who press their softened bodies against one another. The captain comes into view, moon gleaming in his glass eye, his voice of rusted chains, his breath of dark smoke. He calls to me.

A heart is pounding. Deep in the ship, under the deck boards, a heart is pounding and I rise to meet it.

A hollow distance unveils; a dancer whirls out on the edge of the ocean. Drums and echoes, bells ring in the tall air. I speak your name and a gong sounds. The ship crashes on a mountaintop. Dawn: a flight of doves wheels off with the stars.

Now, there is silence. With rocks and timber and the charred sails I build a shelter. I have one dove feather, the letters of your name; and a song for when the winds come.
To Return Home

i. memory, tapestry

At the peak
a sparrow falls,
dives in the air,
disappears into itself, swoops,
and rises again,
a drop of light on its wings.

ii. decent, shadows, clouds

She is down there, somewhere.
These steep hills
draw me down, I must
choose my way with my eyes.
Rocky path, stream whispering,
animals scattering. I am
separated from my flesh.
Long and heavy,
I dare not look back.

iii. still life

She is lost to the fire,
sees strange faces in the flames.
I cannot enter the thatched hut.
The lake is still,
a dark animal, poised,
its single eye full of reflections.
Intimate Landscapes: I

His wife,
who is no longer young, is beautiful
in her anticipation,
standing in the doorway,
hands behind her back.

The weight of his journey
fills him utterly
as a tree is filled,
or a word, with stories.

As he approaches,
she begins to wait,
a task she will forever be completing.
Where he has been he can never say.

After dinner,
she presses against his chest,
trying to touch the flesh of hills.
The Gates Of Hell

1.

The land turns a new face to me,  
the eyes of the world pierce me  
as the river rolls under my boat.  
The faces of the gods with their parched lips,  
who crawl armless through the forest  
to wet their tongues in the river,  
watch me  
as I pull slowly home.

My love,  
why has your voice not risen before me  
to bloom in the stars,  
echo in the cool light?  
Why only these desperate creatures to greet me?

With your name on my lips  
I carried our music to the water,  
and from the sea that drinks our river  
to distant seas.  
There I rode one great wave  
for days and days  
while I taught the whales our song.  
You were there beside me.

Now, why do the gods thirst?  
Why do they pant and eye me hungrily?  
Why do their arms shrivel into leaves, drying?
2.

Yes, my love, as you fear, 
these gods feast on my body. 
I taught them to work cold iron. 
Towering here above the river, 
the moonlight in my eyes, 
it is I they fear.

I gaze down and see 
you have woven me into mountaintop-snow. 
The song I once thought so small in my ear, 
rocking me tenderly to sleep, 
has stolen my soul and sold it to the sea. 
Everywhere I look I must face myself.

As you return to the Land of Drums, hear me: 
beneath my gates the river now runs dark and icy to the sea.
Ana Marie Serves Tea

Come inside, close the door,
the tea is almost ready.
You missed the sunset, you know.
It was slow and easy to forget.
Why don't you sit in the straight-backed chair by the window
where all my lovers used to sit?
And listen ---
the sky is sobbing now,
like a big sad dog.
See that old oak tree across the street?
It's been trying to tear itself apart for years.

Touch your face.
Can't you feel the way your flesh
pulls towards some dark shape it can never fill?
building cages . breaking through

is it the same
twist of browning sky
every time i pass the alley?
is it the same
twist of browning sky
the crumpled little lady
in the neon-blue scarf
wrapped tight around her
white hair sees?
her bloated pig-dog?
is it the same
twist of browning sky
that colors the spit
i leave on the side-
walk, and the startled
little stale cloud, and
the sweat on her lip/ who else
sees that twist
of browning sky seeping
like the smell of smoke/
i want to know
if anyone else sees that
twist of sky
will i?
with our bare hands we dig a tunnel for the sun

here on the beach at point lookout at 6am
the new year pulls out of its steep dive
and i walk away from simon, james and jon who are
kneeling in the sand before a duraflame log
with only one match left.
i walk past the girls huddled under the wool blanket
who face the boys not the ocean.
the wind blows their words back in their faces
and out to sea.
this not-yet-morning i am not-yet-drawn toward them.

the sun in its tunnel is apprehensive
and so am i, urging it to crawl onto the wave
that will toss it into the sky. but it waits.
the ocean pants at my feet, each cold wet breath
buries my bare feet further in the sandy mud.
the tide is flat and taut today,
a skin stretched over the mouth of the cave of the sun.
jon is repeating:
"i am sand"
"i am sand"

i want to grab their voices before they break against the waves
but they rush away like footfalls down a tunnel to the sun
and i stand here trying to lift it.
Hewitt School Playground At Dusk

To toss across the open field we have the frisbee; stronger than words and rounder, sailing through the air to settle spinning over Geoff,

who, come Fall, will be in England, across the Atlantic, an expanse of water a deeper shade of green than this grass, our home that crashes against us.

The girls sit on the grass and wonder when we will give up. The frisbee goes out again, is swallowed up by darkness and so our circle shrinks.

In our eyes I see hunger. I see the depth of the ocean.
What The Grass Knows

Well, just about everything:
when you jump up, when you come down,
that you're on her horse now, trotting and
in trouble because the hill is steep and falls down
in rocky trips to the lips of the hungry marsh.
But it doesn't know if she is touching you,
or the horse's soft chin,
or just running alongside holding the rope.

There are no exits or entrances or parts to play.
You go inside and the grass surrounds you,
presses its warm ears to your hut, and waits.
II. Translations from Pablo Neruda's

*Odas Elementales*
Ode to Winter

Winter, there's something
between us,
hills under rain,
a galloping, a dancing
in the wind,
windows
where your clothes have piled up,
your rough white shirt,
your soaked pants,
your belt of transparent leather.
Winter,
for others
you are fog
on the jetty,
clamorous
white roses,
dawn of the snow ---
but for me, Winter,
you are
a horse:
a fog lifts from your mouth,
drops of rain fall
from your tail,
electric flashes
are your mane:
a galloping dance
that continually
splashes mud
on passers-by.
We look up
and you are gone,
we don't see your face,
we don't know
if your eyes are sea-water
or a chain of mountains, if you have passed
like the hair
on a lightning-bolt:
you didn't leave a single tree intact, 
leaves 
reunited on the ground, 
nests were 
sucked like rags 
into the air 
when you galloped 
through the planet's dying light.

But you are cold, Winter, 
and your clumps 
of black snow and water 
on the roof 
blow across 
the housetop 
like needles, 
clacking 
like rusty knives. 
Nothing 
can stop you. 
You start 
an attack of coughs, children 
with soaked shoes 
come out of the house, 
in bed the fever 
is like the broad sail 
of a ship 
riding toward death, 
the city of the poor 
that burns, 
the collapsing 
mine, 
the thrash of the wind.

Ever since then, Winter, 
I've recognized 
your tattered clothes 
and the whisper 
of your trumpet through the araucaria-pines, 
when you scream 
and weep, when you crack 
in the crazy rain, 
rolling out thunder 
and the heart of the snow.
Man
grew up on a sandy beach,
he protected himself from the weather,
the salt and the sun
splashed with silk,
and attended the body of the woman who swam to the beach.
But when Winter comes
the man
makes himself a tangled little ball
that walks
under funereal umbrellas,
that covers itself
with impermeable wings,
that gets itself wet
and loosens
like a crumb, fills
the churches,
or reads enlightening nonsense.
Meanwhile,
overhead
in the oaks,
in the prow of the snowdrifts,
on the coast,
you reign
with your sword,
with your icy violin,
with the feathers that fall
from your indomimable chest.

One day
we will
recognize you
when
your beautiful face
isn't falling
on people,
when
you no longer poke holes through
my brother's roof,
when we can climb
to your highest blankest space,
where you can't gnaw at us.
One day your unchained monarchy
will flow past us with open arms.
I will take off my hat
under the same rain
that fell in my youth
because I will have faith, then,
in your waters:
they wash the world clean,
they bring the papers,
they dissolve
the dust of the day,
they wash us,
your waters
wash the earth's face
and fall beneath the forest,
where the Spring
sleeps.
You shake it, make its
transparent feet move,
you awaken it, drench it ---
and it begins to work.
Its dead eyelids drop off,
it joins your fragrant work,
it climbs the stairway
of the trees
and suddenly we see it:
up in the air,
in its new clothes,
and its ancient
green eyes.
Ode to a Happy Day

This time I will let myself
be happy.
Nothing bad has happened to anyone,
I am not on any side;
it follows, simply,
that I am happy:
for the four sides
of the heart, for walking,
sleeping, or writing.
What'll I go do? I am
happy,
I'm more innumerable
than the grass
on the prairies,
I fit into my skin like a rugged tree,
and the water below me,
the birds above,
the ocean in a circle
around my waist,
the earth made of bread and of stone,
the air singing like a guitar.
At my side in the sand
you are sand,
you sing and I sing you,
the world today
is my soul,
I sing, and sand,
today the world
is in your mouth!
Let me be happy
in your mouth and in the sand,
happy because of yes, because I breathe,
because of your breath,
happy because I touch
your knee
and feel like I touched
the blue skin of the sky
and its freshness.
Today I let myself
be happy,
by myself,
with everyone or without anyone,
happy
with the grass
and the sand,
happy
with the air and the earth,
happy,
with you, with your mouth,
happy.
Bread,
you rise
with flour
and water
and fire.
Heavy and light,
thin and round,
you take the shape
of a mother's
belly,
earthly
equinoxal
birth.
Bread,
how simple
and profound you are:
on the white tray
in the bakery
your rows of dough extend
like tools, like plates
or pieces of paper ---
and suddenly
the wing
of life,
the conjunction of seed
and fire:
growth! growth
suddenly like
the waist, mouth, breasts,
hills of the earth,
you're alive:
you swell in the heat, fullness
floods through you,
a fertile wind,
and then
your golden color fixes,
and when they puncture
your tiny bellies,
the brown scar
under your cooked crust,
in all your golden
system of hemispheres,
just then!
intact,
you are
the Human Act,
the recurrent miracle,
the tenderness of life.

Oh Bread of Every Mouth:
we will not beg
for you,
not from wandering gods
nor dark angels,
we are not beggers:
we will make bread
from the sea or from the earth,
we will plant the wheat
in the earth and the planets,
the bread of every mouth,
of every person,
every day
you will come because we have
sown you
and made you,
not for a single man but
for all,
the bread, the bread
for all the towns,
and we share with whoever needs it
the form and flavor of bread,
the earth,
the beauty,
the love,
all this
has the flavor of bread,
the form of wheat,
every thing
was made to be shared,
to be surrendered,
to be multiplied.
And therefore, bread,
if you leave
the house,
if they disown you,
or hide you,
if the miser
prostitutes you,
if the rich
hoard you,
if the seed of the wheat
does not find a furrow and soil,
bread,
we will not pray for you,
bread,
we will not beg for you,
we will fight together with other men for you,
with all the hungry,
with all the rivers and the air
we will go to look for you,
we will spread across the earth
so that you will grow
and lead the earth
with us:
the water, the fire, the man
will fight with us.
We will go crowned
with leaves,
winning
earth and bread for all,
and then
life also
will take the shape of bread,
it will be simple and profound,
innumerable and pure.
All beings
will have dignity,
the earth and life,
and this will be the bread of tomorrow,
the bread of every mouth,
sacred,
consecrated,
because it will be the product
of the biggest and hardest
human struggle.
This earthly victory
does not have wings:
it has bread in its arms
and it flies, bravely,
setting the earth free
like a baker, conducting,
face to the wind, leading us!
Ode to Wine

Wine the color of day,
Wine the color of night,
Wine with its purple feet
and its blood the color of topaz:
Wine
a star-filled child
of the earth,
Wine smooth
as a gold sword,
soft
as the folds of velvet:
Wine spiralling
and suspended,
my lover,
the sea,
you overflow every wineglass,
every song, every man:
you are coral, you are friendly,
giving us always what we bring to you.
Sometimes
you feed on human
memories.
Riding on your tide
we go from grave to grave,
you carve an icy tombstone
and we weep
temporary tears.
But
your brilliant
spring clothes
are different:
the heart climbs to the high branches,
the wind shakes the day.
Nothing can stay
next to your motionless soul:
Wine
shakes the Springtime,
happiness sprouts like a plant,
walls fall,
stone cliffs, chasms close, and
song is born.
"Oh bottle of wine,"
the old poet said,
"in the desert
with my delicious love."
Wine adds its kisses
to the strength of love.

My love, suddenly
your hips
are the full curves
of the wineglass,
your breasts are bunches of grapes,
your hair the light of alcohol,
your nipples grapes,
your navel the pure seal
stamped on the curve of your belly's cask ---
and your love
the waterfall of wine,
the crystal look you cast at me
is my life's earthly splendor.

But Wine of Life,
you are not only
love,
flaming kisses
from a warm heart:
you are
peace, a clarity,
an obedient choir,
a downpour of flowers.
When we talk,
I love the light
of a bottle of wine
on the table.
When we drink
we remember:
in each gold drop
or glass of topaz
or spoonfull of purple
we remember
that autumn has worked
to fill the vine with wine ---
and the private man learns,
in his day-to-day details,
to remember the earth and his duty:
to sing the canticle of fruitfulness,
to song of the fruits of the earth.
Ode to Numbers

What a thirst,
to know how many!
What a hunger,
to know
how many
stars in the sky!

We pass
through our childhood
counting rocks, plants,
fingers, sands, teeth:
children counting
petals, hair.
We count
the colors, the years,
the lives and the kisses!
In the country
the cattle, at the seaside
the waves. The ships
made codes that grew
and multiplied.
The numbers came to light.
The cities
were thousands and millions,
the wheat by the hundreds of units
that had smaller numbers inside them,
smaller than seeds.
Time was made a number.
The light was enumerated,
and no matter how fast the sound hurried,
its speed was a 37.
Numbers surrounded us.
We closed the door
at night, very tired,
and the 800 arrived,
from underneath;
it climbed into bed with us
and in the dream
the 4000 and the 77
bash on our foreheads
with their hammers and pliers.
The 5
adds to itself
till it enters the sea of delerium,
till the sun salutes with its sword
and we go running off
to the office,
to the shop,
to the factory,
to begin anew the infinite
number 1 of every day.

Hey, we had plenty of time
to satisfy
our thirst,
the ancient desire
to enumerate things
and add them,
reduce them to dust,
to the sand of numbers.
We were
papering over the world
with numbers and names, but
Things
do exist:
they fled
from the number,
they went crazy at quantities,
they evaporated,
leaving their odor or a memory ---
and the numbers burned after them, empty.

Because of that,
because of you, Things,
I am in love with every thing.
The numbers
lead to jail,
they march
in close columns
reproducing themselves
till they give us the sum-
total of infinity.
But for you I wish
only that those
streets of numbers
might protect you,
and that you protect them.
The sum of your weekly salary
unrolls till it covers your chest.
And the number 2,
that links your body with the body
of the woman you love,
may it shine through the eyes of your children
so that they can count
the ancient stars again,
and the innumerable
flowers
that fill this transformed earth.
Ode to Love

Love,
we tell stories.
But these days
it isn't possible
to fool or be fooled.
Once upon a time
I was a highwayman:
I haven't repented.
For one eternal moment,
a magnolia-blossom between my teeth,
the light of the celestial moon....
--- but what did it matter?
Solitude held out
its net, woven over
with cool jasmine
and then
what came into my arms
was the rose-golden queen
of the islands.
Love,
though you fall
drop by drop
through everything, all
the night-dark Spring,
ceaselessly,
you don't form the ocean by yourself ---
and I wait naked,
alone
and hopeful.

But suddenly! something
that passed through my arms
like a wing,
that was only a taste
of evening fruit,
suddenly it
flickereded like a dove:
I felt it flying
loose across my skin
like the long bright hairs of a bonfire.
Love, from then on
everything was simpler.
I obeyed the laws
I heard my heart give me,
and I held you around your waist
and claimed your mouth
with all the power
of my kisses,
like a king who desperately attacks
to reclaim the little castle
where the lily of his childhood grows wild.
And for this, Love, I believe.
your road can be
tangled and difficult.
But when we return from the hunt,
when we once again light
the fire in the hearth,
then
what we love,
must be
like the bread on the table,
that simple.
Love, this is what you teach me.
When she came to my arms
for the first time
she came like falling water in Springtime.
Today
I gather it up.
My hands are narrow and small,
the spaces in my face are small
where my eyes receive you,
the waterfalls
of your endless light, gold thread,
the bread of your fragrance ---
that are all so simple, Love, my life.
Ode to Time

Inside you, your growing age:
inside me, my walking age.
Time is determined,
its bell never rests,
it grows, it walks inside us,
it appears in a glance
as a deep water,
and next to the burning chestnuts of your eyes
a chip, the print of a tiny river,
a small dry star rising toward your mouth.
Time spreads its threads through your hair
but in my heart your fragrance is like honeysuckle,
alive like fire.
It is beautiful, like the life we live,
growing old alive.
Every day was transparent rock for us, every night was a black rose,
and this wrinkle on your forehead or on mine is rock or flower,
the memory of a lightning-flash.
My eyes are pleased by your beauty, but you are my eyes.
Once again I grow sleepy,
kissing your twin breasts,
but in my happiness all things
seem your secret splendor.
Love, how important
time is,
that same time that rose like two flames
or parallel stems —
my body and your sweetness, your body:
tomorrow time will let them be
or will peel them away,
and those same invisible fingers
will erase the identity that separates us,
giving us the victory
of one single being, finally, beneath the earth.
Ode to a Seagull

Seagull,
above
the pines
of the coast:
in the wind,
the whistling
syllable of my ode.

Sail,
boat of light,
two-winged banner:
in my verse,
silver body,
raise
your signal
across the shirt
of the frozen firmament,
Oh flyer!
soft
serenade of flight,
arrows of snow, float
tranquil in the transparent torment:
you raise your balance
while
the harsh wind
smears the meadows of the sky.

After a long trip,
you,
feathered magnolia, triangle
held on high,
slowly you return
to your closed
form,
your silver vestments,
ovaling your bright treasure:
once again you are
a white bud of flight,
round
seed,
egg of beauty.
Another poet
would end his victorious ode
here.
I
cannot permit myself
only
the white luxury
of the useless foam.
Forgive me,
Seagull,
I am
a realistic
poet,
photographer of sky.
You eat,
you eat,
you eat,
there is nothing you will not devour,
you bark over the water
of the port
like a poor dog,
behind
the last piece of fish
intestine,
you bark to your white
sisters,
you rob
the despicable spoils,
the helpless heap of marine
trash,
you spy
on the decaying
tomatoes,
the garbage
of the cove.

But,
you transform
everything
on clean wings,
in white geometry:
the ecstatic line of your flight.
Because of this,
snow-white anchor,
flyer,
I celebrate you completely:
with your ceaseless hunger,
with your cry in the rain,
your song,
your peace or your flight,
Seagull,
I consecrate
my earthly words,
heavy attempts at flight,
to see if you will drop
your seed on my ode.
Ode to a Magnolia

Here,
deep in the depths of Brazil:
a magnolia!

These roots rose up
like black snakes,
the trunks of trees
were mute columns of thorns.
All around
the branches of the mangos
were wide cities
filled with balconies,
and homes
for birds
and stars.
The ancient comets
were terrifying flowers
with hungry mouths,
they fell
into the ashes of the leaves.
Everywhere there arose
the silent terror
of the animals, of
gnashing teeth ---
a desperate land
of blood and darkest green!

A pure
magnolia,
as round as a circle
of snow,
rose up to my window
and bound me again to beauty.
Green and ochre,
its soft petals
closed:
perfect
as the egg
of a star.
Open,
it was the stone
of the moon,
fragrant Aphrodite,
platinum planet.
Its palm-sized petals
recalled the white-sheets
of the new moon
of love;
erect,
its pistil
was the marriage-tower
of the bees.

Oh whiteness
among
all the whiteness,
immaculate magnolia,
resplendent love,
the scent of white snow
and lemons,
capturing the dawn
in a new language ---
arched home of swans,
radiant apparition!

How
to sing of you without
touching
your
purest skin,
to love you
only from the foot
of your beauty,
and to carry you
asleep in the tree of my soul ---
brilliant, open,
dazzling
over the dark forest of dreams?
As time goes by,

you realize all it really takes is a gentle embrace on the dance floor, your bodies pressed lightly together like two hands cupping water.

And it comes to you, a calm voice, that says you must soothe the song as it rises from the saxophone, heavy and in search of air, gasping and sad.

The song in your arms, you sing softly to it, and dance slowly the way dolphins brush lovingly over each other and press together to the surface only to return in unending hunger to the dark breathing weight of the sea where the song resounds.
Returning Home

Calm and tender,
we do what must be done
with a sense of purpose,
like setting the table for dinner.

There is a family now.
A lot of the same old dancing and hooting
and wild greetings, but also,
there are long walks early in the morning,

the sun dancing on the water,
as big as a dream. We are
starting to learn about longer rhythms and silence.
We are coming home.
Love Poem

Do I turn from my desk
to find you in the doorway once again,
touching my arm?

Yes,
we're helpless, but that means nothing.
So is the grass everywhere.
Even the grass which hides
beneath the street
rushes up through the cracks.
I found a single blade
stuck in sweat to your forehead.

Christianne, my love is a river
rushing through the dark forest.
The drums are hollow booming long slow questions
that steal out in shivering rings of air.
The unseen towns haunt each other.
Beneath the hand-shaped clouds women wash clothes.
One finds a shell hidden in the soft mud
and, turning away from the other women,
holds it to her ear to hear the sound of the sea
washing over the sound of the drums,
the sad drums, crying from town to town.
and blow the candles out.

There goes the squirrel in the ivy. A flash of dark eyes is all we get to see. Then, the rustle: retreating, retreating. Soon, his small hunger will return --- when we are gone, when we are safe at home, waiting for dusk to roll over into darkness so we can eat our meal.
The old maroon volvo is no more.
No more sex in the death seat
while Russell weaves through the turns
on Harvard Avenue. No more racing
over dark highways and grid drawbridges
to the beach --- standing naked together,
in the water, trying to forget, trying to
keep moving. The wind in my face
was alive, I felt it
pick my words out of the air and
feed them to the seagulls sitting
on the wooden lampposts.
I felt safe in that car.
The Brave Always Return

Lois Indyke is in Argentina.  
When she comes home next Spring, 
it will make four years since

I've seen her. We are old friends: 
arm in arm in '79 we sang 
the Hallelujah Chorus coming down

the cobblestone streets of Old Quebec.  
My mother's friend, Ed Soares, was 
a priest once, then he went

to Rome to see the Pope 
because he loved a woman. 
The Pope whispered:

Go home, my son, you are free. 
Django Reinhart was a gypsy. 
His two good fingers

roamed wild on the fretboard, 
wandered to the edge of a waterfall of sound, 
weaving home again to the heart of the song:

there are many paths to a common language.
Smoke Signal

Big sky and I go embracing everything with my eyes but nothing fights back.

I follow girls, pretty girls with wicked eyes who know I follow and don't care. I stoop for a drink of water, I'm burning inside.

When I look up the faces go floating by mirrored inside me by the clouds drifting over the lonely landscape tucked away behind my ribs. Somewhere down there the Indian is cooking his dinner. The thin finger of smoke is choking me. How can he survive all alone? My friends, the squirrels, go up and down the trees gathering nut and acorn and other small things.
Avram,

Avram, you think too much.
Only when you laugh,
when you play paddleball
and pose for the devil,
all sweaty and muscles and fireworks,
but he can't catch you,
only when you play violin
with your head tilted to hear a tiny Beethoven
spell out the alphabet of courage,
do you forget who you are.
But that doesn't mean you are dead.

See the boy, Av, searching for patterns in the french toast?
He is a silhouette filled with sorrow.
The morning sun playing on the table
somehow reminds him of a certain girl
who once danced naked, a fire on the mountain.

My grandmother is getting old, Av,
she won't last long.
She is learning the vocabulary of death.
Slow, simple words, like a song:
Yes, I'm happy.
I'm eating well.
I have many friends.
Dios te compaña.
Adios. Adios.
She forgets who I am as soon as I hang up.
She is learning new words every day
and must forget the old ones.

Avram, you're not who you think you are.
The forest is so crowded
some trees are suffocating.
Your words are big,
ships with giant hands for sails,
and can't get out of your mouth to me.
See the girl, Av, in her simple frock, seated on the mountaintop?
She is dreaming while
her sheep go wandering in the pasture.
But it is not of the boy she dreams.
No, she gazes into the rising sun
and sees God and wishes he would
fold her in His hands like dough for bread.

Sometimes when I can't sleep I hear voices and suddenly
someone crawls down off the wall
and into the sculpture garden in my brain.
They are small people
but boy can they dance.
Lynbrook.
Rockville Centre.
Baldwin.
Freeport.
Towns in a line
with a train track connecting them.
Massapequa.
Massapequa Park.
Amityville.
Copague.
Lindenhurst.
and Babylon.
The people in one town
don't know the people in another.

Have you got all that, Av?

Tomorrow, I want scrambled eggs for breakfast,
and I want you to forget all the rules.
Cut across the red and black squares
and place your black pawn's head
in the lap of the slim white queen.

What could be easier than that?
Autumn

There is marriage in the air and we are preparing for Winter, lifting the heavy quilt out of the cedar chest. She moves slowly to the bay window and says, "The trees are going down in flames."

The Greeks appreciated that all flights of love flutter first in the cold air between us, uncertain as newborn birds, before plunging from my soul into yours. We are brave to stand among burning leaves hugging, whispering: Our house. Our house. Our memories of each other are no more real than the white satin scarf at the beach. What was once a breeze of milkweed becomes

a flock of birds circling our town, waiting for friends who have been missing all year, circling the swelling trees, until, one morning, in a rush of wings, they leave.
The Difficulties of Translation

Moving from the inner world to the outer world: it is too easy to become lost in the inner world, swimming in a sea of private details; it is so difficult to take the first step outside, to risk being seen in open air, to say this is no longer Neruda's poem, it is mine, to throw away two months of work because the voice in those junked poems did not speak to the world, it spoke only to me.

Let me go back to the concrete lessons I learned from Neruda. When I first faced the Odes I was in awe: such a simple voice, such a bold, trusting, innocent voice --- how could I translate these poems? I sat with dictionary in hand looking up even the words I knew, hunting for subtlety where there was no subtlety. I wrote out the rough drafts thinking this is too easy, all I have to do is keep the poems moving down the page. Steve and I had discussed the complexities of translating Spanish to English: the special concern of the Latin colloquial roots in Spanish as opposed to the germanic roots in English. I thought about this a lot but the actual word choices almost always leaped into mind straight from Neruda's voice. I think now I was lucky to have heard my mother and grandmother speaking Spanish every day: I understood Spanish voices, using a language to tell someone something, to tell stories.

I began to make emotional ties to certain of the Odes. The last stanza of Ode to a Magnolia echoed in my mind: "How to sing of you without touching your purest skin..." In my poetry I sought to reach out to
others but continually found myself falling back within my own inner world. Love Poem, a poem from two years ago, made this inward move right out in the open: "Christianne, my love is a river..." and then proceeds to sketch vast landscapes from my inner world. Only the sound of the sea in the last stanza remembers that there is an outer world. The sound of the sea. This was my clue: on the journey from the inner world to the outer world the rhythm of the ocean would be my guide.

Having finished the rough translations I put them aside to work on my own poems. This was at the beginning of last fall. I conceived of a series of poems all centered around a vision from my inner world: my friends and I are swimming in an endless ocean, drifting sometimes apart, sometimes together, all moving toward some vague goal, some island; all weary. I wrote five or six poems. They felt flabby, I could find no reasons to have events happen, the voice was detached, the poems had no form. So I trashed them.

About this time I began to talk with Steve about including some translations in my thesis. At first I felt that the Odes were so different from my poems that I could not imagine them together in the same collection. I began to think about what made the Odes work as poems. Rhythm I discovered is what makes the Odes work, a rippling triplet rhythm that rushes the poems down the page, waves on the ocean, a "waterfall of sound". And there were longer rhythms as well.
Study for a moment the Ode to a Seagull and you will feel Neruda's longer rhythms at work — tides, the rhythm of the oceans, the earth and the moon. The first three stanzas praise and celebrate the seagull, "serenade of flight". But the next stanza turns us around, gives us new eyes to see the seagull with, the seagull as scavenger, only to "transform" the seagull once again into a triumphant bird in the final two stanzas. "Music depends on its own diminishing." Ellen Voigt tells us this. It is the seagull's diminishing that allows its music to rise from the Ode. This music of renewal, these longer rhythms I learned from Neruda and in this way I made the Odes my Odes.

I learned that musical form is what we hear in the world, musical form is what links my inner world to the outer world. My old poems were about the ocean, but they did not contain the ocean. The new poems are aware of musical form. Stanzas set up a rhythm for the phrases to flow against. In Autumn the voice of the poem rolls over line breaks and stanzas, leaping away from the 4 - 5 - 5 - 4 stanza form, itself a swelling and release, only to meet up with it just as the birds depart. This double movement, the counterpoint of motion shows how a poem's musical form reaches out to musical form in the world.

Musical forms appear everywhere in the collection and as I do not wish to cheat people of the surprise of discovery I shall mention but a few more. The nine poems, nine translations, nine poems form a structure that is carefully balanced, each poem resonating in its proper place. The Odes at the center are the source of music
in the collection. Birds and eyes and drums and the sea are musical figures which are woven into different themes throughout the collection. Music depends on its own diminishing, but it also cries out for resolution. The wheel turns, the seasons revolve and the longer rhythms of the world give us maps of our life. Returning and completion could almost be said to be the big ideas in the collection. In To Return Home, and Intimate Landscapes, and The Gates of Hell the resolutions are incomplete or mistimed or impossible to achieve. In the last section, Returning Home and The Brave Always Return and Autumn reveal the beauty of completion, the need to find a home, a nest in the world. And every completion is a new place to leap from, marriage on the earth leads back to the sky.