

University of Dallas

**UDigital Commons**

---

Fall 2021: Global Vistas of Lyric

Cowan Center Seminars


---

9-9-2021

## Meeting 2: Selected Poems

Jose Espericueta

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.udallas.edu/cowancenter\\_fall2021](https://digitalcommons.udallas.edu/cowancenter_fall2021)

 Part of the [Language Interpretation and Translation Commons](#), [Latin American Literature Commons](#), and the [Spanish Literature Commons](#)

---

## “El corrido de Cananea”<sup>1</sup>

Voy a dar un pormenor  
De lo que a mí me ha pasado (2x)  
Que me han agarrado preso  
Siendo un gallo tan jugado (2x)

I am going to recount to you all what happened to  
me, (2x)  
They've taken me prisoner for being an oft-played  
fighting cock. (2x)

Yo me fui para Agua Prieta  
A ver quién me conocía (2x)  
Y a las once de la noche  
Me aprehendió la policía (2x)

I went to Agua Prieta to see who would recognize  
me, (2x)  
And at eleven o'clock that night, the police  
apprehended me. (2x)

Me aprendieron los gendarmes  
Al estilo americano (2x)  
Como un hombre de delito  
Todos con pistola en la mano (2x)

The officers grabbed me in the gringo style, (2x)  
Like a wanted fugitive, all of them with pistols in  
their hands. (2x)

La cárcel de Cananea  
Está situada en una mesa (2x)  
Y en ella fui procesado  
Por causa de mi torpeza (2x)

The jail of Cananea is situated up on a mesa, (2x)  
Where I was "processed" because of my careless  
blunder. (2x)

Despedida no la doy  
Porque no la traigo aquí (2x)  
Se la dejé al santo niño  
Y al señor de Mapimí (2x)

A farewell I do not give because I do not carry it  
here. (2x)  
I leave it to the Holy Child and the Lord of Mapimí.  
(2x)

---

<sup>1</sup> I choose to start here for a number of reasons. First, because the Mexican corrido follows faithfully one of the oldest poetic traditions in the Spanish-speaking world - the Romance. In the context of the Mexican Revolution, many corridos were shared by revolutionaries - some exalted Pancho Villa or Emiliano Zapata while others narrated more 'everyday' experiences. The simple 8-syllable verse and regular rhythm made them easy to memorize and reproduce. This one has some subtle references to U.S. interventions in the Cananea mine strike, a key historical context to the Mexican Revolution.

## “El Enigma De Vivir”

*Nabua poem (15th century, 16th century translation)<sup>2</sup>*

Lloro, me aflijo, cuando recuerdo  
que dejaremos las bellas flores, los bellos cantos.  
¡Ahora gocemos, ahora cantemos,  
del todo nos vamos y desaparecemos en su casa!  
¿Quién de vosotros, amigos, no lo sabe?  
Mi corazón sufre, se llena de enojo:  
¡No dos veces se nace, no dos veces es uno  
hombre:  
sólo una vez pasamos por la tierra!  
Si aún por breve tiempo  
estuviera con ellos y a su lado...  
¡Nunca será, o nunca tendré placer, nunca gozaré!  
¿Dónde es el sitio de vivir de mi corazón?  
¿Dónde está mi casa, dónde está mi hogar  
durable?  
Aquí en la tierra solamente sufro.  
¿Sufres, corazón mío?  
¡No te angusties en esta tierra:  
ése es mi destino: tenlo por sabido!  
¿Dónde merecí yo venir a la vida,  
dónde merecí ser hecho hombre?  
¡Acción suya fue!  
Allá se hacen las cosas ondulando  
donde vida no hay.  
Es lo que dice mi corazón.  
¿Y el dios, qué dice?  
--No en verdad vivimos aquí,  
no hemos venido a durar en la tierra.  
Oh, tengo que dejar el bello canto, la bella flor,  
y tengo que ir en busca del lugar del Misterio.  
Él pronto habrá de hastiarse:  
prestado tenemos sólo su bello canto.

I cry and I suffer when I remember  
That we will leave the beautiful flowers, the  
beautiful songs.  
Now let us enjoy, now let us sing  
From all of this we must leave and we disappear  
in his house!  
Which of you, my friends, doesn't know it?  
My heart suffers and fills with anger.  
One is not born twice, one is not human twice:  
Just once do we live on earth!  
If even for just a short time  
I were with them and by their side...  
It will never be, or I will never have happiness, I  
will never have pleasure!  
Where is the dwelling place of my heart?  
Where is my house? My enduring home?  
Here on earth I only suffer.  
Do you suffer, my heart?  
Don't suffer on this earth:  
That is my destiny: take that as a fact!  
Where did I deserve to come to this life,  
Where did I deserve to be made man?  
It was his action!  
Over there things are done, where there is no life,  
Things are done in waves.  
This is what my heart says.  
And God? What does he say?  
We don't really live here,  
We haven't come to endure on earth.  
Oh, I have to leave the beautiful song, the  
beautiful flower,  
And I have to go in search of the place of  
mystery.  
He will soon grow weary:  
We have only borrowed his beautiful song.

---

<sup>2</sup> In fact, this is a translation from Nahuatl. I think it's a slightly uncomfortable but excellent way to start. This is not a "Western" poem but it has a lot of elements of the poetic traditions of the West - some elements of *tempus fugit* for sure and an overall monotheistic message that may or may not be at odds with pre-Hispanic polytheism in Mexico. But was it christianized when it was taken from the oral tradition? It's hard to know. I like trying to inhabit that space of unknowing here.

**“A Su Retrato”<sup>3</sup> (“To Her Portrait”)**

*Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*

Este, que ves, engaño colorido,  
que del arte ostentando los primores,  
con falsos silogismos de colores  
es cauteloso engaño del sentido:

éste, en quien, la lisonja ha pretendido  
excusar de los años los horrores,  
y venciendo del tiempo los rigores,  
triunfar de la vejez y del olvido,

es un vano artificio del cuidado,  
es una flor al viento delicada,  
es un resguardo inútil para el hado:

es una necia diligencia errada,  
es un afán caduco y, bien mirado,  
es cadáver, es polvo, es sombra, es nada.

This one you see is painted foolishness  
making everything a show of art,  
splashes of false syllogisms, colors  
that fool the senses craftily:

This one, in whom flattery pretends  
to push aside the ravages of years  
and conquer time's rigors  
and triumph over old age and oblivion,

is a vain artifice of care,  
a fragile flower in wind,  
a hopeless hiding place for fate,

a silly diligent mistake, a brok-  
en urge, and, carefully observed,  
is corpse, dust, shadow, nothing

---

<sup>3</sup> 1690. One of my favorite sonnets, this one merits some context too. It presents itself as a response to a flattering portrait that was painted and then given to the Mexican nun, Sister Juana Inés. But it becomes clear very quickly that she is talking about poetry as well. It draws the *carpe diem* poetic tradition. I have included two poems here for background (Garcilaso de la Vega, “Soneto XXIII” and Luis de Góngora, “Soneto CLXVI: Mientras por competir...”). While Gongora can be placed stylistically and thematically in the Spanish baroque, Garcilaso is clearly more of a Renaissance poet. Pay attention to the connections between “A su retrato” and “Soneto CLXVI.”

**“Soneto XXIII”<sup>4</sup>**

*Garcilaso de la Vega*

En tanto que de rosa y Azucena  
se muestra la color en vuestro gesto,  
y que vuestro mirar ardiente, honesto,  
enciende al corazón y lo refrena;

y en tanto que el cabello, que en la vena  
del oro se escogió, con vuelo presto,  
por el hermoso cuello blanco, enhiesto,  
el viento mueve, esparce y desordena:

coged de vuestra alegre primavera  
el dulce fruto, antes que el tiempo airado  
cubra de nieve la hermosa cumbre;

marchitará la rosa el viento helado.  
Todo lo mudará la edad ligera  
por no hacer mudanza en su costumbre

So long as of red rose and lily white  
the proper colors of your face now show,  
and your impassioned, fervent, honest glance  
inflames the heart and holds it close in tow;

and so long as your hair, which in a vein  
of gold was mined, endowed with rapid flight,  
around your lovely white, and haughty throat  
the wind can still move, scatter, and uncomb;

go, pluck now from the spring of your delight  
the sweetest fruit, before the angry years  
can wrap the lovely peak in snowy scenes.

The icy wind will cause the rose to wilt  
and all things will be changed by fickle time,  
so as to never change its own routine.

**“Sonnet CLXVI: Mientras por competir...”<sup>5</sup>**

*Luis de Góngora*

Mientras por competir con tu cabello,  
oro bruñido al sol relumbra en vano;  
mientras con menosprecio en medio el llano  
mira tu blanca frente el lilio bello;

Mientras a cada labio, por cogello,  
siguen más ojos que al clavel temprano;  
y mientras triunfa con desdén Lozano  
del luciente cristal tu gentil cuello:

Goza cuello, cabello, labio y frente,  
antes que lo que fue en tu edad dorada  
oro, lilio, clavel, cristal luciente,

No sólo en plata o viola troncada  
se vuelva, mas tú y ello juntamente  
en tierra, en humo, en polvo, en sombra, en nada.

While burnished gold gleams in vain in the sun to  
compete with your hair;  
While in the middle of the plain your white brow  
gazes on the fair lily with disdain;

While more eyes follow each lip to kiss them [each  
lip] than follow the early carnation;  
And while your slender neck triumphs over  
gleaming crystal with self-assured scorn:

Enjoy [your] neck, hair, lips and brow, before  
what was in your golden youth,  
gold, lily, carnation, gleaming crystal

Not only turns to silver or to drooping violet but  
you and all of it together [turn] into earth, smoke,  
dust, shadow, nothing.

---

<sup>4</sup> c. 1535

<sup>5</sup> 1582

## “Alocución a la poesía” (“An Allocution to Poetry”)<sup>6</sup>

*Andrés Bello*

Divina poesía,  
tú, de la soledad habitadora,  
a consultar tus cantos enseñada  
con el silencio de la selva umbría;  
tú, a quien la verde gruta fue morada,  
y el eco de los montes compañía;  
tiempo es que dejes ya la culta Europa,  
que tu nativa rustiquez desama,  
y dirijas el vuelo adonde te abre  
el mundo de Colón su grande escena.  
También propicio allí respeta el cielo  
la simple verde rama  
con que al valor coronas;  
también allí la florecida vega,  
el bosque enmarañado, el sesgo río,  
colores mil a tus pinces brinda;  
y céfiro revuelto entre las rosas;  
y fúlgidas estrellas  
tachonan la carroza de la noche;  
y el Rey del cielo, entre cortinas bellas  
de nacaradas nubes, se levanta,  
y la avecilla en no aprendidos tonos  
con dulce pico endechas de amor canta.

¿Qué a ti, silvestre ninfa, son las pompas  
de dorados alcázares reales?  
¿A tributar también irás con ellos,  
en medio de la turba cortesana,  
el torpe incienso de servil lisonja?  
No tal te vieron tus más bellos días  
cuando en la infancia de la gente humana,  
maestra de los pueblos y los reyes,  
cantaste al mundo las primeras leyes

Divine poetry, you who dwell in solitude  
taught to enwrap your songs  
in the shady forest's silence,  
you who lived in the green grotto  
and had for company the mountain's echo;  
it is time for you to leave effete Europe,  
no lover of your native rustic charms,  
and fly to where Columbus's world  
opens its great scene before your eyes.  
There heaven respects the laurel, ever green  
with which you crown men's valor.  
There too the flowering meadow,  
the tangled wood, the twisting river,  
offer a thousand colors to your brush,  
and Zephyr flits among the roses,  
and shining stars spangle night's chariot.  
The king of heaven rises, among bright curtains  
of pearly clouds; and little birds  
sweetly sing songs of love in tones unlearned.

O sylvan nymph, what have you to do  
with pomps of gilded royal palaces?  
Will you too go there with the courtesan crowd  
to offer the foolish incense of servile flattery?  
You were not thus in your most beautiful days,  
when in the infancy of humankind,  
teacher of peoples and of kings,  
you sang its first laws to the world.

---

<sup>6</sup> 1823. Overall theme here: "What poetry does for young, independent, nations." I think everything to a varying degree here is Transatlantic, the Nahua poem being an example because of its translation into Spanish and the potential for an imposition of Western religious traditions. This, however, is the most explicit case in which the poetic voice calls upon Poetry to leave Europe (where it is not fully appreciated) and root itself in Latin America - whose nature in particular is best expressed by poetry.

No te detenga, ¡oh diosa!,  
esta región de luz y de miseria,  
en donde tu ambiciosa  
rival Filosofía,  
que la virtud a cálculo somete,  
de los mortales te ha usurpado el culto;  
donde la coronada hidra amenaza  
traer de nuevo al pensamiento esclavo  
la antigua noche de barbarie y crimen;  
donde la libertad, vano delirio,  
fe la servilidad, grandeza el fasto,  
la corrupción cultura se apellida:  
descuelga de la encina carcomida  
tu dulce lira de oro, con que un tiempo  
los prados y las flores, el susurro  
de la floresta opaca, el apacible  
murmurar del arroyo transparente,  
las gracias atractivas  
de natura inocente  
a los hombres cantaste embelesados;  
y sobre el vasto Atlántico tendiendo  
las vigorosas alas, a otro cielo,  
a otro mundo, a otras gentes te encamina,  
do viste aún su primitivo traje  
la tierra, al hombre sometida apenas;  
y las riquezas de los climas todos,  
América, del sol joven esposa,  
del antiguo océano hija postrera

en su seno feraz cría y esmera  
Oh goddess, do not stay  
in that region of wretchedness and light,  
where your ambitious rival, Philosophy,  
subjecting virtue to calculation,  
stripped you of mortals' worship,  
where the crowned hydra menaces,  
bringing anew to enslaved thought  
the old night of savagery and crime;  
where freedom is called vain delirium,  
faith servility, and pomp greatness,  
and corruption bears the name of culture.  
Take from the rotted oak your golden lyre  
with which you sweetly sang to spellbound men  
of meadows and flowers, of the whisper  
of the dark forest, the tranquil murmur  
of the transparent stream,  
and innocent Nature's fresh allure.  
Spreading your diaphanous wings,  
over the vast Atlantic go,  
to other heavens, other folk, another world,  
where earth still wears its ancient dress,  
and man has scarcely conquered it;  
America, the sun's young bride,  
last daughter of old Ocean,  
where the riches of all other climes  
grow and flourish in her fertile breast

**“Las alturas de Macchu Picchu” (“The Heights of Macchu Picchu”)<sup>7</sup>**

*Pablo Neruda, from Canto General*

Sube a nacer conmigo, hermano.

Dame la mano desde la profunda  
zona de tu dolor diseminado.  
No volverás del fondo de las rocas.  
No volverás del tiempo subterráneo.  
No volverá tu voz endurecida.  
No volverán tus ojos taladrados.  
Mírame desde el fondo de la tierra,  
labrador, tejedor, pastor callado:  
domador de guanacos tutelares:  
albañil del andamio desafiado:  
aguador de las lágrimas andinas:  
joyero de los dedos machacados:  
agricultor temblando en la semilla:  
alfarero en tu greda derramado:  
traed a la copa de esta nueva vida  
vuestrs viejos dolores enterrados.  
Mostradme vuestra sangre y vuestro surco,  
decidme: aquí fui castigado,  
porque la joya no brilló o la tierra  
no entregó a tiempo la piedra o el grano:  
señaladme la piedra en que caísteis  
y la madera en que os crucificaron,  
encendedme los viejos pedernales,  
las viejas lámparas, los látigos pegados  
a través de los siglos en las llagas  
y las hachas de brillo ensangrentado.  
Yo vengo a hablar por vuestra boca muerta.  
A través de la tierra juntad todos  
los silenciosos labios derramados  
y desde el fondo habladme toda esta larga noche

Rise up in birth with me, my brother.

Give me your hand out of the deep  
zone of your wide-spread sorrow.  
You will not return from the bedrock depths.  
You will not return from subterranean time.  
It will not return, your hardened voice.  
They will not return, your pierced eyes.

Look at me from the depths of the earth, you,  
the farm worker, the weaver, the quiet shepherd,  
the tamer of guardian guanacos,  
the mason on his defied scaffolding,  
the water carrier bearing Andean tears,  
the jeweler with crushed fingers,  
the farmer trembling among his seeds,  
you, the potter poured in your clay,  
all ye, bring to the cup of this new life  
your ancient buried sorrows.  
Show me your blood and your furrow,  
tell me: here I was punished  
because the jewel did not shine or the earth  
failed to yield enough stone or enough corn:  
point to the rock on which you fell  
and the wood on which they crucified you;  
strike the old flints,  
turn on the old lamps, crack the whips embedded  
throughout the centuries in your wounds  
and the axes with blood-encrusted sparkle.

I am coming to speak for and through your dead  
mouths.

---

<sup>7</sup> 1947. Not just what poetry does for Latin America, but what the poet does as well. Neruda is an inheritor of such a rich poetic tradition, most recently the vanguardia with strong roots in the inter-war European Avant-Garde. This belongs to a more socially active phase of his poems that are subsumed in an impressive tome of poems known as "Canto General" a type of poetic chronicle of Latin America's history. Here he attempts to speak for the commoner, or let the common person (even indigenous Americans prior to the arrival of the Spanish) speak 'through him.' Something to question, for sure, but the poetry carries a lot of weight and remains one of the most consequential poems of the 20th century in Latin America.



A través de la tierra juntad todos  
los silenciosos labios derramados  
y desde el fondo habladme toda esta larga noche  
como si yo estuviera con vosotros anclado,  
contadme todo, cadena a cadena,  
eslabón a eslabón, y paso a paso,  
afilad los cuchillos que guardasteis,  
ponedlos en mi pecho y en mi mano,  
como un río de rayos amarillos,  
como un río de tigres enterrados,  
y dejadme llorar, horas, días, años,  
edades ciegas, siglos estelares.

Dadme el silencio, el agua, la esperanza.

Dadme la lucha, el hierro, los volcanes.

Apegadme los cuerpos como imanes.

Acudid a mis venas y a mi boca,

Hablad por mis palabras y mi sangre.

Throughout the earth, join together  
all the scattered silent lips,  
and out of the depths speak to me during this  
    long night  
as if I were anchored to you.  
Tell me everything, chain by chain,  
link by link, and step by step.  
Sharpen the knives you'd locked away,  
put them on my breast and into my hands,  
like a river of yellow lightning,  
like a river of buried tigers,  
and let me cry, hours, days, years,  
blind ages, stellar centuries.

Give me silence, water, hope.

Give me the struggle, the iron, the volcanoes.

Attach your bodies to me like magnets.

Come to my veins and my mouth.

Speak through my words and my blood

**“Me gustas cuando callas” (“I Like You When You Are Quiet”)<sup>8</sup>**

*Pablo Neruda*

Me gustas cuando callas porque estás como  
ausente,  
y me oyes desde lejos, y mi voz no te toca.  
Parece que los ojos se te hubieran volado  
y parece que un beso te cerrara la boca.

Como todas las cosas están llenas de mi alma  
emerges de las cosas, llena del alma mía.  
Mariposa de sueño, te pareces a mi alma,  
y te pareces a la palabra melancolía.

Me gustas cuando callas y estas como distante.  
Y estas como quejándote, mariposa en arrullo.  
Y me oyes desde lejos, y mi voz no te alcanza:  
déjame que me calle con el silencio tuyo.

Déjame que te hable también con tu silencio  
claro como una lámpara, simple como un anillo.  
Eres como la noche, callada y constelada.  
Tu silencio es de estrella, tan lejano y sencillo.

Me gustas cuando callas porque estás como  
ausente.  
Distante y dolorosa como si hubieras muerto.  
Una palabra entonces, una sonrisa bastan.  
Y estoy alegre, alegre de que no sea cierto

I like you when you are quiet because it is as  
though you are absent,  
and you hear me from far away, and my voice  
does not touch you.  
It looks as though your eyes had flown away  
and it looks as if a kiss had sealed your mouth.

Like all things are full of my soul  
You emerge from the things, full of my soul.  
Dream butterfly, you look like my soul,  
and you look like a melancholy word.

I like you when you are quiet and it is as though  
you are distant.  
It is as though you are complaining, butterfly in  
lullaby.  
And you hear me from far away, and my voice  
does not reach you:  
let me fall quiet with your own silence.

Let me also speak to you with your silence  
Clear like a lamp, simple like a ring.  
You are like the night, quiet and constellated.  
Your silence is of a star, so far away and solitary.

I like you when you are quiet because it is as  
though you are absent.  
Distant and painful as if you had died.  
A word then, a smile is enough.  
And I am happy, happy that it is not true.

---

<sup>8</sup> 1923.