

Ode *to* Typography]
Pablo Neruda

Letters,
long, *severe*,
vertical,
made
of pure **line,**

erect
like a
ship's
mast

in the middle
of the page

filled
with **confusion**
and *turbulence*

algebraic

Bodoni,
complete
letters,

lean

as greyhounds,
subject

to the white rectangle
of Geometry;
Elzevirian
vowels

cast

in the minute **steel**
of the printshop by the water,
in Flanders, in the North

of the canals,
ciphers of the *anchor*;



Aldine characters

firm as

the marine
stature

of Venice,

in whose mother waters,

like a leaning

sail,

navigates the cursive

curving the alphabet:

the air

of the oceanic

discovers

bent down

forever the profile of writing.

From

medieval hands

to your **eyes** advanced

this *N*,

this double **8**,

this *J*,

this *R* of *regal* and **rain**.

There

they were shaped

like

teeth,

nails,

metallic hammers

of **language**.

they **beat** each letter,

e r e c t e d it,

a small **black** statue

on the *whiteness*,

a *petal*

or a starry foot
of thought taking the form

of a **swollen** river,

rushing to a sea of people
with all
the alphabet

illuminating
the outlet.

The *hearts*  the eyes
of men
became filled
with **letters**,

messages,
words,

and the **passing** or **permanent**

wind
raised mad
or sacred

books.

Beneath

the newly written *pyramids*

the letter

was alive,

the alphabet **burning,**

the vowels,

the consonants like *c u r v e d*

flowers.

The paper's

eyes, which **lOOked**

at men

seeking

their gifts,

their history, their loves;

extending

the accumulated

treasure;

spreading suddenly

the slowness of wisdom

over the printer's word

like a deck of **cards;**

all the secret

humus

of the ages,

song,

memories,

revolt,

blind parable,

suddenly

were

fecundity,

granary,

Letters, letters

that traveled

and **kindled**,

letters
letters that *sailed*
and **conquered**,

letters

that awakened
and climbed,

letters
that **liberated**,

letters dove-shaped
that *flew*,

letters scarlet in the snow;

punctuation,
roads,
buildings
of letters,

and Villon and Berceo,
troubadours
of memory
faintly
written on leather
as on battle
drum,

arrived

at the spacious nave

of books,
at the sailing

typography.

Yet
the letter

was not beauty *alone*, **life**,
but
peace for the soldier;

it went down to the solitudes

of the mine,
and the miner

read

the hard and
clandestine leaflet,

hid it in the *folds*

of the secret

heart

and above,

on earth,

he was different

and different

was his **word**.

The
letter

was the mother
of the new banners;

the
letters

begot

the terrestrial

stars

and the song,

the *ardent hymn*

that unites

peoples;

from

one

letter

added

to another

letter

and another,

from *people* to people went bearing its SONOROUS authority,

and welling in the throats of men

it imposed the clarity of the **song**.

But

typography,

let me
celebrate you
in the purity
of your
pure profiles,
in the *retort*
of the letter

O,

in the fresh

flower vase

of the Greek

Y,

in the

Q

of Quevedo,

(how can my poetry

pass

before that letter

and not feel the ancient shudder

of the dying sage?),

in the *lily*

multiplied
of the

V

of

victory,

in the

E

echeloned

to climb to heaven

in the

Z

with its **thunderbolt** face,

in the orange shaped

P.

Love

I love
the letters
of your hair,
the
U of your *glance*,
the
S of your figure.

In the *leaves*
of the young springtime
sparkles the diamantine

alphabet;

emeralds

My *love*

write your name

with the fresh initials of *den*.

your hair

profound

as jungle or dictionary

covers me

with its totality

of red language

In everything,

in the wake

of the worm,

one reads,

in the rose, one reads,

the roots

are filled with letters

twisted

by the dampness of the forest

and the heavens

of the **Black Isle**, in the night,

I read, *read*

in the cold firmament

of the coast,

intense

diaphanous with beauty

unfurled,

with capital

and *lower case*

stars

and exclamations

of frozen diamond;

I read, read

in the night of austral

Chile, lost

in the celestial solitudes

of *heaven*,

as in a **book**

i read

all

the *adventures*

and in the grass

I read,

read

the **green**, the sandy

typography

of the rustic earth,

I read

the ships, the faces

and the hands,

I read your **heart**

where

live

entwined

the provincial

initial

of your name

and

the

reef

of my surnames,

r e a d i o n

●
I read
I read

your forehead,

your hair

and in the *jasmine*

the hidden

letters

elevate

the unceasing

springtime

until I decipher

the buried

punctuation

the poppy

and the **scarlet**

☀ of summer:

letter

they are

the exact *flowers* of my song.

But,

when

writing

unfolds

its roses,

and the letter

its essential

gardening,

when you **read**

the old and the new

words, the truths

and the **explorations,**

I *beg*
a thought
for the one who orders
type, and raises them,
for the one who **sets**

for the **linotypist**
and his lamp
like a pilot
over
he *waves* of language
ordering
winds and foam,
shadow and *stars*

in the book:

man
and **steel**
once more united
against the nocturnal wing
of *mystery*,
sailing,
perforating
composing.

Typography,

I am
only a **poet**
and you are
the *flowery*
play of reason,

the **movement**
of the chess bishops
of **intelligence.**

You rest
neither **night**
a nor winter,
you circulate
in the *veins*
of our
anatomy
and if you sleep, **flying**
during
some night or strike
or *fatigue* or break
of linotype,
you go down anew to the **book**
or newspaper
like a cloud
of birds to their nest.

You return
to the system,
to the unappealable **order**
of intelligence.

Letters
continue to **fall**
like
along my way. *precise rain*

Oh, **letters**
of all
that lives
and dies, **light**,
letters of
of moon,
of silence,
of water,

I love you,

and in you

I gather

not only *thought*

and **combat**,

but your dress,

senses,

and sounds:

A

of *glorious* avena,

T

of trigo and tower,

and

M

like your name

of manzana.

—Pablo Neruda



Pablo Neruda 1964, translated from the Spanish version by Carlos Lozano

Ode to Typography

Greg Dodds
2003

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