

# **100 Love Sonnets = Cien Sonetos de Amor Study Guide**

**100 Love Sonnets = Cien Sonetos de Amor by Pablo Neruda**

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# Dedication - X

## Dedication - X Summary

Dedication: In a dedication to his "beloved wife" Matilde, Neruda explains that he went through a lot of pain to produce these 100 sonnets. He feels he is barely up to the task of accomplishing something as classical and elegant as sonnets. Instead of being made of crystal or silver, Neruda says his sonnets are made of wood, wood he has done a lot of work to in shaping and cutting into form. Only Matilde herself gives these sonnets life and meaning.

I: The name "Matilde" is the name of "things that begin in the earth, and last." It is a kind of invisible, intangible life force. Neruda wishes to "steer like a ship" through Matilde's name, and to rest there.

II: Neruda laments that his path to love with Matilde, even in just the space before consummating a kiss, has been traveled with great effort and loneliness. Once close and in love, however, Neruda and Matilde have become one, and even when "divided by trains and nations," love is such a unifying force that it obliterates all physical distance and boundaries.

III: "Bitter love" is compared to thorns and a spear, a weapon that has wounded Neruda. Neruda asks how love has found him, who told love where to look, and why it has wounded him so. Love has carved a wound through his heart in a ferocious manner.

IV: Neruda asks Matilde to remember several items they have encountered together in nature: a stream full of aromas, a bird fresh from its winter hibernation, thorns and thickets, a bouquet that Matilde picked. Neruda goes back to that place, and time has no meaning, and he finds everything he needs.

V: Neruda speaks of Matilde with metaphors involving the earth. Matilde is his "dark familiar clay" (7). At this point in his relationship, he was not in love, and he confesses he even forgot Matilde's kisses. But finally he understood love, and had found his place.

VI: Neruda describes himself as lost in the woods and starved. In desperation he snaps a twig from a tree, hoping for some moisture to slake his thirst. The forest seems to cry out in pain, from somewhere far off and secret. The twig gives off a good taste, along with a fragrance that is initially pleasing. But the fragrance seems to wake Neruda up from a stupor, and now he finds the fragrance wounding.

VII: Neruda urges his lover to "Come with me," and is for a time unheard and unrequited. This time is spent in private agony; no one can see the intense pain he is undergoing. Finally, Neruda's call is answered by his lover, and with this action all of Neruda's pain and roiling emotions explode to the surface, geyser-like.



VIII: Similar to Sonnet I, Matilde is described as both part of and giving life to some elementary, natural objects. In particular her eyes are the object of the conceit, their brownish-yellow color compelling Neruda to invoke some items of a similar color: the autumn moon, clay, fire.

IX: Neruda invokes a seaside cliff, where waves continually crash in against the rocks. Compared to this kind of violent activity, Neruda and Matilde, watching from a distance, make the only tenderness in the scene, their tender love in sharp contrast to the crashing of the waves.

X: Neruda admires the beauty of his lover, who is walking through the shallow ocean on the shore. He wishes this moment might last forever, and that she remain untouched and perfect.

## Dedication - X Analysis

Dedication: Neruda feels his earthy, modern prose style is a strange, even poor, fit for the elegance and beauty demanded by the love sonnet form. While others may have built their sonnets to sound like "silver, or crystal, or cannonfire" - things that are luxurious, beautiful, and powerful, respectively - Neruda, exuding typical authorial humility, can only make his sonnets from wood. This is an appropriate material for humility, as it is neither beautiful, expensive, or particularly powerful. Instead, it is functional, commonplace, and difficult to work with, a trait Neruda ties to his difficulty in crafting them. Neruda here uses the idea of wood to introduce the notion that his sonnets are more genuine, more "from-the-heart," more earned and paid for and worked on, than could be possible from the "elegance" and high lyricism of the traditional love sonnet from Elizabethan or Renaissance times, which by comparison rings false.

I: Matilde is a kind of prime mover or vital force that gives life to not only Neruda ("its letters are the waters of a river that pours through my parched heart" [7-8]), but to plants and rocks and wine. Neruda invokes the sea particularly with boat imagery in this poem. The last section introduces a sensual eroticism, as he asks Matilde to "Invade me with your hot mouth" (12) (hotness usually being a favorable condition for life, tying it back to Matilde as life force).

II: Neruda plays upon the idea of aloneness. When Neruda is separated from Matilde, even in such a brief moment as the approach to a kiss, he feels desperately alone, "loneliness in motion" (2), and he feels that an eternity takes place in this brief space. But when Neruda meets Matilde, they are one, "from our clothes down to our roots" (6), and paradoxically not even being divided by "trains and nations" (11) can sever their love or make them alone again (though they are "alone together," (8) a delightful oxymoron).

III: Here another side of love is demonstrated, that of its painful, harmful, destructive nature. Love is a "crown of thorns" (1-2), a reference to Jesus Christ's crucifixion that



serves as a reminder that "passion" originally meant suffering (The Passion of the Christ). Before love, Neruda was cool, but now with love a fire has erupted, a "corolla of rage" (3). Word choice is very visual, visceral, and martial, the poem full of spikes, weapons, and wounds.

IV: Neruda, nostalgically, remembers the sensuous experiences of an outing into nature with his lover. Nature's splendor is very much on display, with specific images like a bird "wearing water and slowness" and "its winter feathers" (3-4), fresh from hibernation, and "magical thorns like swords," (8). Neruda makes a sort of metaphysical expansion in the final stanza. The outing ceases to become a singular experience and becomes "like never, and like always" (12), a timeless place they might retreat into forever, speaking to the cycle of life.

V: In a confessional sonnet, Neruda admits that at the beginning of his relationship with Matilde, he did not know "your night, or your air, or the dawn" (1) but instead her earth, with all its sensual delights, invoking vivid imagery of fruit in clusters or wheat in its fields. Here is a clear division between spiritual love, and earth-bound, sexual love. When kissed in this state, Neruda forgets the kisses as they are symbols of spiritual love he has not yet attained. There is a clever distinction between forgetting the spiritual kiss yet "remembering your mouth" (12), again referring to sex and physical attraction.

VI: This sonnet is a kind of lamentation for the loss of childhood. Adulthood is characterized as being starved and alone in a dark forest. The sights and sounds around are unclear. Adulthood is also a confusing place, then; Neruda wonders if a sound "was the voice of the rain crying, a cracked bell, or a torn heart." (3-4). He cannot even tell where it comes from, somewhere "deep and secret to me" (6). Hoping for some sustenance, some kind of meaning, he sucks on a the branch of a tree, and is instead rebuked by a forest that cries for its loss. This cry is directly tied to the sadness for a land lost, that of childhood (13). The sonnet could be interpreted as a take on Adam and Even in the Garden of Eden; with knowledge comes the death of innocence.

VII: This sonnet speaks to the private nature of the agony of unrequited love. Neruda urges Matilde to love him, and she does not hear him. Like a boiling teapot, Neruda has all the emotions of love but not a proper outlet (i.e. a reciprocal lover); these emotions must be kept inside only to continue to grow and fester. When Matilde finally answers, all these long-held emotions are unleashed. Neruda uses two colorful metaphors for this release: "cork-trapped wine" (11) and "geysers flooding from deep in its vault" (12). Paradoxically, love reciprocated allows Neruda to feel again, though he was under intense pain when love was not returned.

VIII: Neruda again ties physical attraction to his deeper love for Matilde. Her eyes, and then Matilde herself, are the subject of a long conceit in which, as in Sonnet I, she breathes life and gives sustenance to natural objects. Through Matilde Neruda sees "everything that lives" (14), Matilde again becoming a sort of vital charge of life force.

IX: Waves crashing against rocks are given a violent, brutal power; "waves shatter" (1), salt is "broken" (8), "the sea destroys its perpetual statues" (10). Here words are



carefully chosen for their visceral violence. Amid this violence, the author and his love "ratify the silence," a particularly rich phrase, indicating that the lovers must be far enough away as they view this battle so they cannot hear it, a kind of irony that gives them an insulation. In contrast to the ever-changing, violent waves, the lovers "make the only permanent tenderness" (14).

X: Matilde's beauty is compared to earthly things - "music and wood, agate, cloth, wheat, peaches" (1-2), as she walks in the ocean. The only competition for her beauty is the sun and the sea. Neruda wishes that this beauty, this moment, remain undisturbed, and "may not even love disturb that unbroken springtime!" (10). This is Woman expanded into eternal beauty, perfect complement to the beauties found in nature, requiring nothing else.



## XI - XX

### XI - XX Summary

XI: Neruda imagines himself as a puma prowling the streets, starved not for traditional food, but for Matilde's body, in a large, complicated conceit in which various body parts are made metaphors for things of earthly beauty.

XII: Love, here embodied specifically as sex, is a long journey. In this conceit, Matilde's body is a body of land, full of rivers and villages. There is something great and eternal at this end of this journey, and the author wonders what it is.

XIII: Matilde is made of bread, able to both act as sustenance for Neruda, and representative of bread-like characteristics, a certain earthiness, raised by fire, born of good harvest and stock.

XIV: Hair is the subject of Neruda's amor in this sonnet. He hasn't the time to fully contemplate the loveliness of Matilde's hair, and without this hair he is a lost man.

XV: Neruda states that his lover is firm, permanent, and eternal, like bread or wood. She is tangible because she was born of clay. While other beings may come and go and "dissolve like the air," because of this earthy quality of their love Neruda knows his lover will always be.

XVI: Matilde is the only thing the author needs to understand the universe. She is a microcosm of the universe herself, with whole meadows, planets, and meteors contained in her compact form.

XVII: Neruda loves Matilde not in a traditional, obvious sense, but in a secret, not-readily-apparent way. His love is neither intellectual nor complex nor completely understood, but simply is.

XVIII: Matilde is said to move through the mountains quickly, like a breeze or stream, taking on beautiful qualities of nature. A ruined army fortress even gives up some of its water and bears flowers in honor of Matilde's presence.

XIX: While Neruda watches Matilde take a nude dip in the ocean, he is attracted to the comings and goings of a bee.

XX: Neruda finds both ugly and beautiful things in an appraisal of Matilde's physical characteristics.



## XI - XX Analysis

XI: In a creative conceit, Matilde's body is the food on which the poet, "a puma" (14) hunts for and feeds upon. Her body is composed of a series of metaphors, once again involving things found in nature, such as "the pale stones of your fingernails" (7) and "skin like a whole almond" (8). Erotic sensuality is on clear display here, tempered somewhat by the extreme fancy of the conceit itself.

XII: Matilde is an object of desire, and more nature metaphors are employed by Neruda: "flesh-apple, hot moon, thick smell of seaweed (1-2). Love, and specifically the lovers' sexual play, is made to be a journey, the woman's body a "little infinity" (9) through which the author must cross rivers and villages.

XIII: Similar to the Dedication, Matilde's beauty is not something remote and untouchable, "not mother-of-pearl, not chilly silver" (3) but bread. Bread is appropriate for both its basic earthiness (which Neruda lauds over and over), but because of its nature as food. Similar to Sonnet XI, Neruda pictures himself consuming this bread (10). Matilde's maturation is compared to the making of bread - borne of the earth (wheat), risen dough erotically "doubling your breasts" (7). The fire used in the baking of the bread has informed Matilde's personality, and otherwise from bread she has learned "holiness" (13) along with "language and aroma" (14).

XIV: From the broadness of previous sonnets, we move to the specificity of Matilde's hair. Without this hair to contemplate (which he both knows intimately, and cannot fully comprehend), he is lost in a "dark world, webbed by empty roads with their shadows, their roving sorrows" (12-13). Here is also a display of intimate affection; Neruda calls his lover "curly, my tangler" (7), using dual meanings of "tangle," both as descriptive of the quality of her hair, and for her hair's ability's to entangle him with desire, lust, etc.

XV: Once more "bread" and "wood" (2) are favorite metaphors for Neruda, this time because they are tangible and present. Like clay, another favorite invoked here, Matilde is permanent, versus the "beings" that "dissolve like the air, or water, or the cold" (9). Because Matilde is earth, and earth is permanent, she will never cease to exist. In a last macabre image, even in death Matilde "will fall with me like a rock into the grave," earth to the end.

XVI: Matilde, a mere "handful of the earth" (again, she is earth incarnate), is all Neruda needs in order to understand and experience the universe. This idea has been stated a different way previously, with the lovers "alone together," needing nothing but the other. In yet another grand conceit, Matilde's skin is like "the streak of a meteor through rain," (7-8), her hips "that much of the moon for me" (9).

XVII: Unlike the love of "salt-rose, or topaz, or the arrow carnations the fire shoots off," (1-2) or obviously pretty, vivid things, Neruda's love is more comfortable in the dark, "in secret, between the shadow and the soul." (4) Once again the lovers are alone, together, and completely self-sustained and solipsistic. The last stanza in fact merges "I" and "you" into a single being: "so close that your hand on my chest is my hand" (13).





XVIII: This sonnet has several interpretations. Matilde, like previous sonnets, may simply be nature - a breeze, a stream, her hair as the sun - or her lithe movements may indicate that the metaphor is instead Matilde as deer, in fact a common metaphorical choice in the Elizabethan and Renaissance periods in the sonnet. In this latter interpretation, there is some threat to this elegant deer in the third stanza, a mention of a "warrior road" (9) and an "old army fortifications" (10) perhaps invoking a hunter on the prowl. However, the explosion from this hunter is not a bullet or arrow, but "a sprig - a lightning bolt - of a few blue flowers" (13). Not even a hunter (or the darker side of humanity) could kill such a beautiful creature as this deer-like lover.

XIX: It could either be said that Matilde is the bee in this sonnet, or that the bee, a separate creature, only bears some qualities that might apply to Matilde. The bee has an elegance, "as if it slid on invisible wires" (5), a fickleness, and a certain lethality ("the assassinations of its mean little needle" [8]). Whether Neruda means to make a direct comparison, or if this be is somewhat of an aside, is open to interpretation.

XX: Starting with the startling "My ugly love" (1), Neruda vacillates between pointing out ugly, then beautiful characteristics of Matilde. Ugly includes her big mouth, small breasts, and discolored toenails. In doing this "inventory of your body," (11), Neruda returns to the ideas that their love is a) unorthodox (not based on obvious beauty), b) of the earth (honest, and a kind of "warts and all" approach to love), and c) absolute and without conditions, involving but not requiring physical beauty.



## XXI - XXX

### XXI - XXX Summary

XXI: Without love, specifically requited love, the author is lost in an endless night, groping for his lover's hands or kisses. Only the lover can bring light to this darkness.

XXII: Neruda states that he loved Matilde before ever meeting her physically, that his behaviors and experiences pre-Matilde were all nonetheless colored with his eternal love for her.

XXIII: Matilde's love has subdued nature, and cured Neruda of any physical ills. Neruda imagines that when the two lovers are dead and gone, their love will nonetheless be alive.

XXIV: The author marvels at Nature, specifically the beauty of the blues in the sky and the sea, and urges his lover to share in this amazing experience.

XXV: Before Matilde came into his life, Neruda's world was harsh, unfriendly, colorless, and dead. Love changed this world.

XXVI: Nothing in a long list of natural beauties and phenomena has or can change the eternal beauty and form of the author's lover.

XXVII: Neruda expounds upon what his lover is like naked, once again invoking many natural tropes. Naked is her natural state of being.

XXVIII: Despite the wars, bloody revolutions, and other violence the lovers have encountered in the course of their travels, violence has never disturbed their love, and they have remained stable.

XXIX: Matilde was born in the "poor South" to poverty, and still carries that spirit in her heart, a spirit Neruda greatly admires and what attracted him to her.

XXX: Matilde is once again the subject of a complicated conceit featuring elements in nature. Neruda could not disentangle his heart from this nature, nor would he want to.

### XXI - XXX Analysis

XXI: In Sonnet XXI, the conceit utilized is the lover (Matilde) as the darkness, but a darkness ironically capable of bringing light. Matilde is given omnipotent power, both over Neruda and over nature: she is able to "shut out the month's light with your fragrance" (4) and "close all the doors with your hair" (5). The lover is thus capable of ushering in dreams (as undoubtedly the subject of the author's dreams), with the author



a "lost child" (8) afraid of the dark who must be comforted. Power is the currency here, which the author freely admits is in Matilde's hands.

XXII: Stemming from the ideas that "love is eternal" and that Neruda and Matilde are soulmates, Neruda states that he loved Matilde before physically meeting her. But instead of invoking an ethereal spiritualism, Neruda keeps them earth-bound and grounded, wondering if, when he strummed a guitar, was he actually caressing Matilde (7), or when he broke into houses, was it only to find her? (10) A curious but effective way of relaying eternal love without resorting to well-worn spiritual tropes.

XXIII: Nature is frightening in Sonnet XIII, full of "talons and claws" (7), with only "fire for light" and a "rancorous moon for bread," (1). From this war-torn life, love has brought peace (4) and healed all wounds. Love here is revolutionary and utterly transformative. The final stanzas, similar to Sonnet XXII, intimate that love is eternal and will outlast the fragile physical bodies.

XXIV: The author's reverence for nature is no more explicit than in Sonnet XXIV, where the author's lover, so often metaphorized as nature, is now separated and asked to attend the show nature is putting on. The blues of the sky and sea seemed to have merged, "all exiled together" (4), into a single, thrilling experience. The experience is temporary (the lover is urged to come "before its petals wither" (8), and the lovers are dazzled and confused by the enormity of it all, and the secret (truth) it holds.

XXV: Again Neruda refers to the time Matilde was not in his life. In a powerful statement on perspective, whereas pre-love "everything was empty, dead, mute, fallen, abandoned, and decayed (9-10), post-love "filled the autumn plentiful with gifts" (14). As with nearly all the sonnets, nature again plays a role, in so far that seasons are invoked, autumn decay giving way to spring-like vivification.

XXVI: Matilde is again "dissected" in a manner of speaking along earthly lines, with her "plump-grape form" (4) and her "traveling grain of wheat" (11). She is compared to nature, exposed to nature, and found to be unchanged. As in other Sonnets, she in fact bears dominion over the earth and is still part of that earth.

XXVII: Furthering Neruda's insistence on naturalizing his lover, Sonnet XXVII has Matilde naked as a sort of obvious, natural state, with clothing, chores and other social, worldly concerns but a "long tunnel" (12) from which to emerge naked once again. The Naked Lover is treated to the same nature conceit as in previous sonnets — "you have vines and stars in your hair" (6).

XXVIII: "War with its bloody shoes" (3) is the subject of XXVIII, a novel subject and stark departure from previous sonnets. What is unchanged is the permanence and eternal nature of the lovers' love, despite any outward disturbance. The disturbance here is war, rebellion, and the violence of nation-building, especially prevalent, the reader supposes, in the communist countries Neruda and Matilde visited during the 1950s.

XXIX: Poverty (which we are told Matilde was born into) is treated to the kind of earthiness the reader has seen expressed before. Poverty has kept Matilde low (literally



close to the earth), humble, and truthful. She is a "little horse of black clay," born of her environment. It is no surprise that poverty (or the consequences of living a life thereof) is lauded, its participants having to live off the land.

XXX: Noteworthy amid the usual conceit of "Matilde as Nature" is an additional dimension, that of time. Her skin is "made by centuries of time" (2), with "green blood dropped from the sky into memory" (4). These and similar lines add the aspect that Matilde is the kind of product of the ages, an evolved perfection, not only made of present nature, but of a course of events.



## XXXI - XL

### XXXI - XL Summary

XXXI: The author states that both he and his lover are born of the earth, and as such are uncomfortable in the city.

XXXII: The author describes the natural sleepiness and cozy disorder of his home at dawn. Matilde, with the energy of a buzzing bee, wakes the house with her energy and prepares everything for the day.

XXXIII: The lovers return home after traveling a long distance, having to rest and recuperate before heading out again.

XXXIV: Matilde is of the earth and is able to cause earthly phenomenon. Her dreams are made of natural things, like seaweed and vegetables.

XXXV: The lover's hand is removed from the author's eyes, and he is able to take in all of nature's beauty. Later that day, darkness comes, and the hand comes back to shroud his eyes in darkness.

XXXVI: The lovers' life and home are compared to a little empire over which Matilde rules. Neruda marvels at Matilde as she does everyday chores.

XXXVII: Love has torn down the castle-like walls that the author had built around his heart, a great and natural gift.

XXXVIII: Matilde in her daily life of tending house and doing chores makes for a very pleasant din, a natural clash of sounds unlike the harsh din of the city.

XXXIX: Neruda admires the skill Matilde has in gardening, comparing her to a bee which pollinates the flowers and makes them grow.

XL: Neruda, from his home, admires Matilde at a distance, who is walking along the sand near the ocean, picking flowers.

### XXXI - XL Analysis

XXXI: Marrying the well-worn conceit of Matilde as Nature with the notion of togetherness, Neruda includes himself in the earth from which Matilde is sprung: "Like the man who loves you, you come from the green provinces" (5). With a clever specificity, the lovers are compared to wandering country people, confused in the city as to when the market closes (7-8). Never in the previous sonnets have the city and the country been so clearly juxtaposed.



XXXII: Matilde is given the title "The One Who Puts Things in Order" (9). As in early sonnets, Matilde is a sort of vital energy, a life force which activates the world. In this sonnet, this energy is specifically directed to the states of sleep and wakefulness, in between which the house "drifts like a poor little boat" (3). Other objects are similarly given "groggy" human qualities. Once again the prime mover, Matilde stirs the house awake, and seizes order from disorder.

XXXIII: In a kind of circadian rhythm, the lovers must return home after a long journey. The reader is told that "love cannot always fly without resting" (12). The most prescient trope here is the lovers as two birds, specifically "two blind birds [returning] to their wall" (10), indicating this cycle of recuperation and activity, as related to love, is both natural and instinctual, as a bird migration.

XXXIV: The most interesting part of this sonnet may be the references to cooking; Matilde is called a cook (3) whose body will "bloom resurrected in the kitchen" (10), and whose dreams are made of "vegetables, seaweeds, and herbs" (14). Aside from the usual nature tropes, Matilde is either cook-like in her grand dominion over nature, able to manipulate nature for her own purposes, or a great cook in the kitchen in reality.

XXXV: As the reader has seen in earlier sonnets, Matilde is able to usher in the light and the darkness. Here, playfully, Neruda literalizes this power in invoking the simple "peek-a-boo" scenario of Matilde's hands over Neruda's eyes. Once they fly away Neruda is literally treated to sight, and all the visual beauty nature has to offer. When night comes, the bird-like hand again flutters back and completes the darkness.

XXXVI: In this sonnet, everyday chores are lauded, admired, and infused with the elaborate natural metaphors the reader has become accustomed to. Calling the home a "miniature empire" (3), common tasks are raised to hyperbolically lyrical heights: "your weapons of wax and wine and oil" (4) being, well, common kitchen ingredients, and a "transmigration of dream into salad" (7) dressing up the mundane task of making a salad. From watering the garden to helping Neruda find the right word while writing, chores are praised for their very commonness.

XXXVII: Love here is a kind of violent surge, a "purple premonition" (1) that crashes down the "pale walls" (4) Neruda had built around his heart. The notions of city and nature are again at odds here, the city (castle) described as cool, intricate, sad, crystal-like, all negative connotations torn down by the opposite, that is, natural love, which as described previously is warm, violent, passionate, coursing.

XXXVIII: Continuing to expound upon the difference between city and country, Matilde's activities in the house "sounds like a train at noon" (1). This is an ironic simile, as "the city has no voice here" (9), and similarly the house's din cannot really sound like a train; instead, this is just another instance of Matilde giving life to the home. "Homer" arrives, perhaps the poet Neruda himself, and it is he who draws the line between the pleasant din in the home and the unpleasant din of the city (9-11).



XXXIX: In the last few sonnets, chores and everyday activity have been praised; as part of that, Neruda moves to gardening in particular, a perfect activity considering a certain synergy achieved with the earth Neruda so often invokes. Her hands are likened to bees, insofar that they encourage growth (9-10). In the last stanza, Neruda extends Matilde's gardening to the growth and vitality of his own heart, comparing her life-giving talents in the garden to her love.

XL: In a further expression of Neruda's praise for the everyday and commonplace, Neruda admires Matilde gathering flowers along the sand. Particularly evocative is Neruda's description of her hands, "still white, cracked by corrosive salt" (7), with "nails, offerings, in the suns of your fingers" (10).



## XLI - L

### XLI - L Summary

XLI: January, in winter, is a rough time for nature, bringing fruit to its limit. In time, though, winter will fade, spring will come, and everything will bloom again.

XLII: Neruda imagines that the daylight is a kind of scorching fire. Because the earth does not wish to be scorched, trees and branches hide it from the sun. Neruda admires this natural barrier.

XLIII: The author searches for a suitable substitute for his lover in other women, but none can compare. At the end, the author is content to be with his lover.

XLIV: Neruda states he both loves and not loves Matilde. By not loving Matilde, there is room to love her in the future.

XLV: Neruda begs Matilde to not leave him, not even for an hour or a second, as he will empty, hollow, and even dead without her near.

XLVI: Neruda thinks upon the various stars he has seen, waves he has been witness, and all the beauties in nature, and out of all these he chose one - his lover.

XLVII: Neruda imagines his lover to be a fruit tree, as he watches her grow and then finally partakes of her sweet fruit.

XLVIII: The lovers are as one, and in nature they blend in perfectly and do not disturb the world around them. In this they become one with nature, and are eternal.

XLIX: The author concentrates on today, versus yesterday or tomorrow, and celebrates what he has versus what he had or will have, namely, his lover.

L: Matilde's laughter is the subject of this sonnet, which is lyrically compared to such things as lightning and a meteor. Neruda encourages Matilde to laugh forevermore.

### XLI - L Analysis

XLI: January (and therefore the worst of winter) is described as pushing the earth "to its blue limits" like wine filling a glass (3-4). Fruit and seeds are conflated with grief and sadness, both of which winter lays bare. Both, the reader is assured, "will ripen, will burn" (11) again. As in sonnet XXXIII, emotionality (there love, here grief) has a seasonal ebb and flow to it.

XLII: A complex sonnet. The daylight is characterized as yellow, bee-like in its energy, crackling like fire, able to scorch. Like a bee, this light impregnates the earth, so to





speak, giving life to trees and leaves, which act to hide the dark earth from the scorching effects of the sun. What the reader is expected to admire is the perfect symbiosis of this system. In the last stanza it is wished that nothing artificial get in the way of this natural system.

XLIII: Neruda hunts for his lover, in nature, and here specifically in other women, and while he catches some hints and deceptive likenesses, "no one else had your rhythms, your light" (9-10). This continues the notion from other Sonnets that Neruda is lost, confused, and alone without Matilde, any stray from his "exact" lover a useless errant into the wilderness.

XLIV: While in previous sonnets there had been some exploration of duality, Neruda here flatly states "everything alive has its two sides" (2). From this premise, a delicious paradox is developed, with the claim that love and "not love" must co-exist, just as silence presides next to words (3) or "fire has its cold half" (4). "Not love" can give way to love; in a more colloquial sense, here is an idea of perpetually "falling in love" over and over again. The idea of love as a cycle is given a new twist here.

XLV: The emotional energy behind this sonnet is clear and universal. Neruda begs Matilde not to leave him, as he will hurt, feel empty, and even feel a sort of death with her away. His loneliness is compared to "an empty station when the trains are parked off somewhere else, asleep" (3-4). In this desperate funk, he will "wander mazelily over all the earth" (13). This follows the pattern Neruda has established of the poet sans lover - he is aimless, adrift, hungry, lost in the wilderness.

XLVI: The choice of agency in this sonnet is interesting. While usually Neruda is a lost, confused man who is saved only by the grace of Matilde's light, here it is he who chooses Matilde, from amongst the other beauties that nature provides.

XLVII: Of particular note here is the passage of time. Matilde is not a fully-matured fruit tree at the beginning of the sonnet; Neruda takes particular care in admiring her as she grows and matures. This is related to the cyclical nature of love Neruda adheres to - there must be "not love" before there is love. Finally the fruit is ripe, giving the last stanza a particular erotic energy: "my mouth will fill with the taste of you" (12).

XLVIII: There are two different ideas in this poem: that the lovers are one (which the reader has seen before), and that this oneness also becomes one with Nature. In communion with nature, the lovers are eternal and cannot die (12). This is another paradoxical sonnet playing with oneness versus separateness.

XLIX: In a lyrical affirmation of the phrase *carpe diem*, Neruda affirms outright that "it's today" (1). Time is here an unstoppable river (4, 5). Neruda surrenders to this inevitability, urging his lover to surrender to her sleepiness (6), where in dreams Neruda and Matilde can reconvene. Neruda "sing[s] to the day and to the moon" (12), celebrating the cycle of nature as he has done elsewhere.

L: Matilde's laughter is bombastically compared to sky-related phenomenon: lightning (4), "little bombs of light" (8), a meteor (13) and electricity (14). The reader imagines her

laughter to be loud, unique, and sudden, especially considering her smallness (12). This is a more private sonnet due to this level of specificity, doubly so because a mutual friend, Cotapos, is also mentioned (1).



## LI - LX

### LI - LX Summary

LI: Matilde's laughter is a powerful force, able to split trees like a lightning bolt. Neruda imagines this force was born in the mountains, even a volcano, in the high altitudes.

LII: Matilde's singing causes all of nature to sing in turn, in its own way, from bird whistles to wooden wheels creaking to the sea sloshing.

LIII: Neruda admires his home as a place of peace and sanctuary from the violence and confusion outside. He praises the "simple tenderness" (14) of his wife doing chores.

LIV: Far from the din of the city, the lovers spend time together at home, living and thinking as one so that there is a refreshing honesty and transparency between the lovers.

LV: Even in contentment, one cannot fully escape the woes of the world, including disease, war, famine, etc. Humanity is one family, and even in dreams these woes manifest themselves.

LVI: Matilde is free (and frees Neruda) of darkness, envy, rot, and other unpleasant things. Neruda sees Matilde in beautiful things.

LVII: Neruda strikes back at his detractors who said he was washed-up and finished; Matilde's love has proven them wrong, and has provided a second life for Neruda.

LVIII: Neruda feels outmatched, and a foreigner, in the field of literature. All he can do is be true to himself, and draw inspiration from nature, especially the nature he grew up with in his childhood.

LIX: Neruda laments the fate of poets, after their death, when they become subject to criticism and derision, and are unable to defend themselves.

LX: Literary critics who attack Neruda's work have a deleterious effect on Matilde. Neruda asks and wishes that these attacks on his work not worry Matilde, as an innocent bystander.

### LI - LX Analysis

LI: Continuing the "lightning" metaphor from Sonnet L, Matilde's laughter is powerful and violent force, "like an extravagant light [that] breaks through the tree of life" (13-14). Invocations of light and the tree of life return us to the familiar notion that Matilde is a life-giver, an animator, here able to activate and energize her surroundings with laughter.



LII: Moving from laughter to the singing voice, in a knowing parallelism Neruda has Matilde's voice cause Nature to sing in turn: "the pine trees speak with their green tongue" (3). However, amid this natural din, Neruda can only hear Matilde's voice. In the last stanza, her voice can even make peace from war: "your voice scatters the highest swords and returns with its cargo of violets" (12-13).

LIII: Neruda once again finds honest, everyday work laudable and beautiful, with Matilde as "the ballerina who dances with the broom" (8). The primary idea here, however, is the house as a place of peace, as contrasted to what's outside, "those rugged rivers of water and of threat" (9) and "torturous pavilions of the foam" (10).

LIV: Building from the unpleasant cacophony of the outside established in Sonnet LIII, Neruda further describes this unpleasantness as "the savage city's delirium" (4). Once again the home is a sanctuary away from this, and in this home, "alone, without loneliness" (3) (echoing a previous oxymoron, "alone together"), "mind and love live naked" (8), inferring a certain honesty to this peace.

LV: A noteworthy sonnet due to its pessimism and lack of love, Neruda drastically widens his scope, speaking of "thorns, shattered glass, sickness, crying" (1) as well as "the conqueror who advances, pace by pace, with his flag" (11). One, even one who is content, cannot escape these unpleasant realities; as Neruda has done previously with peace and war, or love and "not love," life's dualities cannot be separated and in fact they help define the other. Humanity is one, "a huge and sorrowful family" (14), and in one sense we all travel the same road, the cycle of life and death, in which case the "conqueror" of line 11 becomes Death himself.

LVI: A meandering, confusing sonnet, Neruda takes pains to contrast Matilde (who hands are "clean from the rancor" [2]) with frightening or unpleasant things, like rancor, and Envy. Envy is defeated by songs of love. The subject and object of this Envy is up to interpretation; most likely Nature is envious of Matilde.

LVII: Neruda turns his lyrical ammunition to detractors, "liars" (1) who said he had "lost the moon" (1) and who "plotted an oblivion for my guitar" (8). To counter these detractors Neruda attacked them with "the dazzling lances of our love" (9); through Matilde's love Neruda was literally "born again" (14). To literalize what is most likely a real-life situation, the reader might surmise that there were those who thought Neruda might never find love again after he lost it with his wife.

LVIII: Similar to the dedication, where Neruda likens his sonnets to wood, the author displays a similar humility, describing himself as a "foreign sailor" (2) amid the "broadswords of literary iron" (1). Multiple sailor and sea analogies help to describe Neruda's unease amid literature, like a sailor in a brief visit to solid land. In this confusing world, according to the last stanza, he relied upon his experiences in childhood and in his native land as a sort of compass to find his way in literature.

LIX: Another rare sonnet in that it does not take on love as its subject, Neruda laments "poor unlucky poets" (1) whose reputations and names are "dragged behind the



arrogant horses" (4-5) of critics and detractors. These cruel critics, even after they have succeeded in besmirching the poet's name, in effect killing him (9), go the further humiliating step of holding a funeral service "with turkeys, and pigs, and other orators" (11). Sonnet LIX is a bitter, pointed attack on literary critics.

LX: In another powerful statement on critics and detractors, attacks launched on Neruda's work "like a net passes through my work - but leaves its smear of rust and sleeplessness on you" (3-4). Neruda wishes this weren't so, but admits that "bitter footsteps follow me" (9) and, in a particularly macabre formulation, "an empty suit of clothes [...] chases me, limping, like a scarecrow with a bloody grin" (13-14). Critics are made to be monsters, with Neruda the constantly harried victim. Here is a negative consequence of the "oneness" Neruda so celebrates elsewhere.



## LXI - LXX

### LXI - LXX Summary

LXI: Love carries with it pain. Neruda tries to console his lover, who is crying, and reminds her that they carry their pain together, as love has made them one.

LXII: Neruda and Matilde wanted only love, but there are those who hate and wish to inject grief into their world, and who disrupted the lovers' perfect union.

LXIII: Neruda travels through his "savage homeland," beautiful, rugged, and dangerous, and states that he is made of this material, and that he both owns and belongs to this area.

LXIV: Neruda has been healed by Matilde's love. He cannot fathom how much he owes this woman.

LXV: Matilde has momentarily left Neruda. Neruda asks where she is. He was able to detect her absence because grief started aching in his ribs. He will be lonely and empty until Matilde returns.

LXVI: The author vacillates between conflicting states of being, from love to not love, cold to fire, hate to not hate.

LXVII: Neruda compares the rain falling upon the island and nourishing it, to the kisses Matilde gives him, and the similar spiritual nourishment he receives from these kisses.

LXVIII: Neruda concentrates on the girl-shaped figurehead of a ship which has wrecked and scattered debris on the beach. He finds it remarkable that the girl, though she has eyes which stare out, can neither see or understand him, or know that he exists.

LXIX: Neruda muses that the definition of nothingness is the absence of his lover Matilde, specifically the absence of her activity. Neruda then ties "you" and "I" into oneness.

LXX: Neruda, walking in the jungle, feels that he is wounded, though he does not bleed. He senses that Matilde's eyes have pierced him, but he is alone amid the patter of the rain.

### LXI - LXX Analysis

LXI: Love has a "tail of pain" (1) and a "train of static thorns" (2) that it carries, revealing an aspect of love quite different from the pure nirvana expressed in previous sonnets. This love is behind their control, quite like nature, and "like a huge wave" it "crashed us against the boulder" (9-10). The lovers were "milled [...] to a single flour" (11), marrying



the idea of oneness with one of Neruda's favorite source of analogies, bread, into a single, simple image.

LXII: Positivity has been regressing through these last sonnets; here Neruda creates a scenario where the lovers are against the world. We have seen this division before, lovers "alone together," and insulated against the violence of the world, but never before have we had the division presented so starkly and bitterly.

LXIII: Important is not only that Neruda feels a sense of belonging (and ownership over) his home country, but that he feels this about every bit of the country, not only the obviously beautiful, but of "the poisonous skin of the copper" (9), and the "wasteland where the salted rock is" (1). This place is referred to as the "realm of lost sorrow and inclement tears" (8), the land anthropomorphized and given powerful, negative human emotion. Like all the sonnets, nature severely impacts the author.

LXIV: In this sonnet, Neruda is a kind of lame-winged bird, who by chance (and certainly not his own volition) arrived at his lover's window, who then nursed him to health. Ironic that the source of Neruda's pain or lameness is love; he was "tinted purple by so much love" (1). The reader imagines this love is a kind of love-sickness or unrequited love, requiring reciprocation.

LXV: Matilde is gone, perhaps for just a second, and Neruda feels a pain, like a twin with a psychological connection to his other half. The conceit here is Neruda as an empty house, "nothing left but tragic windows" (8) which ache until Matilde (and thus energy, light, activity, and life) return. This echoes the sentiment of the "chore" sonnets, in which Matilde enlivens the house with the zest she pours into everyday chores.

LXVI: A thoroughly confused author flies back and forth between the dual states previously explored: love, hate, fire, cold, calm, mania. Part of the reason for this confusion is the need for new or blind love (9); to keep love fresh and ever-new, there must be a period of "not love."

LXVII: Physical nourishment and emotional nourishment are conflated in comparing rain falling upon Isla Negra to kisses issued to Neruda by Matilde. The final stanza wraps both these images up into one, in typical fashion.

LXVIII: A singular object, the wrecked figurehead of a ship, is given a "story" of sorts by Neruda. She is given human qualities and represented as human, "her expression the sadness of roots" (4), but of course she is inanimate, and appearances are deceiving: "She watched over us without seeing us" (7-8). Here is another opportunity for Neruda to play with opposites.

LXIX: In a return of Matilde as the prime mover or first cause, nothingness is defined as an absence of Matilde, nearly mirroring God in Genesis prior to creation. In other sonnets the reader has seen Neruda confused, sad, and alone without Matilde; that notion is taken to the extreme here.



LXX: In a typical scenario, Neruda is alone, wounded, sad, and frightened without Matilde near, this time walking in the jungle. He then suspects Matilde's eyes have wounded him, "pierced me, into my grief's vast hinterlands" (7). To be wounded here may mean to be exposed, to have what is inward exposed, and in this sense Matilde has opened Neruda up to find the grief that he had hidden and repressed. In this way, as we have seen, the proverbial "love hurts," is true, but here it is a kind of cathartic love that hurts only to ultimately heal.





# LXXI - LXXX

## LXXI - LXXX Summary

LXXI: Neruda and Matilde had searched for a place, even another planet, where they could love in peace and quiet, but they were unable to, and love itself disallowed them this kind of peace and quiet.

LXXII: Winter has come, and Neruda asks Matilde to fly away with him to another land to get away from winter's deleterious effects, presumably to a warmer, more hospitable climate.

LXXIII: Neruda describes a scenario in which a man and woman set up a military-style defense against love. However, love wins out, unsurprisingly.

LXXIV: Neruda describes a road, as well as the general state of nature, which seems cold, foggy, wintry, and bleak, in opposition to the season (late Summer).

LXXV: Neruda and Matilde return to their home, after seemingly a long absence. The house has fallen into bad disrepair, and even with their presence, it seems slow to come to life again.

LXXVI: Neruda describes the act of Diego Rivera painting a portrait of Matilde, finding just the right shades and shapes for his lover, many of these choices representative of Matilde's lineage.

LXXVII: Neruda focuses on Today rather than Yesterday or Tomorrow. Today bears all the weight of the past, and the hope of the future. Today is a completely new experience, with all of yesterday dead and all of tomorrow non-existent.

LXXVIII: Neruda declares that he is always (and has always been) open-minded, full of love even in the face of hate, virtuous, and truthful.

LXXIX: Neruda asks Matilde to become one with him as they sleep, so they might beat back the darkness and conquer the dream world together as one.

LXXX: Neruda returns from a long travel and takes comfort in Matilde's singing and strumming a guitar. Though his travels are necessary, he is always most alive at home, in love with Matilde.

## LXXI - LXXX Analysis

LXXI: In a further delineation of "us versus them," the lovers "searched for a wide valley, for another planet where the salt wouldn't touch your hair," (4-5), a place "without hurt or harm or speech" (12). They failed in this endeavor, due to the nature of love: "love was



a lunatic city with crowds of people blanching on their porches" (13-14). Here, division between the lovers and the outside world is impossible; given Neruda's celebrity in his home country, the reader can easily imagine why.

LXXII: The set-up of this poem is fairly obvious; winter has come, and Neruda wishes to whisk Matilde away, either by wheel, ship, or airplane (4-5), to another land to escape winter. This offer or wish seems fairly spontaneous, in keeping with Neruda's insistence that love must be ever-new.

LXXIII: The "razor-faced man" (1) who helps build a "contraption, armed to the teeth against love" (7-8) along with "atrocious artillery" (11) is most likely Neruda himself, pre-love with Matilde. It is interesting that the poem is third-person until the revelatory final stanza, when it switches to first-person. The identity of the "pallid woman with black hair" (4) is less clear; perhaps both Neruda and Matilde fought their instincts of love before consummation, but Matilde has never been described in such unflattering terms.

LXXIV: Starting with the wetness of a road, Neruda describes a nature that is cold, clammy, drawn-in, and inaccessible, so inaccessible in fact that the lovers are described as "blind ones, endlessly, alone" (11). The road returns in the final stanza, as a symbol of "motion, farewell, of departure" (13). This symbolism, along with reference to seasons, once again brings cyclical change to the foreground, a topic the reader has seen is very important to Neruda.

LXXV: Personification of the Neruda home is the central device in this sonnet. Ironically, the house is given not life, but death, in the absence of the Nerudas. It is full of "dead rats, empty farewells, the water that wept in the pipes" (7-8). The house is described as having wept and whimpered, then fallen apart, all in the past tense, as it is now dead. Just another example of how love provides energy, and absence engenders hollowness and death.

LXXVI: A specific event is described, which the reader assumes actually occurred - Diego Rivera painting a portrait of Matilde, and the usual natural tropes are employed. The choices are all very well thought-out, with the choices being described as a hunt through paint (2). Perhaps tellingly, Neruda himself is drawn most to the portrait's hair. He has of course devoted several sonnets to just that subject.

LXXVII: Perhaps the most valuable lines of the poem come in the second stanza: "yesterday comes trotting down its darkening path, so we can remember the face of yours that died" (7-8). The consequence of this line of reasoning is the notion that every day brings death and rebirth, that literally the person of yesterday died to be replaced with the person of today. This is a completely unsurprising conclusion, considering Neruda's obsession with cycles and of the need for love to be ever-new.

LXXVIII: Unique in its degree of self-adulation and self-congratulation, Neruda again plays upon the theme of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow, this time to praise himself and his work. "I have no never-again, I have no always" (1) he declares, as an open-minded fellow, he "repaid vileness with doves" (8) and "fought against mockery" (6).



This kind of "turn the other cheek" philosophy, along with a couple references to thorns and a crown of thorns, obviously leads to Neruda as a kind of Christ-like figure, misunderstood and stoned by detractors, but ultimately beyond reproach.

LXXIX: Neruda's petition for Matilde and himself to become one is not new, but now we have this oneness in the context of dreaming and nighttime. All of the questions posed by the stars might be answered/unlocked by a single key (12-13); love and partnership helps defeat all the fear, doubt, and existential questions that may occur at night and in dreams.

LXXX: The power of this sonnet is that it describes a real moment. Neruda returns home after a travel. A very political, cause-driven man, Neruda travels in order to "ask for bread and dominion for all; for the worker with no future I ask for land" (4-5), tying his travels to his socialist/communist agenda. The "song" of this agenda is answered by a much simpler song at home, that of Matilde singing and strumming a guitar, a "waltz of the tranquil moon" (9) which propels Neruda into dreaming (11). Once again home is the place of safety and tranquility, with "outside" being the place of hurt, cacophony, and violence.



# LXXXI - XC

## LXXXI - XC Summary

LXXXI: Neruda urges Matilde to enter with him into sleep and dreams, and to put love and pain and work aside. In dreams they may be alone.

LXXXII: In darkness and in dreams, individual identities seem to merge as one with the shadows, becoming indistinguishable, so that the lovers become one.

LXXXIII: Neruda admires Matilde in deep sleep, her conscious self having abandoned her body. When she awakes Matilde will be a new person, but will have left something behind in the dream world.

LXXXIV: Neruda describes the process of Matilde and he preparing for sleep. Day eventually surrenders to night, only the moon shines, time seems to slow, then all is enveloped in darkness.

LXXXV: Autumn has come, and with it fog, dampness, and the changing of leaves. Matilde's body, in this cold change of seasons, provides a fire that Neruda sensually enjoys.

LXXXVI: Neruda praises the Southern Cross, and invites it to come to earth and fill the lovers with its power and warmth.

LXXXVII: Three birds in a flight across the cold sky causes Neruda to muse upon loneliness, to ask of its origins. Loneliness seems to infect everything in nature.

LXXXVIII: March arrives, a time of inconstant, ominous, and cold weather. Love is able to bring fire into this sea of cold, to wake and stir it.

LXXXIX: When Neruda dies, he wishes that Matilde continue to live life to its fullest extent, if only to remind the world of what Neruda loved so fiercely.

XC: Neruda thinks that he is dying, and in this kind of near-death experience, he sees only Matilde's eyes and feels only her love. Other worldly possessions, his books, other friendships, his home, all dropped away and became meaningless.

## LXXXI - XC Analysis

LXXXI: In Neruda's book-long quest to find quietude away from the world, dreams seem a good destination, a place where "love and pain and work" (2) can sleep. Neruda assures Matilde that "no one else, Love, will sleep in my dreams. You will go, we will go together, over the waters of time" (4-5).



LXXXII: As dreams are a much-needed sanctuary in Sonnet LXXXI, dreams in this sonnet are useful for the goal of oneness that Neruda has so often craved. In the "shadowy places" (2), away from "cruel daylight" (5), identities collapse and merge, things cannot be distinguished visually or otherwise. In the most telling lines, Neruda cannot even distinguish what this dream state even is: "In this ship, or water, or death, or new life, we are united again, asleep, resurrected" (9-10). Dreams here allow a kind of freedom from identity, as a way toward the breakdown of "you" and "I" into "we."

LXXXIII: Neruda views a sleeping Matilde. He takes comfort from the warmth of her physical body, but knows that her consciousness is elsewhere. Neruda's theme of "ever-newness" reveals itself once again, as the reader is told Matilde will wake a new person (9), though importantly she will leave something behind in the dream.

LXXXIV: Neruda captures a specific moment, that of the seconds between wakefulness and the dream. As in Sonnet LXXXI, all cares go away, including "work, wheels, fires, snores, good-byes" (2). The surrender to the night takes on religious connotations, with mention of "heaven's harbor" (6) and night as a "chalice filling with celestial ashes" (13). The enormity of the universe becomes accessible at night, perhaps if only because of the presence of the stars.

LXXXV: With seasons akin to the change in a single day, Autumn becomes a kind of twilight in the day, bringing fog, several lyrical instances of water, and a general coolness or coldness. In yet another inside-outside contrast, Matilde's "nocturnal body" is said to be "fire" (12). In a return to eroticism, Neruda "loves not only your breasts but autumn" (12-13), in another instance of opposites informing/defining one another.

LXXXVI: The Southern Cross is praised, its stars "diamonds of blue frost" (5-6), a "firefly condemned to the wholeness of the sky" (11). The author seems to take some comfort in gazing up at it. This is an "ode" type of poem, elegant in its simplicity and straightforward praise.

LXXXVII: Three birds darting across the sky leave the air "trembling" (3) and "everything trembled like a wounded flag" (4). This consequence is given a name, Loneliness, a "palpitation that surely comes before honey, music, the sea, a birth." (7-8). This strange sonnet describes a) an emotional response to seeing the birds by Neruda, and b) another example of how opposites define each other, if loneliness must precede more positive states of being.

LXXXVIII: The lover (or, generally, love) as fire and outside/nature as cold is a very familiar pair of opposites for the reader at this point. Love "joined the sea's lives to the fire's lives" (6). This union creates a stillness, a serenity: the waves "exhaust themselves" (12) and the sea forgets "its goods and its lions" (13). At last the world falls into a "shadowy net" (14). In a literal sense, love has calmed the lover and finally brought sleep to restlessness.

LXXXIX: While the reader has seen death in a poetic or lyrical sense many times, this sonnet deals with death in a more straightforward, more literal way. Neruda wishes for



Matilde to go on living, "full-flowered" (11), to continue (in the second stanza) to experience nature's thrilling beauty. The last stanza supplies three reasons for this wish: a) so Matilde can yet gather and experience all love has to offer, b) so that Neruda can experience a bit of what Matilde does, spiritually, as a shadow, and c) so that the world can learn of her beauty and why Neruda was so passionate about her.

XC: In another "thanatopsis" Sonnet, meaning a Sonnet contemplating death, Neruda imagines he is dying, and in this moment the only thing that matters is Matilde (2): "everything dropped away, except your eyes" (8). "Love is a wave taller than the other waves" (9). Against the horror of non-being, only love provides a light and a means to "shut out the shadows" (14).



# XCI - C

## XCI - C Summary

XCI: Neruda muses upon time, the the inevitable passage of time, which pecks away at man and nature alike. There is small consolation that perhaps the life he poured into loving Matilde will blossom like a seed to bear new fruit, but even this is attacked by merciless Time.

XCII: Neruda begins to wonder what will happen if he dies and Matilde does not, or vice versa, but he stops himself, and instead focuses on the here and now, on the love they now share.

XCIII: Should Matilde die, and all of the movement become stilled in her body, Neruda begs her to leave her mouth half-open, so that he might kiss a final kiss and become one with her in death.

XCIV: Neruda asks Matilde to carry on after he is dead, to not grieve over his loss, and even to pretend he never existed. Should she bear grief and sadness and wait for Neruda, the pain of seeing this would kill Neruda a second time.

XCV: Neruda looks back at his love life, and admires it for its longevity and strength of feeling and meaning. He wishes to enliven this "ancient" love with newness, and to make old love blossom again.

XCVI: The present Age will pass away someday, ignorant of those who try to cling to it. A new Age will replace it, and tears will be shed no longer.

XCVII: The author laments the insistence that everyone must fly, rather than walk. The roads and the earth have become of no use, apparently, in this strange, ever-moving new reality.

XCVIII: The words, the sonnets Neruda has written, will not be content long to be read privately by Matilde. These sonnets threaten to burst out into the earth and sing Matilde's name loud and long.

XCIX: Wondrous inventions, technologies, and developments of the future are wondered about. In this future world where anything is possible, Neruda's heart, long dead, has turned to dust, and even in this dust Matilde's love still circulates.

C: The lovers are imagined in the center of the earth, completely insulated from earthly cares but yet surrounded by natural beauty. Alone together forever, they share a victorious kiss.



## XCI - C Analysis

XCI: A sonnet of particular provocative power, XCI begins with "Age covers us like a drizzle" (1). Time works with an almost imperceptible subtlety: "a salt feather touches your face" (3) or "a trickle ate through my shirt" (4). Nature spares neither man, beast, or nature in the second stanza. The third stanza carries some hope that the lovers' love is a "grape" that "will return to the earth" (11), but the final stanza returns pessimistically to the notion that even this will be washed away by time.

XCII: Neruda begins to think about what will happen to him if Matilde dies, or her if Neruda dies, starting the sonnet with a kind of stutter imitative of someone dealing with an uncomfortable subject. He stops this line of thinking and concentrates on the here and now: "no expanse is greater than where we live" (4). The second stanza expresses a certain gratitude that the lovers, amid the wide world and all of its chaos, managed to find one another. This little miracle is enough to satisfy Neruda.

XCIII: Neruda chooses another aspect of death in the first stanza, that of a lack of movement. Should this lack of movement occur, Neruda begs Matilde to leave her mouth half-open (5), "because that final kiss should linger with me" (6). "I will die kissing your crazy cold mouth," (9) confesses Neruda. The sensuality and eroticism that is Neruda's trademark is perverted into a disturbing necrophilia here.

XCIV: A Sonnet very similar to Sonnet LXXXIX, Neruda again urges Matilde to live at full gallop after he dies. This time he explicitly forbids her to miss him: "don't call to my breast; I'm not there. Live in my absence as in a house" (7-8). By living in Neruda's absence, and embracing this void, Neruda will not be missed and Matilde's heart will not ache.

XCV: Sonnet XCV is a kind of retrospective, beginning with the rhetorical "Whoever loved as we did?" This love, in fact, was so deep and true that it utterly exhausted its fuel: a heart becomes "ancient cinders" (2), and love "consumed its fruit and went down [...] into the earth" (5-6). The lovers literally could not have loved any more passionately than they did. To these cinders and rinds, Neruda wishes to inject new light and new life, even new wounds, so that love, cyclically, may continue evermore.

XCVI: Going beyond himself, Neruda imagines a new Age, or new world, replacing the current one. "None who try to tie time down" (5), including bureaucrats and businessmen, will survive this cosmic shift. In the new world, "other eyes will be born in the water" (13) and "another skin will cover the same bones" (3). The notion that Neruda here is referring to reincarnation is not entirely without merit.

XCVII: This Sonnet is a kind of playful comment on the hustle-bustle of his contemporary (or younger) generation. In the mid 50s, the airplane had gained popular acceptance, with space travel on the near horizon, and Neruda sarcastically states that "footsteps have passed on" (3) and "the earth is no use anymore to the wanderer" (10). Amid constant flight, constant movement, the message here is pretty clearly, "Stop and smell the roses."





XCVIII: Perhaps anticipating the end of the 100 Sonnets, Neruda states that "this word" (1) (the poems) "falls to the earth; there it continues" (4). Not content to be merely the stuff of dreams (3) or of the "churned foams" of Neruda's memory (11), the Sonnets will burst out into the world, "to write your name," (12), meaning that everyone will know of Matilde, and Neruda's love for her. Before Neruda has explored the private versus public spheres, and here is another instance of that, albeit one given a more positive spin.

XCIX: "Other days will come," (1) the reader is told, referring back to the inevitability of time. Only this time, progress yields not sadness and death, but the potential of the future: knowledge (2-3) and new technology ("and so many pure things will happen!" [3]). In this strange new world, Neruda even imagines love can be manufactured like an industrial product, it "will fill huge barrels like the ancient honey of the shepherds" (10-11). But apart from all of this wonder, in "the dust of my heart" (12), Matilde "will come and go among the melons" (14), intimating a sort of eternal truth or reality, even in the face of such change and newness.

C: This final sonnet places the lovers in an ideal environment, having conquered all the scenarios that have disrupted their love in past sonnets. They are "in the center of the earth" (1), hidden from earthly cares, even something like the violence of weather and the changing of seasons. "There'll be no more dissension in the bells" (8) in this magical place, in which the lovers are fully insulated amid natural beauty: "there won't be anything but all the fresh air" (9). In the final stanza they "make ourselves a clothing" (13), a further symbol of insulation from the cares of the world, as they share the "eternity" of a "victorious kiss" (14). Violence, time, outside disturbance, have all been conquered in this victory.



# Characters

## The Speaker, The Author appears in Throughout

Such an intimate collection of poems brings the author to the fore. As the dedication so clearly indicates these poems are a gift from Matilde Urrutia from Pablo Neruda, the "speaker" of the poem and "Pablo Neruda" the poet and man are fairly indistinguishable. The speaker's most obvious trait is his eternal, passionate, and fierce love for his subject, Matilde. The 100 Love Poems, then, become the speaker's one-hundred attempts to express that which is inexpressible.

The speaker goes through many moods. The "Morning" section of poems features an upbeat, youthful, and exuberant speaker. Physical rather than spiritual love is many times the subject, and Matilde undergoes conceits that scale fabulous heights. "Afternoon" shows a more thoughtful, even pessimistic speaker, who realizes the wounds of love along with its delight, and who is able to appreciate a more spiritual and less physical love. "Night" features a somber, philosophical speaker, musing on the passage of time and the eternal nature of love.

The Speaker, or Neruda, is a chameleon of sorts, even within the span of a single sonnet, able to turn from beautiful lyricism to bawdy mischief within a stanza, or from delight to utter despair, reflecting the complexity of the love he is trying to convey.

## The Subject, The Loved appears in Throughout

Neruda's real-life love during the fifties and third wife, Matilde Urrutia is clearly the "you" of these Love Sonnets, the object of Neruda's great affection. She (and her body parts) are compared to a bewildering array of objects and phenomenon, most all of them occurring in nature, from honeysuckle and jasmine, to the stars and moon, to bread and wheat, and everything in between. It is clear from her seeming ability to infuse life, energy, and joy into the speaker, that she is the speaker's reason for living.

Physically, one senses Matilde has a handsome, earthy beauty rather than supermodel-type looks (Neruda in fact gently chides her for her small breasts and big mouth). As for particular traits, of frequent note is her "medusa-like" tangle of curly hair, which Neruda adores. As for personality traits, outside of unconditional love, and a unique, unnerving laugh that Neruda remarks upon, little can be divined. This lack of specificity is no doubt an effort to keep at least some parts of the lovers' life secret (the sonnets were always meant to be published), and a way to state that her love is all Neruda needs, and other qualities are unimportant and fall away. Otherwise, Neruda admires Matilde for her energy in doing chores around the house, and her energy generally. She is also shown helping Neruda find the right word in a poem when he is stuck, and she is a great cook as well.



## **Detractors appears in Sonnets LVII, LVIX**

Several times in the "Afternoon" Sonnets, Neruda speaks of liars and nay-sayers who attempt to interrupt his love with Matilde. Most probably these are both literary critics who pan his poetry and other writing, and those critical of Neruda's strong socialist/communist views and political statements. Neruda's instinct in the face of this criticism is to retreat inward, in a place away from such injury where he can be "alone together" with Matilde.

## **Acario Cotapos appears in Sonnet L**

This friend of Neruda and Matilde, a composer, is mentioned in Sonnet L as remarking upon Matilde's unusual and striking laughter.

## **The Girl, The Figurehead appears in LXVIII**

In Sonnet LXVIII, Neruda remarks upon a "wooden girl," or figurehead, he found among wreckage on the beach. This girl looks on into eternity and yet is not alive and therefore is not looking. Neruda is fond of these types of paradoxes.

## **My Ugly Love appears in Sonnet XX**

In Sonnet XX, and hinted elsewhere, Neruda gently chides Matilde as ugly, remarking upon her small breasts and big mouth, for example. This is most likely a move to simply dismiss such superficial traits and love Matilde not for physical features but the content of her character and the condition of her love.

## **Pre-Love Speaker Neruda appears in Sonnets XXII, XXV**

Neruda sometimes describes himself before the love of Matilde as a hungry puma stalking the streets for food, or a desperately lonely man or wounded bird who wanders the earth without aim or purpose. Love is then a salvation for this lost soul.

## **The Crowds in the City appears in Sonnets LIV, LXII**

Neruda frequently sets up a public sphere versus a private sphere. The public sphere, full of critics, cacophony, and prying eyes, is a place of violence and confusion. Only away from this pandemonium can the lovers enjoy peace and fully consummate their love.



## **The House appears in Sonnets LXXV, LIII**

Neruda's home at Isla Negra is personified with very human characteristics. Without the love and energy of the lovers when they are gone for periods of time, the house weeps, becomes dark, and dies.

## **The People of the Poor South appears in Sonnets V, XXIX**

Matilde hails from the southern part of Chile, a mountainous, rugged region, a hard place to live, where poverty reigns. Neruda feels this upbringing has influenced Matilde in a very positive manner, making her humble and more genuine than an upper-class upbringing would have



## Objects/Places

### **Bread** appears in **Dedication, Sonnets XIII, XV**

Matilde is frequently described as bread or wheat. This emphasizes her simplicity, her earnestness, and her earthiness. She is a simple sustenance for Neruda to enjoy. She is Neruda's means of living.

### **Wood** appears in **Dedication, Sonnets XV, XLVII**

Neruda states that, instead of crystal, silver, or cannonfire, he made his sonnets out of wood. Similar to why Matilde is likened to bread, Neruda chooses wood as a basic gift of the earth, without pretensions, a difficult but solid material to work with.

### **Light** appears in **Sonnets XVI, XXI, XXXV**

Matilde is many times likened to light. This functions just as light in poetry and elsewhere has, historically: Matilde brings life to death, light to darkness, knowledge to ignorance, being to non-being.

### **Puma** appears in **Sonnet XI**

In one Sonnet, Neruda is a puma who stalks the streets, desperately hungry. But, he is hungry not for food, but for love. This puma image describes Neruda's mental state of being before he found love with Matilde.

### **Isla Negra** appears in **Sonnet XIX, XL, LXVII**

Neruda established a home on Isla Negra in Chile. Its natural splendor and easy access to the sea and jungle no doubt influenced many of the nature images found in these sonnets.

### **The Seasons** appears in **Sonnet XL, XLI, LXVI**

Seasonal change has a great effect, seemingly, on the speaker. Springtime brings exuberance, whereas Autumn and wintertime brings introspection and musings on death.

### **Carnations** appears in **Sonnets II, VII, XVII**

The carnation is perhaps the speaker's favorite flower in tropes with Matilde.



## **The Wounded Bird appears in Sonnet LXIV**

In Sonnet LXIV, Neruda is compared to a wounded bird who is nursed back to health by Matilde and made to fly again, an obvious analogy for what Neruda believes Matilde has done by loving him.

## **The Rain appears in Sonnets LXVII, XCI**

The rain is a common topic in the sonnets. Neruda is interested in its duality: it both provides life to the earth, and invokes a sadness in him as he watches it.

## **Dreams appears in Sonnets LIV, LXXIX, LXXXI**

Dreams afford Neruda a place to be fully alone with his love, conquering the problems of the hustle-bustle violence of the natural world. However, the dream world is also a frightening place, as it reminds of death.



# Themes

## Duality, Opposites, and Paradoxes

As Neruda states, everything alive has two sides, and throughout these 100 Sonnets, the author seems to take particular delight in exploring contradictions, dualities, and opposites. He states he must "not love" in order to love more profoundly, as continual love may become everyday and stale where it should instead be ever-new and passionate. In a similar way, love is eternal, yet Neruda expresses fear in his musings on mortality that something important is lost when love leaves the physical world and becomes merely spiritual. Love is capable of great happiness, but it can also wound and cause great strife. The speaker idealizes the lovers "alone together," two beings but somehow one in love. Neruda talks of Matilde as being physically ugly in some respects, but also the most beautiful creature he has ever laid eyes on. Love is capable of a great serenity, but also great violence. Light and dark is a constant struggle in the sonnets. There is also much made about the opposites of city and nature, with the city a frightening labyrinth of noise, and nature a quiet sanctuary.

Neruda ties these various contradictions to cycles, particularly natural cycles. As life turns to death, night to day, or springtime to fall, so are these opposites invariably linked, informing and defining the other. Love must wound before it can heal, and there must be chaos before one can appreciate serenity.

## Earthiness and Wood

Neruda is forever beholden to the earth, and a certain indefinable "earthiness" is given high praise by the author. He states he uses wood as the medium for his sonnets, instead of the crystal or silver of previous poets. Why? Part of this claim is modesty. In a display of humility, Neruda wishes to show he is too crude, too down-to-earth to work successfully with delicate crystal. Instead, the image he gives the reader of his creative process is a lumberjack hacking at wood. The result will not be perfect by a long-shot, but it will be his. Part of this "wood" choice is a kind of "return to nature," a stab at simplicity and earnestness, and a lack of pretension, in the manner, say, of Henry David Thoreau. For the same reasons, Matilde is most often described as "bread," a simple and unadorned source of sustenance for a simple man.

Another reason the sonnets are made of wood is inspiration. This is the notion that Neruda took direct inspiration from nature in order to "build" his sonnets. The notion of building, of hard work, of labor, is also important in setting up the intent of these sonnets. In the dedication, Neruda states that "with fourteen boards each [lines of poetry], I built little houses, so that your eyes, which I adore and sing to, might live in them." (3). He is exerting much hard work to please Matilde, to build little monuments to her greatness. The content and emotional feeling behind the poems are made that



much more real and genuine, if the "building material" is simple, yet difficult to shape and work with. These sonnets are then literally a "labor of love."

## Matilde as the Light-Bringer

In the imitation of a creation myth, Matilde is frequently pictured as the embodiment of both light and energy (or the bringer of those things). She is called in one sonnet, "She Who Brings Order To Things." In this way, her love literally creates life, like God uttering "Let there be light" at the beginning of Genesis. In a less hyperbolically extreme analogy, Matilde has given Neruda new life. Neruda before Matilde is depicted as a lost soul, a starved puma roaming the streets aimlessly, a lonely man lost in a dark jungle. From this place Neruda emerges into light, saved by the grace of Matilde's love. In keeping with the creation myth and Matilde's poetic omnipotence, this scenario is played over and over again, and almost always Matilde is the agent, the active participant to Neruda's inactive, passive speaker.

Matilde as the Light-Bringer is an image found chiefly in the "Morning" sonnets, sonnets of particularly abandon and exuberance. As the reader progresses to the "Afternoon" sonnets, this image disappears, Neruda preferring a more mature approach. However, importantly, Matilde is still the light and energy. Note, though, the form of this energy. Instead of issuing forth from an all-powerful deity, energy is instead found in Matilde's hands as she makes pasta, or her voice as she sings while strumming the guitar, or just in the way her hips move as she goes about her household tasks. By the time the "Night" sonnets arrive, Matilde is utterly mortal, with Neruda musing on the couple's mortality, urging Matilde to go on without him should he die, and so forth. Quite an evolution.





# Style

## Point of View

As is a tradition with the love sonnet dating back to Elizabethan times and earlier, the speaker is the "I" speaking to "you" (his lover, here Matilde) in the second-person. This choice creates an intimacy, a kind of dispensing of the "fourth-wall" which engenders a feeling of genuineness and emotions truly and honestly felt. Second-person also creates the sensation (real or illusory) that the poems were meant or crafted for the sole benefit of the person who is "you," though of course the poems were eventually published for general consumption. The question arising from this second-person perspective is the degree to which the speaker is Pablo Neruda, and the degree to which "you" is Matilde Urrutia, or whether the reader wishes to completely divorce the work from the author and any stated authorial intent or biographical realities. The answer, as usual, probably lays somewhere in between. It would seem a fruitless endeavor to claim that Pablo Neruda is not expressing any of his own personal love to Matilde, and Matilde bears none of the qualities the speaker provides and praises. At the same time, the very nature of the carefully chosen prose and imaginative conceits dissuade the reader from concluding the poems are simply sprung full-form without the benefit of any filter or critical eye.

## Setting

Setting is difficult to pin down in a series of poems. Extratextually, Pablo Neruda wrote the majority of these poems from his home on Isla Negra in central Chile, from 1955 to 1957. Isla Negra, a place of natural splendor, remote, and close to the sea, can account for much of the natural imagery in these sonnets, and especially imagery involving the sea. Otherwise, undisturbed nature in all of its forms could be described as the "setting" of these love sonnets, from fields of wheat to dark jungles. Invocation of these places afford Neruda (and the reader) an undiluted communion with nature, something Neruda believes is a great good. Many times Matilde IS this nature, with the speaker going on a kind of journey or exploration into the wilderness, with all the erotic consequences that might hint at. Outside of the frequency of nature, the "where" and "when" of one sonnet to the other is limited only by the imagination. Sometimes Matilde is the stars as Neruda soars through the night sky, gathering inspiration from the Southern Cross; sometimes Neruda places the reader in a labyrinthine city, full of confusion, loneliness, and dead ends; and particularly in the latter "Night" sonnets the dream world is evoked, a place where physical forms and identities disintegrate, and a more pure union and love may be achieved.



## Language and Meaning

As the reader might expect in love sonnets, word choice is highly inventive and provocative, full of unusual pairings and paradoxes. There is no shyness or restraint in these sonnets; Neruda wishes to "sing to the rooftops" about his love, and he is unafraid of his emotions or the excesses of his language. In regards to the massive amount of tropes, Neruda prefers the metaphor, stating that Matilde is the sea or the stars or the fruit tree; much more rare is the simile, wherein Matilde would be only "like" those things. Personification is also a frequent technique; the couple's house may cry and die, for example, or the sea may come alive to make violence on the cliff rocks with its waves. Nature is the common ingredient throughout almost all the sonnets, with skin "like a whole almond" or Matilde's walk leaving jasmine and honeysuckle in its wake. Specificity of the flora and fauna in nature combine with Neruda's unusual word-pairings to produce evocative imagery. Despite the elevated level of poetry and vocabulary, Neruda celebrates groundedness and earthiness, and thus Neruda is careful to infuse the poetry with specific items in nature and specific natural phenomenon so that his musings don't fully escape reality. In this way the love to be celebrated is similarly "grounded" and real, not just made up from thin air.

## Structure

At its most basic, as the title implies, this is a collection of exactly one-hundred love sonnets, numbered with Roman numerals (this choice probably in keeping with the antiquity of the sonnet form itself). Before the sonnets, there is a page-long dedication, in which the author dedicates the poems to his love, Matilde, and says some words about what he intended to achieve with the poems.

The poems are divided into three sections, named after times of day. Sonnets 1 through 32 are labeled "Morning"; Sonnets 33 through 78 are "Afternoon"; and Sonnets 79 through 100 are "Night." Outside of the obvious passage of time implied, with an analogy perhaps to an entire life span, with time a very important factor and subject in the poems, sonnets in each section usually are tonally similar. "Morning" features wildly exuberant, celebratory, erotic, happy poems, usually comparing Matilde to some aspect of nature. "Afternoon" features a more mature love on display, also introducing the darker sides of life and love such as was not present in "Morning." "Night" sonnets are primarily musings on immortality, and the eternal nature of love.

At the level of an individual sonnet, no sonnet has a title. Sonnets, as is traditional, are 14 lines long. In a slight departure from the Shakespearean sonnet, which is composed of three 4-line stanzas with a final 2-line couplet, Neruda's sonnets are composed of two 4-line stanzas, and then two 3-line stanzas. Only the loosest attention seems to be paid to meter or rhyme, though this commentator cannot be any sort of authority on the original Spanish.



## Quotes

Dedication: "I knew very well that down the right sides of sonnets, with elegant discriminating taste, poets of all times have arranged rhymes that sound like silver, or crystal, or cannonfire. But - with great humility - I made these sonnets out of wood; I gave them the sound of opaque pure substance, and that is how they should reach your ears." (3)

V: "But my heart went on, remembering your mouth - and I went on and on through the streets like a man wounded, until I understood, Love: I had found my place, a land of kisses and volcanoes." (15, lines 11-14)

XI: "I hunger for your sleek laugh, your hands the color of a savage harvest, hunger for the pale stones of your fingernails, I want to eat your skin like a whole almond." (27, lines 5-8)

XVII: "I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where I love you straightforwardly, without complexities or pride; so I love you because I know no other way" (39, lines 9-11)

XXVII: "Naked, you are simple as one of your hands, smooth, earthy, small, transparent, round: you have moon-lines, apple-pathways: naked, you are slender as a naked grain of wheat." (59, lines 1-4)

XLIV: "You must know that I do not love AND that I love you, because everything alive has its two sides; a word is one wing of the silence, fire has its cold half." (95, lines 1-4)

LV: "For life throbs like a bile, like a river: it opens a bloody tunnel where eyes stare through at us, the eyes of a huge and sorrowful family." (119, lines 12-14)

LVIII: "Among the broadswords of literary iron I wander like a foreign sailor, who does not know the streets, or their angles, and who sings because that's how it is, because if not for that what else is there?" (125, lines 1-4)

LXIV: "My life was tinted purple by so much love, and I veered helter-skelter like a blinded bird till I reached your window, my friend: you heard the murmur of a broken heart." (137, lines 1-4)



LXXVIII: "I have no never-again, I have no always. In the sand  
victory abandoned its footprints.

I am a poor man willing to love his fellow men.

I don't know who you are. I love you. I don't give away thorns,  
and I don't sell them." (165, lines 1-4)

LXXXV: "I bend toward the fire of your nocturnal body, and I love  
not only your breasts but autumn, too, as it spreads its  
ultramarine blood through the fog." (181, lines 12-14)

XCI: "Age covers us like drizzle;  
time is interminable and sad;  
a salt feather touches your face;  
a trickle ate through my shirt." (193, lines 1-4)



## Topics for Discussion

A common oxymoron throughout the Sonnets is the idea of being "alone together." Discuss what this means for the author, and its possible implications.

Bread is a common metaphor for Matilde in these poems. Why would Neruda choose such an object? What qualities does bread have that apply to Matilde and/or love?

Why does Pablo Neruda state that he has fashioned his Sonnets from wood, in the Dedication?

Why do you think Neruda has divided these 100 Sonnets into Morning, Afternoon, and Night? Is there a common subject matter or tone among poems in one division?

Explore the differences between the city and the country in these 100 Sonnets. Why is this an important distinction for Neruda? What does the city represent, and what does the country (or nature) represent?

According to these Sonnets, what was Neruda's life like before Matilde loving him?

Matilde's hands become a very important subject for Neruda. Why this focus? What power do they have, over the earth and/or over Neruda?

Latter sonnets deal with the passage of time. What role does love play in relation to time? Is love eternal? Can it affect time, or at least the perception of it?