CHAPTER III

Fanciful Odes of Pablo Neruda

So that everyone may live here,
I built my house with transparent odes
The *Ode to Common Things* was written towards the end of Neruda’s life in a voice steeped in the wisdom of a life experienced in the greatest joys and sorrows of the twentieth century. When Neruda writes about a table, a chair, flowers, socks or soap, these common things become more than everyday banal objects. They are transformed and elevated into metaphors, vehicles for the greater questions that haunt ones lives, capturing the often over-looked beauty of everyday life, of the little things that one seems to remember only in one’s twilight. Neruda’s elevation of what we take for granted to entities of self-completeness is brilliantly described in *Ode to Common Things*. For the readers, the chair is a place to plant one’s weary body, but with Neruda the chair is transformed into something wildly exotic, transcendent and magical. “Ode to the Dictionary,” will make the reader regret not using it more. The odes convey the poet’s vision of the realities of day-to-day life. The atom, a tuna, laziness, love - the everyday elements and essences of human experience glow in the translucent language of Neruda’s odes. The odes, entrance by their elegant and touching simplicity.

“Chile,” Neruda once said in reference to the work of the sixteenth century poet Alonso de Erucilla, “was invented by a poet.” In the Nobel Prize acceptance speech Neruda declared that “we (writers from the vast expanse of America) are called upon to fill with words the confines of a mute continent and we become drunk with the task of telling and naming.” The odes reflect what Neruda’s *Ode to Common Things* seems to be more about beauty of things per se than it is about ownership of them. Neruda, in many ways, calls the readers to attention, exhorts them to appreciate the beauty in a pair of scissors, salt-shakers, ship, the ocean ... from bread and soap to a bed and a box of tea. The *Ode to Common Things* conjures up the essence of their subjects clearly and wondrously:
I have a crazy,
crazy love of things,
I like pliers, and scissors.
I love
cups,
rings,
and bowls
not to speak, of course,
of hats. (1-9)

Obviously, every individual is always passionate about tools and the objects they share their lives with. There is a sacred sacredness in these everyday objects, touched as they are by life, imbued as they are with it:
glasses, knives and scissors
all bear
the trace
of someone’s fingers
on their handle or surface,
the trace of a distant hand
lost
in the depths of forgetfulness. (10-18)

This Ode to Common Things is playful and haunting. Neruda saw as both an obligation and a privilege - the naming and defining of his world.

Love, brotherhood and nature are the themes throughout the odes. The form
and re-dedication to social and political responsibility are the salient features of the odes, in their affirmation and celebration. These luminous odes, are mini-narratives – some propaganda, some declarations of love or scorn.

Although his four books of odes were published separately, Neruda said that he thought of all his odes as making up a single work, as they tell "a history of the time, of diverse things, trades, people, fruits and flowers, of life and my vision ..." (Peden 3). The odes met with resounding success from all quarters in Chile, from ordinary readers to literary figures to academic critics. Neruda's odes inspire our celebration of common things leading us through colorful descriptions, captivating scenes, surprising realizations and peaceful transformative conclusions. Page after page, the readers find themselves suddenly in love with a tomato, a dog, a dictionary, or a pre-existing love is powerfully re-awakened by the winning marriage of basic images and well chosen words.

Pablo Neruda's odes remain among his most beloved poems. Written during his middle life, they examine ordinary things, nouns, both concrete and abstract. Their common link is appreciation. Most of the poems, in his first volume deal with concrete nouns. Neruda accepted the challenge of making the abstract come to life through using his own brand of imagism. Neruda combined simple phrases with simple ideas and his airy style is lovely. The list of their subjects is dizzying. Nothing ordinary was alien to Neruda, everything was magical. He wrote separate odes to tomatoes and wine, to an artichoke and a dead carob tree, to conger chowder, to a large tuna in the market, to his socks and his suit, to his native birds, to light on the sea, to the dictionary and to a village movie theatre. He wrote an ode to time and another to the earth, an "Ode for Everything." "Nothing was to be omitted from my field of action" (Hirsh), Neruda commented. The odes are funny, fiery and exultant,
savagely new and profoundly ancient.

The *Odes* (1954-1959) are written to the simple things in life, they celebrating the tomato as well as the soup, the table and the moon stand as equally important parts of our existence. Besides the love poems, the odes are the best part of Neruda's gigantic poetic work. The odes are beautiful. Neruda takes everyday objects and sings its glory. He talks about love and life and music and nature and friendship and war and dreams and beauty and travel and learning and everything in between. One marvels at Neruda’s talent, beauty and melody of the odes. Towards the end of his career, the versatile Neruda turned to simple forms on simple topics namely, *Elemental Odes* (1954) in which he sings the praise of an artichoke, wood and the like. Exuberantly, his odes exalt their subject matter. But they are not characterized by an elevated style, it is here that Neruda’s poems consciously differ from its prototype.

These fanciful odes celebrated everyday objects - chair, bed, guitar, dog, cat, flowers, soap, socks, dictionary, scissors, tea, spoon, plate, orange, apple, bread, onion, potato and a few more. The odes are loveable and some of them are more loveable than the others. In the odes, Neruda's message is expanded into a more extensive description of the world, where the objects of the hymns – things, events and relations - are duly presented in alphabetic form. Neruda was a master of the ode which he conceived as an homage to just about everything that surrounded him, from an artichoke to the clouds in the sky, from the moon to his own friendship with Federico Garcia Lorca and his favorite places in Chile.

Neruda’s odes celebrate ‘ordinary’ things which people usually considered unworthy of attention. Hence, Neruda wrote an ode to a spoon, the artichoke, the tomato, the onion, the lemon, the water melon and garlic. The food poems deserve particular attention; it educates the readers about the subject in the process of praising
that subject.

Neruda was in his late forties when he committed himself to writing an ode a week and in the end produced a total of two hundred and twenty five, which are dispersed throughout his varied oeuvre. These odes are translated into English by accomplished translators like Philip Levine, Paul Muldoon, Mark Strand and Margaret Sayers Peden. Collectively, the odes read like the personal diary of a man in search of meaning, who sings to life itself, to one’s connection to one another and to the place, they have in nature and the cosmos. The odes are also a lasting statement on the role of poetry as a lighting-rod during tumultuous times.

Neruda’s odic lines are described by Margaret Sayers Peden as “sensuous and vertical, recalling spirals of smoke, slim stalks of celery, or branches of the lemon tree.” Some odes are as “a river of print flowing down the page.” These descriptions of the odes evocate the physical space the poem creates. Neruda invents contemporary Chilean reality – his reality – in the *Elemental Odes*. To John Felstiner, of Stanford University: “Neruda’s odes carved out a new field for him and for Latin American Poetry.” The odes convey Neruda’s vision of the realities of day-to-day life.

The sinuously enthusiastic odes to artichoke, watermelon, salt, Walt Whitman and the human eye have combined much scholarly attention and enthusiasm, internationally. These poems of simple objects express Neruda's love for reality and his materialistic approach to ordinary things: watermelon, artichoke, dictionary, onions, animals and so on. It was a celebration of everyday life before global consumerism had reduced everything to goods for sale.

The *Elemental Odes* continued Neruda’s efforts to reach the common man, to bring poetry, to the people, political without appearing to be politicized, simple
without being simplistic. It appealed to an extraordinarily wide range of readers through a seemingly artless, almost breezy series of compositions exalting the most basic things of daily existence, the plain and the ordinary fruits and flowers, thread and bread. The style is simple and straightforward, as these poems were first published in the columns of a daily newspaper. The verses are short and direct and the tone is intimate and conversational.

Pablo Neruda’s odes expressed his joy in the beauty of simple things. These odes were heralded for their insightful brand of simplicity. Neruda was inspired by humble things like socks and the smell of firewood, which he glorified in his odes. His *Elemental Odes* followed Whitman’s lead and were heralded for their insightful brand of delectable simplicity. They gained immediate universal praise. And they were read by people who had never before paid attention to poetry. Here, everything is seen in its best light, everything has value, everything deserves to be the subject of a poem.

Neruda’s greatest literary success was his ability to approach the grandiose and the minute, the tragic and the joyous, with equal patience and reverence. The things ensnared admirably in the odes are - chestnuts, books, tomatoes and so forth - are given fresh, original poetic life. The *Elemental Odes*, are the tone of the great man showing us how humble and playful he can be. The three books that came out in rapid succession - *Elemental Odes*, *New Elemental Odes* and *Third Book of Odes* (1952-1957) were truly meant to be elemental, ever elementary to carry news of things from their birth onward, to accord material objects a life of their own, to estrange the familiar. Neruda’s breath and vision and wide range of themes are extraordinary. From his youth, Neruda was known as a naturalist. In dozens of his odes, Pablo Neruda expressed his joy in the beauty of simple things.
The odes mark a new departure for Neruda. They are brutally simple poems, strings of lines sometimes only three syllables long, sometimes containing only one word. The effect is to force breath stops on the rhythm, sometimes for suspense preceding a surprise image, always in order to maintain a fresh pace. The originality of the odes lies in the “new vision of the world Neruda manifests in them” (63). One begins to detect a hedonistic vein in the odes. Neruda had decided to jettison his early gloom with a vengeance and blatantly to assert his right to enjoy himself. The very titles of some of the odes “To Happiness,” “To a Happy Day,” “To Wine,” “To Life,” indicate the extent to which his neurosis have been finally sacked. These return to the beginning of time, served as a therapeutic recall, whereby “not only the history of the continent was retraced in order to stamp out its agonies, but also Neruda’s life” (Gallagher 65).

The odes make clear Neruda’s intent as in “Odes for Everyone ”:

It will be you who decide
what is in them:
tomatoes
or deer
or cement. (1-5)

These long lyrical odes, sing of the elements and evoke nature, they praise fundamental and essential subjects.

Pablo Neruda’s *Elemental Odes* are particularly interesting for their fusion of a considerable amount of social doctrine and of many subjects traditionally considered “unpoetic” into very effective poetry. Neruda’s choice of poetic subject has made certain poetic techniques particularly apt. Neruda wants to endow the poetic message with substance and sustenance. He wants to “penetrate life and make it
prophetic” (Yglesias 101). The *Elemental Odes* is a collection of tributes to common things published in the middle of the author’s career, celebrating often – forgotten objects and unsung emotions. Through the onion, Neruda explores a variety of aspects of human life, illustrating appealing aspects of femininity as well as weightier issues of social justice and equality.

In the poem “Ode to My Socks,” the main topic though will be “two fish / made of wool” (19-20). When read out, the poem sounds disjointed. Neruda uses this to put emphasis on every line; especially on lone words … my socks are glorifying and plentiful and give a vivid picture on Neruda’s passion for his socks. This poem mainly contains similes “two socks” (5). Uniquely distinct and desolate visions of the world and life. This ode makes use of a delightful catalogue of metaphors, in all the things Neruda compares these marvelous socks to his “unworthy” feet (29).

“Ode to My Socks,” is a poem about poetry or it is a poem about Pablo Neruda’s idea of what poetry is and what it should be. He shows the readers the magic in the mundane. He shows the readers how poetry is everywhere and all they have to do is change how we look at the world. . Neruda’s “Ode to My Socks” exalts one of the basic things of daily existence. The poet describes the object of this celebration in such a way as to make it achieve another worldly status. It becomes clear that what normally might be taken for granted as being ordinary is actually quite extraordinary. The poet finds, two socks quite remarkable - soft as rabbits, like jewel cases, made of a non-material substance (dusk) as well as wholly material sheep’s wool. The socks transform the poet’s feet, so that they become sharks, blackbirds and cannons. They are celestial, beautiful and luminous woven fire. The various similes used to describe the socks reinforce the idea of the enormous possibilities in things of the world and of the grandeur and power of socks.
In “Ode to Wine,” the stricture of the poem is like a purling stream of wine flowing from a bottle. The poem flows at different intensities, almost as if someone was powering it out of a bottle. There is an appealing, rhythmic tempo to it. Some one, two word lines followed by some five, six, seven word lines. As for the
metaphors used, it is clear that the speaker is comparing women to wine and wine to women, for example, hips to wine goblets, breasts to grape clusters, nipples to grapes, hair to spirits, navel to chaste seal etc. These elements are riddled throughout the poem to show the speaker’s love and obsession with wine. The speaker loves wine like a mistress because his mistress is like a fine glass of wine. This loving almost sexually explicit relationship is explored, briefly at different points throughout the poem.
Words and phrases like amorous, lascivious, spring dress, kiss of love etc, display the sensual and seductive qualities of wine, which are, to many, similar to those of a woman. Neruda captures perfectly the sensuality of wine, the physicality of the ripening vine and the pure, thrusting fecundity of the grape itself:

… My darling, suddenly
the line of your hip
becomes the brimming curve
of the wine goblet,
your breast is the grape cluster,
your nipples are the grapes,
the gleam of spirits lights your hair,
and your navel is a chaste seal
stamped on the vessel of your belly. (48-56)

Here is the ecstatic opening of “Ode to a Stamp Album”:

Album of perfect stamps!
butterflies,
ships,
sea shapes, corollas,
leaning towers,
dark eyes, moist and
round as grapes. (1-7)

The poem concludes as breathlessly as it began:

Insatiable
spiral,
comet’s tail
of all earth’s
highways,
dictionary
of the wind
star struck album
bulging
with noble
fruits and territories. (8-18)

“Ode to the Clothes,” is one of Neruda’s attempts to bring seemingly
humdrum objects to life, personifying them for the readers. Through his poetic eye,
Neruda sees clothing become a lover and a most loyal friend and all these while
putting on his garb in the morning and noticing how his clothes take on the mould and
contour of his body. Neruda personifies his clothes into a lover, giving them
admirable qualities like loyalty and describing shared experiences. He sees them
being together until “death do us apart” (22) and then beyond.
In lines 1-32 Neruda is personifying his clothes as waiting out the night for morning to serve its purpose and be filled by our bodies, hopes, vanities and love. Neruda describes his morning routine in literal terms - walking, getting out of bed and dressing. His clothing gives him tireless fidelity. In it, he goes out to face the world. He makes the clothes what they are, pushing out their sleeves and seams and so the life of his clothes are made in his image.

In lines 33-70, “our clothes live with us and if we are struck down by a bullet our blood stains them and they die with us.” Or “the clothes will sicken gradually with us as we die slowly and together we enter the earth with our clothes.” With this in mind, everyday he greets his clothes with reverence. “Ode to Clothes,” is a direct address to the clothes he is accustomed to wearing daily. This ode records Neruda’s feelings about something as mundane as his everyday clothes. Pablo Neruda’s “Ode to Clothes,” is the harmonious and interdependent relationship the poet enjoys with his clothes:

and so,
clothes,
I too go forming you,
extending your elbows,
snapping your threads,
and so your life expands
in the image of my life.(28-33)

Clothes are just external garments to be worn and cast aside without a thought, but for Pablo Neruda, they are very much an innate part of his entire being: “We are one” (66). His clothes do not just cover his body but contain his entire being: “to fill you with / my vanity, my love, / my hope, my body” (3-5).
Even when he is not wearing his clothes and they have been left out to dry his clothes continue to embody the very core of his existence: “In the wind / you billow and snap / as if you were my soul” (32-34). It is this symbiotic relationship which he enjoys with his clothes which makes him conclude:

because of this

each day

I greet you

with reverence and then

you embrace me and I forget you. (61-65)

The details make it easy to visualize what the author is discussing. The author reveals the feelings and meaning that clothes and humans share. That the writers are called upon to fill with words the confines of a mute continent and they become drunk with the task of telling and naming. The odes reflect what Neruda saw as both an obligation and joy in speaking gloriously of all life things.

“Ode to the Tomato,” is an interesting poem because it gives us a glimpse of Neruda as a human being, who eats and loves food. In “Ode to Clothes,” the reader sees Neruda’s amazing ability to take some things as mundane and everyday objects as clothes and gives a new idea to the use of clothes. The details make it easy to visualize what the author is discussing. The author reveals the feelings and meaning that clothes and humans share. That the writers are called upon to fill with words the confines of a mute continent and they become drunk with the task of telling and naming. The odes reflect what Neruda saw as both an obligation and joy in speaking gloriously of all life-things.

Neruda was so prolific and wrote so often of subjects that fascinated him that there are twenty odes about everything from scissors to gillyflowers. Scissors have cut
the shape of all life, loves, grave clothes and finger nails. Organizing the beauty of a flower Neruda tells in “Ode to a Gillyflower”: “everything is bright again! / I see that the world is suddenly simpler, as if filled with gillyflowers (1-2). Gillyflowers have evolved from discarded weeds to “fragrant light, perfect protagonists of silence” (3). Neruda makes the reader think about the commonplace, as if encountering it for the first time. Neruda touches on loneliness, war, hunger, kindness, memory in his adoration of things. He is lush, rich and sensual. An apple is an opportunity to seduce as in “Ode to an Apple”:

you, apple
are the object
of my praise.
I want to fill
my mouth
with your name
I want to eat you whole. (1-7)

Neruda’s ode, are the many, many short poems that he wrote for things both mundane and spiritual: his odes to maize, to bees, to the atom and to laziness. Ilan Stavans, who edited a six-hundred page collection of the best of Neruda in 2003, tells that, Neruda had written these odes with “Buddhist-like concentration on the mundane, insignificant objects” to publish in newspapers alone. Neruda chaffed when literary critics tried “to force creative artists to deal only with sublime themes.” But they are wrong, “we’ll even make poetry from those things most scorned by the arbiters of good taste.” “In Ode to an Atom,” his command of rhythm and language allowed him to reflect beautifully and painfully on such things as the atom:
The city crumbled its last honey combs
and fell, fell suddenly,
demolished, rotten;
men were instant lepers,
they took
their children’s hand
and the little hand
fell off in theirs. (1-9)

The odes vividly convey the poet’s vision of the realities of day-to-day life. To write simply of simple things was a task the poet undertook consciously. These odes are arranged in brief, sinuous lines that flow down the page and connect the poet to the animal, mineral and vegetable world, to people and objects and to the landscape of history, in a simple, interesting way.

Neruda’s love of food is something that was cultivated at an early age and can be found in his numerous *Odes to Common Things*, such as the tomato and the onion. These objects of food are no longer a simple means of sustenance, but a catalyst for intimacy. Ordinary objects were elevated to a high degree of significance. “Ode to French Fries”:

What sizzles
in boiling
oil
is the world’s
pleasure. (1-5)
Pablo Neruda, a man who knew hunger, showed a great appreciation of food in his books of odes. “Ode to Fried Potatoes,” exudes astonishing love for the potato. A simple recipe for fried potatoes was among the best of his odes. Neruda expresses his love of fried potatoes, ironically, with startling images. The stubby potato, so consummately fat and ordinary in the collective imagination, becomes graceful, virginal and quite angelic. Readers experience white potato flesh as “snowy wings / of a morning swan” (10-11). The transformation that the poet undergoes amounts to kitchen alchemy, as olive oil turns the crisp whiteness to savory amber-gold. Neruda delivers the poem in alchemical recipe form. Olive oil is not enough to complete the transformation. Magical garlic and the “pollen of pepper” (20) complete the rustic recipe.

A deep sense of gratitude for nutrition pervades in these odes to food - to prepared dishes. The dish is something transcendental and sacred: something beyond itself. Neruda’s odes are delightful and wildly inventive. He had an extraordinary ability to write about almost any subject, which was quite original and enlightening, as in “Ode to Onion”:

Generously
you give up
your balloon of freshness
to the boiling consummation
of the pot,
and in the blazing heat of the oil
the shred of crystal
is transformed into a curled feather of gold. (32-39)
Neruda’s “Ode to Onion” transforms a common household bulb into a heavenly avatar and carries that sense of transcendence and universality into his “you,” made more prominent by his late introduction of an authorial “I.” In “Ode to Onion,” addressing the onion, Neruda uses a familiar “you” rather than the more formal “than.” The juxtaposition of these stylistic choices with his humble subject matter of the onion allows Neruda to subvert the ode’s context as a ‘high art’ form and bring it, like the onion: “… within the reach / of the villagers hands” (47-48). At the beginning, he focuses on uniting human growth with that of the onion. Through his multiplicitous representation of the onion, Neruda again uses nature to explore humanity.

By praising the lonely origins of things and exalting them the way he does Neruda is arguing in favor of the indigenous poor and the lower classes. The onions represent the underprivileged and the under - represented classes. The co-relation between the poor and the onion was during times of famine, the onion was the only thing available to eat for the poor. Neruda makes explicit that the onion is:

within reach
of the hands of the common people
and that is a big part of
why he loves it.

Many great images, but my favorite:
the crystal shred
in the flaming heart of the oil
is transformed into a curled
golden feather. (30-39)
Neruda’s use of scriptural syntax contributes to his transformation of the onion into a symbol of transcendence available to the common people. The onion is described as sacrificing itself to the pot and the oil and sliced by the kitchen knife, then referred to as “you rise from the soil,” (49) as “salt of the earth” (51). This double-meaning firmly cements Neruda’s deification of the onion as savior to the poor and the working class. Pablo Neruda knew a little something about the ordinary, so much so that he wrote an entire series of odes in praise of objects or foods the readers pass by in their lives. The onion is described as clear as a planet, in lyrical language, how Neruda dances around its layers and peels them away, describing every piece the onion’s humble existence.

In “Ode to the Tomato,” Neruda gives a divine description of the radiant tomato:

Tomatoes have
their own glow,
and a benign grandeur…
The knife
sinks into
its living pulp
it’s a bloody
organ,
a poignant
raw
inexhaustible
sun. (27-38)

The rhythm of the poem is described as “chopped.” Neruda offers very little in the way of formal setting or narrative point of view in the poem. “Ode to the
Tomato,” is expressed in idiosyncratic free-verse, with short, clipped lines and a conspicuous absence end-rhyme, as well as a lack of a refrain or chorus. The poem’s speaker is the poet himself. The opening line of “Ode to the Tomato,” describes summer tie, how the tomatoes have just been harvested and they are plentiful. Then the setting is winter time, when the canned tomatoes come off the shelf. Neruda says that the tomato has its own “radiance, a goodly majesty” (26). Therefore, it is too bad the reader must assassinate it. The red flesh of the tomato looks gruesome to cut into. Tomatoes are the star of the earth, without bones, without husks, scales or thorns.

Pablo Neruda has painted a poetic portrait in the ‘Ode to Onion.’ Even simple, strong-smelling things that come out of dirt can still be wonderful and pretty deep. The theme is about, new life. He is directly speaking about an onion, but he is symbolically speaking of new life. In “Ode to Fried Potatoes,” Neruda is searching for a more complete definition of what it is to be American and a caretaker of the new world, both native vegetables become objects of poetic meditation. “Ode to the Tomato,” is an interesting poem because it gives the readers a glimpse of Neruda as a human being, who eats and loves food.

Neruda’s odes are clearly oral, to be understood through the ear. The term that Neruda used to justify his work, is simplicity. His new poetry is excluded from the drawing-rooms and cafes, where we get a clearer sense of simple poor people. More than celebrating things in a general way, Neruda celebrates the ‘things’ of the poor. Rene de Costa calls the “Ode to Onion” as ‘highly conceptual,’ where the words are singled out as ‘pure and simple.’ In his delightful “Ode to the Tomato” the poet heightened the sensuousness of the tomato. The tomato is almost an excuse for verbal cleverness as it is for asserting his patriotic love for Chile: “its pulp fills the salads of
Chile.” There are further odes to Caesar Vallejo, to woods, to birds, to bread, to the sea etc.

The *Elemental Odes* was published in the books between 1954 and 1957. With them, Neruda’s hope was realized and he reached a wider audience than he already had. The odes gained immediate and universal praise. They are about the things of everyday life: a lemon, a dead carob tree, a boy with a hare and a stamp album. And they were read by people who had never before paid attention to poetry. Written in very short lines, some as short as a single word, the odes tumble effortlessly down the page in chain-like sentences. Everything is seen in its best light, everything has value and everything deserves to be the subject of a poem.

After *Canto General* Neruda became more and more conscious of his language and concerned about the clarity of his communication as he realized that as a political activist he had to deal with the common man who is illiterate and uninformed. These efforts resulted in the composition of his *Elemental Odes* consisting of short lines, which mark a radical departure from long and descriptive poems of other collections. Neruda was always concerned about human being and human conditions. He did not believe in no man’s land in literature. Each book of poem by him meant always a new beginning and an extraordinary ending. The odes celebrated the plainest objects of daily life, in the plain simple style meant for the proletariat. He once said that the greatest poet is the local baker. In “Ode to the Dictionary” it is delightful:

I

turn

its

pages:
caporal,
capote
what a marvel
to pronounce these plosive
syllables,
and further on …
like dormant seeds waiting
in the vaults of vocabulary,
alive again and giving life:
Once again the heart distills them. (1-14)

“Ode to My Socks,” is charming in its directness. There is an intimacy that is created immediately with the use of the first person. The poet begins by telling a personal story, these are socks that were given to him by a certain person, Maru Mori, that she knitted with her own hands, which he finds to be endowed with an almost unbearable beauty. The entire tone of the poem is simple without being simplistic, direct without being artless, plain yet sophisticated. The moral offered at the end comes across as unaffected wisdom:

so this is
the moral of my ode:
beauty is beauty
twice over
and good things are doubly
good
when you’re talking almost a pair of wool
socks
in the dead of winter. (36-44)

Neruda’s *Ode to Common Things*, celebrates and elevates everyday objects, making them priceless.

In “Ode to the Lemon,” Neruda uses the lemon as a metaphor for god’s infinite love. The lemon is used as a metaphor for the earth (breast) and the (nipple) (51) which springs out from it. A lemon has yellow spherical centre with a ‘nipple’ pointing out. It is the love from mother earth. The lemon is used as juice for humans. This is the ‘goblet of miracles,’ (50) he talks about - the wonder of creation and the color yellow which suddenly bursts out from a flower into a fruit to finally fall onto the ground. The poet seems to have a strange fascination for the lemon in particular because of its ‘perfect symmetry’ (31). The knife (man) (32) cuts open lemon (love could also be love of / from God) to make juice (selfish pursuits).

Cathedrals, houses and architecture suggest physical design and purpose. The poet refers to the cathedral. Since cathedrals have yellow color windows, this could also mean that it is the lemon which supplies life to the inhabitants of the earth and its cathedral of God. A ‘bazaar’ (14) could suggest that the poet is trying to bring in man’s eternal selfish pursuit. The lemon is gold. The prominence of heavenly images, moonlight and the planetarium convey a sense of higher purpose: providence and Godliness.

“Ode to Hope,” is one of his shorter works. The poem concludes with his fellow Chileans touching the ocean and feeling its promise. At the centre of the poem, there is an “oceanic dawn” (1) or beginning. Yet, the shorter form speaks to the poet’s relative impatience with tyranny and need for change. The final line of the poem suggests that justice will come through natural forces rather than political ones. Above all, the poem conveys nature as the source of inspiration for human hope:
we men,
touch the water,
struggling
and hoping,
we touch the sea,
hoping.
And the waves tell the firm coast,
everything will be fulfilled. (25-32)

The curious column-shaped form of Neruda’s odes was no accident. Form truly followed function, as the poems appeared regularly in Chilean newspapers. It is slim and rather waterfall-like. The short lines allow for isolation of images. Above all, the short lines allow the reader to slow down and actually breathe along with the work. Neruda revolutionized form in his work. Through Neruda’s four volumes of odes, the readers discern that the poet, a so-called atheist, constantly acknowledges spirit within the natural world.

As in his Book of Odes, the opening poem in New Elemental Odes 1956, defines Neruda’s aesthetics against his earlier hermetic poetry and against all difficult poetry. Again, the poet equally stresses his Chilean-ness. The odes that follow are ordered alphabetically. In his New Elemental Odes 1954 he attacks the Spanish poet Juan Larrea. Neruda mocks him: “He doesn’t know anything but he teaches us.” What this ode and its reception reveal is how poetry can sting as well as sing.

These odes marked a significant turning point in Neruda’s career as an artist, as he moved away from the high style and over politicizing of his works written in the late 1930s and 1940s to a plainer form and interest in the particulars of everyday life. The odes also show Neruda’s continued commitment to the political ideals seen in his
other works. As a devoted communist, he sought all his life to write poetry for common folk, to speak for the dispossessed and reflect their concerns in his poetry. The odes, with their simple language and celebration of ordinary life, are indeed poetry for the people, a reconciliation of art and ideas with the concreteness of life.

These odes to things, be they plant, animal, or household object, show specific love for the objects themselves and general love for their place in the world. Every ode includes an object’s construction, appearance and purpose and gradually unfurls into elaborate stories and fantastic asides related to the object. **Elemental Odes** are among Neruda’s most loved works. Isabel Allende became familiar with Neruda through a copy of his “Odes.” She carried the book with her during her exile and said it was like carrying a piece of her country with her because as much as Neruda means to people elsewhere, “when I think of the voice of Chile, I think of him.” In **Elemental Odes**, Neruda’s message is expanded into a more extensive description of the world, where the objects of the hymns, things, events and relations - are duly presented in alphabetic form.

In Neruda’s first collection of odes, **Elemental Odes**, he expresses his desire to prolong happiness in the world that appears to attack it. Neruda’s “Ode to the Happy Day,” is a many-layered love poem. While expressing affection for his beloved, the poem also praises gifts of nature surrounding and sheltering the couple. A sense of evanescence pervades the work, as the poet realizes he cannot freeze time, it will surely pass. Yet, he wishes to preserve some fragments of the experience. He was a poet to eternalize the moment: “This time, / let me be happy / nothing has happened to anybody- / I am nowhere special” (1-4).

Ultimately, “Ode to the Happy Day,” expresses the plight of a deeply conflicted man. His desire to live close to the earth and experience romantic love
becomes fractured by his ability to lead a country to a difficult, transient reality through poetry. His *Elemental Odes* were heralded for their insightful brand of simplicity. In the *Elemental Odes*, Neruda’s message is expanded into a more extensive description of the world, where the objects of the hymns - things, events and relations - are duly presented. It reveals Neruda’s poetry as a way to appreciate everyday things for their individual essence or value and their relationship to the lives and struggles of the common man. The *Elemental Odes* explore the struggle of individuals and their connection with daily life and the universal.

Neruda’s odes to the minute details of everyday life possess a sort of every-man’s appeal. It is a distinctly American perspective, where things like plates, cups and backyard things are not taken for granted. Exactly, the form of these odes, draw attention to the little things that never get credit. Beginning with the first volume of the *Elemental Odes*, the war, betrayal and exile no longer dominate the poetry. Neruda’s work begins to grow more personal, less poetical. The three books *Elemental Odes, New Elemental Odes* and *Third Book of Odes* - were truly meant to be elemental, even elementary, to carry new things from their birth onwards, to accord material objects a life of their own, to estrange the familiar. These three rapturous collections present an affirmation alternative to the three despairing books of *Residence on Earth*, which Neruda felt were too negative.

The odes are funny, fiery and exultant, savagely new and profoundly ancient. In *Elemental Odes*, his message is expanded into a more extensive description of the world, where the objects of the hymns - things, events and relations - are duly presented in alphabetic form. The epic vision of *Canto General* was replaced by odes to the plainest objects of daily life: a bicycle, an apple, a pair of socks, once again in the plain style meant for the proletariat. Neruda combined simple phrases with simple
ideas in lovely, airy style. The odes were responded with enthusiasm and Neruda published four volumes of odes during the 1950s.

His *Elemental Odes* were hailed for their insightful brand of simplicity. In the *Elemental Odes*, Neruda’s message is expanded into a more extensive description of the world, where the objects of the hymns – things, events and relations – are duly presented in a lovable manner. It reveals Neruda’s poetry as a way to appreciate everyday things for their individual essence or value and their relationship to the lives and struggles of the common man. The *Elemental Odes* explore the struggle of individuals and their connection with daily life and the universal.

Beginning with the first volume of the *Elemental Odes*, the war, betrayal and exile no longer dominate the poetry. Neruda’s odes become more personal and less political. The three volumes of the odes, were well received by his public and they considered it easy. And the volume presented its remarkable moments and rarely has a fallen chestnut inspired such music as in “Ode to a Chestnut on the Ground”:

```
perfect

as a violin that has just

been born in the treetops

and falls

offering the gifts locked inside it,

its hidden sweetness. (4-9)
```

The verse in *The Elemental Odes* was written in a new poetic style: simple, direct, precise and humorous, it contained descriptions of everyday objects, situations and beings, as seen in “Ode to Onion” and “Ode to the Cat.” Neruda could write equally well about the human sufferings and the simple beauty of nature. “Ode to My Socks,” appeared in the second volume of a series of four collections of odes.
Neruda’s elegant and frank celebration of a pair of woolen socks is an homage to the ordinary material objects of daily existence. The poem, is pure and elemental, written in short, irregular lines of free verse. It communicates in words that all people can understand a simple message about the wondrous nature of the physical world, with no affectation no intellectualizing, the poem employs unusual images to praise the extraordinariness of a mundane but useful objects.

“Ode to the Petrified Forest,” appears in Neruda’s Third Book of Odes. Through Neruda’s four volumes of odes, he constantly acknowledges the spirit within the natural world. The poet uses the live trees of his Chilean coast to introduce the stone trees: “blue eucalyptus and / the new carob mansions” (2-3). These trees are exotic and redolent. They serve as a gateway to the tribes peopling the “Petrified Forest.” Ironically, though Neruda’s forest is petrified and sleeping like a fairy tale, it is alive just slumbering. This forest can last as long as the earth endures, if not disturbed by humans. The forest itself is primordial “like a savage pallor” (21). Even Neruda, who had been close with nature, passes through this place, like a visitor. The forest appears to awaken, from a twilight sleep and then returns to its death-like sleep.

Neruda writes plainly in a sense that he appeals to the reader’s own emotional, personal connection to ordinary material objects. He is a writer who communicates powerfully with the common man and woman. In Neruda’s poetry, the tangible objects of his everyday life become representations of abstract concepts, such as love. The part of Neruda that is grounded in reality is evident in the characterization of his fondness of food and objects. This poet of simple object communicates in direct, accessible language. In these several book of odes Neruda brings poetry to the most ordinary, everyday things. What enabled Neruda to make poems of everything from
salt and tomatoes to a movie theatre in winter or a train in the rain was a passionate
instinct for beauty and an inexhaustible curiosity before things.

In the *Elemental Odes*, Neruda developed a clear, simple and accessible style. The language of his odes is refined to the point at which it achieves in Jean Franco’s words, “the naturalness of song.” In the odes, Neruda experimented with a new form – short meter and a pleasing colloquial tone. The odes were meant for collective public readings, hence the simplicity of language and the expression of solidarity with the pain and suffering of the collective. The individual is subsumed in the collective. His “poems no longer could be a sign on the printed, but were to be uttered and declaimed in order to elicit a response,” says Jean Franco.

Pablo Neruda wrote a specific type of ode now referred to as Nerudo-esque odes. These are poems with short lines and heavy praise. Neruda’s odes describe a subject from everyday life that he had strong feelings about. He exaggerated its admirable qualities, until it became central to human existence. He was that rare thing – a public poet and a great one, held in deep affection by every layer of Chilean society. For the skill that earned him such esteem was his ability to find beauty in ordinary things. In *The Elementary Odes*, which he began to write in the early 50s captured the poetry of the everyday – in old suits, warm woolen socks, onions and the rich juicy tomatoes that grace every Chilean table.

Neruda’s “Ode to Opposites,” captures beauty and deep meaning. He inspires us to compare thoughts, feelings and the real world against their foils as in “Ode to the Present”:

> the moment
> with our fingers,
> we cut it
to size,
we direct
its blooming.
its living,
its alive
it brings nothing
from yesterday that can’t be redeemed'
nothing from the past. (13-24)

Neruda had propelled out of conventional ways of looking at time and age, he re-defines how age is measured in “Ode to Age.” And in the end he tells it is better to go fishing than to worry about being old:

I don’t believe in age.

All old people
carry
in their eyes,
a child,
and children,
at times
observe us with the
eyes of wise ancients. (1-9)

The verse in the Elemental odes was written in a new poetic style: simple, direct, precise and humorous. Neruda turns to a simple style and colloquial language not only to communicate with the masses but also to sing the praises of ordinary objects. Neruda deviates from the traditional form of the ode, using simple, short verses, rich in poetic images. This new form of writing was in tune with Neruda’s
activism and his conception of social poetry. One of the first odes to be published was
“Ode to Bread”:

In the bread,
I look
beyond the form;
I like bread, I bite it
and then
I see the wheat,
the new wheat fields,
the green form of spring
the roots, water,
and so,
beyond the bread
I see the land,
water,
man,
and thus, I taste everything
looking for you
in everything. (20-36)

The odes sing of the elements and evoke nature. They praise fundamental and
essential subjects. The over simplicity makes Neruda’s odes unique within the genre.
Like the onion that he praised as a “fairy god mother in delicate paper,” (55) one skin
after another was peeled away to reveal a new and perfectly formed entity. The odes
represent one of the most abrupt changes, contrasting with the hermetic epic and other
complex poetry that preceded them. Neruda once said “I confess that to write with
simplicity has been my most difficult undertaking.” In the *Elemental Odes* Neruda stated “my poetry became clear and happy when it branched off toward humbler subjects and things.”

The odes glorify the ordinary and the everyday. Here, the readers see Neruda’s “physical absorption of the world” (Peden1-4). Love, brotherhood and nature are his themes throughout the odes. Neruda had written odes, in praise of natural objects, to champion the common man, in a manner accessible to him. The most salient feature of the odes is their tone of affirmation and celebration.

The odes vividly convey Neruda’s vision of the realities of day-to-day life. Neruda invents contemporary Chilean reality – his reality – in the *Elemental Odes*. Pablo Neruda takes a seemingly banal subject and creates a fantastic and extraordinarily enthralling little world for it through the skill of breath-takingly beautiful language and totally unique imagery. These odes are so simple but yet they are so visual.

In his *Elemental Odes*, the impact of imagism was displayed in full, as Neruda turned from the abstract to the concrete and sang the praises of ordinary things such as tomatoes, celery and a watch. In these four books of odes, Neruda presents a history of everyday life in Latin America. The odes were intended to reach the common man and woman. They first appeared in the news section of *El Nacional*, a Caracas’ daily. These poems are filled with a delight in everyday things. Their language is concrete and easy to understand. The odes value everyday objects, without losing sight of their poetic dimension. In these odes the practical becomes the poetical.

To Neruda, an onion has beauty, as does butter, oil and rain. The odes had a great impact on the other Latin American poets and the poetry reading public. Neruda in these odes changed conception of what constitutes poetry. Many of the individual
odes, are delightful and fulfill his goals. Pablo Neruda, the Whitman of the Spanish speaking world, championed change in Latin America, through his odes.

The three books of odes brim over with an exuberant vitality, expressing the pleasure Neruda experienced in ordinary everyday things. In the end, Neruda has made the readers his accomplice in his effort to probe the interdependence between man and things, extracting its essence by praising the lowly origins of things and exalting them. Neruda is arguing in favor of the indigenous poor and the lower classes. His odes appreciate the extraordinariness of the ordinary. In the “Ode to Onion,” Neruda is drawing attention to the poor, common people. He lifts it out of obscurity and immortalizes its pleasure. His odes go on to list a myriad assortment of things he is passionate about, from keys to elevators. His particular love and vivacity for the simple beauties bring such a fresh wave of appreciation and gratitude to the soul.

In *Pablo Neruda, Fifty Odes*, Neruda tells:

> I proposed to myself a foundation for the going back to origins from birth on. I wanted to rediscover many things already sung about, told and retold. My deliberate point of departure was to be like the child’s undertaking, while chewing on his pencil, the obligatory composition assigned on the sun, the blackboard, the clock or the human family. No theme would be beyond my orbit, I could touch everything, walking or flying, expressing myself with the utmost clarity and freshness.

Neruda’s “To my Duties,” from *Ode to Opposites*, captures beauty and deep meaning. He inspires us to compare thoughts, feelings and the real world against their foils. It brings an added insight into the mind and heart of the poet:
While I’ve been doing my job
stone by stone, quill by quill,
winter has passed, leaving
empty places
and dead rooms,
I work on all the same.
I really should replace
all those things I’ve forgotten,
fill the darkness with bread,
inspire hope again. (1-10)

The odes with their simple language and celebration of ordinary life are indeed poetry for the people, a reconciliation of art and ideas with the concreteness of life. The Dionysian sensuality of Neruda’s odes is contagious, joyful and erotic. Each poem conjures up personal associations and appreciations with everyday things that fill our senses and hearts. The imagery is exquisite. Neruda brings to life the most mundanely inanimate of things. Neruda once said, “I confess that to be simple has been my most difficult undertaking.” In his *Elemental Odes* Neruda said “I change tones, seek out all possible sounds, pursue every color and look for life forces wherever they may be.”

In the early twentieth century, with war going on and the economy at the brink, food was surely appreciated. Neruda expressed his own appreciation for what lay on his kitchen table. He writes entire poems on a single subject that most people barely think twice about. In “Ode to Onion,” Neruda takes celebration to the level of worshipping. The poem reveals so many characteristics of the onion that Neruda proves to be a realism extractor with words. Neruda not only worships the onion, but
recognizes it as a living thing. Neruda’s verb choices ‘formed,’ ‘expanded,’ ‘grew,’ ‘appeared,’ depict the vegetable as an ever-changing element. His word choices illustrate an appreciation for his subject and raise it to a level that is almost human.

Neruda has contextualized several of his obsessive concerns – the material conditions of the Americas. In the odes Neruda experimented with a new form – short meter and a pleasing colloquial tone. The odes were meant for collective public readings, hence the simplicity of language and the expression of solidarity with the pain and suffering of the collective. The individual is subsumed in the collective. His “poems no longer could be a sign on the printed, but were to be uttered and declaimed in order to elicit a response,” says Jean Franco.

The Elemental Odes followed Whitman’s lead and were heralded for their insightful brand of delectable simplicity. They gained immediate, universal praise and they were read by people who had never before paid attention to poetry. Here, everything is seen in its best light, everything has value; everything deserves to be the subject of a poem. The verse of the Elemental Odes, were written in a new poetic style: simple, direct, precise and humorous and it contains descriptions of everyday objects, situations and beings. Elemental Odes, is Neruda’s poetry of common, everyday objects, animals and plants. These odes expose his ever-present attention to details of daily life and his love of things made or grown by human hands.

To write simply on simple things was a task the poet undertook consciously, in his odes. The ode is arranged in brief, sinuous lines that flow down the page and connect the poet to the animal, mineral and vegetable world, to people and objects and to the landscape of history. The odes reflect what Neruda saw as both an obligation and a privilege – the naming and re-defining of his world. The poems sing of the
elements and evoke nature. In the clear, simple and resonant lines of the *Elemental Odes*, Neruda sings the praises of this ordinary transient and luminous world.

What is most memorable about these poems is the abundant love that gleams through every line. Praising a chestnut lying on the ground, Neruda sees it as an “intact delight / an edible rose,” imaging the brave nut leaping to the earth to open a new world of life. The themes of the odes propose a social view, about the struggle of the marginalized man, establishing Neruda’s social awareness in the description and detailing of simple essential things. We see his “physical absorption of the world” (Peden 2). Neruda’s odes and their simple beauty remain both timeless and uplifting.