

Entangled Gutenberg:
the house with spiders, in darkness,
Suddenly, a letter of gold enters through the
window.
Thus printing was born

Letters,
long, severe, vertical,
made of pure line,
erect like a ship's mast in the middle of
the page's sea of confusion and turbulence;

algebraic Bodoni,
upright letters,
trim as whippets
subjected to the white rectangle of geom-
etry;

Elzevirian vowels
stamped in the minute steel of the printshop
by the water,
in Flanders, in the channeled North ciphers
of the anchor;

characters of Aldus,
firm as the marine stature of Venice,
in whose mother waters,
like a leaning sail,
navigates the cursive curving the alphabet:
the air of the oceanic discoverers slanted
forever,
the profile of writing.

From medieval hands to your eye
advanced this N,
this double 8 this J,
this r of rey and rocío.

There they were wrought,
much as teeth, nails,
metallic hammers of language:
they beat each letter, erected it,
a small black statue on the whiteness,
a petal or a stary foot of thought
taking the form of a mighty river,
finding its way to the sea of nations
with the entire alphabet
illuminating the estuary.

The paper's eyes,
eyes which looked
at men seeking their gifts,
their history, their loves;
extending the accumulated treasure;
suddenly spreading the slowness of wisdom
on the table like a deck of cards.

All the secret humus of the ages,
song, memory, revolt, blind parable,
suddenly were fecundity, granary, letters,
letters that traveled and kindled,
letters that sailed and conquered,
letters that awakened and climbed,
letters dove-shaped that flew,
letters scarlet on the snow,
punctuation, roads, building of letters.

Yet, when writing displays its rose gardens
and the letter its essential cultivation,
when you read the old and the new words,
the truths and the explorations,
I beg a thought
for the one who sets type,
for the linotypist with his lamp
like a pilot over the waves of language
ordering winds and foam,
shadow and stars in the book:
man and steel once more united
against the nocturnal wing of mystery,
sailing, researching, composing.

Typography,
let me celebrate you
in the purity of your pure profiles,
in the vessel of the letter O,
in the flesh flower vase of the Y,
in the Q of Quevedo,
(how can my poetry
pass before that letter
and not feel
the ancient shiver of the dying sage?)
in the lily multi multiplied
of the V of victory,
in the E
escalated to climb to heaven,
in the Z
with its thunderbolt face,
in the near-orange P.

Love,
I love the letters of your hair,
the U of your look,
the S of your figure.

My love,
your hair surrounds me
as jungle or dictionary
with its profused red language.

In everything,
in the wake of the worm, one reads,
in the rose, one reads,
the roots are filled with letters
twisted by the dampness of the forest
and in the heavens of Isla Negra,
in the night, I read,
read in the coast's cold firmament,
intense, diaphanous with beauty, unfurled,
with capital and lower case stars,
and exclamation points of frozen diamonds.

Yet the letter was not beauty alone,
but life,
peace for the soldier;
it went down to the solitudes of the mine,
and the miner read the hard and clandestine
flyer,
hid it in the folds of the secret heart and
above,
on earth he became another
and another was his word.

Typography,
I am only a poet
and you are the flowery play of reason,
the movement of the chess bishops of intel-
ligence

You rest neither at night nor in winter,
you circulate in the veins of our anatomy
and if you do sleep or fly away during the
night
or strike or fatigue or breakage of linotype,
you descend anew to the book or newspa-
per
like a cloud or birds to their nest.
You return to the system,
to the inevitable order of intelligence.

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

Letters of all that lives and dies,
letters of light,
off moon, of silence of water,
I love you,
and in you
I gather not only thought and combat,
but your dress, senses and sounds:
A of glorious avena,
T of trigo and torre
and M
like your name of manzana.

Ode to Typography
—A Typographic Poem

Paul Neruda
—1964