

# CHILE

*I murmur and invoke your name, an Indian word for cold-  
from America's southern hemisphere you reply  
as a flowering branch newly suspended over my life  
neither twin nor imitation  
but a world of differences  
packed into one long strand of a country.  
the great vertebral Andes  
your axis of haunting deserts, arid plains,  
vineyards, lakes, volcanoes, primeval forests,  
archipelagos, glaciers,  
a ribbon of land tangled in vegetable matter and stone,  
in the untamed and modern,  
oxen-drawn carts and computers,  
always facing the broadest ocean westward  
where the palm of daily fire spreads from the departing sun.  
Never homesick, we wandered the road of our life-line  
north to south  
from vast desolation and unrelieved purple-brown hills  
to lush, planted valleys where*

*"el vino comienza su vida entre el mar y las cordilleras"<sup>1</sup>  
and the markets are praised by the eye and the palate.  
Our wonder opened at your unfamiliar tapestry-  
guanaco, nandu, chirimoya, condor, copihue, cisne de cuello negro,  
and your cities' ubiquitous motor and discord  
to a rustic cabin perched above the beach  
where all past suffering was put aside,  
where our love-making was a mosaic of waves,  
candles, night, and whispers  
continual as the wind spilling over beyond itself,  
and the clouds above us always travelling carelessly  
within the permanent blue arch of vivid freedom. . .*

*In too many places,  
people so wrought with scars dared to speak,  
Pinochet still moves through the riverbeds  
his torture was worse than death,  
his terror held in the ground,  
in only a tissue of time  
there were guitars and the voices of Violeta and Victor,  
now resting in the refuge of history,  
echoes of strength in the strange theater of politics.  
We journeyed in the middle of nowhere-  
the vast Atacaman Desert  
where mummies predate the Egyptians,  
and where copper, iron ore, gold, silver, nitrate  
are pulled out  
and the earth laments  
as the economy sings its riches.*

*Wandering down the coastline, the ocean's white petals  
disappeared on the shores of pulverized shell  
or sand or rock,  
repeating its syllables  
while our faces pressed against bus windows  
everything seen with new eyes  
and without assumption.*

*Arica to Valparaiso- 2,000 kilometers  
the port's ascensores lifted us out from the chaos  
to La Sebastiana, one of three of Neruda's homes  
all filled with eclectic treasures, imagination, communism,  
libraries, enchantment, the illumination of his poetry in every room,  
his woman, his friends, in his beloved country where  
"quiero poner mi brazo en tu cintura exigua*

*y sentarme en tus piedras por el mar calcinadas. . ."<sup>2</sup>  
and Santiago, its hugeness alive and framed by mountains,  
a density of streets, plazas, parks, lovers, buses,  
a world-class subway, movie houses, hotels, ice cream shops,  
universities, churches, racy coffee bars, wonders and disasters,  
the stores that have everything,  
melancholy sunlight filtered by smog,  
a city saturated in allegiance to soccer  
and the tragic grip of Catholicism,  
Alameda's bustle, and almost half the nation's population,  
all in motion.*

*Another thousand kilometers by the train's sleeping car to the far south  
in twenty-two hours orchards became vineyards,  
became forests dense with pine and eucalyptus,*

*became majestic volcanoes silhouetted against sky  
with stands of monkey puzzle trees,  
and Puerto Montt- the unpainted shingles of wooden houses  
beneath grayness, thin drizzles and wet asphalt  
too similar to what I needed to leave,  
we turned north to camp  
with the soft soliloquys of lakes,  
the illegible writing of constellations,  
beneath another face of the moon.*

*We travelled and loved and finally shook with the earthquake on our last night  
as four months passed, I heard Gabriela's words in our good-bye:*

*"la misma ola vagabunda que te lleva te devuelve."<sup>3</sup>*

~JUANITA HUEBNER

1 "the wine begins to come to life between the sea and the mountain ranges."  
(Pablo Neruda)

2 "I want to put my arms around your narrow waist and sit down on your stones  
whitened by the sea

(Pablo Neruda)

3 "may the same vagabond wave that takes you, return you."

(Gabriela Mistral)

