

TAVISTOCK CLINIC
PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDIES

Object Relations in a Love Poem

A Psychoanalytic Reading of Neruda.

Ricardo Readí Garrido

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INTRODUCTION

This essay is an attempt to explore the relation between applied psychoanalytic studies and the work of the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. One poem was chosen in order to develop an in-depth discussion about the poet's expression. This poem is in the book titled "Twenty love poems and one desperate song", and its name is Poem N°15, better known by the first line of its first verse: "I like you quiet because its as if you are absent" ("Me gustas cuando callas porque estás como ausente").

The objective of this work is to explore the unconscious dynamics that provide an underlying meaning for this love poem. As it will be shown, the condition of love poem will not be altered, but will now include a new dimension in which the emotional intensity is not taken for granted. The hypothesis for this work is the following general interpretation: The lover is in unbearable pain because he has lost the woman he loves; he struggles with this fact and is constantly trying to deny it. This is a departure from the traditional interpretation for Poem N°15, in which the lover is speaking to a silent woman.

This essay includes the notion of regression as a state of mind. This means that a healthy personality can make use of very pathological dynamics in order to overcome a markedly distressing experience. In other words, anybody can become a bit mad at times when reality is difficult to bear. The transitory quality of madness is emphasized though, after which a process of integration and awareness takes place. In this sense, mourning provides a valuable example for this process. Even though it is a very common state of mind, it demands an enormous psychic effort in order to be dealt with.

Kleinian developments have extensively explored this alternation of states and the description of their functioning, considering the recursive movement between schizoid-paranoid and depressive positions. This was possible through the evolution of the Freudian theory towards the notion of object relations, in which the concepts of

narcissism and mourning provide the necessary model for a starting point. An attempt will be made to bridge the psychoanalytic developments between Freud, Klein, and Bion, in order to establish the links between mourning and regression, and the way this is experienced by the ego. There is awareness of the fundamental differences between these authors, particularly with Freud, but the focus will be the points in which these contributions meet, as it can be clearly seen a continuum in a line of thought.

The clinical impression of the poet will be avoided, as it is not pertinent or at all possible. For this, no interpretations will be made about Pablo Neruda, and the reflection will only revolve around the poem itself. To facilitate the expression of thoughts, and to highlight the applications of Object Relations theories, the characters will be referred as the ego and the object. This has theoretical implications, as the concept of “self” is not used, but as expressed before the idea is to use an integrative theoretical model for the interpretation of this poem.

To start, a personal translation will be offered. This was done because the translations that were found seem to avoid this interpretation for the poem, and there are also some mayor alterations in its Spanish meaning. Next, a brief biography of Pablo Neruda will be included, as a context for the poem’s cultural significance. Later, an attempt will be made for the application of psychoanalytic theory to this poem. Finally, I would like to explore some aspects that could determine our approach to this particular poem, and how this might affect the interpretation of it.

As an introduction for the suggested translation, I must mention that the effort was focused on the direct translation of words and lines. This inevitably has a cost in relation to the expected structure of a poem, but the idea is explore the subtleties of meaning as a result of the complex use of the Spanish language in the art of Neruda.

PART I: *The Poem.*

“I like you quiet because its as if you are absent.”

Poem N°15, in Twenty love poems and one desperate song.

PABLO NERUDA

I like you quiet because its as if you are absent,
and you hear me from far away, and my voice doesn't touch you.
It seems that your eyes had flown away
and it seems that a kiss is closing your mouth.

As all the things are filled with my soul
you emerge from the things, filled with my soul.
Dream butterfly, you look like my soul,
and you look like the word melancholia.

I like you quiet and its as if you are distant.
And you are as if complaining, you cooing butterfly.
And you hear me from far away, and my voice doesn't reach you:
let me be quiet with your silence.

Let me speak to you also with your silence
clear as a lamp, simple as a ring.
You are like the night, quiet and constellated.
Your silence is as a star's, so far and simple.

I like you quiet because its as if you are absent.
Distant and painful as if you had died.
A word then, a smile would do.
And I'm happy, happy that it isn't true.

PART II: *The Poet.*

Pablo Neruda (1904-1973)

Pablo Neruda was the pen name of Ricardo Eliécer Neftalí Reyes Basoalto. He was born the 12th of July 1904 in Parral, a small town in the South of Chile. His mother was a teacher and his father a railway worker. He was an only child and his mother died shortly after giving birth to him.

Soon after this, he and his father moved to Temuco, a larger town further south. There his father married again, with a woman that will be very significant for Neruda: he called her “mamadre” (as “momother”).

He was thirteen years old when he was published for the first time; it was a poem for the local newspaper. He continued his activities as a young poet, locally publishing and participating in contests. In 1920 he meets Gabriela Mistral (1945 Nobel Prize in Literature), who was the headteacher at his school. She made him read Russian literature which was a great influence for him and his work. That year he started signing his works with the name of Pablo Neruda, in memory of the Czechoslovak poet Jan Neruda.

In 1921 Neruda left the south and arrived to Santiago, to enrol at the Universidad de Chile to study French and pedagogy. He continued working in poetry and actively participated in the magazine of the student’s federation. “Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada.” was his second book (after the 1923 “Crepusculario”), first published in 1924, when Neruda was 20 years old. This work made him the most popular poet in Chile, and is also one of his best-known books worldwide, being the most translated (35 languages). In this book, the most celebrated are “Poema N°15” and “Poema N°20”.

Neruda won the Chilean National Literature Prize in 1945, and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1971. He had a very close relationship with the Spanish poets of the “generation of ‘27”, and particularly a close friendship with García Lorca, from whom

surrealistic influences were expressed in his later work. Neruda wrote a total of 45 books, and some of them have been translated into more than 35 languages.

In parallel to his poetry, he had a very active political life. Between 1927 and 1943 the government put him in charge of a number of consulships, in Burma, Ceylon, Java, Singapore, Buenos Aires, Barcelona, Madrid, Paris and Mexico. In 1945 he was elected Senator of the Republic, representing the Chilean Communist Party. Because of his protests in defence of miners he represented, he had to hide and live in exile for five years, after which political circumstances allowed his return. He was appointed as Chilean Ambassador to France in 1971, but had to return to Chile due to his delicate medical condition. Though they were present from the beginning, Neruda's work evolved in the inclusion of social contents and concerns, bearing with the stamp of his ideological and political views.

Neruda died in September 23 1973, of heart failure. His funeral is remembered as the first massive reaction against the General Government Board presided by Pinochet, leader of the coup d'état that had taken place 12 days before.

PART III: *Applications.*

IN THEORY

For the psychoanalytic interpretation I want to propose, the focus will be the connections that can be made between the concepts of mourning, narcissism and projective identification. The idea is to use a model based on the Object Relations tradition, in which mourning triggers regressive states of mind. An attempt will be made to show that in this poem Neruda expresses a denial of loss, and how this unbearable situation sets in motion a regressive attitude towards the lost loved object.

Freud's contribution to the concept of Narcissism will be the starting point. He explains that when the ego is not allowed to maintain the relationship with the object, the libido that was directed towards it is withdrawn and redirected towards the own ego. Appealing to its autoerotic features and the absence of love or interest for the object, this is considered to be a state of narcissism. Freud baptized this process as secondary narcissism, as a regression to what he considered was an original state of primary narcissism. He also used this model as explanatory for the psychotic phenomena, as the characteristic retreat from reality seen in megalomania and paranoia. Later, Freud would make a link between what is known as the work of mourning and secondary narcissism. He explains that mourning consists in the progressive retreat from the lost object, in the sense that the libido that was invested in this relationship is slowly retrieved by the ego. Reality testing plays a mayor role in this process, as it provides with the evidence about the absence of the loved one, and justifies this turning away from it. Freud explores the effect that this introverted libido has in the ego. He describes a process of identification with the lost object, as an expression of the resistance to abandon this loving relationship. This will have further narcissistic gratifications, as identification justifies this autoerotic

disposition. In this sense, a state of secondary narcissism would be normal as a transition, necessary for the work of mourning.

Klein agrees with Freud in that the mourner goes through a process of very pathological characteristics, but that it seems so natural, common and transitory that it can't be considered as an illness. The loss of a loved person involves phantasies in which primary internal "good" objects are also lost. The consequence of this is the feeling that internal "bad" objects predominate, what is translated into a threat of annihilation. This is how early psychotic anxieties are reactivated in normal mourning. A revisiting of the primitive ambivalence towards the object results from this regression. Klein developed the idea of narcissistic states as the initial disposition of the ego, always in relation to the object; different from Freud's primary narcissism. In narcissistic states the existence of the object is only considered for its effect on the infant's sensations and in whom extreme identification processes lead to a relationship with parts of himself, instead of a proper relation to a separate object. This is the basis for the mechanism of projective identification, in which parts of the self are projected into the object, identifying the latter with these aspects. The intention for this is to control, destroy, and/or rob the object, which involves notorious omnipotent phantasies, with envy as an implicit motive and narcissism as an explicit attitude. The violence and omnipotence of this exchange between projection and introjection blurs the boundaries between the object and the ego, and so between internal and external reality. Klein mentions that narcissistic states imply a withdrawal to this internalized objects and early mechanisms, a withdrawal we can link to her ideas about mourning. At this point, we can understand how the ambivalence mentioned before relates to this regression, and not necessarily to a melancholic result of loss, as described by Freud.

Bion does not deal explicitly with the ideas of mourning and loss, though he developed in depth the importance of the "emotional" presence of the object for the development of the personality. Regarding projective identification, Bion understood that due to the intensity of difficult emotions the infant used this mechanism as a defense, but

he also emphasized its use as a primary model for communication at a preverbal level, of incomparable value for the kind of experiences that the dyad must sort out. He explains that the emotions that are felt too powerful for the personality to contain and integrate are split off and put into the object. If these are allowed to rest there they would undergo some kind of modification by the object's mind, which would lead to a safe reintroduction. The results of this situation would be the integration of a tolerable experience, that strengthens the ego for dealing with further difficulties. What is internalized is the containing function that the object offers, getting to be a quality that the ego gains for the relationship with itself: its own mind as a container. This leads to a lessening of projections that result from an enhanced capacity for tolerating frustration. Thought is developed in this way, and its recurrence generates a capacity for transforming situations in meaningful experience. This is closely linked with a growing of reality sense and a diminished omnipotent phantasy. On the other hand, the absent object is seen as a present bad object, actively responsible for the current distress. A paranoid situation is established in which the need to expel these bad objects through projective identification populates the experience with very dangerous objects. The distortion of reality testing as a relational phenomena and other consequences of an absent, or lost, containing object, allows one to think about mourning through Bion's theory.

AN INTERPRETATION FOR THE POEM

“I like you quiet because its as if you are absent.”

This is the introductory line, usually considered as the title when referred to, of Poem N°15 of Neruda’s “Twenty love poems and one desperate song.” This line is explanatory for the state of mind that will find expression throughout this poem. It appears to be a denial of the loss, when the ego says that he would rather think that his object was just quiet, but still there.

The first verse is a concentration of the dynamics that are present and interrelated, during a regressed mode of functioning. The split state of mind also can be seen through what is an apparently disconnected message.

Denial of reality is omnipotent by definition, though it is interesting the way the ego expresses itself. When saying “I like you quiet...” it can mean both (in the original Spanish version) “I like you becoming quiet” and “I want you to be quiet”. The ego makes an active attempt, in phantasy, to control the object: he wants to make her be quiet to avoid the assumption of her absence.

“and you hear me from far away, and my voice doesn’t touch you.”

At this point it is introduced the means by which the ego is going to attempt a dialogue with the lost object. This line talks about an idea of communication that is central for the concept of projective identification. There is no need to “touch” the object with the words, as the message can be transmitted in some other way and without consideration of any limitations: it is preverbal and omnipotent. There is no acknowledgement of the need of an object to carry on with the communication; the regression to a narcissistic state allows this to happen. It is a narcissistic dialogue of the

self with himself, an interaction with an internal object that has no time or space, with which the actual voice is not required for communication: it is a phantasied dialogue.

**“It seems that your eyes had flown away
and it seems that a kiss is closing your mouth”**

Following the trace of the denial of reality, projective mechanisms seem to play a major part in the perception of the object’s destiny. On the one hand, denial is placed in the object, projected into it by the attribution of the loss of sight. Bion explained how unbearable frustration leads to a destruction of the apparatus for awareness of reality. The senses play a determining part for this, and they are felt to be split off and ruined, avoiding perception. The ego is sending as a possible message: “What is your problem? Haven’t you seen how much I am suffering?”. If the object was present, this projection could be used for communication when saying “It seems that your eyes had flown away”, as it could probably lead to an exchange in which “awareness” would be an issue. Another way in which projection is expressed is by the persecutory anxieties with which the verse is closed. Not only she is not seeing him, but she is not talking to him, and this is because she is receiving a kiss from someone else. This could be the phantasized explanation for the loss: Neruda concisely presents a summary for this story.

**“As all the things are filled with my soul
You emerge from the things, filled with my soul.
Dream butterfly, you look like my soul,
and you look like the word melancholia.”**

Now the poem expresses more concretely the way in which massive projective identification is carried out. The ego fills everything with his soul and no object has a soul on its own. The “filling” suggests the perception of an emptiness in the object, a lack of soul that appropriately matches with the title of “things”. This feature relates to the idea of a lack of will, or initiative, that can be easily replaced by the ego’s own intentions.

“Things” can be easily manipulated, especially if they carry the same characteristics as the ego, or as being an extension of it. Here projective identification is playing a crucial role, as it appears to be the possibility for controlling the object. It has a different quality than in the first verse, now it seems to be a defensive reaction, a need to control, maybe because of the fears of infidelity.

The striking omnipotence expressed in the first lines fades away at the end of this verse. The ego tries to idealize the object by investing it with his narcissistic qualities, his soul. For this, the idea of a “Dream butterfly” does not help, as supposing a projection into something that doesn’t exist, something unreal. The consequence for the ego is twofold: the recognition of an absence of the ideal in reality, and a revision of the own over-valuated characteristics. The doubt about the own narcissism implies, by definition, a moving on from this condition. This painful awareness naturally induces the search for internal good objects to hold on to, but the inner world has suffered a marked impoverishment as a consequence of the excessive use of projective identification. The awareness of the loss, the narcissistic wound implied, the sense of emptiness and hopelessness, all set the grounds for a depressive state, as part of the process of mourning. From a Freudian perspective the word melancholia wouldn’t be appropriate for this description, including the rest of the material in the poem. Even though there is an obvious ambivalence, where the sadness is mixed with a constant aggression, there is no evidence of a previous pathological ambivalence and it can be supposed that this is a reaction to the loss. The way to trace this hypothesis is by the absence of any exhibitionist expression of remorse, self-reproaches or autoaggressive attitudes.

**“I like you quiet and its as if you are distant.
And you are as if complaining, you cooing butterfly.
And you hear me from far away, and my voice doesn’t reach you:
Let me be quiet with your silence.”**

The first line of this verse shows a variation from what is the first line of the poem. When saying: “I like you quiet because its as if you are absent” there is the chance of substituting absence with quietness. The difference now is that there is an assumption that the object is not there. There is no alternative, and the “and” instead of the “because” implies an integration between quietness and distance. This integration supposes some awareness of the situation of loss, and of the object as separated from the ego. The latter is expressed by the perception of demands made by the object, which now appears to have a “soul”. Of course that at this moment all the expressions of the object will be considered as a threat, as it suddenly is not under the ego’s control; the doubt expressed about this responds to the pressure of denial: “And you are as if complaining...” With the adjective “cooing” this struggle seems more manifest. In Spanish Neruda uses the word “arrullo” which is the sound that birds make when interacting affectionately with each other, or the soft and loving singing or talking one person makes to another. Any of these alternatives is the opposite of a complaint. Anyway, butterflies can’t make cooing sounds, so the perception of the object is being distorted in order to make it fit with the idealization that is being dragged unsuccessfully from the previous verse. The ego cannot keep up with the integration and splits again, but with a different affect. There seems to be a depressive mood that is more explicit at this point. The ego tries to speak, but it can’t reach, even though the projection has been carried out in phantasy. This could be seen as a less confident and omnipotent attitude than before, when the line said: “and you hear me from far away, and my voice doesn’t touch you.” There was no full-stop before this line and the voice’s capacity to “touch” made it seem that the ego had taken this mechanism for granted. This depressive tone can also be appreciated with the ego’s introjection. He is identifying with a quiet/absent object.

**“Let me speak to you also with your silence
clear as a lamp, simple as a ring.
You are like the night, quiet and constellated.
Your silence is as a star’s, so far and simple.”**

Resulting from the alternating dynamics between both mechanisms, the following projections will express qualities previously introjected: what wants to be put in the object now includes the aspects that had been recently incorporated from it. This characteristic is directly transmitted from introjection to projection, without modification, because there is no mediating object that has contributed for this. The ego tries to believe that the silence, previously related to a shutting-off, now implies the will to communicate, in what seems a desperate psychic effort to reach for contact with an absent object.

The taking in of the quiet/absent object is also used to avoid the separateness, being used as an alternative to continue the relationship through identifications. This negotiation leads to a progressive distinction between ego and object, though it necessarily begins with a confusion between them. This confusion can be sensed as it is not established whose silence is “clear” and “simple”, or even if these qualities refer to the speaking or to the silence. The idea of speaking in silence is confusing in itself and expresses an underlying ambivalence.

This ambivalence is also expressed later, in the way the silence of the object is interpreted, represented by the starlight. On one hand, constellations imply complex patterns with a symbolic meaning. This may involve a recognition of a frustrating reality in which the quietness (and absence) promotes thought, by making creative “constellations” that symbolize the absent. On the other hand there is a need to reduce the symbol to a concrete aspect, where the star’s silence is perceived as simple, not linked, responding to an attempt for denial. The problem is that with this simplicity the “star” lacks of meaning, making it appear as something distant, foreign and strange: the star’s silence is so far and simple. A lamp appears to be a solution for this conflict, as it provides a controllable alternative for the presence of the object.

Maybe the lamp is linked to a loving memory of the nights shared with the object. The ring is a commonly used symbol for the union in love, related with expectations of commitment. Maybe its the clearness of the memories and the simplicity of the expectations, that are always so difficult to renounce. Freud emphasized, as characteristic of the work of mourning, the withdrawing of the libido from the attachments to the object. This is done bit by bit, in order to prolong the existence of the object as much as the reality testing permits it. *“Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it.”*(Freud, 1917, p.245)

**“I like you quiet because its as if you are absent.
Distant and painful as if you had died.
A word then, a smile would do.
And I´m happy, happy that it isn´t true.”**

This verse represents a final stage in the evolution of the states of mind expressed throughout the poem. The first line appeals to a return to the initial omnipotent attitude. What follows is the consequence of the painful journey that this poem describes. The permanent efforts to get to, or into, the object have been constantly frustrated. Reality gives evidence that the object is not available. Persecutory anxieties result from the incapacity to carry out projective identification: the increasing intensity of emotions can´t be dealt with, leading to expressions of increased desperation and violence. This is how a resource available for communicating overwhelming emotions ends up being (or returns to be) a defensive attack towards the object, serving as a basis for sadistic object relations. The first two lines express the sequence of one same idea, and together a possible lecture could be: “I like you quiet, absent, distant and painful, as if you had died”. The resentment and hatred has built up in such a way that murderous phantasies can easily slip in the rest of the ego´s expressions.

What follows, being the end of the poem, remarkably presents the ego's healthy resources. The awareness of these phantasies is scary, and the omnipotence, which has led the ego to this situation, is set aside. The ego now mentions that it is not much what he is asking for, that a word and a smile would be enough: the presence would do. Finally, the aggressiveness can't be avoided, and the ego mentions that he is glad that the object is not dead, just absent. The tone used for this comment is particularly meaningful as it keeps with the nature of an awareness, and its depressive and reflexive state. The other alternative would have been a denial of the aggression, which could have easily been expressed by adding exclamation marks: "And I'm happy, happy that it isn't true!!" Neruda frequently uses exclamation marks when he wants to give shifts in the affects, besides from when he wants to emphasize a statement; in this case he is expressing a painful integration of these emotions. It seems as an acknowledgement of the state of madness triggered by the loss of the loved object.

ON RELATING TO THE POEM

The devotion and intensity that a person undergoes when being deeply in love can be thought of as the most stirring mental state we can normally experience in adult life. Freud puts it this way: *“The highest phase of development of which object-libido is capable is seen in the state of being in love, when the subject seems to give up his own personality in favour of an object-cathexis...”*(Freud, 1914, p.76). This implies a blurring of the boundaries with the object, that from a Kleinian perspective is regressive, in a relationship in which the ego offers itself in the name of love. This condition depends on idealizations, radical appreciations (splitting), and even a laxness in reality testing: many talk about the temporal hallucinatory admiration for some physical traits, for example. It is interesting to think about the state of being in love as the healthiest expression of a mature ego, being determined by dynamics that in other circumstances would be clearly pathological.

It is understandable that the end of this union would result in unbearable pain. There is a mismatch between a narcissistic state of mind and the absence of the narcissistic gratification of being loved. This can relate to Bion’s idea of “catastrophic change”, in which the breaking down of a personal theory leads to a deconstruction of the previous structure of the mind. Love is a very peculiar subjective theory: it doesn’t depend on the regularity of previous realizations (it could happen for a first and only time) and it presents itself as eternal. This situation of loss is the beginning of a very profound psychic change, which must begin with a return to a schizoid-paranoid functioning, as fragmentation is induced. The link between thinking theories is broken so the containing capacity of the mind is at risk.

As readers we are exposed to both states: the perception of the most passionate and devoted love, and of a man that is struggling not to fall into pieces for his suffering. This coexistence is only possible in a state in which denial is not yet penalized by reality testing, when awareness is not rigidly installed and hope colours the experience. Neruda

has the ability to immerse the reader in this same state of denial. Both love and suffering are so intensely transmitted, that the perception of them implies a conflict in itself. Here, the poet's art in talking about love prevails, and the suffering seems to emerge as a way of loving. In this poem suffering is usually not considered as a result of loss, and its presence is used to enhance the sincerity and profundity of love. This is how denial is enacted by the reader.

Another relevant aspect in the understanding of the denial of loss in this poem, is the unusual loving expression in such an unpleasant experience. This kind of narcissistic wound usually manifests itself with defensive rage and aggressiveness. The latter is implicit in the poem, as explored previously, but with such subtlety that it doesn't collide with love, but intensifies its expression. In this way, the poem has the confusing effect of appreciating the most moving and potent declaration of love, with a depressive tone. In moments of confusion it is necessary to pick up the concreteness of the message, besides the understandable conflict with the idea of expressing love to someone that has caused so much pain. This has direct relation with the consideration of a loving relationship as the main topic.

It is very interesting to explore how these dynamics are manifested in translations made of this poem. In these, a space is provided to distort the message in order to make it fit with the personal interpretation. Of course, the translation presented at the beginning of this work must be received with the same critical attitude.

The translations of Poem N°15 have noticeable differences between them. Usually what varies is the degree in which the translator emphasizes the loving quality of what is expressed in the poem. With more or less effort, translators have avoided most or all indication of aggressiveness or suffering that would affect the primacy of love. In this way, the possibility of loss and mourning is denied.

Due to the limitations of this work only one example of a translation is given in the appendix, even though other translators have adopted a similar attitude with this and

other poems of Neruda. The selected translation was made by a well-known American poet. **The aim is not to focus on the translator;** on the contrary, the use of this translation exclusively obeys to the possibility to show with an example the way in which object relations can be explored with this poem. The idea is to think about how Neruda's expression affects our interpretation of his work.

On comparing this translation with the one presented at the beginning, some general aspects can be emphasized to find some suggestive differences in meaning.

**I like it when you're quiet. It's as if you weren't here now,
and you heard me from a distance, and my voice couldn't reach you.
It's as if your eyes had flown away from you, and as if
your mouth were closed because I leaned to kiss you.**

On this first verse, the object appears to be much more active in being quiet, supposing a presence more than an absence. This quietness also seems transitory, and it is referred at as something common. It says something like: "I like it when you remain silent, as in moments when you are not here". At the end of the verse, the paranoid anxieties in relation to the infidelity of the object are radically denied.

**Just as all living things are filled with my soul.
you emerge from all living things filled with the soul of me.
It's as if, a butterfly in dreams, you were my soul,
and as if you were the soul's word, melancholy.**

On the second verse, now there are "living things" with which the ego relates. This makes a big difference, as it implies the possibility of interaction with a presence, and a lessening of the omnipotent attitude towards "empty" things. It is noticeable the modification of the structure of the verse, giving it an exaggerated lyrical expression in what appears to be a manic reaction to the depressive material.

**I like it when you're quiet. It's as if you'd gone away now,
And you'd become the keening, the butterfly's insistence,
And you heard me from a distance and my voice didn't reach you.
It's then that what I want is to be quiet with your silence.**

Like the first verse, this one starts pointing out what seems to be an intention of the object to be quiet, and as a temporary situation. What follows maintains the sense of confusion, previously described, as the butterfly's insistence represents the lamenting of the object. At the end, the ego shows a different attitude than the original one. When saying "It's then that what I want is to.." the regular quality of this situation is mentioned again. By replacing "Let me.." the desperate tone is minimized. Both alterations avoid the topics of loss or introjection, and suppose an alternative to deal with a familiar situation.

**It's then that what I want is to speak to you your silence
in a speech as clear as lamplight, as plain as a gold ring.
You are quiet like the night, and like the night you're star-lit.
Your silences are star-like, they're a distant and a simple thing.**

The suggestion of an ordinary situation is maintained since the beginning of this verse. In the second line a concrete solution is used to confront its abstract nature, expressing a certainty about the speech being clear and the ring representing a marriage. In the rest, the focus is set on the loveliness of a star-lit night, avoiding all ambivalence expressed in the original poem.

**I like it when you're quiet. It's as if you weren't here now.
As if you were dead now, and sorrowful, and distant.
A word then is sufficient, or a smile, to make me happy,
Happy that it seems so certain that you're present.**

Now, the second line directly expresses the aggressive attitude of the ego. The difference with the other translation is that this appears to be out of context. As an unavoidable piece of material, it makes no sense with the rest of translation's attempt to deny any aspect that would alter the state of great-good-love. Actually, it ends with a strong manic reaction against this thought, as an explicit denial of the loss: "Happy that it seems so certain that you're present"

CONCLUSIONS

Neruda has the ability to express beautifully the ways in which emotions and states of mind develop and entwine. In this particular poem, denial of loss is the aim which fuels all the stirring emotions that the ego experiences. The sequence expressed for this gives account of the process in which awareness takes place: going back and forth, though always acquiring a distinctive quality, from persecutory anxieties to depressive ones, from narcissistic states to mature object relations.

Understanding the flexibility of the mind as a resource for adaptation has a major theoretical and paradigmatic impact. The consideration of psychotic states of mind in early development and in “normal” regressions, besides the usual consideration of psychopathology and psychiatry, allows us to understand the mind’s constant process of development. Meaning is a recurrent achievement, in the day-to-day exchange between inner world and external reality.

Neruda’s art has the outstanding capacity to transmit the narratives of an ego that is overwhelmed by intense emotions: his passion clearly shows in his work. In Poem N°15, this capacity is particularly useful for understanding the movements of the mind. The coexisting presence of mourning and love, being both extremely complex states of mind, invites to explore topics that are essential for development. Loving relationships, of whatever kind, are a main purpose in life (besides, or because, of the fact that survival depends on an initial loving relationship). It is also true that development depends on the changes achieved through the numerous and unavoidable states of mourning that life entails.

The poet’s capacity to be in touch with these states of mind, gives his expressions a beautiful sense of courage and sincerity, similar to the achievements of personal analysis. Like Freud, Klein, Bion, and others, Neruda also can explain that states of madness are always a necessary ingredient for development.

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APPENDIX I: *The Original Poem.*

“Me gustas cuando callas porque estás como ausente.”

Poema N°15, en Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada.

PABLO NERUDA

Me gustas cuando callas porque estás como ausente,
y me oyes desde lejos, y mi voz no te toca.
Parece que los ojos se te hubieran volado
y parece que un beso te cerrara la boca.

Como todas las cosas están llenas de mi alma
emerges de las cosas, llena del alma mía.
Mariposa de sueño, te pareces a mi alma,
y te pareces a la palabra melancolía.

Me gustas cuando callas y estás como distante.
Y estás como quejándote, mariposa en arrullo.
Y me oyes desde lejos, y mi voz no te alcanza:
déjame que me calle con el silencio tuyo.

Déjame que te hable también con tu silencio
claro como una lámpara, simple como un anillo.
Eres como la noche, callada y constelada.
Tu silencio es de estrella, tan lejano y sencillo.

Me gustas cuando callas porque estás como ausente.
Distante y dolorosa como si hubieras muerto.
Una palabra entonces, una sonrisa bastan.
Y estoy alegre, alegre de que no sea cierto.

APENDIX II: *An Example of a Published Translation.*

Poema XV

I like it when you're quiet. It's as if you weren't here now,
and you heard me from a distance, and my voice couldn't reach you.
It's as if your eyes had flown away from you, and as if
your mouth were closed because I leaned to kiss you.

Just as all living things are filled with my soul.
you emerge from all living things filled with the soul of me.
It's as if, a butterfly in dreams, you were my soul,
and as if you were the soul's word, melancholy.

I like it when you're quiet. It's as if you'd gone away now,
And you'd become the keening, the butterfly's insistence,
And you heard me from a distance and my voice didn't reach you.
It's then that what I want is to be quiet with your silence.

It's then that what I want is to speak to you your silence
in a speech as clear as lamplight, as plain as a gold ring.
You are quiet like the night, and like the night you're star-lit.
Your silences are star-like, they're a distant and a simple thing.

I like it when you're quiet. It's as if you weren't here now.
As if you were dead now, and sorrowful, and distant.
A word then is sufficient, or a smile, to make me happy,
Happy that it seems so certain that you're present.