

# Poets

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## The Ocean At Long Beach

*I need an ocean to teach me...*

— Pablo Neruda, "The Sea"

The huge edge of the wind cuts away from me what I think I know.  
That is how a man more myself than I can know  
is visible in the surf — spray twisting to a lit screen,

a man like a brilliant diagram. Every moment, he steps out of hellfires  
with the one he is rescuing his arm's length behind him —  
his grief an ecstasy now as they arrive at blue air.

There they are within chaotic, unearthly rays. Then the wave's jolt,  
its single pulse at its height, spuming thick white —  
he turns to her, her hand losing hold of his hand, its fingers suddenly bleak

and reaching out of nothing into nothing, she vanishes. Every moment,  
the wave shatters and is his abandonment and laceration,  
it hurls and is his dispersal in the froth-lined, sliding tidewater.

I know I stand, living and named, in the place of my skeleton —  
If I imagine the marrow within it I am touched awake  
and I look out at a wave travelling to the far end of the ocean and back.

And what is not human turns, and is also human;  
it turns, and as out of the throats of the presences, lets loose calls;  
they echo in the wild driftwood, the wind-spiralled trees, the sky.

That is how a wave lifts and is a winding man and woman —  
their dark way to and from each other is through the interior of the crest;  
their chant fills and fills the skull of each waiting sandgrain.

The whole air here has a face — the face of an infant those two  
break from as it rises out of immeasurable sleep,  
the ocean gazing out of it with its opening eyes, and the face of the one

we hold in our arms when we hold each other, the one  
we create and can never turn back to see — yet turn, as we have to,  
to try to see, when it leaves us and becomes us looking.

Reprinted from *The Human Shore*  
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