FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Los versos del Capitn
Pablo Neruda
New Directions
978-0-8112-1580-0
(June 30, 2004)

For the contemporary reader, this book will perhaps be redolent of the film *Il Postino* (*The Postman*), which was set on the Isle of Capri, where the poet lived in exile with his lover, Matilde Urrutia, later his wife. The poems were written during that period of his life, but long unpublished because of their intimate intensity.

All but flying off the page with a heightened lyricism, the poems are suffused with the sights, sounds, and smells of the island, and populated with its lush flora and persistent wind. Many of them are cautiously but elegantly structured, with short lines of seven or eight syllables. Although the translator has done an admirable job capturing both the sense and tone of the poems, the original Spanish has an extra flavor, those cadenced lines suggesting an urgent rush of pure utterance, passionate and sometimes rash in their graphic sexuality. The last two poems may be regarded as going on rather too long, as though the poet was determined not to leave out a single breath of his intoxication with his love.

Even in the midst of his amorous paeans to love, and to the woman who inspired it, Neruda was first, last, and always a humanist, a dreamer, and a warrior. The proof resides, over and over again, in such lines as: "If suddenly you do not exist; / if suddenly you are not living, / I shall go on living / I do not dare, / I do not dare to write it
if you die. / I shall go on living. / Because where a man has no voice / there, my voice. / Where blacks are beaten, / I cannot be dead. / When my brothers go to jail / I shall go with them. / … my feet will want to walk where you sleep / but / I shall go on living … / because you know that I am not just one man / but all men."

This new edition of the love poems has been released to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of Neruda's birth. Walsh's introduction to the 1972 edition offers a complete rundown of the book's history, with ample quotes from the poet explaining his reluctance to see the poems published under his name. As a companion volume, the publisher has also released a new edition of *Residence on Earth*, widely considered Neruda's greatest work, with an introduction by Jim Harrison.

A native of Chile, Neruda was in exile for much of his life because of his involvement with Communism. In spite of political prejudice, he gained almost every possible prize for his reckless and determined humanism, and for the brilliance of his poetry, including the Nobel Prize for Literature awarded to him in 1971 in recognition of such exquisite poems as these.

Sandy McKinney