

# Ode to a Large Tuna in the Market


POETRY OUT LOUD 

By Pablo Neruda

Translated by Robin Robertson

Here,  
among the market vegetables,  
this torpedo  
from the ocean  
depths,  
a missile  
that swam,  
now  
lying in front of me  
dead.

Surrounded  
by the earth's green froth  
—these lettuces,  
bunches of carrots—  
only you  
lived through  
the sea's truth, survived  
the unknown, the  
unfathomable  
darkness, the depths  
of the sea,  
the great  
abyss,  
*le grand abîme,*  
only you:  
varnished  
black-pitched  
witness  
to that deepest night.



Only you:  
dark bullet  
barreled  
from the depths,  
carrying  
only  
your  
one wound,  
but resurgent,  
always renewed,  
locked into the current,  
fins fletched  
like wings  
in the torrent,  
in the coursing  
of  
the  
underwater  
dark,  
like a grieving arrow,  
sea-javelin, a nerveless  
oiled harpoon.

Dead  
in front of me,  
catafalqued king  
of my own ocean;  
once  
sappy as a sprung fir  
in the green turmoil,  
once seed  
to sea-quake,  
tidal wave, now  
simply  
dead remains;  
in the whole market  
yours  
was the only shape left  
with purpose or direction  
in this  
jumbled ruin  
of nature;  
you are  
a solitary man of war  
among these frail vegetables,  
your flanks and prow  
black  
and slippery  
as if you were still  
a well-oiled ship of the wind,  
the only  
true  
machine  
of the sea: unflawed,  
undefiled,  
navigating now  
the waters of death.

Notes:

[Read the translator's notes on this poem.](#)

Source: *Poetry* (April 2007)