



My Life with Pablo Neruda

Matilde Urrutia

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Matilde Urrutia was poet Pablo Neruda's lover, muse, wife, and widow. The Nobel-laureate Chilean wrote *The Captain's Verses* and *One Hundred Love Sonnets*—two of the most celebrated volumes of love lyrics in modern Spanish letters—for her. In *My Life with Pablo Neruda*, Urrutia reveals her side of their famed romance. But her book is not simply a love story told by a muse; it is also a document of her life as the persecuted widow of a national hero. Her voice lifts out of the sorrow and violence of the military dictatorship that precipitated her beloved's death in 1973, to reaffirm the power of Neruda's own passionate voice.

My Life with Pablo Neruda opens with the dramatic events of September 11, 1973, with Augusto Pinochet's overthrow of the democratically elected socialist president of Chile, Salvador Allende. Devastated by the coup, the sixty-nine-year-old Neruda dies a few days later of a heart attack. Grief-stricken, Urrutia takes refuge in her memories, reeling back through time to recount the heady early days of her twenty-two-year romance with Neruda. Here, she reveals the birth of *The Captain's Verses* and divulges the secrets of their illicit marriage in Italy. Urrutia then returns to the grim reality she faces in Santiago in the mid-1970s, to describe life under the dictatorship. Harassed by Pinochet's henchmen, she becomes an exile within her own country, mourns the torture and disappearance of loved ones, and finally awakes from the stupor of sorrow and commits herself to using Neruda's words to lash out against the bloody regime.

Reading *My Life with Pablo Neruda* is like spending a long afternoon with Matilde Urrutia. In a conversational style, she brings Neruda to life, and he emerges as a vibrant, playful, and impatient man driven by unbounded appetites. At once humorous and heart-breaking, Urrutia's story makes for a fine domestic complement to Neruda's own lush memoirs.

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