As unlikely as it may seem, this is a book in which the vibrant poems of the great Chilean poet Neruda illuminate the art of Mary Heebner, not the other way around.

Heebner’s inspiration comes in part from a lifelong fascination with the sculptor Auguste Rodin. In her introduction, she recalls sitting on the stairs of her childhood home in New Jersey and looking up at three Rodin watercolors of nude women.

Heebner’s nudes, rendered on handmade paper in watercolor washes and graphite are at once grounded and fragile. Like Neruda’s poetry, they relay what Heebner calls the "naked, exposed, vulnerable" aspects of love.

Heebner’s inspiration comes in part from a lifelong fascination with the sculptor Auguste Rodin. In her introduction, she recalls sitting on the stairs of her childhood home in New Jersey and looking up at three Rodin watercolors of nude women. To accompany her muscular yet fluid work, she has combed Neruda’s vast repository and found a few perfect partners. She paints a female torso in descending shades of terracotta, the paper wrinkling beneath the intense color of the hips. Across the way is "In Praise of Ironing" (Oda a Planchar). She gives us a reclining nude, the body heavy with sleep, the head invisible. On the facing page: "I prefer ... soft verses/ with the intimacy of beds/ where people have loved and dreamed."

This is Heebner’s second volume of Neruda paintings and her second collaboration with Alastair Reid, the superbly gifted translator of Neruda’s work. There is something elemental and moving about these wistful nudes, squired as they are by verses written in the later years of Neruda’s life. One can just picture the poet at home in Isla Negra, looking out at the restless sea, summoning visions of remembered love.