



English Studies in Latin America

Select Poems

Author: Gregory O'Brien

Source: *White Rabbit: English Studies in Latin America*, No. 7 (July 2014)

ISSN: 0719-0921

Published by: Facultad de Letras, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

Your use of this work indicates your acceptance of these terms.





Select poems by Gregory O'Brien¹

CHILDHOOD OF CHRIST IN SANTIAGOⁱ

for Nicanor Parra

The gift of an upbringing. It was
all downhill

from there: the apartment
on Vicuña Mackenna

stray dogs and roaming pepper-grinders
of Bellavista. And Saint Joseph

¹ Born in Matamata, New Zealand, in 1961, Gregory O'Brien is a poet, essayist, visual artist and curator. He travelled to Santiago de Chile three times during 2012-13, while working on the ocean-related art project, 'Kermadec--Art Across the Pacific'. He curated the exhibition of that title which was shown at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Santiago. O'Brien has written extensively about visual art as well as literature, and his most recent publication, CITIZEN OF SANTIAGO, a collaboration with photographer Bruce Foster, appeared in 2013.

Gregory O'Brien

of the numberless light-bulbs, Mary's hair
of many colours; the sky an empty cathedral

in which they would hold hands or pray dutifully
to the god of old bicycle parts, the daily melt; the boy

meanwhile, lost in the blue brightness of
his jacket. It was all downhill from there

as everywhere is
in the sloping city of Santiago. With its

uncontrolled intersections and dance floors,
the confluence of streets a boy might imagine as

the educated body of a woman, or
an education offered

therein; the barrio after an unseasonal
shower, the smooth surface

of a body as it might have
breathed once, or been breathed upon.

IN PARQUE FORESTAL, REMEMBERING A CHILEAN NAVAL VESSEL IN AUCKLAND HARBOUR, MID-
1980s

Esmeralda, slender-waisted
one, may the great tongue
of the Pacific forever

mispronounce your name.
Strolling down this bitter avenue
of lemons and pisco

and fighter planes, O
bony mistress of the dictatorship
the nation's poor will inherit

your scattered body, your
divided family. May
the legless veteran begging

on Avenue Santa Maria
his wheelchair marooned
in six lanes of traffic

thrive and prosper
like the good nation of Chile
and never be run down.

¹These poems were originally published in *Citizen of Santiago*, co-authored by Gregory O'Brien and photographer Bruce Foster.