

Poems of Pablo Neruda

The Beggars

By the cathedrals, clotting
the walls, they deploy
with their bundles, their black looks, their limbs,
ripped tins of provender,
the livid increase of the gargoyles;
beyond, on the obdurate
unction of stone
they nurture a gutter-flower
of legitimized plague, in migrations.

The park has its paupers
like its trees of extortionate
follage and root-forms:
at the garden's margin, the slave,
like a sink at the verge of humanity,
content with his tainted dissymmetry
supine by the broom of his dying.

Though charity bury them
in the pit of their pestilence,
they suffice for the human condition: they prefigure us.
Our wisdom is this: to trample them under,
to harry the breed in the sties of contempt,
servility's creatures, wearing servility's livery —
we may show them our bootsoles
or interpret their lack in the order of nature.
American panhandlers, '48's
offspring, grandsons
of church doors, I do not commend you.
I will not invest you with ivory usages,
the rhetorists' figure, monarchical beards,
or explain you away with a book, like the others.

I efface you, and hope —
who never will enter my discipline's love,
neither you nor your pieties, nor pass to my pity.
I exile your dust from the earth
and those who contrived you to soil
a contemptible image —
till metals remake you
and you issue and blaze like a blade.

There's no forgetting (sonata)

Ask me where have I been
and I'll tell you: "Things keep on happening."
I must talk of the rubble that darkens the stones;
of the river's duration, destroying itself;
I know only the things that the birds have abandoned,
or the ocean behind me, or my sorrowing sister.
Why the distinctions of place? Why should day
follow day? Why must the blackness
of nighttime collect in our mouths? Why the dead?

If you question me: where have you come from, I must talk
with things falling away,
artifacts tart to the taste,
great, cankering beasts, as often as not,
and my own inconsolable heart.

Those who cross over with us, are no keepsakes,
nor the yellowing pigeon that sleeps in forgetfulness:
only the face with its tears,
the hands at our throats,
whatever the leafage dissevers:
the dark of an obsolete day,
a day that has tasted the grief in our blood.

Here are violets, swallows —
all things that delight us, the delicate tallies
that show in the lengthening train
through which pleasure and transciency pass.

Here let us halt, in the teeth of a barrier:
useless to gnaw on the husks that the silence assembles.
For I come without answers:
see: the dying are legion,
legion, the breakwaters breached by the red of the sun,
the headpieces knocking the ship's side,
the hands closing over their kisses,
and legion the things I would give to oblivion.



CHEVRON GRAPHIC

The United Fruit Co.

When the trumpets had sounded and all
was in readiness on the face of the earth,
Jehovah divided his universe:
Anaconda, Ford Motors,
Coca-Cola Inc., and similar entities:
the most succulent item of all,
The United Fruit Company Incorporated
reserved for itself: the heartland
and coasts of my country,
the delectable waist of America.
They rechristened their properties:
the "Banana Republics" —
and over the languishing dead,
the uneasy repose of the heroes
who harried that greatness,
their flags and their freedoms,
they established an opéra bouffe:
they ravished all enterprise,
awarded the laurals like Caesars,
unleashed all the covetous, and contrived
the tyrannical Reign of the Flies —
Trujillo the fly, and Tacho the fly,
the flies called Carias, Martinez,
Ubico — all of them flies, flies
dank with the blood of their marmalade
vassalage, flies buzzing drunkenly
on the populous middens:
the fly-circus fly and the scholarly
kind, case-hardened in tyranny.

Then in the bloody domain of the flies
The United Fruit Company Incorporated
unloaded with a booty of coffee and fruits
brimming its cargo boats, gliding
like trays with the spoils
of our drowning dominions.

And all the while, somewhere, in the sugary
hells of our seaports,
smothered by gases, an Indian
fell in the morning:
a body spun off, an anonymous
chattel, some numeral tumbling
a branch with its death running out of it
in the vat of the carrion, fruit laden and foul.

Pablo Neruda

Pablo Neruda is a Chilean poet and winner of the
1971 Nobel prize for literature. A member of the
Communist Party of Chile, Neruda is presently his
country's ambassador to France.