Fugitive Poets of Fenway Park

The Chilean secret police
searched everywhere
for the poet Neruda: in the dark shafts
of mines, in the boxcars of railroad yards,
in the sewers of Santiago.
The government intended to confiscate his mouth
and extract the poems one by one like bad teeth.
But the mines and boxcars and sewers were empty.

I know where he was. Neruda was at Fenway Park,
burly and bearded in a flat black cap, hidden
in the kaleidoscope of the bleachers.
He sat quietly, chomping a hot dog
when Ted Williams walked to the crest of the diamond,
slender as my father remembers him,
squinting at the pitcher, bat swaying in a memory of trees.

The stroke was a pendulum of long muscle and wood,
Ted's face tilted up, the home run
zooming into the right field grandstand.
Then the crowd stood together, cheering
for this blasphemer of newsprint, the heretic
who would not tip his cap as he toed home plate
or grin like a war hero at the sportswriters
surrounding his locker for a quote.

The fugitive poet could not keep silent,
standing on his seat to declaim the ode
erupted in crowd-bewildering Spanish from his mouth:

*Praise Ted Williams, raising his sword
cut from the ash tree, the ball
a white planet glowing in the atmosphere
of the right field grandstand!

Praise the Wall rising
like a great green wave
from the green sea of the outfield!

Praise the hot dog, pink meat,
pork snouts, sawdust, mouse feces,
human hair, plugging our intestines,
yet baptized joyfully with mustard!

Praise the wobbling drunk, seasick beer
in hand, staring at the number on his ticket,
demanding my seat!*

Everyone gawked at the man standing
on his seat, bellowing poetry in Spanish.
Anonymous no longer,
Neruda saw the Chilean secret police
as they scrambled through the bleachers,
pointing and shouting, so the poet
jumped a guardrail to disappear
through a Fenway tunnel,
the black cap flying from his head
and spinning into center field.

This is true. I was there at Fenway
on August 7, 1948, even if I was born
exactly nine years later
when my father
almost named me Theodore.

Martin Espada

One quick poem by Neruda, just for a taste…

III

Tell me, is the rose really naked

or does it just dress that way?

Why do the trees hide

the splendor of their roots?

Who hears the penance

of the criminal automobile?

Is there anything in the world sadder

than a motionless train in the rain?