

# Paul Jenkins

## WALT WHITMAN IN CHILE

I am only imitating Erastus S. Field  
In a nearby town a hundred years ago  
Who did portraits for hire sturdy clerics in black  
And a woman with an M of lace across her neck  
Returning each night to his private visions  
U.S. Grant for instance shaking hands with Moses

Whitman looks stricken what's a bandbox doing here  
Bristling with policeman above a busy intersection  
Of all the countries he has traveled in his mind  
He's saved Chile for last for its mint-green color  
Its skinny length and danceable name  
And its very crisp grapes

Up comes Neruda face long as an eggplant  
Walt Whitman I don't believe it  
But you've picked the worst possible of times  
Now that they've cleared the bookstalls for Milton Friedman  
And those dime police novels that cost eleven ninety-five  
And I'm about to die

The banner above the street reads Order Under Law  
The hardware store's saucepans on cotton ropes  
Dangle from the tin ceiling like a visitation from Magritte  
No the soul can never be pried loose  
Fills its wineglass to the brim and loves to waltz  
As the generals look on in their creamy linen suits

And you must not lose your joy  
Neruda have you lost your joy  
(How I love Vallejo)

Whitman have you done proclaiming yours  
Marrying everything in sight with your stevedore's embrace  
(How I love gentle Vallejo)

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