

WN Network

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Pablo Neruda: Ode to conger chowder

Choice, cooking, meals, friends, the senses

Fabio Gomes writes: In his Elemental Odes, Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) celebrates the intimate aspects of Chile and Latin America, just as in his *Canto General* he tells the entire history of the country and continent. In this ode to a fish dish, the joy of the entire process of freshly prepared meals from market to table combines with sensory delight in food as central in landscape and in the whole of life.

In the storm-tossed Chilean sea lives the rosy conger, giant eel of snowy flesh.
And in Chilean stewpots was born the chowder, thick and succulent, a boon to man.
You bring the conger, skinned, to the kitchen (its mottled skin slips off like a glove,
leaving the grape of the sea exposed to the world), naked. The tender eel glistens,
prepared to serve our appetites.

Now you take garlic. First, caress that precious ivory, smell its irate fragrance,
then blend the minced garlic with onion and tomato until the onion is gold.
Meanwhile steam our regal ocean prawns, and when they are tender,
when the savour is set in a sauce of the liquors of the ocean and the clear water
released from the onion light, then add the eel that it may be immersed in glory,
that it may steep in the oils of the pot, shrink and be saturated.

Now all that remains is to drop a dollop of cream into the concoction, a heavy rose,
deliver the treasure to flame, until in the chowder are warmed the essences of Chile,
and to the table come, newly wed, the savours of land and sea, so that in this dish

You may know heaven.

Editor's note

'Network' is edited by Fabio Gomes. Its purpose is to remind us of the contribution of the arts to our understanding of food, nutrition, health and well-being. Usually it will simply present the art with a caption but without commentary – though we welcome follow-up letters for publication in *Feedback*. Please send contributions to wn.network@gmail.com