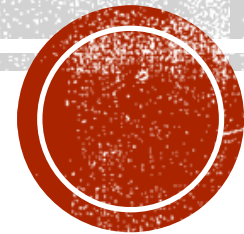


PABLO NERUDA'S POEMS

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TIMELINE



1 AD

5th cent.
BC



20th cent.

Present

Pablo Neruda (1904-1973)



PABLO NERUDA

- Original name: Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto (born July 12, 1904, Parral, Chile—died September 23, 1973, Santiago)
- Poet, diplomat, and politician
- Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971.
- He was perhaps the most important Latin American poet of the 20th century.



“TONIGHT I CAN WRITE”: A MODERN POEM

- The form of the poem: A lyric (fairly short)
- The use of refrain, or lines that are repeated, sometimes with slight alteration (the first line, “Tonight I can write the saddest lines,” is repeated twice; also note lines such as, “I no longer love her, that's certain, but how I loved her” and “I no longer love her, that's certain, but maybe I love her.”)
- Vocabulary: Everyday words (no attempt to use deliberately “poetic” language), at least in the English translation by W.S. Merwin



LOVE, MEMORY AND SADNESS

- Thoroughly modern approach to love:
- i) The fact that love is seldom perfectly reciprocated (note the lines: “I loved her, and sometimes she loved me too” and “She loved me, sometimes I loved her too”). And yet that does not diminish the strength of the love that was sometimes shared, albeit unequally
- ii) The emphasis that love operates in physical, emotional and spiritual planes, and not necessarily in that order (the poem starts with “I held her in my arms / I kissed her again and again...”, but then goes on to say, “My soul is not satisfied that it has lost her. / My sight tries to find her... / My heart looks for her...”)



NO ATTEMPT TO JUDGE THE WOMAN

- The poet is jealous of the fact that his beloved belonged to someone else before their relationship and will belong to someone else now that their affair has come to an end

Note the line: “Another’s. She will be another’s. As she was before my kisses. / Her voice, her bright body. Her infinite eyes.”

However, this is not held against the woman. The poet refrains from passing a judgement on the beloved’s character (like Shakespeare does about the dark lady, for example) and he is not bitter about it. For in the next line he says:

“I no longer love her, that's certain, but maybe I love her.”



THE WOMAN AS A COSMIC FORCE

- Traditionally love poetry has equated woman with nature. Neruda took this established mode of comparison and raised it to a cosmic level, making woman into a veritable force of the universe.”

—Critic Rene de Costa in *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*

- Note how Neruda draws parallels between “the endless sky” and “her infinite eyes”; also note the line, “To hear the immense night, still more immense without her.”



A DIFFERENT KIND OF POEM

- While “Tonight I can write” is a deeply personal poem, the other Neruda poem in your syllabus, “What Spain was like”, is deeply political
- Written during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)
- From the title it is clear he is talking about a country that is no longer the same



NERUDA'S POLITICS

- By 1935, Neruda was serving as consul in Spain, where poets like Rafael Alberti and Miguel Hernandez, who had become closely involved in radical politics and the Communist movement, helped politicize Neruda.
- When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, Neruda was among the first to espouse the Republican cause with the poem “España en el Corazon”—a gesture that cost him his consular post.



POETRY IS POLITICAL

- According to critic Salvatore Bizzarro in *Pablo Neruda: All Poets the Poet*, Neruda came to believe “that the work of art and the statement of thought—when these are responsible human actions, rooted in human need—are inseparable from historical and political context.”
- Neruda reportedly “argued that there are books which are important at a certain moment in history, but once these books have resolved the problems they deal with they carry in them their own oblivion. Neruda felt that the belief that one could write solely for eternity was romantic posturing.”

