



PABLO NERUDA'S "TWENTY LOVE POEMS AND A SONG OF DESPAIR": A NOTE

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Abstract

The article captioned Pablo Neruda's "Twenty Love Poems and a song of Despair": A Note explores his love poems wherein he praises knowledge of body as well as prioritizes knowledge as the foundation of love. He also switches to the youthful passion, sensual poetic beauty which lingers sadness and despondency of grief. Nature is a constant presence in the poems and nature imagery permeates the collection. The poems represent an open curiosity of different dimensions of life like sexuality, solitude, melancholy and loss. Also, he does not idealise beauty and love. Further ontological methods have been adopted.

Keywords: *Love, Grief, Despair, Relationship, Solitude, Loss and Sexuality.*

Introduction

"Twenty Love Poems and a song of Despair" is a collection of romantic poems by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. It was first published in 1924 by Editorial Nascimento of Santiago, when the poet was nineteen years old. This verse collection was Neruda's second published work, after "Crepusculario" and it made his name as a poet. In his love poems Neruda asserts that love without understanding is not love at all but rather an infatuation. He praises knowledge of body, prioritizing knowledge as the foundation of love; the facts of his lover's body are the evidence of his love through which he declares that one cannot love an unfamiliar person. The book "Twenty Love Poems and a song of Despair" is possibly the most mature poetry written by such a young poet. It remains one of the most celebrated and admired books of erotic poetry published in the last one hundred years. The book under discussion was translated by Pulitzer Prize-winning poet W.S. Merwin from the original Spanish text.

The exuberance of youthful passion, sensual poetic beauty, the lingering sadness and the despondency of grief, this collection encapsulates so much. The main themes treated in it are the imbalance of love, the role of the Song of Despair and the change of love in one or more of this collection. The amount of love is not equal and one person loves the other more. In nearly no poem of this collection do both person love each other the same strength. I think the reason why there is never equality is that basically the poet wants to show that even in real life there is never equality of love between two humans. He uses imbalance of love in most of the poems, in some it is difficult to understand, but in others not. Especially in poem 20 "Tonight I Can Write" it is pretty obvious. In the second line of the fourth stanza he writes: "I loved her, sometimes she loved me too". Then he writes in the same poem "She loved me, sometimes I loved her too". That shows that first he loved her more but later his love for her got weaker and her love for him stronger. "Tonight i can write the saddest lines" is another line of this poem. It shows the love in this poem is sad. They can't find a point where their feelings are pretty much the same about each other. When we read this poem we also can find the change of love. There are a few lines where we can notice that the feelings about the other person change. Something happened and consequently the love someone feels for other human changes. It gets stronger, weaker on evens starts. What Neruda is trying to say is that feelings never stay the same for a long or a short time and are continually in flux. For example, the first thing of the first poem is : "Body of a Woman". Later in the last stanza is written.. "Body of my Woman". So there is a change of love between these lines. In the



second paragraph he writes.. “To survive myself i forged you like a weapon” which basically says that he only used her at the beginning. Later in the first line of the third paragraph he writes: “But the hour of vengeance falls and I love you” which shows that he loves her now. So in these lines he says that he fell in love with her and stopped only using her. The line where he says; “I love you” is the point he realises that his feelings got stronger for her than before and she is more important to him than she was in the beginning. The reason why the “Song of Despair” is in the end and not called the 21st poem is that it is not a real part of the collection. It is about the memories of the love and the relationship and his thoughts about it. The line “The memory of you emerges from the night around me” shows his effort to process his feelings in the song of despair. The poet uses the past tense and the present tense to represent the beginning and the end of the love. So somewhere between the first and the last poem (except the song of despair) they stopped loving each other.

“Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair” written by Neruda at the age of seventeen, represents the youthful posing of many enigmas, perhaps it represents the answers to those enigmas. Neruda was one of the first poets to explore sexual imagery and eroticism in his work and become accepted for it. Many Latin American poets had attempted the same, but failed to become popular with their critics. He merges his own experiences and memories with that of the picturesque Chilean scenery to present a beautifully poetic sense of love. Pablo Neruda’s second poetic collection “Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair”, first published by Neruda at the age of nineteen in 1924, caused something of a scandal because of its frank and intense sensuality: “I have gone marking the atlas of your body/ With crosses of fire / My mouth went across a spider, trying to hide/ In you, behind you, timid, driven by thirst”. It later became one of Neruda’s best – loved works, selling two million copies by the 1960s. Why? With image after arresting image Neruda charts the oceanic movements of passion, repeatedly summoning imagery of the sea and whether. “On all sides I see your waist of fog,/and your silence hunts down my afflicted hours,/my kisses anchor and my most desired nests/ in you with your arms of transparent stone”. As irresistible as the sea, love is engulfing, but also departs as mysteriously as it arrived, leaving the poet’s heart a “pit of debris, fierce cave of the ship wrecked” these unabashedly romantic poems wonderfully translated by Merwin are illustrated in this addition by the paintings of Jan Thompson Dicks with aptly fauvist tones and ironic formality.

The book immediately established the author’s reputation and became one of the most widely read collections of poetry written in Spanish. The 20 love poems of the title poignantly describe remembered affairs with two women: a girl from the poet’s native town Temuco and a classmate at the university of Santiago. The collection begins with intensity, describing sensual passion that slackens into melancholy and detachment in the later verses. The closing poem, “A Song of Despair” hopelessly dwells upon bitter emotions.

The collection is divided into two parts, the first part consist of a sequence of 20 poems in Roman numerals and the second part is a single long poem titled “The Song of Despair”. In the first 20 poems Neruda explores love in many forms and stages. He writes about love that have been lost, loves that replace solitude, and loves that haunt lovers forever. At last, in the “Song of Despair” he encapsulates many of the concerns established through the sequence and offers a heightened emotional culmination: ... is the hour of departure oho abundant one! – Neruda was 20 years old when he published this collection and even at his young age he does not fall into the trap of producing abstract representations of life. To the contrary, the poems represent an open curiosity for different dimensions of life like solitude, sexuality, melancholy and loss. Also he does not idealise beauty and love.



Nature is a constant presence in the poems and nature imagery permeates the collection. For instance images of stars, rivers, wind, and sky reappear in the sequence and are also present in the final long poem as nature takes part in the lovers' relationship. The lovers became nature itself, they are immersed in nature. She is an earth-shell, in whom the earth sings. Neruda also uses refrains in some of the poems (viii,xv,xviii,xix,xx). These repetitions, which he uses moderately, give the poems the sensitivity of a prayer, which strengthens the speakers lament and plea.

The tone in the poems is consistent, through the sequence we can feel that these poems are speaking to one another, sharing the same agony and pleasure. However in "A Song of Despair" there is a palpable change in the tone, the speaker is desperate as the memory of a lover haunts him. The imagery in this poem is of a ship wreck and loss: "Oh pit of debris, fierce cave of the shipwreck" and "Oh flesh, my own flesh, woman whom i loved and lost. He also repeats the line". In you everything sank six times and each time its meaning changes as the poem grows in emotional intensity and pain. Also his repetition gives the poem a musical quality that corresponds with his desires to title the poem "a song". Neruda's collection of love poems is read with zest by those who dislike love poetry for its sentimentality and melodrama. In his poems love is complex but the emotions are as real as the oxygen that flows throughout our bodies.

The poems of Chilean Pablo Neruda remain significant in contemporary times through their use of continuing poetic love metaphors and discussion of love. The analysis focuses on Neruda's language and word choice itself in the absence of a historical, political or even a highly contextual personal examination. His love poems in particular, such as in his books "One Hundred Love Sonnets", "Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair"

References

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