Ode to My Socks Study Guide

Ode to My Socks by Pablo Neruda

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Neruda's straightforward but elegant poetic celebration of a pair of woolen socks is one of many odes he wrote to pay homage to the ordinary material objects of daily existence. The poem, written in short, irregular lines of free verse, is poetry at its most pure and elemental, as it communicates in words that all people can understand a simple message about the wondrous nature of the physical world. With no affectation nor any attempt at intellectualizing, the poem uses a series of unexpected and unusual images to sing praise to the beauty and extraordinariness of a mundane but useful object.

"Ode to My Socks" ("Oda a los calcetines") appeared in the second volume of a series of four collections of odes written between 1954 and 1959. The majority of the almost 250 odes praise common things, including a lemon, an onion, salt, wine, the sea, clothes, a watch, and laziness, but there are odes too to personages, from poets to literary critics. These poems marked a significant turning point in Neruda's career as an artist, as he moved away from the high style and overt politicizing of his works written in the late 1930s and 1940s to a plainer form and interest in the particulars of everyday life. However, despite this artistic shift, the odes also show Neruda's continued commitment to the political ideals seen in his other works. A devoted communist, he sought all his life to write poetry for common folk, to speak for and to the dispossessed and reflect their concerns in his poetry. The odes, with their simple language and celebration of ordi nary life, are indeed poetry for the people, a reconciliation of art and ideas with the concreteness life.

Author Biography

Neruda is one of the most-read poets in history. His collection *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* sold over a million copies in Spanish and has been translated into more than twenty languages, including Chinese and Russian. In addition to writing what is considered some of the greatest poetry of the twentieth century, Neruda was an essayist, translator, playwright, and novelist. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. Neruda's career is divided into three periods, each of which shows a particular range of interests and artistic styles. The first period extends from 1921, when he began writing serious verse, to the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. The second is marked by the end of the war in Spain in 1939 to Neruda's return to Chile in 1952 after three years of exile for his political beliefs. The final period begins with his return to his homeland and ends with his death in 1973.

Pablo Neruda was born Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto in the town of Parral in southern Chile in 1904. His mother died a month after his birth, and the family eventually moved to Temuco, one of the last strongholds of the Araucanian Indians. One of the teachers at a girls' school in Temuco was Gabriela Mistral, who would later become a Nobel Prize-winning poet. She took a liking to Neruda, and introduced him to the classics. Neruda left Temuco at age seventeen to study French at the University of Santiago. In 1921 he won first prize in a student poetry contest. In 1922 he took the pen name Pablo Neruda (after the Czech writer Jan Neruda), declared himself a poet and activist, and left his formal studies. In 1923 he self-published *Crepusculario*. The following year the deeply erotic and lyrical *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* appeared and secured his reputation.

In 1927 Neruda obtained an appointment in the Chilean diplomatic service. He was posted to the Far East, where he suffered loneliness and isolation at being separated from his home and his cultural roots. The poems in the first volume of the collection *Residence on Earth* (1933), written during his time in Asia, use hallucinatory and sometimes surreal images to depict what he saw in the world around him. Back in Chile in 1933, he met the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca. In 1934 Neruda was sent to Spain as the Chilean consul, where he continued his friendship with Lorca and published the second installment of *Residence on Earth* (1935), which continues the inward-looking perspective of the previous volume. Neruda's life and outlook changed with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, during which he observed horrible violence and the execution of Lorca. Neruda's poetry thereafter became less personal and more directed at depicting social and political realities. Neruda had always been active politically, and his sympathy with the communist cause deepened during this time. After Spain, Neruda was posted to Mexico, where he was criticized after announcing his support for the Soviet Union. He returned to Chile in 1943, and wrote his epic poem *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* after visiting the Incan ruins. In 1949, Neruda's criticism of the right-wing government in Chile forced him to flee the country. While in exile, he finished the Marxist-inspired epic *Canto general de Chile* (1950), was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize, worked for the European Peace Party, and met his

third wife, Mathilde Urrutia. Neruda returned to Chile in 1952, when the government eased its restrictions on the activities of left-wing activists.

The publication in 1954 of *Odas Elementales* (*New Elemental Odes*) marked a turning point in Neruda's poetry. With these simple verses he turned away from political concerns and the heroic tone of the epic to a humorous and sometimes ironic celebration of common objects and experiences. His language became plainer and free of overt political purpose. The use of an unaffected form and the celebration of simple objects was seen again in his second collection of odes, *Nuevas odas elementales* (*New Elemental Odes*) in 1956, in which "Ode to My Socks" appears. Neruda wrote prolifically for the next twenty years, producing works in a wide range of styles, from the simple and humorous to the politically didactic to the erotic. When Salvador Allende was elected President of Chile in 1970, he appointed Neruda as ambassador to France. Neruda was serving at the Chilean embassy in 1971 when he received word of his receipt of the Nobel Prize. Neruda returned to Chile in 1973 after being diagnosed with cancer, and lay ill when he heard of the violent military uprising in his country. He died in Santiago eleven days after the military coup that ousted Allende, on September 23, 1973.

Plot Summary

Title

The title alerts us to its purpose: it is a poem in praise of socks. The ode is a poem of celebration or exultation. Originally odes were elaborate and stately compositions sung in public in honor of a great personage, event, or season. The form dates back to ancient Greece. The poet Pindar, who lived in the fifth century B.C.E., composed poems of praise or glorification in highly structured, patterned stanzas. The odes of the Roman poet Horace who lived in the first century B.C.E used a simpler lyric form. European Renaissance odists Pierre de Ronsard and Andrew Marvell wrote in both Pindaric and Horatian form. The odes of nineteenth-century English poets such as John Keats and Percy Shelley tended to be freer in form and subject matter than the classical ode. However, the ode in general is primarily formal in style and about a serious subject. "Ode to My Socks," like all the poems in Neruda's books of odes, announces itself as a poem of celebration and praise, but the objects that are the subject of glorifi- cation, surprisingly, are common, everyday things. Few people would expect that a humble pair of socks would be candidates for exultation in a poem, but this is what the title announces to readers will be done.

Lines 1-16

The poet explains that he received as a gift from Maru Mori (who, although this is not mentioned in the poem, was the wife of the distinguished Chilean painter Camilo Mori) a pair of woolen socks that she knitted for him. They are so soft that they feel like rabbit fur. Immediately the poet elevates the stature of these otherwise simple objects by likening them to jewel cases. But they are no ordinary cases; they seem to have magical yet earthy properties and he imagines them to be woven with "threads of / dusk / and sheep's wool."

Lines 17-45

The poet continues to exalt the socks by comparing them to various objects. He uses a series of images that would ordinarily never be used to describe a pair of socks. He says that clothed in the socks his feet became like woolen fish. They are two long sharks the color of a blue gemstone that are shot with a golden thread. The use of mixed metaphors emphasizes the wondrous nature of the socks. His feet in the socks he says are also two huge blackbirds, and two cannons. These unusual images, which are so unlike each other, call attention again to the extraordinary quality of these socks. The poet says they are celestial, again emphasizing their otherworldly nature. The socks are so beautiful that he feels his feet are not worthy of them. He compares his feet to two tired old firefighters and the socks to be made of woven fire. His feet are

unacceptable to him because he thinks their plainness will put out the fire of the luminous socks.

Lines 46-78

Despite his feelings of inadequacy in the face of the beauty of these incredible socks, the poet resists the temptation not to wear them. He does not save them, he says, the way schoolboys keep fireflies in bottles or scholars store rare books on their shelves. He does not make the mistake of sacrificing their beauty and utility by preventing them from serving their function or allowing them to be enjoyed. He does not treat them like some precious animal that is placed in a gold cage and fed with birdseed and ripe melon, that is not allowed to do what it is supposed to do. With these images the poet again emphasizes the rare and exotic nature of these socks. The poet says he does not save the socks but rather wears them, but not without feelings of remorse. Indeed he feels a mixture of pleasure and pain, just as the explorer in the forest must do when he kills a rare deer and eats its tender and succulent young flesh. Despite all the feelings of admiration he has and the feeling that he is not good enough for these socks that perhaps should be kept as pristine as when he received them, he sticks out his feet resolutely and pulls on the socks and even covers them with his shoes.

Lines 79-88

There is a moral to the poem: Beauty and goodness are twice as beautiful and twice and good when they exist in two woolen socks in wintertime. Presumably they are doubly beautiful and good not only because they are two in a pair, but because they are beautiful and good, gorgeous and useful, and extraordinary and ordinary.

Summary

"Ode to my Socks" is Pablo Neruda's short but eloquent poem about the exquisite beauty and soul satisfaction found in mundane objects, a pair of socks, found in everyday life.

As the poem begins, the narrator has received a gift of a pair of hand knitted, woolen socks from a woman named Maru Mori. The narrator is amazed that this woman could have made such fine items as soft as rabbits with her own big hands, which are like those of a sheepherder.

Slipping his feet into the socks feels to the narrator as if he is encasing his feet in jewel cases with mystical qualities, held together with bits of twilight and goatskin.

The narrator considers his feet entirely inappropriate to wear such beautiful items and compares his feet to fish, two long sharks, immense blackbirds, and cannons, which are also elements that would never benefit from such luxurious warmth.

In addition to being inappropriate, the narrator's feet are also deemed unworthy to wear such heavenly comfort. Comparing his feet to two decrepit old firemen, the narrator claims his feet to be unworthy of such beauty and warmth provided by the glow of the new socks.

Although the socks are exquisite, the narrator intends to wear them and not put them away for special occasions or "save them somewhere as schoolboys keep fireflies." The socks will not be stored away as if they are sacred, even though they are special. The narrator will also not display the socks in a cage and provide birdseed and pieces of melon every day.

Owning these luscious socks engenders the same feelings that a hunter must feel when forced to eat the rare and beautiful deer he has stalked and killed. In spite of all the conflicting emotions about using these precious items, the narrator pulls on the socks and then his shoes and decides that there is twice the beauty in an object, and that anything good is doubled when there are two woolen items for the winter.

Analysis

As indicated by the poem's title, the style is in the form of an ode, which is a structured telling of a story or subject about which the author has special feelings. During his career as one of South America's most noted poets, Neruda had created quite a collection of odes dedicated to ordinary objects, one of his most famous being this tale about the gift of a pair of woolen socks.

The style of an ode is usually full of feeling, and Neruda has summoned both elegance and practicality when describing his socks. Typically, an ode has the pattern of the

identification of the subject, two separate turning points, and then the declaration of the moral of the story.

In this ode, Neruda quickly names the handmade gift of socks as the subject and makes his first point by declaring the beauty of the socks. As another point of thought, Neruda tells the reader what he does not intend to do with the socks. Finally, the moral of the ode is that a thing of beauty is twice as beautiful especially when considering woolen socks in the wintertime.

In addition to the simplicity of the language and the brevity of the lines, there is also beautiful visual imagery used by Neruda. The socks are first compared to the softness of rabbits. The sock-encased feet take on the qualities of "two fish made of wool" and "two long sharks sea-blue." Neruda also describes his feet as two blackbirds and two cannons, both descriptions that leave no question as to the intended visual image.

Neruda also uses many references to colors in the poem such as "Violet socks... shot through by one golden thread," "put them into a golden cage," "feed them pieces of pink melon," and "the very rare green deer." In this way, Neruda rises above the mundane and asks the reader to consider the full affects of woolen socks, not just for their warmth but also for the feelings of comfort and pampering which are evoked bringing to mind exquisite images in brilliant detail.

Neruda provides an element of irony in the poem by elevating a common item; such as, a pair of socks, to a position of beauty. He then confides that the real beauty of the socks is in their usefulness. "What is good is doubly good when it is two socks made of wool" is not just Neruda's practicality expressing the need for two socks, but also his expression of the socks' beauty and utility.

Ultimately, Neruda wants the reader to understand the most important theme of the poem as the importance of finding reasons to celebrate everyday objects. Neruda invites the reader to contemplate mundane objects, move beyond functionality, and consider the ethereal qualities and transformations, which these items can bring to a person's life.

The topic of this ode is about a pair of socks, but the author's volumes of similar odes invite readers to reflect on not only the items about which Neruda writes, but all things which a person encounters which may have transformative qualities and add a small element of magic to every day.

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Themes

The Extraordinary in the Ordinary

As with the majority of the odes he wrote from 1954 to 1959, in "Ode to My Socks" Neruda exalts one of the basic things of daily existence. The poet describes the object of his celebration in such a way as to make it achieve an otherworldly status. It becomes clear that what normally might be taken for granted as being ordinary is actually quite extraordinary. The mundane objects described here, two socks, the poet in fact finds quite remarkable soft as rabbits, like jewel cases, made of a nonmaterial substance (dusk) as well as wholly material sheep's wool. The socks transform the poet's feet, so that they become sharks, blackbirds, cannons. They are celestial, beautiful, luminous woven fire. The various similes used to describe the socks reinforce the idea of the enormous possibilities in the things of the world, and of grandeur and power (the poet's socked feet are compared to cannons) in unexpected places. The poem has the effect of turning readers' eyes outward to the world, to notice it in its detail, and to take a deeper enjoyment of the simple pleasures of life to "stop and smell the roses," as it were. There are things around us that often go unnoticed but which, when we stop for a moment to consider, it startles us to remember that they are essential to our daily existence and quite lovely in their own way. If we examine them closely we may in fact find that they are remarkable and extraordinary. The poem is very much a celebration not only of socks but of the very real objects of the material world that affect us deeply. The poet conveys this message of the wonder of the ordinary world with honest simplicity and a touch of whimsy, since it is indeed a mere pair of socks that arouses such emotion in him.

The Beauty of Utility

In the preface to *Nuevas odas elementales*, in which "Ode to My Socks" appears, Neruda says that he wants his poems to "have a handle. . .to be a cup or a tool" to be useful. His poems are intended to bear witness to the wonder of the everyday world. This injunction is beautifully borne out in this poem, which is useful of its own accord because of what it shows readers about the extraordinariness of life, and also because it celebrates the beauty in the usefulness of a pair of socks.

In the third stanza, after having glorified the socks by comparing them to blackbirds, fish, cannons, and fire and confessing that he feels unworthy of their greatness, the poet says that he resolved nonetheless to wear the socks. Wondrous, heavenly, and audacious as they are, he does not hide them in a drawer or admire them apart from their intended purpose. He explains in detail what he does *not* do with the socks. He doesn't save them like fireflies in a bottle, or keep them like sacred documents, or lock them up in a cage. To do so would be to not allow the socks to function as they were intended to. These marvelous socks are, after all, still socks, and they are to be worn to be *used*. They are certainly beautiful celestial, in fact but their purpose is to

keep his feet warm. So he summons his courage to wear them, despite the remorse that tugs at him. He feels a sense of guilt at taking what will be a base, bodily pleasure rather than an aesthetic or intellectual enjoyment in the celestial socks. There is a tension here between the beauty and the utility of the sock. But still he sticks out his feet, and pulls them on.

At the end of the ode, the poet explains gently what the moral of the tale is. The statement of it is somewhat ambiguous, as he says merely that beauty is "twice beautiful" and goodness "doubly good" when one is talking about a pair of woolen socks in the wintertime. He stresses the dual function of the socks. They are doubly beautiful and doubly good because there are two of them□which is of course essential for socks to serve their purpose. And they are not only beautiful, they are good. The wonder of these socks is in their being objects to be admired *and* to be used. There is really no need for him to feel remorse because there is no tension between the beauty and utility of these objects; their beauty is also in their utility. Earlier in the poem the poet had praised the socks' incredible, otherworldly qualities, but at the end he pointedly refers to their goodness in wintertime, as useful objects that will keep his feet warm when this is most needed.

Style

Style

"Ode to My Socks," like so many of Neruda's odes, is charming in its directness. There is an intimacy that is created immediately with the use of the first person. The poet begins by telling a personal story; these are socks that were given to him by a certain person, Maru Mori, that she knitted with her own hands, but which he finds to be endowed with an almost unbearable beauty. The entire tone of the poem is simple without being simplistic, direct without being artless, plain yet sophisticated. The moral offered at the end comes across as unaffected wisdom.

The simplicity of the poem is surprising considering that it is an ode, which traditionally is a solemn and elaborately structured poem. Choral odes of ancient Greece (so called because they were sung by the chorus during the performance of a drama) had a three-part structure of strophe (literally "turn"), antistrophe ("turning the other way"), and epode ("added song"). This structure marks a turn from one intellectual position to another and then a recounting of the entire ode subject. Neruda to some extent follows the conventions of the ode. He chooses a subject to praise (albeit one that is traditionally not the subject of such lavish exultation). His first "turn" is to celebrate the socks' beauty by comparing them to jewel cases, sharks, and so on. He "turns the other way" by saying what he did not do with the socks. Finally he offers a moral to the story by explaining obliquely why these socks are worthy of his admiration□and why he is in fact worthy of them.

In "Ode to My Socks," as again he does in his odes, Neruda uses very short, irregular lines. This emphasizes their simplicity, forcing a slower reading and making the poems sound more like natural speech and less artificially "poetic." But they are very clearly poems from their structure. This is in keeping with Neruda's desire to write poetry for those who did not normally read it, to represent life for "ordinary people" in a way that they could enjoy, to write as a poet of the people. Fernando Alegría, in his discussion of the odes, also points out that the short lines serve a function within individual poems. He says that Neruda does this not out of whimsy but "because he believes this type of line performs a definite functional purpose. . .These short lines are like the skeleton of a Baroque body. In its aerial structure, the Nerudian *Ode* is like a tall building made of glass and steel to support an invisible but formidable mass. . .In this poetic architecture every corner line becomes a live and resplendent fire of images which give birth to other images. . . ." The diction used in the odes is also straightforward. This is poetry that can be enjoyed by anyone, but has subtleties and artistry (including subtle internal rhymes that are not captured in translation) that make them interesting and textured.

Imagery

Neruda uses a great many images in his poem of very few words to describe a lowly pair of socks. The images are surprising and certainly not expected to be used of hosiery. The socks' softness is compared to rabbit fur. The shiny, dark bluish/black color of the socks is captured by comparing the poet's stockinged feet to blue sharks, blackbirds, and cannons. The socks are otherworldly, not quite material (they are made partly of dusk) and his feet are honored to wear them. Their luminosity is emphasized as they are likened to sharks the color of the lapis lazuli stone woven with gold thread and also to fire. That they are precious to the poet is noted as they are compared to jewel cases and even something he had a wild impulse to place in a gold cage. They are like a rare and exotic animal. All of these images that are used as comparison with the socks emphasize their extraordinary nature. They also contrast with the simple declaration at the end of the poem, where the poet describes them finally as simply as "two / woolen socks / in wintertime." The socks are all the things the poet has said; they are an aesthetic wonder. But their beauty lies also in their usefulness, and that is simply in being socks that make feet warm in wintertime.

Historical Context

Chile in the Early Twentieth Century

When Neruda was born in 1904, Chile had been independent from Spain for eighty-six years. Neruda's life was little affected by World War I, during which Chile remained neutral and prospered economically because of wartime demand for nitrates, one of the country's chief natural resources. However, he grew up seeing considerable poverty in his home province. From early on, he was concerned with the plight of the peasants and workers around him, and he identified with the socialist cause that aimed at addressing the economic problems of Chile's poorest citizens. After World War I, Germany began to export synthetic nitrates, and the Chilean economy collapsed. Strikes erupted from all sectors of society, and conflict developed between liberal and conservative elements. The liberals gained power with the 1920 election of Arturo Alessandri Palma, but he was unable to pass his program of reform through Congress. During these turbulent years, Neruda lived in Santiago beginning his career as a poet and political activist. In 1924 a group of military figures launched a coup d'état in order to force liberal reforms. The dictatorship they formed was overthrown early in 1925 in another military coup. A new constitution was written that reformed the electoral system, reduced the power of the Congress, and conferred greater freedoms to individuals. Alessandri was restored to the presidency for less than a year. Emiliano Figueroa took over as president in 1926, and Carlos Ibáñez del Campo ruled from 1927 until 1931. It was during this time that Neruda obtained his first posting in 1927 as a diplomat. The worldwide depression that began in 1929 caused severe economic problems in Chile. After several more coups and changes in government, Alessandri was elected president again in 1932 and served until 1938.

The Spanish Civil War

Neruda did not escape political and social turmoil by living abroad. He was in Spain when the Civil War broke out in 1936. In this conflict, conservative forces in Spain overthrew the second Spanish republic. The war pitted Nationalists, led by the wealthy landowners and aristocracy, Catholic Church, military leaders, and fascist Falange party, against the Loyalists, which consisted of liberals, anarchists, socialists, and communists. Many of Neruda's close friends and associates, including the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca, were executed by Nationalist forces. Neruda aided in the Loyalist cause, organizing support for political refugees and helping them to find asylum in Chile. The events of the war had a profound effect on Neruda, and he wrote: "The world changed, and my poetry has changed. One drop of blood falling on these lines will remain alive in them indelible like love."

Chile in the 1940s and 1950s

In 1943 Neruda returned to Chile after a diplomatic posting in Mexico. The president in Chile at the time was Juan Antonio Ríos, a member of the Radical Party that was a part of a coalition of democratic groups united in a popular front. Ríos governed as a moderate as tensions escalated between factions of Chileans who supported the poli cies of the United States and those who supported the Soviet Union. Ríos entered the war on the side of the United States in 1944. During the war, the Communist Party emerged as one of the strongest political organizations in Chile, and Neruda was a prominent member. During this time, he continued to write poetry with a distinct sociopolitical message.

After the war the 1946 presidential election was won by Gabriel González Videla, a Radical Party leader who was supported by a left-wing coalition consisting mainly of the Radical and Communist parties. Videla's coalition lasted for less than six months. The Communists were removed from the cabinet in April 1947. In 1948 Neruda published an open letter denouncing Videla, and was forced into exile. The same year hundreds of other communists were imprisoned and the Communist Party outlawed. A military revolt led by former President Ibáñez was suppressed. Manifestations of social and labor unrest were frequent in the following years; in 1951 strikes occurred in almost every sector of the economy. A popular reaction against the traditional parties resulted in the election of General Ibáñez the following year.

In 1952 Neruda was permitted to return home, and he settled in Isla Negra, a seaside village on the Pacific coast of Chile, with his wife Mathilde. It was here in 1954 that he began composing his odes. "Ode to My Socks" appeared in 1956 in the second volume of these simple verses. The political voice that characterized his poetry of the earlier years is clearly softened in these direct poems that sing of the humble but extraordinary beauty of the everyday, praising such mundane things as an artichoke, clothes, fish stew, a tomato, girls gardening, and a fallen chestnut. Neruda declared that he wanted to write poetry for the people, for the peasants and workers who had helped him during his years in exile, for common folk who were unfamiliar with the conventions of sophisticated poetry. This aspiration seemed to stem from his lifelong commitment to communism and his desire to speak for and to the unrepresented. The poems also make clear the philosophical underpinnings of Neruda's position as a communist. Communism has its basis in the teaching of Karl Marx, who stressed the material (as opposed to immaterial, metaphysical, or spiritual) nature of the world and its effect on historical events. The things of the world and humans' place in it, according to Marxists, are what shape history. So then the odes, which celebrate the material world, mark a turning point in Neruda's poetry because they move away from overt politicizing but reveal still the poet's enduring commitment to social justice and communist ideas. As Neruda himself said, "Poetry is like bread, and it must be shared by everyone, the men of letters and the peasants, by everyone in our vast, incredible, extraordinary family of man."

Literary Heritage

Chile is a long, narrow country on the west coast of South America. It is about ten times as long as it is wide and stretches 2,650 miles from north to south. It has a varied climate and topography, from its deserts in the north to rugged, snow-capped central mountain ranges to its rainy south. For nearly 300 years, Chile was a Spanish colony. It gained independence in 1818, after which it has been ruled by mostly by democratically elected governments, with the exception of military dictatorships in the late 1920s and then from 1973 to 1989. About two-thirds of Chile's people are of mixed Indian and Spanish ancestry. The descendants of the original Araucanian Indians form a tiny minority. Spanish, the official language, is spoken by nearly all the population with the exception of some Indians, who retain their own tongues. About 76 percent of the population is Roman Catholic.

This small Latin American country has enjoyed a particularly rich literary heritage. Chilean writers who have reached international stature in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries include the novelists and short story writers Joseé Donoso, Joaquin Edwards Bello, Manuel Rojas, Isabel Allende, and Nicanor Parra; the playwright Ariel Dorfman; and the cubist poet Vincente Huidibro. The poet Gabriela Mistral won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1945, and Neruda won the prize in 1971.

Until the early nineteenth century, most of Latin American literature was indistinguishable from that of the Spanish conquerors. In the early twentieth century the literary movement called *Modernismo* (modernism), which had its roots in French and American poetry of the late 1800s, swept Chile and the rest of the continent. *modernismo* was influenced in part by French symbolism and the poetry of North American poets such as Edgar Allan Poe. Practitioners of *modernismo* tended to use elegant form and exotic images. When Neruda began writing in the early 1920s, the poetry of his Chilean contemporaries contained elements of latenineteenth- century Spanish classicism as well as *modernismo*. Mistral was one of the few poets who rebelled against tradition and the elegant, mannered style of modernismo to take on a more authentically Chilean voice as she wrote of the suffering of children, peasants, and Indians. Neruda was certainly influenced by *modernismo* early in his career, but he too moved in the direction of Mistral, declaring that his artistic goal was to liberate Latin American poetry from the nineteenth century and bring it into the twentieth century by returning it to its cultural roots. Neruda's innovative techniques and contributions, including a concern with politics and social issues, attention to the sensuality of the present, use of tight metaphors, elaborate imagery, interior rhyme, repetition, and alliteration, and the use of multiple points of view, have had a revolutionizing influence on subsequent Chilean poetry and indeed all of Latin American literature.

Critical Overview

Neruda wrote four volumes of odes from 1954 to 1959. *Nuevas odas elementales*, in which "Ode to My Socks" appears, was the second volume in the series and was released in 1956. Two more volumes followed in 1957 and 1959. Neruda apparently began writing the poems for a weekly column in a newspaper in Venezuela, which accounts for their simple, public style. Although his four books of odes were published separately, Neruda said that he thought of all his odes as making up a single work, as they tell "a history of the time, of diverse things, trades, people, fruits, and flowers, of life and my vision. . ." When the first collection, *Odas elementales*, appeared in 1954, it met with resounding success from all quarters in Chile, from ordinary readers to literary figures to academic critics. Even readers who were unsympathetic to Neruda's politics accorded them unequivocal praise. The conservative writer Hernán Diaz Arrieta wrote in the Chilean journal *El Mercurio* in 1955:

> Some say this clarity of expression was imposed by the Soviets so that Neruda would be able to reach the masses. If that were true, we would have to forgive the Soviets for an awful lot. . . Bitterness gone, complex obscurity banished, it was to fear that poetry would reach excessively down to the lowest common denominator and fall into prose. Well, never has the poetry of Neruda seemed more authentic. . . We would like to place a limit on its praise. It is said that no judgment is good without its reservations. But we can find none. We even forgive the poet his Communism.

The praise for the odes has continued almost unabated since their initial publication. René Costa, in his 1979 study of Neruda's works, mentions that some early critics did complain that the trivial subjects were not appropriate for the solemn form of the ode. The objects glorified□from flowers to fruit to clothes□seemed too trivial to be thus lauded. With Neruda's fourth volume of odes, Costa also explains, some readers began to become concerned with what seemed to be the sameness of the odes, with their similar form and subject matter of the concrete things of daily existence. However, as might be expected of a great artist, just as the public began to tire of the odes, Neruda produced a new and very different work, the complex and politically infused *Estravagario* (1959).

All of Neruda's poetry has received tremendous critical attention in Spanish, and the odes are no exception. There has been less scholarly work done on them in English, but the many collections of Neruda's odes that have been published in English are an indication of their popularity. The release of the feature film *Il Postino* in 1996, about Neruda's stay on a small Italian island during his political exile and its effect on the humble villager who delivered his mail to him, raised interest in Neruda's poetry, including the odes. There are at least five collections of Neruda's odes translated in English, including *Odes to Common Things*, translated by Kenneth Krabbenhoft (1994);

Fifty Odes , translated by George D. Schade (1997); *Selected Odes of Pablo Neruda*, translated by Margaret Sayers Peden (1990); *Neruda's Garden: An Anthology of Odes* (1995); and *Odes to Opposites* (1995).

Critics writing in English have admired the odes for the immediacy, simplicity, and unaffected beauty of the poems. Margaret Agosin remarks on the odes' perfect melding of theme and form. Fernando Alegría says that with the odes Neruda "inject[s] his readers the joy of living which springs from a profound understanding of the inner miracle of reality." And Salvatore Bizzarro comments on the odes' high lyricism. There have been no indepth treatments of "Ode to My Socks" in English, but the critics who have remarked on the poem briefly see it as a fine example of Neruda odic art, with its vivid images, gentle philosophizing, whimsical tone, and concern for the beauty and utility in the everyday.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Rader has published widely in the field of twentieth-century poetry. In the following essay, he considers the didactic content of "Ode to My Socks." "Ode to My Socks" is a poem about poetry. Or, at least it is a poem about Pablo Neruda's idea of what poetry is and what it should be. In some of his other odes, like "Ode to Salt," "Ode to a Watermelon," and "Ode to Laziness," he does what he does best□he shows us the magic in the mundane. He shows us how poetry is everywhere, and all we have to do is change how we look at the world. Neruda achieves this effect through his brilliant play with ekphrasis. An ekphrasis is a poem, usually an ode, dedicated or written about an art object. The most famous use of ekphrasis is probably John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn." In "Ode to My Socks," he dedicates the ode, one of the most revered poetic forms, to a pair of socks knitted by a friend of his and shows us how wearing these socks transforms a typically routine gesture into an epiphanic moment, an almost holy engagement with the divine.

There is a funny rumor surrounding the genesis of Neruda's odes. According to legend, a literary critic made the claim that Neruda could write endlessly about abstractions and ideas, but he couldn't write about "things." So, to prove him wrong, in 1954 Neruda wrote a book entitled *Odas Elementales* (*Elemental Odes*) and another, *Nuevos Odas Elementales* (*New Elemental Odes*) in 1956. Robert Bly has translated the title as "Odes to Simple Things." And, the form of the poems conform to their subject. The lines are very short. Often, only one or two words appear on a line, and never are there more than four or five words per line. The form forces us to focus in on the individual word, the small unit, the thingness of the poem. In this way, Neruda's odes resemble Rainer Maria Rilke's *dinggedichte* or "thing poems." Also, it would appear that long after Ezra Pound's influence had lagged, Neruda had decided to take to heart some of Pound's imagist ideals, most notably the refusal to use any word that was not absolutely necessary. As William Carlos Williams would write later, "Not ideas but things."

What distinguishes Neruda's (and most Latin American) poetry from North American poetry is how they work with the image. Bly argues that Imagism should change its name to "Picturism," since the Imagists don't really use the image so much as they use the picture. Reality is not changed in Imagist texts, simply represented. In other words, there is a sense in which Imagism is little more than condensed, poetic realism. On the other hand, Bly suggests that real imagism is grounded in Surreal ism, in the subconscious, in the conflation of unlike ideas, such as when Neruda writes "my feet were / two fish made / of wool." Picturing Neruda's two feet as woolly fish is *much* different than picturing a red wheelbarrow glazed with rainwater beside the white chickens. So, another way to think of the distinction is to consider that the poetry of Pound, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), and Williams is grounded in external images, whereas the poetry of Neruda is grounded in the internal image.

And oh, does Neruda give us some wonderful images in "Ode to My Socks." The poem begins in a typically narrative fashion; in fact, it is a sort of realist, autobiographical beginning. A woman, Maru Mori, brings Neruda a pair of socks that she knitted herself.

However, as soon as Neruda describes the gift as "two socks soft as rabbits" the poem shifts from realism to surrealism, from the practical to the magical. Neruda animates the socks, almost to the point of personification. Note that he does not claim they are as soft as rabbit fur but rabbits themselves. Already, the poet pulls us out of the realm of the rational by suggesting that the socks live. As is the case with most Neruda poems, he keeps pushing:

I slipped my feet into them as though into two cases
knitted with threads of twilight and goatskin. Violent
socks, my feet were two fish made of wool, two long
sharks sea-blue, shot through by one golden thread,
two immense blackbirds, two cannons

Through these wild images and intense metaphors, Neruda makes his socks a kind of menagerie and a virtual arsenal. In the first part of the excerpt, we see Neruda linking the socks to magical treasure chests, woven chests, comprised of both real and metaphorical material. Then, with no warning, no explanation, the socks transform the poet's feet into various sea-creatures: woolly fish and blue sharks and back again to blackbirds. Students often want to attribute symbolic meaning to the rabbits or cases or fish or sharks or blackbirds; or they wonder if Neruda is referring to Wallace Stevens' poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." There is no evidence in this poem or in Neruda's opus that he is working on a symbolic level here. It is important to note that these images are not symbols; they are metaphors. Again, symbols usually refer to something external, whereas a metaphor is an internal, non-logical fusing of two unlike ideas. When he claims that the socks have turned his feet into two cannons, he is probably not suggesting that his body is armed for political revolution, rather that his feet have been "armed" through their immersion in enchanted socks.

So incredible are the socks, that at first the poet's feet seem unworthy of the socks, their "woven fire." This bizarre and powerful image seems to connote layers of meaning, yet makes little sense on a rational level. What if fire were material, cloth, thread? What if you could weave a flame? Through this image, we get a sense of how warm the socks are through animation, not via simple description. Again, Neruda pushes how far he can take this motif. First, he likens the socks to fireflies, then birds. He wants to "put them / into a golden / cage" and "give them / birdseed / and pieces of pink melon." Notice how far the poetic imagination has brought us from the opening lines of the poem, even from the first metaphor of the socks feeling like rabbits. What's interesting about these images and metaphors is that they do not necessarily have anything to do with each other. The poem does not have a controlling metaphor the way a Shakespearean sonnet or a poem by John Donne might. Neruda leaps back and forth from image to metaphor to reality, then back into the world of the illogical and the irrational, where, for him, poetry resides.

But, poetry also resides in the external world, and on some level, this poem is not only about socks but about poetry as well. To be more precise, the poem might be a plea to the reader to think of the world in more poetic terms. What "Ode to My Socks" does share with Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow" and "This Is Just to Say" is a belief that

poetry exists everywhere. It exists in the most mundane, the most unnatural of places. It's simply a matter of looking at the world the way a poet does. Certainly, Maru Mori has knitted similar (even better) socks for other people who did not see them as rabbits but merely socks. Similarly, most people would not see the poetry in a red wheelbarrow or in frozen plums, but from the poetic perspective, poetry can happen anywhere. Thus, Neruda's poem continues its ekphrasistic energy because the world is art. Socks, books, watermelons, salt, clothes: all are art. Every object, every thing is a potential engagement with the artistic imagination. In the final stanza, Neruda tells us the theme of his poem: "The moral / of my ode is this: / beauty is twice beauty / and what is good is doubly / good / when it is a matter of two socks / made of wool / in winter." Notice how Neruda allots "good" and "beauty" their own lines, driving home the idea that beauty and goodness exist on the most "elemental" levels.

In the middle of the poem, Neruda compares his desire to safeguard his socks with the way "learned men / collect / sacred texts." The textuality of this image is no coincidence. Here, the poet wants to make a palpable connection between the socks, books, and the holy. For Neruda, poetry is sacred as life is sacred. Life is poetry, and we should read and engage our lives (and our poetry) the way one reads and engages a sacred, holy text. In the poem, two knitted socks are the sacred texts that Neruda engages; for you, Neruda's poem is another.

Source: Dean Rader, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Kukathas is a freelance writer and a student in the Ph.D. program in philosophy at the University of Washington, where she specializes in social, political, and moral philosophy. In the following essay, she explores the idea of utility in "Ode to My Socks" and other elemental odes*.*

"Ode to My Socks" is so simple and direct that it is hardly possible for a reader, even one not normally familiar with poetry, to not understand it from beginning to end. There are no subtle allusions, no poetic tricks, no metaphors that need unraveling here. The poet sings praise to a pair of woolen socks that he receives as a gift. The socks are beautiful, wondrous, celestial, and the poet is loathe to wear them because he feels he is not worthy of their grandeur. But he resists the temptation to hoard them, and he puts them on his feet to warm him against the cold. The poet then offers a short moral to his story. Each line and phrase of the poem is straightforward and presented in the rhythms of natural speech. It is poetry at its most basic: poetry as communication. In "The House of Odes," the opening poem in the collection *Nuevas odas elementales*, in which "Ode to My Socks" appears, Neruda makes very plain his intention with this and the rest of his "transparent" odes:

I want everything to have a handle,I want everything
to be a cup or a tool. I want people to enter a hardware
store through the door of my odes.

I work at cutting newly hewn boards storing casks of
honey arranging horseshoes, harness, forks: I want
everyone to enter here, let them ask questions, ask for
anything they want.

With these simple poems, Neruda says, he intends to offer something useful to the world. These verses are not mysterious or complicated, but solid and utilitarian as a cup or a fork; they are tools to be used. But this is not to forget, however, that they are, first and foremost, *poems*. How does Neruda hope that his poems are to be considered something useful? What practical function can poetry play? "Ode to My Socks" can be seen to be a paradigm example of a Nerudian ode, and an examination of it makes it clear how Neruda's ode functions as a "tool," or how utility for him is tied up with art and poetic expression.

On the most obvious level, the subject matter of "Ode to My Socks," as is the case with many of Neruda's odes, is something useful. In fact a pair of socks hardly seems like the sort of thing that one would praise in an ode *because* it isn't normally thought of as something other than useful. One doesn't think of socks apart from needing them to serve their function of clothing one's feet. But Neruda takes this staple object of daily existence (at least in the culture he is writing in) and describes it in such a way as to make it seem endowed almost with magical properties. As he celebrates his socks, this simple object of daily existence takes on a greater, deeper meaning. The reader is

forced to look closely at something that ordinarily would be overlooked or ignored. Something that is taken for granted in everyday living becomes alive through the penetrating eye of the poet. It is worthwhile, the poem seems to say, to take a moment and consider carefully our material environment and the wonders in it. It is important to take notice of the beauty in things that serve human needs. Neruda's Marxist understanding of the material world as that which transforms human life is communicated in this poem that draws close attention to the wonder of a concrete, physical thing. Neruda says in a 1935 essay, "Toward an Impure Poetry," that this is in fact what he wants his poetry to do:

> It is well, at certain hours of the day and night, to look closely at the world of objects at rest. Wheels that have crossed long, dusty distances with their mineral and vegetable burdens, sacks from the coalbins, barrels and baskets, handles and hafts for the carpenter's tool chest. From them flow the contacts of man with the earth, like a text for all harassed lyricists. The used surfaces of things, the wear that hands give to things, the air, tragic at times, pathetic at others, of such things□all lend a curious attractiveness to the reality of the world that should not be underprized.

The poem, then, is a useful tool as it reminds readers of the often forgotten presence and signifi- cance of the material world.

The idea of usefulness is also one of the central themes of the poems. The poetic voice of "Ode to My Socks" begins by explaining that he received these socks from Maru Mori, which she knitted with her own hands. The socks are the direct product of someone's intimate labor. The poet says he slipped them onto his feet as if into two jewel cases that have been woven with dusk and sheep's wool. He goes on to describe how wondrous these seemingly simple socks are. They transform his feet into two woolen fish, two lapis blue sharks woven with golden thread, two blackbirds. They are so beautiful that his feet seem unacceptable to him; he fears they diminish the glow of the socks. But yet he realizes that these socks must be used and worn. He resists the urge to save them the way schoolboys bottle fireflies or scholars hoard rare books, and resolves to wear them. He feels remorse that he must surrender these beautiful objects to his use, and feels guilty at the bodily pleasure he gets from wearing them. But, resolutely sticking out his feet, he does so.

The poet recognizes that the socks are not socks unless they are worn, and so, despite his guilt at sullying this beautiful creation, he puts them on. In the early part of the poem, the socks transform the poet's feet, making them into all manner of fantastic objects. But it is also his feet that transform the socks and turn them into these marvelous things. Art and utility are not two separate things, but inform each other somehow. *Using* the socks is what makes them the beautiful creations that they are. And using them is what makes them useful; a tool is not a tool unless it is used. The poet knows not to hoard the socks as schoolboys keep fireflies in glass bottles, for to do so would be to prevent them from

serving their function. The firefly no longer shines when trapped in a bottle without air; books hoarded by scholars and not read and enjoyed by the rest of the world are lifeless. Similarly, socks that will not be worn are of no worth. Objects need to fulfill their purpose to truly be those objects. The poem, then, seems to offer the reader an exploration of the relationship between art and usefulness.

"Ode to My Socks" is also a useful poem, a tool in its own right, because it has a clear didactic purpose. It offers a lesson to help the reader understand a practical problem. The ode presents a story of the poet's socks, his admiration of them, his ambivalence about wearing them, and then offers a clear moral at the end. The moral is that beauty and goodness are twice as beautiful and good when it comes to two woolen socks in wintertime. This moral reinforces the idea that the socks are both beautiful and useful, that they have a dual function of providing aesthetic pleasure and utility. The handsome woolen socks serve the very important function of warming the poet's feet in wintertime. And the poem has the function of explaining the lesson to be learned from the poet's ruminations about his splendid socks.

The ode, as seen thus far, is useful on several levels: it celebrates a useful object, it alerts the reader to the wonder of the material world, it explores the idea of the relationship between art and utility, and it serves a didactic function to explain with its moral that beauty and utility are united. The poem is also useful on a more general level. It is useful in that it is simple and can be easily understood. And because it is useful, it in fact reinforces its power and purpose as art and as poetry.

Neruda turned to the form of the ode after living abroad for many years and being involved in diplomatic, political, and literary activities. He was a committed communist, and most of his poetry written between 1936 and 1952 is clearly political. From his early days as a student activist and poet, Neruda envisioned himself as a voice of the people, as someone who would speak for those who could not speak for themselves. But much of his early poetry, even though it is written in his direct realistic style, is accessible only to a relatively sophisticated audience. Neruda uses a great many hermetic images and shifting perspectives, which makes much of his earlier poetry difficult reading for the unschooled reader. With the odes, however, poetry serves its elemental function as a means of communication. This is poetry□simple, direct, uncomplicated□that reaches all people. It speaks in the voice of those to whom Neruda all his life sought to speak for and to. Thus with the simple odes Neruda's poetry finally serves the function he meant it to throughout his career□to speak to the everyday concerns of the simple people of Chile.

Thus Neruda's ode is useful in the same way as the pair of socks in "Ode to My Socks" is useful. The ode is a tool of communication that only becomes a true tool□and a true work of art□once it is used. Poetry is not poetry when it fails to reach people because it is obscure or difficult or arcane; it becomes poetry not from being hoarded by scholars who understand it with erudition, or by being held up as an object of admiration, or by gathering dust on a bookshelf. Rather it becomes poetry by being read and understood□by being usable and by being used. With odes like "Ode to My Socks," Neruda's poetry fulfills its intended purpose. This is a poem that can be read and

understood by all people, that speaks in a voice that all can hear. With these poems, Neruda has produced beautiful and delicate works of art that are no less poetic or beautiful for their simplicity, but whose aesthetic delight is enhanced and extended by their utility.

Source: Uma Kukathas, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #3

In the following review of the collection of poems entitled Selected Odes of Pablo Neruda*, Don Bogen gives an overview of the various phases and influences of Neruda's writing throughout his prolific writing career.*

Pity the poets of the New World. If Columbus et al. merely had to subdue the native flora and fauna long enough to set up shop here, the poets had to describe it all. They were stuck with the languages of the Old World□English, Spanish, French, Portuguese□ but the literary traditions made about as much sense as a court ball at a trading post. No wonder many of them fell back on the hoariest text of all, the Bible, for a sense of the poet's role. The myth of Adam naming the creatures in the Garden was perfect for a world their languages had not yet touched. Not only did it simplify the task□if you don't know what to call this plant, river or group of people, make it up□ it gave the poet a combination of innocence and importance that was hard to resist. In this country that vision ended with the closing of the frontier□ Walt Whitman is the last successful exemplar□but it survived longer in Latin America. Describing South America in an interview published in Robert Bly's *Neruda and Vallejo: Selected Poems* (Beacon, 1971), Pablo Neruda noted "rivers which have no names, trees which nobody knows, and birds which nobody has described. . . . Everything we know is new." The poet's task, as he put is, is "to embrace the workd around you, to discover the new world."

The Adamic poet, like his namesake, has a problem: If everything is new and you're the only one who determines what's what, how do you keep your pride at bay, and how do you know when to stop? Both Whitman and Neruda had enormous egos, and neither showed much restraint in output. Because Neruda wrote so much, including weak poems in almost all his more than forty books, it's advisable to start reading him in an edition of selected poems. The best of these, with translations by Anthony Kerrigan, W.S. Merwin, Alastair Reid and Nathaniel Tarn, has recently been reissued by Houghton Mifflin. The two new translations published by the University of California Press, Jack Schmitt's version of *Canto General* and Margaret Sayers Peden's *Selected Odes of Pablo Neruda*, provide a closer look at the poet's work of the 1940s and 1950s□both its glories and its excesses. This was a pivotal period for Neruda□the culmination of one phase of his career and the beginning of another□and these books are important additions to the body of work available in English translation.

With Neruda it's impossible to separate the poetry from the life. Both are huge, protean in their variety and ultimately political. Neruda, of course, has a sentimental appeal for anyone on the left. His commitment to the socialist cause and his death in the wake of the U.S.-sponsored Chilean coup can make him seem a literary martyr. But Neruda is more complex than this. While a single presence□ expansive, passionate, directly personal□lies behind all his work, his career is marked by distinct changes in style and focus. The Adamic voice and political awareness we associate with him today are not strong elements in his early work. The volume that made him famous at 20, *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* (1924), is a hybrid of French Symbolist yearning for the ineffable, and earthy Latin American eroticism. In the two major books that followed,

Residence on Earth I (1933) and *II* (1935), Neruda turned from a young love poet into a surrealist, capturing the alienation he felt as a diplomat in the Far East in bleak monologues with long, fluid lines and torrents of imagery. The end of this period of surreal despair came in the mid-thirties when Neruda was serving in the Chilean Embassy in Madrid. His firsthand encounter with fascism during the Spanish Civil War solidified the basic commitment to the left that infuses all his subsequent work. In 1945 he was elected senator in the Chilean legislature; that same year he joined the Communist Party.

Canto General (1950) is the flowering of Neruda's new political stance. This epic collection traces the history of Latin America from before the arrival of human beings, through pre-Columbian times, colonization, liberation from the European powers, and the Yankee imperialism of the twentieth century. Much of it was written while the poet was on the run from the dictator Gabriel Gonzalez Videla; Neruda escaped into exile in 1949. When he returned to Chile after Gonzalez Videla's government fell, Neruda transformed his poetry yet again, developing a shortlined, deliberately "simple" mode of looking at everyday things in three volumes of *Elemental Odes* (1954-57). Though he wrote in a variety of styles after the odes, there is a general unity of tone in the poems of his last twenty years. The confidence and openness of this work reflect the richness of the poet's life: his travels all over the world; his broad recognition, capped by the Nobel Prize in 1971; his wealth of friends, including Salvador Allende, who named him Ambassador to France; his domestic life at homes in Santiago, Valparaiso and the coastal village of Isla Negra, where Neruda had a rambling house full of everything he had collected over the years. The autumnal abundance of this period ended with Pinochet's seizure of power in 1973. Gravely ill with cancer, Neruda survived for eleven days after the coup, chronicling in his memoirs the murder of Allende and the destruction of the country he loved. After his death, soldiers ransacked his houses.

Written when Neruda was in his 40s, *Canto General* stands at the center of the poet's life and work. Jack Schmitt's translation□the first complete English version□gives us Neruda at his most Adamic and most overtly political. In this collection the poet's task is not only to name the geographic features and forms of life in Latin America but to examine this garden after the Fall, as it moves through history in the flawed human world of hope and exploitation. *Canto General* is a huge work, including some 300 poems collected in fifteen sections. The first half of the book is broadly chronological, with five sections extending from pre-Columbian times to the year before the book was published. The second half is a group of ten varied sections tracing Neruda's encounters with nature, recent history, people and himself. The kinds of work Neruda brings together in *Canto General*□ verse letters to friends, satiric blasts, lists, chronicles, elegies, descriptions, autobiographical musings, exhortations, lyric interludes□show his astounding poetic fertility. What unifies this diverse material is his focus on the question of justice. On one level, all the poems are exhibits in a vast historical trial.

The main defendant in this trial is Gonzalez Videla, the leftist turned reactionary who ordered Neruda's arrest after the poet denounced him in 1948. A triggering device for the poet's rage, Gonzalez Videla gets more attention than other dictators in the book,

but finally he is seen as just another lackey of twentieth-century imperialism, one of many Neruda attacks in the fifth section of *Canto General,* "The Sand Betrayed." Our old friends Trujillo and Somoza crop up in this group as "voracious hyenas," as Neruda calls them. Their brutality in the service of corporations like Standard Oil, the United Fruit Company and Anaconda Copper (each given its own skewering) echoes that of the conquistadors Neruda describes in the third section of his epic: the same pretext of respectability; the same official blessings, from U.S. presidents now rather than bishops; the same cruelty toward the populace; the same underlying drive for power and wealth. As Neruda traces the history of Latin America in the first half of *Canto General*, he sets up a basic alternating pattern of a just world and its destruction. The pre-Columbian harmony of people and nature celebrated in the beautiful opening section, "A Lamp on Earth," is shattered by the Europen conquerors, then partially restored in a new form by the nineteenth-century liberators, then lost again in the neocolonialism of our time.

This pattern is fairly accurate, but it does raise two problems for the poet. The most obvious is repetition: Neruda's exhaustive catalogue of conquistadors, liberators and twentieth-century caudillos can at times become exhausting. The villains in particular tend to blur into one mass□which is obviously part of Neruda's point but nonetheless somewhat soporific. Some of my reaction may stem from general gringo ignorance of the intricacies of Latin American history□I confess I perked up when I saw Harry Truman come in for it in "Puerto Rico" or read about "Wall Street heroes" in "Sandino (1926)." Nonetheless, there are so many narratives of conquest and betrayal in the first 200 pages of *Canto General* that the various atrocities can begin to lose their punch. Neruda's tendency to slip into purple passages in some of the longer poems adds to this overstuffed quality.

The second problem is simplification. Again, Neruda's basic point is simple□there are good guys and bad guys in the history of Latin America□but sometimes the language is not lively enough to flesh out particular virtues and vices, and the figures end up as stereotypes. This happens most often when the poet is telling a story□narrative is generally the weakest element in *Canto General*. When Neruda abandoned his melancholy surrealism of the 1930s for the politically committed work that was to follow, he gave up some of the surprise and complexity that his plunges into the irrational had provided. Straight historical narrative doesn't always give him the oomph he needs to get his characters off the page. Fortunately, Neruda's restless technical inventiveness leads him to do more than just recount incidents, and many poems bring figures to life in bursts of sheer poetic energy, like the wacky run-on ironies at the start of "Miranda Dies in the Fog (1816)"□

If you enter Europe late dressed in top hat in the
garden decorated by more than one Autumn beside
the marble fountain while leaves of tattered gold fall
on the Empire□

or the pounding list of accomplishments that defines the Araucanian Indian leader Lautaro in "The Chiefs Training":

He drank wild blood on the trails. He wrested treasure
from the waves. He loomed like a menacing god. He
ate in every kitchen of his people. He learned the
lightning's alphabet. He scented out the scattered
ashes. He cloaked his heart with black furs. He
deciphered the smoke's spiraling plume.

Neruda's masterpiece in *Canto General* is its second section, "The Heights of Macchu Picchu." In this exquisitely paced group of a dozen poems occasioned by his visit to the ruins of the Inca citadel in 1943, Neruda finds the heart of his vision. Beginning the sequence in alienated wandering "from air to air, like an/empty net," he concludes in a convincing solidarity with nameless exploited workers throughout history□"Juan Stonecutter," "Juan Coldeater," "Juan Barefoot"□who will "speak through my words and my blood." The Adamic impulse here is fundamentally political, a matter of standing up for those whom history has buried, of naming crimes. The city of Macchu Picchu is central to the sequence, but not in the ways we might expect. Neruda doesn't praise it was a symbol of pre-Columbian grandeur or even as a prototype of state socialism. Rather, the ruins serve as a locus for questions about basic human activities: work, survival in nature, community life. The stark majesty of this "towering reef of the human dawn" leads Neruda back to find its origins in punishing labor enforced by hunger and cold:

Macchu Picchu, did you put stone upon stone and, at
the base, tatters? Coal upon coal and, at the bottom,
tears?

The deserted city has become "a life of stone after so many lives." In his struggle to name those lives and define their meaning, Neruda develops a profound meditation on the glory and horror of human achievement.

Moving away from the history of Latin America, the last ten sections of Canto General are more personal in their approach. We see more of Neruda's life in the second half: his relations with friends in the rambling letter poems of "The Rivers of Song" his years as a senator from the poor mining provinces of northern Chile in "The Flowers of Punitaqui"; and his days underground in "The Fugitive," which includes one of his finest descriptive passages in this evocation of a poor quarter of Valparaiso:

the high hills brimming with lives, doors painted
turquoise, scarlet and pink, toothless steps, clusters of
poor doors, dilapidated dwellings, fog, mist extending
its nets of salt over things, desperate trees clinging to
the ravines, clothes hanging from the arms of inhuman
hovels, the hoarse whistle, abrupt creature of the
vessels, the sound of brine, of the fog, the sea voice,
made of strokes and murmurs.

It's not just the eye for sensory detail and the wealth of metaphor that dazzle here—readers of Neruda come to take these for granted—but the careful modulation that braids together houses, hills and sea fog as the images wind down the page. Topography, weather, social and economic conditions— Neruda catches the very texture of life in this district.

Other sections are less autobiographical, like Neruda's hymn and warning to the United States, "Let the Woodcutter Awaken," or the dramatic monologues of "The Earth's Name Is Juan," a poetic documentary on the struggles of Chilean workers. In "America, I Do Not Invoke Your Name in Vain," Neruda takes on what might seem an unlikely mode for such an expansive poet: the lyric glimpse of one moment. Averaging a dozen short lines and often just one sentence long, these poems include some of the book's most haunting endings, as in "Youth" —"all adolescence becoming wet and burning/like a lantern tipped in the rain"—or "Hunger in the South":

and just the winter cough, a horse moving through
black water, where a eucalyptus leaf has fallen a
dead knife.

The last two sections of *Canto General* wrap up Neruda's vast project with meditations on nature and death in "The Great Ocean" and a final grounding of his political vision in personal experience in "I Am." Nothing in Neruda is neat, but these two final units give a sense of closure like that in one of the bulkier Dickens novels: a kind of summary and goodbye that leaves you with a huge social canvas— eccentric, flawed in spots, but rich with imagination and human sympathy.

The sheer heft of *Canto General* makes me admire Jack Schmitt for his diligence. The literalness of his translation is both its virtue and its limit. While you never feel the need to have the Spanish on facing pages to check if Neruda really said that, Schmitt's texts don't always work well as poems in English. He has a tendency to rely on Latinate cognates, lending a certain abstract quality to the work, as in the opening lines of "The Great Ocean":

Ocean, if I could destine my hands a measure, a fruit, a
ferment of your gifts and destructions, I'd choose
your distant repose, your steely lines, your extension
guarded by air and night.

In translations from Romance languages the choice of whether to use a cognate or a different word that would avoid abstract overtones is a judgment call on any given line, but Schmitt's general procedure gives us a fairly Latinate and hence somewhat less physical Neruda. Great translations of a body of poetry—Richard Howard's Baudelaire, for example, or Stephen Mitchell's Rilke—reflect not only an affinity between translator and poet but a distinctive mastery of the original text, a transformation of the work into the translator's personal idiom. I wish Schmitt had seized Neruda in this way a little more. Though more accurate on a literal level, his translation of "The Heights of Macchu Picchu" lacks some of the flamboyant energy of Nathaniel Tarn's; and his versions of

"Gold," "The Ships" and other individual poems are less lyrical than Anthony Kerrigan's. But Schmitt has produced a consistent, readable version of the entire *Canto General*, and this is a major achievement.

Margaret Sayers Peden's task is less monumental than Jack Schmitt's. Her *Selected Odes of Pablo Neruda* translates sixty-seven of the nearly 200 "elemental odes" Neruda collected in three major books of the 1950s. I suspect anyone familiar with the odes will find that Sayers Peden has left out a few favorites. I'd love to see a version of "Ode to the Potato," for instance, with its effortless movement from names for the food (South American *papa* versus Castilian *patata*), through its role in history, to the way it sings in a frying pan; or "Ode to Copper," which shows the human dimension behind the schoolbook concept of "natural resources." But Sayers Peden's collection is nonetheless rich and representative. Her translations bring out the sensuous quality of Neruda's odes well; there is little of the Latinate or abstract here. Neruda's distinctive tone in these poems□casual, self-conscious but direct, musing yet open to passion□is captured with great sensitivity. My only quibble is with Sayers Peden's enjambment. In these shortlined poems Neruda will occasionally use the line break to separate an article from a noun or a preposition from its phrase. But the translation does this about twice as often as the original, and the effect is to make some poems a bit less fluid in their movement than they might be.

After the bulk and stridency of *Canto General,* the odes give an immediate impression of ease. The drive to document oppression that pushes out the fairly blocky lines of *Canto General* and the fierce rhetoric that often accompanies it are replaced by skinny texts that lope down the page: speculative, funny at times, seemingly open to anything. The Adamic impulse has modulated. The odes are as expansive as *Canto General*, but Neruda is naming material things now rather than patterns in history. Instead of reaching for the "general" or universal, he turns to the basic, the "elemental." These poems have their designs on the reader□what work doesn't?□but they are deliberately user-friendly. As he puts it in "The House of Odes":

I want everything to have a handle, I want everything
to be a cup or a tool. I want people to enter a hardware
store through the door of my odes.

Neruda's hardware store is not one of those spread-out franchises in a shopping plaza but the mom-and-pop operation squeezed into an urban lot that just happens to have everything you might ever need. And Neruda walks along with you as you browse, pointing out this and that, telling anecdotes, passing along a broad enthusiasm for everything that catches his eye. This is lively, accessible poetry. The odes combine a detailed specificity with an encyclopedic range of subjects: artichokes, atoms, chestnuts, his clothes□in the Spanish books Neruda even arranges them alphabetically. The danger in such abudance, of course, is prolixity. Neruda published three volumes of odes between 1954 and 1957, and the third collection shows him starting to run out of steam, with more passages that seem pulled directly from mere journal entries, more random meditations. And while the open-ended quality of these poems gives a sense of freedom and the possibility of surprise, the later odes occasionally fall back on vague

moralizing to wrap things up, as at the end of "Ode to the Gentle Bricklayer": "Ah, what a lesson/I learned/from the gentle bricklayer!"

If there are a few duds in Sayers Peden's selection, her book also contains some of the best poems Neruda ever wrote. The ode format and the proposition of celebrating all elemental things clearly invigorated his work after the completion of *Canto General*. "Ode to a Watch in the Night" is among his most sensuous love poems, with a hushed richness of sound in both original and translation:

A leaf falls, a droplet on the ground deadens the
sound, the forest sleeps, waters, meadows, bells, eyes.

The pacing here and in other odes is masterful. Lines this short could easily ossify into predictability, but Neruda keeps them flexible by varying the line breaks and the syntax of phrases that run over them. At times his movement is light and rapid, a half-dozen lines for a single phrase. "Ode to Summer," "Ode to My Socks" and other take a kind of glee in this. Insouciant, almost occasional, they romp down the page. Elsewhere there's a more deliberate pace as Neruda keeps a single object in view, naming it with image after image. In "Ode to the Cranium" he describes his skull after a fall as "the one thing/sound as a walnut," invoking it in a list of metaphors:

boned tower of thought, tough coconut, calcium dome
protecting the clockworks, thick wall guarding treasures
infinitesimal.

The combination of delight in abundance, curiosity and bemused self-mockery is typical of Neruda's tone in these engaging poems.

From the start of his career, Neruda was a poet of the senses, but in the odes he is at his most direct. Everything has not only a sound and a color but a smell, a taste, a texture, sometimes in startling combinations. In "Ode to the Birds of Chile," ocean light is "acid," parrots "metallic," the southern swan a "ship/of silver/a mourning velvet." There is enough vibrant writing about food and drink in these poems to arouse the most jaded gourmet. Like great recipes, Neruda's odes to the lemon, tomatoes, wine, salt and maize unlock the possibilities in what might have seemed mundane. "Ode to Conger Chowder" actually is a recipe, with the poet inviting us to skin the eel, "caress/that precious/ivory" of garlic before tossing it in the pot, and savor the final product of this Chilean specialty so "that in this dish/you may know heaven."

The grace and humor of these food poems make them a real delight, but they are more than rich confections. As an "elemental" act, eating□along with working□is at the center of Neruda's political vision in the odes. In "Ode to Maize" he delves into the history of this most basic American crop, setting its promise of mass nutrition against the reality of inequality and hunger. When he looks at salt, the first thing he thinks about is the salt miner. For Neruda food and other pleasures are our birthright□ not as gifts from the earth or heaven but as the products of human labor. As they celebrate the sheer wonder

of being alive, the odes lead us back to origins. They are the clearest—and surely the most inviting—illustrations of Marxist materialism I know.

Neruda was a poetic Antaeus, constantly rejuvenated by making contact with the ground. The odes and *Canto General* draw their strength from a commitment to nameless workers—the men in the salt mines, the builders of Macchu Picchu—and the fundamental value of their labor. This is all very Old Left, of course. As the statues topple in the former Soviet republics and Eastern Europe, it may seem anachronistic to read what a faithful Communist had to say about Latin America and the world as a whole. But the collapse of the Second World hasn't ended the problems of the Third. If anything, it should make the pattern of oppression in Latin America—and the heavy hand of the colossus to the north in supporting it—even more clear. *Canto General* is an excellent corrective to the self-congratulatory versions of history we are hearing these days. The odes take us back to the elemental facts behind history. Both books are radical in the best sense of the term. They ask questions that get to the root of the matter: Where do things come from? Who suffers and who doesn't? Why?

Source: Don Bogen, "Selected Odes of Pable Neruda," (book review) in *The Nation,* Vol. 254, No. 3, January 27, 1992, p. 95.

Topics for Further Study

Research the literary form of the ode. In what sense does Neruda use the ode for its traditional purpose and to what extent does he revise its use? Does the traditional ode have a moral, as "Ode to My Socks" does?

Investigate the post-World War II poetry of Neruda's contemporary, the Chilean poet Nicanor Parra (1914-). Examine the differences between Neruda's "impure poetry" as he uses it in his odes and Parra's "antipoetry."

In "Ode to My Socks" Neruda compares his woolen socks to rabbit fur, jewel cases, sharks, blackbirds, and cannons. Compare his use of similes here to those used in his other odes or poems. Pay attention to the use of figurative and concrete language.

Think of ordinary objects that can be celebrated in an ode. What poetic or literary devices are used to elevate the significance of common things?

Compare and Contrast

1948: The Communist Party is outlawed in Chile, and many left-wing intellectuals are imprisoned or forced into exile and hiding.

1950s: U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy announces that he has lists of Americans who are suspected communists, ranging from State Department workers to artists to businessmen. In 1954, the Senate holds hearings about these lists, which are televised nationally. Many suspected communists are blacklisted and are unable to find work.

1970: Salvador Allende is the first communist to be elected democratically to head a nation in the Western Hemisphere.

1973: Chilean military forces overthrow Allende's government. The United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) supports those who oppose Allende, although U.S. involvement in the overthrow is not established. Chile is ruled by military leaders, headed by General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, until 1989.

1998: Pinochet is arrested in London at the request of a Spanish court, alleging that he had been responsible for the murder of Spanish citizens in Chile when he was president. He is later served with a second warrant alleging he was responsible for systematic acts in Chile of murder, torture, "disappearance," illegal detention, and forcible transfers.

1999: Human rights organizations reveal that documents declassified in 1998 indicated that the United States had not only paved the way for Pinochet to seize power but helped him keep it.

2000: A communist party member runs for election in Chile.

Today: The U.S. Communist Party is an active organization that continues to promote its vision of a socialist United States, despite the fact that the party has never won a significant political election.

1954: Neruda begins composing his series of odes about common, everyday objects. The poems are written in simple, direct language so that they will reach people who are unfamiliar with poetry.

1980s: Chicano poet Jimmy Santiago Baca writes and publishes poetry which he says is dedicated to the people on the streets rather than the elites in universities.

Today: Many cities in the United States have programs called "Poetry on the Buses," in which short, usually uncomplicated poems by people of all walks of life are displayed to reach a wide audience.

1949-52: Neruda is forced into exile from Chile because of his commitment to communist ideas and his criticism of the Chilean government.

1974-76: Nobel Prize-winning novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn is arrested and tried for treason by his Soviet government in 1974 after the publication of *The Gulag Archipelago*. He is exiled from the Soviet Union for his criticism of the communist government. In 1976 he is given political asylum in the United States and settles in Vermont.

1991: Chinese writer Yang Lian is forced into exile in Europe after his involvement in antigovernment demonstrations in Tiananmen Square.

1994: Wole Soyinka, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, is forced to flee Nigeria after a warrant is issued for his arrest for his criticism of the Abacha regime.

What Do I Read Next?

Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair (1924), which launched Neruda's reputation, is one of the most widely read collections of Spanish poetry. The poems describe the poet's affairs with two women, and move from sensual passion to melancholy and detachment to bitterness

In a celebrated essay, "On Impure Poetry" (1935), Neruda calls for "a poetry as impure as old clothes, as a body with its foodstains and its shame, with wrinkles, observations, dreams, wakefulness, prophesies, declarations of love and hate, stupidities, shocks, idylls, political beliefs, negations, doubts, affirmations, and taxes."

In *Poems and Antipoems* (1954), the Chilean poet Nicanor Parra practices the "impure poetry" called for by Neruda but without the gentleness or uplifting spirit of Neruda's verse. Parra's "antipoetry" is often ironic, savage, and iconoclastic.

Josée Donoso's collection *Charleston and Other Stories* (1960) tackles questions of psycho-social identity, marginality, social caste, and the sti- fling codes of Chilean society.

Neruda's posthumously published collection *The Book of Questions* (1974) poses questions in poetic form about all manner of subjects□from the meaning of life to what hell must be like for Adolf Hitler□with humor and pathos.

Neruda's *Memoirs* (1974) offer insights into Latin American politics, art, and history with the poet's characteristic passion, breadth, and intimacy. The book includes portraits of such prominent figures as Lorca, Picasso, Gandhi, Mao Tsetung, Castro, and Allende.

Black Mesa Poems (1989) by Chicano poet Jimmy Santiago Baca celebrates the elemental aspects of life and pays special tribute to the earth as well as the courage, tenacity, and dignity of the people of the *barrio*, or Mexican-American ghetto.

Eva Luna (1988), a novel by Isabel Allende, the daughter of the slain Chilean President Salvador Allende, recounts the life of a poor young woman who finds friendship, love, and worldly success through her ability to tell stories. *The Stories of Eva Luna* (1991) is a collection of twentythree passionate, human tales told by Eva to her European lover.

Four famous practitioners of the ode from across cultures and centuries include the Greek lyricist Pindar (518-440 B.C.E.), the Persian Sufi mystic poet Rumi (1207-1273), the English Romantic John Keats (1895-1821), and the contemporary Mexican-American writer Gary Soto (1952-). Examples of their work can be found in *The Odes of Pindar* (1982), *These Branching Moments: Forty Odes by Rumi* (1996), *The Complete Poems of John Keats* (1994), and *Neighborhood Odes* (1994).

Further Study

Alazraki, Jaime, "Pablo Neruda: The Chronicler of All Things," *Books Abroad*, Vol. 46, 1972, pp. 49-54.

Offers a short discussion on the structure of the odes.

Bloom, Harold, ed., *Modern Critical Views: Pablo Neruda*, Chelsea House Publishers, 1989, 345 p.

Representative selection of the best criticism available in English on Neruda's work; includes an essay by Walter Holzinger on the subject and form of the odes.

Teitelboim, Volodia, *Neruda: An Intimate Biography*, translated by Beverly J. DeLong-Tonelli, University of Texas Press, 1991.

Biography written by a novelist and senator in the Allende government who was an intimate of Neruda's.

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Bizzarro, Salvatore, *Pablo Neruda: All Poets and the Poet*, Scarecrow Press, 1979, 192 p.

Costa, René, *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*, Harvard University Press, 1979, 208 p.

Belitt, Ben, ed., "Toward An Impure Poetry" (1935), reprinted in *Selected Poems*, by Pablo Neruda, Gove Press, 1991.

Sayers Paden, Margret, trans., "The House of Odes" (1956), reprinted in *Selected Odes of Pablo Neruda*, University of California Press, 1990, p. 171.

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literature of Developing Nations for Students (LDNfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, LDNfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and

undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LDNfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LDNfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LDNfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LDNfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LDNfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literature of Developing Nations for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Literature of Developing Nations for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literature of Developing Nations for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from LDNfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from LDNfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of LDNfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Literature of Developing Nations for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of LDNfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Literature of Developing Nations for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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