

Suffering in the Love Poetry of Faiz and Neruda

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ABSTRACT

The political aspects of the work by Pablo Neruda and Faiz Ahmed Faiz have long dominated the love poetry of the two writers. The paper has tried to shift the critical focus back to the issue of suffering as it is evidenced in their chosen love poems. By means of close reading and comparative analysis, the paper analyzes the way in which both poets express personal anguish, loss, and longing as the general poetic issues as opposed to being the byproducts of their revolutionary identities. In this respect the following poems by Neruda are considered: Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines, A Song of Despair, and Don't Go Far Off, and poems by Faiz, in this case: If My Suffering Found a Voice, The Death of the Fires of Love, and Don't Ask Me Now, Beloved. The results indicate that the two poets are connected with one another through the common subject of suffering, but they are radically different in their reaction to suffering - Neruda becomes desperate and existential and Faiz uses suffering as an identity source and survival. The paper concludes that the love poetry of both Neruda and Faiz should be read in its own right without concern to the political paradigms in which they have been traditionally read.

Keywords: Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Pablo Neruda, Contemporary poetry, love poetry

INTRODUCTION

Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Pablo Neruda are both known majorly as revolutionary poets, Neruda being the voice of the Latin American left, and Faiz being the conscience in the Urdu literature and the Pakistani progressive movement. However, this excessive critical attention to their political identities has not been free. Their heart poetry, full of agony, desire, and emotional susceptibility, has not been given much attention but has been analyzed only to the extent that they do not contradict their politics. This paper tries to balance out this imbalance. By closely reading and analyzing the text comparatively, this paper will consider the theme of suffering in the chosen love poems of the two poets and will be arguing that suffering is not just a background emotion but is rather a focal poetic and thematic element in the work of these two poets. The analysis is based on the theoretical principles of New Criticism, especially the concepts of close reading as elaborated by Cleanth Brooks, to determine how both poets create, express, and turn personal suffering into the piece of art. Thus, it provokes a second reading of Neruda and Faiz outside of the revolutionary paradigms that have historically softened their critical approaches and makes their love poetry worth serious academic study in its own right.

FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The research focuses on the representation of the persona of the poet figure as a lover, rather than as a rebellious activist, and this aspect of the study is analyzed through a qualitative textual analysis. The first part of this chapter outlines the research method, whereas the second part sets out the theoretical framework on which the research is built, defining key concepts and outlining how these have been used to answer the research questions. The nature of this study is qualitative and focuses on analyzing love poems which show the poets not as fire-breathing revolutionaries seeking to change the world, but

as soft-hearted individuals. The study is not a critical discourse analysis of power dynamics, but a textual analysis of selected poems which serve to undermine the stereotypical images established through a focus on the revolutionary poetry of the two poets. The research is descriptive qualitative and focuses on selected love poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Pablo Neruda. In order to gain a deeper insight into the representation and oft-quoted stereotyping of Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Pablo Neruda as poets, this study employs textual analysis as the technique to fulfill the research objectives and answer the research questions specified. The technique used for the study is close reading of the content of the selected poems. In order to do a close reading, the poems are analyzed as a whole and, where necessary, line by line. After this, the observations and analysis are put together and studied as a whole, both within the texts and between texts.

The aim is to study the meanings and ideas present in the poems which are relevant to the chosen theory. This is accomplished by examining the poems by themselves, and then selected poems are compared with models of conventional love poetry. The technique of textual analysis has been chosen because the aim of the researcher is to study the poems from a different lens in order to re-establish the poets' figure as love poets as well. To use the technique of textual analysis, the method of close reading is employed. This involves a thorough reading of the texts accompanied by annotation, which is then followed by tracing similar patterns within and between the selected poems to carry out the process of textual analysis. The rationale for choosing textual analysis is that this technique involves the use of close reading, which is an essential component in the application of the theory of New Criticism. The primary sources for this research are selected poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Pablo Neruda. Secondary sources comprise varied love poems and articles for the literature review chapter.

To carry out the study, the critical theory of New Criticism is employed. Under this theory, selected poems are analyzed in order to examine the representation of the respective poets, using a framework developed from Cleanth Brooks' theories. New Criticism is known for its dedication to the activation of skills such as close reading, with the purpose of evaluation and explanation of textual evidence. New Critics dismissed literary commentary that focused on history and culture as extrinsic, arguing that it was not literary criticism because it concentrated on matters outside the literary text. Instead, they called for intrinsic criticism, which focuses on the text itself. Building on this foundation, New Criticism provides the basis upon which the present research is built, and the study focuses on a textual analysis of selected poems. The two key defining features of New Criticism are close reading and a focus on formal and linguistic elements such as point of view, metaphors, symbols, ambiguity, paradox, irony, and tension, which support the interpretation of literary texts. Central to this approach, according to the Common Core Reading Standards, close reading is a method used to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it, citing specific textual evidence to support conclusions. Close reading marks a shift away from the reader's experiences and the writer's intentions; instead, the author's words themselves become central. One aspect of close reading is rereading the text to gather deeper insight. Close reading can be approached by reading the text as a whole or by targeting specific passages within it. In this study, close reading is employed with the aim of studying power dynamics and the elements of conventional love poetry in the selected poems. The guiding questions in close reading include: what the text says, what it infers, and how meaning can be supported through textual evidence. Close reading enables readers to engage with complex texts independently and proficiently. Alongside close reading, the second major feature of New Criticism applied in this study is the analysis of literary techniques. To answer the second research question—what factors accentuate the elements of conventional love poetry—the analysis makes use of Cleanth Brooks' concepts of sensitive close reading, unity of the poem, and judgment in totality. Brooks emphasized the reconciliation of opposites and believed that complexity in literature serves the purpose of unification. He frequently discussed irony as the mechanism through which such unity is achieved. Such concepts of the New Critics as paradox, ambiguity, and tension were also taken into consideration in this study. The concept of ambiguity by William Empson has contributed a lot to the New Criticism and is commonly referred to as irony and paradox. This idea by Allen Tate of tension is the manner in which a literary text addresses the oppositions whilst maintaining the conflicting meaning to be suspended. Closely related to this, in *The Well-Wrought Urn*, Cleanth Brooks believes that a paradox is an unavoidable problem in poetry,

saying that we can only approach poetic truth by paradox. He attributes that poetic language disturbs the fixed meanings by repeatedly altering words and posing a conflict between denotation and connotation. It is this tension that creates the element of irony and makes the poem complex and unified. Taken together, based on this discussion of New Critical procedures, one realizes that the contemporary criticism turns the focus back to the literary text itself. The poem itself is discussed as the main piece of analysis, but not as it is connected with the life and history of the poet. Larger symbolic meanings can be explained in the poem by doing close textual reading and paying attention to language. Finally, the theoretical framework returns to the central principle of New Criticism—close reading—to determine whether the selected texts, when analyzed through this framework, successfully resist stereotypical representations and present the poets and their poetry in a different light.

LITERATURE REVIEW

American author Jaime Alazraki in his commentary titled "*Pablo Neruda, the Chronicler of all Things*" notes that Pablo Neruda was "a poet who best echoed the hopes and struggles of a whole continent." Another point established in this paper is the significance of how Neruda's poetry paved the modernist way of approaching love. By removing "mythological gods and goddesses, nymphs and satyrs, Sirens and Tritons," Neruda presents a love which regards solely the lover and the beloved. A similar strain of describing love as physical, and "wild" is found in Rabindranath Tagore's and Walt Whitman's works also.

When Alazraki's work claims that "since Neruda joined the Communist party in 1945, much of his poetry became heavily politicized," it seems to contradict the previous notion this paper provides that it was not "political arguments" which "convinced" Neruda to move his poetry from "the emotions of the inner ego to the emotions of the outer world," but the tenderheartedness and emphatic spirit which encouraged him to do so. Luis Monguió unambiguously states that it is "fashionable among certain critics to say that the poetry of Pablo Neruda is really constituted by two poetries," a dichotomic view which has resulted in polarizing readers rather than diversifying them. When mentioning Neruda's love poetry in *Crepusculario* and *Veinte poemas*, Salmon and Lesage disclose that the poems are somber yet sensual in tone. The melancholy and nostalgia, however, are not for a lover alone, rather this longing for connection is between Neruda's "poetic self and matter." According to Neruda the fundamentals of consciousness are the past, death, nature and heritage. Russell explains that politics, love of woman, nature, his land and fellow man are all interwoven with the problem of mortality, and therefore of his life. Neruda himself clarifies this stance in his *Memoirs*: "I had to suffer and struggle, to love and sing; I drew my worldly share of triumphs and defeats, I tasted bread and blood." These choices, tears or kisses, loneliness or the fraternity of man survive in his poetry and are an essential part of it. One of the possible reasons for the customary linear portrayal of Neruda's poetic journey can be attributed to our ideas concerning love and maturity, where passionate and physical love is dismissed as ephemeral.

A similar critical pattern can be observed in the case of Faiz Ahmed Faiz. Inderjit Lall notes Faiz's pronounced "Marxist influence" and compares him to Allama Iqbal by stating that both are political poets yet different in their outlooks. A large number of research papers published on the works of Faiz Ahmed Faiz have focused on Faiz's historical and political background and the Marxist influence on his life and work as their prime concern. They seem to have bypassed his persona as a connoisseur of beauty and disregarded his love poetry altogether. Capolla notes Faiz's infusion of "traditional romantic imagery" with "political overtones," while Faiz himself recalls in an interview that the earlier poems from *Naqsh-e-Fariyadi* were heavily influenced by works which operated on "beauty for beauty's sake and literature for literature's sake." He establishes a socially and economically carefree period of contentment as grounds for poetry concerned with matters of the heart and all that is tender and pleasing in life. Durriya Kazi observes that love in Urdu, Persian or Arabic literature is of necessity unrequited or unfulfilled. Most of Faiz's ghazals have tackled the theme of suffering and loss of love, where the beloved is unattainable and indifferent to the poet's longing. "Tragic romance" evokes the ongoing struggle between hope and despair. Love is described as an intoxicating madness where the lover circles the beloved like a moth around the candle, indicating dominance, submission, and emotional suffering. Alamgir Hashmi acknowledges that Faiz expressed his "revolutionary fervor through the language of

amorous verse.” Agha Shahid Ali further argues that suffering for Faiz is always in communion with “a sense of history and injustice.” In “Don’t Ask Me Now, Beloved,” there is suffering exacted by the beloved as unreciprocated love, but this loss is overshadowed by the anguish of the poet’s people. The personal and political, therefore, remain deeply intertwined. Sarvat Rehman compares Faiz Ahmed Faiz to Pablo Neruda, identifying both as revolutionary poets, yet this very comparison reveals how deeply entrenched the stereotype has become. Even when Faiz’s love poetry is discussed, it is framed within rebellion and resistance. This literature review thus establishes that both Faiz and Neruda have predominantly been studied through political lenses, while their love poetry—rich with suffering, loss, and emotional vulnerability—remains critically underexplored.

ANALYSIS

"The true subject of poetry is the loss of the beloved" (Faiz Ahmed Faiz to Alun Lewis, Burma, circa 1943). One of the most common themes of love poems is heartbreak. This is further divided into two distinct phases; one being the heartbreak itself and the other is what comes next; acceptance. The poem "Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines" deals with the second phase of the heartbreak. The poet is desperate in trying to comprehend what has befallen him. It does not matter how rationally he interprets the loss because he realizes there will always be sorrow where there once was his beloved. The first two lines of the poem "Write, for example 'The night is shattered with stars, twinkling blue, in the distance.'" and the title suggests the nihilistic approach of the speaker (Neruda 1-2). When grief of a love lost is coupled with the suffering inflicted by society one is bound to break down. Rebels, leftists, and revolutionaries have since the dawn of time been alienated by the right wing forces. "If my suffering were granted a voice / this speck of dust would have an identity" (Faiz 4-5). Dejection from society than by a beloved is worse because it gives rise to anguish. Betrayal from a loved one is bearable as one can vent it out in their writings or through discourse with closed ones. But being cast-down by society leaves no outlet where to expel the bitterness now harbored for society itself. There is no solace.

Faiz's Suffering as Identity-Making

A similar poem regarding the pain of existence and the pain of love is "If My Suffering Found a Voice" by Faiz Ahmed Faiz. The poem flows steadily and reading it appears like going through the thought process of the writer himself. Each idea comes in proper succession to the previous. Faiz begins by describing himself as "an atom of dust without a name" (2), and concludes in hope that he "would be master of the cosmos, owner of this world and the next" (11-12). This glimmer of hope is possible only if he finds a way to give words to his pain, which seems impossible. But the possibilities once that happens are endless.

If I discovered my own identity the secret of the universe would be revealed to me
If I were privy to that secret my silence would be transformed into eloquence (6-9)

In this sense Faiz differs from Neruda when he talks about his suffering. Faiz revels in the idea of greatness achieved if only he can harness his grief and transform it into power. Neruda is also committed to life, to love, to an awareness of the uneasy. There is a sense of unease oozing from the desperate tone in his poems also. Being aware of his shortcomings makes him a poet of commitment. This commitment is to positive thought and to criticizing all that is unacceptable in life. The poem "If you Forget Me" is said to be written for Matilde Urrutia, Neruda's muse whom he met while in Exile after fleeing from Chile with his wife in 1948. This poem is featured in the collection *Los Versos Del Capitan* which Neruda compiled during his clandestine stay in Mexico. Overall the poem brings to light the relation of love between a man and a woman. It highlights how quickly one emotion can morph into another. The poem consists of six stanzas in total which are unrhymed and written in free verse. The first stanza which is of only one line- "I want you to know one thing" is often read as a continuation of the title. When done so, the sentence formed "If you forget me I want you to know one thing" lends a threatening tone to the poem from the beginning. In the second stanza the threatening tone suddenly changes into

something sweet and sublime as expressing one's love in all earnestness. The sudden shift is also resonant of the overall theme of the poem which is the fluid nature of love, both fickle and intense.

The poem begins in a romantic manner where the poet is singing praises for his beloved, comparing her to everything beautiful like "the crystal moon" yet also ephemeral as "the red branch of the slow autumn at my window," (Neruda 5-6). By doing so the poet wants his lover to be fully aware of his love for her, but right next to this stanza the tone changes. In the mid section of the poem the thought picks up pace and we can witness a change in emotions: "do not look for me, / for I shall already have forgotten you.." (Neruda 22-23). The shorter sharper lines in this stanza hint at how Neruda is rushing through this part, and in essence rushing through and out of a love which is not reciprocated. Towards the end again, however, a sense of belonging sets in and the poet is heard sighing when addressing his beloved as "my love" and "my own" (Neruda 43). In the last stanza the tone is similar to the first where the poet is positive about this love, and promises that the beloved will forever have his heart as long as she loves him back. "My love feeds on your love, beloved / and as long as you live it will be in your arms / Without leaving mine" (Neruda 47-48).

Where Neruda's suffering is driven by the volatility of affection, Faiz approaches the same pain from an entirely different direction. In "The Death of the Fires of Love" the poet has explored the concept of annihilation in love. He is beyond grief at the loss of love and has now passed into the realm of the ascetics who rejoice at the separation from their beloved. "Let's rejoice in the pangs of separation from the beloved's frame and figure" (Faiz 4-5). Faiz has combined two seemingly opposing ideas of being satisfied at the act of willingly separating from his beloved. He has become a heretic who is so enamored by the beloved that even though the beauty of nature reminds him of the beloved, he does not shy away from them. Instead he deliberately focuses on those aspects that remind him of the beloved. "Let's punish our sight with the sight of the cypress / and the rose and the jasmine" (Faiz 6-7). Upon reading the poem one can classify it as a love poem given the use of imagery and a sense of longing in the overall tone of the poem.

In contrast to Faiz's willing embrace of separation, Neruda's suffering in "Don't Go Far Off" is rooted in dread and dependence. The poem is written and structured like a monologue. The poet's anguish at the thought of his beloved's departure is palpable right from the beginning. The title of the poem indicates the constant longing which has eventually transformed into a dependence upon the beloved. Upon reading the poem one can classify it as a love poem given the use of imagery and a sense of longing in the overall tone of the poem. The theme does not deal with the pleasant aspects of love but excels in providing a more realistic view of love and desire. This facet of love is elucidated throughout the poem by use of vivid imagery. In the very first stanza Neruda compares himself to an isolated railway station which is devoid of trains even, enhancing the poet's desolation and anxiety. He appears to be stranded with nowhere to go, and no one to take him where he wants to go; just as he feels when his beloved is not around. Similar imagery continues in the next stanza. The technique of personification in "the smoke that roams looking for a home will drift / into me, choking my lost heart" (Neruda 7-8). This stanza is reminiscent of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by Thomas Stearns Eliot. In both the poems "smoke" and "fog" are described as something stealthy that creep up into empty rooms and empty hearts, thus suffocating. "The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes, / The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes, / Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening" (Eliot 15-17). The beginning of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" also conjures images aptly comparable to those aroused in the first stanza of "Don't Go Far Off". "Half-deserted streets" are analogous to "empty station(s)" and "one night cheap hotels" are exactly where someone who is roaming and without an abode will end up. Apart from personification of smoke, the key word in this stanza is "roams" (7). It brings to mind the image of someone aloof, walking the streets without purpose, and often distraught because of being homeless. Distraught because the beloved who has "go (gone) far off" (Neruda) is nowhere in sight. The romance characteristic of Neruda's poetry is missing from this poem because the reader can sense how insecure Neruda is about his love. "Will you come back? Will you leave me here, dying?" (Neruda 14). He constantly worries of losing her which renders us incapable of enjoying "Don't go far off" as we enjoy his love sonnets. Another aspect dissimilar to Neruda's poems

is the haphazard rhythm of this poem. This disarray is reflective of the anxiety and apprehension building up in the poet throughout the poem. The bundled up sentences in the beginning hint at some composure which holds the poet together. Progressing through the poem imitates the lover's descent into despair and an almost mild neurosis which is apparent by quick succession of lines which are merging into each other also. This rapid movement is also visible in the poet's thought process towards the very end where he seems to lose all grip on reality and is troubled.

This descent reaches its darkest point in "A Song of Despair", from the collection "Twenty Love Poems and A Song of Despair". "It is a mournful book, but its attractiveness has not worn off..."(Guibert 14). It is considered one of the longest poems in the book along with some others, but none of the other longer poems are as morose in tone as "A Song of Despair". The title is aptly chosen because throughout the poem Neruda is lamenting for his lost love. The poem is addressed to the poet himself as the abandoned one. It consists of thirty couplets which have lost end rhyme in the English translation except the first two lines which end at 'sea' and 'me'. "The memory of you emerges from the night around me. The river mingles its stubborn lament with the sea" (Neruda 55). The fact that only this rhyme remains also leads us to conclude that in this poem the poet has used the sea as a conceit. He relates with the sea even more so now that the beloved has abandoned him. In some couplets he uses the sea as a metaphor for his love and the beloved as well. In "A Song of Despair", sorrow and sadness dripping from every metaphor overpower what little hope there arose in all the previous love poems included in this collection. The woman of Neruda's desire is described as vast and unforgiving as the sea, as eternal as time, and like a black hole which devours everything including the light of the poet's soul. Six couplets end with "in you everything sank" (Neruda 1-58). Neruda also remembers a time when there was no distance between them both. He reminisces about a time of love and brightness only to be gushed over with sorrow once again. The idea that happiness is not ultimate has never been better expressed than in this poem. Happiness and joy brings warmth to his soul for the time being but when remembered it is only a memory. Happy memories never deliver the same mirth as they once did because all they are now are memories and only bring nostalgia. This concept is best narrated in the only couplet in which the poet has mentioned a close encounter with the beloved; he has equated a kiss with an assault. "He combines erotic imagery with extremely bleak visualizations of this doomed romance, such as a 'Cemetery of kisses'" (Race, "Poetry Analysis a Song of Despair by Pablo Neruda"). In the beginning of the poem Neruda bears in mind a joyous memory of his beloved but as he keeps on writing this recollection becomes a source of pain. Throughout the poem we see the poet as a figure that has no power over his thoughts and feelings.

"The two line verses of the poem are broken up by two single lines at the end of the poem. The penultimate line sees the poet repeat himself by thinking that nothing seems so far away now as his departed lover. The last line brings out his sadness – both for him, and for her" (Rance, "Poetry Analysis a Song of Despair by Pablo Neruda"). In Neruda's poem "The Poet's Obligation" we are made aware of Neruda's desire to use poetry for social good. In the first stanza Neruda is calling out to everyone in slumber; those who are imprisoned in their own perplexing minds, and those who are oblivious of nature and its riches. The third and fourth line of this stanza is important in understanding the poem in context of suffering as an integral part of love poetry. It might not always be as explicit but there is always an aspect of distress and anguish attached with love and devotion. As in "The Poet's Obligation" Neruda has seemingly paralleled a man occupied with a "woman", to a man in the "harsh prison cell". Equating imprisonment and being in love is an ideal characteristic of Faiz Ahmed Faiz. In an interview with I A Rehman, Faiz notes "Going to jail...was like falling in love again. Not that the jail was a particularly suitable place to write; only one had a lot of time to think and put one's thoughts in verse". By mentioning "the rumble of the planet and the foam, / the raucous rivers of the ocean flood" Neruda establishes a tone of chaos and disorder (9-10). The last line of this stanza further reveals the suffering in love by "the sea is beating, dying, and continuing" (Neruda 12). In this verse the poet is comparing himself and his beloved with the sea and its nature. The poet is constantly dejected and disillusioned by love yet he "beats on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (Fitzgerald 180). In the next stanza Neruda continues using sound and sensorial imagery, for example "the crash of the hard water" and "gather it up in a perpetual cup" bring to mind the sounds and images of a roaring and

boundless sea. These images are reflective of the poet's roaring and boundless love which at times becomes hard to contain and is ever increasing; both in intensity and in yielding pain. Gathering something vast in a smaller object is also a remark on the massiveness of Neruda's burden, that is, to convey to his readers what he as a poet observes and feels. Towards the end the poet is giving in to this ephemeral life, considers his work done, and pledges to being a messenger to the "shattered hearts" of those seeking freedom and answers in the sea (Neruda 31).

In light of this textual analysis, it can be concluded that Faiz and Neruda, in the selected poems, appear as aesthetes and lovers of beauty. The result of utilizing close reading as a tool to analyse love poetry is that it displays and encourages an imaginative and critical approach toward studying the poetic works by any poet. Close reading of the poems allows the reader to draw comparisons between all aspects of the selected poems with poems from the Romantic era. This study views the poems of Faiz and Neruda and finds ample evidence to support the objective of the study: to analyze how power dynamics function in the texts of selected love poems of the two great revolutionary poets of the West and the East, Pablo Neruda and Faiz Ahmed Faiz.

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