

# ACCEPTANCE OF SEPARATION: A READING OF NERUDA'S SONG OF DESPAIR

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**ABSTRACT:** - Pablo Neruda, one of the greatest poets of 20<sup>th</sup> century Latin American Literature. He wrote in Spanish language and later his poetry was translated into many languages including English also. He was one of the greatest gems of Chilean literature and won the Noble prize in 1971. In Chilean literature, poets have the upper most hand. Pablo Neruda wrote a number of collections but his second poetic collection “Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair” made him a world famous poet. After the publication of this collection, he became famous as a poet of passion, love, loss, longing, and despair. The verses of this collection touch the heart of the youth because the feelings that he portrays in it are ordinary and common to everyone. Some critics criticized him by saying that he expressed the love in erotic manner. “Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair” includes both generation young as well as old . Young can easily identify themselves with these verses and the old one can revive their youth again. In the first Twenty Love Songs of this collection, he expresses the feelings of love and passion, while he concludes it with “Song of Despair.” In the first twenty verses, he is not ready to accept the thing that his beloved is not present in this physical world. He presents her with a physical body as if she lies in front of him. In the concluding verse, he himself accepts the thing that he is all alone in this physical world. Because after leaving the speaker in this physical world, she herself has become the part of heavenly world. The aim of the present paper is to show that how does the speaker accept the separation and the feeling of separation begins to come on the surface as the song proceeds.

**KEYWORDS:** - Acceptance, love, loss, despair, passion, separation, earthly world, heavenly world.

Pablo Neruda, the world renown poet and a legend of his lifetime was born as Neftali Ricardo Reyes Basoalto on July 12, 1904, in Parral, Chile. He used the name Pablo Neruda as his pseudonym in order to write poetry. He used this name because his father Jose Del Carmen Reyes Morales, a railway employee was not in the favor of writing the poetry. His mother Rosa Bosoalto, a school teacher died just two months after giving him birth. Neruda spent his childhood in isolation and this isolation turned into creativity. Like most Latin American countries, Chile also has the tradition to honor their poets with diplomatic posts. Neruda became the honorary consul in Burma, at the age of 23 and the poems, wrote during this time, have the impact of Surrealism.

He wrote the second poetic collection “Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair” at the tender age of 20. However when someone reads the verses of the collection, it seems as if they were written by an experienced person who has experienced many things in his life. It is not easy to believe that a boy of 20 years has expressed the feelings of love in such a passionate and intense manner. Rene de Costa in his article on Neruda notes that all the poems in this collection contain “a highly charged confessional intimacy that challenged and charmed the sensibility of its reader...which continues to resonate in the language of love.”

“Song of Despair” is one of the sad and heartbroken connotations of Neruda’s “Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair.” Neruda added it at last because it indicates towards the end of a love affair. It may be the end of the poet’s affair himself for this collection has autobiographical elements. This song is a juxtaposition of bitterness and despondency. It has regular metric pattern or written in paired alexandrines. It uses some phrases recurrently. It also uses anaphora device, which gives it song like air. Once he said about the “Song of Despair” in his Memoirs:

“the song desesperada springs are the old docks of carhue and under imperial[...] in a slender and long boat abandoned, of not is that boat shipwrecked sailor [...] wrote the song desperate[...] Zero I do not have vueltona be so deep as in those days[...] Near my all what existed and continued to exist for always in my poetry: the rudio far of the sea, the cry of them brds wild, and the love burning without consmising as a bush immortal.” (OCV, pp 452-53)

In the “Song of Despair,” feelings are expressed in such a beautiful manner either they will console the broken heart; inspire someone or both. In this song, the speaker is in a sorrowful state because he has lost his beloved. The pain of the loss is unbearable for speaker. However, this song helps the speaker to ponder out his feelings of pain, so that he could feel relax after it. It soothes him and works like a balm for his aching heart. In this song, he expresses the feeling of love that every person has in his/her heart. The feeling of despair is common after the end of love affair. In this poem, there is a sad speaker because his beloved has departed from this earthly world after leaving him all alone. Through this song, the speaker tells that how sad he is. The pain of separation is unbearable and painful to speaker. He uses a number of images and decorates these images with a number of figures of speech in order to show the agony of his heart. The tone of the song is pessimistic. Throughout the poem, the poet expresses his sorrow and gloominess. He recalls the memories from his past or happy days when his beloved was with him and after it compares the past days with his present state when he is isolated. In the past, they both were together with hand in hand, while in present time he is alienated and far away from all the happiness of world. He begins the poem:

The memory of you emerges from the night around me.  
The river mingles it stubborn lament with the sea. (Line 1-2)

The very first line of the poem indicates that the poem begins at the time of night. At the time of night, he remembers his beloved and the souvenir of his beloved sparks in his mind. There may be two reasons behind it. Traditionally it is considered that the lovers meet at the time of night and all the union takes place in the darkness of night. Another reason may be that at the time of night he is isolated and far away from the activities of this materialistic world so the reminiscences of his beloved come in his mind. He reminds all those happy days, which they both spent together. In this song, these days have turned into memories. This is the only difference in the twenty love verses and this last song. In the first twenty verses, he presents his beloved with a living body as if she lies in front of him while in the concluding verse he addresses her as memory. This gives a biggest proof of his acceptance that he is ready to accept the absence of his beloved. The second line indicates towards his location where he is standing. He is standing on the bank of the river and hears the mingling sound of sea and river. He associates this mingling sound with his own lamentation and says that natural elements also accompany him in his sad state. They also wail on the lost of his beloved one.

Next he compares himself with ‘wharves’ and says as at the time of early morning wharves are deserted in the same way he is. He calls himself ‘deserted one’ and this phrase shows how alone he is. He also gives the image of ‘cold flower’, which naturally indicates towards death. From the very beginning of the poem, it can be seen that the poet is in immense pain. He sees himself as an isolated sole without any companion. Death is the ultimate isolator and provides the peace when the pain is on peak. Therefore, he sees death as his companion and is ready to embrace death. He knows that death is the only medium through which he can unite with his beloved. He shows his beloved as a powerful being:

You swallowed everything, like distance.  
Like the sea, like time. In you everything sank! (Line 9-10)

He compares his beloved with sea. He says as sea submerges everything in itself in the same way his beloved has devoured everything including his joys or smile. Therefore, all his joys were depending on his beloved. As she departed from this world, all his happiness also departed with her. The words ‘happy hours’ refers to those past days when his beloved was physically present in this world. They both were in the arms of each other. ‘The hour of spell’ indicates towards their romantic feelings. They both were passionate in love. They both consummated this passion and ‘blazed like a lighthouse.’ He also makes a comparison between the pilot of the ship and his beloved. As pilot is the sole master of the ship and can direct the ship in any direction according to his own will, in the same way the

speaker's beloved is the master of his soul. She is like a pivot and the whole life of speaker revolves around her. He again returns in his past memories and calls them 'the childhood of the mist.' The word 'childhood' may have two meanings. It may refer to the innocence but at the same time, it indicates that he lost his beloved in early age. He calls her 'lost discoverer'. As a captain who sailed off the edge of the earth and never came back, in the same way his beloved never returned. In this song, there is recurrent repetition of line 'in you everything sank', which indicates that the speaker lost everything to his beloved. Now he is living without any hope and joy. He is like a hopeless being. He says:

Oh flesh, my own flesh, woman whom I loved and lost,  
I summon you in the moist hour, I raise my song to you. (Line 21-22)

The first line shows the impact of bible on speaker when he calls his beloved his own flesh. According to the bible, it is considered that God made the woman from the flesh of man. Once he loved her very much but later lost. He does not forget his beloved even for a single moment and summons her every time. He remembers her in all the spheres of his life. He raises his voice and sings the song in loud voice so that his beloved could hear his love songs. Next, he compares the heart of his beloved with a 'jar'. He says as the jar is made by glass and is very tender, in the same way the heart of his beloved is very tender and soft. There is no space for any malice. He also gives the description of those spots where he and his beloved used to go together to spend their romantic moments. This island reminds him about his happy days because it witnessed their romantic days. Whenever the speaker comes to these spots, the stale memories of his past become fresh. These memories also give him pain by putting the finger on his alien nerve. After it, he expresses the agony and calls these spots 'the black solitude of the islands'. The agony of speaker is enough to tell that why does he call the island black. The speaker's beloved is not with him now. He visits his favorite spots alone and feels isolation. Those spots, which were once dear to him now haunts and increase his craving. In the island he feels the presence of his beloved and addresser her as 'woman of love'. The speaker feels the arm of his beloved and says 'your arms took me in'. In the next line, he says:

There were thirst and hunger, and you were the fruit.  
There were grief and the runs, and you were the miracle. (Line 27-28)

The speaker says that there was 'thirst' and 'hunger' in his voice but his beloved worked like a 'fruit' in order to satisfy his quench of thirst and hunger. She was with him in every times whether it was the time of joys or woes. She worked like a miracle in his life. In this song, also earth is used as a metaphor for woman. This is the quality of Neruda's poetry to associate woman with the earth or nature. The speaker again uses the reference from Christian mythology when he associates the pain and sufferings of woman with 'cross'. Christians takes cross as a pious emblem because it refers to the suffering of their God Jesus Christ. Christ suffered unbearable pain at the time of crucifixion and became martyr. Through this comparison, the speaker wants to show the suffering of his beloved. The speaker's love is very deep and intense for his beloved. His beloved is in the tomb but still he feels the fire of her passion and calls her 'cemetery of kisses'. The lovers are no longer together but there is no diminishment in their passion. He again reminiscences his romantic time when their bodies were entwined and they both were engaged in love- making. He gives the image of 'bitten mouth' and 'kissed limbs'.

The speaker covers a journey from romantic time to deserted time and calls it 'voyage of my longing'. The speaker long for his beloved and equates her with 'pit of debris' which indicates towards sorrow. He says that the sorrow was inside the heart of his beloved but she never expressed it before anyone. The speaker recurrently compares her with sea in order to show her strength of bear. She submerged not only her own pain but the pain of others inside her. He compares his beloved with a sailor who stands on the deck of the ship and sings in a loud pitch. He equates her with mermaids as the mermaids attract the sailors, in the same way speaker's beloved attracts him. All of sudden his praise turns into negativity and calls her 'bitter well'. He says:

It is the hour of departure, the hard cold hour  
Which the night fastens to all the timetables. (Line 51-52)

These lines give an idea to the reader that the night is about to end. At the time of night, he feels the presence of his beloved. However, as the night disappears with the arrival of dawn, in the same way his beloved disappears in the light of dawn. The speaker again feels lonely and desolate. Therefore, the speaker says that it is the time of departure. 'Hard cold hour' refers to the time of night. At the time of night, the speaker is restless because the memories of his beloved haunt him the whole night and do not allow him to sleep. These memories tear his heart and mind. He compares himself with empty shore, for his beloved is not with him. His hands are empty, the only thing he holds in his hands is 'shadow', and it refers to the memories of his lost lover. His hands are empty but his mind is not. It is filled with the memories of his beloved. The memory of his beloved every time flutters in his mind. The last two lines of the poem are very impressive and heart touching:

Oh farther than everything. Oh farther than everything  
It is the hour of departure. Oh abandoned one! (Line 57-58)

In these lines, the lament of the speaker can be seen. He is lamenting for a thing that is not present in this world. What is that thing, which is far away from everything, is not clear. However, a perception may be that, his beloved, who is not present in this world, is that thing. She is in spiritual world that is far away from this earthly world and is beyond the reach of human beings. In this way, she has become out of the reach of every person and especially her lover. In the last line he again uses the apostrophe figure of speech and calls himself 'abandoned one'. The meaning is that finally he gets ready to accept the thing that his beloved is not physically present with him and he is lonely.

Finally, it can be said that the speaker of the poem is no one else but the poet himself. This song was inspired by an unhappy love affair. He begins the song with his past memories. He remembers his beloved whom he loved dearly. However, at the same time, he also remembers those happy moments, which they lived together. Therefore, in the beginning of the song, the speaker is very happy. As soon the poem proceeds and the nighttime comes, a note of sudden change can be traced in the mood of the speaker. He begins to feel lonesome completely. One thing is clear from the beginning of this song that the speaker accepts himself. He accepts that his beloved is not physically present in this physical world. This is the only difference between "Twenty Love Songs" and the "Song of Despair".

"Song of Despair" is one of the greatest songs of "Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair." This song expresses the pang of the heart of the speaker. Therefore, in this song he expresses the pain of separation from his beloved. No pain of the world is as immense as this pain. The life of the speaker begins with his beloved and ends at her only. At last, he gets ready to accept the bitter truth that is related to the absence of his beloved. So, in this song there is an acceptance of separation.

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