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## **UNIT 2 PABLO NERUDA: “TONIGHT I CAN WRITE”, “THE WAY SPAIN WAS”**

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### **Structure**

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Brief Overview of Latin American Literature
- 2.2 Introduction to Pablo Neruda
- 2.3 “Tonight I can Write” -Text with Annotations and Analysis
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### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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In this Unit, we shall discuss the poetry by Pablo Neruda. After reading the Unit carefully, you will be able to:

- recall names of prominent Latin American poets;
- outline the life and works of Pablo Neruda;
- critically comment on “Tonight I can Write”; and
- critically comment on “The Way Spain Was”

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### **2.1 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE**

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In this section we will learn about the major authors and trends in Latin American Literature. But let us first understand; what is meant by the term 'Latin America'?

In terms of geography, Latin America includes all parts of Central and South Americas that were part of Spanish or Portuguese Empires during the colonial period. It also includes the Caribbean, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Brazil. In the United States, all the countries south to it on the American continent are broadly called the Latin America. Thus, English speaking countries like Belize, Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Lucia, Dominica, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the Bahamas, the French-speaking Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana and even the Dutch-speaking Netherlands Antilles, Aruba and Suriname, all are included under this category. However originally, Latin America designates all those countries and territories in the Americas where a Romance language (languages derived from Latin i.e., Spanish, French, Portuguese or the Creole languages) is spoken. The term came into use in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was coined by intellectual leaders who were looking to France for cultural leadership instead of Spain or Portugal. It was during the French invasion of Mexico in 1862 under the Empire of Napoleon III. The motive of using the

term 'Latin' was to mark a difference from the Anglophone people of the North America. The term came in vogue even more in the twentieth century as then Mesoamerican, Central American, Caribbean and South American countries tried to establish their cultural distinction from the United States. However, Scholars today find the term highly problematic because it elides and subsumes the many distinct countries with different pre-conquest origins into one collective entity.

The corpus called 'Latin American Literature' includes oral and written works in Spanish, Portuguese and English. It also encompasses work in any native language by authors from parts of North America, South America and the Caribbean. Critics usually adhere to the following classification of major periods of Latin American Literature: Pre-Colombian, Colonial Resistance, Modernismo, Boom, and Contemporary.

The Pre-Colombian period refers to the time before the arrival of Christopher Columbus. Latin American literature of this period was primarily oral and created by people of Omec, Mayan, Aztec and other Mesoamerican civilizations. It primarily dealt with accounts about religion, astronomy, agriculture and political history. Many scholars consider the term pre-Columbian flawed because it takes the colonial explorer as the frame of reference and does not directly indicate the indigenous people. Ancient Americas is regarded as more suitable term to indicate the flourishing cultures of Mesoamerican civilizations.

The Colonial period began in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The colonization of America began with the arrival of Christopher Columbus at the islands now called Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Mistakenly assuming that he had reached India, he proclaimed the natives of these islands as 'Indians'. It is in this period we see the beginning of the written tradition in Latin American literature. It comprises of the first-person accounts of European explorers. Some Natives also created anecdotes of the way life changed after coming of colonizers.

Neoclassicism, Realism and Naturalism are the prominent trends in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Latin American literature. The first novel called *El Periquillo Sarniento* was published in 1816. It was written by José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi. It was romanticism and popular poetry that informed the Latin American public opinion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century thereby in many ways influencing the invention of the concept of Latin America. In this context, the contribution of José Martí Heredia of Cuba exiled in Mexico and Antônio Gonçalves Dias of Brazil has been immense. Both are well known for their poems on exile. Some of the widely known poems by Heredia are about Niagara Falls, Aztec ruins, and other natural wonders such as a storm. His ode "Himno a un desterrado" relates his experience as an exile. It is difficult to present generalized picture of characteristics of romanticism in Latin American poetry, yet some commonly identifiable traits have been as follows; advocacy of individual freedom, nature as a source of knowledge, nature metaphorically depicted as the eternal witness of history turned to ruins, the quest for voice of the people and a reaction against Spanish imperialism couched in nationalist and anti-colonial discourse. Another major poetic voice of this era was of José Hernández who wrote 'gauchesque' poetry. These are romantic verses about the persecuted Argentinean gauchos in the wake of modernization and industrialization. The Argentine gaucho is a type of cowboy and occasional laborer located in rural Argentina. Hernández poetic and prosaic works elucidate all aspects of the life of these people. His epic poem *Martín Fierro* written in Spanish is about the life of the gaucho. Written in a style that

evokes the rural Argentine ballads known as *payadas*. It was originally published in two parts; *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* (1872) and *La Vuelta de Martín Fierro* (1879). Notable for enunciating the contribution of gauchos in Argentina's independence from Spain, it has now been translated into over 70 languages.

The late 19<sup>th</sup> century is marked by the rise of Resistance literature. It includes anti-establishment works of fiction written in Romantic and Naturalist tradition. The prominent themes are quest to establish a sense of national identity, rights of indigenous people and national independence from the Spanish and the Portuguese colonizers. Doris Sommer's has called these narratives foundational fictions and include works such as *Facundo* (1845) by Argentine writer Domingo Sarmiento, *Maria* (1867) by Jorge Isaac from Columbia, *Cumanda* (1879) by Juan León Mera from Ecuador etc. With the rise of women's education women writers also wrote fiction highlighting the oppression and marginalization of indigenous people, slaves and women. Some notable works are *Sab* (1841) by Cuban author Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. He wrote in Romantic conventions. *Blanca Sol* (1888) by Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera is another important text. One of the most important novels of 'indigenismo', *Aves sin nido* (1889) was penned by the Peruvian Naturalist author Clorinda Matto de Turner. Beginning in Mexico with the Revolution of 1911, indigenismo was a nationalist political ideology expressed in various policies, educational and economic reform programs as well as through artistic expression. It advocated dominant social and political roles for Indians in constructing a nation-state, according to Indian heritage by drawing a sharp distinction between Indians and Europeans.

The first distinctly Latin American literary movement in Spanish that had a global impact is called 'Modernismo' that emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was an amalgamation of Romanticism, French Symbolism and Parnassian school of poetry. This Spanish American modernism that flowered in 1880s must not be confused with the Anglo-American Modernism of poets such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound that peaked around 1922 or with the Brazilian modernism that arose around 1928. Global industrialization, capitalism, Spain's loss of all its colonies and the rise of North American cultural and economic imperialism were some factors that ushered in a new poetic era of Modernistas who were critical of the conservative thematic and stylistic structures that persisted from the colonial period. The poetry of José Martí, Julian del Casal (Cuba), Salvador Díaz Mirón (Mexico), José Asunción Silva (Columbia), Leopold Lugones (Argentina), Ricardo Jaimes Freyre (Bolivia), Amado Nervo (Mexico) and Delmira Agustini (Uruguay) is usually considered to have started the trend. Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, a renowned journalist from Mexico and founder of the literary review *La Revista Azul*, promoted Modernismo throughout Latin America. It was the publication José Martí's *Ismaelillo* in 1882 which is regarded as a definitive moment in the growth of the movement. Martí is considered the first great visionary Latin American poet as he sought to define Nuestra América. That is casting the identity of Latin America as one struggling for artistic, political and economic independence. However it is Rubén Darío's collection of poems *Azul* (1888) which is considered a foundational text of this poetic movement. The Nicaraguan poet Darío is regarded the central figure and also the father of this movement. His poetry was a reaction to the decadence of Romanticism. Modernismo poetics has many stages and diverse poets yet there are some defining notions associated with it such as; cosmopolitanism or transnational preoccupations, a cult for the exotic, use of Greek and Nordic mythology as

inspiration, use of free verse, propensity for musicality, adherence to the ideal of arts for art's sake and a search for aesthetic ideals of perfection and beauty. Jean Franco has summed up *modernismo's* key features in the following words: "rejection of any overt message or teaching in art, the stress on beauty as the highest goal and the need to free verse from traditional forms"(119). Nevertheless, the movement began to wane by 1914 and other avant-garde artistic and aesthetic movements gained prominence.

In the 1920s a number of innovative but somewhat ephemeral artistic movements that are categorized under the heading avant-garde cropped up as an attempt to free art from having to respond to needs other than those of artistic creation and expression. Their impact was most strongly felt in Argentina, Chile, Peru, Cuba and Mexico. However, some critics say that these trends also inspired visual artists, Cubist poets etc. in Eastern, Western Europe and the United States, culminating in surrealist tendencies. These movements were guided by the intention of defying and revising the 19<sup>th</sup> century literary and artistic tradition. Many groups were also connected to social and political antagonism against hegemonic trends of the time. They laid emphasis on stripping poetic language of ornamental devices and other conceptual debris of tradition to foster powerful newly created imagery. Art was thought to be an unmediated expression of the genius of its creator. The poet was perceived as a small God and the main thrust was to create from scratch. Vicente Huidobro's essay "El creacionismo" of 1925 was an influential manifesto to proclaim these ideas. The publication of *Altazor* in 1931 by the Chilean Vicente Huidobro marks a break with the past. The ingenious stylistic practices that Huidobro devised and his poetic vision came to be known as 'creacionismo' as he sought to create a poem the way nature made a tree. He invested his words with autonomous linguistic and symbolic significance. His unique antilyrical, intellectual use of words which were disconnected from emotional and spiritual experience created a world different from other words and captured poet's experience of the existential angst. His poems "Arte poética," "Depart," and "Marino" exemplify this. Huidobro's influence is also evident in the school of thought centered on the 'theory of Ultraísmo' which attempted to construct alternative linguistic choices and synthesized Latin American with Spanish and European tendencies. The main proponent of this movement was Jorge Luis Borges. Some of his most representative poems that embody his theory of unification of lyricism and metaphysics as means of the poetic process are "Everything and Nothing," "Everness," "Laberinto," "Dreamtigers," and "Borges y yo", though he was frequently nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature primarily for his short fiction. Another distinctive and eminent figure that emerged during this phase was César Vallejo from Peru. Though, he was hardly recognized during his lifetime, he created an idiom to render the Spanish tradition, his own Peruvian heritage as well as the contemporary concerns involving war, depression, isolation and alienation. His first book of poems titled *Los heraldos negros* (1918) got translated as *The Black Heralds*. It shows stylistic influence of Parnassianism and Modernismo. It was in *Trilce* a major work published later where we see abundant use of startling imagery, neologisms, colloquialisms, typographic innovations. In 1945, the Nobel Prize for Literature was given to Gabriela Mistral. A Chilean poet, educator and diplomat, she became the first Latin American to be awarded. Enjoying popularity throughout her life she is remembered as Latin America's most honoured woman. She was the recipient of National Award for Chilean Literature as well. Further, she received honorary doctorates from the University of Florence, the University

of Chile, the University of California, and Columbia University. Her poetry infused with lyricism, inspired by strong emotions is considered representative of the idealism of the Hispanic American World. Her influence is profoundly evident on Pablo Neruda who won the Nobel Prize in 1971. For an elaborate discussion on Neruda as a poet read section 2.2. Another significant poet from the region who was internationally famous as a distinguished poet, critic and essayist is Octavio Paz. One of his best-known books, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* is a comprehensive portrait of Mexican society and culture. Awarded the Nobel prize in Literature in 1990, his eminence was recognized as early as the mid-1960's when J. M. Cohen, in his influential study *Poetry of This Age, 1908-1965*, called Paz and Neruda, "two of the chief Spanish-American poets." In the presentation speech of Nobel Prize his poem "Piedra de sol" ("Sunstone") was praised as a magnificent instance of surrealist poetry. His early poetry bears influence of Marxism, Surrealism, Existentialism, Buddhism and Hinduism. However in the later poems, love, eroticism and Buddhism become dominant themes. It is the opinion of many critics that Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, Cesar Vallejo, Alejo Carpentier and Jorge Luis Borges created the groundwork for the next phase in Latin American Literature called 'the Boom' that peaked during the 1960s and 1970s.

Boom is the phase after the II World War. It is the time when some seminal works by writers like Julio Cortazar (Argentina), Carlos Fuentes (Mexico), Octavio Paz (Mexico), Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru) and Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Columbia) brought international acclaim to Latin American Literature. It did not constitute a formal movement or had any clearly defined manifesto. The writers in focus were mainly authors of prose fiction who brought to fore the concept of magical realism although it predates the boom period. These writers did not follow a credo but shared perceivably common traits. Some common features of Boom fiction are: it is heavy in metaphor, has freewheeling non-linear use of time, has shifting perspectives, tends to be folklorist, is often politically charged but the themes are largely metaphysical and universal in nature. William Faulkner, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Federico Garcia Lorca are regarded as inspiration for this literary effusion. Another important factor that was a significant political event and became the intellectual rallying point for the writers of this period was the Cuban Revolution. Many of the Boom writers were pro-revolution. They saw themselves as public intellectuals. They explicitly supported the regime of Fidel Castro. One of the definitive literary features of the texts written during this time was the non-linear and experimental narrative structure. Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* (1963) and Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (1966) published in Spanish became hugely popular. They were pretty soon translated into English as *Hopscotch* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* respectively. Márquez's novel especially became a landmark text in World Literature. It led to the association of magic realism with Latin American literature. A nebulous term to define, magical realism is a mode of writing in which the fantastical and magical elements are presented as normal/commonplace and ordinary is presented as extraordinary to question the normative reality. It is because it constructs an alternative to accepted reality this mode is also considered a genre of political subversion because many writers have used it as a tool against political regimes. Also known as "marvelous realism" or "fantastic realism", the concept was introduced as "*lo real maravilloso*" ("the marvelous real") by the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier in his essay "On the Marvelous Real in Spanish America" (1949). According to him the dramatic history and geography of Latin

America appeared 'fantastic' in the eyes of the world. But it was the critic Angel Flores who in 1955 adopted the term 'magical realism' instead of 'magic realism' to describe Latin American authors writing in the mode that transformed “the common and the everyday into the awesome and the unreal”. Today, magical realism is as an international trend. However, the popularity of magic realism as literary trend increased tremendously when in 1967 the Nobel Prize for literature was awarded to Miguel Angel Asturias. Augusto Roa Bastos's *Yo, el supremo* (1974) is also considered a monumental text. In 1982 García Márquez received the Nobel Prize and published *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Some other important novelists of this period were Chilean José Donoso, the Guatemalan Augusto Monterroso and the Cuban Guillermo Cabrera Infante.

The next phase is called 'the contemporary era'. It is also called 'the post-boom phase' because writers had started reevaluating the success of the Boom period to be burdensome. They condemned the caricature that stereotyped Latin American Literature to magical realism. The literature written in this phase is often characterized by a propensity towards irony, humour and popular genres. However some writers continue to ride the success wave of Boom. Laura Esquivel in *Como agua para chocolate* translated as *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989) is one such text. It employs a pastiche of magical realism. The writing in the contemporary period is varied. Some other significant authors who have earned international acclaim in the recent years are Paulo Coelho, Isabel Allende, Diamela Eltit, Giannina Braschi, Luisa Valenzuela and many others. In the recent years the genre of *testimonio* has gained a lot of popularity after Rigoberta Menchu (a feminist and human rights activist for Indigenous people of Guatemala) earned international acclaim. Some prominent contemporary Latin American poets are Nicanor Parra, Carmen Ollé, and Ernesto Cardenal. Nicanor Parra is the originator of the contemporary poetic movement in Latin America known as antipoetry (poems that are antiromantic, demeaning and aggressive). Ernesto Cardenal's poetry blends revolutionary political ideology with Roman Catholic theology to reveal ugly truths. Another important contemporary poet has been Rosario Ferré who is known for her radical and militant feminist poetry. In general, the poetry since the 1980s focuses majorly on themes of oppression and exile. For instance, Mario Benedetti from Argentina and Juan Gelman focus on the experience of exile. There have also been number of poets such as Alejandra Pizarnik, Rosario Murillo, Giaconda Belli, Claribel Alegría, Juana de Ibarbourou, Ana Istarú who write poetry about the marginalization and oppression of women in a male dominated society. Finally, the 21<sup>st</sup> century Latin American poetry characterized by experimental orientation and socio-political consciousness about national and international issues, signals the work of *los nuevos*, the new poets.

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Recall briefly the names and contributions of the prominent Latin American poets.

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2) What do you understand by the term magical realism?

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## 2.2 INTRODUCTION TO PABLO NERUDA (1904-1973)

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Hailed as 'Picasso of poetry' for his inclination to experiment and change his poetic style frequently, Pablo Neruda was a poet-diplomat from Chile. He was born in the town of Parral on 12 July 1904. Earlier known as Neftali Ricardo Reyes, he adopted Pablo Neruda as a pseudonym. The pseudonym later became his legal name as well. Neruda's work is central to Spanish American Poetry between the 1920s and 1970s and forms a critical link between the surrealist movement and the Magic Realism of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He is considered the greatest poet writing in the Spanish language in his lifetime. Neruda won the Nobel Prize for poetry in 1971. His poems have been translated into many languages.

The early part of Neruda's life was spent in Temuco where he received his education. His father is known to have been a railway employee and mother was a teacher. Unfortunately both the parents died when Neruda was still very young. Brought up by his stepmother, Neruda's poetic talent was encouraged by his school teacher Gabriela Mistral. Mistral, a Nobel Prize winner herself, gave him books to read and mentored him. In the early 1920s he went to the capital city of Santiago to study. A precocious boy he published some of his first poems in the student magazine *Claridad* and contributed some articles to the daily "La Mañana". In 1920, he adopted his pen name and started contributing to the literary journal "Selva Austral". He greatly admired the Czechoslovak poet Jan Neruda (1834-1891). It is reported that he took his name to honour his memory. His first book was published in 1923. It was titled *Crepusculario*. His best-known work *Veinte poemas de amor y una cancion desesperada* (Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair) was published the following year. This internationally celebrated and critically acclaimed collection of poems made him immensely popular and the much quoted Latin American poet. Poems in this volume are lucid, lyrical, contain vivid nature imagery and are highly symbolic. The poem 'Tonight I Can Write' is taken from this collection. The predominant tone in the entire collection is modernista- simple, meditative and highly suggestive that brings strong images and memories to mind. In his article "Pablo Neruda: Overview" Renéde Costa states that this book when published was judged by critics to be brazenly titillating. It was criticized for being highly erotic and its daring departure from the established tradition of genteel Hispanic lyricism. In *Saturday Review* Robert Clemens observes that this book "established [Neruda] at the outset as a frank, sensuous spokesman for love."

The second phase of Neruda's life, when he emerged as a poet diplomat, spans from 1927 to 1935. During this phase he was put in charge of number of honorary consulships by the government. Subsequently he travelled to Burma, Ceylon,

Java, Singapore, Buenos Aires, Barcelona, and Madrid. His experiences in these countries left a powerful impact on Neruda. He felt pained to see the intellectual servitude of the culturally rich South Asian Masses. Anguished about the contemporary social disorder he increasingly identified with the downtrodden masses. In 1933 he published *Residencia en la tierra*, which contains esoteric poem with marked surrealist tendencies. Subjects like past, death and chaos are recurrent and are presented as nightmarish visions of disintegration. Some poems are difficult, cryptic, mysterious and obscure. Chile's relationship with Spain and the aftermath of colonization is a predominant theme. The style is fragmented which is an outcome of abandoning normal syntax, rhyme, and stanza organization. There is deliberate juxtaposition of opposites; crude against the beautiful. Conscious references to violence and vagueness are also pervasive. Nature imagery is intensified.

In 1934, Neruda was appointed Chilean consul in Barcelona, Spain. However soon he got transferred to Madrid, where he met and befriended Federico García Lorca. Later García Lorca became a close friend of Neruda. Lorca was an enthusiastic supporter of Neruda's poetry. It is around this time that Neruda emerged as a people's poet and developed staunch communist leanings. He also came in contact with Rafael Alberti, Miguel Hernández and Peruvian poet César Vallejo. The Spanish Civil War that broke out in 1936 (the military revolt against Republican government in Spain, supported by conservative elements) and the execution of García Lorca affected him deeply, motivating him to join the Republican Movement. His poetry written during this phase is concerned with social and political matters. In 1937 he returned to Chile. Hereafter he became actively involved in his country's political life. He also gave many lectures and did poetry readings. He was a supporter of Republican Spain and Chile's new centre-left government. In 1940 moved to Mexico as Chile's consul general. Here he began writing the epic poem *Canto-General*. Hailed as the Bible of America, the poem celebrates Latin American flora, fauna and history. Neruda returned to Chile in 1943. In 1945 joined the Communist Party of Chile. During 1946 elections he campaigned for the leftist candidate Gabriel González Videla. 1947 was the year of publication of *Third Residence*, that contained the poem *The Way Spain Was*. Embodying his attitude of solidarity for the people of Spain, as a poetic response to the horrors of the Spanish civil War, the poem recounts the repeated strife and suffering that Spain had to endure historically. Feeling betrayed by the President in 1948 he published an open letter criticizing Videla for his repressive policies. Consequentially, Neruda was expelled from the senate for his subversive activities. Persecuted, he went into exile. During his banishment he visited Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary and Mexico. It is also reported that during this time that he met a Chilean woman, whom he later married. Her name was Matilde Urrutia.

In 1952 the political situation in Chile had become favourable for Neruda to return. In this last phase of his life simulated by international fame and personal happiness, he wrote incessantly and published *Elemental Odes* in 1954. These odes are written in simple language, humorously capturing minute details of everyday objects. Between 1958 and 1973 he published about 20 books. Among his works of the last few years are *Cien sonetos de amor* (1959), *Memorial de Isla Negra*, *Arte de pájaros* (1966), *La Barcarola* (1967), the play *Fulgor y muerte de Joaquín Murieta* (1967), *Las manos del día* (1968), *Fin del mundo* (1969), *Las piedras del cielo* (1970), and *La espada encendida*. After



being diagnosed with cancer in 1970, Neruda was bed ridden between 1972 and 1973. The Nobel Prize for literature was awarded to him in 1971. Neruda died in September 1973. His funeral turned into a public protest against the Chilean dictatorship, when thousands of grieving Chilean flooded the streets spontaneously.

Now before we read the prescribed poems, let us first answer the following questions.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 2) Make a critical appraisal of Pablo Neruda as a poet.

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- 3) Name the collection of poems that catapulted Neruda to fame. Critically comment on its prominent literary features.

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**2.3 “TONIGHT I CAN WRITE” –TEXT WITH ANNOTATIONS AND ANALYSIS**

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From Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair [1924]

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.  
Write, for example, ‘The night is shattered  
and the blue stars shiver in the distance.’  
The night wind revolves in the sky and sings.  
Tonight I can write the saddest lines.  
I loved her, and sometimes she loved me too.  
Through nights like this one I held her in my arms.  
I kissed her again and again under the endless sky.  
  
She loved me, sometimes I loved her too.  
How could one not have loved her great still eyes.

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.

To think that I do not have her. To feel that I have lost her.

To hear the immense night, still more immense without her.

And the verse falls to the soul like dew to the pasture.

What does it matter that my love could not keep her.

The night is shattered and she is not with me.

This is all. In the distance someone is singing. In the distance.

My soul is not satisfied that it has lost her.

My sight searches for her as though to go to her.

My heart looks for her, and she is not with me.

The same night whitening the same trees.

We, of that time are no longer the same.

I no longer love her, that's certain, but how I loved her.

My voice tried to find the wind to touch her hearing.

Another's. She will be another's. Like my kisses before.

Her voice. Her bright body. Her infinite eyes.

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

Love is so short, forgetting is so long.

Because through nights like this one I held her in my arms

my soul is not satisfied that it has lost her.

Though this be the last pain that she makes me suffer

and these the last verses that I write for her.

### ANNOTATIONS

Tonight I Can Write—The word 'tonight' in the title indicates that the devastating sorrow had perhaps prevented the poet from writing about the loss till now. The poem is a lyrical evocation of speaker's relationship with the woman he has loved and lost

"blue stars shiver in the distance"—suggests the distance between the lovers and the fidgetiness of the speaker's isolation.

line 4 sings- the whistling sound made by the wind (wind is personified)

line 13 immense- endless, infinite

line 14 verse- poetry

dew-tiny drops of water that form on cool surfaces at night, when atmospheric vapour condenses.

pasture-land covered with grass and other low plants suitable for grazing animals, especially cattle or sheep

line 24 touch her hearing- deliberately intermixed sensuous imagery.

### ANALYSIS

The poem has been taken from the collection titled *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* published in 1924. In English it reads as *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*. It was translated in English by W. S. Merwin in 1969. According to Anil Dhillon, "*Vinte Poemas* is a series of tense and desperately sad poems, often sensuously erotic in which the poet analyses the nature of his feelings for two separate girl friends "Marisol" of Temuco and "Marisombra", who was a fellow student in Santiago. The poem is a lament. The theme of the poem is regret due to heartbreak and loss of love. Written in simple language the poem is a lyric expressing poet's sadness because he has been estranged from his lover. A lyric is a formal poetry, typically spoken in first person and expresses personal emotions and feelings of the poet. This poem is written in free verse with no rhyme scheme or meter. But it does have a sense of rhythm. A mixture of consonance and assonance brings it through. The predominant mood is that of melancholy and nostalgia indicative of poet's conflicted emotional state. The imagery is sensuous and vivid. Nature as trope is highly ambiguous and symbolic of different things such as memory, the backdrop, and indicator of time as well as emblematic of poet's feelings. The speaker is contemplating on the aspects of nature that remind him of his lost love. Thus nature not only becomes a link to past memories but also his current emotional state.

The title of the poem lends significant sub-text to the poem. Written with ellipses, it is incomplete yet suggestive of the main idea that the pain of separation that causes much sadness to the poet is also a catalyst for him to compose this poem. The first line 'Tonight I can write the saddest lines' is repeated three times in the poem thus it also forms a refrain emphasizing the melancholic mood. The repetitions also provide thematic unity to the poem. After stating the major theme the poet then uses nature imagery as symbols to depict his passion, emotional turmoil and grief. As if echoing the poet's heartbreak, 'The night is shattered'. Blue stars shivering in distance are symbolic of the coldness and distance between the former lovers. The personified 'night wind' indicates poet's emotional turmoil. The poem remarkably captures the ambivalence of the poet who claims that he loved his beloved and in reciprocation his beloved also sometimes loved him. Night is a recurrent trope in this poem. In the line "Through nights like this one I held her in my arms", night becomes a trigger of memories reminding the poet of intimate times when the poet kissed his beloved over and over under the boundless sky. Yet night is also a setting for the poem to unfold and amplifies the immensity of poet's loneliness. In retrospect, the poet then claims that his beloved loved him and sometimes he too loved her back. The word 'sometimes' used again brings connotations of uncertainty. This implies the treacherous nature of memories that are susceptible to ambiguity and deterioration. The poet then acknowledges that perhaps it was the beauty of her "great still eyes" that compelled him to love her. The use of the refrain reiterates the sense of loss, making the poet realize, "I do not have her", "To feel that I have lost her". This feeling is heightened to a mournful suffering when in the next line poet states that the immense night has only intensified the feeling of loss. However, despite the anguish he finds recompense in poetry as, "the verse falls to the soul

like dew to the pasture". The poetry wells up in the heart of the poet as gently as moist water drops upon green fields. This expression is a poetic device called simile. The idea is continued in the next line where he consoles himself by saying, "what does it matter that my love could not keep her", yet in the very next line he contradicts himself by recounting that the night is shattered and the lover is not with him. In the next two lines the poet says that though he is aware of "someone singing in the distance" but he is so much engulfed by sadness and his soul is unable to come terms with his loss. Overwrought by it he yearns to be with her, so much so that "his sight searches for her" and "his heart looks for her". Night as a trope is repeated in the next line, fusing the idea of night as a backdrop and an indicator of the passage of time. "The same night whitening the same trees. / We, of that time, are no longer the same" encapsulates the idea that while the world remains the same, the lovers have changed drastically. The moon is not mentioned but it is suggested that it is moonlight that makes trees appear white. The next few lines of the poem capture poets conflicted emotions where he first claims with certitude that he doesn't love her anymore but then immediately recalls the passion with which he had loved her. This makes him yearn for her again, and his "voice tried to find the wind to touch her hearing". Contradictorily, he is reminded that the lady now belongs to someone else, though in his mind he vividly remembers, "Her voice. Her bright body. Her infinite eyes." In this line he expresses his longing to reunite with his lover but he can't so he tries to console himself by repeating to himself that he no longer loves her. However, his heart belies him and he doubts himself again saying, "but maybe I love her". This emotional turmoil makes him come to a realization that "Love is short, forgetting is so long." The line is indicative of the profound and lasting impact love has on people. Forgetting a passionate love affair or an estranged lover is thus a difficult and time taking process. Also, love as an idea is universal and eternal in the sense that it transcends the lovers who are only objects of love and prone to change. Once again the poet mentions the night because it is "through nights like this one he had held her in his arms" so he is made to reminisce the amorous intimate moments he shared with her. The night is a reminder of these memories so his "soul isn't satisfied that he has lost her". But these sentiments act as impetus for the poet to transmute his pain into poetry, making him conclude, "though this be the last pain that she makes me suffer and these the last verses that I write for her." Rejection in love becomes an inspiration for the poet to write. From a flux of complex and contradictory emotions that the speaker feels, the poem becomes a medium to crystallize his resolves to move on. In Agosin's opinion this poem along with some others in this collection, "marks a clear transition from the era of Spanish-American modernism to that of surrealism, with its often disconnected images and metaphors, which will dominate Neruda's next phase."

### Check Your Progress 3

Read the following questions and answer the questions in the space that follows:

- 1) Discuss the significance of the title "Tonight I can Write . . .". Does it aptly reflect the theme?

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2) Examine the symbolic use of nature imagery in the poem.

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3) Make a short critical appraisal of the poetic devices used in the poem ,  
“Tonight I can Write”.

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## 2.4 “THE WAY SPAIN WAS” –TEXT WITH ANNOTATIONS

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From Third Residence [1947]

Taught and dry Spain was,  
a day’s drum of dull sound,  
a plain, an eagle’s eyrie, a silence  
below the lashing weather.

How unto crying out, unto the very soul  
I love your barren soil and your rough bread,  
your stricken people!  
How in the depths of me  
grows the lost flower of your villages,  
timeless, impossible to budge,  
your tracts of minerals  
bulging like oldsters under the moon,  
devoured by an imbecile god.

All your extensions, your bestial solitude,  
joined with your sovereign intelligence,  
haunted by the abstracted stones of silence,  
your harsh wine and your sweet wine,  
your violent and delicate vineyards.

Stone of the sun, pure among territories,  
Spain veined with bloods and metals, blue and victorious,  
proletariat of petals and bullets,  
alone alive, somnolent, resounding.

### ANNOTATIONS

taut: tensed, rigid

day's drum of dull sound: dreary monotonous rhythm of time

eyrie: eagle's nest usually made high on mountain cliffs

lashing weather: tempestuous storm

barren soil: infertile land

tracts: large expanse

bulging: swelling outwards

oldsters: opposite of youngsters, old people

devoured: eat, consume

imbecile: foolish

bestial: savage

sovereign: monarch, supreme

haunted: frequented by ghosts, possessed

abstracted: intellectual, withdrawn

harsh: coarse

violent: aggressive, brutal

proletariat: the wage earners that comprise the lowest rung of the society and are oppressed by the bourgeoisie in a capitalist regime.

somnolent: sleepy, tired, drowsy

resounding: emphatic and ringing

### ANALYSIS

The Spanish Civil War forms the context of this poem which was published in *Third Residence* 1947. Between 1936 to 1939 Spain got engulfed in civil strife due to conflict between the leftist Republicans who were in the government and the Nationalist who were conservatives who were supported by Fascist forces. The right wing nationalists had the support of army, Catholic church, monarchists and large landowners. There were a number of reasons for the war to break out. One reason was the decline of the Spanish Empire, as by 1930s Spain had lost all of its colonies. The Second Empire formed in 1930s had proved incompetent in maintain law and order. The Church was strongly opposed to the social reform measures and army had always interfered in the country's politics. The feeling of unrest was compounded by the fact that by this time Spain also had been lagging behind industrially in comparison to the rest of the Europe. During this time Neruda had been posted in Spain as a consul and was deeply affected by the Spanish Civil War as it claimed the lives of two of his close friends, Garcia

Lorca and Miguel Hernandez. Neruda returned to Chile in 1937. Hereafter he became a member of the Communist Party of Chile and continued to express his concerns for social issues. In John Felstiner's words, "Spain's trauma affected Neruda unexpectedly: in teaching him a form of patriotism, an identification through time with land and people, the war on Spanish soil tightened his bond to Chile"(55).

Tejwant Singh Gill in "Neruda and Spain" argues that the Spanish Civil War deeply moved the intelligentsia world over who perceived General Franco's revolt against the Republic, abetted by German Nazism and Italian Fascism, as a threat to the treasured ideals of freedom, democracy and socialism. For poets and artists who felt overwhelmed by this contest between the democratic and the despotic forces, this war became a metaphor that they rendered in different ways through creative compositions. Some notable examples are the poem 'Ode to Spain' by W. H. Auden and Pablo Picasso's painting 'Guernica'. In Latin American poetry Pablo Neruda and Cesar Vallejo showed forceful engagement with this metaphor. For instance, Neruda's *Spain in My Heart* published in 1937 was written with the intent to extend his support for the republican cause. The poetry collection provided solace to the refugees. Expressing his sympathy with the vast multitude of strife stricken people, it contains poems such as "I Explain a Few Things" that invoke Spain's glorious past, full of prosperity and happiness, which is then contrasted with a decaying Spain ridden with endemic poverty perpetrated by royalty and also religion, and also the horrors perpetrated upon the civic population by the despotic forces. Further, many poems also express his compassion for the innocent people victimized, written with an intent to instil hope and show solidarity. In this poem too (The Way Spain Was) he recounts with deep anguish the suffering that people of Spain had to endure repeatedly. Some critics also opine that it is due to his experience in the diplomatic service he cultivated a feeling of solidarity for the tormented masses of Spain. He mourns for the 'stricken people' going through the hard times, and historically rich and glorious Spain destroyed by the despotic fascist forces. This sentiment is reflected in the title of the poem, *The Way Spain Was*. It is because the poem is a retrospective recollection of Spain's glorious past juxtaposed with contemporary disintegration and decay. It charts out his emotional response towards Spain through the use of surrealist poetic techniques. Before we begin stanza by stanza explanation, let us understand what is surrealism? Surrealism is a movement in literature and visual arts that emerged in Europe with Paris as the centre, between the I and the II World Wars. It grew out of the earlier anti-art Dadaism. It was a reaction against excessive rationalism and bourgeois values which were pervasive in the European culture and politics and had culminated in the horrific destruction caused by these wars. The term 'surrealism' was coined by Guillaume Apollinaire in 1917. The major spokesman of the movement was the poet and critic André Breton, who was also trained in medicine and psychiatry. He published the Surrealist Manifesto in 1924. Breton who regarded it as a revolutionary movement was influenced by the theories of Sigmund Freud, particularly his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), and perceived the unconscious (especially dreams and fantasy) as a means to unlock imagination because the rational mind repressed imagination by weighting it down with taboos. He also advocated the need to bypass reason and rationality, to embrace chance through "pure psychic automatism" while creating art. Thus, the thrust of the movement was to reunite the conscious and unconscious realms of experience to create an absolute reality or super reality/surreality. Unlike their forefathers of Romanticism who also stressed upon the importance of

personal imagination, the surrealists believed that revelations could be found on the street and everyday life. These writers were also influenced by Karl Marx and believed in the potential of imagination to encourage the revolution by revealing the contradictions in the everyday life. The most recognisable element of the movement is the element of surprise which is achieved through incongruous juxtaposition of content. The literary device called 'non sequitur' (denotes an abrupt, illogical, or unexpected turn in plot or dialogue by including a relatively inappropriate change) is used for comic purposes. Another prominent feature is the perplexingly outlandish and uncanny imagery meant to jolt the reader out of complacency and normative assumptions. Nature imagery is frequently used but with a twist, for instance the German painter and sculptor Marx Ernst used a bird as his alter ego. W.H. Auden, Dylan Thomas, Ted Hughes, Robert Bly, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Duncan, etc. are some Surrealist poets in English. Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon and Federico García Lorca have also created their most enduring work under the influence of surrealism. In Latin American poetry surrealist aesthetic is discernible in poems by Pablo Neruda and Octavio Paz.

In the light of above discussion let us now analyse the poem, "The Way Spain Was".

The first stanza presents a visual impression of Spain's topography as a severe land caught in the monotonous rhythm of time; a country with mountains where birds like eagle make their nest and plains that are full of tumultuous storms. Through these symbolic images Spain is invoked here as a land ridden with turmoil both in geographical and topographical sense.

The second stanza records Neruda's personal attitude to Spain, his love for the country, the people in its villages, its infertile land, and its rudimentary crude food. He is deeply moved by the suffering of its people who remain sunk in endemic poverty. He yearns to see the fresh bloom of life, which is not to be found anywhere because be it rich minerals or old people, all alike are being consumed by an 'imbecile god' the despotic General Fransico Franco who led the military uprising backed by right-wing nationalists.

In the third stanza Neruda reflects on the condition of Spain by juxtaposing past and present. Spain is historically rich but reduced to a state of destitution at the time of the Spanish Civil War. Neruda personifies it and juxtaposes contradictory qualities as its attributes. For instance, it is gifted with supreme intelligence as well as withdrawn quietude. Its wine is both potent as well as mild. Its vineyards are turbulent as well as delicate.

In the last stanza too Neruda presents a surrealistic collage of images to recall the lost glory of Spain and its condition during the civil war. The antiquity of Spain is evoked through the phrase "stone of sun, pure among territories". Its rich mineral reserves evoked with the phrase "Spain veined with bloods and metals". A land once governed by great monarchs, "blue and victorious" it is now "proletariat of petals and bullets" because of the protesting masses. Here Neruda deliberately juxtaposes the coarse against the alluring. The motive is to shock the reader out of complacency. The concluding line of the poem instills hope, that despite the strife, and despite its sleepy, lonely state, in future, Spain will emerge emphatic and reverberating in victory.

In terms of use of poetic technique, inspired by surrealism the poem is highly cryptic and obscure. The meaning is not easily conveyed because of the use of



the mysterious and unusual images. Nature imagery is intensified. The syntax is fragmented. There is predilection with alliteration. According to Marjorie Agosin (2011), the inspiration behind this chaotic enumeration in the collection *The Residence Cycle* was not just Neruda’s experience of the Orient during his sojourn in the South East Asia but also a culmination of the avant-garde movement that had been gestating in Europe and Latin America in the early decades of twentieth century. In “The Residence Cycle Neruda and the Avant-garde” she writes “we see that the language of these books, charged with metaphor, intense subjectivity, and distilled aestheticist vocabulary, unleashes the imagination and makes possible a break with the order characterized by logical structures, established rhythms, and other traditional norms of poetic expression”(77).

**Check Your Progress 4**

Read the following questions and answer the questions in the space that follows:

- 1) Discuss Neruda’s attitude towards Spain in “The Way Spain Was”.

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- 2) Critically comment on the poetic techniques used by Neruda in “The Way Spain Was”.

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**2.5 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit the following ideas have been discussed:

Latin America refers to territories in the Southern American continent. It also includes Mexico (North America) where the (Romance languages) Spanish, Portuguese or French are spoken. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Latin American literature shows influence of Neoclassicism, Realism and Naturalism. The first distinctly Latin American literary movement in Spanish that had a global impact is called Modernismo. It emerged in last decade of 19<sup>th</sup> century and eventually gave way to avant-garde tendencies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which are evident in movements like Creacionismo and Ultraísmo. In fiction of the next phase called 'the Boom' the literary mode of magical realism came to the fore with many Latin American writers getting international acclaim.

There have been many illustrious poets from Latin America like, Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda and Octavio Paz who won the Nobel Prize. Among them Pablo Neruda is the most widely read poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His poetry collection *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, a collection of poetry from which the poem “Tonight I can write...” has been taken, brought him into limelight.

The poem is a lyric where poet persona laments the loss of a lover. The next poem "The Way Spain Was" is from the collection titled *Third Residence*. Infused with surrealist poetic tendencies the poem invokes Spain's glorious past and juxtaposes it with its decaying, degenerating condition under the grip of despotic forces after the Spanish Civil War.

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## 2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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These are only suggested as additional reading and are in no way compulsory.

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## **2.8 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES**

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### **Check Your Progress 1**

For all answers refer to 1.1

### **Check Your Progress 2**

For your answers refer to 2.2

### **Check Your Progress 3**

For answers refer to 2.3

