

Bread, Truth, Wine, Dreams: A Study of Pablo Neruda as a Mythic Figure
in Latin American Popular Fiction

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“I have often maintained that the best poet is he who prepares our daily bread: the nearest baker who does not imagine himself to be a god. He does his majestic and unpretentious work of kneading the dough, consigning it to the oven, baking it in golden colors and handing us our daily bread as a duty of fellowship. And, if the poet succeeds in achieving this simple consciousness, this too will be transformed into an element in an immense activity, in a simple or complicated structure which constitutes the building of a community, the changing of the conditions which surround mankind, the handing over of mankind’s products: bread, truth, wine, dreams.”

—Pablo Neruda

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Abstract

Pablo Neruda has become much more than a legacy of poetry. It is evident by the numerous studies done that Neruda's life has as much to do with his continued success as does his written work. What is interesting is the way in which the appropriation of Neruda—in the form of stories that directly relate to his life—has allowed for different types of myths. Using Roland Barthes's theory of Mythology, it is possible to link Neruda the man to a number of concepts. By exploring his life and then studying several works of fiction that include Neruda as a character, we can see how a particular myth can illuminate both our understanding of the work and the way we feel about Neruda. The importance of this study lies in what it reveals about our ideologies and how we perpetuate Neruda's ideas of love, hope, dreams, and desires.

INTRODUCTION

On December 13, 1971 Pablo Neruda delivered his Nobel lecture in Sweden after being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. He began with, “My speech is going to be a long journey, a trip that I have taken through regions that are distant and antipodean...” In true Neruda fashion, he opted to detail a heroic account of his renegade travels across the Andes during Gonzalez Videla’s presidency. His escape from Chile reads like a Homeric adventure filled with peril, romance, and redemption set in a landscape of “huge trees, impassable rivers, immense cliffs and desolate expanses of snow.” Neruda chronicles his experience as an opportunity for creativity and comes to an important realization. He states, “Each and every one of my verses has chosen to take its place as a tangible object, each and every one of my poems has claimed to be a useful working instrument, each and every one of my songs has endeavored to serve as a sign in space for a meeting between paths which cross one another, or as a piece of stone or wood on which someone, some others, those who follow after, will be able to carve the new signs.” In much the same way that his poetry serves as an instrument, whether it is as political protest or catalyst for seduction, it can be argued that Neruda himself serves as an instrument or an object that can be carved on with new signs, and has, in the process, acquired a mythic status.

Teresa Longo, in Pablo Neruda and the U.S. Culture Industry, talks about the immense popularity of Pablo Neruda in the United States. Longo details the various

ways in which Neruda has been appropriated over the years, “Neruda’s name surfaced on ABC’s *Ellen*, in the quick repartee between Bart and Lisa Simpson [Bart smartly replies to Lisa with, “I am aware of the works of Pablo Neruda.”] and in the Broadway musical *Rent*” (xvi). To that list, I add my own observations: Robin Williams as Patch Adams reads a poem from Neruda’s 100 Love Sonnets, and the 2004 film The Motorcycle Diaries, based on Che Guevara’s memoirs, references Neruda’s poems. Che Guevara was known to have carried Neruda’s verses during the revolution in Cuba. Ann Marie Stock points out that Neruda’s own Chile appropriates his image for the purposes of selling real estate, “*Condominio Pablo Neruda*...features the familiar image of the legendary poet alongside the slogan ‘*El sueño de vivir en lo propio*’” (114). Stock writes, “just as residents of the *Condominio Pablo Neruda* buy their place in this collective, so too do readers—from critics to coffee-shop proprietors—deploy Neruda’s poetry to narrate the myth of hemispheric harmony” (115). In my observations I have also come across Pablo Neruda in the works of three well-known authors: José Donoso, Antonio Skarmeta, and Gabriel García Márquez. Just as Stock suggests that Neruda’s *poetry* is used to narrate a myth, I will demonstrate how these authors incorporate and produce a specific myth or idea of *Neruda* in their respective work. In order to talk about Neruda as a mythic figure, it is important to first establish an appropriate working terminology. The semiotic studies done by Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes will serve as a base for this purpose.

SAUSSURE AND BARTHES

“Semiotics involves the study of signification, but signification cannot be isolated from the human subject who uses it and is defined by means of it, or from the cultural system which generates it.” –Kaja Silverman

Ferdinand de Saussure, in his *Course on General Linguistics*, posits the following: “we can say that what is natural to mankind is not oral speech but the faculty of constructing a language, i.e. a system of distinct signs corresponding to distinct ideas” (154). Saussure categorizes this sign system into three parts: Signifier, Signified, and Sign. The Signifier can be thought of as the “sound-image” what Saussure distinguishes as a “psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses” (159). The signified is the “concept” or thing. The linguistic sign is the conjunction of the signifier and signified. What is important is that the construction of the sign is arbitrary. There is no necessary connection between the signifier HORSE and the composition of “hoofness” “maneness,” etc. that signal the concept HORSE. The value is derived from our communal agreement on the meaning. The well-known critic and theorist Roland Barthes will add to the ideas set forth by Saussure’s study of signs by suggesting that a second order sign system also exists: myth.

Barthes’ theory begins where Saussure’s ends—with the Sign. Barthes will be working with his own tri-dimensional pattern using the terms *signification*, *form*, and *concept*. In talking about the formation of myth and ideology, Barthes suggests that anything, whether it is a bird, pencil, rock, Pablo Neruda, etc. can stand for something else: “Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society, for there is no law, whether natural or not, which

forbids talking about things.” (Barthes 109). The sign is taken and used as a signifier for a particular myth. For example, Barthes notes that an arrow, which is brought in to signify a challenge, is a type of speech. Because this speech acts as a message, it is not limited to oral speech. Barthes points out that “it can consist of modes of writing or of representations; not only written discourse, but also photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity, all these can serve as a support to mythical speech” (110). Just as the image of Neruda on a billboard advertising real estate is a literal sign, the use of his image, like the use of the arrow, comes to signify something else, namely the myth of a communal existence through apartment living and/or the larger utopian idea of global communal harmony. The arrow can also be used as a signifier for a multiple of signifieds. In other words, one thing can come to suggest a number of *concepts* such as “kindness,” “trustworthiness,” etc. Pablo Neruda, like any actual person, does not have a simple history. He is a multifaceted person capable of signaling love, hate, compassion, or grief. Therefore, his image can be used to signify the concepts of “loveness,” “hateness,” “compassionness,” or “griefness.” Indeed, as Adam Feinstein in his biography of Neruda reminds us—citing an important observation made by critic James Nolan—“each volume of Neruda’s poetry presents a new personae” (320), for example, “the lost child,” “the adolescent lover,” “the witness of war,” and “the poet of simple objects” to name a few. Arguably, these “personas” have been emptied of Neruda’s particular history and have, over time, transformed him into a figure, and in most cases, a mythic or idealized figure, linked to any number of concepts. As Barthes states, “mythical speech is made of a material which has already been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication” (110). The reason that Neruda is emptied of his history is precisely to make room for

the *concept*. The *concept* will be the basis for a new history that will inform the myth. For Barthes, “the fundamental character of the mythical *concept* is to be appropriated” (119). And indeed Neruda is appropriated again and again in order to do everything from sell real estate, to provoke political change. Finally, just as in Saussure’s system, the SIGN (*signification*) is the combination of SIGNIFIER (*form*) and SIGNIFIED (*concept*) working together. The SIGN in Barthes’s system is the myth itself (121). In the case of the Neruda billboard, the myth is the idea of harmonious communal living (which works over, as myths do, other stakes such as capitalism, private ownership, etc.) this conclusion could only be reached by linking Neruda’s image (form) to a particular concept: “harmoniousness.” It is this linking of form to concepts that will make it possible to “mythify” Pablo Neruda.

THE MYTHIC LIFE OF PABLO NERUDA

Often, when the opportunity arises to speak about Chile, I find myself using the poetic language of Pablo Neruda. It is, after all, through Neruda that I came to understand the landscape of that South American country; the remarkable shape of it, thin and outstretched, flanked by the Pacific Ocean and the Andes Mountains; the fecund central river valley dotted with rich vineyards and golden farmland; Cape Horn and the scorched Atacama Desert. Among all of this diverse geography lays a rich history of conquest and rebirth, the struggle of the indigenous peoples to overcome the Spanish, and the resultant mixture of cultures and philosophies. When speaking of Pablo Neruda, it is not uncommon to begin with a description of his homeland. After all, it has become as much a part of him and his writing as to be almost inseparable. In his *Memoirs* Neruda writes, “Anyone who hasn’t been in the Chilean forest doesn’t know this planet. I have come out of that landscape, that mud, that silence, to roam, to go singing through the world” (6).

From humble beginnings, Neruda rose to become what Gabriel García Márquez calls “the greatest poet of the 20th Century, in any language.” Through his poetry and actions, he shared his life, his love, and his unwavering tie to humanity. Thirty-three years have passed since his death, and his image and words continue to inspire a multitude of people. The moments represented in this brief biography are meant to illustrate how the boy from Temuco grew up to become a mythic figure in literary and cultural history.

BEGINNINGS

Pablo Neruda was born on 12 July 1904 in Parral, Chile. He was given the name Ricardo Eliecer Neftalí Reyes Basoalto and would not take his famous pseudonym for quite some time. His mother, Rosa, is often described as a hard working schoolteacher, reserved and with a passion for reading. Fernandina Court, the wife of one of Rosa's pupils recalls she was, "stiff, haughty, of iron-fisted discipline" (Feinstein 4). His father, Jose del Carmen, a long time railroad worker, was six years younger than Rosa and had already fathered a child with another woman when he married her. Neruda never knew his mother, who died a few months after giving birth to him. Neruda's biographer, Volodio Tietelboim was present when Neruda returned to Parral, already established internationally as one of the greatest poets, to find some trace of his mother's past. A neighbor provides Neruda with the only known photograph of his mother, "Neruda spent a long time trying to reconstruct the intimate features of that woman. He asked several times about her character and her tastes. About any phrases she used to repeat, about words she liked" (Tietelboim 6).

After Rosa's death, José del Carmen decided to move Pablo to Temuco, a land that Neruda often characterized by its incessant rain and proximity to the indigenous Mapuche Indians, who occupied the surrounding lands. A few years later, in 1906, José del Carmen would remarry, and Neruda would find in his new stepmother, whom he called "mamadre," an outlet for his first attempts at poetry. It is here, in Temuco, that

Neruda would enter the Boy's Lyceum at the age of six and establish relationships with people who would remain his life long friends and important contributors to Chile's politics, literature and economy.

It is clear—by the research done by biographer Adam Feinstein—that Neruda was embraced by a need to write poetry at an extremely young age, and had, even in his first years at the Lyceum, taken on the persona of a melancholy, contemplative intellectual. Neruda had also begun to establish his famous passion for the opposite sex, and both Feinstein and Neruda's personal friend and biographer, Tietelboim, talk about his early sexual encounters as a metamorphosis. Feinstein states, "There is a quiet longing in many of these poems [*Obras Completas*] that reflects the tormented nature of Neftalí's early, fleeting love affairs in Temuco" (18). These formative years in Temuco would continually become the subject of his poetry, but it is while Neruda studies in Santiago that his work really begins to flourish.

THE BUDDING POET IN SANTIAGO, CHILE

Pablo Neruda arrived in the capital city of Santiago at the age of sixteen. Adam Feinstein writes, “The Chilean capital, which had grown dramatically in size in the early years of the twentieth century...was wracked by political upheaval [sic] and student and worker riots in 1920 and the aftermath both fascinated and horrified Neruda” (25). The exposure to social injustice would have a significant influence on Neruda’s work, and is perhaps an early sign of his future political inclinations. It is also at this age that Neftalí, in an attempt to discourage his father’s growing disapproval of his chosen profession, began to use the name Pablo Neruda. Although there are some contentions as to the origins of the name, most scholars agree that the name Pablo was taken from Neruda’s admiration for the use of Paolo in Italian verse, while Neruda was adopted from the Czech writer, Jan Neruda (Feinstein 23).

While in Santiago, Neruda lived an extremely impoverished life. The stereotypical “starving artist” surrounded himself with other young men, most of whom were fellow students at the university in Santiago, and often relied on them for clever ways to find food and shelter. At the same time, Neruda had established an epistolary relationship with Albertina Azocar, an important figure in Neruda’s famous collection *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada*. Though their love would never lead to anything serious, Albertina would remain a constant in Neruda’s life.

In 1923, Editorial Claridad¹ published Neruda's first collection of poetry, *Crepusculario*, written while he was living on Echarren Street in Santiago. The book was successful among the residents of Santiago and, "the critics, by and large, were also impressed" (Feinstein 39). Although Neruda experienced mild success with his first publication (he sold the rights at a pittance and made enough money to hold a celebratory dinner with his friends), he would only have to wait a year for his name to become ubiquitous in Chile.

Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada is arguably one of the most recognized collections of poetry in the Western World.

Crepusculario and *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* had quickly earned Neruda what Diego Muñoz described as, 'the greatest fame ever witnessed in Chile, surpassed only by that still enjoyed by Rubén Darío.' Literary critics fought with each other to gain interviews with the new celebrity, whose verse was known by heart by youths all over Latin America. Everyone was talking about *Twenty Love Poems* (Feinstein 43).

Neruda was only twenty years old when he experienced this newfound fame in Chile. Unfortunately, the poet had many more years of obscurity and poverty before him, and his growing restlessness with Santiago would take him to some of the most remote places of the world.

¹ Editorial Claridad was the "Chilean Student's Federation publishing house" (Feinstein 35).

CONSULAR ADVENTURES

In 1927 Neruda was offered a consular position in Rangoon, which he accepted gladly. Though he had been hoping for a position in Europe, he thought Rangoon would provide an air of exoticism and adventure. His time in Rangoon would be one of the darkest of his life, filled with depression and disappointment. Neruda had grown accustomed to having friends surround him to help him through his naturally melancholy disposition, and though his friend, Alvaro, had joined him, Rangoon would only isolate him. In a letter to his half sister Laurita, Neruda writes, “Life in Rangoon is a terrible exile, I wasn’t born to spend my life in such a hell” (Feinstein 61). Neruda later received a position in Java, which he found considerably more favorable. It was also here that he would meet his first wife, María Antonieta Hagenaar Vogelzang, whom he nicknamed “Maruca.” Though his time in the Far East was not exactly what he had expected, he left with Maruca by his side and in possession of some of the surrealist poetry that would make up *Residencia en la tierra*.

Neruda and Maruca returned to Chile in April of 1932, but they would not spend much time there. Shortly after their arrival, Neruda was offered a consular position in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It was here that Maruca became pregnant with Neruda’s only child. By 1934 a new position became available in Spain and, once again, Neruda and Maruca boarded a ship, this time for Barcelona. The time spent in Spain would be a pivotal point in Neruda’s life, both politically and romantically. Here he would reunite with the famous Andalusian poet, Federico García Lorca, and meet the woman who would become his second wife, Delia del Carril. Maruca would also give birth to their

daughter, though she was born sickly and would only survive for a few years. In Madrid, Neruda and Maruca moved into what would become one of several of his famous houses, this one named, *La Casa de Las Flores*, or the house of flowers. This house would appear in Neruda's famous poem, *Explico Algunas Cosas*, and was a gathering spot for many important people, including García Lorca. Up to this point in his life Neruda had stayed clear of political issues, though Chile was suffering through its share of unrest, but the onslaught of the Spanish Civil War would bring a change in him.

On 18 August 1936 Franco's men executed Federico García Lorca. In his memoirs Neruda writes, "And so the Spanish war, which changed my poetry, began for me with a poet's disappearance" (122). No longer able to maintain his relationship with Maruca, Neruda made his love for Delia del Carril public, and also publicized his pro-Republic viewpoint. This new involvement with the Left was a hint of the "poet of the people" who would affect the lives of the working class both in Chile and abroad. One of the most memorable feats that Neruda orchestrated, with the help of the newly elected Chilean president Aguirre Cerda, was the rescue of 2000 Spanish refugees. In speaking of the passengers Neruda writes, "We finally put them aboard the *Winnipeg*... There were fishermen, peasants, laborers, intellectuals, a cross section of strength, heroism, and hard work. My poetry, in its struggle, had succeeded in finding them a country. And I was filled with pride" (Memoirs 147). In other good news, Neruda's collection *España en el corazón* was published and "many critics saw this book as marking Neruda's dramatic conversion from anguished self-obsession to social commitment" (Feinstein 139). Though Spain had provided Neruda with the impetus to reconsider his political views, it would be his time spent in México that would make it absolutely unmistakable to those

around him. After only a short trip back to Santiago, Neruda and his new companion Delia would be ushered to Manzanillo, México where Neruda would fill the position of Consul General of Chile.

COMMUNIST TIES

Neruda arrived in México in 1940, a year into Hitler's storm in Europe. Here he would have the opportunity to meet several well-known communist supporters, including Diego Rivera and photographer Tina Modotti, and would publicly announce his support for Stalin and Communist Russia, going so far as to write his 'Love Song to Stalingrad.' Feinstein writes, "The three years Neruda spent in México – and his travels through the region – were very important in maturing him as a poet and as a man...Politically, he was moving further to the Left. His contact with Spanish and Mexican Communists was pushing him inexorably towards joining the Party – though that formal commitment was still a couple of years away" (167). After leaving México, Neruda and Delia would continue their travels through Panama, Colombia, and Peru before returning to Chile. In Peru, at Machu Picchu, Neruda gains the inspiration for one of his most famous poems, *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*, which would become one of the poems in his epic *Canto General*.

In Chile Neruda was asked to run for senator of the northern provinces of Tarapacá and Antofagasta in the Atacama Desert. Neruda, nervous about the prospect of giving political speeches, used his poetry as his campaign message. During his travels through this arid region Neruda saw a large population of Chile's indigent citizens and began to feel a genuine connection to them. On March 4, 1945 he was elected as the Communist Senator for that region of which he said, "I shall always cherish with pride the fact that thousands of people from Chile's most inhospitable region, the great mining region of copper and nitrate, gave me their vote" (Feinstein 181). Another political

event, which had been years in developing, was also on the horizon. On July 8, 1945 Neruda officially joined the Chilean Communist Party. It was a moment of great pride for him, but one that would cost him greatly in the constant flux of Chile's political arena.

During the race for the presidency in 1946, candidate Gabriel Gonzalez Videla asked Neruda to join his efforts and to “act as head of information—basically, to be his propaganda chief in the forthcoming election campaign” (Feinstein 189). Since Videla was the most “left-wing” politician available, Neruda agreed. The campaigning would prove a success and Videla would ascend to the presidency with the backing of both the Socialists and Communists of Chile. Unfortunately, it would not be long before Videla would betray Neruda and the Communist party by turning against them and their policies. After giving several public speeches denouncing Videla, Neruda officially became a fugitive.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

From 1948 to 1949 Neruda and Delia would have to go into hiding. They spent the year running from house to house, relying on friends and strangers alike to take them in, sometimes just overnight. During this time, Neruda continued work on *Canto General* adding several more poems to the collection. Though he and Delia had managed to stay hidden from Videla's men, Neruda knew that he would have to leave Chile soon. Biographer Volodia Teitelboim recalls, "Looking over some old newspapers and documents as I write these pages, I come across the first page of *El Imperial* dated 5 February 1948. The banner headline, in exceptionally large type, reads "NATIONWIDE SEARCH FOR NERUDA" (293). Outside of Chile, word quickly spread of Neruda's persecution and, in a show of solidarity, Pablo Picasso publicly heralded Neruda at the World Congress of Intellectuals, "Pablo Neruda, my friend, is not only a great poet, but also a man who, like everyone here, has devoted himself to presenting good in the shape of beauty. He has always been on the side of the unfortunate, of those who ask for justice and fight for it. My friend Neruda is presently being stalked like a dog, and nobody even knows where he is" (Teitelboim 294). Several plans were devised for Neruda's escape, including a plan to leave by boat, but it was a trek across the Andes that would lead to his freedom.

Jorge Bellet was in charge of the expedition that carried Neruda to safety. In his memoirs Neruda recalls, "There were no tracks, no trails; my four mounted companions and I wove in and out, overcoming such obstacles as powerful trees, impassable rivers, enormous crags, desolate snows, guessing more often than not, looking for the road to my

freedom” (181). Though Neruda made the difficult journey to Argentina, it would not be a prolonged visit. The World Peace Congress took place in Paris that year, and Pablo Neruda, to the astonishment of many, appeared in public for the first time in over a year introduced by his friend Pablo Picasso (Feinstein 235).

THE MUSE

While Neruda was making his way across the mountains, his wife, Delia, remained in hiding in Chile until she was reunited with him in Poland. Once again, the couple headed for México, and it is here that Neruda would meet the woman he would spend the rest of his life with.

Matilde Urrutia became Neruda's caregiver after he fell ill in México; their affair began soon after, continuing clandestinely for several years. Neruda realized, while he was in Capri with Matilde, that they could "never again live apart" (Memoirs 215). In Capri he would also begin work on the beautiful collection of love poems to Matilde—Los versos del capitán, which he published anonymously so as not to hurt Delia. Meanwhile, Videla's presidency was falling apart and Neruda, after three long years, would finally be able to set foot on Chilean soil.

Back in Chile, Neruda's love for Matilde was becoming more apparent in public and their affair could not remain hidden; Neruda had no choice but to confront Delia. Adam Feinstein writes, "There followed a horrific scene: Neruda and Delia had a meeting with Galo González, the secretary-general of the Chilean Communist Party, in an effort to avoid a public scandal. In tears, Pablo begged Delia to stay with him, but her mind was made up" (302).

Neruda and Matilde were officially married on 28 October 1966. Neruda had built a house for his mistress, La Chascona, and it is here that they would spend much of their time. The famous house was known for its extraordinary collection of things (as was the house in Isla Negra), which he had accumulated over the years: figure heads,

bells, seashells, books, and numerous other objects that Neruda found personally valuable. Many of these found objects became the focus of Neruda's poetry and in his Memoirs he takes time to describe them with obvious affection. Matilde often aided him in acquiring what he called his "toys."

THE END OF AN ERA

In the five to six years before his death Neruda experienced a lifetime of significant events: he served as presidential candidate of Chile, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, published numerous collections of poetry, and witnessed a devastating coup.

Neruda's nomination for presidency was viewed positively, though the chances of a Communist winning the election were nominal. Neruda was swept up in the excitement of the campaign trail and was a little disappointed when the Party decided Salvador Allende should take the position instead, but he wholeheartedly worked on the campaign for his friend's election. On 4 September 1970 Chile voted Allende into office. It was made official on 24 October when Congress approved the decision (Feinstein 375). Salvador Allende made history by becoming the first democratically elected Socialist president.

On 21 October 1971 Neruda was awarded the Noble Prize for Literature. Although Neruda had been told earlier about his award, he was skeptical; rumors had floated about in the past but never came to anything. In his Memoirs Neruda writes about his experience in Sweden, "No doubt, that ceremony, carried out with such strict protocol, had the proper solemnity. Perhaps the solemnity given to important occasions will always exist in the world. Human beings seem to need it. But I found a charming similarity between the parade of eminent laureates and the handing out of school prizes in any small country town" (308). His self-deprecating attitude is evident, but the prize certainly meant quite a lot to Neruda. What is also impressive about this time in

Neruda's life (roughly between 1968-72) is the amount of work he published: Los manos del día, Fin de mundo, Aún, La espada encendida, La rosa separada, Geografía infructuosa. Through all of his accomplishments, Neruda was also enduring the difficulties of prostate cancer seeking medical help and professional advice in Chile and abroad. Although his illness made him weak, he was in generally good health. The events of 11 September 1973 would cause him to take a turn for the worse.

11 September 1973 marks a dark day in Chilean history. The presidential palace, La Moneda, was attacked under the command of General Augusto Pinochet and with the support of the CIA. The coup d' état resulted in the death of President Salvador Allende and the persecution of many Chilean citizens who were associated with the Left. Neruda was at his home in Isla Negra when he heard the news accounts. A few days later the military arrived at Isla Negra intent on raiding his home. A soldier was sent up to Neruda's room where he lay in bed. Feinstein writes, "The young soldier suddenly found himself face to face with Neruda, and this disconcerted him. Neruda looked at him and said: 'Look around—there's only one thing of danger to you here: poetry.'" (413).

In the coming days Neruda's health grew increasingly worse and he was transported by ambulance to the María Clinic in Santiago. Only a few days later, On 23 September 1973, Pablo Neruda, succumbing to grief and cancer, died. His wife, Matilde, spent the night guarding his body afraid that, "the authorities could take control of it for some masquerade of an official ceremony, or for some even worse purpose (Feinstein 417). Matilde insisted that Neruda's body be taken to La Chascona, their home in Santiago, which had been raided by the military and lay in complete shambles. The wake was held amid broken glass, torn books, and a flood of water (the pipes had been broken)

but that did not stop people from coming to pay their respects. On 25 September Neruda's body was taken from La Chascona to the General Cemetery. A huge crowd amassed despite the threat of military intervention, "when someone in a loud voice began to shout: 'Comrade Pablo Neruda!' we all answered 'Present!' The cry was repeated two or three times, and the responses grew in strength. Then suddenly the cry was 'Comrade Víctor Jara!' All at once our voices cracked: this was the first time that Victor had been named in public to denounce his vile murder. 'Present!' Then the voice shouted: 'Comrade Salvador Allende!' The response was a hoarse, broken howl distorted by emotion and terror and the desire to shout it out so that the whole world could hear" 'Present!'" (Feinstein 419).

The few moments chronicled here are only small pieces of Neruda's life, but they represent an important theme: his connection to people. There are countless testimonies from friends and strangers alike that detail Neruda's ability to forever change their perception, whether of love, politics, food, poverty, or literature. Bruce Dean Willis, who wrote an article entitled "Loving Neruda," discovered this continuing phenomenon by searching the Internet. One nascent fan writes on Amazon.com, "ONLY THE ONE SONET [sic] FROM THE MOVIE 'PATCH ADAMS' HAS CHANGED MY IDEA OF LOVE. I CAN'T WAIT TO READ THE REST OF THE BOOK AND TO CHANGE MY LIFE FOREVER" (92). There are numerous monuments, poems, plays, paintings, and stories that chronicle the same type of enthusiasm for Neruda. Eduardo Galeano, a friend of Neruda's, describes the fence that surrounds Neruda's abandoned house on Isla Negra, "There is not a scrap of the wood not written on. They all address him as though he were alive. With pencils or nail-points, each and all of them find a particular way of

saying Thank you” (Poirot 118). It is precisely because Neruda’s life is so rich that it becomes easy to transform him into a mythic figure. He possessed an extraordinary connection to his surroundings and was able to transpose that connection through his poetry. It is an incredible testimony to his life and work that his poetry and image continues to be appropriated in the 21st Century. He not only changed the people he met (as with the Spanish refugees he helped rescue), but people far removed. And, even years after his death, people continue to credit him for their “awakenings.” The following writers have each, in their own way, contributed to the admiration of Pablo Neruda and in so doing perpetuate a Neruda myth.

“I SELL MY DREAMS”—GABRIEL GARCÍA MARQUEZ
MYTH: THE POET OF MYSTICAL INVENTION

“The greatest poet of the 20th Century, in any language.”
-Gabriel García Márquez

As is well known, the Colombian journalist and novelist Gabriel García Márquez, frequently constructs his fictional stories out of his real life experiences. His short story, “I Sell My Dreams,” is no exception. Adam Feinstein writes, “During his brief stay in Barcelona, Neruda met the Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez, who gave this wonderful fictionalized portrait of the poet in a book written in 1992”(351). The story is one of twelve in García Márquez’s experimental Strange Pilgrims, a collection that emerged in a curious manner. The first story idea was written after a dream Márquez had in which he attended his own funeral. Márquez writes, “I don’t know why, but I interpreted that exemplary dream as a conscientious examination of my own identity, and I thought this was a good point of departure for writing about the strange things that happen to Latin Americans in Europe” (Márquez viii). It took eighteen years for Márquez to complete the collection, and only after several mishaps that included losing the original notes. He states that each story went through a pilgrimage to the trashcan and emerged, finally, as his strange pilgrims.

“I Sell My Dreams” chronicles the life and strange occupation of Frau Frieda, a woman who is able to predict the future through her dreams. The story begins with a traumatic accident in Havana, Cuba. A giant wave lifts above the seawall and slams into the Riviera Hotel where the narrator, presumably García Márquez, is dining. The force of the wave is so great that some of the vehicles that line the curb are crushed against the façade of the building. In a surreal fashion, the debris is cleaned up, the windows of the

hotel are replaced and all is restored to normalcy within six hours. Eventually, it is discovered that a woman's body is in one of the embedded vehicles, and our narrator becomes intrigued when he reads a description of the woman's serpent shaped ring in the newspaper. He believes that she is the Colombian born woman who sells her dreams for a living and whom he met in Vienna years before. He recalls her life as a young girl, when she predicted the death of her brother, and then her work with an affluent family who were, "all religious and therefore inclined to archaic superstitions" (65). Eventually, Frau Frieda dreams of the narrator and warns him to leave Vienna immediately—that night he leaves for Barcelona. In Barcelona, years later as he is dining with Pablo Neruda, Frau Frieda emerges for the last time before the accident in Havana. The narrator accompanies Neruda to his home after their meal so that Neruda can take his siesta. When Neruda awakes he remarks, "I dreamed about that woman who dreams...I dreamed she was dreaming about me" (69). He begins to write as soon as he gets the opportunity, "in the green ink he used for drawing flowers and fish and birds when he dedicated his books" (69). Later, when the narrator speaks to Frau Frieda she says, "I dreamed about the poet...I dreamed he was dreaming about me" (70). The narrator is obviously surprised and Frau Frieda dismisses him by saying that some of her dreams have "nothing to do with real life" (70). In the end, the narrator discovers that the deceased woman was, in fact, Frau Frieda.

Márquez develops his short story with the use of magical realism, a technique that combines the use of surreal elements and a realistic narrative. This is evident within the first paragraphs and the dream-like circumstances surrounding the accident in Havana, which sets the tone of surrealism for the rest of the story. There is also the strange

connection between Márquez, the narrator, Frau Frieda, and Pablo Neruda to consider. The most obvious connection is their occupations as storytellers. Márquez, as author, constructs a story to sell to the reader, as does Pablo Neruda, who says, “only poetry is clairvoyant” (68). Frau Frieda is able to predict the future by interpreting dreams, which also requires the construction of a story. The stories of Márquez and Neruda are much more acceptable than the irrational constructs of Frau Frieda (whose clients, which include the narrator, are “inclined to archaic superstitions”) yet, both Márquez and Neruda evidently draw from their dreams to create their work. Márquez admits, in the introduction to his collection, that the idea for his first story manifested in a dream. When Neruda was asked to run for president of Chile his constituency asked, “And what about your siestas and your dreams...As President, will you go on taking your long siestas and feeding your fabulous dreams” (Alegria 7). This is certainly an insight as to how the people of Chile viewed Neruda; it is also interesting that a minor event, like his siestas, was public knowledge. On another occasion, a friend, María Luisa Bombal, recalled a night in Buenos Aires when Neruda awoke from a nightmare in which he believed he saw death, “Shortly afterwards, they sent him to Europe. He had a premonition of the war, of death, of the Spanish Civil War” (Feinstein 103). The importance of prophecy for Márquez and Neruda, both in real-life and fiction, is evident. In Márquez’s short story, Neruda is transformed into a magical realist figure. Though Neruda is grounded in the reality of everyday objects by his love for the physical, his occupation, as storyteller, elevates him to a spiritual/metaphysical level. In his poetry, the tangible objects of his everyday life become representations of abstract concepts, such as love. The part of Neruda that is grounded in reality is evident in the characterization of

his fondness of food and objects and lends itself over to yet another myth: Neruda as the “Poet of Mystical Invention.”

“I Sell My Dreams” produces the myth of Neruda as the “Poet of Mystical Invention” in two ways: first, in the sense of inventing environments (he possessed a unique ability to make commonplace environments magical), and second, the literal inventing of poetry. It is not only that Neruda invents poetry, but also that he draws people into his view of the world. This is, perhaps, why Neruda is often described as a child—intensely curious about the world around him—and García Márquez contributes to that particular image of Neruda, especially in his “dining” scene.

In the story, the narrator and Neruda are dining after spending the day shopping in Barcelona. He describes Neruda in action, “He moved through the crowd like an invalid elephant, with a child’s curiosity in the inner workings of each thing he saw, for the world appeared to him as an immense wind-up toy with which life invented itself” (67). It is important to the progression of the story that Neruda be characterized with a degree of innocence. It is, after all, his presumed receptiveness that allows him to create and dream. When Neruda sits down for a meal with the narrator, we are given another aspect of his desire and amazement and witness his role as epicurean:

He ate three whole lobsters, dissecting them with a surgeon’s skill, and at the same time devoured everyone else’s plate with his eyes and tasted a little from each with a delight that made the desire to eat contagious: clams from Galicia, mussels from Cantabria, prawns from Alicante, sea cucumbers from the Costa Brava. In the meantime, like the French, he spoke of

nothing but other culinary delicacies, in particular the prehistoric shellfish of Chile, which he carried in his heart. (67)

Neruda's enthusiasm is both palpable and infectious. Nemesio Antunez, an acquaintance of Neruda recalls, "How he [Neruda] loved to eat eel at Isla Negra, *piure* and *ulte* at Puerto Saavedra!" (Pierot 136). His love of food is something that was cultivated at an early age and can be found in his numerous odes to common things, such as the tomato and the onion. That García Márquez chose to insert this particular account of Neruda adds to the myth of invention and also demonstrates Neruda's connection to people. It so happens that the act of dining, in Neruda's presence, becomes an art. There is a degree of skill involved, as when he dissects the lobsters, and also a lesson in geography; the table has now become a map of Galicia, Cantabria, Alicante, etc., endowed with an exoticism that the Poet encourages and which, in turn, the narrator reproduces. In semiological terms, this particular form of Neruda has become a signifier for the concept "inventiveness." Also, the sharing of food represents a communion between Neruda and the other diners. This is not a rushed meal, but a sensual, pleasurable meal that further illustrates Neruda's tie to humanity. The food is no longer a simple means of sustenance, but a catalyst for intimacy.

The importance of "I Sell My Dreams" is that it propagates an idea of Neruda that is familiar, yet simultaneously places him in the realm of mythic figures. This dichotomy is evident throughout his life in that, though he experienced unprecedented fame as a Latin American poet, he was continuously thought of as a comrade and poet of the people. Also, the quality of his mystical inventiveness meant that ordinary objects were often elevated to a high degree of significance, as in the seafood in the story. Through

Neruda's poetry, it is evident that the material world holds great importance to him. Adam Feinstein compares this importance with the existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Sartre, whom Neruda opposed. "For Sartre, objects and nature have no meaning. For Neruda, they are imbued with life enhancing meaning (306). Neruda's life was filled with objects that he collected and, in turn, used to create his poems. What is gained by Márquez's fictional account of Neruda is an understanding of how Neruda's everyday life was imbued with poetry. Even in his dreams, he is constantly inventing.

BURNING PATIENCE—ANTONIO SKÁRMETA
MYTH: THE POET OF LOVE

“When I was very young, thirteen—or twelve—years old, I used to fall in love forever every two days with different girls who were older than me and I remember this terrible feeling of not finding a word to say. I was so shy, so fascinated by their beauty, their charms—unable to say a word...I decided that maybe I could try with some poetry. I took a book, Neruda—of Neruda—I read some love poems and I learned them by heart. I would say these poems as if they were mine to the girls, and I succeeded. And that’s the reason why Neruda was—my whole life—so important to me” —Antonio Skarmeta (Longo 108).

Antonio Skármeta’s novella, Ardiente Paciencia or Burning Patience, which has been translated into twenty different languages, presents an idyllic form of Pablo Neruda as a “Poet of Love.” The story became hugely popular after it was adapted to film by Michael Radford as *Il Postino*, but it is Skármeta’s version that, historically and politically, offers a genuine account of Neruda and Chile during the pivotal years in Chilean history between 1969 and 1973. At this time Salvador Allende, a Socialist, is elected as president of Chile in 1970 only to be overthrown by a military coup, led by General Augusto Pinochet, three years later. Allende’s death and Pinochet’s brutal dictatorship, forced many citizens (including Skármeta) to become political exiles. Many of those exiles would go on to tell their stories, and the story of Chile, through the medium of the novel.

Skármeta worked as a journalist in Chile and had the chance of meeting Pablo Neruda on assignment. Though Neruda was a bit laconic with his answers and refused a formal interview, the two formed a friendship nonetheless. It seems that Neruda became the catalyst for more than a few budding novelists, encouraging them to put their efforts into fiction instead of journalism. Neruda’s encouragement prompted Isabel Allende to quit her job as a journalist and Neruda told Skármeta he would write the introduction to his first novel. After the military coup in 1973, Skármeta fled Chile for Germany as a

political exile and remained there for many years. It is, therefore, understandable that Skármeta's work would deal with issues surrounding the coup and simultaneously pay homage to one of Chile's greatest figures. Skármeta's novella recreates the idyllic (and quickly disintegrating) Chile before the coup and Neruda's death.

Skármeta's novella, which rather faithfully follows the real life events in Chile, begins in the coastal town of Isla Negra, the true-life location of one of Neruda's most famous houses. The main character is Mario Jimenez, a seventeen-year-old son of a fisherman. Mario is unable to tolerate the strains of a fisherman's life and opts to stay in bed with made up illnesses, occasionally riding his bicycle to town to catch a movie. During one of these excursions Mario fortuitously sees an ad asking for a postman. Mario is offered the job, at a pittance, and accepts only to discover that he will be delivering mail to a single client: Pablo Neruda.

Over a short period of time Mario begins to form a friendship with the poet, which eventually leads to serious discussions about the nature of poetry and the definition of a metaphor. Later, when Mario falls in love with the daughter of a local tavern owner, Beatriz Gonzalez, he turns to Neruda for help. Amidst Mario and Beatriz's passionately charged courtship there is a presidential election occurring. At one point Neruda is chosen to run as candidate for president of the Republic of Chile, but he graciously steps down (even after widespread support) in favor of campaigning for his fellow compatriot Salvador Allende. Eventually, through the power of Neruda's poetry, Beatriz and Mario are married and have a child. Neruda spends some brief time in Paris as ambassador of Chile, wins the Nobel Prize, and finally returns to Isla Negra with his health failing. Soon after, the democratically elected Socialist president Salvador Allende falls victim to

a military coup, Neruda's house is blockaded by soldiers preventing anyone from leaving or entering the house, and Mario, determined to deliver one last set of telegrams, stealthily sneaks in to see the poet. We find out that the twenty telegrams are all offers of asylum, which Neruda ignores. What follows is a scene similar to José Donoso's description of Matilde Urrutia's wake in Curfew (discussed below), Neruda's funeral march surrounded by workers, friends, and Pinochet's army. That same night, Mario is taken away for questioning by two ominous men, we assume never to be heard from again.

Reading Skármeta's novella it is impossible not to notice the homage he pays to Neruda—Skármeta seems to be taking lessons from the poet incorporating a highly stylized form of writing. Skármeta does warn the reader in the dedication to Burning Patience when he writes, "To Matilde Urrutia, Neruda's inspiration, and through him, that of his humble plagiarists." We can expect that there will be some amount of "plagiarizing," and, indeed, that does become a recurrent theme throughout the novella. The importance of metaphors is also a recurrent theme and one that seems to answer the final question of Neruda's role in Skármeta's work as a "Poet of Love."

From his first introduction in the novella until his death, the character of Neruda takes every opportunity to create metaphors. Skármeta even has Neruda explain what a metaphor is to Mario: "To be more or less imprecise, we could say that it is a way of describing something by comparing it to something else" (12). It seems that Skármeta is giving the reader a guide to understanding Neruda's poetry, specifically his earlier works that appeared in Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair and Elemental Odes, while simultaneously suggesting that metaphors are accessible to everyone, even if they are

unaware of it. The following conversation between Neruda and Mario is a perfect example of the “availability” of metaphor:

“Of course. I was like a boat tossing upon your words.”

The poet’s eyelids rose slowly.

“Like a boat tossing upon my words.”

“Uh-huh.”

“You know what you just did, Mario?”

“No, what?”

“You invented a metaphor.” (Skármeta 15)

Eventually, Mario, Beatriz, and Beatriz’s mother all begin to invent their own metaphors creating a bond between them and Neruda’s poetry, and eventually between them and Neruda himself. In this way, a circle is formed in which Neruda explains what a metaphor is to Mario, Mario uses metaphor to woo Beatriz, and Beatriz’s mother uses metaphor to chastise Neruda for using metaphors to begin with. Ethan Shaskan Bumas puts it succinctly when he writes, “In Skármeta’s world view, writing—as characters’ creating, disseminating, and critiquing metaphors—is a group project. In Ardiente Paciencia Neruda is to some extent Mario’s creative writing teacher, though the only technique he uses is metaphor” (17).

Neruda is seen as teacher, creator, and catalyst. In other words, he becomes a sign of innovation and possibility. Through Neruda and his metaphors Mario is able to realize his potential—not only romantically but also politically—in that he is able to win Beatriz’s affection, write his own poetry (however unrefined), and openly support the Communist party. Skármeta also suggests the power of Neruda’s metaphors as a catalyst

for action, both positive and negative. This is evident when Beatriz's mother reprimands her for falling for Mario's borrowed poetry, "All men who first touch with words go much further afterwards with their hands" (Skármeta 38). Beatriz's mother is all too familiar with Neruda's poetry, recalling lines by heart, while denouncing the author for the trouble his verses cause, and presumably the trouble it caused in her own youth. Although this example is obviously humorous, there is also Mario's fate to consider. If Mario had never met Neruda and, therefore, never recited his poetry at strikes, etc., his political views may have gone unnoticed. At one point, referring to Mario plagiarizing Neruda's poetry, Beatriz's mother says, "Mario could end up in jail for telling you...*metaphors!*" (Skármeta 40). As we later learn, Mario is indeed taken away for "questioning."

Skármeta has said that the Neruda that he wanted to bring out was the less famous Neruda, "Not the enormous Neruda of fame, but the intimate Neruda, full of tenderness and a quality of irony" (Bumas 10). The fictionalized Neruda, through his relationship with Mario, represents a metaphorical connection between poetry and the people of Chile, particularly the working class that the real life Neruda was so fond of protecting and writing about. In her article, "The De-Chileanization of Neruda in *Il Postino*," Irene B. Hodgson quotes Skármeta as saying, "The Poet and democracy died with painful synchronization...almost a metaphor that Chile offered" (98). In real life, as in the story, Neruda dies a few days after the coup, and it has often been said that his burial came to represent not only the burial of Salvador Allende, but also the symbolic burial of an idyllic Chile. In Skármeta's work, Pablo Neruda as a "Poet of Love" allows a connection between Neruda, his poetry, and the opportunity for change. Jorge Edwards recalls,

Neruda “could not conceive of human existence without the permanent state of being in love. Solitary people worried him; he found them incomprehensible. He was famous for putting people in touch with one another, and helped bring together a number of couples...He wanted to see the world as communication, as concert, as harmony, as a marriage of heaven and earth” (Poirot 134). Through the power of his words, and particularly the shared power of a metaphor, Pablo Neruda was able to transform many peoples’ lives. Skármeta’s novella suggests that Neruda’s love for poetry, politics, and mankind did indeed create a harmony.

CURFEW: A NOVEL—JOSÉ DONOSO
MYTH: THE POET OF SIMPLE OBJECTS

“Neruda’s element is very important: it was his houses. I think of him as a creator of ambiances, environments, as much as of words, environments made out of objects. His is a world of *materials*, materialist, if you like, quite closely connected to his poems. His fantasies are also material. The things that crowd his poems are things you can touch, almost see, almost smell. I think of him as a great creator of physical surroundings...His houses are not beautiful...they are Neruda, the products of his subjectivity, his being. He spoke of them so much that they became myth. He mythified, so that when one knew them after hearing so much about them, one was entering Neruda’s aura, and saw them as rare. Now, without Neruda, they disintegrate and fall.” —Jose Donoso (Poirot 122)

José Donoso was working on his first novel in Isla Negra, Chile when he had the opportunity to become acquainted with Pablo Neruda. Donoso, who lived modestly in a small shack, would often use Neruda’s shower. He recalls, “Then I got to know him well, or he me, perhaps” (Poirot 122) and so began another lasting friendship. Like most of his fellow writers Donoso would soon leave Chile, though for literary not political reasons. He would not return until seventeen years later, in 1981, when he would begin work on his novel Curfew. Though Donoso had begun to write notes for his eventual novel late in 1980, he felt that the idea for the novel had lost its direction and he set it aside. His original intent revolved around Chiloé myth² and was titled “El Regreso” or “The Return.” It wasn’t until a few years later that Donoso would, once again, consider his notes. Mary Lusky Friedman writes, “The death of Pablo Neruda’s wife Matilde in January 1985 seemed to Donoso to signify the end of Unidad Popular and he resumed work on the novel, which he retitled ‘La Desesperanza’” (14). The focus was turned to Santiago, Chile instead of the mythical Chiloé, and the action would revolve around two protagonists: Mañungo Vera and Judit Torre.

² Chiloé is an island located a few hundred miles south of Santiago, Chile and is known for its black magic. Donoso does not leave behind the myths entirely but includes several in his novel, such as the Caleuche myth. “According to lore, the Calueche is a ghost ship manned by one-legged *brujos* which tempts mariners to their doom with a bewitching music” (Friedman 15). Donoso’s Caleuche will be helmed by Pablo Neruda.

The novel, which is broken up into three sections, Evening, Night, and Morning, begins with Mañungo Vera, a popular folk singer, returning to Chile after years of political exile in Paris. The occasion for his return is the funeral of Pablo Neruda's wife, Matilde Urrutia. Mañungo, though well recognized by the populace, seems unable to identify his place/purpose in Chile. Mañungo's wife has left him, he suffered a public breakdown, his relationship with his young son is unsteady, and now, in Chile, he is being asked to take a stand once and for all as to his political affiliation. Though some of the Chilean dissidents believe Mañungo is a "false idol" unworthy of his fame, others view him as a voice of the people and a sounding board for victims of the coup. Mañungo's relationship to the Neruda's is made evident early in the novel, "A respectful friendship of many years' duration had united him with the Nerudas, his protectors—hadn't they discovered him?—early on in Chile, and later his sponsors in Paris when the poet was ambassador. Mañungo had set several of Neruda's poems to music and sung them" (Donoso 6). Mañungo's link to Neruda is marked by the memory of a stuffed toy lion that the poet bought in Paris. This memory is typical of the way in which the different characters of the novel describe Neruda, namely through the objects he left behind.

Once in Santiago, Mañungo is ushered to La Chascona, another one of Neruda's real-life houses, where a crowd of people has gathered to pay their respects. Within this first section the connections between the Nerudas and each character become clear. Mañungo and Judit are described as close friends of the Nerudas, Celedonio as Neruda's translator, Lisboa intends to use Neruda's name for the benefit of the Communist party, Ada Luz is holding an important secret about Matilde's last wishes, and Freddy Fox,

Judit's distant cousin reputed to have molested her as a child, has ill intentions hoping to capitalize on Neruda's collection of letters and first edition books. We later find that Freddy intends to hinder the formation of the Pablo Neruda Foundation so as to prevent the shaky Left from uniting under a common cause and becoming stronger. Lopito, a drunkard poet and Judit's former lover, plays a marginal role in this section, but will be important in the formation of Mañungo's identity throughout the novel.

The second section of the novel concentrates on Judit Torre and her experiences in Chile since the coup. Judit comes from a privileged background but has chosen to break from her family for political reasons, namely her involvement with the Communist Youth League. During the early years of the coup Judit and several of her friends are detained and tortured on suspicions of political dissent. The details of her torture are a source of great pain and conflict for Judit and not because, as the other women, she was raped and beaten, but because her torturer chose to pardon her. Judit chooses to hide her secret and instead leads everyone around her to believe that she too was beaten and raped, all the while plotting her revenge against her alleged torturer. Mañungo is reunited with Judit at the funeral and decides to join Judit on a night out and inadvertently joins her on her quest to murder her former captor. Judit, though she finds the man that may have been her captor, is unable to go through with the murder. Mañungo must confront his feelings about Judit, though both agree that their relationship is based on necessity and immediacy rather than love. Meanwhile, the midnight curfew, instated by Pinochet's army, is quickly approaching.

Matilde's funeral, in the final section, becomes an opportunity for many in attendance to symbolically bury many of their friends and relatives who disappeared after

the coup. Mañungo is aware that Matilde's funeral, like Pablo's, is drenched in meaning and tells Judit. Mañungo eventually convinces Judit that she should leave for Paris with him so as not to deal with her cousin Freddy, the fate of the Pablo Neruda Foundation, and the weight of guilt she feels about her capture. An argument between several soldiers present at Matilde's funeral and Judit's ex-lover Lopito results in his arrest. Mañungo attempts to use his celebrity for the purposes of releasing him, but the policemen have been informed not to acknowledge his fame. Judit and a friend, Don Cesar, witness Lopito's death at the hands of several officers and Mañungo is finally vocal about his disdain for the Pinochet regime and so discovers his identity.

Donoso has created a complex view of Chile under Pinochet that suggests several different views of Pablo Neruda, including his fascination with collecting seemingly worthless objects and his effect on people. In discussing Neruda as a "Poet of Simple Objects," there are several sections that are particularly fitting. These are by no means the only ones, but will serve the purposes of this study.

In his Memoirs Neruda writes, "In my house I have put together a collection of small and large toys I can't live without. The child who doesn't play is not a child, but the man who doesn't play has lost forever the child who lived in him and he will certainly miss him" (269). Neruda goes on to list the "toys" that fill his houses: bottles and figureheads, books and seashells. The importance of these items is made evident in Donoso's Curfew and, much like Márquez's story, they become a symbol of Neruda's ability to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary. Though Donoso admits that he found Neruda's houses ugly, he understood the importance of Neruda's ability to influence people and bring them into his view of the world. Neruda's house and objects

become a character in Donoso's novel and also serve as a means of explaining Neruda as a mythic figure. It is, after all, through Neruda's house that several characters in Curfew come to understand Neruda and also their role in the history of Chile.

In the novel, Don Celedonio, who is described as a friend of poets and artists, has been given the task of organizing Neruda's collection after Matilde's death. Celedonio has an obvious respect for Neruda that borders on the obsequious, but he is keenly aware of the differences between reality and what he terms the "Nerudian": "Even this America to which Neruda's marvelous poetry has condemned us is more Nerudian than real—which, by the way, was what made it interesting" (19). According to Celedonio, Neruda had the ability to transform people's perception with his unwavering passion. The nondescript Bellavista neighborhood, where Neruda's home was situated, becomes legendary simply by his enthusiasm. He thinks, "People were destined sooner or later to follow Neruda to Bellavista—an ugly neighborhood according to Don Celedonio. More of Pablo's tricks! He had a talent for picking an object out of a junkman's shop...and infusing these worthless objects with the lyricism or irony that gave them the uniquely personal stamp of his imagination. His house in Bellavista was pure fantasy" (19). Celedonio is aware that with the deaths of Neruda and Matilde, the "fantasy" is no longer viable, "Everything was ugly in this dead house, because the pair of magicians, whose presence had managed to transubstantiate what was ordinary into poetry, had disappeared...This house, once marvelously complex, was today easy to analyze. It revealed its more modest truth now that it had been abandoned by the twin spirits of poetry and love. Reduced to its elements, it died" (21). This sentiment is almost identical to Donoso's who said, when speaking of Neruda's houses, "Now without

Neruda, they disintegrate and fall” (Poirot 122). Though Celedonio feels that the magic of Neruda’s house has been extinguished, it seems that he is at least aware of the “magicalness” that it possessed, and may still possess for some people. Not all of the characters share these sentiments though, and this is evident in Freddy Fox.

When speaking of Freddy Fox, Celedonio states, “Federico Fox never looked hungrily at anything because unlike other mortals he’d never experienced that honest need. However, he added, his gluttony was such that he could devour everything” (44). This, perhaps, explains why Freddy is so quick to dismiss Neruda’s objects: they have no intrinsic value for him. Freddy’s only interest lies in Neruda’s valuable manuscripts and rare letters, “God in heaven! They’re worth a fortune!” he exclaims (47). When Freddy arrives at La Chascona, he immediately begins to assess Neruda’s objects, “His inquisitive eyes seemed to put a price tag on everything, as if they themselves possessed the power to turn over a bowl and check the name of its manufacturer, or to finger a piece of fabric and tell its quality. They found nothing of any worth...What a lot of junk! What in the world could people mean when they talked about this house in awe struck tones” (45). There exists an obvious dichotomy between Freddy and Celedonio: whereas Celedonio is at least aware of the power of imagination to transform simple objects, Freddy is much too practical and greedy to give himself over to imaginings. Unless Freddy can capitalize on Neruda, there seems no point in imbuing his objects with myth and giving them an undeserved value.

Patricio Santoro writes in his article “Pablo Neruda: Absence and Presence” that, “The houses and objects invested with time and place, are analogous to his [Neruda’s] poetry that embraces multiple dimensions and feelings. The past and the present are

interwoven. The objects have their own past, their own adventures” (Santoro 35). What this suggests is that Freddy, through his inability to “imagine,” is left with inanimate objects. Though Celedonio feels that the objects have “died,” it seems that with Neruda’s and Matilde’s death they have simply been transformed. Instead of people relying on Neruda’s narrative of his own objects, they will have to invent their own narrative (much as Donoso has done in Curfew). Mañungo, by recalling a simple stuffed lion is able to reproduce an exquisite memory of Matilde and Neruda in Paris, and in so doing create a separate narrative about his relationship with the Nerudas. Donoso suggests that it is through people like Mañungo, not Freddy Fox, that Neruda will continue to exist.

Neruda’s objects have become synonymous with Neruda himself. It is impossible not to link him to his collection when so much of that collection was immortalized in his poetry and is continuously photographed and discussed. Neruda’s friend and translator Alistair Reid states, “Neruda appeared to live on terms of intimacy with the world of things, and to carry on secret conversations with all kinds of beings, animate and inanimate, conversations that often became poems” (Santoro 39). Donoso’s novel simultaneously deals with politics and love, and it is through Neruda’s home, and particularly Neruda’s objects, that the characters of the novel reveal their political/emotional tendencies. Freddy, as a politician, sees only in a restricted manner, Mañungo, as an artist, is much more open to imagination, and Celedonio, who is known for his association with famous writers but not for any of his own creations, has trouble maintaining the “magic” of objects after their author is dead. Donoso propagates the myth of Neruda as a poet of simple objects by making Neruda’s home such an important

figure in the novel. Through the use of careful descriptions Donoso seems to remind us that Neruda is a real man and that these objects are real objects.

Donoso's novel is thematically rich and deserves fuller consideration. The "Poet of Simple Objects" is a starting point for understanding the role Neruda plays in the novel, but it does not, by any means, cover the breadth of the novel's complexity.

Curfew offers a detailed account of Chile under Pinochet, a commentary on the fallibility of political parties (no matter what their affiliation), the relationships that are formed under a dictatorship, and the role of the arts in politics and love. Neruda, in one way or another, is tied to all of these themes without undermining their importance. Neruda's house, which plays a prominent part in the novel, comes to represent a larger metaphor: Chile. It is not only the house that has lost its "spirit," but Chile has lost its "spirit" as well.

CONCLUSION

This particular study of Neruda as a mythical figure is important because it demonstrates a unique societal phenomenon: our ability to perpetuate a life through story and to create myths. It also reveals our ideologies, and the importance we place on figures, whether political or not, that possess those ideologies. Each author studied here created a narrative that will contribute to our idea of Pablo Neruda. For each writer Neruda possessed a unique attribute: for Márquez it was his ability to indulge in the fantastical, for Skármeta it was his ability to love and to share that love with humanity, and for Donoso it was his ability to transform the ordinary. These are all intimately connected with each other and reveal the kinship Neruda shared with people. Just as these authors shared their own moments of discovery, those who are familiar with Neruda are often quick to offer up their own story about how they first read Neruda's verses. The discovery becomes a story in itself and another way of continuing the thread of dialogue Neruda began when he shared his poetry with the world.

As is evidenced by his Nobel Prize lecture, Neruda had an uncanny ability to create a narrative. One of the most important legacies he left behind may be the hundreds of imitators that Skármeta alludes to in the introduction to his novella. The imitation of his work suggests that it is something worth preserving. His verses send out simple messages of love, hope, and an important awareness of our humanity.

The use of Roland Barthes's theory of myth allowed for a structured look at Neruda and his life. By understanding Neruda's history, we can better understand his work and the work of those who appropriate him. Foremost we must remember Neruda

was a real figure, but that in the particular works highlighted he has become a character and in some cases almost a caricature.

What was most illuminating about this study was the realization of the many people in history that become mythic figures. Che Guevara is a good example, as is John Wayne. When figures like these appear in a work of fiction, they should serve as signals, markers that shout, "This is important!" Through our continued narratives these figures continue to exist, and in the case of Pablo Neruda, it seems that the narrative has just begun.

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