



REVISITING THE THEME OF SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN PABLO NERUDA'S POEMS

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ABSTRACT

One of the best poets of the 20th century is Pablo Neruda, who was born in Chile in 1904 and is well known for his works. He captures the essence of love, desire, and the human experience in his poems by delving into the depths of human emotions. The vivid imagery, poetic language, and raw emotion of Neruda's writing are well known and have found an audience among readers all around the world. There is, however, a critical discussion surrounding the issue of sexual objectification of women in Neruda's poetry in addition to the admiration for his lyrical skill.

Some of Neruda's poetry, according to critics, reduce women to mere objects of desire, diminishing their identities to only serve male gratification. They claim that these portrayals reinforce gender stereotypes and aid in the objectification of women and their marginalisation in society. Analysing specific instances that show sexual objectification is crucial for conducting a thorough examination of Neruda's poetry. This research aims to identify the underlying meanings and implications of the portrayal of women by carefully evaluating the linguistic and imagery choices made in these poems. This analysis will clarify if these occurrences are rare or common throughout Neruda's whole body of work.

In my research paper, I aim to present a thorough analysis of Pablo Neruda's poems' treatment of the sexual objectification of women. This study tries to provide a thorough view of the relationship between Neruda's work and the portrayal of women by looking at specific examples, exploring the historical and cultural background, and taking into account the poet's personal experiences. With the help of this study, I can analyse the implications of sexual objectification in his writing and add to the discussion on how gender is portrayed in literature.

Keywords: Sexual Objectification, Women, Pablo Neruda, Poems, Critique, Analysis, Historical Context, Cultural Context, Gender Representation, Literature.

Introduction

Background and Significance:

Ricardo Eliécer Neftalí Reyes Basoalto, also known as Pablo Neruda, was one of the most renowned and important poets of the 20th century when he was born in 1904. His poetry exhibits a unique capacity to convey intense feelings and experiences, frequently finding inspiration in the natural environment and interpersonal connections. The poetry of Neruda can be divided into many periods, such as his early amorous phase, his politically motivated poems, and his latter works that investigate love and sexuality (Navarrete Lopez, 2010). Although many people adore Neruda's poetry for its vivid imagery and impassioned expression, it has not been immune from critical analysis. The subject of sexual objectification of women, which penetrates some of his poetry, is a frequent target of criticism. According to critics, Neruda's depiction of women reduces them to objects of desire and possession, supporting gender stereotypes and fostering the objectification of women in society.

Understanding how Neruda treated women in his works requires knowledge of the historical and cultural setting in which he penned his poems. Neruda's career spans a time when Chile and Latin America saw considerable societal transformation. Traditional gender norms and societal expectations dominated the middle of the 20th century, which inexorably affected how women were portrayed in literature and art. In addition, Neruda's relationships and experiences, such as his turbulent love affairs, may have influenced his literary expression and altered his viewpoint on women. Concerning both his artistic accomplishments and the scrutiny of how women are portrayed in his work, this research paper tries to delve into the complexity of Neruda's poetry. One can evaluate the presence and effects of sexual objectification in Neruda's poetry by looking at certain poems and examining the linguistic and imagery choices made in them.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of the study is to revisit the theme of sexual objectification of women in Pablo Neruda's poems. The study aims to advance discussions on the ethical issues surrounding artistic expression by undertaking a thorough investigation to add to the existing conversation on gender representation in literature. In the end, the research seeks to broaden our comprehension of Neruda's writing while critically analysing its consequences concerning gender dynamics.

Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To investigate the historical and cultural setting, particularly concerning gender norms and expectations, in which Neruda's poems were produced.
2. To investigate the effects of sexual objectification on gender inequality and stereotypes in Neruda's writing.
3. To engage in feminist literary criticism and assess the claims and objections made about Neruda's portrayal of women.
4. To look into Neruda's motivations and goals for including female characters in his poetry.
5. To offer a critical analysis of Neruda's art and how it relates to how women are portrayed, taking into account the complexity of his writing.
6. To advance discussions on the moral implications of artistic expression and to add to the larger conversation on gender representation in literature.

Literary Analysis of Neruda's Poetry

Neruda's poetry can be broadly divided into many phases, each of which is characterised by particular thematic and stylistic traits. His early works frequently deal with themes of intense love, desire, and longing, such as "Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair" (1924). These poems have become well-known for their strong feelings, sensual imagery, and intimate descriptions of romantic events (HENI, 2022). Neruda wrote about social and political issues during this time when he was politically active, expressing his commitment to Marxist beliefs and his experiences as a diplomat and political activist. Themes of social injustice, revolt, and the misery of the underprivileged are explored in works like "Canto General" (1950) and "Residence on Earth" (1935–1947). Later works by Neruda, such as "The Captain's Verses" (1952) and "The Book of Questions" (1974), have a more

introspective and thoughtful tone. These poems examine the complexities of human existence, existential issues, and the mysteries of life and death. Neruda used metaphors and symbolism to express his feelings and thoughts in his poetry, which is distinguished by its vivid and sensual imagery (Reiner, 2018). His use of environmental images, frequently inspired by Chilean scenery, gives depth and richness to his lyrics. In addition, Neruda's peculiar writing style, which is characterised by lyrical language and rhythmic patterns, adds to the poetry's aesthetic appeal and emotional resonance.

Identification of Sexual Objectification:

Female objectification refers to the process of reducing women to mere objects or commodities, primarily valued for their physical appearance and sexual appeal rather than their individuality, thoughts, and agency. It involves the portrayal of women as passive, subordinate, and existing solely for the pleasure or consumption of others, typically men. Zizek proposes that there is a game being played between the sexes that is equally false as the representation of the object, the woman (Tayyab, 2020). Both genders participate in this game of sexes in accordance with culturally driven binaries and traditions, and they hold on to them for a longer period. He claims that “this masochistic theatre is thoroughly non-psychological in nature.”

There are instances of surreal atmosphere and passionate imagery in the field of erotic writing or love poetry, which eventually create a lot of leeway for female objectification. Since the presence of the desired object must make one's imagination worthwhile, the author may attempt to masochistically prolong the desire. The female body becomes the object of desire that can only be obtained after a protracted fight or is ultimately unattainable. For instance, in Pablo Neruda's poem - *Body of a Women*, he states -

**“Body of a woman, white hills, white thighs,
when you surrender, you stretch out like the world”**

The imagery of white hills and white thighs represents the idea of perpetual being or spiritualization. The writer's deepest aspiration is to achieve the colour of purity. It's also extremely clear that the writer wants the subject to give up. The word “body” also draws attention to Fredrickson's claim that males regard female bodies as objects of sexual desire (Fredrickson, 2000). The body itself serves as the only reference to a woman or the author's beloved in this particular literary composition. Because of this, it appears like just certain portions of the woman's body are visible in these lines rather than the woman herself. Their value and importance were decided by their sexual propensity or physical appearance.

In Neruda's poetry, love and desire are persistent themes that frequently interact with how women are portrayed. The complexity of love and desire are captured in Neruda's poems, which frequently portray strong passion, longing, and amorous encounters. Even while feelings of love and desire can be intense and life-changing, it's important to consider how women are portrayed in these subjects. Women frequently represent the objects of desire in Neruda's poetry, acting as muses and inspiration for the speaker's sensuous and emotional experiences (Karmakar, 2015). It's crucial to remember, though, that not all of his poetry's depictions of desire and love involve sexual objectification. There may be passages in which Neruda depicts women as multifaceted people who are nuanced in their wishes, emotions, and experiences.

In his poem - *Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines*, Neruda engages in a melancholic reflection on lost love and longing. While the poem captures the emotional depth of the speaker's experience, there are elements within it that reflect the objectification of the woman being addressed. The word “lines” conveys a sense of distance, as if the speaker were witnessing and recounting the woman's experience from a distance rather than getting to know her as a whole person. This initial distance lays the groundwork for a representation that places the woman's physical beauty above her character traits or feelings. Instead of exploring the woman's inner thoughts, the speaker emphasises the woman's exterior characteristics throughout the entire poem. The lady is shown as a desirable object, and her body and beauty are highlighted. Lines like “Her voice, her bright body” and “Her infinite eyes” draw attention to the speaker's obsession with her physical attractiveness and reduce her to a list of appealing qualities. This focus on the woman's physical attributes contributes to the poem's objectification of her. The speaker fails to acknowledge the woman as an individual with ideas, feelings, and agency because of the speaker's emphasis on her outward characteristics. The woman turns into the object of the speaker's desire; she is admired more for her physical beauty than for her character.

Further, in Neruda's poem *Brown and Agile Child* from his collection *Residence on Earth*, the speaker's portrayal of the woman involves elements of objectification and dehumanization. The poem's language and imagery emphasize the woman's physical attributes while reducing her to an object. The first line of the poem reads, -

“Brown and agile child, the sun which forms the fruit”

Here, the woman is originally characterised in terms of her beauty, emphasising her agility and relating her to the colour brown. The word “child” denotes a power dynamic in which the speaker assumes an observer or authority role, further removing the lady from her agency. The woman is then described as a “statue,” making her appear more like an item to be adored and scrutinised than a real, breathing person. She is further objectified by this comparison to an inanimate object, which implies a lack of agency and autonomy.

The line -

“I do not know how you could contain me within the earth of your flesh” -

further demonstrates the emphasis on the woman's body. Here, the speaker emphasises how the woman's physical attributes serve as a vehicle for his or her needs, reducing her to nothing more than a mere vessel or food item. The speaker's desire overrides the woman's autonomy and identity, continuing a narrative of objectification and power inequality.

In his - Sonnet XXVII, Neruda makes frequent use of nakedness to draw attention to the female body and organs. He writes -

“Naked, you are simple as one of your hands
smooth, earthy, small, and transparent round”

Her breasts are referenced in the comparison of the body to translucent circular objects. This highlights once more how the female is simply a body, an object of desire, without any real personality.

Examination of Linguistic and Imagery Choices:

- 1) **Linguistic Choices:** Neruda's choice of language significantly influences how women are portrayed in his poetry. Certain linguistic choices might highlight women's physical characteristics, support gender stereotypes, and reduce their agency. Several instances include:
 - a) **Emphasis on Outer Appearance:** The poet frequently employs evocative language that emphasises women's outside appearances, accentuating their beauty and sensuality while ignoring other facets of their identities and inner selves.
 - b) **Metaphors that objectify women:** Metaphors that compare women to things, creatures, or the natural world can objectify them. Such comparisons deprive women of their autonomy and personality and turn them into passive beings.
 - c) **Descriptive adjectives:** By emphasising only physical characteristics and sexual attractiveness, as opposed to reflecting the entire complexity of women as varied beings, the adjectives we choose might support the objectification of women.
- 2) **Imagery Choices:** The vivid imagery of Neruda's poetry gives it depth and richness, yet it can also lead to the objectification of women (Gibbs Jr, Lima, & Francozo, 2004). Certain occasions can be spotted, where women are portrayed as objects of desire and beauty rather than as fully realised people by looking at the imagery selections. Several instances include:
 - a) **Sensual and erotic imagery:** By emphasising a woman's sexual appeal over her emotional or intellectual attributes, the use of vivid sensory imagery, particularly related to physical feelings and sexual encounters, can perpetuate the objectification of women.
 - b) **Nature as Symbolism:** Neruda frequently uses nature imagery in his poetry as a form of symbolism for instance - in “Brown And Agile Child”, he writes - “**You are the delirious youth of bee, / The drunkenness of the wave, the power of the wheat.**” Although nature can be an effective metaphor, it's necessary to consider whether using it to represent women as passive objects within a naturalistic framework adds to their becoming objectified.

Impact on Readers' Perception:

Readers' perceptions of gender can be significantly impacted by Pablo Neruda's objectification of women in his poetry, which can also help to maintain negative stereotypes and attitudes. Women who are portrayed as objects of desire, valued exclusively for their physical attributes, risk reinforcing a limited conception of femininity and undermining the acceptance of their agency, autonomy, and complexity. The objectification of women in larger societal contexts can become normalised and validated when readers come across poetry that does so. These poems may reinforce unequal power dynamics and contribute to the marginalisation and devaluation of women's experiences and viewpoints by depicting women as passive objects of male desire.

Furthermore, readers' expectations and impressions of real-life women might be influenced by the objectification of women in literature. It might cause people to internalise objectifying attitudes and behaviours by affecting how they view and interact with women. This may contribute to the objectification and abuse of women in a variety of spheres of life, including intimate partnerships, the workplace, and contacts with the larger community.

On the other hand, readers can gain a deeper understanding of gender dynamics and the effects of such portrayals by critically analysing the objectification that can be found in Neruda's poems. Readers can fight persistent biases and promote a more egalitarian and respectful view of gender by identifying and challenging objectifying features. It fosters the quest for more complex and empowering portrayals in literature and culture by encouraging readers to think about the varied and multifaceted experiences of women.

Historical and Cultural Context

Pablo Neruda's historical and cultural background must be taken into account to comprehend how women are portrayed in his poems. The 20th century, in which Neruda lived and produced his works, saw tremendous changes in social norms and gender roles. In Neruda's era, men typically held positions of power and control while women were frequently expected to perform domestic and caring duties. Societal institutions that emphasized male authority and female subjugation, such as marriage and family structures, reinforced these gender norms. Gender disparities were exacerbated by the frequently limited educational, professional, and civic prospects for women.

An important period of social and political transformation occurred during Neruda's formative years, both in Chile and around the world. In Chile, traditional gender roles were thoroughly ingrained in social conventions, with men typically holding positions of power and authority in the public realm and women typically restricted to the home. Legal and administrative frameworks, as well as cultural and religious beliefs, reinforced these gender norms (Echevarría, 2012). Women's rights movements, which pushed for suffrage, equal access to education, and more engagement in public life, started to pick up steam in the early 20th century. These movements demanded the acknowledgement of women's rights and equality while contesting the prevalent gender conventions. Feminist organisations started to establish in Chile, and women there began to call for social, political, and economic reforms. Neruda could not have been immune to these effects given that he was an observer of these societal developments. Although he was raised in a conservative culture, he would have been aware of the expanding feminist groups and calls for gender equality. His worldview and his knowledge of gender dynamics were probably impacted by the shifting landscape of gender norms and expectations.

Influence of Neruda's Personal Life on His Poetry

Without question, Neruda's relationships and personal life had an impact on his poetry, notably how he portrayed women. His multiple relationships with women, including his marriages and exchanges with them, are depicted in his verses, giving us a glimpse into his feelings and experiences. Neruda had a variety of connections with women, from intense romances to complicated interactions characterised by power disparities (The Hudson Review, 2014). His poetry frequently makes use of these intimate meetings to express strong feelings of want and longing. But it's vital to remember that lyrical language doesn't always reflect a writer's values or deeds. Neruda may have had deep connections with women, but his poetry's depiction of women does not always align with his moral principles or how he treats women in his personal life.

Neruda used poetic licence and artistic devices in his writing to arouse intense feelings and produce vivid imagery. His poetic depictions of women might not have only reflected his personal thoughts or goals, but also the literary and societal norms of the period. It is also important to remember that Neruda underwent a political and social paradigm shift as part of his development as a poet (The Paris Review, 2023). He supported the cause of social justice later in life and got more and more involved in socialist politics. This development raises the possibility that his grasp of gender dynamics and the representation of women may have grown with time, resulting in more complex portrayals in his later works.

Feminist Criticism Towards Neruda's Poems

The ways in which Pablo Neruda's poetry fosters gender inequality, particularly with respect to the objectification of women, have been addressed by feminist critics of his work. These criticisms draw attention to the flaws and problematic parts of Neruda's portrayal of women, as well as the power disparities and patriarchal conventions that are ingrained in his poetry. The unequal power dynamics in Neruda's work are a subject of criticism as well. His poetry frequently cast the male speaker as the dominant figure, while women are reduced to the status of passive objects to be adored and desired, feminist analyses have noted (Otis, 2022). The disparity in power contributes to the marginalisation of women's voices and experiences as well as the maintenance of traditional gender norms. Feminist critics also draw attention to how women's viewpoints and voices are absent from or marginalised in Neruda's poetry. Women are frequently portrayed via the prism of male fantasy and desire, with little or no regard or attention paid to their thoughts, feelings, or wants. The exclusion of women's agency and subjectivity strengthens a narrative that is dominated by males and restricts the portrayal of the wide range of female experiences.

The greater societal repercussions of Neruda's representation of women are also examined in feminist analyses of his writing. They contend that although being praised for its lyrical beauty, his poetry may unintentionally help to reinforce negative gender stereotypes and devalue the autonomy and intellectual accomplishments of women. Neruda's writing reflects and supports larger patriarchal oppressive institutions by fostering objectification and uneven power dynamics (Otis, 2022). It is significant to emphasise that feminist criticisms of Neruda's writing do not discount his literary accomplishments or the potency of his poetry. Instead, they provide a critical framework for analysing the nuanced aspects of his representation of women and the ways in which his work may both challenge and legitimise gender inequality. Furthermore, the objectification of women in Neruda's writing can be damaging to the emancipation of women. His poetry deprives women of their autonomy and agency by reducing them to objects of masculine desire, portraying them as passive recipients of male attention and approval. This hampers efforts to establish gender equality and prevents women from being empowered because it perpetuates the idea that women are only as valuable as their physical appearance, not their academic prowess, accomplishments, or personal aspirations.

Revisiting Neruda's Intentions and Motivations

Authorial Intention versus Reader Interpretation:

The contrast between authorial purpose and reader perception must be kept in mind when discussing the subject of the sexual objectification of women in Pablo Neruda's poetry. Although objectifying women may not have been Neruda's express goal, the influence of his writing on readers cannot be separated from the social and cultural environment in which it is read. Readers' own experiences, worldviews, and conceptions of gender dynamics have an impact on how they interpret and react to the representation of women in his poetry. The aims, convictions, and motivations of the artist when producing a piece of art are referred to as authorial intention. In the instance of Neruda, it is important to recognise that he wrote at a time when gender roles and cultural conventions were well established. On the other hand, reader interpretation has a big impact on a literary work's meaning and impact. Each reader brings their unique experiences, viewpoints, and values to the reading process. As a result, there are many different ways to interpret Neruda's poetry, from those who see objectification and the reinforcement of negative gender stereotypes to those who discover elements of resistance, empowerment, or alternate interpretations.

Multiple Dimensions of Neruda's Poetry:

When analysing Neruda's representation of women, it is important to take into account the poet's poetry's many facets. In addition to themes of want and passion, his works also examine more general human sensations like love, longing, and grief, as well as social and political topics. The intricacy and diversity of his poetic corpus, which features a variety of forms, themes, and tones, must be acknowledged. It is obvious that some of Neruda's poems have objectifying components, but it is also crucial to understand that his poetry encompasses more than just one representation of women. Intricacies of human emotions, the splendour of nature, and the social and political realities of his era are all captured in his works. This can give a broader perspective for comprehending

Neruda's goals and his involvement with gender dynamics. Neruda's poetry frequently expresses his profound empathy for the human predicament and his commitment to social justice.

Assessing the Complexity of Neruda's Representation:

A careful analysis of Neruda's poetry indicates the complexity of his treatment of women. It is essential to examine particular poems in the situations in which they were written, taking into account the language, imagery, and themes used. While some poems unavoidably objectify women, others may do it in a more nuanced manner or even go so far as to question conventional gender roles. There may be moments or glimmers of resistance in some of his poetry that disturb or complicate the objectifying features. These situations present chances for alternate interpretations that highlight the complexity of interpersonal relationships and cast doubt on traditional ideas of gender roles. It is obvious that some of Neruda's poems have objectifying components, but it is also crucial to understand that his poetry encompasses more than just one representation of women. Intricacies of human emotions, the splendour of nature, and the social and political realities of his era are all captured in his works. This can give a broader perspective for comprehending Neruda's goals and his involvement with gender dynamics.

Conclusion

This research article has revisited the subject of sexual objectification of women in Pablo Neruda's poetry and has looked at specific instances, studied the historical and cultural setting in which the poems were written, assessed the effect on readers' perceptions, and taken feminist criticisms into account. The results draw attention to the objectifying features that may be seen in some of Neruda's poetry, where women are frequently portrayed largely as objects of desire with less emphasis placed on their personality or agency. Neruda's poetry, which features a variety of themes, genres, and viewpoints, is difficult, therefore it's also necessary to understand that. Key poems where the objectification of women is visible include "Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines" and "Brown and Agile Child," according to the research. Neruda emphasises physical beauty, compares women to inanimate objects, and dehumanises them through his use of language and images. These decisions support the idea that women are only objects of passive male desire. The effect on readers' perspectives varies; some readers understand these depictions as supporting gender discrimination and stereotypes, while others may come to different conclusions or value other aspects of Neruda's poetry.

Implications for Future Literary Analysis:

The research's conclusions have a number of ramifications for literary analysis in the future. First off, a closer look at certain poems and the linguistic and literary choices made in them can help us better grasp how sexual objectification functions in Neruda's poetry. Researchers can offer light on the underlying power dynamics and the implications for gender portrayal by carefully examining the language and metaphors used.

Future research can also examine the connections between gender and other themes in Neruda's poetry, including politics, the natural world, and social justice. Researchers can clarify how gender dynamics interact with other sociopolitical concerns and add to the overall meaning of his poetry by taking into account the larger context and topics of his work. Additionally, comparing Neruda's representation of women to that of other poets or literary movements from his age might offer insightful comparisons. Researchers can develop a more thorough grasp of the complexity of gender representation in literature by examining how various poets dealt with gender dynamics and questioned or supported established standards.

The Role of Artists in Addressing Gender Issues:

A larger discussion regarding the function of artists in addressing gender issues is prompted by the examination of Neruda's work and the theme of the sexual objectification of women. While it is crucial to critically assess how women are portrayed in literature and fight against damaging depictions, it is equally necessary to understand that artists are allowed to explore a variety of viewpoints and emotions, even if they are uncomfortable or conflicting (Bohatala, 2019). Artists have the ability to form cultural narratives and affect public debate. They can question cultural expectations, elicit reflection, and create an environment conducive to discussion and reflection. But artists also have a duty to think about the moral implications of their work and how it might affect underrepresented groups, such as women. The creative process should entail ongoing involvement with social

and cultural processes, a readiness to hear from many viewpoints, and a dedication to introspection. Thus, artists can actively work to produce pieces that reject objectification, promote agency, and support a society that is more diverse and egalitarian.

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