

Fear by pablo neruda

Literature



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When health fails, it is again the involvement of the people around one that concerns one the most: " Everyone is after me to take it easy./ They all make doctors' appointments for me, eyeing me in that quizzical way." The attitude of people around a seriously ill person begins to change, the " quizzical" looks are part of an effort to deal with the nearby prospect of mortality.

When confronted by evidence of an illness, one goes into denial: " Everyone is spotting oddnesses/ in my innards, suddenly shocked/ by radio-awful diagrams. I do not agree". Neruda correctly diagnoses the human weakness of not wanting to face facts, and most importantly, not wanting to face the transient nature of existence and the cold touch of death.

The same weakness of not knowing and acknowledging the truth about human existence plagues people when things are not going so well professionally: " Everyone is picking at my poetry/ with their relentless knives and forks,/ trying, no doubt, to find a fly./ I am afraid." This confession of fear is uncharacteristic of people in general but the poet Neruda takes the first step towards confronting his fears: accepting that he is afraid. His apprehensions stem from the criticism of his work: just as a chef serves cuisine, the poet serves poetry, and Neruda is worried that critics would find fault with his writings just as a diner tends to find problems with the food. But once he begins to face his fears, Neruda is forced to confront what he is really afraid of: " I am afraid of the whole world,/ afraid of cold water, afraid of death./ I am as all mortals are,/ unable to be comforted." He takes stock of the fact that human beings are the children of fear: they are spiritually afraid of everything around them, they are trying to run on and on because they are afraid to stop; they do not reflect because they are scared of their thoughts.

The use of " cold water" and " death" is significant. A comparison could be drawn between the two. Just as someone is hesitant to enter cold water for a bath, but when one actually steps into it, one gets used to it and is no longer afraid, one could reflect on mortality and get used to the idea of death, and then the fear of death vanishes.

Having confessed and faced his fear, Neruda is determined to set it aside and reflect in the silence of solitude, and make closer acquaintance with his own self: " I shall not take them into account./

I shall open up and closet myself/ with my most treacherous enemy, Pablo Neruda." The poet brings himself into the universe of the poem, and knows that his gathering realization of mortality has given him the strength to confront his own weaknesses, the " most treacherous enemy", his own self, known to the world as " Pablo Neruda".

In conclusion, Neruda talks about the human condition dominated by worries, preoccupations, surrounding people, their concerns and opinions, and a thousand such thoughts which leave little time for meditating on inner silence. In this superficial and perpetual busyness with externals, the reality of death is evaded. It is not confronted, left unknown, and hence feared because anything that is unknown is generally feared. The poem " Fear" is about facing the things that make one afraid, confession of those fears, and a calm reflection of one's shortcoming in tranquil solitude.