

Pablo Neruda: Poet, Statesman

By Samuel Putnam

WITH this issue, Pablo Neruda becomes a contributing editor of *NEW MASSES*. This is a highly significant cultural event. It is an event for *NEW MASSES* and its readers. It is significant for the world of modern poetry, in the light that it has to throw upon the poet's—the artist's, the intellectual's—evolving relationship to the world of modern man.

Critical superlatives are always dangerous; they lay the one who employs them open to the charge of immaturity. However, if one were to assert that Pablo Neruda (in private life, Neftali Reyes) is the finest Spanish language poet since Federico Garcia Lorca, I do not believe that there would be many competent voices to contradict him. Nor would one be running much more of a risk in asserting that Neruda and Ruben Dario, who died in 1916, are the two towering peaks of Latin American poetry. In any event, the former is unchallengeably one of the major figures in the contemporary poetic scene, without regard to geography.

Indeed, if there is any vital relation between the poet's art and society—which in the last analysis is simply to say: between poetry and human life; if it is at all the poet's business to reflect life in the large, rather than the mere nuances of personal feeling, then Pablo Neruda must rank very high in a period in which so many of our most gifted singers, turning their backs on the greatest drama in recorded history, have sought mystic havens of escape, subjective oases in a world of B-29's. One thinks of the author of *The Waste Land* and the host of little Eliots, of Auden and the Audenites and the palpable course they are steering, of Pound and his treason—And then, one remembers Neruda's *Spain in the Heart* (*Espana en el Corazon*), that "Hymn to the Glories of the People in War," written in the midst of the Spanish struggle and set up in type by the front-line Loyalist fighters.

One thinks of this resplendent battle-song, whose aesthetic qualities not even the hyperaesthete would deny, and of a number of other equally fine poems which Neruda later wrote, in what was for him a time of intense poetic activity, as the Red Army battled its way westward, past Kharkov, Stalingrad, Sevastopol—inspiring landmarks, each of them, to one who was becoming all

the while more and more of a people's poet, and more and more conscious of the fact. Read his "Love Song to Stalingrad."

For Pablo Neruda is a people's poet—he has become a people's poet. This must inevitably be stressed in any adequate consideration of his work, with a special emphasis on the *becoming*. It is the failure to grasp the phenomenon of social and poetic growth which he exemplifies that accounts for the one-sided estimates of his poetry that are to be encountered in literary magazines and scholastic journals; although one frequently has the impression that the critics in question are guilty of a willful shortsightedness: they are blind because they do not wish to see, and accordingly prefer to give us the Neruda whom Pablo Neruda himself has outgrown or cast off, the scars of a chrysalis that has long since been shed.

In Latin America, back in the 1930's, there was a continent-wide fashion of writing—for fashion it was—among poets that came to be known as "*Nerudismo*," and which Neruda had to repudiate. He had gone on; his imitators were left with the husk. Such is the penalty of greatness.

BUT in order to understand what happened to him, it is necessary to go back to the period immediately following World War I. We are all of us familiar by this time with the mood of despair that laid hold of the most capable poets in the after-war years. Down in his native Chile, Neruda felt this, too, and it is not without significance that his first noteworthy volume should have borne the title, *Crepusculario*, or "Twilight Book." Published in 1923, one year after *The Waste Land*, this collection showed much the same tendency as did the Eliot poem, toward a formalization of bourgeois despair. *Crepusculario* and the work that followed in 1924, the *Twenty Love Poems and a Despairing Song* (*Veinte Poemas de Amor y una Cancion Desesperada*), are filled with what has been described, and not without good reason, as a charnel house imagery. They represent what the poet has called his "formal" period, although his form was never as tight, as arid and constipated as Eliot's.

It is to be noted that this period was a brief one, lasting only two years, from 1923 to 1925. Then began what the

poet calls his "informal" one, from 1925 to the outbreak of the Spanish War, in 1936. During this ten-year interregnum, in 1931 and 1935, Neruda published his best known work, the two-volume collection entitled *Residencia en la Tierra* (Residence on the Earth). One novel, the only one he has written, saw the light in 1926; it was entitled *El Habitante y Su Esperanza* (The Inhabitant and His Hope).

The very titles that the poet gave his books during this second period—"Residence on the Earth," "The Inhabitant and His Hope"—are meaningful; in themselves, they hint that he was progressing from the "twilight" and the "despairing song" of his youth to a deep questioning of life's purpose. It was Spain, the people's Spain, that was to provide the beginning of the answer. As with Malraux, "man's fate" was becoming "man's hope."

Then, in the later 1930's and early 1940's, came the period of the life-and-death struggle against world fascism. Spain, the sight of what happened at Almeria, his first-hand acquaintance with the International Brigades, whose laureate he was to be—these things it was that brought the poet out of his chrysalis, out of the charnel house of old. He was now not only a poet, but a fighter, a poet who fought with his verses and when necessary, with the anti-fascist populace in the street, as he did in Mexico City. (He was wounded on one occasion.) During the years that he was Chilean consul in the Mexican capital, he never let diplomacy interfere with the rights of man; never once did he take refuge in his position and keep silent when his voice should have been heard. He is one of the most courageous and honest of living poets.

Being honest, and with a new purpose before him, that of writing for the people, he is conscious of his limitations. He tells us that it is hard for him to change his matured style. There are clinging remnants of the old imagery, the old formalization and stylization; but during the last few years—from 1942, let us say—both images and style have been undergoing a change of which the poet himself, possibly, is not fully aware.

And in any case—"I should like to see the people's level of comprehension raised so that they can penetrate with

the poet into all the richness of the modern world." Note that it is now a "rich" world for Neruda, no longer a charnel house; for he found the world when he found the people that inhabit it, the residents of this earth and the hope that is theirs.

In connection with writing for the people, Neruda says: "I feel very humble in this task. To write for the people is too great an ambition. Antonio Machado put it well when he said that only two men in all history have succeeded in writing for the masses: Shakespeare and Cervantes."

In the light of all this, it is not hard to understand why Neruda should readily accept the position which NEW MASSES has offered him. A real fighter knows his fellow fighters when he sees them. One thinks of a Pablo Picasso in France. It is, surely, indicative of a new world in the making when a painter like Picasso and a poet like Neruda take their stand with the people and find in so doing a new meaning for their art.

WORKS OF PABLO NERUDA (In Spanish)

La Cancion de la Fiesta (poems), Santiago de Chile, Editorial Juventud, 1921. (Neruda's first published volume.)

Crepusculario: Poemas, Santiago de Chile, Editorial Nascimento, 1923; second edition, 1926. (Written in 1919, before *Cancion de la Fiesta*.)

Veinte Poemas de Amor y una Cancion Desesperada, Santiago de Chile, Editorial Nascimento, 1924; second edition, 1932; Buenos Aires, Editorial Tor, 1934.

Tentativa del Hombre Infinito (Poems), Santiago de Chile, Editorial Nascimento, 1926.

El Habitante y Su Esperanza (Novel), Santiago de Chile, Editorial Nascimento, 1926.

Anillos: Prosas (with Tomas Lago), Santiago de Chile, Editorial Nascimento, 1926.

El Hondero Entusiasta: Poema, Santiago de Chile, Empresa Letras, 1933 (Cuadernos de Poesia, num. 2). (Written 1923-1924.)

Residencia en la Tierra (Poems), Santiago de Chile, Editorial Nascimento, 1933; Madrid, Cruz y Raya, 1935; 2 vols. (Ediciones de Arbol.)

Tres Cantos Materiales, published in *Homenaje a Pablo Neruda*, Madrid, Plutarco, 1935.

Espana en el Corazon, Spain, 1937. (This work was set up and printed by the Loyalist soldiers in the front lines. A copy of the original edition is in the Library of Congress, Hispanic Foundation.)

Nuevo Canto de Amor a Stalingrado, Mexico, 1943.

(In addition to his creative work in verse and prose, Neruda is a translator, having rendered into Spanish William Blake, Anatole France, Quevedo, and Villamediana. There is a large number of critical studies of Ne-

ruda in Spanish. Two of particular interest and readily available, having to do with his imagery and style, are: "Pablo Neruda en su Extremo Imperio," by Concha Melendez, *Revista Hispanica Moderna*, ano III, num. 1, octubre, 1936, pp. 1-32; and "Algunos Simbolos Insistentes en la Poesia de Pablo Neruda," by Amado Alonso, *Revista Hispanica Moderna*, Ano V, num. 3, julio, 1939, pp. 191-220.)

WHAT TO READ ON PABLO NERUDA IN ENGLISH
The Modernist Trend in Spanish American Poetry, by D. S. Craig, Berkeley, Cal., University of California Press, 1934, pp. 330-333 (with translations of poems).

"Pablo Neruda in Mexico," by Maurice Halperin, *Books Abroad*, Vol. 15, No. 2, April, 1941, pp. 164-168. (A very interesting interview with the poet.)

"Pablo Neruda," by Samuel Putnam, *NEW MASSES*, March 16, 1943, pp. 23-25. (Deals with Neruda and Ruben Dario.)

"Poet of Strife," by Angel Flores, *The Inter-American*, Vol. II, No. 5, May, 1943.

NERUDA'S POEMS IN ENGLISH

An Anthology of Contemporary Latin American Poetry, edited by Dudley Fitts, Norfolk, Conn., New Directions, 1942.

12 *Spanish American Poets*, edited and translated by H. R. Hays, Yale University Press, 1942, pp. 240-265.

"Spain Within My Heart," translated by Lloyd Mallan, *Smith College Monthly*, Vol. III, No. 4, February, 1943, pp. 7-9.

"Phantom of the Freighter," translated by H. R. Hays, *Latin American Issue of Poetry*, Vol. LXII, No. 11, pp. 62-64.

Japan's Front Yard

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in the bombardment which consisted of 1,000-ton salvos of shells.

Meanwhile land-based planes were not sitting idle. Superfortresses from the Marianas made 2,000 flights and dropped something like 12,000 tons of fire bombs on Japanese objectives. Medium bombers and fighters from Okinawa and Iwo joined in the huge operation, blasting the airfields of Kyushu, the railroads of Korea, the defenses of Formosa, and Japanese shipping in the inner seas, including the key bottleneck of communications of Tsushima Strait.

Four separate warship strikes, six separate carrier attacks and four Superfort strikes were made between July 10 and 20—ten days which the Japanese people will hardly forget and which their leaders will have a tough time explaining away. During the fateful ten days of the combined attacks more than 400 Japanese ships, including the battleship Nagato, were sunk or damaged, and more than 500 Japanese planes destroyed or damaged. While this was going on, our planes from the Philippines ranged over Celebes and Borneo.

Australian troops made another landing on Borneo. Fighting flared up in the long-forgotten theater of New Guinea (in the region of Wewak where Japanese garrisons are "drying on the stalk.") Chinese Kuomintang troops fought inconclusive see-saw battles around Kweilin and near Swatow, losing ground and gaining some but still failing to cut the last thread of Japanese communications between Hankow and Canton and Indo-China.

Men and Machines

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under iron gradually died; for it was not loved or hated, it had no prayer or curses." Here is a soil-mysticism worthy of Knut Hamsun.

But 150 pages further on, Steinbeck reflects: "Is a tractor bad? Is the power that turns the long furrows wrong? If this tractor were ours, it would be good—not mine, but ours. If our tractor turned the long furrows of our land, it would be good. Not my land but ours. We could love that tractor then as we have loved this land when it was ours. . . . Only a little multiplication now and this land, this tractor, are ours. The two men squatting in a ditch, the little fire, the side-meat stewing in a single pot, the silent stone-eyed women behind, the children listening with their souls to words their minds do not understand. The night draws down. The baby has a cold. Here, take this blanket. It's wool, it was my mother's blanket—take it for the baby. This is the thing to bomb. This is the beginning—from 'I' to 'we.'"

To conclude: Has the question raised by the Machine yet been answered—blessing or curse? The Nazis brought the robots from behind the footlights of melodrama out upon the stage of world history. The Waste Land of the poet's imagination—"these fragments have I shored against my ruins"—became the landscape of our daily news broadcasts. And the Russians mastered the machine in time to save—ironically enough—the American and English capitalist nations. Perhaps the poets and playwrights and novelists may help to make the scales dip on the side of blessing rather than curse, if from now on they can do as well with the theme of mastery over the machine as in the past decades they have done with that of destruction by the machine. Is this perhaps a version of the old problem, unsolved even by the genius of a Dostoevsky or a Milton, of making God more interesting than Satan?

The Art Season's End

By Moses Soyer

ANOTHER exciting and busy art season has drawn to a close. It was highlighted by one-man shows of such great European artists as Degas, Renoir, Rouault, Picasso, Maillol; by group shows such as Masterpieces of Dutch Art, the Child Through Four Centuries, the Whitney show of the work of European artists in America, the Artists League of America, the American Group and the seaman shows; the first Pepsi-Cola and the *Britannica* exhibitions, and one-man exhibitions by American artists too numerous to mention. The encouraging thing about it all was the fact that American art, as I said in a previous review, has proved itself vigorous, attuned to the times, and full of promise. Noteworthy among the one-man shows of this season were those of Marguerite Zorach, Doris Rosenthal, Georgia O'Keefe, Lena Gurr, Sara Berman Beach and Margaret Lowengrund. Among the first one-man shows, those of Charles Keller, Cpl. Milton J. Wynne and Nova seemed to hold forth most promise. The entrance of private industry into the field of art patronage was a significant event of the year.

The ACA gallery has completed its season with an unusual exhibition of pen and ink drawings by a young American soldier, Cpl. Milton J. Wynne. In conjunction with the exhibition the gallery published soldier Wynne's prose poem *Why I Hate the Nazis*. The drawings are incorporated in the book. Corporal Wynne has experienced war at first hand, having served as a member of the Air Corps in the campaigns of Africa, Sicily, Corsica and Italy. He has seen the black misery and human degradation the brave fascists and Nazis have wrought upon the world. He writes with a fervor and passionate hatred that "cuts deeply into our consciousness like a keen razorblade," to quote Herman Baron's introduction. To me, the visions he conjures up with words are more vivid and stark than those expressed in line. I feel that when Corporal Wynne adds to the fine emotional quality of his drawings a greater knowledge of line and form, which he now lacks because of youth and lack of experience, his work will gain greater power. The drawings are executed somewhat in style of the German expressionists, and also betray a slight influence of John Groth, Grop-

per and others. In spite of all this, the drawings and the book combined show a fine talent.

WHILE I am concerned with publications I should also like to say a few words about the monthly published by the ACA gallery and edited by Charles Steingart. I have before me as I write the first thirteen issues and I am really impressed by the important material they contain. Some of its contributors have been Oliver Larkin of Smith College, Elizabeth McCausland, Elizabeth Olds, Philip Evergood, Irene Rice Pereira, Harry Sternberg, Burliuk and John Groth. The usually well written and carefully documented articles deal with problems that face the artist. Among other things it has contained an important essay on Picasso by Juan Marinello, which originally appeared in *NEW MASSES*, "The Museum and the Community," by Holger Cahill, "The American Tradition," by Elizabeth McCausland, a letter on Russian art in wartime, "Art for Veterans," by Victor D'Amico, and a "Gallery Director's Diary," by Herman Baron. The magazine is well illustrated and attractively printed. Two other books published by the ACA gallery this year are *Picasso*, by Elizabeth McCausland and *Moses Soyer*, by Bernard Smith.

The Artists League of America dedicated the most important issue of its official publication, the *ALA News*, to members in the armed forces. It contained, among other things, greetings to the artist-soldiers from Lynd Ward, Rockwell Kent, Philip Evergood and Yasuo Kuniyoshi; an article on the GI Bill of Rights, by Bill Sanders, an interesting letter on Italian art and artists from Jacob Landau and many letters from artists from the various fronts.

WITH the cessation of war on the European continent, an international exchange of art has become possible. Pioneering work in this field is being done by the artists' committee of the National Council for American-Soviet Friendship. Last year this committee sent canvas, paint, brushes, etc., to the Russian artists. This year it is sending a collection of photographs of the work of some 150 American artists and 100 illustrators, in the hope that the Russian artists and people will get

from these photographs some idea of what we are doing over here. The Russians will be asked in turn to send us a representative collection of photographs of their work. The collection is being shown prior to its being sent overseas at the Associated American Artists Galleries, until August 4. On July 24 there was a preview at which formal presentation of the collection was made by the committee to the representatives of the Soviet Union. The chairman of the committee is Paul Manship. Its vice chairmen are Jo Davidson, Rockwell Kent, Leon Kroll (who is also chairman of the committee of selection), John Sloan and Max Weber.

ANOTHER fine contribution to art made during the season has been artist Frank Kleinholz's Wednesday radio program "There's Art in New York." With great skill and tact Mr. Kleinholz has brought to the people of New York the problems and strivings of the artist both from a technical and social point of view. Among the people he interviewed were not only artists but also forward-looking directors of museums and writers on art. Mr. Kleinholz's method has been one of informality and intimacy. The listener has been made to feel as if he himself were drawn into the circle as a participant in a friendly and pertinent exchange of views on art. Perhaps the most unusual program in the series was the one in which Mr. Kleinholz had as his guests artist George Picken, veteran of World War I, and Joe Hirsh, artist correspondent of World War II. The reminiscences and the note-comparing of these two men were extremely interesting.

FOLLOWING the present trend of private industry's entrance into the field of art, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 177 years old, has come forward with a large, if not altogether comprehensive, collection of contemporary American art. Beginning its national tour in Chicago, it has just completed the New York showing at the International Building in Radio City. I say it is not comprehensive, even though I realize the difficulties attendant to forming such a collection and that the number of acquisitions had presumably to be kept within certain limits. The collection contains too many items that could be classi-