

English – World Literature Essay

(Q) How are the sources of knowledge used in 'Blood Wedding', 'Love in the Time of Cholera' and 'And How Long?' to convey various ideas?

A number of knowledge sources, religious, scientific and gossip knowledge are used in the texts to express various purposes. Religious knowledge is about people's different beliefs and their variation from culture to culture. It is about God's existence and people's thinking about Him controlling the world. On the other hand, scientific knowledge is about inventions done by humans through using technology. Gossip is concerned with the ways in which people, both dead and living communicate. It also includes weapons that cause destruction and death.

'And How Long?' is based on the theme of life and death. The narrator, Pablo Neruda uses sources in this poem as tools to find an answer to his rhetorical questions about life and existence.

"How long does a man live, after all?" (Line 1)

"How long does a man spend dying?" (Line 4)

With these questions in mind, Neruda sets himself on a journey of exploring the sources to satisfy himself.

'Blood Wedding' has a completely different setting and is mainly about the Spanish culture and about a typical Spanish wedding. 'Blood Wedding' depicts how the sources are used in family disputes in Spain and how it affects the people concerned.

"Mother – "Knives...guns...pistols, even the sickle and the scythe " (Page 30)

The sources are used in conversations in the novel and when the setting changes to the wedding and in the end of the novel during its climax.

Last but not the least, 'Love in the Time of Cholera' is about the unrequited love of a man with a higher status female who has a better background than he does. However, she rejects him and marries someone else of a better status and background than him. Nevertheless, he is not ready to forget her and waits for her. The knowledge sources are used to show the high status and the technology used to solve the terror of Cholera in the novel. Still though, the sources help to show images of the deaths that occurred due to Cholera. Scientific knowledge is used where Dr. Juvenal Urbino is mentioned.

"... As did the instruments, the bottles of medicine, and all the other things jumbled together in his crowded medical bag." (Page 5)

The sources are used where a character is introduced, when characters are communicating or where Cholera is mentioned.

The first source used is Religious knowledge. This is where Neruda, in 'And How Long?' goes first during his journey of finding a purposeful answer.

"I sought out knowledgeable priests...to visit God and the Devil" (Line 11)

He waited for the priests while they worshipped their God and did their rituals, which shows that he carefully observed every move they made with the hope that it might help him. However, all his efforts seemed fruitless, as he was unable to get an answer to his questions because

"They wearied of my questions...
They were no more than administrators" (Line 14)

The priests got tired of him because they knew little that would help Neruda and neither did they care about him. All they believed was in God and worshipping Him was all that they lived for.

On a similar note, religious knowledge is used in 'Blood Wedding' during various conversations when a shocking event has occurred and the people are calling God for help. When the Bride runs away with her boyfriend during her wedding and the father finds that out, he says

"Father – God help us, no...not my daughter" (Page 80)

Nevertheless, similarly to 'And How Long?' where Neruda is not helped by God, the Father is not helped by God either as her daughter runs away with her boyfriend during her wedding causing him to be hugely embarrassed in front of all the relatives who came to the wedding.

In 'Love in the Time of Cholera', religious knowledge is used through churches to show the community's daily routine.

"In the distance... the bells of the Cathedral were ringing for High Mass"

Religion is regarded as of great value in Spanish societies. In addition, the use of religious words such as "Divine Providence" (Page 4), "Holy See" (Page 44), "Holy Spirit" (Page 66) and sentences

"...Sister Franca de la Luz, Superior of the Academy of ... the Blessed Virgin..." (Page 78)

show the significance of religion in Spanish high-class societies.

Dr. Urbino says,

"It's the third time I've missed Sunday Mass ...But God understands" (Page 7)

The next source mentioned in Neruda's journey is scientific knowledge. Scientific knowledge is all about science, technology and innovations. Neruda thought that maybe science has the answers to his confusions.

"Medical men received me...busier each day." (Line 19)

Despite his efforts, he did not receive success here either and all he realized was that science is all about microbes; microbes that also live life like humans and only the best survive due to competition just like in humans today. Furthermore, even the few that survived were deliberately destructive against other people's ideas.

"It was not so much the death of a microbe...
But the few which survived
Showed signs of perversity" (Line 25)

Antithetically, scientific knowledge is used in a completely changed manner in 'Love in the Time of Cholera'. It is used to show newer inventions and professions like of doctors who work to stop the massive destruction from Cholera to the Spanish society. Doctors are regarded as of extremely high rank in the society as they fight against Cholera.

"...Dr. Juvenal Urbino had followed a set routine and achieved a respectability and prestige that had no equal in the province" (Page 8)

Finally, the last source of knowledge that Neruda visited is Gossip (Death). He visited every possible place where he found dead bodies. He came to them with a lot of hope, as he did not find an answer anywhere else.

"...I went to the rivers where they burn
Enormous painted corpses ...
There were whole beaches of dead
And ashy specialists." (Line 36)

Even after his high expectations, it seemed that Neruda's hopes were stranded because he

"...Asked them a slew of questions.
They offered to burn me;
It was the only thing they knew." (Line 40)

The tone was turning depressing as Neruda had lost hope, and so he went back to his country.

"...The undertakers
Answered me, between drinks:
'Get yourself a good woman
And give up this nonsense'" (Line 44)

“I never saw people so happy.” (Line 45)

“Raising their glasses they sang
Toasting health and death.” (Line 47)

He realized through undertakers, the people who fed themselves from the money made through dead bodies, that there was nothing to worry about from death and that the poet is better off not bothering for an answer for his questions. By now, Neruda was satisfied from his quest and accepted that there is no answer, which changed the tone drastically in the poem as well. He felt that the undertakers were the happiest people on earth, as they had nothing to fear from as they lived on what everyone else feared.

Gossip is also used in ‘Blood Wedding’ through words such as “Blood” (Page 97), “Raging” (Page 83) and “Grave” (Page 100). The main use of gossip in the novel has been to show deaths and the adverse results of the family disputes between the family mentioned in the novel and the Felix family.

Girl 1 says to Girl 2

“...Bathed in blood,
I saw them both...
Lying stiff” (Page 97)

Mother says to Father

“And I tell you this...blood will flow before this day is over ... Let’s go! Now!”
(Page 81)

Overall, the sources are used to express numerous views in the three texts and they help to bring together a completely different conclusion for each text.

In ‘And How Long?’ Neruda learns that some things are better left unanswered and not thought about because it is the way life works. Therefore, Neruda finishes on an enigmatic note through a mystifying tone with mystery in his sentence just like there is mystery in the questions to which he never got answers.

“I returned home, much older
After crossing the world.

Now I question nobody.

But I know less everyday.” (Line 51)

In ‘Blood Wedding’, the sources lead to a dramatic and tragic ending with both the bridegroom and the lover killing each other, therefore, showing that eventually, everyone has to die and one day death takes over life. Moreover, the novel shows how the use of weapons leads to destruction. Mother says

“Neighbors, it was with a knife...
Two men in love killed each other...
Where the dark root of the scream
Lies trembling enmeshed.” (Page 104)

In ‘Love in the Time of Cholera’, the sources lead to another miracle as Florentino Ariza is able to find his unrequited love as Fermina Daza accepts his love even after they are in their old age.

“At a certain moment... Only then did he have the courage to admit to himself how much he had loved her.” (Page 346)

“Florentino Ariza had kept his answer ready for fifty -three years, seven months and eleven days and nights.” (Page 348)

Hence, it could be said that the sources lead to completely different conclusions in the three texts depending on the way they are used in the texts and thus, they bring a positive, negative or a mystifying ending to the text according to the author’s intentions.

(Word Count – 1500 words)