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Close Reading Analysis “To Roosevelt”

As suggested by the title, “To Roosevelt” appears to have served as an outlet for Rubén Darío to address and even critique the American president concerning his intentions related to the colonization or control over Spanish American countries. Upon further reading, it is revealed that the poem was instead a warning to the United States regarding the true strength of Latin people across the entire continent. Moreover, Darío’s true purpose was to invite his fellow brothers with a call of arms to stand united beside him by reminding them about their powerful history, culture, and faith.

In this text, Darío broke free from the rigid rules of structure and excluded rhyme. In addition, the tone, word choice, and allusions received greater emphasis. In the first section, sentences are short, and the stanzas seem to follow a four-line structure. These suggest that the author intended his message to be direct and concise. In the first stanza, the narrator introduces who appears to be the principal character by asking a question addressed to the 'Great Hunter'. These first lines foreshadow a negative connotation related to this character since they possess a critical and even sarcastic tone. “You yourself are the United States” (line 5) and “exemplary of your race” (line 10) indicate that Darío was addressing the American people as one entity, not just their president. The succeeding lines contain repetition of the second-person pronoun, which are followed by present tense verbs like “you’re”, “you think”, and “you put”. With every

descriptive line, the reader learns more about the strengths and weaknesses of this nation and its leader. Some were contradictory like “primitive and modern, simple and complicated” (line 3).

The author also compared the president to several figures like Nimrod (line 4), Alexander (13), Nebuchadnezzar (line 13), Hercules, and Mammon (line 28). These figures are remembered in historic and mythological books as powerful warriors, but also as ruthless and barbaric conquerors. With these allusions to the past, the author reminds readers that great leaders built their empires upon the blood and suffering of others. Furthermore, Darío included more graphic and direct descriptions like “You will be a future invader/ of naïve America” (lines 6-7), and “You’re tamer of horses, you’re a killer of tigers” (line 12). These bluntly portray Darío’s image of the U.S. and its violent past, which seems to indicate that the president intended to invade Latin America and control its economy. But was the author’s goal to reach the U.S. President by criticizing the way of his people? Or did Darío intend for this poem to impact another audience?

Based on the tone and structure shift on line 20, it is arguable that Darío’s principal audience is revealed in the last three stanzas. Suddenly sentences are longer, and the references to warrior and imperialistic figures are replaced by Latin American historical icons and world-renowned intellects like Plato (line 38) and Moctezuma (41). Most importantly, the first-person plural pronouns emerge. The poem no longer discusses the United States; the focus shifted to “our own America” (line 32). The seventh stanza reminds Latin Americans about their resilience and multifaceted identity by bringing light to their ancestors, colonial past, suffering, religious faith, and language. By stating “America of the great Moctezuma and Inca,/ America redolent of Christopher Columbus,/ Catholic America and Spanish America” (lines 41-43), Darío intended to create a sense of union that divided Latin America from the Northern threat.

Afterward, the author included a direct warning “Be careful, Spanish America is alive and well!” (line 50). This line creates another turning point in the tone since it is the only line with an exclamation point that was not a quote. Moreover, it is followed by a powerful metaphor comparing Spanish American countries to “the myriad loose cubs from the Spanish Lion” (line 51). An image that portrays the fragile but growing strength of these newly independent countries. To conclude the poem, Darío utilized an element previously alluded to, and that plays a central role in Latin culture: religion. United under one faith, Darío specified that Roosevelt was missing “God!” (line 55) and that he was the only one who could help him “capture us in your talons of iron” (line 54). This further strengthens Darío’s intention of setting clear divisions between South and North America. This conclusion also appeals to the faith and emotion of his Latin American audience.

“To Roosevelt” by Rubén Darío might first appear like a letter or critic but proves to be abundant with complex and diverse literary elements, meanings, and messages. With word choice, metaphors, allusions, tone shifts, and sentence structure as evidence, it can be proven that the poem served multiple purposes. It shed light upon the differences between Spanish American and North America, as well as their strengths, weaknesses, values, history, present states, and possible futures. The text also addressed various audiences since it warned an entire continent and appealed to the emotions of another one by calling for its union.

Works Cited

Darío, Rubén. "To Roosevelt". *Rubén Darío Selected Writings*, translated by Andrew Hurley, Greg Simon, and Steven F. White. Edited by Ilan Stavans, Penguin Books, 2005, pp. 119-121.