

Chile successfully exhumes body of poet Neruda

April 9 2013, by Eva Vergara



In this photo released by Chile's Judiciary, forensic specialists dig at the grave of Nobel laureate Pablo Neruda as they prepare for the exhumation of the remains in Isla Negra, Chile, Sunday April 7, 2013. The body of Neruda will be exhumed in an effort to clear up four decades of suspicion about how the poet died in the days after Chile's military coup.(AP Photo / Judiciary of Chile)

(AP)—Chilean forensic experts exhumed the body of Nobel laureate Pablo Neruda on Monday, trying to solve a four-decade mystery about the death of one the greatest poets of the 20th century.

The official version is that the poet died from prostate cancer and the trauma of witnessing the 1973 military coup that led to the persecution and killing of many of his friends. But his driver and many other Chileans say Neruda was murdered by agents of Gen. Augusto Pinochet's brutal dictatorship.

Experts were concerned that high salinity and humidity could affect the [exhumation](#) at Neruda's home in Isla Negra, a rocky outcropping overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

But Patricio Bustos, head of Chile's medical legal service, said Neruda's casket is in good shape after the one-hour exhumation. After draping Neruda's coffin in the Chilean national flag, forensics workers took his remains to the capital for tests. They could also be analyzed abroad and Bustos said they have offers from labs in the United States and Europe.



This Feb. 14, 1952 file photo shows Chilean poet Pablo Neruda in Capri, Italy. The perseverance and persistence during the last two decades from who was the driver and assistant of Neruda, who believes that the Pinochet dictatorship ordered the world-wide poet's assassination, prompted a human rights judge to order on Feb. 8, 2013 the exhumation of his body. But chances are that the exhumation won't be conclusive on whether the poet died in the middle of a treatment for prostate cancer or was killed by a doctor, whose existence no one can verify, to silence the vocal poet who was an active member of the Chilean Communist Party. Officially, Neruda died of cancer only days after the 1973 coup toppled his close friend, socialist President Salvador Allende. (AP Photo/File)

"After we take a look at our lab, following the biomedical [safety measures](#) and with total vigilance, we will be able to set a timeline for the process," Bustos told reporters.

"The most complex part will be searching for toxic substances that could not only be classic poisons, but also, according to testimonies, could be medical substances at very high doses to harm the poet."

Neruda, who won the Nobel prize for literature in 1971, was best known for romantic verses, especially the collection "Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair." He was also a leftist diplomat and close friend of socialist President Santiago Allende, who committed suicide rather than surrender to troops during the Sept. 11, 1973 coup led by Pinochet.



A band plays music near the tomb of Pablo Neruda on Isla Negra, Chile, Monday, April 8, 2013. Chilean forensic experts exhumed the body of Nobel laureate Pablo Neruda on Monday, trying to solve a four-decade mystery about the death of one the greatest poets of the 20th century. (AP Photo /Luis Hidalgo)

Neruda planned to go into exile, where he would have been an influential voice against the dictatorship. Just a day before he was scheduled to leave, he was taken by ambulance to the Santa Maria hospital in Santiago to keep him safe from political persecution.

Officially, Neruda died there on Sept. 23 from natural causes related to the emotional trauma of the coup.

For years, his driver and bodyguard, Manuel Araya has said that the poet was murdered when agents of the dictatorship injected poison into his stomach at the clinic.

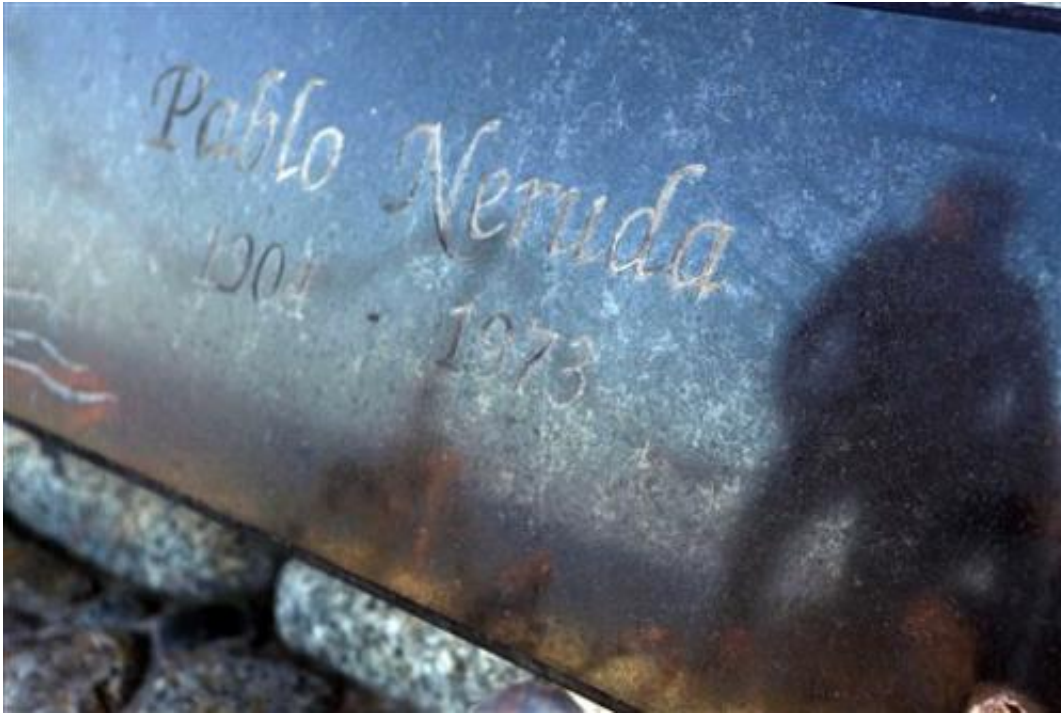


Workers set up protective sheets around the tomb of literature Nobel laureate Pablo Neruda in Isla Negra, Chile, Sunday April 7, 2013. The body of Neruda will be exhumed in an effort to clear up four decades of suspicion about how the poet died in the days after Chile's military coup. (AP Photo / Luis Hidalgo).

"If it hadn't been for that shot Neruda wouldn't have died," Araya said.

"After seeing him being removed from the site, I felt a huge amount of pain because I lived the 24 hours with Neruda before his death. It took a long time, but justice has been served."

Former President Eduardo Frei Montalva died at the same clinic nine years later. Although doctors listed the cause of his 1982 death as septic shock from stomach hernia surgery, an investigation almost three decades later showed that the vocal opponent of the Pinochet regime had been slowly poisoned to death.



A visitor is reflected on the marble of the tomb of literature Nobel laureate Pablo Neruda in Isla Negra, Chile, Sunday April 7, 2013. The body of Neruda will be exhumed in an effort to clear up four decades of suspicion about how the poet died in the days after Chile's military coup. (AP Photo / Luis Hidalgo).

The exhumation was approved by Judge Mario Carroza on a request by Chile's Communist Party. It was attended by the driver and one of Neruda's four nephews.

"It was an emotional moment that reached our very fibers," said Rodolfo Reyes, one of Neruda's nephews.

"It's very important that the truth is known and the eyes of the world are set on this new investigation."

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