

Pablo Neruda as the Place-maker: An Ecocritical Enquiry of ‘Place’ in Neruda’s Selected Poems

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the more than 50 years of Pablo Neruda’s poetic career, natural places were a fundamental component of his poetry. Neruda was a major 20th century Latin American and Nobel Prize winning poet who was famous as a political poet. This paper examines the concept of ‘place’ in Neruda’s selected poems to reveal his experiences and emotions connected to specific places. ‘Place’ is an essential component of ecopoetry. In this paper, we utilise the conceptual framework of ecopoetry, which is a sub-theory of ecocriticism. Ecopoetry is a genre of poetry that explores how human beings are connected to their habitat or home, how ‘home’ is defined and built, and how a sense of ‘place’ is invoked. In this paper, we scrutinise the relationship between man and place (nature) with an emphasis on ecological awareness. Therefore, the paper will illustrate how the environment is closely associated with the concept of place. Based on the evidence presented, we propose that Neruda was very much an eco-poet and a ‘place maker’. Through his poetry, he establishes his poetic goal to achieve ‘topophilia’ or love of places by illustrating that the knowledge of spiritual belonging is the result of the knowledge of one’s physical roots.

Keywords: Pablo Neruda, ecopoetry, eco-criticism, place, place maker, identity, belonging, topophilia

INTRODUCTION

Pablo Neruda’s birth name was Ricardo Eliecer Naftali Reyes Basoalto. He was

born in the geographical centre of Chile, Parrel in 1904 and spent his childhood in the beautiful landscape and forests of Temuco in the south of Chile. Neruda adopted the pseudonym, Pablo Neruda, from the Czech author Jan Neruda partly because he wanted to keep his written works hidden from his father who was opposed to his writing. His family moved to Temuco when he was a

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child. It was a tremendously lush region of Southern Chile, surrounded by lakes, rivers, waterfalls, mountains and rich vegetation. Wilson (2008) states that Neruda came out of that lush landscape where silence roams and went singing around the world. He also remarks that in the wild west of his country, Neruda first opened his eyes to the rain, the land, the poetry and life.

According to Gleaves (1980), Neruda's love for Chile and his indebtedness to his native land was apparent in one of Neruda's speeches in 1962 in which he stated that his biggest and longest book was the book called Chile. One of Neruda's critics, Yannielli (1997, p.4), once remarked that Neruda yearned to return to the immense forests of Chile in the south "where he could get back in touch with the earth." A similar idea is expressed by Gleaves (1980, p.6), who related Neruda's devotion to Chile, "Chile for Neruda served as spiritual anchor and place of his solace of his soul: the only country that Neruda indeed understood intellectually and emotionally." In this vein, Peden (1983), echoing Neruda, states that the poet cannot be separated from his land and birthplace but by force. He states that, "Even in these circumstances, his roots must stretch across the ocean deeps, his seed follows the fight against the wind, again to become flesh in his homeland and has two sacred obligations: to leave and to return" (Peden, 1983, p.331). However, Neruda's political life separated him from Chile.

Neruda started his political career in 1927 when he worked as a member of the diplomatic services and served as Chilean

consul in Java and Rangoon, as well as in Spain's capital from 1927 to 1945. Even during his political career, he composed poetry ceaselessly. Although he expatriated several times and spent an important part of his life in exile like many other Latin American authors, memories of the Chilean landscape and places never left him. He returned to Chile in 1952. He was conferred the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971, and on September 23, 1973, he died of cancer. He was identified by Gabriel Garcia Marquez as the greatest Latin American poet of the 20th century.

His literary life began at age 13 when he was a contributor of some articles to the daily newspaper, 'La Manana', and also the literary journal, 'Selva Austral' in 1920, under the pen name of Pablo Neruda. Throughout Neruda's literary career, many scholars and critics attached to him labels like social poet, political poet, surrealist, love poet and erotic poet of the 20th century. However, in his *Memoirs*, Neruda (1977, p.293) stated that, "Some critics believe that I am a surrealist poet, for others, I am a realist, and still others do not believe I am a poet. They are all to some extent correct and partly incorrect." These facets of his poetry have been examined and varied methodologies, theories and ideologies have been utilised. Scholars have also approached Neruda's poetry from various critical perspectives: symbolic, socio-political, biographical, Marxist and thematic textual perspectives. As an example, Dawes (2006) stated that Neruda was at first affected by surrealism, but later showed impatience

with its irrationalities. He considers Neruda a Marxist writer because of his great affinity with the dialectical approach in *Third Residence* (1933) and *Spain in Our Heart* (1937). Another scholar, Johnson (2015), investigated Neruda's *Canto General* from a political perspective to reveal that his images are the result of a dominant cultural ideology to which the writer subscribed. Feinstein (cited in Johnson, 2015, p.232) states that Neruda's poetry "started to change from being hermetic, neo-romantic and pessimistic, into more direct, simple and accessible verse."

From a biographical perspective, McInnis (1997) argues that Pablo Neruda's extensive poetry corpus may be regarded as an enormous diary in which he recorded his reaction to the emotions, events and things which overwhelmed him every day. The best example of this is *Memorial de Isla Negra* which, according to Olney (1972), requires the autobiographer to find the many selves or voices of Pablo Neruda. Hart (2004, p.256), in an overview of Neruda's works, states that, "Critics, of course, routinely split Neruda's work into two halves: on the one hand, there is the pre-political poetry (1924-37) and on the other, the committed poetry (1937-73)." However, other critics like Brooks (2012) considers Neruda's works as being in the best traditions of Modernism. In addition, another scholar, Karmakar, reexamines Neruda's poems in a detailed analysis to show the poet's outlook, thought and poetic vision to the world of literature. He remarks that "the critics have called Neruda a self-indulgent writer, but he was a

poet who had deep feelings for his country, readers, and surroundings and he always expressed them passionately" (Karmakar, 2015: pp. 1-2). Likewise Duran and Safir (1982) introduced Neruda as an eminent poet who continuously travelled and wrote while exuding energy. They believed that this energy of both poetry and poet came from the stone, forests, land, rain and places of the south of Chile. They state that Neruda, through his poetry, takes life through a subtle and refined process of discovery and awareness.

Consequently, few poets seem to have such a variety of voices and selves as Neruda does in his works. Each collection of Neruda's poetry depicted a new self or persona. Based on an investigation of a large and growing overview of his literary works, Nolan (1994) pictured the persona of Neruda as: the lost child of *Twilight* (1923); the neo romantic of *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* (1924); the anguished existentialist of *Residence on the Earth* (1925-1931); the war witness of *Third Residence*; the epic and political voice of the American in *Canto General* (1950); the simple-objects poet in *Elemental Odes* (1954); the strange private man in *Estravagaria* (1958); the autobiographical poet in *Memorial de Isla Negra* (1964); and the metaphysician and naturalist in his late work, *Stones of the Sky* (1969). Based on Nolan's work, it is apparent that scholars seemed to have ignored or overlooked Neruda's ecological and emotional attachment to specific locations of his country and national sites of his continent

that portray him as a 'place maker'. Pablo Neruda can be considered one of a few authors who are integrally bound to place in their works. Most of his poems represent multiple elements of place and 'whereness' while introducing his birthplace, his career, ideology and even place of death. Many of his poems also reflect his strong devotion to Chilean places that can be considered as discursive evidence to identify Neruda as a poet of 'where' or a 'place maker'. A similar idea stated by Carrasco Pirard is that "Neruda is never a poet in some abstract senses, he is a poet of a particular [determinado] 'where' (cited in Handley, 2007, p.159). In view of the arguments presented, this paper scrutinises Neruda's selected poems to reveal his experiences, affinity with particular sites and sense of place that represent him as a poet who creates 'place' in the readers' minds i.e. he comes across as a 'place maker'. In examining the concept of 'place maker,' understanding the concept of place would be an indispensable guide.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism, the broad theoretical approach that frames this study, takes into account the whole Earth as its 'oikos,' which means dwelling place, home and house. It sensitises the readers' mind to the ecological and environmental aspects of a place. Many intellectuals and scholars have maintained that place is a multi-layered concept that is impacted by a diversity of social, political, historical and ideological forces. In the same

vein, *place* theorist Buell (1995, p.267) argues that environmental literature creates places in a particular method "not only by naming objects but by dramatizing in the process how they matter." A similar idea is expressed by Ball (2006, p.233) in his article *Literary Criticism for Places*, which investigates specific methods of place in literary criticism to establish recent place-based ecocriticism. He argues:

Place-based literary ecocritics aim to inspire or suggest the importance of a sense of place and emphasize the ecological as well as social aspects of place (especially environmental history and human relationship with the environment)—all through a reflexive narrative scholarship comprised of reading literary texts and reflecting autobiographically on themselves as inhabiting the place in question.

The above statements correspond considerably to Glotfelty and Fromm (1996), stating that ecocriticism is dedicated particularly to the study of the environment and literature, which aspire to create place as a central issue of critical concern. Place-based ecocritics sustain not only the significance of sense of place but also the consciousness of the human-nature relationship. They assert that when scholars contemplate place, they should consider biological, geographical and living physical location as well as subjective experiences of the human beings. Generally speaking, ecocriticism claims that all

humans are interconnected with the natural world surrounding them, thus studying the environment is a kind of examination of how we are interrelated to and affected by the world around us.

Concept of Place in Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism as a literary term became an exploratory trail for poems rooted in place. The concept of 'place' can be traced back to Aristotle (384-322 BCE) and to Plato (428-348 BCE). Aristotle believed "everything exists within a place" and stated that "place takes precedence before all other things as nothing can exist without place," while Plato "saw place in terms of experience" (both cited in Johnson, 2015, p.7). This shows that understanding the concept of 'place' has been an important subject from early times. In modern times, the significance of 'place' dates back to the 1970s when the influential geographer, Tuan, in his important work, *Place and Space*, argued that a place is born and comes into existence when human beings give name and meaning to a piece of the wider and undifferentiated space. He believed that place demonstrates more than its physical constituents. It may connote another meaning; for example, Stedman (2002) states that sense of place may be considered as a set of symbolic meanings for a particular site. More importantly, Cresswell (2004, p.12) remarks that "place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world."

Ecopoets and Place Makers

Ecopoets are often place makers, trying to take their listeners to exotic and abstract spaces. Ecopoets propose an image of the universe that evaluates the interaction between two longings that attempt to address the problem of modern divorce between the human and the natural world. Bryson (2005, p.9) believes that ecopoets make this connection for two reasons: (1) "to create place, awareness and focus on knowing the natural world around us" and (2) "to value space, identifying that extent to which the very world is eventually unknowable." In brief, Bryson asserts that contemporary ecopoets support these two objectives, to know the world and to identify its extreme unknowability. We recognise our present surrounding as place and so, as home. The ecopoets' goal is to create a new feeling that Tuan calls 'topophilia', which means "the affective bond between people and place." 'Topo' is the Greek word for 'place' (Tuan 1974:4, as cited in Christou, 2006, p.35). Therefore, considering the cultural geographer Tuan's work along with other ecocritical thinkers from various disciplines, we come to clarify the understanding of the concepts of *space* and *place* and how they relate to modern ecopoetry.

As the current article endeavours to expand the notion of *place* through the lens of ecopoetry, it is noteworthy to take a look at the etymological root of the term 'ecopoet'. Both 'eco' and 'poet' are from Greek roots and mean, respectively,

'dwelling house or home' and 'place composer' or one who is place making or making place in poetry (Bryson, 2005:6). Almost all ecopoets are really place makers who repeatedly encourage us to create and value place, and their writings concurrently force readers to appreciate and even have reverence for place. Neruda is a poet who must be considered a place maker because he encourages his readers to see the "precious wholeness" of nature around them as a place, where an existing geography as well as a history of the place can help in the identification of the 'who'.

Place and Identity

Within the ecopoetic framework, identity is a significant concept for understanding 'place'. In fact, within every person is the mixing of emotion, imagination, experience, memory, and present situation that can be so various that she/he can see a particular place in several completely different ways. Actually, for every person, a place can have many different identities. In this regard Entrikin emphasises that:

place serves as an important component of our sense of identity as subjects. The subject's concern for this sense of identity may be no different in kind from that of the geographer, in that the geographer's aim of accurately representing places can also be tied to concerns for social action and cultural identity (cited in Christou, 2006, p.43).

Considering Entrikin's idea and the definition of place, this paper shows that people become aware of how a sense of place can be influential on their own sense of being. There are places that tell their story, where the evidence of the past relates to their history. Tuan (1997) expressed the opinion that these places can enliven the spirit and make us feel emotionally empowered. When a specific environment becomes meaningful, when a large number of human connections are connected to that place and temporal significance and subjective value create a memorial or emotional connection to the particular location, then such a place becomes one of the key elements in the theory of ecocriticism. By examining Neruda's poetry through the lens of ecocriticism, this article identifies him as a poet of 'where' or as a 'place maker'. This relates well to Wendell Berry's famous statement that "if you know where you are, you know who you are" (cited in Dreese, 2002, p.1).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Sometimes places leave a significant mark in human lives. These places can obtain meaning through important experiences (loss, trauma, alienation) and also through the experience of moving and changing. Places associated with such experiences can be meaningful irrespective of whether they are positive or negative. Neruda's poetry is rooted deeply in his native land. For instance, the poem entitled *Birth* echoes Neruda's emotional connection to his local birthplace, Parral:

[...]
And that's where I'm from, that
Parral of the trembling earth,
A land laden with grapes
Which came to life
Out of my dead mother (*Isla Negra: 'Birth'*)

Here, Neruda's emphasis on the specific place, Parral, implies that his experience turned into his poetic voice, which represents him as an ecopoet. Parral is a place in the south of Chile, an area which Neruda in his *Memoirs* (1997) compares to the American Wild West. It is also known by the names 'Araucania' and 'La Frontera'. Like Snyder's *Turtle Island* and Thoreau's *Walden* for their authors, Parral was constantly in his dreams.

According to Teitelboim, his experience of Asian culture taught Neruda lessons about human belonging to the landscape (cited in Handley, 2007, p.142). Neruda's poetry is activated by the phenomenological moment at which place and nature impacted upon the consciousness of the human. For instance, in his memoirs, Neruda (1977, p.177) says, "in this town, (Parral) my poetry was born between the hill and the river, it took its voice from the rain, and like the timber, it steeped itself in the forests." Neruda once said that even though he had opportunities to live in another place in any part of the world, he had decided to return to his birthplace. It is the physical environment of Neruda's birthplace that made him return to stay and not to depart again. Also in his *Memoirs* (p.167), Neruda describes his birthplace:

"I come from the other end of the republic. I was born in a green country with huge, thickly wooded forests. I had a childhood filled with rain and snow."

The south of Chile is a local place where Neruda can recollect his sensual solidarity with the world. As Wallace Stegner argues,

[A] place is not a place until people have been born in it, have grown up in it, lived in it, known it, died in it—have both experienced and shaped it as individuals, families, . . . communities . . . until things that have happened in it are remembered in history, ballads, yarns, legends, or monuments (cited in Handley, 2007, p.48).

In another poem, *Patagonias*, Neruda connects his existence and his name to the place where his roots have spread. He introduces this site, *Patagonias*, in this way:

[...]
Here, summits in shadow,
blizzards,
And extending pride
That makes
The lonely places
Shine;
Here, by some appointment my roots,
Or only driven by the wind,
I must have been born.
[...]
And now I might discover
My own name, my wild astonishment,
The volcanic statue of my existence
(*Isla Negra A Note Book: 'Patagonias'*)

Neruda's poetry often provides a situation which readers can use to establish the relationship between the self and the place. The situation usually reflects knowledge of the place and the direct experience of it. In the above lines, the stanza illustrates Neruda's quest for his roots. He utilises the word "Here" to show his affinity with Patagonia. His strong attachment to the local place is also manifested in the following lines:

My own *Patagonias*
belong to the harsh contradictions
Of some huge star
That fall, defeating me,
And I am no more than a hurt root
Of that slow landscape (*Patagonia*)

Here, Neruda echoes the recurrent theme of intimacy with place, which manifests into belonging to nature. In this regard, Weil states that "the need to have roots is perhaps the most important need of the human soul" (cited in Johnson, 2015, p.21). This is seen in Neruda's poems, where he reveals his identity through the search for his roots:

I come to look for my roots,
The ones that discovered
the mineral food of the forest. (*Isla Negra: 'The Night Train'*)

Neruda's poetry appears to clarify that the knowledge of spiritual belonging is the result of the knowledge of one's physical roots. Gleaves (1980, p.6) clarifies this idea: "Chile for Neruda served as a spiritual anchor and the place of his solace of his

soul." Neruda's poems always attempt to reflect his commitment and devotion to his native land.

Neruda's writings often involve the persona reminiscing about Chile's landscape. To Neruda, memory plays a significant part in creating a sense of 'place'. In the poem, *Territories*, he remarks that:

Wherever I was, I remember the
landscape
as if it still had a hold over me.
[...]
But, seacoast or snow, rock or river,
my essences made tip more of
mountains,
the teeth of geography,
footprint still visible in the undergrowth
(*Isla Negra: 'Territories'*)

The opening stanza starts with the poet's remembrance of the landscape that filled up all of his existence. The affiliation with local places, rivers, rocks and mountain provides an emotional connection with the place for the persona. Such poetry is similar to that of the canonical ecopoet, Harjo, who is also a place maker relating her memory. Bryson (2002, p.181) states that "the processes of going back and place-making are intertwined; in order to recover the sense of place we must remember and return to what we have known in the past." Another example in which Neruda establishes emotional ties to a particular place is illustrated in the following stanza:

The earth springs up as if alive
in me, I close my eyes, therefore I am.

I close my eyes and a cloud opens,
 a door opens to a whiff of perfume,
 a river enters, singing, with its stones,
 dampness of places seeps into me,
 [...]

and the sea enters through my buried
 eyes. (*Isla Negra: 'Territories'*)

Neruda emphasises the importance of recognising a connection to the place. The persona feels the spirit of his homeland when he says, "dampness of place seeps into me." This profound connection to his native land and local places is not only reflected in his other poems like *Goodbye to Paris*, *Santiago Song*, *The City* and *Spring in City* but also in the pristine marine landscape as well. Throughout Neruda's poetic career, from when he was in exile to when he lived in the Orient, and to his home in Isla Negra, maritime places were recurrent themes. Neruda remarks that "my poetry and my life have advanced like an American river, a torrent of Chilean water born in the hidden heart of the southern mountain, endlessly steering the flow of its currents toward the sea" (Memoirs 1997, p.167).

Much of Neruda's experiences and emotional attachment to local sites is reflected in his *Isla Negra* poetry collection. Isla Negra happens to be a small village on the Pacific coastline south of Valparaiso. "A house on the sand", it is regarded as the centre of Neruda's world, and the place where he penned some of his wonderful marine poetry. Isla Negra was a magical place for Neruda, as Walden was for Thoreau. Upon his return from exile, he decided to

live beside the sea and said, "Now I am returning to Chile, to my oceanic country, and my ship is approaching the coasts of Africa" (Memoirs, p.217). Isla Negra is where his poetry germinated and took root. Apart from the land, the sea also played a key role in Neruda's reflection on his roots. Neruda's connection to the maritime place is exemplified in the following lines:

I come back, and still the sea
 Keeps sending me strange foam.

It does not get used to the way I see.

The sand does not recognize me.
 (*Extravagaria: 'Strangers on the Shore'*)

Neruda confesses in the poem *Strangers on the Shore* that for the ocean to pay attention to his presence on the shore, he has to "learn / to swim within his dreams," in this case the sea should "come / to visit him in his sleep." Perhaps in this way, the great resounding of water and wind "will know who I am and why I return, / will accept me into their school" (*Extravagaria: Strangers on the Shore*).

[...]

By now we feel we are friends,
 We come back with open arms,
 and here the sea, dancing away,
 not bothering with us (*Extravagaria: 'Strangers on the Shore'*).

Neruda's rootedness in place, particularly in a local and regional place such as Isla Negra is also reflected in his poetry that conveys 'topophilia'. The lines in the stanza above represent his sensuous connection to the sea as his friend. Curry

(2013, p.35) explains this when he says that the character of a place is reflected in its sensuous qualities that can be felt when a place becomes real. This happens when a lived experience is experienced again. Many of Neruda's poems were born on these "Antarctic shores"; *Memorial de Isla Negra* and 'Canto General' are great examples. The first is a kind of autobiographical verse that explores Neruda's strong link to and roots and formative experiences in this maritime place. Neruda's passion for oceanic places and his unending longing for the coastal landscape of Chile, even when he was in exile, is echoed in the following poem:

In faraway regions I bathed
Your foamy feet, your scattered shore,
With furious exiled tears.
[...]
O, Chilean sea, O, water
Soaring and encircling like a raging
wildfire,
O, earthquake of salt and lions!
Sea of Valparaiso, wave
Of lonely nocturnal light,
Window of the ocean
From which my country's
Statues looks out
Gazing with eyes still blind. (*Canto
General: 'Chile's Seas'*)

He illustrates not only the importance of present local places in his poetry, but also old historical places that are part of his identity. Place plays a significant function in reminding people of their past, origin and identity. This article extends the sense of place in the historical construction evident

in Neruda's poetry. For example, his poem, *The Height of Machu Picchu*, was written to demonstrate past historical identity and its connection to the present and the future of the South American continent. Morgado (2011, p.44) clarifies this idea:

To intellectuals, Machu Picchu exemplified the achievements and developments of the history of pre-Columbian cultures, allowing them to question what America's present would have been like had the development of these cultures not been abruptly interrupted in the 1500s by the Spanish conquest and the colonial period that followed.

Machu Picchu is a coherent narrative of the past that connects to the present and will guide the future of the American continent. Neruda revitalises the myth-like history of the Inca ruins to show us his roots and his identity. He invokes the motif of the ruins in the framework of rethinking the cultural heritage of twentieth-century Latin America and its literary tradition. *The Heights of Machu Picchu* comprises 12 sections and is composed in free verse. It explores the historical construction and identity of the ancient civilisation of the Incas. Through the Inca city of *Machu Picchu* and its wilderness, Neruda takes his readers to meet the historical identity of his origin.

Machu Picchu is a poem Neruda most admired. The ancient Inca city of Machu Picchu was built around 1400 AD and abandoned after the Spanish conquest. Neruda reviews the historical events and the

lost paradise of his ancestors to invoke the sense of place in his reader's mind. Neruda makes his descent into the ruins, the old historical place, and ultimately ascends to the heights to find the historical civilisation of his ancestors. In the same vein, Johnson, (2015, p.235) states that *The Heights of Machu Picchu* "describes the poetic persona's pilgrimage to the Inca city of Machu Picchu. It is a journey both upwards and inwards where the poetic persona finds his identity as a person belonging to the American continent." Neruda's visit as pilgrim reveals his experiences and attachment to his native land; as Milligan states, attachment to place has been described as "the emotional link formed by an individual to a physical site that has been given meaning through interaction" (cited in Harmon et al., 2006).

From the air to the air, like an empty net,
I went on through streets and thin air,
arriving and
leaving behind,
[...]
I bent my head into the deepest waves,
dropped down through sulfurous calm
and went back, as if blind, to the jasmine
of the exhausted human spring. (*The Heights of Machu Picchu: 'I'*)

Neruda binds history to nature and relates the story of the buried stone city of the Incas, in the mountains of the Andes. Like a historical archeologist, the (poet) persona searches in the depth of the ruins to find the culture, history, identity and spiritual origin of the people of this continent. As

he 'walks' through the ruins in Machu Picchu, he reveals a reflective nostalgia that reminds him of the colonial history of the Spanish conquerors. *Machu Picchu* is a symbolic poem that relates the history of the indigenous people's death, their resurrection and their native roots.

The poet is the witness of history and wants to engage readers in creating a historical awakening. Machu Picchu is a place of greatness, and this idea is reflected in the following lines:

Then on the ladder of the earth I climbed
through the lost jungle's tortured thicket
up to you, Machu Picchu
High city of laddered stones (*The Heights of Machu Picchu: VI*)

Here the poet creates a place for the readers when he encounters Machu Picchu. Neruda also demonstrates his affiliation with the past natural history of this site and often utilises the adverb of place "here" to refer to Machu Picchu to depict the significance of flora and fauna and the fertility of this place through his experiences.

This was the dwelling, this is the place:
here the broad grains of maize rose up
and fell again like red hail
Here gold thread came off the vicuña
to clothe lovers, tombs, and mothers,
(*Canto General: Machu Picchu: VIII*)

Neruda takes his motif and themes of landscape and celebration of the earth and land and creates a place for his readers. The poetry and landscape are intertwined and dialectic. Neruda's poetry speaks via

the land and the land speaks via poetry, as Jeffers asserts: “poetry does not create the significance of place, like the poetry of Stevens or William Carlos Williams; instead for Jeffers, place creates the significance of poetry” (cited in Bryson, 2002: p.40).

In the above *Canto*, Neruda is approaching Machu Picchu, ascending to a place where he finds Incan history. With historical vision, he provokes a type of connectivity to this place. The poet’s soul is unified not only with the American continent, but the history of its past as well. This union is echoed in the poet’s strophic divisions, which correspond with distinct steps of symbolic communion that gives the poet a continental mission. In his descending journey, he wanted to become their voice, and retold their sufferings. The Incan ruins are a site to which Neruda feels strong historical and emotional ties. He joins the Incan ruins to the present history of Latin Americans because he knows, like all cities, Machu Picchu was constructed on human suffering and echoes the history of the social class of the Incan people. This place relates the story of the affliction of the people who built Machu Picchu and died. The poetic persona addresses the ruins to let his readers see the circumstances under which the Indians constructed this place and died. It is here that the poet invokes the readers to realise intuitively the way ancient places epitomise meaning, memory and significance. The influential geographer, Tuan (1997), clarifies this idea that people look back at old places for different reasons,

but acquiring a sense of identity and of self is something that is shared by all. He remarks that the passionate feeling for conservation arises out of the necessity for tangible objects that can maintain a sense of identity. A similar idea is expressed by Snyder, who states, “knowing who you are and where you are, are intimately linked” (cited in Dreese, 2002: p.1).

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to analyse Pablo Neruda’s poetry through an ecopoetic lens to depict how his poetry is highly attached to the concept of place, which is one of the key elements in ecocriticism. In his poems, Neruda makes a great effort to relate the readers’ minds to the environment and the place in which they live so that they appreciate and value the places. The depictions of the various forms of ‘place’ distinctively reflect Neruda’s ideology and attitude towards nature and geographical and historical spaces. By portraying the places in different forms, he endeavours to establish an ecological awareness while also conveying a sense of belonging in readers’ minds. Neruda’s poetry successfully illustrates the historical heritage, identity and destiny of the Latin American people. As an ecopoet and a place maker, he attempts to take his readers into tangible and exotic lands to explore natural spaces as home. He therefore accomplishes his poetic goal of establishing ‘topophilia’ i.e. intimate relationship between the readers and places by illustrating that the knowledge

of spiritual belonging is the result of the knowledge of one's physical roots.

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