

The Heights of Macchu Picchu (1945; 1950)
Cantos I - XII
Pablo Neruda (1904-1971)
Translated by William Little© (2008)

I

From breeze to breeze, like an empty net,
at the advent of autumn, I wandered between the streets and the air,
arriving and dispatching (the coins of the leaves reaching out,
and, between springtime and sprigs of wheat)
what the greatest love delivers to us like a long-setting moon,
as if fitting into a falling glove.

(Days of living radiance during the tempest
of the bodies: steel blades converted
by the silence of the acid:
nights unraveled down to the last bit of flour:
assaulted stamens in the nuptial homeland.)

Someone who awaited me among the violins
found a world like a buried tower
sinking its spiral even below all
the hoarse sulfur-colored leaves:
lower, in geological layers of gold,
like a sword wrapped in meteors
I plunged my sweet and turbulent hand
into the planet's genital innards.

I placed my forehead among the deepest waves,
I went down like a drop submerged in sulfuric peace,
and, like a blind man, I went back to the jasmine
of our squandered human springtime.

II

If one flower to another flower¹ delivers it germinating seed
and if solid rock² disseminates its flower
in its beaten suit of diamond and sand,
humans³ fold into wrinkles the petals of light they gather
from specific springs in the sea
and they drill the palpitating metal in their hands.
And quickly, between clothing and smoke, on the sunken table,
like something shuffled, there lies the soul:
quartz and sleeplessness, tears in the ocean
like pools of cold: but even so
it they kill and it they torment on paper and with hatred,
it they submerge in the carpet of daily routine, it they shred
among the hostile vestments of wire.

No: throughout hallways, in the air, on the sea, or on roads,
who without a dagger guards—like scarlet
poppies—his blood?⁴ Anger has exhausted
the sad wares of the seller of beings,
and, meanwhile, on the treetop of the plum, the dew
for a thousand years has been leaving its transparent card
on the same waiting branch, oh heart, oh forehead shredded
among the cavities of autumn.⁵

How often in a city's wintry streets or on
a city bus or a boat at sunset, or in thicker
solitude, at a nighttime party, beneath the sound
of shadows and bells, in the same grotto of human pleasure,
I've tried to stop myself and search for the eternal, unfathomable vein
that once before I touched in stone⁶ or in the lightning unleashed by a kiss.

(That which in grain as in a yellow story
of small plump breasts keeps repeating a number that is never-ending
tenderness in the germinal layers,
and that, always identical, strips its kernels into ivory
and that which in water is a transparent homeland, rings
from the distant snows down to the bloody waves.)

No, I could seize no more than a cluster of faces or of masks
thrown down, like rings of hollow gold,
like clothes tossed away, children of a rabid autumn

that would make the wretched tree⁷ of frightened peoples tremble.

No, I failed to find a resting place for my hand,
a place that, running like shackled spring water
or solid like a nugget of anthracite or crystal,
could have returned heat or cold to my outreached hand.

What were humans?⁸ In what part of their unguarded conversations
in department stores and among sirens, in which of their metallic movements
did what in life is indestructible and imperishable live?

III

Being, like corn,⁹ would fall kernel by kernel into the endless granary of lost deeds, of miserable events, from eight to four or nine to five, and not one death would come to each and every one, but many deaths: every day a little death,¹⁰ a speck of dust, a worm, a lamp extinguished in suburban mud, a little death with heavy wings would enter each person like a short lance and each person¹¹ would be besieged by bread or knives:¹² the rancher, the child of seaports, or the dark captain of the plow, or the rodent in dirty streets.

Every one of them lost vigor awaiting their death, their daily death: and their ill-omened breakdown day by day was like a cup of blackness they would drink while trembling.

IV

Powerful death¹³ invited me many times:
She was like the salt unseen in the waves,
and what her invisible taste disseminated
was like halves of cave-ins and height
or vast constructions of wind and high snowy peaks.¹⁴

I came to the knife's harsh¹⁵ edge, to the narrow passage
in the air, to the shroud covering farmland and rock,
to the starry void of final steps
and the vertiginous spiral highway:
yet, oh death! oh wide sea! you never come riding wave after wave,
but rather like a galloping nocturnal light
or like entire number system of night.

You never came to rummage in people's pockets, your visit
was impossible without wearing a red garment,
without a carpet of enclosed silence at morning's first light,
without exalted or buried patrimonies of tears.

I failed to love a tree¹⁶ in each person
shouldering a burden of their own little autumn¹⁷ (death of a thousand leaves),
all those false deaths and all those resurrections
without earth, without abysses:¹⁸
I tried to swim in the widest of lives,
in the freest outlets to the sea,
and when little by little people began denying me
and they began blocking my way and closing their doors so that my fountain hands
would not touch their wounded inexistence,
then I went from street to street and river to river,
and city by city and bed by bed,
and across the desert went my briny mask¹⁹,
and in the last humbled houses, without lamps, without fire,
without bread, without stone, without silence, all alone,
I drifted while dying my own death.²⁰

V

It was not you, grave death,²¹ bird with iron-like feathers,
she whom the last poor inheritor of those rooms
used to carry among quickly eaten bits of food, beneath his empty skin:
it was something, a poor petal of exterminated rope,
an atom of a heart that refused to enter the fray
or the harsh dew that did not fall on one's head.
It was what failed to be reborn, a piece
of the little death²² with neither peace nor territory,
a bone, a bell that was continually dying in him.

I tore off the iodine soaked bandages, I plunged my hands²³
into the poor pains that were killing death,
and all I found in the wound was nothing but a cold blast of wind
that was entering through the vague interstices of the soul.²⁴

VI

Then up the ladder of the earth I have risen,
through the awful tangles of lost forests,
up to you, my friend, Macchu Picchu²⁵.

High city of laddered stones,²⁶
at last, final dwelling for those whom earthliness
did not hide in its sleeping garments.
In you, like two parallel lines,
the cradle for lightening and people
would be rocked in a wind of thorns.

Mother of stone, condors' sperm and spray.

High reef of the human dawn.

Shovel lost in the earliest sand.

This became the dwelling, this is the site:
here the broad kernels of corn²⁷ rose up
and again they fell like red²⁸ stones of hail.

From hence came the vicuña's golden fleece
to dress their loves, their catafalques, their mothers,
their king, their prayers, their warriors.

Here human²⁹ feet rested at night
near eagles feet, in the high slaughterhouses
of their ayries, and at dawn,
with the thunder's feet, they trod the rarified mist,³⁰
and they touched the earth and the stones³¹ until
they could recognize them in the night and in death.

I look at garments and hands,
traces of the water in the sounding cracks,
walls smoothed by the touch of a face
that watched terrestrial torches with my eyes,
that oiled with my hands the long lost
wooden beams: for everything—clothing, skin, pots,
words, wine, loaves of bread—
all of it has left, has fallen to the earth.

And, with orange blossom³² fingers, the air³³
entered covering every sleeping person:
a thousand years of air, months, weeks of air,
weeks of azure wind, weeks of ferrous mountain chains,
that once were like gentle hurricanes of footsteps
polishing this solitary³⁴ site of stone.

VII

Ye dead in a single abyss, shades from one ravine—
the deepest one—this is how, as fully large
as your magnitude,
the first true death came, the most withering
death, and from out of the hole-bored rocks³⁵,
from out of the buildings' crimson capitals,
from out of the ladder-scaled³⁶ aqueducts,
you tumbled down like an autumn³⁷
into a single death.
Today the empty air³⁸ no longer cries,
it no longer knows your clay feet,
it has already forgotten the jugs with which you used to filter the sky
when the lightning's knives³⁹ would split it asunder,
and the powerful tree⁴⁰ was eaten
by the fog⁴¹ and cut by a gust of wind.
It help up a hand⁴² that suddenly fell
from the heights down to the end of time.
You are no longer, ye spider hands, feeble
threads, tangled cloth:
—everything you were fell: habits, frayed
syllables, masks⁴³ of dazzling light.

Yet, one permanence of stone and words:
the city⁴⁴ rose like a water glass⁴⁵ in everyone's
hands, alive, dead, silent, upheld
by so much death, a wall, by so much life, a blow
of stone petals:⁴⁶ the permanent rose,⁴⁷ the dwelling:⁴⁸
this Andean reef with glacial colonies.

When the clay-colored hand⁴⁹
was converted into clay, and when the little eyelids closed
full of harsh walls, populated with castles,
and when every person got entangled in their own hovel,
precision's banner was raised:
the high precinct of human dawn:
the highest jub trapped by silence:⁵⁰
a life of stone after so many lives.⁵¹

VIII

Arise with me, American love⁵².

Kiss with me the secret stones.
The Urubamba's torrential silver⁵³
makes pollen fly to its yellow crown.
Above the silence⁵⁴ of this Andean box canyon
everything flies: the climbing plants' vacant⁵⁵ spaces,
the rocky plants, the hard garland.
Come, minuscule life, among the wings
of the earth; meanwhile—crystal and cold, beaten air⁵⁶—
pushing the embattled emeralds aside,
O wild water, you come down from the snow pack.

O Love, love, until the night's steep and sudden end,
from the Andes' sonorous flint peaks,
look toward the red knees of the dawn,
feast your eyes on the blind child of the snow.

O Wilkamayu⁵⁷ and your sonorous fibers,
when you unleash your line-straight thunderclaps
into white spray,⁵⁸ like wounded snow,
when the gale-force winds in your sheer cliffs
awaken the sky with your songs and whips,
what language do you call to your ear suddenly
uprooted from your Andean spray?

Who imprisoned the lightening bolt of the cold
and left it chained on the heights,
dispersed in its glacial tears,
shaken in its fast swords,
pounding the threads of its war-tested stamens,
carried about in its warrior's bed,
startled in its rocky resting place?

What do your flashes tell you when attacked?
Long ago did your secret, rebellious lightening bolt
travel inhabited with words?
Who goes about breaking frozen syllables,

black languages, golden banners,
deep mouths, conquered cries,
in your slender arterial waters?

Who goes about cutting off floral eyelids
that come to watch from the earth?
Who scatters dead bunches of seeds⁵⁹
that descend in your waterfall hands
to thresh their flailed night⁶⁰
in the coal of geology?

Who pushes the branch of these bonds off a cliff?
Who buries good-byes again and again?

O love, love, do not touch the border,
do not worship the sunken head:
let the fullness of time mature
in its great room of broken springs,
and, between the rushing waters and the steep walls,
recover the canyon's air,
the wind's parallel coverings,
the cordillera's⁶¹ blind channel,
the dew's bitter greeting,
and rise, flower by flower, through the thicket,
trampling the serpent thrown from the crags above.

In the escarpment zone, rock, forest,
dust of green stars, clear jungle.
Mantur⁶² explodes like a living lage
or like a new floor of silence.

Come to my very own being, to my dawn,
all the way to the crowned solitudes.

The dead kingdom lives still.

And across the Clock⁶³ the bloody shadow
of the condor crosses like a black ship.

IX⁶⁴

Sidereal eagle, misty vine.

Lost bastion, blind scimitar.

Starry belt, solemn loaf of bread.

Torrential ladder,⁶⁵ immense eyelid.

Triangular tunic, stone pollen.⁶⁶

Lamp of granite, stone loaf of bread.⁶⁷

Mineral serpent, rose of stone.

Buried ship, water source of stone.

Horse on the moon, light of stone.

Equinoctial quadrant, steam of stone.

Ultimate geometry, book of stone.

Iceberg among the squalls carved.

Coral madrepore⁶⁸ of submerged time.

Walls by fingers softened.

Roof by feathers attacked.

Mirror branches, thunderstorm bases.

Thrones overturned by climbing plants.⁶⁹

Régime of the inflamed red talon.

Gale-force winds⁷⁰ carried on the slope.

Immobile waterfall⁷¹ of turquoise.
Patriarchal bell⁷² of those who fell asleep.
Giant ring of the tamed snows.
Iron bar resting on its statues.
Inaccessible closed storm.
Puma paws, bloody rock.
Shadow-casting tower, argument of snow.
Night raised on fingers and roots.
Window of the mists, hardened dove.
Nocturnal plant, statue of thunderclaps.
Essential cordillera,⁷³ marine roof.
Architecture of lost eagles.
Sky-rope, bee on the heights.
Blood level, constructed star.
Mineral bubble, moon of quartz.
Andean serpent,⁷⁴ brow of amaranth.
Dome of silence, pure homeland.
Bride of the sea, tree of cathedrals.
Branch of salt, cherry tree of black wings.
Snowcapped teeth, cold thunder.
Scratched moon, threatening stone.
Head of hair of the cold, action of the air.
Volcano of hands,⁷⁵ dark waterfall.⁷⁶

Wing of silver, direction of time.⁷⁷

X

Stone on stone, human beings, where were they?
Air on air, human beings, where were they?
Time in time, human beings, where were they?
Were you also humanity's—empty eagle's—
unfinished little broken piece
that, through today's streets, from footprint to footprint,
through the leaves of autumn's dead end,
wanders about crushing the soul into the grave?
The poor hand, the foot, poor life...
The days of frayed⁷⁸ light
in you, like the rain
on the bullfight's banderillas,⁷⁹
did they put their dark food
into empty mouths?

Hunger, mankind's coral,
hunger, secret plant, root of the woodcutters,
hunger, did your stretch of reef⁸⁰ rise up
to reach these high, detached, open-aired towers?

I shall interrogate you, salt of the highways,
show me your spoon; allow me, oh architecture,
to gnaw on your stone stamens⁸¹ with a little stick,
to climb all the steps of air right up to emptiness,
to scrape entrails until I touch mankind.
Macchu Picchu, did you place
stone on stone,⁸² and, at the base, rags?⁸³
Coal on top of coal, and tears at the bottom?
Fire atop gold, and, trembling in it, the giant red
raindrop of blood?

Return to me the slave you buried!
Shake the suffering people's hard bread
from these lands, show me the servants'
clothes and their windows.⁸⁴
Tell me how they slept when they were alive.
Tell me if, when they slept,
they snored with mouths ajar like black holes
fixed by fatigue on their walls.
The wall, the wall! What if each stone floor
hung over their sleep, and what if they fell under their floors,

when sleeping, as if beneath a moon!

Ancient America, submerged bride,⁸⁵
your fingers also,
emerging from the jungle into the gods' empty heights,
under the nuptial banners of light and decorum,
mixing with the thunder of drums and lances,
your fingers also, also—
the ones that the abstract rose⁸⁶ and the line of the cold, those
that the blood-red breast of the new grains⁸⁷ transferred
to the fabric of shining matter, to the hard cavities—
again, again, buried America, did you store it in the deepest place,
in the bitter intestine, like an eagle, did you store hunger⁸⁸ there?

XI⁸⁹

Through the hazy radiance,
through the stony night, let me plunge my hand
and, in me, like a bird held prisoner for a thousand years,
let the heart of those long forgotten palpitate!
Let me forget this happiness today, for it is wider than the sea,⁹⁰
because mankind is wider than the sea with all its islands,
and we must fall into it as into a well only to emerge from the bottom
with a branch of secret water and submerged truths.
Let me forget, broad stone, the powerful proportion,
the transcendent measure, the honeycomb stones,
and let me slide the T-square's hand today
across the hypotenuse of rough blood and hair shirt.

When, like a horseshoe of red elytra,⁹¹ the choleric condor
pounds my temples in the first order of its flight
and the hurricane of carnivorous feathers sweeps the somber dust
of diagonal steps, I do not see the swift beast,
I do not see the blind cycle of its claws,
I see the ancient being, the servant, the person asleep
in the fields, I see a body, a thousand bodies, a man, a thousand women,
blackened by rain and night, beneath the black gust of wind,
weighed down in statuary stone:
Juan Stonecutter, Wiracocha's⁹² son,
Juan Coldeater, green star's son,
Juan Barefoot, grandson to turquoise,
rise up with me in birth, my brother.⁹³

XII

Rise up in birth with me, my brother.⁹⁴

Give me your hand out of the deep
zone of your wide-spread sorrow.
You will not return from the bedrock depths.
You will not return from subterranean time.
It will not return, your hardened voice.
They will not return, your pierced eyes.

Look at me from the depths of the earth, you,
the farm worker, the weaver, the quiet shepherd,
the tamer of guardian guanacos,⁹⁵
the mason on his defied scaffolding,
the water carrier bearing Andean tears,⁹⁶
the jeweler with crushed fingers,⁹⁷
the farmer trembling among his seeds,⁹⁸
you, the potter poured in your clay,
all ye, bring to the cup⁹⁹ of this new life
your ancient buried sorrows.
Show me your blood¹⁰⁰ and your furrow,
tell me: here I was punished
because the jewel did not shine or the earth
failed to yield enough stone¹⁰¹ or enough corn:¹⁰²
point to the rock on which you fell
and the wood on which they crucified you;
strike the old flints,
turn on the old lamps, crack the whips embedded
throughout the centuries in your wounds
and the axes with blood-encrusted sparkle.

I am coming to speak for and through your dead mouths.¹⁰³

Throughout the earth, join together
all the scattered silent lips,
and out of the depths speak to me during this long night
as if I were anchored to you.
Tell me everything, chain by chain,¹⁰⁴
link by link, and step by step.
Sharpen the knives¹⁰⁵ you'd locked away,
put them on my breast and into my hands,

like a river of yellow lightening,
like a river of buried tigers,
and let me cry, hours, days, years,
blind ages, stellar centuries.¹⁰⁶

Give me silence, water, hope.

Give me the struggle, the iron, the volcanoes.

Attach your bodies to me like magnets.

Come to my veins and my mouth.

Speak through my words and my blood.

Notes to the Cantos

¹ See similar image in Canto VIII, 54.

² See similar image of *rock/stone* in Cantos II, 27; IV, 7, 30; VI, 4, 15, 23, 38; VII, 5, 10, 22, 26, 35; VIII, 2, 7, 8, 29, 56 ; IX, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 25, 40; X, 1, 21, 25, 37; XI, 9, 10, 21, 22; XII 4, 22, 23.

³ See similar image below in II, 38. For a discussion of the translation of *hombre* ("man" or "humans" or "mankind"), see the Translation section of the Introduction.

⁴ This is the first specific reference to *blood* in *The Heights*, but there will be many more including the work's last word. It also appears in: II, 17; VIII, 63; IX, 25; IX, 33; X, 28; X, 47; XI, 12

⁵ See similar images of *autumn* in Cantos I, 2; II, 36 below; IV, 18; VII, 8; X, 7.

⁶ See fn. 2 above for the many images of *stone* throughout *The Heights*, and see its virtual apotheosis in Cantos IX and XII.

⁷ See other *tree* images in Cantos IV, 17; VII, 14; and IX, 37, 38.

⁸ See fn. 3 above for a comment about the treatment of the word and images relating to "humans" in *The Heights*.

⁹ See similar images of *corn* in Cantos VI, 14; XII, 21.

¹⁰ Cantos IV and V focus almost entirely on the image, fact, and presence of death.

¹¹ See fn 3 above for a treatment of humans, persons, people, man, mankind, etc.

¹² See similar images of *knives* in Cantos VII, 13; XII, 21, 35.

¹³ See Cantos III and V for other references to the image of *death*. Also, see fn. 10 above.

¹⁴ See Cantos II, 33; VIII, 11, 15, 18; IX 22, 26, 39 for other images of *snow*.

¹⁵ See Cantos VI, 1; IX, 23; XII, 42 for a similar image of harshness (<*férreo*, 'iron', 'strong', 'harsh').

¹⁶ See fn 7 above for other reference to images of *trees*.

¹⁷ See fn 5 above for other references to images of *autumn*.

¹⁸ See Cantos VII 1; XII, 4, 8, 31 for a similar image of a *chasm* (<*abismo*, 'abyss,' 'chasm,' 'depth').

¹⁹ See Cantos II, 34 and VII, 21 for similar *mask* images.

²⁰ See Canto VII for a similar reference to the poet's own death. Also, see fn. 13 above.

²¹ See Cantos III and IV, and V, 1, and below in this Canto for other references to the image of death.

²² See Canto III, 5 for another specific reference to the "little death".

²³ See Cantos II, 6, 18, 41; IV, 24; VI, 25, 29; VII, 16, 18, 24, 28; VIII, 40; IX, 43; X, 9; XI, 2, 11; XII, 2, 36 for other images of *hands*.

²⁴ Translation note: the last two words in Spanish for "the soul" (*el alma*) can be translated either as "the soul" or "my soul". Certainly, a common reading would see the poet putting his hands into the pains of a wound into which a cold wind entered his own soul. However, the relationship between the poet as a single being and others both collectively and generally is fairly loose in Neruda's magnificent vanguardist universe. Hence, the pains and wounds would seem to be at once both his own and those of others; and likewise, the soul here seems to be simultaneously both his own suffering soul and the generic soul of misery-suffering generic humanity, both Latin American and all humanity.

²⁵ Macchu Picchu = Neruda's spelling. There are two different spellings for these Inca ruins: Machu Picchu, Macchu Picchu, and Machu Pijchu. The last is most similar to Quechua, the language of the Incas and their modern descendants; the middle one was the traditional Spanish spelling; and the first one, which I use in the Introduction is a modern compromise between the other two.

²⁶ For other references to *stone*, see fn. 6 above and below in this Canto.

²⁷ For other references to *corn*, and see fn. 9 above.

²⁸ For another reference to the color *red*, see Canto IV, 14.

²⁹ See other references to human (> *del hombre*) fn. 3 above.

³⁰ For a photographic image of these mysterious mists at Machu Picchu, see : => the 2461

website images beginning at [Machu Picchu #3](#).

³¹ See both earlier and later in this Canto for other references to *stone* and also see fn. 2 above.

³² See Canto II, 1, and II, 2, for earlier allusions to *flowers*.

³³ For other references to the image of the *air*, see Cantos I, 2; II, 14; IV, 7; V, 35; VII, 10; VIII, 9, 51; IX, 41; X, 2, 22.

³⁴ This allusion to solitude found in and represented by the ruins of Machu Picchu foreshadows Octavio Paz's magisterial analysis in the *Labyrinth of Solitude (El laberinto de la soledad)*, 1950. The poet alludes to solitude earlier in II, 24.

³⁵ For other significant references to *rocks* or *stones*, see the last line of this Canto and fn. 2 above.

³⁶ For an earlier reference to this seminal motif of Machu Picchu (ladder-stepped > *escalares*), see Canto VI, 4; also see fn. 26 in Canto VI. The motif is repeated again in the fourth incantation (l. 4) in Canto IX.

³⁷ For other references to *autumn*, see fn. 5 above.

³⁸ See especially Cantos I, IV, VI, and VIII for other references to *air* and fn. 33 above.

³⁹ See fn. 12 for similar images of *knives*.

⁴⁰ See Cantos IV and VI for other allusions to a *tree*.

⁴¹ See Canto VI for the first reference to the mountain *mists* of Machu Picchu.

⁴² See Canto VI for an earlier reference to *hands*.

⁴³ See Cantos II and IV for earlier references to *masks*.

⁴⁴ See Canto IV for a specific mention of this reference to a *city*.

⁴⁵ The poet returns to this image in the penultimate line in this Canto.

⁴⁶ For the use of this specific metaphor again, see Canto VII. For other references to *stone*, see fn. 2 above.

⁴⁷ For a later reference to a *rose*, see Canto X, 46.

⁴⁸ For an earlier reference to *dwelling*, see Canto VI, 4.

⁴⁹ For the first use of the hand image in *Heights*, see Canto I, 18.

⁵⁰ For other references to *silence*, see Cantos I, 9; IV, 15; IV, 30; VII, 34; VIII, 5; VIII, 59; IX, 36; and XII, 9.

⁵¹ The last stanza in this Canto seems to be constructed around a metaphorical syllogism. Even Neruda's unique punctuation (i.e., colon after colon) suggests such a syllogism of that perhaps could be stated thus: If (A) a hand becomes clay; and if (B) children's eyelids become closed; and if (C) humans are turned into holes in the wall (burrows, dens, hovels); then precision is (D) a place of humanity's dawn and (E) there is life in the permanence of stone(s). The stanza is

structured around the first five lines in which the if clauses are presented and the last three lines in which the (double) conclusion is stated.

⁵² For other references to *love*, see Canto I, 5; IV, 17; VI, 17; VIII, 1, 12, 45 and below in this Canto; and for later references to (Latin) *America*, see Canto X, 40, 49.

⁵³ For photographic images of the abundant white water in the Urubamba River, see the sequence of photos that begins in the web page [Machu Picchu #2](#) and the digital tour of the [Urubamba River](#).

⁵⁴ For other referenced to *silence*, see fn. 50 above.

⁵⁵ For an earlier notion of *emptiness*, see Cantos I, 1; V, 3; VII, 10; X, 4, 14, 22, 42. For a later reference to *climbing plants*, see IX, 16

⁵⁶ For earlier references to *air*, see Cantos I, VI, and VII and fn. 33 above.

⁵⁷ *Wilkamayu* means "sacred river" in Quechua, the language of the Incas spoken at Machu Picchu. As such, it refers to one of the cosmic origin myths of those who founded the Inca empire. The term also refers to a river of stars, or specifically, the Milky Way. In the daytime, it could refer to the arc of light and color in the sky; i.e., a rainbow.

⁵⁸ For an earlier reference to foam (spray > *espuma*), see Canto VI, 10; and see the reference to *spray* (also > *espuma*) below in this same stanza.

⁵⁹ Incidental translator's note: When I visited Machu Picchu and took the photos of flowers you can see in the following link (Acllacuna: => [Machu Picchu #22](#)), I asked a bilingual (i.e., Spanish-Quechua) anthropologist what the names of the flowers (I've tried to remember those names on the corresponding web pages). He told me their names. I asked what kind of vegetable seeds he and his fellow paleo-anthropologists had found in the ruins' terraces, and he told me they had found none. The only seeds they had found were those of flowers.

⁶⁰ Neruda begins Canto III with the same vocabulary based on the idea of shucking corn (*desgranarse*) that, because of the context in that poem, I translated with the image of corn kernels falling. In the fifth line of the present stanza, the poet returns more intensely to the same vocabulary: *a desgranar su noche desgranada*.

⁶¹ For an earlier reference to Andean cordilleras, see Canto VI, 37.

⁶² *Mantur*: In *La extirpación de la idolatría en el Perú* (The Extirpation of Idolatry in Peru; Lima, 1920), by Fr. Pablo Joseph de Arriaga, a Jesuit priest, the term *Mantur* is explained. According to the priest, *Mantur* is a synonym for *Matayzara*, which refers to ears of corn set aside by the Incas and their descendants, the Quechuas, for "superstitious practices concerning the display and eating of corn. This explanation is set forth by the book's editor, Horacio de Urteaga, in fn. 55, referring to page 55 in the source text.

⁶³ *The Clock* (> *el Reloj*; with a capital letter unusual in Neruda) is a reference unknown to me. In general parlance, *reloj* simply means clock. Nathaniel Tarn translates it as "dial" (Tarn, p. 42); whereas Jack Schmitz translates it as "sundial". Since Tarn consulted Neruda during his creative translation of the *Alturas*, it is likely that Neruda explained that he was referring to a condor sweeping across the dome of the sky as across the dial on a clock face. On the other hand, curiously, *Rejoj* (sic) also refers to a card game that uses only a Spanish deck. In this game, played by players in a circular order, the first player having no cards left in his/her hand wins. Is Neruda alluding to both a clock dial and the element of chance in a card game in which the winner has no cards left, much like the Incas at Machu Picchu, so to speak, had no cards left? Remember that the condor was a literal and figurative purveyor of justice for the ancient Incas.

⁶⁴ The 43 lines in this poem are actually 43 one-line stanzas as printed in the Farrar, Straus, Giroux bilingual edition of 1966. They are composed in perfect, unrhymed hendecasyllables, and each stanza contains a verb free line with one or two metaphors. Other editions (*Obras completas*, I, Losada, 1967; *Obras Completas*, I, Galaxia Gutenberg, 1999; *Canto General*, University of California Press, 1991) do not print the lines as separate stanzas, but I feel the need to the kind of longer pause or break one experiences between stanzas rather than the shorter one that is implied between lines that follow one another immediately.

⁶⁵ See VI and VII for earlier references to the *ladder* motif; see also fn. 36 above.

⁶⁶ See VIII, 4 for an earlier reference to the *pollen* motif.

⁶⁷ The *bread* motif appears in Cantos III, 8, IV; 30; VI, 31; IX, 3; X, 30.

⁶⁸ Rather than referring directly to coral or a coral reef, the poet refers to *madrépora* (literally, madrepora), which is the animal whose skeleton hardens into the material that makes up the coral of a coral reef: < Engl *madrepore* < Fr *madrépore* < It *madrepora*, literally, mother-stone < *madre* (< L *mater*, mother) + *poro*, a pore < L *porus*, pore. f. Madrepora is a common name for several *cnidarios antozoos* with a calcareous skeleton found in intertropical seas.

⁶⁹ See VIII, 6, for an earlier reference to the *ivy* image.

⁷⁰ See VIII, 19, for an earlier reference to *gale-force winds*.

⁷¹ See VIII, 40, for an earlier reference to a *waterfall* image.

⁷² See II, 24, and V, 9, for earlier references to the *bell* image.

⁷³ See VIII, 52, for an earlier reference to the *cordillera* image.

⁷⁴ See VIII, 55, for the first reference to *serpent* in *The Heights*.

⁷⁵ For earlier references to *hands* in the *Alturas*. see: II, 6; IV, 24; V, 10; VI, 25; VI, 29; VII, 18; VII, 23; VII, 29; and VIII, 39; also see fn. 23 above.

⁷⁶ For an earlier reference to the *waterfall* image in the *Alturas*. see: VIII, 40.

⁷⁷ The work's poetical voice at last find his orientation in time: the past leads to the future.

⁷⁸ *Frayed* (< Sp *deshilachada*; Engl: frayed, fragmented, unraveled). The poet quizzes Machu Picchu about whether daily life in the ancient Incan mountain retreat was as fragmented as he sees it in contemporary Hispanic societies (e.g., the reference to bullfights).

⁷⁹ *Banderillas* (< Sp *banderilla* (Engl *little flag*) are short hard wood shafts or darts used in a bullfight. They have sharp steel tips and at the opposite end they have colorful strips of cloth. The matador's assistant bullfighter called a *banderillero* runs at the bull with a *banderilla* in each hand. As he approaches the fighting bull he dodges the bull's horns while sticking each of the *banderillas* into the top of the bull's neck and back. The purpose of this maneuver is to soften the bull's neck muscles, thereby making the bull lower its head, thus making the final kill easier, and, supposed, more humane.

⁸⁰ The poet initiated the *coral reef* motif in IX, 13.

⁸¹ The first reference to *stamens* is found in I, 11.

⁸² The first reference to *stone* or *rock* in the *Heights* is found in II, 2.

⁸³ The poet quizzes Machu Picchu about whether Machu Picchu was built with slave labor or the labor of the poor, just as mid-twentieth-century Latin America's prosperity, from Neruda's socio-political perspective, was built on the backs of the continent's vast poverty-stricken population.

⁸⁴ For a photo of windows in Machu Picchu, see: => [Machu Picchu #12](#) and [#13](#).

⁸⁵ The editions of Losada (1967), UC Press (1991), and Galaxia Gutenberg (1999) do not start a new stanza with this line, but Farrar, Straus, Giroux's (1966) does. It follows the last edition because a stanza separation here creates four stanzas of nearly equal length and weight in Canto

X. Such a four-part organization seems subtly to recapitulate the cosmic, this Canto's cardinal-point tenor and vector.

⁸⁶ For an earlier reference to the *rose*, see VII, 26.

⁸⁷ The immediate and general context surrounding the reference to red grains suggests that the poet is referring to maize (*zea mays*), which is, of course, a cereal grain that was first domesticated in Mesoamerica, later spreading throughout the American hemisphere. The term maize nowadays refers to "Indian corn", which refers to multi-colored "field corn" varieties of corn.

⁸⁸ *Hunger*. This is the first specific reference to hunger in the *Heights*.

⁸⁹ The Farrar, Straus, Giroux bilingual edition (1966) prints this Canto as two stanzas; however, other editions, including, Losada (1967, Galaxia Gutenberg (1999), and University of California Press (1991) print this Canto as one twenty-five-line poem. I prefer the two-stanza organization because it corresponds, in my view, to the poem's sense.

⁹⁰ The first reference to the *sea* is found in II, 5.

⁹¹ *Elytra* > Sp *élitros* > Gr *elytra*. These are the hard first pair of wings in coleoptera (i.e., insects like beetles) that protect their soft second pair of wings when they are at rest because only the second pair is used for flying. In an on-line journal article, "Elytra color as a signal of chemical defense in the Asian ladybird beetle *Harmonia axyridis*," Alexander L. Bezzerides, Kevin J. McGraw, Robert S. Parker, and Jad Hussein, mention that these beetles exhibit "this nature because males and females exhibit highly variable red and black colors on their elytra and are chemically defended with an alkaloid (harmonine)". Ref.: <http://www.springerlink.com/>. How can we understand Neruda's complex metaphor of *una herradura de élitros rojos* (a horseshoe of red elytra) as related to a condor, the bird of prey par excellence of Machu Picchu and the entire Andean cordillera, since, as far as I can determine, condors do not have two sets of wings and the only place one finds red on a condor is on the male's head when it flushes during an emotional state. Condors flap their wings furiously, as described in the lines here, upon rising from the ground, but in flight they soar and circle. What we are seeing (see the reference to sight in the four successive lines three lines below), I think, is the condor's emotional fury as it goes through its stages to rise in the majestic flight of this the largest bird of prey in Western Hemisphere. Reference to a *condor* in *The Heights* appear earlier in VI, 10; VIII, 64; XI, 13. In 1966, Neruda published a book of thirty-eight poems dedicated entirely to birds, *Arte de pájaros* (Santiago: Lord Cochrane, Ediciones Sociedad de Amigos del Arte Contemporáneo), one of which is dedicated to the Andean condor (*Vultur gryphus*). In 1985, Jack Schmitt published a beautiful translation of Neruda's book as *Art of Birds* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 30). Incidentally, the word *herradura* also refers to a reddish horseshoe-shaped muzzle on bats. Furthermore, a number of images relating to the condor in *The Heights* also appear in *Art of Birds*; notably one of a condor eating horseshoes. For an Inca stone image of the condor's head, and this bird's judicial function in Inca law, see the embedded images in [Machu Picchu #21](#).

⁹² In ancient Incan mythology Wiracocha refers to Apu Qun Tiqsi Wiraqutra, often simplified in English to Viracocha. As the Incas' supreme god he was thought to be the creator of civilization, who was at once a sun god and a storm god. As in all myths, there are several versions of the legend of Wiracocha. In one version, he had a son, Inti, and two daughters, Mama Quilla and Pachamama. In this legend, he destroyed the people around Lake Titicaca, the giant lake that now borders Peru and Bolivia with a great flood, but he saved two people to keep humanity alive, Manco Capac ("radiant foundation") and Mama Ocllo ("mother fertility"): notice the male-

female duality in the conclusion to Canto XI; also, notice the reference to radiance in this Canto's first line. In another version of the Wiracocha myth, this great god and his sons traveled throughout what would later become the territory of the Inca Empire. During the trip they named everything they encountered. Finally, they arrived at Cuzco, which would become the capital of their empire, before disappearing across the Pacific Ocean. It is interesting to note that "Viracocha" means "sea foam", which is a notion that has appeared throughout the *Heights* (see: VI, 10, and corresponding fn).

⁹³ In the pre-contact civilizations throughout Latin America, the supreme ruler fused the roles of emperor, priest, and speaker for the people. In fact, for example, in Náhuatl, the so-called "emperor" of the Aztecs was called a *tlatoani*, which means "one who speaks" (see: => under the heading of Aztec history, the 2461 page on [Aztec Notes](#)).

⁹⁴ This one-line stanza, of course, repeats the last line of XI. Other references to *brother* are found especially in VIII. At the beginning of this Canto, the poet addresses his "brother" in the familiar singular form of address (*tú*), which can refer both to the brother-reader and to a mass noun implying all "brothers". Remember that in Spanish the masculine singular noun *hermano* means both "brother" and "sibling". Later in this Canto (line 15 and below), as will be noted below, the poet switches to the familiar plural form *vosotros*, which is the form of address with which he began the entire work. He retains this quasi-sacred or biblical register consistently throughout the rest of this Canto.

⁹⁵ *Guanacos* (*lama guanicoe*) are animals native to South America that are related to llamas, vicuñas, and alpacas. Only the vicuña's light brown to dark cinnamon wool is said to be superior to that of the guanaco. Regarding Neruda's guanaco image, we note that the guanaco's strong neck and thick, protective skin help them fight strongly when competing for mates.

⁹⁶ See II, 9, for an earlier reference to *tears*.

⁹⁷ See IX, 14, for an earlier reference to *fingers*.

⁹⁸ See VIII, 39, for an earlier reference to *seeds*.

⁹⁹ See III, 13, for an earlier reference to *cup*.

¹⁰⁰ See II, 16, for the first reference to *blood* in *The Heights*. The very last word (in Spanish original and English translation) in the entire work is also *blood*.

¹⁰¹ The first reference to *stone* in *The Heights* is found in II,

¹⁰² The first reference to *corn* in *The Heights* is found in III, 1.

¹⁰³ The editions of Losada (1967), UC Press (1991), and Galaxia Gutenberg (1999) do not print this line as a separate stanza, but rather group it with the lines above and below, but Farrar, Straus, Giroux's (1966) does. I follow the 1966 edition. Once again, in this line and throughout this Canto, the poet takes on the role of *tlatoani*, the precontact emperor-spokesman-poet for his entire people.

¹⁰⁴ Unlike other printing situation, here I follow the printing conventions of Losada (1967), UC Press (1991), and Galaxia Gutenberg (1999) rather than Farrar, Straus, Giroux (1966) because it seems to me that there is no real stanza break at this line.

¹⁰⁵ The first reference to *knives* in *The Heights* is found in III, 8.

¹⁰⁶ Following the reference above (XII,) to Latin America's dead masses of the crucified poor, in this line we see the poet taking on the role of Christ figure, *tlatoani*, and Romantic poet in that he invites all others to let him weep for them throughout the ages.