

From the “Heights of Macchu Picchu” to the World: A Few Pathways for Pablo Neruda’s Ruin Poetry

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Abstract. “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” (the Heights of Macchu Picchu), part of Pablo Neruda’s *Canto general*, has enjoyed a remarkably international reception, which may be surprising given it is a poem ostensibly rooted in a specific place, Machu Picchu in Peru. The article seeks to understand this global reception and to measure the radial dimensions of “Alturas de Macchu Picchu”. It frames the poem within *Canto general*, using a genetic and historical approach in order to establish a sense of the interplay of the local and the general in the making of the work. It then focuses on “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” itself, from a textual and intertextual perspective, showing how the poem turns Machu Picchu into a continental nexus, connected to a large space and a deep history. This seemingly topographical poem is also entangled with multiple poetic traditions, ranging from Dante to baroque Spanish poetry. The article ends with a few selected examples of illustrated editions of the poem in translation (in English, French and Ukrainian), which tend to highlight either the local dimension or the global. Taken together, illustrated editions and translations stretch what was compressed in the poem. Approaching the poem from the angle of its reception unfolds its multiple spatial layers.

Keywords: topographical poetry; intertextuality; translation; illustration; Barry Brukoff; Friedensreich Hundertwasser; Vira Vovk

“Alturas de Macchu Picchu”, part of Pablo Neruda’s *Canto general*², almost immediately joined the Western canon of world poetry. It has been published separately in numerous editions, in Spanish and many other languages, and has been lavishly illustrated. Of all Neruda’s work, it has enjoyed a remarkably international reception, which may be surprising given it is a poem ostensibly rooted in a specific place, Machu Picchu in Peru. However, the relationship

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² As explained below, the poem was first published separately: I will therefore sometimes refer to the work as *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* (in italics), and sometimes to “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” when it is part of *Canto general*.

of the poem to its *locus* is much more complex than the toponymic title suggests. Firstly, it is a poem about the revelation of the interconnectedness of continental history, about the possibility of expressing the lost voices of America. In it, Machu Picchu becomes a continental nexus, connected to a large space and a deep history. Secondly, it is a contrived piece, written by a poet highly aware of the multiple traditions within which he was working. As Jahan Ramazani wrote: "In a global age, scenic poems have radial dimensions. Modernity intensifies the cross-locational propensities of poetry; even when describing a single site, a poem's allusions, formal structures, generic inheritances, affective work, and etymological self-consciousness spin outward" (Ramazani 2017: 682).³

This article seeks to measure the radial dimensions of "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" with several tools. First, I will frame the poem within *Canto general*, using a genetic and historical approach in order to establish a sense of interplay of local and general in the making of the work. I will consider the early editions of the poem, first as an autonomous piece and then as part of *Canto general*, taking into account the illustrations that often came with it, since they always suggest an interpretation of the poem's relationship to the place it evokes – topographical poetry and the visual arts have long entertained a rich, albeit vexed, relationship. I will then focus on "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" itself, from a textual and intertextual perspective. I will end with a few selected examples of illustrated editions of the poem in translation (in English, French and Ukrainian), which tend to highlight either the local dimension or the global. Approaching the poem from the angle of its reception will help unfold its multiple spatial layers.

1. From the Mapocho river to the world, through Machu Picchu

Canto general serves as a particularly salient case study through which to analyse the entanglement of the local and the global in topographic poetry. Neruda's initial intention was to write a "Canto general de Chile", an idea that arose upon his return to Chile after years abroad.⁴ The project was a national one, yet with an all-encompassing scope, as the poet stated a few years later, in 1954:

³ My main theoretical frame is Jahan Ramazani's work on the relationship between the local and the global in poetry. I refer mainly to his article "The Local Poem in a Global age" (2017), but further developments are available in his book *Poetry in a Global Age* (2020), which includes a revised version of the 2017 article as chapter 2.

⁴ For a detailed account of the genesis of the poem, see Felstiner 1980.

Mi primera idea del Canto general fue sólo un canto chileno, un poema dedicado a Chile.

Quise extenderme en la geografía, en la humanidad de mi país, definir sus hombres y sus productos, la naturaleza viviente. ("Algo sobre mi poesía y mi vida", Neruda 1999–2002, v. 4: 931)

[My first idea for *Canto general* was only a Chilean song, a poem dedicated to Chile. I wanted to spread out across the geography, the humanity of my country, define its people and its products, its living nature.]

The restrictive adverb “sólo” (only) is offset here by the verb “*extenderse*”. The verb is repeated, this time to refer to the roots of the Chilean people and their heroes:

Muy pronto me sentí complicado, porque las raíces de todos los chilenos se extendían debajo de la tierra y salían en otros territorios. O'Higgins tenía raíces en Miranda. Lautaro se emparentaba con Cuauhtémoc. La alfarería de Oaxaca tenía el mismo fulgor negro de las gredas de Chillán. (931–932)

[Very soon I felt perplexed, because the roots of all Chileans extended beneath the earth and emerged in other territories. O'Higgins had roots in Miranda. Lautaro was related to Cuauhtémoc. The pottery of Oaxaca had the same black glow as the clay of Chillán.]

Neruda uses the word “*raíz*” repeatedly, to the point that his Russian translator, Ilya Ehrenburg, complained about it.⁵ However, the roots are always associated with an extensive horizontal movement rather than being fixed in a given place.

The first poem Neruda wrote with this project in mind was “Oda de invierno al río Mapocho” (Winter Ode to the River Mapocho)⁶. The Mapocho river flows through Santiago: it is both a discrete geographic entity and a dynamic flow, thereby acting as a connector between distinct locations. “Canto general de Chile” became the seventh of the 15 sections of *Canto general*: its pivotal place signals it as a centre around which the continental epic develops.

The local, albeit already radial impulse, waxed in the following years, as Neruda explained emphatically. In October 1943, as he returned from

⁵ “Ehrenburg, que leía y traducía mis versos, me regañaba: demasiada raíz, demasiadas raíces en tus versos. Por qué tantas?” (Ehrenburg, who read and translated my verse, scolded me: too much root, too many roots in your verse. Why so many?) (Neruda 1999–2002, vol. 5: 206).

⁶ The poem was published in 1938; it was then part of *Canto general de Chile*, first published with the subtitle *Fragmentos* in 1943 in Mexico (limited author's edition).

Mexico, where he had been impressed by the continental ambitions of the muralist painters (see Méndez-Ramírez 1999), he visited the ruins of Machu Picchu. Having only been discovered in 1911 by Hiram Bingham, it was still difficult to access at the time. The ascent turned into an epiphany – or at least, the poet presented it as such.⁷ As Harris Feinsod pointed out, this account is well known and contains small “falsifications”: rather than “the scene of hemispheric epiphany”, the visit “built on several years of alignment between Marxist indigenism and Pan-Americanism.” (Feinsod 2017: 150) However, I am less interested here in the historical accuracy of Neruda’s retrospection as in the way he interprets his poem in terms of focus: “After seeing the ruins of Machu Picchu, the fabulous cultures of antiquity seemed to me to be made of cardboard, of papier-mâché.”⁸ Again, he places emphasis on the local, in contrast with distant civilisations (China, India, Assyria, Persia...). This refocusing on the near involves a postcolonial change of perspective, as well as a new political awareness: the acknowledgement of the greatness of America’s past goes hand-in-hand with the recognition of the “efforts” of a “community” and of its struggles:

Ya no pude segregarme de aquellas construcciones. Comprendía que si pisábamos la misma tierra hereditaria, teníamos algo que ver con aquellos altos esfuerzos de la comunidad americana, que no podíamos ignorarlos, que nuestro desconocimiento o silencio era no sólo un crimen, sino la continuación de una derrota.

El cosmopolitismo aristocrático nos había llevado a reverenciar el pasado de los pueblos más lejanos y nos había puesto una venda en los ojos para no descubrir nuestros propios tesoros.

Pensé muchas cosas a partir de mi visita al Cuzco. Pensé en el antiguo hombre americano. Vi sus antiguas luchas enlazadas con las luchas actuales. (932)

[I could no longer separate myself from those constructions. I understood that if we walked on the same ancestral land, we had something to do with those mighty efforts of the American community, that we could not ignore them, that our ignorance or silence was not only a crime, but the continuation of a defeat.

Aristocratic cosmopolitanism had led us to revere the past of distant peoples and had blindfolded us so that we could not discover our own treasures.

⁷ A shorter account of this insight appears in Neruda’s memoirs *Confieso que he vivido* (I Confess that I Have Lived), published posthumously in 1974. I quote at length from the 1954 speech, where the dialectics between *locus* and expansion is particularly salient.

⁸ “Después de ver las ruinas de Macchu Picchu, las culturas fabulosas de la antigüedad me parecieron de cartón piedra, de papier maché” (932).

I thought about many things after my visit to Cuzco. I thought about the ancient American man. I saw his ancient struggles intertwined with current struggles.]

Neruda presents “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” as a watershed, as the first poem responding to the revelation of America’s unity – at least that of Latin America, since although he simply uses the name of the continent, none of his examples are located north of Mexico:

Allí comenzó a germinar mi idea de un canto general americano. Antes había persistido en mí la idea de un canto general de Chile, a manera de crónica. Aquella visita cambió la perspectiva. Ahora veía a América entera desde las alturas de Macchu Picchu. Este fue el título del primer poema con mi nueva concepción.

Fui precisando lo que nos era necesario. Tenía que ser un poema extraordinariamente local, parcial. Debía tener una coordinación entrecortada, como nuestra geografía. La tierra debía estar invariablemente presente. (932)

[That was where my idea for an American general song began to take form. Before that, I had been fixated on the idea of a general song of Chile, like a chronicle. That visit changed my perspective. Now I could see the whole of America from the heights of Machu Picchu. That was the title of the first poem based on my new conception.

I gradually clarified what we needed. It had to be an extraordinarily local, partial poem. Its coordination had to be disjointed, like our geography. The land had to be invariably present.]

Again, striking in these lines is the intertwining of the “general” (or “whole”) and the “local” (or “partial”). Not only does Neruda see no contradiction between the two, but the “local” quality of the poem is presented as an answer to the continental scope and general aim of the project.

Neruda wrote *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* in the autumn of 1945, in Isla Negra, Chile. Two years and more than 3,000 kilometres separate the time and place of the poetic project from those of its realisation. Interestingly, it was first published in a French translation rather than its original language: the first stanzas of “Hauteurs de Macchu Picchu” appeared in January 1946, in the exiled Resistance journal *La France libre*, translated by Roger Caillois, who had visited Neruda while he was composing it.⁹ In February 1946, the journal *Confluences* featured more fragments. Only in the summer of 1946 was the poem published in Spanish, in a Venezuelan journal (*Revista Nacional de Cultura*, Caracas); the integral version (with no section breaks) was then

⁹ Roger Caillois gave an account of that visit in *Cases d’un échiquier* (1970).

published in the Argentinian journal *Expresión* in December of that year. From its first publications, the poem moved away from its sites of conception and of writing, was placed on a transatlantic trajectory, and stretched onto the map of South America. In 1948, it was finally published as a booklet by Neira, a Chilean communist publisher, with illustrations by José Venturelli emphasising the poem's native American rootedness.

The scope and meaning of the poem were consolidated as it became the second section of *Canto general*. More exactly, its continental scope was bolstered as it now appeared, in accordance with Neruda's account of the genesis of the poem, to act as the foundation of the whole *Canto*, the part where the poet's voice gains its legitimacy as the source of continental history. The call launched at the end of section II, "*Hablad por mis palabras y mi sangre*", appears to be fulfilled by the adjacent sections.

However, *Canto general* is not only the epic of Latin America, and its scope became even more global as it assumed its final form. Indeed, before the project was completed, a third event led to a third circle of extension, from the continent to the world. In 1945, Neruda enrolled in the Communist Party of Chile, marking his ever more radical commitment to internationalist struggles; then in 1948, he wrote the verse pamphlet *Que despierte el leñador* (Let the Rail Splitter Awake), in which the poetic "I" extends its gaze and its praise toward the USSR. It ends with a wish for peace and a list of places somehow reminiscent of Walt Whitman's "Salut au monde": "*paz para el río/ Mississippi, río de las raíces*", "*paz para el gran koljós de Kíev*", "*paz para el corazón desgarrado/ de España guerrillera/ paz para el pequeño Museo de Wyoming*" ("peace for the river/ Mississippi, river of roots", "peace for the great kolkhoz of Kyiv", "peace for the broken heart/ of rebellious Spain/ peace for the small museum of Wyoming"). Again, the motifs of the river and the roots combine to form an image encapsulating both locality and extension.

Que despierte el leñador was also published separately, before it became section IX of *Canto general*. It was widely translated and distributed by communist presses as a gateway to *Canto general*, which emphasised internationalism. In 1948, Waldeen, a communist American choreographer and dancer living in Mexico, translated it into English. In 1950, her translation was printed with added poems for the American communist review and publishing house *Mainstream and Masses*. It opened with "Let the Rail Splitter Awake", as the title of the volume indicates,¹⁰ and also contained a few other pieces, both from *Canto general* and other collections. The penultimate poem, "Heights of

¹⁰ Neruda, P. 1950. *Let the Railsplitter Awake and Other Poems*. Waldeen et al. transl., New York: Mainstream and Masses.

Macchu Picchu”, was framed between two addresses to imprisoned writers (Miguel Hernández in Spain, and in the context of the Red Scare, Howard Fast in the USA): this composition brought internationalism to the fore and connected identification with the Native American past to current communist struggles.

The final arrangement for *Canto general*, consisting of 15 sections or cantos, was published in Mexico in 1950, with illustrations by Diego Rivera and David Siqueiros emphasising both its continental and global scopes. Rivera designed the illustration for the front endpaper and Siqueiros the one for the back endpaper. Rivera’s painting (“*pintura*”) is captioned with a few lines from the poem “Los hombres” (Men), taken from a stanza about the Mayan site of Chichen Itza in Mexico. However, the right side of Rivera’s image represents Machu Picchu (which is mentioned in the following stanza of Neruda’s poem): the llamas, the Peruvian hats, the design of the ruins, and the shape of the mountain are all unmistakable hints. The illustration as a whole is very much in the style of *Epopéya del pueblo mexicano*, a mural that Rivera painted in the stairwell of the National Palace in Mexico (see Valensi 2025), but with a continental scope and an emphasis on Machu Picchu, in accordance with *Canto general*. On the other hand, Siqueiros’s illustration emphasises the global. It is captioned with a few lines about the multitudes of the “people” but it is much less figurative than Rivera’s work, and the relationship between the image and the lines is far less obvious (here again, see Valensi 2025). The figure of a man arises from what appears to be a globe. Another edition was clandestinely published in Chile by the communist press Ediciones de la Resistencia, with illustrations by José Venturelli.

“Alturas de Macchu Picchu” became the most translated, published and distributed part of *Canto general*. Its ostensibly local theme, as evidenced in the title, proved no obstacle to its circulation. Before turning to a few examples of how this seemingly local poem was received globally, I will highlight how the text itself actually “darts in multiple directions”, an expression that Jahan Ramazani uses to characterise “the local poem in a global age” (Ramazani, 2017: 677).

2. The intricate texture of the poem

At first sight, “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” corresponds to the definition of topographical poetry, as laid out by Samuel Johnson (quoted in Ramazani 2017: 671): “a species of composition” whose fundamental subject is “some particular landscape” and for which embellishment can be supplied by “historical retrospection” or “incidental meditation”. “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” provides

both, as it leads to historical retrospection, or rather, a historical enquiry. "El hombre, dónde estuvo?" (where was man?) is the spurring question of section x:

*Piedra en la piedra, el hombre, dónde estuvo?
Aire en el aire, el hombre, dónde estuvo?
Tiempo en el tiempo, el hombre, dónde estuvo?*¹¹ (Neruda 1995: 137)

Stone upon stone, and man, where was he?
Air upon air, and man, where was he?
Time upon time, and man, where was he? (Neruda 1993: 38)

The poem also meditates on death: on collective death, on the death of the Inca people, and more specifically of Inca workers, whose voices the poet intends to recover.

The poem further fits Stephen Burt's contemporary, enunciative definition of topographical poetry as a mode with a "set of formal signals" (Burt 2012: 602): the title indicates the name of the place; it uses the present tense – more exactly, the past yields to the present, as the poet firstly uses the preterit, then the present perfect, "*he subido*" (I have climbed), and finally the present, "*Miro las vestiduras y las manos / el vestigio del agua en la oquedad sonora miro*" (I look at); and its structure involves "movement or perspective". It also makes spectacular use of deictics:

*Ésta fue la morada, éste es el sitio:
aquí los anchos granos del maíz ascendieron
y bajaron de nuevo como granizo rojo.*

*Aquí la hebra dorada salió de la vicuña
a vestir los amores, los túmulos, las madres,
el rey, las oraciones, los guerreros.*

*Aquí los pies del hombre descansaron de noche
junto a los pies del águila, en las altas guaridas
carniceras, y en la aurora
pisaron con los pies del trueno la niebla enrarecida,
y tocaron las tierras y las piedras
hasta reconocerlas en la noche o la muerte.* (Neruda 1995: 132)

This was the dwelling, this is the site:
here the full kernels of corn rose
and fell again like red hailstones.

¹¹ I am using Jack Schmitt's translations for all the quotes from *Canto general*.

Here the golden fiber emerged from the vicuña
to clothe love, tombs, mothers,
the king, prayers, warriors.

Here men's feet rested at night
beside the eagle's feet, in the high gory
retreats, and at dawn
they trod the rarefied mist with feet of thunder
and touched lands and stones
until they recognized in the night or in death. (Neruda 1993: 34)

Deictics are used with the past and present tenses in the very same line ("*Ésta fue la morada, éste es el sitio*"), making time converge in this specific place.

However, all these generic signals are ambivalent from the start. The name of the place, the toponym, should be a token of loco-indexicality, but as has often been noted, Neruda's spelling is peculiar: Macchu Picchu instead of Machu Picchu. The additional *c* was certainly not a typo – or if it was, Neruda never corrected it. The extra *c* makes the name visually symmetrical (2 times 6), with a total of 12 letters – matching the number of sections in the poem. Much can be said about the symbolism of this number, in particular regarding time, a central theme here: it is the number of months in a year and of hours on a clock or a sundial (the "*Reloj*" mentioned in the poem with a capital R):

*Y en el Reloj la sombra sanguinaria
del cóndor cruza como una nave negra.* (Neruda 1995: 136)

And overt the Sundial the sanguinary shadow
of the condor crosses like a black ship. (Neruda 1993: 37)

The number 12 is also associated with classical epics: *The Aeneid* has 12 sections (half the number of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*). In canto VI, right in the middle, Aeneas descends into the underworld; symmetrically, in section VI of "Alturas de Macchu Picchu", the poet begins his ascent to the ruins of the Inca citadel, which turns out to be a form of *nekyia* – an invocation of the dead. In other words, the mere addition of a single letter transforms the referential toponym into a dense intercultural and intertextual nexus. The poem is sited in one place while being "figuratively stretched" to other places, to again deploy Ramazani's expression: geographical (the Mediterranean), literary (European epics) and metaphysical (the realm of the dead, although Neruda gives it a materialist inflexion).

Beyond the spelling of the toponym, there are yet more openings and extensions to literary spaces, in particular Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in which the

existential wandering before the ascent refers to the beginning of *Inferno*, as does the path leading to the stone citadel: "*entre la atroz maraña de las selvas perdidas*." "*Selva*" is not the only Spanish term for forest, but its choice allows an echo with Dante's lines, with the "*selva selvaggia*" at the beginning of the first canto. When the poet understands the meaning of collective death, man's plunge into the abyss is compared with the falling of leaves in autumn: "*os desplomasteis como en un otoño*" – a topical comparison, also present in Canto III of *Inferno*:

*Come d'autunno si levan le foglie
l'una appresso dell'altra, fin che 'l ramo
vede a la terra tutte le sue spoglie,
similimente il mal seme d'Adamo
gittansi di quel lito ad una ad una,
per cenni come augel per suo richiamo.*

Even as in autumn leaves detach themselves,
now one and now another, till their branch
sees all its stripped off clothing on the ground;
so, one by one, the evil seed of Adam
cast themselves down that river-bank at signals,
as doth a bird to its recalling lure. (Dante 1918: 34–35)

The archaeological site therefore turns into a dense intertextual weave, with epic threads from Virgil, Dante, and Ercilla (see Goic 1971 and Rumeau 2009).

Other texts from the Spanish tradition loom large. Cedomil Goic convincingly argues that "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" relates to the genre of the heroic elegy, which laments the death of a people. From that perspective, the *deixis* ("here", "here") does not signal topographical poetry so much as it references the famous baroque poem "Las ruinas de Itálica" (The Ruins of Itálica) by Rodrigo Caro. Here again, the question "where was man?" takes on a different meaning and should be read as a variation on the elegiac "*ubi est?*" Caro's poem also belongs to the tradition of ruin poetry, another intertextual frame for "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" (see Enjuto Angel 2010). Of particular interest is the invocation to the Wilkamayu River. Willkamayu is the Quechua name for the Urubamba River. It is a toponym, indicative of referentiality but also of auctorial intentions: the site is seen from the perspective of Native American history, hence the use of the Quechua word, and at the same time, as with "Macchu Picchu", the common spelling is altered as though to indicate that the place is not reducible to its designation on the map. Indeed, as Cecilia Enjuto Angel has shown, invocations to rivers are a topos of Baroque ruin

poetry, as in Francisco de Quevedo's sonnet "A Roma sepultada en sus ruinas" (To Rome Buried under its Ruins): Quevedo addresses the River Tiber as the only remnant from the era of Rome's splendour. The opposition between the permanent fluidity of the river and the disappearance of solid stone is a baroque paradox *par excellence*. I should add that Neruda regularly addresses rivers as sources of stories and history: in canto I, he summons the River Bío Bío to tell the poet the history of the Spanish conquest. Here too, the Wilkamayu sings and speaks a language that requires interpretation:

*Oh, Wilkamayu de sonoros hilos,
cuando rompes tus truenos lineales
en blanca espuma, como herida nieve,
cuando tu vendaval acantilado
canta y castiga despertando al cielo,
qué idioma traes a la oreja apenas
desarraigada de tu espuma andina?* (Neruda 1995: 134–135)

O, sonorous threaded Wilkamayu,
when you beat your lineal thunder
to a white froth, like wounded snow,
when your precipitous storm
sings and batters, awakening the sky,
what language do you bring to the ear recently
wrenched from your Andean froth? (Neruda 1993: 36)

The Homeric epithet associates the river with 'threads'. Again, as with the Mapocho river as the source of "Canto general de Chile" and the River Bío Bío as the source of the historical narrative, it is a river – associated with a specific place and a local toponym, but also involving fluidity and connection – that is designated as a metapoetic emblem.

From a less strictly generic perspective, "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" can be related to Francisco de Quevedo's poetry. Neruda visited the ruins and conceived the poem at a time when he was reading and commenting on the metaphysical poet. He wrote that for Quevedo, "*la metafísica es inmensamente física*" (metaphysics was immensely physical) (Neruda 1999–2002, vol. 4: 457). "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" is also a reassessment of metaphysics in the context of material destruction and a turn toward a materialist ideology. As Hernan Loyola pointed out, the "dialectics between Life and Death" is its main concern (Loyola 2011: 6), as was the case for Quevedo, but Neruda puts it in a more collective and political frame.

Without being exhaustive, this survey of the main allusions to extra-territorial traditions reveals how complex the relationship between this seemingly topographical poem and its site of origin is. As Robert Pring-Mill wrote in his introduction to Nathaniel Tarn's first translation of the poem into English, "the citadel becomes the centre of a tangled skein of associations with disparate and intertwining strands" (Neruda 1966: 9). To quote again from Jahan Ramazani, it is a remarkable example of how "the formal contrivance of poetry, its transnationally mediated relation to its subject matter, its verbal weightedness and reflexivity complicate its locational aboutness" (Ramazani 2017: 682).

3. Three examples of global reception, three facets of the poem

Translations are part of the global history of a text: while the poem "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" can be read as the result of a centripetal afflux of references, in its turn it also becomes the point of departure of a centrifugal move, which expands with each translation. In the same text where he gives many details about the making of *Canto general*, Neruda provides extensive information about its translations into French, Italian, German, Russian, and Czech (with a special emphasis on his team of Soviet translators), along with specific examples of questions or mistakes. He concludes that:

Les cuento todos estos detalles de las traducciones porque son parte de la intimidad y del ámbito expansivo de un libro de esta época.

Antes los libros caían como piedras en un pozo. Ahora tienen nuevos y anchos caminos. (Neruda 1999–2002, vol. 4, p. 937)

[I am telling you all these details about the translations because they are part of the intimacy and expansive scope of a book from this era.

Before, books fell like stones into a well. Now they take new and broad pathways.]

As I noted earlier, "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" became the major sample of *Canto general* and has been established as one of the most translated, distributed and illustrated selections from Neruda's poetry. This is particularly true for English translations: before the first full translation of *Canto general* in 1991, there were no less than nine translations of "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" by nine different translators, the first one as early as 1948 in the widely read surrealist magazine *The Tiger's Eye* (see Felstiner 1980: 13–25). In 1950, it was selected in Whit Burnett's popular anthology of contemporary world poetry

(Burnett 1950), in Angel Flores' translation. Penelope Johnson, who studied these partial translations, asks: "Looking at the selections made, the first two questions that come to mind is why Section II has been selected so many times and why others have not been selected at all" (Johnson: 54). She ventures the explanation that it is because "maybe at least on the surface" the poem provides "an apolitical view of Latin America". True as that may be in the context of the poem's Anglophone reception, it does not exclude other answers, ranging from the radial quality of the poem that I briefly exposed above, to its metaphorical density, which, far from hindering translations, probably stimulated them. The poem was also the only one to have this special visibility in French. I mentioned above the early translations by Roger Caillois in 1946, followed by a full translation in 1961, which has been regularly reprinted (1973, 1974, 1978, 1999, 2022).

Rather than mapping out the "broad pathways" taken by the poem, I will now focus on a few examples of its global reception, each unfurling a thread of the tight knot, or skein of references that it holds together. A striking feature of this global reception is that it not only involves translation, but also the visual arts. As was already the case with editions in Spanish, the various illustrated translations offer different interpretations of the poem's relationship to its referential site. I will briefly present three examples here, not in chronological order but as examples of the diverging interpretations of the poem's relationship to its referential site.

3.1. Indexing the poem to the site with photographs

The first instance associates text and photography. Although there is much to discuss around the idea that photography is the most mimetic visual art, one thing is certain: supplementing the poem with photographs emphasises loco-referentiality, although, of course, the photographs were not necessarily taken at the same time the poet saw (or wrote about) the place. An early, separate edition of "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" had already included photographs: in 1954, on the occasion of Neruda's 50th birthday, the Chilean publishing house Nascimento printed 1,000 copies of the poem with 12 photographs by the Peruvian indigenist photographer Martín Chambi (Neruda selected the photographs himself). Chambi was already well known in Latin America for his work on local places and indigenous people and had been to Machu Picchu in the 1920s, before Neruda (see Arce 2003). The cover of Roger Caillois's translation "Hauteurs de Macchu Picchu" also regularly featured a photograph of the site.

The 2001 book *Machu Picchu* is quite a maximalist example of the use of photography as site-grounding: it is a book of photographs by Barry Brukoff, with a bilingual edition of "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" in a new translation by Stephen Kessler, and a prologue by Isabel Allende. As the title indicates, the poem is secondary to the photographs, which take up most of the space and spread across double pages. The title also clearly emphasises referentiality, being comprised of the mere toponym, with its topographic spelling. A map at the beginning of the book is another tool with which to index the poem to the site.

In her prologue, Isabel Allende insists on the special attraction of certain sacred places ("*lugares*") for artists, and presents this "extraordinary book" as "the result of two pilgrimages separated by half a century" (Brukoff 2002: 13). In this case, the poem is presented as a supplement to the photographs, rather than vice versa. It is ancillary to the documentary ambition of the book and is grounded to its original locus.

3.2. A shrine of images and colours

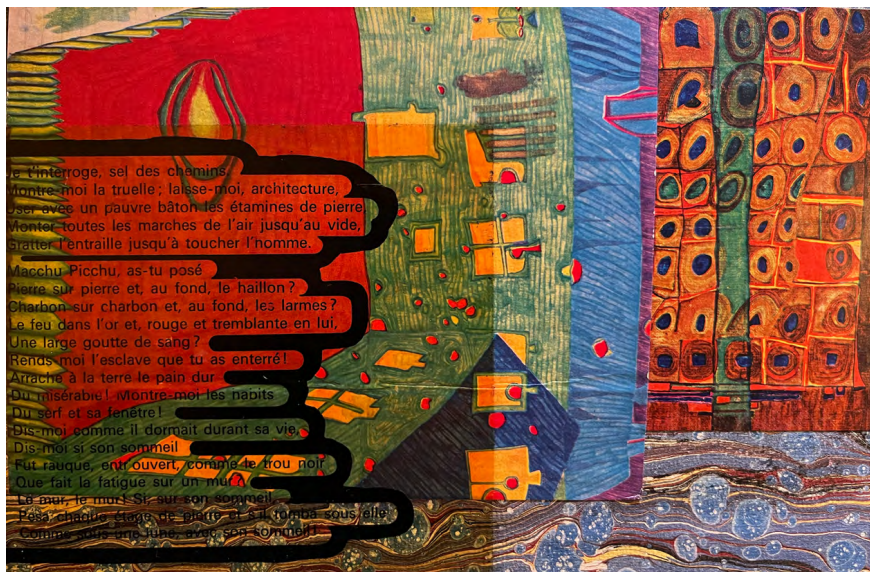
A second example takes us to the other end of the spectrum, since it detaches the poem from its site of origin. Even though it is sometimes catalogued in libraries as a bilingual edition of "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" in Spanish and French, it is first and foremost a 1966 work by the Austrian artist Friedensreich Hundertwasser. It is indeed based on Roger Caillois's translation (not the partial early one, but the complete 1961 "*Hauteurs de Macchu Picchu*"), although in it, the text is almost covered by the art. It is a book made of nesting boxes, an idea that came from the publisher and art gallerist Claude Givaudan (Koschatzky 1986: 66). Hundertwasser explained how he "cut part of the edition up in 'storeys,' pasted them on the front of nesting boxes, and covered the rest of the box surfaces with a collage of postcards and reproductions" (Hundertwasser 2002: 991). The boxes are meant to be piled up and combined into a sort of pyramid, evocative of some of the structural forms of Machu Picchu.¹² A total of 66 copies was produced, each one unique since all the paper that Hundertwasser designed for printing the lithographs had varied colours. The art is quite typical of Hundertwasser: the colours are bright and the lines spiral into convoluted patterns. The intricate and abundant motifs somehow correspond to the metaphorical density of the poem.

¹² For more images, see: https://hundertwasser.com/en/applied-art/638_a_apas85_hauteurs_de_machu_picchu_1619 and <https://drawingmatter.org/friedensreich-hundertwasser/>



Pablo Neruda, *Hauteurs de Macchu Picchu*, transl. R. Caillois, ill. F. Hundertwasser, Genève, Claude Givaudan, 1966. Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien. © Hundertwasser Archive

The interior of the pyramid has to be displayed for the text to appear, drenched in colours and forms. It is bilingual, in Spanish on one side of the pyramid and French on the other. The order of the sections has been completely reshuffled. The lines with the thick black edge are somewhat reminiscent of Inca quipus:



Detail of an inside box; Neruda. P. 1966. *Hauteurs de Macchu Picchu*. R. Caillois, transl., ill. F. Hundertwasser, Genève, Claude Givaudan. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

More interestingly, the complexity of the device bears a resemblance to the dynamics of the poem: just as the poet searches for history, for man, and for meaning, asking many questions, the reader of this artist's book (or rather, the handler of the book) must experiment to understand how to fold or unfold its parts and accept its many possibilities, some with the text kept hidden inside the shrine of cardboard. Hundertwasser wrote about the result: "At any rate, this first three-dimensional object was not a success. Even though, when the boxes were put together, amazing overlapping architectures and surprising configurations were the result. Now, after 35 years, I am again working on an architectural building block project called *Die Hoelzer Sieben*" (Hundertwasser 2002: 991). Hundertwasser's "Hauteurs de Macchu Picchu" could indeed be described as an "architectural building block project". The work also epitomises the idea of a portable Machu Picchu (though one which is not so easy to manipulate), distancing it quite radically from its site of origin.

It went through yet another transformation as Hundertwasser had created separate colour lithographs representing the boxes in their pile, called *The Eyes of Macchu Picchu* (patterns of eyes are indeed visible on the boxes), which were cut and used for the front of the box book. On the lithographs, the boxes are surrounded by shrubs, a fusion of architecture and vegetation typical both of

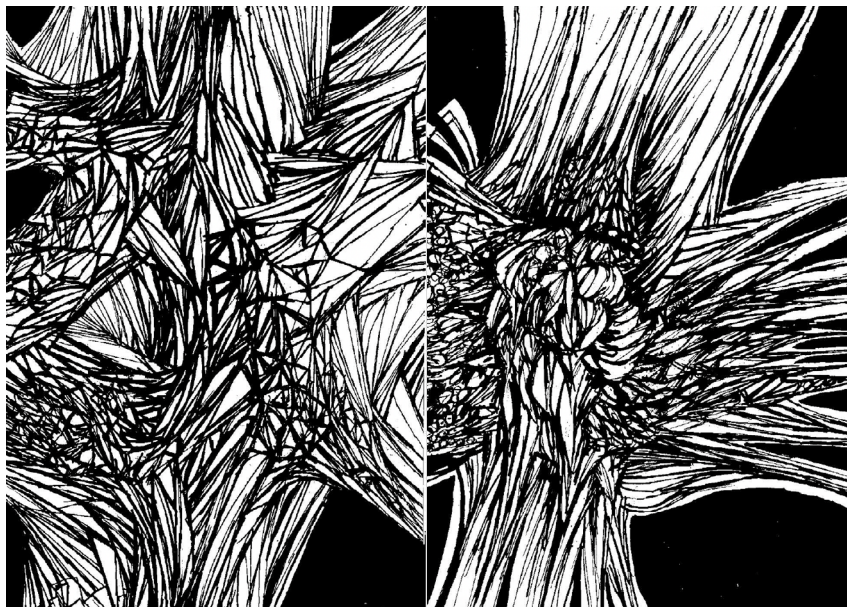
Machu Picchu and of Hundertwasser's conceptions (he famously advocated vegetal roofs as early as the 1970s). One of the lithographs was later reused as an illustration in Hundertwasser's edition of the Bible in 1995.

3.4. Connections and abstraction

Finally, I would like to draw attention to a little-known edition, an illustrated translation of the poem published in Ukrainian in 1970. The translator Vira Vovk and the artist Slava Guerullak belonged to The New York Group of Poets (*N'iu-Iorks'ka hrupa*), Ukrainian poets who had emigrated to the Americas (mainly to the United States, but also to Canada and Brazil), often from Germany. Born in 1926 in western Ukraine, Vira Vovk was forced to leave for Germany at the beginning of the Second World War, before emigrating to Brazil in the early 1950s, initially settling in Curitiba. Her own trajectory is an extraordinary combination of local rootedness (she always referred to her native Hutsul country as fundamental) and diasporic extension. She often commented on her specific position among the New York Group of Poets, who were mainly city writers. Brazilian nature was an important inspiration for her, and it is possible that the luxuriant vegetation of the "*selva*" leading to Machu Picchu connected Neruda's poem with her own inklings. Her translation of *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* was first published in 1968 as *Verkhy Machu Pichu* in the journal *Suchasnist'* (no. 11), the main publishing house of the Ukrainian diaspora after the Second World War, based in Munich, and whose chief editor at the time was Wolfram Burghardt. It was then reprinted (by *Suchasnist'* again) in 1970, with a different title, *Verkhiv'ia Machu Pichu*, as a bilingual and illustrated booklet.

Ukrainian was a language some members of the New York Group of Poets were not born into, but moved into; for all of them, writing in Ukrainian was essential, albeit for a small audience, since their works were not distributed in Soviet Ukraine (even though Vira Vovk returned to Soviet Ukraine and was in contact with the *shistdesiatnyky*, the 'sixtiers', a 1960s group of dissident intellectuals and writers). They were prolific translators, as might be expected, since translation plays a role in the fight for minority languages: demonstrating a language's ability to translate world literature reinforces its prestige and, in Pascale Casanova's words, translated works help build the cultural capital of dominated languages (Casanova: 2015). However, the poets of the New York Group had an oblique relationship with nationalism and resisted submitting poetry to a political agenda, at least in a simplistic way. Their models were modernist poets such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, whom they translated extensively. In that context, the choice of Neruda, a highly acclaimed poet in

the USSR, was perhaps somewhat surprising. But it is precisely an anti-Soviet Neruda that the translation of "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" showcases. While the Soviet Neruda was internationalist (the poet of *Que despierte el leñador*), the Neruda of the New York Group was a modernist poet who expressed an existential anguish – he was particularly important for Yuriy Tarnawsky (see Rewakowicz 2024). In this case, his poem appeared as connecting a specific place – Machu Picchu (note the reduction to eight letters in Ukrainian, "Мачу Пічу") – with abstraction and a more metaphysical poetry. After all, the first part of "Alturas de Macchu Picchu", where the poet evokes his sense of aimlessness and existential loss, has been paralleled with some of Eliot's poems, especially *Four Quartets* (see Felstiner). The black and white illustrations by the ceramist artist Slava Gurullak are hardly referential:



Illustrations by Slava Gurullak, in Neruda, P. 1970. *Verkhiv'ia Machu Pichu*. W. Wovk, transl. (sic), ed., W. Burghardt, ed., Munich, Suchanist'.

Though very different in style, in common with Hundertwasser's device the images convey a strong sense of complexity. More specifically, they illustrate the very idea of a skein, of an entangled web. They contribute to reshaping Neruda into a modernist and metaphysical poet rather than a political and internationalist one.

Not long after that edition, an anthology of Neruda's poetry was published in Soviet Ukraine. It also featured "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" with a different spelling: *Verkhy Machu-Pitchu* ("Мачу-Пікчу", the standard way to write Machu Picchu in Ukrainian). Referentiality is therefore more emphasised than it was in Vira Vovk's symmetrical "Мачу Пічу". The framing of the poem is also very different: the book opens with a long introduction by Vitaliy Korotych, who insists on Neruda's communist commitment, and the anthology itself opens with "Ode to Lenin". "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" belongs to a selection of poems from *Canto general*, including the most propagandistic part of "Que despierte el leñador" (the reason for the selection of this part might also have been the line referring to Ukraine, with the mention of the "great kolkhoz of Kiev"). "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" is therefore framed by the paratext and by an overtly political choice of poems, which give it a very different meaning from the Suchasnist' version. It is, however, still noteworthy that it is the only section from *Canto general* to be given in its entirety.

"Alturas de Macchu Picchu", a seemingly site-grounded poem, is a spectacular example of the complexities of a poetic locus. It condenses an array of places into a dense knot by making use of all of the capacities of poetry listed by Jahan Ramazani: "its metaphoric reach and formal elasticity, its compression and velocity and deep memory, its inhabiting of multiple spaces and times at once, and its proficiency at straddling discrepant sites, both real and imagined" (Ramazani 2017: 696). Its rich, global reception is therefore unsurprising. Taken together, illustrated editions and translations stretch what was compressed in the poem. Taken separately, they emphasise different relations of the poem to place. In the examples that I have briefly exposed, the poem was interpreted as site-grounded, then recomposed as a portable and colourful device, and finally read in a much more abstract way, as a black and white metaphysical meditation: these three versions maximise the different scales of the poem and display, as though under a magnifying glass, the diverging directions in which the poem itself darts.

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