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The Normative Environmental Discourse in Pablo Neruda's *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*

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Engaging Environmental Violence

Environmental violence (EV) is a cycle that preserves global power through the unequal distribution of pollutants while affecting society's most vulnerable ecosystems and populations. This concept poses a series of associations and interdependencies between our economic systems, our power structures, and our relation to nature. The EV perspective approaches society and what is human-made or derived as intertwined with what encloses nature – questioning whether there is a division between humans and nature. Certain cultural aspects can be perceived as subordination to a power structure but could also transgress or subvert it. Culture has autonomy from the economic practices that pollute the environment and its inhabitants. Under certain conditions, specific praxis and beliefs could dismantle the binary between the classical Marxist concepts of base and superstructure on which the relation between cultural violence and EV, as defined, seems to depend. Therefore, there is a need to reconsider how culture, and our ways of understanding it, are part of the cycle in which excess production and consumption are incompatible with the stability of the environment and society. In the following pages, I trace how far culture can, in its autonomy, reproduce the practices associated with EV by analyzing a canonical Latin American poetic discourse: the poem *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* by Pablo Neruda.

11.1 Introduction

Columbus's diary and the letters he wrote that still survive until now, edited mainly by Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, make evident what O'Gorman called the invention of America. The European mindset of Columbus and Vespucci did not have the epistemological frame to incorporate another continent's geographic and historical existence absent in the Ptolemean map of the world. The *Cartas de relación*, written by Francisco Pizarro (describing the conquest of

Peru), and the letters written by Hernán Cortes on the conquest of Mexico drew upon the European gaze over the territory and its populations. Nature, territory, human bodies, animals, and everything that affected their senses was described and understood (it became knowledge) under the scope of European referents. That frame created a regional literature representing itself, its inhabitants, and the environment filtered by the colonial logic since the Hispanic conquest. Since then, the complicity or the fracture with the dominant episteme has created various discourses on the local and regional nature and the behaviors of its populations. Whether or not all these discourses are environmentalists themselves, they wonder how to use nature to serve human needs and how humans must behave to make their land and themselves more productive. The texts by Alexander Von Humboldt maintain a similar vision regarding creating an inventory of the resources in the New Continent. With the wars of independence came a change in the vision of the region's economy. The political discourses of the republican era claimed agriculture and mining as necessary for the region's progress and as a colonial holding, respectively. The narratives influenced by the social realism of the twentieth century depicted natures under the recurrent threat of being dominated or as the dominating force keeping development away from the region. During that period, Pablo Neruda wrote and published the poem *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*. This text is not exempt from the Latin American tradition's constant literalization of the relationship between humans and nature. Even if it is using language in an innovative way to poeticize that relation, it is not necessarily a predecessor of contemporary texts. More recently, with the advent of the twenty-first century, Latin American literature's paradigmatic division between humans and nature has been contested, generating a varied search for interrelations between economic development, the human body, and the environment.

Neruda's poem, *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*, corresponds with a long poem in which 12 cantos can be read as a unit and as a set of autonomous poems. *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* describes the journey of the poetic voice to the top of the famous Andean mountain and his subsequent descent. My approach to the text focuses on Canto I, where the poetic voice establishes the symbolic oppositions for fertility and death. Although those antagonisms order the poem, there is a debate about the function of the first canto. Fesltiner reads the first and second cantos as the beginning of the poetic voice's journey. For Felstiner, the first canto "sets in motion the imagery of fruitless wandering" and "the poem's coordinates in time and space" (p. 156). According to this reading, the first canto happens in the present, in a modern city where the poetic voice begins his path toward the ruins and the past of Macchu Picchu. On the other side, the reading of Santí sees the first canto, not as part of the journey itself, but as a prologue. Based on the structure of another of Neruda's works, *Residencia en la tierra*, Santí proposes that the first canto of

Alturas is "a prologue that summarizes the argument of the poem" (p. 125), being "instability and material dispersion," as well as uncertainty, the thematic nodes of the stanzas of this canto.

I align with Santí's interpretation; however, Felstiner's translation is helpful for my analysis, even if he reads the first canto as a point of departure, rather than as an aperture or introduction to the poem. In Canto I, the poetic voice uses language to raise a series of associations and oppositions between a past in which harmony with nature prevails and a modern present separated from it. The following cantos of the poem revise the historical past of the city of Macchu Picchu. Cantos II to XII describe how the poetic voice changes from an unsatisfactory life determined by an alienating mode of production to become a subject committed to the past. After experiencing what Bauman would call an accelerated individualization common in liquid modernity, the poetic voice finds a solid identity by embodying the forgotten voices of the people oppressed by colonial systems. In the poem's final canto, the poetic voice asks to mediate between the unheard and lost voices, past and present – who represent the human cost of any monumental activity, and the contemporary reader. The poem addresses a forgotten community and talks to a universal audience. In the poem, silencing those voices results from establishing an economic system that commodifies and instrumentalizes bodies and natural resources. Therefore, there is a questioning of the origin and perpetuation of the cultural imaginaries that assume the function of Latin America as a zone of extraction in the international market.

Although, that question does not make the text part of what is known as the export age literature from Latin America. The function of Latin America as a source of resources for the globe and its presence in the text appears through the notions of a binary conceptualization of gender and sexuality. The feminine representation of America traces back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the continent was associated, as Rogers states, with "depictions of South American earth as a virginal female space that European male explorers seek to claim and possess" (pp. 14–15). These gendered depictions disguised the indigenous bodies and the extractive enterprises in the continent behind the images of feminine, childish, or maternal landscapes that needed to be domesticated by the male European imaginary. The opposition between the male/female qualities of the European/American territories assumes that there is a given superiority of the male over the female to justify dominance.

The cultural associations of America and its cultures with a pejorative conceptualization of the female gender are also part of the technological and economic changes introduced by the Spanish colonization. Consider, for example, how people produced gold in the region of Potosí (present-day Bolivia) between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Gold had a ceremonial significance, a religious value, for the Inca empire that ruled the region before the Spanish conquest.

However, gold was economically valuable for the Spanish: It embodied wealth. In the Inca empire, extracting gold and producing artifacts from it was based on a process known as "mita." This process involved the use of water, rollers, and platens. In the process, the participation of men and women established a society that built its cities and roads based on the quantities obtained, processed, and transported from Potosí to other centers of the empire. The limitations of the quantities obtained were, in a way, the result of the cultural meaning attributed to gold. Therefore, to preserve that meaning and its value in comparison to other materials, mita was an appropriate technique that served a purpose for this culture. Mita works as a sign of their worldview. The empire's need and demand for gold were related to and reflected their ways of giving meaning to the precious metal. But after the conquest, the mita process proved insufficient to satisfy the crown's demands. Silver and gold were needed to produce coins and introducing mercury into the extraction process made it more efficient.

Nevertheless, using mercury decimated native and enslaved populations, while polluting the environment. This change increased the amount of gold and silver obtained. Thus, although the value of gold is attributed to the same material, it does not have the same cultural meaning. The introduction of a different use for gold and the establishment of another set of cultural and economic values changed humans' relationship with this mineral.

In Neruda's text, the negative effect of colonization is communicated by the poetic voice lamenting the degradation and silencing of Latin American people. Through the poem, the voice depicts his present and modern conditions of life as an adverse effect of the colonial economic system. The regret felt by the poetic voice seeks to recover the vitality lost due to the rupture between humankind and nature. However, the poem refers to the whole species as men and associates the concept of vitality with virility. What is lost and makes modern life unbearable for the poetic voice is the lack of firmness, steadiness, and authenticity in the daily experience of life. The poetic voice sees the present as a rupture with nature, which is structural to modern society's rational and organized lifestyle. The longing of the poetic voice starts by questioning how the distance from nature affects every aspect of life: from food and clothing to desire, pleasure, and death. However, he conceptualizes his depictions of vitality and virility by opposing the ideal past to a pathologized present. The poetic voice uses different figures to describe this conceptual opposite but is constant in its proximity to death or death in life. When the poetic self (or the river in Canto VIII) embodies that conceptual opposite, he experiences it as a loss that changes original, natural conduct. The poem promotes a harmonious relationship with nature. However, it does so within a normative logic that structures its motifs.

I will closely read the poem's first canto in the following pages. I will focus on the structural opposition between life and death in the canto. This duality is

represented by associating life, fecundity, and reproductivity with the past and the steadiness of the rock. In contrast, the text associates death with a present in which everything is momentary, transitory, futile, and meaningless. The poetic voice refers to pejorative figures of emasculated subjects to associate the present as a modern time detached from nature. The following analysis aims to generate a reading of the canto that exposes the continuities between Nerudian poetic discourse and contemporary environmentalist discourse. This continuity depends mainly on the fear of the impossibility of securing a future, but also on looking to create a different relationship with nature by questioning modern ways of production and consumption. This analysis's second objective is to question fecundity's function as a symbol of harmony between humans and nature. The images of fecundity emerge in the canto when a balanced relationship between humans and nature results in a harmonious culture. However, this approach resorts to the figure of the emasculated subject as the negative effect of the rupture between past and present and between humans and nature because of the instauration of a modern mode of production. Hence, the third objective of this analysis is to expose the disparaging vision of the emasculated body as a symptom. In the canto, the poetic voice seeks to evade this figure of dubious and unnamed identity, moving between the present and the past in search of stability to ground himself. Finally, this analysis seeks to define the negative representation of this figure as a sign of cultural violence. This sign allows us to expand the existing relationship between culture and EV in Latin America during the mid-twentieth century.

For this analysis, I will focus on Williams' proposal on the emergence of the nature/culture dichotomy in Western thought. For Williams, this rupture is a consequence of technical and industrial development. I also draw on Marcantonio's definition of EV and its relationship with Galtung's cultural violence concept. This relationship allows the articulation of the concept of EV with the contemporary use of extractivism in Latin American cultural and literary studies. Additionally, I draw on Seymour's, Mortimer-Sandilands, and Erickson's critiques of contemporary environmentalist discourses and their alliance with normative ideas of reproductivity. Through these methodological resources, I hope to question the necessity of futurity and its allusion to heterosexual fecundity as a condition for environmental studies.

To demonstrate that this interpretation is possible, first, I present a methodological articulation between the concept of EV and the use of extractivism in literary studies. Second, I will investigate how the first canto of the Nerudian poem assigns a negative valuation to gender expressions that do not classify within the masculine/feminine binary. Thirdly, I will analyze how that attribution justifies the longing for a harmonious past between humans and nature. Throughout the analysis of the first canto, I will identify the poetic devices that articulate human fecundity and infertility as signs of a fractured relationship with nature.

11.2 From Environmental Violence to Literary Analysis: A Methodological Articulation

It is difficult to find a connection between the EV framework and the relationship concerning extractivism and the cultural production of the twentieth century from the Andean region of South America. The focus of my analysis is located "outside of the mine." Meanwhile, most of the approximations of the concept of extractivism have taken the scopes of political economy, sociology, and anthropological perspectives. Hence, they approximate to extractivism from the "inside of the mine." These approaches have made visible how race and class endure as identity categories that exacerbate power and economic differences. In the extractive zones, which are marginalized, but made profitable by the extraction of natural resources, colonial logics of social hierarchization are still visible. The urban and political centers in Latin America draw upon the structural marginalization of ethnic groups to profit from the expropriation and the extraction of resources in protected territories. The studies around extractivism have also established how in discourse, nature and femineity are associated and valued as inferior to the masculine symbolization of progress. Consequently, the structural differences culturally associated with gender are also fundamental to establishing power in the urban and political centers of economic consumption and circulation. As seen, the opposition between the urban and rural areas of society is fundamental to the phenomenon of extractivism in Latin America as well.

My analysis aims to make visible the influence and presence of extractivism outside of the extractive zones. I seek to understand how extractivism is present in texts that do not explicitly depict the mines or the resources obtained through extractive practices. My approximation aims to find a way to undermine the oppositions over which the extractive discourse seems to emerge. My path comes from other explorations that establish an articulation between the economic activities necessary to reproduce the material conditions of life and the discourses that legitimize, naturalize, or question the systematization of those activities. Thus, my approach identifies how a dialectic relationship ties discourse with the economic base. The link between these two separate spheres is theoretical, if not rhetorical. That division is the metaphor for the base and the superstructure in classical Marxist theory. The metaphor is a substation of some terms for others: a wordplay. Base and superstructure are not theoretical concepts, but just an image that helps explain how people talk, think, and communicate their ideas about why and how people intervene in nature to stay alive in this world. Besides the theoretical limitations of the metaphor, it is still revisited and updated by scholars who find it to be a tool to make the relationship between institutions, power, discourse, and economic praxis visible.

While analyzing Neruda's poem, the metaphor helps explain how the poetic discourse could have any relation to extractivism, even though it is about a man who visits the ruins of Macchu Picchu for the first time. Neruda's poetic discourse corresponds with a cultural production that questions, from the superstructure, the reproduction of the activities at society's material and economic base. The contact of the male subject with the ancient past makes it possible for him to see the effects of what EV would be. When Neruda reaches Macchu Picchu, he realizes he has been trying to escape the tedious and meaningless life caused by modern production conditions. His life in the modern cities is negatively affected by economic practices. At the core of these practices, the poetic voice identifies a broken relationship between humanity and nature; the human activities are therefore a deviation from nature, which is conceptualized as destiny. The pollution in the cities, the lack of personal connections, and the impossibility of relating to others and giving meaning to everyday objects beyond their instrumentalization make the poetic subject experience life as a void. In Canto II, the poetic voice says:

Cuántas veces en las calles de invierno de una ciudad o en un autobús o un barco en el crepúsculo, o en la soledad más espesa, la de la noche de fiesta, bajo el sonido de sombras y campanas, en la misma gruta del placer humano, me quise detener a buscar la eterna veta insondable que antes toqué en la piedra o en el relámpago que el beso desprendía. (vv. 45–50)	How many times in the city's winter streets or in a bus or a boat at dusk, or in the densest solitude, that of night festivity, under the sound of shadows and bells, in the very cave of human pleasure, have I wanted to stop and seek the timeless fathomless vein I touched in a stone once or in the lightning a kiss released.

The poetic voice associates those deleterious conditions of the present times with a colonial past. The imposition of a colonial structure fractured humans' supposedly harmonic relationship with nature in the pre-Columbian era (as will be explained in the following section of this chapter). Therefore, Neruda's poem establishes a relationship between the direct and indirect harm produced by an economic praxis that exacerbated and created power differentials at the individual, community, regional and global scales.[1]

The difficulty of merging the EV frame with the approach of extractivism relies on the fact that Neruda's text condenses the harmful effects of the economy on vulnerable populations in the image of the emasculated subject. In other words,

[1] See the Introduction of this volume.

even if Neruda's poem aims for a just, sustainable, and fulfilling economic system, he reproduces a pejorative representation of a pathologized male subject to promote change.

The recurrence of that representation in the text makes it a structural motif of the poem. The poetic subject's desire to affirm, secure, and set his identity as a male mestizo drives his adventure of traveling from the modern city to the ruins and the historical past. He is escaping from the association of the indigenous identity with the blurred, unstable, and fluctuating, but he considers those characteristics to be long-term effects of the past, not only because of how practices that involved toxic pollutants like mercury, as mentioned before, decimated the workers of the mines. The virility of the poetic subject is threatened by historical and structural violence that defines his place in the world. Those adverse effects are associated with an ill environment that the poetic voice wants to regenerate. In addition, those effects also determine the character of the poetic subject and the subjective experience he has of the world. The ungrounded experience he finds in the present is perceived as a spectral vision of the colonial conditions in the daily life economy. Hence, the enterprise to revive himself and his epoch requires the derogatory conceptualization of a deviant masculine identity and the longing for its precarious state.

Nonetheless, the ill environment and the emasculated subject are not always represented as different motifs. The opposition between the male identity and a non-identity is structural because it integrates the environment and the subject. This integration happens, for example, when the poetic subject interacts with non-human entities like the river in Canto VIII:

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? (vv. 213–219)	Oh Wilkamayu of resonant threads, when you shatter your bands of thunder into white spume, like wounded snow, when your steep gale sings and slashes arousing the sky, what language do you bring to the ear barely uprooted from your Andean foam?

In these verses, the river doesn't have a voice to respond. It lost its strength as it went from the highest mountain to the valley. The mentions of the wounds and the uprooted ears link the gone virility with the descent of the river. In addition, using native terms in the canto establishes the resemblance of the now silent river with the agony of the culture who named it. Thereby, the opposition non-identity/identity codes the language employed to poeticize the history of the colonial system.

The resource to the unnamed queer indigenous identity justifies the enunciation of a masculine intervention. However, the image of the queer identity as a burden is a transposition into poetic discourse of the processes that reduce and reinforce the ability for marginalized people to work against the effects of EV.[2] Emasculation cannot make a subject vulnerable to pollution just by itself. In a quantitative study, emasculation doesn't function as a variable of the effects of EV in a population. But in Neruda's poem, the figure of the emasculated subject is persuasive. It has the function to motivate action against a system that prioritizes profit over the hazards of pollution in human lives. Neruda's poetic subject has a voice unlike the men of the past who lost theirs (loss that is also representative of their emasculation). To talk for, or instead of, the others based on the possession of a voice is a re-masculinization of their discourse. It is the male mestizo subject who can speak, and his voice represents himself as a subject compared to those who lack it and cannot be a subject anymore.

Hitherto, the aims to change the economic system at its fundamental and conceptual relationship between human and nature end up, tragically, disseminating a symbol of violence against a vulnerable population. That contradiction informs the problem of who are included and excluded in the environmental discourse. Using the emasculated subject as a negative symbol relies on the determinacy of nature over humanity. Gender, under the poem's logic, is the effect of a biological sex difference (associated with nature). Thus, the poem portrays a society's strength, dynamism, fecundity, and wealth as consequences of a correspondence between those biological differences and human behavior. The assumption of a natural correspondence between gender and sex reproduces the colonial mechanism of instrumentalizing difference to legitimize violence against subjects who do not classify within the reproductive norm.

11.3 Canto I: Interpreting the Bodies Turning into Iron

The structural function of the motif explained in the previous section appears for the first time in Canto I. Neruda wrote *Alturas* after he visited the city of Macchu Picchu around 1942 and 1943. After touring the city's ruins, in his book *Confieso que he vivido*, he describes what it was like to arrive in the ancient city and how it inspired him.[3] There he had a kind of epiphany that led him to write the poem that begins as follows:

[2] See the Introduction of this volume.

[3] There is a current debate around the significance of Neruda's public figure and his life. After the advent of the *metoo* movement, many of his works have been reviewed under the scope of gender violence. For more information, see the article published by Lioman Lima. Also, see the book by Hernán Loyola, *Neruda's Sins* (2022).

Del aire al aire, como una red vacía, iba yo entre las calles y la atmósfera, llegando y despidiendo, en el advenimiento del otoño la moneda extendida de las hojas, y entre la primavera y las espigas, lo que el más grande amor, como dentro de un guante que cae, nos entrega como una larga luna. (vv. 1–6)	From the air to the air, like an empty net, I went on through streets and thin air, arriving and leaving behind, at autumn's advent, the coin handed out in the leaves, and between spring and ripe grain, the fullness that love, as in a glove's fall, gives over to us like a long-drawn moon.

The first lines of this stanza are a comparison. Neruda's poetic voice narrates how he was in the city and was trapped in that atmosphere, going from one side to the other. He seems almost trapped between the streets on the ground and the atmosphere in the sky. The empty net that captures the attention of the poetic self becomes an element of exchange or transaction. That atmosphere in which the poetic voice was walking announces the change of season from summer to autumn. It refers to transitioning from a period of much sunshine and fertility (connoted in the ripe grain) to a time representing a slow suspension of vitality. In one way or another, the advent of autumn links the series of landscape elements that represent the changes of the season. Therefore, the poetic discourse's atmosphere allows communication between two different moments or times. By enunciating this instability, the poem seems to begin at a moment that is both a culmination and a beginning – a transition.

For Felstiner, *Alturas* shifts Neruda's poetic trajectory. The importance of reading and (in Felstiner's case) translating this poem lies in the fact that it was written at the midpoint of Neruda's career after two decades of varied and arduous evolution (p. 11). Felstiner's translation seeks to balance the meaning and the emotions conveyed in the poetic language. In his book, Felstiner acknowledges and explains in detail the process by which he excludes and prioritizes using specific terms so that the poem can maintain its qualities in its English version. During this process, he compares other translations, biographical sources, and recordings and refers to people who may have been as close as possible to the author's direct utterance of the poem. However, Felstiner does not comment in detail about the first canto, so his reading focuses on the first stanzas' dark aspects. He says that: "(…) the beginning of Alturas de Macchu Picchu is pervaded by loneliness, thwarted passion, disintegrative forces, and death" (p. 12).

Nevertheless, Felstiner acknowledges the presence of erotic elements referring to a lost paradise, so for him, Neruda "thinks of penetrating to some progenitive source beneath earth and ocean" (p. 157). Now, my interest lies in considering

these fecund elements in their proximity to economic practices that depend on the extraction of mineral resources. I consider that there is not only an association between the semantic field of sexuality and the myth of the golden age or lost paradise. Neruda is questioning the extent to which these practices, values, and semantic realms are associated. As will be seen below, this section of the poem conceptually organizes a division between the symbols of an agricultural economy that are different from those based on the production of metals. This division is as old as the founding of the independent republics in Latin America. The notion that metallurgical economies represent decadence as opposed to the progress that only agricultural development can provide has been widely studied.[4]

However, in Neruda's poem, the association that Felstiner identifies has an ideological substrate. The idea that eroticism is essentially reproductive has characterized a series of discourses on what are nature, bodily functions, and biological determinism associated with certain currents within environmental studies. These associations are not alien to Neruda's critique because, as Santí says, the prophetic character of his poetry is close to the notion of Christian notions of futurity. However, Santí's project and Felstiner's do not intend to recognize the Christian and Marxist tensions of Neruda's poetry. What is relevant about these associations between Christian and Marxist ideas in the text is, on the one hand, the fact that while, Neruda, as Santí says, "carried Marx over from theory to poetry, he fashioned not simply a political tract but a peculiar kind of prophetic text" (p. 181).

On the other hand, the conceptualizations of the prophetic text as one that conveys a message sent by someone else and as the text that conveys something that has been seen or revealed to the poet suggest that Christianity is informing Neruda's poetry. However, the relationship that Felstiner identifies between the erotic evocations in the poem and the myth of the lost paradise links these semantic fields beyond an ideological dispute. The poetic voice is prolific about certain materials that become symbols and are used in the text when the poetic voice is making these tricky associations.

Progressing with the poem, I would like to continue reading the last two lines of this first stanza. In these, the poetic voice speaks of the greatest love (translated by Felstiner as "the fullness that love"). This love can be that of a mother, a divine and spiritual love, or a lost but reciprocated love. Without specifying what kind, the poetic self says that this great love experience is also part of the experience that he had of the atmosphere of Macchu Picchu. Although the voice does not specify whether this love is part of the series of previous comparisons, within this atmosphere of temporal exchanges lies the value of this image. The

[4] For more information, see García-Caro (2011).

interaction between these epochs makes arriving in the city comparable to saying goodbye (or leaving behind) in the second verse. However, the act of surrendering or leaving is also part of the series of comparisons in the stanzas due to the use of simile. Everything that is in motion in this stanza is a donation, and it is also a loss. The giving, or that great love, alludes to the same instability as the spring and advent of autumn. Like the ripe grain, the giving of that long moon refers to fertility. By how it falls, the movement described evokes a tear and the sadness accompanying the farewell. However, this movement is a donation referred by the poetic voice to great love, so that the object that falls and gives itself is also semen, in the sense of seed or origin.

The second stanza is entirely in parentheses and has three moments in which a sentence concatenates with the following one through a colon. Thus, I read this stanza as a single long sentence with three subordinate sentences articulated by an opening or explanation. The stanza goes as follows:

(Días de fulgor vivo en la intemperie De los cuerpos: aceros convertidos al silencio del ácido: noches deshilachadas hasta la última harina: estambres agredidos de la patria nupcial.) (vv. 7–11)	(Days of live brilliance in the storm Of bodies: steels transmuted Into silent acid: Nights raveled out in the final flour: Battered stamens of the nuptial land.)

In the first part of this stanza, the parenthesis is indicating a consolidated time or epoch, different from the present of the poetic self and the rest of the stanzas. In that time, the vitality of the bodies (referred to in the glow) is also evoked in the sonority of the word *intemperie*. The poetic voice characterizes the atmosphere of that time with a joyous vivacity. However, the colon that ends this sentence shows that the temporal fracture persists. Therefore, in addition to representing fracture, the colon introduces another function of metaphor in the poem. The poetic voice says that these glowing bodies are, then, like steel in their hardness, but they have been transformed and converted through smelting. Thus, the poem includes the common tropes of the lost paradise and the myth of the golden age, but here, the discourse constructed by the poetic voice resorts to images belonging to the field of metallurgy. In addition, comparing these bodies with steel is part of the poetic self's confrontation between the present and the past. The conversion of which the poetic voice speaks replaces, through the mention of acid, the set of experiences associated with physical pain. Doing so generates a causal relationship between the moment of the melting (or subjectification) of the bodies and the end of the epoch of vigorousness.

Both times would then be confused in the city's atmosphere, from where the poetic voice can perceive all these signs.

In establishing the relationship between bodies, steel, acid, and colonization, the poetic voice says this conversion occurs in silence. The mention of a lack of sounds implies that this process is a conversion that concealed its development. The poetic voice in these lines evokes the incorporation of the indigenous subjects into the colonial system and marks that moment as the end of a paradisiacal era. That incorporation and the end of that time are not sudden events. Like the material transformation of natural resources to make them useful, the city's decay is slow and quiet. Therefore, these verses add an element to the motifs that make up the poem so far. This element would be the silence that announces that the poem does not tell the story of a cataclysm. The poem describes the agony of a culture with a rhythm other than calamity.

After the previous lines, the poem goes on to say, after another colon, that those days of brilliance, those converted steels, are: "nights raveled (*deshilachadas*) to the last flour" (v. 10). The motif of change or confrontation between two epochs appears here as an antithesis between days and nights. However, that motif is a variation in the allusions to mineral, textile, and agricultural economies. The steel and the textures of fabrics and wheat products refer to the historical process narrated in *Alturas*. The poetic voice tells us that there is no longer a particle that refers to that seductive, dynamic, and vigorous pre-Columbian era. And finally, the stanza concludes with the last metaphor that poeticizes, between parentheses, the antagonism between these cultures and their times: "battered stamens of the nuptial land" (v. 11). The stamens, which are a phallic section of a flower, allow the poetic voice to allude to colonization as a process analogous to mutilation. The allusion to the European political and economic domination over the Inca territory (as a castration) generates a parallel, or a chiasmus, and an antithetical relation with the allusions to fertility, reproductivity, and vigor that appeared earlier.

This parenthetical stanza recalls elements that symbolize Andean pre-Columbian cultures in our contemporary popular culture. The poem begins by confronting these epochs, while the poetic subject sings about the passage through the streets of an unnamed city. Although it has a biographical referent, this memory allows the poetic self to produce a transition between his present and the past in which a rupture emerged. This rupture generates, in turn, two different temporalities – a past, still prior to it, which was utopian, and a more recent past that refers to the decadence of the city that made it remain isolated.

My interpretation reveals other presences that, for Felstiner, were secondary. The third stanza of the first part of the poem incorporates the presence and perspective of someone else. It reads:

Alguien que me esperó entre los violines Encontró un mundo como una torre enterrada Hundiendo su espiral más debajo de todas Las hojas de color de ronco azufre: Más abajo, en el oro de la geología, Como una espada envuelta en meteoros, Hundí la mano turbulenta y dulce En lo más genital de lo terrestre. (vv. 12–19)	Someone expecting me among violins Met with a world like a buried tower sinking its spiral deeper than all The leaves the color of rough sulfur: And deeper yet, in geologic gold, like a sword sheathed in meteors, I plunged my turbulent and gentle hand into the genital quick of the earth.

Regardless, this third person has no voice. Although its presence duplicates the glances or perspectives that compose the poem, the same poetic subject enunciates its story. For Santí, this person is an unfolding of the poetic voice (p. 127), yet the poetic subject transmits hearsay. More mysterious is that the relation between them in these verses is not specified. Nor does he say if he has arrived late or if there has been a reunion. He only states that this person waited for him between violins. Indeed, this waiting refers to a suspension in time. For this to be so, the violins must be understood as a symbol of Eurocentric culture. The poetic self perceives the other person framed by the hints of neoclassical and baroque styles. The violin, when assigned the function of a symbol of the culture of the metropolis, seems to reveal that, although this person has no name, he is another poet or writer on a metaphorical level. So, this stanza consists of a dialogue between the poetic self and a person embedded in a humanist tradition.

The poetic voice tells that this person found a world similar to a spiral tower buried deep in the earth. The poetic voice evokes the feeling of depth, employing a metaphor that substitutes the act of descent for the ambiguity of the leaves. Just as they can refer to the pages of a book and to that textual tradition to which the anonymous third person can belong; the leaves are also those of a tree. The poetic voice emphasizes this ambiguity by saying that the leaves are sulfur-colored but also hoarse (Note that I argue a more accurate translation is needed because rough does not necessarily mean what *ronco* is in Spanish). They are not only the leaves that fall during the autumn, nor only the pages of an old book; but if the metaphor was not enough for this poetic voice, he also brings synesthesia to this verse. Although it has a characteristic yellow color, sulfur evokes a distinct aroma. If that aroma is hoarse, the poetic voice gives another reason to underscore the use of synesthesia in this part of the poem. In this way, these verses compose a depth that is not only perceived with the eye, but also with the sense of smell and hearing.

The poetic voice appears to point out the literalness of its own words: the tower, spiraling, and referring to a whole world (an epoch with its episteme), which has acquired a suggestively phallic dimension, buries itself in the earth until it reaches

the geologic gold (v. 16), but before getting there, the poem has another colon. Is it limited to only one possible reading in this case? The colon, as seen above, can string together a series of metaphors, replacing the function of the verb to be. If this usage applies in the case of verses 15 and 16, each corresponds to two different grammatical sentences.

Nevertheless, the colon can also expand the previous idea. That is, the gold of the geology would be the ground in which the spiral tower is burying itself. If we read the colon as a mark of continuity and not of fracture, these verses show the contrast between two different registers of the same experience. I appeal to both readings of the colon. Insofar as the message of the verse refers to finding something valuable in a substratum, both the third person and the poetic self are making a transhistorical comment on the slogan "drill, baby, drill." They are both witnessing an extraction. In the past, the underground was valuable because it retained gold in its literal sense. What is underground is valuable for the poetic voice because it is seminal. He manages to sink his own hands into the most genital layer of the earth. That genitality, like the earlier references to fertility, is erotic as it refers to the production and reproduction of life. It is as valuable as a mineral because of how it is found. This positive approach to gold reproduces a cultural value associated with gold that promotes its extraction. Likewise, he equates the finding of a cultural material whose value resides in the fact that it is submerged (in a figurative sense); but that matter, unlike gold, has importance for the poetic self because it condenses the concepts that he has been associating in the previous verses with the vitality of that utopian past.

The world is like a spiral tower, and the hand wrapped in meteors appears in the poem as elements external to the terrain they penetrate. The mention of the tower fulfills the function of being the object that, by its similarity, can illustrate an inverted world that seems to bury itself. The hand of the poetic self is, for its part, wrapped in meteors. In this sense, the two phallic objects in this stanza are intervening in a territory (or world) into which they enter to find objects of value. However, it is unclear from this stanza whether these acts that form an emplacement and an exploration correspond with the duplicity of gazes. The stanza also functions as a chiasmus in which the elements of the first part (before the colon) correspond with the elements of the second part. However, the meaning of punctuation is hard to define. Therefore, although the possibilities of interpretation remain open, it is on purpose. The grammatical coincidence in both usages reveals that the mention of gold affects the referentiality of language. It does so by commemorating a painful past and celebrating and participating in the practices of that world.

The fourth and last stanza of the poem's first part concludes the setting and locating the poetic voice of *Alturas*. The stanza reads:

Puse la frente entre las olas profundas, Descendí como una gota entre la paz sulfúrica, y, como un ciego, regresé al jazmín de la gastada primavera humana. (vv. 20–23)	I bent my head into the deep waves, Dropped down through sulfurous calm, And went back, as if blind, to the jasmine of the exhausted human spring.

The first part of the stanza expands the series of metaphors that closed the previous one. To summarize the line of associations that structure my reading, I assert that the poetic voice has described how the encounter with the city leads him to penetrate the center of that world. Then, he recognizes that that city was inhabited by a community subjected to a foreign production system. The center of that community, or its substrate or essence, consisted, for the poetic voice, of a set of values that embodied the ideal of vigor, fertility, and vitality. Since the system implanted disabled those bodies, that world remained isolated or inaccessible. Furthermore, this first canto ends by comparing the encounter of the poetic self with a lost place and time to the act of submerging into the deep waves.

Namely, the poetic subject marks a departure from those past practices. Although he participates in an analogous action at one point in the canto, he ends this part by differentiating his present self from the past time and what others have seen. The poetic self does not bury himself, and by metonymy, it associates with this earthly act a set of events that constitute the process of colonization that led to the extinction of a dominant culture. By submerging himself, the poetic self generates a variation, which implies that, although he sees how the consequences of this historical process remain, his intermediation is not a reproduction. Although that process persists in the thanatological representations of descent and sulfur, the present in which the poetic voice sings is another.

Nevertheless, he preserves the conventional symbols of an infernal descent. In a literal and raw sense, the stanza would say: "I descended like a drop among the sulfuric peace" (v. 21). It is no longer like a meteor sword that he enters the ground and its figurative equivalent, history. The poetic self now enters a liquid field, like a water drop, almost unnoticed and seemingly inconsequential. In this case, a drop is an antithesis to the images with which the poetic voice has described the conquest and colonization of America. This antithesis means that, in turn, the subjectivity in which the poetic voice seeks to categorize itself is also different from that of the subjects who exercised extractive practices in the past. Finally, that drop has an advantage because of its small dimensions. Unlike the sword, the trembling hand, or the spiraling tower, the drop can reach further. By resembling this little thing, the poetic voice can encounter a time even more inaccessible to everyday memory. He says he went back to that time, blinded as one

who sees the light for the first time after living in a cavern. He calls that era "the jasmine of the exhausted (or better, worn out) human spring" (v. 22). It is not only to the almost pre-discursive season that the poetic voice arrives or returns, alluded to in the springtime of the first lines. In the final verse of the first canto of the poem, the poetic voice refers to the jasmine flower. The evocation of its scent, its singular qualities that make it stand out above other flowers, places it in the same category as other equivalent elements in the poem. Like the geologic gold, the genital layer of the terrestrial, the battered stamens, and the ripe grain, jasmine is a phallic object that symbolizes the lost vital force. After going through all those layers of history, memory, and dirt, like hoarse sulfur-colored leaves, the poetic voice seems to know, and experience contact with a utopia.

11.4 Conclusions

The representations, icons, or symbols used to make the concept of nature intelligible impact people differently than EV. Nevertheless, these symbols, icons, or representations interpolate the readers. The elements that structure the poem are embedded in a discourse that reproduces different forms of violence based on a binary conceptualization of gender. While the poem advocates for a more harmonious relationship between humans and nature, that relationship necessarily increases fecundity. In other words, even if the poem defends a conscious behavior of production and consumption and sees the past as a possible referent for the present, the text uses images of abundance and reproductivity framed within a heteronormative logic on which the modern capital logic relies. Therefore, even if the poem defends nature and questions the mode of production that leads to its destruction, it does so by creating a subjectivity that it cannot name and rejects. Therefore, it is possible to consider how the poetic discourse subverts and reproduces a dominant discourse around what is natural or not for a human body to do.

These subversions become evident in the first canto of Neruda's poem when a proposed vision levels the dichotomous relationship between nature/culture. For example, in speaking of the human spring, the poetic voice refers to a past in which, in colloquial terms, things were better for humans. The poetic voice uses terms referring to metallurgy and agriculture to symbolize two contrasting relationships between humans and nature. Likewise, in this song, a symbol can be evidenced that alludes to establishing a developed culture that conceals the possibility of making this return. However, this culture is also the means that allows us to perceive the existence of that past. In this way, the poem proposes that a harmonious relationship with the environment can restore the lost vitality of human beings.

Nevertheless, the mention of gold in the poem shows that the poetic voice assumes the positive valuation of this mineral as a desirable raw material. Therefore, although a cultural subversion depreciates the metallurgical processes associated with extractivism, the poem maintains a traditional view of using non-renewable resources. Although gold has a metaphorical function that alludes to an original era, this function is only possible within an extractive logic. The metaphor loses its meaning if gold does not have cultural and economic value.

In Neruda's poem, both approaches meet and are in tension. On the one hand, the poetic voice laments the effects on the population of incorporating a production technique associated with a change in the cultural values attributed to gold. But on the other hand, the poetic voice maintains the cultural value associated with the material itself. Thus, the poem assumes a stable meaning for "gold." However, it denounces the harmful effects of the change in the mode of production. Thus, the fracture generated in the relationship between nature/culture through the development of technique appears in the poem as a process that harms the very corporeality of the subjects. The introduction of this technique marks the beginning of the phenomenon of extractivism. Although the use of the category of gender as a biological determination is questionable, it is through this use that the poetic voice can denounce the historical continuity of the mode of production.

The concept of EV proposed by Marcantonio defines it as the direct or indirect damage experienced by human beings because of toxic or non-toxic pollutants released on the planet by human activities (p. 26). This concept allows us to understand the associations and interdependencies between our economic systems, our power structures, and our relation to nature. Among the components that make power preserve the vulnerability of populations in regions directly affected by EV, the cultural factor plays a supplementary role. Therefore, there is a need to reconsider how gender and sexuality, as categories that are part of what is culture (as well as race and class, for example), and how they are represented, are part of the cycle in which production seems to be incompatible with the stability of our environment. Latin American literature has a long history of representing nature and its relation to humans, mediated by a symbolic understanding of gender.

When we approach a text like Neruda's, the equation is complex as it preserves a dominant vision of how a harmonious relationship with nature should look. Then, it is also possible to consider how these discourses in literature affect specific populations while promoting increased production and consumption. In other words, even if Neruda longs for a broken relationship with nature, it also assumes that abundance and fecundity are the signs of a more responsible mode of production.

The longing for that lost past is motivated by the recovery of a lost vital force associated with virility. For this reason, when the terms of metallurgical smelting are used to denounce the damage that these activities generate in a population,

paradoxically, a hostile gaze on non-normative bodies is also reproduced. The poem, in this way, suggests that such bodies have been emasculated and have lost their masculine symbolism as an effect of environmental damage. Seymour says that the concept of nature has been employed as a prescription for the categories of sex and gender (pp. 4–5). Considering that the poetic voice constructs the image of the emasculated body as a symptom of environmental damage, one must consider to what extent such a figure functions as a scapegoat. The poetic voice laments the loss of this virility, but to what extent do we assume this symbolic representation of the emasculated body is an effect of environmental damage?

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