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A Mission of Two: The Process of Prophecy in the Poetry of Pablo Neruda and Cecilia Vicuña

by

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A Mission of Two: The Process of Prophecy in the Poetry of
Pablo Neruda and Cecilia Vicuña

Approved by
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Dedication

Para mi madre, la Linda rosa de mi vida.
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Abstract

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When it seems that humankind has lost the capability of knowing the essence of
being, poets such as Pablo Neruda and Cecilia Vicuña take on the role of a prophet who
carries the burden of recovering the internal knowledge that individuals no longer
possess. In Neruda’s poem “Alturas de Macchu Picchu,” (published in 1950 in Canto
general), and in Vicuña’s book PALABRARmas (1984), both authors express that the
correlation between humankind, language and the understanding of being remains
lacking. Having observed these weak connections, both authors embark on a poetic
journey in order to find the essence of human life so that they may return this internal
awareness to all individuals. This study is an examination of the prophetic process that
Neruda and Vicuña carry out in order to arrive at a higher level of knowledge. In order to
provide a theoretical foundation for their poetic journey, I will include an investigation of the weakening connection between human beings, their language and their internal consciousness as commented by Ernest Fenollosa, Octavio Paz and Martin Heidegger. These theories, combined with the analysis of “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” and PALABRARmas, will provide insight concerning the intricate development of the poet-shaman role that each author takes on in order to arrive at a higher level of awareness.
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INTRODUCTION

If one were to define the word poet, what words would he or she use to accurately describe this literary occupation? When one contemplates a possible definition of the term, several descriptions come to mind. Some would simply say that this person creates poems; however, others might insist that these literary men and women surpass the mere writing of poetry in order to reach a higher type of understanding. The Oxford Dictionary, defines a poet as a person who possesses high powers of imagination or expression (1149). Therefore, what distinguishes some poets from among the rest lies in the ability to use their imaginative faculties in order to tell the uncommon or the unseen. Like a prophet, defined as someone who speaks innovatively for a cause (Oxford 1199), a poet employs a skilled manner of expression in order to accurately convey a message that the common man does not know.

Upon examining more closely the etymology of the aforementioned terms, one discovers another possible correlation. The expression poet remains rooted in the Greek term poietes meaning maker (Oxford 1149), and the word prophet comes from the Greek word prophetes which signifies spokesman or speaker (Oxford 1199). Therefore, when one who writes poetry takes on the role of interpreter, he or she becomes a medium or a creator through which a message is communicated. This combination of roles occurs in the poetry of the two poets who are the object of this study, Pablo Neruda (1904-73) and Cecilia Vicuña (1948).

Although the two Chilean authors write during different periods and possess diverse styles, two of their publications, the poem “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” published
in Neruda’s *Canto general* (1950) and *PALABRARmas* (1984) written by Vicuña, represent the poet as a type of prophet or shaman who holds access to a higher knowledge or truth. In each work, both of the authors engage in a prophetic process containing distinct stages. The initial stage of the poetic journey commences with the authors’ acknowledgement that something remains missing in life. Both Neruda and Vicuña illustrate a strong preoccupation that people have lost the most intimate knowledge of what it means to be human. Due to this lack of understanding, beings remain trapped in a mundane life filled of sadness and confusion. Individuals feel uneasy and they lose not only their sense of self but also their sense of divinity as well.

As poets, Neruda and Vicuña, possess a special form of insight that allows them to observe this lost understanding and the growing schism between humankind and its internal awareness. This perspicacity leads to the next stage in the poets’ process of prophecy. Upon making these perceptions, both authors decidedly take on the role of a prophet who embarks on a journey through time, space and language in order to find the missing link that will return to humans what they have lost in modern times.

Now that the authors assume the responsibility and the voice that will carry the burden of recovering the unknown, they transition into the next stage of the process. Like shamans with the ability to see the invisible and relate it to those who lack such capabilities, the two Chileans embark on a poetic expedition into the past in order to discover the essence of humankind. On this voyage, both Neruda and Vicuña make use of specific spaces, concepts of time and myths. In addition, they employ language as vehicle that will lead them to their objective.
Near the end of their journey, the poets enter into the discovery stage of the prophetic process. They uncover what it is to be human. Neruda finds the “antiguo ser” (52) while Vicuña discovers that “poetry, in its metaphorical capacity converts into the fountain of existence” (Vicuña, PALABRARmas 70). Now that the quest for knowing that which is unfamiliar ends, the authors cross the threshold of the last phase in the process of prophecy. In doing so, they disseminate their newly found knowledge to others by means of their poetic visions, and they call for the reader to participate in a new way of understanding and a unique way of living. Neruda carries out this step by inviting others to listen to his voice which speaks for those who no longer possess the ability to share their stories. In a somewhat different way, Vicuña urges the readers to develop their metaphoric comprehension in order to recover the lost meanings of words which in turn leads to the recovery of the history of the human being.
STEP ONE: RECOGNITION OF SOMETHING MISSING IN LIFE

In his book *The Bow and the Lyre* (1956, English translation in 1973), Octavio Paz states, “Western history can be seen as the history of an error, a going astray in both senses of the word: in losing our way in the world we have become estranged from ourselves. We have to begin again” (87). This statement brings awareness to the environment in which both Chilean poets produce their poetry. Although both authors produce their works in different decades, each one passes through an epoch of despondency that relates to the time in which they write their poetry. Neruda writes “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” in 1945 and later publishes it in 1950 as a part of the larger work *Canto general*. At this time near the end of the Second World War, the better part of Europe remains destroyed by the wrath of advanced technological warfare and for many years Spain lies in the hands of a dictator from the result of a bloody civil war. When Vicuña publishes *PALABRARmas* almost forty years after “Alturas de Macchu Picchu”, many crises still remain throughout the world. In 1973, the violent coup d’ état that occurs in Santiago prevents Vicuña from returning to her native country after having lived in London since 1972, and by the time she publishes *PALABRARmas* in Argentina in 1984, the Cold War is still in full force. As a result of these and other tumultuous events, many uncertainties exist in the lives of citizens all over the world.

In addition to the effects of this anxiety and violence, the stresses of modern life rise and cause the modern human being to become absorbed by machines and the rapid pace of urban life. Martin Heidegger echoes these sentiments in his book *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971). He highlights the fact that in using technology humans think...
that they can channel the energies of physical nature and render their being as happy in all respects (116). However, in contrast with the expected positive outcomes expected from modern advances, Heidegger describes the unintended negative product of a world where individuals manipulate nature:

The essence of technology comes to the light of day only slowly. This day is the world’s night, rearranged into merely technological day. This day is the shortest day. It threatens a single endless winter . . . The wholesome and sound withdraws. The world becomes without healing, unholy. (117)

Although Heidegger produces these comments almost twenty years after Neruda publishes “Alturas de Macchu Picchu,” his words reflect the situation of those affected by the increasing amount of modern advances in society. Like Paz’s claim that the history of the West is a history of an error, the “essence of technology” remains a blunder because it results in times of despair as represented by the words “a single endless winter”. Heidegger describes some of the pressures that add to this despair by stating, “Our dwelling is harassed by the housing shortage. Even if that were not so, our dwelling today is harassed by work, made insecure by the hunt for gain and success, bewitched by the entertainment and recreation industry” (213). These insecurities caused by the stresses of everyday life such as personal ambition and the influences of corporate industries only separate humans from knowing their true selves.

Having observed the never ceasing mechanisms of modern life that consume each person’s daily activities and thoughts, Heidegger ponders if all dwelling or living remains incompatible with the poetic (214). His answer resides in the following statement: “Perhaps one [dwelling or the poetic] . . . bears the other in such a way that dwelling rests
on the poetic” (Heidegger 214). Therefore, if dwelling rests on the poetic, and the existence of man equals dwelling, then one may deduce that the existence of man rests on the poetic. In this way, the two concepts do not oppose each other. They stand as two necessary components that form a greater whole. Without the poetic, humans cannot fully comprehend their existence.

Unfortunately, many individuals who do not have access to education lack contact with poetry, and as a result, they must live in an environment that fails to provide them with a way of understanding their own existence. Heidegger explains this phenomenon by stating, “poetry cannot appear otherwise than as literature. Where it is studied entirely in educational and scientific terms, it is the object of literary history” (214). In a world where poetry remains out of the hands of the common people who are denied access to higher education, the poetic elements of their lives disappear. Consequently, they lose the capacity to comprehend the intricacies of their own being because it dwells on the poetic.

Another result of the lack of this element in the lives of individuals remains evident in the breakdown of language. Paz states that this occurs when individuals use linguistic expression for the purpose of immediate exchange (36). He comments:

. . . words cease to have precise meanings and lose many of their plastic, sonorous, and emotive values. The speaker does not disappear; on the contrary, he is affirmed to excess. What grows thin and weak is the word, which becomes a mere medium of exchange. All its values are extinguished or decreased, at the expense of the relation value. (36)
Paz’s statement shows that the need for rapid communication in a modern fast-paced world degenerates language by placing emphasis on the speaker and overlooking the true meanings of the words used in speech or writing. When this occurs, “language can decay into a mere medium for the printed word” (Heidegger 215); and therefore, its poetic significance decreases and leaves humans with a lower level of internal comprehension.

In relation to this concept, Heidegger states that “everyday language is a forgotten used-up-poem from which there hardly resounds a call any longer” (208). Today, the common speech that once provided humans with an internal understanding remains weak because the call that connects individuals to their environment and to their being is forgotten by the demands of a rapidly paced society that insists on the purely transactional use of language.

This preoccupation does not only date to the time when Heidegger and Paz write. In the early part of the twentieth century, scholars comment on the transformation of language in a rapidly changing world. In his essay “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry” (published posthumously by Ezra Pound in 1918), Ernest Fenollosa articulates some of the ideas that other intellectuals express decades later.

Languages today are thin and cold because we think less and less into them. We are forced, for the sake of quickness and sharpness, to file down each word to its narrowest edge of meaning. Nature would seem to have become less like a paradise and more and more like a factory. We are content to accept the vulgar misuse of the moment. A late stage of decay is arrested and embalmed in the dictionary. Only scholars and poets feel painfully back along the thread of our etymologies and piece together
our diction, as best they may, from forgotten fragments. This anemia of modern speech is only too well encouraged by the feeble cohesive force of our phonetic symbols. (Fenollosa 379)

Here, the use of forceful and descriptive words supports Fenollosa’s ideas about the changing of language due to modernization. By comparing nature to a factory and by using words such as *decay* and *embalmed*, he enhances his argument by painting a picture of the technological advances of the world and their resulting negative effects on language. Words, unused and forgotten, die and rest in their dictionary tombs. These comments remain important because they establish that the concern over the weakening of our linguistic system remains a current of thought that spans many generations.

As poets and intellectuals, Pablo Neruda and Cecilia Vicuña both recognize the concerns of these great thinkers, and they express similar ideas in their poetry. Each author, in some manner, shows a lack of connections between humankind, its language and the ability to know its own inner self.

From the beginning of “Alturas de Macchu Picchu,” Neruda illustrates the wanderings of a man in a mundane and unsympathetic environment. Through the observation of his surroundings, the human being in the poem arrives to many of the conclusions that Heidegger presents regarding the dark qualities of the modern world. The poetic voice states, “Días de fulgor vivo en la intemperie / de los cuerpos: aceros convertidos / al silencio del ácido” (Neruda 40). This statement remains significant because it signals that the person feels unprotected living in the exterior side of the body in the unsheltered *intemperie*. Roaming through the city, the individual observes objects
of the physical world such as clothing, smoke, paper, a rug, a ship and a bus. Concerning this scenario, Hernán Loyola comments:

Simplye vagaba el poeta por entre los días, sin rumbo ni destino, sólo experimentando, de un modo oscuro y ciego, la sucesión rutinaria de los meses y de las estaciones. Su existencia se desgranaba sin sentido en la instanciendad súbitamente clara o dolorosa del tiempo, sin una perspectiva clara del ayer ni del mañana. (190)

Here we see how the individual’s life remains harassed by modern times because it remains defined by a monotonous daily routine. The person simply passes through a life that has no meaning and no clear perspective on the past or the future.

During this state of wandering, the voice in the poem verbalizes the effects of the anguish and distress absorbed from the environment. In the first stanza of the second canto of “Alturas de Macchu Picchu,” the poetic “I” states:

Y pronto, entre la ropa y el humo, sobre la mesa hundida como una barajada cantidad, queda el alma:
cuarzo y desvelo, lágrimas en el océano como estanques de frío . . . (Neruda 41)

These verses help to show that daily life, represented by the objects la ropa, el humo and la mesa hundida, leave the poetic voice with a mixed-up soul. In this sense, everyday things and events create insecurity within the being (Rodríguez Fernández 204). Consequently, this anxiety provoked from the outside world produces a weakened understanding of the human essence which resides in the interior of the individual.
When the poetic voice expresses that “El ser como el maíz se desgranaba en el inacabable / granero de los hechos perdidos, de los acontecimientos / miserables, del uno al siete, al ocho”, he or she illustrates that he or she cannot see the spirit beyond the daily immediate world that eats away at the being bit by bit like the gradual shelling of an ear of corn (42). The occurrences of daily life have stripped this person of poetic dwelling, and in turn they weaken the individual’s ability to know the nature of human essence. This leads the poetic voice to ask the question, “Qué era el hombre?” because he or she can no longer recognize his or her being (Neruda 42).

For Cecilia Vicuña, what remains lacking in the life of humankind is the connection between beings and their language. The feeble correlation between the two hinders the individual’s ability to comprehend the world in which he or she lives; and in turn, it inhibits the recognition of the divine spirit of creation that lies within each person. Different from the poetry of Neruda, that of Vicuña shows her agreement with Heidegger’s and Fenollosa’s ideas in PALABRARmas by directly quoting their works. Although she does not use the exact words of Octavio Paz, many parallels between her poetry and the Mexican author’s thought exist. While she does not present the same opening scenario as Neruda, Vicuña structures her work in a very unique manner. She weaves the reader in and out of a metaphorical process that urges him or her to contemplate the original meanings of words that have been lost due to the necessity for the quickness of the exchange of ideas.

In her essay “Spinning the Common Thread,” Lucy Lippard makes the general statement, “Everything is falling apart because of lack of connections” (11). This comment serves as a gloss to the theories of Fenollosa, Paz and Heidegger.
their ideas, Vicuña expresses in PALABRARmas that the weak correlation between humankind and being creates a sensation of anxiety. People remain incapable of understanding themselves, and consequently, they do not understand their language. Therefore, they do not comprehend the world in which they live because words have lost their true sense of expression that was originally derived from metaphorical associations found in nature.

In order to provide a foundation for these ideas in her work, the Chilean poet cites Fenollosa’s preoccupation for the frail link between words and their original meanings.

Para E. Fenollosa, la anemia del habla moderna

proviene de la débil fuerza cohesiva de nuestros símbolos fonéticos, que ya no transparentan las metáforas que les dieron lugar. (Vicuña, PALABRARmas 87)

By quoting the American professor, Vicuña shows that she too remains worried about the weakening of language. Her verses show a direct correlation to Fenollosa’s preoccupation over the decay of language because the poet uses the same words that he writes in his essay “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry” (1918). The utilization of his unique and persuasive phrases such as “la anemia del habla moderna” and “la débil fuerza cohesiva de nuestros símbolos fonéticos” aids in creating the groundwork of Vicuña’s argument because they emphasize the emergency state of the poverty of language.

Vicuña also quotes Heidegger in order to establish a theoretical basis for PALABRARmas. She writes:

Para Heidegger, no vemos en el lenguaje porque
no vemos en el ser, y ha sido la destrucción
de la relación con el ser lo que ha empobrecido
la relación con el lenguaje . . . (Vicuña, PALABRARmas 87)

By using the words of the German thinker, the Chilean poet is able to add a more introspective point of view to Fenollosa’s thoughts on the crisis of our phonetic symbols. With the verses “y ha sido la destrucción / de la relación con el ser lo que ha empobrecido / la relación con el lenguaje”, Vicuña shows a direct correlation between language and humans. Both related to each other, if one becomes weak then the other suffers as well.

In PALABRARmas, Cecila Vicuña echoes the ideas of Fenollosa and Heidegger by incorporating the theories of Octavio Paz. As a reader of Paz in the 1960s, the Chilean poet incorporates the Mexican author’s thoughts about the level of assurance of humankind in relation to the linguistic system designed by people (Vicuña, Entrevista con Isbell 52). Paz states in The Bow and the Lyre:

Man’s first attitude toward language was confidence: the sign and the object represented were the same . . . To speak was to re-create the object alluded to. The exact pronunciation of the magic words was one of the principal conditions of their efficacy. The necessity to preserve the sacred language explains the birth of grammar, in Vedic India. But centuries later men observed that an abyss had opened between things and their names. The sciences of language won their autonomy as soon as the belief in the identity between the object and its sign had ceased. (19)

After examining this statement, it remains clear that Vicuña recognizes the same problem as Paz. Initially, humans possess much confidence in the language that they create
because the sign remains loyal to the object or concept that it represents. However, when the connection between the signifier and the signified becomes more distant, people lose confidence in the linguistic system that they have created. In turn, this loss of faith in language further alienates humans from the poetic therefore resulting in the decrease of their knowledge of being.

As seen from the just quoted passage, Paz’s statement remains very similar to the words of Fenollosa and Heidegger. Although his assertion agrees with the ideas of the other authors, it also illustrates a new concept that can also be seen in the poetry of Cecilia Vicuña that cannot be traced to the American professor or the German philosopher. Paz attributes mystical qualities to language by describing the word as magic and by characterizing language as sacred. In PALABRARmas, Vicuña incorporates this spiritual vision of words by weaving a current of mystic notions throughout the work. She believes that language contains magical and divine properties that remain unknown to humans, and unfortunately, most people no longer maintain the ability to recognize these aspects of the written and spoken word.

Recognizing that certain qualities of life remain lacking, Pablo Neruda and Cecilia Vicuña both remain ready to move forward in their prophetic process. For Neruda, what remains missing in life is the knowledge of being. Vicuña, having noticed first the “abyss [that] had opened between things and their names” and second, having observed man’s unawareness of the spiritual possibilities of language, is now ready to move into the second stage of the prophetic process. She and Neruda must take on the role of a shaman who seeks the truth in order to return it to their fellow human beings.
STEP TWO: ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITY AND CARRYING THE BURDEN OF SEEKING THE UNKNOWN

Because both Cecilia Vicuña and Pablo Neruda recognize various fundamental problems between humans and their inability to connect to their language, their inner beings and the divine, they must now choose how to react to the observations they make. As poets who possess the ability to see a higher type of knowledge, the two writers decide to take on the role of a prophet or shaman who has the capabilities of seeing what the common man cannot. By taking on this responsibility, Neruda and Vicuña carry the burden of finding the hidden meaning in life, in order to relate their discoveries through poetry to those incapable of seeing beyond the struggle of their daily lives.

The concept of the poet-shaman is not new. In his book The Bow and the Lyre, Octavio Paz states that the poets of the past served as “priests or prophets, lords or rebels, clowns or saints, servants or beggars” (30). As individuals occupying a marginal place in society, these composers of song and letters fulfill the role of communicating the lyric, the epic, and the mystic to listeners and readers. Whether performing in the street for the public, reciting verses in the court or dictating stanzas to a scribe, these early singers possess the innate ability to communicate the unseen and the unknown. With their expressive talents they convey information to the public that lies beyond their consciousness.

On the contrary to the classification of the early poet as a prophet or a beggar, Octavio Paz indicates that those who write the poetry of today have a role different from that of the first poets. He maintains that they play a functionary role in society among the
masses as a “high ranking employee of the ‘cultural front’” (Paz 30). As a result of this change in function and responsibility, Paz affirms that the poet holds a place in society, but he questions whether poetry does, too (30). Perhaps in reaction to the political and social involvement of the contemporary author, Pablo Neruda and Cecilia Vicuña choose to recuperate the original role of the poet. Heidegger states, “To be a poet in a destitute time means: to attend, singing, to the trace of the fugitive gods” (46). Based on this statement, it seems very likely that both Chileans wish to revive the more primitive and mystical duties of the poet because they both recognize that modern life fails to provide humans with the understanding of their inner self, their language and the divine.

It is the acknowledgment of this void of knowledge that pushes Neruda and Vicuña to don the robes of the ancient poets and carry the burden of searching for what remains missing in life. Paz says, “. . . language is poetry and each word conceals a certain metaphorical charge that is ready to explode as soon as the secret mechanism is tripped, but the creative force of the word resides in the man who utters it. Man sets language in motion” (27). Conscious of and confident in their abilities to discover the “metaphorical charge” that contains the wisdom that they seek, the Chileans stand ready to set language in motion through their poetry in order to attain the knowledge that they desire.

By assuming this responsibility, the poets become servants. Octavio Paz describes this service-oriented role by stating, “. . . the poet is not served by words. He is their servant. In serving them, he returns them to the plenitude of their nature, makes them recover their being. Thanks to poetry, language re-conquers its original state” (34). Although this statement may apply more closely to Vicuña’s poetic process of the
palabrar in which she uses metaphor to recuperate initial word meanings, the Mexican author’s statement also applies to “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” because it focuses on the recuperation of the true nature of human beings. Therefore, instead of only allowing language to re-conquer its original state, poetry also allows people to know their primary condition. As authors of poetic works that contain this mission of returning to the core essentials of meaning and the human spirit, both Pablo Neruda and Cecilia Vicuña serve as mediums through which poetry brings about a discovery of higher knowledge.

Evidence of the acceptance of the prophet role remains evident in Neruda’s work. In the first canto of “Alturas de Macchu Picchu”, he presents a soul who resolves to take acquisition of his conscious and his will to change his existence (Araya Grandón 3). Using the poetic voice in the poem, the Chilean author demonstrates the desire to become an active participant in the quest for what remains lacking in the following verses:

Cuantas veces en las calles de invierno de una ciudad o en un autobús o en un barco . . . me quise detener a buscar la eterna veta insondable que antes toqué en la piedra o en el relámpago que el beso desprendía.

(Neruda 41)

In the previous lines, the author shows the individual’s curiosity about wanting to stop and search for the eternal vein of existence that he recognizes in the experience of touching stone, seeing lightning or giving a kiss. This deliberate decision to take action in order to recover the hidden meaning of life shows that the poetic “I” carries the burden of seeking the truth.

Later in the poem, the person verbalizes questions about the true nature of being, and in doing so, takes a step nearer to taking on the responsibility of finding what
remains evasive. Instead of solely contemplating how he or she wishes he or she would stop and look for an answer, the poetic voice inches closer to surpassing the melancholic reality in order to go beyond appearances and find another version of what is real. In “Alturas de Macchu Picchu”, the individual ponders:

Qué era el hombre? En qué parte de su conversación abierta entre los almacenes y los silbidos, en cuál de sus movimientos metálicos vivía lo indestructible, lo imperecedero, la vida? (Neruda 42)

By asking the question “What was man?”, the poetic yo expresses with exactness what he or she seeks—the indestructible, the everlasting and life. Thirsty for an answer to this fundamental question, Neruda, through the speaker in “Alturas de Macchu Picchu,” chooses to assume the role of a prophet who searches for these intangible qualities.

Further along in the poem, the Chilean author intensifies his duties of shaman-poet by causing the poetic “I” to take action upon his or her person. The speaker declares, “Yo vengo a hablar por vuestra boca muerta” (Neruda 53). In relation to this, Rodríguez Monegal states, “Un yo—individuo asume la representación de una ‘boca muerta’ enterrada que es la voz colectiva del pasado que revive alzándose hacia un futuro” (6). In other words, the yo individuo in the poem receives from the silenced mouths of the ancient people the voice that he will carry to the men and women of the present. As a result, the speaker’s body becomes the place where the wisdom of the past manifests itself. Through his or her mouth, those without voice speak (Rodríguez Monegal 7).
Other corporal expressions in “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” that involve the internalization of a message from the past deal with the heart and the hand. In Canto XI, the poetic voice cries, “déjame hundir la mano / y deja que en mí palpite, como un ave mil años prisionera, / el viejo corazón del olvidado!” (Neruda 51). Here, the speaker transfers the forgotten heart of the American person to the hand as shown by the words “deja que en mí palpite . . . el viejo corazón del olvidado.” By serving as a conduit between the heart, which may be interpreted as the original essence of the ancient being, and the hand, the poetic “I” firmly establishes his or her importance in the prophetic process of the recovery of being because through his or her person others will know the lost truth.

The culmination of this manifestation occurs in the last canto of the poem. Charged with conviction, the poetic “I” commands that the silenced people manifest themselves in the veins and blood of the speaker’s body: “Apegadme los cuerpos como imanes. / Acudid a mis venas y a mi boca. / Hablad por mis palabras y mi sangre” (53). In these verses, which comprise the last three lines of “Alturas de Macchu Picchu,” the imagery that the Chilean author utilizes confirms the intimate relationship of the poet/shaman who knows and speaks for his ancestors. Through the poetic speaker, Neruda calls for them to attach themselves to the spokesperson’s body like magnets. As a result, those without a voice become extensions of the flesh. In turn, they pass to the interior realm by going to the veins and blood. Perhaps the highest form of intimacy possible, the poet/shaman individual consumes the souls of the ancients; and their wisdom, knowledge and eternal spirit circulate through his or her person. In this sense, Neruda exhibits the ultimate role of a prophet who assumes the burden of finding a
higher truth because he creates a speaker who sacrifices the use of the body so that through it the lost wisdom of antiquity is expressed.

Similar to Neruda, Cecilia Vicuña serves as a bridge between a higher knowledge and the world in which she lives. According to Méndez Ramírez:

Vicuña establishes, on the one hand, most convincingly the autonomy of language, and on the other, the romantic vision of the poet as someone who has access to the truth. Therefore, we can see the poet serving as a kind of midwife who helps humanity be reborn within the consciousness of being. (62)

Having studied the theories of Fenollosa, Heidegger and Paz, the Chilean author recognizes that the human race suffers from a lack of internal knowledge of being. Therefore, she decides to take on the responsibility of acting as a medium or “midwife” through which the truth comes to light.

For the poet, the unique role that she plays traces back to her view of indigenous shamans and priests. In an interview with Claudia Donoso, she expresses:

En toda América, existen sabios y pensadores que mantienen un potencial de conocimiento que me interesa . . . Juegan una función interna que consiste en reconocer en mí una manera de conocimiento que existe, que nadie sabe exactamente de qué se trata, pero es claramente real. (Vicuña, Entrevista con Donoso 2)

As articulated in the previous statement, Vicuña acknowledges and values the wise thinkers who maintain a type of consciousness that interests her, and although she cannot pinpoint the exact nature of this type of understanding, she knows that it exists. In
recognizing her beliefs of a higher truth and in valuing the shamans who have access to
this knowledge, Vicuña takes the first step in carrying the burden of seeking out the
unknown.

However, somewhat differently from Neruda, Vicuña not only acknowledges that
poets possess the ability to identify this higher level of comprehension, but she also
recognizes the individual’s capacity to understand this type of internal knowledge. She
comments, “Sucede que yo creo que uno tiene un conocimiento interno sin saberlo. Ese
conocimiento es negado por la cultura occidental, en cambio, los indígenas, los chamanes
y los sabios reconocen ese conocimiento” (Vicuña, Entrevista con Donoso 2). In this
statement, Vicuña extends the ability to recognize one’s internal knowledge to all other
human beings, but unfortunately, the western culture of today interferes with their ability
to become aware of the wisdom that lies within them.

As a result of this impediment to knowledge, the poet must take on the role of the
wise prophet who relates the mysteries of the inner being to the common person. In
PALABRARmas, she writes:

pero la negación no hace sino aumentar la sed:

El uso y el abuso de la palabra

que ha oscurecido su razón de ser

la acabará por iluminar:” (Vicuña 87-8)

Here, Vicuña realizes that the use of words in a manner that does not convey their
original meaning darkens the reason for being. Therefore, she deeply desires to
illuminate this obscure reality. The word sed identifies the poet’s shaman-prophet role
because, in spite of the power of a culture that denies humans the access to know their
inner selves, Cecilia Vicuña desires to find a way to return to humankind what our environment denies us.

**STEP THREE: THE POETIC JOURNEY**

Having decidedly taken on the role of a shaman who possesses the ability to know a higher truth, Pablo Neruda and Cecilia Vicuña now remain ready to put their quest for the unknown into action. According to Octavio Paz, poetry is an “invitation to the journey; [a] return to the homeland (3). Expressed in other words, poetry, when sprung in to motion, maintains the capacity to carry individuals away on a voyage to a different reality. In line with this thinking, both Pablo Neruda and Cecilia Vicuña carry out their roles as shaman by embarking on a poetic expedition in order to find a solution to the mysteries they observe. Although different in structure and at times in theme, the works “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” and PALABRARmas share distinct characteristics of this prophetic journey. For example, both authors establish and move through distinct spaces and times, and they use language as a tool for moving beyond the boundaries of modern language in order discover the information they seek.

**Neruda’s General Two-Step Prophetic Voyage**

In general, the poetic journey of Pablo Neruda can be seen as the long process of a spiritual quest. Félix Shwartzman comments that in “Alturas de Macchu Picchu,” “La fantasía poética de Neruda se despliega incansablemente en la búsqueda de un profundo
vínculo espiritual, persiguiendo sin cesar la continuidad viviente que enlaza hombre y naturaleza” (1). For the author, this mission of finding what binds man and nature contains two major movements. After first walking around and observing the environment, the poetic “I” must first descend through the depths of desperation in order to later ascend to the heights of Machu Picchu.

From the very first stanza in the poem, a sense of motion remains evident. The Chilean author expresses, “Del aire al aire, como una red vacía, / iba yo entre las calles y la atmósfera, llegando y despidiendo” (Neruda 40). In these verses, the words del aire al aire provide the reader with a sense of movement from one space to another, and the use of the imperfect tense in the expression iba yo indicates the sensation of an ongoing action in the past. Hugo Montes points out that the motion that the person makes a complete journey as evidenced by the description of the manner in which he or she moves with the phrase llegando y despidiendo (Montes 52). Although these words seem to convey a full motion, they better express not a true departure and arrival in the linear sense, but rather a stagnant type of movement that oscillates between two points. The individual remains in motion; however, it is as if he or she makes no progress because he or she merely bounces back and forth from air to air, achieving nothing.

Having existed in this shifting state, the poetic voice breaks out of this action in order to proceed in a different direction. In the fourth stanza of Canto I, the individual starts descending:

Puse la frente entre las olas profundas,

descendí como gota entre la paz sulfúrica,

y, como un ciego, regresé al jazmín
de la gastada primavera humana. (Neruda 40)

Here this drop is described like a dive into the sea. The individual puts his or her forehead into the profound waves and plunges downward and encounters the jasmine of the worn out human springtime. In arriving to this point, the poetic voice is reminded of the sad status of the used up joyful part of man.

The voyage continues as the individual passes through many different types of deaths in the descent. In *Canto III*, Neruda writes, “y no una muerte, sino muchas muertes llegaba a cada uno: / cada día una muerte pequeña, polvo, gusano, lámpara / que se apaga en el lodo del suburbio” (42). This type of expiration where each person dies a little each day slowly carries the poetic voice on a journey away from the physical world. Further on in the prophetic journey, the being acknowledges the powerful and false deaths and experiences a process of negation. The poetic voice expresses in *Canto IV*:

\[
\begin{align*}
y & \text{y cuando poco a poco el hombre fue negándome} \\
& \ldots \\
oncénticas fui por calle y calle y rio y rio, \\
y & \text{y ciudad y ciudad y cama y cama} \\
& \ldots \\
y & \text{y en las últimas casas humilladas, sin lámpara, sin fuego,} \\
& \text{sin pan, sin piedra, sin silencio, solo,} \\
& \text{rodé muriendo de mi propia muerte. (Neruda 43)}
\end{align*}
\]

In these verses, the poet describes the experience of the rejection that the individual undergoes. First, humans deny the person, and as a result, he or she must change direction and roam from street to river to city to bed. Finally arriving at a place of
desperation in *las últimas casas humilladas*, the individual, alone without bread, stone or silence, falls down and becomes aware of the magnitude of death.

Having intensified this descent gradually, the Chilean poet finally arrives to the lowest point in *Canto V* where the poetic voice probes the pain of death and finds only a cold gust that enters into the human soul:

> Yo levanté las vendas del yodo, hundí las manos
> en los pobres dolores que mataban la muerte,
> y no encontré en la herida sino una racha fría
> que entraba por los vagos intersticios del alma. (Neruda 44)

After plummeting to this place, the individual can go no farther. Regarding this moment in “Alturas de Macchu Picchu,” Loyola comments, “Cuando sobreviene el hastío, el cansancio de perderse cada día en lo accesorio, en lo fútil y fugaz . . . todavía le queda al hombre el refugio de su alma, de su vida interior: a ella acude, angustiado, pero allí sólo hay llanto, desolación, silencio frío” (191). Finding no peace or respite in the inner soul, the person reaches the lowest possible level of the descent. From here, there is no place to go except upward toward the spiritual peaks of Machu Picchu.

Now, halfway through the prophetic voyage, the individual commences a spiritual ascent. Using a personal tone by speaking directly to Machu Picchu the poetic *yo* expresses:

> Entonces en la escala de la tierra he subido
> entre la atroz maraña de las selvas perdidas
> hasta ti, Macchu Picchu. (Neruda 335)
By scaling this sacred and once lost site, the individual finally reaches a place in the voyage where he or she has access to the unknown that lies amidst the *selvas perdidas* (Neruda 44). This space permits the person to see the life of the past and continue the poetic journey through visions. The poetic *yo* describes these images in *Canto VI*:

Miro las vestiduras y las manos,

el vestigio del agua en la oquedad sonora,

la pared suavizada por el tacto de un rostro (Neruda 45)

The person’s observation of human elements and objects, allows him or her to travel beyond the physical world to another place, the mysterious life of the ancients of Machu Picchu. In arriving to this destination, the poetic voice finishes the ascent. Finally, the individual can rest from the climb to a zone where he or she can begin to receive the spiritual knowledge of the past in order to find the essence that makes beings human.

**Vicuña’s General Process of Journey**

In contrast to Neruda’s two-phase prophetic expedition, Cecilia Vicuña embarks on a much more cerebral and linguistic journey in order to find a remedy for the weak connection between language, humankind and the divine. She carries out her voyage through a unique poetic method called the *palabrar*. For Vicuña, this practice of fragmenting words in order to reveal their internal metaphors starts at the early age of seventeen (Vicuña, Entrevista con Isbell 54). In an interview with Billie Jean Isbell, she describes her first experience with this unique process. She states, “Suddenly I had the feeling that a word just came into my field of sight, a word almost like a person. And this
word began to open up, to show me its inner parts, and it began to dance: *en-amor-ados*. . . *en amor enajenados*” (Vicuña, Entrevista con Isbell 54). By splitting the term *enamorados*, Vicuña is able to combine the fragments in such a way that she discovers a new meaning, *en amor enajenados*. Throughout her book *PALABRARmas*, the Chilean poet imaginatively travels through language in order to find the lost meanings of words and the unknown internal consciousness of humankind.

In her work, Vicuña describes the process of the *palabrar* in the following verses:

```
Palabrar más o palabrir
es armar y desarmar
palabras
para ver qué tienen
que decir. (Vicuña, PALABRARmas 34)
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By taking apart and putting together words, the poet believes that she will arrive at an understanding of what words have to say. Once split by this process, the terms display their fragments, and the unique rearrangement of these pieces signals the original meanings of the linguistic symbol that represents reality. Vicuña repeats this procedure throughout her prophetic journey, returning to each linguistic unit its primary value. As a result of this recovery of meaning, the poet can then use the words as a tool for acquiring knowledge and wisdom (Méndez Ramírez 97).

Later in *PALABRARmas*, the poet adds to the previous description of the *palabrar* by stating:

```
pero este texto no es más que una meditación que
avanza por fragmentos y sugerencias, desde
```
y para la imaginación

imagen en acción. (Vicuña, PALABRARmas 60)

From these verses, it remains evident that the meditation of words and their fragments pushes the poet’s imagination into action. As a result, these active thoughts lead Vicuña to a different realm of understanding that lies beyond the immediate, everyday use of language.

**Common Intricacies of the Prophetic Journeys of Neruda and Vicuña**

Although the basic poetic vehicles of the poetic quests of Pablo Neruda and Cecilia Vicuña contain differences in structure and theme, they both share detailed characteristics. For example, both poets’ quests revolve around the concept of finding the origin of language or of humankind because they believe that upon returning to this initial point of creation they will discover the unseen essence or connection that they seek. In order to encounter this source, each author must situate him or herself in a special place and time of origin that aids in the mystical understanding of this higher knowledge.

Because Neruda and Vicuña behave like prophets who seek out a superior truth, they, like the shamans of other cultures, possess the ability to connect to those who lived before them. In order to establish this association, the authors travel back through time in order to arrive at a place of origin. The arrival in this space helps the poets maintain a link to the native civilizations that gave rise to their own; as a result, both Chilean poets

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learn from their ancestors about the first connection between beings and their human essence.

Neruda illustrates his journey through time by returning to the era when the Inca inhabited Machu Picchu. In *Canto VI*, the poetic “I” states, “mil años de aire, meses, semanas de aire, / . . . que fueron come suaves huracanes de pasos / lustrando el solitario recinto de la piedra” (Neruda 45). Here, the air represents the passage of time, and in order for the speaker to reach the indigenous culture, he or she goes backward through the air in order to arrive at a space where one can discover the life wisdom of the voices of the past.

In *PALABRARmas*, Cecilia Vicuña illustrates a prophetic journey back into time through the use of the words of ancient men. For example, she cites the ancient collection of Sanskrit hymns written between the years 1500 and 1000 BCE, the *Rig Veda*, in order to establish a union between man and language. She also quotes a specific part of this sacred text, the Mandukya Upanishad: “OM, esta palabra eterna es todo: lo que fue, lo que es / y lo que será. Y lo que está más allá, en la eternidad. / Todo es OM” (Vicuña, *PALABRARmas* 82). By referring to the sacred scripture of one of the first Indo-European languages, Vicuña remains able to return to a space of linguistic origin. Once in this place, she can now reconnect to the higher level of wisdom that the text holds.

In addition to a journey that involves the manipulation of time, the prophetic process of the Chilean poets also takes place in a specific geographical space—America. Machu Picchu, one of the most visited and historic places on the American continent, stands out as a prime location for the invocation of the past. Neruda adds to this
landscape by naming other distinctive elements of the Andes such as the condor, the vicuña, and the Urubamba River. All of these features combined establish a truly American environment. Described as the mother of stone and the high reef of the human dawn, Machu Picchu and its majestic splendor provide an ideal scene that will facilitate Neruda’s discovery of a higher truth (Neruda 44).

Although Vicuña does not capitalize on an American space to the extent that Neruda does in “Alturas de Macchu Picchu,” she does include elements of her native continent in PALABRARmas. One of the examples of such a reference occurs in the section of the book called “Advinanzas.” She writes, “Una presencia suave sobre Til Til / Lo sutil” (Vicuña, PALABRARmas 27). Here the use of the name Til Til, a town in the providence of Chacabuco in the metropolitan region of Santiago, adds a hint of a Chilean presence to the work.

Other allusions that the poet makes in relation to America deal with the cultures of the Maya and the Guaraní. Just as Neruda makes a prophetic platform of Machu Picchu, Cecilia Vicuña creates a unique setting where she will be better able to establish a link between herself and the wisdom of the ancient past. However, she does not design a geographical or a physical space but rather an ideal environment founded in indigenous myths of creation. She cites both the Popol Vuh and the creation myth of the Guaraní in order to extend her thought-based journey back to the origin of two of the most prominent native cultures on the American continent.

In addition to the factors of time and space, Pablo Neruda and Cecilia Vicuña also include mythical elements in their journey that will connect them to the origin and knowledge they seek. Commenting upon “Alturas de Macchu Picchu,” Saúl Yurkiévich
states, “. . . al querer recuperar la más profunda naturalidad, la naturalidad aculturada, [Neruda] suelta las fuerzas metafóricas que generan la visión mitológica” (1). Because the poet cannot find the answer to the question that he asks in his present reality, he must evoke myth in order to recover the most profound and inexpressible essence of man. Yurkiévich defines this process with more detail in the following statement:

Un mito es una cristalización verbal de fragmentos de signification en una forma orgánica que se capta global y súbitamente; fusiona y transmite a la vez el rito y el sueño; el uno incomunicable el otro ininteligible sólo pueden ser expresados verbalmente a través de su agente simbólico; el mito, representación del enfrentamiento entre el deseo y la realidad, entre lo imaginable y lo practicable. (Yurkiévich 4)

This applies to “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” because Neruda desires to understand the ineffable—the indestructible essence of life. Therefore, the poet must utilize a symbolic agent, the myth, in order discover the incommunicable. In this way, the Chilean author is able to confront his prophetic desires and the practical reality that places limits on the process of his discovery.

To embark on his journey of myth, the poet must verbally express the alternate unseen reality of Machu Picchu. Neruda engages in this process by describing the life of the original residents of the legendary site that no longer remain. In the poem, the speaker states:

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 enredada,
y tocaron las tierras y las piedras
hasta reconocerlas en la noche o la muerte. (Neruda 45)

By speaking of the first residents of Machu Picchu and describing their actions as expressed in the verbs _descansaron, tocaron_ and _pisaron_, the “I” in the poem returns them to their habitat. In describing these acts, the poet invokes not only the image of the man but his spirit as well. Therefore, through the use of myth, the poet penetrates into an unknown world. And, like a prophet who delves into a sacred realm, Neruda now has access to the wisdom of the native people’s being.

In _PALABRARmas_, Cecilia Vicuña also incorporates mythical elements into her journey for a higher truth. Like many myths of creation, this book of poems describes a beginning—the birth of words. Vicuña writes:

> Primero vi una palabra en el aire
> sólida y suspendida
> mostrándome
> su cuerpo de semilla
> Se abría y deshacía
> y de sus partes brotaban
> asociaciones dormidas (Vicuña, _PALABRARmas_ 9)

Very similar to the vision that she had as a young woman in Santiago, Vicuña first locates the word in a space—the air. Just as a uterus serves as the place of conception for human beings, in these verses, the air plays the same role in the creation of new language. Words, like fertile seeds, settle into the air, and then they open up or divide. In doing so,
they give birth to the fragments of meaning that reside inside of them. These pieces of words, or infant linguistic unities, contain *asociaciones dormidas* that, when compared, bring light to the true meaning of the original word-seed.

This mythical process of rebirth shows that each word contains the capacity to germinate the lost metaphorical associations that individuals need to discover in order to recuperate their connection to language. Regarding this procedure, Kenneth Sherwood comments, “Here, a poet coming out of a (mythic) oral tradition insists that poetry can be made from the unraveling of individual words—an entering into the language, rather than a motion to get behind or above it” (79). By going into the word and not around it, Vicuña allows the reader to see the myth unfold in the splitting of words. The verbal fragments fuse together in a manner that unites the unseen with the concrete reality of language. Therefore, through the agent of myth, as previously described by Saúl Yurkiévich, the poet remains able to express linguistically that which is unknown (Yurkiévich 4).

Other elements of the mythical in PALABRARmas occur when the poet refers to the story of creation found in the *Popol Vuh*. In telling this tale, Vicuña provides a spiritual and an indigenous foundation to her linguistic journey into the past. The myth states:

Solamente había inmovilidad y silencio en la oscuridad,

...  
Llegó aquí entonces la palabra, vinieron juntos Tepeu y Gucumatz. Hablaron, pues, consultando entre sí y meditando; se pusieron de acuerdo, juntaron sus
palabras y su pensamiento. (Vicuña, PALABRArmas 81)

In the previous passage, it remains clear that, the poet wishes to reveal some unknown part of history—the creation of language. Like a shaman who invokes the ancient myths of his or her culture in order to communicate a message to those who listen, Cecilia Vicuña cites the Maya story of creation in order to bring a reality to the unimaginable, the origin of language.

In addition to taking a voyage through time, space and myth, Pablo Neruda and Cecilia Vicuña both pass through a linguistic journey as well. Because both poets must use verbal expression in order to give a name to that which they seek, it is only natural that key elements of their quest revolve around the nature of language. Octavio Paz states:

The word is a bridge by which man tries to traverse the distance that separates him from external reality. But that distance is a part of human nature. To obliterate it, man must renounce his humanity either by returning to the natural world, or by transcending the limitations that his condition imposes on him. (28)

Individuals use language to describe their present reality; however, a lost connection to the word results in a feeble link to their human experience. Therefore, in order to recover the essence of the internal spirit, those who are skilled with the word—the poets, must use linguistic expression as a way to understand external reality. Upon engaging in this process, the prophet travels the distance that separates him or her from the mundane world in which he or she lives and the realm where the inner truth comes to light. Although this distance between the exterior and the interior remains natural to human
beings, they must return to the natural world or transcend the limitations of his present life in order to close this gap. As prophets, Neruda and Vicuña both use language in order to go beyond their present realities and go back to the natural world. In doing so, they diminish the space between the outside and the inside realities of man. For them, the poem is an attempt to go past language in order to reach what lies beyond it (Paz 26).

One way for the poets to reach this unknown is by providing a name for the new content of the other reality so that it becomes more real. Heidegger states that naming “brings the presence of what was previously uncalled into a nearness” (19). “The naming call bids things to come into such an arrival. Bidding is inviting. It invites things in, so that they may bear upon men as things” (Heidegger 21). In granting a name to objects and ideas, the poet allows the entity to exist. And once he or she brings the elements of the new reality into existence, then they may “bear upon men.” As a result, the prophet now has the ability to further investigate the unknown of the second realm.

Pablo Neruda engages in the prophetic process of naming in order to give life to the reality that he tries to reach. In *Canto IX* of “Alturas de Macchu Picchu,” the poet presents an immense list of nouns in one single stanza.

Túnica triangular, polen de piedra.
Lámpara de granito, pan de piedra.
Serpiente mineral, rosa de piedra.
Nave enterrada, manantial de piedra. (Neruda 49)

This firing off of names allows Neruda to make present the old world. Regarding this technique, Octavio Paz states that “the first thing man does in the presence of an unknown reality is to name it, baptize it” (18). This is precisely what Neruda does upon
describing the heights of Machu Picchu. By providing words for the objects of the
ancient past such as la tunica, la lámpara, la serpiente and la nave, the poet offers them
all existence once again, and his focus on the noun instead of the action works to set up
the concrete elements of the environment. This naming is a necessary step in the journey
of Neruda because he must construct the reality that he wishes to reach so that he may
extract from it the answer to his question regarding the nature of humankind.

In a similar way, Cecilia Vicuña also uses naming in order to bring to
consciousness the unseen connection between man and language. The prophetic process
of the palabrar exists as a type of naming because spitting apart words and combining
their fragments in order to give rise to a new meaning creates a unique compound name
that brings into existence a different reality. One example of this usage exists in the
“Adivinanzas” section of PALABRARmas. Vicuña writes: “Playa del ser / El placer”
(PALABRARmas 25). Here, the poet begins the naming process by calling out the two
nouns playa and ser. From the combination of the place and the person, she produces a
new word and concept, placer.

Cecilia Vicuña not only makes use of the palabrar in order to bring into existence
the reality of her linguistic journey, but she also uses naming in order to establish a
connection between man, language and the divine. For example, she writes “Los dioses
son los verdaderos padres y las verdaderas / madres de las palabras almas; al nacer un
niño / le otorgan una palabra-alma que vive en él . . .” (Vicuña, PALABRARmas 80).
Here, it is not the poet who names but the gods, and they bestow names and souls upon
each person who enters into the world. Because Vicuña bids the gods into existence and
affirms that they provide both a word and a soul for each infant, she creates an
environment within her poetic voyage where the human spirit, language and a divine essence all remain intertwined with one another.

In addition to the use of naming in their linguistic quests for higher knowledge, Neruda and Vicuña also manipulate the metaphorical properties of words in order to achieve an understanding of the unknown that everyday speech cannot provide for them. Paz comments that everything that lies beyond language can only be reached through linguistic expression (Paz 12). Therefore, both Chilean poets must use language in the form of metaphor in order to cross the frontier of the unfamiliar and attain the truths they seek.

Neruda uses metaphor in “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” to create the center of the imaginative experience of his journey. The geographical focus of the lost Incan city provides the poet with an open sacred, environment where he has the freedom to work with words. As a result of his poetic endeavors, the poetic “I” in the poem remains able to cross over the space between the exterior reality of the daily small death and into the inner reality of the permanent qualities of human beings. Regarding this creative locus, Saúl Yurkiévich states, “A ese centro desciende Neruda por inmersión en las honduras genésicas, genéricas, que son lingüísticamente fuerzas metafóricas y fuerzas mitológicas” (6). In other words, the linguistic force of metaphor aids in the poet’s prophetic immersion because it enables the poetic voice to go beyond the present state of melancholy and desperation in order to search for the veta insondable that represents the life force of the human being.
After the individual descends through many deaths, he or she finally arrives to Machu Picchu. From this point, the poet uses metaphor in order to invoke in the site a meaning that no longer remains present. In *Canto VI* he writes:

> En ti, como dos líneas paralelas,
> la cuna del relámpago y del hombre
> se mecían en un viento de espinas.

> Madre de piedra, espuma de los cóndores. (Neruda 44)

In these verses the Chilean author goes beyond the mere physical remnants of the ruins by distributing qualities to the setting that are not obvious. For example, he makes a direct link between the poetic environment and the birthplace of humankind as shown by the words *cuna del hombre*. Machu Picchu remains a place of origin for human beings; therefore it is mother as well. By using these metaphors, Neruda bridges the gap between the exterior of beings and their interior essence because the poet moves toward establishing a reality that before was not present. This new reality of Machu Picchu, seen as a beginning for humankind serves as a springboard or a foundation for the ultimate metaphor in the poem where the poetic voice assimilates the life of the past into his or her body and therefore becomes the spokesperson for the ancient peoples and their essences that no longer exist.

In her linguistic journey, Cecilia Vicuña also uses metaphor in order to find the information she seeks—a way to reconnect individuals to their internal awareness through language. To find this knowledge, the she uses the *palabrar* as a tool to show the multiple values of words. Once she reveals the fragments of the words, she then combines them in a certain way so that she recovers their metaphorical associations that
give rise to a plurality of meanings. This idea is evident in the poetic theory of Octavio
Paz. He states:

In the poem language recovers its pristine originality, mutilated by the
subjugation imposed on it by prose and everyday speech. The reconquest
of its nature is total and it affects the sonorous and plastic values as the
expressive ones. The word, free at last, shows all its entrails, all its
meanings and illusions, like a ripe fruit or a rocket exploding in the sky.

The poets sets his matter free. (Paz 11)

To reclaim the original nature of words through their liberation, Cecilia Vicuña must use
the process of metaphor in order to unlock the mystery that each word holds within its
interior.

In PALABRARmas, the poet uses a visual and sonorous comparison to indicate
the true value of the word verdad. She writes, “verdad dadver” (Vicuña,
PALABRARmas 36). By opening up the word, Vicuña illustrates the multiple meanings
of the word truth. She first splits the word in to two parts: ver and dad. Then she
extracts from these fragments their basic meanings. Ver means to see, and dad is a
command for give. Next the poet duplicates and rearranges the fragments to produce the
short verses, “verdad dadver”. As a result, the original meaning of the word truth comes
to light. La verdad or the truth equals dar ver or to give sight.

The manner in which the poet unifies the verbal fragments and uncovers the
authentic meanings of words remains unique. Instead of comparing two different terms
in order to find a new or uncommon meaning as is done in the normal process of
metaphor, Vicuña compares the internal parts of words in order to perceive their original
values. This process, a reversed metaphor, maintains the capacity to rehabilitate the fragile connection between human beings and their language because it provides them with the true essence of the words.

Furthermore, Vicuña underlines the importance of metaphor in her linguistic quest for a higher truth by revealing the etymological roots of the word metaphor. In PALABRARmas she writes: “Metáfora, del griego metaphorá / de metapherein, llevar o transferir. / Meta: más allá. Pherein: llevar” (67). The origin of the word shows that it means to transfer or to carry beyond. In this capacity, metaphor serves as the vehicle of Vicuña’s linguistic and prophetic journey. She states:

La metáfora lleva más allá,

hacia formas más complejas

y específicas de comparar;

al más allá o meta del conocer,

a la esencia o corazón

CO n RAZON del ser

o su razón de ser. (Vicuña, PALABRARmas 69)

Here, Vicuña’s acknowledgement of the role of metaphor in her quest to find what lies beyond man’s present knowledge remains clear. This type of poetic comparison carries human knowledge to a different reality of understanding—the realm of the essence or the heart. By mixing the word corazón with the words con and razón, the poet directly links the two concepts in order to produce a new one. The essence of being or the corazón exists with reason or con razón. In other words, the rational capacity of the metaphor takes us to the heart or core of being.
Through their poetic and prophetic journeys both Pablo Neruda and Cecilia Vicuña encounter the knowledge that they set out to find. One of the first concepts that they discover through the wisdom of ancient cultures is the essence of what is human. Fenollosa comments in his essay about the Chinese written character that “Poetry only does consciously what the primitive races did unconsciously” (5). In relation to “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” and PALABRARmas, this statement comes to life because each poetic work attempts to express in words what the native cultures understood without saying—the nature of being.

Neruda’s great poem, shows a conscious expression of the indigenous understanding of what is human because he recalls their lost way of life in order to find the everlasting vein of the human essence. As a result, the poetic voice encounters the true existence in the bosom of the buried community of Machu Picchu (Araya Grandón 7). At the historical site, Neruda achieves the union between man and nature as expressed by the words “En ti [Machu Picchu], como dos líneas paralelas, / la cuna del relámpago y del hombre / se mecan en un viento de espinas” (Neruda 44). By conveying that the lightning and humankind shared the same crib, the author suggests that the peoples of Machu Picchu lived in harmony with nature.

Upon poetically verbalizing this delicate balance between human beings and their environment, Neruda can now discover their true essence of being. In order to do so, he calls into existence the dead souls of Machu Picchu. Araya Grandón states, “Al liberar a estos hombres de su olvido, haciéndolos emerger hacia la superficie, se rescata
dignamente al ser verdadero que mora en ese lugar, y con él, el sentido justo de la Historia” (9). This recuperation of the first people who lived in the mysterious city of the Inca allows the poet to see the essence of human life. He writes:

veo el antiguo ser, servidor, el dormido
en los campos, veo un cuerpo, mil cuerpos, un hombre, mil mujeres,

... 
Juan Cortapiedras, hijo de Wiracocha,
Juan Comefrío, hijo de estrella verde (Neruda 52).

By providing names for the dead indigenous souls, the voice gives them life and recognizes their existence. Finally, the poetic speaker arrives at an understanding of the human spirit. The inhabitants of Machu Picchu share the same essence as the modern person. Both are servers who live in the country, the sons and daughters of the gods. Therefore, because the two remain bound by the same essence, the ancient Inca and the contemporary person, the legacies of the native people of Machu Picchu hold the equivalent internal intuition that modern individuals have lost, and upon reconnecting themselves with this lost primary insight, then the people of the present day will find meaning in their lives.

Like Neruda, Cecilia Vicuña also consciously states what indigenous cultures have held to be true, and as a result, she discovers the authentic nature of humankind through relating the state of being to verbal expression and to the divine. In PALABRARMAS, the poet cites the Guaraní myth of the simultaneous creation of love, language and the sacred hymn. She writes:
Habiéndose erguido [asumido la forma humana],

de la sabiduría contenida en su propia divinidad,

y en virtud de su sabiduría creadora,

concibió el origen del lenguaje humano. (Vicuña, PALABRARmas 79)

By citing this story, Vicuña encounters what the indigenous group understood as a reality. As shown by the previous verses, wisdom remains part of the inner divine quality of each individual. Within this inner knowledge lies the capacity to create, and from this internal understanding springs forth the origin of language. Therefore, human beings, their words and the divine all remain intertwined each one part of the other. Due to the intimate nature of this relationship, the poet discovers that the essence of the individual depends on language and vice versa.

In PALABRARmas, Vicuña models this close relationship in her own words. She states: “La palabra crea al ser y es creado por él / en un misterio del que sólo tenemos las claves / para hacerlo crecer” (Vicuña, PALABRARmas 66). Here she links human beings to language by describing a reciprocal process of creation—words create people and people generate words. The perception of this symbiotic association results in the strengthening of the weakened link between people and language. Therefore, Vicuña shows us that we are words, and like them, we hold within our interior metaphor the poetic creation that will lead us to the knowledge of our being that we have lost. In turn, this leads to the discovery of the divine. Vicuña reiterates this concept in the following verses: “La palabra es el alma otorgada a los hombres / para que tengan conciencia de la divinidad” (Vicuña, PALABRARmas 80). Finally, through her linguistic and mythical
journey, the poet discovers that words, which are the soul and their metaphorical capabilities, provide human beings with an awareness of divinity.
STEP FIVE: REVELATION OF TRUTH AND CALL FOR PARTICIPATION IN A NEW WAY OF BEING

The last stage of the poetic prophecy of Pablo Neruda and Cecila Vicuña resides in the communication of their discoveries with the intent of eliciting a reaction from others. Perhaps one of the most important phases, owing to its capacity to impact the reader, the revelation and call to participation close the circle of the poetic journey. Octavio Paz describes the two-part involvement of the author and the reader in the following statement: “Two opposing forces inhabit the poem: one of elevation or uprooting, which pulls the word from the language; the other of gravity, which makes it return. The poem is an original and unique creation, but it is also reading and recitation: participation” (28). In other words, the mission of the poet is to use words poetically, to take them out of their daily usage and mold them in a way that they form a poetic expression, and the duty of the readers remains to engage themselves in such a way that they re-create the poetic experience.

Heidegger highlights the importance of the reader’s role by stating, “poets in a destitute time must especially gather in poetry the nature of poetry. Where that happens we may assume poets to exist who are on the way to the destiny of the world’s age. We others must learn to listen to what these poets say” (94). Therefore, in order to understand the profound meaning in poetry that relates to the world and how we as human beings act within it, it remains imperative that we hear the poetic message that writers want us to take in.
For the two Chilean poets, the dissemination of their discoveries intrinsically lies within their quest, and they invite the reader to take part in their experience. Neruda not only bids his audience to see the true nature of being that he discovers, but he also invites them to join in the American experience as founded by a culture that possesses the link to the meaning of life. For example, verses that employ commands such as, “Sube a nacer conmigo, hermano” (52) give the readers the impression that the poetic voice speaks directly to them. The command form of *sube* brings about an indirect call to readers to take part in the history of the American experience in order to learn from it. In addition, the reader also remains the recipient of the information that the dead souls will speak through the poetic “I”. Therefore, when the voice exclaims, “Yo vengo a hablar por vuestra boca muerta,” the reader remains the third party in this exchange, and by listening to what the individual has to say for others, they will learn the wisdom of the past (Neruda 53).

Cecilia Vicuña also calls her readers to participate by inadvertently training them in the practice of the *palabrar* so that they will be able to apply it in their own lives. In *PALABRARmas*, she states, “Una historia de las palabras sería una historia del ser” (Vicuña 60). Due to her own discovery that people are their language because the history of words is the same as human history, she leads the reader through metaphorical associations in the text with the hope of developing the readers’ ability to use metaphor. Once they have the capacity to look for the original meanings of words on their own using the *palabrar* method, then they will understand the history of being because they will have closed the gap that separates them from their language.
CONCLUSION

After examining the poetic works of both Pablo Neruda and Cecilia Vicuña it remains evident that the terms poet and prophet merge together to a point where the words share the same meaning. This overlapping causes the enhancement of both roles and produces a new voice, one capable of connecting two different spheres of reality. When the poet realizes that something is missing in life, he or she dons the robes of the prophet in order to search for the mystery that lies just beyond reach. Through poetry, the poet-shaman embarks on a journey in order to cross over the bridge between the known and the unimaginable, and in doing so, he or she recuperates from unconsciousness what is lacking in the unpoetic modern world.

Setting forth on their own prophetic voyages, Pablo Neruda and Cecilia Vicuña encounter what remains deficient in life—the knowledge of the human spirit. Neruda discovers it in the heights of Machu Picchu from the mythical lives of the ancient men and women who once lived there, and Vicuña discovers this wisdom in the original metaphorical associations of language. Expressing their ideas in their works “Alturas de Macchu Picchu” and PALABRARmas, both authors, like prophets, possess the power to communicate to others what they find. In this manner, their words carry the potential to alter the certainty of the present. Both authors see poetry as a way to reveal the true nature of the human condition.

In The Bow and the Lyre, Octavio Paz speaks about the imprint that poetry leaves on the world in which we live. He states: “An operation capable of changing the world poetic activity is revolutionary by nature; a spiritual exercise, it is a means of interior
liberation. Poetry reveals this world; it creates another” (Paz 3). The previous qualities that Paz attributes to poetry define it as a tool for revealing the core of what is human and spiritual. As poet-prophets, Neruda and Vicuña both realize that as a “spiritual exercise” and “a means of interior liberation” poetry can help humans come to an understanding of that which they do not know.

Pablo Neruda acts as a conduit of this knowledge by inviting the reader to recuperate the everlasting human spirit as manifested through his poetry by the voices of the past. And Cecilia Vicuña helps others recover their inner spirit by calling them to understand that humans and words are the same, and within each individual, just like within each word, there lies a creative or metaphorical charge that links people and words to their original essence or meaning. Having communicated this information, both poets return to individuals their internal knowledge therefore illuminating their internal spirit once again with the essence of life.
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Vita

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