Journal of Humanities, Music and Dance
ISSN: 2799-1180
Vol: 04, No. 06, Oct-Nov 2024
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JHMD
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jhmd.46.51.62

Inca Civilization and the Natural World: an Ecocritical Exploration of Pablo Neruda's "the Heights of Macchu Picchu"

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Received: 12 July 2024 **Accepted:** 27 September 2024 **Published:** 15 November 2024

Abstract:** This paper offers an ecocritical exploration of "The Heights of Macchu Picchu," regarding the complicated relationship between nature, culture, and resistance within the poem. Through a qualitative textual analysis, the study investigates Neruda's portrayal of the Andean landscape and the Inca civilization by focusing on imagery, figurative language, and thematic elements. Employing ecocritical concepts of anthropocentrism and biocentrism, the analysis seeks to discern Neruda's ecological perspective and its implications for contemporary environmental discourse. The study reveals that Neruda's poem embodies a biocentric perspective valuing nature for its intrinsic worth and emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life forms. Through vivid imagery and metaphorical language, Neruda celebrates the enduring power and majesty of the natural world and challenges traditional anthropocentric views. Additionally, the poem portrays Macchu Picchu as a symbol of resistance against cultural oppression, suggesting that cultural resistance can find sustenance in the natural world. Ultimately, this study deepens our understanding of Neruda's masterpiece and its relevance to current discussions on nature, culture, and the interconnectedness of humanity and the environment. Through Neruda's poetic vision, readers are inspired to reevaluate their relationship with the natural world and strive for a more harmonious coexistence with nature in our modern era of environmental challenges.

***Keywords:** Culture, Ecocriticism, Macchu Picchu, Nature, Pablo Neruda, Resistance, Etc.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Macchu Picchu, an ancient city perched amidst the rough peaks of the Andes, is a tribute to the creativity and cultural diversity of the Incan civilization. Both historians and artists have long been captivated by this magnificent citadel tucked away in an incredibly beautiful natural

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setting. Pablo Neruda, the renowned poet from Chile, is one of them. His poem "The Heights of Macchu Picchu" analyzes the relationship between nature, culture, and resistance.
Neruda discusses mythology, memory, adversity, and community in the poem. A world of magnificent indigenous architecture and the suffering of enslaved people are coloured by his communist beliefs. Neruda aims to return the glory of their labor into their own hands and give voice to the voiceless with "The Heights of Macchu Picchu." This is more than just a poem about ancient history because he searches back in time for truths that apply to the present day. Twelve different poems by Pablo Neruda, inspired by his trip to Macchu Picchu, Peru, examine the distinction between nature and humanity. He discovers a connection to the native people who once lived there as well as a sense of immortality in the city's ruins as he investigates them.

The study employs an ecocritical perspective to showcase Neruda's exploration of Macchu Picchu. The relationship between literature and the environment is examined via the critical lens of ecocriticism, which offers a framework for analyzing how Neruda depicts the natural world, the legacy of the Incan civilization, and the possibility of resistance in the poem.

2. RELATED WORKS

Khosravi, Vengadasamy, and Raihanah examined the concept of ‘place’ in Neruda’s selected poems to reveal his experiences and emotions connected to specific places by using the conceptual framework of eco-poetry, a sub-theory of ecocriticism. The research illustrated how the environment is closely associated with the concept of place and proposed that Neruda was very much an ecopoet and a ‘place maker’ with lots of evidence.

While the poem's inspiration from the ancient city is established, Morgado proposes a reciprocal influence from a concurrent construction project at Neruda's home, argues that the act of creating with stone, mirroring Inca masonry, further fueled Neruda's poetic response, suggesting an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the poem's creation. Further exploration of the construction's design and connection to Machu Picchu, alongside Neruda's reflections (if available), could solidify this intriguing link.
Patra analyzed Neruda's poems to explore his connection to places, showing him as a "place producer" who instills environmental awareness and a sense of belonging, reflecting Latin America's historical legacy and identity. He states, “Neruda, an ecopoet, guides readers to explore meaningful spaces, fostering "topophilia" by emphasizing the importance of understanding one's roots.” (Patra 64)

In the paper "Eco-Mysticism in Pablo Neruda's Selected Poetry" Khosravi, Goltaj David, et al. investigated the poetic journey taken by Neruda in his selected poetries in the form of a spiritual quest to reveal a mystical awareness and spiritual connection to all life forms in the natural world and thereby reposition him as an eco-mystic poet. Neruda teaches an ecological lesson and portrays environmental awareness to the readers as an upshot of his deep ecological awareness and his eco-mystical vision. ((Khosravi et al. 279) Khosravi, Vengadasamy, and Raihanah highlighted the significance of the eco-ethical consideration of Pablo Neruda towards

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wilderness by utilizing the theoretical frameworks of ecocriticism and ecopoetry to illuminate Neruda's call for reverence of the wilderness, flora, and fauna, in the land, the sea and the sky through an ethical consideration of interdependence and interconnectedness of human and nonhuman. They problematized Neruda's attitude towards nature to obtain new insights into his ethical stand towards the natural world by focusing on the poems that reflect the sense of ethics and represent the significant role of humility in shaping our sense of accountability towards the wilderness while revealing Neruda's ideology and relationship with the non-human world. (Khosravi et al.)

Marjorie J. Wonham, Juan Carlos Castilla and Karin Oldfelt Hjertonsson offered a contemporary biological perspective on the visual and poetic portraits of marine organisms in Maremoto. The paper adopted a modified geopoetics approach and analyzed the paired images and poems of Maremoto in the context of contemporary scientific knowledge of these organisms and their ecosystem. Anthropocentrism emphasizes human-centered values; biocentrism advocates equal moral worth for all living beings, promoting ecological harmony and conservation. According to BHATTACHARJEE and DEBNATH, "thinking without nature for even a moment. The realization of nature's agency and capacity to withstand human interference is currently changing our attitudes toward it." (21) So, MEENAKSHI and Soni investigated Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide through biocentrism and highlighted ecological crises, human-animal conflicts, and environmental ethics.

So, it is clear that previous studies have concentrated on interdisciplinary perspective by linking Neruda's poetic creation to a concurrent construction project, his connection to place and his eco-poetic tendencies or as a "place maker", there remains a notable gap in the understanding of Neruda's stance regarding the relationship between humanity and nature within the poem. Therefore, this research aims to bridge these gaps by analyzing Neruda's figurative language, imagery, and thematic elements in the poem to elucidate his ecological stance and its implications for contemporary environmental discourse.

Research Objectives

This study aims to interrogate the ecological perspective embedded within Pablo Neruda's "The Heights of Macchu Picchu"

To reach this goal the researcher sets two Secondary Objectives:

1. To identify and analyze the imagery and figurative language used by Neruda to reveal the poet's portrayal of the interconnectedness between the Andean landscape and the Inca civilization.
2. To determine whether this portrayal leans towards an anthropocentric or a biocentric perspective.

Research Question

1. How does Pablo Neruda employ imagery and figurative language in the poem to depict the interconnectedness between the Andean landscape and the Inca civilization?
2. What aspects of Neruda's depiction hint at either a human-centric or nature-centric perspective within the poem?

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3. How does Neruda's portrayal of the Inca civilization's relationship with the Andean landscape in the poem reflect an anthropocentric or biocentric perspective?

4. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach, specifically textual analysis, to investigate Pablo Neruda's "The Heights of Macchu Picchu" within an ecocritical framework. It involves a close reading of the poem to identify and analyze the imagery, figurative language, and thematic elements related to the Inca civilization, and their relationship with nature. Drawing on ecocritical theory, particularly concepts of anthropocentrism and biocentrism, the analysis aims to discern Neruda's perspective on the intrinsic value of the natural world and its implications for resistance against environmental degradation. The poem "The Heights of Macchu Picchu" provided the primary data, and other books, websites, journals, articles, and other sources provided the secondary data. This research methodology is designed to provide a comprehensive analysis of Neruda's ecological perspective within the poem and contribute to the ongoing discourse on nature, culture, and resistance in literature.

Theoretical Framework

This research paper adopts an ecocritical theoretical framework to examine the poem and its portrayal of the interconnectedness between nature, culture, and resistance. Ecocriticism provides a lens to analyze literary texts by focusing on the relationship between literature and the environment, encompassing themes of environmental ethics, ecological consciousness, and the representation of nature in literature.
Within the ecocritical framework, this study draws on concepts such as anthropocentrism and biocentrism to explore Neruda's perspective on the value of the natural world and its relationship with human civilization.

Anthropocentrism

Anthropocentrism is a philosophical viewpoint arguing that human beings are the central or most significant entities in the world. This belief is embedded in many Western religions and philosophies. Anthropocentrism regards humans as separate from and superior to nature. It holds that human life has intrinsic value while other entities (including animals, plants, mineral resources, and so on) are resources that may justifiably be exploited for the benefit of humankind.

It mostly appreciates nature for what it can do for people. The creation story found in the Judeo-Christian Bible's book of Genesis, which describes how humans were made in God's image and given the command to "subdue" the Earth and "have dominion" over all other living things, is where many ethicists trace the origins of anthropocentrism. According to certain interpretations, this line supports an instrumental view of nature, according to which the natural world is only valuable when it serves humankind, and it also shows that humans are superior to nature.

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Fig.1 Anthropocentrism

Biocentrism

The ethical belief that all life should be treated equally is known as biocentrism. It is tough for any living being, particularly humans, to survive without harming others. A biocentric faces an ethical conundrum regarding food selection and eating in general. The religion of Jainism, which has its roots in India, holds that enlightenment can be reached by abstaining from violence and harm. To a certain degree, Jainism makes biocentrism possible—to lessen harm to living things.



Fig.2 Biocentrism

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5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Imagery and Figurative Speech in the Poem

Imagery

Neruda employs rich imagery to vividly portray the natural elements of the Andean landscape, such as the mountains, valleys, and rivers, such as "plum treetops", "seashells", and "snow-capped teeth" to create a sense of place and connect it to the Inca civilization. He also employs imagery of suffering, like "wounds" and "axes with blood-encrusted sparkle" to depict the harsh realities faced by the Inca people. "High city of laddered stones", Neruda's use of this phrase vividly depicts the physical structure of Macchu Picchu, the image of ancient stone structures that ascend like a ladder. It captures the monumental and tiered nature of the Inca city. Then "Through the awful tangles of lost forests" creates a visual of dense, untamed forests surrounding Macchu Picchu, suggesting both the wild beauty and the isolation of the site. When Neruda writes, "High reef of the human dawn", he fuses geological and temporal imagery, suggesting that Macchu Picchu is a pinnacle of human achievement emerging at the dawn of history. "Weeks of azure wind, weeks of ferrous mountain chains" represents synesthesia that blends visual and tactile senses to evoke a vivid and multi-sensory experience of the Andean landscape.

Personification and Anthropomorphism

In the Poem, nature is often given human characteristics, which helps bridge the gap between the human and the natural. For example, the "puma paws, bloody rock" and "patriarchal bell of those who fell asleep" imbue the landscape with life and history, suggesting that the land itself holds the memory and spirit of the Inca people. "Stone on stone, human beings, where were they?" personifies the stone structures, implying that they carry the essence and memory of the people who built them. It questions the absence of those who once animated these stones with their lives. By referring to the earth as a "Mother of Stone" and associating it with condors, Neruda personifies the landscape as a nurturing and life-giving entity.

Repetition and Symbolism

Stone is a recurrent word throughout the poem that symbolizes the enduring strength of the Inca constructions and the unforgiving nature of the Andean environment. "Death" is repeatedly signifies the physical demise of the Inca people and the ever-present reality of mortality that connects them to the cyclical nature of life and death in the mountains. "Hands" appear frequently, representing both the creative power of the Inca people and the speaker's yearning to connect with their lost presence.

In Section VII "permanent rose" symbolizes the enduring beauty and resilience of the Inca civilization. "Andean reef with glacial colonies" metaphorically links the city to a coral reef,suggests a thriving, intricate ecosystem. Neruda's vivid action symbolizes a deep engagement with suffering and an attempt to heal historical wounds. Neruda commands, "Show me your blood and your furrow" where blood and furrow as symbols of life and labor, calling for an acknowledgment of the struggles and contributions of the common people.

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Metaphors

When Neruda employs a metaphor that compares death to salt in the waves, highlighting its pervasive and inevitable presence in life. "Let me forget this happiness today, for it is wider than the sea", this metaphor emphasizes the vastness of happiness, comparing it to the sea, and suggests that to understand humanity fully, one must delve into its depths, including suffering and death. "Rise up with me, American love" This is a call to action and a metaphor for unity and awakening. It suggests a collective rise, evoking a sense of solidarity and shared heritage. "Shovel lost in the earliest sand", metaphor portrays a tool of the Inca civilization lost to time, buried in the sand. It suggests the vastness of time and the fading memory of the Inca people's achievements. Hunger, mankind's coral, hunger, secret plant, root of the woodcutters" This complex metaphor portrays hunger as a persistent and destructive force in the lives of the Inca people. It suggests a hidden struggle for survival within the beauty of the landscape.

Similes

Neruda uses similes sparingly compared to metaphors and other figures of speech. However, the few similes he employs are impactful in portraying the interconnectedness between the Andean landscape and the Inca civilization. There is a simile that compares the speaker's wandering to an empty net. It suggests a feeling of emptiness and aimlessness in his search for the lost Inca people. The comparison to autumn further reinforces the sense of loss and decline. A simile compares the fall of the Inca civilization to an autumn where everything withers and falls. It emphasizes the vastness of their loss and connects it to the natural cycle of death and decay in the Andes. The empty streets are likened to "a buried tower / sinking its spiral even below all / the hoarse sulfur-colored leaves", reflecting a civilization lost to time. The speaker's search for the Inca people is like "a blind man... going back to the jasmine / of our squandered human springtime"

Historical and Mythical Resonance

Neruda invokes mythical and historical figures, blending human identities with divine or natural elements, emphasizing the spiritual and ancestral connections of the Inca people by referring "Juan Stonecutter, Wiracocha's son, Juan Coldeater, green star's son"He metaphorically describes the landscape and the city as a bride and a sacred tree, respectively, highlighting their purity, beauty, and spiritual significance when he writes, "Bride of the sea, tree of cathedrals"

Biocentric Elements in the Poem

Images of peaceful coexistence between humans and Andean creatures suggest respect for other living beings, a core biocentric principle. Nature is something Neruda sees as immortal. He admires it, whereas he reviles the way people live in cities and dies slowly each day. The poet finds beauty and permanence in nature. This is something he sees in the remaining structures of Macchu Picchu. Long after the people who built them are gone, the stone structures remain standing. It's a testament to the permanence of nature and the temporary nature of humanity. By the end of the poem, the poet is encouraging and asking the spirits of the laborers and people who lived in Macchu Picchu to be reborn through him. His words and his life can act as the conduit through which they live eternally, much, in the same way, the

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stones that make up the foundation of Macchu Picchu continue to be in the world long after everyone is gone.

Intrinsic Value of Nature

In the second section, Neruda expresses the exhaustion of modern life, both his own and that of his fellow humans. He evokes the seasons, giving a sense of time passing and renewing, from summer when the "flower gives up the high seed," to the "face ground down / among deep pits in autumn," to "the city's winter streets." The personification of the landscape continues to build as the poet confesses: "How many times … kiss released." There is a promise for renewal in the eternal promise of "germinal shells" of grain whereas, for humankind, "in which of his metallic motions / lived the indestructible, the imperishable—life?" This expresses the poet-narrator's existential disillusionment with the pattern of modern life. Neruda assigns intrinsic worth to nature, valuing it for its own sake rather than for its utility to humans, when he uses the personification of the earth and natural elements, he suggests that they possess inherent value "Mother of stone, condors' sperm and spray" "Bride of the sea, tree of cathedrals", these metaphors elevate natural entities to a revered, almost sacred status.

Interconnectedness of All Life

Neruda frequently emphasizes the deep interconnectedness between humanity and nature. "Weeks of azure wind, weeks of ferrous mountain chains" connects human experiences with natural elements. He highlights the interdependence between the two. He is suggesting a worldview that sees humans as part of a larger, interconnected ecosystem. "Let me forget this happiness today, for it is wider than the sea" provides a notion that human happiness is tied to the vastness of nature and underscores the interconnectedness of life. Neruda now answers the questions posed at the end of Section 2. He underlines the struggle of everyday people, comparing them to the grain that nourishes the masses: "Lives like maize …/ granary of wasted deeds," as if their subjugation is justified by the needs of others. He dwells on the deaths that daily fill people's lives: "each day a petty death, dust, worm, a lamp / snuffed out in suburban mud." These "petty" deaths are a strain on humanity, "all of them weakened, waiting their death." The closing image, of "dismal weariness" likened to "a black cup" brings to mind the coffee and tea that many people around the world consume daily, just as the "maize" from the first line of section 3 is a staple food. They have accepted their miserable lives, Neruda is saying. This shows that Neruda does not separate human beings as superior. Nature and human beings all are connected at the same time they are equal.

Nature as a Powerful Force

Neruda acknowledges the power and majesty of the natural world. He often depicts it as a force greater than humanity. "Powerful death invited me many times: She was like the salt unseen in the waves" metaphorically illustrates nature's omnipresence and potency. Death is a fundamental and omnipresent aspect of existence, much like salt is an integral but often unnoticed part of the ocean. The phrase "powerful death" acknowledges death as a natural and inevitable force that constantly surrounds and affects life. By likening death to a natural element, Neruda emphasizes the inescapable and pervasive power of nature. The unseen salt is a subtle yet essential presence, much like the natural forces that shape human existence without

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jhmd.46.51.62

always being directly visible or acknowledged. Neruda emphasizes the vast and powerful essence of natural phenomena. "Starry belt" likely refers to the Milky Way or the celestial expanse, representing the boundless and awe-inspiring nature of the universe. The "belt" suggests order and structure amidst the vastness, indicating the grand design of the cosmos. Bread, a fundamental symbol of sustenance and life, is described as "solemn," imbuing it with a sense of reverence and importance. This metaphor suggests that nature provides essential nourishment and should be respected for its life-sustaining qualities. "Torrential ladder" could be interpreted as waterfalls or cascading rivers, symbolizing the dynamic and relentless power of nature. The word "ladder" might suggest a connection between different realms (earth and sky, or life and death), highlighting nature's role as a bridge and its continuous, unstoppable flow. "Immense eyelid" might refer to the horizon or the sky, symbolizing nature's watchfulness and the vast expanse that covers and protects the earth. The eyelid, by closing and opening, can also symbolize cycles of time and renewal, emphasizing nature's enduring presence. Through these metaphors, Neruda not only depicts nature as a powerful force but also as a fundamental, omnipresent aspect of life that commands respect and awe. His choice of imagery elevates natural phenomena to a level of grandeur and significance that surpasses human endeavors. By doing so, Neruda underscores a biocentric perspective, where nature is valued for its own sake and recognized for its immense, inherent power and beauty.

The following table summarizes key instances from the poem to further elucidate the interplay between anthropocentric and biocentric elements.

Table1: Comparison

Anthropocentric Elements	Biocentric Elements
The lost Inca people	Stone structures that remain
Laborers and their legacy	Nature as eternal and unchanging

A Contrast to Anthropocentric Perspective

An anthropocentric perspective prioritizes human experiences, values, and concerns above those of the natural world. In the poem, some elements emphasize human achievements, struggles, and connections with the landscape. A significant part of the poem mourns the lost Inca civilization. The first section is about the speaker roaming through Macchu Picchu and looking for something more than ruins. He wants to find the spirit of the people who lived there but is unable to. It can be interpreted as Neruda's anthropocentric approach towards nature as he is more concerned with human beings. Soon the second section depicts a celebration of nature and truth. He finds that nature is eternal while human life is temporary and that you can find truth in nature sooner than in anything else. The third section is about the people who live in cities and how they lose their happiness when they get stuck in a routine. It seems like Neruda is anthropocentric but its further comparison between nature and humanity, with humanity being transient hints at Neruda's biocentric attitude. The sixth section is done as the speaker climbs Macchu Picchu and starts to feel better about things. He thinks about how the place was made. He sees the city as a symbol of how the modern world fades away, but nature endures because the people who built the city are gone but the actual structures are still there. The seventh section discusses how the builders died and how, despite their deaths, the stones remain and the people who built them live on in the stones. So according to Neruda, human beings are

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jhmd.46.51.62

not superior to nature. The ninth section compares Macchu Picchu to different natural things, like plants and storms which posits Neruda as biocentric definitely. In the tenth section, the speaker's curiosity about the people who lived in Macchu Picchu, wondering whether the builders were slaves and how the people who lived in the city went about their lives invites the reader to consider him as humancentric. The eleventh section represents his concern more for the people who built the city. When in the final section he requests the people who came before him, the indigenous Incans, to rise up and live again as he does by saying, "Speak through my words and my blood" Neruda considers human beings, the central or most significant entities in the world.

So, the speaker's yearning and the emphasis on their suffering and absence suggest a human-centered perspective. Macchu Picchu itself stands as a testament to human ingenuity and ability to shape the environment. While it reflects a connection with nature, it also highlights human dominance over the landscape.

Human Achievements in the Context of Nature in "The Heights of Macchu Picchu"

The poem consistently blurs the lines between the Inca and the natural world. Macchu Picchu is described as existing in harmony with the harsh Andean environment. For example, "In you, like two parallel lines, / the cradle for lightning and people / would be rocked in a wind of thorns" (Section VII) integrates human existence with natural forces that human life and accomplishments are part of the natural world rather than separate from or superior to it. "The powerful tree / was eaten / by the fog" emphasizes the enduring and cyclical nature of life, portraying human history as transient and subject to natural processes. While Neruda acknowledges human achievements, he places them within the larger context of the natural world. This means they are part of, rather than superior to, nature and underscores the absence of the people who once animated the city. This indicates emphasizing the human presence and legacy in the physical structures.

Resistance to Human-Centric Solutions in "The Heights of Macchu Picchu"

The poem emphasizes the enduring presence of the natural world. Even with the Inca gone, the "empty air" and the "permanent rose" of Macchu Picchu remain. This suggests a value for nature beyond its usefulness to humans. Neruda writes, "What do your flashes tell you when attacked?" (Section VIII) which reflects an understanding and respect for natural processes. He advocates for a non-human-centered approach to interpreting and interacting with nature. When Neruda says, "The dead kingdom lives still" (Section IX) he indicates that nature continues to thrive and persist even after human civilizations have fallen, suggesting a biocentric view that sees nature as enduring and foundational. Neruda seeks to connect with the past and the natural world on such a deep level, he emphasizes a continuity that transcends human existence.

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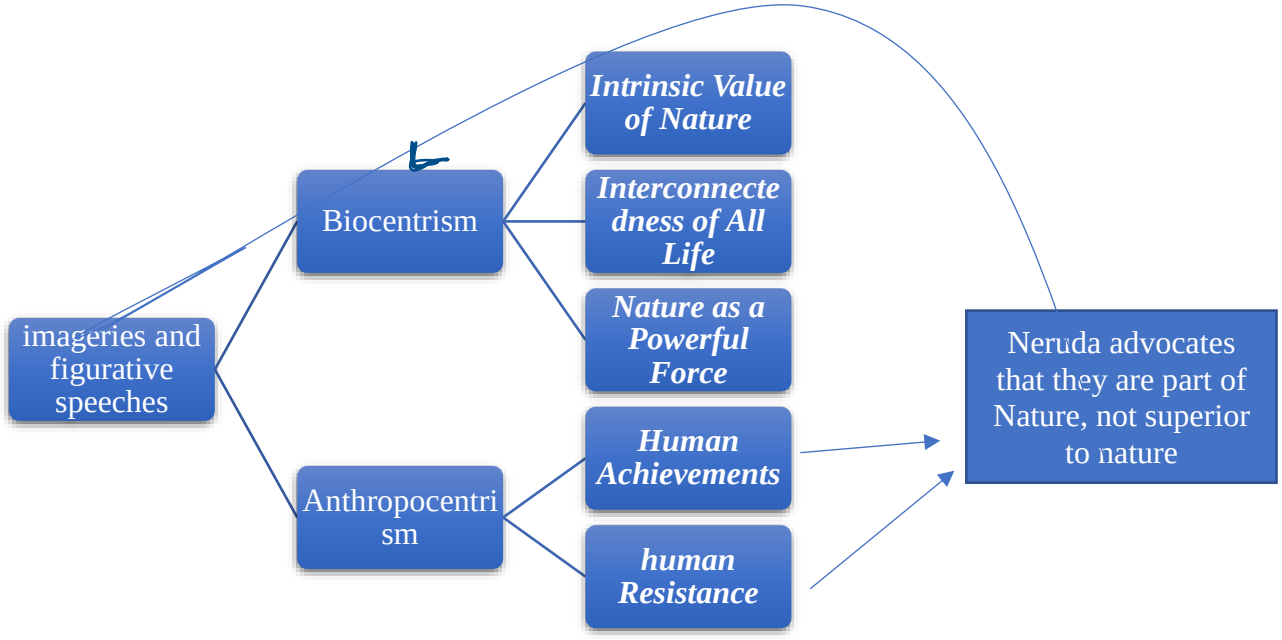


Fig.3 Neruda's stance

After examining the imagery, metaphors, and overall themes, it is evident that Neruda adopts a biocentric perspective. He consistently values nature for its intrinsic worth, emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms, and portrays nature as a powerful and majestic force. Neruda's "The Heights of Macchu Picchu" reflects a biocentric perspective. This biocentric viewpoint challenges anthropocentrism, suggesting that humans are part of a larger ecological system and should approach nature with reverence and respect. The poem advocates for a deeper ecological consciousness, encouraging a harmonious relationship between humanity and the natural world.

6. CONCLUSION

"The Heights of Macchu Picchu" stands as a testament to the enduring power of nature, the resilience of ancient civilizations, and the interconnectedness of humanity and the environment. Through rich imagery, metaphors, and thematic exploration, Neruda crafts a poetic masterpiece that transcends the mere description of a historical site. His portrayal of the Inca civilization's relationship with the Andean landscape in the poem reflects a blend of both anthropocentric and biocentric perspectives, though it leans more heavily towards a biocentric view. This ecocritical exploration challenges traditional anthropocentric views and embraces a biocentric worldview. Neruda's portrayal of Macchu Picchu and its relationship with nature highlights the intrinsic value of the natural world, its interconnectedness with all life forms, and its power and majesty. Neruda's ecological perspective challenges us to reevaluate our place in the world and inspires us to strive for a more harmonious coexistence with nature. As we navigate the complexities of the modern world, Neruda's words continue to resonate, guiding us toward a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

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Journal of Humanities, Music and Dance
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Vol: 04, No. 06, Oct-Nov 2024
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JHMD
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jhmd.46.51.62

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