

Representations of Rapa Nui in Chilean literature: The case of Pablo Neruda

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The following article invites readers to think about Rapa Nui from the perspective of literature questioning the representations we have inherited since the island received its Christian name, Easter Island. This paper focuses on the work of Chilean Nobel Prize winning poet Pablo Neruda and his book The Separate Rose.

El siguiente artículo invita al lector a pensar en Rapa Nui desde la perspectiva de la literatura, cuestionando las representaciones que hemos heredado desde que la isla recibió su nombre occidental, Isla de Pascua. Este artículo se enfoca en el trabajo del Premio Nobel chileno el poeta Pablo Neruda y su libro La Rosa Separada.

Introduction

Rapa Nui, the small island in the South Pacific which came to be Chilean due to life's coincidences, is a universe. However, the knowledge of the island that we have today comes mainly from the fields of archaeology and anthropology. These academic disciplines have been interested in understanding the great mystery that surrounds the stone statues and different cultural enigmas. The objective of this work is to invite readers to think about Easter Island from a different perspective, in order to elucidate a part of this great universe that has remained in the shadows of the *moai* and its cultural mysteries. This new perspective arises from literary studies, and this article hopes to answer the question: How has Easter Island been represented in literature, specifically Chilean literature?

This question came to me while I lived on Easter Island, teaching Spanish to high school students at the local public school. In order to motivate an interest in reading among the 15 and 16-year old students, I began to look for texts that spoke of their island – its traditions and landscape – trying to bring them closer to the students' own reality and interests. After reading and studying these books, I began to find regularity in the way that Easter Island was represented. I use Easter Island and not Rapa Nui on purpose, because the literature regarding this territory that is preserved in archives begins with its “discovery” in 1722. It was the Dutch sailor Jacob Roggeveen who inaugurated the invention of Easter Island in the western imagination with his travel diary. Let us consider for a moment what it means to name a place: Mary Louise Pratt in her book *Imperial Eyes* states that “to name, to represent, and to possess are one and the same” (2010:71). Tzvetan Todorov (1987:35) adds in his famous book *The*

Conquest of America: The Question of the Other that when Columbus reached the New World, he arrived with the cross, the sword, and the word. He baptized many of the new places he took possession of with Christian names, putting them in order in his mental geography. This is how Rapa Nui received its new name, as an identity imposed by the verbal control of the Dutch sailor Roggeveen, who sighted it on Easter Sunday. In other words, the Christian worldview inaugurated the existence of Easter Island on the map of the West.

This is very important when we start to consider the relationship between literature and Rapa Nui, because we must begin with the firm conviction that Easter Island is a discursive reality. This means that it does not exist as a given, but has been built over centuries by a language that has molded it according to the limits and interests of the occidental–continental discourse.¹ Beverly Haun, in her book *Inventing Easter Island*, states that the “shaped truths about Easter Island” (2008:27) must be questioned; they come mainly from the imperial narratives that have been preserved since the island was baptized by Jacob Roggeveen with its Christian name. This is why it is very common to find books that speak about Easter Island and repeat the same adjectives and the same stories. In general, we find novels in which a preferably female character travels to the island and falls in love with a young native man, or a visitor comes to carry out an archaeological investigation, solving one or another of the enigmas that other books have delved into. The reiterative use of adjectives such as ‘mystery’, ‘strangeness’, ‘fantasy’, and ‘enigma’ is mixed with continuous descriptions of the beautiful women who dance sensually, moving their hips. The main voice is always that of the visitor who arrives upon and leaves

the island; he or she holds the place of privilege, the eyes, and the adventure. These are the themes and the words that are repeated in the titles of literature on Easter Island. The topics reproduce a stereotype and control the reader's imagination and knowledge, which are drawn from the narratives that follow Rapa Nui's new name in the 18th century – like an inheritance.²

Edward Said (1990) has created the concept of “orientalism” to explain this phenomenon of representation, which manifests the strength of the western cultural discourse. This discourse is built based on abstract and immutable sentences that strive to overcome otherness, to try to comprehend and control a world that is different from our own. Easter Island is a region characterized by having been built by thinking that is external to it. It has been thought of with images transmitted by the western ideology, based on the role that the island has played in the experiences of travelers, explorers, and other visitors that have arrived at its coasts. This is why the concept of orientalism seems indispensable to me in examining how Easter Island has been built discursively. This concept has become a very expansible theoretical tool, because although it emerged as a way to understand the relationship between the West and the East, it currently allows us in Latin America to look into the relationships between – for example – the indigenous women, or ‘Latino’, and the white, European males in the region. I would also add to these dichotomies one that seems very significant to me, and that I think should be studied in greater depth: the relationship between the continent (mainland or center) and the islands (or periphery). Generally speaking, one side of the scale has always had the voice, the writing, and the power to represent the silenced segment. Orientalism questions the coding by which those who hold power produce knowledge of the “other”. Therefore, this concept allows us to discuss the inherited “objectivity” that is naturalized in the representations that make up the equation. No such objectivity exists; all representation is permeated by the power games that organize the view and the writing. Consequently, it is feasible to consider Easter Island as an “intersection of western interests” (Said 1990:47) which has handed down a vocabulary, a rhetoric, and standardized and stereotyped figures of this territory. I will examine this hypothesis below by analyzing the poetry of Pablo Neruda that represents Easter Island, because it shows a break in the orientalist discursive construction of Easter Island.

Pablo Neruda is Chile's best known and is among Latin America's most important poets. He began writing when he was a child and did not stop until he died, just days after the coup that marked the beginning of a 17-year dictatorship in Chile. He was an active member of the Communist Party and Ambassador in France for Salvador Allende's socialist government.

He received the Nobel Prize for Literature for his extensive work in late 1971. It was that same year, but in the month of January, that Pablo Neruda traveled to Easter Island – his only visit there. However, the first time that Neruda wrote about the island was in the year 1950, when he included three poems in a book characterized by its political commitment, the great *General Song*. This book was an attempt to tell America's history in verse, and Easter Island was not absent from this great project. But it was in 1972, when he was Ambassador in France for Allende's socialist government, that he published *The Separate Rose*, a short book completely dedicated to Easter Island. The way he writes about the same place in 1950 and in 1972 is significantly opposed. This difference is not based solely on the different life stages and his poetic project, but also on the experience of a specific trip to Easter Island in January 1971. This trip came about because a Chilean television channel wanted to make a program of the “History and Geography of Pablo Neruda”, filming the poet at different locations. It was Neruda himself who decided that he wanted one of the series' chapters to be filmed on Easter Island, and so it was that he traveled by plane to the island in January 1971, financed by the TV station and accompanied by a cameraman, an assistant, and his wife. This trip is very significant, because it allows me to organize his writing of Rapa Nui into different stages: one that I have called the “horizon of expectations” stage, and the other the “space of experience” stage.³

Horizon of Expectations: The Insular Yearning

Imagine for a brief moment how you feel when you are about to take a trip. There is anxiety, the imagination takes flight, you seek information about your destination; altogether, there are endless details that make up your expectation. This activity prior to the trip reflects an entire horizon of ideas that unfold in the existing imaginary of the destination that you will travel to. In Neruda's case, his expectation of Easter Island was formed from his childhood through his readings of authors that he greatly admired. For example, his personal library holds the account of James Cook's second voyage to the Pacific, where he describes his visit to Easter Island in 1774. He also read the travel journal of Pierre Loti, who was on Easter Island in 1871. Neruda's library holds many books by missionaries and scholars interested in the island, and maps and images also allowed him to shape his expectation regarding this place.⁴

The poems that are part of the Easter Island “horizon of expectations” are mainly characterized by the representation of stereotypes based on his previous readings and also on the island's insular imaginary.

What do I mean by insular imaginary? I am referring to the naturalized image that islands awaken in the minds of those who imagine them – from the mainland. There are many researchers of the subject of islands in literature. They all agree that they are more than simple geographic realities; they strengthen the imagination, and have been charged with an allegorical richness since Homer's times. Marco Martínez, a Spanish critic who has studied classical literature related to insular worlds, says that:

“... the fact that an island is located in the middle of the ocean translates into a perception of a place that is very far away, remote, and beyond most mortals' reach. This feeling of distance turned the islands into exceptional places, where all sorts of wonders, myths and utopias fit” (Martínez 1998:16).

Utopic thought, precisely, cannot be disconnected from the insularity that gives origin to the term *utopia*:⁵ a literary description of an imaginary society that arises based on criticism of a specific society. The basis of any utopia is a proposal of an alternative world

model that is coveted. An alternative world, which is only possible in an insular geography, arises with the verification that reality must be transformed based on dreams and projections of happiness. In a dictionary of motives in universal literature, the term *island* is defined as a “counterpoint function compared to normal existence” (Frenzel 1980:376), where an interruption of everyday life is achieved so that existence may find a new direction. Finally, islands have been described as sedative and instinctive attractions, where the idea of peace and solitude, fertility and abundance entails the comforting idea of refuge and security. All of this allows me to read some of Pablo Neruda's poems and verses that represent the “horizon of expectations”. The poet unfolds his imagination of Easter Island, not based solely on what he has read in his youth regarding the island by sailors and scholars, but also from the insular imaginary that – I dare say – almost all of us who live on the continent (mainland) have developed unconsciously from the diverse images that the insular geography brings with it.

Neruda's following poem demonstrates what I have proposed here (original form of the poem is in italics):

Introducción en mi tema

*A la Isla de Pascua y sus presencias
salgo, saciado de puertas y calles,
a buscar algo que allí no perdí.*

*El mes de enero, seco,
se parece a una espiga:
cuelga de Chile su luz amarilla
hasta que el mar lo borra
y yo salgo otra vez, a regresar.*

*Estatuas que la noche construyó
y desgranó en un círculo cerrado
para que no las viera sino el mar.*

*(Viajé a recuperarlas, a erigirlas
en mi domicilio desaparecido.)*

*Y aquí rodeado de presencias grises,
de blancura espacial, de movimiento
azul, agua marina, nubes, piedra,
recomienzo las vidas de mi vida.*

Introduction to my issue

*To Easter Island and its presences
I go out, satiated with doors and streets,
to look for something I did not lose there.*

*The month of January, dry,
like a stalk of wheat;
its yellow light dangles from Chile
until the sea washes it away
and I go out again, to return.*

*Statues that the night built
and threshed into a close circle
so that none but the sea would see them.*

*(I traveled to recover them, to right them
in my vanished home).*

*And here, surrounded by gray presences,
by spatial white, by blue
movement, sea water, clouds, stone,
I begin again the lives of my life.*

What we have seen before is demonstrated in this poem. The first verse shows the utopic thought that underlies the imaginary of Easter Island. The speaker “goes out” toward the island, “satiated with doors and streets.” This is a metonymy of the city, an

environment that feels stifling. The reasons to leave are “to look for something I did not lose there”; in other words, there is no particular motive for the trip but simply to leave the everyday urban reality. In the other verses, the stone statue motifs reappear,

seeming to recall that the value, the interest, and the amazement with Easter Island depend exclusively on the mysterious *moai*. Here, Neruda is continuing with the stereotyped representation that has existed in literature, where the only characters worthy of description are the megalithic statues. But I would like to linger on the final verses. Here, the speaker is certain that Easter Island is the sacred space he needs to “begin again the lives of my life.” This blind faith in the island’s meaning in his life project can only be driven by the insular imaginary that I commented on above. On Easter Island, he is surrounded by a mythic environment: “gray presences,” “spatial white,” “blue movement,” “sea water,” “clouds,” “stones” – all these elements are part of the physical universe that the speaker hopes to find on Easter Island, the source of origin, of rest, of renovation. However, when Pablo Neruda gets off the plane and stands on Easter Island in

January of 1971, this “horizon of expectations” formed by his insular imaginary and by his images, readings of sailors, and the information he preserved in his files on Easter Island is questioned and faced with the “space of experience,” as we will see below.

Space of Experience: Mass Tourism on Easter Island

The poem “The Men I” begins with the speaker’s arrival on Easter Island, introducing a radically different tone than that above. There is no longer an idealization of the island’s expectations, nor will we observe the trust in the possibility of protection and safety to begin life again. On the contrary, this – the second poem in the book *The Separate Rose* – introduces suffering due to the certainty of becoming an urban invader in this geography that he yearned to belong to:

Los hombres I

Yo soy el peregrino
de Isla de Pascua, el caballero
extraño, vengo a golpear las puertas del silencio:
uno más de los que trae el aire
saltándose en un vuelo todo el mar:
aquí estoy, como los otros pesados peregrinos
que en inglés amamantan y levantan las ruinas:
egregios comensales del turismo, iguales a Simbad
y a Cristóbal, sin más descubrimiento
que la cuenta del bar.

Me confieso: matamos
los veleros de cinco palos y carne agusanada,
matamos los libros pálidos de marinos menguantes,
nos trasladamos en gansos inmensos de aluminio,
correctamente sentados, bebiendo copas ácidas,
descendiendo en hileras de estómagos amables.

The Men I

I am the pilgrim
of Easter Island, the strange
gentleman, come to knock upon the doors of silence:
yet another of those brought by the air
leaping the entire sea in a single flight:
I am here, like the other heavy pilgrims
who suckle and raise the ruins in English:
illustrious guests of tourism, the same as Sinbad
and Columbus, with no more discovery
than the bar tab.

I confess: we killed
the five-masted ships and their wormy meat,
we killed the pale books of waning sailors,
we moved in enormous aluminum geese,
Properly seated, sipping our sours,
descending in rows of happy stomachs.

The subject of tourism is presented here from a negative perspective. The first verse indicates that the speaker is the “pilgrim of Easter Island.” We may consider the pilgrim as a precursor of post-modern tourism; however, both types of travelers are radically opposed. The first will always have a goal to reach, to travel to different places to connect with God in the hope of reaching eternal life beyond this land. The pilgrim knows where he is traveling to and knows the reasons for his trip. On the contrary, the tourist appears as a type of traveler that does not know the reasons that push his yearning to leave. The tourist erases the real distances that separate him from his destiny, “leaping the entire sea in a single flight” as the poem

says. This leap provokes a “tunnel effect” (Delgado 2000) in which the dangers and adventures that were experienced in the past by ancient gentlemen on their trips are no longer possible. Toward the end of the poem, the speaker confesses that he, as a member of the technological society represented in images such as the “enormous aluminum geese,” “properly seated,” or “sipping our sours,” has been an accomplice to the elimination of ways of life that gave meaning to the adventure trip, which is shown in the enumeration of “five-masted ships and their wormy meat,” or “we killed the pale books of waning sailors.” These oppositions – comfort and speed/difficulties of the adventure trip – are emphasized in the poem as an important difference

suffered by the contemporary tourist. This way, after his confession, the initial “pilgrim of Easter Island” turns into “another of those brought by the air,” a negatively connoted tourist: “somos los mismos y lo mismo frente al tiempo, / frente a la soledad: los pobres hombres / que se ganaron la vida y la muerte trabajando / de manera normal o burotrágica” [we are the same and the same before time / before loneliness: we are the poor men / who earned our life and death / working normally or bureau-tragically] (*The Separate Rose* “The Men IV”). This neologism conjugates bureaucracy and tragedy, creating an adjective that defines the tourists that come to Rapa Nui *en masse* “with no more discovery than the bar tab.”

Gabriela Nouzeilles (2002), in the introduction to the book *Nature in Dispute: Rhetoric of the Body and Landscape*, reflects on the image that tourism has constructed in Latin America as the last refuge of the natural world. This image is produced by the geographic imaginary of late capitalism as one of its cultural fictions, thus turning economic underdevelopment into an unexpected guarantee of different reserves (dietary, economic, symbolic) for the West. Latin American products are promoted with marketing strategies that promise the cosmopolitan consumer more health, more reality, and a better multicultural experience with humanitarian ramifications. Latin America also provides scenarios for escapist fantasies, such as the luxuriance of the tropical rainforest (if we think of the Amazon), the sublime immensity of the mountains (if we think of the Andes), and the arid infinitude of the Patagonian plateaus. Thus, the international traveler can opt out of and escape from his excessively technological world and find an antidote against human alienation. On his part, Noel Salazar, in a study that explores the anthropology of tourism, has examined how “in the context of tourism, the burden of neocolonialism has emerged as one of the main ways to describe the retention of the old colonies into a state of perpetual subordination to the so-called ‘developed

world’, despite its formal political independence” (2006:103). Salazar notes that the conception of modern tourism as an extension of colonialism is rooted in anthropological studies that try to explain the phenomenon of tourism in the 21st century, and despite the attempt to negate or evade the relationship, “colonialism... and tourism... were born together and are relatives”⁶ (Salazar 2006:103).

If we consider Easter Island’s terrible history of domination and colonization, we can better connect the negative connotation that Pablo Neruda imposes on himself when he personifies himself as a just another tourist among thousands that have arrived on the island without any more merit than to raise the money to buy the plane ticket. Since the first contact with the western world in 1722, all those who reached Easter Island thought they had rights over the territory or its inhabitants. There was no protection, for example, when slave boats stole workforce from the coasts of Easter Island mainly to work in the extraction of *guano* in Peru. The usurpation of men and the poor conditions in which they returned, plagued with disease, were such that the island’s population was almost decimated. In light of this, we are not surprised by the fact that the island was later rented to a British sheep company, Williamson Balfour, which occupied the insular territory as breeding grounds for sheep and imprisoned the native population in a true ghetto. The sheep moved freely and the islanders were locked up and forced to accept the terrible life conditions imposed by the *Compañía Explotadora de Isla de Pascua* (Easter Island Exploitation Company). These are some of the more relevant milestones that I can comment on here regarding Easter Island’s history of domination and colonization.⁷ Pablo Neruda connects these unfortunate historical events with mass tourism, which begins to emerge toward the end of the 20th century, as a new means of domination. Let us examine this hypothesis in the poem “The Island III”:

Antigua Rapa Nui, patria sin voz,
perdónanos a nosotros los parlanchines del mundo:
hemos venido de todas partes a escupir en tu lava
llegamos llenos de conflictos, de divergencias, de sangre,
de llanto y digestiones, de guerras y duraznos,
en pequeñas hileras de inamistad, de sonrisas
hipócritas, reunidos por los dados del cielo
sobre la mesa de tu silencio.

Una vez más llegamos a mancillarte.

Ancient Rapa Nui, homeland without a voice
forgive us the chatterboxes of the world
we have come from everywhere to spit into your lava,
we come full of conflicts, of divergences, of blood,
of tears and digestions, of wars and peach trees,
in small rows of unfriendliness,
of hypocritical smiles, united by the celestial dice
atop the table of your silence.

Once again we come to defile you.

The speaker defines himself as part of this group of people who come to spit in Easter Island's volcanoes. They are people that bring conflicts, wars, and hypocrisy with them, features that contrast with the island's passive silence. This poem shows how this "Ancient Rapa Nui" is – still in the 20th century – a "homeland

without a voice," vulnerable to the dominations of the "chatterboxes of the world." This opposition between the noise and the silence is also presented when Neruda defines Easter Island as a sacred place, showing the opposing differences between the loud tourists and the wise islanders:

Los hombres IX

A nosotros nos enseñaron a respetar la iglesia,
a no toser, a no escupir en el atrio,
a no lavar la ropa en el altar
y no es así: la vida rompe las religiones
y es esta isla en que habitó el Dios Viento
la única iglesia viva y verdadera:
van y vienen las vidas, muriendo y fornicando:
aquí en la isla de Pascua donde todo es altar,
donde todo es taller de lo desconocido,
la mujer amamanta su nueva criatura
sobre las mismas gradas que pisaron sus dioses.

Aquí a vivir! Pero también nosotros?
Nosotros, los transeúntes, los equivocados de estrella,
naufagaríamos en la isla como en una laguna,
en un lago en que todas las distancias concluyen,
en la aventura inmóvil más difícil del hombre.

The Men IX

We were taught to respect the church,
not to cough, not to spit in the atrium,
not to wash the clothes on the altar
and it is not so: life destroys religions
and this is the island where the Wind God lived, the
only true and living church:
lives come and go, dying and fornicating:
here on Easter Island where everything is an altar,
where everything is a workshop of the unknown,
the woman nurses her newborn baby on the very
steps on which her gods once tread.

Here let's live! But us as well?
We, the transients who follow the wrong star, would
be stranded on the island as well as in a lagoon,
In a lake in which all distances come to an end, in
the immobile adventure, the most difficult for men.

This constant opposition: noise/silence; sacred/profane is finally based on two types of people: us and them. "They" – the islanders – coexist with the sacred, without limits; all of the island's open space is a church – "the only true and living church." Natural acts such as breastfeeding are considered part of the life process and not something to be hidden. On the other hand,

"us" in *The Separate Rose* is a synonym for invading tourists, who are incapable of living in the everyday freedom of that which is sacred.

The poem "The Men IV" shows the absurd view that the subject has of himself, presenting severe criticism of the image, which does not concur with the place to which he has arrived:

Somos torpes los transeúntes, nos atropellamos
de codos,
de pies, de pantalones, de maletas,
bajamos del tren, del *jet*, de la nave, bajamos
con arrugados trajes y sombreros funestos.

We are the clumsy transients, we bump each other
with elbows,
feet, trousers, luggage,
we get off the train, the jet, the ship, we get off,
with wrinkled suits and disastrous hats.

It is not difficult to imagine these men running over each other, dressed so inadequately. From an eco-critical perspective we can understand, following Neil Evernden (1996:103), who states that "there is no such thing as an individual, only an individual in context, individual as a component of place, defined by place" under the premise that ecology is an interaction of everyone with everyone, where there is no space for an independent being except

as an integral part of a larger context. The idea that an individual exists only in context and is defined by it inspires me to begin to understand the discomfort of the subject that observes himself and feels out of place. We must add to this the curse of modern life, related to mechanical time and the typical haste that defines this man. To get off the train, jet, or vessel is nothing more than to get rid of the artifacts of modernization

and technological progress. In other words, there is ostentation in the visiting tourist that arrives on his airplane, but when he gets off he is left with nothing more than his garments, the garments of the civilization, which in the insular context lose the significance that they held in the urban context. On the island, the suit is an empty symbol, wrinkled in its vacuity.

Conclusion

The previous analyses have allowed me to show the conflictive encounter between the “horizon of

expectations” and the “space of experience” in Pablo Neruda’s poetry that represents Easter Island. If the first built an image of the island as a propitious place to begin life again and renewed rebirth, the touristic experience ended up expelling Pablo Neruda from his yearning for Easter Island. The poet, dressed in his tourist suit, did not manage to connect himself with his insular yearning. The myth of the island was not possible in the face of the evidence that this last corner of the planet is also possessed by the urban system, its vices and sins. This is why in the poem “The Men XV,” the speaker says:

Los hombres XV

El transeúnte, viajero, el satisfecho,
vuelve a sus ruedas a rodar, a sus aviones,
y se acabó el silencio solemne, es necesario
dejar atrás aquella soledad transparente
de aire lúcido, de agua, de pasto duro y puro
huir, huir, huir, de la sal, del peligro,
del solitario círculo en el agua
desde donde los ojos huecos del mar
las vértebras, los párpados de las estatuas negras
mordieron al espantado burgués de las ciudades:
Oh Isla de Pascua, no me atrapes,
hay demasiada luz, estás muy lejos,
y cuánta piedra y agua:
too much for me! Nos vamos!

The Men XV

The transient, the satisfied traveler,
returns to his rolling wheels, to his planes,
and the solemn silence has ended, he must leave behind
that transparent solitude of lucid air, of water,
of grassland hard and pure,
to flee, flee, flee from the salt,
from the danger, of the solitary circle in the water
where the hollow eyes of the sea,
the vertebrae, the eyelids of the black statues
bit the frightened bourgeois city dweller:
Oh Easter Island, do not trap me,
there is too much light, you are very far away,
and so much stone and water:
Too much for me! Let’s go!

The irony is clear in the final verse, where a colloquial formula appears to express that Easter Island is too much – “too much for me!” (written in English in the original Spanish version) – for the bourgeois speaker, accustomed to the city and its dose of contamination. There, if in the “horizon of expectations” the subject sought the “transparent solitude,” “the lucid air,” the light, the stone, and the water, after the “space of experience” these searches, these yearnings end up expelling the speaker. The apparent incoherence between what was expected and what was lived is what gives *The Separate Rose* its rich poetic significance. There is a contradiction and a confusion in Pablo Neruda’s poems of Easter Island that invites us to consider mass tourism as a threat to the fragile insular ecosystem.

In conclusion, there is a question that appears in one of the verses of *The Separate Rose* and that is significant in this reflection: “Y para qué vinimos a la isla?” [And why did we come to the island?] asks the speaker in the “The Island XIV.” In Pablo Neruda’s poetry,

Easter Island is put forth in two stages separated by the experience of the trip in 1971. Before the trip, the poems played with an imaginary of solid convictions based on the insular imaginary. After the trip, it is questioned and doubted. This is why the question seems fundamental to me, because it inquires about the decisive moment in Neruda’s poetic representation, the instant in which expectation and experience converge, when the images are confronted with the evidence of reality. That is the crucial encounter that allowed me to investigate how Neruda represents Easter Island in his poetry; his trip inspired the question of representation. “And why did we come to the island?” means that all certainties that were comfortably installed in the image of the dreamy, pristine, and uncontaminated island before the trip are shattered. “And why did we come to the island?” implies that the experience is faced with the expectation, taking apart the solid roots that sustained the tree of Neruda’s writing. “And why did we come to the island?” is ultimately the sad confirmation of the impossibility of reaching the insular ideal to which the poet aspired.

A version of this commentary was presented during the “Chile Week” organized by the Department of Languages and Literatures of Europe and the Americas (Spanish Division) of the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa held in November 2013. The title of the work was “Representaciones de Rapa Nui en la literatura chilena: la desencantada visión del poeta Pablo Neruda.”

Notes

1. From now on, I will use the term *discourse*, on one hand, – following Foucault – as “discursive formation” – that is, as a series of declarations articulated in one sense, among which a certain regularity may be defined. These formations have rules, or in other words, certain conditions of existence, co-existence, conservation, modification, and disappearance. On the other hand, I will use the term *discourse* following Stuart Hall, who proposes that “a discourse is a group of declarations that provide a language to speak about [...] a topic.” Hall adds that “when the declaration regarding a topic is made within a specific discourse, the discourse makes it possible to build the topic in a certain way.” (quoted in Pizarro 2009:26). This can be compared to other realities such as the Amazon and the Patagonia, places that – like Easter Island – have been dominated by the writing of the imperial view.
2. The poems in English that I will quote from *The Separate Rose* are taken from *La rosa separada. Tiare Haka Topa He Rosa. Pablo Neruda Rapanui*. The epilogue, “And why did we come to the island?” (Galilea 2011) includes a brief study of the poems and a contextualization of the biographical circumstances that surround the creative process of Neruda’s writing during this period.
3. I took these concepts from Reinhart Koselleck (1993) in his book *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Koselleck’s hypothesis is that, in the current world of progress and technology, the horizon of expectations is strengthened by the thought that it would be possible to reach greater and better life conditions. However, the space of experience has slowly shown that those expectations cannot be matched by reality. This distance, this abrupt collision between expectation and experience, is what defines the contemporary world, in the author’s opinion. As I will analyze below, Pablo Neruda precisely embodies this tense polarity between expectation and experience. The scenario in which he crystallizes the distance from both categories of knowledge is Easter Island, and the poems I will read account for both the experience of the island as well as the disappointment with his experience when he visited in 1971.
4. For more information on Neruda’s books about Easter Island, my thesis for the degree of Doctor in Literature may be consulted: “Easter Island in Pablo Neruda’s Poetry: Idealization and Disillusionment,” which was presented in April 2013 at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso.
5. Formed by the Greek prefix “ou” that implies negation and “topos” that means place: no-place. The homophony between “ou” and “eu,” the latter of which has positive attributes such as prosperous, ideal, or optimal, creates the term *beautiful-place*. As we know, this term was

used for the first time by Thomas More in his work *On the Best State of a Republic and the New Island of Utopia, a truly golden little book, no less beneficial than entertaining*, written in 1516.

6. Salazar explains that tourism may be understood as a post-colonial cultural form that is based on structural colonial relationships from the past and the present (104).
7. For more details about this subject, Hermann Fischer’s book *Sombras sobre Rapa Nui: Alegato por un pueblo olvidado* (2001) may be consulted.

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