

GENDER, DESIRE AND WHITENESS IN *LOS RÍOS PROFUNDOS*

By  
J. M. ARGUEDAS

by

GREGORY MURPHY

A THESIS

Presented to the Program in Comparative Literature  
and the Honors College of the University of Oregon  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts

July 1998

Approved:



*Leslie Bary*  
Professor Leslie Bary

Copyright 1998 Gregory Thomas Murphy

## An Abstract of the Thesis of

Gregory Thomas Murphy  
Bachelor of Arts

for the degree of

in the Comparative Literature Program,  
June 1998

to be taken

Title: GENDER, DESIRE AND WHITENESS IN LOS RÍOS PROFUNDOS BY J. M.  
ARGUEDASApproved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Leslie Bary

*Los ríos profundos*, the major work of José María Arguedas, has long been read as an example of a novel that successfully transculturates; that is, that successfully fuses two systems of expression--European and Indian--ordinarily incompatible. Through this fusion, Arguedas attempts to create a new linguistic model for understanding the world, a model better able to absorb diverse cultural influences yet always fundamentally Andean in orientation. This project forms the primary system of significance in the novel and becomes the motivation for the development of a unique metaphorical vocabulary. However, I show that this primary discourse is fundamentally masculine in orientation and that there exists a secondary, feminine, discourse that disrupts and undermines the first. Read in this context, *Los ríos profundos* proves thematically incoherent, the expression of conflicting cultural desires rather than of a revived indigenous perspective capable produce meaning.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Chapters:

1) By Way of Introduction.....	1
2) Transculturation.....	8
3) A New Discourse.....	19
4) Men and Women.....	28
5) The Aryan Ideal.....	35
6) A Pattern of Futility.....	46
7) In Conclusion.....	49
Endnote.....	51
Works Cited.....	52

## I) BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

[E]l caudal de las dos naciones se podría y debía unir. Y el camino no tenía por que ser, ni era posible que fuera únicamente el que se exigía con imperio de vencedores expoliadores, o sea: que la nación vencida renuncia a su alma, aunque no sea sino en apariencia, formalmente, y toma la de los vencedores, es decir, que se aculture. *Yo no soy un aculturado: yo soy un peruano que orgullosamente, como un demonio feliz, habla en christiano y en indio, en español y en quechua.*

José María Arguedas<sup>1</sup>

I begin with this quotation, taken from Arguedas's acceptance speech at the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega awards ceremony in October of 1968, because I believe it to contain the fundamental convictions underlying the post-colonial critical endeavor. Arguedas, certainly immune to accusations of optimism, does not deny the catastrophe brought first by conquest and then by modernization. Yet he holds forth, embodied in his own doubled subjectivity, the promise that amid the wreckage of modernity<sup>2</sup> may still be retrieved elements of the earlier underlying cultures, that the path may be somehow re-

---

<sup>1</sup> "The wealth of the two nations could and should have been united. And the path did not have reason to be, nor was it possible for it to be, only the path which succeeded with the spoliating conquerors, or the path along which the defeated nation relinquishes its soul, if only in appearance, formally, and accepts the soul of the conquerors, which is to say, the path along which it acculturates. I am not acculturated, I am a Peruvian who proudly, like a happy demon, speaks Christian and Indian, Spanish and Quechua." *Zorro* 257

<sup>2</sup>See endnote for discussion of my usage of the terms "modernity" and "modernization."

evaluated and set right. When, in his final sentence, Arguedas changes from the past tense to the present, he introduces the idea that remedial steps may still in good faith be taken, that the soul may be returned to a defeated people and, most important, that it may be coupled with the intellectual contributions of their conquerors to forge a new subject, capable now of survival and creation--ideas which, it seems to me, contain the hopes motivating post-colonial critical discourse. This doubled subject now makes it possible to disregard questions of cultural relativism or ethnocentricity, even to avoid reinterpreting texts that seem to be writing to a Western audience, for when Arguedas speaks, the language he seeks is half--but only half--our own. The critic, concerned before with complicity, is presented with the prospect of an opportunity not just to reinterpret but to reinvigorate a history written on the gag of the conquered. If such a thing is possible, if the colonized cultures may be successfully reincarnated and given a voice, certainly José María Arguedas is in an ideal position to speak it.

Arguedas was born in 1911 in Andahuaylas, a small village in the Peruvian Andes. His mother died when Arguedas was two years old, and his father later remarried a woman who had three children of her own. The stepmother apparently developed such a rabid distaste for her new charge that she banished him to the kitchen and to the care of the Quechua servants, while his father, an itinerant lawyer, was away. Consequently, Arguedas's first language was Quechua, with which he continued to identify more than with the language and culture of the *señores*. Nonetheless, he became and remained painfully aware of the social difference between himself and the Quechua culture of his upbringing. In 1924 he was taken by his father to a school in Abancay, where, for the first time, he was forced to adopt Spanish as his mother tongue. That school later became the scene of his major fictional work, *Los ríos profundos*. He spent most of the rest of his life in Lima, working as a teacher of Spanish, then turning to writing, first as an ethnologist of indigenous culture and finally as a writer of literature. In 1969, writing his last novel, *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*, which was, as he says, "part of the

therapeutic treatment I was told to undergo," Arguedas committed suicide, shooting himself twice in the head.<sup>3</sup>

In his written work, Arguedas's bicultural experience becomes obsession. The critic Angel Rama notes:

una rara unidad distingue a la obra intelectual de José María Arguedas respecto a la producción de su tiempo... Salvo la novela testimonial *El sexto* (1961)...y salvo una escasa serie de páginas sobre asuntos accidentales, su producción resulta unificada por el manejo de una temática. Rota en torno al indio peruano y aspira poco a poco a reflejar, con criterio francamente nacionalista, a la totalidad socio-cultural de su país cuyo estructurante, para Arguedas, no puede ser otro que la cultura indígena. (Rama 194)

[A rare unity distinguishes the intellectual work of José María Arguedas with respect to the production of his time. Excepting the testimonial novel *El sexto* (1961), and excepting a limited number of pages on incidental topics, his production is unified by the handling of a single theme. It revolves around the Peruvian Indian and aspires little by little to reflect, with frankly nationalistic criteria, the socio-cultural totality of his country, whose structure, for Arguedas, could not be other than that of the indigenous culture.]

Arguedas takes it upon himself to transform his personal sense of alienation into the foundation for a literature that attempts to meld concerns of nationality and culture, European and Indian. To this end, he wrote three types of literature: ethnographic studies of Quechua culture; poetry, primarily in Quechua; and fiction, for which he is best known. His first fictional work, a collection of short stories entitled *Agua*, largely undertook the exploration of a well explored theme: violence against Indians. Arguedas,

---

<sup>3</sup>I owe the information contained in this paragraph, as well as much of its style, to the biographical information included in Moreiras's essay, as well as in the introduction to *Los ríos profundos*, written by William Rowe.

however, managed the revolutionary task of reformulating the phenomenon within a historical context, in which both sides take part. In *Los ríos profundos*, experience and obsession are united most closely. The novel describes the experiences of an adolescent white child, named Ernesto, raised among Quechua speaking people, who is moved to a school in Abancay. There a European perspective and the world of the Indian are thrown into conflict and Ernesto must identify his position between them. In the novel, as in life, the protagonist finds he does not belong to either world, that his is a doubled and doubling subjectivity. Arguedas made it his life's mission to write the language of the doubled person, to resurrect, reinvigorate, and reintroduce Quechua into the conception of Peruvian identity.

For Rama, Arguedas, who is seemingly so transparent in his political and thematic project, becomes the ideal candidate from which to formulate the basis of a specifically Latin-American critical apparatus. Borrowing a term developed by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, Rama designates Arguedas, and Joao Guimarães Rosa, Juan Rulfo, Gabriel García Márquez, and Augusto Roa Bastos as "los transculturadores," those who transculturate. If, Rama begins, the fundamental desires of every Latin American literary venture are originality and authenticity, then the fundamental problem of a Latin American critical apparatus is to mediate between (European) modernity and the unique racial and cultural heritage of Latin America, to achieve the quantum ability to speak, as Arguedas does, with and in two tongues. For Arguedas, heterogeneity is a fact of those resistant to acculturation. To transculturate is to experience and to write this fact. In this way, formulating a new national and literary identity by invigorating the past so as to articulate the future, transculturation becomes a path towards the creation of meaning.

Yet, for all this, under critical pressure, transculturation seems to fall apart. Arguedas's famed thematic unity becomes thematic incoherence. In what follows I hope

to show that once one questions the level of coherence that Arguedas's works present, they offer little by way of thematic alternative. Recently, Alberto Moreiras presented what seem to be the crucial questions facing transculturation theory: "Hasn't transculturation theory assumed for too long that meaning is always available, always already to be either found or produced? What if transculturation were shown to be not a path towards meaning but rather a path into the implosion of meaning?" (Moreiras 89) Moreiras goes on to suggest that when Arguedas completed both his last novel and his life, placing two bullets through his head in his office at the Agrarian University of La Molina, that act marked the final unraveling of the transculturation project. I believe that its incoherence was visible long before.

There are, to my mind, several great challenges to the coherence of transculturation, made clear in the incoherence I find in Arguedas's work. First, transculturation theory has not adequately understood its relationship to the experience of modernization it seeks to forestall. Transculturation is a trick, performed with smoke, but especially with mirrors. Spitta, perhaps recognizing this, describes Rama's formulation as an attempt to

analyze the processes at work in a Latin-American literature that consciously situates itself at a cultural intersection: between different ethnicities and linguistic traditions (Quechua, Guaraní, indigenous Mexican, and Afro Brazilian on the one side and Creole/Spanish and Portuguese on the other); between different geographic areas ("retrograde" rural areas and "modern," rapidly acculturating metropolitan centers); between different literary movements (avant-garde and diverse and unsuccessful regionalisms and *indigenismos*); and between different conceptions of the literary (written and oral). (Spitta 9)

The reflected space between these series of opposed principles describes the area in which the critic works, where (s)he takes on the Sisyphean task of mediating this network of polarities. Of course, one dialectic underlies the rest. As Moreiras points out, "the militant or critical version of transculturation must posit both a (utopian) zero-degree and a full degree of transculturation, a point of origin and a goal, which are always unreachable, but without which it would find itself deprived of a teleological reason for its own existence." (Moreiras 88) For transculturation to remain viable--even on the most superficial level--it must understand that it is, at best, "a remedial step undertaken after acculturation has happened," that it is an *engaged* stance with respect not just to Indian, but also to Christian, to Quechua as well as to Spanish. (Moreiras 94)

Such a recognition may allow the post-colonial critic to avoid many of the epistemological pitfalls that transculturation has produced, but it cannot save its coherence. To admit the relationship of transculturation to the experience of modernity is to open the door to a new, and as yet not fully explored, polarity.<sup>4</sup> Rama's suggestion that a desire for originality and authenticity is at the root of the Latin American literary venture calls for the critic to base his criticism in the particular cultural and racial makeup of the country. This in turn, suggests the possibility of transculturation, the notion that the fundamental problem is to mediate between heritage and modernity, between the old and the new, between a utopian zero degree and the catastrophe of complete assimilation. Yet transculturation in this formulation does not provide a model for understanding the appearance within a text of the desire for authenticity that began this train of logic and which at every stage binds itself to and disrupts attempts at articulation. Because transculturation is ideology,<sup>5</sup> this problem may be restated in terms of the formula

---

<sup>4</sup>A rare, but important exception to this rule is *Hybridity*, by García Canclini. Canclini's argument, which is persuasive and lucidly argued, nonetheless emphasizes the cosmopolitan manifestations of hybridity and is thus tangential to the discussion of transculturation in Arguedas. Moreover, transculturation is always and intimately involved in the analysis of a particular nationality. The contemporary discussion of hybridity seeks to look beyond nationality in ways that, while interesting, are irrelevant to my argument.

<sup>5</sup>While the point may be obvious, it seems responsible to support further this claim. Transculturation is ideology most simply because it involves a critical relationship to a literary text, and "all literary texts are

succinctly set forth by Terry Eagleton in "Ideology, Fiction, Narrative." Eagleton suggests that ideology is composed of two elements, the emotive and, here borrowing Jakobson's language, the conative, the speaker-oriented location and the recipient-directed, "the language of wishing, cursing, fearing, denigrating, celebrating"; and the language of the speech act. (Eagleton 67, 66) Transculturation has done an admirable job of examining the politically comprehensible aspect of the project, and, in its relentless pursuit of articulation, in its insistence that within its schema lies the possibility of formulating a new conception of national identity, has clung to the conative, to the recipient directed. Yet critics have neither sought nor understood the motivating desire behind this objective. The failure of transculturation theory lies in its inability to recognize that what Rama and Spitta describe as transculturation, most fundamentally, is less about articulating two systems of expression ordinarily incompatible than about articulating the desire to mediate between the two. In *Los ríos profundos*, on a textual level, these problematics are transformed into ever simpler polarities: into that which is comprehensible and that which is not, into that which produces meaning and that which is desired, into the masculine and the feminine.

In this paper I want to explore these challenges to transculturation theory, and attempt to describe what is at stake, first by elaborating some of the inconsistencies in the theory itself, and then, using *Los ríos profundos* as my guide, to show how these inconsistencies, through the appearance of desire, subvert the thematic coherence of the text. I begin with transculturation itself.

---

in some sense ideological--that is to say, aligned somewhere on a spectrum of significations which contribute either to securing or transforming the conditions of existence of the dominant social relations of production." (Eagleton 66) What's more, transculturation explicitly takes it upon itself to attempt to revise, transform, or reconsider these conditions of existence.

## II) TRANSCULTURATION

The contemporary debate over transculturation in Latin America has been plagued by a confusion as to the meaning of the term. A great deal of this lack of clarity is attributable to confusion between the anthropological origins of transculturation as a description of social development and the outgrowth of a literary notion of transculturation as a critical and aesthetic scheme. Coined by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in 1940 as an alternative to "acculturation," the anthropological usage of the term "insist[e]n el papel activo y creador de los pueblos colonizados y subray[a] la novedad irreductible de las culturas populares latinoamericanas [insists on the active and creative role of the colonized people and underscores the irreducible novelty of Latin American popular culture] (Lienhard 97)." That this new identity is the product of both cultures--rather than the result of the dominating culture absorbing the dominated--is understood within Ortiz's schema to be an empirically demonstrable fact of encounter and co-existence. It is also a radical ideological stance. Insofar as Ortiz's model inherently--and rightly--positions itself against a "whitening" model of cultural development, transculturation sets itself up as a study of social organization and development while also proposing an ideological position that draws attention away from the union of cultures and towards the stubborn influence of the dominated. To this end, as Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán has pointed out, the prefix is carefully chosen: "Volviendo a nuestro término: *ad-culturación* indica unión o *contacto de culturas*; *ab-culturación* separación

de culturas, rechazo; y *trans-culturación* paso de una cultura a otra [returning to our term: ad-culturation indicates a union or contact of cultures, ab-culturation separation of cultures, rejection; and transculturation passage from one culture to another].” (Aguirre Beltran 13) Where once existed two discrete cultures, Ortiz now seeks to examine the historical processes that resulted in the formulation of the unique character of contemporary Cuban culture, to his mind fundamentally mestizo, not just racially, but linguistically and aesthetically. In the notion of transculturation, in its economic model of cultural exchange, Ortiz suggests a model and a methodology that allow for the consideration of the subordinated elements in this economy, that insists on the active and creative and powerful influence of the dominated.

This emphasis on re-evaluation becomes the axle by which literary transculturation turns its anthropological antecedent on its head. Whereas Ortiz derived his preference for the term from firsthand observations of Cuban culture, so that on some level transculturation describes "any kind of cultural mixing," a literary model of transculturation understands itself to be an aesthetic project, still unresolved and always unavailable. (Moreiras 85) Ortiz's work leads to the present. Rama's reacts to it. The anthropological task is to assume a revitalized interest in the historical influence of the dominated, while the work of the literary transculturator is to constructively imagine the future. In this way, transculturation in a literary context requires a subjective attempt at formulating or examining a relationship between an understanding of modernization and a conception of indigenous purity. As Rama notes, "sólo una percepción estética renovada que venía de la modernización del continente podía autorizarlos a recomponer sobre aquellos materiales [culturales] un discurso superior que se homologaba y enfrentaba a los productos más jerarquizados de una literatura universal [Only a renewed aesthetic perception that comes from the modernization of the continent can authorize them to recompose on these cultural materials a superior discourse which confirms and confronts the most hierarchical products of a universal literature]." (Rama) The end goals

of this project are not modest. At its core is the belief that this recomposition can produce a new voice, a new conception and a new way of conceiving of Latin American identity, a specifically Latin American literary apparatus.

Within the small canon of literary transculturation studies, one would be hard pressed to locate a declarative sentence that does not in some way refer to the novelty, to the reanimating nature, of the project. Nonetheless, since the conquest, in all of Latin America and particularly in Peru, personal identity has, through designators like “mestizo,” “criollo,” and “cholo,” been understood socially through one’s position on a cultural and racial spectrum with European and Indian at opposing poles. The Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, writing in the years following the conquest, explains:

De manera que al español y al guineo nascidos allá les llaman criollos y criollas...Al hijo de negro y de india o de indio y de negra dizen mulato y mulata. A los hijos llaman cholo...quiere decir perro, no de los caztizos, sino de los muy vellacos gocones...A los hijos de español y de india o de indio y española, nos llaman mestizos, por decir que somos mezclados de ambas naciones...Me lo llamo y p a boca llena, y me honro con él. Aunque en Indias, si a uno dellos les dizen “sois un mestizo” o “es un mestizo”, lo toman por menosprecio...A los hijos de español y de mestiza, o de mestizo y española, llaman cuatralvos, por dezir que tienen cuarta parte de indio y tres de español. A los hijos de mestizo de india o de indio y de mestiza llaman tresalvos, por dezir que tienen tres partes de indio y una de español. Todos estos nombres...se han inventado en mi tierra para nombrar las generaciones que ha havido después de que los españoles fueron a ella; y podemos dezir que ellos los llevaron con las demás cosas que no havía antes. (Garcilaso de la Vega, 279)

[The children of Spaniards by Spanish women born there are called *criollos* or *criollas*, implying that they were born in the Indies...The child of a Negro by an Indian woman or of an Indian and a Negro woman is called mulato or mulata. Their children are called cholos...It means dog, but it is not used for a thoroughbred dog, but only a mongrel cur. The children of Spaniards by Indians are called mestizos, meaning that we are a mixture of two races...I call myself by it in public and am proud of it, though in the Indies, if a person is told..."You're a mestizo," it is taken as an insult...The children of a Spaniard and a mestizo, or vice versa, are called *cuatralvos*, meaning that they have one part Indian blood and three of Spanish. The children of a mestizo and an Indian...are called *tresalvos*, meaning that they have three parts of Indian blood and one of Spanish. All these names...have been devised in Peru to describe racial groups that have come into existence since the arrival of the Spanish, and we can therefore say that they were brought in together with the other things not previously found in Peru.]  
(Garcilaso de la Vega, 607-608)

Insofar as the notion that a fusion of racial elements may produce a new identity is as old as the proliferation of races in the New World, transculturation, to some extent, is a matter of emphasis. El Inca's explanation reflects the value system of a colonized world. The project of transculturation, then, expands race into culture, and reverses the insitutional system that associates personal value with proximity to a European ideal. On some level, the innovation is ideological rather than methodological or epistemological.

Moreover, in important ways, transculturation falls within a long tradition of Latin American literature. It is fitting that Arguedas's declaration of doubled subjectivity should occur at the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega awards ceremony, because it ties Arguedas to the beginning of a tradition, not just of advocacy for the indigenous people, but of attempts to describe in the interaction between European and Indian cultures the promise

of a new national identity. El Inca, as well as his rather more cryptic counterpart Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, advocated for the indigenous people and did so in a language that took advantage of both European and Indian systems of expression. If these authors stopped short of developing a new, peculiarly Peruvian linguistic system, it was not by much. Furthermore, the nation-building novels of the nineteenth century, as cogently elucidated by Doris Sommer, as well as the *indigenista* movement of the early twentieth century attempted, in different ways and with varying degrees of success, this same project.

Still, despite its similarity to past literary ventures, transculturation is still a distinct undertaking. Our times are very different from those of the conquest. El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega was able to formulate his rhetorical attack within the clear-cut lines of national opposition.<sup>6</sup> No longer does it make sense to appeal for the Incas to the Spanish. Indeed, Spanish dominance in Peru ended relatively early, as "in 1821 unmarried Spanish were ordered to leave the country and forfeit half their property, with the same restrictions placed upon married men soon thereafter." (Chevarría 9) The dominant European influence throughout the nineteenth century was the British, who floated many of Peru's loans and exploited much of Peru's minerals and guano. The "Christian" side of Arguedas's dialectic is a hodgepodge of European influences, comprehensible under the mantle of modernization. Furthermore, transculturation, for all its apparent similarities with the political agendas of earlier literary movements, explicitly sets itself against them. The difference between the transculturative enterprise and that of its *indigenista* and regionalist precursors, Spitta suggests, is "that between a novelistic point of view that situates itself as superior and distant to the world it describes--a

---

<sup>6</sup> For El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, the battle lines of the cultural struggle he witnessed were clearly drawn: a nation, the Incan, had been conquered by another, the Spanish. His argument, indirect as it often was, was framed in these terms, as suggested by the dedication of his *Royal Commentaries* to "the Most Serene Princess, the lady Catarina of Portugal, Duchess of Braganza, etc." (dedication page) For twentieth century transculturators, this is no longer a reasonable framework.

folklorist position--and a more interior vision that is closer to the referent." (Spitta 9) Whereas previous work removed Indians from context and assigned them a thematic meaning within a Western world-view, the language of Arguedas and other transculturators, attempts to reproduce the indigenous way of speaking, to place itself at the indigenous vantage point. Transculturation may work along the same scale as its predecessors, Inca/indigenous at the one end and Spanish/European at the other, but ideologically it situates itself in a very different location.

Because literary transculturation, at least in rhetoric, maintains the Indian/European dichotomy and explicitly and ideologically intends to counter the colonialist "whitening" of Latin America, it takes its place within the broad field of contemporary post-colonial studies. Yet the dichotomy expressed in these studies may not be any more precise or relevant than that found in their predecessors. Jorge Klor de Alva has suggested that the whole application of the designator "post-colonial" to the contemporary (Latin) American experience is a misnomer, in that colonization, as now understood, has never existed in the Americas. Without underestimating the profound oppression and racial prejudice that has existed, Klor de Alva points out that these crimes were committed by mestizos upon mestizos. It may be an semantic quibble, but when applied to a critical endeavor that understands its own utility in terms of the ability to articulate both Indian and European systems of expression, semantic quibbles turn out to have portentous implications.

Spitta, recognizing this problem, proposes a solution that may be still more troubling. She claims that within the world-view of Arguedas, whom she holds up as the paradigmatic literary transculturator,

Indian culture ceased to exist with the conquest. All things labeled "Indian" were actually only markers for the different stages of transition away from that original

culture and towards a mestizo one. Since the conquest, it had become impossible to determine what was truly indigenous and what was Spanish. ( Spitta 144)

This construction is meant to affirm Ortiz's conclusion that transculturation is the inevitable result of encounter, but, applied to a critical venture, it acknowledges and dismisses the problem raised by Klor de Alva, only to underscore the tenuous subjectivity of literary transculturation--so that it falls to the artist or critic to determine an appropriate or desirable extent of transculturation. Transculturation, as a Latin American literary venture, runs the risk of either becoming hopelessly vague or relying on anthropology to determine acceptable landmarks to describe the proper ratio of cultural mixing.

The models of successful transculturation that the transculturators invoke--both anthropologically and literary-representationally--seem to demonstrate this consistent and troubling pattern. Spitta tells us that Arguedas's notion of desirable transculturation comes from his studies of the Montaro river valley. In this region, she notes, Arguedas found a fundamentally mestizo culture, where elements of the original Quechua culture flourished. Yet, unlike those remote, mostly indigenous areas left largely unchanged since the conquest, the communities of the Montaro river valley seemed to possess the proper "antibodies" to resist modernization, and thus were better equipped to adapt to the technological and social changes that accompanied rapid modernization. These communities achieved this remarkable success due in large part to the fact that in the early days of the conquest, its military utility to the Spanish allowed its occupants to forge alliances with the conquistadors, while other less strategically useful areas were brutally oppressed. Lacking in natural resources, the Montaro river valley was left alone--and partially transculturated--after the original threat was overcome. A society both Indian and Spanish was thus allowed to develop under unusually favorable circumstances.

This pattern is reflected on the literary-representational level in, among other novels, *Cien años de soledad*, by García Márquez, perhaps the most successful of Rama's "transculturadores." After a duel of honor, the Iguarans first move from Riohacha, a port town at the intersection of Indian and European culture, to a "a settlement of peaceful Indians located in the foothills." There, in that "hidden village," a "native-born tobacco farmer" named Buendía and our European Iguaran forge an alliance that makes them rich and ultimately results in the intermarriage of their two bloodlines. After a duel of honor, the families move again, to even more remote Macondo, a town "surrounded on all sides by water." There, again, a culture is allowed to develop with both an inexplicable yet steady influx of European intellectual influence, and the indigenous, communal social structure and the trademark symbolic-representational perception of the natural world. When the banana company arrives, the structure accommodates, but the magic remains.

In each case, after an original and amicable encounter, the community, which now includes members of both cultures, is allowed to go head and happily transculturate itself without impediment. While these examples may fuel hope for a mestizo solution to the cultural division of Peru and Colombia, they do not present a useful model for how this transculturation can take place. Because transculturation as a literary apparatus is already transculturated, that is, because its utility as a hermeneutic concept relies both on its ready assumption of a notion of indigenous purity and on an understanding of the ubiquity of modernization, it is unreasonable to advocate a space in which this productive transculturation can occur without external interference. The notion of critical transculturation requires positing an essential shift in the cultural relationship to modernization, which in theory would allow the dominated culture more productively to absorb the modern onslaught. Insofar as it is an engaged stance with respect to this onslaught, it cannot also include the notion that the process can be halted or ignored. It may be resisted, but not halted. Interestingly, many critics have read the cataclysmic

weather pattern that destroys Macondo, as well as the plague that ends Arguedas's *Los ríos profundos*, as efforts to start over, to create exactly such an indeterminate space of stasis in which productive transculturation can take place. But, if one considers the violence of each event and its peculiarity to the community that provides the thematic center of each novel and if one considers that in each case the ancestors of our idyllic original secluded cultures are wiped from the planet, it is plausible to read these holocausts, not as suggestions of new beginnings, but as literal failures of old endeavors.

The answer to these problems, of course, is to retain the original dichotomy as comprehensible abstractions, so that transculturation achieves a precarious balance, on the one hand engaging the real world experience of modernity, while, on the other, adamantly relegating itself to the aesthetic, the literary-representational. The validity of transculturation would then rely on its practicality, so that "the end or the limit of every transculturating practice or analysis determines in every case its specific relevance as a hermeneutic tool." (Moreiras 88) My concern, and the point of the preceding paragraphs, is that this inherent vagueness within transculturation, which relies on the re-articulation and re-evaluation of dominated cultures, may cause it to fall prey to the same failings as Western post-modern culture, which on some level it is always trying to resist. Fredric Jameson describes among the characteristics of post-modernity a lack of historicity and a consequent cannibalization of the past. Transculturation, both fundamentally abstracted from and subjectively engaged in recovering the indigenous cultural elements with which it seeks to construct a desirable ratio for the future, seems to reflect both these characteristics, and, consequently, may not be able constructively and honestly to "translate the problematics and the peculiar flavors" of indigenous discourse.

That transculturation possesses some utility as a hermeneutic tool is proven by the frequency with which these basic dichotomies inform Latin American literature. That it is an effective model for countering the tendency towards colonialist "whitening," or even that is capable of any sort of constructive articulation, seems to me considerably less

certain. Much rides on its success or failure. I have argued, in the preceding pages, that transculturation is an ambiguous construction, based neither on historical experience nor on clearly delineated abstractions, that consequently it requires a subjective effort by the critic or author to determine the limit or extent of transculturation. In so far as this is true, transculturation joins a number of other, very useful, critical constructions, from post-structuralism to modernity. However, it also loses any claim to anthropological truth. This is important because, when transculturation claims to represent an internal viewpoint closer to that of indigenous people, it often does so without understanding that it is an engaged stance with respect to modernization. This failure allows the (Western) critic to appropriate the voice of the Indian and opens up a door to the very deceptive appearance of participating in his attempt to formulate identity. While certainly to some extent the experience of alien cultures may be read in their texts, transculturation provides, to my mind, too facile a construction for appropriating and analyzing the voice of these cultures. By assuming that meaning is always ready to be found or produced, transculturation compels these texts to offer up answers appropriate to a Western discourse, even as it calls for the subversion of that discourse. If, as Moreiras suggests, transculturation should prove to be “not the purveyor of a new historical coherence, but rather a mestizo space of incoherence,” then the construction no longer allows the critic to claim the articulation of the Indian.(Moreiras 88) It may also, paradoxically, bring him/her closer to the real problematics being expressed in these texts.

Much of the problem is attributable to the fact that transculturation does not analyze a clearly demarcated object of study, but only what an epistemologist would term a “fuzzy domain.”<sup>7</sup> But transculturation, at least in Arguedas, is not epistemological; it does not seek to achieve or articulate knowledge. Rather it is ideological, both the expression of a struggle for identity and the subsequent critical stance developed to

---

<sup>7</sup>I owe this thought in part to personal communication with Gustavo Verdesio.

examine this expression. In the remainder of this paper, I want to examine in some detail *Los ríos profundos*, Arguedas's masterpiece, to show how Arguedas's struggle strips transculturation of any capacity for articulation. As with all texts that transculturate, *Los ríos profundos* announces its central concern to be the experience of the subordinated Indian and mestizo classes. I hope to show that, beneath this surface motivation, the novel's central obsession, and that which ultimately forces it into incoherence, is instead the idea of and desire for "whiteness."

### III) A NEW DISCOURSE

Arguedas's primary rhetorical task in *Los ríos profundos* is twofold. First, insisting on the internal subjectivity of the Indian and the persistence of indigenous culture, Arguedas must amend his language so as to carry a voice both alien to Spanish and to which Spanish is alien. Second, in order to constructively imagine a transculturated response to modernization, Arguedas must devise a mechanism for articulating a perspective outside the paradigmatic discourse that surrounds him. The result is a very complicated work. *Los ríos profundos* is essentially a realist novel, yet each event is filtered linguistically through a Spanish flavored with Quechua idiom and Quechua myth and thematically through the unique outlook of its child protagonist Ernesto. This singular perspective, its special language, provides the thematic center of *Los ríos profundos*. Yet, as Antonio Cornejo Polar has pointed out, it is a personal perspective only in appearance:

en realidad compromete la suerte de todo el universo. Y es que *Los ríos profundos* tiene como supuesto una concepción del universo entendido como totalidad coherente, compacta, absolutamente integrada. El contraste entre esta concepción y la realidad de un mundo desintegrado y conflictivo es el núcleo de la novela.

[In its reality comprises the situation of the entire universe. And it is that *Deep Rivers* assumes a conception of the universe understood as a coherent totality, compact, absolutely integrated. The contrast between this conception and the reality of a disintegrated and conflictive world is the nucleus of the novel.]

(Cornejo Polar 100)

In this way, *Los ríos profundos*, is a properly transculturating work, at once confronting the catastrophe of social and cultural inequality and forging a new discourse with which to reconceive the dominant system, a discourse, "that is made up of native and Hispanic elements, with both integrated to form a *mestizaje*, or mingling of cultures, whose organization, however variable, is always, basically, Andean." (Ortega 208)

Ernesto, importantly, is an adolescent and *Los ríos profundos* is always on some level a novel about growing up. Ernesto's discovery of his own voice occurs parallel to the development of a literary and national language. The return to Cuzco that begins the novel takes on important symbolic significance as a return to an idealized origin for the wandering son of an itinerant lawyer--an origin that instead turns out to be an ambivalent space in which language is fundamentally disjoined and meaning inaccessible. "Cuando mi padre hacía frente a sus enemigos, y más, cuando contemplaba de pie las montañas...yo meditaba en el Cuzco," Ernesto remembers. "Sabía que al fin llegaríamos a la gran ciudad [When my father confronted his enemies, and even more when he stood contemplating the mountains...I would think of Cuzco (7)]." (Ríos 11)<sup>8</sup> The reality of his return, however, is frustrated for Ernesto: "El Cuzco de mi padre, el que me había descrito no podía ser ése [This couldn't be the Cuzco my father had described to me a thousand times (4)]." (Ríos 11) Cuzco is a city of linguistic chaos in which the Ernesto

---

<sup>8</sup>All translations of *Los ríos profundos*, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the translation by Frances Horning Barraclough. Her page numbers follow the English translation.

can no longer look to the figures of power to provide explanation or articulation. The old man, Ernesto's powerful uncle and a cruel and wasteful landowner who viciously represses his Indian servants, speaks "con voz de condenado [with the voice of the damned(3)](Ríos 4)." Ernesto's father, his guide through his travels, is now a "fugitivo [fugitive(4)]" in his native town, carrying out some peculiar and unexplained plan, the motivation for which is never clear to his son. The architecture of Cuzco mirrors this linguistic disjunction, as Incan stones "bullían bajo el segundo piso esclado [seemed to be bubbling up beneath the whitewashed second story (7)]." (Ríos 11) These cultural reminders are relegated to the status of public urinals. As the offender moves away along the wall, Ernesto imagines that the man "luchaba contra la sombra del muro [wrestled with the shadow of the wall (7)]." (Ríos 11) His attempt to infuse meaning into the misdeed, however, is frustrated. By the end of the paragraph, Ernesto can only conclude that the man must have been a drunk. At each step, any attempt at linguistic comprehension is confused and contradicted. Ernesto asks his father to pause so that he can listen to the speech of the stone walls. "No es que hablan," his father replies. "Estás confundido. Se trasladan a tu mente y desde allí te inquietan [It is not that they are talking. You're just confused. They get into your mind and disturb you (8)]." (Ríos 12)

From this ubiquitous and institutional madness, which implies the absence of language, arises a new symbolic vocabulary as "narrador y protagonista se unen en la decisión básica de movilizarse hacia el pasado en busca de la autenticidad existencial [narrator and protagonist are united in the basic decision to move towards the past in search of existential authenticity]."(Cornejo Polar 104) When Ernesto touches the stones of the Incan wall, he establishes a system of communication that is at once expressive and yet expresses nothing concrete:

Toqué las piedras con mis manos; seguí la línea ondulante, imprevisible, como de los ríos, en que se juntan los bloques de roca. En la oscura calle, en el silencio, el

muro parecía vivo, sobre la palma de mis manos llameaba la juntura de las piedras que había tocado. (Ríos 11)

[I touched the stone with my hands, following the line which was as undulating and unpredictable as a river, where the blocks of stone were joined. In the dark street, in the silence, the wall seemed to be alive; the lines I had touched between the stones burned on the palms of my hands.(6)]

In this gesture, running his hands along the ancient wall, Ernesto enters into participation in a speech act that encompasses both subject and object, but also language, so that this wall and these living stones take on important metaphorical significance for the boy. These natural images, living stones and undulating rivers, become the symbols that will inform and translate the entirety of Ernesto's experience and through which the virtue of other characters will be signified. Ernesto's physical communion with the wall precipitates a larger and, to borrow a term from Bakhtin, carnivalesque overturning, which revives subordinated, even defunct, cultural material and gives it both semantic preference and power of judgment over the dominant system. For example, when Ernesto asks his father how it is that the Inca allows the old man's greed, his father explains that, "los incas están muertos [The Incas are dead (9)]." Ernesto disagrees: "Pero no este muro. Este muro puede caminar; podría elevarse a los cielos o avanzar hacia el fin del mundo y volver [But not this wall. The wall can walk, it could rise into the sky and travel to the end of the world and back (9)]."(Ríos 13) The Incan people may be gone, their culture cataclysmically repressed, but their systems of expression remain vibrant and active, revived in the unique insight of the child Ernesto.

Within this linguistic schema, all things and people are to some extent transculturated. Ernesto's experience provides a metaphorical vocabulary for designating the particular degrees of transculturation and consequently of personal virtue. In the first chapter this is played out in the following contrasting descriptions. The old man, who

lives on the same street as the great wall, is marked by “un árbol de cedrón...que era bajo y de ramas escuálidas...[L]os niños debían de martirizarlo [A cedron tree...low with shabby branches. The little children must have made a martyr of it (5)].” (Ríos 9)

Ernesto’s father, too removed from an indigenous perspective to be capable of his son’s insight, nonetheless is symbolically positioned closer to Ernesto’s (utopian) perspective than the old man. From his father’s blue eyes, Ernesto imagines, “iban a brotar ríos de lagrimas [rivers of tears might flow (7)].” (Ríos 11) Within the metaphorical system of the novel, this pairing of whiteness (blue eyes) with the rivers that provide the novel’s central symbol denotes the father’s intermediate cultural position. While the use of metaphor to denote authorial and thematic sympathy may not be Arguedas’s invention, his usage is truly revolutionary, reversing the value system of the dominant culture and seducing the reader into a linguistic system of Arguedas’s creation. Here, Ernesto embodies the utopian position, closer than his father in orientation to indigenous culture yet retaining his father’s European worldliness. Each character exists on a spectrum between Indian and white, their proximity to this ideal discourse marked by metaphor.

Julio Ortega suggests, therefore, that the primary conflict in *Los ríos profundos* is fought for control of language and information:

the opposition of good and evil is proposed as a struggle for information when communication systems that signify by different means from the one in power are stifled. An antinatural power has been imposed, and this, as regards the social order, has given rise to present injustice, which first and foremost, goes against the natural order of things.(Ortega 207)

This struggle, of which the characters are conscious throughout the novel, is played out in Ernesto’s first meeting with the old man. Having witnessed the old man’s greed and attempt to humiliate his father, Ernesto is finally brought face to face with a

communication system antithetical to that which he has developed himself. The confrontation is resolved as follows:

“¿Como te llamas? me preguntó el Viejo, volviendo a mirarme...

“Me llamo como mi abuelo señor,” le dije.

“¿Señor? ¿No soy tu tío?”...

“Es usted mi tío. Ahora ya nos vamos, señor,” le contesté.

Vi que mi padre se regocijaba, aunque permanecía en actitud casi  
solemne.( Ríos 22)

[“What is your name?” the old man asked, again training his eyes on me.

“I have the same name as my grandfather, señor.” I told him.

“Señor? Am I not your uncle?”

“You’re my uncle. It’s time for us to go, señor,”

“I saw that my father was delighted despite his almost solemn  
expression.(17)]

The importance placed on the consideration of this child, his father’s joy and his uncle’s insistence, underscores for the reader that the battle for communication and information will be decided in Ernesto’s unique awareness. The child’s attitude towards diverse linguistic information forms a totalizing communication strategy through which Arguedas reveals his social, nationalist, and literary agenda. Thus Ernesto’s insistence on the formal “señor” to address his uncle subverts the legitimating power of the cultural system his uncle represents. Conversely, he addresses his uncle’s *pongo* as “taya,” the Quechua word for father, and a familiar form of respect, thereby granting both the ragged servant and his culture legitimacy in the face of its societal negation. As his father explains, Ernesto, because he is a child, can see things that adults cannot. An unfinished voice in this land of linguistic confusion, Ernesto becomes the ideal vehicle for Arguedas’s

project. Both character and author, transposing suppressed cultural material into the primary language, attempt to re-evaluate and re-legitimate the Andean world.

Ernesto's special capacity, as I have mentioned, is the ability to fuse disparate cultural material into a single expressive system. As Ortega points out, his reaction to the sounding of the bell called María Angola from the towers of the Cuzco cathedral provides significant insight into the nature of language within the novel. At its song, "La tierra debía convertirse en oro... Todo se convertía en esa música cuzcuena, que abría las puertas de la memoria."(17) The bell, a Spanish cultural object, reminds Ernesto of the bells of small Indian villages where "hay campanas que tocan a la media noche. A su canto triste salen del agua toros de fuego... Pensé que esas campanas debían de ser illas, reflejos de la María Angola, que convertiría a los amarus en toros [There are bells that ring at midnight. At their mournful tolling, bulls of fire...emerge... I thought that those bells must be *illas*, reflections of the María Angola, which would change the *amarus* into bulls (13)."(Ríos 17) This conversion from snake, an Indian symbol, to bull, a Spanish symbol, "announces a religious synchronicity implicit in a way of looking at reality that is made up of native and Hispanic elements."(Ortega 208) In this mingling of cultures Ernesto finds a strength and an insight absent from either alone. The tolling of the bells makes him want to sing Quechua songs, but not as the Indians sing them, not with tears. Rather, Ernesto's song is indicative of a new aesthetic perspective that promises a reversal of the process of acculturation. Ernesto is able to appropriate the bells and the cathedral, to reinterpret them within a linguistic schema that is fundamentally Andean yet strong enough to absorb other cultural material.

The mechanism for the development of this new language, Cornejo Polar points out, is memory, which allows both the narrator and the protagonist to situate in the present events, objects and persons of the past. In this way, Arguedas produces a highly personal form of realism, a realism that always, "asume lo interno y lo externo, lo subjetivo y lo objetivo, la psíquica y la materia física, la razón y la magia, el individuo

y la sociedad, el hombre y el mundo [assumes the internal and external, the subjective and objective, psychic and physical material, reason and magic, the individual and society, man and the world].”(Cornejo Polar 106) On a narrative level, within this organization, Ernesto’s personal participation in the event, the chain of associations it inspires, takes on greater significance often than the event itself, as memory provides an interpretation and a language for the external world. Furthermore, through memory, Ernesto is able to subdue events, to reinterpret them through his own experience and thus gain some rhetorical mastery. The son of a lawyer incapable of remaining in one place, Ernesto’s skill allows him some psychological stability. But, as Cornejo Polar again notes, it may also be his greatest limitation. As the world around him grows more chaotic, Ernesto increasingly returns to an idealized and static Indian past for consolation. To the extent that memory provides for Ernesto a method of translating the past into the circumstances of the present, it inspires a fusion of cultural elements, allowing him to maintain and express a stable identity through a fragmented and repressive experience. Furthermore, to the extent that it requires an essentialized, ideal origin through which to interpret the disordered present, memory in *Los ríos profundos* performs a transculturative task.

As Arguedas filters *Los ríos profundos* through the perceptions of his child protagonist, language itself becomes the primary fiction. The novel relies upon a symbolic vocabulary that designates an ideological position to each object, person, and event--thus producing meaning. Because this vocabulary relies on the obscure and often contradictory subjecthood of Ernesto, Arguedas’s language manages to be expressive without actually signifying anything. In William Rowe’s view, “The sound of the river becoming music produces... a totalizing effect. It is not a matter of representative totality--nothing, to be precise is being represented--nor is it expressive (the natural world is not expressed, since it is already the material of signification); rather it is a totalizing whole.”(Rowe 41) Ernesto creates from his memory a vision of the world that is its own

explanation and its own justification. For Arguedas, this is a linguistic coup that is not to be underestimated. For the duration of the novel, an explicitly political work, Arguedas convinces and evokes through a linguistic system of his own making.

To accomplish this Herculean task, Arguedas must enlist the complicity of the reader. Thus, when at the sight of the brutally oppressed *pongo*, Ernesto tells us, “Lloré como al borde de un gran lago desconocido,” the reader does not ask why a great unknown lake would make one cry or what similarity the aforementioned lake has to the *pongo*. Rather, because the image is wholly consistent with the symbolic vocabulary Arguedas has erected, it is evocative and effective; it signifies without ever exposing the signified. If read in complicity with Arguedas’s project, *Los ríos profundos* is clearly and successfully a transculturating work. And certainly some suspension of incredulity is necessary and warranted. It seems more productive and interesting, however, to look carefully at those people and events that lie outside this primary system of significance, for which Arguedas’s carefully crafted vocabulary of metaphor offers no explanation and that critics, choosing to read *Los ríos profundos* at the level of coherence it presents, have overlooked. I am interested in those times when the linguistic organization veers, when it becomes, basically, European.

#### IV) MEN AND WOMEN

This symbolic vocabulary, through which Ernesto's unique insight is conveyed, becomes the primary system of significance in *Los ríos profundos*. From the linguistic chaos of Cuzco to the apocalypse of the novel's end, this system is amended and complicated in parallel with the maturing Ernesto's experience. His ideology is refined and sharpened through his interactions with the various figures of power in the novel, first his father, then the old man, then Padre Linares and doña Felipa. The resulting linguistic system assigns meaning and value in such a way as to reveal, depending on one's emphasis, either a fundamentally heterogeneous and disjointed world, as Cornejo Polar has suggested, or, in the successful fusion of cultural elements, the promise of linguistic salvation, as Rama suggests. In either case, Arguedas's carefully crafted vocabulary of metaphor, the primary system of significance in the novel, seeks in good realist fashion to portray a world that is entirely coherent, in which each part is fully describable.

Significantly, the primary system of significance, which has as its goal a wholly describable and fully described world, is also fundamentally masculine in orientation. Without exception, those characters who are assigned consistent thematic significance in *Los ríos profundos* are men or are allocated unmistakably masculine characteristics. Doña Felipa provides perhaps the best demonstration of this pattern. As Luis A. Jiménez notes, "She is the only female character that, together with the rest of the *chicheras*, imposes her voice in the text and redefines her culture and her self." (Jiménez 225) The

power to impose, however, requires that Doña Felipa relinquish her claim to femininity. The voice of the *chichera* is “casi varonil, llena de amenaza [almost masculine, full of menace (98)].”(Ríos 109) When the peasants to whom they bring the salt do not respond, frightened by the mestiza procession, the *chichera* “avanzó violentamente hacia una puerta y la hundió con el hombro [She charged at a door and broke it in with her shoulder (98)].”(Ríos 109) The women of the uprising, in the moment of seizing power and thematic import, lose their claim on femininity. As the procession marches towards Patibamba, “aplastaban las flored endebles del ‘parque,’ tronchaban los rosales, los geranios, las plantas de lirios y violetas [crushed the delicate park flowers, breaking off rosebushes, geraniums, lilies and violets (91)].”(Ríos 101) The woman standing next to doña Felipa is shot. injured in the chest. In front of the crowd, Amazon-like, she exposes her battle wound: “se desnudó el pecho y levantó su monillo. Mostró la herida [Lifting her blouse, she bared her breast and exposed the wound (95)].”(Ríos 106) These women produce meaning. Their actions demand thematic importance within the novel and their rebellion inspires and ignites Ernesto to absorb their fury into his perspective. Yet in order for these women to assert their voice and consequently to influence the development of Ernesto’s, they must relinquish their status as objects of desire and lose their distinction from the novel’s other main players.

The masculine nature of Arguedas’s primary discourse is underscored in the ways in which sex is written into the novel. As Sara Castro-Klarén has pointed out, “se observa inmediatamente una gran distancia de clase entre los hombres y las mujeres [one observes immediately a great difference in class between men and women.]” (Castro-Klarén 57) Sexual desire in *Los ríos profundos* is private and animal, visited upon the waitresses in the chicha bars, on the demented Opa, on the boys themselves at midnight in the school’s latrines. For these desired women, members of an oppressed and silenced class, their sexuality becomes the sole instrument of personality. The success of the

chicha bars depends upon “la hermosura de las mestizas que servían, en su alegría and condescencia [The beauty of the mestiza waitresses, and their gaiety and availability (45)].”(Ríos 52) For these women to participate in the predominantly male world of commerce, they must learn the tricks of the trade; they must literally hold their sexuality up for sale. Yet, as Arguedas notes, it is a dangerous commodity: “muchos forasteros lloraban en las abras de los caminos, porque perdieron su tiempo inútilmente, noche tras noche, bebiendo chicha y cantando hasta el amanecer [Many men from other towns broke down and wept on their way home through the mountain passes because they had wasted their time night after night, drinking *chicha* and singing until dawn (45)].”(Ríos 52) In this way, Arguedas implicitly reaffirms the conventional notion that men are responsible for production, and that sexuality, particularly female sexuality, is destructive to this purpose.

In the school itself, sex is violent and dirty. The boys knock each other over in their eagerness to couple with the degraded Opa, who suffers from such mental retardation that her speech is limited to animal moans of desire at the rush of adolescent boys. Masturbation is as ritual and as undiscussed as the rape of the Opa on moonless nights. For the younger boys, Ernesto included, the trips of their older compatriots to the school latrine contain an inexpressible horror. The stench of the latrine, “nos oprimía,” Ernesto says. “Se filtraba en nuestro sueño y nosotros, los pequeños, luchábamos con ese pesado mal, temblábamos antes él, pretendíamos salvarnos, inútilmente, como los peces de los ríos, cuando caen en el agua turbia de los aluviones [oppressed us, seeing into our dreams, and we smaller boys struggled with that evil burden, trembling before it. We vainly tried to save ourselves, as river fish do when they are swept into waters muddied by an avalanche (59)].”(Ríos 67) Nor is this revulsion limited to the youngest of the boys. Ernesto tells of another student, Chauca, who performs penance for his corruption by flagellating himself in the doorway of the cathedral. In *Los ríos profundos*, sex taints

and destroys. For Castro-Klarén, this vilification of the sex act within a paradigmatic masculine discourse affirms “una visión patriarcal hacia la mujer [a patriarchal perspective with respect to women].” (Castro-Klarén 55) In her view, the narration is judged and given value through a masculine system of perception, which ostracizes the female to a secondary position. Within her interpretation, if sex is dirty and sexual desire destructive, then women, like Eve, are seen as responsible for the introduction of the temptation.

Luis Jiménez frames the incidents of desire rather differently. For him, Arguedas half parodies traditional masculinity and particularly adolescent masculinity. He suggests that the rituals that accompany the sex in the novel--the telling of pornographic stories, the metaphorical transformation of the latrine into the common (Latin American) symbol of the brothel--suggest not so much a particular linguistic system that excludes and oppresses women as a common and oppressive experience of growing up masculine. He points out that characterization of sex in *Los ríos profundos* finds easy analogue in a great quantity of European texts. Jiménez does not excuse the students' behavior, particularly not the intermittent rape of the Opa, but he points out that a great deal of the writing of sex in the novel is explainable by how adolescent boys are. His point is well taken, but significantly, it does not refute the basic notion that the primary system of significance at work in Arguedas's novel is essentially masculine in orientation, that those elements capable of articulation, of imposing a coherent voice in the text, are described and understood as male.

If those women who are objects of sexual desire in the novel do not influence the development of the language of cultural fusion, neither are they inconsistent with it. Within the linguistic schema of *Los ríos profundos*, within its vocabulary of metaphor, these women are wholly describable and comprehensible, either as secondary members of

a patriarchal system or as objects within a masculine scheme of perception, depending again on one's ideology and emphasis. The prevalence of sexual desire does, however, draw attention to the fact that Ernesto's language is as yet not fully developed. Since language becomes the primary fiction of the novel, and the novel is always on some level about growing up, the real story is about coming into language, about Ernesto's developing and unique perception of the world. For Ernesto and the other younger students, what occurs in the latrine is something they do not yet have the linguistic capacity to understand. Ernesto watches the waitresses in the chicha bars, and chronicles their interactions, but never participates in that discourse. Similarly, he is able to absorb the taint of the latrine without ever experiencing the desire. Rather he is a voyeur, impelled by a fascination with the abject. "Yo también, muchas tardes, fui al patio interior tras de los grandes, y me contaminé, mirándolos. Eran como los duendes, semejantes a los monstruos que aparecen en las pesadillas, agitando sus brazos y sus patos velludas [But on many afternoons I, too, would follow the bigger boys to the inner courtyard and contaminate myself watching them. They were like goblins, like monsters who appear in nightmares, moving their hairy arms and legs (60)]." (Ríos 68) For Ernesto, sexuality again becomes part of his mythological consciousness, but like the rivers of the novel's title, it is significant without being accessible.

*Los ríos profundos* revolves around scenes of love and longing. Ernesto consistently pines for some remembered past and dreams of achieving some as yet unrealized, adult, capacity. Yet the primary desire is never sexual; it is cultural, linguistic, and as such is phrased as marriage fantasy with an idealized feminine. This is played out perhaps most clearly in the relationship between Ernesto's friend Antero, more commonly called Markask'a, and Salvinia, "la reina de Abancay [the queen of Abancay (GTM)]" (Ríos 80). The relationship requires a full and untarnished commitment from the start. When Markask'a first mentions her, asking Ernesto to write Salvinia a letter for him, he has never spoken to her, only sent notes to her through her servant. Still, he

claims her as his own, cautioning Ernesto not to fall in love with her. Markask'a explicitly contrasts his desire for the wealthy and secluded Salvinia with a sexual desire for the exploited and accessible *cholas*: "Dicen que se puede querer a una después de otra... ¡No! A ella sola. Yo no pienso estudiar mucho. Me la llevaré y se el demonio me la quita, me dedicaré a las cholas. Tendré diez o veinte." "Ya no parecía un colegial;" Ernesto notes, "a medida que hablaba, su rostro se endurecía, maduraba [They say it is possible to love one girl after another. No! Her alone! I do not intend to study very long. I shall carry her off, and if the devil takes her away from me, I shall dedicate myself to the *chola* women. I shall have twenty or thirty." He no longer looked like a schoolboy; as he talked his voice hardened and grew more mature (GTM)]."(Ríos 119) Salvinia is worthy of love, but only a love that is complete, pure, and wholly romanticized, while the *cholas* are just diversion. Importantly, the expression of this love takes place in terms of culture and convention. After introducing Ernesto to Salvinia, Markask'a exclaims, "¡Tengo ansias de pelear, hermano! ¡Que ella me viera desde su ventana quebrantando a algún rival, a algún ofensor de ella! ¡A caballo! Mejor sería a caballo [I'm eager for a fight, brother! So that from her window she could watch me beating some rival or someone who had offended her! On horseback! It would be even better on horse back (105-106)]."(Ríos 119) Markask'a's exclamation describes a more expansive societal desire. To impress Salvinia, to express a love for this idealized feminine, requires that one assume all the trappings of one's culture and one's experience. Markask'a's desire to fight does not articulate an internal passion, but rather calls upon a desire to participate, publicly, in the established cultural behavior of love. This desire to fight is therefore every bit a celebration of culture and identity as a wedding ceremony. And Markask'a's identity is changed through his interaction with Salvinia, with the romanticized feminine counterpart to his masculine discourse. He ceases to be Markask'a and becomes instead Antero, the landowner, who understands the need to kill rebelling

Indians. Markask'a's interactions with his idealized feminine allow him to become adult, to complete his voice. Ernesto's idealized feminine is white.

### V) THE ARYAN IDEAL

A strange series of white women runs throughout *Los ríos profundos*, conspicuous if only for their lack of description, for the peculiar absence of any metaphorical markings to designate thematic significance in the text. These women do not speak and never take up more than a couple of paragraphs, yet they seem to afford Ernesto access to language in a way that others cannot. They linger in his thoughts and imagination. These women, who have no description beyond their whiteness, represent an idealized purity, femininity. They provide Ernesto linguistic sanctuary. White women in the novel are inaccessible, still beyond Ernesto's linguistic and cultural ability, yet he romanticizes them and dreams of the day when he can approach them. The series of white women represents a counterpart to the primary, masculine system of significance, a secondary system that troubles Arguedas's explicit project of articulation. Ultimately they reduce the novel to incoherence and bring about the failure of his transculturating project.

In the middle of the second chapter of *Los ríos profundos*, entitled "Viajes [Journeys]," Ernesto recalls his experience as a child staying with his father in a hostile town that persecuted strangers. The passage is worth quoting at length.

Vivía allí una joven alta de ojos azules. Varias noches fui a esa esquina a catar huayos que jamás se habían oído den el pueblo. Desde el abra podía ver la esquina; casi terminaba allí el pueblo. Fue un homenaje desinteresado... Después

de comer, odiabamos al pueblo y planeába nuestra fuga. Al fin nos acostábamos; pero yo me levantaba cuando mi padre empezaba a roncar... Llegaba a la esquina, y junto a la tienda de aquella joven que parecía ser la única que no miraba con ojos severos a los extraños, cantaba huaynos de Querobamba, de Lambrama, de Sañayca, de Toraya, de Andahuaylas... de los pueblos más lejanos; cantos de las quebradas profundas. Me desahogaba; vertía el desprecio amargo y el odio con que en ese pueblo nos miraban, el fuego de mis viajes por las grandes cordilleras, la imagen de tantos ríos, de los puentes que cuelgan sobre el agua que corre desesperada, la luz resplandeciente y la sombra de las nubes más altas y temibles. Luego regresaba a mi casa, despacio, pensando con lucidez en el tiempo en que alcanzaría la edad y la decisión necesarias para acercarme a una mujer hermosa; tanto más bella se vivía en pueblos hostiles.(32-33)

[A tall, young, blue-eyed girl lived there. Night after night I went this corner to sing *huaynos* that had never before been heard in the town. I paid her disinterested homage... Once we had eaten, we could spend some time hating the town and planning our escape. Finally we would lie down; but I would get up as soon as my father began to snore...I would reach the corner, and, in front of the store of the young girl, who seemed to be the only one in the town who did not look upon strangers with a disapproving eye, I would sing the *huaynos* of Querobamba, of Lambrama, of Sañayca, of Toraya, of Andahuaylas...of the most distant towns--songs of the deep valleys. I unburdened myself. I would pour out the bitter scorn and hatred with which that town looked upon us, fiery stories of my journeys through the high Andes, images of many rivers, of bridges that overhang desperately rushing waters, of the radiant light and shadow of the most

awesome clouds. Then I would slowly return home, thinking clearly of the time when I would be old enough and determined enough to approach a pretty woman, who would be all the more beautiful if she lived in some hostile town.(27-28)]

The strange white girl who inspires this outpouring and causes Ernesto to long for adulthood conspicuously lacks any identifiable defining characteristics beyond her height and her blue eyes. In a novel that denotes personal virtue through proximity to Ernesto's ideal discourse, this young woman seems not to be transculturated at all. Yet, like Markask'a, who counters the indeterminate and unstable experience of school with the fantasy of Salvinia, Ernesto in this hostile town seeks refuge in the romanticized notion of the tall white girl. And, like Markask'a, he trots out all of his cultural experience before her. Still, there is a linguistic disjunction here that is not easily explained. The girl does not speak and possesses no personality beyond her apparent European heritage, yet she impels and inspires Ernesto to emotional release, to unburden himself through the retelling of cultural material that, in the transculturating schema, is antithetical to her own. In the worst of all towns, which seeks actively not just to silence Ernesto and his father, but to expel them, Ernesto finds sanctuary and linguistic asylum in this young white girl, in her imagined indifference to his status as stranger and consequent willingness to accept his emotional outpouring. Ernesto's romance retells the paradigmatic colonial encounter narrative. Confronted with a distant, unexplained and desired world, he seeks refuge in the trappings of his own experience, regardless of its cultural relevance. And this woman's perceived ability to understand hints at an greater textual schism. If *Los ríos profundos* is about the creation of language, about the development in Ernesto's unique perceptions of a system of significance capable of fusing cultural material but always basically Andean in orientation, then what does it mean that the only figure he imagines capable of absorbing his expression is simply, and exclusively, white?

On some level, the girl, white or not, would seem to be incidental. Certainly the encounter tells a great deal more about Ernesto than about her. Yet the image of the idealized white girl is pervasive throughout the novel and becomes the standard of feminine purity. Later, Ernesto recalls seeing a young girl, contemplating the black rocks from the observatory atop her manor house. “Pude recordar la expresión indiferente de aquella joven blanca;” Ernesto says. “su melena castaña, sus delgados brazos apoyados en la baranda; y su imagen veló toda la noche en mi mente [And yet I was still able to recall the indifferent expression of that young white girl, her long chestnut locks, and her slender arms resting on the banister; her lovely image kept vigil all night long in my mind (73)].”(Ríos 83) After the chichera insurrection, he awakes in the arms of a white woman who holds him as he sobs. He passes the same spot with Padre Linares the next day. “Aquí me despedí de ella,” he says. When the priest asks whom he left, Ernesto replies, “De la señora de ojos azules [here is where I said good-bye to her...to the lady the he blue eyes (111)].”(Ríos 123) And still later, he remembers a woman named Clorinda, who “tenía los cabellos del color...de la paja... Sus ojos eran azules...Repetí su nombre mientras cruzaba el gran desierto... [had hair the color of straw. Her eyes were blue. I repeated her name as I crossed the great desert.(149)]”(Ríos 164) In each case, the characterization of these women is limited to physical symptoms of European heritage, yet their brief presence lingers in Ernesto’s imagination, and their names accompany him through his experience. These women seem somehow, through their unmitigated whiteness, to allow Ernesto to confront the inexpressible, to release the linguistic torment he periodically encounters. In each of these examples, these women offer sanctuary and expressive ability when he is faced with circumstances beyond his own capacity for articulation. The more hostile the town, the greater the white woman’s beauty. In this pairing of desire with incomprehensibility, these white women become for Ernesto like *Salvinia* for *Markask’a*: the romanticized feminine, the counterpart to masculine discourse, the inspiration towards adulthood.

Yet while Markask'a's romantic desire is individual, focused on the person of Salvinia, Ernesto's is wholly cultural. Even as he unburdens himself to the girl in the hostile town, pouring out bitter scorn and hatred, his homage remains disinterested. The girl is useful and comprehensible to Ernesto only as a symbol of a distant culture, inaccessible and desired. He resists any incarnation of his Aryan ideal. Markask'a arranges a meeting between Ernesto and Salvinia's friend Alcira. Initially Ernesto imagines his first encounter with Alcira as a movement towards manhood. "Que importaba que fuera hermosa o fea," he wonders. "Era la primera noticia y yo tenía catorce años [What did it matter if she were beautiful or ugly? It was my first news of this kind and I was fourteen years old (101)]."(115) As he approaches her, however, Ernesto is disturbed by her resemblance to Clorinda and is stricken, incapable of speech. It is only by consciously marring her perfect beauty, by deflating her capacity to embody an ideal purity that he is able, finally, to accept her as an approachable part of his surroundings. "Me atreví a examinar por un instante a Alcira y descubrí que sus pantorrillas eran muy gruesas y cortas, muy cortas, sus piernas. Cuando volví a mirarle el rostro sentí alivio [I stole a brief glance at Alcira and discovered that her calves were very thick and short and that she was quite short legged. When I looked at her again, I felt relieved. (150)]."(165) Paradoxically, having thus made his ideal immaterial again, Ernesto abruptly chooses to leave for Patibamba. As he runs away, he again incorporates Alcira into his mental body of idealized whiteness, chanting, "¡Alcira, Alcira! ¡Clorinda!"(165) This transformation of Alcira back into Clorinda demonstrates the conflation of the desired women into a single, European, ideal--into "la niña impar, la más bella de todas! [A peerless woman, the most beautiful of all!]" The description of the peerless woman is wholly essentialized: "¡Sería rubia! Los arcos de hielo la alumbrarían con esa luz increíble, tan blanca [She would be blond. Icy arches would cast their incredible, almost white light on her]."(115)

Ernesto does not yet have the linguistic sophistication to encounter the idealized white feminine in any but the most immaterial sense. He has neither the age nor the determination; however, in the phantom company of the white woman, he is capable of full and unique cultural expression, capable in her distant purity of confronting the inexpressible. He finds, at least for a time, his “mejores palabras, [best words]” his completed voice, linguistic sanctuary.(74) In the indifference of these idealized white women, Ernesto perceives a capacity for comprehension denied the other, thematically significant characters. In a hostile town, this white girl is the only figure capable of or willing to accept Ernesto’s outpouring. This capacity imbues the white feminine with an affinity for language denied the indigenous culture that provides the novel’s thematic orientation. Just as importantly, the linguistic capacity of these white women affords Ernesto unique access to language. It is only through the idealized purity of the white women, through the act of translation for a distant and desired world, that Ernesto achieves the ability for linguistic release, that he achieves, briefly, an adult voice.

Arguedas reveals the mechanism for this phenomenon only once, when Markask’a asks Ernesto to write a letter to Salvina for him. Ernesto’s interactions with white women are emotional, inarticulate. At the sight of them, he sobs or pours out disorganized cultural material. Yet here, for the first time, Ernesto is compelled deliberately and self-consciously to create language, to express desire. Initially, Ernesto struggles with the project. “¿Cómo empezaría la carta?” Ernesto asks.

Yo no recordaba a esa pequeña reina de Abancay...Yo no conocía a las señoritas del pueblo. Los domingos me internaba en los barrios, en las chicherías, en los pequeños caseríos próximos. Consideré siempre a las señoritas como seres lejanos, en Abancay y en todos los pueblos...huía de ellas; aunque las adoraba en la imagen de algunos personajes de los pocos cuentos y novelas que pude leer.(81-82)

[How should I begin the letter? I could not remember seeing that little princess of Abancay. I did know the young ladies of the town. On Sunday's I would lose myself in the poorer sections of the city, in the *chicha* bars and in the neighboring settlements. I always thought of the young ladies as remote beings, in Abancay and in all the other towns. I avoided them; although I adored their image as it was portrayed in the few stories and novels I was able to read (73)]

In the affiliation of whiteness with literature, in the strange affiliation of Ernesto's romantic desire and his literary devotion, Arguedas expands the linguistic battlefield. Ernesto's letter now mediates culture and language and class but also engages the Western literary tradition. Ernesto is charged with expressing desire to an ideal, who is, in his mind, white, and consequently the passage may be understood both as illuminating his romances with white women and now as analogue to Arguedas's larger novelistic task. This project sets off a long associative digression in which Ernesto plumbs his experience for the material of articulation. This material, predictably, is white.

Ernesto first recalls loitering outside the gateway of the huge hacienda that surrounds Abancay listening to an unfamiliar waltz being played on the piano. "Nunca pude ver a la persona que tocaba el piano," Ernesto says. "Pensé que debía ser una mujer blanca, de cabellos rubios, quien tocaba esa música lenta [I was never able to see the person who played the piano, but I thought it must be a white woman with blond hair that played such slow music (73)]." (Ríos 82) The thought of this music inspires Ernesto to remember staying with his father in the Apurímac valley, so tortured by insect bites that his face throbbed all night, and specifically to remember the slender white girl who stood contemplating the black rocks of a nearby precipice from her observatory. That woman, her indifferent expression, remained in his mind throughout the night. These manifestations of white femininity merge again into a single ideal feminine through the peculiar logic of Ernesto's desire: "La música que oí en la residencia de Patimbamba

tenía una extraña semejanza con la cabellera, las manos, y la actitud de aquella niña [The music I hear coming from the Patibamba mansion bore a strange resemblance to the hair, hands and posture of that girl (73)].”(Ríos 83) Furthermore, in this pairing of musical and physical beauty, Arguedas attributes activity to whiteness for the first time. Beauty itself, mute and inarticulate, is, for Ernesto, expressive and thus allows these women a unique linguistic capacity. For Ernesto, each is metonymically suggestive of a larger cultural system that has as attribute a unique ability to stimulate and inspire expression.

The cultural and linguistic system of these women is not Ernesto's. The language of desire necessary for his letter requires the creation of a new linguistic system, one that can carry the poetics of his indigenous and mythological consciousness to the idealized European feminine. Just as in his other encounters, this new language, the linguistic bridge between opposing cultures and classes, affords Ernesto access to linguistic inspiration impossible without them. The distance between him and girl of the Apurímac valley, he understands, is the same as that between his insect-ridden bed in the *tambo* and the luxury of her glassed-in observatory. But he is inspired to find the linguistic agility to span that chasm. “Yo sabía, a pesar de todo, que podía cruzar esa distancia... La carta que debía escribir para la adorada del Markask'a llegaría a las puertas de ese mundo. 'Ahora puedes escoger tus mejores palabras--me dije--. ¡Escribirlas!' [I knew that, in spite of everything, I could cross that distance.. The letter I was to write for Markask'a would reach the gates of that world. “Now you can choose your best words,” I said to myself. “By writing them!” (74)]”(Ríos 83)

In Ernesto's exclamation, Arguedas implicitly pairs fully realized language with the faculty of writing and makes explicit the novel's fundamentally unresolvable linguistic disjunction. Where his imagined romances with specific women brought him to tears, now confronting whiteness as symbol and actuality in the most general way, Ernesto articulates its attraction. He continues,

¿Y si ellas pudieran leer? Si a ellas pudiera yo escribirlas?

Y ellas eran Justina o Jacinta, Malicacha o Felisa; que no tenían melena ni cerquillo, ni llevaban tul sobre los ojos. Sino trenzas negras, flores silvestres en la cinta del sombrero... “Si yo pudiera escribirles, mi amor brotaría como un río cristalino; mi carta podría ser como un canto que va por los cielos y llega a su destino.” ¡Escribir! Escribir para ellas era inútil, inservible.(84)

[And if they could read? If I could write to them?

And they were Justina or Jacinta, Malicacha, or Felisa, who had neither long hair nor bangs, nor wore tulle over their eyes. Only black braids and wildflowers in the bands of their hats... “If I could write to them my love would flow like a clear river; my letter could be like a song that goes through the sky to reach its destination.” Writing! Writing for them was useless, futile (74).]

Reading is the exclusive domain of the idealized white woman. Reading, in this passage, becomes emblematic of the unique linguistic ability of the white woman, the unique cultural ability to comprehend. These women, whom Ernesto “adoraba en la imagen de algunos personajes de los...cuentos y novelas” exist in books, in an idealized space of linguistic freedom, in the area of significance. This affiliation signals the final disruption of Arguedas’s primary system of significance. Ernesto’s love does not flow “como un río cristal, [like a clear river]” because the language of his love is inaccessible to those with black hair and braids. Arguedas thus suggests a linguistic dichotomy that, on the one hand, allocates to indigenous culture the stuff of the primary, masculine, and thematic significant discourse and, on the other, limits comprehension and linguistic sanctuary to its secondary, feminine, and white counterpart. Romanicized desire for an Aryan ideal therefore becomes significantly equivalent to the desire to write. If as Ortega suggests, the primary conflict of *Los ríos profundos* is fought for control of language and

information, then to associate the faculty of linguistic comprehension with whiteness is to undermine the foundations of the transculturating project.

The pairings throughout the novel of thematically significant events and strange phantasmic white women highlight this basic dichotomy. Ernesto's desire for these women is most essentially a desire to be understood, a desire for freedom of language. That this dichotomy is not resolvable, that the signifying power of the indigenous culture is undermined by the comprehending power of the European ideals, does not point to a fundamental social disjunction of the type noted by Cornejo Polar. Within the primary and political discourse of Arguedas's novel, the idealized white women exert no thematic significance and occupy next to no textual space. Nor does this linguistic heterogeneity expose solely a troubling fascination with whiteness and with the imagined purity of European culture. The linguistic disjunction apparent in Ernesto's perception of the idealized white feminine is not limited to those times when he attempts to communicate with his ideal. As Spitta points out, if the transculturative enterprise really attempts an "interior vision that is closer to the referent," then the idealized audience of Arguedas's work is not, or at least not exclusively, white. (Spitta 9) Rather, these women in their stark whiteness and their peculiar capacity to understand highlight the impossibility of a language of fusion. The metaphorical vocabulary of the novel is based upon an ideological positioning between two essentialized poles. Ernesto's desire for these women exposes this position as unstable. Transculturation does not then mediate between opposing principles, languages, and cultures in such a way as to produce a signifying system capable of describing a compact and coherent world. Rather it becomes, in Moreiras words, "a mestizo site of incoherence." It expresses the experience of a subject torn, at this cultural intersection, in every moment and in every direction. In this context it is possible to re-examine the primary metaphorical vocabulary at work in *Los ríos profundos*, to ask again how a *pongo* is like a great unknown lake. Both

represent a vastness of information, linguistic and sensual, that is overwhelming.

Ernesto's tears signal awareness of the linguistic impossibility of their description.

## VI) A PATTERN OF FUTILITY

The procession of idealized white women through *Los ríos profundos* follows a pattern that underscores their troublesome linguistic nature. When, in the hostile town, Ernesto unburdens himself by singing huaynos to a disinterested white girl, the cultural and linguistic disjunction is clear. The girl represents little more than a symbol of an essentialized European culture. On some level, Ernesto's project is to Indianize the white girl, to translate for her the flavors and the perceptions of Quechua culture. As the novel progresses, however, that project reverses. He has to work harder to maintain these women as disembodied ideals. Increasingly, Ernesto erases from the white women any sign of Indian-ness. He whitens them. The women, still denied any stable habitation in the text and any thematic influence, become increasingly less aristocratic, forcing Ernesto to transform them in his mind into the essentialized, linguistically useful conception of whiteness.

Thus Ernesto begins with the girl from the hostile town and the girl in the observatory. Later Ernesto runs from Alcira at the discovery of her physical imperfection, and, even as he runs, transforms her back into the ideal he imagined. Ernesto repeats an idealized notion of Clorinda, despite the fact that he knows of her relationship with a brandy smuggler with calloused hands. Perhaps most significant is the woman who comforts Ernesto after the insurrection and whose position in the center of the novel marks the place where Ernesto's ideals begin to change. "Tenía medias

negras y zapatos bajos; su falda rosada le cubría hasta los pies; su monillo estaba adornado de cintas que dibujaban flores sobre el pecho, a moda de las mestizas,” we are told. “Pero ella era blanca y de mejillas encendidas, de ojos azules [She wore black stockings and low shoes; her pink skirt reached her feet; the front of her blouse was trimmed with flowerets of ribbons, in mestiza fashion. But she was white, with rosy cheeks and blue eyes.(99)].”(Ríos 110) This woman apparently works for the wife of the hacienda owner. Yet throughout the novel, she is identified only as “la señora de ojos azules [The lady with the blue eyes (111)].”(Ríos 123) This woman, who allows Ernesto, again, to cry, is recalled, again, in terms of her ethnic and cultural origin. Interestingly, this woman has the double distinction of being the only maternal white woman and the only one who speaks. “¿Quién eres, hijito?” she asks, first in Spanish. Then, in Quechua, “¿Quién te ha abandonado? [Who are you, my son? Who abandoned you? (111)]”(Ríos 99) For Ernesto, and Arguedas, caught between cultures, torn between a desire for (European) literate language and an identification with Quechua world-view, these are the questions that haunt the text.

The various contradictions of *Los ríos profundos* are contained and played out in the figure of the Opa. She is white, “tenía los cabellos claros y su rostro era blanco, [Her hair was light and her face was white.(51)].” yet she is degraded beyond any of the cholitas.(Ríos 58) Her mental deficiency renders her incapable of any linguistic ability at all except inarticulate moans of sexual desire, the only expression desire shown by any of the novel’s female characters. The Opa is fully dehumanized, a languageless figure compared to a bear. Yet in the final chapter of the novel, as she loses her body to the plague and dies, she too is whitened and thus achieves the perfection of feminine beauty reserved for white women. In the final chapter, she is named for the first time, Marcelina, and, as she lies on her deathbed, “el rostro de ella embellecía, perdía su deformidad [her face was growing beautiful, losing its deformity (209)].”(Ríos 229) As Ernesto runs to

the company to Hermano Miguel, the Opa completes a radical transformation.

“¡Hermano!” he exclaims, “La Opa Marcelina estará rogando por mí en la gloria. Ella quemará las alas de los pojos, nos salvará [Brother! The idiot Marcelina must be praying for me up in heaven. She’ll burn off the lice’s wings and save us. (212)].”(Ríos 232) As she dies, the Opa completes this progression. Ernesto’s final evocation of the White ideal, the standard of purity, is the most degraded of all the characters. In the end, as the Opa changes from lumbering bear to the celestial protector, she too becomes sanctuary for Ernesto.

The Opa leaves the school only once, traveling to the river to recover the discarded shawl of doña Felipa who has vanished into the mists of legend. With the shawl, the Opa brings to the school, and to Abancay, the plague, typhus, that decimates the town. This union of the most powerful thematic character with the most incoherent of the white women produces a linguistic seizure that destroys, ends, and unwrites the novel. In the end, *Los ríos profundos* is not about the creation of language but about its futility. Those who are wealthy enough leave the town. The Indians are left chanting prayers at the impending apocalypse. Ernesto disappears back into transience. In the end the original social order is reaffirmed. Language is proven insufficient.

## VII) IN CONCLUSION

Implicit thus far in my argument is the notion that Arguedas does not fully control the secondary, feminine, logic of his text, that the primary system of significance is not ironized. I have assumed that Ernesto, an adolescent left alone in an unknown world, may be read as a reliable narrator. For this reason, and noting near unanimous critical agreement, I have chosen, largely, not to debate questions of authorial intent. However, it is worth noting that if one can not rely on Ernesto, if the linguistic disjunction of *Los ríos profundos* is the real message of the novel, then the outcome is very much the same. *Los ríos profundos* ceases to be an explicitly political work, the story of the development of a new cultural awareness, and becomes a novel about a subject that can speak for no one, whose alliances and desires are too contradictory to enable the production of meaning.

Yet it is impossible to overstate the importance of this project of linguistic and cultural fusion for Arguedas himself. In a letter to his students, one of his last before his suicide, Arguedas explains his decision. “Me retiro ahora,” he says, “porque siento, he comprobado que ya no tengo energía e iluminación para seguir trabajando, para justificar la vida [I withdraw now because I feel I have verified that I no longer have the energy or the illumination to continue working, to justify my life.]”(Zorro 253) In his final words, he begs the University to complete an anthology of Quechua myth that he no longer has the energy to write. For Arguedas, himself always between cultures, the drive to find and create language capable of describing the world he knew literally kept him alive. In the

end, as Moreiras suggests, the elusiveness of this language may have brought about his death.

For this reason, I propose not the elimination of terms such as transculturation but rather a radical shift in emphasis, a revitalized examination of the speaking-subject.

Transculturation would not then describe a path through a maze of polarities but rather the expression of a subject always, consciously, desiring that path. That, at least in the case of *Los ríos profundos*, this does not lead to comprehensible political analysis, that it does not suggest the symbolic salvation of a divided world, should not devalue the project. The critic may no longer be able to identify and appropriate Ernesto's voice, but (s)he may now be able more accurately to understand his perspective.

## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Modernity and Modernization

Borrowing from the very useful definitions found in *Memory and modernity: popular culture in Latin America*, ed. William Rowe and Vivian Schelling, I have chosen to understand modernity as an impulse towards homogeneity in national culture. However, unlike those authors, and sympathetic to the dangerous problematics involved, I use the term to denote a homogeneity that is fundamentally closer in orientation to Western industrialized culture than to the specific indigenous traditions of a (Latin American) nation. Consequently, modernity in my usage always involves to some extent “modernization,” which in Rowe and Schelling’s definition refers technological and economic changes that in turn lead to urbanization and marginalization of the pre-capitalist sectors and finally to radical and general changes in popular culture. Rowe, noting Arguedas’s interest in nationality in *El zorro de arriba y el zorro del abajo*, amends these terms in an illuminating way. “Arguedas’s text,” he says, “implies a project of modernity, but an unprecedented Peruvian modernity, based in the multiplicity and inventiveness of popular culture.”(Rowe 213) see also (Rowe 31, 101)

## WORKS CITED

- Aguirre Beltrán, Gonzalo. Un proceso de aculturación, Mexico, Universidad Nacional de México, 1957
- Arguedas, José María. El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo. Nanterre, France: ALLCA XX, 1990
- . Los ríos profundos. Madrid, Spain: Alianza Editorial, 1996
- . Deep Rivers. Trans. Frances Horning Barraclough. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1978
- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. Rabelais and his World. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1984
- Castro-Klaren, Sara. "Crimen y castigo: sexualidad en J.M. Arguedas" Revista Iberoamericana. 49.122 (1983) 55-65
- Chavarria, Jesus. José Carlos Mariategui and the Rise of Modern Peru, 1890-1930. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1979
- Cornejo Polar, Antonio. Los universos narrativos de José María Arguedas. Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1973
- Eagleton, Terry. "Ideology, Fiction, Narrative" Social-Text 2.Summer (1979) 62-80
- García Canclini, Nestor. Culturas híbridas: estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad. Mexico: Grijalbo: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1990
- Garcilaso de la Vega, El Inca. Comentarios reales de los Incas. Volume two. Buenos Aires, Emecé editores S. A. 1945

-----Royal Commentaries of the Incas and General History of Peru. Austin, University of Texas Press. 1994

Jameson, Fredric. Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991

Jiménez, Luis A. "(Wo)men in the Carnavalesque Discourse of Deep Rivers." José María Arguedas: Reconsiderations for Latin American Cultural Studies. Ed. Ciro A. Sandoval and Sandra M. Boschetto-Sandoval. Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1998. 218-233

Lienhard, Martin. La voz y su huella: escritura y conflicto etnico-social en America Latina, 1492-1988. Hanover, NH: Ediciones del Norte, 1991

Moreiras, Alberto. "The End of Magical Realism: José María Arguedas's Passionate Signifier (*El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*)." Journal of Narrative Technique. 27.1 (1997): 84-112

Ortega, Julio. "Plural Narrator and the Quandary of Multiple Communication Arguedas' Deep Rivers." José María Arguedas: Reconsiderations for Latin American Cultural Studies. Ed. Ciro A. Sandoval and Sandra M. Boschetto-Sandoval. Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1998. 199-217

Rama, Angel. Transculturación narrativa en America Latina. Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1982

Rowe, William. Introduction. Los ríos profundos. By José María Arguedas. New York, NY. Pergamon Press, 1973. i-xxxv

----- "Music, Awareness, and Social Transformation." José María Arguedas: Reconsiderations for Latin American Cultural Studies. Ed. Ciro A. Sandoval and Sandra M. Boschetto-Sandoval. Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1998. 35-52

Rowe, William, and Vivian Schelling. Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America. New York, NY: Verso, 1991

Sommer, Doris. Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America. London, University of California Press, 1991

Spitta, Silvia. Between Two Waters: Narratives of Transculturation in Latin America.  
Houston, TX: Rice University Press, 1995