2012

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An Understanding of *Deep Rivers* through an Analysis of Three of its Main Symbols

Vincent Spina

The aim of "An Understanding of Deep Rivers" is to analyze some of the iconographic uses in the novel from the point of view of the Andean Cosmovision. Though many inroads have already been made in this direction, when the novel first appeared much of this cosmovision was not understood at all or considered part of Andean "folklore". In the present work, the use of the Quechua term "illa" and that of the Southern Cross (the Chakana in Quechua) are analyzed with respect to the symbolic role they play in the novel.

The four most successful novels written on the American continents conforming to the genre of bildungsroman are probably *Huckleberry Finn* (Mark Twain), *Don Segundo Sombra* (Ricardo Güiraldes), *Go Down, Moses* (William Faulkner) and *Los Ríos Profundos* (José María Arguedas). What for me marks these novels as peculiarly "American" is that, in addition to the development of the main protagonist, there is also a quest to discover or define a national identity. To a greater or lesser extent, therefore, these novels make specific mention of, or at least imply, the presence of the three major ethnic groups that form the population of these countries. These groups are of course, the indigenous people, the Europeans—either English or Spanish—and the Africans. Each writer treats these three ethnic components according to what he judges to be their influence on the formation of the protagonist himself and on their contribution to a national identity.

With regard to *Don Segundo Sombra* the emphasis is on the gaucho, a shadowy figure—at the time the novel was written—but an essential trope assimilating the Spanish and Indian traditions which form the basis of Argentine identity. Both *Huckleberry Finn* and *Go Down, Moses* include the three races that constitute North American identity with a strong emphasis on slavery and the achievement of justice for the African brought to the Americas as a slave. In these two works the indigenous American also enters. In *Huckleberry Finn* he is a dark and foreboding character, Indian Joe. In *Go Down, Moses*, the Native American’s presence is paradoxically symbolized almost as an absence. He represents a time when humanity was in synchronization with nature, a time gone and irretrievable. Thus in these two works, the resolution, to the extent that there is one, lies within a Western understanding of the cosmos that surrounds humani-

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1 The Bildungsroman genre refers generally to coming-of-age stories. Here I am referring to one of the main characters, Uncle Ike, Isaac McCaslin, as he appears throughout the book but especially in "The Bear" episode.
ty, i.e., a composite of Greek philosophical analysis and the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. Only in Los Ríos Profundos, which takes place in Perú where approximately half the country speaks Quechua as a first or second language, must the protagonist, Ernesto, come to terms with Hispanic society and how it is manifested in the Peruvian Andes and the native Andean society, which, despite all efforts to eradicate it, lives on, preserving much of its customs and understanding of the cosmos.

In light of this fact the novel has presented many problems for those critics who have attempted an analysis, problems that can only be solved by a deeper investigation about the meaning of certain symbols contained within the Andean cosmovision through which Ernesto is led to a fuller understanding of the world in which he is placed. It is a world of conflict between the Andean indigenous people and the descendants of the Spanish conquerors. Ricardo González Vigil, in his finely elaborated introduction to Los Ríos Profundos (Catedra, Madrid, 2000)

, offers the reader a broad panorama of reaction among other writers and critics regarding this book; much of it, in the earlier phases, based on misunderstandings of the Andean Quechua culture from which it derives, and sometimes on actual misreadings of the text itself. To summarize a part of this reaction in somewhat simplistic terms, Arguedas was considered a “regionalist” writer, i.e., a writer concentrating on “regional” problems at the expense of more universal concerns. This dichotomy between what is “regional” and what is “universal” is not new in the course of Latin American literature. The “regional” has always been identified with the “Indian” or the “mestizo.” But what then has constituted the “universal” but a literature derived from the Greco-Christian culture, often a reaction against this culture or a doubting of its very authority, yet still firmly anchored within its parameters? This begs the following question: does the fact that Western culture—Greco-Christian culture—is more widely spread through the world than Andean culture (or any other Native American culture) make it less regional?

The intention of this article, therefore, will be to show that what is truly universal in a novel derives from how an author, through the manipulation of the signs and symbols available to him within the bounds of his specific cosmovision, uses these signs and symbols to reveal to us, in a wholly new way, what is common to all human beings. Murasaki’s vision of medieval Japan in The Genji comes to us through such a manipulation, only through a thorough understanding of her particular cosmovision does her vision of humanity come to us. Among the many signs and symbols found in Los Ríos Profundos, the three most basic to an understanding of the novel may be the terms illa and yllu (Arguedas, 2000, p. 235) and the Pachachaca bridge and river (p. 207).

To get an understanding of the first two of these terms, it is necessary to read what Arguedas himself writes in Los Ríos Profundos:

The Quechua ending yllu is an onomatopoeia. Yllu represents the music made by small wings in flight; the music that comes forth from the movement of small objects. The sound is similar to a vaster one: illa. Illa names a certain kind of light and the monsters that were born wounded by the rays of the moon... All illas cause both good and evil

2 To my knowledge this is the latest edition of Los Ríos Profundos and the most scholarly. I have consulted other texts but all citations in this essay are from this edition.
but always on a grand scale. To touch an *illa* and to die or to attain resurrection is possible. (pp. 235-236)³

On these same pages Arguedas mentions creatures and natural phenomena also related to *illa*, which accordingly mix the same life and death giving powers. Among those mentioned are mythic bulls which inhabit Perú's lakes, all that is black and crossed by streaks of light (such as stones), and all reflected light. These creatures and phenomena are associated with the moon. The items associated with *yllu*, such as insects whose wings make a buzzing sound in flight, and Perú's famous Andean scissor dancers exhibit the same creative (life giving) and destructive (death dealing) powers.

In an article I wrote for the German magazine *Khipu* in 1987 I mentioned,

*Yllu* is related to daylight while *illa* is associated with the nocturnal minor lights. The two sounds set up two distinct categories of (cognitive) ordering: objects and events related to the sun and others associated with the moon. And within these categories all human experience is implicitly included, day time and night time experience. (*Spina, 1987, pp. 20, 37)⁴

Finally, to the extent that *yllu* represents the sun, considered male in Andean cosmology, and *illa*, the moon, female, an intricate pattern of male/female complementary duality is established.⁵

Irene Silverblatt elaborates on this theme:

The Pachamama, who embodies the generative forces of the earth, needed a male celestial complement to realize her procreative powers. So Andean thought paired her to the god of thunder as bestower of rain. Similarly, the Andean way of seeing the world would consider Illapa's (lightning) rain causing powers meaningless if not tied to his capacity to generate fertility in the earth. This was one dimension of the dynamics of Andean thought which bound the god of heaven to the goddess of the earth. (1987, p. 22)

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³ La terminación quechua *yllu* es una onomatopeya. *Yllu* representa en una de sus formas la música que producen pequeñas alas en vuelo; la música que surge del movimiento de objetos leves. Esta voz tiene semejanza con otra más vasta: *illa*. *Illu* nombra a cierta especie de luz y los monstruos que nacieron heridos por los rayos de la luna... Todos los *illas*, causan el bien y el mal pero siempre en grado sumo. Tocar un *illa* y morir o alcanzar la resurrección, es posible. (The translation of this and all other citations in Spanish are mine.)

⁴ *Yllu* se relaciona con la luz del día mientras *illa* se asocia con las luces menores de la noche. Las dos voces así configuran distintas categorías de (cognitive) ordenación; los objetos y sucesos relacionados con el sol y los otros asociados con la luna. Y dentro de estas categorías, de una manera implícita, se engloba toda la experiencia humana, la experiencia incluida por el día y la noche.

⁵ While *yllu/illa* duality represents an overall ordering of objects, events, and creatures within a paradigm of a male/female duality, the detailing becomes much more elaborate. A figure such as a bull, an obvious symbol of male fertility is associated with the Amaru, a water creature associated with the moon and female symbolism. Arguedas' novel *Yawar Fiesta* delves more deeply into this kind of elaboration and should be read in association with *Los Ríos Profundos* to produce a deeper understanding of Andean cosmology in this respect.
Silverblatt further documents that this kind of complementary dualism extends up to Viracocha, the supreme deity, him/herself:

The Incas structured their universe by parallel hierarchies of gender which ranked gods and categories of humans in the language of descent. At the top of the cosmological order was the androgynous divinity, Viracocha. Pachacuti Yannqui leaves no doubt as to Viracocha’s sexual duality, for above his/her image are the inscribed words, “whether it be male, whether it be female.” Viracocha incorporates the opposing forces that each gender represents: “the sun, the moon, day, night, summer, winter.” Heading a hierarchy of descent, Viracocha is a founder of parallel chains of gods and goddesses who engender men and women as lowest-ranking descendants. (1987, p. 44)

In her book, Androgyny, June Singer explains what the concept of dual creation implies:

**The idea of a Divine Androgyny is a consequence of the concept that Ultimate Being consists of a unity-totality. Within this unity-totality are seen to exist all the conjoined pairs of opposites at all levels of potentiality... Cosmic energy is created, generated by the surge of longing in each of the two for the other. (1987, p. 21)**

The fact that the concept of complementary sexual duality is widespread and current in the thought processes of the Andean people today is documented in Luis Enrique Cachiguango’s book *Yaku-Mama: La Crianza de Agua* (Yaku-Mama: the Upbringing of Water). Cachiguango, who is an ethnographer and a yachac (the word literally means “wise person” and refers to one who has studied healing, tradition, ceremonies, etc.) within the Kotama community of Otavalo, Ecuador, explains that the solar year itself is divided into feminine and masculine halves. The feminine half corresponds to the months of planting and the masculine to harvesting (2010, p. 21).

At the mid-point of the novel, Ernesto, who has been placed in a Catholic boarding school in the city of Abancay by his father, an itinerant lawyer, and who has spent much of his young life with the Indian servants and in free Indian communities in the southern Andes of Peru, now finds his living conditions intolerable. He is unable to balance his former idyllic world with the exploitation and suffering of the Indians who live and are worked mercilessly on the haciendas that surround the city.

Disturbingly, he witnesses the almost nightly sexual activities taking place in the inner courtyard of the school between the older students and the mentally deficient woman Marcelina, who herself was brought to the boarding school by one of the priests. At times the woman is raped, at others, she not only consents to the boys’ advances but encourages them. Particularly deplorable are acts of one of the students nicknamed “Peluca.” On the other, Ernesto is witness to the sadomasochistic bullying of two other students, Lleras and “Afiuco.” Yet what he finds particularly appalling and incomprehensible is the brutalization of the “colonos,” those Indians who live and are worked mercilessly on the haciendas that surround (strangle) Abancay itself, Patibamba being the largest and most notorious. Yet, as a child raised mostly among Indian servants and, at times, in a free Indian community, what upsets him most, causing him to lose almost all confidence in the Indian world to which he is so much attached, is the utter passivity of the colonos and their refusal—as Ernesto sees it—to defend them-
selves and to assert their right to their culture and to their very right to live as free human beings. The isolation he feels from the Indian community plus what he witnesses in the courtyard lead to feelings of total desolation which Ernesto expresses in this manner:

No thought, nor memory was able to breach the mortal isolation which during that time separated me from the world. I who had always felt so much mine even that which did not belong to me! Upon seeing a row of beautiful willow trees shimmering by the side of an irrigation canal, I could not imagine that those trees were not mine! The rivers had always been mine and the bushes that grow on the sides of mountains, even the homes in those small towns, with their red tile roofs crossed with streaks of slaked lime; the blue fields of alfalfa, the adored fields of corn. But by nightfall upon returning from that courtyard the maternal image of the world would fall away from my eyes. When night arrived my solitude and isolation grew more and more. (Arguedas, 2000 229) 6

This, of course, is to say the protagonist is in a state of complete crisis. In the face of the apparent evil, the memory of his past life, the affect he has experienced within Indian society, his attachment to the land: all this fades away. In addition, though Arguedas does not emphasize the following in the narration itself, it is important to understand that Ernesto is a boy of 14 going through puberty. His own body is changing in ways he could not anticipate. He is repulsed by what he sees in the courtyard: “But many afternoons I also went into that interior courtyard behind the older boys and contaminated myself looking at them” (Arguedas, 2000228). 7

It is not surprising that in a bildungsroman the main character may experience a crisis as he or she goes from one phase of life to another. In the case of Huck Finn, for example, he is forced to decide whether to return Jim, his fellow runaway, to slavery or to continue helping him in his escape. The choice for Huck is critical and climatic in terms of the Western system of thought of that period. On the one hand there exist biblical precedents for owning slaves plus the simple societal convention of the time; on the other, the emergence of a new morality which includes all of humanity. Though the choice is difficult for the character, the two options, at least, exist within the same Western cosmological system. Huck, therefore, makes a “transit” from one state and period of Western cosmological understanding to another.

This is not the case for Ernesto. When he states “I who had always felt so much mine even that which did not belong to me...” he is not alluding to a mere naive and sentimental feeling of childhood; rather he is referencing a radically different position—

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6 Ningún pensamiento, ningún recuerdo podía llegar hasta el aislamiento mortal en que durante ese tiempo me separaba del mundo. Yo que sentía tan mío aun lo ajeno: ¡Yo no podía pensar, cruzando veia por primera vez una hilera de sauces hermosos, vibrando a la orilla de una acequia, que esos árboles eran ajenos! Los ríos fueron siempre míos; los arbustos que crecen a las faldas de las montañas, aun las casas de los pequeños pueblos, con su tejado rojo cruzado de rayas de cal; los campos azules de alfalfa, las adoradas pampas de maíz. Pero a la hora en que volvía de aquel patio, al anochecer, se desprendía de mis ojos la maternal imagen del mundo. Y llegada la noche, la soledad, mi aislamiento seguían creciendo.

7 Pero yo también, muchas tardes, fui al patio interior tras de los grandes, y me contaminé mirándolos.
ing of humanity’s relation to the world, a different understanding which amounts to an essentially different cosmovision from what is understood in the West. And within this system, a child’s feeling of attachment to the world is not by any means based on childish sentimentality. Whereas within the Western cosmovision, humanity is detached from this world (as stated from the Bible to Cartesian philosophy), within the cosmology of Andean thinking and beyond in the thinking of other cultures found in the Americas, humanity is configured as essentially part of the natural order of the world, as are the lords and gods (known as huacas throughout the Quechua speaking world). Thus, Dennis Tedlock points to this connectedness in his introduction to and translation of the Popol Vuh. 8

The worldview of an interdependent communal cosmology between the earth, man, and woman is seen once again in the Cusco school of art developed in the 17th century, in which the Virgin is not only painted as firmly planted on the earth, but she herself, in conjunction with her outwardly flowing gowns adorned with greenery and flowers, resembles a hill or huaca, transforming the earthly into the divine. 9 Humanity’s connection to the earth is made dramatically clear in a prayer this writer heard while witnessing a ceremony celebrating Hatun Puncha or Inti Raymi in Otavalo, Ecuador, the northern pole of the Quechua Andes. The presider of the ceremony was Enrique Cachiguango, already mentioned. Here are some verses from the prayer:

We are no more or less than Mother Earth
for we ourselves are earth.

We are no more or less than air
for we ourselves are air...

We are no more or less than Mother Water
for we ourselves are water.
(Cachiguango, 2010, p.135) 10

Thus, while Huckleberry Finn only sacrifices one phase of Western cosmological thinking in favor of another more humane and moral, Ernesto risks the loss of an entire cosmovision with nothing, as far as he sees, but an extremely immoral and demoralizing Western system of Indian exploitation looming in his future to take its place.

8 (1996). New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. The communion between humanity and nature can be implied from the fact that in the Popol-Vuh men and women are created by the grandmother-figure out of sacred yellow and white corn respectively and not out of mud or dust. The connection is further implied by the fact that the gods (largely personifications of the forces of nature) exist within a bond of mutuality with humanity. Humanity comes to life through the efforts of the gods, and the gods are kept alive through the nurturing efforts of men and women.

9 In her book, The Virgin of the Andes, Carol Damian states: “Pachamama was a comprehensive deity, primordially identified with the earth and worshipped on numerous levels at various times as the protector of crops and giver or life” (1995, p. 10).

10 “Nosotros no somos ni más ni menos que la Madre Tierra, porque nosotros mismos somos tierra. Nosotros no somos ni más ni menos que el aire, porque nosotros mismos somos aire. Nosotros no somos ni más ni menos que la Madre-Agua, porque nosotros mismos somos agua.”
The title of the chapter in which Arguedas explains the meaning of Yllu and Illa is titled “Zumbayllu.” The zumbayllu, as we learn from the text, is a toy top Andean children fashion themselves. To make it spin, the user wraps a thin cord around its base, holds one end of the cord and tosses the top onto the ground. The characters in the novel hold competitions to see whose top will spin the longest. Antero, also known as Markask’a (his nickname in Quechua owing to the beauty marks on his face), is expert at making these tops. He becomes one of Ernesto’s first friends at the boarding school. As the chapter begins, he gives one to Ernesto as a gift. From this point, Ernesto becomes increasingly more capable of overcoming his isolation and taking an active role in opposing the social system that surrounds him. The key to understanding this transition in the protagonist is the top itself.

When Ernesto sees the top spinning on the grounds of the boarding school what was denied to him before, all his memories, are suddenly opened to him again. In a moment of sheer wonder he asks rhetorically: “What could this word name whose ending (the yllu suffix) reminded me of beautiful and mysterious objects?” (Arguedas, 2000, p. 1240). Of course what he is remembering is his past: the tankayllu, a buzzing insect that the Indian children capture to drink the honey that comes from its false stinger, which, nevertheless, is also associated with something evil, and on whose abdomen there are brilliant stripes reminiscent of illa, and Tankayllu, a famous scissor dancer, mentioned in this chapter. Tankayllu who by scraping the two blades of a scissor together produced a buzzing sound while the mirrors of his costume called to mind the reflected lights of the illa paradigm (Arguedas, 2000 p. 236-237). Thus what he sees is the conflation of two classes of categorization. Yllu on the one hand names a kind of music (Arguedas, 2000, p. 239) and refers to objects seen during daylight (the sun) while illa names the minor light: moon light, the lightning bolt, all shimmering lights; these kinds of light not totally divine, in which ancient Peruvian man believes to have a profound relationship still between his blood and all shining material (Arguedas, 2000 p. 239).

These two kinds of light, then by extension, define a holistic vision of all that is visible in the world, i.e., they place order in the visible world, define its characteristics and its powers, which include aspects of both destruction and creation. As seen, this system of classification also alludes to the masculine and feminine forces of creation and destruction since the daylight, the sun, in Andean belief is associated with the masculine force and moonlight with the feminine force. The system also implies that these opposite forces are not antagonistic but rather complementary. There is no day without night, no masculine without feminine; together they make creation, which by extension must include destruction.

If this world was an ideal place where only good existed, the protagonist’s understanding of it has now matured. The good, the creative forces of nature and the cosmos do, indeed, exist, but in a relentless, though complementary, relationship with the de-

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11 ¿Qué podía nombrar esta palabra cuya terminación me recordaba bellos y misteriosos objetos?
12 ... el relámpago, el rayo, toda luz vibrante. Estas especies de luz no totalmente divinas con las que el hombre peruano antiguo cree tener aún relaciones profundas, entre su sangre y la materia fulgurante.
structive forces. Within this world the boarding school can exist with all its evils, as well as the haciendas defining in part what these institutions mean in the lives of the Indian people. But these “evils” are only part of a grander system which includes their opposites, and the potential for change. By the end of this chapter, the young Ernesto does not fully grasp all this (or any of this) on an analytical level, but there is no doubt that it has come to him as though it were a gestalt.

Thus the chapter VI ends in the early morning. After washing very carefully (reminiscent of the ritual baths I have observed in the Otavalan Indian communities before a celebration is to take place) Ernesto goes to the courtyard where he has seen so much human defilement. He lets the top spin (dance) there, listening to its buzzing sound which, upon recalling the sound of the (praised) insects, symbolically cleanses the ground of its past iniquity. He begins to dance with the top claiming that no one is his enemy any longer (Arguedas, 2000 p. 266). He has found peace and cosmological order has been restored for him.

In the following chapter “The Revolt” (El motín), Ernesto takes part in the rebellion of the chicheras against the municipal authorities who have apparently withheld salt from the people of the town of Abancay and from the Indian hacienda workers. In earlier chapters Ernesto has already described his visit to the district of the chicheras, the barrio of Huanupata. In the times before this revolt he would go there frequently. It was the only place in the entire Abancay district, including the haciendas, where Andean music could be heard, where mestizos and Indians, though not those from the hacienda, could be themselves, and where he could thus find some solace from his loneliness (Arguedas, 2000, p. 207-208). Now, it is the chicheras, led by doña Filipa, who have come out to the streets demanding that the salt be distributed in the town and among the women of the haciendas. Markask’a (Antero) accompanies Ernesto during part of the rebellion through the streets of Abancay, but leaves when he realizes that, as the son of a small hacienda owner himself, his “place” is not among these women. From this we can discern that the friendship between the two adolescents is weakening. Ernesto, however, participates with the women as they defy Father Linares himself, who has arrived to quell their rebellion, push past the local constables and break into the salt depository. Doña Filipa then presides over an orderly distribution of the salt and leads the rebellious women to the Patibamba hacienda where they divide the salt among the wives of the hacienda workers.

At the end of the afternoon, Ernesto has fainted from exhaustion and wakes in the lap and arms of an older woman who, he assumes, must be in the employ of one of the women to whom Patibamba belongs. The woman, from the description offered by Ernesto is obviously a maternal figure:

She remained silent. Under her chubby hands that softly caressed me, the harshness of the dusty road was dissipated from the burning high heavens and from my memories.

13 The fact that the eruption is over salt—kachi in Quechua—is particularly important since this element is so difficult to procure in the mountains. The word appears in Enrique Cachiguango’s last name, and, as this person has informed me, is an honorific passed down since Inca times, meaning keeper or lord of the salt.
Her sigh did not induce me to cry more hopelessly. It recalled sleep, the true sleep of children on a mother's lap. (Arguedas, 2000 p. 284)

Aside from the younger women whom Ernesto has known and with whom he has fallen in love in a childlike way over the years, this woman, who has blue eyes but who is obviously an employee and not a member of the ruling classes, completes a triumvirate of adult women for Ernesto. There is Marcelina, the victim and partially guilty of her own victimhood, the rebel doña Filipa, and finally the unnamed mother figure. How to make sense of these three possibilities for women becomes an underlying theme throughout the rest of the novel, while Ernesto's inability to comprehend the passivity of the Indian hacienda workers still weighs heavily on him. At the end of the chapter and in a rather ironic way the author brings up the theme once more of the Pachachaca River, ironic because Antero mentions how he has conquered the river, while the river itself becomes an important promise of a future triumph of the Indian people themselves of their environment and over those who oppress them.

At the same time a discussion of the problem of Indian passivity and a resolution of the three images of woman presented in the novel become deeply more symbolically pertinent if they are viewed considering Andean iconography attached to the river and the bridge, denominated "Pachachaca" in the novel, "World Bridge" or "Bridge over the "World."

The primary mention of the river and the bridge occurs in the last section of chapter five Puente sobre el Mundo, "Bridge over the World." The main part of the chapter deals with Huanupata, the chichería district, and with the desperation Ernesto feels owing to what he has witnessed in the inner courtyard of the boarding school. Mention of the river, of course, recalls the title of the book itself and, furthermore, reminds the reader of Ernesto's first visit to Cusco and his first glance at the Inca walls that form the foundation of many buildings in the present day city. The curved lines where the many faceted rocks meet recall the yaguar mayu which refers to the Andean rivers during flood times but also refers to the war dances of the Indian people themselves (Arguedas, 2000 144). Now, at the depths of loneliness and despair, he finds solace on the banks of the Pachachaca River at the site of the bridge.

Important to the development of the novel and the bridge/river iconography is the fact that the bridge was built by the Spanish, while the river has already been associated with the Andean people. In regard to the river and the bridge, Ernesto states,

I couldn't tell if I loved the bridge or the river more. Yet both wiped clean my soul, and filled me with strength and with heroic dreams. All the mournful images, the doubts and the bad memories (of the courtyard) were erased from my mind. (Arguedas, 2000 p. 232)

14 Se quedó callada. Bajo sus manos gordas que me acariciaban suavemente, se disipaba la inercia del camino polvoriento, del alto cielo quemado y de mis recuerdos. Su llanto no me inducía a llorar más desesperadamente. Llamaba al sueño, al verdadero sueño de los niños en el regazo materno.

15 No sabía si amaba más al puente o al río. Pero ambos despejaban mi alma, la inundaban de fortaleizy de heroicos sueños. So borraban de mi mente todas las imágenes planíferas, las dudas y los malos.
As will become evident this paragraph suggests a mestizo interpretation, a simultaneous understanding of both the Andean and Western input. To begin: The word “pa-chachaca” itself is practically a synonym for “chacana,” the Quechua word for the Southern Cross Constellation. Chacana, however, does not mean cross. It is a combination of the word “chaca” (“bridge”) and the word “hana” (“high” or “on high” according to the context). It is a symbolic representation of the three “pachas”: the “high pacha”, “this pacha” and the “lower pacha”, which are divided on a horizontal axis.

The word pacha is difficult to translate since it means both “place” and “time.” The implication is that place and time exist in a sort of continuum (place changes in relation to time) and cannot be limited to a static concept of place: place changes. Additionally the three pachas do not correspond exactly to a Western concept of heaven, earth, and hell. Rather these three regions are interdependent and make up a whole of complementary parts. The chacana in this sense marks the paths through which they communicate with each other. In fact, certain creatures hold a special place in Andean cosmology since they can transit from one region to the next (Dover & Seibold, 1992, pp. 169-175). Among these creatures, in her article, Katherine Seibold mentions the amaru, which originally was conceived as an immense snake but is now associated with the bull, which, in turn is associated with illa. She also mentions the toad, a creature that Arguedas describes frequently in association within the inner courtyard. Seen in this light, Arguedas’ reference to this animal may not only lend more texture to his description of the courtyard but may also point to some hope of escape to a higher realm since this is the very essence of the toad, to pass from one realm (the lower pacha in this case) to a higher one. Considered in association with the Chacana, the Pa-chachaca Bridge and River become a site of transformation or transition from one state of being to another. Illustrations of the Chacana also show a line running through the center from the second from the bottom point on the right hand side to the second from the top point on the left side. This is the Qhapaq Ñan (capac in Ecuadorian Quechua, Quichua). The words loosely translate “the Way of creation and order,” and mark the Inca Trail running in a straight line from Potosi, through Cusco to Cajamarca. The Qhapaq Ñan has been compared to the Tao. The word qhapaq itself to the extent that it refers to order and the act of ordering relates to an ideal of balance between humanity and nature and, of course, within nature itself.

At the same time, in his description of the bridge, Ernesto also mentions that the structure has a stone cross (Arguedas, 2000, p. 351) which relates it to a Christian iconography.


17 I have included one illustration of the Chacana at the end of this essay.
nography of salvation through suffering, thus entwining these two conceptualizations into a thoroughly mestizo understanding of the universe. And in so far as the Qhapaq Ñan refers to a “way,” we are reminded of the Via Crucis, the Way of the Cross. Despite these similarities, however, it is important to remember the differences. Christian iconography is based on a linear understanding of time; salvation means the end time. Andean iconography emphasizes continuance; a circular transition from one state to another. The Andean cosmovision, at least in its pre-Columbian manifestation, saw the three worlds (pachas) as part of a complementary whole. The earth, this world, was not a battle ground between the upper and lower worlds, but rather a meeting place.

The revolt of the chicheras ends with the arrival of the military and Abancay’s falling under military rule. Doña Filipa and some companions flee from the town over the Pachachaca Bridge, where she leaves, wrapped around the bridge’s cross, her shawl as a challenge to military power (Arguedas does not hesitate to call to mind the violence underlying this part of the narration; in addition to her shawl, doña Filipa and the other women slaughter a mule and close off the entrance to the bridge with its entrails). At this point, Ernesto has gone down to the river once more. He spies Marcelina, the demented woman, crossing the bridge with Father Augusto, returning from one of the haciendas to which the priest has been sent to say mass. When she notices the shawl wrapped around the cross, she immediately climbs the pedestal to reach it and snatches it away for herself. Thus begins her “transition.” In a following scene, while the entire town is celebrating in the central plaza, Ernesto sees the woman again. She has climbed the tower of the church overlooking the town square where she sits as though in judgment of those who have violated her and, by extension, the upper classes of Perú, the military, etc.18 In terms of the Chacana, we can see that she has crossed from the lower world into this world, but, configured within a universe of constant change, her ascension comes at a fatal price: she has contracted typhus fever at the hacienda she has visited with the priest.

In one of the climactic scenes of the novel, Ernesto is present at Marcelina’s death. The scene takes place near the boarding school’s kitchen quarters where Marcelina sleeps. Ernesto and the cook who has watched over Marcelina are present:

I lifted the opa’s arms (Quechua for a demented person) and crossed them over her chest; her hands were very heavy. I said to the cook that that was strange.

“It is because she has worked and suffered,” she answered...

The opa became completely pale. Her features stood out in relief. I asked her for forgiveness in the name of all the students. I felt that as I spoke the heat that the fleas

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18 Gonzalez, in his edition for Los Ríos profundos quotes from my book El modo épico en José María Arguedas in which I here translate as saying... the demented woman demonstrates that she feels and understands the symbolism of the shawl—the challenge that this constitutes for the upper class—and the mere comprehension (of this) permits her to ascend with respect to her own humanity and situate herself in a position of judge... la demente demuestra que ella siente y comprende el simbolismo del rebozo—el reto que éste constituye para la clase alta—y la mera comprensión le permite ascender con respecto a su humanidad y situarse en una posición de juez (p. 401).
caused me to feel was calming down; her face was becoming beautiful, it was losing its deformity. She had closed her own eyes. (Arguedas, 2000, p.430)

In death she ascends to the upper world of the Chacana and her deformity is transformed into beauty, while the mention of her suffering reminds the Western reader of the Way of the Cross. If doña Filipa and the white woman who comforts Ernesto after the chichera revolt, represent two aspects of woman in general—woman as destroyer and woman as creator—they also represent two kinds of woman in Perú: the Hispanic white woman and the Indian woman. Marcelina comes then to represent all of these tropes regarding woman. On the one hand, she is white. At the same time she has been exploited and outraged, but by taking possession of doña Felipa’s shawl, she symbolically represents the woman who rebels and struggles against her exploiters. By extension it is easy to understand how she might represent the country itself. Perú is a society composed mainly (but not exclusively) of two distinct cultures: the Western and the Andean. Since the Spanish conquest these cultures have been in bloody contention. The exploitation of the Andean people has led to countless revolts on both a grand and lesser scale which have been followed by as many massacres of the revolting people. Yet a mixing does take place, as gradual as it may seem. In the three women of the novel, seen against the backdrop of the Southern Cross, both as chacana, “bridge” and Christian cross, the novel does imply a solution, a blending of the realities each of these cultures represents.

The last dilemma to be resolved for Ernesto is the issue of the hacienda workers: Has their spirit been entirely broken, symbolizing the extinction of the Andean culture, or does its unique understanding of humanity and humanity’s relationship to the world still persevere, if only latently? This is an existential question as far as Ernesto is concerned, a vital question, since it signifies his own existence as a product of this very culture. Yet to this point in the novel the workers’ passivity vis-a-vis their suffering and exploitation has been at the center of the protagonist’s own frustration and suffering.

Thus he can hardly believe that in the face of the typhus epidemic in the haciendas, they are marching into Abancay to demand that Father Linares say a mass for their salvation. The following dialogue between Ernesto and a resident of Abancay who is fleeing the city reveals his disbelief. At the same time as González notes in a footnote to his edition of the book (Arguedas, 2000, p. 457), the assessment of the workers’ will to defend themselves derives from other witnesses as well as from Ernesto. Thus the reader does not have to rely on Ernesto’s understanding of the events:

“It can’t be! They aren’t capable! They can’t! Didn’t the guardias scare them off?

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19 Levanté los brazos de la opa y los puse en cruz sobre el pecho; sus manos pesaban mucho. Le dije a la cocinera que era extraño.

—¡Es lo tanto que ha trabajado, que ha padecido! —me contestó.

La opa palideció por completo. Sus rasgos resaltaron.

Le pedí perdón en nombre de todos los alumnos. Sentí que mientras hablaba, el calor que los piojos me causaban iba apaciguándose; su rostro embellecía, perdía su deformidad. Había cerrado ya sus ojos, ella misma.
“Ha, caray, young man. I’m not just saying. The workers are like hens. Worse. They die like nothing. But the plague is a curse! Who sends a plague? Church (pronounced incorrectly by the speaker revealing his own rooting in the Quechua language), church? A mass! A priest! the workers are demanding!...the head priest of Abancay (Father Linares) (Arguedas, 2000, p. 450)²⁰

On pages 454 and 455 the fearlessness of the hacienda workers in the face of the epidemic and their determination to have a mass said is underlined again, once by a sergeant in the National Guard and once more by Father Linares himself. Thus Ernesto learns to trust again in the spirit of the people with whom he essentially identifies. Their inexorable march into the city identifies them with the deep rivers of the Andes, the yawar mayu, “the river at flood time.” Ultimately it unites them with their own past as seen in the Andean walls of Cusco, the same walls Ernesto has seen and dubbed puck’ik’ yawar runi, “rocks of boiling blood.” (Arguedas, 2000, p.144)

The meaning of their invasion of the city is enhanced and deepened in connotative meaning if we consider it in terms of the Chacana, the Southern Cross. To the extent that the Chacana signifies transition between zones (pachas) of the universe, we can trace the invasion of Abancay as movement from the under world to the high world. The fact that the workers cross into the city over suspension bridges, the kind constructed during Incan times, again emphasizes their identity with the cosmovision represented in the Chacana. At the same time, Arguedas is at pains to demonstrate the orderliness of the worker’s march through Abancay. He mentions how they enter the city silently and with reserve and how it is only after they have heard mass, that they begin singing to ward off the epidemic (Arguedas 2000, pp.458-459). Finally, the next day, as Ernesto himself is leaving Abancay, he discovers that the workers, accompanied by their wives, haven’t even disturbed the flowers in the plaza (Arguedas, 2000, p. 460).²¹

If we recall that the Qhapaq Ñan is the way, crossing through the Chacana, a clear parallel is drawn between this iconographic symbol and the actions of the workers. The Qhapaq Ñan is literally the route of the Inca Empire, at the same time it is the way of creation and order. In their orderly march toward a goal that to them will ward away the epidemic they symbolize the quest for balance and harmony in nature.

With the boarding school emptied of students because of the plague and with the people leaving the city for the same reason, Father Linares tells Ernesto to flee also to the home of an uncle who is the owner of a hacienda in Cusco. Ernesto has already made the acquaintance of this uncle and is appalled by the man’s treatment of his Indian workers, his miserliness, and his ostentatious displays of his Catholic faith. By this

²⁰—¡Mentira! ¡Ellos nos pueden! ¡No pueden! ¿No se han espantado viendo a los guardias?
—¡Ja caray, joven! No es por nada. El colonio es como gallina; peor. Muere no más, tranquilo. Pero es maldición la peste. ¿Quién manda la peste? ¡It’s a curse! <<Inglesia, inglesia; misa, Padrecito... del Padre grande de Abancay.

²¹ I compared the worker’s march on the city to that of chicheras in my own book (Spina, 1987,p.119). While the chicheras did destroy the flowers, the hacienda workers don’t, mirroring their sense of order. Their protest is against the plague and their goal is to have the mass said. No other part of nature is affected or harmed in their quest for justice as they understand it. González cites me with regard to this (Arguedas, 2000, p. 271).
time, however, he has already traversed the city and the Patibamba hacienda where he was comforted by the anonymous woman when he fainted. He has seen the devastation caused by the exploitation of the Indian people and later by the epidemic. In one home he finds an old woman dying of typhus who has been abandoned by her family. When he asks who she is her only answer is “I am going to die (Arguedas, 2000, p. 449),” as though death had become her identity. At the hacienda he witnesses a young girl extracting the larvae of a parasitic insect from her younger sister’s private parts (Arguedas, 2000, pp. 452-453). On a much reduced scale his journey of a single afternoon parallels the Indian workers’ journey through the lower pacha (hell, but with the distinctions mentioned in this study). And like their journey it is one of transit from the urku (lower) pacha to the other pachas, “this world” (kay pacha) and the “upper world” (hanan pacha). He arrives at the Pachachaca River which, he imagines is washing the epidemic away. He crosses over a suspension bridge (i.e., a bridge built the Incan way, recalling again all the iconology attached to the Chacana) and decides not to return to his uncle’s hacienda but to journey higher (or deeper) into the mountains, “la cordiéría” (Arguedas, 2000, p.461), the hanan pacha.

What Don Segundo Sombra, The Bear, and Huckleberry Finn have in common, among other bildungsromans written in the Americas, is that the development of the main character in the three novels somehow reflects or is attached to the development of the country itself. Don Segundo Sombra is a nostalgic farewell to the life of the gaucho on the Argentine pampas. His name itself implies that the gaucho is now a shadow, yet, though a shadow, he exists within the countries understanding of itself, of its history and its national myths. The character Huck Finn embodies for the United States a new understanding of democracy based on the reality that all people, no matter their race, have the moral right to be free. Huck embodies this new understanding and becomes a symbol of a new nation, a civil war fresh in his mind. The Bear is the saga of a culture, noble and brave though it might have been or believed it was, that was based on a misuse of the land and the abuse of two races: the Native American and the African. It is a tragic story and “Uncle Ike,” Isaac McCaslin, the protagonist, despite his love for the land and the culture, remains childless at the end, a symbol of the futility and hopelessness derived from a past, wrong at its very roots.

In this sense, these novels exist at another level of story telling; they are visionary. These stories are not limited to the main character, but open on to the experience of a nation concerning its myths, its history, and the very traditions on which it is founded. And the main character himself is an incorporation of the nation. Of course, it is true, that any main character can be a symbol of his society but they are not their nation the way Huck Finn is. Holden Caulfield (The Catcher in the Rye) is a true representation of a kind of youth found in the United States. He has seen through the hypocrisy that makes up so much of adult American society, but he does not incorporate American society they way Huck does. Alberto Fernández, the main character of La Ciudad y los Perros, similar to Holden Caulfield, becomes disillusioned and embittered when he witnesses all that is false and hypocritical in the Peruvian military and, by extension, in its society, but he is not Perú.

22 Voy a morir.
Ernesto, on the other hand, is Perú. He represents the nation’s races, its cultures, and the bitter contention between these cultures that have saddened the country’s history since its founding. At the same time he is alive with all that is beautiful and creative within the country. The country is his and he is the country’s: its triumphs and its tragedies.

**Figure 1: Diagram Depicting the Southern Cross within the Andean Cosmovision.**

Source: Pueblos Originarios Cosmogonia, http://pueblosoriginarios.com/sur/andina/ina/chakana.html. This website explains how the chacana was and has been interpreted. In Los ríos profundos Ernesto speaks of the Pachachaca bridge, which recalls the Chacana which means cross but whose root word “chaca” means bridge.
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