

ALLUSION TO WATER, MUSIC, AND SOCIAL DRAMA IN THE EARLY WRITINGS  
OF JOSÉ MARÍA ARGUEDAS

[Victoria F. Wolff](#)

*The University of Western Ontario*  
Canada

**ABSTRACT**

The novel *Los ríos profundos* (1958) by José María Arguedas alludes to a myriad of cultural and natural undercurrents of modern Peru. The question that arises is: How and when did these features of Arguedian literature develop? In this article, I analyze the early writings of José María Arguedas to understand how culture and natural features perform in concert. Under study are his first collection of short stories in *Agua* (1935) and the essay and collection of songs from *Canto kechwa* (1938). My findings show an indissoluble connection between music and water, with references to social drama in these foundational writings. This article contributes to interartistic (music and literature), eco-critical, and performance studies perspectives on Latin American literature. Arguedas's use of music in literature gives voice to the lived experiences of water; his early writings are an important step in the development of his ideas of national aesthetics and identity.

**Key words:** José María Arguedas, Literature, Music, Water, *Agua*, *Canto kechwa*

**RESUMEN**

La novela *Los ríos profundos* (1958) de José María Arguedas alude a una miríada de corrientes culturales y naturales del Perú moderno. La pregunta que surge es: ¿Cómo y cuándo se desarrollaron estas características de literatura Arguediana? En este artículo, analizo los primeros escritos de José María Arguedas para comprender cómo funcionan en concierto las peculiaridades culturales y naturales. Se estudia su primera colección de cuentos incluidos en *Agua* (1935) y el ensayo y la colección de canciones de *Canto kechwa* (1938). Mis hallazgos muestran una conexión indisoluble entre la música y el agua, con referencias al drama social de la época. El presente artículo contribuye a los estudios inter-artísticos (música y literatura), eco-críticos y de perspectivas de performance en la literatura latinoamericana. Con el uso de la música en la literatura, Arguedas le otorga voz a las experiencias vivas del agua; sus primeros escritos son un paso importante en el desarrollo de sus ideas en torno a la estética e identidad nacionales.

**Palabras claves:** José María Arguedas, literatura, música, agua, *Canto kechwa*

“Yo tengo un diálogo con el agua...  
Por eso canto yo.  
Viajando, voy viajando.  
Conectando con el agua.  
Conectando...conectando.”

–*Sigo Siendo (Kachkaniraqmi)* by Javier Corcuera

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Allusion is the suggestion of someone or something through cultural, historical, or mythological reference; this reference is intended to provide new levels of meaning. Allusions, therefore, are important extensions of the communicative power of language. Words, and their suggestive extensions through allusion, draw upon and extend our collective understandings of culture.

In terms of literature, allusion is connected to borrowing and utilizing elements from different sources. It indicates great intention on the part of the author as s/he combines textual and extratextual references. However, allusion also implicates the strong participation of the reader, as their own knowledge extends allusion into new territories (Pucci 5).

There have been many readers of the literature of José María Arguedas. One such contemporary reading is that of film director Javier Corcuera as depicted in his musical documentary *Sigo Siendo (Kachkaniraqmi)*, (2013). In his interpretation, water is connected to Peru’s diverse musical traditions; those individuals that unite water and music are the musicians and singers. This documentary of Peru’s musical heritage pays homage to writer and ethnographer José María Arguedas (1911-1969). From the Amazon to Lima, the second scene of the film transitions to a recording of the singing voice of Arguedas; the echoes of his past performance are played in the home of violinist Máximo Damián.

Damián explains of Arguedas: “Él sigue vivo, no ha muerto. Está en todo: En sus escritos, en su canto... ahora mismo he escuchado su voz. Él está vivo.” The subsequent journeys of the violinist through different geographies of Peru are then documented in the film. In *Sigo Siendo*, the life of Arguedas is harmonized with music. Damián declares: “Él era escritor. Aprendió nuestra lengua, por eso quería nuestra música.”

Arguedas wrote about music as an important cultural expression linked to the vitality of nature and environmental activism, resistance and struggle, as well as an enduring source of indigenous and *mestizo* identities. His literary use of music is what Steven Paul Scher calls “music in literature” or the “musicalization of literature” (179-80). More specifically, Scher discusses “verbal music” as “any literary presentation (whether in poetry or prose) of existing or fictitious musical compositions... such poems or passages often suggest characterization of a musical performance or of subjective

response to music” (188). Arguedas’s knowledge of Andean music comes from both personal and professional experience; his use of music in literature not only documents songs, but also recreates the effects of their performance.

Numerous critics, such as Ángel Rama, William Rowe, and Jorge García-Antezana, have described the musical qualities of the literature of Arguedas.<sup>1</sup> Studies on the expression of music in literature have primarily focused on his most famous novel *Los ríos profundos* (1958 [Fig. 1]). Less known, however, is the use of music in his earliest published work.

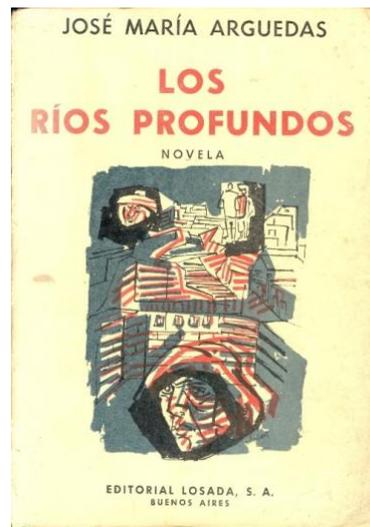


Fig 1. Book cover, Mercado Libre, Perú

This essay analyzes the origins of music in the literature of Arguedas before *Los ríos profundos*. The sources for my study are the short-story collection *Agua* and the essay and collection of songs *Canto kechwa*, both published in the 1930s. This period is significant for three main reasons. First, it was when Arguedas undertook the formal study of literature at the University of San Marcos in Lima (1931-37). As his first published collection of short stories (1935) and printed essay with compilation of songs (1938), together, they represent a crucial juncture in the development of the enduring features of Arguedas as a writer. Second, it denotes an intense stage of literary formation just prior to the publication of Arguedas’s first novel *Yawar Fiesta* (1941). Third, according to Raymond Leslie Williams, it was a time of mutually influential geographic and literary transformation in Latin America.

<sup>1</sup> Some examples of important studies on Arguedas and music can be found in *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (Rama), and also take the form of articles such as “Arguedas: Música, conocimiento y transformación social” (Rowe) and “Cosmovisión mítica en *Los ríos profundos*: Conceptualización de luz y música” (García-Antezana).

Inspired by the perspectives offered by Scher in his essay "Literature and Music" and by Williams in "Rural and Urban Rivers: Displacements and Replacements in the Modern Latin American Novel," I argue that Arguedas connects Andean environment and expression in these early writings through allusions to water, music, and the performance of social drama; these interconnections of creativity and the vitality of nature later become the cornerstone of his emblematic novel *Los ríos profundos*.<sup>2</sup> This study contributes to growing discussions on interarts research, eco-critical awareness, and performance studies in relation to Latin American literature.

## 2. INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

Both interartistic and eco-critical approaches to literature are based in the awareness and appreciation of the idea of relationships. Scher explains that "of the fine arts, music and literature are viewed as closely akin, because they are both auditory, temporal, and dynamic art forms." In other words, literature and music are sound-based, move through time, and progress in order "to be completed." These process-based "activities," when together, require a special critical "decoding" based in comparative practices (182).

Chalena Vásquez explains that Arguedas's literary works create a unique opportunity for understanding Andean music; through traversing the narrative, the reader is able to "observe" music, as if viewing a score, or "comprehend" music as if evoking a soundtrack (56). Vásquez notes that much of the experience of reading music in the literature of Arguedas depends on the reader (57).<sup>3</sup> Arguedas's corpus of written work frequently includes discussions of music, musicians, and instruments, as well as transcriptions of songs. Martín Lienhard's designation of "oralizing writing" (*escritura oralizante*) is applicable here, as what Arguedas's accomplishes is writing narrative works that collect or rework certain enunciative and poetic elements ascribed to oral discourse (374).<sup>4</sup> This practice became a principal way in which Arguedas mediated verbal and

---

2 Beyond *Los ríos profundos*, ecocritical and interartistic perspectives extend into Arguedas's last work *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* (1971). This has been studied by Jorge Marcone in "Recuperar Chimbote, o la ecología menospreciada de Los zorros de José María Arguedas" and by Enrique Bernal Albitas in "El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo: variaciones sobre lo pastoral y el psicoanálisis." I am grateful to one of the reviewers for the references.

3 Vásquez explains: "Lo curioso de este procedimiento literario es que el lector no andino, no escuchará nada, simplemente imaginará paisajes y se conmovirá con las diferentes situaciones narradas, en tanto el lector andino que tampoco escuchará nada en el momento de la lectura, comprenderá de otra forma dicho mundo sonoro, pues lo guarda en su propia memoria por experiencia vivida" (57).

4 As part of his discussion on *escritura oralizante*, Lienhard also notes that those in this category may be professional writers as well as "(ex)members of the marginalized oral sectors" (my translation) (374). Both designations are applicable to Arguedas. Lienhard's conceptualization of oralizing literature allows

written traditions, literary and ethnographic discourse, and different languages and cultures to reflect the heterogeneous reality of Peru.

As noted by Amy Nauss Millay, Arguedas was particularly interested in songs (74). Lawrence Kramer explains that “song is a form of synthesis. It is the art that reconciles music and poetry, intonation and speech, as means of expression... a reflection of the original synthesizing power of divine creation.” He goes on to add that the “mixed power” of song is frequently embodied in Western literature by the poet-singer Orpheus, “who transforms both the world and the underworld” (125). However, in the context of Peru, Arguedas’s understanding of song and its creative and transformative potential is deeply informed by indigenous perspectives.

The Andean world-view perceives the sacredness of the natural world, what John Staller and Brian Stross call a “mythic landscape” (7). Therefore, for Arguedas, song is the “symbiotic construct” of poetry and music deeply connected with nature. As interpreters of his texts, we must ask ourselves: Where do songs appear in his writings? What are their connections to Andean mythology and world view? In what ways do songs, and those that give voice to them, serve to “transform” the narrative? How is song linked to geography? In the case of literature and music in the writing of Arguedas, interarts perspectives are enhanced through the interdisciplinarity of ecocritical points of view.

Beatriz Rivera-Barnes and Jerry Hoeg explain that “ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the environment” (1). Moving beyond a purely cultural focus (in our case, literature and music), ecocritical perspectives expand to examine the interconnections of culture (human nature) and the environment (nature). Through this approach, the idea is that readers not only appreciate the aesthetics of a text and its cultural implications, but are also brought to an awareness of the “place-connectedness” of the literature (2). In the early stories of Arguedas, water and music unite during key moments of ritual performance;<sup>5</sup> their analysis together provides new understandings of the Peruvian writer’s inventive narrative strategies highly attuned to the lived experience of the Andean cultural and natural worlds.

### **3. CULTURAL PERFORMANCE AND SOCIAL DRAMA IN AGUA**

us to understand how Arguedas’s written use of verbal language is tied to worldview and expression in different languages (Spanish and Quechua). The question of who the reader is or is not is always scrutinized by the author (374).

<sup>5</sup> According to Carlos Huamán, the flow of water through the landscape and its relationship to music and community ritual is symbolized by *yawar mayu* (*río de sangre* or blood river). He explains: “El *yawar mayu*... trae otra armonía musical y da paso a la renovación de la vida. En las comunidades campesinas hacen fiestas, revientan cohetes, cantan, bailan, puesto que limpia los cauces, se lleva los males, entre ellos las enfermedades y anuncia la llegada de una temporada favorable para los cultivos. Los ríos son comunicativos” (*Atuqkunapa Pachan* 102).

Williams observes that the physical geographies of places with and without water, such as the *llano* and the river basin, both tangibly and metaphorically “define the very people who inhabit the region, as well as their customs and legends... As an insider and an outsider to Native American culture and society, Arguedas has a relationship with indigenous culture that provided him with insights into rivers and local people that were not common” (197-98).

Arguedas was born in 1911 in Andahuaylas in the Peruvian highlands. The death of his mother in 1914 and the travels of his itinerant lawyer-father left him mainly in the care of indigenous servants, where he learned Quechua and became immersed in native perspectives. After his father’s remarriage, Arguedas moved to his stepmother’s estate in San Juan de Lucanas (1918) and later to his uncle’s property in Viseca (1921-1923). These settings become central to the early writings under study.

The published collection *Agua* (Fig. 2) is comprised of three stories “Agua,” (San Juan de Lucanas), “Los escolares,” (Ak’ola) and “Warmá kuyay” (Viseca). The stories were written from 1933-1934 and published together as a collection in 1935. In all three, rivers and correlated water imagery are representative of an intricate network of historical, social, and environmental relationships. However, instead of surveying the stories in their published order, I recommend, instead, analyzing the collection in reverse, beginning with “Warmá kuyay” and ending with “Agua.”<sup>6</sup> I argue that the stories read in this manner suggest “cultural performance” and the literary depiction of “social drama.” Some background from Performance Studies is useful here.

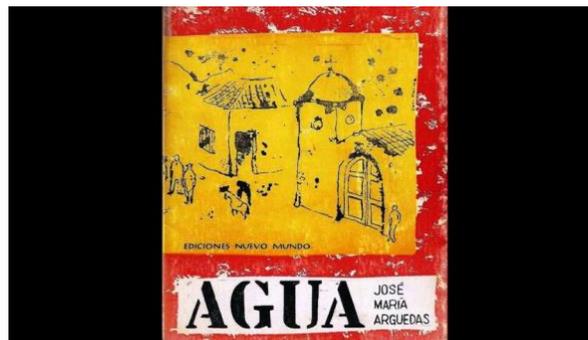


Fig. 2. Book cover, Archivo Trome, Perú

<sup>6</sup> The proposal to begin our analysis with “Warmá kuyay” is also justified by indications that it was the first of Arguedas’s three stories to find completion in print. It was originally published in the journal *Signo* in 1933. The specifics of the original publication dates and venues for “Los escolares” and “Agua” are unknown to me at this time.

Theatrologist Marvin Carlson explains that anthropologist Milton Singer first introduced the idea of “cultural performances” as acts that communicate cultural content on specific occasions through media particular to the culture in question. According to Singer, all cultural performances share characteristics of a marked beginning and end; they are said to be “framed experiences,” with a plan of action or script, performers and observers, and a focused site of interaction (Carlson 13-14). In his work on ritual, anthropologist Victor Turner combined Singer’s idea of cultural performances with work on rites of passage completed by ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep. Instead of “cultural performance,” Turner used the term “social drama,” which he divided into distinct ritualistic phases (15-17). Collaborative work by Turner and performance theorist Richard Schechner later applied the idea of social drama to aesthetic works of theater.

In relating these concepts to Arguedas and his writing, I argue that his early stories suggest the three-fold structure of a rite of passage with the preliminal stage of crisis and separation alluded to in “Warma kuyay,” the liminal or transition period referred to in “Los escolares,” and finally, the post-liminal time of reintegration and adjustment to the original situation as indicated in “Agua.” In this manner, Arguedas’s three stories can be understood as literature depicting the writer’s perspectives of the social drama of the Andean world. Reading the three stories in conjunction with the essay and compilation of songs known as *Canto kechwa* from the same period reveals much about Arguedas’s developing aesthetics.

#### **4. AESTHETIC CONSIDERATIONS: CANTO KECHWA**

The essay introducing Arguedas’s earliest collection of songs stresses that the water-like source for a national artistic aesthetic is essentially indigenous and flows, river-like, from the highlands. He explains:

Lo indígena está en lo más íntimo de toda la gente de la sierra del Perú. La vergüenza a lo indio, creada por los encomenderos y mantenida por los herederos de éstos hasta hoy, será quebrantada, cuando los que dirigen el país comprendan que la muralla que el egoísmo y el interés han levantado para impedir la superación del pueblo indígena, el libre desborde de su alma, debe ser derrumbada en beneficio del Perú. Ese día aflorará, poderoso y arrollador, un gran arte nacional de tema, ambiente y espíritu indígena, en música, en poesía, en pintura, en literatura, un gran arte, que, por su genio nacional, tendrá el más puro y definitivo valor universal. (17-18)

Arguedas connects art to environment through what he views as the necessary experience of “feeling” (*sentir*) and “living with” (*convivir*) the people and landscape of

the Peruvian highlands. He is, therefore, critical of any artists (“Costeños, o surgidos, casi todos, de las minorías serranas europeizadas”) who, in his eyes, create distant imitations instead of authentic representations of the *sierra* (18). Therefore, by drawing upon his unique upbringing, Arguedas positions himself as a paradigmatic writer of national narratives embedded in autochthonous cultures.

Arguedas constructs his narratives in a manner similar to what is known as a “coming of age” story. These stories are often set in the past, emphasize the interior monologue of the narrator-protagonist, as well as his/her dialogue with other key characters, and recount a frequently painful transition into more adult understanding. As reflections on the past, Arguedas grounds his narrator’s perceptions in recollection and memory. Arguedas, as a writer, creates a narrative space in which he is able to portray the sensory qualities of his own experience as a boy (autobiography), invent new stories (fiction), and detail specifics about life in the highlands (ethnography).

As Arguedas draws from his early childhood experiences and employs the pattern of a coming of age story, it is perhaps no surprise, then, that he selects a boy on the verge of manhood as narrator for each story in *Agua*. Not yet subject to the established hierarchies of class, race, and gender of the adult world, Arguedas’s young narrators more easily meander through the crossflows of the ethnic and linguistic spaces of the national territory.

## 5. DOMESTIC USE OF WATER, VIOLENCE, AND RESILIENCE IN “WARMA KUYAY”

In the article “Crossing Deep Rivers: José María Arguedas and the Renaming of Peru” Margaret V. Ekstrom explains the importance of both character and place names in Arguedas’s writing, stating that “[t]he relationships between the two cultures are carefully delineated in the use of language and speech patterns” (34). For the short story “Warma kuyay,” Arguedas selects the name “Ernesto,” meaning “steadfast,” “serious,” or “determined” for his young narrator. Significantly, this narrator and alter-ego for the author persists in *Los ríos profundos*. In relation to the novel, Ekstrom states:

The protagonist Ernesto/Ernest is diligently trying to find his cultural and personal place in the world. The title **Deep Rivers** refers both to his love for the waterways and other natural beauties of Peru and to the profound ethnic currents which flow in the boy and the land...The reader gains this information through occasional flashbacks scattered throughout the novel. There are also included numerous *huaynos* (indigenous Peruvian songs) in both the original Quechua and Spanish translations, to reflect Ernesto’s moods and longings and to reinforce the bicultural nature of the work. (34)

The central themes of *Los ríos profundos* as described by Ekstrom are present in “Warma kuyay.” Constructed as a remembrance, Ernesto narrates his boyhood search for his own cultural and personal space. Furthermore, the memory of the events surrounding the narrator’s coming of age are connected to a specific location: the ravine (*quebrada*) of the Viseca river.

Music reflects the emotions of the characters in the story. Furthermore, there are clear connections between the short story “Warma kuyay” and the opening essay of *Canto kechwa*. Both story and essay open with a description of Viseca: the hacienda, the people, the music, and water. “Warma kuyay” begins by transcribing a song:

Noche de luna de la quebrada de Viseca.  
*Pobre palomita por dónde has venido,  
Buscando la arena por Dios, por los suelos.*  
-¡Justina! ¡Ay, Justina!  
*En un terso lago canta la gaviota,  
memorias me deja de gratos recuerdos.*  
-¡Justinay, te pareces a las torcazas de Sausiyok!<sup>7</sup>

This song evokes in the narrator Ernesto memories of his boyhood on his uncle’s hacienda in Viseca. Central to his recollection are the feelings of affection towards the indigenous woman named Justina, who, at the time, was in a relationship with Kutu.

Both short story and essay describe communal gatherings of music and dance by the hacienda workers at the edge of the river. In *Canto kechwa* (Fig. 3), the narrator’s description emphasizes both landscape and soundscape:

Viseca es una quebrada angosta y honda. El caserío de la hacienda está junto al río; en las noches, el río sonaba fuerte. Junto al caserío hay una cascada, entre las piedras el agua se vuelve blanca y suena fuerte. En las noches, cuando todo estaba callado, esa cascada levantaba su sonido y parecía cantar. A ratos, la gente de la hacienda se callaba; don Sararaura nos decía: “El río ya también...” Todos bajaban la vista, y oían: sentíamos como la voz de una mujer; seguro era el viento que silbaba entre los duraznales de la huerta, en los montes de retama; pero nosotros creíamos que el río cantaba. Y nos alternábamos; el río y el coro de los peones. Don Sararaura nos hacía creer que el río nos contestaba. (7-8)

<sup>7</sup> There are two songs from *Canto kechwa* that call to mind “Warma kuyay”: “Como dos palomas...” and “La arena del río...” (59, 67).

In *Canto Kechwa*, the river clearly embodies a feminine voice; in “Warma Kuyay,” it is the character Justina who leads the singing.



Fig. 3. Book cover, librosperuanos.com

In the short story, the relationship between the hacienda and the river is one of exploitation; the river powers the mill and its waters are used for the extraction of minerals at the mines. A parallel is drawn between the exploitation of the natural environment and the poor treatment of the indigenous workers. The abuse of both is highlighted in the defining moment of the story when Ernesto learns from Kutu that Justina was raped by the *hacendado* Don Froylán at the river’s edge:

El Kutu se echo [sic] callado; estaba triste y molesto. Yo me senté al lado del cholo.  
- ¡Kutu! ¿Te ha despachado Justina?  
- ¡Don Froylán la ha abusado, niño Ernesto!  
- ¡Mentira, Kutu, mentira!  
- ¡Ayer no más la ha forzado; en la toma de agua, cuando fue a bañarse con los niños!  
- ¡Mentira, Kutullay, mentira!  
Me abracé al cuello del cholo. Sentí miedo; mi corazón parecía rajarse, me golpeaba. Empecé a llorar, como si hubiera estado solo, abandonado en esa quebrada oscura. (103-104)

From the lens of cultural anthropology and our understanding of the preliminal phase of rites of passage, Justina’s rape symbolizes the crisis. Both Kutu and Ernesto experience feelings of shame and anger in relation to her violation.

Kutu takes his frustration out on Don Froylán’s animals, abusing them mercilessly with a whip. Ernesto accompanies Kutu; but the boy grows to understand that, instead

of alleviating his anguish, the abuse of the animals only intensifies his despair. Ernesto regrets his complicity in the cycle of violence and asks his victims, the animals themselves, for forgiveness:

Ahí estaba “Zarinacha”, la víctima de esa noche; echadita sobre la bosta seca, con el hocico en el suelo; parecía desmayada. Me abracé a su cuello; la besé mil veces en su boca con olor a leche fresca, en sus ojos negros y grandes.

- ¡Niñacha, perdóname! ¡Perdóname, mamaya!...

- ¡Yo te quiero, niñacha, yo te quiero!

Y una ternura sin igual, pura, dulce, como la luz de esa quebrada madre, alumbró mi vida. (107)

At this point in the story, the paths of Kutu and Ernesto diverge and the preliminal stage of separation is now enacted.<sup>8</sup> Kutu flees the hacienda and Ernesto explains:

¡Era cobarde! Yo, solo, me quedé junto a don Froylán, pero cerca de Justina, de mi Justinacha ingrata. Yo no fui desgraciado. A la orilla de ese río espumoso, oyendo el canto de las torcazas y de las tuyas, yo vivía sin esperanzas; pero ella estaba bajo el mismo cielo que yo, en esa misma quebrada que fue mi nido. Contemplando sus ojos negros, oyendo su risa, mirándola desde lejitos, era casi feliz, porque mi amor por Justina fue un “warma kuyay” y no creía tener derecho todavía sobre ella; sabía que tendría que ser de otro, de un hombre grande... (108)

Ernesto ultimately recognizes the impossibility of his boyhood love for Justina; however, he articulates, for the first time, his admiration for what she represents: the native expressions vibrant around the hacienda. He exclaims: “Y como amaba a los animales, las fiestas indias, las cosechas, la siembras con música y jarawi, viví alegre en esa quebrada verde y llena del calor amoroso del sol” (108). This mention of ritual and festival according to the rhythms of nature makes reference again to music, which takes the reader full-circle back to the opening scene of the story: Justina’s song.

Through following the trajectory of the story, the reader comes to the realization that Justina’s singing took place the night after her rape. The performance of her song suggests resilience in the face of oppression, as neither the voice of the river in the background nor the voice of Justina were silenced: “Los eucaliptos de la huerta sonaban con ruido largo e intenso; sus sombras se tendían hasta el otro lado del río... En medio del witron, Justina empezó otro canto: *Flor de mayo, flor de mayo, / flor de mayo primavera, / por qué no te liberaste / de esa tu falsa prisionera*” (102). Ernesto, observing, recalling, and

<sup>8</sup> Ernesto states: “El Kutu en un extremo y yo en el otro” (“Warma kuyay” 109).

reporting on this remarkable event is understood by the reader as an important witness to life of the hacienda.

In “Warma kuyay” rivers are the flow of life; through their course, separations are inevitable.<sup>9</sup> Divergences symbolize change, movement, and migration. At the story’s conclusion, it is clear that Ernesto’s remembrance is narrated from a different geographical space, as he now lives on the coast.<sup>10</sup> The narrator’s journey from *sierra* to *costa* parallels that of author’s own experience as stated in *Canto kechwa*: “A los doce años de edad me sacaron de la quebrada. Mi padre me llevó a recorrer otros pueblos... En todos esos pueblos, como en el mío, las grandes fiestas las hacían y las preparaban los indios; toda la fiesta, con música indígena, con bailes indígenas, con costumbres indígenas o indigenizadas...” (9-10). Arguedas explains that, through his migration, he encountered many communities that maintained their musical expressions, as well as those that could not.<sup>11</sup> Like water moving to the sea, native and *mestizo* musical expressions disperse, intermix, and sometimes vanish.<sup>12</sup> The recounting of both the author’s and the narrator’s coming of age serves as a bridge reconnecting the national space from the coast back to the highlands.

## 6. AGRICULTURAL USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES: WATER CONFLICT AND MUSIC AS TRANSFORMATION IN “LOS ESCOLEROS” AND “AGUA”

As indicated by Paul H. Gelles throughout his book *Water and Power in Highland Peru: The Cultural Politics of Irrigation and Development*, the distribution of water is ultimately the struggle for control of vital resources. Conflict over water is central to the

<sup>9</sup> In relation to Andean perspectives, Huamán explains: “Bifurcar la vida-río, separarse, abrir otros cauces es abandonar el seno familiar, la comunidad, el *ayllu* (familia), la sangre unitaria. Esta situación genera muchas veces la soledad y el desamparo” (*Atuqkunapa Pachan* 101).

<sup>10</sup> The narrator Ernesto says: “...un día me arrancaron de mi querencia, para traerme a este bullicio, donde gentes que no quiero, que no comprendo” (“Warma kuyay” 108).

<sup>11</sup> Arguedas elaborates: “Todo, como en mi pueblo. En esos pueblos también aprendí nuevos cantos. Y en todos esos pueblos encontré waynos distintos en letra y en música. Pero un año llegué a los valles del Apurímac. Allí tenía haciendas un pariente lejano de mi padre... Los indios eran del viejo, como las mulas de carga, como los árboles frutales. Los indios le tenían miedo al dueño, como al diablo, temblaban cuando el viejo gritaba... Esa indiada no sabía cantar. Los indios de la hacienda nunca hacían bulla... En sus ranchos no tenía ni una quena, ni un charanguito siquiera” (*Canto Kechwa* 10-11).

<sup>12</sup> Arguedas notes: “Cuando llegué a las ciudades de la costa, la gente de esos pueblos todavía despreciaba mucho a los serranos. En esas ciudades no se podía cantar waynos; todos miraban al que cantaba un wayno como a un inferior, como a un sirviente, y se reían... no querían oír los waynos de su pueblo, cantaban tangos, one-steps, jazz. Vivían convencidos que lo europeo es lo superior, que todo lo indígena es malo y vergonzoso” (*Canto Kechwa* 12).

storylines of both “Los escoleros” and “Agua” and they will be analyzed in succession in this section.

Reflected in these stories are the historical tensions between local, ritualized models of land and water-use closely aligned to culture and community, and the disruption of these institutions when secular models tied to economic, social, and political power were imposed, first in the colonial period, and continuing on through to the Peruvian state of Arguedas’s time.

Liminality, the second stage of a rite of passage or social drama, is apparent in various forms in “Los escoleros.” This period of adjustment is primarily indicated by the name change of Arguedas’s narrator from Ernesto to Juan. Juan can be described as a “transition being” in the process of becoming someone who ultimately challenges prescribed notions of thinking and acting (6). His condition as an *huérfano* (“orphan”) and as a *forastero* (“foreigner”) further emphasizes how he is currently of a status outside the typical social hierarchy of his community. This is what Victor Turner would call “neither here nor there” and this stage indicates great potential for growth and transformation (7).

The town of Ak’ola, where Juan lives, is situated between two streams leading to a much larger river. Juan recounts how the river, over thousands of years, shaped the physical characteristics of the land. The community members (los ak’olas) practiced sustainable resource management by planting thorn-bushes to create a barrier along the river’s edge to protect animals and children from danger.

The area’s water source is Jatunk’ocha (“large lake”). Conflict over water distribution is principally between those from Ak’ola and those from Lukanas (los lukaninos). Although these tensions are historical, the narrator indicates that disagreements have intensified under the authority of the local landowner Don Ciprián.

The principal way in which community discord manifests is through livestock grazing. According to Huamán, in Andean cosmology rivers are *la vena del mundo* (“the vein of the world”) and the land in close proximity to rivers is advantageously inhabited and cultivated by both animals and people (*Atuqkunapa Pachan* 100). In this worldview, the intersecting point of rivers, people, and animals is no less than a representation of the totality of the elements of the universe (103).

In contrast to the fastmoving current of the river, Don Ciprián’s eyes are described as pools of stagnated water (“charcos podridos”) (Arguedas 56). He patrols the area in search of free-range grazing livestock, with the objective of collecting strays and claiming damage to his private property. The acquired animals are locked away, until their owners arrive to plea for their release. If they cannot pay a fine, Don Ciprián simply allows the animals to starve. For the community, the domestic animals are a vital source of sustenance; for the natural environment the grazing produces potentially beneficial results by stimulating plant growth and producing nutrient-dense soil. However, for Don

Ciprián, the mistreatment of the animals is the means by which he asserts his dominance to manipulate the residents for his own economic benefit.

It is only during Don Ciprián's absence from town while on patrol that music is played. Music allows different sectors of the community (indigenous/*mestizo*, male/female, young/old) normally under Don Ciprián's control to freely come together:

Esos días en que el patrón recorría las punas eran los mejores de la casa. Los ojos de los concertados, de doña Cayetana, de Facundacha, de toda la gente, hasta de doña Josefa, se aclaraban. Un aire de contento aparecía en la cara de todos; andaban en la casa con más seguridad, como dueños verdaderos de su alma. Por las noches había juego, griterío y música... Muchas veces se reunían algunas pasñas y mak'tas del pueblo, y bailaban delante la señora, rebosando alegría y libertad. (72-73)

The first song transcribed in the story is "Wikuñitay" (vicuña).<sup>13</sup> The vicuña, although wild grazers, can be associated with the domesticated grazing animals at the center of Don Ciprián's raids. Vicuña, like cattle, sheep, goats, and pig, are scientifically classified as even-toed ungulates (hoofed animals). These artiodactyl species are of great dietary and cultural significance to Andean peoples. Andean perspectives perceive animals, like the vicuña, to have deep emotions and to communicate with people (Huamán, *Atuqkunapa Pachan* 119).

The connection between animal and human abuse is made explicit through the musician-figure at the center of the communal gatherings, doña Josefa. We learn from Juan that she is essentially a victim of human trafficking: "Don Ciprián trajo a doña Josefa desde Chalhuanca; allá fue de viajero, como hombre de paso, y ahora era su señor, como su patrón, porque a ella también la ajeaba y golpeaba" (81). Like the character Justina from "Warma kuyay," doña Josefa's voice in an otherwise oppressive situation reminds the reader of her resilience. Juan explains: "Doña Josefa era humilde, tenía corazón de india, corazón dulce y cariñoso. Era desgraciada con su marido; pero vino a Ak'ola para nuestro bien. Ella lo comprendía, y lloraba a veces por todos nosotros, comenzando por su becerrito Juancha. Por eso los ak'olas le decían mamacha, y no eran disimulados y mudos para ella" (81). Doña Josefa's final song transcribed in the story serves as a warning when facing men such as Don Ciprián and calls for renewed ties with nature.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> There are three songs from *Canto kechwa* that mention vicuña and evoke "Los escoleros": "Que no encuentre ni el rocío...," "¡Ay flor morada...!", and "El agua dulce..." (33, 43, 71).

<sup>14</sup> Doña Josefa sings: "No quieras hija mía a hombres de paso./ ... Más bien ama al árbol del camino,/ a la piedra que estira su sombra sobre la tierra./ Cuando el sol arda sobre tu cabeza,/ cuando la lluvia bañe tu espalda;/ el árbol te ha de dar su sombra dulce,/ la piedra un lugar seco para tu cuerpo./" ("Los escoleros" 81).

This extensive story reaches its denouement when Don Ciprián steals the best milk cow from the widowed mother of one of the schoolboys. Juan and his friends are thrust into what Turner would call a “betwixt and between” juncture in the middle of fear (inaction) and redress (action) (7). Juan takes the initiative to plan an attack on Don Ciprián; however, the challenge to his authority ultimately comes from the widow herself as she publicly denounces him *ladrón* (“thief”). Juan observes: “El patrón no tenía ya la mirada firme y altanera con que asustaba a los lukanas; parecía miedoso ahora, acobardado, su cara su puso más blanca” (96). In a fit of rage brought on by the direct challenge to his power, Don Ciprián shoots the cow dead and puts Juan and his friend in prison.<sup>15</sup>

As the liminal stage depicted in Arguedas’s collection, there is no clear resolution to the story; it simply concludes: “Pero el odio sigue hirviendo con más fuerza en nuestros pechos y nuestra rabia se ha hecho más grande, más grande...” (98). Resistance will come for Arguedas’s narrator in the final story “Agua,” for which the collection of three stories is ultimately named.

“Agua” takes place in the town of San Juan de Lucanas. The landscape is defined by two mountain summits separated by the Viseca River and its distributary channels. The final postliminal stage is enacted here. Arguedas’s narrator is once more called Ernesto.

Ernesto arrives to San Juan alongside the musician-figure Pantaleón. Their entrance symbolizes return and reintegration into the community, as Pantaleón has been away working on the coast. The musician-figure has the first spoken words of the story: “San Juan se está muriendo...” (15). The town is suffering due to unequal access to water. The owner (*dueño*) of San Juan, Don Braulio Félix, supplies water for irrigation only to his supporters: “San Juan se va a morir porque don Braulio hace dar agua a unos y a otros los odia” (16). Don Braulio is not a steward of water, but rather a thief, manipulating a resource that was once held in trust (22). As a result, crops fail, livestock languish, and the community suffers.

The action takes place in the town plaza, surrounded by the imposing structures of punishment (the prison), acculturation (the school), and religious imposition (the church). Ernesto and Pantaleón arrive on a Sunday, the day of water distribution. The musician gathers the *comuneros* in solidarity before the water distribution. It is his music that converts the day of water to a day of *alzamiento* (“resistance”, [28]).

The music played by Pantaleón highlights a shared sense of celebration, plenitude, and harvest by evoking memories of past rituals of communal life. The story describes the effect of Pantaleón’s musical performance as follows:

---

<sup>15</sup> The prison also represents the liminal as it is segregated from the normal mechanisms of communal order; in Turner’s words, it is a “seclusion site.” To be in prison is to continue to exist yet not exist at the same time. It recalls Turner’s description of having a “physical but not social ‘reality’” (8).

La tonada del cornetero nos recordaba las fiestas grandes del año; la cosecha de maíz en las pampas de Utek' y de Yanas; el escarbe de papas en Tile, Papachacra, K'ollpapampa. La hierra de las vacas en las punas. Me parecía estar viendo el corral repleto de ganado; vacas allk'as, pillkas, moras; toros gritones y peleadores; vaquillas recién adornadas con sus crespones rojos en la frente y cintas en las orejas y en el lomo; parecía oír el griterío del ganado, los ajos roncós de los marcadores.<sup>16</sup> (17-18)

Pantaleón is a skillful player of the *corneta*. This wind instrument, comprised of cow horns, forms a spiral. As its main material comes from an animal introduced by Europeans, its origins are understood to be in the post-contact period.

Pantaleón plays a specific type of song called a *huayno*. Raúl Romero Cevallos defines *huaynos* as “[t]he most popular song genre in the Andes” (170). This type of music is characterized by improvisation; its performance, through both song and dance, can take place at any time and within a variety of contexts. Since early colonial references to *huaynos* are scarce, it is understood that they, too, originated later in the colonial period (“Peru” 363).

Both the *corneta* and the *huayno* prove to be significant in the story as both examples of Andean musical culture represent an important process of *mestizaje* through which Arguedas seeks to express modern Peruvian identity and culture; they are considered “mixed” artifacts and become the symbolic means through which diverse elements of the Andean world are harmonized.

Ernesto specifically requests of Pantaleón a *huayno* called “Utek'pampa” about a nearby community that resists don Braulio. Utek'pampa is a place that balances water (*el río Viseca*) with the dryness of the plains (*pampa*): “Utek'pampa/ Utek'pampita./ tus perdices son de ojos amorosos,/ tus calandrias engañadoras cantan al robar,/ tus torcazas me enamoraron/ Utek'pampa/ Utek'pampita” (19). Of note in the *huayno* is the mention of three types of birds, each conveying important symbolic meanings that brings together allusions to water, music, ritual performance.

Juan Javier Rivera Andía explains that partridges (*las perdices*) are associated with water; oral histories note these birds' fellowship with bulls, cows, and branding rituals (174-75). *Calandrias* are song-birds adept at imitating the human voice. Conversely Andean musicians frequently attempt to replicate the birds' sound in their compositions (Huamán, *Atuqkunapa Pachan* 132). Finally, the (*paloma*) *torcaza* is thought to have mystical, magical, and transformative powers: “Su canto limpia y purifica el alma del hombre” (244).

---

<sup>16</sup> The song “Carnaval taki” from *Canto kechwa* brings to mind the story of “Agua,” the arrival of Pantaleón, and the celebratory nature of his music (39, 41).

Inspired by Pantaleón and his music, the *semanero* don Pascual defies don Braulio and orders water to be given to those most in need. Like don Froylán in “Los escolares,” don Braulio reacts with violence, firing his revolver on the crowd. Pantaleón confronts don Braulio with his instrument raised, but is shot and killed. Ernesto then takes up Pantaleón’s *corneta* and uses it strike don Braulio on the head.

At the story’s conclusion, Ernesto escapes San Juan, fleeing to Utek’pampa, the distinctive community referenced in Pantaleón’s *huayno*: “Bien abajo, junto al río Viseca, Utek’ pampa se tendía, como si fuera una grada en medio del cerro Santa Bárbara. Nunca la pampa de Utek’ es triste; lejos del cielo vive: aunque haya neblina negra, aunque el aguacero haga bulla sobre la tierra, Utek’pampa es alegre” (44).

Beginning in the colonial period, administrators recognized the central role of music for indigenous cultures, ascertaining that it had the potential to transmit messages, call together large groups of people, and initiate rebellions. As such, native musical expressions were suppressed, sometimes violently. Arguedas references this legacy in “Agua”, yet seeks to emphasize the possibility for revolutionary change. His protagonist, transitioning over from boyhood to manhood, confirms a “realm of pure possibility” in which art and environment, that which is felt and lived, is a potent opportunity (Turner 7).

In “Los escolares” and in “Agua” we witness how disharmonious social relations in harsh conditions not only harm the environment, but also threaten creative expression. Together, the stories present narratives of resilience, transformation, and resistance that evoke what Arguedas perceived to be Peru’s temporal and spatial realities. Arguedas wrote the stories of *Agua* on the verge of a time of rapid modernization, urbanization, and migration in Peru; historical divisions between the *sierra* and the *costa* would become important to national debates related to issues of linguistic alienation, cultural dislocation, and environmental degradation. In *Canto Kechwa*, Arguedas explains “...nuestros mejores artistas ensayan hacerse intérpretes del paisaje andino y del pueblo indígena. Y aunque no se ha logrado todavía una realización plena, está ya abierto el camino” (18).

## 7. CONCLUSION

In Arguedas’s efforts to document and give explanation to songs in *Canto kechwa*, he is mindful that music is an enduring yet dynamic expression of popular culture that flows river-like through the highlands arriving to the coast of modern Peru where it will begin to circulate in new ways. Like the process of rite of passage embodied in his stories, Arguedas endeavors to usher in a marked beginning in which bias toward Peruvian popular arts is challenged and these forms are allowed to evolve from disrespect to admiration. His foresight in using music in literature to express the lived experience of

the land was an important step in the process of proposing a way forward for the development of national identity and aesthetics. Our analysis of allusion to water, music, and social drama in the early writings of José María Arguedas not only offers a window into the mechanisms of a young writer with an eye to better understanding his later, more established work; it also provides an opportunity to engage with contemporary readers of Arguedas, such as film director Javier Corcuera, who continue to extend these references in original ways fifty years after the death of the author.

## 8. WORKS CITED

- Arguedas, José María. *Canto kechwa con un ensayo sobre la capacidad de creación artística del pueblo indio y mestizo*. Lima, Editorial Horizonte, 1989.
- . *Agua*. Prólogo de Antonio Cornejo Polar. Lima, Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 1974.
- . *Los ríos profundos*. Edición de Ricardo González Vigil. Cátedra: Letras hispánicas, 2006.
- Albites, Enrique Bernal. "El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo: Variaciones sobre lo pastoral y el psicoanálisis." *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, vol. 40, no. 79, 2014, pp. 163-180. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43854814>. Accessed 11 May 2020.
- Carlson, Marvin. *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd Edition, Routledge, 2004.
- Corcuera Andrino, Javier, director. *Sigo siendo (Kachkaniraqmi)*. Documental, 110 minutos. New Century Films, Perú, 2013. <https://vimeo.com/77245467>
- Diccionario de la lengua española de la Real Academia Española*. "Alusión." 28 February 2020. <https://dle.rae.es/?w=alusión>.
- Ekstrom, Margaret "Crossing Deep Rivers: José María Arguedas and the Renaming of Peru." *Literary Onomastics Studies*, vol. 16, 1989, pp. 33-37. Digital Commons Brock University, <https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/los/vol16/iss1/9/>.
- García-Antezana, Jorge. "Cosmovisión mítica en *Los ríos profundos*: Conceptualización de luz y música." *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, vol. 22, no. 43/44, 1996, pp. 301-312. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4530864>. Accessed 11 May 2020.
- Gelles, Paul *Water and Power in Highland Peru: The Cultural Politics of Irrigation and Development*. Rutgers UP, 2000.
- Huamán, Carlos. *Atuqkunapa Pachan – Estación de los zorros: Aproximaciones a la cosmovisión quechua-andina a través del wayno*. Mexico D.F. y Lima, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México y Ediciones Altazor, 2006.
- Kramer, Lawrence. *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After*. California UP, 1984.

- Lienhard, Martín. "Oralidad." *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, vol. 20, no. 40, 1994, pp. 371-374. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4530780>. Accessed 11 May 2020.
- Marcone, Jorge. "Recuperar Chimbote, o la ecología menospreciada de *Los zorros* de José María Arguedas." *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, vol. 40, no. 79, 2014, pp. 141-161. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43854813>. Accessed 11 May 2020.
- Nauss Millay, Amy. *Voices from the Fuente Viva: The Effect of Orality in Twentieth-Century Spanish American Narrative*. Bucknell UP, 2005.
- Pucci, Joseph. *The Full-Knowing Reader: Allusion and the Power of the Reader in the Western Literary Tradition*. Yale UP, 1998.
- Rivera Andía, Juan Javier. "A partir de los movimientos de un pájaro...La 'danza de la perdiz' en los rituales ganaderos de los Andes peruanos." *Revista Española de Antropología Americana*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2012, págs. 169-185. *Revistas científicas complutenses*, <https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/REAA/article/view/38642>.
- Rivera-Barnes, Beatriz and Jerry Hoeg. "Introduction." *Reading and Writing the Latin American Landscape*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 1-7.
- Romero Cevallos, Raúl. *Debating the Past: Music, Memory, and Identity in the Andes*. Oxford UP, 2001.
- . "Peru." *The Garland Handbook of Latin American Music*, Edited by Dale Olsen and Daniel Sheehy, Garland Publishing, 2000, pp. 352-74.
- Rowe, William. "Música, conocimiento y transformación social." *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, vol. 13, no. 25, 1987, pp. 97-107. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4530309>. Accessed 11 May 2020.
- Scher, Steven Paul. "Literature and Music." *Essays on Literature and Music (1967-2004)*. Edited by Walter Bernhart and Werner Wolf. Rodopi, 2004, pp. 173-201.
- Staller, John and Brian Stross. *Lightening in the Andes and Mesoamerica: Pre-Columbian, Colonial, and Contemporary Perspectives*. Oxford UP, 2013.
- Turner, Victor. "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage." *Betwixt and Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation*. Edited by Louise Carus Mahdi, Steven Foster, and Meredith Little. Carus Publishing, 1999.
- Vásquez, Chalena. "Un universo sonoro en *Los ríos profundos*." *Lienzo: Revista de la Universidad de Lima*, no. 23, 2002, pp. 55-86.
- Williams, Raymond Leslie. "Rural and Urban Rivers: Displacements and Replacements in the Modern Latin-American Novel." *Troubled Waters: Rivers in Latin American Imagination*. Edited by Elizabeth Pettinaroli & Ana María Mutis, vol. 12, 2013, pp. 195-211. *Hispanic Issues Online*, [https://cla.stg.umn.edu/sites/cla.umn.edu/files/hiol\\_12\\_11\\_williams\\_rural\\_and\\_urban\\_rivers.pdf](https://cla.stg.umn.edu/sites/cla.umn.edu/files/hiol_12_11_williams_rural_and_urban_rivers.pdf).