

Chapter 7

CULTIVATING NON-EUROPEAN ROOTS

Latin America's cultural turn away from Europe intensified in the middle years of the twentieth century. First, the awesome destruction of World War I had called the long-assumed superiority of European civilization into question. Then came the world economic crisis that began with the crash of the New York stock market in 1929. The capitalist order instituted globally by European colonialism seemed to be unraveling along with colonialism itself. Nationalist self-awareness was the order of the day, and writers around the world sought inspiration in what was local and native. In Latin America, non-European roots provided the cultural touchstone.

One strong current of this intensified search for national identity was *indigenismo*. The word (from *indígena*, a common Spanish synonym for Indian) referred simultaneously to political attitudes, anthropological interests, and (our major focus here) literary developments. The unifying theme in all this was the idea that the indigenous people of Latin America, rather than being *defined out* of emerging national identities, as had been common in the 1800s, were now regarded as the *chief defining element* of national identity in many countries, particularly in Mexico and the Andes. In the 1800s, there had been an artistic motif—sometimes called “Indianism”—in which Latin American writers and painters portrayed Indian princes and princesses of centuries past, something safely remote, Romantic, idealized, and long-disappeared. Indigenista writers of the 1930s, on the other hand, focused instead on living indigenous villagers, and they did so in ways that were anything but idealized and tended, instead, to linger on the villagers' poverty and misery, denouncing

their marginalization and advocating their assimilation into the modern life of the nation.

In retrospect, the indigenista emphasis on “modernizing” and assimilating indigenous people amounted to an assault on their culture. Indigenismo involved a large dose of paternalism, and indigenista writers were not free of stereotypes or airs of superiority. Yet, by their own lights, they meant to serve the interests of indigenous people, and many had a truly radical Marxist vision of revolutionary social transformation. In addition, indigenistas typically learned indigenous languages and had considerable experience with the people whom they portrayed in their fiction. Many had had anthropological training. As a literary school, indigenismo was especially Andean. The two indigenista stories included in this chapter, “Runa Yupay” and “Three Silver Sucres,” from Ecuador and Peru, respectively, illustrate both the penchant to denounce the exploitation of indigenous people and the tendency to espouse a vision of social amelioration based not on the indigenous people's own direction and agency but on the wisdom and leadership of paternalistic whites and mestizos.

In countries without large populations of indigenous peasants, writers located non-European roots in populations of African or mixed descent. In many parts of Latin America, African descent was defined as characteristic of particular regions within each country, most often coastal regions—the pattern in Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, also in Central America and, to a lesser degree, in Mexico. There, non-European roots became a focus of literary regionalism that explored the traditional life ways of particular areas of the Latin American countryside. The protagonists of “The New Saint,” a regionalist example included in this chapter, are people of African descent whose racial identity is never mentioned except to specify that they are people of the Ecuadorian coast. In this common pattern, African descent was subsumed into regional identities, building blocks of larger national identities because diverse regions add up to the nation. Brazilian literary regionalism, which flourished in the 1930s and 1940s, found its most vigorous expression among writers of the Northeast, some focusing on coastal areas characterized by populations of African descent and some (as in the novel *Arid Lives*, excerpted here) on the mixed-race populations of the arid

backlands, the same sertanejos whom the reader will recall from the da Cunha selection in the last chapter.

In sum, both indigenista and regionalist writers tended to present the non-European roots of the nation as distinctive marks of authenticity, providing Latin American countries with unique identities. Yet indigenistas and regionalists assumed that the protagonists of their stories would need to be modernized and assimilated into the national mainstream. Non-European roots, in other words, constituted defining ingredients which, when combined with other ingredients and properly cooked, added a signature element to national cuisines. But they were not to be served raw or by themselves.

TWO SHORT STORIES

José de la Cuadra

José de la Cuadra was born in 1903 in Guayaquil, Ecuador's chief port city. The coastal region of Ecuador was the focus of his fiction, and he figured importantly in the "Guayaquil Group" of writers who turned their attention to social issues in the 1930s. De la Cuadra wrote especially about Ecuador's coastal people of African descent. In addition, he wrote about the indigenous people of the Ecuadorian Andes, as in the first story that follows. Note the powerful compression of de la Cuadra's writing, which makes a few words go a long way. Also of interest is a clear contrast in his attitudes toward the indigenous people of highland Ecuador, on the one hand, and the people of the coast, on the other.

THREE SILVER SUCRES (1932)

Presentación Balbuca adjusted the drawstring at the waist of his white, pajama-like Indian's trousers. He threw his red poncho with

SOURCE: José de la Cuadra, "Ayoras falsos" and "El santo nuevo," in *Obras completas* (Quito: Editorial Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1958), pp. 410–14, 592–99.

its broad lead-colored stripes over one shoulder and remained standing, motionless, in the door of the small-town lawyer's shabby little office.

"You'll see, you'll see, Balbuca," the lawyer was saying. "The judge has ruled against us so far, but it doesn't matter. We'll appeal."

He added:

"Don't forget the three *sucres*."*

But the Indian was no longer listening.

He spat on the ground in front of him, the way llamas do, and trotted up the steep, narrow street to the town square. He seemed oblivious to his surroundings, and his face wore a dark frown. But the expression was merely external. In reality, he thought about nothing, nothing at all.

Every now and then, he stopped to rest for a moment.

He scratched the ground with his stubby toes, drew the air thickly into his lungs, and expelled it with a hoarse whistle, a sort of prolonged "hunhhh . . ." of exhaustion. Then he resumed his rhythmic trot up the hill.

When he reached the square, he sat on a stone bench attached to the wall of one of the buildings that faced it. He took a handful of toasted barley from a small cloth bag that hung around his neck under his poncho and tossed it into his mouth.

The starchy sweetness of the barley made him thirsty. He went to the fountain that enlivened the middle of the square with its cheerful sound and shooed away the mules that were drinking there.

"Away! Away," he cried, with a mule-driver's voice. "Away!"

The animals moved away, and Balbuca dipped his cupped hand into the dark, murky water and slurped. His thirst slaked, he returned to the stone bench.

There he sat for over three hours without the slightest movement indicative of boredom, his eyes fixed on his bare feet, over which green-and-black, shiny-winged flies buzzed and occasionally alighted.

*Ecuador (along with Panama and El Salvador) has now adopted the US dollar as its official currency, but formerly it used *sucres*, named after the patriot general who defeated Spanish forces near Quito in 1822.

Finally, the man for whom he was waiting passed by: master Orejuela.

"Master Orejuela, can you give me three sucres? My boy Pachito will work for you. Can you?"

Orejuela, who was the administrator of a nearby hacienda, prided himself on knowing how to deal with Indians.

He discussed the matter at length with Balbuca and finally agreed to advance him three sucres in return for three week's work on the part of Pachito.

"I know your son Pachito. He is still a little boy, eight years old, nine at most. What can he do all by himself? The sheep would get away from him! He can only be a helper."

Finally it was settled. Pachito would start early in the morning on the following day. But there was still a final difficulty to be resolved.

"Will you give him food to eat, master?"

Orejuela did not like that a bit. Food? Was he going to have to feed the child, too? That was too much! That would just be too expensive! The child would have to bring his own toasted corn and barley rations. The hacienda would provide water. . . .

Balbuca implored him. His hut was very far from the hacienda. If Pachito had to bring his own food he would eat so much on the way that it would last only two days.

Orejuela finally consented to give the boy food every day . . . except for Sundays.

He shouted with laughter.

"Sunday is a day of rest. That's a holy obligation, right? The owner of the hacienda is a big Conservative, you know, very Catholic. So let the boy fast on Sunday. The hacienda only feeds workers. If you don't work, you don't eat—just the way they say it is under Commonism.

Balbuca accepted, and they closed the deal.

"Bring the sucres, then."

Orejuela indicated that they would have to draw up a contract first.

"The hacienda has to protect itself. The kid is a minor and you'll have to give your permission in writing as his father. The laws are very strict."

So they went to look for a government official, whose office was in the dim and foul-smelling little back room of an old house, to formalize the contract.

Presentación Balbuca did not know how to read or write, so he signed the document with a shaky, crooked X.

The document incorporated a number of innovations that the official implemented in response to certain silent signals given him by Orejuela. According to what was written and signed, Balbuca declared that he had received not three, but ten sucres, and that he committed his son to provide two full months of personal service.

Orejuela then paid the Indian with three coins that he carefully put into the cloth bag that hung around his neck.

"Don't forget to send the kid tomorrow bright and early."

Presentación promised to do so and went out the door. In the street, he hurried down the hill.

When he got to the lawyer's shabby little office, he stopped.

"Doctor," he called from outside, "I have brought the three sucres that you said."

The lawyer appeared at the door and extended his trembling hand, as avid as a beggar's.

He explained:

"These three sucres are the rest of the five that I needed to buy the stamps that have to go on your petition to appeal the judgment against you."

The lawyer squeezed the three coins between thumb and forefinger, and found that he could bend them.

He shook with fury:

"These are made of lead, not silver! They are as false as your mother!"

Indignant, he threw the worthless slugs of metal in the Indian's face.

"You wanted to fool me, Indian son of mule! *Me* . . . a lawyer!"

Balbuca silently gathered the slugs out of the dirt.

Once again he climbed the hill and looked around the square for Orejuela. He found him sitting at a table drinking chicha with the government official who had drawn up the contract.

"Master Orejuela, they are no good," he said, putting the worthless coins on the table. "Master doctor said so."

Orejuela reared up violently.

What! What was this piece of rubbish saying? That *he*, Felipe Neri Orejuela, had given out counterfeit money? Is *that* what he was saying? Accusing him of a *crime*, was he? In the presence of a government official?

He addressed his companion in dismay. Would the authorities allow this? Would they not impose a modicum of respect for a free Ecuadorian citizen publically insulted by a miserable Indian?

An outrage! What on earth had this corrupt country come to?

Balbuca listened without expression to Orejuela's histrionics. Then he said simply:

"Change the coins, or I won't send the boy."

At that point, the authority had heard enough. He turned to a couple of Indian day laborers who were passing by and commanded them:

"Grab hold of this lowlife."

Hesitant but cowed, they obeyed.

Turning to Balbuca, the official added:

"I'm taking you prisoner, and you'll stay in jail until your boy reports for work. Contracts are sacred and must be obeyed."

Balbuca struggled weakly in the arms of the men who held him. His eyes were very wide. His pupils were dilated. He bit his lips and said something unintelligible in Quechua under his breath. Then he fell silent and stopped resisting.

Orejuela now intervened sympathetically with the official. He offered to send a man to Balbuca's hut as soon as possible to collect the boy so that the Indian would not be in jail long. He, Orejuela, was not the sort of man who liked to see others suffer, not even uppity Indians who violated the rules of civilized behavior.

And, in fact, eight-year-old Pachito was brought at dawn the next day, with his sweaty little face and his ruddy cheeks that, chapped by the cold air of the high Andes, gave a misleading impression of robust health. . . .

Presentación emerged from jail and did not ask to see his son. He left town immediately and headed for his hut on a distant mountainside.

When he passed by the large gate of the hacienda administered by Orejuela, he picked up a small stone, made sure that nobody was looking, and threw it against the heavy wall in anger. The stone knocked a bit of white-washed plaster off the wall with a dull thud.

The Indian smiled expressionlessly, vaguely, stupidly. . . .

Then he looked in all directions, wiped his wild, glistening eyes on his sleeve, and quickly concealed his hand beneath his red poncho with its broad, lead-colored stripes. . . .

THE NEW SAINT: A STORY OF POLITICAL PROPAGANDA ON THE ECUADORIAN COAST (1938)

I

In the bottomland along the river, the rice crop was almost ready, its sprigs gradually turning golden in the equatorial sun, its roots refreshed by the dark waters that rose around the base of the plants twice daily at high tide and then subsided at low tide, as if the marsh were breathing. The wind came down the river flirting with its ripples, just as crystalline as the water, seemingly emanating from the same distant Andean source, and it gently shook the long, rough leaves of the rice plants. Small splashes made by the sudden swish of tails—a catfish, a small crustacean—occasionally shook the lower parts of the plants from below. The springs would soon swell to the bursting point, matured by the labor of the mud and the sun.

"You're going to make a pile of money this year, don Camilo."

"You never know. It depends on the price. And as far as I know, the price of rice in Guayaquil is rock bottom. Of course, who cares what we make, right? A poor man's sweat doesn't make anything but a stink."

"Relax, don Camilo, you'll see. The sucras are going to rain on you thicker than mosquitoes in the marsh."

"Maybe."

But Old Camilo Franco—whose unflattering nickname was “Bottles” because of his formerly limitless predilection to drain liter bottles of aguardiente—was not really thinking at all about the erect, parrot-green stalks of grain. Nor was he thinking about the potential produce of the stand of fruit trees that extended behind his riverbank dwelling with walls of woven cane. Nor about the egg-laying hens that clucked and pecked at caterpillars and dried corn in their little enclosure. Nor about his enormous white ducks, “big as a one-and-a-half-year-old goat,” that floated in the surrounding ponds and drainage channels, dipping their bills in vain pursuit of fish. Nor about the hogs that awaited their judgment day in his pigsty, meanwhile getting fatter and fatter. Nor even about the young calves that frolicked around his cows, rubbing themselves against their mothers’ thighs and tugging ineffectually at the wild grasses in the pasture.

You could have said to the man:

“Don Camilo, your house is falling down. . . .”

“Let it fall.”

At most he might add:

“The termites have eaten through the supports, and I don’t have any arsenic.”

And, vaguely and slowly, he would make an ugly face signifying sadness.

And yet, Camilo Franco was, or had been, a tough, energetic man, strong as a thorny *guadua* cane as big around as your arm, and just as prickly, too, a man who had held firm against the ravages of age—never weakening even for a day—since he turned fifty a couple of decades back.

He had an adventurous past, one that he never bragged about, and, to the contrary, used to curse with regret.

Old Camilo had been born the son of agricultural workers who lived by arrangement with the landowner on a large estate, the descendant of slaves, still in the same place where both the slaves and their descendants had lived out their miserable lives for generations, always working for the same rich families. He did not conceal his family’s long history of servitude:

“Until I was thirty-three years old, the age of Christ, as they say, I worked my whole life for the white Moreira family.”

But then he had left, running away from everything, in order not to marry Magdalena.

“I had been in love with Magdalena. That was one pretty heifer! Everybody gawked at her. We were about to get married, on my saint’s day . . . but the patrón got ahead of me. . . .”

The old man sighed when he told the story, even now, so many years later.

“He took advantage of her and wanted me to accept it and cover his tracks. But I couldn’t accept it . . . how could I? Magdalena cried . . . and I loved her more all the time . . . but the patrón got ahead of me. . . .”

His voice became opaque and hoarse when he told the story, even now. And if his listeners were able to look deep into his eyes while he told it, they would no doubt see, against the background of his ashen grey pupils, the dark figure of that distant country girl, still wandering today, perhaps, on who-knows-what twisting pathway through this life. . . . Meanwhile, told from the angle of the patrón Moreira, the story would include a pastoral landscape, the blue sky, and lustful Love descending on fluttering wings. The rustic damsel would surrender herself to the conqueror’s powerful arms as Pan, or some other similarly lecherous deity, watched with amusement from a nearby copse of trees.

The time that old Camilo spent in the inhospitable, virgin wilderness, deprived of the deliciously human virginity of Magdalena, had been full of countless, extraordinary adventures. The forest gave up all its secrets to him. He learned the magic of the plant kingdom: the herbs that cure and the herbs that kill, the trees that signal the presence of water or buried treasure, that ward off thieves or malicious spirits. He familiarized himself with the obscure lives of animals, from the most horrible creeping things to the fiercest of beasts.

“I’ve made plenty of money off that stuff, too. But I never did anything un-Christian, either. Not me! I’m a good child of the Lord.”

People used to make fun of his religiosity:

“You, don Bottles, will believe in anything.”

In fact, his fanatical religiosity led him to expect divine intervention in almost all matters, appealing to each saint according to his or her spiritual jurisdiction: “San Andrés, please look after my

rice crop. Santa Ana, please watch over my cow. Santa Bárbara, I need rain! But, San Jonás, don't let it flood!" On the other hand, shrewd man that he was, he always took practical measures to facilitate the miracles that he so devoutly awaited, and he systematically applied the philosophy of old sayings. "God helps those who help themselves," he would say solemnly, or "He who find himself in the water should swim for shore," and he would then let out a shrill little laugh.

They say that when he supposed the danger to have passed, that the patrón had forgotten about his act of defiance in not marrying Magdalena, he finally came out of the hills.

"But I came here, to the bottomlands."

"And why didn't you go back to the Moreira estate, don Bottles?"

"Some say I refused to go back so as not to face the patrón, and some say it was so as not to face Magdalena."

"And how about you? What do you say yourself?"

"Nothing. I don't say anything. I don't say yes, and I don't say no . . . to anything."

Instead, he found a place as a sharecropper on lands belonging to the Echarri family, occupying a little piece of bottomland along the river, where he lived ever after.

"This is where fate brought me, where I found me a little piece of ground. This is where I married my wife, may she rest in peace. Here is where my daughter Carmen was born, the one they called Blackberry because she was so dark. And here is where Carmen died, too, in childbirth, leaving me my little filly, Marta. And here is where Marta has grown up, my only companion. . . ."

He adored his little filly. This big macho, as he liked to think of himself, seemed more like a woman when he was taking care of the girl. Every night before going to bed, he quietly approached the mosquito netting beneath which his granddaughter slept and contemplated her for a while. He carefully adjusted the netting to protect her from the mosquitos. And then, raising his calloused right hand, he made the sign of the cross and blessed her in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. . . .

II

The cause of don Camilo's distraction was, precisely, his granddaughter.

He knew that she was eye-popping pretty, an object of desire. He knew that her firm flesh was a morsel for any palate. He knew that her tender seventeen years were tempting, indeed. And, tireless watchdog, he suffered because he knew. He meant to get her married as quickly as possible, and he had already chosen a husband for her. The marriage would happen when the waters rose at the end of the season.

But he was still worried. . . .

The fiancé, Juan Puente, was an agricultural worker on a nearby estate, but he was not of peasant origin like Camilo. He was from the city and had held a good job on the railroad until he lost it, accused of being a labor agitator.

The old man liked to chat with Juan Puente. Or rather, he liked to listen to the young man's impassioned ideas about social reform, ideas that opened unexpected vistas before his tired eyes. When Juan Puente talked about the legitimate demands of workers and peasants, old Camilo got it. He got it, and he became pensive and, not understanding everything that Puente said, he squirmed, determined to master the ideas. Gradually, he incorporated the new ideas by mixing them with the old ones already in his head, and, without intending to, he modified the new ideas to make them fit.

Certain phrases danced in his mind: "Social Revolution," "the dictatorship of the proletariat," "Lenin is the great saint of the new religion."

Don Camilo thought of Vladimir Illych Lenin in a manner that harmonized with his ingenuous peasant religiosity. One time Juan Puente gave Camilo a magazine that contained a picture of the Russian leader, and the old man cut the picture out and put it up on the wall beside a number of saint's images in the corner that he devoted to them. The little kerosene lamp that flickered there on a tiny altar thus illuminated one more holy image for the old man to remember in his daily prayers.

Without confessing it aloud, old Camilo supposed that, in case of necessity, Lenin would be able to protect him, by some sort of miraculous intervention, from the depredations of the patrón.

And necessity seemed imminent.

The patrón's son, Dionisio, was prowling around Camilo's house on an almost daily basis.

"I don't like to see that hawk flapping around here," repeated the old peasant. "That bird's looking for prey."

And he could easily guess that the prey was his granddaughter, his little filly, who was not so little anymore.

"Just like the other one. Just like him. Whites are all the same, all cut from the same cloth."

He was afraid that the story of Magdalena might be repeated with his granddaughter, and so one day he communicated his fears to Juan Puente.

"You know, Juan Puente. I like you very well, obviously, and because I like you I'm going to tell you . . ."

"Tell me what, don Camilo?"

"I've had it with that Echarri boy, up to here . . ."

"Why?"

"He's after Marta. He'd like to have her."

"Really."

"It's God's own truth. I've seen him."

"Ah . . ."

Juan Puente then said firmly:

"I'll take care of that little twit. You'll see. I know how to treat his kind."

Don Camilo smiled, still worried.

III

But lo and behold, within a short time it became evident that young Echarri had discontinued his campaign.

He vanished completely from the vicinity of the humble house where he had appeared so often in the past, riding his fine thoroughbred horse with its expensive saddle and bridle, taking no care

to keep the enormous animal's hooves from trampling the crops that old Bottles had planted.

And then came the news that the patrón's son had left the estate to travel to Guayaquil, and eventually, to Europe.

One day at dusk, when don Camilo was conversing with Juan Puente outside on the porch in the cool of the evening, he brought up the matter.

"What did you do, Juan Puente, to get him off our backs so fast?"

"Easy. I bumped into him one time, where your coffee bushes are planted. And I said to him: 'Look here, young man. You're after Marta, aren't you? Well,' I said, 'Marta is going to be my wife, and if you don't clear out of the way . . . I will *kill* you . . . understand? With this blade that I keep sharpened up just for you. Try it out. Touch it!' And I showed it to him right there."

"And what did the white boy say?"

"He got all pale and stuttered all over the place, making excuses, saying I'd made a mistake, that he wasn't after anybody, and that to prove it he was going to move up the date of a long trip that he was planning. . . . So I told him: 'Good idea, young man. You take the trip that you have in mind, because if you don't, I'm going to send you on a longer one . . . much, much longer. . . .' These bourgeois that want to ride us are really cowards, don Camilo. You just have to know how to deal with them!"

"Ah . . ."

The old man asked no more questions. He walked into the house and softly caressed the hair of his granddaughter, who sat in the corner near Camilo's little shrine, sewing her wedding dress. He lit the tiny kerosene wick and put it right in front of the portrait of Lenin. Then he went back out onto the porch to rejoin Juan Puente.

He took the younger man's arm and whispered into his ear:

"Listen, Juan Puente. I'm going to tell you something. . . ."

"What?"

"That white Echarri boy going away . . ."

"Yeah?"

"Lenin did it!"

And looking up at the low, heavy clouds, the old man obeyed a powerful impulse, and raised his tired voice to shout at the sky:

"Viva San Lenin!"

A gust of wind that was passing on its way to the river at just that moment caught the last syllable of the shouted name and returned it with a clapping of leaves. . . .

Analyzing the Sources: Presentación Balbuca undergoes a subtile but meaningful transformation in the reader's eyes over the course of "Three Silver Sucres." What is the transformation, and why does it matter? "The New Saint," on the other hand, is not very subtile, but it does raise a question of broad importance in the 1930s: How would Latin Americans respond to Marxism? What answer does de la Cuadra seem to be giving?

ARID LIVES

Graciliano Ramos

Graciliano Ramos (born 1898) was from the small state of Alagoas in the Brazilian Northeast. Ramos may be considered the founder of Northeastern regionalism, one of Brazil's literary highlights in the 1930s. The following excerpt is from the stark 1938 novel Barren Lives, his most important work, which describes the daily life of sertanejos who tend herds of cattle in the scrubby, arid sertão region, their lives constantly menaced by recurrent droughts. Typically of writers in search of the non-European roots of national identities, Ramos espoused left-wing politics, and he spent time in jail as a result.

Squatting beside the three stones that supported the pan over the cooking fire, her flowered skirt tucked between her thighs, Vitória*

SOURCE: Graciliano Ramos, *Vidas secas, romance* (Rio de Janeiro: J. Olympio, 1947), pp. 53–57, 60–63.

*In the Portuguese original, Vitória is always called *Sinha* Vitória, indicating her aspiration to status as a respectable married woman.

blew on the embers. A cloud of ashes billowed up and covered her face. Smoke flooded her eyes, and her rosary of blue and white beads swung forward, clinking against the pan. Vitória wiped the tears from her eyes with the back of her hand, pushed the rosary back into her blouse, squinted, and blew again with puffed-out cheeks.

The flames licked at the sticks of acacia, died away, arose again, and gradually filled the spaces between the stones. Vitória straightened her back and fanned the fire. A luminous shower of sparks descended around the dog, Baleia, who lay curled up nearby, dozing in the warmth, lulled by the aroma of food.

Sensing the movement of the air and the crackling of the fire, Baleia awoke, moved a prudent distance away for fear of singeing her fur, and gazed in wonder at the whirling red sparks that disappeared before touching the ground. She panted, wagged her tail approvingly, and tried to signal her admiration by standing erect on her hind legs and hopping toward her mistress. But Vitória was in no mood for the dog's admiration.

"Get away!"

She kicked at the dog, who withdrew, humiliated, contemplating rebellion.

Vitória had gotten up cranky that morning and, by way of nothing at all, had complained to her husband about their improvised bed. Taken aback by her unprovoked assault, Fabiano had simply grunted and, reflecting that women are impossible creatures to understand, had climbed into the hammock and gone back to sleep. Vitória had paced back and forth looking for a suitable target, and finding everything in order, she had vented at life in general, and now, at Baleia, by giving her a kick.

She approached the low kitchen window, saw the children under a tree playing in the mud, happily covered with it, shaping it into little clay cattle that they then put in the sun to dry, and she failed to find a reason to scold them. She thought again about the improvised bed of tree boughs that she and Fabiano slept on, and she silently cursed him. They had gotten used to the thing, but it would be much nicer to sleep on a real bed, the way other people did.

She had been telling him that for over a year. Fabiano had accepted the idea at first and had mumbled a few confused

calculations. It would cost so much for the wooden frame, so much for the leather bottom. All right. They could save the money for it by economizing on clothes and kerosene. Vitória had said that was impossible because their clothes were rags, the kids ran around practically naked already, and they all went to bed with the chickens. The truth was that nobody practically ever lit a lamp in that house. So they had discussed other possible economies. Failing to agree on any, Vitória resorted to bitter comments on the money that her husband spent at the market, playing cards and drinking. Fabiano had retaliated with observations on Vitória's expensive and useless dress shoes. She looked ridiculous stumbling around in those shoes like a wobbly parrot. The comparison gravely offended her, and had she not been somewhat fearful of Fabiano's reaction, she would have told him a thing or two. In fact, though, the shoes really did not fit her very well. They pinched her toes and gave her calluses. She tripped and limped, and had trouble walking on the high heels. She probably did look ridiculous, but still, Fabiano's remark had wounded her deeply.

When the cloud of sadness lifted and she dispelled that bitter recollection from her mind, the bed reappeared on her narrow horizon, now in the guise of a totally unachievable goal. She mused about it unhappily as she went about the household chores.

She went into the main room, ducked under the end of the hammock where Fabiano lay snoring, took her pipe and a bit of tobacco from the shelf, and went out to the porch. A cowbell could be heard down by the river. It was the red cow. Fabiano might have forgotten about its medicine. She considered waking him up to ask him, but she became distracted looking at the prickly pears and mandurucu trees in the distance.

A haze rose from the scorched earth. She shuddered and grew pale, recalling the last drought, and her eyes widened. She did her best to banish the memory, fearing that it might become a reality. She said a Hail Mary under her breath and felt better, her attention caught now by a hole in the fence around the goat pen. She rubbed and crumbled the tobacco between the palms of her rough hands, filled the clay pipe, and went to repair the fence. She returned, walked around the house, and entered the kitchen.

"Fabiano might have forgotten about the red cow."

Squatting by the fire, she stirred it and, with a spoon, extracted an ember to light her pipe and puffed at the tar-clogged bamboo stem. The pot hissed and a warm, dusty breeze shook the cobwebs that hung like curtains from the underside of the roof. Baleia lay biting at fleas and snapping at flies. Fabiano's snores rang rhythmically in Vitória's ears, and their rhythm influenced her thoughts. Fabiano snored with assurance. Probably there was no danger of drought.

Once again Vitória began to daydream about the bed. But the thought reminded her of the "wobbly parrot" remark, too, and she had to make a great effort to focus her mind on the object of her desire.

Everything around her seemed so stable, so fixed. Fabiano's snoring, the crackling of the fire, the sound of cowbells outside, even the buzz of the flies—gave a sensation of fixity and repose. Would she have to sleep on a bed of tree boughs her entire life? And in the middle of that awful bed was a thick knot, a knot so thick that she had to sleep on one side of the bed and Fabiano on the other. Neither could stretch out in the middle. At first the bed had not bothered her. Limp and exhausted from work, she would have lain on a bed of nails. Lately, however, things had been looking up. They were eating better, getting a little flesh on their bones. They still owned practically nothing, of course. If they had to flee a drought, they could leave that house carrying only their clothes, the shotgun, and the small tin trunk full of odds and ends. But they were managing to live, thank God, one way or another. The owner of the place liked them, and things were almost all right. All they lacked was a bed. The idea dogged her thoughts. No longer so exhausted by hard work, she lay awake thinking part of every night. And going to bed as soon as night fell was just not right. People are not chickens.

From there Vitória's thoughts took a detour, but it led back to the original route soon enough. That fox had stolen the speckled hen. It had to be the speckled one, the fattest one, didn't it? She decided to set a snare for the fox by the hens' perch. She was mad now. That fox was going to pay dearly for the speckled hen!

"The thief."

Little by little, her anger shifted orientation. Fabiano's snoring became intolerable. Nobody snored more than that man. It would be good to get up and look for a bough to replace that damned one with a knot that didn't let you turn over in bed. Why hadn't they replaced the blasted thing already? She sighed. They didn't seem to be able to make up their minds. She'd have to be patient. Maybe it would be better to forget the knot altogether and think about a bed like the one that belonged to Tomás the miller. Tomás had a real bed, made by a carpenter, with a frame of sucupira wood, shaped and smoothed and neatly dovetailed at the corners. It had a bottom of rawhide tightly stretched across it and firmly tacked along the edges. Now, *that* was a bed where a body could rest her bones.

What if she sold both the hens and a pig? Too bad that the blasted fox had gotten the speckled hen. The fattest one. She needed to teach that fox a lesson. She was going to set a trap by the chickens' perch and break the back of that wretched fox.

She got up, went into the bedroom to look for something, and returned discouraged and empty handed, having forgotten what she went to get. Where was her head?

She sat down unhappily by the low kitchen window. She would sell the hens and a pig and stop buying kerosene. No use consulting Fabiano, who always got excited and made plans that came to nothing. She knitted her brow, a bit shocked at her bold idea, but confident that her husband would be pleased at the idea of owning a bed. Vitória wanted a real bed of leather and sucupira wood, like the one that belonged to Tomás the miller.

Analyzing the Sources: The *sertanejos* described by da Cunha in *The Backlands* were admirable but exotic beings, viewed very much from the outside. Compare and contrast the portrait of Vitória in this selection from *Arid Lives*.

RUNA YUPAY

José María Arguedas

José María Arguedas (born 1911) was raised in the rural Peruvian highlands in intimate contact with the Quechua-speaking indigenous people of the Andes whose language he grew up speaking. Later, Arguedas became an anthropologist and a leading voice of indigenista literature. During the 1930s, the Peruvian government commissioned Arguedas to write a story (finished in 1939) to prepare the country's school teachers for the 1940 census, which they were expected to help administer. In the story's Quechua title, Arguedas evoked the runa yupay, a census that had been carried out periodically in the Inca empire.

In the Indian village of Huanipaca, honeysuckle flowers grow everywhere and perfume almost every street. Travelers look around for the plant and find it growing atop the stone walls of all the gardens. They go over to smell it close up and pause for a moment, as if listening to something, and when they return to their own villages, they say:

"In Huanipaca there is a plant so fragrant that, if God smells it, he will surely take it up to heaven."

The Indians have it in their patios, and so does Señora Amalia, whose house is the biggest in the village. Señora Amalia owns four sugarcane haciendas in the fertile valleys of the district and is served by five hundred Indians.

In front of Huanipaca rises the high cordillera of the Andes, blue in the distance, with snow-covered peaks. Beside Huanipaca runs the stream of that name, at the bottom of its narrow canyon, seeking the river that runs through a much larger canyon, at the foot of the snow-covered mountains, a canyon so deep that the river is almost always hidden. At intervals along the flank of the cordillera, other

SOURCE: José María Arguedas, "Runa Yupay," in *Agua y otros cuentos indígenas* (Lima: Editorial Milla Batres, 1974), pp. 115–16, 119–26, 134–35, 137.

streams run down to the river as well, each in a canyon of its own, wide and shallow toward the top, narrowing and deepening as it descends to the river until each stream has become a tumbling thread of white water at the rocky bottom of a vertical gash so narrow that it seems one could almost leap across it. The Indians use these streams to water the corn that they sow along the lower part of their course and to water the wheat, barley, potatoes, and quinoa that they sow higher up. The great landowners of the region use the water, too, for their sprawling sugarcane haciendas in the valley.

Huanipaca is the administrative seat of its district. It has a church with a steeple of plaster-covered masonry and a large unpaved square where grass and broad-leaved *romaza* grow, where free-ranging little pigs root around during the day and toads and crickets sing at night. The little streets that lead away from the square are straight, sloping, and unpaved. Down the middle of each runs a shallow, stone-lined drainage ditch full of dirty water, pieces of glass, rags, corncobs, and corn husks. Pigs and ducks splash around in the pools that form along them in places, and in the stillness of the night one can hear the water burble musically in the tiny rapids between the pools. A peculiarity of this place is the frequency of goiter among its inhabitants, many of whom—men, women, and children—have the telltale lumps of that disease on their necks. Some say it is because of the water, some say the air. Huanipaca also has a school. The school teacher, who is not from the village, rooms in Señora Amalia's big house, and so does the village priest, who is not from there, either. The señora resides on one of her four haciendas.

The schoolhouse, one large room with an earthen floor, stands next to the church. It has a covered walkway on the front side, facing the village square, and a large patio overgrown with romazas on the back side. The students sit to do their lessons in the large room and in the covered walkway, and they play among the romazas at recess. The teacher has managed to get the students to carry woven bags for their notebooks and writing slates and to wear aprons of cheap fabric to protect their clothes against the chalk dust. They must pass a hygiene inspection every morning and afternoon, and so they always have clean faces and combed hair. The teacher, who studied in Lima, is a mestizo of modest background, the son of a provincial

storekeeper, and the villagers approve of him. With his low forehead, his thick black hair, and his indigenous-looking features, he could be a *cholo** from Huanipaca or any other town of the vicinity. Since the beginning of the year, he has been on a campaign to get all of the Indian boys into his schoolhouse, and to do so he has visited each and every family in the village and the surrounding countryside.

"*Jampuyki tayta!*" he says in Quechua to the father of each house he enters: "Send your boy to school! What he learns there will help him when he grows up. That way, they won't be able to take advantage of him. He'll know better. Look at how you and all your neighbors have goiters on your necks. Your son will learn to protect himself from goiters. Send him to school!"

"*Cumunú, Werak'ocha!*" they always say. "Of course, sir!"

But then they don't do it. So every month, the teacher repeats the visit.

"What's this, *tayta*? A man your age should speak the truth. Why do you lie to your friend? You must trust me. I will take good care of your boy. Send him to school!"

"But who then will care for our calf, *Werak'ocha*? Who?"

"Send him only in the afternoon, then. But send him! It's best for your boy. Do you want him to grow up ignorant?"

"All right, *Werak'ocha*, I will send him."

The teacher has been persistent, and gradually his school has filled with Indian boys.

After mass on Sundays, the people of the village usually gather in front of the church to receive the warming rays of the sun and hear the schoolteacher explain the news from Lima. The teacher subscribes to several newspapers mailed to him from the capital and also maintains correspondance with several friends in that large and distant city.

"What news, sir? What do they say about the so-called census? Will it really take place?"

"Of course it will! It's nothing bad! The census is needed to take the pulse of Peru, to measure the health of our nation. The government needs to determine the number of our country's inhabitants

*An Andean mestizo, more indigenous than European in appearance.

and attend to the needs of each of its villages. It will be good for everyone. These are fortunate times, for it seems that all Peru now wants to progress rapidly into the future. The people are ready to work hard, so the government in Lima needs information to direct our labors, to choose the right path forward."

"They say that there are many construction projects underway in Lima."

"Many, indeed. Our palace of government is finished and should make us proud. It is even superior to similar buildings in other countries. And they are building many new parks and avenues in Lima, too. They have had to tear down entire blocks of old buildings to make the avenues properly wide and straight. . . .

"That must really be something to see!"

"And the Pan-American Congress has just been held in Lima."

"What was that like, sir?"

"Something really big and important, a meeting of representatives from all the nations of North, South, and Central America. Around twenty nations, just imagine! And each nation has sent its very best and wisest men to represent it. They gathered in a great building to discuss what we all need, what is best for all the people of America, to educate them and improve their lives, to make them truly free and truly happy, to find ways for them to help each other, like brothers. Brotherhood and betterment is what the congress was all about."

More people arrive to hear the schoolteacher explain these matters. Even those who did not arrive in time for mass hurry from their distant houses to join the group in front of the church. When he is through with mass, the village priest comes to stand beside the schoolteacher and help explain the news of the day to the Indians, who usually do not speak, but rather, listen attentively. From time to time, however, when discussion is called for, the villagers voice their own ideas.

For various Sundays in a row, the teacher and the priest have mentioned the projected national census, the public works underway in Lima, and the many highways that are being constructed to bring the automobile to even the most isolated villages of Peru.

"So much progress!" exclaims a villager. "To think that in an airplane you can fly across the entire world in the blink of an eye!

What are a hundred leagues now, or even a thousand leagues? Nothing is impossible."

"Forget airplanes," says the priest. "With automobiles alone you can hurtle through these cordilleras the way an ant scurries through the cobblestones. Think of it. In the old days, who would have considered going to Cuzco or Arequipa, much less Lima, except for reasons of extreme urgency? The Indians had no idea of such places. And now? Thanks be to God, now, even Indians can pay a *sol*** or two or three, climb into the back of a truck, and go to any of those places. And what's more, they pass through town after town where they find other Indians speaking Quechua like themselves, who tell them, 'This, too, is Peru, just like your own village.' And hearing Quechua, they feel deep down that it is true. They think, 'This is our country, a country called Peru.'"

"It's true! We have to travel through our country to see what it really is. A Peruvian should be ashamed if he goes to foreign lands and is asked about Cuzco or Arequipa or Trujillo and can't describe those important cities."

"Well, he should be even more ashamed if they ask him, 'How many inhabitants does Peru have?' and he can't answer with confidence and has to mumble something ignorant."

"That's exactly right," says the schoolteacher, taking advantage of this turn of the conversation. "The purpose of the census is precisely to avoid that sort of ignorance. And look at how this works," he goes on, addressing the entire group. "When we know how many inhabitants Peru has, we will also know how many tailors, how many engineers, how many doctors, lawyers, teachers, and priests there are. We'll know how many know how to read and how many suffer the misfortune of not knowing so much as how to write their own names. Town by town and village by village, the census will tell us how many children there are, according to their ages. So the government will be able to calculate the number of teachers that will be needed at various levels, one teacher for every fifty children. . . ."

The Indians and mestizos listen and learn. It is true. They know more or less how many people live in their village, but they have no

**Peruvian currency.

idea how many people live in Peru. And not just them, because sixty-three years have passed since the last national census!

As the hour of the midday meal approaches, the people drift away in the direction of their houses, and one can hear their appreciative remarks:

"Huanipaca is a lucky village. We have a good teacher, a good priest, a good mayor. All the authorities are good. That's why we get along. . . ."

"It's not that way in other villages where neighbors tussle like dogs and cats."

"That's the way it is if you don't have good local authorities."

When the schoolteacher goes to get his mail on the following Friday, he finds a large envelope addressed to him and bearing an official seal. It is from the national census bureau, and he opens it eagerly. Inside are a number of circulars and pamphlets.

"Now it's really happening! It's about time! I bet they are asking schoolteachers for their cooperation. It makes sense! We teachers ought to help because nobody is in a better position to do so. And our students can help as well. I've already spoken to mine about that."

He looks at the materials as he walks home and reads the title of the thickest pamphlet: *The School Teachers of Peru and the Census of Population and Occupation*.

"Wonderful! This is exactly what I had hoped and exactly what ought to be done! It is absurd not to know how many Peruvians there are. When the last census was done in 1876, I had not yet even been born. There were just a little more than two and a half million of us then. I wonder how many of us there are now? Now we are going to find out! I'm going to work like the devil!"

The schoolteacher of Huanipaca practically runs the rest of the way home, and that night there is a light burning in his room into the wee hours.

Before long his students are moving excitedly through the streets of the village to collect census data. They greet the residents of each house respectfully and explain that they have come in the name of their teacher before entering. Then they draw a small notebook from their pocket and request all the necessary

information. They take the process very seriously, asking the questions and noting the responses as if they were quite grown up. And the people of Huanipaca answer all the questions. The teacher has impressed upon them their obligation to collaborate with the government, and they consider it a matter of village pride to do so. Some behave just as seriously as the students, answering the questions in the manner of one who discharges a civic duty. Others do it with humor and applause for the boys, offering them a little something to eat or drink. In Indian houses the census-takers are Indian students, and all the questions are asked and answered in Quechua.

The teacher watches the students run from house to house, filling their notebooks with details for the national census.

"Look at them, busy as ants. Incredible! Being a schoolteacher is the most rewarding thing there is."

The national census is a great event in Huanipaca, involving all the inhabitants of the village. The students feel great enthusiasm for the census because the teacher has communicated to them a sense of its enormous significance. And their enthusiasm is contagious. Their elders, too, have come to understand the benefits that the census would bring to them, the Indian inhabitants of Peru, who have for so long lived half-forgotten and abandoned to their fate. Now they will be counted!

Analyzing the Sources: How does the indigenista vision presented here relate to earlier selections dealing with the indigenous people of Peru? What common thread links it, for example, to *Matto de Turner*? What theme links it to *Guaman Poma*, *Carrió de la Vandra*, and *de la Cuadra*?