

## Reviews



MORAÑA, MABEL. *Arguedas/Vargas Llosa: Dilemas y ensamblajes*. Madrid/Frankfurt: Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2013. 314 pp.

In *Arguedas/Vargas Llosa: Dilemas y ensamblajes*, Mabel Moraña uses the occasion of Mario Vargas Llosa's 2010 Nobel Prize to examine the distinct aesthetic and ideological dynamics posed by his legacy and that of his longtime interlocutor, José María Arguedas. Moraña's title signals her interest in these two prominent Peruvian authors not only as writers but as cultural figures whose different trajectories illustrate the dilemmas of postcolonial subjects with respect to modernity. Moraña reads the full cultural performances of these two intellectuals, their assemblages, by way of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of the double bind, wherein the postcolonial subject is faced with two possible but contradictory options that null any true ability to choose. The dichotomous structure of Moraña's analysis—contrasting the renowned *indigenista* writer to the one-time neoliberal presidential candidate-intellectual—at times praises Arguedas the ethnographer and defender of Quechua culture as a postmodern and decolonial thinker *avant la lettre*, while relegating the masterful ideological rhetoric of Vargas Llosa's oeuvre to the domain of "marketing." As the reader will note, chapters dedicated to Arguedas seem more or less succinct while those of Vargas Llosa tend towards protracted critical analysis, no doubt intended to offset his decades of literary production over that of the Arguedas, which give the effect of partiality. Yet, despite inescapable critiques of and admirations for these figures, Moraña is at her best when probing the negotiations, ambiguities, and conflicts that characterize the larger Arguedas/Vargas Llosa assemblage. By demonstrating the coexistence of and relationships between the diverse epistemologies present in Peru, *Dilemas y ensamblajes* offers a capacious approach to the broader and still pressing question of Latin American modernity.

Before discussing the distinct visions of social and cultural alterity that Arguedas and Vargas Llosa represent in their works, Moraña first considers the intellectual paradigms associated with these two literary figures, prompted by Spivak's imperative of "¿cuál es el yo que pone en marcha la máquina de la otrificación?" (Moraña 22). Given his ties to subaltern indigenous culture, Arguedas occupies the site of desire and utopia within the Latin American imaginary. This is an alternative position to that of the organic intellectual, aligned with power and

national modernization projects, to which Moraña consigns Vargas Llosa (24). Read as proto-postcolonial thought, Arguedas's intellectual model is given more prominence due to the links that his works create between subjectivity, subalternity, multiculturalism, migration, and social movements (49). However, Vargas Llosa's status as an organic intellectual is examined in depth in terms of the literary and political power of the *palabra* as a "mecanismo de legitimación personal y como plataforma de lanzamiento público" (26). Moraña traces the development of Vargas Llosa's public image as an intellectual, detailing how his dual status as an *intelectual mediático* and a *superestrella* writer were decisive in his projection of the self as a subjectivity that leaves its mark on society on the basis of its attitude of radical rebellion rather than its concrete message (39).

The importance of Andean culture itself is explored in the chapter titled, "El arcaísmo como significante flotante," wherein Moraña recognizes the concept of "the archaic" in modern Peru as central to understanding the double binds in these two writers. As a discourse of the nation, "the archaic" wrestles with the imperative of conserving Andean culture as national patrimony as well as the challenges it poses to the desire for modernity. Moraña understands *lo arcaico* as a symbolic field within which these two cultural figures must position themselves. In the case of Arguedas, *arcaísmo* exemplifies the authentic and legitimate base of national culture. As such, his intellectual role is to "channel, translate and interpret" subaltern Quechua culture into the dominant creole culture, contending that the indigenous is compatible with modernity through a process that modifies modernity along Andean practices (51). While *lo arcaico* confirms the continuity of Andean utopia, projecting this towards a future where the discourse of emancipation is transferred from the colonial context to the modern one, Vargas Llosa dismisses this as a "significado retardo, sustancia residual con connotaciones de primitivismo, remanente atávico que obstaculiza el progreso y persiste como un anacronismo en escenarios contemporáneos" (52). Shaped by his privileged *criollo* position, which permits him to represent "desde afuera y desde arriba el drama de la interculturalidad peruana," Vargas Llosa counters Andean utopia with a neoliberal one that must constantly respond to and/or deny Arguedas's notion of Andean utopia (51). Ultimately, *arcaísmo* grants the novelist-turned-politician performative license with which to disqualify those outside modernity, denying the possibility of any

confluence of indigenous and modern. As such, Moraña dedicates the bulk of this chapter to Vargas Llosa's insistence of his definition of *arcaísmo* in his later period, detailing how he recycles this notion in his literary criticism of Arguedas in his aptly titled *La utopía arcaica* as well as his report on the events of the murder of journalists in Uchuraccay.

The discussion of language as a "campo de batalla," specifically as Homi Bhabha's notion of a third space, wherein representation and construction of subjectivity are negotiated in an effort to resolve the double bind, is granted ample space in the next two chapters. Arguedas, as the *escritor atormentado*, represents for Moraña the most difficult option present in this double bind, one that "sin renunciar al espacio abierto por la modernidad, se apropia de estas propuestas a partir de sus propios términos y sus propios valores" (87). She analyzes how Arguedas's literature destabilizes Western logic through his mobilization of Andean epistemologies grounded in affect and collective testimony. Arguedas's experimentation with Quechua-Spanish hybrid language in his earlier works and the radical qualities of language present in *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* attest to his persistent linguistic struggles in locating a third space in relation to Western and Andean epistemes. With regards to Vargas Llosa, Moraña recognizes his literary techniques as indeed representative of the pinnacle of literature in the Spanish language. However, her primary concern centers on the Nobel laureate's literary production in terms of his privileged insertion into the international cultural production apparatus and the diffusion of his works into various cultural circuits (123-4). Vargas Llosa's literary language pretends to transmit verisimilitude to his representations of human characters and their social conflicts through the use of local jargon, colloquialisms, and other elements of orality, which the critic deems part of the writer's cultural performance in terms of "escribidor" and "hablador," repurposing titles of the author's novels as a way of understanding his literary as well as extraliterary functions. Taken together, the Arguedas/Vargas Llosa literary machine constitutes two uses of language as well as contrasting organization of thought, where one is oriented towards mass communications, markets and public persona, and its *contracara* is linked with a project of cultural revindication from within national culture that confronts and challenges modernity.

In the two chapters that follow, Moraña's discussion of discursive language in these writers is concerned with the truth behind their respective representations of Peruvian culture and society. In the chapter "Hacia una poética del cambio social: verdad, modernidad y sujeto nacional en José María Arguedas," Moraña articulates Arguedas's function as a *trabajador cultural*. Within the context of Arguedas's discussions and negotiations with prominent social scientists as well as leftist political pressures placed on him in the 1960s, Moraña details the following aspects of his project: 1) Arguedas's reflection on his role as an intellectual and his relation to dominant disciplines and epistemologies, and to those alternatives posed by Andean culture, 2) his understanding of social change, as transformations that capture the historical and cultural *long durée* of *lo andino*, and 3) his elaboration of a national-popular subject as a possible agent of social change and political alternative to exclusionary liberalism (154). Arguedas epitomizes the transdisciplinary intellectual via his appreciation of popular culture in terms of cultural objects and artifacts. The testimonial dimension of his work, indicative of his search for truth, seeks to rewrite "la historia posible del Perú moderno" from a perspective capable of incorporating the suppressed and submerged elements of official history (170). The poet/ethnographer/novelist produces a synthetic truth; composed of a "materialidad de la textura sociocultural (interacciones, objetos, creencias)" that implies a relational understanding between history and discourse as well as reality and language (190).

As the following chapter's title, "¿Cuál verdad? Otreidad y melodrama en Vargas Llosa," indicates, the issue of truth becomes elusive in the *maquina vargasllosiana*, his textual representation of reality, in a "*mise en scène* en el que la realidad y la literatura confunden sus respectivos territorios" (195). According to Moraña, Vargas Llosa's construction of a degraded reality is a product of a contradictory notion of the irrational production of lies bestowed by the demons of literary creation and the conviction that these individual fictions transmit *el mal* of reality, without "una profundización en la complejidad de lo real" or the economic inequality at the base of said degradation of contemporary life (227). The narratives of collective struggle, as the Uruguayan critic states, are not part of Vargas Llosa's repertoire; instead the adventure of the hero is what motivates his proclivity for totalization, as seen in *El hablador* and *El sueño del celta*. The

key principle of Vargas Llosa's narrative world, best conveyed by his assertion of "la verdad de las mentiras" can be found in his melodramatic theatrical performances that employ farce as a desire to distort, dismantle and re-write premised on the experience of the victim (248). This victimhood relates to the writer's polemics with the left, his literary contemporaries, and Peru's electorate that denied him the opportunity to fulfill his neoliberal utopia.

In her final chapter "¿Punto final?: la muerte / el Premio Nobel," Moraña discusses the climactic moments in these figures' two biographies, and the limits that death and the Nobel Prize pose at the contemporary crossroads with respect to these assemblages. The Swedish endorsement of Vargas Llosa's body of literature as one that reveals the conflicts of society is rendered paradoxical in the complex construction of fictive realities or realistic fictions. Whereas Arguedas's suicide, contrary to a fatalistic and tortured psychology as Vargas Llosa claims in his study on the author of *Los ríos profundos*, reproduces an Andean cosmovision, in which death "no tiene una carácter de clausura inevitable y definitiva, sino que se asocia a la idea de la renovación y la continuidad de los ciclos vitales" (284). This death transmits, "un lenguaje mudo, explosivo, cargado de connotaciones y sugerencias, saturado de voces acalladas, de represiones, de llamados y de contenidos irrepresentables" (286). In this way Moraña brings her examination to a close by reposing the question of the double bind in the abyss of signification of Arguedas's suicide/silence, asking if such a "final concession" to the dominant language is the inevitable result of decolonial projects in which he participated. Despite the insurmountable double bind preserved in the writings of Arguedas, it is precisely its unresolved tensions and its representation of an unstable world of difference and inequality that Arguedas's project, within this assemblage, continues to offer, despite the recent literary consecration of Vargas Llosa.

It is this breadth of well-elaborated topics together with the subtlety of Moraña's dialogue with an impressive array of scholars that will make this book an essential reference work in the ongoing debates concerning Peruvian modernity. Yet its contribution to the field is not limited to that of Peruvian or Andean cultural studies as the author shows that the dilemmas posed by these writers are relevant to the larger world of Latin American cultural politics. The case of Peru and its intellectual and cultural production stem from

a current of experience of difference and inequality that has given rise to figures like Arguedas and Vargas Llosa, along side Guamán Poma, José Carlos Mariátegui, Antonio Cornejo Polar and others, who continue to offer ways in which we can rethink Latin American postcolonial reality.

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