Part II

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Introduction to Part II

In part I, we laid out the cultural and literary problems that Latin American literature went through under the impact of modernization during the twentieth century, focusing on how its regionalist writers transformed fiction. Though overshadowed by the dazzling and widely disseminated works of cosmopolitan writers, the regionalists fundamentally transformed the premises of their art and reclaimed narrative forms whose originality and ability to represent the genuine, widespread problems of Latin America have perhaps not been fully grasped before.

In Brazil, where the conflict between regionalism and modernity was actively discussed and even theorized in print, narrative writers from very different regions—and faced with specific cultural problems—offered a series of original artistic solutions. This is clear in the works of José Lins do Rego, Graciliano Ramos, and João Guimarães Rosa, among the most powerful Brazilian writers of the twentieth century; perhaps we should also include here Mário de Andrade for his novel *Macunaíma*. Alongside them there is a fairly extensive list of writers from all the regions on the map of Brazilian cultures who have faced similar problems in other instances of modernization up to the present. As a country that began by establishing its basis for nationhood without disturbing the lively autonomy of its regions, Brazil is a very fertile laboratory for examining these conflicts and its original solutions to them.

External pressure for modernization also affected the republics of Spanish America, however, often coming via versions of modernization that had developed in their capital cities. We outlined the case of one dynamic region, the Caribbean coast of Colombia, which gave rise to the

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Barranquilla literary group and the works of Gabriel García Márquez. We also briefly covered central-western Mexico, a region centered on the state of Jalisco where an equally innovative literary movement arose, the clearest exemplar of which was Juan Rulfo.

In parts II and III of this book, we will explore a region where these conflicts grew extremely bitter not only because of the innovative impact that modernity had on the region after its introduction there around 1930 but also because of the static, rigid condition of the region's traditional cultural forms. This is highland southern Peru, with its center in the old capital of the Inca empire, Cuzco—a region that served as the battle flag of the *indigenista* generation of the 1920s and 1930s in the critical works of Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, José Carlos Mariátegui, and Víctor Andrés Belaúnde, to cite the authors of the most important intellectual and political reflections on a topic that led to a lively, modern questioning of what Peruvian nationality meant. In 1932, the Committee on the Constitution in Peru's Constitutional Congress ignited the controversy by dividing the country into political regions, thus reviving the nineteenth-century argument between centralist conservatives and federalist liberals. The committee was marked by the political prejudices of the various parties, and so it was deaf to the richly varied cultural expressions of Peruvian regionalism. Still, Jorge Basadre observed with his usual balance: "Regionalism, then, is valid insofar as it signifies understanding of, and interest in, the country's problems; that is, insofar as it helps to counter the foolish phrase, 'Lima is Peru, and the heart of the Union is Lima.' Regionalism is important in another way, then: for combating the exclusivist influence of the European model, the unexamined importation of prescriptions that arose from realities alien to our own."[1]

The perspective back then, and for a long time afterwards, was purely political.[2] In spite of Basadre's cautious warning, people on every side enthusiastically and ingenuously took up imported European prescriptions—even an intellectual as well versed in national reality as Mariátegui. The debate obscured the aspect of the clash that most interests us, its cultural impact (in the full anthropological sense of the term *cultural*), and the next generation was rather phlegmatic about recovering and asserting such a cultural view. Among the intellectuals who contributed most to that new, cultural direction, the leading role was undoubtedly played by José María Arguedas as a teacher, an ethnologist, and a writer.

He confronted the most complex and seemingly least tenable situation of any of the many culturally frozen hinterlands in Latin America.

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He had, moreover, received simplistic doctrinal views from his predecessors that were unhelpful for finding effective solutions to the cultural conflict. Besides, every previous solution that had been put forward had been subverted by the unforeseen modifications that arose in the regions of Cuzco and Apurímac, so we must first take a new look at the problem of the Andean cultural area (which, though it covers a vast region crossing several South American countries along the Andes, has highland southern Peru at its core). We will then investigate the evolution of Arguedas's thoughts on a subject to which he devoted his whole life, concluding with a recognition of his mestizo mediations between the country's two drastically divided cultural spheres. He found in that obscure character, the mestizo, and in the saga of the mestizo, the archetype of a transformative role that seemed to mirror what he himself undertook in anthropology and literature.

The evolution of Arguedas's thinking, based on his patient study of indigenous life in Peru, lined up with one of the great movements in intellectual life. That Arguedas never particularly bothered to polish his ideas or set them down in rigorous academic reports in no way detracts from the originality of his research into a problem that has done more to lead contemporary intellectuals astray than to enlighten them: the function of myth among Latin American societies. Armchair intellectuals have written copiously on the subject, much more than Arguedas, who studied it as an ethnologist and experienced it as an enlightened man. Therefore, studying Arguedas's subtle investigations into the understanding of "mythic intelligence" can be thought of as an adult, responsible, and profound way of taking a second look at this very important topic.

Part II of this book thus examines the steps that led Arguedas progressively from the problems of a hardscrabble region, to cultural solutions to a seemingly endless conflict, and then to the higher forms in which the spirit incorporates the forces that are in play and discovers a balancing vision for them. Part III centers, in turn, on a study of a single book by Arguedas, *Deep Rivers*. I see this novel as one of the great artistic creations of Latin America, the equal of many more widely known examples of the so-called new novel. The two chapters of part III are not intended as an exhaustive study of the novel; that is something that a whole series of recent books has already taken on, which is proof of growing critical interest in *Deep Rivers*. Rather, these chapters delve more deeply into the themes of part I: how artistic forms were developed out of cultural traditions, themselves forged by bounded communities in the rich regions

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of the Latin American hinterlands, under the impact of a modernization that aimed at eliminating those very same cultures; and how writers rose up against that type of modernization, not in order to oppose it in vain but to put modernization to use in the service of rediscovering and reviving the cultural legacy they had inherited in childhood and whose survival they wished to guarantee.

In an era of rather childish cosmopolitanism, our aim is to demonstrate that one can indeed create new art on a high level based on the humble materials from one's own traditions and that such traditions can do more than provide picturesque themes; they can also be sources of well-designed techniques and shrewd artistic structures that fully translate the imaginaries of Latin American societies that have been crafting brilliant cultures for centuries. Instead of the Romantic themes that claimed to be faithful to their subjects, in the belief that this was the only way the nation could be represented, what we find in the transculturators' novels is a kind of loyalty to the spirit they attained by reclaiming structures peculiar to the Latin American imaginary and by revitalizing those structures under new historical circumstances instead of abandoning them. Those structures are the greatest inventions of the peoples of Latin America; they form the symbolic system through which Latin Americans express themselves and recognize themselves as members of a community—which is, in the end, the highest intellectual and artistic construction people are capable of producing.

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