Polyphony and performance in the poetry of José María Arguedas

Leslie Bayers

St. Mary's College of Maryland, lbayers@pacific.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/provost-facarticles

Part of the Latin American Literature Commons, Poetry Commons, and the Spanish Linguistics Commons

Recommended Citation

Bayers, Leslie, "Polyphony and performance in the poetry of José María Arguedas" (2011). Academic Affairs Faculty and Staff Articles. 13.
https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/provost-facarticles/13

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Academic Affairs at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Academic Affairs Faculty and Staff Articles by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact mgibney@pacific.edu.
POLYPHONY AND PERFORMANCE IN THE POETRY OF JOSÉ MARÍA ARGUEDAS

Leslie Bayers
St. Mary’s College of Maryland

While the narrative works of José María Arguedas have garnered extensive critical study, scholarship on his poetry—composed in Quechua generally, translated by the author himself into Spanish, and published in dual-language formats—is comparatively sparse. In a relatively early assessment of Arguedas’s poetic output, Antonio Cornejo Polar attributed this oversight to the sporadic publication of these texts (until their posthumous 1972 collection Temblor/Katatay), the more profuse narrative production of the author, and—most decisively—the linguistic nature of a body of work interpreted most authoritatively by a relatively small bilingual readership (169-70). Martin Lienhard’s more recent study echoes the latter sentiment, affirming that the main audience of Arguedas’s poetry and the modern Quechua verse following in its wake consists of “Quechua speakers in the urban centers, and therefore familiar with both the Andean and the creole cultures” (“Arguedas” 127). In equally insightful analyses, Julio Noriega and José Antonio Mazzotti concur, noting that neither monolingual Quechua speakers nor Spanish-language readers unfamiliar with Quechua enjoy full access to these works (Noriega, Poesía 33, 40; Mazzotti, Poéticas 49).¹ The question of limited reception could suggest that, wittingly or unwittingly, Arguedas produced an exclusive body of poetry. Without disputing that bilingual readers are in a position to analyze these works most comprehensively, this essay takes a distinct stance, proposing that Arguedas cultivated a polyphonic poetics to encourage a wide readership to engage with his work. Specifically, I analyze Arguedas’s first published poem, “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” / “A Nuestro Padre Creador Tupac Amaru” (1962), to examine the distinct and perhaps uneasy, yet potentially awakening, ways in which the text interpellates Spanish-language readers. The bilingual format of Arguedas’s poetry awakens audiences unable to confidently navigate both the Spanish and Quechua versions to the very literary and social boundaries that create their limited interactions with the text. Prompted by my own entrance into Arguedas’s poems through the Spanish translations, I argue that “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” / “A Nuestro Padre Creador Tupac Amaru” not only invites Spanish-language readers to engage with an otherwise inaccessible work but also sets off an intentional and productive disencounter with the less

¹In addition to those directly referenced in my essay, the following insightful studies have informed my reading of Arguedas’s poetry: Chapter I of José Antonio Mazzotti’s Poéticas del flujo. Migración y violencia verbales en el Perú de los 80; Chapter VI of Martin Lienhard’s La voz y su huella: Escritura y conflicto étnico-social en América Latina 1492-1988; Chapter IV of Miguel Angel Huamán’s Poesía y utopía andina; Regina Harrison’s article “José María Arguedas: El substrato Quechua”; William Rowe’s “La complejidad semántica de la poesía de Arguedas,” included in his Ensayos Arguedianos; Luis Rebaza-Soraluz’s “La poesía y la lengua quechuas como un espacio andino de narración nacional: José María Arguedas, Javier Sologuren y la subjetividad artística.”
familiar Quechua version, encouraging us to embark on what Doris Sommer has called “bilingual games” (1-2). Sommer proposes that “a 'target audience' today can mean the target of exclusion or confusion. And feeling the unpleasant effect is one valid way of getting the point, or the kick, of a language game” (2). The side-by-side, dual-language format of Arguedas’s poetry prompts a similar process, urging readers departing from the Spanish-language versions to wander over to the Quechua originals, read and speak their words, and thus begin to contemplate the artistic, social, and political ramifications of what they do and do not understand.2

In particular, a latent orality that saturates Arguedas’s written work heightens its transformative potential. The poem cultivates a performative aesthetic akin to what postcolonial writers and scholars have described as “orature”3; as Joseph Roach explains, “orature goes beyond a schematized opposition of literacy and orality as transcendent categories; rather, it acknowledges that these modes of communication have produced one another interactively over time and that their historic operations may be usefully examined under the rubric of performance” (11-12). While the concept of “literatura oral” is already an established field of analysis in Andean studies, the phrase suggests texts that emanate primarily from or at least privilege orality (even if later transcribed by the pen). Yet Arguedas’s graphic representation of an oral language is equally dependent on what Diana Taylor has called the “archive,” or memory that endures through graphic material substance like writing, and the “repertoire,” or memory embodied in ephemeral performance practices (19-20). While the “repertoire” infiltrates the written word and even, as I will argue, encourages voiced performances of “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” / “A Nuestro Padre Creador Tupac Amaru,” it is neither the singular root nor the primary mode of transmission of the poem. Rather, the text transcends the perceived divide between oral and literate cultures in Peru, and for this reason I find the term “orature”—which itself linguistically collapses that divide—particularly useful to an examination of Arguedas’s poetry.

The publication of “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” / “A Nuestro Padre Creador Tupac Amaru” (which I will subsequently refer to as “Tupac Amaru”) marked a literary turning point for Arguedas. While his well-known fiction manifests the contentious interplay of European and indigenous traditions in the Andes through Spanish narrative punctuated by markers of a hybrid aesthetic (including Quechua words and phrases, fragments of song and poetry, and anthropological discourse), his dual-language poetry conveys an even more palpable bicultural sensibility. In a prologue that heads the original publication of “Tupac Amaru,” Arguedas explains his rationale for writing in Quechua:

A medida que iba desarrollando el tema, mi convicción de que el quechua es un idioma más poderoso que el castellano para la expresión de muchos trances del espíritu y, sobre todo, del ánimo, se fue acrecentando, inspirándome y enardeciéndome. Palabras del quechua contienen con una densidad y vida incomparables la materia del hombre y de la naturaleza y el vínculo intenso que por fortuna aun existe entre lo uno y lo otro.4 (8-9)

---

2Unfortunately, subsequent reprints of “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” do not tend to replicate the original side-by-side format of the 1962 edition.

3As Ngugi wa Thiong’o details, the term “orature” was coined in the 1960s by Ugandan linguist Pio Zirimu and has been varyingly adopted by subsequent writers to describe fusions of oral and written modes of expression (103-28).

4All citations of the poem and its accompanying note are taken from the 1962 edition of “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” / “A Nuestro Padre Creador Tupac Amaru.” I am unfortunately unable to replicate the important side-by-side presentation of the dual language versions of the poem in my citations.
For Arguedas, Quechua was inherently lyrical and thus an ideal medium for poetic expression. In his title, Arguedas calls “Tupac Amaru” a haylli-taki, or hymn-song, associating the poem with traditional harvest or victory songs and immediately recalling the oral traditions that feed it (Lienhard, “Arguedas” 118). Arguedas’s modern haylli-taki combines traits of the lyric and the epic to portray Andean communities whose resilience, though beleaguered by the legacy of colonization, emanates in redefined traditions shaped by urban migration. Arguedas’s cultivation of “orature” in the poem thus seeks to reconcile the complex ideological challenge of Quechua communities struggling to preserve their traditions amid modernization. Given this contemporary dilemma, along with the fact that Arguedas’s graphic representation of an oral language depends on a Western alphabetic system, the poem neither embodies nor idealizes what Paul Zumthor calls “primary and immediate or pure orality” (25) and Walter Ong describes as “primary oral culture” (11)—those societies in which the graphic representation of voice is nonexistent. While on the one hand Arguedas’s alternative poetics implicitly contests the institution of writing brought to the Americas alongside the violence and domination of the Spanish conquest, his poetry—published on the page—also makes use of that institution. He negotiates this predicament by honoring oral traditions while urging Quechua communities to recover and exert their agency through writing. His prologue announces this twofold project:

...ruego a quienes tienen un dominio mayor que el mío sobre este idioma, escriban. Debemos acrecentar nuestra literatura quechua, especialmente en el lenguaje que habla el pueblo; aunque el otro, el sensorial y erudito, debiera ser cultivado con la misma dedicación. ¡Demostraremos que el quechua actual es un idioma en el que se puede escribir tan bella y conmovedoramente como en cualquiera de las otras lenguas perfeccionadas por siglos de tradición literaria! (9)

Here, Arguedas revindicates popular, spoken Quechua while promoting the development of a modern written tradition.

Arguedas’s preliminary note reveals further indications of his appeal to potential listening and reading audiences. After specifying that the poem is written in “el quechua actual,” suggesting his intention to make it accessible to contemporary speakers, Arguedas explains that he has taken great pains to represent a non-academic version of the language: “Una sola palabra casi erudita quechua figura en el texto: sirka (vena)...; también es posible que la palabra qochoy (regocijo)... resulte erudita y aun desconocida para los hablantes del quechua chincaysuyu” (7). The poet goes on to justify the words he has selected, as if imploring popular audiences to bear with intrusions of an elite register. Finally, he indicates that he has consciously merged different dialects of Quechua so that his text will have pan-Andean appeal:

Estas son las únicas limitaciones que creo que tiene el texto de este himno-canción para su entendimiento completo por parte de los hablantes del quechua del gran área del runasimi no dialectal que abarca desde el Departamento de Huancavelica hasta Puno, en el Perú, y toda la zona quechua de Bolivia. Creo que en el Ecuador podrá ser bastante bien comprendido. (7)

The author’s deliberate creation of a contemporary, non-academic text capable of being understood by a wide range of Quechua speakers suggests that he imagines potential literate and non-literate audiences for his poem. At the same time, as Lienhard observes, his amalgamation of dialects results in the construction of a “non-authentic” language (“Arguedas” 119). In other words, while drawing from popular speech, the Quechua employed in “Tupac Amaru” is modified for practical and artistic

5In this sense, his work is consistent with a characterization of recent Quechua poetry offered by Julio Noriega: “Son poesías que [...] se nutren de la tradición oral quechua y de las angustias ‘escripturales’ del migrante andino” (Buscando 133).
purposes and thus represents a literary creation, not a true vernacular. In this sense, Arguedas rejects neither literariness nor orality in his poem, but rather navigates between the two to create a text capable of being appreciated through both modes of expression.

A precursory glance through the poem itself suggests this blend of oral and literary origins. Within each language version of the work, prose-like segments of free verse, arranged in paragraph form and printed in a standard typeface, alternate with italicized stanzas that look more like conventional lyric. On the one hand, this varying structure recalls Latin American avant-garde endeavors to subvert formal tradition and jolt readers into a new sensibility. Arguedas, quite aware of his literary audience, similarly challenges conventional reading practices with an alternative poetics. At the same time, the graphic nature of the poem also hints at its fundamentally oral nature. Regina Harrison describes how some of Arguedas’s colonial predecessors struggled with the question of how to transcribe oral poetry, pointing out, for example, that the bilingual writers Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala and Joan de Santacruz Pachacuti transcribed Quechua prayers as prose, whereas their contemporary Inca Garcilaso de la Vega chose to inscribe them in a form reminiscent of Spanish versification (Signs 20). Harrison herself chose to break the Ecuadorian Quichua songs she transcribed into lines depending on breath groups, internal rhythms, and shifts in syntax or semantic structure (Signs 20). The irregularity of style apparent in Arguedas’s poem may also signal an uncertainty about the visual representation of words that are meant to be spoken; rather than choose one method, he switches between two, guiding the reader toward rhythms with punctuation in the prose-like segments and the more explicit notation of the lyric stanzas. The visual appearance of “Tupac Amaru” thus hints at how the poem taps into both visual and aural sensibilities.

Finally, the oral undercurrent of the poem is conveyed through Arguedas’s privileging of Quechua as the original language of the poem and that which appears on the left-hand side of the dual-language presentation. In his preliminary note, Arguedas highlights the remarkably onomatopoetic nature of Quechua. Readers of his celebrated novel Los ríos profundos (1958) will recall the oft-cited illustration of this acoustic power in a substantial ethnographic passage included in the chapter entitled “Zumbayllu.” The chapter begins: “La terminación quechua yllu es una onomatopeya. Yllu representa en una de sus formas la música que producen las pequeñas alas en vuelo; música que surge del movimiento de objetos leves” (70). The passage continues, linking the musical sound represented by “yllu” to the visual brilliance expressed by “illa,” associated with “cierta especie de luz y a los monstruos que nacieron heridos por los rayos de luna” (70). Arguedas then offers examples of words that contain these sounds, culminating with his description of the zumballyu, a top whose whirr and radiance are heard and felt in the very word that represents them. Given this substantial digression on the sound quality of Quechua within his novel, Arguedas likely hoped that the Quechua in which he wrote his poetry would not remain voiceless on the page, with or without full semantic understanding on the reader’s part.

Indeed, the first lines of “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” encourage even those reading the poem silently from the page to experience its sound from the start. The poetic speaker invokes Tupac Amaru in an oratory register:

Tupac Amaru, Amaruq churin, Apu Salqantaypa ritmanta ruwasqa; llantuykin, Apu suyu sombran hiña sonqo ruruykupi mastarikun, may pachakama. (10)

Tupac Amaru, hijo del Dios Serpiente; hecho con la nieve del Salcantay; tu sombra llega al profundo corazón como la sombra del dios montaña, sin cesar y sin limites. (11)

---

6In the original text, the alternate language versions of the poem appear side-by-side on separate pages.
This appeal to Tupac Amaru recalls prayer, compelling readers to speak and thus hear the poem. This push toward vocalization indicates the speaker’s desire to tap into a power greater than humankind, which Zumthor (6-7) and Ong (74-75) persuasively argue is most compellingly achieved through voice. Ángel Rama affirms that the sacralization of language through voice was greatly influential for Arguedas: “Arguedas estuvo íntimamente vinculado a las comunidades ágrafas, donde la palabra, como privilegiado instrumento de elaboración cultural, se emplea con la reverencia y laconismo de un valor superior, reconociéndosele capacidad encantatoria, poder sobrenatural, alcance sacralizador” (Transculturación 235). In his initial lines, Arguedas conveys this notion of voice as a thread to the sacred, here symbolized by Tupac Amaru.

Rather than signifying a single referent, however, the figure of Tupac Amaru evokes multiple historical and mythological figures. The first that comes to mind is Tupac Amaru II, née José Gabriel Condorcanqui, the illustrious leader of a historic Andean revolt during the eighteenth-century. As Lienhard reminds us, however, Condorcanqui’s assumed name built upon the legacy of the first Tupac Amaru, “the last Inca of the Vilcabamba region” and a leader who resisted Spanish rule during the early colonial period (“Arguedas” 123). In addition, the name assimilates that of the Andean serpent god amaru, said to appear in moments of pachakuti, or cyclic cosmic upheaval (Lienhard, “Arguedas” 123-24). The mythological dimension of the name “Tupac Amaru” is indicated by the qualifier “Kamaq Taytanchisman,” or “Nuestro Padre Creador,” that appears in the title of Arguedas’s poem. As Mazzotti points out, the term “kamaq” identifies him as “one who brings or gives life,” represented by the divinities Pachakamaq and Wiracocha in the Andean pantheon (“Bilingualism” 101). In addition, as Lienhard observes, many saw the historical Tupac Amaru II as a syncretically prophesized Inca messiah (“Arguedas” 123). The poetic speaker’s invocation to Tupac Amaru thus brings to mind both human and divine entities descending from a variety of periods and cultures, reinforcing the hybridity, literary renovation, and socio-political revolution celebrated in Arguedas’s work.

This initial call to Tupac Amaru (“Tupac Amaru, Amaruq churin”/“Tupac Amaru, hijo del dios serpiente”) forefronts a trope of parallelism that runs through the entire poem. Such constructions recall both the aggregative and formulaic nature of traditional oral poetry and the dualistic and complementary basis of Andean thought, as Julio Noriega observes (Buscando 151-54). Additionally, this parallelism creates a semantic variability similar to what Dennis Tedlock, in a discussion of Mayan texts, characterizes as a “poetics of polyphony” (178). For example, the epithet used to identify the poetic addressee a second time in the phrase “Tupac Amaru, Amaruq churin”/“Tupac Amaru, hijo del dios serpiente” evokes a distinct chain of referents and sensations, indicating the absence of definitive meaning attached to any signifier. Tedlock notes that the one-to-one referentiality of proper names—often viewed in Western contexts as playing out “stable, isomorphic relationships”—is often challenged in Mayan texts (186). The phrase “Tupac Amaru, Amaruq churin”/“Tupac Amaru, hijo del Dios Serpiente” has a similar effect, expanding the multiplicity already inherent in the name of the poetic referent. In effect, both micro-repetitions within “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” (in the form of reiterated phonemes, words, or phrases) and the macro-repetition of the poem itself (the linguistic doubling of the text) undo any notion of permanent meaning or authority that their printed status might imply. Rather, they dislocate meaning and allow a space for innovation on the reader’s part, a characteristic of poems passed down via the spoken word as well.

While the initial fragment of “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchismán” hints at the undercurrent of orality, the power of the spoken word becomes an explicit thematic concern of the work in the next segment of the poem:

Qanqa kamta, amam ñawikiwan, wamancha kanchariyninwan, qawarqanki. Kaypin kasiani, yawarmiyiwan kalpachasqa, mana wañusqa, qaparispa. (10)

Tus ojos de serpiente dios que brillaban como el cristalino de todas las águilas, pudieron ver el porvenir, pudieron ver lejos. Aquí estoy, fortalecido por tu sangre, no muerto, gritando todavía. (11)
While this passage begins with the power of sight (emanating from the snake god’s eyes), it culminates in that of a human cry (“qaparispa’7”gritando todavía”), characterizing voice as not only as the primary medium of human expression, but also as a matter of life and death. The flow of voice, like that of the blood streaming from the mountains to Tupac Amaru and his descendents, is both a source and sign of resistance. In the second line of this fragment, the onomatopoeic power of Quechua conveys this sentiment explosively, the repeated occlusive sounds represented by “k,” “q” and “p’ (“Kaypin kasiian, yawarniykiwan, kallpachasqa, mana watusqa, qaparispa”) echoing the force of the human cry. The especially volatile word “qaparispa” (“gritando”) is picked up at the beginning of the next passage—“Qaparisianin, llaqtaykin kani, runayki’”/“Estoy gritando, soy tu pueblo” (15)—in which the word llaqtaykin (translated by Arguedas as “tu pueblo”) also creates a particularly forceful aural impact with its contiguous “q” and “t” (a phonetic combination absent from Spanish). Arguedas artistically highlights this onomatopoeia to appeal to both the eyes and ears of his audiences.

While the Spanish version of these particular lines has a softer feel, I do not wish to imply that the translation should be dismissed as an afterthought; it is a creative act in its own right and spurs different yet compelling effects. One crucial outcome of the translation is its multiplication of the “poetics of polyphony,” extending its destabilizing process to another language. The translation is also essential to the didactic function I see operating in the poem, which draws Spanish-language readers to the Quechua version, encouraging them to read and speak the original words and thus experience the richness of the language, even if without full understanding. In this sense, the translation may encourage these readers to “submit to the material current of unfamiliarity in a text” and “understand the sound of not understanding,” as Jed Rasula describes the pleasurable gaps in comprehension that oral texts (be they in familiar or foreign tongues) present (256). Along these lines, for the Spanish-language reader, the Quechua original of “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” may become akin to what Nick Piombino describes as the “aural ellipsis,” or the semantic indeterminacies in a poetic work that prompt a listener to subjectively fill in gaps in meaning or understanding. In struggling to find logic in something nonsensical, the reader effectively becomes an active participant in the creation of the poem, creating subjective “sound images,” as Piombino terms them (67). Piombino further suggests that the “aural ellipsis” not only manifests an increased layering of languages in ever more globalized societies, but may also didactically guide audiences toward the ability to grasp meaning in unfamiliar languages “by subliminally teaching us how to intuitively apprehend at least the rough outlines of meanings, both manifest and latent, of verbal constructs, by means of detecting, tracking and decoding their rhythmic presentations alone” (54). In this sense, “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” may prompt monolingual Spanish-language readers to not only become, in a certain fashion, students of Quechua, but also to explore additional new linguistic and cultural spaces.

The presence of the “aural ellipsis,” which prompts readers to make subjective sense of the text, is one way in which “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” cultivates the improvisational and collaborative nature of traditional oral poetry. Arguedas diminishes his authorial presence in a number of even more explicit ways in this text, including the elaboration of a collective poetic speaker. The beginning of the third segment of the poem, “Qaparisianin, llaqtaykin kani, runayki’”/“Estoy gritando, soy tu pueblo,” makes it clear that the voice enunciating the poem is not a solitary one, but that of a community (reflected, in effect, in the multiple referents of Tupac Amaru). This is not surprising, given that a collective conscience pervades Andean thought, as manifested, for example, in the worship of a pantheon of gods, the collective work system of the traditional ayllu, and the general organizing tenets of duality, reciprocity, and balance.

As the third fragment of “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” continues, this collective speaker is more explicitly identified as an Andean population struggling against colonial oppression. As the collective speaker recalls how Tupac Amaru II sparked armed rebellion by speaking, the power of voice is once again framed as fundamental to that opposition:
Qan rmasqaykimanta, yawar mikuq jierro españolwan maqanakusqaykimamanta, uyanta tooqasqaykimamanta, yawarmiki timpqe alpapi timpusqanmantan, manaña sonqoypi qasilla kanñachu. Rupayllañan kan, amaru cheqniyllañan kan, supay weraqochakunapaq, sonqoypi. (10)

Desde el día en que tú hablaste, desde el tiempo en que luchaste con el acerado y sanguinario español, desde el instante en que le escupiste a la cara; desde cuando tu hirviente sangre se derramó sobre la hirviente tierra, en mi corazón se apagó la paz y la resignación. No hay sino odio de serpiente contra los demonios, nuestros amos. (H)

Even readers unfamiliar with Quechua will note the Spanish words embedded within a phrase toward the beginning of the fragment, “jierro españolwan.” On the one hand, the intrusion of these Spanish-derivated terms in the Quechua text underscores the legacy of cruelty inflicted by not only the conquistador’s swords, but also his language and writing system. However, if Arguedas suggests a connection between writing and colonial power in “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman,” his own written text demonstrates how Quechua communities can strategically appropriate this chirographic system.

The power of voice remains a central motif as the poem moves into its fourth segment. However, here the prose-like style seen thus far is broken up by an indented stanza that is visually and figuratively more akin to conventional lyric:

Mayun takisian,
tuyan waqcisian,
wayran muvusian,
ichun, tuta punchay sukasian.
Wamanikimaq, apukunaq kirunpi, riti sutusian, llipipisian.
Hatun mayunchijmi qaparisian.
¡Maypitaq kanki ñoqayku ray ku wañusqaykimanta! (10)

Esta cantando el río,
está llorando la calandria,
está dando vueltas el viento;
día y noche la paja de la estepa vibra;
nuestro río sagrado está bramando;
en las crestas de nuestros Wamanis montañas, en sus dientes, la nieve gota y brilla.
¿Dónde estás desde que te mataron por nosotros? (13-14)

The “less hurried rhythm” of these more lyric stanzas, as Mazzotti aptly characterizes them (“Bilingualism” 102), can be seen as balancing counterpart to the more urgent lines rendered in prose, again conveying the principle of equilibrium that pervades Andean thought. The combination of these differing styles in one poem also suggests the related Andean notion of tinkuy; which can refer to any encounter (peaceful or violent), but also connotes the dialectic created by converging forces, or the resolution of imbalance (Harrison, Signs 50-52; Allen 207). While Arguedas’s poem represents the violent clash of cultures in Peru, it also visually, rhythmically, linguistically and thematically attests to how these conflicting forces may be creatively and productively synthesized.

This lyric segment conveys the intense bond between Quechua communities and the natural world, a connection emphasized by Arguedas in his preliminary note to the poem (9). In these lines, a link between the Andean landscape and the human voice also becomes particularly apparent, as the river “sings” and “roars,” the lark “cries,” the wind “blows,” the straw “vibrates,” and snow drips and shines from the mouth of the personified mountaintops. These images are vividly accented with the lexical patterns Arguedas employs in the Quechua version of this segment. First, strong consonant rhyme links the words that end each of the first six lines of the segment—“takisian,” “waqasian,” “muyusian,” “sukiasian,” “llipipisian,” and “qaparisian” (singing, crying, blowing, vibrating, shining
and shouting, respectively)—creating a fluidity that enhances the dynamic movement of water and breath depicted here. This lexical flow is particularly intense in the first three lines of the segment, since the first consonant of each line-final word is picked up again at the beginning of the next line: “Mayun taksian, /wayran wayqasian, /wayran mayusian” (1-4). Furthermore, the word that ends this sequence, “muyusian,” phonetically loops back to the first word of the sequence, “mayun.” In fact, these lines produce a tri-fold visual and acoustic chiasmus, whose layered, mirror-like quality enhances the depiction of a material link between sound and nature. Sound effects on the level of phonemes—such as the assonance of the “i” and “a” in these words, along with the liquid consonance of the “s,” “m” and “w”—and regular internal rhyme patterns further intensify the natural and verbal stream portrayed in this segment. Once again, the onomatopoetic intensity of Quechua adds an acoustic layer of signification to these images.

This initial lyric segment is closed by the question, “¿Maypitaq kanki ñoqayku rayku wañusqaykimanta!/ ¿En dónde estás desde que te mataron por nosotros?” (10-11). The subsequent prose segment provides an answer: Tupac Amaru’s spirit—now a symbolic representation of the seeds of revolution—is scattered throughout the natural world and can be felt through its sounds and movement. As the segment continues, the natural world is described as a vessel that transmits energy from Tupac Amaru’s body to that of the community:

Taytay: mayukunata uyariykuy, sutilla; hatun yunkapipas manchay sachakunata uyariykuy; la mar qochapa supay, yuraq takinta, waqayninta uyariykuy, papay, Amaruy. ¡Kausasianikun! Chay rumi, sacha, unu, mayu kuyusqamannt; mayu muyurisqamannt, wayra tususqamannt, astawan hatunta, astawan yawar kallpata hapisayku. ¡Hatarisianikun, qan rayku, apu sutiyki, apu wañuyymiyyki rayku! (12)

Padre nuestro, escucha atentamente la voz de nuestros ríos; escucha a los temibles árboles de la gran selva; el canto endemoniado, blanquísimo del mar; escúchalo, padre mío, Serpiente Dios. ¡Estamos vivos; todavía somos! Del movimiento de los ríos y las piedras, de la danza de árboles y montañas, de su movimiento, bebemos sangre poderosa, cada vez más fuerte. ¡Nos estamos levantado, por tu causa, recordando tu nombre y tu muerte! (13)

As the collective poetic speaker drinks the blood of Tupac Amaru, which flows through the natural world (an evocation of the Eucharist), it implores the serpent god to hear the echoes of its own fervor in the awakened community. In the offset lyric stanza that follows, the word uyariykuy, used to implore Tupac Amaru to listen in previous lines, is again repeated. Here, however, the serpent god is no longer identified as the specific addressee of this appeal. This erasure of a precise referent makes the verb speak more directly to the reader/listener, who also needs to take urgent note of this voice:

¡Uyariykuy sonqoyta, tanlinyasqanta! Uyariykuy yawarniyta chirinyinta, katatasqanta; uyariykuy lambras sachapi mana piyiyvoq teripipa likakisqanta; takssalla mayupa, illampu timpq puquityupa takisqanta. ¡Kachkanimraqmi! (12)

¡Escucha la vibración de mi cuerpo! ¡Escucha el frío de mi sangre, su temblor helado. Escucha sobre el árbol de lambras el canto de la paloma abandonada, nunca amada; El llanto dulce de los no caudalosos ríos, de los manantiales que suavemente brotan al mundo. ¡Somos aín, vivimos! (13)

While a voiced performance of “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” is tacitly encouraged in preceding stanzas, the repetition of “uyariykuy,” or “escucha,” in these lines implores audiences to go beyond a “close reading” of the text, speak the words on the page, and engage in what Charles Bernstein has called “close listening” (4).
In theory, the poetic speaker should not have to push readers to engage more than their eyes in experiencing this text, given that poetry is presumably a spoken medium. Yet by the time Arguedas published “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman,” post-Enlightenment poetics had drawn increasing attention to the page-bound word and solidified a lasting conceptualization of poems (at least in the Western mind) as visual, rather than spoken, phenomena. The lines of “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman,” however, challenge this notion, prompting readers to sit up and listen, not only to the collective voice articulating the poem, but also to the social spaces that shape it. In fact, the synaesthetic line “/Uyariyku yawarmiyqa chirijinta, katatasqantď/ /Escucha el frío de mi sangre, su temblor helado/” invites readers to symbolically join the consubstantiation ritual described earlier; by engaging in a dramatic voicing of the poem and feeling the vibrations of the collective speaker pass through their own bodies, readers may figuratively step into the position of the Andean speaker.

While sound is represented as an empowering force for Andeans in this and several other segments of “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman,” a lyric stanza that appears toward the middle of the poem demonstrates its destructiveness in the wrong hands. In these lines, the poetic voice implores Tupac Amaru to hear the sounds of Spanish guns, swords, and horses:

_Uyariy, papay, Amanuy, uyariykay:  
balan sipsian,  
metrallan yawarta toyyachisian,  
jierro cuchillun runaq aychanta kuchuchkan,  
cawallun irrajinwan, upca, llasciq chicikinwan umayta, wiksaykuta ñitisian._ (14)

_Escucha, padre mío, mi Dios Serpiente, escucha:  
las balas están matando,  
las ametralladoras están revolviendo las venas,  
las espadas de hierro están cortando carne humana;  
las caballos, con sus herrajes, con sus locos y pesados cascos, mi cabeza, mi estómago están revolviendo._ (15)

The violence inflicted is described in terms of sound. Furthermore, the prominent presence of the Spanish lexical items “balan,” “metralla,” “jierro cuchillun,” and “cawallun” at the beginning of the Quechua lines of the text symbolically echo the violent clatter of their tools of domination. In his analysis of this same fragment, Mazzotti emphasizes how it references the migratory descent from the sierra toward Lima, insightfully noting that “this descending movement is two-fold: It is destructive when carried out by Western agencies, and constructive or redeeming when in the hands of Andean migrants” (“Bilingualism” 102). A similar statement can be made regarding the portrayal of sound here: the noise of Spanish arms and violent letters squelches Andean agency, while the empowered voices of a resurgent community feed it.

In the second half of “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman,” this migratory movement through time and space follows the collective poetic speaker from the colonial sierra to an urban present in the capital city of Lima (Mazzotti, “Bilingualism” 102-04). It is useful to remember that the boom of infrastructure brought Peruvian urban migration to an all-time high during the period in which Arguedas wrote “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman,” doubling the population of Lima during the 1960s (Blouet and Blouet 349). In his poem, Arguedas describes Lima as the headquarters of the “falsos wiraqochas,” or “false gods,” reminding readers of alleged Inca misinterpretations of Pizarro as a prophesied deity and questioning the Eurocentric national governments that followed.

---

7 In 1950, the estimated population of the Lima-Callao metropolitan area was 1,010,000 (13.2% of the total population of Peru); the population grew to 1,700,000 (17% of the total population) in 1960 and jumped to 3,850,000 by 1970 (21.5% of the total population) (Blouet and Blouet 349).
Lienhard points out that the pronoun used throughout “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” to identify the collective speaker is the “exclusive” first-person pronoun ñoqayku, or “we alone”; it is now understood that this “we alone” is the modern indigenous or mestizo migrant (“Arguedas” 116). This pronoun appears, for example, at the beginning of the next prose-like segment: “Kay weraq-chakunaq uma llaqtanta, ñoqayku, as asllamanta tikrasianiku” / “Al inmenso pueblo de los señores hemos llegado y yo estamos removiendo” (18-19). Lienhard points out that the historical memory of this social group encompasses both the experience of rural Quechua communities and modern urban ones, representative in Lienhard’s view of “the entire historical Andean experience” (“Arguedas” 116). Lienhard also implies that the association between the collective speaker and contemporary migrants functions as another link between orality and literacy: “the poetic speaker coincides ‘sociologically’ with the most likely possible public [of the poem], the one most familiar with reading” (“Arguedas” 116). This strengthens Lienhard’s argument that the main audience of the work is urban, literate Quechua speakers (“Arguedas” 127). However, in the Spanish translation of the same line Arguedas does not paraphrase ñoqayku as “we alone.” His translation thus subtly invites monolinguals into the world that frames the poem. At the same time, readers who pick up on the difference between the restricted ñoqayku and more open nosotros will either identify with the inclusive we or benefit from being “the target of exclusion,” to borrow Sommer’s phrasing again (2). In the latter case, the marker of exclusion gives the reader a taste of what communities marginalized from official national culture have experienced for centuries.

As the poem nears its conclusion, it urges bilingual and monolingual readers alike to take note of a revolutionary Andean re-appropriation of Lima:

Waranqa waranqa kasiayku, huñusqa, llaqtan llaqtan huñusqa. Mat’isiayku kay runa cheqniq llaqtata, cawallupa akanta hina milakukuwaqmiñchis llaqtata. ¡Qespischíaqkún! Runa llaqtan kanqa, tawantin suyu hatun takiq, manchay kusiq, allín llankaq, mana cheqniq ¡chuya! Apu ritin hina mana asnaq huchyoq (18)

Somos miles de millares, aquí, ahora. Estamos juntos; nos hemos congregado pueblo por pueblo, nombre por nombre, y estamos apretando a esta inmensa ciudad que nos odiaba, que nos despreciaba como a excremento de caballos. Hemos de convertirla en pueblo de hombres que entonen los himnos de las cuatro regiones de nuestro mundo, en ciudad feliz, donde cada hombre trabaje, en inmenso pueblo que no odie y sea limpio, como la nieve de los dioses montañas donde la pestilencia del mal no llega jamás. (19)

As Quechua hymns emanating from the four regions of the world (an allusion to Tahuantinsuyu, the name for the four geographical corners of the Inca Empire) infiltrate the modern city, the oral tradition is once again underscored. As snow from the mountains, seen at the beginning of the poem as a source of Andean life, symbolically cleanses the city of corruption and the integrity of the migrants transform a Lima tainted by the “falsos wiracochas,” Arguedas inverts vilifying portrayals of unhygienic campesinos that have been diffused by hegemonic writers since the conquest. This description of a revolutionary Lima, in which “every man works,” both recalls the traditional ayllu system and reveals an underlying socialist agenda.

In the final lyric segment of the poem, the speaker suggests that Andean agency can be most effectively asserted through a selective combination of tradition and modernization. For example, the
speaker learns the Spanish language, the “wheel,” and the “machine” without compromising time-honored song and dance:

*Takisaykun

tususiykun,

takiyniykiwanraq, tusuyniykiwanraq.

Castellanutupas rimasianíñan,

maquinatapas, waranga ruedayq kaqtapas, kuyuchisianíñan;

sutikin ñoqaykuwan kuska wiñan, kallpachakun;

wayna wiraqochakunapas iyarisinkiñan, requisinkiñan

hatun amauta raura kanchariq hinata. (18, 20)

Canto;

bailo la misma danza que danzabas
el mismo canto entono.

Aprendo ya la lengua de Castilla,
entiendo la meda y la máquina;
con nosotros crece tu nombre;
hijos de wiraqochas te hablan y te escuchan
como al guerrero maestro, fuego puro que enardece, iluminando. (21)

Whereas earlier in the poem the notable presence of Spanish terms embedded within the Quechua text signaled a violent, forced intrusion of European inventions, here the presence of hybrid words like maquinatapas and ruedayq suggests an empowering appropriation of them. The combination of language and modern technology described in these lines also hints at the potentially productive merger of orality and the printed word, of which the text before the reader provides a prototype. While written partially in Spanish and disseminated thanks to the “machine,” Arguedas’s “oration” celebrates Andean cultural memory and conveys aspects of traditional oral literatures. The collective speaker suggests that this new voice may have a sweeping impact, enlightening a new generation of mestizos and whites (“hijos de wiraqochas te hablan y te escuchan”) (21).

The closing lines of the poem, rendering a final invocation to Tupac Amaru in prose, stylistically and conceptually link the poem back to its beginning: “Uraykamuy Amary, samayniykita urpuchiy; sonqoypá likiski makikita churaykuy; kallpachaway” / “Baja a la tierra, Serpiente Dios, infiúndeme tu aliento; pon tus manos sobre la tela imperceptible que cubre el corazón. Dáme tu fuerza, padre amado” (22-23). Breath (represented here as “samay,” or “aliento”) becomes a tangible thread that connects and empowers Tupac Amaru, the collective poetic speaker, and perhaps readers. The imagined union of these bodies underscores the transcultured and transhistorical nature of the poem.

Considering “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” half a century after the poem was first published, it is clear that the urban utopia Arguedas projected has not materialized. Political initiatives to balance the social structure of Peru have been repeatedly undermined, and ethnic and linguistic inequalities remain intact. However, a displacement of the “lettered city”—the term that Ángel Rama coined to describe the authority designated within the colonial city by virtue of the plume—has indeed taken place at the hands of migrants, who continue to flood the city.9 Raúl Bueno describes this modern reconfiguration of the Peruvian metropolis:

9The civil war between Sendero Luminoso and government counterinsurgent forces from the early 1980s through the mid 1990s only intensified urban migration, as communities fled the violence that most severely impacted rural highland areas.
Polyphony and Performance in the Poetry of José María Arguedas

[El modelo civilizador que había prevalecido en el Perú y en el resto de América Latina desde la instalación de la colonia, en el que la ciudad proyecta orden y cultura en el campo, ha sido puesto en abierto entredicho por un modelo inverso, a partir de la segunda mitad del siglo XX, en que el campo y el interior de las naciones vuelcan su compleja heterogeneidad en las ciudades y las redefienden en términos de cultura y aun de organización social y política. (253)]

Bueno calls this contemporary heterogenous space the “ciudad oral,” a term that captures its disarticulation of the orderly “ciudad letrada.” Bueno’s purpose is not to suggest a region dominated by an illiterate mass, but rather an urban space “basada en una formalidad ajena a la escritura, y por lo tanto ajena a la oficina, el documento, el sello, la firma y el papel oficiales” (259). The emphasis on orality throughout “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” and the eventual appropriation of Lima by the collective migrant speaker of the poem alludes to the vigor of the “ciudad oral” that Bueno identifies. Bueno affirms that corporeal acts of life, or articulations that go beyond mere speech acts, project the resurgent voice of the “ciudad oral”:

En efecto, esa masa migrante también ‘habla’ con sus cuerpos, desplazamientos, acciones, posiciones y reposiciones. Maneja su situación espacio-temporal para enunciar carencias, necesidades, reclamos, conquistas, acciones, reacciones, etc. Desde esta perspectiva, la migración masiva termina por urdir un lenguaje enérgico y desafiante. (255)

The critic goes on to mention several phenomena that have sprouted within the city under the influence of the “ciudad oral,” including folkloric peñas, district clubs, and ritual celebrations. He also notes how migrants have adapted the traditional ayllu structure to urban building sites, daycare cooperatives, and soup kitchens, similarly changing the face of the “ciudad letrada” (262).

Bueno’s description of the “ciudad oral” as a manifestation of radical acts of life invites consideration of how performance, beyond the mere voicing of the text I have thus far analyzed, is played out in Arguedas’s poem. If the urban phenomena shaped by a migrant agenda are indeed dramatic acts that defy the homogenizing impulse of national authority and demand socio-political change, then the poem “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” can be seen as both a testimony to and a performance of the “ciudad oral.” That is, the poem’s portrayal of a post-aristocratic, heterogeneous Lima inflected by Andean codes attests to the explosion of the “ciudad oral,” while the text’s transculturated linguistic, formal, and thematic nature—each challenging hegemonic literary, linguistic and political structures—embodies its spirit. In this sense, the poem itself is a socio-artistic performance that urges change.

José Cerna-Bazán offers an insightful reading of “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” that similarly views the work as a literary act advocating social change. First, the critic argues that Arguedas himself performs the role of serrano migrants, as he assumes their heteroglossic discourse and melds it with his own artistic voice. The resulting enunciation is that of a hybrid yo-poético—which Cerna-Bazán calls the yotro (the poet’s yo plus the migrant otro)—that plays out a spectacle of language and identity (236). Cerna-Bazán points out that Arguedas implicitly acknowledges the theatrical nature of this display of language and identity by explaining (in his prelogue to the poem) his amalgamation of various dialects of Quechua, or his conscious creation of a dramatic vernacular (237). The critic further argues that the readers of the poem—encouraged by the diminished authorial presence of Arguedas—then assume the voice and identity of this yotro, essentially undertaking their own performances of Andean identity. He summarizes: “La consecuencia de tal ‘fusion’ en la performance de la lectura es que el lector tiene que leer—y simular que habla—como el Serrano migrante en Lima que el texto inventa” (Cerna-Bazán 238). Cerna-Bazán sees this second tier of performance as radically political, especially when carried out by Spanish-language readers (239). By trying on the voice of the “other”—in Spanish and Quechua, as I argue the work encourages them to
do—these readers will feel the tension of competing codes in the text and be awakened to profound cultural and political conflicts.10

The performances embedded within and encouraged by “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” articulate a conceptualization of poetry as a genre in flux and an expression of mingling tendencies: it is at once individual and social, local and universal, denunciatory and conciliatory, human and transcendental. In other words, the institution of poetry as shaped and propagated within the “ciudad letrada” is subverted as the codes of the “ciudad oral” find expression in Arguedas’s work. This multi-generic, unstable nature is standard to oral poetry, in this sense, “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” is not so much a departure from the norms of Western verse, but rather an homage to its origins, or to an oral aesthetic that anchors all poetry. Arguedas’s originality lies in his interrogation of histories and aesthetics assimilated within modern Peru, and his invitation to a variety of readers and listeners to join a potentially transformative poetic dialogue.

Works Cited


10In fact, the dramatic undertones of “Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman” have been exploited in several contexts. For example, Arguedas himself read the poem publicly, the renowned theatre collective Yuyachkani opened its play Allpa Rayku (1979) with the first lines of the poem, and recently Manuelcha Prado set dramatic readings of the poem to music on his 2003 album Poesía kechua.
Polyphony and Performance in the Poetry of José María Arguedas


