

UC Berkeley

New Faculty Lecture Series (formerly Morrison Library Inaugural Address)

Title

Entering the Lettered City: Jesús Lara and the Formation of a Quechua Literary Patrimony in the Andes

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8z69j7ps>

Author

Tarica, Estelle

Publication Date

2001

M o r r i s o n
L i b r a r y
I n a u g u r a l
A d d r e s s
S e r i e s

Estelle Tarica

*Entering the Lettered City:
Jesús Lara and the Formation of a Quechua
Literary Patrimony in the Andes*



University of California, Berkeley
2001

Morrison Library Inaugural Address Series
No. 21

Editor: Carlos R. Delgado

Morrison Library: Alex Warren


Text format and design: Mary Scott

© 2001 UC Regents

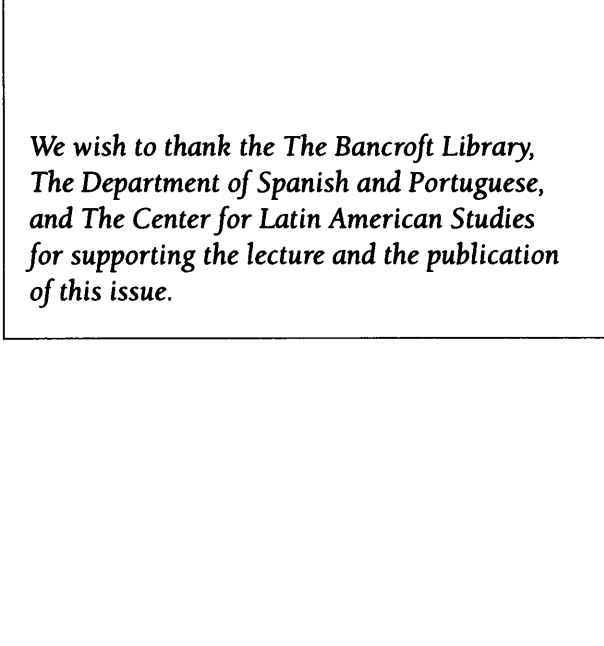
ISSN: 1079-2732

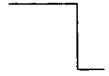
Published by:

The Doe Library
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720-6000



*We wish to thank the The Bancroft Library,
The Department of Spanish and Portuguese,
and The Center for Latin American Studies
for supporting the lecture and the publication
of this issue.*






PREFACE

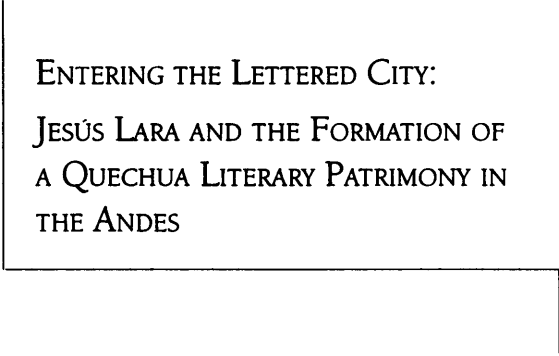
The goal of this series is to foster scholarship on campus by providing new faculty members with the opportunity to share their research interest with their colleagues and students. We see the role of an academic library not only as a place where bibliographic materials are acquired, stored, and made accessible to the intellectual community, but also as an institution that is an active participant in the generation of knowledge.

New faculty members represent areas of scholarship the University wishes to develop or further strengthen. They are also among the best minds in their respective fields of specialization. The Morrison Library will provide an environment where the latest research trends and research questions in these areas can be presented and discussed.

Editorial Board



ENTERING THE LETTERED CITY:
JESÚS LARA AND THE FORMATION OF
A QUECHUA LITERARY PATRIMONY IN
THE ANDES




In 1967 Aymara intellectual Fausto Reinaga published a book-length critique of Bolivian intellectuals whom he called “intellectual cholos,” cholos being a somewhat pejorative term in the Andes for mestizos and urbanized Indians.¹ Reinaga documented how this group had betrayed their indigenous origins to become apologists for a racist and repressive state. The book was animated by a deeply felt resentment at what he considered to be their silencing of his oppositional voice, both through active censorship and pervasive neglect. Reinaga indeed felt so excluded from all forms of national debate that he was compelled to appeal to a higher authority. He registered a complaint with the Secretary General of the United Nations, in a letter charging his compatriots with racism. “Es que en Bolivia,” Reinaga wrote in his letter, “nadie admite que un indio escriba...” (8).

Reinaga’s book was an irate response to what the literary critic Angel Rama would call “the lettered city,” a phrase I take up here in order to address some of the contradictions that accrue around written representations by, and of, Indian intellectuals in the Andes once they engage with the nation-state. I will be particularly concerned with two works by Bolivian writer Jesús Lara, his essay and anthology titled La poesía quechua (1947) and his novel Surumi (1943). La poesía quechua consisted of a long scholarly essay about Quechua literature that was accompanied by a small anthology of poetry presented in both Spanish and Quechua.² The novel Surumi recounts the story of a Quechua Indian, son of hacienda laborers, who leaves his rural Cochabamba home to attend school in the city. Lara was an *indigenista* writer, directly inspired by the writings of Peruvian *indigenistas* of the 1920s and 30s such as José Carlos Mariátegui and Luis Valcárcel, whom Lara cited in his essay. Like these thinkers, Lara

took up the question of the status of Indians and indigenous culture within the nation—the infamous ‘problema del indio’—as the basis for contesting a series of military governments in the 1940s that, although nominally progressive, did not go far enough in limiting the political and economic power of an entrenched national oligarchy. As with many *indigenista* writers, Lara went to great lengths to expose the regressive role of the oligarchy in maintaining Bolivia in a colonial-like state that impeded its progress towards modernization. However, although La poesía quechua and Surumi belong within the *indigenista* strain, they also push its limits. Both represent what I would call “intimate *indigenismo*,” a mode of representing the Indian as “other” that is complicated by the identity of the author, who may be considered in this case, although in an extremely ambiguous fashion, an Indian himself. This is one of the reasons, not incidentally, that Lara became the target of a scathing attack by Reinaga.³


Lara belonged to a generation of intellectuals who found their voice in the 1930s and 40s, the period following Bolivia’s Chaco War against Paraguay. Many of these *letrados* served in the war, and their experiences on the frontlines—which served as the raw material for numerous books in the subsequent decade⁴—lent a renewed urgency to ongoing criticisms of Bolivia’s oligarchy and of the repressive military-socialist regimes that came to power successively after the war.⁵ Their arrogance, lack of foresight, and gross mismanagement were held responsible not only for the war’s disastrous losses, but for the nation’s overall lack of progress. This generation of intellectuals was instrumental to the social transformations that would eventually culminate, in 1952, with the Bolivian Revolution. Lara’s Surumi indeed documents this period



through the life of its protagonist who, after serving in the war, returns home to join forces with other *letrado* veterans in opposing the government and proposing a national revolution. La poesía quechua, too, though it is a very scholarly text, is also quite clearly an intervention into these political debates about the future of Bolivia, and particularly about the role that Bolivia's indigenous people should play in that national future. The essay-anthology was not only intent on demonstrating the aesthetic achievements of the Quechua civilization *in the past*, but also in proving that Bolivia's contemporary Indians are the heirs to this tradition, and furthermore, that they would continue to develop its literary arts were the Quechua language allowed to flourish.

This political intervention was couched in the academic format of literary criticism, and continuing in the tradition mapped out by Angel Rama, it made letters a political weapon. Rama's book The Lettered City is an attempt to account for the power of written discourse in the formation of post-Conquest Latin American societies. He seeks to understand the exclusive nature of this power, the role of cities in deploying it, and most importantly, its concentration in the state. The phrase "the lettered city" refers to both a concrete geographical location—the urban centers of administrative power of an imperial system based on the exploitation of the countryside—and a specialized group of people within that system. He calls this group "the lettered city." This small nucleus of educated men, "letrados," produced the edicts, the official reports, the letters and the histories that played a key role in consolidating state power across vast territories.⁶ The social distinction that has accrued over the centuries in Latin America to the literate and educated is thus, for Rama,


instrumental to empire. It is also, he argues, foundational to it. Like many critics, Rama holds that writing has a special status among all of the other distinctions that have been used to mark the division of society into two camps, civilization and barbarism. Rama claims that it is in the nature of the written sign to enable the vision of order and permanence that the Spaniards hoped to realize in the New World. The cities they erected were texts before they were a reality, he argues, inscribed on the American soil as if it were a blank page (Rama 2). He writes, "The notion that statutory order must be constituted at the outset to prevent future disorder alludes to the particular virtue of signs: to remain unalterable despite the passage of time and, at least hypothetically, to constrain the changing reality in a changeless rational framework" (Rama 6). But it was also in the particular nature of the Conquest, especially the conquest of Peru, that writing would inaugurate this division. Antonio Cornejo Polar, for example, argues that the first meeting between Atahualpa and Pizarro's army at Cajamarca in 1532 initiates a historical rift between writing and all other forms of discourse in the Andes. In this scene, as it was depicted by a number of 16th-century chroniclers, Pizarro's emissary reportedly proffered the Inca prince a Bible to ascertain whether he recognized its divine authority and would submit himself to it. Atahualpa reportedly took the Bible into his hand, stared intensely at it, raised it to his ear—presumably to listen to its word—, heard nothing, and then threw it to the ground. This act unleashed the Spaniards' violence and the prince and his army were destroyed. Thus, writes Cornejo, "[E]l fin del imperio [inca] comienza con el poderoso misterio de la escritura" (Heterogeneidad 104).



For Rama, the lettered city not only marks a cultural boundary between two kinds of discourse—written and oral—as Cornejo emphasizes, but also a socio-economic division of labor charted in spatial terms: between rural agricultural labor and urban forms of work. It thus comes to be complexly tied to the organization of social classes within the modern state. Although there are a number of limitations to Rama’s analysis because of its condensed, schematic nature—particularly as regards the modern period⁷—the spirit of his model holds true: writing has been used to mark a social and cultural boundary that, as far as Indian identity is concerned, has been given the status of an absolute. Those who cross that boundary cease to be what they once were. It is this paradigm of Indian identity that prompted Luis Valcárcel, for example, to assert in 1927 that Indians who received an education degraded themselves in the process and became “degenerate” mestizos and “common shysters” who contributed to the continued oppression of the Indian (Valcárcel 39-40). However, as Marisol de la Cadena has pointed out, the absolute nature of this boundary, the impossibility of imagining a “civilized” or *letrado* Indian, is not a direct inheritance of colonial identity categories. Rather, it is the result of the reduction of the complex dynamics of identity formation in the Andes into a simplified binary between two opposing forces: illiterate, hence innocent, Indian agriculturalists and the corrupt landed sectors that oppress them (de la Cadena 87). This simplification corresponds to a particular historical moment in the Andes, namely, the emergence in the 1930s and 40s of politically progressive, liberal and even populist governments intent on modernizing that nevertheless retained strong allegiances to conservative oligarchic social sectors. Within this historical conjunction, Indian identity was rigidly re-

defined as *inherently* other to rational political processes (de la Cadena 115), and even though efforts at state consolidation and expansion aimed to incorporate Indians, modernization and integration of the Indian became synonymous with acculturation. Within this conjunction, the demands made by articulate, educated Indian activists, who in Bolivia in this period formed unstable and provisional alliances with populist military governments, provoked a range of anxieties among the ruling classes that, as Laura Gotkowitz argues, “conjured up a whole set of long-standing assumptions about purity and danger; about the innocence of Indians versus the nefarious interference (or abuse) by mestizos and eventually also labor organizers or communists; about the sanctity of rural society versus the contaminating effects of cities” (Gotkowitz 201).

This is the historical context that frames the two texts by Jesús Lara that I will examine. If, as Rama claims, the written norm has colonized all other modes of expression to such a degree, that “[a]ll attempts to deter, defy, or negate the imposition of these functions of writing must, inescapably, also be formulated in writing” (Rama 37), then how is it possible for a lettered Indian ever to enter the lettered city as an Indian? In both his essay-anthology of Quechua literature and his novel Surumi, Lara attempts to reformulate this paradigm of Indian identity that holds that Indians are inherently outside the boundaries of the modern ‘lettered city,’ that they in fact constitute these boundaries negatively, through their exteriority to it. Yet Lara will remain constrained by this limit precisely because his horizons fall within a national modernizing project. Thus both the essay-anthology and the novel demonstrate a recurring slippage which the entry of the Indian into the




lettered city and as a subject of the nation-state, so often dramatizes: the slippage from Indian identity to mestizo identity, and more particularly, to a subject category Lara terms the “lettered mestizo.”

Lara’s attempt to bring that which had been excluded from the lettered city into its hallowed walls necessitated the careful construction of a scholarly persona who both hides and reveals his own ambiguous positioning across the lettered city’s very perimeter. Unlike other indigenista writers, and unlike the majority of those who at that time had produced anthologies of Quechua works of one form or another and whom Lara used as sources for his own,⁸ Lara was himself a native speaker of Quechua. This fact is one to which Lara will only refer obliquely in his essay, as I will show in a few moments. These indirect references are sufficient to allow the reader to imagine that Lara was concerned with bringing himself, and others like him, into the lettered city. Yet Lara never qualifies himself, ever, as a native. Who, then, is to be brought into the lettered city? What happens to them once they are inside? And what happens to the perimeter traced around the lettered city once it has been breached?

In his essay-anthology, Lara argued for the existence of a highly developed tradition of Quechua literature, one whose intellectual achievements testify to the existence of an advanced indigenous civilization. The bulk of Lara’s essay is dedicated to an historical overview and explanation of a variety of Quechua literary forms, applying European aesthetic categories to a body of works that was more often the province of folklorists and ethnohistorians. There are sections on the pre-hispanic period, the Colonial period, and the Republican period; each of these is broken down into subsections by literary genre: poetry, theatre, and, in

the later editions, prose. Lara's book thus authorizes this tradition by codifying and organizing it in the terms of national literary history.

The first few sections of the essay, which are its most polemical, explain the problems with the historical record that Lara faced as a scholar of Quechua culture. For Lara, there are basically two issues that must be confronted. One, he argues that the chronicles of the colonial period were essentially propaganda to justify the conquest; therefore they cannot be trusted to provide an accurate account of the subjugated Incan culture. He writes, "Los españoles emplearon un método propio para ver e interpretar el pasado de los indios, acondicionándolo con maestría y presentándolo en una forma que les permitiera sentirse dignos de la obra de la conquista y con derecho a disfrutarla" (*La poesía quechua* 8). How then can one trust their generally negative views of the merits of Incan society, their claim that it was not a true civilization? The historical record is not objective; its findings must be treated with suspicion. Yet, he argues, it is this same historical record that has continued to be used into the present day to justify the exclusion of the Indian. Lara asserts that the post-colonial period is, in this regard, entirely continuous with the colonial period: "[L]a nueva sociedad, consituída sobre postulados democráticos, no fue sino una continuación de la antigua colonial, con su mismo enjambre de intereses, prejuicios y pasiones... En tal situación ha permanecido el indio hasta los tiempos que corren, pues no forma parte todavía de la familia boliviana" (*La poesía quechua* 13). Lara cites a number of Liberal thinkers who variously declare the Indian to be "without history" (15); "un ser abyecto y reacio a todo impulso de progreso" (14); and possessed, furthermore, of an extremely ugly dialect ["feisimo dialecto"] (15).⁹



This brings me to the second argument that Lara develops to counter the negative view of Indian culture held by contemporary thinkers. This argument is, like the other, quite simple, namely, most scholars of Quechua literary forms lack sufficient knowledge of Quechua to be able to make accurate literary interpretations of Quechua texts, or even, in many cases, accurate translations. On the basis of this claim, Lara directly refutes a belief originating in the Colonial period that holds that the Quechua language, because it is “rough” and “primitive,” cannot serve as the proper vehicle for the expression of beauty (47). He will show that the Quechua language is extraordinarily fluid and subtle (49). But only those who know it profoundly, he goes on to say, are aware of the wealth of its expressive possibilities, particularly as regards poetry (50). He writes,


[E]s verdad que la esencia de la poesía—sutil en extremo—sólo puede ser valorada y gustada, en muchos casos, por aquellos que poseen por herencia el genio del idioma... La ignorancia del idioma ha sido en todo tiempo un serio obstáculo para el enjuiciamiento razonable del pueblo incaico, principalmente de su cultura. A esta causa no sólo ha resultado difícil captar las prestancias de su espíritu y de su obra, sino que casi siempre se ha traducido e interpretado mal lo que hay escrito en quechua. (57).

Thus, for those who know the language, Quechua is entirely capable of producing aesthetic forms as developed as any to be found in the European languages. These languages, Lara points out, have been considered by some thinkers to reflect the highest artistic expression of a given people (47). They are held to be works of art in themselves,

and of even greater importance than literature. He asks, “¿Pero seríanos permitido aventurarnos a decir otro tanto de la **lengua general del Perú llamada comúnmente quichua**? ¿No será una herejía pretender colocar junto a las perfecciones del altivo occidente un **dialecto** de los atrasados pueblos de América?” (47, bold in the original). Of all these fighting words, Lara chooses to underscore the word “dialect,” as if the greatest of all the injustices suffered were the degrading assignation of Quechua as a mere dialect. Language, thus, is the base of the colonial hierarchy that Lara means to undo. Shift this base, turn it on its head, and the entire structure will come tumbling down.

This association is more than a rhetorical flourish. In denying the linguistic and aesthetic achievements of the Incas, Lara argues, the Spaniards were more easily able to justify their economic exploitation of the Indians as forced laborers. The degraded status of the language is thus metonymically linked to the degraded status of the people who speak it, as the following elaborate metaphorical construction illustrates: “La lengua aborígen despertó en la conciencia del resto de los conquistadores una concepción que guarda armonía con la servidumbre a que había quedado sometida la raza que la creó” (12). Or consider another, more extended construction:

El inkario había perdido su soberanía integral en un momento. En poco tiempo sus monumentos habían sido arrasados, desfigurada su historia, barrida su cultura y suplantados sus dioses. Pero su idioma salió casi indemne del cataclismo y en vano los ministros de Cristo estrellaron contra él sus armas innumerables. Sin fuerzas para destruirlo, optaron por penetrar en sus dominios



y adueñarse de él hasta convertirlo en instrumento.
No necesitaron muchos años—unas tres a cuatro
décadas—para someterlo a su voluntad y servirse
de él como hacían con los indios de las
encomiendas. (11-12)

Having carefully established the intimate connection between the status of the language and the status of the people who speak it, Lara is poised to operate a reversal: the elevation of the Quechua language to the status of an art form and the consequent social elevation of those who speak it. In the hands of those who do not possess a profound knowledge of it—and this profound knowledge is the result, he specifies, of inheritance—Quechua cannot exist as a thing of beauty for itself. It is reduced to an instrument of exploitation, like the Indians who speak it. The formulation of the argument in this way clears a space for the entry of an intellectual subject whose authority is positioned ambiguously between the authority of the native speaker and the authority of the scholar. The identity of this intellectual subject remains obscure in Lara's essay, and yet it is clear that it refers, among others, to the author himself. He has made clear that *his* literary interpretations and translations are more valid than others, even though, he admits, he is neither a linguist nor a philologist (49). He has made the native speaker the only legitimate translator and interpreter of Quechua poetry. He does not have to identify himself as a native speaker—and in fact he never does directly, only by inference—but the very structure of his argument leaves no other possible interpretation.


Cornejo Polar has written of *indigenista* texts that they operate a particular displacement away from the object of their discourse—the Indian—and onto the subject

enunciating the complaint against the oligarchic regime. This subject, the *letrado* author of the text, comes to occupy the center of the national stage, even if this subject is nowhere named in the text itself, and even if the figure of the Indian is ostensibly placed in this position as the text's protagonist (Escribir 206). Such would appear to be the case for Lara's text, but with an added twist. For by endowing himself with scholarly authority *by virtue of* his native mastery over Quechua, Lara has blurred the distinction between the *letrado* and the object of his discourse.

It may be that this subject who comes to occupy the center of the national stage, who is a *letrado* and a native speaker, yet without being an Indian himself, is one that Lara terms "the lettered mestizo." He writes,

[E]l idioma de la raza madre es un estigma para la clase dirigente de Bolivia. El mestizo letrado imita al español de la colonia, ocultando además su origen bajo imaginarios blasones de nobleza y el indio enriquecido—también él—no vacila en seguir el ejemplo del mestizo. Nadie que se precia de civilizado, nadie que se siente capaz de hacerse entender en castellano se resigna a emplear el lenguaje materno, cada vez más desdeñado y relegado. Triste destino el de este idioma, única obra maestra que sobrevivió a sus creadores. (48)

Although the figure of "the lettered mestizo" merits no more than a passing reference, its presence helps shift the focus of the essay, as Cornejo explains, away from the figure of the Indian reduced to pure labor by the ruling class, and onto the figure of the mestizo, who is defined here as the native speaker who has assimilated to the dominant culture and renounced his mother tongue.



This figure might perhaps be considered Lara's ideal reader. Combating the particular pressures of assimilation felt by lettered mestizos, and instilling in them the pride of their Indian heritage and language, becomes an almost subterranean message of the text that will be confirmed nevertheless in its last pages. This section of the essay consists of a scant three pages dedicated to Quechua poetry of the Republican period—which is, politically speaking, the period in which Lara writes. Its scantiness relative to the multitude of pages dedicated to Quechua literature of the previous three centuries is meant to signal the success of campaigns to eliminate the language by the oligarchy, who repudiated it, he notes, as “an agent of retrogradation” (151). It is here that the scholarly “we,” the impersonal editorial voice characteristic of Lara's prose, finally seems to connect and merge with the personal voice of the author, when he writes, “El lenguaje indígena manchaba igual que un delito a quienes lo empleaban. Se lo abominaba en la tertulia y se lo prohibía en la escuela. Aquella prohibición todavía existía a principios del siglo actual. No olvidamos que en la escuela, allá en una provincia de los valles de Cochabamba, el maestro nos castigaba toda vez que éramos acusados de haber utilizado el quechua. Y la verdad era que no conocíamos otro idioma” (151). This is one of the rare moments when Lara's autobiography surfaces in the text to remind us that what is at stake is not just a dry scholarly argument, nor an abstract appeal to universal principles of Beauty and Art, but the active suppression of the possibility of embedding an indigenous historical memory and cultural tradition in writing.

I have been skirting around a certain issue in my discussion thus far, one that has to do with the identity politics implicit in Lara's argument as I have so far presented it. In exhorting the lettered mestizo to assume his maternal language with pride, and in claiming for the native speaker the only legitimate authority over the language, Lara's essay seems to confirm the same narrow identification of Andean subjects with their language that he has inherited from the colonial period. Xavier Albó, a socio-linguist and activist, argues that this strict indexing of culture to language results from a structure that he terms "dual monolingualism," primarily of Quechua and Spanish, a structure that originated in the Colony but which continued into the twentieth century, although to a far lesser extent. This dual linguistic structure maintains and perpetuates a dual social structure divided along ethno-racial lines, in which language functions as a primary marker of social identity, and a particularly rigid one at that. Albó argues that unlike other markers of social identity (such as clothing), language—and especially such linguistic markers as accent—cannot be so easily exchanged by subaltern groups for the trappings of the dominant culture (Albó 5).

Lara's essay asserts the primacy of this connection between language and cultural identity, as I have shown, but he also fractures it in a number of ways. The essay closes with a citation by the poet José María Olañeta, a priest who sermonized in Quechua and learned it well enough to compose verse in it. Lara cites a fragment of the poem, entitled "Yuyarikúypaj Tikan"/"Flor del recuerdo," reproduced in its entirety in the anthology. The poem is a hymn to Cochabamba, sounding out a nostalgic vision of the pleasures of provincial belonging:

“Yuyarikuy paj Ttikan”

Tunarij chakinpi puñun
Qochapanpa llajtanchajqa
Ttikamanta junttarisqa
Llajtanchajmari sumajqa

Mana llakiy rejsikunchu
Jaqay sumaj llajtakpiqa
Kaj chhikantin runakuna
Kusisqalla jaqaypiqua...

¿Qanpis chaypichu, willaway,
Munakuyta yacharqanki?
Sonqoyki junttachejtapis
Chaypichu tarikurqanki?

Jinapuni kanan karqa
Noqa allinta yacharqani.
Noqapis qan jinnallátaj
Qochala masiyki kani.

Calacata rejsini,
Tiranimanpis rej kani,
Chhikachachaj frutillata
Makiy juntta ttiraj kani...

¿Maykkajllachus kutipusun
Munasqa llajtanchejmanqa?
Ima sonqo junttariychus
Noqapaj chay pacha kanqa.

Paqarimusqay llajtay,
Tukuy sonqo napaykuyki,

“Flor del recuerdo”

Nuestra ciudad, Cochabamba,
Se aduerme al pie del Tunari.
Toda colmada de flores,
Cuán bella es nuestra ciudad.

No se conoce la pena,
Tan sólo existe hermosura
Y todos, sin que falte uno,
Viven alegres en ella...

¿Y fue allí—dime—también
Que tú aprendiste a querer?
¿Fue allí que encontraste a la
Que el corazón te llenó?

Tenía que ser así,
Yo lo sabía muy bien.
Así como tú, yo soy
Cochabambino también.

Conozco bien Calacala,
Iba también a Tirani.
Allí, fresas deliciosas
Recogía a manos llenas...


¿Cuándo podremos volver
A nuestra amada ciudad?
Cuán plena plenitud de gozo
Habrá entonces para mí.

Con todo amor te saludo,
Ciudad donde vi la luz.

Yuraj phuyuj lijranpimin En alas de la nube más blanca
Sonqoyta kachaykamuyki. Te envió mi corazón. (213-214)

The poem sings of the city in Quechua. Merging the beloved onto and into the regional landscape, which it names and describes in loving detail, it partakes of a register of feeling that one recognizes as belonging to a distinctly national poetics.

It is not difficult to imagine why Lara chose this piece to close his essay. It affirms a primordial connection between the indigenous language and Bolivia. “Our city” is intimately addressed in Quechua, as if this were its true language. The poem positions the speaker of Quechua at the center of the national future, nostalgically invoking one of its most prosperous urban centers and vibrant market economies as a collective space of plenitude to which he will one day return. Because the poem is authored by a non-native speaker of Quechua, its placement in the anthology expands the category of the lettered mestizo, to include not just those who by birth speak Quechua but opt in favor of Spanish, but also those who by birth speak Spanish, and yet opt in favor of Quechua. This language can now be seen as the literary patrimony of an entire nation, not just of its silent majority. The poem thus confirms the point that Lara made at the beginning of his essay, about the universal potential of the indigenous language. Olañeta is not, he implies, a native speaker of the language, and yet he chooses to compose his verse in it. What better sign of its universality, its transcendence of an individual racial or linguistic origin, than this gesture by a poet who could have written in Spanish? One must ask whether a poem by a native speaker would have authorized this claim with equal weight.




Having adopted the language of the lettered city, with its scientific injunction to objectivity, Lara must keep his own identity as shrouded as possible. In doing so, I have argued, he enables his own intellectual authority. But he also draws attention away from the central contradiction animating his scholarly treatise, namely, the voice of authority over the Indian language is no longer an Indian voice. His project is undertaken in the name of the Indian, but it cannot be voiced simultaneously by an Indian. Once inside the lettered city, which he seeks to make coterminous with the nation, its very strictures enforce this separation.

This problem of representing the other—the Indian—from within the lettered city is further dramatized in Lara's novel *Surumi*, to which I will now turn. The novel's first section depicts the life of Surumi and her husband, two Indians who work as *colonos* (peons) on an hacienda in a rural Cochabamba valley. They suffer a multitude of abuses at the hands of its overseer as they struggle to scrape together enough money from their surplus labor to "buy" their son's "freedom" (82, 69), that is, to send their son to school in the city and thus spare him the torments they have lived through. The novel's second section, narrated in the first person by Surumi's son Waskar Puma, recounts his experiences at school. Structured temporally by the narrator's four years in Cochabamba, it moves bewilderingly between the space of the city and the space of the hacienda, where he spends each summer with his parents. Shifting between these two spaces, Waskar's identity is continuously destabilized. In the city, at school, he is subjected for his first two years to merciless taunting by schoolmates and teachers, because he is an Indian: "Desde el primer momento me vi aislado y menospreciado. [Mis compañeros] pasaban por mi lado mirándome de pies

a cabeza y riéndose... Yo era indio y llevaba el estigma en la cara, en el lenguaje, en el traje de casinete mal cosido y en los zapatos de cuero burdo" (83). Despite his academic success, he eventually comes to be known at school by the derogatory epithet "Pongo Puma." "Puma" is his Indian last name, and "pongo" is the name given to hacienda Indians who are rotated into uncompensated domestic labor in the homes of their masters.¹⁰ Waskar is given the name when his classmates discover that he is not exempt from this labor, even as a student, and someone sees him hauling trash from his mistress's house. The name "Pongo Puma" becomes a source of intense emotional shame for the narrator that is replayed over and over again in different scenes. Meanwhile, when he is back on the hacienda during school breaks, he finds an uncrossable rift has opened between himself and the Indians that had once constituted his home community. Despite his protests, they now refer to him as "Patrón" and treat him like a master (131). The gulf is cemented within his family as well, because his parents refuse to let him work alongside them. They now care for him as if he were a luxury item, "un objeto de lujo," and contemplate him like an idol (96). Agricultural labor is, in essence, the be-all and end-all of the Indian, the limit horizon of Indian existence. Exiled from it, Waskar is no longer a member of his parents' community. On the one hand Waskar's entry into the lettered city as a student is blocked by its existing residents; on the other hand, it is taken as a *fait accompli* by his family and used to distance him from their world. Thus doubly displaced, he enters into a kind of limbo, a middle space whose boundaries are marked by two names through which he no longer recognizes himself: "Patrón" and "Pongo."

The rest of the novel can be read as a process of creating a new community for Waskar Puma: the national




community. Subsequent sections will narrate his experiences in the war, his return home and the forging of personal and political allegiances with other veterans. Many of these are from the urban middle class but united with him in their disgust at the racism and incompetence of the ruling class, their exclusion from its circle of power, and their subjection to its continuous and violent repression. They meet in urban drawing rooms to hash out their analysis of the state's power and strategize their resistance to it. The novel ends with Waskar and his former comrades in arms turning away from the city—which has come to be figured as the site of the nation's moral corruption—and back towards the countryside. They are comrades now in another battle, poised to spark a national revolution through the awakening of peasant consciousness.

The novel thus initially parallels the narrative skeleton of Lara's essay-anthology of Quechua literature. It starts with an account of the instrumentalization of Quechua Indians as pure physical labor, and links this exploitation to the systematic de-valorization of their capacity for intellectual labor. However, unlike the essay-anthology, the novel does not recenter its narrative on the figure of the assimilated Indian, the lettered mestizo. Instead, Surumi depicts the emergence of an educated Indian subject who, rather than longing for the city, decides rather to return to his rural home in order to liberate it from the power of the city, using the instruments he mastered in the city to forge a just nation. As I will argue, this subject does not renounce his indigenous origin in the process, and leaves the tension between Indian and mestizo identity open and unresolved.

Both of these texts—the essay-anthology and the novel—confirm the situational and relational nature of

Indian identity. Lara in both instances constitutes Indian identity in the dual terms of language and labor: those who speak Quechua, those who work in forced labor, in the fields or in the hacienda house. This form of identity works in terms of negative difference, that is, Indians are those who do not speak Spanish and who do not perform other kinds of labor, notably intellectual labor. Indian identity is thus *both* relational *and* absolute. Hence the violent force of the epithet Pongo Puma that is affixed to Waskar while at school: it not only confirms his lowly position relative to his classmates within a social hierarchy, but also asserts this position as a fixed and irreducible identity, one that prohibits the development of his own fledgling intellectual self-consciousness. While actually working as a pongo, he notes, “Yo me movía como un autómeta. Habíanme resultado suficientes dos días por hundirme, para desaparecer dentro de mi condición de pongo” (112).¹¹ When, on returning to school, he is greeted by his classmates with the words “¡Pongo Puma!” (116), he is thrust back into this self-alienated mode of consciousness: “Como en la casa de la patrona se paralizó mi pensamiento. Mi voluntad y mi rebeldía de otrora sufrían una inercia irremediable. Mi sensibilidad parecía haber fugado de mi cuerpo. Me juzgaba un ser del todo ajeno a mi mismo y al mundo que me rodeaba” (116). A few days later, he sees the words scribbled on the school walls, as graffiti; from there they migrate outward to other parts of the city: “Las dos palabras iban llenando, escritas con tiza, y con lápices de colores, las paredes, los pilares y las puertas. Cundieron por las calles, por las estaciones de ferrocarriles y finalmente por la campiña. En los rincones más solitarios, en los muros ruinosos y en los troncos de los árboles como grabado por manos de brujo se veía el letrero: ‘Pongo Puma’” (117).




The proliferation of the sign “Pongo Puma” signals not so much the systemic disturbance occasioned by the unusual presence of an Indian at school, but rather his continuing dual status, his shifting from student to servant and back again. It is his mobility, in other words, that calls down on him this form of punishment, as if the words could anchor him in one place. When Waskar sees the graffiti, he notes, “Huí como culpable de un crimen monstruoso... Mi culpa estaba en mi nacimiento, era culpa heredada, culpa de raza, una culpa que llevaba el indio desde que una cruz de falsa piedad extendió sus brazos ávidos sobre las entrañas de oro de los Andes” (119-20). The words “Pongo Puma” inscribe Indian identity as absolute, as inherently outside the law (“criminal,” as Waskar puts it, in an echo of Lara’s autobiographical comment in the essay-anthology), and synonymous with uncompensated, forced servitude. And historically speaking it is no coincidence that “Pongo” would be the Indian name his peers use to abject him so forcefully: during the time period represented in the novel, Indians in the valleys of Cochabamba presented numerous petitions requesting the abolition of *pongueaje* as the question of Indian labor came to play a central role in contemporary debates.¹² It is a name, in other words, meant to silence him, to disable him as their equal and interlocutor by circumscribing him to a space of passive acceptance that is wholly incompatible with the space of intellectual self-awareness and questioning that school has come to represent for him.

Nevertheless, it becomes clear that the novel is driven by an attempt to resignify this identity so that it is no longer the mark of absolute abjection. For the novel takes an unexpected turn when it recounts that over time Waskar

comes to accept the name “Pongo Puma,” with diminishing degrees of pain, until one day he realizes that his classmates now utter the words with “good humor,” and that he has become so accustomed to it that he barely notices it, even though it remains etched into the city’s walls (120). He admits, “Yo ya no establecía diferencia entre mi nombre y mi sobrenombre...imperceptiblemente y sin cicatrices habíase injertado en mi vida” (135). This rather startling admission that he no longer recognizes the difference between the name “Waskar Puma” and “Pongo Puma” is all the more surprising when we consider what the name “Waskar” refers to. While the name “Pongo” projects the Indian as an abject being of labor, “Waskar” encodes its direct opposite, the majestic bearer of imperial grandeur, because “Waskar” was the name of Atahualpa’s brother, an Inca prince, direct descendant of that illustrious line of kings, and like his brother, killed in the initial stages of the conquest of Peru. What has happened to the narrator to render these two names indistinguishable?

I would argue that his good-natured willingness to take on the name “Pongo Puma” signals a recognition of his subjection to the domain he has entered. It demonstrates his ability to live within it as a subject, rather than an automaton. The passage of the name “Pongo Puma”—from an oral epithet to a written sign graffitied on the landscape—parallels the passage from orality to literacy, from the rural to the urban space, undertaken by Waskar as he is educated at school. His identification with and through this name reveals that education—the process of becoming a *letrado*—is not only a process of enlightenment and liberation. It is also a passage to a new form of subjection and subjectification. The epithet thus serves as an instance of Althusserian interpellation by and



to an ideological apparatus of the state, a state that, the rest of the novel suggests, is not to be overturned or abolished but rather taken over. Furthermore, it seems possible now for the narrator to live within this state with two names which, while they are indistinguishable from one another, nevertheless do not cancel each other out. Thus the narrator of the novel enters the lettered city as a *fractured* Indian subject, both imperial and abject, but he does not enter it as a mestizo. In this way, Lara's novel confronts the problem of the Indian intellectual's self-representation without having to shift the locus of national subjectivity away from the Indian and onto the lettered mestizo, as occurs in his essay.

Before I conclude, and by way of comparison, I'd like to mention briefly here another anthology, of a very different nature, or rather, a review written by West Indian writer Derek Walcott of a recently published anthology of English literature from the 18th century Caribbean. This anthology is made up of early texts and engravings by the English about their colonized island territories. These texts, Walcott writes, emit a "frowsty fragrance." He says, "reading these texts that are hallowed by age requires an adjustment of mood. One must read like the historian, without moral judgements, to translate oneself into the tone of their time, which means for most West Indians, certainly the African and Indian and Chinese, a return to illiteracy. This is why the idea of a West Indian history wobbles on its pivot and ultimately collapses" (57). Walcott's statement makes manifest the difficulty of establishing a line of literary descent stretching from this "frowsty" written tradition to the present production of letters in the Caribbean. Caribbean literary history is discontinuous,

Walcott shows, because it is fractured by another history, the history of forced labor.

Both the novel Surumi and the anthology of Quechua literature that Lara produced likewise acknowledge the fracture implied by the history of Indian forced labor, a fracture that is registered at the level of national history and individual subjectivity. However, Lara's essay-anthology is designed in such a way as to bridge this gulf, by toppling this discontinuous national history and its subjects and erecting continuity in their place. The idea of a Bolivian history is rescued from collapse, because Lara maps his Quechua literary canon onto the already established timeline of Bolivian national history. It extends this timeline back to an anterior point not previously recognized as belonging to national history, but this does not decenter the primacy of the nation as the canon's structuring principle. It is not, in other words, a canon meant to ground the emergence of a separate and alternative Quechua national identity existing within the body of the Bolivian nation. Rarely, if ever, does Lara speak of the distinctive nature of Quechua identity as against Bolivian identity in order to prove "[its] essential right to a *separate* national destiny," as David Lloyd has shown was the case with Irish canon formations (Lloyd 3, emphasis mine). Rather, as I have argued, Lara recenters Bolivian national identity *around* Quechua, and around its new speakers. The historical fracture of the conquest is thus sutured by Quechua, the Inca empire's only remaining trace of majesty, and through which he imagines a more modern majesty may yet be constructed.

Works Cited

Albó, Xavier. El futuro de los idiomas oprimidos en los Andes. Lima: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos—Centro de Investigación de Lingüística Aplicada, 1977.

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971. 127-186.

Arguedas, Alcides. Historia general de Bolivia. La Paz: Gisbert y Cia, 1975 [1922].

Cornejo Polar, Antonio. Escribir en el aire. Lima: Editorial Horizonte, 1994.

—. "Heterogeneidad y contradicción en la literatura andina (Tres incidentes en la contienda entre oralidad y escritura)." Nuevo Texto Crítico. 9/10 (1992): 103-111.

de la Cadena, Marisol. Indigenous Mestizos: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919-1991. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

de la Campa, Román. "El desafío inesperado de La ciudad letrada." Angel Rama y los estudios latinoamericanos. Mabel Moraña, ed. Pittsburgh: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 1997. 29-53

Gotkowitz, Laura. "Within the Boundaries of Equality: Race, Gender and Citizenship in Bolivia (Cochabamba 1880-1953)." Diss. University of Chicago, 1998.

Mariátegui, José Carlos. Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana. Mexico: Ediciones Era, 1979 [1928].

Lara, Jesús. La poesía quechua. Ensayo y antología. Cochabamba: Universidad Mayor de San Simón, 1947.

—. Surumi. Cochabamba: Los Amigos del Libro, 1988 [1943].

Lloyd, David. Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

Rama, Angel. The Lettered City. Trans. John Charles Chasteen. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.

Ramos, Julio. Desencuentros de la modernidad en América Latina: Literatura y política en el siglo XIX. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1989.

Reinaga, Fausto. La 'intelligentsia' del cholaje boliviano. La Paz: Ediciones PIB (Partido Indio de Bolivia), 1967.

Reyerros, Rafael A. El pongueaje. La servidumbre personal de los indios bolivianos. La Paz, 1949.

Valcárcel, Luis E. Tempestad en los Andes. Lima: Editorial Universo, 1972 [1927].

Walcott, Derek. "A Frowsty Fragrance." Rev. of Caribbeana: An Anthology of English Literature of the West Indies, 1657-1777, ed. Thomas W. Krise. The New York Review of Books 15 June 2000: 57-61.

Footnotes

1. Reinaga titled his book La 'intelligentsia' del cholaje boliviano, his preferred phrase for this group, and one that conveys his definitive disdain.

2. La poesía quechua was substantially revised and then reissued in 1961 under a new title, La literatura de los Quechuas. The changes Lara made to the text are extensive: the inclusion of Quechua prose, the expansion of the anthology, the elimination of certain sections of the essay, particularly those sections that most polemically engaged the political context of the 1940s. A comparison of the two versions would yield a very fruitful study of the significant changes in the political landscape of Bolivia in the intervening years, most notably the advent of the 1952 revolution, and Lara's own engagement with the Communist Party.

3. In addition to accusing Lara of becoming a "venal merchant" ["un comerciante venal"] of folkloristic indigenista literature, and thus of selling out his indigenous heritage, Reinaga's primary reason for criticizing Lara was because Lara was a Communist, and thus, it seemed to Reinaga, was guilty of advocating a "Bolshevik" model for Bolivian Indians that was as foreign to their reality as any other form of assimilation. Only Lara's La poesía quechua was exempt from this charge (Reinaga 106). Lara's novel Surumi, it should be noted, was published a full decade before Lara joined the Communist Party.

4. Notable examples include Lara's own Repete (1937); Augusto Guzmán, Prisionero de guerra (1937); Oscar Cerruto, Aluvión de fuego (1935); Augusto Céspedes, Sangre de mestizos (1936).


5. See Gotkowitz for an excellent analysis of the political landscape of this period, and for the complex positions adopted by the military governments vis-à-vis Indian issues.

6. Rama writes, “To advance the systematic ordering project of the absolute monarchs, to facilitate the concentration and hierarchical differentiation of power, and to carry out the civilizing mission assigned to them, the cities of Latin America required a specialized group...we will call this group “the lettered city” (17).

7. Román de la Campa, for example, points out that Rama’s model homogenizes the complexity of colonial discursive practices (de la Campa 31), while Julio Ramos argues for the need for a more nuanced account of the transformations to the lettered city in the late nineteenth century, when the consolidation of nation-states entailed the reorganization of discursive spheres and their differentiation in substantially new ways (for instance, the development of academic fields instrumentally tied to state administration, and the consequent depoliticization of intellectuals and the ‘republic of letters’) (Ramos 62-72).

8. Notable examples drawn from Lara’s own bibliography include: J.M.B. Farfán, Poesía folklórica quechua; Rigoberto Paredes, El arte folklórico de Bolivia; Ricardo Rojas, Himnos quechuas; Luis Alberto Sánchez, Historia de la literatura americana.

9. Lara refers here among others to Gabriel René Moreno, one of the most important intellectual figures of Bolivia’s late-nineteenth century, and Nataniel Aguirre, a writer whose novelistic account of Cochabamba’s role in the wars of Independence, Juan de la Rosa (1885), is a foundational classic of Bolivian literature.



10. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, pongueaje and other forms of forced labor (and tribute as well) were legally abolished and then subsequently reinstated various times. As late as 1945 it was once again formally abolished by President Villaroel. Nevertheless, despite these legal attempts to abolish it, the practice continued to flourish until 1952. See Reyerros 127-150.

11. This description of the base condition of the pongo is strikingly similar to one offered by Alcides Arguedas, in his Historia general de Bolivia, which he reproduces from an 1869 text La situación: “Un pongo es el ser más parecido al hombre, es casi una persona, pero pocas veces, hace el oficio de tal, generalmente es una cosa. Es algo menos de lo que los romanos llamaban ‘res.’ El pongo camina sobre dos pies, porque no le han mandado que lo haga de cuatro, habla, ríe, come, y, más que todo, obedece; no estoy seguro si piensa...Pongo es sinónimo de obediencia, es el más activo, más humilde, más sucio y glotón de todos los animales de la creación” (Arguedas 300).

12. see Gotkowitz 220-234 for more on these debates.

Morrison Library Inaugural Address Series

No. 1: Antonio Cornejo-Polar, *The Multiple Voices of Latin American Literature*, 1994

No. 2: Laura Pérez, *Reconfiguring Nation and Identity: U.S. Latina and Latin American Women's Oppositional Writing*, 1995

No. 3: Loïc J.D. Wacquant, *The Passion of the Pugilist: Desire and Domination in the Making of Prize-fighters*, 1995, Will not be published.

No. 4: Kathleen McCarthy, *He Stoops to Conquer: The Lover as Slave in Roman Elegy*, 1996

No. 5: Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Mamelukes in Paris: Fashionable Trophies of Failed Napoleonic Conquest*, 1996

No. 6: Cathryn Carson, *Building Physics after World War II: Lawrence and Heisenberg*, 1997

No. 7: Kerwin Klein, *Apocalypse Noir, Carey McWilliams and Posthistorical California*, 1997

No. 8: Ralph J. Hexter, *The Faith of Achates: Finding Aeneas' Other*, 1997

No. 9: Albert Russell Ascoli, *'Faith' as Cover Up: An Ethical Fable from Early Modern Italy*, 1997

No. 10: Kate van Orden, *Street Songs and Cheap Print During the French Wars of Religion*, 1998

No. 11: David Henkin, *Sheets and Streets: The Daily Paper in Nineteenth-Century Urban America*, 1998

No. 12: Nicholas Paige, *Writing Interiority: Some Speculations on Gender and Autobiographical Authority in Seventeenth-Century French Mysticism*, 1998

No. 13: David Hult, *Manuscript Transmission, Reception and Canon Formation: The Case of Chrétien de Troyes*, 1998

No. 14: José Rabasa, *Franciscans and Dominicans Under the Gaze of a Tlacuilo: Plural-World Dwelling in an Indian Pictorial Codex*, 1998

No. 15: William Taylor, *Our Lady of Guadalupe and Friends: The Virgin Mary in Colonial Mexico City*, 1999

No. 16: José Luiz Passos, *Machado de Assis' Library: Drama and Deception in the Rise of Brazilian Realism*, 1999

No. 17: Linda H. Rugg, *Male Reproductive Rights: Mark Twain, August Strindberg, and Literary Paternity*, 1999

No. 18: Richard Halpern, *An Impure History of Ghosts: Shakespeare, Marx, Derrida*, 2000

No. 19: Pheng Cheah, *Chinese Cosmopolitanism in Two Senses and Postcolonial National Memory*, 2000

No. 20: David William Bates, *Creative negations: Defining the space of politics in revolutionary France*, 2000

