

# Deep rivers essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Deep Rivers can be seen as an allegory for historical conflicts in South America. The novel can be seen as a symbolic narrative of not only the problems that Indians faced in Peruvian society, but also Jose Argueda's childhood and his struggle to find his identity. Deep Rivers is beneficial to the reader because it is a first hand account of the problems that Indians faced in Peru, thus allowing the reader to make a deeper connection to the novel and understand what was going on at that date and time.

Through the narrator of the novel one begins to truly understand the injustice that Native Americans faced and understand how the author (Arguedas) viewed this dilemma. The book intricately works in symbolism, and if the reader can grasp the symbolism, they can truly grasp the novel. Jose Maria Arguedas was born in 1911 in Peru's south-central highlands, an area in which the culture of the Quechua Indians has remained vital despite the Spanish Conquest and exploitation of the native peoples. Though Arguedas's family belonged to the white Hispanic upper class, they were poor.

His mother died when Arguedas was two years old, and his father, an itinerant lawyer, whose clients were mostly Indians and mestizos, remarried shortly thereafter. According to Arguedas, his stepmother and her family hated him and often sent him to the Indian kitchen of the household, where he was welcomed and loved by the Indian servants and where he learned the Quechua language. For the rest of his life, Arguedas felt an attachment to the Quechua, and that helped shape his work. (Portocarrero)

Deep Rivers is a novel about a young man, Ernesto, in Peruvian Andean society in the 1920s. Apart from the pressures of growing up, Ernesto must come to terms with the antagonism between the dominant white society to which he belongs racially, and the Quechua society in which he was raised. Though it isn't stated in the book, Ernesto is a character obviously based on Arguedas himself, so one could come to the reasonable conclusion that the story is a tale of Argueda's childhood. As stated previously, symbolism is a key literary device throughout the novel.

The first form of symbolism is the title of the novel, and the word "river". Arguedas starts the novel with a great example of the significance of rivers throughout the novel. As stated on page six, "I touched the stone with my hands, following the line, which was as undulating and unpredictable as a river...(Arguedas, 6)." You might not get the importance of the quote, but Ernesto does not fully understand at this moment exactly what the walls and other Andean symbols will come to mean for him, the experience however, reveals a key insight to Quechua thinking.

Two apparently unrelated phenomena can be identified as a single process; In this case, the stillness associated with rocks and the movement associated with water. Basically, all things are related or share the same essence. Stillness allows us to notice movement, and without movement, the concept of stillness evaporates. This thought is then continued shortly after when Ernesto comments on his father's dilemma. "When my father confronted his enemies, and even more when he stood contemplating the mountains from the town plazas and it seemed as if rivers of tears might flow from his blue eyes... (Page 7).

I believe the mountains are set to represent his fathers beliefs and morals, and that the river represents his emotions. My reason for this is that your beliefs and morals are like a mountain, sturdy and strong, and your emotions are like a river, something you cannot control nor change. The “ River” stands for more than just what you might think. It is a symbol to follow your beliefs and shy away from the crowd. Ernesto could choose to join his peers in their un-holly and disgusting deeds such as rape, but instead he visits the river and bridge to cleanse his sole.

The river cannot be moved by man, it is on it’s own path, sort of like Ernesto. He doesn’t follow the pack; he sets his own beliefs even when they are contrary to his peers, such as when his friendship with Antero is ended over their different views of the “ rebellion”. He knows he needs only himself, he even says so in the novel, “ On those days I decided I didn’t need my little friends. I was exalted by my decision to march along invincibly. Like you, Pachacha River! ” Last but not least, I believe the title of the book has to do with the Colonos.

Their arrival is like a river. Nothing has been able to stop them, not even armed guards. They are the deep rivers of the novel, triumphantly chasing the plague out of the city with bravery and song. Despite the fact that like a river the colonols may seem passive, Ernesto realizes that, when motivated, the colonos are capable of great deeds. The social and political conditions that affect the characters in Arguedas’s novel are rooted in Peru’s colonial past. Before the Conquest the native population of Peru lived in cities or, for the most part, in small farming communities.

These communities were subdivided into ayllus, a word from the Quechua language that primarily refers to an extended family and the land that they tend to together. Ayllu land was separated into three parts. All produce from the first part was reserved for use by the community. (Jacobs) A second part was stored in community warehouses to be used in case of crop failure or famine within the community itself or in other communities. A third part was owed to the Inca, and used by the army, the empire's administrators, and the numerous male and female priests. (Seligmann)

The Spanish monarchy immediately took advantage of the native social structure, modifying it to their needs as a colonizing nation that lacked mineral resources, agricultural products, and, of course, gold to finance the wars occurring in Europe during this period. The land was not allocated to the Spaniard; rather the natives in a given area were entrusted to him. They owed him tribute in the form of labor or goods, and in return he owned them protection and religious instruction. Meanwhile, the land, formerly the property of the Indian community as a whole, now belonged to the Spanish king.

The natives were expected to work the soil as before. Stripped of their fundamental source of income (their farm produce), they became de facto slaves, forced to work for others on land that was formerly theirs. (Jacobs) Arguedas made a huge effort to correct the view that the native Andean people passively accepted the abuses of the hacienda system, an assumption that Ernesto makes about the colonos living near him in the novel. This view is not true. Revolts were frequent during all phases of the colonial and republican periods while the hacienda system was in existence.

The most famous was the revolt of Tupac Amaru II, whose Christian name was Jose Gabriel Condorcanqui. Born during the colonial period, Tupac Amaru belonged to a noble Inca family. Reacting to the abuse of his people, he led a revolt that nearly succeeded in driving the Spanish colonists from Cuzco and Peru. However, because his army lacked weapons and he himself was reluctant to attack the capital of the former Inca Empire, he was defeated and captured by the Spanish. (Jacobs) In the 1950s Peru was experiencing a social uprising that still has not come to an end.

The Indian populations had begun to demand their basic human rights. Finally there were a sufficient number of people from Indian origin who had received basic education, knew about laws, and demanded protection under them. Arguedas was well aware of these movements. Indeed, he was a friend of Hugo Blanco who was, at the time, leading a guerrilla movement in the sierra. With the success of the Cuban revolution of 1959, one year after the publication of *Deep Rivers*, agitation for social change in Peru became even more demanding. Programs of reform were introduced that, at last, eliminated the hacienda system.

As for Arguedas himself, though he pushed for many of the reforms initiated by Peru's socialist and communist parties, he refrained from joining them because he felt that they were based too much on European models of history and were not made practical enough to the Andean reality. He has consequently been criticized for advocating a return to an "Inca utopia." But a careful reading of his works shows that this was not really the case. His conviction was rather that before the peoples of Peru could come together they had to learn to respect one another's culture and beliefs. (Seligmann)

Deep Rivers are large, they swirl, over flow their banks, are mysterious, and are capable of carrying away all human impurities. In Arguedas novel, typhus kills the poorest Quechua Indians as they flee a hacienda. The bridge that divides the mestizos from the Indians is also how the disease spread.

Arguedas believes that these poor Indians would rise up, against the violence and injustice they faced. Arguedas rejected the fact that there had to be a dominant class over the other. He believed in a future with room for difference without integration, or assimilation. He believed in equality.