

**Inconceivable Saviors: Indigeneity and Childhood in U.S. and Andean Literature**

by

Emily Metz-Cherné

B.A., Weber State University, 2002

M.A., University of Pittsburgh, 2007

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This dissertation was presented

by

Emily Metz-Cherné

It was defended on

April 15, 2013

and approved by

John Beverley, Distinguished Professor, Hispanic Languages and Literatures

Elizabeth Monasterios, Associate Professor, Hispanic Languages and Literatures

Susan Andrade, Associate Professor, English

Marah Gubar, Associate Professor, English

Dissertation Advisor: Gonzalo Lamana, Associate Professor, Hispanic Languages and

Literatures

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**INCONCEIVABLE SAVIORS:  
CHILDHOOD AND INDIGENIETY IN U.S. AND ANDEAN LITERATURE**

Emily Metz-Cherné, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2013

This dissertation explores the question of indigenous development and its literary representation through an investigation of depictions of growth in novels from the United States and Peru where boys mature, perhaps, into men. I find that texts with adolescent characters intimately connected to indigenous communities challenge western concepts of maturity and development as presented in the traditional *Bildungsroman*. Specifically, I read José María Arguedas's *Los ríos profundos* (1958) and Sherman Alexie's *Flight* (2007) as parodies of the genre that call into question the allegory of a western civilizing mission with its lineal trajectory of growth in which the indigenous is relegated to an uncivilized time before modernity. I describe the protagonists of these novels as inconceivable saviors; inconceivable in that the West cannot imagine them, as indigenous, to be the saviors of the nation (i.e., its protectors and reproducers). They are border-thinkers who live in-between epistemological spaces and the stories of their lives serve as kinds of border-*Bildungsromane*, narratives of growth that arise in the blurred time/space of a border culture, or Bil(*dung*)sroman, stories of the abject or expelled. Arguedas's and Alexie's narratives confront the issue of race, a problem that allegories of the consolidation and development of the nation (e.g., *Bildungsroman* and foundational fictions) evade through magical means by turning the form into a fetish and presenting fetishized fetal origins that offer reassurances of legitimacy for the western narrative of modernity and the nation-state. That is, the traditional form acts like

a talisman that magically disappears the fragmentation of coloniality by providing a history to hold on to, creating an origin that does not really exist. Instead of conforming to the model of the genre or rejecting it, Arguedas's and Alexie's texts yield to the power of the original form, appearing to tell the familiar story while carrying a subversive message. Their power derives from the uncertainty inherent in this mimesis. In this way, these novels encourage readers to question the maturation process as conceived and represented in the west and in western literature and to consider alternative paths and formations of self.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

You can't understand the world without telling a story.  
—Gerald Vizenor in *Winged Words*

So is the right of identity simply a privilege of power?  
—Thomas King in *The Truth About Stories*

This project primarily focuses on the depiction of growth in novels from the United States and Peru where boys mature, or supposedly mature, into men. Such novels of formation are often referred to as the narrative form of the *Bildungsroman*. In agreement with scholars who recognize the *Bildungsroman* as allegorically representing the tale of growth of a people or community within modernity, I recognize the symbolic function of the form as reassuring the legitimacy of the narrative of modernity, including the path for entry into and participation in the nation-state.<sup>1</sup> I find that texts with adolescent characters intimately connected to indigenous communities challenge western concepts of maturity and development.<sup>2</sup> Although these texts

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Franco Moretti, Jed Esty, and Joseph Slaughter.

<sup>2</sup> By development, I mean the conviction in a universal order that marks achievement as the autonomous movement along a single fixed path in which the accumulation of matter (increase in size, strength and property) and western knowledge (increase in self, national, and cultural understanding) results in maturity on personal, national, and global levels. This definition may seem self-evident. However, clearly outlining development highlights the particularity of the western concept of maturity and calls attention to the role of development in the construction of hierarchies of power. People or cultures that do not move along this course are deemed backward and seem to struggle to reach the goal of development: maturity—a time/space where one can enact power. Non-western notions of development offer similar but distinct understandings of how one becomes an active member of the community. For example, in their study of Aymara socialization, Denise Arnold and Juan de Dios Yapita discuss the importance of *thakhi* (pathways), a series of developmental and social stages that lead to *jaqichasiña* (becoming a person). As in the bourgeois *Bildungsroman*, the pathways of *thakhi* highlight the movement through the *ayllu*'s “formal institutions that structure the relations of teaching and learning and of gender and age groups and facilitate the

appear to fit the standard account of a boy's coming-of-age, they actually parody it. This performance and imitation of the genre jeopardizes the legitimacy of modernity's own story of development symbolically represented in the *Bildungsroman*, encouraging readers to reevaluate the western model and to think beyond this paradigm.

Belief in the western concept of development makes permissible Mitt Romney's comment that "[c]ulture makes all the difference" when considering the economic disparities between countries such as the United States and Mexico (quoted in Rucker and Greenberg). Romney's remark, said openly on the 2012 campaign trail for the highest governmental position in the United States, demonstrates the perseverance of an epistemological frame that is self-supportive in its own reassurance of legitimacy. That is, his comment highlights a western tendency to verify superiority (maturity), and thus legitimate authority, by marking cultural differences as inferiorities. In addition, the comment reveals an ignorance of modernity's darker side, coloniality. Alongside modernity's logic of progress and culture runs coloniality's logic of economic, political, and epistemological domination.

Following along with Romney's reflections, one might imply that culture makes all the difference as to why Indians are less successful than white men. Colonists have employed this perception to authenticate their domination of indigenous peoples for centuries, classifying Indians as uncivilized, savage, barbarian, childish, etc. Antonello Gerbi traces the European narrative of the inferiority of the Americas (including its native inhabitants) in *The Dispute of the*

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socialization and integration of individuals into society" (Arnold and Yapita 119). However, in the Andes the body holds precedence over intellect as the essential element in socialization (132). Arnold and Yapita note that as with "other Amerindian groups, the development of personal capability depends on capturing a surplus of the exogenous energy that exists in the world" (132). They focus on the cycles of ontological depredation in the Andes, describing Andean ideas of growth in terms of the processes of capturing external energies and phagocytosis (99-100). Moreover, in the community they study, "ideas about the body, being and knowing, and growth and development all have textual homologues in cloth rather than paper" (112). Thus, while an Aymara concept of growth appears similar to a western one, the two concepts have their own set of knowledges and processes for learning as well as distinct symbolic forms.

*New World*. Not only did the theorists that Gerbi studies consider America as developmentally retarded, but as incapable of reproducing.<sup>3</sup> In this view, America and its inhabitants are stuck and unable to progress. Childish and impotent, this image of America presents a time/space where growth is inherently restricted.

My research asks what it means for an Indian to develop. To address this question, I explore stories in which adolescent protagonists connected to both white and indigenous cultures appear to grow up within western society. Specifically, I describe the protagonists of José María Arguedas's *Los ríos profundos* (1958) and Sherman Alexie's *Flight* (2007) as *inconceivable saviors*, inconceivable in that the West cannot imagine them, as indigenous, to be the saviors of the nation (i.e., its protectors and reproducers). That is, as Indians, these children are not supposed to grow up. If they do, they do so by supposedly moving away from their primitiveness (immaturity) into the realm of the adult white male. I employ close readings of these novels to examine if and how Ernesto and Zits seek accommodation in the white community around them. Unlike other readings of these novels that conclude that the characters progress through the path of the western *Bildungsroman* and thus move away from childhood and the indigenous,<sup>4</sup> I find that they elude the binary of childish Indian/White adult. The protagonists do not embrace one way of living or another, but instead come to terms with their shifting positions and remain part of an "ever changing synthesis" (Alexie "Sherman Alexie on 9/11").

The conclusions of these novels are key for understanding their representations of growth. One way they diverge from the traditional *Bildungsroman* is that both novels end before

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<sup>3</sup> He notes the concept of an immature and impotent America: "Immature, in each case [for Buffon and Hegel], meant the not yet systematized, the imperfectly known, or the continent of which man's knowledge was *immature*. But America's privilege of impotence remains intact: 'America has always shown itself and still shows itself physically and spiritually impotent'" (426).

<sup>4</sup> I discuss these readings in more detail in the chapters that follow. Two examples are Julia Kushigian's reading of *Los ríos profundos*, which considers Ernesto as undergoing the process of *Bildung* (136), and Jeffery Melnick's reading of *Flight*, which takes at face value the protagonist's acquiescence into the western social order.

the characters reach maturity. However, this does not mean the characters have failed their initiation into society. Instead it reflects the characters' continuing negotiations between spaces and an acceptance of the instability of their positions. Since the stories are truncated while the characters are still adolescents—still subordinate to their caregivers and not part of the adult superstructure surrounding them—the expectation that they will continue to grow and survive in western society is left as a condition of possibility. Zits is *beginning* to think he has a chance (*Flight* 180) and Ernesto waits on a bridge, believing he *will be* safe and thinking that if “los colonos...habían aniquilado a la fiebre, quizá, desde lo alto del puente la vería pasar arrastrada por la corriente” (Arguedas, *Los ríos profundos* 318). These conclusions present movement into a future where hope is not discounted, but it is also not affirmed. Although they may grow out of childhood, they will continue to be marked as different or will continue to feel a connection to an indigenous identity. The unsettled internal conflicts of these characters at the conclusions of the novels suggest that these tensions will follow them into adulthood.

The narratives end with the characters approaching an awareness of their divided position. Gloria Anzaldúa expresses a similar self-reflection in *Borderlands/La Frontera* when she explains:

[I]t is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions.... Because the counter-stance stems from a problem with authority—outer as well as inner—it's a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life. At some point...we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once. (100)

Unlike the heroes of traditional *Bildungsroman*, the characters in Arguedas's and Alexie's novels present children who may maintain the label of *undeveloped* into adulthood. They are in the process of healing the split Anzaldúa describes by finding ways to survive without losing the indigenous pieces of themselves that conflict with the western idea of maturity. In their uncertain positions, these protagonists challenge the western notions of development and adulthood along with the responsibilities that supposed proper aging carries with it such as power, authority, and knowledge.

Putting into dialogue theories of race and childhood in a literary analysis, I propose that racialized children in the stories of my corpus symbolize threatening colonial inheritances that disrupt the integrity of North and South American states' constructions of indigeneity. Through their awareness of coloniality these characters hold within themselves the contradictions of an unmarked liberal nation-state. These children blur the discursive line set by white adult authorities within the texts between who is and who is not indigenous, racialized, and inferior. Thus, they enact white social anxieties about the incorporation of indigenous communities into the state and also destabilize state constructions of national heritage that romanticize, vilify, or exclude indigenous history. Racialized children, even more so than marked adults, suggest particular uncertainties about threats of colonial inheritances. The child protagonists I study are the *potential* to be both a safeguard and a detriment to a white liberal nation. Being connected to indigenous and western cultures, these children do not represent one phenomenon or the other, but the possibility of both. By containing and assimilating marked children, the state employs them in the regeneration of the nation-state. Integrated indigenous children exemplify the possibility of a liberal (multicultural) state in which all—with proper socialization—grow-up to be equal. At the same time, however, racial difference puts such neutral growth in question,

suggesting an illusionary equality because indigenous children remain sites of the specter of colonialism as well as the possibility of alternative memories and discourses that contest dominant white constructions of the national community. Racialized children are inconceivable saviors of the nation-state because their racial difference hampers their ability to fully integrate into dominant white society, to assume white adult responsibilities necessary to stimulate the nation's progress, and to grow into (supposedly) unmarked, independent citizens.

This restricted growth contrasts with the characters' status as children or adolescents, classifications based on *age* that point to development, change, and movement toward an end of dependency. Whereas categories of gender, race, and class often "retain some experiential boundedness" (Sánchez-Eppler xxv), childhood is often conceived as liminal. Its transitoriness accentuates the ability to be *in-between*—to be not one thing or the other, but both. Thus, studying childhood allows for an analysis of negotiations in border spaces, including racial binaries like white/Indian that seem to preserve some "boundedness" (Sánchez-Eppler). The child protagonists indicate that we should read these texts not as *mestizo*, indigenous, or hybrid expressions of the nation in which the novels represent the force or emergence of one race or culture in contrast to others. Instead, we can examine how these texts demonstrate the power in the intersections of and negotiations between borders and the possibility of thinking from such spaces.<sup>5</sup> By doing so, we can reevaluate our conceptions of the relationships between childhood, race, and the nation-state.

Emphasizing the importance of the Child appears to conflict with the idea that the *Bildungsroman* tells the story of an evolution of a person's life and contrasts with other criticism

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<sup>5</sup> Walter Mignolo employs the term "border thinking" to describe thinking that arises in the borders of the colonial/modern world system. Border thinking creates spaces to craft "an other thinking" (Mignolo, *Local* 66); these are the spaces where the discourse of modernity "cracks" (Mignolo, *Local* 23).

that stresses the role of the journey in the development of the self.<sup>6</sup> The *Bildungsroman* does tell the story of the unfolding of a person, but in a tautological-teleological framework that fixes growth along a specific path.<sup>7</sup> For example, the boy traditionally grows into a heterosexual man. In his study of the genre, Jerome Hamilton Buckley goes so far as to outline the course the protagonist takes, which he says includes moving from the county to the city, having at least two love affairs, and returning home in the end to measure his degree of success (17-18). In laying out the standard path, Buckley's *Bildungsroman* blueprint actually deemphasizes the journey because it seems so cookie-cutter that one protagonist's journey is just an imprint of the last guy's. Discussing the Child focuses on the idea of genesis in a genre where the journey and conclusion often take precedence.

Ultimately, I read Arguedas's and Alexie's stories as playing a parodic game with the narrative form of the *Bildungsroman*. In other words, I argue they are not *Bildungsromane*. Nor are they anti-*Bildungsromane*. *Los ríos profundos* and *Flight* challenge the genre and its portrayal of modernity's lineal trajectory of growth, in which the indigenous is relegated to an uncivilized time before modernity. Their protagonists are border-thinkers who live in between epistemological spaces and the stories of their lives could be described as kinds of border-*Bildungsromane*, stories of growth that arise in the blurred time/space of a border culture. Instead of conforming to the model of the genre or rejecting it, they yield to the power of the original form appearing to tell the familiar story and yet carrying a different message. Their power derives from the uncertainty arising from this mimesis. In this way, these novels encourage

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Yolanda Doub focuses on travel in the Spanish American *Bildungsroman*, arguing that "the self is formed in large part *through* the journeys" and thus "the interactions that occur on the road or during the journey are relevant to the *Bildung* process" (9).

<sup>7</sup> See Joseph Slaughter for more on the tautology and teleology of the form.



readers to question or reconsider the maturation process as conceived and represented in the west and in western literature.

Specifically, I consider Arguedas's novel as a form of Andean energy and light known as *illa* and Alexie's novel as a kind of trickster discourse based on a western form of potty training. One can read Arguedas's novel as functioning as a parody that works like an *illa* light—indirect, distorting, and insurgent. The novel itself serves as an *illa* force, making it a particular kind of border-*Bildungsroman*, an *illaroman*. I also argue that Ernesto is a form of *illa*. Thus, even though he is a child connected to the Indigenous—or from another perspective, *because of this*—Ernesto is a powerful and *cultured* member of the community. In a similar way, Alexie presents a character who is not simply a passive object of assimilation but an active participant within the process of the trickster parrot discourse of *elimination communication* or EC. In short, EC describes the performance of assimilation that allows the abject other to enter into the “*production of modern discourse*” (Deloria 238). Alexie thus maintains his colonial critique in a novel that appears to support the idea of white superiority. Through these differing discursive techniques Arguedas's and Alexie's novels work toward the similar objective of encouraging readers to reevaluate form and content by taking the original and presenting it back to readers in a deformed or contorted way.

## 1.1 FOR THE BIRDS

They shall die gruesome deaths; they shall not be lamented nor shall they be buried, *but* they shall be like refuse on the face of the earth. They shall be consumed by the sword and by famine, and their corpses shall be meat for the birds of heaven and for the beasts of the earth.

—Jeremiah 16:4

*That's shit for the birds.* The terse phrase refers to something worthless, trivial, or undesirable. It also pairs two themes that have repeatedly popped up in the course of this investigation: the abject and the avian. In *Los ríos profundos*, filth fills the pages that describe the school lavatory and the town of Abancay under an attack of typhus-infested fleas. At the same time, birds metaphorically carry the protagonist Ernesto away into a realm of song.<sup>8</sup> The title of Sherman Alexie's *Flight* and the nickname of his protagonist, Zits, spotlight both terms. These two stories describe characters that one could consider *Aves sin nido*. They are without a solid home base, orphan or orphan-like, social outsiders, connected intimately with the Indigenous, and at the fringes of dominant white society. Moreover, these stories of an Indian coming-of-age, are they not, supposedly, something *for the birds*, that is, a trivial aspect of modernity's civilizing project? It seems cliché to say the savage must become the man through white discourse. And these characters, are they too, for white civilization, just *for the birds*—undesirable and worthless?

This project pays particular attention to two narratives *for the birds*. That is not to say they are worthless or trivial.<sup>9</sup> Despite their differences, I argue that both novels assume symbolic legitimacy from what appears to be compliance with the formulaic model of the genre they seem to recreate. The characters of these novels are not the standard protagonists of the *Bildungsroman*, but the abject and excluded and in recognition of this position, they can enter into dialogue with the form they mimic and the symbolic power it presents. In this light, these

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<sup>8</sup> Estelle Tarica pays close attention to the importance of song in the novel, examining how the narrator describes his origin in an “immaterial region of song” (96).

<sup>9</sup> Although, chiefly in Alexie's case, critics have argued that the story is so cliché that it is not really worth our time. This differs from Arguedas's novel, which is widely considered his best piece of fiction (notes). This distinction highlights one the various elements that mark each novel as unique.

stories are not *Bildungsroman*—novels of formation (of the self/society)—but Bil(dung)sroman. While *Bildungsroman* focuses on *Bildung*, that magical and untranslatable German word that describes a lofty sense of self-becoming, *dung* is the expelled in the process of digestion or incorporation. The phrase Bil(dung)sroman then draws attention to modernity's need to expel in order to tell the tale of its development.

But this is not just a study of abjection. The avian also plays an important role. By avian, I do not literally mean birds. Although these winged creatures appear in both Arguedas's and Alexie's novels. The bird theme goes in many directions. First, birds take flight. That is, they have a freedom inconceivable to those confined to the earth. Their perspective and viewpoint is unique and they have exceptional mobility. Thus, the avian theme connects to the idea of border-thinking, the characters abilities to move and live between spaces and epistemologies. Second, flying birds are in a space (ideally) free of the abject. In fact, in the air, birds are the ones to cast down on earth their own expulsions. Therefore, one could view the avian theme as connected to cleansing (like the Christian dove) or at least movement away from the abject. Third, as mentioned above, these characters share an inheritance with Clorinda Matto de Turner's orphaned protagonists in *Aves sin nido*. That is, their connection to an indigenous origin appears threatened and, without strong roots to a family, it seems that to survive, they *must* incorporate into their only option: white western society, modernity. But, these birds without a nest do not merely reproduce the model of the *Bildungsroman*, but actually parody it. This leads to the fourth point about the avian in relation to these texts, which is that they act as a special kind of bird: *the parrot*, who repeats back the authoritative discourse in a distinct and peculiar voice.

I argue that these novels are parodies of traditional *Bildungsroman*. My discussion of parody leans towards a broad interpretation of the term and considers it more than just an

imitation designed for comic effect or ridicule.<sup>10</sup> Rather, I employ the concept of parody to describe an imitation that yields to the power (authority, legitimacy) of an original source and, at the same time, provokes the reader to question the stability of this power. In other words, in copying another text the parody seems to acknowledge the authority of the original, conforming to its standards. However, this repetition is not without some distance and the imitative act actually works to shed light on the uncertainty of the legitimacy founded in the original.<sup>11</sup>

The *uncertainty* of parody is one of its fundamental traits and plays an important role within my project. Parody makes the reader consider the volatility of the criteria of the *Bildungsroman* form and the symbolic legitimacy it represents. As Robert Phiddian describes, parody is “crooked, reflexive writing, with the instability of irony inscribed deep in its structure” (683). He emphasizes that parody is an “unstable process” (684) and stresses parody’s ability to expose the artifice of language suggesting that the first lesson of parody is to “defamiliarize, to show that language forms, distorts, and masks the world, that it is an impure medium and that

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<sup>10</sup> See Linda Hutcheon and Margaret A. Rose for two studies reflecting a broader scope of parody. As Linda Hutcheon describes, parody serves as “a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion;” it is “repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity” (*A Theory* 6).

<sup>11</sup> One may argue that Alexie and Arguedas do not intentionally engage in parody. That is, their aim was never to critically reproduce the western story of growth. Indeed, I have found no evidence that this had been their objective in the writing of these novels—and even I had found such evidence, there would be no way to know for sure if the authors were telling the truth, especially in the case of Alexie whose interviews often seem to become performances. I cannot argue for how Arguedas and Alexie intend for readers to perceive their stories. I can only point out the ways I see the texts as encouraging readers to read them in certain, parodic ways. Margaret A. Rose notes that in addition to imitation, a key component in parody is the “creation of comic incongruity or discrepancy,” which the reader must recognize (31). Rose explains that humor often arises when an incongruity destroys a reader’s expectation (34). Much of Alexie’s humor stems from the tension between reader expectations (or stereotypes) and what they encounter in his text. Rose advises that readers should interpret comic effects as intentional; if it is unintentional, it is not parody (37, footnote 126). This differs slightly with what I argue here in that I stress the uncertainty of the interpretation and the power of parody to generate “critical perspectives dependent on reader competence and response” (Phiddian 691). Suggesting that readers *should* assume an intention by the author implies uncertainty of intention and places responsibility on the reader. The role of the reader is particularly important in regards to texts such as Alexie’s because indigenous and white readers may interpret the text in various ways due to cultural differences. Alexie has noted in various interviews that an Indian reader may laugh at something that a white reader does not. He describes these situations as “Indian trapdoors” (Purdy and Alexie 15). Therefore, white readers (like myself) could walk right by intentional “signals for parody” (Rose 35) or mistake something unintentionally humorous as a comic signal for parody.

pure referentiality is a crazy and often dangerous dream” (691). While Phiddian links parody with deconstruction, he also believes that parody “has already seen its way out of the deconstructive impasse that treats language as an endless and odorless play of differences,” noting that parody “shows that there can be no monolithic Scriptural reality, on the one hand, and on the other that there are things beyond texts which texts cannot control the construction and operation of” (691). There is something (someone) that lies beyond the discourse. In the case of my project, colonialism and its aftermath concern the lives of real people. The portrayals of children who negotiate cultural and racial boundaries point to bodies (marked by both race and age) that exist outside the text. The instability of parody draws attention to the disjuncture between real bodies and their representations shattering the authenticity of both an authoritative discourse and its image of a real Indian.

While I discuss *Los ríos profundos* and *Flight* as parodies of an original form, the genre itself is illusive. It is a fantasy fraught with its own issues of mimicry, imitation, and ambiguity. Instead of a form with obvious origins or clear examples, a search for the traditional *Bildungsroman* reveals “an empty synthesis” with “numberless beginnings” and a “liberating profusion of lost events” (Foucault, “Nietzsche” 81). Marc Redfield claims that, like an intangible ghost invented and sustained by theory and criticism, it “does not properly exist” (vii). This phantom, however, is a *fetish* and is therefore pervasive more so because we conjure it than because it creeps back to haunt us. As a fetish the reassurance of legitimacy it provides derives from western magic, not western rationality.

The *Bildungsroman* as fetish draws its powers from sources beyond its pages. One may follow Roberto González Echevarría’s line of reasoning in *Myth and Archive* that as novels *Bildungsromane* have no “fixed form” of their own and therefore must assume “that of a given

kind of document endowed with truth-bearing power by society at specific moments in time” (8). Echevarría pays particular attention to the novel’s mimicry of legal, scientific, and anthropologic discourses. He explains that the novel does not mimic reality, but “a given discourse that has already ‘mirrored’ reality” (8). Thus, when analyzing the origin (or copy), critics enter a hall of mirrors in which reality always lies beyond a perpetual series of reflections. Echevarría talks about imitation not parody, however following my employment of parody as outlined above, one could extrapolate to say that the novel *parodies* extra-literary sources in order to gain reassurance of legitimacy.<sup>12</sup> In the case of the *Bildungsroman*, one could argue that it molds itself after a testimony or record of a person’s life. Interestingly, criticism of the genre often plays out in psychoanalytic terms, as if the novel were a client that had recounted his life and traumas to the critic/analyst. These readings explain the evolution of the fictional characters through a western expert hegemonic discourse, an act that compliments and bolsters both analyses of growth.<sup>13</sup> A search for the origin of the *Bildungsroman* is more than a quest through literary sources. It reaches into the history of the modern concept of development and maturity where psychoanalysis has assumed a prominent role.

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<sup>12</sup> Parody, as Phiddian notes, “can involve not just a particular aesthetic object, but many kinds of discourse within its own structure” such as the legal and scientific ones Echevarría explores. Phiddian goes on to explain that the “crucial point for parody is that the body of words is always preloved and redirected” (683).

<sup>13</sup> Thus, it seems that criticism also mimics documents “endowed with truth-bearing power by society at specific moments in time” (Echevarría 8). For example, Franco Moretti observes the *Bildungsroman*’s imitation of other discourses when he remarks that “[n]o socialization of the individual will ever be convincing if it lacks a symbolic legitimation: if it cannot justify itself with values held to be fundamental such as those...converged around the idea and practice of law” (208). In particular, he finds the eighteenth-century English version of the form “seems to justify itself as a form in so far as it duplicates the proceedings of a trial” (212). An interesting aspect of Moretti’s analysis is his focus on the fairytale-like aspect of this courtroom-like structure. He mentions that the “clearcut and unquestionable value structure” of these novels in which the world is divided into good and evil is “most suited” for fairytales and childhood (213). Using the findings of psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, who studied the relationship between fairytales and children’s development, Moretti explains why the English *Bildungsromane* are so bad—in other words, appealing to children. The novel copies the courtroom and in turn criticism copies psychological readings of fairytales.

Due to the close relationship of the form to criticism (a topic explored by Redfield) it is not just that the *Bildungsroman* represents a literary depiction of the western idea of development, but that criticism perpetuates this image through an authorized discourse. This discourse creates stability on top of shaky ground. Criticism of the *Bildungsroman* threatens to become a form of “radical parody,” which Daniel O’Hara describes as the “the exaggerated imitation of a recognizably characteristic position or style that the parodist in question shares with others by virtue of a network of ideological and professional identifications and associations” (49). Thus criticism not only fails to discover an origin, but also generates a “masquerade” of its own (Foucault, “Nietzsche” 94). Redfield explains that the “persistent return of the problem of the *Bildungsroman* in recent scholarship is a symptom of an instability within criticism,” which “is threatened with an inability to know the status or control the production of its own knowledge. In response to this uncertainty, critics return obsessively to this phantom genre” (56-57). As with parody, the reader assumes a primary role in interpreting and granting meaning. Instead of comic “signals for parody” (Margaret Rose 35), the critic is on the look out for signs of western development (or lack thereof), criteria amusingly produced and sustained by criticism.

Parody is a literary tool for making sense out of a world that does not make much sense. Its “very instability...becomes the means of stabilizing subject matter which is itself unstable and fluid, and parody becomes a major mode of expression for a civilization in a state of transition and flux” (Kiremidjian 242). Marking an example of western development provides a stable image of an uncertain concept. Parodies of the *Bildungsroman* reflect the uncertainty of the genre and all it implies. That is, parody of the form reveals the evasiveness and artificiality of the idea of modernity’s progress and white superiority. In addition, since the *Bildungsroman* is

so sustained by criticism, parody of the form is also a critique of the criticism that validates the story through an expert discourse. That is, it provokes readers to question the authority (the literary critic) who describes and outlines the parameters of the form. Or going beyond that, it incites readers to reevaluate the source of the critic's authority (for example, psychoanalysis). Discussing the play of parody within this narrative form calls it into question, suggesting its instability and encouraging readers to reconsider which story is legitimate and which is just for the birds.

## 1.2 CULTURAL CONSTRUCTIONS: AETONORMATIVITY AND THE CHILD

Authority in the *Bildungsroman*, as in modernity, is located in adulthood. In the aetonormative frame, power originates in the adult world. Aetonormativity refers to adulthood and maturity as the benchmark from which other age classifications and their associated cultural practices depart. Adult normativity marks a child's logic as irrational and an elder's as senile.<sup>14</sup> In the case of parody of the genre, aetonormativity and the adult voice come under scrutiny. The parody disturbs the source of authoritative discourse.

Michael Taussig humorously illustrates the uncertainty of the adult's role in the civilizing process in *Mimesis and Alterity* when he describes the process of training a child:

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<sup>14</sup> Children's literary theory, particularly the work of Maria Nikolajeva, has explored the significance of aetonormativity in relation to child/adult power inequalities. Maria Nikolajeva's work with aetonormativity focuses on children's literature and the power dynamics at play between adult writers and child readers. This concept, however, extends beyond texts written with the direct intent of publication for children. Adulthood as the standard plays an important role in grown-up texts as well, especially in the *Bildungsroman*. One could apply the argument that Nikolajeva makes about children's literature's role as an instrument "to educate, socialize and oppress a particular social group" (13) to texts such as the *Bildungsroman* also written with the intent to serve as models for bourgeois readers.



Adults imitate what they take to be baby talk or childish tones of voice and expression and insert themselves in what they take to be the “child’s world,” playing with the child...patting the dog this way, not that way, eating this way, not that way, and so forth. In fact, the adult is imitating to differing degrees two different things here, one being the child, the other being the dog, the food, the language, and so forth. Control and education comes about by judicious blending of these two realities, moving one into the other and thereby creating new behaviors and understandings. And the child? Does it respond to this with mimicry of mimicry? And what, then, was the adult imitating in the first place....was the adult imitating the child’s mimicry of the adult’s mimicry? In which case we seem to be doing something quite strange, simulating and dissimulating at one and the same time for the sake of our epistemic health and the robust good cheer of realness. (77)

Taussig’s observations reveal an uncertainty of origin of authoritative behaviors. The adult becomes an apparition of authority lost in a cycle of mimicry and the line between adult and child blurs. Taussig’s example highlights how the distinction that appears natural between adult educator and child trainee may not be as clear-cut as it seems. This line is fundamental for the traditional *Bildungsroman*, which reaffirms the power imbalance between child/adult and whose lineal trajectory legitimates aetnormativity. The border-*Bildungsromane* of this corpus work to unsettle aetnormativity through the blurring of the line between boy and man and the rejection of passive representations of children. In doing so, they call into question the binary of child/adult. This deteriorates the foundation of a power structure where the adults are mature and hold authority and the young remain inferior.

Certain generational terms such as *the child* set boundaries that sustain aetnormativity. In his well-known text *Centuries of Childhood*, Philippe Ariès argues that childhood was discovered at the end of the Middle Ages, prior to which “the idea of childhood did not exist” (128).<sup>15</sup> But the line separating a true adult from those below seems to be ever evolving.<sup>16</sup> Childhood, adolescence, and adulthood are culturally constructed and therefore flexible over time and space. In other words, age classifications are not universal concepts but are culturally and politically constructed, making any attempt to define them inadequate.<sup>17</sup> However, a sketch covering a few points regarding childhood, the child, and children will help clarify my use of these terms.

Scholars have defined childhood as “an early phase of the life-course of all people in all societies. It is characterized by rapid physiological and psychological development and represents the beginning of the process of maturation to adulthood” (James and James, *Key Concepts* 22). While childhood is distinguished from adulthood by various physiological characteristics (e.g. babies are physically smaller than adults), the biological aspect of this definition is “interpreted and understood in relation to ideas about children’s needs, welfare, and best interests, which vary between cultures” (James and James, *Key Concepts* 22). Childhood is also a period that adults (parents, the nation) expect to be temporary. Due to the transitoriness

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<sup>15</sup> By marking the historical moment of the emergence of the child in social consciousness, Ariès also establishes a “pre-modern period” before and during the Middle Ages “when children were not segregated into schools and treated like a separate class of citizen” (Browning 7). Thus the idea of childhood becomes a marker of modernity. For further discussions on Ariès’ theories see Linda Pollock, John Morgenstern, Lloyd DeMause, Barbara Hanawalt, and Vasanthi Raman.

<sup>16</sup> For example, in an article published in 2000 Jeffery Jensen Arnett states that more scholarly attention should be paid to the concept of “emerging adulthood.” He locates this semi-adulthood in youth from eighteen to twenty-five years and notes that it is a time in which “many different potential futures remain possible and personal freedom and exploration are higher for most people than at any other time” (479). It thus appears to be an extension of adolescence primarily reserved for the socioeconomically privileged, which one might say is an extension of childhood, which marks the line between responsible authority and dependent inferiority.

<sup>17</sup> Much has been written on the construction of childhood; for example, see *Children and the Politics of Culture*, Allison James and Adrian James *Constructing Childhood*, and *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood*, editor Shirley R. Steinberg.

and variations of the meaning of childhood, it seems that “[o]nly children who somehow remain frozen in time seem to successfully stand for some version of childhood” (Cook 3). It is interesting to note that the temporariness or transitoriness of childhood implies the fallacy of a movement toward some kind of adult stability. Fixing childhood as a liminal state thus is more about adulthood and the desire to set a boundary where one achieves a secure authoritative position.

Thus, I will employ the term *childhood* to refer to an imagined state of youth (from infancy to late adolescence) and *the Child* as a symbolic representation of a young person existing within such a state (a *tabula rasa* upon which we inscribe meaning).<sup>18</sup> In general, *child* and *children* are generic terms that refer to offspring or a condition of subordination in association with youthfulness. I employ the term *adolescent* to refer to a person of teenage years. At the same time, I locate the concept of adolescence under the umbrella of childhood; I do not disconnect adolescence completely from childhood since both are marked as prior to adulthood, adulthood being a condition of utmost maturity and therefore the culmination of self-development. In addition, it is important to note that my use of terms reflects the position of the characters within the texts. Thus in *Aves sin nido*, although Margarita is in her teens and her sister is much younger, both are children—until Margarita falls in love and then becomes a woman. Throughout my analysis, I hope to continue to refine and also to demonstrate the malleability of these designations.

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<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, as Perry Nodelman notes, “real children” exist as readers or potential readers (“Precarious” 5). I believe it is important to recognize these children as actors influencing the construction of childhood, even though they escape our understanding. Similar to the “Other’s face” that Emmanuel Levinas describes, real children interrogate adults, indicating that there is something (someone) that lies beyond the discourse (116). With the “nakedness of his defenseless eyes” the child gains authority by limiting the power of the adult; the child forces the adult to acknowledge an ethical responsibility to the other person, in this case to the child (Levinas 110). No matter how much they are studied, children remain autonomous. It is important to keep in mind that although the texts I study are fiction, part of their significance rests in the ethical encounter with the evasive other (child) occurring outside the texts.

These guidelines establishing general definitions of terms are based on western conceptions. Nonwestern perspectives disturb these notions. For example, in their exploration of the negotiations and intersections between Andean and western concepts of childhood and literacy in *The Metamorphosis of Heads* Denise Arnold and Juan de Dios Yapita explain that some key meanings of the concept *wawa* (baby/child) “refer to states of transition”:

For example, school children as *wawa* mediate between the annual production of the *ayllu* as a form of tribute to the state.... In its widest sense, *wawas* articulate the liminal spaces between opposing domains: masculine and feminine, the defense of what is and what is not one’s own at the *ayllu* limits, the realm of the dead and the living. (93-94)

As in the case of the western idea of childhood, an essential element of the *wawa* is its transitoriness. However, the *wawa* engages in transitions that are not simply progressions in its own development. Instead, the *wawa* is an important factor in cyclical processes, rituals, and seasons; it is an active member of the community who can negotiate between opposing spaces (such as modernity/coloniality).

An alternative view of childhood is also apparent in Arguedas’s final novel, *El zorro de arriba, el zorro de abajo*. He describes childhood in a unique and perplexing way, one which indicates that, for him, *infancia* holds a particular meaning that relates not to a generational age, but a worldview and way of living in the world:

Parece que se me han acabado los temas que alimenta la infancia, cuando es tremenda y se extiende encarnizadamente hasta la vejez. *Una infancia con milenios encima, milenios de historia de gente entremezclada hasta la acidez y la dinamita.*  
Ahora se trata de otra cosa.

Y creo que el intento de suicidio, primero, y luego las ansias por el suicidio fueron tanto por el agotamiento—estoy luchando en un país de halcones y sapos desde que tenía cinco años—como por el susto ante el miedo de tener que escribir sobre lo que se conoce solo a través del *temor y la alegría adultos, y no el zumbar de la mosca que uno percibe apenas el oído se forma*, a través del morder conviviente del piojo en el cuero cabelludo y en la barriga, y en los millones de mordeduras a la raíz y a las ramas todavía tiernas de la suerte, que te dan hombros y ríos, grillos y autoridades hambrientas. (81 emphasis mine)

Arguedas's reflections imply that his employment of childhood is related to an indigenous epistemology and history. He is not describing the noble savage, but explaining a tension between two worlds. Although Arguedas's affinity is toward the Quechua communities of the Andes, his description above evokes similar images found in Aymara philosopher Gamaliel Churata's *El pez de oro*. Both Arguedas's reflections and Churata's writing indicate that the concept of childhood in Andean epistemology does not necessarily match its western form and history.

Instead of presenting childhood as an intermediate or ideal stage of life, Churata presents it as an integral part of human existence not separated from adulthood. The voices and characters of Churata's text are connected through the *ahayu watan*—"el alma amarra," or the Aymaran soul (Pantigoso 201). Churata explains that this soul consists of old and new life. Furthermore, it is collective: "El sapo negro es el alma...pero es también, el alma, o las almas, que vinieron" (362). Represented as the fertile toad, this Aymara soul uniting youth and maturity also symbolizes reproductive power. The sperm-like tadpoles carry the past within themselves as they

cultivate the future. In this sense, the division between child and adult is not so clear: “No hay universos infantiles, fuera—lo que siendo abstruso enseñan los sabios—del orbe galáctico. Gran poeta desvertebrado, dijo: ‘Toda juventud es sólo una vejez que se renueva’” (26). The past is not irrecoverable, but lives into the future. This and Arguedas’s visions of childhood do not fit into a lineal progression of time.

This differs from modern theory that describes the Child in the context of *reproductive futurism* (Edelman). This is tricky because of the way Churata’s discourse employs sexually reproductive imagery such as the seaman-like *tadpoles* and the *lactic pathway*. Moreover, the western image of the Child as the “embodiment of futurity collapsing undecidedly into the past” through its “unmediated access to Imaginary wholeness” (Edelman 10) make the western and Andean concepts appear to be closer cousins than I would argue they are. Despite what appears to be similarities, the Andean concepts are distinct. It is not just that an inheritance is carried from one generation to the next in a continual projection into the future, but that the impermissibility of life and death conjoining is overturned, that life and death must exist together, that the origin (child) and end (adult) coexist. In this way, mortals “e inmortales viven en dos mundos unidos en un solo y mismo mundo; Pacha,” represented by the *ahayu watan* (Untoja Choque 38).

As Arnold and Yapita, Arguedas, and Churata demonstrate, Andean childhood (*wawa*) is more than an age classification. It is a whole understanding of and relationship with the world. These Andean descriptions of *wawa*—or, as Churata describes, *achachi-guagua* (grandfather-baby)—break with aetonnormativity by including the child as an essential active member of the community. It is not that the child must grow into the adult world, but that the child’s and the adult’s worlds are one *pacha* space.

### 1.3 CHILD, NATION, RACE

My research dialogues with other scholars' ideas about the relationships between childhood, nationalism, and race by questioning how the child protagonists of my corpus function as sites of national reproduction. By looking at texts with children connected to the Indigenous, my project explores the role that race plays within the purportedly pure point of childhood. To better understand the symbolic potential of these marked children, it is helpful to review some of the ways western theories have tried to deal with the seeming contradiction of the abject (race) invading the avian (the Child's dove-like innocence). However, western models limit the terms on which the Child can participate within the nation-state. Therefore, alternative conceptions of childhood like Arnold and Yapita's indicate that looking beyond the western paradigm may open the way for reevaluating the role children play in national imaginaries.

As other scholars have noted, in the west adults often conceive of children as playing a nostalgic role in the imagining of the unrecoverable "origins upon which a sense of self and of nation are established" (Krips 9).<sup>19</sup> Following Jean Franco's depiction of the family as a "space of refuge and shelter...a place for turning one's back on the world" (415), the Romantic Child is often marked as the only time-space immune from the power of the state. This concept differs from the Andean infancy observed above in which childhood is intimately connected to and part of a community or *pacha* space.

In spite of its imagined freedom, the western Child's pre-social self often places him in a subordinate and dependent position in need of state support and care—or in the metaphor of the family, of love and discipline. In her examination of the connection between child, race, and the

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<sup>19</sup> Caroline Field Levander, in her examination of the connection between child, race, and the state in U.S. history, finds that the Child "remind[s] each self of an original 'infancy' that conforms to nobody" and embodies "the seemingly authentic, pre-social self" (6).

state in U.S. history and literature Caroline Field Levander notes that the child “indicates the state’s reliance on the idea of a self in whose behalf society must advocate.... [T]he state... requires the self that the child represents in order to maintain the perception of its power” (12).<sup>20</sup> Additionally, as a pure point of origin, the child serves as a kind of common ground to unite a diverse population. In this position, the child is an ideal (imagined) citizen of a liberal democratic nation-state embodying an innocent equality.<sup>21</sup> Thus while views of the Child often place him outside of the state, in fact, the child “has historically helped to constitute and buttress the nation” and represents its very foundation (Levander 6).

Existing in a pre-social time/space, the Child is a fetal origin of the man and the nation-state. In using the term fetal origin, I am playing with the idea from the scientific concept of fetal origins of adult disease (FOAD) hypothesis that analyzes the impact of the intrauterine environment on future adult disease.<sup>22</sup> Basically, FOAD-hypothesis theorizes that the development of a person from the time of *conception* affects the diseases the *adult* will be susceptible to in the future.<sup>23</sup> Thus, at the time of birth, we are already programmed to be the adult we will grow to be. More accurately, since the theory focuses on the relation of fetal environment and adult illness, we are born already programmed with our susceptibility to the disorders that shape our adult lives.

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<sup>20</sup> Similarly Anna Mae Duane finds that in U.S. culture, the “fantasy of the admirable self-reliant American individual was forged in contrast to a politically invalid child” and that this contrast serves to emphasize “how *all* subjects are dependent and vulnerable” (7 emphasis in original).

<sup>21</sup> Courtney Weikle-Mills discusses children as *Imaginary Citizens* in her study of the relationship between the concepts of childhood and citizenship in the United States.

<sup>22</sup> As with childhood, the concept of the fetus also culturally constructed. Lynn M. Morgan’s investigation of Ecuadorian perspectives on the unborn highlights the distinction between a western “reification of the fetal subject” in which North Americans “individualize, personify, and sometimes even glorify and prize fetuses as ‘super-subjects’” (326). She compares this with the women from the rural highlands of Ecuador that she interviews who imagine the unborn as “liminal, unripe, and unfinished creatures” (329). She notes that the woman she interviewed “were perplexed that [she], or [her] compatriots, would expect to find a single or satisfactory answer to the question of when fetuses become persons. Why, they wondered, would we press so hard to know the unknowable?” (347).

<sup>23</sup> For more information see Kara Calkins and Sherin U. Devaskar and Annie Murphy Paul.



We might chuckle at the naïveté of Immanuel Kant’s hypothesis sketched in “Of the Different Human Races” that difference in race results from the deviations of “numerous seeds and natural predispositions” that lie “ready in human beings either to be developed or held back” (14); but it shares something with FOAD-hypothesis, which is also very interested in why the “power of the heart” differs in spaces outside of the west (Kant 15).<sup>24</sup> Within both hypotheses, the key location for the possibility of change is not in the journey to adulthood or civilization, but in a fetal origin. Transferring this concept to my own project, I suggest that if one views the development played out in the *Bildungsroman* as being grounded in a fetal origin she can better understand the function of the genre within modernity/coloniality.

Like Kant’s theory, in FOAD-hypothesis a man’s current condition is linked to an irrecoverable past before birth. In this hypothesis, the womb is not a pristine sanctuary, but a space in which difference becomes marked. Often this difference follows along class and race lines.<sup>25</sup> Thus it is not just that children from disadvantaged groups (lower economic status, racial minorities) have fewer opportunities in their journeys to adulthood, but that at conception the health of their future adult selves is already in more jeopardy than those of the privileged. Taking this idea to the fetal origins of the *Bildungsroman*, one could say that the Child who serves as the imagined citizen and pure point of origin is already part of the nation-state’s hegemonic structure. This Child is the conceivable savior of the nation-state, a key element in reproductive futurism. Contrastingly, the Child who is an outsider (e.g., who is racially marked as inferior) has “no future” (Edelman) within the power structure of the nation-state.

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<sup>24</sup> Some FOAD studies have looked at the connection between fetal health and adult cardiovascular health and coronary heart disease. For example, see D. J. Barker and Patricia Jackson Allen and Bridget M. Cota.

<sup>25</sup> One example of this is the analysis of Pima Indian health in Dana Dabelea’s article “The Predisposition to Obesity and Diabetes in Offspring of Diabetic Mothers.”

So, what happens to these abject *Aves sin nido*? In some representations, their lines perish. For example, in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* the bloodline of the boy Felix is linked with the protagonist (Wilhelm). Felix is destined to acquire family (and to give family to Wilhelm). Meanwhile the incestuously-conceived foreigner, Mignon, is doomed. In other representations, as in *Flight*, it seems like the only choice is acquiescence to the dominant order. In this scenario, the racialized child is not damned so long as the environment provides the most optimal conditions for development, as in FOAD-hypothesis. The dynamics of the womb is not something the fetus or future baby can control. But society as a biopolitical unit can attempt to encourage healthy growth in this system (through education, improved nutrition, etc). In like manner, a protagonist who is dealt a bad hand can make it with state support. Thus, Zits is saved in the end by civil servants who are dedicated to enriching his life. The problem, however, is that despite attempts at whitewashing, the racialized child remains the site for the reproduction of alternative memories and knowledges.

Similar to Mignon, Ernesto and Zits are not just children struggling to make their way to adulthood. They are marred with the extra baggage of *otherness*. To make the transition to manhood and enter the western world—to cross the river that Anzaldúa describes—they must let go of their supposed primitiveness. At least, that is the predestined script for the journey. Mignon, Ernesto, and Zits are marked like Kant's germs or the poorly nourished fetuses of FOAD-hypothesis. In other words, their connection to a savage history (an incestuous or indigenous past) programs their path into adulthood.

This idea also appears in a different form in recapitulation theories, like those of American psychologist G. Stanley Hall, who believed a child repeats the developmental history of its race. In this theory, children are born carrying the consequences of their ancestors' lives.

While children of other races might get stuck in one phase of development, the white child “inevitably moves successfully beyond them, thereby ensuring that ‘skin color’ becomes an accurate ‘index of intelligence and mental ability’” (Levander 138). In this theory, race indicates whose ancestors did or did not advance through the developmental stages of life and thus who can mature.

Alexie seems to take this theory and distort it when he explains in an interview that he feels that “pain is carried in the DNA” (“A World” 157). One sees this idea at work in *Flight* when Zits claims that he has “memory in [his] DNA” (107). With his belief in “blood memory,” Alexie seems to agree that the racially marked child is hindered by a personal past, not because his race is inferior, but because colonial histories cut non-suturable scars that go deep into many generations (“A World” 157). It is not that these marked children are stuck in a developmental stage, but that they must perpetually battle the pain from a colonial past. In this way, they are a destabilizing element to the nation-state. They are a threat not because their development may be restricted, but because they carry within themselves a colonial history that is not supposed to exist—their difference is supposed to be natural, not a product of coloniality.

Alexie’s description of DNA-memory could serve as an unconventional definition of race, a concept with a range of interpretations.<sup>26</sup> From a postcolonial perspective, definitions of race are products of modernity. Anibal Quijano describes race in American as “un modo de otorgar legitimidad a las relaciones de dominación impuestas por la conquista” (203). He explains race as a tool to divide society and subordinate the colonized. This concept of race is not completely divorced from Alexie’s painful DNA memory. Conquest and colonization are major

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<sup>26</sup> For example, Ernest Renan and Claude Lévi-Strauss highlight a separation between biological (or anthropological) and cultural (or historical) concepts of race. See Renan’s “What is a Nation?” and Lévi-Strauss’s *Race and History*.

incidences of pain for indigenous groups—pain that under Alexie’s theory is carried over into other generations. Thinking about race in this way means that reproduction of the nation through racialized children is the reproduction of the memories of colonial histories.

The idea of a history of pain regenerating in the population shares something with Michel Foucault’s particular employment of the term in his description of what he calls the “race struggle” during his lectures at the Collège de France (61). Foucault does not talk about pain, but about counterhistories and histories of violence. Foucault’s definition of race is ambiguous:

[T]he word “race” itself is not pinned to a stable biological meaning.... Ultimately, it designates a certain historico-political divide.... One might say...that two races exist whenever one writes the history of two groups which do not, at least to begin with, have the same language or, in many cases the same religion. The two groups form a unity and a single polity only as a result of wars, invasions, victories, and defeats, or in other words, acts of violence.... And finally we can say that two races exist when there are two groups which, although they coexist, have not become mixed because of the differences, dissymmetries, and barriers created by privileges, customs, and rights, the distribution of wealth, or the way in which power is exercised. (“*Society*” 77)

Based on this definition, race emerges from the writing of the history or the memories of groups in struggle, from discourses of counterhistories. That is, he discusses race as histories that oppose a dominant sanctioned history of the sovereign or state. Foucault believes a shift occurred, transforming the revolutionary “race struggle” of an epoch when people sought to protect themselves from the “necessarily unjust” state into a state racism in which “the State is no longer an instrument that one race uses against another: the State is, and must be, the

protector of the integrity, the superiority, and the purity of the race” (“*Society*” 81).<sup>27</sup> Despite a discursive shift to class struggle, Foucault argues that at this time the counterhistory begins to be coded in terms of biological difference (“*Society*” 80). At this point, he sees the emergence of a public fear of the counterhistory—of the “other race” (“*Society*” 61)—as the destructive, abject *growth* produced within society and infesting it. In other words, out of liberalism rises a sense that the people (supposedly unmarked bourgeoisie) are the possibility of the state and a belief that the regulation of this socio-political body is necessary for its survival.<sup>28</sup> Race thus is not, as some scholars describe, the “Achilles heel of the liberal tradition” (Chafe 179), but a central element in its forging.

Foucault’s discussion of race is useful to my project because it suggests that the significance of race as a concept rests in the state’s protection of the “purity of the race” (“*Society*” 81)—that is, in the protection of the legitimacy of the official discourse. I argue that the sanctioned discourse includes fictional depictions of the development of the self as portrayed in the *Bildungsroman*. In addition, Foucault’s thinking on biopolitics within this discussion relates to the idea of establishing the most advantageous environment for the site of society’s reproduction (the Child). In other words, the state’s responsibility for ensuring the “purity of race” as Foucault describes is accomplished through securing the purity of the Child. My project looks at what happens when the site of counterhistory appears in a place of supposed purity like

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<sup>27</sup> Tracing the genealogy of race, Foucault describes an evolution in the idea of a counterhistory from one that contests the state (beginning around sixteenth century) to a time when state racism appears (around mid-nineteenth century). He explains that “racism is born...when the theme of racial purity replaces that of the race struggle, when counterhistory begins to be converted into a biological racism” (“*Society*” 81).

<sup>28</sup> For Foucault this phenomenon is related to modernity; the emergence of state racism is a modern issue following the rise of the bourgeoisie, liberalism, Darwinism, and capitalism. Compared to the context Foucault discusses (Europe), the Americas experienced these movements at similar moments in history, but their application had to be adapted to the New World’s particular social, political, and historical environment. The colonial legacy in Latin America complicates the situation since the Indian and slave (or ex-slave) were and are sites of counterhistory in both senses that Foucault describes: the revolution against the state with its “declaration of war on laws” and the biologically different sub-race that the biopolitical state must control (Foucault, “*Society*” 73).

that of the Child. If the Child serves as an imaginary site of the potentialities of the nation—a site/self that the state must protect—then the Child carrying a counterhistory (in pain in the DNA, in the color of his skin, etc.) is threatening to the State whose function is to protect “the purity of the race” (Foucault, “*Society*” 81). Race disturbs the Child as a site of innocent purity. It taints the fetal origin.

Children in Foucault’s writing about race disappear into the mass of the population.<sup>29</sup> This is a common trait of nationalist and race theories where aetnormative discourse dominates. Children’s exclusion from adult social structures and the idea of their dependency give the impression that they are passive players in the regeneration of the nation. For example, cultural theorists with Marxist sensitivities frequently discuss the child in discourses of education and class as a universal, simply one of the youngest victims of the struggle between master and slave. A primary example is Louis Althusser’s idea that the “School-Family couple has replaced the Church-Family couple” as the dominating dyad that ensures the child’s (and future citizen’s) “*subjection to the ruling ideology*” (Althusser 154; 133 emphasis in original). Similar to Althusser, Etienne Balibar places children within the large social context of school-family. Balibar, however, critiques Althusser by proposing that families and schools do not only reproduce labor power, but “they subordinate that reproduction to the constitution of a fictive

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<sup>29</sup> In “*Society Must Be Defended*” Foucault shows more interest in the relationship between childhood and sexuality than childhood and race. He employs the child masturbator to demonstrate the connections between body, power, and population: “the child who masturbates too much will be a lifelong invalid” whose defective legacy will continue in its descendants (252). The state is interested in reproduction and birth rate (244), but the child’s place in the nation is unclear. Foucault describes the nation as the “vertical relationship between a body of individuals who are capable of constituting a State” (223). Children seem to fall at (fall off?) the very bottom of this vertical relationship and it remains uncertain if children are capable of constituting a state? At the same time, Foucault claims that the “strength of the nation is...something like its capacities, its potentialities” (223). As both potentialities of the nation and immature dependents, children seem to be inherently part of and yet outside of Foucault’s definition of the nation.

ethnicity” (102).<sup>30</sup> In other words, these institutions work to reproduce the nation-state’s fetal origin, its imagined foundation that provides reassurance of legitimacy.

This trend continues in intellectual work produced in the Andes. For example, José Carlos Mariátegui is interested in issues of the state and indigeneity, but he never directly interprets the complex place and role of children in Peruvian reality.<sup>31</sup> Instead, as in Balibar’s work, children appear as an unquestioned and silenced fact. They are cogs in the state-run educational machine. Mariátegui does not posit that the state must wait for reform from below, in the child, but that the child must wait for changes from above, in the economic structure of Peru and for a resolution of the “problema de la tierra”—the unequal distribution of land and power sustained by semi-feudalism (46).

While Mariátegui generally omits or skips over the child in his interpretation of Peruvian reality,<sup>32</sup> Denise Y. Arnold and Juan de Dios Yapita bring the child to the forefront of Bolivian discourse. Focusing on the conflict between alphabetic and textile-based writing in rural Bolivia following the educational reform of 1953, Arnold and Yapita’s investigation concentrates on “regional concepts of childhood within the wider context of schooling” (89). Similar to Philippe

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<sup>30</sup> Fictive ethnicity, for Balibar, derives from the use of “language and race” to create an image of the populations of a nation “in the past or in the future *as if* they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture and interests which transcends individuals and social conditions” (96 emphasis in original).

<sup>31</sup> The child in Mariátegui emerges in the educational system. But all students are not necessarily *children*. His in-depth discussion on university reform includes references to actions taken by university students. While university students are capable of action, their behavior is linked to “contagios de entusiasmo” [contagions of enthusiasm] (131). This fault is not associated with childlike behavior, but is considered a defect that the Hispanic American “se ha acusado siempre al hispanoamericano” [has always been accused of] (131). The students do not understand the objectives of university reform, but the movement also falls short because it “carece de fuerzas para sojuzgar intelectualmente y espiritualmente a la juventud” [lacks the forces to conquer the youth intellectually and spiritually] (131). Mariátegui’s mention of the *juventud* in universities differs from his silence about the *niño* (child) in primary schools. Whereas the *juventud* appear as actors in the nation who must be intellectually and *spiritually* conquered—appearing much like Denise Arnold’s and Juan de Dios Yapita’s image of the state capturing indigenous children who metamorphose into trophy heads—younger generations are simply objects molded and controlled through education.

<sup>32</sup> For a collection of essays that explore how the “‘minor omissions’ of children from Latin American history may...be no small matter” see *Minor Omissions*, editor Tobias Hecht (12). None of the essays, however, discuss Mariátegui’s or Arnold and Yapita’s work.

Ariès' idea of the invention of childhood, they assert the fabrication of a “recently invented Andean childhood” (63). This Andean childhood results from educational practices in which indigenous children become consumers of western textual practices and at the same time assume the “new role of ‘cultural guardians’” (65). As in the Marxist theories briefly sketched above, Arnold and Yapita study how the state employs schooling to “ensure that its children are incorporated into the dominant economic system” (88). However, unlike Mariátegui and Balibar, Arnold and Yapita examine Bolivian indigenous culture and they also shift away from the passivity of children.<sup>33</sup> Instead, indigenous children in their investigation are important actors who impact and influence society.

Employing Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s theory of “ontological depredation” to describe the interactions between the community and the state (Arnold and Yapita 8), Arnold and Yapita view the school as an institution that transforms the child into an agent of two processes: the “*reproduction of the state in the community*” and the “*reproduction of the community in the state*” (105, emphasis in original). These processes are not lineal, but simultaneous. As the state consumes the child, transforming it into “an enemy trophy head,” the community converts these defeated heads back into children (104). On one side, the state works through the child to invade the “‘felicitous’ spaces” and the “formerly immune territories” of the home and family (Franco 417; 414). On the other, the community reappropriates the child that has been consumed by the state, allowing indigenous peoples to “constantly replenish their own cultures (and notions of Self) from the outside by appropriating vital aspects of the Other, in a context of struggle” (Arnold and Yapita 8). In such a way, the child moves between home and state, the community

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<sup>33</sup> Like Arnold and Yapita, Mariátegui is also interested in indigenous cultures and the importance of writing (see his essay on literature). However, his study does not examine indigenous groups from their cultural and epistemological positions. Arnold and Yapita focus on indigenous writing; Mariátegui seems ignorant of it (Mariátegui 209-210).



and the nation, and is an active participant in both of these institutions.<sup>34</sup> After internalizing the knowledge imparted by the state, the child can remake this knowledge based on its community's "own interpretation of reading and writing, and the criteria of regionally constituted textual practices" (279). Accordingly, children "eat letters" and incorporate the school "into the wider ritual ambit of the *ayllu*" (143) allowing traditional textual practices to become part of the state through school rituals such as libations (145-148). Thus, Arnold and Yapita see the child as playing an important role in the reproduction of local knowledges and memories.

While other theorists such as Mariátegui share with Arnold and Yapita a concern about the position of schooling in modern nation-states, the Bolivian study is distinct and enlightening because it explores discourse with which children directly engage and considers this discourse a possibility for alternative loci of enunciation. Their study shows that although the indigenous students participate within the western structure of the school, their involvement is not simply a process of assimilation but a way for the indigenous to use western knowledge within their own epistemology. Arnold and Yapita's research is informative because it demonstrates that while national reproduction may appear from the western eye to be one thing—the production of new citizens, laborers, racial hierarchies, etc.—something else might be going on. They explain that the unjust system for incorporating indigenous children into the western state may actually serve a different purpose to the indigenous communities who do not simply see themselves as being

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<sup>34</sup> The child is thus, more than a mere border-crosser. In his study on childhood in Latin American literature, Richard Browning discusses the child's role as mediator. He associates representations of childhood in Latin American literature with the marginalization because of the child's inherit "boundary-crossing" and rebelliousness (147). Thus children in literature often represent alienated or marginalized groups (13). Browning clarifies that although "children are marginalized beings, they are unlike other marginalized groups in that, no matter their race, class, or gender, their status will change as they age" (146). This statement implies that while childhood is temporary, "race, class, or gender" permanently mark a person's status. He also provokes questions about the impending adult status of the female, indigenous, or poor child.

devoured by the west, but instead conceive of themselves as the consumers who eat western letters.

The children in Arnold and Yapita's research are similar to the characters in Arguedas's and Alexie's novels in that they straddle two worlds—that of the white school and that of their indigenous *ayllu*. Being part of both worlds frames the context of their stories of growth. If one side is ignored, then it looks as if the Indian either assimilates by being swallowed up into the state or returns home disconnected and abject. It is not just that the indigenous Child is the *abject* cast outside of modernity. Arnold and Yapita indicate that for the indigenous communities, these children are connected to the *avian*. They note a community member who comments that “it is only through learning to write on white paper that children ‘can learn about the spiritual world’ and have ‘the spirit fly high’ in glory” (96). Arnold and Yapita's study indicates that childhood is not just an isolated starting point for an aetnormative path and that the process of accommodation to the western world is not necessarily a one-way street. Instead, children are important intermediaries and their development is a “warlike yet fertilizing metamorphosis of baby to head and back to baby again” (108).

#### 1.4 QUESTIONS OF FORM AND FOUNDATION

Considering unconventional patterns of growth such as the metamorphosis of baby/head/baby that Arnold and Yapita discuss opens spaces for conceptualizing narratives of the formation of the self, and in turn the nation-state, that are distinct from the *Bildungsroman*. From a western perspective, patterns that break up a lineal trajectory of growth by bringing the characters home imply an incomplete journey to adulthood and therefore an incomplete formation of self. Such is

the case with children's literature where a home/away/home model protects the sanctity of childhood. One could also view a protagonist's move to his tribe in Native American literature as a failure to succeed—a sign of regression not progress. In a similar light, narratives of incomplete development that stop before adulthood (*Entwicklungsromane*) could indicate failure of the protagonist to acquire agency. On the other hand, these texts disturb the power hierarchies established in the *Bildungsroman* and provide alternative narratives that challenge the aetnormative Eurocentric standard.

Arnold and Yapita employ the baby/head/baby metamorphosis to describe the symbolic movement of indigenous children out of their communities into the school and then back to their communities in a context of a “fertilizing cycle centered in children's ritual powers” (Arnold and Yapita 98). In narrative form, the story of this migration sounds similar to the home/away/home pattern that Perry Nodelman employs to describe children's literature.<sup>35</sup> Nodelman notes that the home the child returns to is not necessarily the same physical place he left (65). Thus while it appears that this model maintains a static view of childhood as an “unchanging place” it actually “admits change in the very process of trying to keep it out” (Nodelman, *Hidden* 67). In a similar way, the indigenous children of Arnold and Yapita's study leave the familiar space of the *ayllu* for the western (adult) space of the school, and then return home. One difference, however, is that in the home/away/home paradigm the home is a safe place “provided for children by adults” (Nodelman, *Hidden* 224). In the Andean context, the *ayllu* is not a space specifically quartered off for childhood. It is a *pacha* space for the whole community and the child is the force that transforms (in) its environment. The indigenous child can grow up within the *ayllu*, a

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<sup>35</sup> See Perry Nodelman's *The Hidden Adult* (61-68). These movements are not only physical, they “imply psychic journeys, moves from one state of mind to another, from one set of values to another—specifically from adult views of what childhood is and should be to child-centered ones and back again” (Nodelman, *Hidden* 64).

development distinct from the child's who must leave home to become a man. Moreover, in the Bolivian study the cycle serves not to help the children appreciate their home or to acquire a more idyllic one (as in children's literature),<sup>36</sup> but to transform the unfamiliar into the familiar—to bring the head/away/western into the baby/home/indigenous.

The movement Arnold and Yapita describe thus might appear more similar to William Bevis's description of the tendency in Native American literature of "homing in." Bevis observes that often in (North) American Indian novels, the protagonist does not light out as in the *Bildungsroman*, but comes home. Bevis explains that "coming home, staying put, contacting, even what we call 'regressing' to a place, it is a primary mode of knowledge and a primary good" (16). In this model, the protagonist's movement home is a recognition of a place, its history, and culture. It is an affirmation of the tribe and makes self-formation the finding of "a 'self' that is transpersonal and includes a society, a past, and a place. To be separated from that transpersonal time and space is to lose identity" (19). Bevis's literary analysis and Arnold and Yapita's anthropological one describe travel from western society to an indigenous community. This movement is important because it disturbs the concept of development as advancement on a fixed path toward western autonomy. Instead, growth occurs from a regression to a place of supposed immaturity. Bevis's idea of homing in differs from the home/away/home and baby/head/baby cycles because the protagonist starts his journey already detached from home.<sup>37</sup> The sanctity of home has already been violated before the narrative begins and the character appears orphaned and starts his journey without the foundation of his indigenous community. Moreover, in Bevis's homing plot, home does not change; it is the protagonist that transforms.

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<sup>36</sup> See Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult* (223).

<sup>37</sup> See Michelle Pagni Stewart for a comparison between Bevis and Nodelman's models (146-147).

Home remains a place where indigenous knowledge survives and where the protagonist can engage with alternative epistemological and political frames.

One could read *Los ríos profundos* and *Flight* as following, to some extent, various elements from these models. Ernesto in *Los ríos profundos* begins the home/away/home plot, but never achieves his final homecoming. Home in either a childish form (the safety of family) or adult form (marriage and childrearing) remains illusive. The story is an *Entwicklungsroman*, a novel depicting growth where adulthood is not necessarily reached.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the story could be read under a baby/head/baby frame where Ernesto leaves his father, enters the school, and in the end is in the process of a metamorphosis, not into a man, but into an *illa* force. That is, his journey begins anew after the typhus fever has overturned the power structure of the town and he becomes infested with *illa* energy becoming a (metaphorical) child with two heads, with two epistemological frames. Like *Los ríos profundos*, *Flight* ends before Zits becomes a man and is thus an *Entwicklungsroman* as well. Zits's story *almost* follows the home/away/home plot, which may be one reason why some readers demark it is as a novel for young readers.<sup>39</sup> However, Zits begins without a proper home. It thus seems Alexie's novel is a contorted form of Bevis's homing paradigm. In *Flight*, the indigenous boy who begins without community concludes with a homecoming. But his home is not a tribe or reservation. It is a white family.

Bevis's assessment is informative. However, his explanation that *Bildungsroman* narratives are "leaving" plots where the "individual advances, sometimes at all costs, with little or nor regard for family, society, past, or place" is simplistic (16). Family and society play an

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<sup>38</sup> For more on the *Entwicklungsroman* see Roberta Seelinger Trites.

<sup>39</sup> In an interview Alexie responds to the question about whether *Flight* is a young adult novel by saying it is too violent to be in this category and that he "worked really hard at making my 15-year-old sound and act like a 15-year-old. And because [he] was highly successful at doing that, people assume it's *for* teen-agers [*sic*]" (Alexie, "Sherman Alexie Discusses").

important role in white *Bildungsromane*. One example is *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* in which the Society of the Tower as well as Wilhelm's love interests, offspring, and marriage possibilities are important to the narrative and to Wilhelm's progress. Bevis distinguishes the American *Bildungsroman* as a story of a man or woman setting off to look for "better opportunities in a newer land" (16). But some of the novels that he cites as telling the story of "leaving home to find one's fate farther and farther away" (for example *Moby Dick*) could be read in the home/away/home pattern or as a failure to find a better opportunity (16). More importantly, in the traditional *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist might depart from home and have exotic experiences, but he never really *leaves*, at least not psychically. He does not transform in the way that the children from Arnold and Yapita's study do. Who can forget the callous manner that Huck engages with Jim at the end of their long journey together? He may want to "light out for the Territory ahead of the rest" (296), but following along with Tom Sawyer as he toys with Jim indicates that Huck remains *stuck* in a western worldview that ignores the colonial difference.

The important element distinguishing a traditional *Bildungsroman* from a border-*Bildungsroman* is not how a character moves, coming home or departing, but how he claims a home, an indigeneity. I use the term indigeneity here loosely, not restricting it to cultures and worldviews considered Indian or Native, but to denote an assertion that one naturally belongs to a place. The construction of home plays a distinctive role in the Americas, a land that appeared to have sprung up, as R. W. B. Lewis describes in *American Adam*, "emancipated from history" and in a position "prior to experience" (5).<sup>40</sup> In traditional *Bildungsromane* protagonists stake out

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<sup>40</sup> Kenneth Millard notes the importance of the creation of origins in American *Bildungsroman*, remarking that the novels he studies "might be seen as attempts to define an origin, to produce a compelling story of the American empire's beginnings, to construct an account of the birth of the nation" (8). Millar limits his research to narratives

a home through colonial expansion legitimated by the Child. Bevis notes that in the *Bildungsroman* “[i]solation is the poison...and romantic love seems to be its primary antidote” (16). But romantic love is more than an antidote. It is part of the legacy of the literary scripting of the nation, part of the “family resemblances” that link contemporary *Bildungsroman* with the first American fictions (Sommer 1). Man goes out into the world, settles, reproduces. This appears as a kind of individualistic leaving that ultimately comes back to a western heteronormative and aetonormative vision of home. In the border-*Bildungsromane*, protagonists claim a domicile in the fragmentation of the traditional homestead’s stable foundations, making their homes in the straddling of Anzaldúa’s riverbeds. The function of the *Bildungsroman* is to act as a fetish for the legacy, the illusion, of the home of the national family. Parodying this story, the Bil(*dung*)sroman casts as uncertain the heteronormative and aetonormative frame employed to claim home and, in the process, transforms the abject into the avian.

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from the United States and does not critically question the position of the indigenous within this story of origin. For example, he approaches *The Miracle Life of Edgar Mint* by Bradly Udall, a story about a part-Indian boy written by a westerner, from a western religious perspective (that of original sin) (31-45)

## 2.0 FLIGHTS OF FANCY: THE FETISH AND THE FORM

Originally, I had planned to begin with a brief overview of the canonical *Bildungsroman* that would serve as a contrast for José María Arguedas's *Los ríos profundos* and Sherman Alexie's *Flight*. However, this proved to be no easy task. In fact, it is a job fit only for literary magicians who can pull narrative forms like bunnies from top hats. The genre is elusive and defining it is particularly challenging since every critic seems to establish his or her own standard. Many definitions begin with a disclaimer that a systematic categorization is difficult if not impossible; but such explanations are often followed by a description of general characteristics of *Bildungsromane*.<sup>41</sup> This allows the critic to recognize the flexibility of the genre while still employing the term for a specific design. When all is said and done, it seems that all I have to offer is an examination of a fantasy. The benchmark is a constructed illusion. Therefore, contrasts set against it are not just distinctions between a traditional form and its variants. *They uphold the fantasy of contrast*, the fantasy of the line separating a live unadulterated form from its failure or death in a corrupted or mutated stage.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Yolanda A. Doub's introduction to *Journeys of Formation* presents a succinct summary of various approaches to the genre (2). She also notes that an "unappreciated" aspect of the genre is its "adaptability. That is not to say that anything goes, however" (4). Jerome Hamilton Buckley sets up a *Bildungsroman* plot blueprint, but notes that "[n]o single novel, of course, precisely follows this pattern" (18).

<sup>42</sup> Moretti discusses the "signs of a literary genre dying" (177) and the *Bildungsroman* ultimate inability to serve its social work and thus becoming a "failure" (243). Slaughter asserts that the "corruption of the *Bildungsroman* form represents a corruption of the norms of human rights" (29). Jed Esty describes a shift in the genre as "mutating" (30).



My goal is not to present a clear definition of the traditional genre. A definition or limit seems necessary in order to clearly imagine what is being discussed. At the same time, a narrow description of the form creates an artificial border that is open for inconclusive debate. I find that it is not the parameters of the classification that are most revealing, but the attempts to establish such parameters. I argue that the debates over the definition of the genre reflect more than critics' peculiarities and fanatical interests in definitions. These debates are a symptom of the fissures in modernity's tale of universalism and discourse of futurity. They emphasize a desire to identify a universal—a truth that can be applied in all situations, with all people, and with all histories and cultures—even when the only way to construct such a universal is to undo it through conflicting incorporations. What is more, these debates go beyond taxonomy into what lies at the heart of these stories: how to define those who can meaningfully participate within the nation and within modernity.

What may help in an investigation of the *Bildungsroman* as a genre is to consider it not as a form with origins or clear examples, but as a *fetish* born from “an empty synthesis” in which the analysis of its “numberless beginnings” reveals a “liberating profusion of lost events” (Foucault, “Nietzsche” 81). I discuss Arguedas's Alexie's novels as imitations or parodies of the traditional *Bildungsroman*. But parody here does not stop at the level of critical imitation of a text. After all, how can the form be copied if the original itself is so illusive? The imitation is thus not just a copy of a thing, but a parody of a parody. The story of the traditional *Bildungsroman* provides the narrative of a conceivable savior of the nation-state, and this “rather weak identity, which we attempt to support and unify under a mask, is in itself only a parody: it is plural; countless spirits dispute its possession; numerous systems intersect and compete” (Foucault, “Nietzsche” 94). An examination of the traditional *Bildungsroman* is thus a study of a

“masquerade” (Foucault, “Nietzsche” 94), or “phantom” (Redfield), or what I call a fetal origin. To describe the form is to enter a “carnival” of masks that provide western readers with a reassurance of legitimacy (Foucault, “Nietzsche” 94); it is to enter into the game of masking and unmasking.

In the following chapters, I will look more closely at ways the *Bildungsroman* has been written from a marginalized position which challenges the established order—what I call border-*Bildungsroman* or *Bil(dung)sroman*. In this chapter, however, I would like to look more closely at the intimacies of the dominant discourse of traditional *Bildungsromane*, particularly in relation to the matters of faith and fidelity that bind the protagonist to the nation-state. I begin with a general description and a brief history of the *Bildungsroman*, arguing that its primary function is to serve as a reassurance of legitimacy for the narrative of modernity and the nation-state. I then look more closely at the magical relations of the form, asserting that the genre both serves as an allegory for the fetishization of the state and as a fetish itself. My next step is a closer look at the process of reading the nation. My approach to the genre is admittedly a broad one. I include in this discussion some texts that others may argue have nothing to do with the *Bildungsroman*, such as those that Doris Sommer has described as *Foundational Fictions* and books for the youngest of readers. These texts share with the *Bildungsroman* their function as variants of the developmental period described in psychoanalysis as the mirror stage. As such they hold two primary functions: to serve as a tool of socialization and to act as a fetishized fetal origin. Additionally, the foundational fictions set the scene for future allegorical depictions of national development, outlining the proper norms for socialization, in particular what to do with the abject. Although these stories are about incorporation, expulsion and abjection play key roles. In

calling for the nation “to be fruitful and multiply” (Sommer 6), the foundational fictions imagine the removal of that which could contaminate and destabilize the desired homogeneous nation.<sup>43</sup>

As with the *Bildungsromane*, the foundational fictions provide one dream of uniting a people, of the individual soul finding a place in a greater spirit. But for these narratives, community is *western* society and these souls are *white* men. Part of the fantasy is the universalizing of the particular, which relieves the tension of coloniality. Both the foundational fictions and the *Bildungsroman* face the same problem of what to do with the racial marking of difference in stories that are supposed to represent the making and development of nations constructed of equals. These narratives cannot solve the problem. Instead, the idea of them acts like a talisman that clears the air by providing a history to hold on to, creating an origin that does not really exist. We know where we want to go; it is the “sacred given” towards which the foundational fictions move (Sommer 49). We just need the origin to set us on the right course.

## 2.1 THE BILDUNGSROMAN

One could translate the German word *Bildungsroman* as a novel (*roman*) of formation (*Bildung*). This literal translation hinges on one’s understanding of *Bildung*, which Joseph Slaughter explains is a “notoriously untranslatable word that denotes simultaneously image and image making, culture and cultivation, form and formation” (Slaughter 92). Not only is the manner of cultivation the protagonist experiences a critical factor in the novel’s categorization, it reflects a larger message about living a life of meaning found within modernity and the modern nation-

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<sup>43</sup> In this respect, I agree with Fernando Unzueta, who comments that national romances “work as a rhetorical strategy of inclusion and exclusion that resembles the hierarchical social practices and realities of the period, and they also signal the desire for (and not the reality of) national unity and a homogeneous citizenry” (132).

state. Generally, such a life is attainable for a male.<sup>44</sup> His path is an example of learning how to make it in the adult world, how to find happiness and success. It offers readers the fantasy of a natural order that surpasses the laws of man, gaining authority in its universality and providing a reassurance of legitimacy.

German philosopher and critic Wilhelm Dilthey, often credited for coining the term in his 1870 biography of Friedrich Schleiermacher, distinguished the form from other “novels modeled on biography....in that it intentionally and artistically depicts that which is *universally human* in such a life course” (335 emphasis mine).<sup>45</sup> According to Jerome Hamilton Buckley in *Season of Youth*, the path presented is formulaic. The protagonist usually grows up in a constraining rural setting where he is unable to adequately fulfill his ambitions. He thus leaves the “relative innocence” of home for the city. Now his “real ‘education’ begins, not only his preparation for a career but also...his direct experience of urban life,” which “involves at least two love affairs.” Ultimately, the hero must decide on the “sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make.” In doing so, he moves from adolescence to maturity and completes his initiation. He then can return home to prove his success in the adult world (Buckley 17-18). Dilthey’s and Buckley’s descriptions reflect typical perceptions of the genre: the stories of boys on their way to maturity, their psyches developing as they confront the challenges of growing up.

Despite labels of being universally human, the idea of the story resides very much in a western white world. Socialization equals accepting citizenship within a recognized nation-state. Joseph R. Slaughter describes the construction of the protagonist’s *Bildung* as “an achieved state

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<sup>44</sup> Much has already been said about the paternalistic nature of the *Bildungsroman*. See for example *The Voyage In*.

<sup>45</sup> Despite its popularity, Dilthey’s interpretation has received its fair share of criticism, notably from Fritz Martini, who locates the term’s source as prior to Dilthey, “as early as 1819 and 1820 in two lectures by professor Karl (von) Morgenstern of Dorpat” (2) and from Joseph R. Slaughter who finds his “misreading of the genre...quarantine[s] *Bildung* from historical questions of social power” (116).

as well as a process of human socialization that cultivates a universal force of human personality (*Bildungstrieb*) that is naturally inclined to express itself through the social media of the nation-state and citizenship” (92-93). Of course, citizenship here really reads as *bourgeois citizenship*. Seeming to dialogue with Moretti—who argues that the “classical *Bildungsroman* narrates ‘how the French Revolution could have been avoided’” (64)—Slaughter notes that the “claim to a natural right of personality development (*Bildung*)” by the prototype *Bildungsroman* protagonist, Wilhelm Meister, “is a political appeal for the rights of the bourgeoisie to enjoy the historical privileges of the nobility” (105). This undercuts the concept of a *natural* and *universal* right since what we are apparently talking about is the bourgeois acquisition of privileges originally claimed by an elite class or the usurpation of universal (that is, *bourgeois*) rights by elites. Thus, the protagonist’s development in the traditional *Bildungsroman* offers him access to his natural rights, which, as it turns out, are aristocratic privileges and rights of class. What is more, a claim to universality and transparency notwithstanding, this bourgeois world is a racially white one.

The genre, or the idea of the genre, is born from of modernity/coloniality, but this connection goes beyond 1789 and the emergence of a European bourgeois class. I agree with Walter Mignolo that modernity describes the “regional narrative of the Eurocentric worldview,” which is intimately connected to “the geopolitics and body-politics of the knowledge of white European and North Atlantic males” (“The Historical” 13). Thus, I refer to modernity as a worldview—a way of conceiving, perceiving, and being in the world. As Enrique Dussel notes, the “discovery, conquest, colonization, and integration (subsumption) of Amerindia” ushered in the advent of a first modernity in which Europe became the center of a planetary system (“Beyond” 5). Within this primary modernity, America played a central role. As Anibal Quijano explains, “América se constituyó como el primer espacio/tiempo de un nuevo patrón de poder de

vocación mundial y, de ese modo y por eso, como la primera id-entidad de la modernidad” (203). A second modernity followed as power shifted during the late eighteenth century from southern to northern Europe, around the time of the French Revolution. Dussel explains that the “Eurocentric position” of the second modernity

reinterpreted all of world history, projecting Europe into the past and attempting to show that everything that happened before had led to Europe’s becoming, in Hegel’s words, “the end and center of world history.” The distortion of history begins with the Encyclopedists...but continues with the English “Enlightenment” thinkers, Kant in Germany, and finally Hegel, for whom the “Orient” was humanity’s “infancy” (*Kindheit*), the place of despotism and unfreedom from which the Spirit (*Volksgeist*) would later soar toward the West, as if on a path toward the full realization of liberty and civilization. Since the beginning, Europe had been chosen by Destiny as the final meaning of universal history. (“World-System” 222)

This is the regional narrative of history that comes to life in the *Bildungsroman*. While Dussel’s quote focuses on the second wave of modernity, what he discusses initiates with the discovery of America at the beginning of a primary modernity. Not only did the discovery and colonization of America usher in the reinterpretation of history with Europe and the Catholic Church at its heart, but also a new concept of self and subjectivity. José Rabasa notes that the “emergence of ‘nature’ in the interstices of Columbus’s discourse anticipates a particularly modern form of subjectivity generally identified with Descartes’s *Metaphysical Meditations*” (82). Dussel also notes that the “process of discovery and conquest...is part of the constitution of modern subjectivity itself” (“Eurocentrism” 67). I believe that the modern man whose life course

constitutes the *Bildungsroman* has his roots not only in second modernity, as other critics have claimed, but also in the first modernity and thus is profoundly connected to the Americas.

The attraction to the genre (for both readers and critics) and the debates surrounding its definition suggest a western desire for this story. One thing that makes the form so tempting is how it preserves a sense of security that grounds modernity. Particularly, I am interested in the security that arises from the reassurance of legitimacy. By reassurance of legitimacy I mean the scaffolding surrounding the idea of modernity and western superiority. It is the evidence collected/created that keeps the structure intact, and in fact is the structure itself. Reassurance of legitimacy does not prove the authority of western thought to those outside of modernity, but reminds those within it that the scaffolding will not (in fact, cannot) fail. For example, Spaniards reading the *Requerimiento* to indigenous peoples in the sixteenth century were talking more to themselves than to any possible indigenous listeners, reaffirming their role and power in the New World.<sup>46</sup> Reassurance of legitimacy continues to be at work in contemporary state owned museums and parks that house pre-Columbian artifacts from indigenous cultures. These examples function in different ways; but both incorporate the indigenous as a natural participant in or ancestor of projects of modernity (the empire, the state). Reassurance of legitimacy ignores coloniality, painting a picture that modernity and western epistemology are what the world is supposed to be and always has been destined to be—in Dussel’s terms, that “Europe had been chosen by Destiny as the final meaning of universal history.”

The *Bildungsroman* provides reassurance of legitimacy through “tautological-teleological” configurations that unfold to uncover conclusions that have always already been established

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<sup>46</sup> The *Requerimiento* (literally, the “Requirement”) was a document read out loud by the Spaniards as part of their process of conquest. It *requests*, under threat of death, that the indigenous peoples of America accept the Christian faith and Spanish rule. See Patricia Seed.

(Slaughter 250). Its plot, as Slaughter describes, “we could provisionally gloss as the didactic story of an individual who is socialized in the process of learning for oneself what everyone else (including the reader) presumably already knows” (3). In Slaughter’s study, this understanding translates into the language of human rights: that the right to development is an inalienable human right and that one becomes “what one already is by right”: a man-citizen (26). It presents a story that makes sense because, tautologically, it is the story that readers have been anticipating. It is common sense that a boy will become a man, that men have rights and are participants in a larger social body. The form is tautological in that it tells the obvious—that man is a man (with his inalienable rights). The “redundancy of tautology rejects the burden of logical proof to stake its claim in the formalism of common sense” and acts as a “formal expression of a discursive and legislative will to self-sufficiency (or sovereignty)...the expression of an imminence that aspires to be immanent” (Slaughter 78). The temporal aspect of the growth of the individual and his inevitable compromise with society makes the form teleological. The boy will always be a man. The primitive, civilized. This is modernity’s project of incorporation; it is natural and normal for all to fall into line by accepting a western order.

The tautological-teleological form that Slaughter describes in regards to the *Bildungsroman* and human rights law is also apparent at the dawn of the first modernity when Christopher Columbus describes in his diary how the natives will serve as perfect future subjects to the Spanish crown, and good Christians to boot: “Ellos deben ser buenos servidores.... Y creo que ligeramente se harían cristianos, que me pareció que ninguna secta tenían” (107). The American Indians Columbus mentions may have very well looked like they would be “buenos servidores” because *they already were*; after all, Bartolomé de las Casas transcribed Columbus’s diary years after the legendary voyage to America, once colonization had already begun.



Centuries later, westerners continue to read and take pleasure in the stories of children (and primitives) who follow what appears as a natural progression into civilization, stories—like the Disney film *The Lion King*—that usher their characters into the future, but always with the understanding that the child (or cub) has always already been—or at least is always the potential to be—a manly futurity. We know, even before the lights dim, that Symba is not the lion prince, but the lion *King*. As distinct as they are, Columbus’ Indians and Disney’s Symba share a tautological-teleological story of development that marks not only the traditional *Bildungsroman*, but the story of modernity itself.

I agree with Slaughter’s line of reasoning when he considers the *Bildungsroman* “as the generic name of a kind of literary social work—a function (or practice) that articulates certain social relations—rather than as the name of a typologically consistent literary artifact” (7). Therefore, considering a novel a *Bildungsroman* has less to do with the time or place of publication, plots, or characters than about its ability to express an underlying social condition. For my purposes, I am interested in the form’s ability to serve as a reassurance of legitimacy of the Eurocentric regional narrative described above. Moreover, the act of defining a work serves a literary social work. Discussing what a *Bildungsroman* looks like in its classical, capitalist, postmodern, Latin American, or indigenous form becomes a way of attempting to articulate “certain social relations.”

This concept of the importance of the social work of the *Bildungsroman* is also apparent in Moretti’s writing when he describes the form as providing “one of the most harmonious solutions ever offered to a dilemma conterminous with modern bourgeois civilization: the conflict between the ideal of *self-determination* and the equally imperious demands of *socialization*” (15 emphasis in original). This understanding of the genre is based on the “idea

that symbolic functions are fundamentally problem-solving devices: that they are the means through which the cultural tensions and paradoxes produced by social conflict and historical change are disentangled (or at least reduced)” (243). The *Bildungsroman* thus not only expresses particular social interactions, but makes them look lovely.

Under Moretti’s characterization, the genre’s function is limited. Thus, he demarks the nineteenth-century as the apex of the genre and claims that twentieth-century writers like “Rilke, Kafka, and Joyce.... [were] literally *forced* into modernism by [their] failure with the previous form” (243 emphasis in original). This coincides with his view that “literary evolution” derives from “literary failures.... the sort of thing that occurs when a form deals with problems it is unable to resolve” (243).<sup>47</sup> In a similar manner, Slaughter notes that the genre has “allegedly ceased to have viable social work to perform for the Anglo-European white male” because this man is already an incorporated subject-citizen—the key word being “allegedly” (27).

I view the form as continuing to hold a function or social work after the apex of its application in the nineteenth-century. In fact, it seems coming-of-age novels are still particularly attractive to western readers, especially when the protagonist is non-western (such as *The Kite Runner*).<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the booming field of young adult literature is comprised of stories of growth and development. Moreover, if one looks at the genre as the *fantasy* of a “typologically consistent literary artifact” (Slaughter 7), then the social work for this apparently ineffective relic

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<sup>47</sup> For Moretti what brought about the failure of the *Bildungsroman* was “trauma” of World War I: “it disrupted the unity of the Ego, putting language of self-consciousness out of work; it dismantled neutralized spaces, originating a regressive semiotic anxiety” (244).

<sup>48</sup> This genre seems to be in so much demand that westerner writers sometimes invent *Bildungsromane* of this variety under the guise of autobiography and readers eat it up, hungry to see the fictional *Bildungsroman* portrayed as nonfictional autobiography. Two examples include Nasdijj’s *The Blood Runs like a River Through My Dreams* about a (supposedly) Navajo man and Forrest Carter’s *The Education of Little Tree* a story of a Cherokee’s youth but written by a white man.

is ongoing. It may no longer serve as a useful solution to socialization or may allegedly appear needless, but it remains as a fetal origin that serves as a reassurance of legitimacy.

The real issue, it seems to me, is that the form could never serve as the problem-solving device intended and that “the trauma” of World War I that Moretti argues shattered the harmony that bound the *Bildungsroman* only unveiled the illusion of such unity (244). To say that the form functioned in an earlier time implies the belief that at some point it succeeded at being “one of the most harmonious solutions” to the dilemma of modern socialization. Interestingly, the era of its purported success also coincides with an era of European colonial expansion, an aspect Moretti does not explore. Maybe more than just narrating how the French Revolution could have been avoided, the classical *Bildungsroman* of the nineteenth century narrates how the Haitian Revolution could have been *ignored*. Furthermore, the concept of the literary evolution of the form and its failure to uphold its problem-solving abilities maintains the tautological-teleology of the genre itself. In this sense, the form constitutes one stage of the process of modernity’s linear trajectory of literary self-expression.

## 2.2 MATTERS OF FAITH AND THE FORM AS FETISH

It may be constructive to think of the function of the *Bildungsroman* less as a problem-solving device and more as a form of fetish. A problem-solving device implies a rational answer with an air of science and logic. In fact, Moretti employs science (psychoanalysis) to explain how the genre made sense and then stopped making sense to the European imagination. A fetish, on the other hand, involves superstition and magic. To say the *Bildungsroman* is a fetish places it in a new conceptual frame removed from western reason. That is not to say that it is detached from

western discourse. Quite the contrary, the genre's magical aspect highlights its link to modernity/coloniality and exposes the "magical side of modernity" (Lamana, "What makes a Story Amusing" 87). In particular, the genre's connection to the nation-state makes it vulnerable to magical dealings. As much as one could read the narrative of the *Bildungsroman* as the making of the self-citizen, she could read it as an allegory of the fetishization of power of the nation-state. Not just telling the story of a man's experiences and how this represents the development of a nation, the genre is a project within which western readers witness the development of Hegel's "soul of man" (94) presented in a "soul-nation allegory" (Esty 4). A person's *soul* is more than his mental or physical being. Unexplainable by science and with spiritual and immaterial connotations, the domain of the soul is religious and magical. But more than just telling the story of a fetish, the form functions as one itself.

The *Bildungsroman* acts as a literary tool for portraying the emergence of the self-citizen. As a fetish, it reflects the otherworldly process of this formation. Although one's rise to maturity means access to a life of logic and rationality—leaving behind the things of youth, like make-believe and enchantment—admission to the national family is achieved through magical means. For example, in a speech on immigration, President Obama describes being a citizen in America as "not a matter of blood or birth. *It's a matter of faith.* It's a matter of fidelity to the shared values that we all hold so dear" (emphasis mine). What is important is not skin color or ethnic background, but a "matter of faith," that is, the sharing of ideological and epistemological ground. By participating in the patriotic Eucharist, any and all can enter the freedom of the national fold.

Scholars like Moretti and Slaughter make the association between the development of the self in the *Bildungsroman* with the construction of the modern nation-state. Similarly, Jed Esty

describes the genre as a “soul-nation allegory” in which “the discourse of the nation supplies the realist bildungsroman with an emergent language of historical continuity or social identity amid the rapid and sweeping changes of industrialization” (4). Esty’s study focuses on Modernist novels. However, one could more broadly apply his concept of the allegory functioning in a “soul-nation” fashion. It is not just that the self or the nation develops, but that the two are dependent on each other, an aspect of nationalism that Pheng Cheah highlights in *Spectral Nationality*. Cheah describes “national Bildung” not as “ideological indoctrination, but as a cultivation process where universal ideals are incarnated in the daily practices of a collective’s individual members” (8). In this sense, the ordinary everyday lives of men are not only the backdrop, but the essence of nationalism. Furthermore, the representation of these daily practices—such as in a literary form like the *Bildungsroman*—serves as part of this cultivation process. Moreover, Cheah notes that political divisiveness makes literary representation essential because the ideal unity of a people through national *Bildung* “can only be maintained through literary *Bildung*” (137).

Cheah notes that for Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel “national culture enables a state’s citizens to see and know the rational unity between their individual spirits and the national spirit. It infuses the citizen’s identification with the state with such absolute conviction that the state becomes a second, infinite nature so inseparably fused to the citizen that it cannot be transcended” (171). The *Bildungsroman* functions as a form that legitimates the state since the state becomes inseparable from the interiority of individual citizens whose development plays out in these novels. As man becomes who he is meant to be, the state becomes who it is meant to be. In the *Bildungsroman*’s “normative process of incorporation” the protagonist becomes a “natural citizen” (Slaughter 27).

One could say the protagonists thus partake in what Hegel describes as Freedom of the Spirit manifest in the State. I include Hegel because his writing epitomizes the narrative of modernity (and thus, I argue, the traditional *Bildungsroman*) in its description of an imagined community in which the Spirit makes its home in the western man's domain, i.e., the State. His thinking exemplifies how traditional western philosophy has worked to legitimize state power and to link the concept of *Bildung* with the state. Moreover, I view Hegel's ideas about the Spirit and the State as fetishistic and therefore based on the magic and illusions that he rejects in non-western cultures. His work thus emphasizes the magical elements of modernity and counteracts itself to actually destabilize the reassurance of legitimacy it attempts to establish. Allow me to explain myself in some detail.

As Dussel explains in the extended quote above, Hegel's vision of development outlines a sentiment of modernity in which civilization unfolds towards its pinnacle in Europe. In *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel describes the journeys of World History, the State, and the Spirit in formulas of gradation—everything moving logically from a lower point to a higher one. History advances geographically from East to West. Societies develop from childhood to old age. This is the trajectory of the *Bildungsroman*. In these progressions, Freedom moves from the idea that *one* is free to *all* are free. Hegel finds “[t]he highest point of development of a people is this—to have gained a conception of its life and condition—to have reduced its laws, its ideas of justice and morality to a science; for in this unity lies the most intimate unity that Spirit can attain to in and with itself” (76). This Spirit “is self-contained existence,” or Freedom, which achieves perfect embodiment in the State (Hegel 17). The traditional *Bildungsroman*'s protagonist faces the challenge of socializing into this “most intimate unity.”

Hegel's musings on the Spirit highlight a magical connection between the individual and the state. For Hegel, however, magic is relegated to practices outside of European tradition in communities he sees lacking a fusion between the people and the state. In his framework of social and historical maturation, natural or savage people cannot attain Freedom because "of untamed natural impulses, of inhuman deeds and feelings." The formation of the state limits these "brute emotions" and thus creates the "very conditions in which Freedom is realized" (41). After discussing the magical—versus moral—characteristics of African religion, Hegel remarks, "God thunders, but is not on that account recognized as God. For *the soul of man*, God must be more than a thunderer, whereas among the Negroes this is not the case" (49 emphasis mine). The systematization of the levels of History Hegel outlines coincides with a lineal progression of the fetishization of power, a movement from magical, savage systems to a scientific one where the power of the Spirit dominates.

While Hegel considers the African fetish a magical and illogical form of power, he does not apprehend the possibility that the Spirit embodied in the state may also become a fetish.<sup>49</sup> For Hegel, the African fetish lacks a transcendental connection to "the soul of man" and hence its power cannot surpass its original use-value. There is nothing behind the fetish; it is thus "merely a creation that expresses the arbitrary choice of its maker." The fact that the African fetish can be discarded if it does not successfully fulfill the people's desires leads Hegel to conclude that "there is no relation of dependence in this religion" (49). As a result, the fetish cannot unite the people of the community. Individual wills remain separate from each other as well as from the power of the fetish. Unlike African cultures that discard the object of power

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<sup>49</sup> While Hegel marks the fetish as magic, thus inherently non-western and anti-modern, William Pietz's study on fetishism in British African colonies places it firmly within modernity, finding its origins in the British-African colonial encounter.

when it does not correspond with the will of the people, in Hegel's mature society the individual and his desires "are sacrificed and abandoned" to the will of the Spirit (33). The African fetish is subjective and superstitious. The Spirit, on the other hand, seeks unity, has an essence of Freedom, and derives its authority from Reason and God.

Although Hegel works to distinguish the European Spirit from the African fetish, one can nevertheless view the state's embodiment of the Spirit as a fetishization of power. Hegel believes that the "State is the Idea of Spirit in the external manifestation of human Will and its Freedom" (47). Therefore, the state is the concretization of the abstract Spirit. The will of a political entity becomes a natural and rational response to the will of the Spirit, becoming what Dussel describes as the state's "Voluntad-de-Poder" (its *willpower* or, literally, *Will-of-Power*) (*20 Propositiones* 55). In essence, the state has power to govern because of its "Voluntad-de-Poder," which results from its divine connection with Reason, God, and the Spirit. The state's power becomes fetishized because its origin is not in *people*, but in an abstract force that results from the dialectical unity between the objective (collective, universal) and the subjective (individual, innate) that creates a "We the People." When this occurs, *all* are free because all recognize the existence and power of this fundamental unity. This sounds very much like what Wilhelm Dilthey describes as a trait of the traditional *Bildungsroman*: the " 'greatest happiness of earth's children' is 'personality,' as a unified and permanent form of human existence" (336).

A weakness in Hegel's logic is that he assumes that the Spirit will never be fetishized because it is rational and has been "reduced ... to a science" (76). Conferring the power of the Spirit on the State opens the possibility of "the fancy of the individual [or Hegel's Hero] projecting itself into space, the human individuality [remaining] master of the image [or abstraction]" (94). Once fetishized, this image of an Idea of the Spirit becomes independent and



an “arbitrary choice of its maker” which can be discarded and destroyed in a similar fashion to the African fetish. If one agrees with Philip Abrams that the state is “at most a message of domination—an ideological artefact attributing unity, morality and independence to the disunited, a-moral and dependent workings of the practice of government,” then the “message—the claimed reality of the state” is shown to be only an “ideological device in terms of which the political institutionalisation of power is legitimated” (Abrams 35). Abrams demystifies the state, claiming that the state is not “the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice,” but is the mask itself (Abrams 35). Although trying to act as a reassurance of legitimacy, the magical underpinnings of Hegel’s writing undermine a claim to rationality.

In review, while Hegel sees other cultures lying outside the west as unable to unite their energies through their fetishes and non-Christian practices, the Europeans come together in reason and freedom under the state’s power. Socialization under Hegel’s state implies incorporation into an idyllic unity of free men—the movement from primitive *man* to civilized *men*. This movement follows what Moretti notes is the normal “exchange proposed by the classical *Bildungsroman*—the ‘sweet and intimate’ feeling of belonging to a system that literally ‘takes care of everything’” (65). Therefore, one can read the form as an allegory for the fetishization of power within the western nation-state.

My reading suggests that the difference Hegel strives to distinguish between European and non-European cultures cracks with his blindness to his own fetishization of the Spirit. My main point here is that Hegel’s description of the relationship between the Spirit and the state supports the tautological-teleology that Everyman will always be part of (or on his way to being part of) a unified community—the nation—which the State is supposed to embody. Furthermore, Hegel paints this frame as superior to any other and the goal to which less developed (non-

western) cultures naturally progress in their own development of *Bildung*. The recognition of the fetishization of the Spirit denaturalizes this structure and reveals its artificiality, making possible the conception of multiple Spirits, Freedoms, incorporated communities, and thus multiple *Bildungsromane* or border-*Bildungsromane*.

More than the telling of the story of a fetish, the genre itself becomes a fetish. As a fetish, the genre assumes a power and life beyond the words. Peter Melville Logan notes in his article on George Eliot and the fetishism of realism that realist novels encourage readers “to attribute a kind of life to the narrative, to imagine that behind or within this inert body of words resides a living spirit” (39). Thus the desire for authenticity—for a story that, despite its fiction, readers find matches their idea of real life—is a desire for a fantasy, or as Logan states, “an illusion of life” (40). He explains that in this way, “the realist object always strives to attain the status of the fetish” (40). In working to capture the essence of man—his interiority and life experiences—the *Bildungsroman* follows this tendency of instilling the novel’s words with a meaning beyond the text, providing an illusion or fantasy of what life is or should be (or has always been).<sup>50</sup>

This holds true beyond what would usually be considered realist fiction. For example, fantasies like the *Harry Potter* or *Twilight* novels are filled with magic and the supernatural.<sup>51</sup> But their narratives are relatable to their (implied) teenage readers because they are coming-of-age stories. While the characters in the novels might not be *completely* human and their experiences are extraordinary, the trajectories of their life paths follow along with those in realist

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<sup>50</sup> This may be one reason why novels published falsely as autobiographies cause such a stir (see earlier footnote for examples). The stories are more than words on paper, but it is as if telling a life story is a way of capturing a piece of that life.

<sup>51</sup> I note these two novels because they were and continue to be ravenously consumed. In an interesting article about technological reader participation in twentifirst-century *Bildungsromane*, Leisha Jones claims that “the popularity of the Potter franchise and the *Twilight* series signals a return of the transitional bildungsromangenre to the fore” (440).

*Bildungsromane*. Never mind that Bella has married into a family of vampires in *Twilight*'s third novel. One could read this as an allegory for eventual incorporation into an elite (very white) western power structure. As *Bildungsroman* fetishes, *Harry Potter* and *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* function on the same level. Logan notes that the "fetishistic goal of realism—to create an object that succeeds by seeming to come to life—gives it a counter-intuitive resemblance to the discourse of fantasy" (45). What is interesting with fantasy is that the employment of the *Bildungsroman* trajectory appears to ground the novel in some comprehensible reality; but instead it is the ultimate fantasy. Whether in fantastical or realistic form, the *Bildungsroman* exemplifies Michael Taussig's description of the "European history of consciousness making itself through the making of objects" (Taussig, "Maleficium" 118). In this case, the object is not solely the construction of a book or its electronic representation on screen, but the idea of what the reader expects to find inside.

The interaction between text and reader intensifies the magical qualities of the *Bildungsroman*. Slaughter points out that "a scene of reading, in which we read the *Bildungsheld's* reading of other *Bildungsromane*" is a frequent occurrence in *Bildungsromane* from various nations and eras (31). *Bildungsromane* model the making of the man as a literary process and thereby make their own stories important pieces in the journey they outline. In reading the text, the viewer is drawn into the same path as the protagonist. The text assists readers in the movement out of primitivism (with its youthful magic) and into civilized society (with its logical literacy). But at the same time, just as with the realist novels Logan discusses (47), they encourage readers to invest the books with a life of their own and in this manner return the reader to a savage stage supposedly left behind.

### 2.3 IMAGINING THE SELF AND THE NATION

For Benedict Anderson, this process of protagonist-reader modeling corroborates what he describes as the imagined community of the nation, “confirmed by the doubleness of our reading about our young man reading” (32).<sup>52</sup> Discussing the progression of reading events—critic reading the theorist reading a protagonist who reads about a man who may be reading a *Bildungsroman*, which may contain a scene of reading—highlights the layering of masks on masks, the play of parodies of parodies, or the expansive rippling of a fetish’s enchantment. In this chain of readers reading readers, the critical factor is not the lectors alone, but the link between them and the extrapolation of this association beyond the text. Although Anderson does not directly address the *Bildungsroman*, his ideas about reading the imagined community and the fusion of the “world inside the novel with the world outside” relate to the magic of the genre (Anderson 30).<sup>53</sup> Scenes of reading suggest a magical element in the doubleness Anderson describes, a supernatural power to draw the reader into the dream of the *Bildungsroman*. That is, if considered a fetish, the *Bildungsroman* does not serve to legitimate the idea of the nation as an imagined community, but to paint the cohesion of this unity in term of magical fantasy.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Slaughter also notes that in Anderson’s theories on nationalism the image of the protagonist reading is taken to be “the quintessence of national imagining” (32). Slaughter observes that many postcolonial *Bildungsroman* focus not on a national imaginary, but on an international one and he argues that they serve as “*Clef à Roman*: a generic key to the lettered city (the international literary public sphere)” (33).

<sup>53</sup> Anderson’s scene of reading example comes from his analysis of an Indonesian novel in which the character reacts after reading the title of a newspaper article that describes the death of a vagrant. Anderson’s point is that the character is impacted by what he reads in the print and does not think about the vagrant in personal terms, but instead cares about the “representative body” (32).

<sup>54</sup> This goes along with Anderson’s theory that secular nationalism “has to be understood by aligning it...with the large cultural systems that preceded it” (12), including the religious community, and that in medieval Christian descriptions of their religious faith “we can detect the seeds of a territorialization of faiths which foreshadows the language of many nationalists” (17). The unarticulated implication is that maybe the magic and faith of religion did not vanish when, as Anderson describes, the “sacred communities...were gradually fragmented, pluralized, and territorialized” (19). Interestingly, the only time Anderson mentions the supernatural is when he notes that it is “the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny” (12). This magical power carries over into national allegories such

Using an analogy of a man looking at a photograph of himself in his childhood, Anderson explains why national histories must be narrated. In viewing a photograph from his infancy the man is estranged from the “consciousness of childhood.” He cannot remember it; so he must narrate (204). In like manner, we narrate the nation. But unlike people, nations have no clear beginnings and ends. Anderson finds that due to this lack of origin, deaths and “remorselessly accumulating cemeteries” makeup the nation’s life story (206).

Something is missing in Anderson’s conclusion in which he quickly pairs the narration of our lives with the narration of our nations. He makes it seem as if it is simpler for one to know (or better, construct) who he is as a person than to know/construct who we are as citizens. Psychoanalytic theories of self-formation employ a much more complicated schemata to describe how one reaches a sense of individual identity. Maybe Anderson simplifies this because he focuses on autobiography and biography, forms that can be substantiated with “a huge modern accumulation of documentary evidence” (204) and in which man “emerges from parental genes and social circumstances” (205), making it seem a more or less straightforward task to write a person’s life history. Or maybe his focus is so much so on death and its significance that he forgets to look the other direction, at the unborn and the newly born.

For Anderson, what creates the feeling of *nation-ness* is not so much the connection of births and beginnings (marriages and children), but death and shared “ghostly *national* imaginings,” as evidenced in the sacrifices of the “Unknown Soldiers” who died defending their country (9 emphasis in original) and that “more and more ‘second-generation’

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as the *Bildungsroman*, in which the characters struggle to ascertain if their life courses are matters of luck or fate even though their destiny is always already set from the beginning. As Cheah remarks, “Bildung is a rational inner-directed process we undertake or submit to precisely because it brings out and develops natural dispositions or capacities (*Naturanlagen*) already in us” (41). The *Bildungsroman* portraying the unearthing and development of what has always been inside highlights the tautological-teleological framework of the genre, as discussed above. It also points to the relationship between the genre and what I have been calling the fetal origin, a special time/space encapsulating these natural dispositions.

nationalists...learned to speak 'for' dead people with whom it was impossible or undesirable to establish a linguistic connection" (198). In this theory, the nation is constructed in reverse, looking back at those ghosts who established the foundations of the nation. At the same time, Anderson claims that "print-capitalism" makes national narration possible by linking "fraternity, power, and time meaningfully together" (36).<sup>55</sup> His examples focus on the impact of newspapers on the public at time of their publication. While it seems there are two subjects reading and creating the nation (the man speaking for the dead and the man who had read the old newspaper), there is really only one. The imagined past readership is narrated by the current citizen looking back, envisaging his national ancestors imagining their community. While these original readers might be dead, I would argue that they function more as forms of fetal origins than ghostly phantoms.

Looking towards childhood instead of death, one could approach texts that invite readings of imagined communities, such as those that Anderson studies, as variants of the developmental period described in psychoanalysis as the mirror stage, which I acknowledge I am using liberally and changing from Jacques Lacan's original intent. In such a role, these texts appear to function as tools of socialization and act as fetishized fetal origins. Noticeably, two different ideas come into play. In psychoanalytic terms, one could say that the novels are engaged in the process of entry into the Symbolic (where the text serves as an Ideal-I or model that readers should emulate) as well as the Imaginary (the pre-social fetal origin). As allegories for national development, *Bildungsromane* function in this way as do the texts that Doris

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<sup>55</sup> Anderson—defining "nation" as an "imagined political community" that is imagined as both "inherently limited and sovereign" (6)—argues that print-capitalism fueled nationalism by "creating unified field of exchange and communication;" providing a "new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation;" and creating "languages-of-power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars. Certain dialects were inevitably 'closer' to each print-language and dominated their final forms" (44-45).

Sommer describes as *Foundational Fictions*. The latter, however, play a particular role as fetal origins for later representations of development (such as those portrayed in the *Bildungsroman*) by staging the process of what white elites consider proper socialization.

In the Americas, the foundational fictions are the fetal origins of the traditional *Bildungsroman*. They establish the future nation that the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* eventually accepts, questions, or rejects. The foundational fictions of America serve as imaginary points of origin in a land that appeared to have sprung up, as R. W. B. Lewis describes, as “emancipated from history” and in a position “prior to experience” (5). In republics that arose from colonization, these texts create time/spaces where, “in an effort to prove his own indigeneity,” the colonizer can “rewrite the past” (Weaver 228). The colonial legacy of these nations contributes to the desire to legitimate a patriotic history, including claims to the land and forms of indigeneity—indigeneity here not limited to cultures and worldviews considered Indian or native, but signifying a claim that one (or a people) naturally belongs to a place, a view that makes possible R. W. B. Lewis’s first line of *American Adam*: “This book has to do with the beginnings and first tentative outlines of a native American mythology” (1). Native American mythology (note: not American Indian mythology) is just what the foundational fictions create.

Establishing storyboards for proper western social and political incorporation, these narratives present the acceptable codes for relationships with whites and with those considered abject (slaves, indigenous). In the United States, the instability of the family units that the foundational fictions represent emphasizes a desire to restrain the impure and, in turn, to contain the purity of those that remain behind to mourn the loss of the abject other. In South America, the dynamic switches to an focus on *mestizaje* and inclusion in which the family remains stable, but only with the admittance of the originally undesirable other and the acceptance of the abject

as alterable. Examinations of the foundational fictions are instructive in a study of the *Bildungsroman* because they help to explain what we will already know when we reach the conclusion of *Bildungsromane* like *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and *The Giver*: that the protagonists—whether their socialization appears successful or not—are already part of an imagined community that provides the reassurance of legitimacy of modernity's universality, or, in other words, that ignores coloniality and alternative epistemological frames.

### 2.3.1 Imagining Foundational Fictions

Sommer employs Anderson's theories in her well-known study of Latin American sentimental novels, in which she argues that texts written at the beginning of national formations in the Americas demonstrate the ability of print-capitalism to mold nationalism. One example of Anderson's influence on Sommer is found in her description of the inclusion of local color in the novels she studies as a way “‘to make the different strata of society comprehensible one to another,’ that is to promote communal imaginings primarily through the middle stratum of writers and readers who constituted the most authentic expression of national feeling” (14). Of course, these stories could only spur such emotions in those reading the texts, which most likely did not include the colorful lower strata. Communal imaginings were thus just that: imaginings limited to privileged reading subjects. The magic of the text is highlighted in Sommer's note that these scenes were meant to provoke some kind of action in the reader, even if it just lead them to be “‘moved by that phantasmagorical ideal” (14).

Based in the genre of the romance, foundational fictions in Latin America unite politics and erotic love to create a sense of cohesion in the couple—and in extension the nation—and are



works of literature instilled in the educational system as examples of national history and pride. Sommer describes the fiction of romance as “a cross between our contemporary use of the word as a love story and a nineteenth-century use that distinguished the genre as more boldly allegorical than the novel. The classic examples in Latin America are almost inevitably stories of star-crossed lovers who represent particular regions, races, parties, economic interests and the like” (5). Thus these stories employ fantasies of romantic love and passion to override social inequalities and to create the ideal condition for a “contagious desire for socially productive love and for the State where love is possible” (6).

While a thorough continental study of foundational texts goes beyond the scope of this current project, a brief discussion of the foundational fictions of the United States in relation to those of Latin America will assist in understanding the way the foundation fictions operate as fetal origins and their relationship to the *Bildungsroman*. While Sommer’s study focuses exclusively on Latin America, she does not reject the idea of foundational fictions from other regions. She recognizes that the “inextricability of politics from fiction in the history of nation-building” is not particular to Latin America, noting that Leslie Fielder explores this issue in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (5-6). She also mentions the importance of romance to nineteenth-century U.S. literature and that Latin American foundational fictions were similar to “European foundational fictions” in that they “sought to overcome political and historical fragmentation through love” (26).

One thing that Sommer observes that makes Latin American foundational fictions unique is that they “tended to patch up” the cracks of the idyllic bourgeois family “with the sheer will to project ideal histories backward (as a legitimating ground) and forward (as a national goal), or with the euphoria of recent successes” (18). Cathy N. Davidson’s investigation of the

foundational texts of the United States in *Revolution and the Word* also notes this distinction. Although Davidson quietly mentions both Anderson's and Sommer's work in her study and in both cases makes some attempt to relate Latin American foundational texts with American ones, she rejects them as applicable and excuses these studies from her project. In the case of Anderson, she dismisses his work since Anderson deals with publications *before* revolution and she concentrates on novels written in "North America after a revolution from a colonial power" (21). She thus turns to Sommer, commenting that "in intent and political impact, early American novels may more closely resemble the nineteenth-century postrevolutionary Latin American novels that Doris Sommer calls 'foundational fictions'" (21). Notwithstanding a possible connection, she discards Sommer's study as well because while Sommer argues that Latin American foundational fictions "are designed to end conflict and promote unity, despite a range of opinions and disagreements evidenced in the plots...in early American novels it is not at all clear that unity is the end result—especially in novels where 'union' is the explicit goal" (21). Thus, Davidson claims that "American foundational fictions are, more typically, antifoundational" (21), and with that her comparison stops.<sup>56</sup> Thus, like Sommer, Davidson notes that *something* literary was happening in other regions of America at the time of the founding of

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<sup>56</sup> Davidson does not seem to reconcile the idea of American texts being antifoundational with her argument that the "early American novel, as a genre, tended to proclaim a socially egalitarian message. It spoke for...orphans, beggar girls, factory girls, or other unfortunates, and it repeatedly advocated the general need for 'female education'" (142). Thus, although the novels do not show the unity that Latin American foundational fictions celebrated, Davidson claims they still offered a democratic message that could advocate for the "unfortunates" of American society and served as a form for the voices of the marginalized and disenfranchised, providing a forum for their incorporation. From this perspective the early American novel could serve as a space for resistance and expression of discontent, but I believe this is not necessarily "antifoundational." Winfried Fluck explains that Davidson's position is one of three popular responses to early American fiction: "In the age of formalism, it was considered artistically inferior and illustrates an infant stage of American culture; in feminist criticism, it articulates disenfranchised voices and thus gains a subversive political potential; in recent political criticism, it is either a manifestation of Republican values of participatory democracy or of a nascent ideology of liberal capitalism (including a particular gender politics) that subjects the reader to a hegemonial disciplinary regime" (568).

the new nations, giving a brief nod to the South, but the limits of her study constrain any real dialogue between north and south.

I agree with Sommer and Davidson that some similarity exists between the foundational fictions of North and South America but that, ultimately, they have distinct characteristics. One strong resemblance is that they both share a dreamlike quality similar to that which Redfield employs to describe the *Bildungsroman*. The *idea* of the foundational fiction is fabricated and sustained in theory and criticism; and although criticism is “unable to guarantee [its] existence” (Redfield 63), the idea continuously pop ups, as if is “so relentlessly attractive” (Sommer 6) that we just cannot let it go. Like the *Bildungsroman*, they function as reassurance of legitimacy for the nation-state. On a more basic level, foundational fictions of North and South America share important elements of their plots common to sentimental literature (e.g., star-crossed lovers, young love, seduction, adulterous desires, illegitimate and stillborn children). At their core, these novels share similar concerns about the fates of the future nations—or better, the *readings* that produce the idea of the foundational fictions are concerned with how the literature foretold the development of the new nations.

The foundational fictions for both America and Latin America serve as the fetal origins that structure the (dis)order that the child (that is, the nation and its narrations) will grow into as it matures—its potential and ability to survive already outlined in the foundational fictions. The fact that Latin American foundational fictions are imbedded within the educational system and well read suggests that these fetal origins operate on the level of a fetish. But, I would argue any novel marked as a foundational fiction acts as a fetish.<sup>57</sup> Although less commonly read in the

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<sup>57</sup> Early American texts that attempted to make their stories look realistic also fetishize the fiction in a way similar to Logan’s description of the fetishism of realism. Winfried Fluck notes that early American novels wanted to define “themselves against romances which manipulate the reader’s imagination and trap her in foolish daydreams” (574).

U.S., American foundational fictions prove to act as the origin for succeeding national novels. Narrations following the foundational fictions of the U.S., like those from Latin America, are “responses” (Fluck 584) that “rewrite, or unwrite, foundational fiction” (Sommer 27). But not, as in Latin America, as “the failure of romance” (Sommer 27)—since the romance in these novels has already failed—but as the failure of a system of control that functioned “by fear of separation” (Fluck 584) from a “patriarchal guardianship” (Fluck 581). In the U.S. the foundational fictions were thus “replaced in the favor of its readers by genres that promised to be more useful and effective” at serving as a “medium for imaginary self-empowerment” (Fluck 581). The next generation—appearing in the masculine and feminine forms of the frontier romance and domestic novel—acts as a gendered “training ground” for personal and national selfhood (Fluck 584). Two examples of such novels would be James Fennimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868). Interestingly, these are the novels more commonly read in American literature classes in high school, dramatized in film and theater, and protected as part of American history.

Despite the similarities, Latin American foundational fictions remain distinct from their North American counterparts. One dissimilarity is that the foundational fictions of the United States are a curiosity to the common public, whereas those in Latin America have become well-known national novels. Latin Americans read them as they enter the civil society of their

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To set themselves apart, “these early novels recommend themselves by their claim not to be fictions but, as in the case of *Charlotte Temple*, ‘a tale of truth,’ designed to provide instructions for female education” (Fluck 574). *The Power of Sympathy* thus is labeled as “FOUNDED in TRUTH” and *The Coquette* as “FOUNDED ON FACT.” The desire to protect the reader from the foolishness of romance is embedded, quite directly, in the texts. For example, *The Power of Sympathy* gives a warning that expecting too much (as one would from reading a romance) will only lead to disappointment: “When the heart is elevated by strong expectation, disappointment and misfortune come with redoubled force. To receive pain, when we look for pleasure, penetrates the very soul with accumulated anguish” (75). These novels do not recuperate and save the protagonists from their disastrous fates. To do so would be to trap readers in unattainable expectations, leading only to more ruin. For these early U.S. novels, it was thus more beneficial to *contain* the sentiment and stimulation of erotic love than to let them take deep root and possibly spread.

nations—that is, as they become the subject-citizens playing out their own *Bildung*. Sommer explains that as “national novels,” the foundational fictions are books

frequently required in the nation’s secondary schools are a source of local history and literary pride, not immediately required perhaps but certainly by the time the Boom novelists were in school. Sometimes anthologized in school readers, and dramatized in plays, films, television serials, national novels are often as plainly identifiable as national anthems. (4)

The novels that Davidson studies in *Revolution and the Word*, while foundational, are not national novels in the terms that Sommer describes. My main argument for their exclusion in such a category is that they are not popularly read (particularly in the educational system). In her examination of reading early American fiction, Winfried Fluck notes that until recently, “early American fiction appeared embarrassingly bad. Reading it was thus characterized as unpleasant, if not downright painful experience which should best be left to the experts who were willing to face the unenviable task in stoic professional self-denial” (566).<sup>58</sup> Sommer’s discussion of the rejection of foundational fictions by Boom authors—their “disingenuous dismissal” of earlier texts (1)—marks a similarity of disinterest in foundational texts. But in the case of Latin America, at least the Boom authors had read some of these texts, or at least knew of them by name.<sup>59</sup> Personally, I have yet to hear of anyone reading *The Power of Sympathy* or *The Coquette* in a U.S. high school. It may be that North American foundational fictions are *antifoundational* in that they provide very little groundwork in the contemporary national imaginary. That is, they

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<sup>58</sup> Julia A. Stern concurs with this opinion in her introduction to *The Plight of Feeling*, explaining that “[t]hrough the mid-1970s, students of eighteenth-century American politics, as well as critics charting the rise of an indigenous literary tradition, find little of value or interest in the novels of the post-revolutionary era” (1).

<sup>59</sup> As mentioned in the quote above, Sommer believes that Latin American foundational fictions were “certainly” required reading in secondary schools “by the time the Boom novists were in school” (4).

are not employed to engage citizens in discourse on American values or history. In fact, they are rarely discussed. This is significant because I have been arguing that the foundational fictions serve as fetal origins—as such they play a role in the legacy and conception of what the nation-state is and how it was formed. They are an anchor of “native American mythology” (Lewis) or national values. What is interesting is despite this lack of connection with the contemporary public, United States’ foundational fictions still act as origins for national representations of sympathetic magical relations and strategies of purification through removal.

This *containment of the abject other* (who appears in characters socially marked as inferior) differs from the attempt in Latin American novels at *neutralization and integration*. It seems that Sommer’s conclusion that Latin American romances worked to undo the fragmentation of European foundational fictions does not apply in the case of foundational fictions of the United States. Contrastingly, American writers appeared to maintain what Sommer describe as a European tendency to show the “strains and finally the cracks” of the bourgeois family of the liberal-democratic nations (18). Why would Latin Americans work in their fictions to “engender new nations” (Sommer 18) that saved the family while American writers, in a colder version, left their protagonists to a sorrowful fate?

To answer this question, I follow Fluck’s line of reasoning about early American fiction’s “strategy of removal and containment” (576).<sup>60</sup> In contrast, Latin American novels seem to

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<sup>60</sup> Other explanations present themselves and while worthy of investigation, close examination of them goes beyond the limits of the current discussion. For example, one could argue, such as Anne Dalk, that in the United States, “authors approved established patterns of familial and social deference and responsibility” through “inversion, in their display of the dreadful consequences of neglecting such obligations” (200). The novels present the worst-case scenario: a force or entity (the rake/aristocracy/democracy itself) “could cause the nation conceived in the revolution to be stillborn” (Evans n.p.). The rakes in these novels thus stand for the old European aristocracy that must be cast aside and imply that attachments to European social tradition prevent the healthy growth of the new American republic. The lack of fertility is thus a discourse against the old system and these sentimental novels serve as a “catalyst for middle class development” (Evans n.p.). One could argue that American texts differed from Latin American ones because their objective was to instill a “fear of separation” (Fluck 584) that encouraged dependency.

function with a strategy of reform and acquisition. If considered as national allegories, these foundational fictions describe the development of the nation in similar terms. That is, as systems of containment or neutralization. The United States and Latin American countries emerged from histories of colonization. Not only were they colonies of a European empire, but they were physically constructed in spaces originally inhabited by indigenous groups which had been conquered and colonized. How these states treated indigenous cultures during the consolidation of nationalism differed, and I argue this distinction is reflected in the divergent approaches of their foundational fictions.

One principle difference in the treatment of indigenous peoples and the conceptions of race is that as the U.S. population, government, and army moved westward it fought against, exterminated, and removed indigenous peoples from their territories, segregating them on reservations and forcing their assimilation. Philip J. Deloria, a history professor of Dakota Sioux heritage, explains that in the United States the “bounded landscape” of indigenous groups on the reservation “represented a colonial dream of fixity, control, visibility, productivity, and, most importantly, docility” (27). He locates the pacification of the Indian in white national consciousness at the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890 (16), after which “the imaged

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That is, the rake is the possible threat that could lead to disloyalty and disturb the new nation and thus it is best to be bound to the new government and dependent on it. Instead of love, fear is the motivator for consent. Or, one could consider the difference in religious traditions (Protestant and Catholic). Leslie Fielder, although not engaged with Latin American literature, notes a difference in European writing between “mother-directed Catholicism and father-centered Protestantism” (56). Latin America’s history with Spain and the Catholic Church places it on the side of the Mediterranean writing, which Fielder believes held a stronger connection to courtly love with “its elevation of the lady to a kind of God-head” (52) an image that could be sustained in the “cult of the Virgin” (53). In this sense, perhaps a sense of courtly love and “Latin ‘gallantry’” (Fielder 57) could survive in Latin America, but not in the Protestant U.S. where “there is no real tradition of gallantry” (76). This, however, does not explain why Latin American novels would differ from Catholic European ones (like those from France). Another possible answer is timing. Written in the nineteenth-century, Latin American foundational fictions emerged several decades after those in North America. One could counter this argument with a look at nineteenth-century U.S. novels, which are markedly distinct from the foundational fictions of Latin America. In the end, I find these responses do not resolve the fundamental question as to why foundational fictions from the U.S. would use a different approach than those from Latin America.

possibility of an Indian tradition of physical resistance was swept away” (51). At the same time, Indian representations “tended to fetishize the violent potential of the Indian” and assimilation of the tame Indian prompted a disquieting sense that “a rigorous racial and cultural division between Indian and white might no longer be tenable” (Deloria 50, 45). While tame and safe, Indians, whose barbarous history continued to mark them as the inferior enemy, still represented an external threat that could corrupt society from within.

The process of colonization was different in Latin America. In the Andes in particular, the white elite attempted to fix racial inferiority not by binding the indigenous to reservations, but through racial and ethnic taxonomies.<sup>61</sup> In the early twentieth century, *letrados* (Andean intellectuals) and the *criollo* oligarchy<sup>62</sup> employed the discourse of *mestizaje*<sup>63</sup> in the ranking of racial classifications that distinguished the white and *mestizo*<sup>64</sup> from the indigenous. Distance from the *indio* was further marked with subdivisions of *mestizaje* that differentiated between “nascent *mestizo-criollo* bourgeoisie” and the *cholo* (a *mestizo* with indigenous cultural connections) (Sanjinés 398; 400).<sup>65</sup> In addition, the rise of Andean *indigenismo* in the early 1900s led some intellectual elites, such as José María Mariátegui, to idealize and praise the Indian as vital to national heritage (although continuing to speak for them and often still considering them inferior).<sup>66</sup> Since Andean social hierarchies articulated difference through

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<sup>61</sup> See Javier Sanjinés C.; *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*; and Kevin A. Yelvington.

<sup>62</sup> *Criollo* refers to a person of Spanish descent, i.e. white elite.

<sup>63</sup> Referring to racial mixing, particularly between the Spanish (or *criollos*) and Indians, *mestizaje* could be translated in English as miscegenation or crossbreeding; however, these phrases do not fully capture the word’s particular racial and social connotations.

<sup>64</sup> Products of *mestizaje* or people of Spanish and indigenous descent.

<sup>65</sup> At the same time, discourse on *mestizaje* in other regions of Latin America (e.g. Mexico) in the early twentieth century challenged notions of the white superiority and “decoupled racial mixture from the idea of racial degeneration” (Holt xi). José Vasconcelos’s “Cosmic Race” (1925) is one well-known example of the praise of Latin America’s *mestizaje*.

<sup>66</sup> See Appelbaum, Macpherson, and Roseblatt (7). For a discussion and critical analysis of *indigenismo* (particularly its function in literature and in the Andes) see *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* by José Carlos Mariátegui (206-320); “*Indigenismo* and Heterogeneous Literatures” by Antonio Cornejo Polar;



conceptions of moral (versus biological) race, the lines separating races could blur, giving racial classifications some fluidity based on status, education, and migration (De la Cadena 46).<sup>67</sup> These racial hierarchies are an instance of elite attempts to establish *as real* the *dream* of racial fixity and visibility. At the same time, the fluidity of the concept of race allows for the illusion of the acquisition of the other—incorporation not as an *indio*, but as a *reformed Indian* (*mestizo*, *cholo*). Although permitting more incorporation than a system based on biology and family heritage, the Latin American racial hierarchies function in a similar manner, that is to establish a line between the civilized and the savage. As in North America the ultimate fluidity of these classifications raises white fears of the “dark side of assimilation,” i.e., the arbitrariness of the lines separating white from Indian (Deloria 45).

The foundational fictions from the U.S. and the Latin America thus reflect this distinction in the treatment of race and indigenous groups. In the U.S, white settlers excluded the Indian and established boundaries to separate white from native, limiting social and racial boundary-crossing. Their foundational fictions attempt to balance sympathy and distance with the suffering/abject other. On the other hand, in Latin America, racial hierarchies, while inhibiting for those of the lower strata, permitted a form of incorporation (however unequal). Their foundational fictions follow this more flexible pattern of possibilities of incorporation, but still

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“Anthropology, Pedagogy, and the Various Modulations of *Indigenismo*” by Javier Sanjinés C.; and *The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism* by Estella Tarica. Estella Tarica describes two common perspectives of indigenismo that position it either as an oppressive discourse by non-indigenous intellectuals about Indians or as a sympathetic, anti-colonial discourse that critiques violence toward indigenous groups. She concludes that while indigenista discourse “has participated in transforming native populations into subjects of state control, appropriating indigenous lands, and transforming indigenous cultures in order to better subordinate them to non-Indian rule,” it has also “promoted a vision of Indians that is distinct from, and often antagonistic to, the vision promoted by colonial settlers and their descendants, who see Indians as objects of exploitation....Indigenismo resisted the equation of Indians with barbarity. Yet in some ways it also continued to desire and justify the subordination of indigenous people” (xii-xiii).

<sup>67</sup> For further dialogue on the significance and fluidity of *mestizo* and *indio* classifications and identities in the Andes see Marisol de la Cadena’s *Indigenous Mestizos*. Her text describes the relationships between culture and race in the Andes and traces the genealogy of the discourse of *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* in Cusco, Peru.

maintain distance from the Indian (colonized or abject). Once again, the objective is the illusion of the wholeness of an imagined community and the creation of a pure point of origin.

### **2.3.2 The Page as Mirror**

The foundational fictions present the possibility of wholeness, however unrealistic or prejudiced—a reflection of an ideal united nation. In doing so, they hold two primary functions: to serve as a tool of socialization and to act as a fetishized fetal origin. These texts are engaged with both the process of one's entry into the social system and one's connection to something outside of it. This is not a contradiction, but two different functions of the foundational fiction.

To explore this concept, I refer to Childhood Studies scholar Perry Nodelman's "The Mirror Staged: Images of Babies in Baby Books." Nodelman's choice of subject matter is clever because the simplicity of baby board books lays bare the reader-text relationship. Without plots, they are just collections of photos of babies to be looked at by babies. While the materials that Nodelman analyzes are unique, their functions correspond to those of the foundational fictions as well as the traditional *Bildungsroman*. Pairing Anderson's theory of the development of the nation with psychoanalytic theories on the development of the self illustrates how conceiving the development of the self shares some commonalities with the ways the development of the nation has been envisioned. From this perspective, one could view the process of reading these diverse texts as variants of Jacques Lacan's concept of the mirror stage.

In brief, Lacan developed a theory of growth where the dimensions of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real shape the psyche. In the Imaginary the child perceives no separation between itself and the world around it. This shifts with entry into the Symbolic, in which the father (the male phallus) comes to represent the child's loss of unity with the mother. This occurs

at the end of what Lacan calls the mirror stage when the child realizes that such a totality is an illusion. Lacan believes that between six and eighteen months the child enters the mirror stage. At this point the child sees itself in the mirror and while he can see his body as whole, his uncoordinated actions create a sense of fragmentation. Lacan explains: “For the total form of his body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt...in opposition to the turbulent movements which the subject feels he animates it” (76). Seeing one’s ideal reflection in the mirror is thus not an act of recognition, but misrecognition since “the perfect version of oneself” is taken to be “superior to one’s actual and apparently less unified and less complete embodied self” (Nodelman, “The Mirror” 15). The image in the mirror is the ideal concept of the self that one desires to be but will never be able to completely acquire.

The books Nodelman studies present photos or images of cute babies going about their daily lives. He concludes that even the youngest of readers participate in an imagined community of “babyhood” (“The Mirror” 21) and argues that by viewing the representations in these books, babies may

see themselves in such images. More accurately, perhaps, the implied readers/viewers of these books for beginners are in the process of learning *how* to identify, being invited by the books and by the ways in which adults interact with babies in the reading and viewing of them to see the images as versions of themselves. (“The Mirror” 16)

In such a way, Nodelman suggests, these books act as “variations of the mirror stage” (“The Mirror” 15). He thus employs Lacan’s term but reconstructs the “process of becoming self-conscious” to include interactions not only with the mirror, but with literary representations

(Nodelman, “The Mirror” 15). Nodelman explains that after the “foundational moment of identifying oneself in one’s mirror image, the fantasy image of oneself as Ideal-I can be replaced in later stages of development by others whom one may want to emulate” (“The Mirror” 16), such as the mother or images of other babies in board books. In such a way, the concept of the mirror stage and its function expands to incorporate a social space, not simply a private act of becoming. Nodelman goes on to suggest that baby books “help make babies into citizens and consumers” by representing “one of the earlier means by which cultural and mercantile forces enter the lives of young readers/viewers and operate to shape their desires and their sense of themselves” (“The Mirror” 17). An imagined community of babies represented in these books influences the reader/viewer’s development of self in relation to the characters (babies) pictured in the text.

Nodelman concludes that contemporary baby board books act as the Ideal-I—the goal to “aspire toward and, possibly, to grow toward” (Nodelman, “The Mirror” 30). In a similar way the foundational fictions serve as models—representations of the socio-political Ideal-I that the nation (those reading the nation) should aspire to. Nodelman’s article brings an interesting element into the concept of self-awareness and the relationship between the development of the self and the act of reading. By focusing on texts for babies, he can stick to the script of psychoanalysis and the emergence of subjectivity that begins in the foundations of human life. Extrapolating on this idea, I would argue that baby board books are just new additions to the world of print-capitalism that Anderson claims helped give rise to the imagined communities that framed the new American nations. The foundational fictions serve as the mirror that reflects an Ideal-I that society can strive toward. In the case of Latin America, this is image is of a cohesive national family. Instead of Sommer’s description of an adult desire to produce the babies of the

nation, desire here arises in the baby (or reader) to be the ideal citizen-subject. It is interesting that Nodelman gets so close to Anderson's idea but keeps his concept in the baby's world. After all, Anderson is arguing what Nodelman suggests as a possibility: that the images in the text work to turn the viewers into citizens.

While Anderson focuses on the adult, leaving the baby behind in an estranged past (204), Nodelman pays attention to the child, overlooking the adult reader. After all, babies cannot pick up and read these books by themselves. For an adult reading these stories, the pictured babies are not Ideal-Is; they do not (I suppose) want to be babies again. But they might imagine their and other babies' infancies to be like those pictured in the books. They are perfect babies, representatives of what I am calling the fetal origin. Connecting this idea to the foundational fictions, for contemporary readers, the narratives of nineteenth-century texts have outgrown their utility as Ideal-Is. The texts however continue to serve a national function. As Sommer points out, they are "frequently required in the nations' secondary schools as a source of local history and literary pride" (4). She remarks that the denial of this literary tradition by Boom writers is "a symptom of unresolved dependence" (3). They therefore continue to work within the "imagined [literate] community" (Anderson) but not as socialization tools, but more as fetal origins. The connection to other adult (in the case of baby board books) or contemporary (in the case of foundational fictions) readers does not result from a desire to strive toward the image presented in the text, but from a shared, re-staged memory of an irrecoverable past that serves as the basis for who we think we are today.

Both memories (of babyhood and nationhood) are whitewashed. The "diminished version of babyhood" in the board books presents a "bright, happy world: the shadows in it are minimal and the colours in it tend to be bright, cheery ones" (Nodelman, "The Mirror" 21). Similarly,

Fernando Unzueta, following Sommer in an analysis of national romances, describes these texts as being “full of idealized literary conventions such as the polarization of its protagonists” and incorporating “literary characteristics, like their use of stock characters, ideal and exceptional protagonists, stylized settings, and their overall abstractness” (132). In another analysis of these texts, Norman S. Holland describes *Soledad* from Bartolomé Mitre’s Bolivian romance as the ideal the reader strives to become (80). Thus, the foundational fictions present abstract, shallow representations that provide readers with an ideal image of social and family relations that should be strived for in the new nations. Like the baby books, these texts present images of life as “less messy, less complex, less uncertain about who one is and what one is or what one’s relationships to other things and people are” (Nodelman, “The Mirror” 22). In this way they are “an invitation to accept a specific, more limited, and more readily socially recognizable and conformist subjectivity” (Nodelman, “The Mirror” 22). Part of this limited perspective is the elimination of the abject, less mess and disorder. With both the baby books and the foundational fictions, the subjects presented are undoubtedly clean. Nodelman notes that in the baby books “dirt is non-existent or invisible” (“The Mirror” 21). In a similar way, the racially abject other is removed as a threat in the foundational fictions. Annihilation of dirt (or of difference), of course has implications for the adult or contemporary reader: it makes the fetal origin a place of purity, cleansed of any colonial dirt or guilt. Here, we all start in the same place on equal ground.

The Ideal-I presented in the foundational fictions works to resolve the tension produced by the threat of the counter-history of the other race that Foucault describes in his lectures at the Collège de France. They thus serve to protect the “purity of the race” (Foucault, “*Society*” 81). As I mentioned in the Introduction, Foucault’s employment of the term race emerges from the writing of the history or the memories of groups in struggle. In this sense, race is neither

biological nor limited to classifications of cultural differences but arises from a discourse of counter-histories. Foucault argues that when the counter-history began to be coded in terms of biological difference (“*Society*” 80), a public fear of the counter-history—of the “other race” (“*Society*” 61)—as a destructive *growth* produced within society and infesting it emerged. One could argue that Anderson’s description of the “continuity” and “meaning” of the nation’s “limitless future” (11-12) conveys the idea of securing the nation’s future from this degenerative, abject race.

Sommer side-steps the dilemma of race by suggesting that the foundational fictions employed love and romance to bring the people together through *mestizaje* as a way of “annihilating difference and constructing a deeply horizontal, fraternal dream of national identity” (39). Although both Foucault and Anderson are integral components of her investigation and although race plays an important role as an obstacle for love in several romances, she does not analyze how these scholars approach the issue of race. Sommer focuses on Foucault’s study of sexuality and, by quoting Anderson, she seems to agree that nationalism and racism are separate and distinct since “nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racisms dream of eternal contaminations, transmitted from the origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations” (quoted in Sommer 39). The imagined communities linked by print-capitalism that Anderson describes are based on *literate* bodies that share language. The idea of a “fraternity of equals” (Anderson 84) comes at the expense of forgetting the mixed origins of the nation (Renan), that is, by disregarding what Foucault describes as counter-histories and other races, particularly those that evoke the fatalities of colonization and are inscribed in non-European writing. Part of the imaginary of these romances (the Ideal-I they create) is thus the idea of a homogenous “historical fatality” (Anderson 146) that serves as a

reassurance of legitimacy. By separating racism from nationalism, Anderson ignores the children who do not embody the limitless future of the nation—the abject growths of the other race that could undermine national progress. Instead, he locates the origin of racism in class (149) and thus overlooks the significance of race in the formation of particular (white) national communities.<sup>68</sup> By following Anderson’s lead and by overlooking Foucault’s racial discourse, Sommer misses a critical point in the importance of the foundational fictions. These stories’ reassurance of legitimacy rests on the production of a fetal origin of the nation-state that preserves the purity of the “race” (Foucault “*Society*”).

The foundational fictions are, as Sommer explains, “written backward, progressing like religious or mythical discourse from a sacred given and reconstructing a trajectory toward it. The narrative begins conceptually from a resolution of conflict, whether that resolution is realized or not, and serves as a vehicle for love and country that seem, after the fact, to have preexisted the writing” (49). This implies that national foundations have a solid base in some “sacred-given”—the fetal origin—from which the story unfolds and which the story reaches. The foundational fictions recast the words of liberator San Martín into sentimental narratives: “in the future the aborigines shall not be called Indians or natives; they are children *and citizens* of Peru and they shall be known as Peruvians” (quoted in Anderson 52). In other words, everyone is a part of this new family and those who might appear outside of it are really not, since they are simply the children who are destined to grow into the national citizenry. The origin of the nation is founded in a projected future and solidified in the reading and rereading of the national forecast.

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<sup>68</sup> Of course, I am not the first to critique Anderson’s study. See the compilation of essays in *Beyond Imagined Communities: Reading and Writing the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Sara Castro-Klarén and John Charles Chasteen, editors) for one example of the debates his seminal book has provoked.



## 2.4 BACK TO *BILDUNG*

Initially, I meant to dedicate this chapter to the traditional *Bildungsroman*. But it seems that the foundational fictions once again proved themselves to be so persistently tempting that there was no escaping their charms. In the Americas, the foundational fictions pair vaginal erotic love with phallic politics, out of which is born the children whose stories of development will be told in the *Bildungsroman*. Both narrative forms act as masks that legitimize power structures within the modern nation-state as well as western conceptions of development and progress.

Putting the *Bildungsroman* and the foundational fictions together is not groundbreaking.<sup>69</sup> I agree with Julia Kushigian, who suggests in her study of Latin American *Bildungsromane* that “nation-building fictions” be read as “foundational Bildungsroman in search of communal self-realization” (17). Kushigian argues that that foundational fictions initiate a “quest for identity” centered “firmly in the national character” (17). Thus she concludes that the foundational fictions should be read as “Bildungsroman, because they conceive the development of identity, be it self or collective, from within the social structure. Rhetorically, they are grounded in self-definition and growth that inform larger issues of justice, social change, identity, and ethical choice” (146). This broad definition includes the foundational fictions because they can be read as describing a journey of a people “moving in a forward direction” (Kushigian 146). Thus, the foundational fictions do not just function like the *Bildungsroman*, but can be read to be a variant of the form itself.

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<sup>69</sup> In her investigation, Sommer attempts to link the nineteenth-century texts to their twentieth-century counterparts, sketching an “Archeology of the ‘Boom’” that situates her discourse within a more contemporary and popular literary movement (1). She claims Boom novels—Latin American works gaining international attention in the 1960s and 70s—are “haunted” by their romantic literary lineages that originated with rise of the Latin American republics (2). Many of these Boom novels could be read as *Bildungsroman*, such as *The Death of Artemio Cruz*. Although Boom writers “resisted” national romances (3), Sommer observes that they are very much indebted to earlier sentimental narratives in the ways they “rewrite, or un-write, foundational fictions as the failure of romance” (27).

I would agree that these romances could be read as a kind of *Bildungsroman* that grounds a national sentiment. However, Kushigian identifies the Latin American *Bildungsroman* (and accordingly its foundational fictions) as unique because of their function of “transforming self-realization into the service of something larger, a universal social goal” (15). In this way she pits Latin American expression against a western literary tradition, which one could very well argue also links self cultivation with the formation of a larger social objective.<sup>70</sup> She does not reflect on how internal colonization present in Latin America might impact the form and content of these narratives. So, like Kushigian, I think it is productive to read American foundational fictions as forms of national *Bildungsromane*; but I am more interested in questioning that relationship and the structure of the nation they establish, rather than simply pairing the two together.<sup>71</sup>

Both the foundational fictions and the *Bildungsroman* (and the baby board books Nodelman studies) serve as fetishes that produce images that tie the reader to something beyond the text. Logan observes that “the discourse of fetishism is never about the fetish as such, but rather is about the sequence of relationships that produce the notion of fetishism” (31). Talking about the *Bildungsroman* as a fetish is the repudiation of the genre’s truth-telling capabilities and is less about discussing the plot than about considering alternative reader-text interactions. The *Bildungsroman* as a fetish disturbs the certainty of modernity’s trajectory from the child to the

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<sup>70</sup> Kushigian claims that “Latin American literature does not belong to the individualistic tradition embodied by the literature of the United States and Europe. In essence, individualism is the patrimony of western tradition....what we see in Spanish American novels of growth and development is a communal and relational structure that frequently critiques the failures of individualism” (18). I believe she oversimplifies the traditional *Bildungsroman* and generalizes the Latin American version claiming its “uniqueness...lies in its capacity to generalize human experience owing to the Bildung or developmental process of nations and social movements on one hand, and the inevitable forming of an American identity, on the other” (16).

<sup>71</sup> One indication of the difference between Kushigian’s and my analysis is her reliance on Hegel to bolster her theory and my critique of the function of Hegel’s concepts in relation to the *Bildungsroman*. Kushigian defines the Beautiful Soul as “a cultural icon that personifies an interconnection between moral and aesthetic qualities” and which “symbolizes the ultimate achievement of human endeavor when linked to potentiality” (13). She takes this phrase from Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. She appears to make a connection between the Beautiful Soul, the Child, and the *Bildungsroman*; however, I find her argument difficult to follow. This may stem more from the lack of clarity in her use of the term Child, than from the concept of the Beautiful Soul.

adult—primitive to the civilized—along with its standards of who has the capacity to form a unified people and who can participate legitimately within this imagined community *versus* who is only united through a fetish (and thus not really connected at all). Considering the magical side of the *Bildungsroman* makes the discussion not just about modernity, but about coloniality and, more specifically, about race.

As described in the introduction, race is a marker of difference that denotes a threat to the official discourse. Part of the official discourse of modernity, the *Bildungsroman* legitimates the nation-state and the natural and universal progression into this unity. If treated as some kind of problem-solving tool, then the *Bildungsroman* appears to function as a means of socialization. The marginalized can incorporate through the standard narrative and in this way all become linked in a kind of sympathetic game, lector reading the other as part of his world. In this sense, the problem of race disappears because, when we get down to it, we are all on the same track, some are just behind others.

But if treated as a fetish, the *Bildungsroman* functions more like a fetal origin and the game looks more like a fantasy. In his investigation of the fetishization of language, Geoffrey Galt Harpham concludes that language as a fetish serves to distract attention from individuals or groups and the consequences of their behavior. We look at the fetish instead of looking at “humanity ‘itself’” (66). But one could argue that this is a function of a fetish in general. The fetish assumes a power apart from and above the human condition. The capacity of the *Bildungsroman* to unite readers in an imagined community is magic and those who believe it are cast under its spell. The narrative of modernity, a plot in which the barbarian’s superstitions are supposed to fall by the wayside, turns out to be founded on what it has allegedly surpassed. Moreover, as a fetal origin, it preexists social norms and categorizations such as racial

hierarchies. Fundamentally we are all human and can all be incorporated. If the fetal origin really existed it would not include the abject, because the abject would cease to exist. No counter-history would threaten the dominant discourse. But at the same time, the dominant discourse would lose its potency. Thus the *Bildungsroman* needs to be both: fetal origin and socializing tool. It needs to offer the fantasy of the liberal democratic nation-state but at the same time must present it as having come so far from the savage tribe. In that way, it can capture the *soul of man*.

### 3.0 SAVIORS (RE)CONCEIVED

Much of what a pregnant woman encounters in her daily life...are shared in some fashion with her fetus. The fetus incorporates these offerings into its own body, makes them part of its flesh and blood.... [I]t treats these maternal contributions as *information*....Will it be born into a world of abundance, or scarcity? Will it be safe and protected, or will it face constant dangers and threats? Will it live a long, fruitful life, or a short, harried one?

—Annie Murphy Paul

Human beings were created in such a way that they might live in every climate and endure each and every condition of the land. Consequently, numerous seeds and natural predispositions must lie ready in human beings either to be developed or held back in such a way that we might become fitted to a particular place in the world. These seeds and natural predispositions appear to be inborn and made for these conditions through the on-going process of reproduction.

—Immanuel Kant

But the important point is that this form [the “ideal-I”] situates the agency known as the ego, prior to its social determination, in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible for any single individual or, rather, that will only asymptotically approach the subject’s becoming, no matter how successful the dialectical synthesis by which he must resolve, as *I*, his discordance with his own reality.

—Jacques Lacan

In the previous chapter I described the traditional *Bildungsroman* as an allegory of the fetishization of power within the modern nation-state and as a fetish itself. Within this discussion, I took into consideration what Doris Sommer calls the *Foundational Fictions* and

asserted that these romances hold similar functions as the *Bildungsroman* including acting as a tool for socialization and as a fetal origin. This chapter will explore how these ideas play out in several texts. The question for my project is that if these novels allegorize the development of the nation-state and incorporation into this community, then how is the issue of difference, in particular racial (indigenous) difference, addressed? As explained in the last chapter, one method is through the fetishization of the form. Geoffrey Galt Harpham claims that the “fetish-object is constituted by the subject as a means of protection...from an unpleasant sight and thus from a painful thought” (66). This chapter focuses on how the form as fetish provides a reassurance of legitimacy and protection from the “unpleasant sight” of a nation fragmented by coloniality and racial markings. Parody of the form, as I will discuss in the following chapters, does not provide a shield from the “painful thought” of the abject, but instead redirects the discourse, challenging the sacred status of the original and presenting an alternative political project.

A key element in the magical relations of the form is the concept I describe as the *fetal origin*. I have discussed the fetal origin earlier, but will explain it in more detail here. While these stories appear to privilege the mature over the juvenile, the child as fetal origin plays a significant role. As Franco Moretti notes, the *Bildungsroman* is about modernity and modernity is intimately linked with youth (5). My point, however, is not that youth is connected to mobility, freedom, and the “world that seeks meaning in the *future*” (Moretti 5 emphasis in original). Instead, I look at the fetal origin as a fetishized time/space that the liberal democratic nation-state depends on to legitimate its projection into the future. It is not just about legitimating the reproduction of the nation-state, but about offering a fetish to wash away the sins of colonialism.

The concept of fetal origin may have more in common with Julia Kushigian’s description of *Beautiful Soul* than Moretti’s discussion of youth. It is worthwhile to mention Kushigian’s

*Reconstructing Childhood* because it is one of the few recent books of criticism on the Latin American *Bildungsroman*. Additionally, she directly links *Bildung* to the “essence of childhood” and attempts to connect the genre to the idea of the Child (24).<sup>72</sup> One issue with Kushigian’s analysis is that she could more clearly elucidate her use of childhood and the concept the Beautiful Soul, which she relates to the Child because of its opposition to death and ability to act as a kind of protection against evil.<sup>73</sup> Although difficult to interpret, it seems that Kushigian’s Beautiful Soul is similar to the fetal origin because, through its connection to the Child, it acts as a conceivable savior that can “save one from death” (24). It is a uniting force of humanity. Kushigian does not question, however, its magical quality nor is she critical of the “psychic persistence” of the genre (24). In her discourse, childhood in relation to the *Bildungsroman* holds a very traditional place as a beacon of hope in the face of death.

My employment of the fetal origin recognizes its status as fetish. As a fetish it is an abstract concept that becomes animated and acquires an energy or power that, from another perspective, it would not ordinarily possess. A fetal origin is a refuge—a safe time/space from the disappointments of the adult (i.e., western, modern) world. It is the imagined time/space of a self before discovery; that is, before Sigmund Freud’s Oedipal complex, Jacques Lacan’s “mirror stage,” or Christopher Columbus’ first contact—prior to growing into the (dis)order that will shape men’s mature existence within western civilization. The Child as a fetal origin is the fundamental starting point of western socialization/colonization only capable of emerging from heteronormative relationships; it is the necessary element for the *natural* or *normal* progression

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<sup>72</sup> Not only does she discuss childhood with the texts, she notes a “mysterious relationship” between infant mortality and *Bildung* (24).

<sup>73</sup> She hazily describes this Hegelian concept as the “ultimate goal of *Bildung*” (24), a “divine plan for the salvation of individual souls,” the “apotheosis of the child in print who is shadowed by death” (25), the “supposedly weaker figure” of the marginalized (25), and the symbol of the “ultimate achievement of human endeavor when linked to potentially” (13).

of the lineal trajectory of society, the nation, and modernity. Child figures embody a fetal origin of purity separate from the socialized world, but also encapsulate the potentialities of a harmonious social unity. I conjecture that the child figures that I discuss in this chapter embody an idealized version of this ahistorical time/space of private purity, free from the constraints of society but, at the same time, always connected to the nation-state in a discourse of futurity.

Lee Edelman's conception of the Child in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* sounds similar to what I describe as the fetal origin.<sup>74</sup> I prefer fetal origin because it connotes a time/space sheltered in the womb and evokes not just youth but genesis. As described in the Introduction, the phrase comes from the hypothesis of fetal origins of adult disease (FOAD), a theory that analyzes the effect of the prenatal environment on growth in adulthood. Annie Murphy Paul's quote above illustrates this approach of questioning the extent the body is programed at conception for the life the adult will live. From such a perspective, a man's journey may make a difference in the form his life takes, but a script for the path he takes has already been written. In relation to narrative forms, the presence of the fetal origin in the foundational fictions and the *Bildungsroman* means the direction of the protagonist's development is certain, his program is set. The Child as the fetal origin acts as a conceivable savior. He is the evidence

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<sup>74</sup> Placing the Child at the heart of all conventional politics, he describes "the Child" as the figure that "invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought" (2). Edelman argues that politics "remains, at its core, conservative, insofar as it works to *affirm* a structure, to *authenticate* social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child" (2-3 emphasis in original). Politics advances, unfolding "in the direction of a constantly anticipated future reality" (8-9). But even with this forward thrust, the aim always belongs "to an Imaginary past" (9). His description of political temporality fits with Sommer's explanation of the how the foundational fictions are "written backward, progressing like religious or mythical discourse from a sacred given and reconstructing a trajectory toward it" (49). Edelman goes on to say that "politics is a name for the temporalization of desire, for its translation into narrative, for its teleological determination" (9). In this understanding, the nation requires at its core this metaphorical inner Child, the limitless future that also remains connected to the illusion of an innocent and harmonious time-space. The foundational fictions exemplify one instance where politics as the "temporalization of desire" are translated into narrative. In a similar way, *Bildungsromane* also embody the desire for the inner Child and the representation of a "teleological determination" that frames the nation.



of reproductive futurism and the continuity of the nation-state. Contrastingly, the abject Child whose future is marked as defunct has “no future” (Edelman).

To explore these ideas, I begin by looking at the children of traditional *Bildungsroman*, primarily paying attention to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1795-1796) but also briefly considering several variations from the Americas: Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* (1993) and *Messenger* (2004), Mario Vargas Llosa’s *La ciudad y los perros* (1962), J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), and Alfredo Bryce Echenique’s *Un mundo para Julius* (1970). I then review some foundational fictions from both Latin America and the United States, including Bartolomé Mitre’s *Soledad*, Clorinda Matto de Turner’s *Aves sin nido*, and William Hill Brown’s *The Power of Sympathy*. The goal here is not to closely analyze these novels but to use them to explore how these texts provide reassurance of legitimacy and thus reaffirm modernity’s discourse of futurity and the superiority of western epistemology. I am particularly interested in the role of the child and will focus on the principle protagonists and their child sidekicks. In the German and U.S. texts, the child appears as a distinct character intimately connected to the protagonist. In the Peruvian texts, the imagery of the child coincides within the protagonists themselves, residing in their histories. As for the foundational fictions, the child is part of the formula of concocting a unified nation and the fetal origin appears in the pregnancies and hushed children folded into their pages.

In affirmative versions of these narratives, the fetal origin maintains its potentialities and presents a seed of hope for the future, even though the adult may be exiled from this place of purity. These novels reaffirm the discourse of reproductive futurism (as in *Soledad*, *The Giver*, and *La ciudad y los perros*). Contrastingly, in novels where characters remain stuck in a pre-adult time/space unwilling or afraid to move forward—those that might take on the label of anti-

*Bildungsromane* (like *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Un mundo para Julius*)—the fetal origin appears as an inaccessible time/space of innocence with little ability to project its hope into the future. However, even characters that reject socialization cling to the idea of a fetal origin.

A study of these texts is productive because, first, it illustrates the way the traditional form operates in various contexts—a point of comparison for the texts I examine in the following chapters. Second, it highlights the fact that, despite the differences of these variations, their underlying position remains the same. That is, although they approach modernity in distinct ways, they remain locked into a frame that excludes alternative epistemologies and adheres to a binary that pits life and progress with the west and death and stagnation with the colonized. Although the more critical texts question western socialization, they cannot seem to let go of the idea of a fetal origin, as if this fetish were the only thing safe from the slop that modernity spews.

I conclude this chapter by examining the sympathetic magical relations of the foundational fictions, questioning their ability to unite the nation-state. In the prior chapter, I reasoned that one may read the pages of these novels as metaphorical mirrors in which readers view the idealized image of what they (as part of a *people*) should become. In this chapter, I look at how these mirrors promote sympathetic magical relations where the white elite attempts “reciprocal ocular exchange” (Stern 24), using the reflection of not just his own face, but also the face of the other to complete a sense of self. This exchange tries to undo inequalities, but the interchange is one-sided resulting in the *illusion* of the suturing of the divided self (of the divided nation). The result is that the fetal origin remains a fantasy—in fact it *must* remain a fantasy because if it existed it would have to admit the abject and thus eliminate the difference between civilized and savage.

### 3.1 SAVIORS AND THEIR SIDEKICKS

I have discussed the *Bildungsroman* as a story that captures “the soul of man,” a phrase taken from Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* (49) that concurs with Jed Esty’s description of the genre as a “soul-nation allegory” (4). One way it conjures the soul is through the portrayal of the experiences of men as members of an imagined community, a community the implied reader is already a part of or is invited to join. In this way, the protagonists serve as versions of Hegel’s “World-Historical Men” and the “Heroes of an epoch”—those whose personal and subjective ambitions reflect the universal and collective aims of the society they inhabit (30). Although the characters of the novels are not the political leaders that Hegel describes, they too serve as “soul leaders” who inspire others to “feel the irresistible power of their own inner Spirit thus embodied” (31). Since the *Bildungsroman* tells the story of “everyday life” (Moretti 54), Hegel’s extraordinary heroes transform into nothing more than the ordinary boys who need only tap into their innate potentialities to become men. As a fictional characters—even uninteresting, everyday characters—they too are not ordinary men (they are not men at all); they too “have derived their purposes and their vocation...from that inner Spirit, still hidden beneath the surface” (Hegel 30). The protagonists share with Hegel’s heroes a higher calling of uniting a people—only for these fictional characters, their role is not to rule a people, but to illustrate how one grows into and comes to exist as part of the nation-state. Being characters within *Bildungsromane*, these protagonists are soul leaders in that they provide a model that can be disseminated and spread through readers.

Protagonists of traditional *Bildungsroman* assume or reject the responsibilities of Hegel’s “World-Historical Men.” In the traditional *Bildungsroman*, the issue that marks the form is not whether or not the boy accepts the role of hero. A better indicator of the genre might be if the

narration champions the idea of western development. As Joseph R. Slaughter notes, novels of both successful and failed initiation are “concerned with similar questions of the legitimacy of social formations and relations” (179). If the protagonist cannot find or rejects accommodation in the world, he is like Lee Edelman’s child with “no future,” following the death instinct, rejecting the heteronormative responsibility to procreate—not necessarily biologically, but ideologically and socio-politically. He remains stuck in a binary structure where he can choose life and his place in the nation-state, or death and solitude. If rejecting the path of western progress simply means residing in a time/space of emptiness, then nothing has been truly challenged and western development (however nastily presented) wins.

Wilhelm Meister, the protagonist of Goethe’s benchmark *Bildungsroman*, is the prototype conceivable savior who sets the standard for the search for and acquisition of the fetal origin. Goethe’s novel tells the story of a young bourgeois of merchant class (Wilhelm) who ultimately concludes his apprenticeship under a bizarre and somewhat creepy organization called the Society of the Tower. He completes his training “through the interaction of inward development and outer experience” and achieves *Bildung* (Steedman 22). The story begins at Wilhelm’s home, where he is in love with a young actress, Mariane. Suspicious about her loyalty, he is convinced she has been unfaithful. He becomes unhinged, falling into depression. His family’s solution is for him to travel for his father’s business. He takes off, but is more interested in the theater and in perusing a dream of being on stage than in business affairs. He has many interactions with different characters during his journey, including two children: Mignon and Felix. He rescues Mignon from an abusive guardian and takes her into his service. He assumes Felix is the relative of one of the actors he has befriended but it is later revealed that Felix is Wilhelm’s son. Towards the conclusion of the novel, Mignon dies, still a child, from a

heart failure. Although both children are significant, only one is capable of embodying the fetal origin, and that is, of course, Wilhelm's legitimate (although illegitimately conceived) son Felix.

In the end, Wilhelm finally decides to "take his formal departure from the theater" and to begin a professional career (Goethe 299). Shortly after this, the Society of the Tower reveals their "mysteries" to Wilhelm, showing him their scrolls of history (301-302). Not only has the Society of the Tower mapped Wilhelm's personal history, but by setting it down in paper and pen, it has created his legacy. Wilhelm's lost past is not lost at all, but captured and recoverable (to the literate), similar to Anderson's use of a childhood photo for the recitation of personal history and the foundational fictions for the retelling of a national one (as discussed in the pervious chapter). Far from being alarmed that the Society of the Tower has recorded the "account of his life...related in every detail and with great incisiveness," Wilhelm is "enlightened" (309). The third person narrator explains that Wilhelm gains a new perspective on himself:

[H]e saw a picture of himself, not like a second self in a mirror, but a different self, one outside of him, as in a painting. One never approves of everything in a portrait, but one is always glad that a thoughtful mind has seen us thus and a superior talent enjoyed portraying us in such a way that a picture survives of what we were, and will survive longer than we will. (309)

The history in the scrolls is not composed of mere stories, but (allegedly) the *authoritative truth*. Interestingly, the first question Wilhelm asks the Society of the Tower is if Felix is his son, which the Society is more than pleased to answer affirmatively (304). Wilhelm needs the confirmation of the Society of the Tower to feel confident about his paternal rights. Likewise, the Society of the Tower needs Wilhelm to seek their reassurance in order to secure

their position as the holder of the true record. Before learning about the Society of the Tower, Felix was already important to Wilhelm. Felix's nurse had already confessed that Wilhelm's old lover (Mariane) was Felix's mother and even provided a letter Mariane had written as proof that Felix was Wilhelm's son. Wilhelm begins to see himself in Felix. Moreover, Wilhelm had already decided that he would "keep" Felix and send Mignon away to the country (297). But confirmation only comes with the Society's guarantee about his biological connection to the boy. It is as if Felix is suddenly born anew into Wilhelm's life with the help of the Society of the Tower. The Society of the Tower gives him what was already his and what he already had accepted. With official validation that he is a father, Wilhelm sets out to begin his life as a professional. He finds at the end of his apprenticeship that he is a rightful father, "a treasure [he] never deserved" (373).

Slaughter, following Moretti's lead, has already noted that Goethe's novel "configures a developmental plot that is simultaneously tautological (confirmative of the same: Wilhelm a biological and social father) and teleological (productive of difference: Wilhelm the *convinced and voluntary* biological and social father)" (99). This corresponds with Moretti's observation that Wilhelm chooses what has already been chosen for him. In Moretti's rephrasing of Wilhelm's voice: "I exist, and I exist happily, only because I have been allowed access to the plot patiently weaved 'around' me by the Society of the Tower. I have acquired 'form'...because I have willingly agreed to be determined from without" (21). Wilhelm's long journey circles him back to the beginning of his story, back to Mariane and the progeny he had voluntarily adopted. While these scholars highlight this important tautological-teleological frame at work in the

novel, they have little to say about Felix and Mignon themselves.<sup>75</sup> Obviously the main character is Wilhelm, but he is nothing without his child sidekicks.

Despite the attention poor Mignon receives throughout the narrative, and especially towards the conclusion when she dies, the primary focus remains on Wilhelm and his son Felix. After her funeral, Mignon's history is revealed in a "very strange story" that uncovers her mysterious past (356). But the spotlight quickly moves from the girl back to her guardian: her demise opens up a business opportunity for Wilhelm. Her uncle, the Marchese Cipriani, proposes that Wilhelm and his family accompany him on his travels and he even offers some of Mignon's inheritance: "let him [Wilhelm] not despise the inheritance of his foster child....we will certainly not deny the benefactor of our niece what was so amply deserved" (363). Wilhelm humbly accepts the kind proposal, claiming to be simply caught in destiny's grip: "for it is useless trying to act according to one's own will in this world. What I most wanted to keep, I have to let go, and an undeserved benefit imposes itself upon me" (364). Thus the girl who came to him with nothing bestows on her guardian a wealth from which she could never benefit. Wilhelm accepts the inheritance although he had been a less-than-perfect adoptive father. Before the Marchese makes his offer, Wilhelm had told the children's nurse that he "was intending himself to keep Felix, but to send Mignon to the country" (297). He also had also already confessed to himself that he has been less than a model father to Mignon: "You took charge of the poor child, her companionship delighted you, and yet you have cruelly neglected her. What have you done to give her the development she longed for? Nothing!" (308). Although Mignon is still alive at this point, Wilhelm's "soliloquy" (309) leads to very little change with how he treats her. Instead it is a "prelude to his recognition" that "after repeated outbursts of sorrow at the loss of Mariane, he

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<sup>75</sup> Moretti discusses in brief detail some observations about Mignon, but completely neglects Felix. Likewise, Slaughter refers to Felix a few times, but does not mention Mignon.

must now find a mother for the *boy*” (309 emphasis mine). Mignon is a lost cause, but her situation encourages Wilhelm to give Felix what he could not give Mignon: a mom.

Mignon’s death is legendary, but the limelight really graces Felix.<sup>76</sup> Not only is it disclosed that Felix is Wilhelm’s rightful son, but he almost dies—not to be outdone by Mignon—not once, but twice. He is saved from a fire and, just pages before the end of the novel, someone cries out to save him: “Save the child!” (367). Felix is the “Child whose innocence solicits our defense” (Edelman 2). The adults in the novel worry that Felix has drunk a toxin (opium) and will die. But Felix is not poisoned and the drama of that moment only leads to the suicide of the owner of the opium (369). Although never in any real danger (he never drank from the tainted cup), when the truth is revealed, “Felix had been restored to [Wilhelm]” as if he were saved from death (370). Felix’s almost-death prompts Wilhelm’s love interest (Natalie) to admit she would marry him. The members of the Society of the Tower verify this and, in doing so, guarantee a successful proposal. Wilhelm, assured his position as (future husband), secures a mother for his son, and is then free to venture forth on his next journey across the Alps with the Marchese to collect Mignon’s inheritance and continue his life post-apprenticeship in the real world of business. The narrative ends with a spell of child deaths and almost-deaths that work to advance Wilhelm on his journey to manhood. But while the strange and unsettling Mignon disappears forever, the prefect and adorable Felix finds a safe and permanent home with Wilhelm.

The two children in Goethe’s novel form an interesting binary. Felix is “the sun. For the loveliest golden curls that hung over his big brown eyes and his round face, his gleaming white forehead arched over delicate brown eyebrows, and his cheeks glowed with health” (149). This

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<sup>76</sup> See Carolyn Steedman for more about the history and influence of Mignon as a character.



“happy child” is highly valued as a “gift” (149). On the other hand, Mignon is dark featured, contorts her body in ways that “aroused both horror and amazement” and inspires “deep pity” in Wilhelm (Goethe 53). Felix is the picture of health. Mignon is sickly. Felix is a German boy. Mignon is from the South, that is, Italy. Wilhelm notices that there “was something strange about everything she did” (61). Furthermore, she seems to know that she is marked as abject and works aggressively to cleanse herself: “She would often take a vessel of water and wash her face so vigorously and thoroughly that she almost rubbed her cheeks raw” (59). Not only is Mignon a foreigner, she is different because her personal past is a mystery—and when it is revealed, it turns out her parents were siblings. Born from a love affair unbound by the restrictions of social norms, she is an outcast even more so than a child born out of wedlock. While Felix has a future, Mignon is deformed and queer, one of Edelman’s *no futures*.

Mignon serves as a defective fetal origin for both the reader and Wilhelm. Like one of Kant’s seeds that is misplaced, she cannot develop as a normal child. Moretti’s interpretation of Mignon’s death finds that she remains “[o]utside the Whole, outside the world-as-homeland” where “there is no life whatsoever” (19). She is unable to strengthen her “*sense of belonging* to a wider sense of community” (Moretti 19 emphasis in original). For Moretti, the protagonist must use time “to find a homeland. If this is not done, or one does not succeed, the result is a wasted life: aimless, meaningless” (19). Far removed from her homeland and with no family, Mignon’s life is “[b]eyond the Organism” where there is only “nightmares, insanity, or death” (Moretti 47). The result of an incestuous love, she is ruled by nature and born outside of the social ties that bind community. Like the incestuous loves of the foundational fictions, her story lays out the dangers of life lived removed from the norms of society, unincorporated in the nation-state, in a

freedom unbound by law. The result is halted development. She dies young because she does not have the potential to be “man-as-species” (Foucault, “*Society*” 243).

Not only is Mignon out-of-place and without a home, more importantly, *she cannot provide a home for Wilhelm*. Felix on the other hand is a homecoming for the protagonist, a return to his original love and to family. Felix provides meaning to Wilhelm’s life and ties him to a larger community and history. Mignon cannot provide this security—this reassurance of legitimacy. She remains tangential to Wilhelm, the excluded and abject staring him in the face and making him uncomfortable—best to send her to the country for some fresh air! Mignon is a deformed growth: the abject. On the contrary, Wilhelm is a conceivable savior and so is Felix. They are able to fully integrate into dominant white society, to assume white adult responsibilities necessary to stimulate the nation’s progress, and to grow into (supposedly) unmarked, independent citizens.

The star in what is often viewed as the typical *Bildungsroman*, Wilhelm sets the bar for comparisons of other protagonists moving through their life stories. However, since my study focuses primarily on the Americas, it is important to briefly review a few texts from that region that vary from Goethe’s model. Although these narratives diverge from what is often cited as the benchmark, they continue the traditional *Bildungsroman* function of serving as a reassurance of legitimacy. A look at these novels demonstrates that their American differences do not make them any less a fetish for a western concept of development. I will look at two texts from the Americas that portray a character accepting his socialization, Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* (in conjunction with her following novel, *Messenger*) and Mario Vargas Llosa’s *La ciudad y los perros*, and two texts where growth appears questionable, J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* and Alfredo Bryce Echenique’s *Un mundo para Julius*. Wilhelm is a conceivable savior who

chooses socialization, accepting his role. In these other texts, the protagonist either rejects or accepts his socialization. Either way, the stories follow the standard *Bildungsroman* model of a boy who confronts the struggle of integration into western society. Ultimately, all of these novels share a common worldview that naturalizes modernity and its lineal trajectory of development.

Although dissimilar in style and content, *The Giver* and *La ciudad y los perros* share a common trait of the protagonists ultimately accepting socialization. In addition, the Child in these novels serves as a beacon of hope for the future. In the North American text, Lowry presents a dystopia where all difference is wiped out. Everything is gray and no choices need to be made. The main character, a boy Jonas, is assigned the job with The Giver, a man who mentors him in acting as a memory keeper for the community. The Giver is possessor of all the memories that have been eliminated from their world (color, violence, love, etc.) and he passes these emotions and memories to Jonas. Once Jonas learns that a baby (Gabriel) that his family has been caring for will be killed, he decides to leave the community taking the baby with him. The consequence of leaving the community is that all the memories that have been passed on to him will spread back into the community. He takes off and in the end, it is unclear if he lives or dies trying to escape. However, in Lowry's *Messenger*, a grown-up Jonas reappears. While his name is not mentioned, his history is similar to Jonas and there is an implication they are the same character. Jonas in *Messenger* is now known as Leader, a title that describes the role he has assumed in the new community.

It is important to note that although the dystopic world in which Jonas begins his story is supposed to be erased of all difference, difference does exist. Jonas and The Giver are different from others in their community not only because they carry the old memories, but also because they are physically distinct: they have light eyes. In addition, Susan Louise Stewart notes that

when receiving memories, Jonas's naming of "brown as a color signifies his new awareness of the color differences." It is a "new experience for him to see something other than light skin....Rather than embrace racial difference, [the Elders of the community] erase it and choose whiteness, or at least lightness, as their universal standard" (24). In addition, when Jonas reaches the edge of the bad community, the memories he has been guarding are released. Jonas feels the cold air and it starts to snow. He sees Christmas lights. This world is western without a doubt. He moves from one world where lightness is the universal to a white, western, Christian world. In other words, the move is not that great.

Despite the differences between Lowry's novel and Goethe's, they share important similarities. *The Giver* is illustrative because it appears to try to uproot the societal control and sameness found in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, but upon close inspection such is not the case. It does not provide an alternative political project. Instead it upholds the values of the fetish of the *Bildungsroman*, for example, western universality, the reassurance of legitimacy founded in the generative force of a fetal origin, and a tautological-teleological frame where the choices that are made have already been decided. Its similarity to Goethe's novel indicates that the form is not defined by generic (*The Giver* is a young adult novel and a fantasy), geographic, or temporal boundaries. As a fetish and a parody, the form is retold and reconstituted, but it continues to hold the same magic that gives meaning to modernity.

As Stewart has illustrated, although Lowry's novel has been perceived as radical, it "actually reinforces cultural norms. In short, the text represents a return to normal" (23). Similar to the tautological-teleological framework of Goethe's novel, Lowry's novel "simply serves as a reaffirmation of what readers have probably learned to value" (Stewart 29). While it appears that Jonas takes a path opposite Wilhelm, escaping from the community instead of accepting his role,

his choice really is not that different from Wilhelm's. He leaves the safety of a home where he has little independence and no freedom in order to enter a community where he and Gabriel can be active participants in the "Whole," as Moretti might say. By releasing the memories, he has a homecoming of sorts and life takes on a new meaning. The old memories (an inheritance) are restored. Similarly, when Wilhelm learns of the Society of the Tower, his past revisits him in the form of his grandfather's art collection (sold long ago) and in Felix. Further, Jonas and Wilhelm both assume responsibility for the future of society, embodied in Gabriel and Felix. Although Jonas is not Gabriel's father—his relationship to the baby is more fraternal than paternal—his adoption of the baby is very similar to Wilhelm's acquisition of Felix. Both Gabriel's and Felix's lives are put in jeopardy and both children are saved in the end. Gabriel's blue eyes link him to Jonas in a familiar or genetic way, similar to Wilhelm's discovery that Felix is his biological son. Protecting the fetal origin means protecting a generative claim to authority.

While Lowry's novel seems to favor freewill over destiny—emphasizing that Jonas makes a choice to live a life where he must decide and choose—as Stewart notes, the underlying message is just the opposite. Jonas' decision to leave and release the memories is a "choice to leave the remainder of the community without choice.... The people of the community have no choice but to accept the inevitable flood of memories they will receive when Jonas leaves them" (Stewart 24-25). This role of deciding what is best for the community continues in *Messenger*, where Jonas appears as Leader with the gift of "seeing beyond" (88), a type of omnipresent ability to see in other locations. Not only is he a figurehead, he is a kind of all-seeing prophet. In addition he has a large library and appears as a center of knowledge. Jonas/Leader thus is a combination of both Wilhelm and the Society of the Tower and his role is to protect the fetal origin, to protect the future of society, to insure a democratic liberal nation-state.

*La ciudad y los perros* is markedly different from Lowry's novels. But it too follows a similar pattern: while appearing at first glance to be radical, the story ultimately gives us another version of conventionality. Vargas Llosa's novel presents the account of a group of boys in a Peruvian military academy. It is told from various points of view (first and third person) and jumps through time and space. The plot that weaves around one of main characters, Jaguar, highlights the traditional form of the narration. His story is intense to say the least and a detailed discussion of it would prove an interesting study in itself. However, such an investigation goes beyond the limits of this chapter. The main point I would like to make right now is that despite all that circles around Jaguar, the story of his entrance into manhood follows the standard set by Wilhelm. Sure, Jaguar may have orchestrated the murder of one of his fellow cadets. While this incident portrays socialization as a dark process, it does not delegitimize it. In Vargas Llosa's novel the adult world is harsh and unfair, power is a corrupting force, and survival and success depend on one's ability to use whatever means necessary to be at the top of the pack. To be a man one must leave the innocence of childhood and the pranks of adolescence behind. In the end, Jaguar is married and, as his friend comments, "tú te has vuelto un hombre serio" (444). A lineal trajectory of growth is not questioned. The violence and darkness of the boys' lives in the academy is similar to the darkness of the dystopia in *The Giver* and, just as in Lowry's novel, the way out is through the choice to enter and find one's place in western adult society. In the end, the Child gives way to maturity: "todos habían crecido, hombres y mujeres parecían más instalados en el mundo" (431).

Like Lowry, Vargas Llosa also presents the Child. In fact, while the novel concentrates on the struggles of adolescents, it keeps a sharp focus on childhood. Unlike Gabriel and Matty, the majority of the children in *La ciudad y los perros* are not external to the main protagonists,

but internal—found in the recounting of their childhoods. On the surface, Vargas Llosa's characters appear to face much harsher struggles than those in Goethe's or Lowry's novels. But the children in *La ciudad y los perros* are placed in situations no more depressing or hopeless than Felix's or Gabriel's. All these children appear vulnerable and removed from strong family connections that could protect them from harm. Felix's mother is dead and he spends the first part of his life without his father as well; in addition, he is almost burned alive and nearly drinks poison. Gabriel is slated for elimination; until he is rescued, he is a child without a future. The boys from *La ciudad y los perros* must face their own miserable problems. A primary difference is that Gabriel and Felix are whisked off to safety, whereas the boys in Vargas Llosa's novel are not rescued by Lieutenant Gamboa, despite his attempts to achieve justice, or by anyone else. The result is a darker portrayal of the world where the fetal origin appears irrecoverable and illusory.

If one agrees with Lee Edelman that the meaning of politics (or one meaning) is “reproductive futurism that perpetuates as reality a fantasy frame intended to secure the survival of the social in the Imaginary form of the Child” (14), it may seem that Vargas Llosa offers an alternative political frame, or at least discredits politics operating as Edelman describes. In *La ciudad y los perros*, reproductive futurism yields nothing but a shady, grim world. The innocence of the Child appears to be squashed with little hope of curing society from its ills. Despite this, Vargas Llosa does not rupture a “foundational faith in the reproduction of futurity” (Edelman 17). Surprisingly, one child is born in Vargas Llosa's novel. While she appears inconsequential, I argue that this sole baby represents “the Child whose innocence solicits our defense” (Edelman 2). After Jaguar's last meeting with lieutenant Gamboa, an officer who ends up taking the heat for a cadet's death and is shipped off to a tour of duty in a remote region as punishment, readers

learn that Gamboa's wife has had a child. Throughout the novel, readers have known that Gamboa's wife was pregnant and at the finale, the baby is born. Jaguar reads a telegram to Gamboa that explains, "Hace dos horas nació niña" (422). The Child is born, a warm token in a reckless world.<sup>77</sup>

Moretti notes that "happiness of the classical *Bildungsroman* is the subjective symptom of an objectively complete socialization.... [T]he classical *Bildungsroman* typically seals this happiness with marriage." (24). Accordingly, *La ciudad y los perros* follows the model of the traditional *Bildungsroman* with Jaguar's marriage. Moreover, it offers a fetal origin in the birth of Gamboa's daughter. It does not present an alternative epistemology or question the legitimacy of modernity and the nation-state, although it does portray them as corruptible by abuses of power.

J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* and Alfredo Bryce Echenique's *Un mundo para Julius* diverge from the models described above. In these works the primary character does not accept willingly his position in society. In Salinger's novel, the disillusioned adolescent Holden rejects his society as phony and hypocritical. Resolution at the end of the novel is uncertain and he implies he is being treated in a hospital, most likely for a mental condition. Echenique's novel similarly ends with a boy who reluctantly faces an abhorrent adult world where innocence is lost. In both novels, the boys come from families that are financially elite—upper and upper-middle class. Their commentary is an internal criticism of the privileged in the United States and Peru. Although Julius is several years younger than Holden (a pre-adolescent) he shares with

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<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, it is a girl. Maybe in this respect one could consider the novel radical. If the fetal origin is both a time/space free from the corruption of (patriarchal) society as well as the germ from which the future will bloom, then maybe, unlike Goethe and Lowry, in Vargas Llosa's work, which is overrun by boys and men, the feminine is the location of salvation. Coupled with the fact that Jaguar's entrance into maturity is marked by his union with a woman (in marriage), it appears that the feminine offers a healing potential as a time/space where man may mature and find a home in the world. But this is hardly revolutionary since it is the heteronormative standard.



Salinger's protagonist a longing for innocence and the feeling of being uncontrollably propelled into "un vacío grande, hondo, oscuro" of adulthood (591). Holden and Julius are conceivable saviors. They are the children born to be the future of the nation-state. They come from white privileged families and are educated in private schools. In the end, however, their rejection or fear of the adult world halts their growth and it appears that their initiation fails, or is at least (temporarily) paralyzed. This is an important point because the two border-*Bildungsroman* I focus on in the following chapters are also interrupted. In both cases, the narratives do not present full development, offering a space for critique. However, as I discuss below and in more detail in the following chapters, the criticism in the traditional texts does not involve a consideration of the concept of the Indian within modernity and remains within a western epistemological frame.

Both *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Un mundo para Julius* end before the boys physically grow into men. One could argue that these novels are thus cases of *Entwicklungsromane* and not *Bildungsromane*, or as Priscilla Archibald describes *Un mundo para Julius*, "partial bildungsroman" (*Imagining* 128). Roberta Seelinger Trites notes that *Entwicklungsromane* "end before the protagonist reaches adulthood" and rarely "depict their protagonists as fully enfranchised within their culture" (19). This is a fitting description of these novels and is a characteristic that sets them greatly apart from *Wilhelm Meister*. As *Entwicklungsromane*, these novels offer opportunities for critique of social power structures. Not entering adulthood distinguishes these protagonists from other *Bildungsroman* heroes. By remaining children or adolescents, they are not incorporated into the power structures around them and continue to be removed from adult maturity and socialization. In these cases, the standard or norm is questioned. The future for these characters seems uncertain. Holden doesn't know what he will

do in the future or what he feels about the past (213-214). Julius too seems unsure as he ends in the novel crying and full of questions (591).

But uncertainty in these cases does not necessarily breed alternative worldviews. Like the *Bildungsromane* discussed in this chapter, these texts do not work to question the legitimacy of a Eurocentric worldview. Holden and Julius are supposed to naturally grow into their future roles and become men-citizens. Their stories of partial growth are productive in their critique and mockery of the social and economic systems in which they are born. However, their stories are distinct from those of Ernesto and Zits that I will discuss in the following chapters in that the characters' disenfranchisement or partial growth is not paired with alternative epistemological structures. Ultimately, Holden and Julius are left with little choice. Moving forward means growing up and accepting one's place in society, however phony or corrupt. The other option is insanity or isolation. As in Jed Esty's study of *Bildungsroman* of the modernist period, these stories that end before adulthood and freeze youth reveal a "cruel lesson...that endless youth is merely the obverse of sudden death" (28). These characters are left in the binary of childhood versus adulthood and western growth (life) versus primitive stagnation (death).

Stagnation or the ceasing of change (in other words, freezing of growth) is what Holden desires. He explains that "[c]ertain things they should stay they way they are" (122). He loves the Natural History Museum because "everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody'd move. You could go there a hundred thousand times, and that Eskimo would still be just finished catching those two fish" (121). Mummies wrapped up so their bodies "wouldn't rot or anything" interest him (201). He wants to move out west where he can work at a "filling station" and pretend to be "one of those deaf-mutes" (198). Most importantly, he wants to be the catcher in the rye. He pictures "all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all.

Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around," except him "standing on the edge of some crazy cliff" waiting to "to catch everybody if they start to go over" (173). His deceased younger brother Allie and his little sister Phoebe are kids removed from the adult world he derides. As in *Un mundo para Julius*, children are innocents in a time/space apart from the adult world and all its uncertainties. For Holden, children, mummies, and Indians all exist in a time/space removed from modernity. They appear as forms of fetal origins that provide safe spaces free from the corruption of the modern world and capitalism. Children are unique, however, in that they continue to be dynamic and changing; they grow up—falling of the edge of the cliff—into adulthood, whereas Indians and mummies remain frozen in pre-capitalist life. The indigenous does offer an alternative for Holden, but it is stagnant and unchanging; it is removed from modernity. In other words, it is a typical conception of the life of the noble savage: illusory and inaccessible to the white man.

### 3.2 FOUNDATIONAL FUTURITIES

Children in the texts described above serve as fetal origins that perpetuate "reproductive futurism" (Edelman). Like the *Bildungsroman*, the foundational fictions anchor the Child in the discourse of origins and futurity—the Child resides in a time/space prior to social codes and yet is the "one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust" (Edelman 11). In America this is important since, as Sommer explains, "[w]ithout a proper genealogy to root them in the Land, the creoles had at least to establish conjugal and then paternal rights, making a *generative* rather than *genealogical* claim. They had to win America's heart and body so that the fathers could found her and reproduce themselves as cultivated through men" (15 emphasis in original). A look at the

foundational fictions highlights the relationship between a generative claim to the land and to legitimate political authority.

Looking “relentlessly forward” (Sommer 46), the foundational fictions are obsessed with reproductive futurism. However, Sommer’s allegorical readings focus on the pairing of adults rather than on their reproductive efforts. The fact that she spends little time on the issue of the Child and childhood is not too surprising since the novels she studies seem to neglect these characters as well. For example, in Bartolomé Mitre’s *Soledad* (1847) children are almost entirely absent. In Clorinda Matto de Turner’s *Aves sin nido* (1889) children are empty and vague characters that move the plot. Nevertheless, their presence serves a critical role in the romantic couple’s relationship—and consequently the nation—by marking its regenerative potential and completing the “narrative of reproductive futurism” (Edelman 21). Mitre’s and Matto de Turner’s novels illustrate that while falling in love and making babies are connected, they are two different projects. Love and marriage are linked to a desire for a “wish-fulfilling projection of national consolidation and growth” (Sommer 6-7). But, contrary to what Sommer says, the goal is *not* “rendered visible” with a heterosexual union sanctioned by the state (a marriage) (7), but by conceptions and babies. For this reason, a look at *Soledad* and *Aves sin nido* is instructive because, although both novels contain two romantic pairs, only one is destined for procreation, limiting national reproduction to a constricted and static path. Reading these texts as examples of foundational fictions in the manner that Sommer suggests privileges the reproductive couple and the story of the conceivable savior. On the other hand, paying attention to the obstructed and aborted pregnancies tells a different story about the darker side of national development.

Set in Alto Peru (current Bolivia) in 1826, the drama in Mitre's novel follows the love interests (and disinterests) of a young woman named *Soledad*. Unhappily married to Ricardo—a Spanish loyalist many years her senior—Soledad's only consolation is the company of a younger man, Eduardo, and the memories of her childhood friend and cousin, Enrique, who is currently fighting in the revolution. When Enrique returns, he manages to save Soledad from a potentially scandalous affair with Eduardo, who readers know has already impregnated another woman, Cecilia. After a failed suicide attempt, Cecilia gives birth to a stillborn child who “para felicidad suya jamás conoció lo que era la luz” (80). Eduardo and Enrique test their masculinity in a duel that Enrique wins; with the influence of his victory, Enrique obliges Eduardo to reunite with Cecilia. Soledad's husband dies, but not before he blesses a future marriage between Soledad and her cousin Enrique.<sup>78</sup> Ricardo's will reveals that Soledad (and thus Enrique as well) will inherit all of his estate. With the death of the old loyalist, Spanish domination ends and a youthful era begins. Instead of illustrating a revolution against an old tyrant (i.e., Spain in the allegorical form of Ricardo), the novel presents a peaceful transfer of power and status from one paternal order to another. The playboy (Eduardo) settles down with the girl who loves him (Cecilia) and they bring a new child into the world. The novel ends with the two new families in happy dialogue, celebrating their unions.

In the end, the reproductive duo turns out to be the one that was initially the most dysfunctional.<sup>79</sup> When readers meet Cecilia, Eduardo has already seduced and impregnated her.

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<sup>78</sup> It should be noted that in Sommer's brief description of the novel, she mixes Eduardo with Enrique, claiming that “cousin Eduardo patiently waits for the superfluous husband to obligingly die, so that he and Soledad can marry” (108).

<sup>79</sup> It is interesting to note that the turning point of Mitre's novel results from the conflict between the secondary couple (Eduardo and Cecilia) and not from any drama related to the trio of Soledad, Enrique, and Ricardo. The story of the threesome is actually quite boring. At her mother's death, Soledad is forced to marry Ricardo because all she would have inherited from her rebel father has been confiscated. She complies with the marriage to Ricardo, but does so without (making) love, thus preserving her virginity. Her true desire is Enrique, but she never acts on this

After Enrique thwarts Eduardo's rendezvous with Soledad, Eduardo and Cecilia fight because Eduardo refuses to marry her. Cecilia is scared of the dishonor she and, more importantly, her child will face if it becomes known she's pregnant and unmarried. But Eduardo is not ready to commit. She asks him to "salvar a nuestro hijo" (76). But he refuses and she then tries to kill herself. Enrique saves her, carrying her limp body to Eduardo, but the fetus has already died. Eduardo fails a duel and submits to marriage with Cecilia.

Surprisingly, the less passionate couple is the only one in the novel that produces the next generation. Reproduction in the novel can only occur under *mutual consent*, not necessarily *mutual desire*. Eduardo and Cecilia's first child (the stillborn fetus) had no future without paternal legitimacy and inheritance; it was dead before Cecilia's suicide attempt.<sup>80</sup> This child with *no future* declares the impossibility of a nonconsensual and/or matriarchal community. The fetal origin can only prosper once the heterosexual couple accepts and submits to the roles already set for them. In a patriarchal society, Cecilia's child would have little chance of social success if she must raise him alone. In addition, by rejecting Cecilia and their child, Eduardo abandons the community he had established in scenes unseen by the reader (his seduction of Cecilia). He already has an obligation to them but it is not until Enrique shames him that he submits to his responsibilities. Although Eduardo agrees to marry and claims in a letter to Soledad that he loves Cecilia, readers never witness any forms of affection directed toward his wife.

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feeling and maintains her honor. Once Enrique sends Eduardo back to Cecilia—and once Ricardo dies—he and Soledad can profess their love.

<sup>80</sup> Norman S. Holland has also considered the implications of an illegitimate child for Cecilia, noting that she "fears the child will be disinherited if Eduardo leaves her....She is cognizant that she has 'fallen;' her hope is to safeguard her child's position. To accomplish this task, she must keep her own. If these postcolonial daughters expect to maintain their social position, and thus to inherit (colonial) property, they will have to perform a crucial role on which the moral health of the polity depends. They will have to subordinate their desires to the ethical life of the community" (80).

Eduardo does not choose his love; instead it is forced upon him. He is obligingly bound to Cecilia because of an erotic encounter that occurred offstage in a time/space prior to the scenes of the novel. When he at last consents, the seeds that had already been planted within him germinate: “las virtudes nativas que Dios había arrojado en su corazón germinaban al fin, y el hombre de mundo se despojaba de los vicios ficticios que la sociedad le había inoculado” (85). Mitre’s resolution of Eduardo and Cecilia’s conflict is hardly romantic and denies the couple any agency. God had already laid down the foundation in the man’s soul that would eventually develop to make him the citizen he was always meant to be (which sounds a little like Kant’s germs). Mitre’s third-person narrator tries to convince us that the obstacle hindering the lovers’ union is not internal (like Eduardo’s lack of love toward Cecilia or his effeminacy),<sup>81</sup> but is externally founded in Eduardo’s misplaced ideas derived from society’s “vicios ficticios”—such as European sentimental novels, like Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Julie* that Eduardo encourages Soledad to read. That is, he has been reading the wrong stories. His own romance becomes a new model that, as Sommer notes, reinforces the idea that “unproductive” love affairs “were risky bases for national constructions” (16).

Similar to the *Bildungsroman*’s chain of readers discussed in the previous chapter, *Soledad* also presents a fetishistic reading chain: lectors read Eduardo reading Rousseau. Mitre’s novel is the antidote to the bad magic of Eduardo’s readings. Moreover, it is not just that the power of the foundational fiction fetish influences the world outside the text (that the foundational fiction makes readers imagine the consolidation of the nation). This power also *derives*, supposedly, from outside the novel. Mitre’s introduction to the novel emphasizes this self-supporting and circular magic when he reveals his ardent belief in the role of literature for

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<sup>81</sup> Holland also notes the feminine character of Eduardo (81).

the advancement of the new Latin American nations. He explains that the novel needs to put down “profundas raíces en el suelo virgen de América” (ix) because “la novela es la más alta expresión de la civilización de un pueblo, a semejanza de aquellos frutos que sólo brotan cuando el árbol está en toda la plenitud de su desarrollo” (viii). Literature is a demonstration of mastery and admission into western civilization. Just as God had thrown down the seeds of love that would germinate in Eduardo, so too the germs of civilization that had been planted in American are ripe for growth ready to express themselves in the literature. Mitre thus offers his novel and its characters as evidence of the nation’s (or region’s) progress—the unification of the people and their ability to prove themselves prosperous.<sup>82</sup> At the same time, this local literature serves as a model for readers in the consolidation of such an imagined community.

This same circular magic applies to the fetal origin as manifested in the Child. In *Soledad*, the child is born because the time is ripe for procreation. Eduardo and Cecilia consent to their duties; the nation is established, growing, and fruitful. But at the same time, the nation is legitimized and gains authority through the Child. The Child naturalizes a generative claim to the land that protects readers from the “unpleasant sight” and “painful” history of colonization (Harpham 66). As a fetal origin, the child is like the seeds thrown down from which Eduardo’s love and Mitre’s literature blossom. Its destiny has been set before birth. It has already always been there waiting for the right conditions to come to life.

Like *Soledad*, Matto de Turner’s *Aves sin nido* is a national novel set in the Andes that also concludes with a hopeful couples’ reproduction. However racial tensions overshadow and

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<sup>82</sup> Since Mitre is Argentinean, it is prudent to ask if he is interested in the Bolivian or Argentinean nation. As Norman S. Holland notes, while Mitre mentions specific place names (like Illimani) the setting is bland enough to be “anywhere in the Southern Cone for nature does not affect their daily lives” (74). I believe it can thus serve as a generic South American foundational fiction, capable of allegorizing the attempts to consolidate the nation of various countries that gained their independence in the 1820s.



complicate the potential of this conception. The narrative receives only a passing glance by Sommer, who points out that its tragedy stems from unresolved racial “disencounters” (21). *Aves sin nido* challenges the idea that nineteenth-century romantic novels “developed a narrative formula for resolving continuing conflicts” through love (Sommer 12). While Sommer acknowledges that race sometimes becomes an obstacle in the union of the couple (and thus, the nation), her analysis of racial issues in the allegorical erotics of politics falls short. A serious problem exists for the nation if *Aves sin nido* is read as a romance “invariably about desire in young chaste heroes for equally young and chaste heroines, the nation’s hope for productive unions” (Sommer 24). By neglecting the importance of race, Sommer misses that Matto de Turner’s novel—similar to Mitre’s—has *two* erotic couples. In *Aves sin nido*, one couple is white and fruitful, the other is part-indigenous and doomed.

The nation, portrayed in what José María Arguedas described as the “primer intento de novela peruana” (Arguedas “Fiesta” 57), is constructed on a divided base in which only half the population is able to serve as a regenerative force. The last page dooms a young couple’s love when we learn that Margarita (an indigenous orphan) and Manuel (from an elite white family) cannot be wed because they are half-siblings. They are *both* “aves sin nido” (183). The novel ends with brother and sister holding each other in a sad and painful embrace. In this moment, both pieces (indigenous and western) lock together in an acknowledgement of an unbreakable bond. It is not erotic love that unites them, but a shared familiar history of violation (their father is a corrupt priest). The eroticism of their relationship is destroyed and turned into sin; thus the reproductive potential of the nation in this couple dies. On the other hand, the story ends with Margarita’s adopted mom, Lucía Marín, expecting her first child. Lucía and her husband are thus the foundational couple that preserves the nation.

As in *Soledad*, in *Aves sin nido* children are boring and voiceless plot movers. They are necessary for the story to unfold but have little character. For example, Margarita's younger sister (Rosalía) has one pathetic line: "Dame, pues, otra galleta" (175). Besides providing some comic relief, Rosalía's voice is nothing but a bland beg from an orphaned child making demands on her adopted *criollo* parents. Childhood is a phase that her sister Margarita must quickly pass through to enter marriage. When Manuel tells Margarita he wants to be her husband "[ella] sabía desde este momento que era mujer. Sabía que amaba" (115). Only love can lead Margarita to a mature life in the national body as a woman. This moment illustrates that Matto de Turner does not deviate far from her contemporaries in the idea that adulthood is marked by the initiation of erotic love in a state-sanctioned union.

The problem with Margarita's womanhood arises in her failure to consecrate her love. She is unable to contribute to a *generative* claim to the land through her relationship to the aristocratic Manuel—this, despite her *genealogical* (indigenous) right. Unfortunately, Margarita's genealogical claim has been corrupted, having been born from an unreciprocated affair, more directly, a rape. Meanwhile, Manuel cannot assert a generative claim because the lover he has fallen for is his sister. This couple lacks any reassurance of legitimacy. Their generative and genealogical claims to the land fail them and thus they lose the authority to assert authentic and faithful participation in the nation. They cannot reproduce. It is Lucía's pregnancy that serves as the base for the nation once genealogical entitlement is eliminated. Lucía's unborn child, like Cecilia and Eduardo's baby, is the savior conceived, the futurity of the nation-state.

In these novels, there are children and there are adults, nothing in-between. Soledad is in her late-teens, but is a wife from page one (and thus fills an adult role, however subordinate she is to her older husband). We see more of the transition to adulthood from childhood in *Aves sin*

*nido*: Margarita and Manuel simply grow-up once they are sexually ready for marriage. Although Margarita is fourteen, she is infantilized in a scene of her educational training (84). She later has an epiphany that she is loved (is in love) and will marry; she then becomes a woman (115). Meanwhile, one line of the novel explains Manuel's transformation: "salí niño de Kíllac, había vuelto convertido en todo un hombre de bien" (43). In Matto de Turner's novel, white adults train and socialize children who simply prepare for and grow into the proper relationships of heterosexual erotic love that will strengthen the nation-state and continue its reproduction.

The absence of adolescence in *Soledad* and *Aves sin nido* points to the nonexistence of a state between childhood and adulthood. This is significant because the place between highlights an *uncertainty* of the child's consent to enter the nation, an uncertainty that one can locate the fetal origin of the nation in the Child. In other words, Cecilia's and Lucía's babies are the future nation because, being dependent and passive, they are without question the benefactors of the national inheritance. On the other hand, the "storm and stress" of adolescence (Hall xiii) threaten the departure from or dissolution of the nation-state. I will return to the importance of adolescence in later chapters. For now, I would simply like to note that absence of adolescence creates a child-adult binary that maintains a power structure in which the new babies have no choice but to become the "imaginary citizens" of the nation (Weikle-Mills). That is, lack of adolescence means lack of choices; the movement is singular, child to civilized adult. The adolescent, contrastingly, presents a problem in the regeneration of the nation because, as Stanley G. Hall explains in his landmark (and troubling/troubled) investigation, this is a period where the "foundations of domestic, social, and religious life are often undermined.... The whole future of life depends on how the new powers now given sudden and in profusion are husbanded

and directed” (xv).<sup>83</sup> I would like to clarify that my intention is not to limit rebelliousness to an adolescent state,<sup>84</sup> but to note that children in the foundational fictions that I examine do not serve a mischievous but a *stabilizing* role.

To restate, *Aves sin nido* does not represent adolescence. At the same time, the abundance of orphans in the novel (Margarita and Rosalía are only two examples of a larger social issue that distresses Lucía) indicates a national concern about the lack of training for the nation’s *youth* and thus concern about future difficulties in the consolidation of the nation-state because of a subject position existing outside of the child-parent binary. These children have no familial loyalties and thus carry the threat of rebelliousness. Moreover, the orphaned children are indigenous and marked.<sup>85</sup> They unsettle the ideals of a liberal-democratic republic in which individuals reap the benefits of the nation-state and can participate equally. Matto de Turner presents these social issues compassionately, but offers little hope. In the end, the white elite assumes a parental role in raising such children and the indigenous remain infantilized.

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<sup>83</sup> For more on the emergence of the idea of adolescence, see Stanley G. Hall and Patricia Meyer Spacks.

<sup>84</sup> Critics looking at childish figures often describe them as rebellious. For example, in his study on childhood in Latin American literature, Richard Browning discusses the child’s role as mediator. He associates representations of childhood in Latin American literature with marginalization because of the child’s inherit “boundary-crossing” and rebelliousness (147). Thus children in literature often represent alienated or marginalized groups (13). Browning clarifies that although “children are marginalized beings, they are unlike other marginalized groups in that, no matter their race, class, or gender, their status will change as they age” (146). This statement implies that while childhood is temporary, “race, class, or gender” permanently mark a person’s status. He also provokes questions about the impending adult status of the female, indigenous, or poor child. As Browning’s definition of childhood exemplifies, whereas categories of gender, race, and class often “retain some experiential boundedness” (Sánchez-Eppler xxv), childhood is often conceived as liminal. Like adolescence, its transitoriness accentuates the ability to be *in-between*—to be not one thing or the other, but both. Thus, studying childhood allows for an analysis of negotiations in border spaces, including racial binaries like white/Indian that seem to preserve some “boundedness” (Sánchez-Eppler). Child (and adolescent) protagonists indicate that we can read texts not as *mestizo*, indigenous, or hybrid expressions of the nation in which the novels represent the force or emergence of one race or culture in contrast to others. Instead, we can examine how these texts demonstrate the power in the intersections of and negotiations between borders and the possibility of thinking from such spaces. By doing so, we can reevaluate our conceptions of the relationships between childhood, race, and the nation-state.

<sup>85</sup> Lucía mentions the orphans in Lima and concludes that the problem stems from a social cause since she knows that “la mujer del pueblo” would not reject her children unless under trying circumstances or crime (175-176). In referring to countrywomen, she implies a racial distinction since the indigenous population resided largely in the rural countryside.

I have argued that the children of *Soledad* and *Aves sin nido* highlight certain conceptions of the potentialities of the nation's imagined future, images that promise healthy and fruitful lives for *white* families. They are on the margins of these texts, props for adult exploits. In *Soledad*, Cecilia's unborn child is a bribe to persuade Eduardo to commit to their relationship. Her healthy child is the necessary evidence of their sustainable relationship. In *Aves sin nido*, the situation is different. Although the children in Matto de Turner's novel are passive and have little personality—they say and do little—*indigenous children actually do play an active role* in the community by serving as a form of payment for debts (28) and working in the church through *la mita* (31). Unincorporated and with no future of gaining meaningful participation in the political body, they serve as economic tokens that bolster the feudal condition of the white elite. In Marxist terms, they are the future specter of the proletariat. In Matto de Turner's novel, children—the potential for national growth—remain stuck in a feudal system if they are indigenous.<sup>86</sup> Thus without white adult power to remove them from their subordinate positions, they lack the agency necessary to become their own subjects, that is, to discover themselves and

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<sup>86</sup> Despite the predominance of this feudalistic system, the presence of an English railroad employee (míster Smith) in *Aves sin nido* (171-2) reveals the development of (a European) bourgeoisie within the novel's portrayal of Peru. This combining of economic stages within Peru is a central argument of José Carlos Mariátegui's *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (1928). Mariátegui claims that feudal, bourgeois, and Inca communist systems operate simultaneously in Peru. Thus, in terms of economic growth and progress, his essays challenge a western concept of development and the natural movement from feudalism to bourgeois capitalism, and then—in the case of Marxism—to communism. In regards to children, although Mariátegui sees class and economic structure as the base of the social problem in Peru, his writings also indicate that primary school discrimination based on race plays an important role in maintenance of class hierarchies. He explains that the state marks the indigenous child as racially inferior when “en sus programas de instrucción pública el Estado se refiere a los indios, no se refiere a ellos como a peruanos iguales a todos los demás. Los considera como una raza inferior” (95). Education in Peru lacks “un espíritu nacional” (95) because the state separates indigenous child from other (white) children, establishing a racism that society directs “against itself, against its own elements and its own product” (Foucault, “*Society*” 62). In other words, the state marks indigenous children as the negative growth that must be isolated and contained. At the same time, Mariátegui describes an economic purpose of such actions: to maintain the subordination and serfdom of the communities into which poor, indigenous children born. Consequently, the state constantly faces battle against those who are the products of the system that it perpetuates, “latifundismo feudal” (29). Decades before Mariátegui's reflections, Matto de Turner plays out this scenario in Lucía's distress over the orphaned children of Peru.

fulfill their individual journeys of *Bildung*. They are unable to incorporate—inconceivable saviors of the nation.

### 3.3 RECIPROCAL OCULAR EXCHANGE, A KIND OF SÉANCE WITH THE LIVING

In the previous chapter, I discussed these romances as working as a variant of Jacques Lacan's mirror stage. In Latin America, the page as mirror works to create a sense of unity through models that include the absorption of the undesirable. Thus, in *Soledad* Eduardo is tamed and comes to accept his position as a husband and father. Although effeminate and a free spirit, he ultimately assumes his masculine duty that requires him to settle down. In *Aves sin nido*, Margarita and Rosalía are incorporated into the Marín home. Even though incest ruptures Margarita's and Manuel's love affair, in the end the family unit maintains its cohesion, although in a nontraditional form: the Maríns with their two adopted indigenous children and then Manuel and Margarita entwined in each others arms, brother and sister.

This contrasts with early novels from the United States like William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy: or, the Triumph of Nature* (1789) and Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), in which consolidation of the family fails. As in Matto de Turner's novel, in *The Power of Sympathy* the lovers turn out to be siblings and thus their relationship is restricted. However, the drama in Brown's narrative is heightened by the death of the female protagonist Harriot and the subsequent suicide of her lover/brother, Harrington. Although Margarita and Manuel are unable to consummate their love, Matto de Turner still concludes the novel with one productive and compassionate union (the Maríns) and thus provides some hope for future of the

nation. Another example is *The Coquette*, which follows a similar pattern to Cecilia's story in *Soledad* with the protagonist birthing an illegitimate and stillborn child after having been seduced by a rake. But while Mitre gives Cecilia a second chance at life and childbirth, Foster kills off her protagonist Eliza. In this case, it seems that the Latin American romance provides a little more hope and compassion than its North American counterpart.

Despite their differences, the North and South American novels share an important similarity. Both reveal that feelings of sympathy for abject others to be nothing more than illusions that serve not as "windows into the plight of embodied others but mirrors into the narcissistic absorption of disembodied selves" (Stern 26). In their studies of early American fiction, Julia A. Stern and Winfried Fluck refer to Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in which he describes compassion as "constituted through reciprocal ocular exchange" (Stern 24). These scholars focus on Smith's idea that by watching others suffer, one internalizes their pain and there is an exchange of interiorities. This relationship creates a dialect of sympathy that bonds people together in a social contract. Interestingly, the novels themselves also serve as a medium for this magic.<sup>87</sup> In reading the abject other as incorporated into the nation, the elite reader can believe in "reconciliations and amalgamations of national constituencies cast as lovers destined to desire each other" (Sommer 24). But the novels reveal

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<sup>87</sup> In his seminal study on magic and religion, James George Frazer defines sympathetic magic as magic based on a "secret symmetry." He clarifies that sympathetic magic is composed of two kinds of magic: homoeopathic and contagious. Homoeopathic magic works by similarity, or copy (Frazer 53-54). By recreating the original, the copy carries with it the power of the real, illustrating that the "wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original" (Taussig, *Mimesis* xiii). Contagion works by contact. According to Frazer, contact magic is a principle of thought based on the belief that "things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed" (52). Adam Smith's theory of sympathetic exchange works with such magic. Contact with the suffering other impacts the viewer and continues to affect him after contact. It also works with sympathetic magic, with the words creating images that copy a situation in life (like slavery). Thus the reader does not have to interact with a real slave, but can experience a sense of sympathy by just *reading* the bondswoman in Brown's novel.

the farce of this sympathetic interaction. The white elite read their aspirations for union as reciprocal exchanges of mutual love, when in fact it is always the elite that narrates his own desires.

In this way, the sympathy game that Adam Smith devises in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* comes into play in the novels as variations of the mirror stage. But instead of seeing the ideal self (as with Perry Nodelman's baby board books discussed in the previous chapter), the reflection includes that of the other that one is supposed to internalize in order to form a better image of the self (or in an allegorical sense, a democratic nation that incorporates this other). For example, Harrington and Lucía in *The Power of Sympathy* and *Aves sin nido* note that inequalities work counter to the ideal of the cohesive nation-state. As in the mirror stage, they sense the fragmentation within the self/nation. Sympathetic magic (or the game of sympathy) attempts to suture this divide in order to relieve the lack that this other exposes—the lack of inclusive incorporation.

Another look at the mirror stage helps to explain this phenomenon. Shawn Michelle Smith explains in *Photography on the Color Line* that the mirror stage

initiates the child into the psychological cycle of lack and desire, for the child will forever attempt to maintain this illusion (this self-delusion) of ideality and wholeness realized only in reflection....[T]he ego is thus founded both in the *split* between body (or physical experience) and image and in the perpetual psychological effort of *suturing* self-identification to image. (30 emphasis in original)

However, we should not assume a universalized child and need to take into account positions as racially marked (indigenous, slaves, white). Moving from the unmarked subject (as



in Lacan's theory) to one marked by race (illustrated in W. E. B. Du Bois's writings), Shawn Michelle Smith claims that "in a social world divided by the color line, race emerges as the dividing force that splits the self beyond (unconscious) suture.... racialization makes apparent the illusory nature of the ego's wholeness" (32-33). She concludes that race forces the black "subject to recognize the misperception on which the ego is founded" (32). In this case, ocular exchange does not result in an equal exchange of interiorities. Instead, while the racially marked other is forced to "see the gulf that divides self from idealizes image" (Shawn Smith 32), the white is "culturally, legally, socially, economically, and institutionally privileged as an *unmarked* racial category" (33). Whiteness thus "enables the 'white' ego to remain blind to the suturing effects of its own fundamental misrecognition" (33).

To emphasize this point, Shawn Michele Smith employs Franz Fanon's description of a child calling him "a Negro." She explains:

As the white child screams and points at 'a Negro,' he reinforces his own ideal self-image though negative projection. This is not a simple distinction between self and other being made, but a racialized attempt to shore up a (mis)recognized (white) self by obliterating the other's subjectivity. Here the hysterical rejection of an image of blackness enables the white subject to remain blind to his own split subjectivity and fundamental investment in self as image. The suturing of whiteness with an ideal image is enabled in part by underscoring a split between self and image only for black subjectivity, and in fervently discarding a grotesquely fashioned, negative image of blackness as antithetical to the (white) self. In the negative reinscription of a white ideal image though the rejection of a

projected image of blackness, the white mother plays a reinforcing role as the one who looks and affirms: “Yes. That’s *not you*.” (34)

In a similar way, protagonists in the foundational fictions, as well as readers who identify with them, may position themselves in contrast to those they are supposed to be sympathetically connected. For example, as Stern observes, in Brown’s novel, Harrington’s “encounter with [an] African American bondswoman in South Carolina...dramatizes the way in which white male citizens ostensibly opposed to the practice of slavery in fact depend on it for their own (paradoxical) self-definition as members of a morally democratic elite” (Stern 26). Harrington’s interaction with a suffering woman only gives *him* the opportunity to make-believe he could understand her plight and to internalize her pain.<sup>88</sup> Treating slavery as if it were “a state of mind,” Harrington can lighten his own burden but does nothing to help the woman (Stern 25).

In Matto de Turner’s novel, Lucía’s care for her adopted indigenous children and concern about the orphans of the nation exemplifies an attempt to create a dialect of sympathy. But once again this sympathy is one-sided. Lucía’s sympathy will never be enough to serve as a liberating force for all those orphans. It is not even enough to save Margarita. In the end, Harrington’s and Lucía’s observations through transparent windows into the suffering of others turns out to be not a window to the other, but a mirror employed in the of construction of the self (Stern 26). Like Fanon’s description of the white child marking him as racially different, Harrington and Lucía position themselves in contrast to those they are supposed to be sympathetically connected. Harrington is more compliant in this regard since at least Lucía appears troubled by the condition of the indigenous in Peru, whereas Harrington’s “extraordinary ejaculation of relief at

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<sup>88</sup> He can then find a way out of it, congratulating her on being able to sympathize with her children: “Heroically spoken!... May thy soul be ever disposed to sympathize with thy children....Then shalt thou feel every circumstance of they life afford thee satisfaction....All thy labors will become easy—all thy burdens light, and the yoke of slavery will never gall they neck” (86).

the end of the scene, the delight he takes in describing the pleasure afforded by his own internal sensations, completely erases the palpable suffering of the African American bondswoman” (Stern 26). Harrington’s concern appears to bind him to the slave, but “when compassion degenerates into privileged self-affirmation” his sympathetic connection only serves to define the self. *He is safe; he is not the slave*. But he may use her in order to suture the fragmentation of his own subjectivity in the act of “absorption of disembodied selves” (Stern 26).

This self-serving sympathy blows up in Harrington’s face when he is forced to recognize that an “ostensibly exogamous relation is revealed to be one of endogamy: otherness becomes identity” (Stern 28). Incest highlights why these magical ocular interactions must be illusory. If Harriot and Harrington are really brother and sister, then the distance that separated her from him shrinks. At first Harrington is a rake who claims to not be interested in marrying “any person of [Harriot’s] class” (34). His acceptance of her coincides with his political proclamations that “[i]nequality among mankind is a foe to our happiness...and, were I a Lycurgus, no distinction of rank should be found in my commonwealth” (57-58). His incestuous love exposes a fear of the “absence of a well defined social system” (Dalke 188).<sup>89</sup> Democracies espouse equality between races and classes, but *The Power of Sympathy* and *Aves sin nido* imply that such limitless incorporation could threaten the nation by the possible acquisition of the undesirable other. Sympathetic magic is dangerous because it could be more than magic. It exposes the fact that if these sympathetic relations *really were to erase difference*, ushering everyone into a harmonious fetal origin where all are equal, then *the other would have to be admitted*. The power

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<sup>89</sup> Harrington’s praise of democracy and displeasure in slavery jars with his inability to escape the consequences of a society in which lack of hierarchy makes it possible to unknowingly fall in love with one’s sibling (i.e., a democracy free of aristocratic privilege). Anne Dalke comments that in early American incest stories where the son is the legitimate child and the daughter the poor and illegitimate one, the “bastard daughter...poses less a threat to the family’s social standing than does her intention to engage the heir in a lower-class marriage. That intention leads to the damnation of both brother and sister; their attempt to subvert the distinctions of class is roundly condemned” (190).

of sympathy that draws Harrington to Harriot and to the slave must remain at an artificial level. The magic of sympathy must fail to bring unity. It draws the lovers together, but is not strong enough to surpass social norms. Incest reveals the limits of a unity built on sympathy.

### 3.4 CONCLUSION

So, what happens to the children of the foundational fictions? Dancing around the child, Sommer never faces it head on. She approaches the child when she discusses the role of regeneration in the establishment of authority in the New World (15). Production, not in economic terms but corporal ones—production of *babies*—makes America home. Of course, the mother and father—both Cecilia and Eduardo—would have to “reciprocate” (15) in order for the union to be “fruitful and multiply” (6). But the idea of the landed elite wooing the hearts and minds of America’s women side-steps the less romantic family portrait of domination, violation, and conquest. What then of the children born from *dirty* love—from abject, racially marked couples or products of the sin of rape? Sommer’s thesis ignores those rejected bodies, the marked and racialized children that the “system vomits” (Galeano 18)—the flood of orphans that catches Lucía’s attention in *Aves sin nido* (175)—born from couples that, although overlooked in the foundational fiction, “keep on reproducing,” as Eduardo Galeano declares (15). In the following chapters I look at some of these children’s stories of development and examine the ways they present alternative national discourses centered on indigenous experiences and perspectives.

**4.0 FROM PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST TO PORTRAIT OF AN *ILLA*: ERNESTO IN  
*LOS RÍOS PROFUNDOS***

—Con qué pagamos?  
Con huevecillos.  
—Ay! Yo no tengo ni un solo huevo  
—En pago entonces !dame tus hijos!  
—!Mis hijos nunca se los daría!  
—En este caso ;fuera del nido!...  
—Oscar Alfaro

Si de mí nació mi hijo, de mi hijo naceré yo.  
—Gamaliel Churata

The story of Peruvian life that José María Arguedas constructs in *Los ríos profundos* differs greatly not only in style and form, but also in content to its foundational fiction predecessor, *Aves sin nido*. For Arguedas, Matto de Turner's novel was the "primer intento de novela peruana, la primera descripción que se hace de la vida miserable del indio peruano" ("Fiesta" 57). Under such a description, it is the first to attempt to capture the complexities and conflicts of Peru, particularly pertaining to the indigenous community, initiating a literary tradition from which Arguedas's stories emerge. If Matto de Turner's narrative is read as a foundational fiction, then Arguedas's work appears as a critique and continuation of such foundations. By continuation I do not mean an extension of plot or repetition of theme or style, but a re-examination of those foundations and the connections they established between the family and the state. Although often removed from the popular Boom writers, Arguedas shares with them a relation to the

foundational fictions. However, it is not, as Doris Sommer's claims, that Arguedas "imagined [himself] suddenly born into full maturity" and thus able to break with stale traditions and create something new (4); instead his novel reveals the uncertainty of such maturity. Arguedas differs from the Boom novelists that Sommer believes "rewrite, or un-write, foundational fictions as the failure of romance" (27) since the romance of the Peruvian novel was clearly a failure to begin with. Arguedas does, however, return to the lovers' narratives by focusing in *Los ríos profundos* on the product of the romantic union: the Child.

Considered to be Arguedas's "most widely celebrated novel" (Tarica 88), *Los ríos profundos* has stirred the imaginations of readers since its publication in 1958. Although some critics have associated this novel of "simple wonder" (Kelley 76) with European *Bildungsromane*—novels of formation in which child characters mature into adulthood—the novel actually parodies the genre.<sup>90</sup> From this perspective, the text does not merely detail the development of a young man. Instead, it transgresses conventional European literary norms and categorizations, thereby encouraging its readers to reevaluate the western model of development as outlined in the *Bildungsroman* and to think beyond this paradigm. The novel can only be read as a *Bildungsroman* when one fills in the gaps and ambiguities with his or her own expectations and pre-existing desires, forcing the literary into an ill-fitting trope marred by contradictions. However, if one reads the novel as engaged in a project of mimicry or parody, then Ernesto's position does not need to be resolved since his condition is exactly what marks the novel's

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<sup>90</sup> For instance, Luis Harss—in an article alluding to James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*—argues that Ernesto, the protagonist of *Los ríos profundos*, is "un pequeño Wilhelm Meister," claiming that the novel is a "crónica de un aprendizaje artístico" (133). For more on the debate over the novel's narrative style and voice, see the critiques of Sara Castro-Klarén, Julio Ortega, Ángel Rama, and Mario Vargas Llosa (*La utopía*). In addition, Yolanda A. Doub, Peter Elmore, Luis Harss, Julia A. Kushigian, Martin Lienhard, Roberto Paoli, and Estelle Tarica discuss the form of the novel in relation to the *Bildungsroman*.

“critical distance” (Hutcheon, *A Theory* 6) from the *Bildungsroman*.<sup>91</sup> This difference functions to jeopardize the stability of modernity’s natural unfolding of history. Rather than working to resolve the uncertainties that unsettle an optimistic and conclusive ending, I recognize this ambiguity as integral to the structure of *Los ríos profundos*. In such a reading, the novel challenges the legitimacy of a “social order” symbolically represented in the *Bildungsroman* (Moretti 16)—an order that ignores coloniality and that limits the terms of incorporation such that the indigenous subject appears always outside of modernity and the nation-state.

As described in the previous chapters, the traditional *Bildungsroman* tells a story beyond that of a man’s journey to his own understanding and socialization. We can also read it allegorically to narrate the history of a national or global trajectory. In *The Way of the World* Franco Moretti notes that the *Bildungsroman* is a form born of modernity that incarnates modernity’s values and ideals. Youth in these stories accentuates modernity’s dynamism and instability and places meaning in the future, not the past (Moretti 5). But what often goes unnoticed is that in order to do so the *Bildungsroman* presents a particular western view of youth and growth. Modernity’s tendency toward a set of supposedly universalized and transparent values and knowledge leads, in the *Bildungsroman*, to the universalization of a particular concept of childhood and development, which in the form of a national allegory expands to encompass the identity and growth not only of an individual, but of an entire “imagined community” (Anderson). While modernity purports to be “the natural unfolding of world history,” it is really

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<sup>91</sup> As a parody of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, Arguedas’s text is not an imitation designed for comic effect or ridicule. Rather, as Linda Hutcheon describes, parody can serve as “a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion;” it is “repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity” (*A Theory* 6). It thus lacks a “postmodern mockery” (Kelley 76) while still employing a technique (parody) that is “usually considered central to postmodernism” (Hutcheon, *The Politics* 89).

“the regional narrative of the Eurocentric worldview” (Mignolo, “Preamble” 13). This is the unspoken narrative that comes to life in the *Bildungsroman*.

*Los ríos profundos* departs from the European *Bildungsroman* in two important ways. First, when the story ends, Ernesto remains a young fourteen-year-old boy. It is thus more of an *Entwicklungsroman*, or a novel of “mere growth,” than a traditional *Bildungsroman* (Pratt 36). A look at the complications and contradictions that arise in readings that assert or refute categorizing *Los ríos profundos* as a *Bildungsroman* indicates the difficulties of discussing the novel in such terms and the need for a new vocabulary. But considering the novel as an *Entwicklungsroman* is more than a question of taxonomy; it opens new avenues for interpretation and meaning. The distinction between terms highlights the power dynamics that inhibit the protagonist from gaining full (adult) authority and from being completely incorporated into dominant white culture. Ernesto’s status as a child ties him to conceptions of the Indian and of America as underdeveloped. But his behavior works against the notion of the child (and thus Indian) as weak, inferior, and illogical. Although Ernesto is linked to a natural order and to an indigenous community, he is not the primitive and innocent Romantic Child. Ernesto is distinct due to his connection to Andean culture, making him different—but not necessarily inferior—to the adults around him. Even though the novel concludes before Ernesto reaches maturity, the ending does not stand for defeat or stasis; Ernesto does not *fail* to reach maturity. Instead, he must continue negotiating between spaces.<sup>92</sup>

Second, Ernesto’s internal tension differs from the duality experienced by characters in traditional *Bildungsromane*. Ernesto seems positioned in a typical coming-of-age narrative, but the particular doubleness of his identity—his connections to both western and indigenous

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<sup>92</sup> This internal movement is mirrored in his physical fluctuation through space; as he leaves Abancay he heads up a hill, but then drops down into a canyon and returns to the river. Ernesto’s journey continues on a zigzag path.



cultures—makes him more than just a maladjusted teenager. Existing in a borderland between modernity and coloniality, he is a “niño de dos cabezas” (Arguedas, *Los ríos* 100). As such, Ernesto is a form of *illa*, a particular kind of Andean light and energy. Through his connection to *illa* energy, Ernesto brings an alternative indigenous discourse into dialogue with a western hegemonic one. The novel itself assumes *illa* energy and serves as a discursive force that confronts the European *Bildungsroman* by highlighting “an other thinking” (Mignolo, *Local* 66) that challenges modernity’s historical narrative and its project of what Lee Edelman calls “reproductive futurism.”

Edelman argues that reproductive futurism frames political discourse, which privileges heteronormativity and projects its vision of social order “to the future in the form of its inner Child” (2). Thus the child embodies not just an underdeveloped state, but the potential “limitless future” of the “imagined community” (Anderson 12). The child is the essential element for the *natural* or *normal* lineal trajectory of society, the nation, and modernity. That is, it is the resulting consequence born of heteronormative relationships that unfurls the progression of society into its destined future. Edelman asserts that the narrative of reproductive futurism renders “unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations” (2). Arguedas’s novel challenges this narrative in that the central protagonist, being a form of *illa*, assumes the position of a child with “no future” (Edelman).

Ernesto’s uncertain position makes it difficult to place him within the standard model of the formation of the self-citizen. If viewed as a *Bildungsroman*, *Los ríos profundos* would imply the erasure of the Indian in his supposedly natural transition into white civilization. On the other hand, considering it an anti-*Bildungsroman* would suggest the failure of the Indian to mature.

But *Los ríos profundos* is neither. It thus presents readers with the need to recognize the western concept of development as a catch-22 since it limits an indigenous subject's life options to only two paths: inclusion and loss of indigeneity or exclusion and perpetual immaturity.

Read as a form of *illa*, *Los ríos profundos* departs from the framework of the *Bildungsroman*, making it a particular type of border-*Bildungsroman*—an *illaroman*. Like the reflective and distorted light of an *illa*, the novel assumes and transforms the power of another source. This act, however, is not mere imitation, but a creative force that calls on readers to recognize the illusion of the universality of modernity as projected in the *Bildungsroman*. Arguedas's novel illustrates that the seemingly inescapable trajectory of modernity, with its futurity and concept of progress, is held in check by its more sinister side: an *unthinkable* alternative knowledge suppressed through domination and violence.

#### 4.1 STORIES OF GROWTH: BILDUNGSROMANE AND ENTWICKLUNGSROMANE

A review of the general characteristics that classify the traditional *Bildungsroman* highlights the resemblances and, more so, the distinctions between these novels and *Los ríos profundos*. As noted earlier Jerome Hamilton Buckley in *Season of Youth* presents a plot formula for a typical *Bildungsroman*. In review, he finds that the protagonist leaves a rural home for the city where he has a range of experiences (including sexual ones) that propel him from adolescence to maturity (17-18).<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> I cite Buckley's description, first, to set an example against which to compare Ernesto's story and, second, because his formula is often employed in the characterization of such novels (for example, Roberta Seeling Trites's

One could certainly read *Los ríos profundos* as following, to some degree, this model. Although the narrator of Arguedas's novel twists and turns through time and space as he describes his own memories, dreams, imaginings, and observations, the story he tells ultimately moves from a beginning to an end. The novel retraces Ernesto's experiences during a short period of his adolescence, beginning with his journey through Cusco, Peru to the mountainous town of Abancay. Shortly after arriving in town, his father must leave to work in the countryside. With his mother absent and his father traveling, the boy begins his education at the local Catholic school in an orphan-like state. He seeks a "substitute parent or creed" (Buckley 19) in both the school rector, Padre Linares, and the *chichera* leader Doña Felipa. Thus Ernesto has grown up in the country before entering the more urban space of Abancay. The narrator rarely describes the boy's academic studies or the goings-on of the classroom. Instead, we witness Ernesto's education in the social realm, based on his interactions with his peers, the school rector, and the townspeople. Ernesto is torn between viewing Padre Linares as a protector and a controlling dictator. He experiments (although quite innocently) with erotic and romantic love and at the novel's conclusion, tumultuous circumstances in and around town force him to depart.

More so than Ernesto, *his peers* follow the path of the traditional *Bildungsroman* and descriptions of their growth highlight how Ernesto's situation departs from theirs. To begin with, there is the arrogant and self-absorbed *Valle*, one of the senior boys in the school. Arguedas's description of Valle is comical and he is clearly the butt of a joke pointed toward an educated white elite. Valle is the only student in the school who does not speak Quechua, is a fan of Chocano and Schopenhauer, and expects to live in Lima or in another (probably European)

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*Disturbing the Universe* and Bernard Selinger's article "*House Made of Dawn: A Positively Ambivalent Bildungsroman*" both reference Buckley's concept of the *Bildungsroman*). Various critics have also taken issue with Buckley's interpretation; see Jeffrey L. Sammons in *Reflection and Action*.

country (118-120). Several scenes depict him walking around town, a gaggle of girls cooing around him, his huge “k’ompo” tied around his neck (118, 255). He believes himself to be a truly sophisticated and eloquent *man*, a poet. His words, however, reveal his inability to see and recognize the significance of the elements in the social world around him. For example, when the *chicheras* are thrown into prison as punishment for the salt riot and the boys discuss the torture the women suffer, Valle’s inappropriate comment is quickly rebuffed through silence:

“Están zurrando a las chicheras en la cárcel,” dijo [Iño Villegas]. “Algunas han chillado duro, como alborotando. Dice que las fuetean en el trasero, delante de sus maridos. Como no tienen calzón les ven todo.... Les han metido excremento en la boca. ¡Ha sido peor, dicen! Insultos contra vergazos es la pelea...”

“¡Homérico! ¡Eso es homérico!” exclamó Valle.

Nadie le hizo caso. (198)

Valle’s comment on the events being “Homeric” jars with the harsh realities of the women’s treatment. It is as if he resides in a world unto himself, oblivious to the circumstances that surround him. At an earlier point in the novel, Ernesto is preparing to fight another boy and Valle is exuberant, declaring, “Un Quixote de Abancay derribará a un quechua, a un cantador de jarahuis. ¡Qué combate, jóvenes, qué homérico y digno combate! Un nuevo duelo de las razas” (120). For Valle, the race struggle is literary and located outside of his reality, deserving of “una loa épica” (120). He has already decided which “raza” will win; it is natural, poetic, and dignified. When the *chicheras* are whipped and punished in jail, Valle has a similar reaction. The “digno combate” has simply extended beyond the pages of his books (120). Valle’s character

mimics the protagonists of classic *bildungsroman* novels. This imitation, with “critical difference” (Hutcheon, *A Theory* 6), criticizes the superficiality of becoming part of society only by turning a blind eye to the cultural conflicts and racial struggles that divide Peru.

A look at another boy highlights the contrast between Ernesto’s story and the *Bildungsroman*. One of Ernesto’s closest friends is Markask’a (*Marcado*), also referred to by his Spanish name Antero and his Spanish nickname *Candela*. Although Antero comes from a landed family, he has a connection with the indigenous order in the beginning of the novel. He brings the *zumbayllu* to school and he is the most captivated by its motion (106). Shortly after Antero brings the top to school he asks Ernesto to help him write a love poem to a girl in town. As payment, he gives Ernesto a *winku*, a special top with even more power than the *zumbayllu*.

But as tensions rise after the salt protest and with the impending typhus fever, Antero and Ernesto grow apart. Antero sides with the white elite, arguing that in the end the Indians must be violently subdued: “si los indios se levantarán, los iría matando, fácil...hay que sujetarlos bien” (206). During this conversation, Ernesto switches from addressing his friend as Markask’a to Candle to Antero. Antero notes the change:

“¡Vamos a la calle, Markask’a!” [Ernesto]

[...]

“Tú anda a la alameda, Candela.” [Ernesto]

“¿Por qué me dices Candela?” [Antero]

“No te decimos Candela?”

“Tú no. Me dices Markask’a, desde que te regalé mi zumbayllu...”

“¡Anda a Condebamba, Antero! Yo puedo llegar todavía al río.” (207)

In this brief conversation, Ernesto calls his friend by all three of his names. At first Ernesto is excited about the possibility that the leader of the salt riot, Doña Felipa, will return to town in glory. He explains that a man can handle only so much beating for no reason before he fights back. At this point Ernesto addresses his friend in his familiar Quechua name. But Antero looks perplexedly at Ernesto and positions himself with the landowners. Antero wants to go meet some girls, but Ernesto can't get his mind off of the possible indigenous uprising. He addresses Antero as *Candela*—a name that refers to his blond hair that appears to be on fire—and declines the offer. Ernesto's use of *Candela* at this point is significant because the switch Spanish emphasizes Antero's place in and familiarity with the white community, but yet, being a nickname, it maintains a friendly connotation. That intimacy diminishes when, at the end of the conversation, Ernesto refers to his friend with a neutral and distanced "Antero." This moment marks a turn in their friendship.

Antero's befriending of some boys from the coast who arrived with the military in the wake of the salt protest, the distance between he and Ernesto intensifies. One difference that separates the two is Antero's interest in and relationships with girls. For example, Ernesto notes that he begins to talk about "mujeres" instead of "muchachas" or "las chicas" (269). Ernesto also observes that Antero, two years his senior, now marks the difference in their ages: Gerardo "como Antero se dirigían a mí como a un menor. Lo era; pero la diferencia entre Antero y yo, en lugar de haber sido marcada desde el regalo del zumbayllu, la habíamos olvidado, borrado" (254). With the tensions between them mounting, Ernesto buries the *zumbayllu* and afterwards feels "aliviado" (277). This burial formalizes the termination of their relationship.

Ernesto witnesses the artificial and cruel development of the boys from his school as they enter adult society. Valle and Antero have unique histories and relationships with Ernesto, but

they both suffer from the same tendency towards selfish exploitation (of women, knowledge, and Indians) as part of their initiation to manhood. Like Ernesto, they too experience the world beyond the safety of home. But, unlike him, they follow the model that Buckley describes of seeking a place in the white adult community. In the context of Arguedas's novel, part of this initiation is the casting off of the indigenous part of their personal and national histories. Their development is predicated on the understanding of the Indian as subordinate, a part of a decadent race that has already lost the battle or a reckless one that must be tied down.

It is tempting to also approach Ernesto's development from the predetermined guide provided by Buckley and many readers have found it convenient in their analysis. However, the ambiguous conclusion, in which Ernesto does not leave "his adolescence behind" (Buckley 17), frustrates the model of the genre. Ernesto does not appear to transition into a new developmental state marked by white adult maturity, as in Valle's erudite formation or Antero's sense of domination. Instead, the novel follows the form of *Entwicklungsromane*, which Roberta Seelinger Trites notes "end before the protagonist reaches adulthood" and rarely "depict their protagonists as fully enfranchised within their culture" (19). Unlike the traditional *Bildungsroman* that valorizes "progress, heterosexuality, social involvement, healthy disillusionment, 'normality,' adulthood," these stories focus on the tensions between spaces and how characters deal with the uncomfortable situation of being part of "normality" and yet existing outside of it (Hirsch 27). *Los ríos profundos* is an *Entwicklungsroman* since Ernesto does not reach full adulthood and remains subordinate to the authority of his adult caregivers.

Paralleling this, he continues to exist on the margins of the white, landed culture of Abancay and the surrounding *haciendas*.<sup>94</sup>

A close look at the ending of the novel reveals that Ernesto's future is indefinite. We know that the rector has orders from Ernesto's father to send him to a relative's *hacienda* while the school is closed because of a typhus epidemic. Ernesto excitedly accepts this plan once he hears about the *hacienda's colonos* (Indians belonging to the *hacienda*). He sets off alone in the early morning, but suddenly remembers "la advertencia del padre director y los relatos de Antero" (317). He then turns back and makes a new plan: "¡Mejor me hundo en la quebrada!...La atravieso, llego a Toraya, y de allí a la cordillera...¡No me agarrará la peste!" (318). Ernesto is not explicit about his intentions, inviting multiple readings. While some say he continues on to the *hacienda*, others see him as setting off in a completely different direction—blazing his own trail or searching for his father. Despite the disparity of these interpretations, they all follow the formula of the *Bildungsroman* by concluding that the presumed action Ernesto makes at the end of the novel is one that suggests his movement beyond adolescence into manhood.<sup>95</sup> These readings try to explain away the conclusion's uncertainty. Instead, one could produce an interpretation that acknowledges the ambiguity of the ending and Ernesto's continued marginal

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<sup>94</sup> Ernesto appears on the margins of various communities of Abancay, whether indigenous, mestizo, or white. That is not to say he does not interact with these communities, but that his interactions often shift between inclusion and exclusion. For example, he joins in the salt riot and when recounting the events speaks as a participant in the first person plural. However, at the end of the day he is alone or "abandonado" (146). Interestingly, his greatest connections are with other outsiders whose stay in town is temporary, such as the "acompañante del kimichu" (237) who he meets at a *chicha* bar and the woman with blue eyes who comforts him in Patibamba after the salt riot (145-47).

<sup>95</sup> For example, Ángel Rama believes Ernesto continues on to *el Viejo* in order to "ocupar el puesto de animador de la rebeldía ante los Colonos y, por lo tanto, irá a entablar un combate que casi parece cósmico, con el Viejo, con el Poder que sojuzga, tortura y mata" (304-305). Ann Lambright believes the plague at the end of the novel returns Ernesto to his family (106) and that Ernesto goes in search of his father (111); she also emphasizes the importance of his movement through the feminine space of the valley to prepare for the masculine space of the mountains. Isabelle Tauzin-Castellanos believes Ernesto moves towards Coracora (the last known location of his father) and views Ernesto as journeying towards the central Andes, a liberating decision: "se emancipa y pasa a ser hombre" (224).



status. In such a reading, Ernesto departs Abancay still a teenage boy, a dependent caught in a whirlwind of unresolved conflict that uproots him along with the town. Although he alters his route without permission, there is little indication that this choice reflects a major change within him and that he leaves his adolescence for adulthood.<sup>96</sup>

The distinction between terms (*Bildungsroman* and *Entwicklungsroman*) helps to clarify the tensions that arise when *Los ríos profundos* is thought of as a *Bildungsroman*. For example, *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature* describes the novel as a *Bildungsroman* but also claims that “[u]ltimately Ernesto remains an outsider, in a third, imagined space where the past and present of two races, two cultures, and a complex system of social classes could meet” (257-258). Being an outsider implies a lack of incorporation. I agree that Ernesto exists in a borderland between two cultures. However, it is exactly this position that hinders him from reaching a complete “initiation” (Buckley 18), from establishing a home, and becoming a man with an “identity sanctioned by the larger white society” (Selinger 43).

In other critiques, although the term *Bildungsroman* is never explicitly mentioned, its shadow floats through the analysis. For example, Anne Lambright explores Arguedas’s novel as the story of the formation of a hybrid intellectual. Lambright employs the indigenous elements within the text to support the argument that *Los ríos profundos* presents a “portrait of a new national subject with roots in indigenous culture” (141). In such an analysis, Ernesto’s story

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<sup>96</sup> Ernesto’s sudden change of plans at the end of the novel is not too unusual since he has previously made independent decisions and not followed the will of the rector. For example, he follows the *chicheras* during the salt riot instead of staying in the school. After the riots, Padre Linares takes him to Patibamba for mass, but Ernesto decides to go his own way and “bajar a carrera hasta el río.” The rector allows him to skip mass, but makes him return to the school (163). Moreover, Ernesto’s other actions and reflections at the novel’s conclusion maintain his imaginative and childlike position. For example, he hangs a small bouquet of lilies on a gate to a girl’s home as his farewell (317), something he had daydreamed about earlier when envisioning what he would do if he were to be dying of typhus (298). He also maintains his childish perspective when he personifies the plague, thinking that it must be frozen by the Indian’s prayers and that he may see it float by on its way to the jungle, the land of the dead (318). These descriptions portray a particular trait in Ernesto that has not changed: as his father says, “Tú ves, como niño, algunas cosas que los mayores no vemos” (30).

fulfills the historical social role of the traditional *Bildungsroman* of “incorporating the problematic individual into the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and thereby legitimating the democratic institutions of the emergent rights-based nation-state” (Slaughter 94). If we agree that one definition of the traditional *Bildungsroman* is the creation of a citizen-subject, then in Lambright’s analysis, Ernesto assimilates into the nation and thus implies a journey of *Bildung*—although one which places Ernesto in a mediatory, “alternative” position that “incorporates the indigenous element and brings it into play with more western-looking elements of the highlands” (Lambright 121) in order to “bring balance and union to the fragmented nation” (Lambright 106). Lambright’s interpretation of the ending reinforces this conclusion since she sees Ernesto as making an independent decision at the end of the novel to search for his father instead of following the rector’s orders (Lambright 111).

It may be telling that Lambright seems to avoid the term *Bildungsroman* since while her description of the novel implies such a journey, the indigenous component disturbs the traditional *Bildungsroman*’s function of legitimizing “authority by normalizing the dominant sociopolitical practices and patterns of the nation-statist modernity and by affirming the capacity of those systems to distinguish good citizens from bad subjects” (Slaughter 124). It is interesting that although Lambright claims that Ernesto embodies a new national subject, she limits his actual agency by clarifying that he is a “*projection* of the type of intellectual who *might*” serve to “insert into the national imaginary previously silenced sectors of Peru” (Lambright 141 emphasis mine); which I read as suggesting that Ernesto is the potential for a viable alternative political project, but one which is still forthcoming. I agree with this reading, however, I believe it is important to note that the restricted nature of growth presented in the novel reflects the conditional nature of Ernesto’s socialization and incorporation into the nation.

On the other hand, some critics have openly refuted *Los ríos profundos* categorization as *Bildungsroman*. Often such critique is built on contradictory statements such as Priscilla Archibald's comment that while "*Los ríos profundos* tells the story of the maturation of a young man, it might nevertheless be characterized as an anti-*bildungsroman*" ("Gender" 118). In a similar way, Estelle Tarica rejects the term to describe *Los ríos profundos*, arguing that "it is not a coming-of-age story...the protagonist does not change and grow" (97). Tarica believes Ernesto "resists all change, understood as maturation" (97). At the same time, she claims the plague at the end of the novel "liberates" him and "cleanses him" (97), implying some sort of change in Ernesto reached by the novel's conclusion. Interestingly, Tarica does not interpret the ending as a demonstration of Ernesto's "progress along the path of social integration" (Tarica 97), as Lambright seems to imply, but as passive non-growth resulting from events that Ernesto cannot control: "the novel ends when the protagonist is prevented from following through on his education, banished from school by the advent of a typhus plague" (97). She thus views the novel as "offering a story of *interrupted* mestizaje" (97). Part of the issue here may be a question of terminology since, as in Lambright's reading, Ernesto achieves some sort of maturation, but not necessarily in a form that follows the rules of white, western society. But there is an issue at stake more consequential than taxonomy; the difficulties of defining the novel point to a larger concern—in particular, if and how the indigenous subject is able to grow up within modernity. A story of "*interrupted* mestizaje" insinuates a failure of the indigenous to acquire a meaningful place in the nation-state. A failure, that is, in that his *Bildung* is cut short because he is unable to meet the requirements for proper inclusion into the "mestizo nation" (Tarica xii).

While Tarica rejects classifying *Los ríos profundos* as a coming-of-age novel, she seeks a similar solution to the novel's ambiguity as other critics who claim it is a *Bildungsroman*. That

is, she finds a “clearly transmitted” indigeneity (revealed in the narration) is the “redemption from the tragic divisions of the modern nation-state” (136). Although the first-person narrator presents a holistic harmony, these divisions remain within the “fragmented” world of the child protagonist (105). Tarica’s description of the novel as “not just a truncated autobiography” but also a “spiritual autobiography” (98) of a man who finds a “pure voice” after he “renounce[s] the body and diminish[es] the self” (129) follows the pattern of the traditional *Bildungsroman* in that it ultimately suggests the “happy belonging to a harmonious totality” (Moretti 65), although a spiritual one existing outside the nation-state.

Tarica can only reach this conclusion by distinguishing the narrator from the protagonist, favoring the former as the real “mediator” who “translates and redeems the Quechua community” (106). This *man* is the “older, yet ageless voice situated between ‘the world of men’ and the diffuse, eternal world of song” (97) who “creates the internal community largely absent from the events of the story” (105). Thus although she critiques readers who view a “plurivocality” in the narration because they “desire to make of this novel a model for the ideal of the nation-state: a Peru whose cultural plurality is nevertheless governed by unity and integration” (92), she too must mark a distinction between narrative personae (the narrator and the protagonist) in order to describe the “inclusive community” (99) of an “immaterial region of song” (96). Since Tarica separates the “innocent, distanced narrator” (an older voice) from the “passionate mestizo protagonist” (a boy) (105), she can read the child Ernesto as resistant to change<sup>97</sup> at the same time that she maintains a hierarchical structure built on the binary

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<sup>97</sup> The first-person narrator in *Los ríos profundos* seems to present the novel as an implied-*Bildungsroman*, since, as Doub argues, it appears that Ernesto is able to “(re)connect with society” by becoming a writer in his “adult” life (53). Tarica’s separation of narrator from protagonist makes this issue irrelevant in the debate over whether the novel is a coming-of-age story. I do not agree with Tarica that my reading of the novel follows a “tendency to confuse [the protagonist] with the narrator” (97) because I see them as working in the text as a single persona; it is

old/young. The child Ernesto does not grow and does not become an active participant in the nation-state, a resolution that also appears to say—because of Ernesto’s connection to the indigenous—that the Indian also fails at integration in the “world of men.” Instead, community can only be found in the voice of a narrator who lives in an alternative realm or “medium” of “intimate belonging” (133). From this perspective, the structure of the novel is based in a contradiction that disjoints the juvenile protagonist from the matured narrator. If instead one maintains the link between protagonist and narrator, then it remains questionable if and how the narrator finds himself within an “alternative, integrated world” (Tarica 105) since this change is not documented in the novel. Focused on the older narrative voice, Tarica neglects the significance of the child’s story and the truncation of his life track.

#### 4.2 THE CHILD, AMERICA, AND THE INDIAN

Ernesto’s youth is significant because it ties him to modernity’s conceptions of America, its indigenous populations, and the Romantic Child. Wild, young, innocent, dependent, and inferior: authors, philosophers, and scientists have used these descriptions to bring America, the Indian,

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not confusion, but a particular reading. Nor do I regard, as Doub does, the first-person retrospective narration as assuring that Ernesto incorporates into society and thus tells his own *Bildungsroman*. Based on his narration, it is unclear into which, if any, community he has finally incorporated at the time of writing the text. His interest and knowledge in indigenous communities appears to distinguish him from white society. At the same time, his ethnographic descriptions detail indigenous practices, but usually from an outside perspective, referring to the customs and beliefs of the *indios*—not necessarily of his people or community. For example, the narrator begins one description by saying, “En los pueblos de indios” (139). In other instances, he reveals his outsider status by simply knowing too much—he knows about both the *wak’rapuku* and *pinkuyllu* (musical instruments), although “en las regiones donde aparece el wak’rapuku ya no se conoce el pinkuyllu” (102). Furthermore, the story he tells is set within the limited timeframe of adolescence. The novel closes with Ernesto alone. We do not witness his integration or see him assume adult responsibilities (work within a community, family, job, education, building of a home, etc).

and the Child together in a synonymic relationship.<sup>98</sup> But *Los ríos profundos* reveals that Ernesto is actually not inferior to the adults around him. Therefore, the structure that maintains his difference (as child) appears unstable; its transparency clouds over. References to his childishness exemplify what Mignolo has called the colonial difference, which one could describe as the moralizing of differences within a colonial context.<sup>99</sup> If we ignore the significance of the form of the novel as *Entwicklungsroman*, we also are blind to this colonial difference.

Modernity is captivated by childhood. Moretti claims that youth is modernity's "essence" and "specific material sign" (5). He views the *Bildungsroman* as emerging in conjunction with modernity. But as Enrique Dussel notes, the "discovery, conquest, colonization, and integration (subsumption) of Amerindia" ushered in the advent of a *first modernity*, i.e., a culture and worldview in which Europe became the center of a planetary system ("Beyond" 5). This primary modernity was followed by a second modernity at the end of the eighteenth century after the French Revolution where power moved from southern to northern Europe. I believe that modernity's fascination with youth is not the result of a sudden "plunge into [second] modernity" (Moretti 5), but the culmination of a long relationship with the Child and youth percolating for centuries. Europeans found youth in the indigenous peoples of the *New World* and their imaginings of the space and people of America illustrate an "attempt to reconstruct an originary state" (Rabasa 126). Indians were wild, without a recognizable writing system, childlike, and in need of socialization. It is no surprise that the characteristics that theorists often use to describe

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<sup>98</sup> These three constructions follow modernity's desire for a lineal trajectory of development. America is the extension of Europe; the Indian is the uncivilized (and less evolved) antecedent of man; and the child is the germ of the adult. See for example Antonello Gerbi's review of the discursive history of the people and land of America and Philippe Ariès' discussion of modern childhood in *Centuries of Childhood*.

<sup>99</sup> Mignolo describes the colonial difference as "the classification of the planet in the modern/colonial imaginary" by "enacting coloniality of power, an energy and a machinery to transform differences into values" (*Local* 13).

the Romantic Child share the qualities of the noble savage: “the child as primitive, as embodying a natural form reaching back to an earlier and more authentic stage of the species: the child as savage, noble but raw...the admirable child of nature and natural energy” (Kincaid 57). The Romantic Child, a child of the second modernity, holds a direct lineage to the first modernity and accompanying coloniality.

Ernesto’s interactions in Abancay reinforce the idea that the dominant social structure (found in the school, church, and *haciendas*) oppresses and *infantilizes* the Indigenous. He describes how the indigenous people in Abancay have been restricted in their development, noting to his friend Antero that in “los pueblos donde he vivido con mi padre, los indios no son *erk’es*. *Aquí parece que no los dejan llegar a ser hombres*. Tienen miedo, siempre, como criaturas” (205 my emphasis). The conditions around Abancay are such that the Indians appear to be *erk’es*, little crying children who do not grow and mature. The white elite must keep the Indians as children to protect themselves. Indigenous maturity would mean the possibility of indigenous agency and authority and would allow the integration of the Indigenous into society on equal footing with the landowners, something that could threaten the vestiges of a colonial order.

When Padre Linares gives a scolding sermon to the people of Patibamba following the salt riots Ernesto witnesses first hand the subjugation and infantilization of the Indians of the *haciendas* surrounding Abancay. The rector shouts at the indigenous crowd, “¡Lloren, lloren...el mundo es una cuna de llanto par alas pobrecitas criaturas, los indios de Patibamba!” As the multitude begins to kneel, their eyes swelling, Ernesto reflects that “[s]e conagiaron todos” (162). The priest’s words do not heal, but sicken. Padre Linares’s message first strokes the lacerations of the Indians, reminding them of their pain and at the same time universalizing it and

minimizing it (162). Once the Indians are broken, he castigates them for stealing the salt and promises them future rewards in heaven if they return the stolen goods. After his blessing, the salt is redistributed. The rector's (and through his hands, the church's and the government's) authority—shaken by Doña Felipa's usurpation during the salt riot—has been reestablished.

Later, Antero confirms the method of Indian infantilization that Ernesto has witnessed when he describes the power of priests to make the Indians weep like children (205). Antero comes from a landowning family and has seen Indians punished to the point of crying “como si fueron huérfanos” (205). When he was young, Antero cried at the sight of the Indian's pain (205). He appears to sympathize: “[c]uando se es niño y se oye llorar así, llorar a la gente grande, en tumulto, como una noche sin salida ahoga el corazón; lo ahoga, lo oprime para siempre”(205). But in his description, he can only come so close to defining the Indians as adults, referring to them instead as *gente grande*. As their conversation continues, Ernesto ends up disappointed to find that his friend has become hardened and now sees the Indians as a potentially dangerous force that he would easily kill if they rebelled (206). Antero is becoming a man and thus assumes his role in the *hacienda*. Like an adult, he defines an emotional alliance with the Indian as childish. Compassion for the Indian's tears is a child's trait and it serves as a kind of litmus test for immaturity.

Although Ernesto's compassion towards the Indians as well as his age reinforce the idea that he is distinct from Antero and the rest of the white adult community that holds political (and spiritual) authority, his position in *Los ríos profundos* blurs the line that divides men from boys. Adults refer to his childishness and he is also self-consciously aware of his reliance on adults, particularly his dependence on the school rector and his indigenous mentor don Pablo Maywa. However, through Ernesto's narrative the child assumes a position of power and is able to speak



back to the project of modernity. In such a way, we can read the novel as unraveling the knot in modern discourse that ties the trio (America, Indian, and Child) together by the common perception that they must be tamed and rescued from their alleged immaturity. Moreover, although sometimes marked as a child, Ernesto and his friends are “casi jóvenes. ¡Unos jóvenes!” (Arguedas, *Los ríos* 273). Caught between childhood and adulthood and continuously transgressing the line that separates the adult from the child, Ernesto’s behavior challenges the idea of adulthood as the end-point and culmination of childhood, suggesting the impossibility of such a border.

Two scenes that the narrator recalls illustrate the difficulty of separating men from boys. In the first, Ernesto remembers a town where the children would rush to the orchards and, “armados con hondas de jebe[,] cazaban a los pájaros como a enemigos de guerra” (50). In the second, the children’s cruel actions are repeated, but this time by adults: “salían de sus casas los tiradores de fusil; corrían con el arma en las manos hacia el bosque.... Apuntaban, y a cada disparo caía un loro; a veces, por casualidad, derribaban dos” (53). The adults hunting the birds are just like the children but with different (but no less lethal) weapons. Or is it that the children are just like the adults? Who mimics whom? Are the children performing adulthood or are the adults regressing into childhood?

Like these children, Ernesto enters (physically and mentally) traditionally adult spaces. He lingers about the *chicha* bars; travels with protestors to another town; and is knowledgeable about the power of language, the injustices of the socio-economic system, and the natural environment (he is a keen observer of insects, rivers, and people). His imagination allows him to understand and read the world in ways that are overlooked or not understood by adults. Instead of being a sign of inferiority, his perception of and relationship to the environment around him is

a virtue that provides him strength and peace in a discordant world. For example, Ernesto has an acute understanding of the power of memory and its transmission, which he uses to connect to his absent father and to an Inca history. Music, particular words, toy tops, insects, birds, rocks, and rivers trigger this power.

Ernesto's intimate relationship with the world around him could very easily link him to the Romantic Child who lives "in a primitive state where 'nature' is still to be found" (Rose 44). Similar to the Romantic Child, Ernesto is drawn to and feels close to nature. He hears the Inca stones speaking in Cusco (27), believes that the voices of the rivers awaken the memory of "los primitivos recuerdos, los más antiguos sueños" (45), and pays particularly close attention to insects, such as *los wayronk'os* (178), *tankayllus* (100), *mariposas* (145), and *moscardones* (200). As mentioned by various critics, these elements relate to a natural order, to the freedom from enclosures, the zone of his infancy and the memory of childhood, the healing power of the world, the supernatural, and the indigenous.<sup>100</sup> However, Ernesto differs from this universalized European concept of childhood in that his relationship to nature is, as William Rowe notes, "a link to an alternative human order (that of Indians), an order which can reverse the social alienation which he experiences" when visiting the towns of the *altiplano* (xix). His interest in nature is not illogical or irrational, but based in "an other" logic and "an other" reason (Mignolo *Local* 66).<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> For example see William Rowe, José Luis Rouillón, and Helen Usandizaga.

<sup>101</sup> Many other critics have explored the role of Andean epistemology in *Los ríos profundos*. For example, see Lambright who discusses an indigenous "feminine code" in Arguedas's writing (26); Rowe who considers the significance of an "Indian mythical world-view" (xviii) in the novel; Tarica who explores Arguedas's relationship to the Quechua language; and Usandizaga who looks at the dark forces (such as *illa*) that reveal a particularly Andean "dimensión de conocimiento" (227). Some critiques that include Andean concepts have discussed the form of the novel as a *Bildungsroman*. For example, Harss discusses the poetic significance of the *zumbayllu* and *huayno*; he views them as tools for the artist to individually "rescatar...la presencia abismada de lo que en la vida cotidiana es ruina y abandono" (136). For Harss, these indigenous elements contribute to Ernesto's poetic experience and "aprendizaje artístico" (Harss 133), revealing "la transparencia envolvente del ojo interior" (138)—not Ernesto's

Ernesto is tied to the indigenous culture of the *altiplano* in various ways, despite his connection to his *hacienda*-owning uncle (*el Viejo*), which associates him with a white landed aristocracy. For instance, even though Arguedas never directly describes Ernesto's physical appearance, the contrasts the narrator provides between himself and other characters often emphasize his more indigenous characteristics, or at least an appearance that is white, "*but not quite*" (Bhabha 122 emphasis in original). For example, when Ernesto meets his friend's love-interest, he feels awkward and wishes he could be more like his father: "¡Si yo hubiera tenido los ojos azules de él, sus manos blancas y su hermosa barba rubia...!" (153) Other students also notice Ernesto's difference. He is challenged to a fight by a student who insults him by saying that although Ernesto looks white, he is just "un indiecito" (116). At another moment, a boy from the school, Valle, identifies Ernesto as a representative of the indigenous people, contrasting him with a student who appears more European (120). Thus, Ernesto's position between indigenous and western communities is not solely internal, but is also something that influences the perceptions of those around him and his relationships to other people.

In addition to his external appearance, Ernesto's understanding of memory and its transmission is another example of his link to an indigenous order. The narrator describes how the opening of memory and communication with other people and the world is associated with the concept of *yllu*: "música que producen las pequeñas alas en vuelo; música que surge del movimiento de objetos leves" (100). Even though Ernesto's belief in the powers of *yllu*-forces could be seen as simply an element of the Romantic Child, it actually reveals his tie to an

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development within an indigenous epistemology. Ernesto's interest in *zumbayllus* and *huaynos* is, consequently, simply another part of a western socialization based in an individual's poetic growth. Other critics have examined the indigenous aspects of Ernesto's development in more depth than Harss, each delivering his or her own conclusion on what this means in regard to the novel's classification as a *Bildungsroman*; for example, please see my comments on Lambright's reading of the novel.

Andean worldview and his knowledge of an alternative epistemology. After a lengthy introduction explaining the meaning of the *yllu* suffix, the narrator shifts to the school courtyard where a group of boys plays with a *zumbayllu*, a spinning top. This toy fascinates Ernesto and through it he can communicate with nature and his father. Antonio Cornejo Polar relates its powers to the ability to “concentra[r] en sí todos los recursos contra el mal y se convierte en símbolo de la ruptura del enclaustramiento escolar” (*Los universos* 105). The suffix *yllu* reveals that the word not only defines a toy, but refers to the movement, sound, light, music, and energy it creates and disperses. The spinning top represents Ernesto’s “link with an alternative human order” where “nature and human society” form a single, continuous unit (Rowe xix). It breaks boundaries of time and space and provides solace from the violence of the town and school and allows Ernesto to recover memory and community, creating a time-space of *pacha*.

Similar to the western mathematical notion of the chronotope,<sup>102</sup> the Quechua and Aymara concept of *pacha* describes a unity of time and space. The Andean concept, however, assumes a spiritual quality that ties it to Andean epistemology and historical memory. Even though Fernando Untoja Choque and Ana A. Mamani Espejo demonstrate the difficulty of defining and translating the idea of *pacha*, they explain that it is founded in the essence of time and space (86); it is “la naturaleza reproductora, pero parece ser una divinidad. Pacha es, el origen, la fundación de un pensamiento” (8). *Pacha* is not just one particular time and space, but an all-encompassing time and space and the relation between them. Further, it works to unify oppositions: “unifica, integra, no divide entre el bien y el mal” (Untoja Choque and Mamani

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<sup>102</sup> The term “chronotope” originates from the mathematical theory of the intrinsic relationship between time and space. Mikhail Bakhtin explains that the term “was introduced as part of Einstein’s Theory of Relativity... [I]t expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space)” (84). To clarify his use of the term, Bakhtin continues: “In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history” (84).

Espejo 92). Mignolo clarifies that in Andean cosmology, “Nature” is a “totality called *pacha*” where man, nature, and deities cannot be understood apart from one another (Commentary 493). Therefore, Ernesto’s relationships to the rivers, rocks, and insects around him are not merely an association to the natural world (as with the Romantic Child), but a connection to *pacha*. When he escapes from the borders of the town into the countryside or down to the river, he reconnects to this order. In the same way, when he focuses on the buzzing of insects, the spinning of the *zumbayllu*, or the humming of a harmonica, a *pacha*-space is opened, creating a connection between nature, gods, and man. These spaces break the time and space barriers of the town, allowing Ernesto to send messages to his faraway father as well as acting as “puertas de memoria” (Arguedas, *Los ríos* 33). These memory-bridges stretch far into a communal past and present.

### 4.3 DIVIDED SELVES AND DISCORDANT WORLDS

The instability of Ernesto’s position at the novel’s conclusion is one indication that *Los ríos profundos* departs from the *Bildungsroman*. Another is that the divisions within Ernesto are distinct from angst-prone protagonists of the traditional genre. While Buckley’s blueprint as cited above focuses on an optimistic synthesis, there is, however, a different version of the form, one that emphasizes the contradictory nature of modernity. In such a version, painful growth is highlighted in an inconclusive and ambiguous ending where the protagonist seems to fail or reject his socialization—where the exchange of freedom for “sweet” social integration is not a blessing, but a curse (Moretti 65). The oppositions that Ernesto experiences could reflect what Moretti describes as the “*intrinsically contradictory*” nature of the *Bildungsroman* that is built on

“sharp contrasts” (6 emphasis in original). Ernesto’s difficulty with integration would then seem to suggest his association with protagonists in some *Bildungsromane* who ask how “one can feel part of a world which deep down one despises?” (Moretti 76) Classifying Ernesto’s story with these criteria, however, would be another instance of ignoring the colonial difference. The relationship between youth, modernity, and the *Bildungsroman* reveals that the secret of Arguedas’s imitation of the genre lies in the estranged child of modernity: coloniality.

One example that Buckley gives of a *Bildungsroman* that does not end with a happy “accommodation to the modern world” (Buckley 17) is *Free Fall* (1959) by William Golding. The protagonist, Sammy Mountjoy, retraces his past searching for “the beginning of responsibility, the beginning of darkness, the point where [he] began” (Golding 47). Sammy finds the origin of his self—a man “trapped without hope” (226)—as distinct from his boyhood, “innocent of guilt, unconscious of innocence” (78).<sup>103</sup> Golding’s ending is inconclusive with Sammy left unsettled as he discovers that “[t]here is no bridge” (253) between the two worlds of rational science and spiritual morality, “only the awareness, in moments of insight, that both worlds exist” (Buckley 278). His story is one of many where growth does not bring peace and where the “freedom generated by mobility makes happiness impossible” (Moretti 115). Unable to suture an illusion of wholeness from the fragmentary nature of two worlds that seem incompatible, he is left totally uncertain: “I don’t know whether I know anything or not!” (175)

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<sup>103</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses the movement from the freedom of boyhood youth to the trappings of male adulthood when she notes in the *Epistemology of the Closet* how “the ‘young, male bourgeois literary subject’ (the bohemian bachelor) of nineteenth-century England was ‘required to navigate his way through his ‘homosexual panic’—seen here as a *developmental* stage—toward the more repressive, self-ignorant, and apparently consolidated status of the mature bourgeois paterfamilias” (193 emphasis in original). Sedgwick’s focus on sexuality and sexual definition in western culture emphasizes the importance of reproductive futurity on the western concept of development and the making of the western subject. That is, the man must assume a patriarchal, heterosexual role within the family and society to complete his *Bildung*. For more on the relationship between the *Bildungsroman*, queer/gender studies, and colonial studies, see Jed Esty’s investigation of their intersection (22-23).

However, Buckley has no issue calling the novel a *Bilungsroman* since, in the end, Sammy becomes a “distinguished painter.... Though he has too often allowed self-will to distract him, he has nonetheless found his proper work and glimpsed a way to truth. Whatever the mistakes of adolescence, he grows at last steadily into his vocation” (Buckley 279-80). Sammy thus finds a way to live and grow up within the contradiction.

Like Sammy, Ernesto is torn between two worlds that oppose each other and, in the end, he cannot bridge the divide and resolve their tension. The conclusion of *Los ríos profundos* is uncertain and Ernesto has not successfully integrated into the communities of Abancay. But the duality experienced by Ernesto differs from the contradictions Sammy faces and those that scholars such as Buckley and Moretti discuss because it explores an epistemological space between modernity and coloniality. The repressions, hostilities, and frustrations that divide Ernesto are not the result of universal (unmarked, but western) psychological conflicts or “painful soul searching” of the traditional *Bildungsroman* (Buckley 17), but specific cultural tensions that reflect a larger social struggle. His conflict does not stem from tensions between “happiness” and “freedom,” or a “stable and ‘final’ [adult] identity” versus the “betrayal” of youth to maturity (Moretti 8). Nor does he face the opposition between meaning derived from the attainment of a promised end and meaning found in the “total rejection of” a “fulfilled teleology” (Moretti 7). His inability to incorporate into society does not lead him to a “constantly piercing nothingness” (quoted in Buckley 269); he does not suffer an existential or nihilistic crisis. Instead, the duality emerges from two epistemologies and the consequences of the collective histories of modernity and its darker side—coloniality: the logic of economic, political, and epistemological domination. Ernesto’s story represents a collective and historical tension between what occidental thought conceives to exist in the *past* (the prehistoric, childish,

indigenous, savage) and that which it believes resides in the *present* and *future* (the modern, mature, white, civilized). Meaning is found in both sides of the border that Ernesto straddles, despite the fact that one side (the indigenous) is not *supposed* to be meaningful or is an “unthinkable” politics (Edelman). Ernesto’s conflict is not how “to be someone” (*ser*) in the world—connoting an individual struggle—but how “to be here” (*estar*) in a world that is itself divided (Mignolo, *Local* 156).

#### 4.4 PORTRAIT OF AN *ILLA*

Although a child, Ernesto is not a passive, naïve body waiting for maturity. Rather, he acts as an Andean *illa*: an energy or force (related to the *yllu* suffix) capable of catastrophic failure and death, or of resurrection and memory. Instead of a portrait of an artist, *Los ríos profundos* is better described as a portrait of an *illa*. The story’s narrator provides a description of an *illa*’s origin and energy:

Illa nombra a cierta especie de luz y a los monstruos que nacieron heridos por los rayos de la luna. Illa es un niño de dos cabezas...son illas los toros míticos que habitan el fondo de los lagos solitarios, de las altas lagunas rodeadas de totora, pobladas de patos negros. Todos los illas, causan el bien o el mal, pero siempre en grado sumo. Tocar un illa, y morir o alcanzar la resurrección, es posible. (100)

Ernesto’s comprehension of and interaction with the world derives from his knowledge of this and other Andean concepts. Although such explanatory sections are often ascribed to an older narrative voice (a.k.a. the Ethnographer), the child protagonist incorporates such beliefs into his worldview. Ernesto demonstrates his insight into *illa* forces when he asks his father if the



bells in the highland lakes could be *illas* of the church bell María Angola (33). His father's response, "Quizá, hijo. Tú piensas todavía como un niño" (34), marks Ernesto's inquisitiveness as childish. However, his imaginings and comprehension of the power of the bells suggest otherwise. Ernesto recalls the bells of "los grandes lagos" whose "campanas...tocan a la medianoche. A su canto triste salen del agua toros de fuego, o de oro, arrastrando cadenas; suben a las cumbres y mugen en la helada" (33). Ernesto identifies these bells as *illas* and connects them to the ringing of the María Angola, located in Cusco, "el centro del mundo" (33). Not only is the María Angola at the heart of the Inca Empire, it was manufactured from Inca gold (35). Although it is a Catholic bell that sets a rhythm for a western religious order, the María Angola carries in it a particular history of Inca power and is linked to an Andean memory. Ernesto's father tells him that the golden bell can send messages between heaven and earth (34), but its song also reaches out across Peru dispersing its energy and breathing life into *illas* of the *altiplano* lakes.

Ernesto's understanding of *illa* accentuates that its power is *not reproductive*, but *resurrective*. In addition to being related to reflected moonlight and the monsters born in such light, *illa* is a term used to describe pre-Hispanic amulets or statuettes that indigenous groups believe possess "a sacred energy, a life-giving force...that could give riches and health and their opposites" (Saignes 116). This energy was thought to have originated from the "energy contained in the bodies of mummies," especially the bodies (cadavers) of *ayllu* founders (Saignes 82; 116). Unbound by the limits of time and space, an *illa* is thus an insurgent type of energy, embodying what appears to be demented, deformed, or dead.

Therefore, it is not surprising that two of the most revolutionary moments of the novel carry traits of *illa* (and *yllu*) energy: the salt riot and the typhus plague. The description of the

women during the salt protest highlights the quality of the *illa*'s reflective light: "los aretes de plata y de quintos de oro que llevaban algunas [mujeres], brillaban con el sol. La mujer que ocupaba el arco de la torre [Doña Felipa] era una chichera famosa; su monillo azul, adornado de cintas de terciopelo y de pines, era de seda, y relucía" (135). Similar to Doña Felipa's position as ringleader of the salt riots, Ernesto views the plague as having a female instigator. He imagines that the plague will enter Abancay "disfrazada de vieja" (305) and he talks about "la madre de la fiebre" (316 emphasis mine). The boys at the school know the plague is spread though lice, which they say God gives wings, "como para llegar de un hombre a otro" (283). The lice thus enter into the community of *yllu* insects whose wings create a certain powerful energy. In addition, Ernesto's memory of a past plague is permeated with *illa* light: "los días y semanas que duró la peste no hubo vida. El sol parecía en eclipse" (282). As with the salt riots, the typhus plague carries *illa* energy, an untouchable power that threatens the stability of the town and countryside. The guards placed around Abancay are useless in keeping it contained. It sweeps across the land with devastating consequences and dominates the town, shutting it down, locking families in their homes, and taking lives. The fever is a contagion spreading death upon its touch; but at the same time, it represents a resurrection—an indigenous uprising. It creates a "momentum of insurgence," a "time of insurgence" (Monasterios, "Uncertain" 568; 569 emphasis in original). The typhus fever is a concern, but the town's principle fear is of the *colonos* who seek to cleanse themselves of the contagion through a midnight mass in Abancay. Ernesto even imagines them arriving in town like "piojos grandes" (308). They are the force through which the *illa* moves.

The salt riot and the typhus fever are not two distinct *illa* forces, but are connected. The momentum of unhinging the power hierarchy of Abancay initiated during the salt riot continues

with the symbolic transfer of authority from Doña Felipa to Doña Marcelina who infects the town with the typhus fever. Ernesto sees Marcelina take Doña Felipa's abandoned orange shawl off of a cross on the Pachachaca Bridge and wave it in triumph (213-214). Marcelina is a short mute woman with a disability referred to as *la opa* and a "mujer demente;" she lives at the school and some of the boys use for sex (83). She is vulnerable and childlike, but when she takes the shawl, the powers of Doña Felipa, who has become a legendary dissident in Abancay through rumors and *huaynos*, touches her. After witnessing the removal of the wrap, Ernesto begins to see the *opa* as a person, not as an idiot or "callo muerto" (259). He even refers to her as "dona [sic] Marcelina," a title that surprises the priest caring for him (291). Ernesto witnesses the transformation in her character when he spies her in a church tower staring down at the town, laughing at the people below (260). Her exaltation is a mockery. Judging the authorities with amusement, she points to and examines "los ilustres de Abancay" (260).

Doña Felipa has disappeared, but the force of the rebellion she sparked continues in a new form. Marcelina is one of the first to die of the typhus plague within Abancay and is blamed for its transmission to the town (288). As a bearer of the disease, she acts like a curse or a *huayronk'o* spitting blood on the foreheads of those who made her suffer. The fever she carries is like an *illa*, an untouchable power that threatens the stability of the town and countryside. But Ernesto interprets Marcelina's influence as positive believing that she has saved him and that she will burn the wings of the lice, "nos salvará" (291). As I will discuss below, Arguedas describes flying insects as messengers of the Devil or carriers of curses. At Marcelina's death, Ernesto instructs one such flying bug, a *chiririnka*, to sit on his forehead before spitting onto her face. He then asks her for forgiveness in name of all of the boys (287). His actions over the dying body indicate that he perceives the flying insects as intermediaries of an opposing force, but not of a

Devil in the Christian sense. Ernesto is compassionate towards Marcelina and his request to the *chiririnka* is not malicious. He is not scared of the insect or of the fever. In fact, he runs through town almost invigorated by it. He is aligned with the rebellion and thus, in an unusual way, with the fever.

More than just being familiar with *illa* energy, Ernesto can be read to be an *illa* himself. Thus, although he does not integrate into any particular (social) community, he is part of an indigenous power, which I also read as representative of an indigenous epistemological frame. His doubleness of being connected to both indigenous and western cultures makes him, not “una especie de muerto” as Mario Vargas Llosa claims (*La utopia* 182), but a “niño de dos cabezas” (Arguedas, *Los ríos* 100). With two heads, he has two centers of knowledge and thought. He is a border thinker capable of crossing between indigenous and western epistemologies. The *illa*'s powers of both good and evil exemplify his duality. He is both the Child who “embodies the citizen as an ideal” (Edelman 11) and a malformed and bewitched threat.

Like Marcelina, Ernesto is a *queer* or deformed subject. Not only because his outsider tendencies mark him as odd, but because he disturbs the narrative of reproductive futurism. Queerness in relation to reproductive futurism as Edelman describes it is a form of colonial difference. Sexual orientation in modernity determines the fate of national reproduction; those that are different—that are *queer* or deformed—are like death to the future of society. Similarly, those whose race marks them in a space outside the framework of modernity are viewed as inferior, barbaric, and childlike. Their racial difference hampers their ability to fully integrate into dominant white society, to assume white adult responsibilities necessary to stimulate the nation's progress, and to grow into a (supposedly) unmarked liberal nation. As a *niño de dos cabezas*, Ernesto challenges reproductive futurism. Being a child, he represents the potential for

the future; but his position is threatening because of his connection to a *pacha*-space outside the framework of modernity, a condition reflected in his incomplete development.

Therefore, the text functions as a particular kind of border-*Bildungsroman*, one that appears to narrate a boy's coming-of-age while telling a different story. If read as exhibiting a "critical distance" from the *Bildungsroman* (Hutcheon, *A Theory* 6), the novel looks like a two-headed *illa*. That is, the form itself serves as an *illa* force, making it an *illaroman*, not a *Bildungsroman*. Reading the novel as an *illa* explains its unique narrative style. The voice of the storyteller often shifts, moving between distanced observations set in the present tense, personal descriptions of Ernesto's life in the preterit and imperfect, and dreams or memories Ernesto had while a child that employ the conditional tense. As a kind of *illa*, the narrative moves like the flying insect *huaronk'o* whose wings produce *yllu* music. Instead of wings, the novel has words. The fluttering of the pages in the reading of these words acts like the humming of "las pequeñas alas en vuelo" that create their own kind of "música que surge del movimiento de objetos leves," such as the ideas, images, and memories that the text evokes and moves through time and space beyond its pages (Arguedas, *Los ríos* 100).

Other scholars have noted the unusual style of the novel, many times explaining it as representing dual narrators identified and separated by *age*, such as Estelle Tarica's analysis described above. Mario Vargas Llosa also splits the narration into two pieces: that of the child, and that of the adult. For Vargas Llosa, the child/adolescent narrator/protagonist distinguishes himself through his "desasosiego y emotividad" (*La utopía* 177). The other narrator is "omnisciente—adulto, sabio, invisible e impersonal"—and assumes authority sporadically throughout the novel through his cultural explanations (*La utopía* 177). Vargas Llosa attributes some of these narrative shifts to "defectos de construcción" and Arguedas's lack of interest in "el

aspecto técnico de la novela” (*La utopía* 192). He cannot appreciate Arguedas’s technique because he does not see the work functioning as a whole *pacha*-space in which these narrative shifts constitute the components of one consciousness and not a dialogue between separate voices.

Similar to Tarica and Vargas Llosa, Ángel Rama divides the narration into two separate speakers. He identifies an adult narrator (“el Narrador Principal”), who is “un doble de Ernesto con distancia y enriquecimiento dado por el tiempo transcurrido” (272). The other narrator (“un etnólogo experto”) is an educated man with greater intellectual knowledge (272). Linguistically, he locates these voices in the text by temporal changes; the Ethnographer situates himself in the present tense while the Principle Narrator speaks in the past. The first (Principle) narrator creates a narrative prose; the ethnographer writes discursively. In Rama’s reading, the child is distinct from the older narrator who recounts his past. In fact, the child is just a protagonist to whom things happen that are beyond his control—not just because the future is unknown, but because he his a *child*. Rama describes the child Ernesto’s disadvantage as his “reducida edad y su escaso poder” (270-271). He is simply a witness, not a leader (271).

This aetnonormative response privileges the adult and his narration. As with Vargas Llosa’s interpretation, the child’s voice remains immature, with the adult’s narrative carrying the weight of knowledge and meaning. Rama associates the Principle Narrator with “el componente histórico (a saber, el accidente único, original, en que se puede volver a repetirse igual una vez que ha concluido)” and the Ethnographer with “el componente mítico” (278). The narration of childhood is a recounting of specific events that have come and gone. It is historical. On the other hand, the ethnographic discourse holds a permanent quality unbound by time and falls into

the mythical mode. Similar to Tarica, Rama does not relate the mythical nature of the narrative to a child's perspective, but instead finds it an attribute of an adult.

Unlike Vargas Llosa and Rama, Julio Ortega discusses the novel as composed of a plurality of voices that are derived from not many but only “un mismo Narrador” (18). He describes three sub-narrators: an author who tells the story (similar to the narrator-protagonist or Principle Narrator), a witness who provides cultural information (the omniscient or ethnographic narrator), and the “yo actor” (the child) (17). According to Ortega, the multiplicity of the narrator's voice allows his “capacidad de controlar y discenir la información que está textualizándose, transformándose en discurso del relato” (18). Under this theory the narrative voices work together to form a complete narrative and to emphasize the multiple models of perception that compete throughout the text (15). For Ortega, the plurality of the narrator and the presentation of multiple communication forms in the text represent the split social hierarchy of Peru and the cultural conflicts resulting from such divisions.

I agree that the narrative presents several voices that reflect differing temporalities that are not necessarily operating in distinct planes, but see them functioning on another level. If we view Arguedas's novel as operating as an *illaroman*, the narrator assumes the form of a “narrador-huayronk'o” (Monasterios, Class lecture) and the shifting, multiple voices of the narrative come together to form the *yllu*-humming of a *huayronk'o*'s wings. This insect plays a small roll in *Los ríos profundos* and Arguedas's dedicates a short description of it in the May 16 diary entry of his last novel *El zorro de arriba, el zorro de abajo* (19). *Huayronk'o* is a Quechua word that names a large bee with a particular movement, which Arguedas describes as “entre mosca y picaflor” (*El zorro* 19). Helicopter-like, it can pause in the air, its large body hovering high until it zips off on a new course. Arguedas's text moves like a *huayronk'o*, holding its

position, catching the eyes' attention and suspending the story with a description of an insect, river, or spinning top before releasing it to take flight. Its movement, resembling the insect's, is not always lineal. Like other objects related to the *yllu*—whose “pequeñas alas” produce music in flight—the narrative breaks the barriers of time and space, carrying messages without regard to these borders (Arguedas, *Los ríos* 100). Elevated high in the air, the eye works hard to contemplate the *huayronk'o*, “para llevar al interior de nuestra vida el intenso significado de sus patas colgantes” (Arguedas, *El zorro* 19-20). Hanging from the bee's little feet is pollen that it transports as it fertilizes flowers. Similarly, the narrative carries ideas that it deposits in readers where they may bloom independently. But, as I will consider below, Arguedas's description of the insect indicates that the *reproduction* it upholds is not what is normally expected from a pollinator.

Instead the *huayronk'o* holds a special power as a messenger and a carrier of death. When Ernesto is with el Viejo, he wishes a *huayronk'o* would appear y “escupiera sangre en la frente porque estos insectos voladores son mensajeros del demonio o de la maldición de los santos” (41). These bugs are mediators between the underworld and earth and, like the lice of the typhus fever, they have the power of contagion and they can fertilize death. In *El zorro de arriba, el zorro de abajo*, Arguedas notes that these particular bees pollinate the *ayak'zapatilla* (“zapatilla de cadaver”), the cadaver flower whose yellow-pollen base Arguedas describes as “veneno” (*Zorros* 19). In the latrines where the boys have sex with Marcelina, Ernesto notices a *ayak'zapatilla* growing in a corner and remarks that the *huayronk'o* is often seen with its little legs stained yellow from nestling in the flower (178). The insect resides in the space of the abject, in the dark, smelly, disgusting toilet.



With its relation to curses, demons, and cadaver flowers, the *huayronk'o* seems to hold a malevolent power. If such were the case, then a reading of *Los ríos* as a *huayronk'o* narrative would be dark and pessimistic. The child would be haunted by the dead (living among phantasms as Vargas Llosa says) and caught in a struggle that would bring nothing but curses. However, the *huayronk'o*'s connection to the abject is part of its recalcitrant and insurgent nature. Its light and reverberating wings link it to *yllu*, which Ernesto notes has “parentesco fonético y una cierta comunidad de sentido con la terminación” *illa* (100). Within this family of *illas* and *yllus*, the *huayronk'o* represents both the power for good (fertilization of life) and bad (pollination of death). It is part of the force that moves an indigenous memory and authority through time and space.

Arguedas does not create two (or more) narrators in tension or cooperation, but creates a *huayronk'o-narrator* who is one voice in various times and places. One example of this comes from Arguedas's descriptions of *illa*. These explanations appear twice in the novel: first in chapter one, when Ernesto and his father are in Cusco (33) and then in chapter six before the narrator describes Antero's *zumbyallu* (100). In the first instance, Ernesto asks his father about the bells in the highland lakes, “¿no serían illas de la ‘María Angola’?” (33) Ernesto's inquiry indicates that as a child he *already had* a clear understanding of the meaning of the *illa*. He has the same knowledge as Rama's Ethnographer, Vargas Llosa's omniscient adult narrator, and Ortega's “yo' testigo” (17) because he is the same person. Even though he is a child, he is not less knowledgeable and is able to question and explore the people and objects around him. He is not just a witness, but an actor capable of planting the pollen (or venom). He is part of a *pacha-space* that bridges and links moments, words, and meanings.

As an *illaroman*, *Los ríos profundos* presents a distorted form of the *Bildungsroman* that challenges its portrayal of modernity's lineal trajectory of growth, in which the indigenous "is nothing less than the name used to designate the state of Being *prior* to modernity and its concomitant identity formation, nationalism" (Povinelli 518 emphasis mine). In this way, the text plays with conventional politics, which Edelman describes as the "temporalization of desire, for its translation into narrative, for its teleological determination" (9). Arguedas's narrative acts as an *illa* that sends an unsettling hum through the maturation and integration of protagonists of traditional *Bildungsromane* and opens a space for an unthinkable politics in which an indigenous epistemology exists as part of modernity/coloniality.

Acknowledging *Los ríos profundos* as a parody, one could say the "simple wonder" (Kelley 76) of the novel "lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and power" (Taussig, *Mimesis* xiii). Thus, the text can compete with the "hegemonic Latin American narrative of the sixties, known generally as the boom narrative" (de Grandis 54) in a way that Arguedas's ethnographic studies or poetry cannot. And yet, defying the genre, it can also escape the trap of "adopting foreign models of representation" that hinder the "ability to construct categories of analysis that will address the deepest constitutive relationships between politics, fiction, and power" (de Grandis 53). Similar to Ernesto's analogous memories about boys and men hunting birds (where it is unclear who copies whom) mimicry of the genre breaks down the power structure that establishes who holds narrative authority, blurring the apprentice from the veteran, the provincial from professional, or, as Michael Taussig would say, the "real" from the "really made up" (*Mimesis* xvii). In other words, it casts doubt on the ability to decipher who can assume the "capacity to participate within the national public sphere—the sociopolitical

community of speech—as a full right-and-duty-bearing citizen” (Slaughter 158). Thus, *Los ríos profundos* can serve, not as an instrument for the proper socialization of its reading subjects (as in the *Bildungsroman*), but as an insurgent literary force (an *illaroman*) with a postcolonial project that, in miming other texts on the bookshelf and assuming their power, can yield to the authority of the traditional *Bildungsroman* as a means to expose how modernity’s concept of growth veils its implicit coloniality. In such a way, the novel works to seduce or infect readers with its *illa* energy, motivating them to think from two heads and to thus move beyond the *Bildungsroman/anti-Bildungsroman* model.

The *illas* of *Los ríos profundos* suggest that it is the queer and deformed that hold a transformative political power to challenge the concept of reproductive futurism and modernity’s lineal trajectory of maturity and progress. Considering Ernesto and his narrative as *illas* brings into question Roberto Paoli’s assertion that “no hay, en efecto, desarrollo real de este Ernesto, que se encierra en su propia memoria” (184). Although the novel is an *Entwicklungsroman*, to see Ernesto as locked in memory is to place the narrative in an unreachable childhood past. It is not that the narrator is enclosed in memories, but that the idea of a present and projected future is deformed by the coexistence of what modernity labels as childish, inferior, and backward. The adult narrator’s writing of his adolescence does not address the protected region of a (childish) past, but the power of the time-space of childhood to confront the ambivalence of a present modern/colonial condition.

## 5.0 ANOTHER BIRD WITHOUT A NEST: THE SHAME OF ZITS

Perfect child  
encased in filth  
It's not right  
you, swaddled in waste  
—Drakka

People aren't supposed to look back. I'm certainly not going to anymore.  
I've finished my war book now. The next one I write is going to be fun.  
This one is a failure, and had to be, since it was written by a pillar of salt.  
[...]  
Birds were talking.  
One bird said to Billy Pilgrim, "*Poo-tee-weet?*"  
—Kurt Vonnegut

power is the inability  
to defecate without assistance  
—Shweta N. Rao

I have been taught to keep secrets  
and to fool you into believing I'll reveal them.  
—Sherman Alexie, "Sasquatch Poems"

In Sherman Alexie's novel *Flight: A Novel* (2007) another bird without a nest flutters into white childless hands. Unlike Matto de Turner's little Andean chicks, the fifteen-year-old boy in Alexie's story (nicknamed Zits) is a relative of the "lost birds" of the United States, a term used to refer to Indian children adopted by non-Native families.<sup>104</sup> After passing through a series of

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<sup>104</sup> In an interview, Alexie clarifies that the phrase "lost birds" is used to describe "Indians adopted out by non-Indian families" ("Spokane"). Under the Indian Adoption Project (IAP) about 395 Indian children were adopted by white families from 1958 to 1967 (Mannes 267). The legacy of the IAP is long, with roots in the 1819 Civilization

abusive foster homes, the orphaned half-American Indian finds himself in an adoption-of-sorts with a white family. Zits's entrance into his new foster family comes at the very end of the novel and follows a series of painful personal and national memories. Under the foster family's wing, he is tamed and no longer narrates his thoughts about his race. His silence reveals that although the initially violent story ends with a metaphorical smiley face, individual success overshadows a haunting collective loss.

Although it seems that the conclusion of *Flight* offers the normal "exchange proposed by the classical *Bildungsroman*—the 'sweet and intimate' feeling of belonging to a system that literally 'takes care of everything'" (Moretti 65), I argue that Alexie actually parodies such a formula and, in doing so, confronts the coloniality of this exchange while playing with white expectations of proper socialization. In his mimicry of the genre, Alexie assumes the role of trickster—the "embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity"—who not only is a "boundary-crosser," but a border thinker who craftily "brings to the surface a distinction previously hidden from sight" (Hyde 7): the artificiality of a trajectory of growth that culminates in white maturity. Twisting the *Bildungsroman*'s focus on the modern man's journey to socialization, Alexie's novel illustrates how coloniality compromises the logic of western development. By recreating the standard and feeding the reader his expectations, Alexie presents his white audience with an awkward situation since a critique of the novel thus inevitably leads to the questioning of the story it mimics.

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Fund Act, which "provided education for Indian youth for the purpose of 'introducing among them the habits and arts of civilization'" (Mannes 266). The Indian Child Welfare Act (1978) was passed in response to such removal of Indian children from their tribes. In *Flight*, since Zits is not legally Indian, he can easily be placed in white foster homes. When he does get placed with an Indian family, he is disappointed. He "assumed those Indian men would automatically be better fathers...than any white guy, but [he] was wrong" (9). His Indian foster father's Indian "identity was completely secondary to his primary identity as a plane-crashing asshole" (11). For more information on the Indian Adoption Project and the Indian Child Welfare Act see Marc Mannes and David Fanshel.

Two entangled elements of Zits's character complicate its categorization as *Bildungsroman*: his age and race. Similar to *Los ríos profundos*, *Flight* concludes with Zits an adolescent who lives under the watchful eye of his adult guardians. In fact, both Argueda's and Alexie's novels end with the protagonist placed under the care of a figure who stands for a hegemonic order, implying a constraint on their autonomy. This seems to follow the form of a classical *Bildungsroman* where the "plot posits 'happiness' as the highest value, but only to the detriment and eventual annulment of 'freedom'" (Moretti 8). Zits is blissful but bound. At first glance, it appears that Zits comes to accept the norms of white society, allowing the "fusion...between individuality and socialization" and completing the *Bildungsroman* (Moretti 16). However, like Ernesto, since he never reaches adult maturity, his story is an *Entwicklungsroman*, a truncated *Bildungsroman*, which leaves the journey to adulthood and western society incomplete. Once again, this distinction of terms is important because it demonstrates a power dynamic that continues to subordinate the still youthful protagonist. Zits's mobility is constrained not because his socialization requires him to assume adult responsibilities (e.g., get a job, get married), but because a prerequisite for his socialization is adult supervision over his youthful immaturity.

In addition, Zits's race is fundamental in how we read his development. Specifically, *Flight* plays with the concept of whitening as the norm for the socialization of a (racially marked) abject other into American society. Both Zits's age (teenager) and race (part-Indian, part-Irish) emphasize his movement across borders and soil him with a shame derived from his relationship to the abject, the outside revolting other, the dirt used to define the self as clean. Similar to other fictional adolescent "abject heroes" (Coats 146), Zits is defined by his socially marginal position and this influences his subjectivity. Yet he differs from other outcast

adolescents in that his position is not only marked by age, but also by race and is a consequence of coloniality. Thus his age highlights his position as abject and, moreover, speaks to the abjection resulting from his racial marking. Physically, his brown skin represents a dirt that coats him not in adolescence awkwardness, but Indian uncleanness (or rather, a white repulsion of possible contamination).

As an abject figure, Zits appears to have no other option for survival within western society but assimilation. At the end of the novel, he plays the part of reformed delinquent, but the silences of his narration make it difficult to tell if he has internalized social norms as his own or if he is just performing. I argue that Zits is not a passive object of assimilation, but instead is an active participant within the process of *elimination communication* (EC). Reviewing the role of elimination in western development and employing EC (a form of infant potty training) as a model for how America cleans itself of the abject, I question the success of Zits's incorporation and claim that, in the end, EC practices lead not to cleanliness but *contamination* and thus empower the abject figure. Although the novel ends in a radically different place from where it began, the ambiguity of the conclusion implies that despite elimination efforts, the abject lingers. Furthermore, Zits position as outcast does not dissolve in the process of EC, but switches from one place of abjection to another.<sup>105</sup>

Harkening back to Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Alexie opens the novel with the quote "*Po-tee-weet?* [*sic*]." This brief epigraph dialogues with Alexie's novel on several levels. First, both novels deal with the meaninglessness of violence. *Slaughterhouse-Five*

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<sup>105</sup> Abjection, adolescence, and Indians also coalesce in Coeur d'Alene author Janet Campbell Hale's *The Owl's Song: A Novel* (1974). Hale's Billy White Hawk is similar to Zits in that he is an Indian growing up an adolescent in white America. His story, however, demonstrates a different strategy in dealing with his condition of abjection. While Zits mimics assimilation and performs elimination communication, Billy rejects it and finds an indigenous cleansing that sets him free.

describes the atrocities of U.S. armed forces in Europe at the end of World War II, specifically the firebombing of the German city of Dresden. Vonnegut captures the absurdity of human violence with the juxtaposition of the indifference of the birdcall *Poo-tee-weet?* in the presence of the carnage of a “massacre” (Vonnegut 19). In referencing this line, *Flight* taps into Vonnegut’s style of interjecting comic relief in the face of unsettling turmoil. The appearance of Vonnegut’s quote in Alexie’s novel emphasizes the incongruity of the image of the United States as a hero of liberty and justice for all alongside violence designed and authorized by the same state. On another level, the brief epigraph implies that, in the end, it is not that harmony overcomes violence (the birds blissfully chirping), but that Zits finds a way to survive despite the violence of the modern/colonial world by parroting the role of a lost bird. So it goes.

Past and present conflate in both *Slaughterhouse Five* and *Flight*. Vonnegut’s Billy Pilgrim becomes “unstuck in time” (23) as the narrative shuttles him from his current state to the planet of Tralfamadore to his youth as a soldier fighting in World War II. Likewise, Zits jumps through time and space in *Quantum Leap* fashion.<sup>106</sup> Zits’s sci-fi travels, much like Billy Pilgrim’s, are more than fantasy flights of fiction. They belong to a genre of American time-slip fantasy that “suggest the cusp of adolescence somehow encourages a reckoning with the past and an acknowledgement of the sacrifices and colonial exploitations on which the present rests” (Balay 137). As Anne Balay notes in her review of the genre, time-slip narrative permits “mechanisms of realistic narrative progression, such as the lineal progression of time, yet challenges them as well” and, unlike other forms of fantasy, time-slip presents the past as true

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<sup>106</sup> *Quantum Leap* is a television show that ran in the United States from 1989 to 1993 in which the scientist Dr. Sam Beckett (Scott Bakula) gets lost in time after an experiment goes awry. In each episode he leaps into the life and body of a new person with the task of solving a problem. Once the problem is resolved, he leaps again into a new body with the hopes that this leap will bring him home to his own body, which, of course, it never does. Like Sam, Zits body dwells and observes calamities that he wishes to avoid or fix. Ultimately, however, Sam can change the past and set things right, whereas Zits is only a witness and is powerless to change the course of history.



(133). The process of maturity often underlies time-slip narratives with characters observing and partaking in memories that help them develop enhanced perspectives of their personal and national identities.<sup>107</sup>

Regarding *Flight*, the question returns to what kind of growth and reckoning with the past does Zits ultimately experience? Can we take Alexie's story at face value, or is he engaging in a form of literary and cultural EC? By giving us the "false security of realism" that glosses over the "irresolvable contradiction of the struggle [of the conflicts of history]" (quoted in Vizenor, "A Postmodern" 6), Alexie's time-slip fantasy allows for a construction of a "'bureaucratic solution' to neocolonialism and the consumption of narratives and cultures" (Vizenor, "A Postmodern" 6). *Flight* takes readers through a "journey into hyperrealism...where the American imagination demands the real thing and, to attain it, must fabricate the absolute fake" (quoted in Vizenor, "A Postmodern" 5). As Gerald Vizenor notes, such "[s]erious attention to cultural hyperrealities is an invitation to trickster discourse" ("A Postmodern" 9). My use of hyperreality differs from Vizenor's description of the fabrication of indigenous culture (like pow-pows and Tipis) for western consumption; instead, in *Flight*, we can uncover a hyperreality based in the artifice of Occidentalism. Alexie's claim that Kurt Vonnegut "heavily influenced" *Flight* (Alexie, "Revising" 169) may indicate that his novel is more critical than it appears. After all, *Slaughter-House Five* satirically points at the weakness of American moral superiority. Therefore, we may learn more about Alexie's novel if we read it as a "language game" or a "comic discourse" (Vizenor, "A Postmodern" 4) than as a direct discourse.

Alternatively titled *The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death*, Vonnegut's novel also relates to Alexie's in its portrayal of the corruption of innocence and modernity's

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<sup>107</sup> For more on the time-slip genre, see Anne Balay, Tess Cosslett, and Barbara Carman Garner.

employment of children to fight its dirty wars. Alexie piggybacks on Vonnegut's image of soldiers being "babies" (Vonnegut 14; 106) when Zits ponders, "Yeah, sure, these guys were serving their country, and a few might become big-time heroes, but they were just kids....And these are the children we send to fight our wars" (83-84). Zits's adolescent state *in itself* points to his marginal and border-crossing position; it also distances him enough from childhood allowing him the space to look back. At the same time, we never see Zits reach manhood and thus he remains part-child. Within Alexie's *Entwicklungsroman*, a chain of signifiers links the Indian man to the weak child, creating a position that shames Zits and hinders him from gaining full (adult) authority. As an Indian, he will forever be tied to the Child. Furthermore, growing out of childhood and moving away from his indigenous heritage, Zits turns to both the Child and the Indian as illusory points of pure origin. Read as a national allegory, *Flight* demonstrates an unattainable desire for the Child-of-the-future and Indian-of-the-past to act as disinfectants that will scrub the U.S. of its history of coloniality and clean the colonial subject of its shame. Alexie's characters seek this cleansing by pursuing a forgiveness that will forever elude them.

### 5.1 ZITS : MICHAEL :: AYAHUASCA: CHRISM

As in *Los ríos profundos*, the novel's pathway (or *flight*) is interrupted by a series of events that shift attention away from the narrator to the actions and characters surrounding him. Sara Castro-Klarén remarks that in *Los ríos profundos* Ernesto's personal journey is put on hold in the middle of the novel by the social focus of the uprisings and the fear of the typhus epidemic (150-151). It is only at the end of the novel, Castro-Klarén remarks, that readers remember that the novel intended to be the invocation of an unfinished journey (151). She finds that the only thing that

saves the novel from this “amplio desplazamiento del enfoque y del modelo” is the fight between good and evil that unites the text (152). One issue with this reading is that it reads the social struggle as disjointed from Ernesto’s individual story, when in fact the journey could be read as one. In Alexie’s novel a comparable pattern transpires. The form of *Flight* recreates the tensions of the doubleness within Zits—his connections to both white and indigenous heritages and his adolescent position between childhood and adulthood. Composed of three parts, the novel appears divided within itself.

Narrating in first person, Zits begins his story by describing his troubled life in Seattle, Washington. He receives his ideological education from Justice, a homeless white boy who brainwashes him and incites him to mass-murder. The story suddenly shifts when Zits enters a bank with two guns, determined to kill. He begins his attack, is shot by a guard, and—like Kurt Vonnegut’s Billy Pilgrim—becomes unstuck in time. This middle section consists of a series of supernatural leaps through time and space into the bodies of both Indians and whites and comprises the majority of the novel. When Zits finally returns to his teenage body in Seattle, a loving couple swiftly rescues him and it appears the delinquent has escaped a life of destitution.

Compared to the novel’s opening, the last three chapters present a sedated Zits. A change in his name mirrors his attitude adjustment: “‘Michael,’ I say. ‘My real name is Michael. Please, call me Michael’” (181). When he professes his name, he labels himself as a regular boy with a very common name. In addition, his old identity is cast aside when his foster mom, Mary, begins elimination communication (EC) by administering a facial wash that will heal his skin. He only washes his face once, but she is very optimistic that he will be zit-free in no time, explaining that in a “few months from now, you will be brand-new” (180). Thus, Zits transforms into Michael with a little help of acne cream and a safe, white household where he can assimilate as a normal

U.S. boy. Once the villain with a gun, Zits/Michael is now a recovering victim. He appears to have remade himself after his journey, becoming older and wiser. But he is still a teenager incapable of taking care of himself (he has no money, no job). Thus, his position in society is limited. In addition, the tensions presented in the first part of the novel, particularly in relation to his family history, are left in unsatisfactory silence.

The ambiguities of the middle section and the seemingly smooth conclusion have lead critics to dismiss the novel as a disappointment. For example, Jeffery Melnick claims that the Spokane/Coeur d'Alene writer has "become a proponent of uncritical togetherness" (130).<sup>108</sup> But with his focus on post-9/11 America, Melnick misses the modern/colonial tensions that Zits confronts within himself and his (and the nation's) past. At the novel's conclusion, although Zits appears to be in a safer and healthier environment than before, he remains under direct state supervision. He jokes that his new foster family—a nurse and her husband, a fireman whose brother is a police officer—must be part of "the civil servant hall of fame" (174). Melnick argues that with this ending, Alexie "offers up two white fathers [a fireman and a policeman] as the ultimate solution to all the pain Zits has suffered" (131). This is certainly one reading. Things suddenly seem to come together for the delinquent and his life appears to be magically transformed thanks to the good will of these white men (and, of course, the female nurse).

This reading, however, is lacking. Melnick fails to recognize that the togetherness achieved at the end of the novel is constructed through colonial power structures that continue to subordinate the main character, leading me to question how uncritical the novel really is. Instead of an "uncritical togetherness" (Melnick 130), *Flight* reveals the doubleness of a marginal boy

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<sup>108</sup>For other examples, see the novel's reviews by Mark S. Luce, who argues that the "knock-you-over-the-noggin message" is "better suited...for high school English classes;" the *Washington Post* that claims that the novel "lacks the depth and scope of Alexie's" previous work ("Time-traveling"); and Mary Brennan, who finds the novel "feels almost like a juvenile fiction" because of its "warm message and its tidy resolution of Zits problems."

surviving within dominant society and the blurring of the line between what America is and what it is not. In fact, by claiming that *Flight* turns towards uncritical togetherness, Melnick accepts the cake that Alexie dishes out without batting an eye to question the ingredients. It looks like a cake, so no need to dig in; we've seen it before: *Bildungsroman*. He thinks he's eating a chocolate éclair, but really it's just shit expelled from a togetherness tainted by coloniality, plated on a doily, and dressed up in white frosting making it "knock-you-over-the-noggin" yummy (Luce).

Melnick's reading focuses on the cliché "can't we all just get along" and neither touches on the power dynamics that continue to play out in this apparently benevolent ending nor on the silences of Zits's assimilation. Firstly, Zits remains a child dominated by adults (standing in for the civil service or the state). His adolescence accentuates his condition of being in-between and his negotiations of the "levels of power that exist in the myriad social institutions within which [he] must function" (Trites 3). Although he grows in the novel and seems to mature after his life-changing experience flying through time and space—and "[a]fter months of counseling, social work, mental therapy, and absolute boredom" (Alexie, *Flight* 173)—his story is not a *Bildungsroman* since he remains subordinate to "benign white fatherhood" (Melnick 130). Furthermore, since Zits's "Indian daddy" was "never legally established" as his father, he is not "a legal Indian" (Alexie, *Flight* 9). If the story is read with the colonial difference in mind, the conclusion is not as "warm" and "tidy" as some critics have claimed (Brennan). The state that serves as his parent denies his indigenoussness and his incorporation into a white middle-class home (into U.S. society) is at the cost of his connection to his Indian heritage. While *Flight* could be read as a redemptive novel where the delinquent child is rescued and brought into a new and loving life, we can also it read as the ultimate failure to connect with one's original heritage and

culture. Zits/Michael's entrance into his foster family's life is nothing more than another leap into a new body.

Zits/Michael's silences in the last section are also unsettling. At the conclusion of the novel, he confesses that although he's "happy," he is also "scared, too." Although the physical manifestation of his shame is being treated, a private interior scar remains. He explains:

I mean, I know the world is still a cold and cruel place.

I know people will always go to war against each other.

I know that children will always be targets.

I know people will always betray each other.

I know that I am a betrayer.

But I'm beginning to think I've been given a chance. I'm beginning to think I might get unlonely. I'm beginning to think I might have an almost real family.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry," I keep saying. (180-181)

One interpretation of Zits/Michael's repetition of "I'm sorry" is that he apologizes for his sins and his general troublemaking (181). He is, after all, talking to *Mary* who just gave him a mini-baptism with her cleanser. However, this explanation does not take into account the statements he makes immediately preceding his apology. He describes the world as a "cold and cruel place" that will never escape war (180). He also claims a role within this injustice as a "betrayer"—not as a thief or a killer (180). More than a feeling of guilt for his past crimes, Zits/Michael is troubled by his place in the world. Zits/Michael's entrance into the new white home is marked by a sense of betrayal—of being a traitor to his indigenous family. Despite his assimilation, a sense of a reservation in his mind lurks within him (Louis).

Zits/Michael's request for forgiveness is a private affair not directed at Mary, but at himself. By forgiveness, I do not mean reconciliation, but the psychological process of "letting go...of the definition of oneself as aggrieved or betrayed and of the obsession with the claim for justice that must be effected if the vengeful state of mind is to be worked through" (Lansky 589). This process allows for the "resolution of splitting—a significant change in defensive organization in the person with an obsessively vengeful state of mind" (Lansky 589). Such forgiveness is the "giving up of an omnipotent state of mind for an increased tolerance of the shame of...one's complicity with or dependence on the offender" (Lansky 590). This definition of forgiveness, offered by psychoanalyst Melvin Lansky, is appropriate—to an extent—for discussing Zits/Michael's condition.

In the beginning of the novel, Zits assumes a vengeful state. Due to his abject position, he is "narcissistically injured" and "fragmented" (Lansky 576). In fact, Julia Kristeva notes that abjection "*is a precondition of narcissism*. It is coexistent with it and causes it to be permanently brittle" (13 emphasis in original). Zits is divided within himself and his fragmentation causes him to feel powerless and ashamed. Defending himself against his shame, Zits "consolidates a state of mind" where mainstream society "becomes vilified, a dehumanized, unidimensional agent of evil" (Lansky 576-577). Zits's abjection is sublimated: "My zits give me superpowers" (16). He believes he is "stronger than all of [his] fathers" (14) and has an "omnipotent state of mind" when he sets off on the shooting rampage (Lansky 590). A wrinkle in time sets him off on a new journey of understanding and, in the end, a painful *process* of forgiveness trumps his need for vengeance.

The instability of body and mind during Zits's supernatural leaps illustrates his fragmentation. As he moves through time and space, he repeatedly enters different bodies and

recognizes his new identities either in mirrors or through the eyes and actions of those around him. These corporeal-shiftings cause a constant disconnect between his body and his mind. For example, when he is a small Indian boy, he desires to talk to his father. However, the neck of the boy has been cut and he is mute. Similarly, when he leaps into his own father's body and tries to run, he can only "shamble" (135). These instances illustrate a split between what he believes his body to be and what it is actually capable of.

The splitting within Zits reflects Jacques Lacan's concept of the "mirror stage." As discussed earlier, at the end of the mirror stage the child realizes that a totality between itself and the world around it—between itself and its mother—is an illusion. The baby sees itself in the mirror and although he can see his body as whole, his uncoordinated actions create a sense of fragmentation. A frustrated separateness from the mother ensues since the child cannot perform as he desires (as the parent does). Lacan explains: "For the total form of his body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt...in opposition to the turbulent movements which the subject feels he animates it" (76). Thus for Lacan the formation of individual subjectivity corresponds with a sense of a "fragmented body" (Lacan 78). Life prior to the mirror stage represents a harmony and wholeness with the world that breaks with the child's realization of its frustrating lack of coordination and unity.

However, one should take into account Zits's position as racially marked (indigenous). Shawn Michelle Smith offers an interpretation of the mirror stage in *Photography on the Color Line* that can help particularize Zits's fragmentation. Moving from the unmarked subject (as in Lacan's theory) to one marked by race (illustrated in W. E. B. Du Bois's writings), Smith claims that "in a social world divided by the color line, race emerges as the dividing force that splits the self beyond (unconscious) suture.... racialization makes apparent the illusory nature of the ego's



wholeness” (32-33). She concludes that race forces the black (or, in Zits’s case, the indigenous) “subject to recognize the misperception on which the ego is founded” (32). Zits’s double consciousness results from an “inverted mirror stage” brought about by another’s negative evaluation (Smith 31).

Zits’s acne operates as a smoke screen of sorts serving as a universalized medium to discuss the construction of the self through an inverted mirror while veiling the critical role that race plays in Zits’s subjectivity. By focusing on Zits’s acne, it seems like Alexie circumnavigates “the damn Indian thing” (Alexie, “Revising” 170), thus allowing his protagonist to fit nicely in a westernized canon. Counting the pimples on his face, Zits is far from the ideal image of the handsome youth (3). His complexion not only marks him as “ugly” (4), but poor, since “[r]ich kids don’t get acne anymore” (21). His acne demonstrates how a splitting of the self can be caused by “a peremptory white glance of dismissal” that fills the self with shame (Smith 35). The first conversation he has with Justice—whose white skin is so “clear that it’s translucent” (21)—is about his acne. Justice stares at Zits and pronounces that his face “doesn’t have to be like that” (21). In an interview about *Flight*, Alexie claims that by beginning the novel with “Call me Zits,” race is moved to the background since the protagonist identifies himself in “a way in which everyone can identify with him” (Alexie, “Revising” 170). Zits is just like other disturbed adolescents in today’s young adult fiction. And, more importantly, we are just like Zits.

But within a breath’s blow of this explanation of his opening line, Alexie plainly states that the orphaned child—who Alexie’s interviewer describes as “missing too many pieces to form a complete or satisfying self-image”—is “a constant theme of any colonial literature. That’s what I write.” (Alexie, “Revising” 170). So, we are back to the “damn Indian thing.” When Alexie says Zits is “[p]hysically marked” he is talking about something more than pimples

(Alexie, "Revising" 170). While medicine and time can clear Zits's skin, he continues to suffer a fragmentation that does not allow suture. Zits's longing to learn about and fill the role of the western construction of the Indian in the first part of the novel (12) demonstrates how he is "disenfranchised of his very subjectivity" by these images that impose on him a "static ontological space of the timeless 'primitive'" or warrior that he can never live up to (Fuss 21). He is not white, but neither is he the Indian that appears on television, in books, and in the discourse around him. At the end of the novel, Zits/Michael knows the expectation is a fabrication. *Flight* is truly an *Entwicklungsroman* because Zits's time-slip adventures have allowed him to witness the realities of history and these experiences have given him greater understanding of his own self beyond the television stereotype. One thing he seems to have learned is to keep private. The silencing of his racial preoccupations in the final chapters may indicate that Zits has decided—similar to a fellow Alexie character—that he is "not going to let [us] know how scared [he] sometimes get[s] of history and its ways....[and] that silence is the best way of dealing with white folks" (Alexie, "What You Pawn" 171). He chooses silence and thus makes it difficult for readers to gage the authenticity of his actions.

Zits's psychological makeover comes after witnessing many forms of pain and shame that seem to universalize injustice. At the end of the novel he returns to the bank. He has leapt back into his body, but has returned to it moments before he originally took flight. His shooting spree appears to have never occurred. Looking around, he questions, "I think all the people in this bank are better than I am. They have better lives that I do. Or maybe they don't. Maybe we're all lonely.... Maybe we're all in this together" (158). It is not that Zits's pain bleeds into a web of universalized violence, but that he begins to believe that we "are all the same people. And we are all falling" (130). In an interview two years prior to *Flight*'s publication, Alexie mentions

that “[e]verybody’s pain is important” (Alexie, “A World” 147). He thus uses this discourse of failure (loneliness, falling, pain) to flip the creed that men are equal because of a shared possession of certain unalienable rights that give them an equal ability to take flight and succeed to one that claims men are equal because no one is immune from pain and thus everyone has an equal opportunity to crash and fail. This chilly message clashes with *Flight*’s apparently “warm” and “tidy” conclusion (Brennan).

In this concept of universal failure, Alexie inverts the dynamic of white superiority and Indian inferiority. During the same interview where he discusses the relativity of pain, Alexie stresses that American Indians “come out of genocide” (Alexie, “A World” 146); they thus carry considerable pain, which went (and goes) unrecognized by white America. Alexie claims that *everyone*’s pain is important and thus presents himself as being more compassionate and having a better understanding of a doctrine of equality than the many Americans who are ignorant or dismissive of the pain of the American Indian and whose prejudices hinder them from living up to the idea of equal rights. A similar tactic appears in Spanish colonial writings and actions by people of indigenous decent. For example, Guaman Poma de Ayala writes the history of conquest and colonization of the Andes in a way that denies the Christian Spaniards moral supremacy since he describes the Indians living under a superior moral order in the Andes prior to contact with Europeans.<sup>109</sup> Paullu Inca “outdid most Spaniards” by “having a private chapel and sponsoring priests publicly stated ‘Christianness’ in ways all Spaniards could understand but few could afford” (Lamana, *Domination* 199). Just as Guaman Poma and Paullu “expose the conquerors as bad Christians” (Lamana, *Domination* 182-183), Alexie reveals the unchristian

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<sup>109</sup> For example, he explains “la primer generaci3n de indios...no murieron y no se mataban” and “todo su trabajo era adorar a Dios.... no adoraban a los 3dolos, demonios, huacas” (44).

actions of the American nation and, on top of that, upholds a moral code of equality that seems to outdo the American claim of the equal rights of men.

Everyone has pain. We are the same. But at the same time, pain is particular; it is “carried in the DNA” (Alexie, “A World” 148). We are different. Alexie explains:

the fact is you cannot separate our identity from our pain. At some point it becomes primarily our identity. The whole idea of authenticity—‘How Indian are you?’—is the most direct result of the fact that we don’t know what an American Indian identity is. There is no measure anymore. There is no way of knowing, except perhaps through our pain. (Alexie, “A World” 147)

Alexie seems to spinning a trickster discourse that dances along a line of similarity and difference. In the interview quoted above, he tells Åse Nygren that he sees the “Indian world...as doomed” and that he is “not hopeful.” Yet he also declares that survival is “a low hope” and that he wants “triumph!” (Alexie, “A World” 146). But he later clarifies, “I want to be the triumph of the ordinary!” (Alexie, “A World” 156) He states that while the “search for identity is not special,” Indians are in a particular position because they have “no power to change [their] lives” (Alexie, “A World” 148). The interview concludes with him asking, “What do you do when survival is assured? Then it really gets complicated. Worrying about racism is easy! Easy! Dealing with racism is easy, compared with dealing with being in love” (Alexie, “A World” 156).<sup>110</sup> But, just a few lines before this, he says that love for him “has always been political. It

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<sup>110</sup> Mignolo’s concept of “bilanguaging love” is one example of the politics of love in a postcolonial context. Mignolo notes, “Love is the necessary corrective to the violence of systems of control and oppression; bilanguaging love is the final utopic horizon for the liberation of human beings involved in structures of domination and subordination beyond their control.” This seems quite idealist and the concept remains unclear, although he tries to articulate such love as “love for being between languages, love for the disarticulation of the colonial language and for the subaltern ones, love for the impurity of national languages, and love as the necessary corrective to the ‘generosity’ of hegemonic power that institutionalizes violence” (*Local* 273-274). Alexie’s passion for playing with

has always been informed by the reservation, and it still is” (Alexie ,“A World” 155). This is clearly confusing. How can the ordinary (defined by sameness) be triumphant (defined by difference)? If Indians have no power to change their lives, how can we understand Alexie’s privileged position as a popular writer? How is racism easy if the consequences of it (e.g., genocide) are painful and unsettling? And if love is informed by the reservation, can it ever be separated from race? Can we take this interview at face value—or does Alexie “lapse into performance mode” (Alexie, “A World” 149) treating the conversation as a piece of narrative “play” (Alexie, “A World” 151)?

The incongruous comments from Alexie’s interview with Åse Nygren are particularly useful in reading a critical scene of *Flight*. When Zits assumes the body of his estranged father, the particular Indian pain or “blood memory” (Alexie, “A World” 147) becomes more than a mere feeling. The friction in the scene stems from his shifting between similarity and difference, between himself and his father, white and Indian. After finding a photo of himself as a young boy in the man’s wallet, he realizes *he is his father* and asks:

What would Hamlet do if he looked into the mirror and saw the face of the man who’d betrayed and murdered his father?

And what should I do now that I am looking into the mirror at the face of the man who betrayed and abandoned my mother and me? (151)

Zits’s experience throws the Lacanian mirror out the door. Even Smith’s inverted mirror cannot reflect this imagery. Zits’s confrontation in the mirror highlights how his subjectivity is based on his internal abjection. In this case, it is not someone pointing out his difference—e.g. that he is “programmed for violence” (Alexie, *Flight* 27)—that “obliterates” his subjectivity

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the colonial discourse and the stereotype in his writing may be one example of the practice of Mignolo’s theory of bilanguaging love.

(Smith 34), but the doubleness of embodying the abandoned and the abandoner, the betrayer and the betrayed. Zits carries the pain of his father within himself. When he leaps into his father's life, he becomes trapped within his dad's traumatic memories; he cannot escape them and is powerless to change the past. He understands that he is *Zits* because of his family history, a history of abuse and pain. We can also read Zits's statement as an acknowledgement of his place in Indian society (he is Indian because of his pain) *as well as in white society*. Following this experience, Zits assimilates and thus becomes part of what he fights against. He becomes a member of a system structured by a colonial imaginary that has developed out of a history of betrayal and murder. After discovering that he embodies his father, Zits pushes into his father's memories to relive his father's pain and to see why his father left. At the end of that scene, Zits flashes back into his original body in the bank. He is now ready to begin a process of forgiveness.

So, while Lansky's definition is useful, it cannot fully capture the complexities of Zits/Michael's movement toward forgiveness. For Zits/Michael, the offenders to forgive include not only his father who abandoned him and white America with its authorization of "genocide" (Alexie, "A World" 154), but also himself for being an abject border dweller. Although he does not discuss his indigenous heritage in the final pages of the book, his final apology could be directed at an Indian community he feels he has abandoned. Zits/Michael moves from the margins of one culture (white) to the margins of another (indigenous). His status as abject does not dissolve; instead he shifts from one side to the other, redistributing his shame.

The novel concludes with Zits/Michael an adolescent caught between childhood and adulthood. This position between generations parallels his existence on the border of two cultures. Alexie's ambiguous ending highlights that the split *is* Zits/Michael and attempting to

heal that divide is an unending means of survival. As in *Los ríos profundos*, *Flight*'s conclusion does not stand for failure or stasis; instead it reflects Zits/Michael's continuing negotiations between spaces. When Zits tries to make an escape route back to his original abject position, claiming his new home is "only temporary," his new foster family suggests an alternative, reporting that they were "hoping to make it permanent." Zits/Michael seems to accept this offer, admitting that such a situation "might be pretty cool" (177). So while the word *permanent* could lead us to believe Zits will now be *settled*—that he will now *be Michael*—it actually serves to demonstrate how Zits becomes a model for border-thinkers who "are forced to live in the interface" between two realities, those "forced to become adept at switching modes" (Anzaldúa 59). By concluding the novel with Zits/Michael an adolescent who accepts the permanence of his position, Alexie implies that Zits/Michael has a perennial residence in this borderland.

## 5.2 ELIMINATION COMMUNICATION/ELIMINATION CONTAMINATION

Superficially, Zits/Michael's washing of his face at the end of the novel appears to indicate that he is remaking himself by clearing away the evidence of his abjection. A "half-breed orphan" (Alexie, *Flight* 8), Zits (from a particular perspective) is *the abject*, a term Julia Kristeva employs in her psychoanalytic analysis *Powers of Horror* to describe that which "does not respect borders.... The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor" (4). The abject works to establish boundaries. These borders "are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*" (Anzaldúa 25). The abject is that which is "opposed to *I*" (Kristeva, *Powers* 1 emphasis in original), the "foul lining of society" (Kristeva, *Powers* 20). As the abject, it is as if the "small man" in Alexie's short story "The Sin Eaters" addresses Zits

when he says, “You’re less than a worm to them. You’re an exile, you’re a leaper, you’re a pariah, you’re a peon, you’re nothing to them. Nothing” (106). Zits looks as if he fits the mold of what Karen Coats calls the “abject hero” with his refusal “to reintegrate into society under its terms” and the haunting of society’s borders (Coats 149). However, Zits’s position is particular because it is a consequence of coloniality.

In her study of the relationship between abjection and adolescent literature, Coats succinctly sums up:

Abjection, as Kristeva defines it, marks a stage in the preoedipal development of the subject. In order for the child to organize his or her boundaries with respect to inside and outside, subject and object, self and other, he or she must first expel as abject that which is not part of its ‘clean and proper’ ego. This includes incestuous attachments to the mother, as well as bodily secretions that persist as reminders that our subjectivity is in fact dependent on, indebted to, corporeality. (140-141)

Engaging Kristeva’s theories, Coats discusses the relationship between abjection and adolescence, a time/space “less an age category than an open psychic structure” where the “frontiers between differences of sex or identity, reality and fantasy, act and discourse, etc., are easily traversed” (Kristeva, “Adolescent” 9). Her argument focuses on how adolescence is tied to abjection with its corporeality, i.e. the initiation of puberty with the “emergence of abject fluids—nocturnal emissions for boys and menses for girls” (143). Additionally, the adolescent experiences a separation from his parents, but at the same time faces a new “diffusion of superegoic injunctions; conflicting demands and prohibitions come from everywhere all the time rather than being focalized within and bolstered by a master discourse” (Coats 143-144). Within this “multivocal” superego, the borders that structure law and society blur and the abject emerges



from this ambiguity (Coats 144). Without “societal and cultural supports” to keep to “the abject at bay,” “abject heroes” cannot reach “that point where drive energies are sublimated into the substitutive logic of the symbolic” and they become the “victims of abjection” (Coats 146). In other words, these characters find themselves caught between social, ideological, political, and religious borders; they reject the law imposed by these orders and instead coast along the border, the “dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge” (Anzaldúa 25). Like Zits when he body-dwells, they see “what surrounds them but is not part of the self” (Coats 145). They are left, then, as abject figures whose subjectivity never develops.

Coats’s abject heroes explore and test the limits of their power asking, “Do I dare disturb the universe?”<sup>111</sup> The answer appears to be yes; the characters she studies influence their worlds. But in the end, Coats argues for inclusion and for teen literature that will help adolescent readers become “fully realized human being[s]” (Alexie, *Flight* 6). As she explains, reading the right kinds of texts, teens may connect with abject protagonists, observe how these characters made their way out of abjection, and begin “the process of developing a more fully realized imaginary on which to build stable yet flexible symbolic identities” (159). Ultimately, her focus is on the preservation of the *status quo* and the reduction of violence enacted by marginal loners. Paired with Coats’s investigation, *Flight* appears to exemplify a way out of abjection since the protagonist shifts from violently refusing to join society to passively making it his home. This reading, however, does not consider the possibility of the text as a “trickster discourse” (Vizenor).

It is important to note that I discuss the concept of the American Indian—of Zits—as the abject from a particular (western) position. Of course, we could flip the argument to make the

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<sup>111</sup> This line has its origin in the T. S. Eliot poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.”

white European the “violent, dark revolts of being” looming within abjection (Kristeva, *Powers* 1).<sup>112</sup> Within this alternative frame, we could discuss native purity practices such as the Ghost Dance and sweat lodges as ways of eliminating the (white) abject.<sup>113</sup> But it is not my project to try to fit an indigenous practice within a western psychoanalytic frame. My focus instead is on how Zits’s story of growth can help us understand a western concept of development and how such a universal idea of development can be compromised by a story like Zits’s. Psychoanalysis is an appropriate medium for such study since, as Ranjana Khanna argues, it is a “colonial discipline that promoted the idea of Western subjectivity in opposition to a colonized, feminine and primitive other” (ix). Psychoanalysis is “designed to give people a personal history through which they can come to terms with their lot in life, and a sense of the past that can explain their current existence” (Khanna 73). But it “brought to the world an idea of being that was dependent on colonial political and ontological relations, and through its disciplinary practices, formalized and perpetuated an idea of uncivilized, primitive, concealed, and timeless colonized peoples” (Khanna 6). Psychoanalytic theories, such as those that I touch on here reflect a concept of the self as essentially broken or damaged and thus in an endless state of curing, healing, torturing, or playing with a wound.

Alexie employs this western concept of the self as broken or diseased and amplifies it through a character who is all that is dirty, someone whose personal history can easily (almost too easily) explain his unhappy psychic state. Zits is an Irish, Indian, abandoned, homeless,

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<sup>112</sup> For example, in Thomas King’s *Coyote Columbus Story*, Christopher Columbus breaks the boundaries between inside and out. In this illustrated children’s book, Columbus has “bad manners” and gets “cranky.” He is like a toddler throwing a tantrum as he struggles to establish his place within the symbolic order—and there is a symbolic order, even if the rules are set by a crazy female coyote who just wants to play baseball.

<sup>113</sup> If we view the sweat lodge as an indigenous form of elimination communication, it too has its contamination. For example, the lodge used by James Arthur Ray in Sedona, Arizona in October 2009, where three people died, was a cheap imitation “covered in plastic and blankets” (Dougherty and Roth). Ray’s sweat lodge reveals a western desire for cleanliness and the appropriation of what the white thinks the Indian thinks is an alternative (and profitable) method of elimination communication.

orphaned, delinquent, murderer, adolescent, and sexual victim. His ego is anything but clean and proper. Not only is Zits socially abject because he operates “at the social rim” (Coats 138), he is also psychologically abject because his “abjection defines his...way of being in the world” (Coats 139). As the abject, Zits is “neither subject nor object;” he organizes his “existence around the pole of that nonbeing...rather than...around the pole of the Name of the Father” (Coats 145). His exterior mirrors this interior and his acne emphasizes his social and psychological abjection. Pus-packed “corporeal exclusions” literally break open the skin that separates inside from outside (Coats 139).

Thus, Zits could be catalogued with Coats’s heroes because of his marginality, violent actions, and age. In this respect, Alexie writes Zits into a genealogy of disturbed American teenage protagonists. However, since Zits is racially marked, something else is going on that Coats’s theory does not address. Zits is Indian, but not legally. He is therefore politically abandoned in a pole of non-being. He is “a blank sky, a solar eclipse” (Alexie, *Flight* 5). He is neither an adult nor a child, neither white nor Indian. It is not enough to say that Zits struggles because he is an adolescent. Instead, being a teenager reveals how his *racial* position defines him as the abject. Moreover, Zits’s adolescence shuttles him into the mainstream (that is, it seems he is just another abject hero) despite his racial difference. Alexie can talk about the “damn Indian thing” in an allegory of teenage abjection. What’s more, unlike the characters in Coats’s study, Zits experiences a multivocal superego not only in adolescence, but in childhood as well, having received superegoic mandates from the state, his multiple foster families, “homeless Indians from Alaska” (Alexie, *Flight* 161), Indians on television, his impotent Auntie Z and her abusive boyfriend, and his pseudo-friend Justice. His “place of banishment” is not just a consequence of adolescence, but a prolonged condition (Kristeva, *Powers* 2).

One issue with Coats's reading is that it is founded on the assumption that psychoanalysis provides a universal explanation of human development. Instead, as Mary Ann Doane suggests, we could look at psychoanalysis as "a quite elaborate form of ethnography—as a writing of the ethnicity of the white Western psyche" (211). In this sense, characterizing childhood as flourishing in a symbolic order where a univocal superego dominates—where "God, country, and family speak with one patriarchal voice" (Coats 141)—means that childhood is preserved in a safe haven of white purity structured by "a celebration of the possession of true knowledge, an Occidental achievement of universal value" (Mignolo, *Local* 3). Maybe instead of being about an adolescent's loss of childhood, Zits's story reveals the fantasy of this western model.

Another issue with applying Coats's theory to *Flight* is that she specifically addresses the young adult (YA) genre. Dispelling such a characterization, Alexie asserts that the violence in his novel goes beyond YA conventions and that just because the protagonist's voice is convincing, "people think it's for teenagers" (Alexie, "Sherman Alexie Discusses"). In this comment, Alexie is both praising his writing (I wrote a convincing character) and explaining the insult (the writing does not seem sophisticated enough for adults). The desire to place Alexie's novel (or any other novel) within the genre of adolescent fiction tells more about cultural standards for readership and socialization than it does about the novel itself.

YA literature is defined by "the concerns of the audience to whom it is marketed" (Coats 138), which include learning about "the social forces that have made them who they are" and negotiating "the levels of power that exist in the myriad social institutions within which they much function" (Trites 3), i.e., the multivocal superego. These themes are not exclusive to YA literature and their role in *Flight* highlights the arbitrary nature of the line marking where YA literature ends and mature literature begins. The teen theme is important in *Flight*, not because it

is written for adolescents, but because adolescents in western society “function as social outsiders, not yet accepted into the established order” (Spacks 10). Adolescence embodies the tensions of a socialization where the “individual has always had to work hard to avoid being overwhelmed by the tribe” (Alexie, *Flight* 25), an idea that takes on new meaning in a colonial context.

Teenagers confronting and finding their place in the adult world of social institutions is the focus of Roberta Seelinger Trites’s study of YA literature, *Disturbing the Universe*. Trites turns to Michel Foucault to discuss issues of power and sexuality in relation to adolescent fiction. While her analysis is insightful, like Coats’s investigation, it too does not confront racial complications such as those we encounter in *Flight*. Again, a universal child who grows into a teenager cannot be assumed. In regards to children, Foucault shows more interest in the relationship between childhood and sexuality than childhood and race. He employs the child masturbator to demonstrate the connections between body, power, and population in nineteenth century European theory: “the child who masturbates too much will be a lifelong invalid” whose defective legacy will continue in its descendants (“*Society*” 252). The power of this child as a body in society, however, rests not in the child, but in the (degenerative) *potential* of its adult sexuality—initiated in adolescence.

Similar to the child masturbator, indigenous children represent the reproduction of a threat to the “hierarchy of races” (Foucault, “*Society*” 255). In this sense, children are the initial sites where the state creates difference by marking race. Like the *mestizo* child, Moacir, in the Brazilian novel *Iracema* who “nursed upon [his mother’s] soul” and sucked it to death (103), children pose a threat to the established order as they strain society’s resources without being

able to contribute economically.<sup>114</sup> Since children are society's future "capacities, its potentialities," they are the "strength of the nation" (Foucault, "*Society*" 223) and their dependence is embraced. This is true, that is, as long as they are part of the nation's "fictive ethnicity" (Balibar 102).<sup>115</sup> Although the modern conception of children views them as existing in a temporary condition (they will grow into teens, adults, etc.), massified, racialized children are ever-present; they are "permanently, ceaselessly infiltrating the social body," like "the other race" in Foucault's description of "race struggle" (Foucault, "*Society*" 61). These children are not able to redeem themselves from their dependent position because their potential contribution (post-childhood) continues to be viewed by the state as inferior. They persist as the other race that threatens the "universality of the State" (Foucault, "*Society*" 225). The indigenous thus assumes representation for childhood's uncontrollable, "boundary-crossing," and soul-sucking qualities.

With state power directed at "man-as-species" (Foucault, "*Society*" 234), children are implicated in the "population as political problem" (Foucault, "*Society*" 245). They are considered innocent and vulnerable, clay to be molded into the nation. Mature adults are already incorporated. And adolescents? They are unpredictable. Children must be protected from themselves—from their potential to turn into the delinquent (like Zits) who weakens the body of society by stepping outside of the state's control of life to become one of Coats's "abject heroes." One reason that the rector in *Los ríos profundos* is concerned about Ernesto's wanderings is that when he leaves the institutions of the town, he is vulnerable to alternative

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<sup>114</sup> This is similar to the situation with the elderly that Foucault describes ("*Society*" 244). This is not to say that the modern state has not found a way to capitalize on children.

<sup>115</sup> Fictive ethnicity, for Etienne Balibar, derives from the use of "language and race" to create an image of the populations of a nation "in the past or in the future *as if* they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture and interests which transcends individuals and social conditions" (96 emphasis in original).

discourses, for example the salt insurrection (131-156). In a similar way, the state places Zits in a squeaky-clean middle class white home. The state's attempt to bring racially marked children under the banner of a universal childhood (for example, through assimilation) is a strategy to eliminate the threat of alternative epistemologies that could blossom in the sexualized energy of adolescence. Moacir must be shipped off to Europe "still in his cradle" (111) and Alexie's John Smith of *Indian Killer* must be dropped into his adoptive parents' white hands still swaddled in his birthing blanket.

If such strategies fail, the marked other is cast-off as "absolute outsider" in the "unsustainable social position" of abjection (Coats 150). There is no locus of enunciation outside the state, or rather, the state constructs such an imaginary. Thus we arrive at the *hypotragedy* of the vanishing Indian (Vizenor "A Postmodern"). Zits final integration paired with his facial cleansing push readers to believe in the hypotragedy. It appears that Zits is no longer refusing the Name-of-the-Father and has succumbed in order to survive and has learned to "bear the abject rather than ignore or dissolve into it" (Coats 158). Zits's foster mom—the saintly Mary—is convinced that Zits will be "a lot happier" if he starts "working on [his] skin" (Alexie, *Flight* 179). With one treatment, readers can breath a sigh of relief when we see that, yes, the abject can be kept at bay; and, moreover, we can embrace a character who has overcome his "complicity in the construction" of himself as outsider (Coats 159). Sarcasm (especially in writing) is often misunderstood, so here I put it plainly: Zits might be faking it. The novel's conclusion highlights and toys with the important role of elimination within the western journey of growth and hints at the possibility that Zits may be *performing* elimination communication (EC).

EC is a recent fad in western parenting that mimics the process of toilet training in non-western cultures.<sup>116</sup> The basic premise is that moms know their babies well enough to tell when the child needs to eliminate body wastes. The parent then trains the child to go on command, cueing the baby with a potty noise such as *pssss*.<sup>117</sup> In EC, the child uses the toilet from infancy, going diaper-free.<sup>118</sup> Since the parent must be aware of the child's elimination practices, mothers who use EC often describe having a "better connection" to their baby (McGrath). One mother who practices EC indicates that interacting with the child in this way allows her to see her baby "as a little person with abilities," as if personhood coincides with organized expulsion of bodily fluids (Kelly). In *Flight*, Mary looks to eliminate Zits's pimply-pus as waste. When she gives him the instructions for washing his face, she uses the first person plural, implying her continued participation: "We do this twice a day" (180 emphasis added). It is a joint activity of cleansing between mother and son. Similar to the "mirror stage" (Lacan), parent and child must first connect ("Yea! It's you in the mirror."/ "Yea! You're peeing.") in order for the child to eventually break with this imaginary and enter independence in the symbolic. EC is a way to extend the illusion of unity between parent and child beyond nursing and the mirror stage. The abject must be eliminated to restore a sense of lovability. Parents desire intimacy with their children, and poop just gets in the way.

EC is an apposite description of the white-native relationship present in Alexie's novel. First, the purpose of elimination communication is the purging of waste. The phrase centers on the removal of the impure, non-white other (the abject). This differs from the expressions

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<sup>116</sup> EC Practitioners claim that this is a non-western practice. But interest in how to deal with baby waste seems very American, since, as EC supporter and Cornell professor of Anthropology Meredith F. Small notes, we are a "bathroom oriented culture." EC allows moms to spend more time in "often color-coordinated, lavishly decorated shrines to washing up and eliminating waste" (Small).

<sup>117</sup> Descriptions of how to train using EC clearly mimic the training techniques of the Digo that deVries and deVries outlines (173-174).

<sup>118</sup> For more information on elimination communication see Ingrid Bauer.



*whitening* and *assimilation*, which concentrate on whiteness and describe the construction of the nation in terms of the *entrance into*, not the *expulsion of*. Other terms such as *acculturation* also focus on the acquiring or devouring of the other and not its removal. *Deculturation* and *transculturation* come closer to describing Zits experience but still do not capture the cleansing of the *abject* and center more on the process and consequences of synthesis rather than on the results of *dialogue* and *mimicry* through which the subaltern can parody back an expected position and participate in the “*production...of modernity*” (Deloria 238). Furthermore, although the objective of EC is to reduce waste, many parents shy away from it because of the fear that it will only lead to contamination and those who do practice it must deal with the occasional (or not so occasional) *accident*. It is thus an imperfect and incomplete training. Furthermore, in imitating the noises of elimination, trainers of EC become dependent on and contaminated by the abject.<sup>119</sup> Therefore EC demonstrates the desire for an impossible cleanliness and purity realized through expulsion and at the same time the possibility for the non-socialized (non-western) other to influence the environment that he participates in. Additionally, EC is part of an existing western discourse concerning proper development and socialization. As part of a genealogy of potty training methods, EC emphasizes the important role of elimination within the western concept of growth and progress. To mature, we must cast off the child and the primitive and be able to cleanse our minds, bodies, and spirits. Lastly, EC is a western imitation of a non-western form of infant care. It is a product of colonial contact and exemplifies in itself the power of the colonized to impact and transform modernity.

Kristeva’s analysis of the abject is based on esoteric theories of psychoanalysis. For a more elementary example of the role of elimination in human development, one need go no

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<sup>119</sup> Please see Kim R. for one example.

further than the toddler section of the local library, which is bound to host a selection of potty training books. The history of potty training in the U.S., of which EC is just one trend, highlights a western obsession with expulsion. With the emergence of psychoanalysis, elimination of wastes and the preparation of the individual to void or defecate autonomously became a central feature in the development of the self. U.S. potty training shifted from a relaxed parent-determined readiness approach favored from 1890 to 1910—“an era of ‘permissiveness’”—to rigid training in the 1920s and 1930s (deVries and deVries 171).<sup>120</sup> With the emergence of psychoanalysis came a fear of disturbing the child’s psychological constellation through improper elimination of wastes; by mid-century rigid potty training then fell out of favor and gave way to a lenient child-determined readiness. Harsh potty training methods “seemed dangerous, in light of retrospective psychoanalytic studies indicating a strong relationship between coercive methods and later emotional maladjustments and psychoneurosis” (deVries and deVries 171).<sup>121</sup> Within the psychoanalytic frame, elimination of wastes and the preparation of the individual to void or defecate autonomously became a central feature in the development of the self.

By mid-twentieth century, waiting for autonomous control of elimination became the standard for U.S. potty training. Despite this trend’s universalization, a 1974 study by Marten W. deVries and M. Rachel deVries on toilet training in the East African Digo community concluded that potty training practices reflect “different expectations of infant capabilities and performance” and that these “expectations are embedded in the broad social orientations and needs” of different populations (170). Trends in U.S. potty training followed the idea that

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<sup>120</sup> Rigid training included “coercive methods such as using a ‘soap stick’ rectal conditioner and stimulating the buttocks with the ‘cold rim of a soap dish while gently rubbing the abdomen’” (deVries and deVries 171).

<sup>121</sup> For example, see Freud’s “Character and Anal Erotism” (293-297).

elimination training should begin only once the child could demonstrate “autonomous control of elimination” (deVries and deVries 171), usually beginning around eighteen months. DeVries’ and deVries’ study notes that in the Digo culture, potty training is “not regarded as private or unclean activity but rather a relaxed and normal part of infant care” (174). Contrastingly, with Sigmund Freud’s influence, the west approaches potty training as a violent socialization of the child, a conflict between the child’s pleasurable gifting of feces and the controlling demands of the parent and society. Despite a western desire to mark an appropriate *developmental* age for waste elimination, deVries’ and deVries’ study highlights how potty training is culturally—not biologically or psychologically—determined.

At the time of the deVries’ and deVries’ article, pediatricians followed the recommendations of Dr. T. Brazelton (deVries and deVries 171), who, about a decade prior, had published the well-known article “A Child-Oriented Approach to Toilet Training” (1962), in which he argued that disposable diapers “liberated” the mother from early training, allowing for parents to view potty training “more honestly” as a “developmental task” (Brazelton 121). Even the deVries’ and deVries’ study—which attempts to illustrate that infant capabilities and behavior are “adaptive and attuned to environmental and cultural factors” (deVries and deVries 176)—cannot relinquish the need to explain the apparently *delayed developmental growth* of western babies in relation to African ones, claiming that it is “possible that developmental precocity of African infants plays a role in early training. The observed technique [of early training] could be adaptive to the Digo newborn’s advanced neurologic and cognitive repertoire” (175). Thus, American babies naturally *must* wait to start their training because they are fundamentally not ready for it.

Assuming this logic, Americans could rest at ease, not because African babies were cognitively more advanced, but because American babies were *more pure*. In effect, the delayed developmental readiness of the western child holds the white baby in a safe-zone, a protected time-space. However, this extension of purity comes only by way of modern science and the invention of super-absorbent diapers. With the use of modern diapers, the baby's "gift" (Freud 266) comes nicely packaged for parents. But using disposables, the baby spends more time in close proximity to the waste contained behind the magic plastic sack around his bum. Children still eliminate, but the parents see less of it. Modern diapers thus shield parents from the abject, extending an *illusion* of babies' purity.

Disposable diapers that can be quickly tossed away and late training,<sup>122</sup> delayed until the child has "mastery for himself," allow the mother<sup>123</sup> not only to be "liberated" (Brazelton 121) from her household chore of constantly changing and cleaning soiled diapers, but also free the parents from intruding on their baby's private affair of elimination. In other words, the child-oriented approach to toilet training not only protects parents from the abjection of the child's feces, but also from the child's sexuality. Brazelton notes that the "child's ability to learn by imitation is complicated by taboos centered around modesty and the sexual feelings of the parents" (122). Delaying training until the "child's autonomous achievement" implies "less parental responsibility for failure" (Brazelton 123) as well as less parental interference in the baby's erotogenic "anal zone" (Freud 265). When a journalist asks a mother shopping in a toy store what she thinks of EC, she reacts to the possible sexual consequences: "Have you read Freud?... I imagine it's going to come out in sexual ways" (Kelly). This woman seems to assume that most parents have read and follow Freud and if not, it might be sexually disastrous for

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<sup>122</sup> Late in comparison to other cultures like the Digo or earlier U.S. generations.

<sup>123</sup> Note it is always the mother who is charged with these tasks.

society. Of course, this is only one random example, hardly a scientific sampling. However, the woman's quote encapsulates an American fear of jeopardizing the innocence (non-sexuality) of children and at the same time the fascination of a possibly sexualized child ("I imagine" its sexual potential). Although arguing an alternative method to delayed training, deVries' and deVries' study of innocent infant capabilities—complete with photographs of African mothers holding up their naked babies as they defecate and void (173)—is not free of the voyeuristic eye of the white adult.

It is no coincidence that toilet training theories of the 60s and 70s (such as those of deVries and deVries and Brazelton) were laced with sexual anxieties. In his study of child sex-abuse, James Kindcaid argues that American culture "has enthusiastically sexualized the child while denying just as enthusiastically that it is doing any such thing" (13). Kindcaid suggests in *Erotic Innocence* that it may be that "the sexual revolution has made us cling even more desperately to the old glowing myths surrounding innocence and to attach that idea of innocence all the more hysterically to our children.... Along with innocence we have loaded them with all its sexual allure" (54). He claims, "We have made children lovable" and construct them as the *desirable*: the "sweet, innocent, vacant, smooth-skinned, spontaneous, and mischievous" (14). We keep the baby pure by covering up the sexual virginity we adore in the child until he is ready to expose himself autonomously—the adult cannot be blamed for a perverted glance.

While children are lovable and desirable, Zits is not. He is an awkward pimply teenager, not a soft, cuddly baby. At fifteen, he is sexualized and describes women who get him "all hormonal" (63). He acts like a tough kid, swearing and even pushing his foster mom at one point (16). Not only is his attitude abrasive, so is his damaged complexion. It is as if his pimples barricade him from love. It is not just one or two imperfections; Zits describes his condition as if

his whole body were diseased: “The skin doctor tells me I have six months to live. I’m exaggerating. I don’t have a skin doctor and you can’t actually die of zits. But you can die of shame. And, trust me, my zit-shame is killing me” (4). His “ruined complexion” (Alexie, *Flight* 4) and the shame it produces not only emphasize his age—since acne is, as Alexie’s interviewer Dave Weich notes, “a problem of adolescence” (Alexie, “Revising” 170), but they also relate to his race, since he inherits this unpleasant trait from his Indian father (Alexie, *Flight* 4).

At the core of Zits’s shame is the “ever deepening conviction” of his “*unlovability*” because of an “inherent sense that the entire self is ‘dirty’, ‘untouchable’, ‘rotten’” (Wurmser 92). He is “ashamed that [he looks] like a bag of zits tied to a broomstick” (Alexie, *Flight* 4) and cannot “conform to the models of the shaming other—white society” (Adamson and Clark 10)—modeled in Justice’s perfect complexion (Alexie, *Flight* 21).<sup>124</sup> This issue is more than skin-deep; it serves as a metaphor for the colonial difference. Justice has clear white skin. He patronizingly reaches out to Zits like a missionary offering cures to bodily and spiritual ailments. Meanwhile, Zits feels inferior with his brown, blemished complexion. Only when Zits is brought under Justice’s—and later his final foster family’s—wing and begins elimination communication can he approach lovability.

Justice and Mary but both initiate EC with Zits, although they employ different means. Justice convinces Zits that elimination (of white people) should take place through murder. When Zits completes Justice’s training in violent revolution, he feels “so proud” and believes he “finally deserve[s] [Justice’s] love” (35). Zits has already fallen in love with Justice (24), but it is not until he agrees ideologically and can be used as Justice’s puppet that he believes Justice loves

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<sup>124</sup> The connection between whiteness and clear complexion that Alexie makes through Justice deserves further study. Another example of such a relationship is found in Stephanie Meyers’s *Twilight* series, which profits from the concept of life-threatening, yet reformed and friendly, youthful-looking yet mature and aged vampires with transparently shiny white skin who settle not only in America, but on tribal lands.

him too (34). After Zits puts Justice's plan into action, Justice remains "free," but Zits is "trapped" (38). In the end, Justice uses Zits for his own agenda; Justice is an illusion, a self-righteous boy who "fooled" Zits (38). Regarding Mary, after Zits applies the "miracle" zit cream (21) in the final chapter, she hugs him in a way that reminds him of his mother (180). Thus lovability is the result of reproducing the form of elimination desired by an authority figure. This brings us back to the idea that as the abject, Zits is being trained to cleanse himself, to make himself more pure, and, ironically in the case of Justice's training, more white.

Although EC appears to be a "leap into the past" (Kelly), it remains in-line with modern attempts to protect the purity of the child. Brazelton notes that some parents want to potty train their children early "in order to avoid such complex areas as...sexuality" (122). The younger the child, the more innocent and less sexually charged it is. In addition, mothers commenting on why they prefer EC to diapers often explain that they do not want their babies to "sit in their own filth" (Kim R.). Anthropologist Meredith F. Small's *New York Times* Op-Ed on EC illustrates this point. Although Small bases her defense of EC on its use (or similar use) in non-western cultures, she concludes with a very western twist. Even though she does not anticipate having more children, "given the opportunity, [she would] certainly go the diaper-free route." Not because its more healthy, cheaper, or more convenient, but because "[j]ust the thought of a baby's bare bottom bouncing through the house is reason enough to try." The belief that EC preserves the purity of a nice white baby bum also appears in a more skeptical *Fox News* article. Although the conservative *Fox* report recites the claim that potty training is defined by the child's autonomous control and mastery of elimination, it also quotes a parent praising EC because it prevents "diaper rash because they [the babies] are not sitting it their poop" (Mann).

As an imitation of a non-western form, EC emphasizes a western anxiety about cleanliness, the rejection of the abject, and the purity of the child.

Even though comments (such as those made in the *New York Times* and *Fox News* articles cited above) designate EC as cleaner than diapers, one of the method's drawbacks is that it can too easily lead to *elimination contamination*: "without a sign (for him [the master or mother]), it beseeches a discharge" (Kristeva, *Powers* 2).<sup>125</sup> Although striving to preserve the "boundaries of the self's clean and proper body" (Kristeva, *Powers* 73), the abject sneaks by without warning. It "neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts, uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them" (Kristeva, *Powers* 15). Furthermore, EC requires the imitation of elimination, the *pissssing* of the mother. Through such mimicry, the waste is reproduced in the mother's voice. The performance however is based on an adult interpretation of the child's elimination. A cycle of mimicry ensues. The adult attempts to assert control over the child by "getting it to imitate the adult's imitation" (Taussig, *Mimesis* 77). If the child then imitates the adult, and the adult again imitates the child, then, as anthropologist Michael Taussig notes, "we seem to be doing something quite strange, simulating and dissimulating at one and the same time for the sake of our epistemic health and the robust good cheer of realness" (*Mimesis* 77). To accomplish EC, the baby must study the parents and the parents must study the baby. Instead of being a simple minion in a game of adult-initiated socialization—implying a blind imitation by the child—the baby observes the adult and

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<sup>125</sup> The actual practice of EC supplies literal examples. Mothers using EC are supposed to be able to tell when the child needs to eliminate, but this doesn't always work, as one mom (Kim) notes on her blog: "While I am fiercely concentrating on his face and penis... he decides to poop, while standing up, right next to my foot. I honestly didn't even see it coming. He made no grunt, no face, no bathroom sounds, nothing. I didn't even realize he had gone until my foot moved half an inch and I felt a squishy, wet, warm sensation." (Kim R.)



acts, creating new meaning and influencing the adult's actions—implying reflexivity on the part of the child. It is a “trickster moment...and it's not clear who is tricking whom” (Deloria 240).

But, you might think, isn't this just another insult that belittles indigenous peoples who have already been infantilized? And yes, this is exactly the point. The Indian has been infantilized and marked as inferior. Thus the employment of something like EC to explain the dynamics of the relationship between white and Indian *appears* to follow the norm, that is, the white's training (yet again) of the unknowledgeable Indian. But what is really at stake in this training is not the socialization of the child (or Indian), but the legitimacy of the adult (or white) authority and the establishment of the stages of growth that proceed from the barbaric to civilized, in which one needs to expel the (soiled) other and in which socialization always ends up as integration into a clean, white, western and a seemingly liberal democratic nation-state. EC reveals that the adult does not hold all the power. Instead, the adult must spend much energy studying the child and pretending to be the child (imitating elimination). The reflexivity on the part of the child implies that the subaltern alters the environment into which he assimilates. EC thus becomes a game—a form of trickster discourse that distorts who mimics whom—who is in charge and who has the knowledge.

Thus, in Alexie's novel EC as an elimination practice, i.e., a description for Zits' process of assimilation, is problematic. One issue with EC is that Zits will never be “brand-new” as Mary claims (Alexie, *Flight* 180). He will not become Michael, but will be Zits/Michael. Even with the acne wash, there is a pretty good chance Zits/Michael will get pimples now and again. Since his zits stand for more than a physical skin condition, I am talking on an allegorical level. He is still the abject, a half-Indian foster teenager. The cleanser will not wash away his past and will not make him any less Indian. Here Alexie may be joking with the fact that brown skin and prejudice

towards it can never be simply washed white. While Zits will physically outgrow adolescence (and hopefully his acne), his family history and its “blood memory” (Alexie, “A World” 147) remain part of him. The process of elimination is incomplete, thus allowing the abject to lurk.

As an indigenous child who assimilates during adolescence, Zits exemplifies the possibility of a liberal (multicultural) state in which all—with proper EC training or socialization—grow-up to be equal. At the same time, Zits’s racial difference throws such neutral growth into question and suggests an illusionary equality because he, as an indigenous child, remains a site of the specter of colonialism as well as the possibility of alternative memories and discourses that can contest dominant white constructions of the national community. Within the text, the fact that the novel ends before we see any physical change (e.g., his acne clearing) and before he becomes an emancipated adult emphasizes that Zits will continue to negotiate between inside and outside, child and adult, normal and abject. In addition, Alexie slips two interpolated stories into the narrative (which I discuss below) that suggest a darker ending. Moreover, Alexie does not solely cook up these issues in a time-slip fantasy; instead he feeds white readers their own “hyperrealities of neocolonial consumerism” distracting them from the fact that *he is a Zits/Michael* playing a “language game” of EC (Vizenor, “Trickster Discourse” 278). As a trickster discourse, *Flight* “unties the *hypotragedies* imposed on tribal narratives” (Vizenor, “A Postmodern” 11), in particular the hypotragedy of the disappearing Indian. After all, Alexie, while being a popular writer with a large white audience, is an Indian.

Another problem with EC in the novel is that the reflexivity on the part of the child implies that the subaltern alters the environment into which he assimilates. Zits thus participates “in the *production* of modern discourse—and of modernity itself,” and does not simply fall into

it (Deloria 238). Zits plays to the expectation that he is the abject by calling attention to his difference (e.g., his nickname), which sets his new foster mom into action. He then becomes the tame, domesticated Indian who has lost his tribe. He “performs assimilation” (Deloria 234), claiming for himself “the privilege of a middle-class white [adolescent]—to pamper [his] body and to have someone else (a white woman) do the drudge work of cleaning and polishing” his face (Deloria 240). Zits plays the game of EC, mimicking the mother and *parroting* back the role they expect him to play.

The fact that the process of EC is an adult-child interaction is also important because it places Zits in a child’s role. Just as he is part-Indian, as an adolescent, Zits/Michael is part-Child. He remains part of a colonial project designed to rescue him from his supposed inferiority and childishness. The concept of the submissive and tame Indian juvenilizes the Indigenous. The childish Indian is not a danger or threat to national expansion and power; instead he is dependent, weak, and in need of training in order to become a “fully realized human being” (Alexie, *Flight* 6), i.e., an adult. Although he does not live on the reservation, Zits/Michael exists within a metaphorically “bounded landscape” where “a colonial dream of fixity, control...and, most importantly, docility” continues to restrain the Indigenous (Deloria 27). As Adrian Louis declares: “Oh Uncle Adrian, I’m in the reservation of my mind” (line 20). Both reservation-containment and assimilation reveal a white desire for fixity, an anal-retentive compulsion for control and categorization of that which is “opposed to *I*” (Kristeva, *Powers* 1 emphasis in original), that “which disturbs identity, system, order” (Kristeva, *Powers* 4). Elimination communication initiates Michael’s emergence into the heart of mainstream America, but such action also fosters elimination *contamination* since the abject (Zits) must first be brought inside the boundaries of white society.

Taking EC beyond Alexie's *Flight* to the plains of U.S. history, a parallel story of growth based on elimination communication/contamination presents itself. In its development as a nation, the U.S. encountered a great disturbance of its borders and fought against, exterminated, and removed indigenous peoples from their territories, segregating them on reservations and forcing their assimilation, in effect working towards their elimination. Along with this cleansing came abjection. Literally, the cartographic skin of the U.S. is marked with abject expulsions, otherwise known as reservations. Reservations contained this abjection, shielding it from the eyes of the white population. A geographical, social toilet.

But the pipes on this potty leak. Transgressing porous reservation lines, Indians like Zits exist beyond official tribal lands. What to do, then, with those who cannot be classified into tribes, separated and contained? Discussions centering on the language of the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Fourteenth Amendment illustrate how perplexing the Indian was (and continues to be) for U.S. statesmen.<sup>126</sup> In this debate the apparently simple question *Are Indians U.S. citizens?* received mixed responses including: no, they have their own tribes and are not subject to the jurisdiction of the U.S. government (their home is the reservation); no, they were never intended to be “embraced” by the nation (quoted in Beck 39); yes, but only if they pay U.S. taxes and own property or hold “lands in severalty by allotment” (quoted in Maltz 565); yes, but only if the Indian is separated from his tribe, having “cast off his wild habits and submitted to the laws of organized society” (quoted in Beck 40); and yes, because although they are collected on reservations, they are “not subject to tribal authority; their tribes are broken up and destroyed” (quoted in Beck 42). Although the reservations are supposed to contain the abject within a

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<sup>126</sup> Indigenous abjection is highlighted in the fourteenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which notes that Indians not-taxed are *excluded* from counts of all free persons. Prior to 1924, when the rights of citizenship were granted to American Indians, non-taxed Indians were considered part of their tribal nations See Earl M. Maltz and George Beck.

distinct, fenced-off area, close contact and leaky borders bring the Indian to an uncomfortable place for U.S. justices and senators.

The debate over the Fourteenth Amendment was particularly convoluted since tribal nations at the time were not considered independent foreign nations by the U.S. legal system, but “domestic dependent nations” (whatever that means) whose relationship to the U.S. was said to “resemble that of a ward to his guardian” (*Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*). In the nineteenth century, reservation Indians not subject to the U.S. jurisdiction were supposed to be subject to a tribal nation; however such tribal jurisdiction was described as “an alien, though *dependent*, power” (quoted in Maltz 570 emphasis added). Therefore, while individual Indians on reservations were not subject to U.S. authority, their tribe was. To some extent, we can say Zits/Michael’s position as an adolescent foster child dependent on a network of state social services parallels the unequal political relationships between American Indian nations and the United States. Although Zits seems to come into white society willingly by accepting his new family, he too has always been labeled a domestic dependent native, a “ward to his guardian.”

Similar to Zits’s story, EC in U.S. history brought docility. Historians locate the idea of the passive Indian in white U.S. national consciousness at the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890 (Deloria 16), after which “the imaged possibility of an Indian tradition of physical resistance was swept away” (Deloria 51). The allotment acts, Indian schools, and the Indian Adoption Project (whose purpose was the assimilation of the tribal Indians) serve as a few methods of cultural EC. Nevertheless, representations of Indians “tended to fetishize [their] violent potential” (Deloria 50). The “threat” of the abject “looms” (Kristeva, *Powers* 1). Incorporation of the tame Indian prompted a disquieting sense that “a rigorous racial and cultural division between Indian and white might no longer be tenable” (Deloria 45). Assimilated

Indians' perceived barbarous history continues to mark them as the inferior enemy and a foreign threat that could corrupt society from within.

Thus in the U.S. history of indigenous relations there are two operations in action with distinct projects of elimination communication: reservation-containment and assimilation. In both cases the borders are unstable and EC only furthers elimination contamination. In the reservation scenario, which works on a geopolitical level, Indian Nations are the excrement of the baby nation unfolding in its Manifest Destiny. The nation must mature and western growth is marked by the autonomous mastery of elimination. But EC is an incomplete process and this is not enough. Now the all-too-close Indian must be trained to cleanse himself in a new cycle of EC that takes place on a sociopolitical level through assimilation. Zits is thus the product of a long history of elimination communication and his position as an indigenous adolescent marks him as the abject of western society.

### 5.3 BAPTISM BY BOILING

Just as adolescence plays an important role in the novel, so too does childhood. In *Flight*, both the Child-of-the-future and the Indian-of-the-past shoulder the “responsibility for saving humankind from the degeneracy of modern society” (Jacqueline Rose 43) by serving as an ideal where freedom and liberty—the goals of the liberal nation—reign. To clarify, I am discussing the Child and Indian as concepts, ideas much like the “idea of America” (Mignolo, *The Idea* 8).<sup>127</sup> In

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<sup>127</sup> As ideas the Indian and the child enchant the psychoanalytic imaginary. For Sigmund Freud, the child could be used not only to read individual pasts, but also to recreate the primitive mind and the history of western development. Through the study of children, Freud notes that psychoanalysts “detect the same archaic factors which were once dominant generally in the primeval days of human civilization. In this development the child would be

both “there is a nostalgia for purity: a time when we were all together and when our identity was sure, and when our lives were better” (Alexie, “A World” 145). The Child is “of-the-future” because that is where its desired potential will play out. Meanwhile, the Indian is “of-the-past” because that is where he is believed to have reigned in a glorious state. But both concepts (the Child and Indian) are activated in the past and future. The Child and the Indian mark a time-space lost to the past “imagined as enjoying unmediated access to Imaginary wholeness” (Edelman 10); yet they also offer a utopic hope for the future. Encapsulating a harmonious home or self destroyed by colonization and adulthood, they are a pure point of origin, desirable for their ability to wipe clean slates covered in injustice, violence, and shame. *Flight* critiques such romantic ideals by presenting children and Indians who defy such representations. Moreover, Alexie embeds *Flight* with stories that imply the forgiveness of the Child and the Indian—the purity they offer—comes as a *baptism by boiling*.

In *Flight* children are both innocents, distinct from adults, and adult-like instigators of violence. Various scenes emphasize the child’s vulnerability and innocence. For example, when Zits relives the memories of Gus, a white Indian tracker whose body he inhabits, he sees “the body of a little girl, blond, blue-eyed, pretty even in death....They [Indians] let her die as an innocent” (86). In one of the final chapters, Officer Dave (a policeman that Zits befriends) tells a story of two babies who died by scalding water. Having arrived at the scene of the crime too late, Officer Dave “wants to go back in time.... He’ll take them away from their terrible parents, from

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repeating the history of his race in an abbreviated form” (quoted in Khanna 40). But real people identified as children and Indians exist outside of the analyst’s notebook. With the “nakedness of his defenseless eyes” the child gains authority by limiting the power of the adult; he forces the adult to acknowledge an ethical responsibility to the other person (Levinas 110). The objects of psychoanalytic and anthropological study, real children and Indians confront the white adult. Thus, although I am discussing a *discourse* of the child and the Indian, it is important to keep in mind that part of their significance rests in the ethical encounter with the evasive other occurring outside the texts.

this terrible life, and he'll love them" (171). Children are thus the victims of adult selfishness and hatred.

At the same time, children in Alexie's novel are also perpetrators of violence. After the Battle of Little Bighorn, Zits sees a "girl, maybe ten years old, digging at a dead soldier's eyes" (73). At another moment he recalls a memory of contemporary U.S. soldiers, "just kids," who are "immature and goofy and mean" (83). In another scene he leaps into the body of a boy who is twelve or thirteen—"only a child" (78)—whose father wants him to slash a young white soldier's throat. Zits himself, only fifteen, has committed an atrocious act of mass murder.

The Indian in *Flight* plays a similar role to the child. Alexie discusses the desire for the purity of an Indian origin while also suggesting it is a fallacy. He explains, "because our [Indian] identity has been so fractured, and because we've been subject to so much oppression and relocation—our tribes dissipated, many destroyed—the concept of a pure Indian identity is really strong" (Alexie, "A World" 145). It is not only the colonial subject whose nostalgia desires a return to a better time of peace and harmony, but also the colonist who seeks to establish a myth of the land he conquers and dominates. The white elite nation (in this case the United States) works to usurp the other's (the Indian's) pure and natural origin—his indigeneity—and claim it for itself in order to justify a claim to the land.<sup>128</sup> One example of this is evident in Jefferson's praise of the mammoth and early American colonists admiration for indigenous peoples.<sup>129</sup> Just as the child is perceived to be a time-place of harmony and innocence that is lost in a process of adulthood, so too the Indian is perceived to be a natural and original time-place that has been lost to the progress of modernization.

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<sup>128</sup> See Jace Weaver.

<sup>129</sup> See W. J. T. Mitchell (113-114) and Antonello Gerbi (285-262).



In the first half of *Flight*, Zits is drawn to the nostalgic image of the Indian warrior. From television, he has learned “how real Indians used to live and how they’re supposed to live now” (12). When he leaps into the body of a nineteenth-century Indian boy whose father sings to him, he wonders if maybe he is in Heaven (65). He quickly realizes that “these old-time Indians are doomed. They’re going to die of disease. And they’ll be slaughtered by the U.S. Cavalry soldiers. They’ll be shipped off to reservations” (66). Zits thus marks a line between an ideal pre-colonized—Indians he believes to have been *real*—and the colonized Indian. But Zits’s understanding of Indians alters after his flights through time. He witnesses Indian betrayals, Indian-on-Indian violence, and “Indian men, women, and children...desecrating the bodies of dead white soldiers” (73). Instead of associating with his indigenous heritage, he looks for ways to distinguish himself: “It’s Indians down there. And I’m an Indian. But we’re not all the same kind of Indian, are we?” (87) Although he realizes the ideal image is an illusion, his comment indicates a denial and a continued desire for its existence. In the end, he rejects the idyllic stereotype but is left with a lack, which is then filled by the child.

Both the Child and the Indian can be located in the past—the Child in a personal imaginary and the Indian in a national or cultural one. They also embody futurities. The child becomes “the citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation’s good” (Edelman 11). In *Flight*, the breaking of this treaty is portrayed as violence against innocent children. The primary example of the national consequences of the ruin of the child is, of course, Zits himself. An abused and lonely child, he becomes a dangerous teenager, an instigator of violence who threatens the stability of society.

Just as the Child of the Imaginary is the “embodiment of futurity collapsing undecidedly into the past” (Edelman 10), so too the Indian-of-the-past can be brought into the future. Zits’s

mentor, Justice, longs for an Indian resurrection. He wishes the Indian “elders, the wise ones...were still here” (30) and incites Zits to recreate the Ghost Dance. Zits’s and Justice’s contemplation on the Ghost Dance indicates a desire for an Indian futurity in which “the future holds out the hope of a final undoing of the initiating fracture, the constitutive moment of division,” offering “hope by mobilizing a fantasy of temporal reversal, as if the future were pledged to make good the loss it can only ever repeat” (Edelman 134). Zits describes the Ghost Dance to Justice: “It was this ceremony created by the Paiute holy man Wovoka, back in the eighteen-seventies. He said, if the Indians danced this dance long enough, all the dead Indians would return and the white people would disappear” (31). But when Zits attempts the Ghost Dance, he encounters an unexpected resurrection. His shuffling through bodies brings the dead back to life, but also reveals that this restoration is ineffective for the establishment of justice. In the last section of the novel, it is not the white people who disappear, but the Indians. In fact, the word “Indian”—so prominent in the first and second sections of the novel—appears only three times in the last three chapters and does not reference Zits’s identity or heritage (161, 175). Rather than a resurrection of Indian power, he observes that “[w]e’re all the same people. And we are all falling” (130). His time-travels reveal that the purity of the indigenous past is an unattainable illusion.

In the end, the Ghost Dance fails Zits. The basis for this defeat lies in his isolation. Even though he tells Justice, “I don’t think one person can do it [Ghost-Dance] well enough to make it work....you need all Indians to do it” (31), Justice “fooled” and “brainwashed” (38) him into believing that he was “strong enough to Ghost-Dance all by” himself (31). Zits works alone, as a puppet of Justice. There is no mass movement or protest behind him. An alternative indigenous political project is not viable, at least not in the sense that the land could be re-conquered, the

white people disappeared, and the indigenous epistemology viewed as natural, not the exotic or illogical. Instead, Alexie works in what Gonzalo Lamana describes as “lugar gris.” Lamana explains these spaces as

los que resultan incómodos a la hora de clasificar las alternativas posibles, *cuyo desafío proviene no tanto de su potencial de revertir la relación de poder como de dislocarlo, ya que su simple existencia cuestiona las clasificaciones sobre las que ese poder esta instituido*. Un poder entendido no como un lugar que posee la capacidad de coerción, sino como algo más ilocalizable, no solo represor sino también generador, cuyo riesgo es enfrentar situaciones que cuestionan la supuesta naturalidad de su ordenamiento. (“Definir” 39)<sup>130</sup>

This idea is similar to how Paulo Freire describes the integration of the oppressed into the “structure of oppression” (74). Freire rejects the concept of the marginal as the socially abject because the oppressed are “not people living ‘outside’ society. They have always been ‘inside’—inside the structure which made them ‘beings for others.’ The solution is not to ‘integrate’ them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become ‘beings for themselves.’” Freire adds that such “transformation, of course, would undermine the oppressors’ purposes” (74). Combining Lamana’s and Freire’s theories, we could say that the marginal (oppressed, abject, subaltern) can operate within the power structure in such a way that they transform the structure from within, subverting power dynamics and creating gray spaces. Readers may unwittingly experience this when reading *Flight*. While Zits’s recreation of the

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<sup>130</sup> Abbreviated translation: “spaces whose challenge arises not from their potential to reverse relations of power but from their capacity to dislocate them, because these spaces’ simple existence calls into question the implicit classifications upon which those power relations are instituted” (Lamana, *Dominar* 188).

Ghost Dance is doomed to failure, his performance of EC indicates the possibility of the generation of gray space.

So, when Alexie says in his interview with Nygren that the “Indian world” is “doomed” and “you have to get lucky to escape that” (Alexie, “A World” 146), maybe we should question his definition of terms. If by “Indian world” he means the stereotype—the hyperreality described by Vizenor—then we could translate the comment as saying, “Any attempt to define the self through the white vision of what Indians were and are supposed to be is bound for failure and abjection.” Furthermore, Zits’s position is not tragic; it is chance. His survival is not “extraordinary magic.... No, the only magic here is ordinary.... It might only be luck” (Alexie, *Flight* 96). You have to get *lucky* (not be whiter or morally superior) to escape the conception of the self based on another’s negative evaluation, i.e., to escape becoming “being for others.” The Indian-of-the-Past serves the colonizer because it makes it impossible to be Indian since the expectation can never be lived up to or recreated authentically. During his flights through time and space, Zits comes to understand himself better by witnessing the instability of the stereotype.

Similar to the Indian-of-the-Past, the Child-of-the-future is a damned fabrication, a hopeless desire. Zits, however, holds onto the hope of a childhood purity. Even though his experiences blur the line dividing the child from the adult, he continues to view childhood as an uncorrupted and sacred time-space. He reflects that “[e]ach day, worldwide, twelve thousand children starve to death. *That* is fucked up” (83). For Zits, violence against children is the ultimate crime. But it is not just the desire to help protect children from pain, but to help protect them from *adult* pain. With a Holden-Caulfield-like complex (Salinger), he desires to run out into the rye and save those falling or ripped away from childhood: “You have to save him.... Save the kid!” (Alexie, *Flight* 104). He desires to separate childhood from violence and preserve

the Child's innocence, declaring that children are "supposed to be children and stay children for as long as possible" (104). Instead of being cherished, children are victims who do not receive their fair share; rich adults "don't share their shit. They're like spoilt little ten-year-old bullies on the playground. They hog the monkey bars and the slide and the seesaw" (26). For Zits, child-adult roles seem reversed or "backward" (84). Instead of adults protecting children, children are the ones preserving the nation; they are the soldiers who "fight to defend adults" (Alexie, *Flight* 84).

Zits reflections highlight the idea that to neglect the child is to neglect the future and be "responsible for the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and inevitably, life itself" (Edelman 13). Correspondingly, to save or heal the child is to save or heal the nation. In his speech "On Babies" (1879) Mark Twain reminds listeners that the child is the "prophecy of the man" and the future of the nation rests in the (now) little hands of those still being rocked in cradles—they are the saviors of the nation (4002). Twain makes babies the universal equalizer: "We haven't all had the good fortune to be ladies; we haven't all been generals or poets, or statesmen; but when the toast works down to the babies, we all stand on common ground" (On Babies 4001).<sup>131</sup> For Twain, only the pre-socialized period of innocent toe-sucking can remove differences evident in adulthood.

In this sense, the idea of a pure child not only protects a personal history, but the idea of "one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all" and the concept of a guiltless American democracy. We are all equal in infancy. However, "Alexie makes clear that America

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<sup>131</sup> While he mentions gender and status as markers that differentiate groups, the author of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*—books laden with characters separated by race—does not broach what W. E. B. Du Bois calls "the problem of the Color Line" (42). Maybe race is too obvious a difference in post-Civil War America. Or maybe the omission is deliberate, indicating that while infancy and childhood unite a social body, the issue of race continues to fracture the shared experience of youth.

was never innocent” (Coulombe 111) and claims that although the U.S. is the “best country in the world,” there is only an “illusion of democracy in the country.” Alexie explains that this illusion allows for the nation to believe it is not a “colony” (Alexie, “An Interview” 60).<sup>132</sup> Moreover, it allows for the child, as a universal unifier, to act as a serum of sorts that will suture the fissures of a colonial past and wipe away the guilt of America’s coloniality.

In *Flight*, two interpolated stories point to ethical encounters that conflict with the idealized discourse of the Child and Indian. These two stories come at the end of the novel and could be easily overlooked because they are brief and overpowered by the rest of the narrative. In one, a man tells Zits about the death of his family’s pet parakeet. In the other, Officer Dave describes the deaths of two babies. The importance of these stories lies in their allegorical meaning as well as their presence in the novel. As stories within a story, these anecdotes highlight the metafictional elements of the novel. According to Patricia Waugh, metafiction “self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact,” allowing the text to critique “its own methods of construction” and to “explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text” (2). The interpolated stories thus highlight the fact that *Flight* is fiction and that Alexie is just telling readers a story. But the intercalated narratives are made to look real. In a book of fantastical leaps through time, these stories are believable; the only unusual thing about them is the misfortune they convey. In a similar way, Zits’s time-slip also emphasizes the fictional element of the novel and yet it also describes a historical past that it presents as true. Waugh believes “all art is ‘play’ in its creation of other symbolic worlds” (34).

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<sup>132</sup> It is interesting to note Alexie’s choice of terms. He asserts in more than one interview that the United States is a “colony” (“A World” 154; “An Interview” 60; and in Giles). One definition of colony is a transplanted group of people settling a new territory while maintaining ties to its origin. Alexie maybe describing the United States in these terms rather than as a political dependency. If so, the U.S. as a colony denaturalizes the idea of Manifest Destiny. Imagined as a colony, the United States continues to be an appendage of Europe and has no organic ties to the Americas. As a colony, its citizens are transplants and foreigners. It is also a reminder that the land was acquired through conquest and is the spoil of an offensive war that led to the deaths and subjugation of many people.

She sees play as “facilitated by rules and roles, and metafiction operates by exploring fictional rules to discover the role of fictions in life. It aims to discover how we each ‘play’ our own realities” (35). As a trickster discourse, *Flight* plays with us and one way it does so is to give us personal and national histories within a fantasy world. In addition, these two peculiar and disturbing interjected stories provide readers with extra toys to interpret as we try to make sense of Alexie’s novel.

In one story, Zits (who has supernaturally jumped into the body of his drunken father) accosts a man walking down the street. Speaking in a mixture of his father and himself, he repeatedly tells the man he wants “some respect” (142). When the man asks what he can do to show respect, Zits requests a secret story. The man rejects that idea at first, but then offers a “bird story” (143), which goes something like this:

The man has a seven-year-old daughter who wants a pet, but the man does not want a pet because he does not want to “clean up a lot of shit” (144). He and his wife go to the pet store and ask what animal poops the least. The clerk recommends a snake. But the man knows that would not please his daughter. So he follows the clerk’s second suggestion: a parakeet. The man thinks, “Small bird, small shit.” Not so. It turns out the little creature is a “shit-master. Poop, poop, poop everywhere.” Despite this, the man loves the bird. The “cutest” thing about the “smart little fucker”(145) (named Harry Potter) is that he sits on the man’s shoulder and critiques him as he cooks. But one day the man makes pasta. The water is boiling and the little bird jumps. The man claims that he “didn’t kill the bird. The bird committed suicide.” “He was only in there a second” before the man scoops him out (146). Witnessing the whole incident, the daughter screams. Harry Potter is still alive and the family goes to the animal ER. Upon seeing the parakeet hooked up to a “tiny little oxygen machine and this tiny little oxygen tube” the man laughs hysterically

(147-148). Big mistake. Aghast at his insensitivity, the wife and daughter are “ashamed” of him because he “turned [his daughter’s] love and pain into a big fucking laugh” (148). The wife and daughter leave him and have not spoken with him since. The bird died.

Maybe this story is a literary jab at J. K. Rowling. Maybe it is advice for parents not to cook with their children’s pets perched on their shoulders. It stands out in the novel because it is so odd. It is strange because it is a tangential narration about a pet bird that makes Zits a removed listener. While the middle section of *Flight* is a compilation of distinct stories that seem unrelated to one another, Zits is always a participant in or witness to the action. What does this man’s misfortune have to do with Zits? On the surface, it seems like it is unconnected to the rest of the novel. But if we look into the layers of Alexie’s writing, the story is revelatory.

First, we can link the pet parakeet with Zits. As stated in the beginning of this chapter, Zits is a relative of the “lost birds.” He thus already has a (metaphorical) connection to the avian world. If the bird represents Zits, then his name (like Zits’s name) is important. In Rowling’s novel Harry Potter is the odd adolescent wizard living in a home of muggles (or non-magical, *ordinary*, and unmarked humans) who do not care for him. Similar to Zits, he is an outsider and only in fantasy can he reverse his position. At the same time, Harry Potter (in Rowling’s series) is a white boy who completes his *Bildung* as a successful wizard. The *parakeet* Harry Potter is not a white boy/wizard and his name is funny and “cute” (147) because of the distinction between name and meaning. In a similar way, Zits/Michael’s employment of a name and persona at the end of the novel might be ironic. Furthermore, the bird mimics the family members. Zits’s easy transition into his new foster home may be evidence of comparable parroting.

It is important to note that in the Pacific Northwest birds, like the raven and blue jay, are often trickster figures. That being so, Alexie’s parakeet story may parody the trickster tale. If this



is the case, the little bird is a form of trickster—and, by connection, so is Zits—which Vizenor describes beyond the greedy, wandering, disobedient joker:

The trickster, then, is a sign, a comic and communal sign, and a discourse in a narrative with no hope or tragic promises. The trickster is neither the ‘whole truth’ nor an isolated *hypotragic* transvaluation of primitivism.... The trickster is ‘nothingness’ in a narrative voice, an ‘encounter’ that centers imagination in comic *holotropes*, a communal being; ‘nothingness’ in consciousness and comic discourse. (“Trickster Discourse” 12-13)<sup>133</sup>

Vizenor’s description of the trickster throws new light on the meaning of nothingness and abjection in *Flight* as well as the form of the novel itself. The bird Harry Potter, like Zits, is associated with the abject. The father in the story desires to keep the abject at bay. Instead, the entrance of Harry Potter contaminates his home as the parakeet’s poop spreads everywhere. Since the trickster is marginal and “nothingness,” this seems to fit with the idea that Zits/Parakeet is a trickster. But instead of being something dirty or negative, this just means that he is a “semiotic sign” and represents the artificial bond between the signifier and the signified (Vizenor, “A Postmodern” 11). Vizenor explains that the trickster is “that wild space over and between sounds, words, sentences, and narratives; and, at last, the trickster is comic shit” (“Trickster Discourse” 196). Trickster shit is a comic sign, the ““material evidence of the process of communication within us”” (quoted in Vizenor, “Trickster Discourse” 204). It is thus the

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<sup>133</sup> Vizenor describes the comic *holotrope*: “Tropes are figures of speech; here the trickster is a sign that becomes a comic holotrope, a consonance of sentences in various voices, ironies, variations in cultural myths and social metaphors. Comic holotropes comprise signifiers, the signified, and signs, which in new critical theories provide a discourse on the trickster in oral narratives, translations and modern imaginative literature....The trickster is a comic discourse, a collection of ‘utterances’ in oral traditions; the opposite of a comic discourse is a monologue, an utterance in isolation, which comes closer to the tragic mode in literature and not a comic tribal worldview” (“Trickster Discourse” 190-191).

opening of language into metaphor. The trickster works at creating a “galaxy of signifiers” and “noise” (Barthes 5; 145), in other words, comic shit.

With this understanding the novel’s title takes on new meaning. Roland Barthes explains that the plurality of the text is found in playful “rereading” (16):

The text, in its mass, is comparable to the sky, at once flat and smooth, deep, without edges and without landmarks; like the soothsayer drawing on it with the tip of his staff an imaginary rectangle wherein to consult, according to certain principles, *the flight of birds*, the commentator traces through the text certain zones of meaning, in order to observe therein the migration of meanings, the outcropping of code, the passage of citations. (14 emphasis added)

Barthes continues by noting the importance of the “shifting” of the signifieds and signifiers (14-15). In *Flight*, one example of this is when Zits is in the bank; he fires a real gun and a paint gun, but it doesn’t matter that only one has real bullets because they both strike equal fear. The power resides in the performance and the ability to make the signifier carry a specific meaning. Words act in a similar way. Alexie prepares us for this in the first chapter of *Flight* when Zits remarks:

I think it’s strange how curse words frighten and disgust people. Yes, there are people afraid of certain combinations of vowels and consonants. Isn’t that hilarious? Don’t those wimps realize that each and every word only has the power and meaning you assign to it? If I decided that *plop* was a dirty word, and started using it to curse people, and convinced enough people to use it as a curse word also, it would eventually become obscenity. (14 emphasis in original)

Zits' explanation looks like a piece of a monologue, but as a trickster discourse it becomes the opposite: a comic, *communal* discourse. The opening line of the novel plays with this distinction. "Call me Zits" is not just an allusion to *Moby Dick*; it is an ironic one (1). First of all, Zits resembles Queequeg—the tattoo-marked Pacific Islander—more than that white narrator, Ishmael. Alexie copies Herman Melville's famous line, but twists it making it something new. Furthermore, Melville ends his novel with an epigraph from the biblical book of Job that quotes, "AND I ONLY AM ESCAPED ALONE TO TELL THEE" (470). If we forget the irony, then the allusion to Melville's novel is tragic. Zits presents the reader with an isolated monologue as the sole survivor of a disappeared tribe. But if read as a trickster discourse, then the narrative is communal and the joke lies in the disjunction between the original (*Moby Dick*) and Zits's imitation of Ishmael's voice.

The communal aspect of the trickster discourse alters *Flight's* relationship to the *Bildungsroman*. According to William Bevis, unlike white American *Bildungsromane*, many American Indian *Bildungsroman* end by "homing in" rather than lighting out. Bevis sums up, "whites leave, Indians come home" (17). These "homing" plots emphasize the importance of the tribe and "finding a 'self' that is transpersonal and includes a society, a past, and a place" (19). Zits's story becomes more than "isolated individualism" because the trickster narrative "is a consonance of narrative voices in discourse ("Trickster Discourser: Comic" 193, 188). In its multiple rereadings, border crossings, and gray spaces, the "trickster is real in those who imagine the narrative, in the narrative voices" ("Trickster Discourser: Comic" 190). Zits survives, but he's not alone as he sets off into his new home; *Flight* is part of a web of meaning.

Alexie plays with the concepts of survival and defeat in the epigraph quoting Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*. In Vonnegut's novel, the narrator tells his readers that he is not going to

look back anymore and that the novel is a disaster written by a pillar of salt. His statements reference the fate of Lot's wife who, unable to obey God's directive, turned around to view the destruction of Sodom and thus turned into a pillar of salt. Again, Alexie's allusion is ironic. The biblical story implies that going back is futile and we must press forward in faith in order to survive. Reaching into the past, pairing it with the present, and questioning past destruction result in disaster and salt pillars. Zits is thus set up for ruin. After a long peek into the past, he transforms into someone who seems to be just as exciting as a column of salt. As a trickster discourse, though, this may be a joke on us.

Part of the joke is that we pity the pillar of salt. That tricky bird commits suicide and it looks tragic. If the bird were to represent the Indigenous, then Harry Potter's death recreates the myth of the disappearing Indian. In this scenario, the parakeet story takes the place of Melville's epigraph: "AND I ONLY AM ESCAPED ALONE TO TELL THEE." But as Vizenor claims there is no tragedy in trickster tales, just chance. As an Indian writing such a *hypotragedy*, Alexie must do so with a grin on his face. Paul Radin's phrase about the trickster, "If we laugh at him, he grins at us" (169), changes to "If we pity him, he shames us." Alexie makes us chuckle and ironically turns his "love and pain into a big fucking laugh." He writes as if the Indian were the one cloaked in shamed. Nevertheless, in a twisted way, our laughing at someone else's pain just makes us the culpable and shamed. In the parakeet story, the shame falls on the father for laughing, as well as on readers who most likely do that same. We are all complicit.

The boiling of the parakeet may also be a joke on the social sciences, chiefly Claude Lévi-Strauss's idea that boiling water transforms the raw (the primitive indigenous, irrational child, the rotten and the abject) into the cooked (the civilized western, the cultured adult, the consumable and wholesome). Boiled foods, Lévi-Strauss notes, are a kind of "endo-cuisine,"

prepared for domestic use....prescription of the boiled accompanies a tightening...of familial or social ties” (“Culinary” 38). Lévi-Strauss considers cooking by boiling a sign of a more advanced culture: “boiling requires the use of a receptacle, a cultural object; symbolically, inasmuch as culture is a mediation of the relations between man and the world, and boiling demands a mediation (by water) of the relation between food and fire” (“Culinary” 37). Furthermore, he claims boiling’s “affinity with the rotten is attested in numerous European languages” (“Culinary” 38). Thus, according to this theory, boiled food is connected to family, culture, and (if not realized) the rotting of food and the production of the abject.

We could take Lévi-Strauss’ theory and apply it to the parakeet/Zits’s story to say that the parakeet represents Zits (or the Indian) and his entrance into (white) culture through a metaphorical boil. But the translation of Lévi-Strauss’ theory to the story is imperfect and full of holes. For one, boiled food actually ends up loosening the man’s familial ties. Instead, we could read the parakeet as a metaphor for a Zits who tries to fit the mold of the white expectation of the Indian, i.e., a white ideal of indigeneity. The bird’s leap into the boiling pot is like saying Zits has given up the impossible expectation. The parakeet story comes at the end of the middle section of the novel, right before Zits leaps back into his original body. Thus, Zits’s attitude adjustment in the last part of the novel may be explained by this metaphorical baptism by boiling.

Hot water also plays an important role in the second interpolated story, which surfaces after Zits has finished time-traveling. While in jail, Officer Dave confronts him, “You are going to die.” Zits blows off the comment by saying Dave “doesn’t care about anything.” The cop’s response is that he cares “too much” and he starts crying (168). But his tears are not only for Zits. He explains that a few weeks earlier he got a “nine-one-one call” from someone who said

they heard “crazy screaming in the house next door” (169). When Dave and his partner show up at the house, they find a couple intoxicated and passed out on the floor. Dave hears water running so he goes to check it out. The hallway has become a pool of cold water. When he and his partner open the bathroom door, they see “two toddlers, a boy and a girl, two or three years old, lying still on the floor.” The children are covered with “burns: their legs, their backs, their bellies.” The water flows cold now, but Dave deduces that it was “boiling hot when it overflowed the tub, when the two babies were trapped by the difficult door, when they screamed so loud that the neighbor could hear them, but not so loud that it woke their parents from their drunken stoned slumber.” Dave picks up the children; their “eyes are open and blue and blind. They’re gone” (171).

Dave wants to go back in time to save the children, but—just like Zits who is helpless to change the outcomes of the past events he witnesses—he cannot. The story of the scalded babies presents the Child as the innocent harmed by the neglect of the cruel adult world. However, the parallels between this story and the parakeet one make me question if we should read it in another light. The story complicates the issue of abjection. Kristeva views the corpse as “the utmost abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part.” The child appears opposed to the corpse; it is that which “saves me from death” (Kristeva, *Powers* 4). And so, what do we do with a *child corpse*—the coexistence of both the infection and the cure? If the parakeet can be read as embodying the Indian-of-the-past, then maybe the deaths of these children (notably a boy and girl, the future heterosexual couple of the foundational fiction) does not represent the vulnerability of children and the loss of innocence, but the ultimate outcome of the Child-of-the-Future. Just as Dave and Zits cannot resuscitate the

past, the future cannot be pre-cleansed. The pure point of origin tempts us with its ability to offer forgiveness. But instead of leaving us renewed and unmarked, this baptism scalds.

Fire and water play important roles in many of Alexie's works and in the parakeet and babies stories they combine to make boiling water. Fire in Alexie's writing is destructive and painful, but is also related to grief and cleansing. Water functions in a similar way, as a purifier and yet a disturbing force.<sup>134</sup> When Zits tells Justice that he likes starting fires, Justice instructs him that he should only "burn down bad things. Remember, revolution is not about spontaneous combustion. The true revolutionary must set himself aflame" (25). At the end of the novel, the pyromaniac Zits thinks he will "go crazy living with a firefighter. They always walk around looking for smoke"(174). Keeping the two interpolated stories in mind, we could say that instead of quenching Zits's fire, the new home transforms it as a force. As an alternative to setting himself aflame as the *resistance* and open revolutionary, Zits has the ability to take his own power and use it to transform the structure around him. Similar to Lamana's gray space (a mixture of white and black), Zits generates a space of boiling (mixture of water and fire) where he can alter the environment from within. In doing so, he is not "being for others," but "being for himself."

The allegorical readings of the two interpolated stories demonstrate that *Flight* is about more than the shame of Zits. Zits's narration is an excavation of his identity and that of the United States. The story is not limited to Zits's own life, but acts as a national allegory. As mentioned above, Zits's shame stems from the sense of his unlovability. Beyond the shame of

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<sup>134</sup> For example, serious fires destroy homes in the movie *Smoke Signals* and novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. In *Smoke Signals* the burning of the protagonist's deceased father's trailer home also demonstrates how fire works as a form of cleansing and renewal. Rivers are significant in *Smoke Signals* as well as the story *The Toughest Indian in the World*. In addition, storms play an important role in the stories of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*.

his appearance, Zits's unlovability has its origins in his loss of familial ties. His father left at his birth and the death of his mother creates a void that he can only fill through memories and declarations of her love for him: "My mother loved me more than any of you will ever know" (3). He is an orphan but has an aunt who neglected his needs and whose boyfriend abused him. The love he believes to find in Justice is hollow and manipulative. Zits lack of love and family is not just a sad story of a teen's loss and psychic disturbance caused by a troubled childhood, but an allegory for the consequences of colonization. It is a twisted version of Sommer's *Foundational Fictions*. We might say it is an allegory of the fatalities of the foundational fiction or maybe of those fucked-by the foundational fiction. In other words, it is an allegory for the other side of the expansion and consolidation of the nation: the breaking up of tribal communities, the removal and collection of tribal artifacts, the loss of tribal lands, a perverse and nasty "erotics of politics" (Sommer 6). Alexie's novel thus employs parody, playfulness, and irony to resurrect a past the United States of America believes to be buried and in doing so confronts the romantic tradition of writers like James Fennimore Cooper and Forrest Carter where the Indian-of-the-past fades into the glory of the sunset.



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