

Interpreting the crisis: narrative, politics and identity in the work of José Donoso

**A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of PhD in the Faculty
of Arts**

1999

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**Abstract of thesis submitted by *Nicholas Wayland Kemey's Morgan* for the Degree of PhD.
and entitled *Interpreting the crisis: Narrative , politics and identity in the work of José
Donoso***

Submitted in September 1999

This thesis deals with the narrative treatment of subjectivity and political commitment in the work of José Donoso. The broad frame of reference is the modernist-postmodernist debate and its relevance to Spanish-American fiction. The first chapter deals with the treatment of personal identity in *Gaspard de la Nuit* and seeks to contextualise the protagonist as a dramatisation of the sense of crisis surrounding views of selfhood in modern fiction. Donoso's obsession with the search for individual autonomy is discussed and interpreted in the light of the novella's relativisation of the concept of individual freedom. The second chapter deals with issues of identity, both personal and cultural, in the treatment of the military dictatorship in Chile in two works by Donoso, *Los habitantes de una ruina inconclusa* and *La Desesperanza*. As well as interpreting the former work as a critique of post-coup society it analyses Donoso's treatment of the relationship between art and politics, and his vision of the importance of social apartheid in Chile and the way this is expressed through race.

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INTRODUCTION:

The choice of the focus of the present study was partly determined by something in which I do not believe, the postmodernist novel. When I say I do not believe in it I am not implying that I think that there is one single concept which we can either accept or reject. The postmodernist novel is a theoretical construct that seems to be put together differently by every theorist. Each and every attempt to define it seems to be doomed to failure given the complexity of the issues at stake and the sheer unruliness of the phenomenon that critics, as ever driven by an urge to order what is probably not susceptible to order, are trying to bring within the bounds of adequate concepts. Linda Hutcheon's influential work *A Poetics of Postmodernism*¹ starts with a discussion of some of the different ways in which this term has been understood and M.Keith Booker² in his work on Vargas Llosa was obliged to include an appendix that provides a useful compendium of different views of postmodernism and modernism, most of which are in substantial disagreement with each other. One wonders at times why critics repeatedly return to the concept, particularly in the case of Latin-Americanists for whom it presents particular difficulties given the lack of anything resembling a so-called "postmodern condition" in the region. It may be the case that as Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat suggested "la posmodernidad latinoamericana es la modernidad periférica en la era de la informática".³ But the literature produced by writers who happen to come from the region is not necessarily doomed to reflect this analysis of socioeconomic history in a crude way. Indeed, at least in this limited sense, literature is autonomous. José Donoso, for example, was not totally determined by a Chilean environment, not least because he spent so long outside it. And even when he was living in Chile he was being influenced by the foreign models that he regarded as playing such an important role in his development as a writer.

Whether we like it or not, the term postmodernist is a critical fact of life. We have been using the concept for a long time and is not going to go away. This in itself seems to suggest that although it can be an unwieldy critical tool, the division between modernism and postmodernism does bring with it some analytical benefits.

¹ *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, London: Routledge, 1988.

² *Vargas Llosa amongst the postmodernists*, Miami: University Press of Florida, 1994.

³ "Autoridad moderna y posmoderna en la narrativa hispanoamericana", *Nuevo Texto Crítico*, vol.III, no.6, p. 122.

In my research on Donoso I had originally intended to look at a very broad range of his novels, novellas and short stories in the light of what John Beverly and his fellow editors called the "postmodernist debate" in Latin America.⁴ In the case of an *oeuvre* as complex and extensive as Donoso's, however, it is impossible to carry out such a project in anything other than a superficial way in the space of 80 000 words. It was nonetheless clear to me that a series of issues that are of particular relevance to Donoso's work crystallise around the discussion of the ways in which we can understand the terms modernism and postmodernism. This is partly true because both of these ways of looking at art and the world at large seem to be imbued with the same sense of crisis that characterises much of Donoso's fictional output. Instead of attempting to create an overview of Donoso's work, however, I have chosen to consider a narrower range of works, attempting in the process to deepen my analysis by focusing on two important and closely related aspects of Donoso's fiction. The first of these is his narrative representation of the self and the second is the treatment of the problematic relationship between literature and politics, two of the most important areas of the debate about the differences between the modernist and the postmodernist work of fiction. These are of such obvious significance that they have frequently figured in the current criticism of Donoso's work. My aim is not to pin a label on Donoso's work, however. The terminology is so diffuse that to attempt to do so would largely be a meaningless exercise. Perhaps it would be better to say that I intend examine aspects of the debate from the perspective of Donoso's fiction and enter into a dialogue with others who have dealt with similar issues.

Many Donoso critics have commented on the idiosyncratic view of subjectivity that is apparent in the constant emphasis on masks and role-playing that are the foundation of his vision of the self. In Donoso's work as a whole we are quite justified in talking of a self in crisis that seems to respond to a recognition of a shift in the consensus view of the nature of subjectivity. Thus while much of Donoso's work speaks for the freedom of the individual it does not fall into the trap of a simplistic exaltation of personal autonomy. One of the central areas of tension in most Donosan texts, in fact, is the conflict between the desire to affirm autonomy and the need to belong. That this should be so is indicative of an acute sensitivity to the ways in which subjectivity is constructed both in fiction and in real life and an awareness of all the many ways in which collective pressures limit individual freedom. In

⁴ Beverly, Aronna and Oviedo (eds.), *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America*, London: Duke University Press, 1995.

this the role of language is particularly important because its inevitably shared nature suggests that however painful the relationship with the group is it must ultimately be accepted. The conflict between a modernist view of the uniqueness of the individual sensibility and postmodern scepticism about the limits of human freedom provides an interesting conceptual framework within which to deal with this issue.

The second area of interest is politics. The clearly coercive nature of many of the groups that Donoso describes in his fiction in itself has obvious political resonance. And although the analysis of the political dimension of his work has proved controversial in the past, particularly as a majority of Donoso critics seem to regard political interpretations of his work to be oversimplifications, there is no doubt that it does contain a significant political vision, in however negative a form. In part to avoid the charge of reductionism I have decided to focus in the second chapter of the present study on two works written after Donoso's return to Chile which deal unequivocally with the contemporary political situation. My intention has been to consider Donoso's somewhat reluctant fictionalisation of life under the Pinochet dictatorship, a theme that brings up the role of Spanish American authors as public figures and leads us to consider the fictional resources they use in order to deal with political reality. In the process I have tried to point out that these stories not only tackle the immediate problem of military rule but also represent the extension of a consistently critical vision of the social hierarchy that has been present in Donoso's work since the earliest stories.

Finally, I want to take the opportunity to make some general comments about form. One of the advantages of considering the work of modern writers from the perspective provided by the variety of theoretical versions of the modernist/ postmodernist divide is that it affords us a great many ways of thinking through their use of the techniques at their disposal in order to create their imaginative worlds. In Donoso's case we could almost say that in the course of his literary career he has progressed from neo-realism to modernism to postmodernism. In a stimulating article on the problems of narrative technique and modernity in Latin America José Eduardo González,⁵ sees modernity as linked in the minds of many critics of Spanish American literature with technical innovation, something he associates with Angel Rama and his influential theory of "transculturación". González suggests that the

⁵ González, José Eduardo, "¿El final de la modernización literaria?: técnica y tecnología en la crítica de Angel Rama", *MLN*, 113 (1998): 380-406.

problem inherent in Rama's obsession with progressive literary procedures is that this emphasis on technical innovation can be regarded as the product of a kind of cultural inferiority complex which finds expression through an almost neurotic desire to be up to date. At the risk of caricaturing his view we could say that it seems to express the idea that Latin American writers and artists consciously or unconsciously took the position that while their region could not achieve socio-economic modernity its art could. From this perspective the attractive thing about postmodernism, or the thing that makes the current work of Latin American authors susceptible to description in terms of their own special form of postmodernism, is that it represents the moment when they can finally accept that they no longer have to prove that they are up to date in this neurotic way. This artistic coming of age makes possible a reassessment of the importance previously assigned to the use of sophisticated and inherently difficult techniques and formal innovation.

At the end of his article González specifically mentions Donoso and the implication of his comments is that the apparent move away from formal complexity in Donoso's work after *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* and *Casa de campo*, might well be the result of a realisation on the author's part that he had taken experimentation as far as he could and that he now had nothing left to prove. The sneaking self-doubt that is evident in Donoso's comments about his relationship to his literary peers was replaced by the confidence derived from the security of knowing that he too had produced his modernist (or according to some postmodernist) novel, his own version of the new-fangled hi-tech gimmickry that was being practised by his envied colleagues. There is something intriguing about this view that seems to invert Philip Swanson's well-known proposal that the change in narrative technique noticeable in Donoso's work after *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* was to a large extent driven by a desire to express a changing philosophy of life.

Whichever analysis best explains Donoso's work—and I do not regard them as necessarily mutually exclusive—both *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* and *Casa de campo* are a constant presence in the background to the present study. All three works examined here, «Gaspard de la Nuit», «Los habitantes de una ruina inconclusa» and *La desesperanza* are considerably less complex in structure but nonetheless show a sophisticated concern for form, an awareness of the problem of representation and a subtle management of the point of view that defy casual readings and question our critical certainties.

Chapter One: «Gaspard de la Nuit» and the dream of freedom.

“Most people are terrified when they encounter freedom, like when they encounter magic, anything inexplicable, especially the world of spirits.”

(Schelling).

Writers' pronouncements about themselves are notoriously unreliable and at times seem to be little more than an extension of their fictional output. However, the choice of the particular mask they choose to present to their readers is often as revealing as anything that it might be supposed to cover up. It is intriguing, therefore, that one of the most striking features of the short autobiography that José Donoso wrote for the Fall 1973 edition of the magazine *Review* is his presentation of himself as an outsider. Given a few paragraphs in which to sum up his development as a writer he chose to create the image of a rebel and loner. Not only does he suggest that his first experiences of The Grange school in Santiago might have determined a “lifelong incapacity to belong to groups of any kind –political, social or recreational”¹ but he goes on to emphasise his inability to fit in to his immediate social milieu, claiming that “[i]n this world of ‘normal’ young people’s parties, cinema-and-beach going, I waged a brief but losing battle to belong”.² Donoso’s parents evidently hoped that he would be a conscientious student, determined to make the most of a privileged environment, but by his own account he was a dropout who preferred to spend time in the company of prostitutes and down-and-outs in the less salubrious parts of Santiago. He then proceeds to tell us that he relished the aura of notoriety gained amongst his classmates by proclaiming himself an atheist and underlines this inability or refusal to conform by mentioning not only his eccentric decision to go and work as a shepherd in Magallanes but also the short period he spent in Buenos Aires and his later wanderings in Mexico. Most importantly of all, perhaps, he presents his decision to be a writer as a mould-breaking event that brought him into conflict with his family who would have preferred him to follow a more conventional path in life.

Donoso’s selective presentation of this personal information contributes to the deliberate creation of a distinctly romantic image of the author as rebel, iconoclast and general free spirit. Given such a self-portrait it is not surprising, therefore, that much of Donoso’s fiction reveals an obsessive fascination with the problem of individual freedom.

¹ *Review*, Fall, 1973, p. 13.

² *Review*, Fall, 1973, p. 15.

This frequently takes the form of stories that explore the conflict between characters who question the routines of thought and behaviour that govern their lives and those who try to make them conform. In most of these cases there is a marked tendency to sympathise with the predicament of the former and to present the demands that society makes on them as an intolerable burden. In a 1992 interview with Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat it was clear that Donoso's view of society's influence on the individual as fundamentally impositional had not changed:

I feel that transformation is always punished with violence. God didn't put us here to be transformed, He put us here to be what we were told to be.³

Donoso, an avowed atheist, uses a reference to God here to underline the power of the coercive forces that demand that we conform. In spite of this, however, it would be as misleading to think of his stories as presenting an essentially romantic picture of the relationship between the individual and society as it would be to interpret them in purely autobiographical terms. Even though the point of departure for many of them is a character's desire for self-determination Donoso's fiction ultimately questions the romantic tendency to think of the individual and society as polar opposites. Indeed, rather than simply exalting the rebellious individual sensibility it poses awkward questions about the nature of the self and the romantic idealisation of individual freedom.

A important part of Donoso's treatment of this issue is his emphasis on the socially constructed nature of our interpretations of reality. This was a typical feature of the writing of the boom period and in Donoso's case often means that we are introduced to closed worlds in which the characters reinforce their shared sense of the real to such an extent that they eventually come to mistake their particular cultural perspective for a reflection of the world itself. As a result the common perspective of Donoso's conformists becomes so deeply ingrained that the categories into which they translate experience appear to them as absolutes. We also find that they tend to have invested so much in seeing the world in a particular way that they are intolerant of any dissenting voices and that the outsiders and misfits who threaten their sense of the real are therefore often punished by exclusion or worse. In these circumstances the tension between those who are driven by a conventional hostility to different ways of seeing the world and others who are influenced by the

³ Interview with Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat, *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Summer, 1992, p. 15.

centrifugal forces of the imagination often explodes into life with disturbing and occasionally violent consequences.

In his early short stories Donoso often uses children to expose the sclerotic aspect of the world in which his adult characters live. Sometimes, as in «El hombrecito», their perspective on matters is far more sophisticated than their patronising and distant elders expect, while in stories like «Ana María», «El güero», «Veraneo» and «La Puerta Cerrada» they appear as beings who are seemingly in touch with some primordial reality, sometimes luminous, sometimes sinister, precisely because their perceptions have not yet been dulled by an uncritical acceptance of their parents' view of the world. A constant feature of Donoso's early forays into this area, therefore, is the underlying insight that his characters' possibilities are to a large extent determined by their reaction to the sense of the real that runs through the society in which they live. Their engagement with the traditions and values of the societies from which they come is therefore of prime importance in understanding their attempts to establish a degree of autonomy for themselves. Indeed, it is clearly impossible to understand their search for freedom without analysing the values of the fictional world which plays a key role in forming them and against which they define themselves. In Antonio Cornejo Polar's words "no hay mimesis sin sujeto, pero no hay sujeto que se constituya al margen de la mimesis del mundo".⁴

In this chapter I intend to focus on one of Donoso's most sophisticated treatments of these issues, the novella «Gaspard de la Nuit». First published in 1973, it is an intriguing mixture of irony and lyricism that deserves greater recognition within the body of the Chilean author's work. In the past it has been treated rather dismissively by some critics. Donald Shaw, for example, felt that it was too derivative, suggesting that *Tres novelitas burguesas*, the collection of novellas from which it comes, can best be thought of as a work that fits into "una tradición rioplatense que Donoso había ya superado en *El Obsceno pájaro de la Noche*", a claim repeated by Philip Swanson.⁵ However, although there are undeniably aspects of the novella that parallel the work of writers like Borges and Cortázar that hardly amounts to being in bad company. My own view is that rather than being a derivative and undemanding fiction far surpassed by delirious experimentalism of the previous novel

⁴ Cornejo Polar, Antonio, "Ensayo sobre el sujeto y la representación en la literatura latinoamericana: algunas hipótesis", *Hispanérica*, 66, 1993, p. 8.

⁵ Shaw, Donald L., *Nueva narrativa hispanoamericana*, Madrid: Cátedra, 2a edición, 1983, p. 152, and Swanson, Philip, *Landmarks in Modern Latin American Fiction*, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 187.

«Gaspard e la Nuit» is a significant work whose ironic investigation of the problem of individual freedom not only tells us much about the view of the relationship between the individual and the group that emerges from the author's narrative as a whole but also affords us insights into other important areas of Donoso's fiction such as its abiding fascination with language and its ambiguous treatment of the problem of representation. In particular, the conflict it sets up between opposing views of subjectivity dramatises some of the tensions that lie at the heart of the debate over the meaning of the terms modernism and postmodernism, most notably, perhaps, through its staging of an intriguing struggle for supremacy between two narrative modes: on the one hand the irony demanded by Donoso's sardonic critique of conformism and on the other the lyricism that characterises his almost visionary evocation of a "mysterious region" that lies beyond the boundaries of rational experience.⁶

«Gaspard de la Nuit» is the last of the *Tres novelitas burguesas*, a triptych of novellas that mock the hypocrisy and intellectual pretensions of the dynamic new bourgeoisie that emerged in the late days of Franco's Spain.⁷ As such it partly represents an imaginative, fictional response to Donoso's experiences when he was living in Spain. One of the first things that strikes critics about this collection is the question of narrative technique. After the labyrinthine complexity of Donoso's massive *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* the *Tres Novelitas Burguesas* undoubtedly represent a return to more straightforward storytelling. Some critics have argued that this change in form reflects a change in the author's attitude to life. Philip Swanson, for example, claimed that the relative harmony in structure and style represents "a relaxation in intensity of Donoso's bleak existential vision".⁸ While Swanson's attempt to establish a link between Donoso's work and his vision of the author's changing philosophical position seems perilously reductive, there is no doubt that these stories are far more accessible than the previous novel. Indeed, the replacement of *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*'s typically modernist "grim reading" by a blackly humorous satire on the lifestyle and values of trendy would-be intellectuals in the Barcelona of the late sixties and early seventies

⁶ The term comes from «Paseo»: "La puerta de la biblioteca era demasiado maciza, demasiado pesada, y jamás supe si la tía Matilde, arrastrada por la perra blanca, se perdió en la ciudad, o en la muerte, o en una región más misteriosa que ambas." (*Los Mejores Cuentos*, p. 154).

⁷ *Tres novelitas burguesas*, Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1973. All page references are to this edition.

⁸ Swanson, Philip, *José Donoso: The «boom» and beyond*, Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1988, p. 106.

means that on a superficial level, at least, they can be read and enjoyed without the reader having to make too much interpretative effort.⁹

Even the bizarre story lines of «Chatanooga choochoo» and «Átomo verde número cinco», the first two novellas of the collection, can be assimilated by the reader as witty and satirical flights of fancy. The former focuses on the conflict between the male characters' ingrained chauvinism and their supposed adherence to an "inmoral moral nueva" (64) which promotes a "libertad antiburguesa en lo que se refiere a opiniones y a vida" (65), and highlights the persistence of a deep misogyny beneath the progressive veneer.¹⁰ The narrator, Anselmo Prieto, a doctor with a passion for painting, has a one-night-stand with the model Sylvia Corday which turns out very differently from the way he expected when she steals his penis. The story then wittily focuses on his attempts to make up for the loss without his wife or friends finding out and examines the importance of sexual identity and gender role-playing in his sense of self. By the end of the story there is a reversal of roles as Sylvia and Anselmo's wife, Magdalena, at first seemingly passive objects of male desire, are revealed to be the ones in control, literally dismantling their respective partners and exchanging their penises at will and the last part of the novella is narrated by a third person narrator who takes over from Anselmo at the moment when Magdalena takes him apart and puts the pieces away in a case.

In the second story a childless couple, Roberto and Marta, are in the process of furnishing the apartment that they intend to be their permanent home with the furniture and *objets d'art* that they hope will set the definitive seal of their personality on the place. The aim of this act of self-affirmation is to protect them from the fear of advancing age and childlessness. The decor, the antiques and Roberto's trendily titled abstract work "Átomo verde número cinco", are designed to hold up a barrier to time, decay and the absurdity of life, proclaiming that they exist and that their lives have some meaning. At the same time, however, the narrative satirises their pretension by pointing out that their choice of art works and decoration is as derivative as Roberto's painting. What they think of as the most authentic expression of their own taste is really the result of consultation with more

⁹ This term used to characterise modernist complexity comes from Richard Poirier's, "The difficulties of Modernism and the Modernism of Difficulty, *Images and Ideas in American Culture*, Arthur Edelstein ed., N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 1979, pp. 124-40.

¹⁰ An interesting perspective on the issue of chauvinism that extends the implied criticism to the text itself can be found in Norma Helsper's "Dismantling Sexual Politics in José Donoso's *Chatanooga Choochoo*", *Confluencia: Revista Hispánica de Cultura y Literatura*, Niwot, Connecticut, vol. 10, pt.2, 1995: 55-66.

sophisticated art lovers like Anselmo and the style guru Paolo. Donoso follows up this insight by punishing his bourgeois characters with a series of inexplicable accidents and absurd happenings that lead to the destruction of their dream. Their most prized possessions begin to go missing from the flat, a process of destitution that reaches the sinister yet comic extreme of Marta losing the top of her little finger in an accident. Their attempt to set up a refuge against the passing of time and the threat of meaninglessness falls apart and at the end of the story they are stranded in a Barcelona alley, clawing at each other like animals, bereft of the possessions that were an integral part of their sense of identity and with them of the veneer of culture on which they had placed such importance.

The satirical, antibourgeois elements of these stories are not difficult to read. Nonetheless, the collection represents rather more than a simple comedy of bourgeois manners. This is particularly true of the final novella, «Gaspard de la Nuit», which recounts its adolescent protagonist's struggle to escape from the demands that he conform. Named after Maurice Ravel's piano composition, a work which plays an important part in the development of narrative, the novella begins with the 16 year-old Mauricio's arrival to visit his mother Sylvia Corday, the model with whom Anselmo Prieto had an affair in «Chatanooga choochoo». Sylvia, associated through her attitudes and profession with a trendy, modernising Barcelona, hopes to impress on her adolescent son the superiority of her values to those of the traditional Spain, symbolised by the admonitions of his grandmother with whom he lives in the more traditional Madrid. Mauricio, however, refuses his mother's attempts to establish a relationship with him on her own terms and engages in an uncompromising and at times barely comprehensible attempt to break free from social conditioning. In a bizarre ending he apparently achieves his aim by exchanging identities with his double, a nameless vagrant whom he encounters by chance while walking in the woods around Vallvidrera. Through a mysterious transmogrification Mauricio assumes his mendicant counterpart's liberating state of non-identity while the latter goes back to Sylvia converted into the sort of malleable and materialistic youth that she had originally hoped her son would turn out to be. In Sharon Magnarelli's words the erstwhile *gamín* "proves to be the ideal son Sylvia needed to complete the cast of the bourgeois mother-son comedy".¹¹

¹¹Magnarelli, Sharon, *Understanding Donoso*, Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1993, p. 124.

Within this relatively simple narrative frame «Gaspard de la Nuit» relativises and complicates the idea of individual freedom, including in the process an intriguing series of references to previous artistic visions of the self. The tension between what can roughly be categorised as romantic, modernist and postmodernist concepts of the subject plays an important part in the novella, although it must be emphasised that these represent broad conceptual trends rather than tightly coherent philosophical schools of thought. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the rash of references to romanticism and the *fin de siècle* through the figures of Aloysius Bertrand and Maurice Ravel, two of the creators of previous versions of “Gaspard de la Nuit” that exert a significant influence on Donoso’s narrative. Mauricio’s exchange of identity with a vagrant at the end of the story, for example, represents the use of a stock romantic image that was already present in Bertrand’s prose poems with their description of the mysterious Gaspard encountered by his narrator as “un pauvre diable dont l’extérieur n’annonçait que misères et souffrances”.¹²

The ways of viewing subjectivity associated with romanticism and the *fin-de-siècle*, however, are filtered through the later modernist or avant-garde (postmodernist *avant la lettre*?) optic of surrealism, present, as Hortensia Morell noted in her study of surrealist influences on the novella, in its references to Antoni Gaudí.¹³ The reference to the *Ondine*, the water nymph after whom the first movement of Ravel’s composition is named, is especially evocative. Not only is it an obvious reference to both Bertrand and Ravel’s use of a stock romantic and symbolist image that had previously found its way into Spanish American *modernismo*¹⁴ but it was also used by the sculptor Isamu Noguchi, mentioned years later by Donoso in *La desesperanza*.¹⁵ Indeed, Noguchi’s sculpture “Undine” (1925) with its perfect proportions but generic and vacuously pretty face could have been the blueprint for some of the descriptions of Sylvia Corday.¹⁶ Furthermore, Noguchi’s fascinating artistic trajectory, embracing both Western and Oriental traditions, representational and abstract periods as well as close links with modernist artists like Brancusi, also suggests tantalising parallels with the novella’s conceptual framework. His “Undine” is subtitled “Nadja”, a name that inevitably

¹²Bertrand, Aloysius, *Gaspard de la Nuit: Fantaisies à la manière de Callot et Rembrandt*, Paris: La Colombe, 1962, p. 44.

¹³Morell, Hortensia, *José Donoso y el surrealismo: Tres novelitas burguesas*, Madrid: Pliegos, 1990, p. 98 (especially note 5).

¹⁴This figure was already present in the work of writers like José Asunción Silva, one of whose poems was entitled “Ondine”. Silva, José Asunción, *Intimidades*, Bogotá: Círculo de Lectores, 1984.

¹⁵Judit is described as “un Noguchi de buena época” (*La desesperanza*, p. 82).

¹⁶See Appendix Two.

brings to mind André Breton's work of the same name (1928) which is also echoed by important aspects of Donoso's novella. These parallels with surrealism and the oriental remind us that many of the ways of thinking about the self associated with these artistic and philosophical movements were rediscovered in the 1960s, a period when the ideals of individual autonomy, self-discovery and self-expression were taken up on a massive scale by what came to be known as the "counter-culture".

The perceived link between conventional language and social conformism is a case in point. Attacked both by surrealism and the 1960s counterculture, the normalising power of language is a major concern in much of Donoso's work and plays an important role in «Gaspard de la Nuit»'s treatment of the theme of freedom. The belief that the self is constituted through language is hardly a new idea but it is one that has received a great deal of attention from recent generations of literary critics. The linguist Émile Benveniste, an authority frequently cited by structuralists and post-structuralists alike, summed up this way of approaching subjectivity in his claim that: "C'est dans et par le langage que l'homme se constitue comme *sujet*; parce que le langage seul fonde en réalité, dans *sa* réalité qui est celle de l'être, le concept d'«ego»."¹⁷ Similar affirmations appear frequently in the writings on psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, an important figure for the surrealists who published extracts from his work in their magazine. Lacan, whose work came to the attention of many intellectuals and artists in the 1960s, consistently emphasised the primacy of language in the constitution of the self.

While Donoso's vision of the role played by language in the creation of subjectivity is not necessarily influenced in any direct way by the work of these thinkers it is nonetheless significant that such ideas were circulating in *l'air du temps* at the time he was writing the novella. There is no doubt that his work often deals with situations that reveal and disrupt his characters' unthinking, excessively conventional use of language and notes how as the words they have at their disposal fail them they are forced to reassess their lives. This desire to subvert conventional values by disrupting the patterns of conventional realist language stretches back at least as far as romanticism and works its way up to the present day through modernism, the avant-garde and postmodernism.¹⁸ Implicit in all of this is an attack on the conventional values of the bourgeoisie that brings us back to the consideration of the effect

¹⁷Benveniste, Emile, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, vol.1, Paris: Gallimard, 1966, p. 259

¹⁸For an interesting discussion of these issues see Peter Bürger's influential *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984, particularly the foreword by Jochen Schulte-Sasse.

on individuals of the sedimented values of the community in which they live. This was a highly significant issue in the 60s when important sectors of the middle-classes in the US and western Europe (and a significant number of other areas), especially the young, began to express a desire to break free from the demands and expectations of a conventional bourgeois background. Given the relative affluence of the period “doing your own thing” was not simply an ideal but a real possibility and the entrance of such ideas into the cultural mainstream through Hollywood films like *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967) or even *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969) meant that the old conventions were being challenged with such vigour that a new sort of consensus was beginning to emerge. The replacement of old conventions by new ones, and the way in which what starts out as a revolt against convention becomes a convention itself, is one of «Gaspard de la Nuit»’s most important themes.

As Benveniste’s words indicate, the relationship between language and individual freedom is ineluctably linked to a vision of the self. Talk of subjectivity is a particularly controversial area in modern literature and in recent years it has proved a favourite theoretical bone of contention. In his article on the status of the subject in Latin American literature Antonio Cornejo Polar claims that:

Es claro [...] que la experiencia y el concepto modernos del sujeto son indesligables de la imaginación y el pensamiento románticos, especialmente enfáticos, sobre este punto, en materias artísticas y literarias y en sus respectivos correlatos teórico-críticos. Un yo exaltado y hasta mudable, pero suficientemente firme y coherente como para regresar siempre sobre sí mismo: el “desborde de los sentimientos” jamás deja exhausta la fuente interior de la que surge, de la misma manera en que, por ejemplo, el casi obsesivo tópico del viaje, en el tiempo o en el espacio, jamás pone en cuestión la opción del regreso al punto originario (la subjetividad exacerbada) de ese desplazamiento. Querrámoslo o no, el romanticismo se convirtió, en esta y otras materias, en algo así como en el sentido común de la modernidad.¹⁹

Cornejo Polar’s choice of words –“algo así como el sentido común de la modernidad”– shows that his comment is not intended to be strictly accurate but his point is clear enough. The common-sense view of the subject that he refers to is the idea that there is some defining essence that makes us what we are, an essential stamp of identity that goes hand in hand with a belief in the intrinsic value of self-expression and self-affirmation. One of the intriguing features of Cornejo’s argument is that it points out the way that what started out as a romantic revolt against bourgeois convention was assimilated into mainstream

¹⁹Cornejo Polar, Antonio, “Ensayo sobre el sujeto y la representación en la literatura latinoamericana: algunas hipótesis”, *Hispanérica*, 66, 1993, p. 7.

culture and became one of the pillars of what in the most general sense can be thought of as bourgeois ideology. To find a contemporary example we only have to turn to consider the grotesque simulacrum of liberty that lies at the heart of the Hollywood culture industry's cult of the individual hero, or more rarely heroine, the maverick who bucks the system only to win out in the end.

In recent years the vision of the autonomous subject that Cornejo associates both with romanticism and modern bourgeois culture has been under consistent attack. Despite our intuitions about the continuity and relative stability of the personality a major preoccupation of literary critics and philosophers alike has been the extent to which the feeling that we have a relatively consistent identity is a conceptual unity imposed on the flux of experience. What might at a pinch be termed the common sense view of the unitary subject has been undermined on all sides. Linguists, philosophers, anthropologists, Freudians, Marxists, post-Marxists, structuralists and post-structuralists have all had their say in this debate, in the light of which any discussion of individual autonomy becomes increasingly complex. In this regard it is significant that an acute sense of the illusory nature of the unitary self seems to have been a factor in Donoso's mind when he was writing one of his most difficult works, *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*. His much quoted comments to Emir Rodríguez Monegal are worth citing at some length to establish this point:

Por otro lado, con mi experiencia psicoanalítica, o con mi experiencia siquiátrica incluso, hay como una duda muy fuerte, una no-creencia en la unidad de la personalidad humana. No creo -es decir, no puedo decir no creo porque no creo es una afirmación, y no me atrevo a afirmar nada- pero en fin, *creo que no creo* que exista una unidad psicológica en el ser humano. He tomado demasiadas veces píldoras; he fumado marihuana; he tomado demasiadas cosas; me han pasado demasiados accidentes psicológicos para creer que yo soy una persona. Soy treinta personas o no soy nadie.

Es decir, quiero corregirme: no soy ni una persona ni treinta, o soy una persona y soy treinta. (Quiero sacar la "o" de en medio y que sea "y").²⁰

Deshacer la unidad psicológica, ese mito horrible que nos hemos inventado y que hoy en día se está viendo que no vale siquiera la pena, nada de nada, hablar de él. Entonces, llegar a la conclusión y llegar a la vivencia de esta no-unidad del ser humano, causa horribles angustias y horribles dolores: significa la destrucción de "patterns" de vida, de esquemas de comportamiento; significa la necesidad de volver a construir mil cosas.²¹

²⁰"La Novela como 'Happening' ", *Revista Iberoamericana*, 76-77, Pittsburgh, 1971, p. 519.

²¹"La Novela como 'Happening' ", p.525. Donoso was equally emphatic on the same point in an interview with George McMurray at around the same time: "I am completely unconvinced of the solidity of the human personality", "Interview with George McMurray", *Hispania*, LVIII, 1975, p. 393.

Such scepticism about the unity of the personality brings to mind an important aspect of the ongoing argument about modernism and postmodernism. The problematic nature of the self is one of the aspects of the crisis of values to which both sensibilities can be regarded as a response. Despite the usual bitter disagreements, what seems to be a majority of theorists suggest that modernist works of art enshrine the uniqueness of the individual sensibility and see art as giving access to an absolute truth. Postmodernism, in contrast, undermines the mystique of the creative individual and regards subjectivity as radically contingent and conventional. The basic scepticism about the self of both structuralist and poststructuralist theorists has exerted a considerable influence here, a scepticism that literary theorist Jonathan Culler resumes in the following way:

The various disciplines engaged in semiotic analysis have treated as systems of conventions so much of what used to be the property of the thinking subject that any notion of man founded thereupon becomes problematic. As the self is broken down into component systems, deprived of its status as source and master of meaning, it comes to seem more and more like a construct: a result of systems of convention. Even the idea of personal identity emerges through the discourse of a culture: the "I" is not something given but comes to exist as that which is addressed by and relates to others.²²

The comments of Linda Hutcheon, one of the foremost theorists of the postmodern, further exemplify this position. Speaking of two works that she considers quintessentially postmodernist she claims that: "what novels like *The White Hotel* and *Midnight's Children* explicitly do is undermine the ideological assumptions behind what has been accepted as universal and trans-historical in our culture: the humanist notion of Man as a coherent and continuous subject."²³ Unlike some critics, however, Hutcheon focuses on what she regards as the decentering of the subject, not its dissolution. Quoting Derrida's claim that "[t]he subject is absolutely indispensable [...] I don't destroy the subject; I situate it",²⁴ she suggests that to "situate" the subject is to recognise "difference", to acknowledge the "ideology of the subject" and to suggest alternative notions of subjectivity. While the way in which this "decentering" is to be conceived is not entirely clear, Hutcheon suggests that

²² Culler, Jonathan, *The Pursuit of Signs*, London: Routledge, 1981, p. 33.

²³ Hutcheon, Linda, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, London: Routledge, p. 177. Hutcheon's statement begs the question of what we mean by "our" culture. To claim that subjectivity, or cultural ego ideals, if you like, change over time and from place to place and between genders, is a truism, but it is significant that Hutcheon does not deal with the processes that create the sense of continuity nor with the forces that fracture it. In this regard the homogenising, overgeneralising and essentially Eurocentric aspects of some postmodernist theorising becomes evident.

²⁴ *The Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 159

postmodernist novels “disperse [...] the notion of the individual, coherent subject and its relation to history, to social formation, and even to its own subconscious.”²⁵

Some theorists cast a particular political slant on the notion of autonomous selfhood. Peter Dews’ reading of Foucault, for example, establishes “a direct, unequivocal relation between subjectification and subjection”.²⁶ By this account, the idea of rational, autonomous selfhood amounts to little more than an ideologically loaded myth that furthers the goals of bourgeois society. For his part, Fredric Jameson, who for similar reasons seems to regard this assault on the idea of the subject as a positive development, also notes the trendiness of notions such as the “death of the subject”, describing it as a “fashionable theme” of contemporary theory.²⁷

Of course, just because Hutcheon and other theorists of postmodernism claim that such a view is the postmodernist does not make Donoso or his work postmodernist. Indeed, some of the formulations mentioned above are as opaque as they are suggestive and raise more questions than they answer. Nonetheless, an intriguing question raised by «Gaspard de la Nuit» is whether or not its overall structure suggests a belief in an essential personality. By the same token, it is interesting to consider whether the novella seems to be the product of a modernist belief in the absolute nature of a truth attainable through art or whether, on the contrary, it corresponds to a postmodernist belief that the only absolute is the partial nature of all truths.

«Gaspard de la Nuit»’s treatment of the question of individual freedom really begins with its presentation of Sylvia Corday, the model who is such a disturbing influence on Anselmo in «Chatanooga choochoo». This, however, is a very different Sylvia from the one encountered by the unfortunate doctor. In fact, it is as if we were dealing with two different women. The Sylvia of «Chatanooga choochoo» is an enchantress who uses her supernatural gifts to subjugate men, whereas apart from the occasional identification of her with the water nymph Ondine, «Gaspard de la Nuit»’s version of Sylvia lacks any exceptional powers. For example, her ability to transform herself is limited to that naturally required by her job as a model and as such is a response to demands from without rather than a strategy that gives her power over others. Thus while «Chatanooga choochoo»’s Sylvia is a sophisticated

²⁵ *A poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 166.

²⁶ Dews, Peter, “Power and subjectivity in Foucault”, *New Left Review*, March/April 1984, p. 87.

²⁷ Jameson, Fredric, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”, *New Left Review* 146, 1984, p. 63

manipulator of others' destinies «Gaspard de la Nuit»'s version turns out to be a conformist who feels fearful when she encounters a situation outside the bounds of her previous experience. Sharon Magnarelli comments on this disparity, on the one hand noting that it is partly due to the fact that Anselmo projects his fantasies on to Sylvia while on the other claiming that the way the character is presented is a commentary on the arbitrary nature of the sign that exemplifies the Barthesian notion that a literary character is not a representation of a person but the agglomeration of a series of attributes around a central signifier, the name.²⁸ Her first point seems to be much the more useful in an attempt to understand *TNB* because the play of perspectives is such a crucial factor in all three stories. Indeed, the satirical aspect of the collection lies in the way Donoso takes us into the minds of his bourgeois characters in order to reveal their hopes, fears and desires, suggesting in the process an ironic reassessment of their values. Thus a great deal of «Chatanooga Choochoo»'s humour derives from what Anselmo's view of Sylvia tells us about his fears and insecurities, even if the final flight of narrative fancy leaves his point of view, while the ironic reevaluation of Sylvia's own perspective is one of the key features of «Gaspard de la Nuit».

This owes much to the fact that the greater part of the novella is narrated in the free indirect style, a technique frequently used by Donoso. This term is a translation of the "style indirect libre" generally associated with Flaubert although as Hortensia Morell, following Dorrit Cohn, points out in her study of «Átomo verde número cinco» Jane Austen used the technique extensively in works like *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), written long before Flaubert's novels.²⁹ Morell includes Cohn's definition of this technique as a process in which:

the reflecting mind is presented in the third person and in the customary epic tense of the narration, the preterite. But at the same time the syntactical structure is that of direct discourse, with the rhythms of spoken language rendered through exclamations, rhetorical questions, repetitions... and exaggerated emphases.³⁰

In other words, this procedure provides us with what can be thought of as a representation of the characters' thoughts without effecting a complete identification with them. Thus although there is a significant area in which the point of view of the narrative and that of the characters diverge, what we suppose to be the characteristic features of their inner

²⁸Magnarelli, Sharon, *Understanding Donoso*, p. 131.

²⁹José Donoso y el surrealismo: *Tres novelitas burguesas*, Madrid: Pliegos, 1990, p. 70.

³⁰Cohn, Dorrit, "Narrated monologue: Definition of a Fictional Style", *Comparative Literature*, 2 (Spring, 1960), 97-112. Cited by Morell on p. 70.

discourse appear in the narrative. The novella's important opening presentation of Sylvia's reflections on her son's arrival to spend three months with her is a good example of the use of this subtly ambiguous technique:

Sylvia Corday dejó junto a ella, sobre los cojines de fieltro escarlata de su inmenso sofá, el espejo y las pinzas con que se estaba depilando las cejas, y tomó el último *Vogue* italiano para estudiar la colección de Valentino, que este año era sencillamente sensacional. (191)

When we read that Valentino's collection is "sencillamente sensacional" we assume that we are to assume that these are Sylvia's words. As the novella progresses it seems to be observing basically realist conventions as the narrative adopts the free indirect style, characterised by the pauses, repetitions and rhetorical questions that mark Sylvia's discourse, in order to represent her thought processes. Despite the initial preterites and imperfects the moment of narration moves close to the present of what we imagine to be Sylvia's thoughts through temporal markers such as "hoy domingo", "ahora" (191) and later "anoche" (191/192). The value judgements too are usually Sylvia's ("su flamante papel de madre", 191), a detail that is central to the development of the story because it reveals her mixed feelings about Mauricio's impending arrival which threatens to impose what she considers to be arbitrary restrictions on her liberated lifestyle ("amenazaba con ordenar en forma artificial la vida hasta ahora tan agradablemente libre de Sylvia y Ramón", 191). The use of expressions that seem to represent the character's idiosyncratic use of language ("chiquillo"/ "abuelis", 191) and the informal style ("así, sin más"/ "era verdad", [both 191] and "y para qué decir a ella"/ "¿qué podía hacer ella?", [both 192]) combine to give the impression that we are following a character's thoughts. For example, the effect of the last phrase quoted in parentheses is to evoke her thought "What could I do?"

The first part of the novella, then, mimics Sylvia's inner discourse, and allows us a degree of intimacy with her as we share the thoughts and feelings that betray her system of values. We start with her sitting on the sofa in her flat, putting aside the tweezers and mirror and picking up her copy of *Vogue* (191) and then follow her thoughts back in time as she reflects on the first four days of Mauricio's visit. We are then brought back to the narrative's point of departure with another reference to the tweezers (197) before moving on to Sylvia's conversation with her cleaning lady, señora Presen, and her telephone conversation with her partner Ramón. At this point we observe her from the outside and hear only her side of the conversation, inferring Ramón's words from her replies. However, while most of this section

is only one step away from what seems to be a direct presentation of the character's stream of consciousness the distance inherent in the use of the third person gives rise to a degree of ambiguity as the narrative alternately homes in on and then veers away from her point of view. As a result there are times when we cannot be sure whether the expressions used are the narrator's or whether they are supposed to represent the characters' idiosyncratic mode of expression.

As well as Sylvia's appreciation of events there are several examples of what can be construed as narratorial comment on her. An interesting example is the description of her image as a model which comes in the middle of a passage in which she justifies her decision to abandon her son:

Nadie podía exigirle que sacrificara por Mauricio –al que había visto intermitentemente y por breves períodos durante los últimos cinco años– una carrera que estaba a punto de proyectarse en un plano internacional: *su imagen, luciendo lujosos atuendos en las páginas de las revistas de moda, era como una cantidad de bellas máscaras distintas que tenían por denominador común un rostro impreciso que era, sin duda, uno de los más conocidos de su generación*" (194, my italics).

It is difficult to imagine the italicised section as corresponding to a personal insight on the part of the character. Instead it seems to be both an important expositional comment that helps us understand Sylvia's social status and also a comment on an aspect of her personality that will assume an increasingly ironic significance as the novella develops. Within the overall context of the *Tres Novelitas Burguesas* it harks back to Anselmo's perception of her as a protean figure in «Chatanooga choochoo».

Embedded in the third person narrative are passages of dialogue. Their appearance in the midst of an extended piece in the free indirect style means that their status is ambiguous. It is not clear whether they are to be taken as precise versions of previous conversations or whether they represent encounters that Sylvia is going over in her mind. Ultimately, however, it does not really matter whether the dialogue is presented directly by the narrator or filtered through a character's consciousness because it soon becomes obvious that the narrative as a whole is being manipulated from an ironic perspective that increasingly undermines the character's credibility.

As we follow Sylvia's musings we learn a great deal about her but how we interpret this information largely depends on the extent to which we read the novella's treatment of her as ironic. This is particularly significant because the opening section of the novella establishes the framework for the conflict of values between mother and son that dominates

the story as a whole. The question of irony is central to our understanding of the novella and brings us back to an interesting aspect of Dorrit Cohn's study that Morell notes with regard to «Átomo verde número cinco» but does not follow up in her discussion of «Gaspard de la Nuit».³¹ Cohn claims that there are essentially two different modes in the use of the indirect free style, the lyric and the ironic:

imitation implies two basic possibilities: fusion with the subject, in which the actor identifies with, "becomes" the person he imitates; or distance from the subject, a mock identification that leads to caricature. Accordingly there are two divergent directions open to the narrated monologue, depending on which imitative tendency prevails: the lyric or the ironic (Morell, 70).³²

The way readers trace this oscillation between the narrative's sympathetic approbation of the characters and its ironic reappraisal of them is perhaps the decisive interpretative moment in the reading of «Gaspard de la Nuit». This becomes particularly apparent as the narrative perspective changes and adopts Mauricio's point of view. Would we be right to speak of a straightforwardly ironic presentation of Sylvia that is followed by a lyrical one of Mauricio? Or are both of these perspectives to some degree ironised?

Given Donoso's magisterial manipulation of the point of view in *TNB* it is not surprising that critics have not always agreed on this central issue. In fact, the way the ironic effects are produced has not really been confronted directly by critics. There is certainly much to be said for Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat's suggestion, echoed by Philip Swanson, that the ironic reappraisal of Sylvia comes about as a result of the juxtaposition of her point of view with that of her son.³³ However, Swanson's claim that "[t]he juxtaposition of these two outlooks allows the reader to compare both attitudes to life: he will reach his conclusions without the need for direct authorial intervention, the message being put across by an almost imperceptible manipulation of the story-line" suggests that there is more to be said here.³⁴ One of the problems with the idea that the treatment of Sylvia is revealed to be ironic through its juxtaposition with her son's point of view is that we could only interpret it as such in retrospect. This does not account for the fact that the treatment of the vacuous mannequin is clearly ironic from the very beginning of the novella.

³¹Morell, Hortensia, *José Donoso y el surrealismo: Tres novelitas burguesas*, p. 70, note 12.

³²The original quotation is from Cohn, "Narrated monologue: Definition of a Fictional Style", pp. 110-111.

³³Gutiérrez Mouat, Ricardo, *Impostura y impostación*, Gaithersburg: Hispamérica, 1983, p. 62.

³⁴Philip Swanson, *José Donoso: The Boom and beyond*, Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1986, pp. 107-108.

Where, then, we might ask, does this irony come from? Although we have an approximation of her thoughts Sylvia is clearly not the ironist. She does not, in the main, see the inconsistencies in her discourse and she is certainly not the source of a wittily self-deprecating discourse. Instead the narrative allows her to speak –although this is a “set-up” in so far as the character is made to speak as the author wishes– in such a way that the reader is able to reinterpret what she says in the light of what she does, a process that we shall be looking at in detail below.

However, apart from the obvious contradictions in the characters’ discourse that function as ironic markers, the way this potentially ironic discourse is interpreted also depends in great measure on our own personal value judgements plus what we might know or guess about Donoso’s beliefs and possible ironic intent. In this respect the use of irony is interesting because it so clearly involves both the reader and the author behind the text. This added interpretative burden, placed squarely on the shoulders of the reader, is what makes literary irony so notoriously complex. Even in those cases where we think that the irony is unintentional and the status of the narrative is therefore similar to that of Sylvia’s unconsciously ironic discourse we still have to take the author’s attitude into consideration.

A further complication is that we are not dealing here with a comparatively simple case of saying one thing and meaning another (antiphrasis). «Gaspard de la Nuit» asks its readers to come to some important conclusions about the systems of values and ways of life that the characters represent, a process that has more in common with Sperber and Wilson’s notion of echoic irony, the use of someone else’s utterance in a context which does not endorse what was originally said.³⁵ The problem is that the general cultural context in which any work of art is received is extremely broad. «Gaspard de la Nuit»’s irony, therefore, highlights the truism that our prejudices and interpretative assumptions have a decisive influence on our reading

As is so often the case with subtly ironic works, then, we cannot be sure we are right. We might be reading as ironic something that was devoid of any ironic intent on the part of the author or taking seriously what was intended to be read ironically. This is why Linda Hutcheon stresses that the role of the interpreter in the attribution of irony is just as important as that of the writer or speaker.³⁶ In this respect irony is amongst the most challenging of

³⁵Wilson, Deirdre and Sperber, Dan, *Relevance*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, pp. 238-239.

³⁶Hutcheon, Linda, *Irony's Edge*, London: Routledge, 1994, p.12. It is also worth bearing in mind that Hutcheon thinks of irony not as a case of saying “not this but that” but as “something that happens in the space between the

literary devices because the reader's linguistic, cultural and ideological competence is called into question.

That said, there is a strong critical consensus that recognises the presence of a basic level of irony in the initial presentation of Sylvia. Most critics seem to agree that the first part of the novella has a dual function, namely to focus on the contradictions between Sylvia's beliefs and actions, thus revealing the hollowness of her values, and to create the context within which the most important elements of the novella will be developed.³⁷ The third person presentation of Sylvia's inner monologue therefore merits close attention.

In fact, as we follow her reaction to Mauricio's arrival we encounter a discourse riven by a basic polarity, namely the conflict of values between Barcelona's new, cosmopolitan bourgeoisie and the traditional, retrograde bourgeoisie of Madrid. This situates the events in the period when the cracks in the Francoist façade began to become ever more obvious as a dimension of cultural and economic freedom was found prior to the political democratisation of the late 70s and early 80s. Sylvia represents the emergence of a modernising Spanish bourgeoisie and it is therefore entirely understandable that the contraposition of the old and the new should form the valorative crux of her beliefs. The rhetoric that characterises her discourse is designed to shore up her liberated position and denigrate what she perceives as the conventional attitudes of her ex-husband and his family. She regards herself as an independent woman who places a lot of emphasis on her career, one of the causes of her divorce from a husband who wanted her to stay at home and look after their child. We also learn that her refusal to have another child and her decision to take the pill were regarded as more scandalous than any extramarital affair (193), a fact that points not only to the backwardness but also the double standards of the *milieu* in which she used to live. She has come to regard the world she left behind as hopelessly antiquated, thinking of the scenes at the time of her separation as "benaventianas, increíblemente pasadas de moda" (193). After her divorce she moved to the more liberal Barcelona where she lives with Ramón, a successful architect. While she sees her own values as cosmopolitan those of the world she has left behind are at best folkloric, representing "una decadencia opulenta más cercana al folklore que a lo internacional" (192). These are the values that she labels as conventional

said and the unsaid", (p.12) that is to say, something relational rather than substitutional.

³⁷With regard to Sylvia and «Chatanooga choochoo»'s Anselmo, Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat claims that "los discursos sociales enunciados por estos personajes son minados por la ironía, no porque sean inválidos en sí sino porque hay una incongruencia entre el discurso y el sujeto que lo enuncia" (*Impostura e impostación*, p. 61)

when she refers to the wedding party that Ramón's ex-partner Jaime Romeu throws for his daughter as an example of "ese ambiente convencionalísimo" (192). She thinks that this claustrophobic world, also associated with her ex-husband, is too limited to offer anything either to her or to Ramón partly because "[e]n ese mundo ya no entendían a Ramón ni su arquitectura" (192).

These early glimpses insights into Sylvia's system of values, therefore, suggest that she and Ramón have escaped from the expectations of the traditional bourgeoisie by identifying themselves with a dynamic and apparently self-confident sector of the middle-class that rejects the ways of the past and looks abroad for inspiration. This division between the modern and the traditional is established and reinforced in all sorts of ways. Even such trivia as the restaurants and clubs the characters frequent and their taste in clothes and music mark out the territorial boundaries between old and new. As they move through this divided world Sylvia and her partner take pleasure in mocking the retro and right-wing attitudes of the class from which they came as Ramón demonstrates when he scandalises the other wedding guests by singing the International, an absurd gesture that provokes little response from a stuffy group of traditionalists the majority of whom do not even recognise the emblematic rallying call of the left (192).

In some respects, then, Sylvia seems to be a positive character. She has, after all, successfully rebelled against the narrow-minded conservatism of her past, something that Donoso's stories generally present in a positive light. She has achieved economic independence, anathema to her ex-husband, by modelling herself on a very different image of womanhood from that which prevails in the social group from which she came. When she presents her rejection of the stifling role of housewife and mother as an act of individual sovereignty, "el uso de su libertad individual" (193), we are therefore inclined to agree with her, especially when she notes that as such it is far more threatening to the status quo than the prospect of her having affairs with other men. In this at least Sylvia is presented as a perceptive character who recognises that while the system of values she rejects can accommodate infidelity the direct challenge of the independent woman is an entirely different matter. In all of these respects her views represent a liberalism of the sort that Franco condemned.

However, as Donoso made clear in an interview a year before the publication of *TNB* he regarded the 'progressive' values of the liberal bourgeoisie as also being largely false:

La sociedad tradicional se desmorona y la progresista, en gran medida, es falsa. Y la que no es ¿dónde se encuentra? Todo ahoga, todo aprieta.³⁸

Although this anecdotal evidence is not compelling in itself it is nonetheless not entirely surprising that our sympathy for Sylvia in the conflict with her divorced husband's family is subtly undermined. Sylvia describes her life with Ramón as "agradablemente libre" (191) and in the contemporary Spanish setting this seems to make sense. The likes of Sylvia were certainly enjoying the beginnings of a very real freedom that was a major improvement on the conservative values of the traditional bourgeoisie, influenced as they were by the sterile dogmas of Franco's Spain. However, although the novella's immediate socio-historical background is significant it soon becomes apparent that it contains a more general commentary about the notions of freedom and conformity. In fact, «Gaspard de la Nuit»'s real focus is not on the soft target of the conservative middle-classes but on something more complicated. What this is begins to emerge as the irony of the narrative undermines Sylvia's credibility by highlighting the inconsistencies in her discourse and the simplistic nature of her system of values.

«Gaspard de la Nuit»'s initial establishment of the framework for the conflict that will come to dominate the story depends on its presentation of what we could call Sylvia's "ideology of the subject".³⁹ We could define this as the set of assumptions about the nature of subjectivity that become apparent as the narrative allows us to follow her thoughts. A central part of this is Sylvia's view of individual freedom, evident in her self-congratulatory rhetoric as she proclaims her personal autonomy. She is not entirely unperceptive, however, as she recognises that identity is both a continual process of transformation and, at least in part, a matter of choosing between a series of social roles to be played. She notes that in the past "tampoco existía la Sylvia Corday de ahora" (193) and contrasts her current sense of identity with "la muchacha romántica que era ella al salir de las monjas" (198), a phrase that acquires an ironic flavour in the course of the novella as the multiple resonances of the word "romantic" begin to make themselves felt. The idea of self-transformation is obviously extremely important to her and she sees herself as an example of what can be achieved through determination and strength of will. She has rejected the role of wife and mother that was all that her ex-husband's traditional world had to offer and feels confident that she is on the way to achieving the state of personal autonomy to which she aspired when she refused to

³⁸Interview with Miguel Morrea Errea, *Triunfo*, (Madrid) no.497, 8 de abril, 1972, p. 38.

³⁹*A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 159.

give up her job and held firm to her belief that “sólo por medio de su trabajo encontraría por fin su independencia, su dignidad personal” (193).

It is therefore understandable that when Mauricio arrives his plain clothes speak to her of the sort of conventional, repressive environment that she associates with the Madrid she has come to loathe. She sees in them a lamentable lack of imagination which she contrasts with the “gusto, deseo de conquista o de autoafirmación” (195) that she would like to see in her son. The prominent place given to the idea of self-affirmation suggests that for Sylvia a firm, recognisable identity is an unproblematic entity that we all somehow have. From such a perspective the self is not in question but simply needs to find ways of expressing itself without fear, an impression reinforced by her approving use of terms like “fantasía” and “creatividad” (195) which are associated with imaginative self-expression. Just like the idea of the self, however, the status of these terms is not questioned. Instead they seem to spring naturally from a strong sense of identity. It does not occur to her that her son might be unsure of himself or that he might be involved in a typically adolescent quest to discover or create an acceptable personality. In fact, what disturbs her at first sight, although this impression does not last long, is the suspicion that her son’s values might turn out to be as conventional as his clothes (“por si resultaba tan convencional de ideas como de indumentaria”, 195). She is disappointed that he is not interested in anything “raro”, “nuevo” or “atrevido” (232) and wants him to let his hair down, buy hippy-ish clothes and hip jewellery (196), to go out and have fun, meet girls, or boys—as she says, she has no prejudices in this area (“Soy muy comprensiva”, 196)—and generally break free from the repressive constraints of his conventional upbringing. She sees her role in all of this as that of the relaxed, liberal mother who allows her son to come and go as he pleases, and who resists the temptation to intrude on his privacy (“no estaba dispuesta a ser una de esas madres que hurgan en los secretos de sus hijos”, 202). All of these features enable her to feel that she is capable of offering him “un mundo más libre que el mundo que le había proporcionado abuelis en Madrid” (196).

The dichotomy between the repressively conventional and the spontaneous or imaginative is easy enough to read in the context of the period. Even if it is the much more limited version associated with Franco’s Spain, the atmosphere of the sixties permeates the novella as Donoso probes the self-deception of those who preach the value of self-expression and tolerance while failing to live out these ideals. “Conventional” and “spontaneous”, therefore, can be separated along familiar lines. Sylvia’s use of them shows that she belongs

to what Norma Hesper refers to as the “hipoisie”,⁴⁰ the progressive sector of the bourgeoisie that has been influenced by the values of the 60s counterculture for which self-expression and a rejection of bourgeois conventionalism were key concepts. The idea of a counterculture may sound spurious with regard to Spain in the late sixties but the *Tres Novelitas Burguesas*’ privileged intellectuals ape the passing trends and ideological tics of the US and western Europe. As we have seen, one of Sylvia’s shibboleths is the primacy of a modernising, cosmopolitan culture over a backward autochthonous one. Politically liberal and sexually liberated, Donoso’s bourgeois are cultural consumers who are finally in a position to satisfy an appetite whetted by years of deprivation in the drab backwater of Franco’s Spain. In this respect, Donoso’s sardonic novellas chart the emergence of one of the stereotypes of “la transición”, the Spanish “progre”, a product of the increasingly liberal economic and cultural climate of the “desarrollo”.⁴¹

As Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat rightly points out one of the characteristics of Donoso’s progressive bourgeoisie is the pretence that it is not bourgeois.⁴² In the first two novellas the term is used negatively to refer to the traditional bourgeoisie while the protagonists, themselves bourgeois professionals, pose as artists and intellectuals. For example, «Chatanooga choochoo»’s narrator Anselmo is a doctor with a passion for painting, an art form in which Roberto Mora, the dentist protagonist of «Átomo verde número cinco» also dabbles rather less successfully. Sylvia and Ramón are in a more ambiguous position as their respective professions as model and architect have more glamorous and artistic connotations but they share the same desire to play down their bourgeois background. There is, for example, a swiftly repressed insight in Sylvia’s reflections on their appearance at Jaime Romeu’s daughter’s wedding: “Pero anoche se había divertido francamente en casa de los Romeu porque fue como efectuar una incursión en territorio desconocido y hostil... o por lo menos olvidado” (197). In the first part of the phrase there is the pretence that she is somehow alien to these *bons bourgeois* while the second part quietly recognises that this is precisely where she came from. This recognition is implicit throughout Sylvia’s discourse in the course of which we are reminded that both her and Ramón’s roots lie in the traditional bourgeoisie they now reject. They have both had to endure the Catholic school system’s

⁴⁰“Dismantling Sexual Politics”, p. 57.

⁴¹Jacques Joset talks of “cierta burguesía falsamente ‘progre’ de principios de los setenta”: “Artes, artistas, artefactos en la ‘Trilogía española’”, *Historias cruzadas de novelas hispanoamericanas*, Iberoamericana, Madrid, 1995, p. 166.

⁴²*Impostura e impostación*, p. 69.

attempt to inculcate its repressive values, Sylvia with the “monjas” (198) and Ramón with the Jesuits (192). More significantly, however, there is the slightest of hints that they do occasionally have to use these past contacts, “su carta de ciudadanía allí consistía en parentescos rara vez reclamados” (192). These links may rarely be used, perhaps, but that they are not entirely forgotten is evident in the fact that Ramón’s successful business was started with an old school friend as partner.

Although she might not like to admit it Sylvia’s relative proximity to the world she has left is not surprising. More importantly, however, the novella as a whole questions the extent to which she has jettisoned the old values. Thus although she mouths feminist clichés she is taken aback when Mauricio sews a button on to his shirt himself:

—Es la disciplina de su abuela. Para que llegado el caso se las sepa arreglar solo, dice. ¡Qué tontería! (200)

She is used to having servants to do her chores and despite her modish sixties rhetoric with its rejection of the authority of conventional values she is still very much a snob, appalled at the prospect of having anything to do with the working class. Her liberal politics, earnestly professed to her son, (“Pero, Mauricio, dime, ¿no hay en el mundo contemporáneo problemas tremendos, pasiones e injusticias terribles, que nos impiden quedarnos en lo elegante... en lo fino?”, 228) and her claim that she and those like her are committed to confronting contemporary social issues (“estamos profundamente comprometidos con los problemas contemporáneos”, 228) supposedly have a radical edge. However, her scorn for her ex-mother-in-law’s three Andalusian maids (207) does not stop her having a cleaner, *Tres Novelitas Burguesas*’ ubiquitous señora Presen, whom she treats with the condescension that we would expect from any *bourgeoise*. For her part, Señora Presen deferentially refers to her as “señorita” and to her son as “señorito” (198), terms which Sylvia reinforces by using them herself: “¿Tomó el desayuno el señorito?” (198). All of this exposes her supposed social concern as nothing more than vacuous radical chic.

In fact, for Sylvia the cleaner is little more than a utility who belongs to Magdalena (“la famosa señora Presen de Magdalena —se la había «prestado» mientras estuviera Mauricio—”, 201), a patronising and dehumanising view reinforced by her genteel horror at the thought of any parallel being made between her attractive son and “los rubicundos nietos de la señora Presen, con su contextura de plumavit y sus manotas como de masa mal

horneada" (199).⁴³ As soon as she speaks to her she is irritated by the woman's uneducated manner and treats her with discourteous arrogance: "Sylvia, arrepentida de haber cedido ante el deseo de hablar con la señora Presen, ahora la cortó" (200). All of this speaks volumes about her snobbery and when she hears "el golpecito hipocritón de esa bruja" (199) on Mauricio's door she is hearing the echo of her own prejudice. For all her professed liberalism, then, Sylvia, like most of Donoso's bourgeois characters, is constantly prey to the suspicion that the servility of the lower orders is really only a façade hiding the envy and malice of the dispossessed.

The inconsistencies in Sylvia's proclamation of independence, therefore, lie not in her rejection of her previous life but in her failure to understand the implications of her confidently expressed belief in personal freedom. In her current incarnation as a figurehead of the modernising middle-classes not only does she fail to recognise, at least overtly, the factors that inhibit her claim to autonomy but she also shows no understanding of the ways in which the demands she makes on others impinge on their liberty.

It is in the distinction between conventional and spontaneous forms of behaviour that her claims to freedom ring most hollow. As we have seen, one of her first reservations about Mauricio's arrival is her fear that it would impose an artificial order on her life (191). This concern implies that she sees her normal behaviour either as natural or spontaneously organised, an echo of Roberto's feeling in «Átomo verde número cinco» that he is right in not going to the Fischer-Diskau concert because "hiciera lo que hiciera debía nacer de un fuerte impulso interior o no hacerlo..." (111/112). These beliefs show the influence of the counterculture's valorisation of impulse and the irrational on *Tres Novelitas Burguesas*' trendy professionals. They clearly do not fit in with the highly structured lives of bourgeois professionals but instead correspond to the fantasy of progressive anti-bourgeois libertarianism into which they enjoy projecting themselves. Sylvia not only works hard and plans for the future but also likes to structure her leisure time with projects such as the visit to Cadaqués, hardly the anarchic "go with the flow" spontaneity of the Kesey and Leary dominated counterculture.

We have seen that for Sylvia the "conventional" that stands in contrast to this bogus belief in spontaneity refers to anything that reflects the conservative values and *mores* of the

⁴³ Anselmo uses precisely the same terminology to refer to señora Presen, who was lent to them by Marta: "me sentía absolutamente incapaz incluso de hablar con la asistenta que Marta le había «prestado» a Magdalena mientras la nuestra regresaba de su visita anual a sus padres en Jaén." («Chatanooga choochoo», p. 67).

traditional middle-classes in Franco's Spain. As such it is a pejorative term, connoting rigidity of thought and obedience, mere conformism next to the freedom associated with the new forms of life that she has embraced. Yet although she has clearly exercised a significant degree of autonomy by reinventing herself as one of Barcelona's beautiful people critics like McMurray rightly note that she is now subject to a set of demands that in their way are as tyrannical as those she has left behind.⁴⁴ Philip Swanson sums this up as her "pseudo-liberal neo-conventionalism".⁴⁵ In fact, her job as a model suggests her true relationship with convention and it is not coincidental that she first appears agonising over the need to pluck her eyebrows, a seemingly trivial act that shows just how far her actions are dependent on the whims of fashion (191). Whereas «Chatanooga choochoo»'s Sylvia, seen through the eyes of Anselmo, achieves power over others by becoming the incarnation of their desires «Gaspard de la Nuit»'s Sylvia is a slave to those very desires, an embodiment of other people's fantasies.

Here Sylvia's professional need to wear masks and assume personae is extended to the way in which she thinks about the social roles she is required to play, particularly that of mother, a part that starts out as "su flamante papel de madre" (191) and very quickly degenerates into "la odiosa comedia madre-hijo" (199). These, like her previous description of herself as a "muchacha romántica", are social stereotypes, not individual, self-shaped identities. Similarly, her hopes that her son will express the fantasy and creativity that she claims to value by going out and buying the latest apparel have little to do with either imagination or freedom and a lot to do with conformity to the generalised rush for novelty that characterises her group's determination to distinguish itself from the traditional sectors of the middle-class: "mañana lunes lo llevaría a las boutiques, le compraría pantalones ceñidos, cinturones fantásticos, alguna camisa marroquí, y dijés misteriosos para que lucieran sobre su bello pecho adolescente" (196).

Far from escaping from convention, then, she and those like her have simply created a new orthodoxy to obey. To an extent, of course, it is only natural that conventions should change. However, in the light of her claims to freedom the new orthodoxy is revealed to be suspect because it demands an uncritical acceptance of glib polarities such as that between self-expression and conformism. It soon becomes apparent that Sylvia and Ramón are tied to

⁴⁴ See McMurray, *José Donoso*, Boston: Twayne, 1979, p. 146.

⁴⁵ *The Boom and beyond*, p. 107.

this set of beliefs without seeming to realise it. Fashion, the search for novelty for its own sake, has replaced tradition as the overriding imperative. While this clearly obeys the cultural logic of the last years of the Franco dictatorship the new conformism is revealed to be essentially empty. Its superficial nature is exemplified by the group's need to consume approved cultural artifacts. Just as *El Dique Flotante* and *S'Agaró* are symbols of the traditional bourgeoisie's bad taste, indicators of the mass of the middle-class's failure to keep up with lifestyle revolutionaries like Sylvia and Ramón, so the need to listen to jazz as well as classical music is one of the norms that cements the progressive bourgeoisie's sense of cultural community. The telephone conversation at the end of the introductory section in which Sylvia tries to explain her feelings of anxiety about Mauricio's behaviour to Ramón highlights the existence of this orthodoxy that they both feel obliged to satisfy:

¡Si sólo supiera qué es lo que estaba silbando esta mañana sería una pista! Si tú pudieras oírlo... Si sé que no entiendes demasiado en música y que te gusta lo que le gusta a todo el mundo, los barrocos y esas cosas y no mucho, tampoco... Claro, no te dedicas... claro, eres un ser civilizado y te tienen que gustar esas cosas como también el jazz y el pop... pero no creo que conozcas esto. Debe ser algo *muy* raro...(209)

The self-justification at the heart of this conversation is characteristic of Sylvia's conformism. Both she and Ramón want to belong and fear the exclusion entailed by any attempt to flout the rules of the group. Although we do not know exactly what Ramón says, Sylvia's comments allow us to imagine him scrambling at the other end of the line to justify his lack of knowledge, afraid that in some way he will be judged out of step with the current demands of intellectual fashion.⁴⁶

This ironic reassessment of Sylvia's discourse implicitly contrasts her claims to freedom with her unwillingness to break the rules of the group. Her belief in individual freedom seems decidedly hollow when she is prepared to define what being 'civilised' is in such a limited way or when she is quite happy to accept 'what everyone likes' in music. This 'everyone', of course, is exclusive (it certainly would not include señora Presen, for example) and refers only to the people that matter, the self-appointed beautiful people of Barcelona. For Sylvia and her group artists, authors and composers are either "in" or "out" according to the dictates of cultural fashion, just as a colour or a particular style of dress might dominate a

⁴⁶In «Chatanooga choochoo» Anselmo rails against this sort of intellectual conformism of which he also is a victim: "la idea de tener que leer a Hesse otra vez, a estas alturas, que era lo que todo el mundo estaba haciendo, simplemente me postraba" («Chatanooga choochoo», p. 72)

summer or winter season. Such arbitrary distinctions are ultimately established by style gurus like Paolo who in this particular case rejects Ravel as unfashionable:

Es un gran músico, claro. Pero uno ya casi no le pone atención. Se oye hablar poco de él ahora.
(228)

The irrational recourse to anonymous authority that is a recurrent feature of Donoso's work is exemplified here by Paolo's use of "uno" and the reflexive "Se oye", impersonal expressions that supposedly establish the objectivity of the collective judgement of Ravel. Sylvia's attitude to the composer reveals her obsession with passing trends and underlines the limitations of what we could describe as her cultural competence. It also confirms her tendency to catalogue people in generic terms, rather than as individuals, belying her supposed individualism:

Yo no conozco a nadie que le interese Ravel. A los muchachos de tu edad generalmente les interesa el pop... el jazz. Y Ravel... bueno, claro a todos nos interesa la buena música... los barrocos, los cuartetos de Beethoven... bueno, sabemos que todo eso es muy interesante, aunque la verdad es que yo casi no tengo tiempo ni tranquilidad para... (227).

The final part of this rambling utterance undermines her claim that she knows that 'all of this is very interesting'. Significantly, she takes refuge in the "we" form of the verb to cover up her self-doubt. On an immediate level this seems to include Paolo, herself, and perhaps Mauricio, but it might better be interpreted as a partially disguised reference to the group to which she belongs. When she does return to "I" it is to excuse what might be seen as her lack of culture by saying she has no time for indulging such tastes, a comment that trails off into an uncertain pause. Soon afterwards, however, she confesses that neither she nor Ramón really likes music at all:

La verdad es que la música me aburre bastante. No sé porqué. Debe ser porque me parece que las cosas son tan aburridas cuando la gente no habla. Y a Ramón tampoco le gusta de verdad.
(232).

Sylvia and Ramón go to the trouble of keeping up this façade in order to belong. Belonging, as ever, means sacrificing an element of freedom. Neither of them can simply say that they do not like orchestral music. After all, the taste for this art form is one of the ways in which they distinguish themselves from the philistinism of the traditional middle-class. They therefore have to go through the charade and put on the required mask. For this self-appointed intellectual elite, then, what one listens to, what one reads and the paintings that one admires are significant principally as conventional markers of belonging. Their

appreciation of art, therefore, is essentially superficial. This kind of bourgeoisie assimilates everything but understands nothing. The fact that at this point in the story Sylvia accepts this previously unacceptable truth is indicative of the tremendous pressure her son's odd behaviour exerts on her, as we shall see.

As well as failing to recognise the ways in which she has traded in one type of conformity for another, Sylvia also fails to live up to her principles of tolerance. Although she sets out not to impose on her son it is obvious from the beginning that she expects Mauricio to conform to her own brand of nonconformism. She therefore allows him a superficial freedom that fits in with her ideology of self-determination, telling him, for example, that he need not worry about coming home for lunch "para que se sintiera libre y no pensara que intentaba presionarlo con horarios fijos de comidas y con otros rituales de la convención" (207). She also wants him to be able to smoke cigarettes if he wishes, a conventional symbol of revolt (196), and has a relatively liberal attitude towards cannabis (196/257). In effect, however, these are simply examples of the kind of behaviour that she expects from him, disguised demands that reveal her idea of what her son ought to be. Indeed, part of her is pleased that he has not developed a personal style because this will enable her to mould him more easily in her own image. This hope, ironic in the light of the fact that one of Mauricio's hidden aspirations is to achieve precisely the state of *tabula rasa* that she attributes to him, but for very different reasons, reveals that "autoafirmación" is all very well so long as it takes the form she wants it to (195). The rebellious adolescent, in other words, is just another stereotype in her highly conventionalised world. He is even supposed to accept her vision of revolt and rebel in the way that she expects:

Es el colmo que un muchacho de tu edad no tenga más entusiasmos... Ravel, lo fino, lo elegante. Que no te interese nada raro, nada nuevo, nada atrevido. (232)

The rebelliousness of adolescence is expected, even condoned, so long as it takes the direction that she thinks it should. Sylvia fails to see the glaring contradiction in this, transforming her own vision of rebellion into an absolute rather than accepting that it is a relative, conventional position. In fact, she shows a tendency throughout the novella to think in terms of stereotypes, absurd generalisations that are often amusingly similar to the sort of ideologically loaded utterances associated with the realist narrator, such as "[l]os maricas jamás tienen programa los domingos" (210).

The irony in Sylvia's discourse, then, is that she appeals to a fashionable ideal of individual autonomy and self-expression without reflecting on what these terms mean. She claims to be in favour of an imaginative, self-affirming approach to life and professes an interest in political causes but her liberated rhetoric, just like her radical chic, includes assumptions that are not borne out by the kind of life she is living. At the very moment she proclaims her liberty her own words underline her lack of it, a fact that forces us to re-evaluate her wish to find a solution to her son's arrival "que no [...] la esclavizara ni profesionalmente ni como mujer" (194). By the time, well into the story, that she tells her son that "[h]e trabajado mucho y he luchado contra prejuicios y contra maneras de vivir que me parece que encadenan a las personas" (259) we can only interpret such claims from an ironic perspective.

Although, then, the new life that Sylvia and Ramón are forging is in many respects significantly freer than the one they have left behind it is also true that they are not the free spirits they pretend to be. This reality becomes increasingly apparent in the course of the conflict between Mauricio and his mother. His arrival is typical of the absurd and/or fantastic events that so often in Donoso's writing destabilise the privileged world of the bourgeois. In «Chatanooga choochoo» this role is played by Sylvia's theft of Anselmo's penis while in «Átomo verde número cinco» an inexplicable series of thefts and accidents break apart Roberto and Marta's cosy world. In «Gaspard de la Nuit» that role will be played by Mauricio's uncanny whistling which ultimately makes possible his transfer of identities with a nameless vagrant.

However, while Donoso seems to take a certain malicious pleasure in upsetting Sylvia's smug pretensions Mauricio's at times bizarre behaviour constitutes a genuine inquiry into the nature of freedom. Donoso introduces him into Sylvia's world almost in the manner of a philosophical thought experiment. What would a character be like if he really wanted to be free, and what would this freedom mean? How would others respond to him? This may seem rather strange at first in a work which portrays the inner life of the characters in some detail but the emphasis is on the generic way that their consciousness functions rather than on their importance as individuals. This almost Borgesian aspect of the novella might have played a role in D.L.Shaw's claim that the novella was too much in the River Plate tradition but I would argue that the story's mixture of irony and lyricism, coupled with its use of strange and at times disturbing imagery, is in fact more typical of Donoso's work as a whole

than the radical experiments with the point of view that characterise *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*.

Mauricio's arrival to spend a long summer holiday with his mother brings with it an implicit challenge to her system of beliefs, way of life and self-image. On an obvious level he disrupts her routine, not simply by imposing inevitable restrictions on her but by defying her attempts to understand what makes him tick. The crucial difference between mother and son, however, is in their different views of what constitutes liberty. Whereas Sylvia appeals to an ideal of individual freedom Mauricio does not conceptualise but simply acts, driven by some obscure yet powerful force that he does not rationally understand. He wants to rid himself of the need to wear a social mask and rebels against all expectations that he conform. However, his half-understood project is far more radical than the typical adolescent's search for a group with its own conventions and exclusive badges of identity. In this he is again contrasted with Sylvia who escaped from the social pressures that were stifling her by joining another group and conforming to its laws. Mauricio's obsessive emphasis on escaping social mediation of all kinds means that at first we appear to have a romantic, Rousseauian vision of the individual as naturally free but corrupted by society. As the story develops, however, it becomes apparent that his uncompromising refusal to accept a conventional persona represents something very like a modernist search for an absolute. This contrast between Sylvia's relative freedom and Mauricio's search for complete liberty is one of the most important conflicts in «Gaspard de la Nuit». In the end, however, what is at issue is not primarily whether the characters have the strength to leave one group and join another, although to do so requires a far from empty act of will, but to what extent the individual can be free of the social pressures that demand conformity. In the process of outlining this conflict Donoso complicates the notion of individual autonomy by pointing out the depth of the social mediation of the individual.

The choice of an adolescent as protagonist seems fitting in a novella which deals with the theme of personal identity. Adolescence, after all, is a period when people begin to experiment with all sorts of roles and when feeling confused about one's identity is a common experience. Mauricio, however, is far from being an average adolescent. On a superficial level his background is relatively unusual, particularly in the context of the period, as he has to all intents and purposes been abandoned by both his parents as a result of their divorce and now lives with his grandmother in Madrid. More important than his immediate family background, however, is his unusual emotional life. Sex, for example,

usually an adolescent obsession, is explicitly brushed aside in favour of more obscure yet more pressing needs. For example, in his chance encounter the woman with the Jackie Kennedy glasses he recognises a sexual *frisson* but does not want it to dominate his feelings: “podía –y sentía la tentación de hacerlo– imaginar muchas cosas sobre ella, pero Mauricio desechó esa posibilidad porque quería conservar ese espacio vacío para colocar otra cosa allí” (213). When he meets the teenager Rosa Mary he experiences similar emotions, although there is a slightly darker note to his thoughts: “sería demasiado fácil obtener de Rosa Mary todo lo que una muchachita de esa edad podía dar, al comienzo desenfadada y risueña, después defensiva y llorosa hasta llegar al no y ponerse de pie” (242). In general, however, he does not feel a need to establish relationships with people of his own age even though it seems that he does not find it particularly difficult to do so when necessary. This aspect of the character is significant because it rules out some of the more banal interpretations of his actions. Thus although some critics might be tempted to read the novella as an expression of unresolved Oedipal tensions, I would argue that the precise details of Mauricio’s psychology are not especially important. He is easier to understand as an imaginative experiment, an ironic attempt to investigate and underline the limits of freedom. His most notable trait is that he feels he is being repeatedly pushed into assuming a series of conventional roles, something that he regards as a violation of his personal integrity. This fear of invasion by others is characteristic of adolescence but in Mauricio’s case it is something to which he is inordinately sensitive. He feels pressurised in all sorts of ways and the list of those who are guilty of inviting, demanding and even forcing him to adopt unwelcome roles is made up entirely of those with whom he has most contact:

Como su madre. Como su padre. Como abuelis. Como sus compañeros de colegio y sus profesores, como todos los que tenían alguna relación con nombre, algún derecho sobre él, todos éstos lo violaban...(225)

He evidently lives in a strange and disturbing world. The paranoid feeling that most of those around him, even those with whom he ought to have a close relationship are invading him, forcing him to be something he does not want, is worthy of horror classics like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Don Siegel, 1956) or the more recent *Society* (Brian Yuzna, 1989). Mauricio attempts to protect himself from this process of imposition in a variety of ways. His first defensive strategy is to blend in with his environment and thus avoid attracting the attention which he finds so disturbing. This desire fits in with the painful self-consciousness that is a typical adolescent trait but in Mauricio’s case it is developed and exaggerated to the

point that it has a more general bearing on the issue of freedom. His urge to avoid attention stems from his understanding that the imposition of conformity is intimately associated with the assumption of a particular pose or mask and he therefore avoids the badges that would mark him out in one way or another. He is conservative in dress, apparently conforming to the demands of his traditional family, but really making sure that he is protected from what he regards as a form of inquisition by the creation of a conformist camouflage. This accounts for his reflection on the suit worn by the homosexual he meets in the park:

un buen traje, se dijo Mauricio, no demasiado a la moda, ni demasiado pasado de moda, no domingueramente nuevo sino un traje cualquiera llevado por cualquier señor de unos treinta y tantos años. (219)

It is not that he approves of the nature of this stranger's personality but that he recognises that the man too is hidden behind a generic façade rather than playing a brash and self-satisfied part in the social script. In not wearing "Sunday best" the man leaves some space for the kind of heresy that Mauricio too secretly practices. Mauricio feels particular contempt for those who get dressed up on Sundays because in his eyes this behaviour sums up their mindless conformism, their enthusiastic assumption of the conventional roles that imprison them: "Él no se regalaba a esta gente endomingada que se dirigía a la meta festiva de la copa o caminaba paralela a él y lo rebasaba, o cruzándose con él se negaban mutuamente todo" (212/213). In contrast the gay man's need to hide a secret from the eyes of the intolerant means that he shares something with Mauricio. What separates them, however, is that Mauricio does not want to take part in the role-play of hidden meetings in public conveniences, not just because he is not interested in gay sex but also because although such activities may be marginalised they would nonetheless fix him in a recognisable role. He is after something more mysterious and more difficult to define.

One of the many ironies of the novella is that Sylvia does not recognise that the ability to adopt a disguise is something that her son has in common with her. Whereas her disguises are flamboyant and attention-seeking, however, Mauricio's general appearance is anodyne in all respects, and in speech he uses a conventional and noncommittal language: "frases tan incoloras como la ropa que traía" (194). Unfortunately for him, the conformist camouflage that concealed him in his previous environment no longer functions. A comic but highly significant touch is that in Sylvia's conversation with Mauricio's father we learn that the latter sees him as 'completely normal' (249) but once removed from his usual habitat he stands out against the flamboyant background of Sylvia's world, a place peopled by "una

cantidad de gente pintoresca” (193) who chatter about art and the value of self-expression. Here Mauricio’s sober dress and reserved manner only serve to attract his mother’s attention, worrying and annoying her, not least because she thinks it reflects badly on her: “en Cadaqués [...] haría el ridículo con esa ropa... sí, sí, por lo menos un hijo de Sylvia Corday haría el ridículo... y con el pelo demasiado corto” (195). By the end of the novella, however, he does learn to adapt to her demands when necessary. Thus when he accompanies her to the cinema with Ramón we have the irony of Sylvia congratulating herself on her youthful taste in films when everything that we have learnt about Mauricio suggests that he picked the film precisely to keep her happy: “Sylvia se congratuló pensando que la juventud tenía los mismos gustos que gente como ellos, ya que Mauricio eligió la película que ella habría elegido”, (250).

Mauricio’s most important and mysterious form of self-defence, however, is his whistling of Ravel’s *Gaspard de la Nuit*, the novella’s central motif. This in itself is a fantastic element that disturbs the otherwise realist harmony of the early part of the story because any reader familiar with this virtuoso piano piece will immediately recognise the impossibility of whistling it. Mauricio’s implausible skill in reproducing the music is the result of hours of practice in a booth in *Galerías Preciados*, something that is made possible by the tolerance of a friendly but nameless salesgirl. As a defence its effects are twofold: on the one hand it helps him to deal with all that he feels has already been imposed on him and on the other it serves to ward off the threat of any future “violación” by others. As we shall see, however, it is a very complicated and suggestive form of behaviour with connotations that go far beyond the simple idea of self-preservation.

The whistling is combined with the only other pastime in which he indulges, going out for long walks in the city. His mother is fazed by the blandness of his claim that he likes to “pasear”, the irony being that if she knew exactly what he was up to she would have been even more baffled and disturbed. The descriptions of Mauricio’s walks, however, are important because they establish a link with one of his most important literary ancestors, Baudelaire’s “flâneur”. Baudelaire’s casual observer enjoyed not only a kind of sensual rapture as he wandered through the Parisian boulevards and arcades but, more significantly, the pleasure of being unknown. In the poet’s words: “An observer is a prince who everywhere is in possession of his incognito”.⁴⁷ This is certainly Mauricio’s case and as such partly

⁴⁷ Quoted by Walter Benjamin in *Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, London: Verso, 1982,

explains why he seeks refuge in crowds. His solitary wanderings have other resonances, too, suggesting parallels between Mauricio and another of his literary forbears, André Breton's narrator – a projection of Breton himself – in *Nadja*.⁴⁸ Like the surrealist observer who wanders aimlessly through the crowd waiting to be led by the obscure forces of “hasard objectif” Mauricio turns down his mother's offer of a street map (206) and prefers to be driven by his irrational impulses.⁴⁹

During these wanderings, which in Madrid used to centre on the Retiro park and in Barcelona end up leading him to Vallvidrera where the exchange of identities with his double finally takes place, Mauricio tries to establish a highly unconventional relationship with others. He is evidently in search of what he thinks is an appropriate person and if he finds one he begins to whistle nearby. The aim is for the “victims” to be subliminally aware of his presence through his whistling without being fully conscious that they are being subtly manipulated by him. As several critics have noted there is a dark side to this behaviour in that he wishes to discharge what has been imposed on him onto others⁵⁰ and Sharon Magnarelli rightly points out that in the description of these encounters, which are mainly described from his point of view, images of penetration and absorption abound.⁵¹ This sense that his personal boundaries are under threat underlines the precarious nature of his sense of self that is occasionally expressed in a desire to penetrate others. For example, while he rejects the gaze of a priest who wants to “penetrarlo profesionalmente” (212) he imagines himself invading the awareness of the woman with the pram whom he tries to manipulate through his whistling: “desde la frontera de su conciencia Mauricio se zambulló por fin en ella silbando agua pura en las sonoridades” (215).

At first these encounters are presented (again from his point of view) as innocuous meetings that make no discernible impact on the people he meets:

Era tan poco lo que le pedía a la gente: sólo que lo dejaran ser ellos durante unos instantes, que su música los ocupara enteros sin que ellos se dieran cuenta. Nada más. Ellos no percibían ningún cambio (222)

p. 40. For Baudelaire's comments on the «flâneur» see *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, transl. P.E. Charvet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.

⁴⁸Breton, André, *Nadja*, Paris: Gallimard, 1964.

⁴⁹Breton's narrator writes that “sans but je poursuivais ma route dans la direction de l'Opéra [...] J'observais sans le vouloir des visages, des accoutrements, des allures” (*Nadja*, p. 71) and when he finds the surrealist woman, his other, he tells us that “elle allait sans but aucun” (*Nadja*, p. 73).

⁵⁰Swanson, for example, calls his whistling “eerie” (*The Boom and Beyond*, p. 106)

⁵¹*Understanding Donoso*, p. 128.

However, this description is immediately followed by a powerful and disturbing image of his “victims” remembering him months or years later and simultaneously reliving the terror of the music:

Quizá sólo mucho después –días, semanas, meses, años– alguna de esas personas con las cuales lograba relacionarse por medio de la música recordaría a un muchachito de camisa celeste y de pantalones claros que una vez vieron en una plaza o en una calle silbando algo cuyo nombre desconocían, pero que ahora, al recordarlo repentinamente meses o quizás años después, les estrujaba el corazón con su presencia feroz clavada en sus latidos mismos. (222-223)

The striking conceit that something of which the objects of his attentions were only subliminally aware should come back to haunt them in all its horror years later momentarily projects the story into the realms of the gothic chiller. The ambiguity of the point of view in this description makes it particularly interesting. Is it a rare example of omniscient narratorial comment on the music, assuming that Mauricio cannot know that his victims will remember him years later, or a representation of his imagination of the likely impact of his behaviour on those he meets? In either case this passage emphasises the dark side of the music with its “presencia feroz”.

One function of Mauricio’s whistling, then, seems to be to fulfil a fantasy of power, as Sharon Magnarelli has pointed out.⁵² The “semirrelaciones” (214) he establishes with strangers allow him what he conceives of as a degree of control over them. He manages to maintain them for a long time “dejando que su conciencia absorbiera a la otra persona, despojándola durante unos instantes de algo incalificable pero que existía, pero sin dejarle adivinar que estaba siendo absorbida” (214). What exactly the something is that Mauricio takes from those he meets is unclear, a feature of «Gaspard de la Nuit» to which we shall be returning later, but the image of his violation of their personality remains. At the start of his relationship with the woman with the pram the narrative points out that “su paseo esa mañana estaba determinando el de Mauricio” (213). Mauricio seeks to achieve a transference of power that will enable him to control her actions through his whistling: “ella no sabía que Mauricio, subrepticamente, la había obligado a entrar en el ritmo de ONDINE, manipulándola desde afuera de su conciencia” (214). The question of power is again explicit in the reference to “la música que ponía el poder en sus manos” (216) and when his attempt to effect a symbolic hanging of the man in the park by whistling «Le Gibet» section of

⁵² *Understanding Donoso*, p. 126.

Gaspard de la Nuit fails because of the man's obvious sexual motivation he feels betrayed by "el falsario que lo había hecho creerse poderoso" (221).

This drive to power is in direct proportion to his feeling of impotence in the face of what he feels is being done to him and he seems to find some relief through imposing or imagining he is imposing on others. When this illusion breaks down he feels cheated: "El hombre del traje marrón tenía facciones físicas y psicológicas independientes de las que lo dotaba su música, y Mauricio quería que se mantuviera como una página en blanco" (221-222). In fact, it is significant that the moment when he thinks that he is indeed controlling his victim is the only time in the novella (outside the dialogue) that the narrative fully coincides with his first person perspective, not explicitly but implicitly as he addresses his victim as "tú": "Ya terminará tu tormento, pero tienes que terminarlo" (221).

Mauricio's choice of targets is intriguing. In the passages dealing with his search for a suitable victim there is an emphasis on the fact that he focuses on people who are not really paying attention to what they are doing. This is reminiscent of Cortázar's fiction and the lapses in concentration that characterise the moments in the Argentine writer's work when the fantastic irrupts into his characters' world are to some extent paralleled in Mauricio's search. For example, his whistling has no effect on people who are too complete ("demasiado completos sin un resquicio por el cual penetrar", 216), too sure of themselves, or too self-possessed. It is only those who are distracted and who do not seem brashly sure of themselves to whom Mauricio make his bizarre overtures.

Yet even the relationships that he does manage to establish do not satisfy the irrational yearnings that drive him on. It is not only his encounter with the woman with the pram and the gay man in the park that are unsatisfactory but all his attempts to make contact with others through his music. All of these relationships are in some measure frustrating and leave him feeling vulnerable. He senses that he is in a perpetual state of becoming, groping towards some dimly perceived goal and although he longs to 'mature' he cannot ("Mauricio crecía y crecía sin madurar", 223). Instead he feels blocked, frustrated by his inability to go on to the next phase, even though he is unaware of what that next phase is.

The relationships he establishes with the people he meets take place in the magical space provided by Ravel's music, a space that is not governed by a series of stereotypical roles. That is not to say that they represent some communicative ideal—in fact they are one-sided and in many ways sinister—but they are undoubtedly unconventional. In fact there is a slight contradiction in the fact that, as we have seen, Mauricio criticises the people he

meets because “se negaban mutuamente todo” (213) while in his meeting with the man in brown we are told that:

No quería entablar una relación personal. Quería permanecer cerrado, secreto (220).

This remains unresolved. What is clear, however, is that the relationship he establishes with the man in the park is especially unsatisfactory because as soon as he realises that the man’s motivation is sexual he feels forced to assume the role of a child menaced by a pervert, a role he feels is not his even as he acts it out:

Y como con el miedo de niño que le había inculcado la frase de abuelis: «Ten cuidado con los hombres viciosos...», pero que no era suyo, corrió hasta la zona del parque donde la gente compraba helados [...] (222).

Mauricio’s feeling that the man too is playing his own part in a pre-set scene is suggested by the description of the latter’s face, “la triste máscara de su rostro” (204), and it seems to be this acceptance of his allotted role rather than any fear of his sexuality that motivates Mauricio’s feeling that “el señor del traje marrón pendía desde mucho antes que él se aventurara a rozar su conciencia” (219).

Helen Calae de Agüera remarks that “[e]l entretenimiento favorito de Mauricio es valerse de su música para apoderarse de la personalidad de algún transeúnte”.⁵³ An interesting question, however, is how much of his relationship with others is real and how much merely imagined. He doubtless has some effect on the people he follows but it is difficult to determine the extent of this, particularly in a novella in which the fantastic plays a prominent role. Indeed there is one striking moment during his encounter with the woman with the pram when we realise, with a shock of recognition, that no sound whatsoever is escaping from Mauricio’s lips:

Era satisfactorio ver cómo ella con sus movimientos o con una risita dirigida a su cría, obedecía a un trémolo o a un arpegio, cómo sus expresiones se iban ajustando al cambiante y sin embargo coherente cromatismo. Satisfactorio sobre todo porque Mauricio no iba exactamente silbando ONDINE, sino repitiendo sus notas dentro de su mente, y cuando ella se alejaba un poco o se detenía en una esquina considerando la posibilidad de doblar por una calle por donde Mauricio no quería ir y no quería que ella fuera, entonces él dejaba que las frases se escaparan por sus labios entreabiertos como modulaciones de aliento *que no alcanzaban a producir sonidos* (214, italics mine)

During the first part of their walk together, then, the music provides the purely mental soundtrack against which their odd relationship unfolds. Although immediately afterwards

⁵³“Desintegración de la personalidad en *TNB*”, *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos*, 320-321, 1978, p. 485.

Mauricio begins to whistle in earnest in order to stop the woman from going the wrong way it is clear that at first the music only exists within his mind. He repeats the process in his encounter with the man in the park in which there is a description of the latter's slight movement as he sits on the bench that might be "una respuesta a la música muda aún" (216). The portrayal of their meeting underlines the way Mauricio projects his desires onto others. It is a chilling detail, a reminder that for all the social nature of personality the strangest and most sinister thoughts might be going through the head of anyone around us. All of this is undoubtedly linked to a crisis of identity in which the dominant force is Mauricio's desire for an absolute liberty, his need to be free of "aquello que lo obligaban a llevar puesto" (223), a choice of words that emphasises the parallels in the story between clothes, fashion and social masks.

Sylvia is baffled by her son's behaviour and her confusion increases in the face of his refusal or inability to explain what is going on. As we have seen, she wants to try and change him and it is therefore not surprising that Mauricio regards her as just one more of those who seek to impose an identity on him. He recognises that she is playing roles –"haciendo la comedia de la madre encantadora, se dijo Mauricio, y con ello lo cargaba de ropajes y caretas y máscaras y disfraces que él no quería" (226)– and rejects the invitation that he play a part in her scenario, although he recognises that these invitations quickly become demands if they are not accepted. Mauricio sees through his mother's offer of greater liberty, noting that her supposed freedom is merely another kind of conventionalism that demands conformity from him:

el "ya eres un hombre y tienes toda la libertad que quieres" de Sylvia al entregarle la llave del piso no era más que una versión sofisticada del "si no puedes venir a comer por lo menos avisa por teléfono" de abuelis. (223)

In the sense that they both make demands on him Sylvia does indeed equal "abuelis". However, Isolina Ballesteros' claim that Sylvia's attitude represents "una pose de modernidad de la clase burguesa"⁵⁴ seems to miss the point. In social terms there is certainly a world of difference between Sylvia and those who went before her. Even though the story's irony does show her to be more conservative than she thinks she is, Sylvia and those like her epitomise the modernising tendencies in Spanish society. Just because they are posers and hypocrites does not mean they cannot be modern, as if this were some moral category. What

⁵⁴Ballesteros, Isolina, "La función de las máscaras en *Tres Novelitas Burguesas*", *Revista Iberoamericana*, vol.60, no.8, July-December 1994, p. 991.

«Gaspard de la Nuit»'s adolescent protagonist comes up against, however, is something much more general, namely the truism that all societies depend on the conventions without which social life would be impossible. Being recognised as a member of the group means accepting some if not all of the conventions that govern it. It is Mauricio's desire to be free himself from this necessity that makes his search so radical, and therefore typically modernist. In fact, we could go even further and claim that it is precisely against the sort of modernity that Sylvia represents at this historical juncture that modernism rebels.

That Sylvia's regime is more liberal than Mauricio's grandmother's (which in some ways does not sound as bad as Sylvia would like to make out: teaching him to sew was not a very *macho* thing for an adolescent male to do in Franco's Spain) does not alter the fact that she is trying to establish a relationship on her own terms, not only inviting but demanding that he take part in a role play of her choosing. Indeed, in Mauricio's eyes all mothers seek to impose their particular version of the law on their children. This is true not only of Sylvia and her surrogate "abuelis" but also of the mother in the zoo who slaps and scolds her son Jordi for pushing past Mauricio to get to the slide machine with the picture of Vallvidrera. She threatens not to bring him again, a threat that the child treats with contempt:

—Mal educado, Jordi. No te traeremos nunca más al Zoológico.

—¡Qué me importa!

Mauricio solidarizó con Jordi: era verdad que no importaba nada no salir un domingo si tenía que salir como miembro de categoría ínfima de la tribu, padres, hermanos, abuelas, tíos de Sardanyola, primos, cuñados listos para ir a atosigarse de vino, embutidos y tortilla. (218)

From Mauricio's perspective the determination of Jordi's mother that her child should conform is another example of the impositional nature of the mother-child relationship. This opinion is later reinforced by Mauricio's view of the park in which he sees "perros de raza obedeciendo a sus amos, niños de raza obedeciendo a sus padres" (236). What also stands out in both descriptions is his perception of the tribal, unequal nature of family relationships that is combined with a hint of elitist contempt for the way these people spend their time. His shrewd observation of the social hierarchy's general disregard for the weak, wittily summed up later on by the striking image of the foldable grandfather —"recogían al abuelo nonagenario que en camiseta había depositado como un trapo al sol y ahora se había quemado demasiado" (245)— is a further source of his distrust of group behaviour.

He comes to see his own mother as a devouring, minatory figure —"la vio aproximarse no como a la ondina de la música sino como a un pez voraz que agitara su cola transparente y

sus aletas antes de devorar" (247)— a perception that adds an ironic note to Sylvia's words when, exasperated by his solipsism, she urges him to accept that "hay que luchar contra los problemas, Mauricio, no dejarse devorar por ellos" (259).⁵⁵ In fact, his feeling that his mother's attempts to get him to open up to her are a constant violation of his privacy reaches such a point that even her kiss is perceived as an act of aggression (223). His precarious sense of identity is constantly under attack, threatened by what he perceives as the invasive demands not only of his mother but of anyone who seeks to define him, even in the smallest of ways.

Having seen his mother only briefly over the preceding five years Mauricio finds that her natural curiosity leaves him painfully open to fundamental questions about his identity while for her part Sylvia is flummoxed by her son's refusal to fit in with her typology of the modern adolescent. His strange whistling in particular bothers her and so she decides to call in Paolo to help her. As well as being one of the beautiful people's cultural commissars Paolo is another character who feigns a non-conventional stance. The fact that he is gay is interesting in itself because in Donoso's work as a whole homosexuality is often a strong symbol for nonconformity and as such is generally presented as a positive trait. In this case, however, Paolo's nonconformism, like Sylvia's, is superficial and Mauricio sees through his affected casualness, recognising that it is just as conventional in its way as the neatness of people who put on their "Sunday best". Mauricio wittily describes him as "criptoendomingado" (225), emphasising once again that what Sylvia and those like her consider to be spontaneous and liberating is simply part of another, albeit newer, set of conventions.⁵⁶ Their fundamental relationship of subservience to the conventions of the group to which they belong has not radically altered.

For her part Sylvia does not have the cultural or conceptual tools with which to understand her son. She occasionally spouts psychoanalytical jargon, using terms like "acto fallido" (210) and "una buena transferencia paterna" (197) that reveal the extent to which this sector of the bourgeoisie has appropriated and trivialised psychoanalysis, as Hortensia Morell rightly points out.⁵⁷ Her attempts to understand Mauricio's music are aimed at

⁵⁵Helsper mentions the importance of the word "devorar" in «Chatanooga choochoo» as part of what she identifies as a fear of women ("Dismantling sexual politics", p. 62).

⁵⁶There is a further echo of James' *The Spoils of Poynton* here in which in the first indirect free style approximation to Mrs Gereth we are told that "She would rather have perished than have looked *endimanchée*." (*The Spoils of Poynton*, London: Penguin, 1967, p. 5).

⁵⁷Morell refers to the "trivialización burguesa de la psicoanálisis", *José Donoso y el surrealismo: TNB*, p. 40 and

neutralising its disturbing effects on her by bringing it within the realm of the known and she therefore seeks “alguna explicación que definiera con palabras su destreza perturbadora para silbar esa música desconocida” (208). She has no real interest in it, nor in what it does. The fact that she contacts Paolo who knows something about Ravel and his work represents a “violación sistemática” (228) for Mauricio, a sully of his magic talisman by the soulless verbiage of the music critic. Paolo may know a lot about Ravel but for Mauricio this sort of taxonomic knowledge is meaningless. By removing it from its special place in the context of Mauricio’s struggle for freedom Paolo renders the music inert. Indeed, as the story unfolds we learn that Mauricio is not interested in the music itself but in what it does, and he therefore sees their questioning as a pointless interrogation to which he puts an end by his bizarre acting out of the theme of «Le Gibet» (233). From this perspective his final melodramatic staging of his own mock-hanging can be understood as the act of an animal at bay.

Sylvia is unable to communicate with her son except on rare occasions that are marked by incomprehension in the face of his replies and a growing irritation and/or fear at her own inability to understand. This feeling of frustration at not being able to find the key to her son’s behaviour (208), linked to the sense of ‘incompleteness’ (208) that she experiences when he goes out without her having been able to find a satisfactory explanation for his behaviour, emphasises the fact that Mauricio’s behaviour also challenges her. This incompleteness seems to have something to do with the quality that Mauricio discovers in his “victims”.

The most important part of Sylvia’s initial reaction to her son is her frustration at the whistling that very quickly begins to get under her skin. In this we are reminded of Cornejo Polar’s insistence that the individual’s view of him or herself is irredeemably intertwined with a whole series of assumptions about the world in which they live. Implicit in this view of the relationship between representations of the world and representations of the subject is the recognition that the creation of a sense of identity is an integral part of acquiring (whether we see that as “learning” or “having imposed”) a view of the world. In other words, our view of the world and our sense of our place in it are interdependent and if one is threatened so is the other. Sylvia does not have the faintest idea why her son whistles as he does and she finds

there are certainly some absurd examples in the collection, such as «Chatanooga choochoo»’s reference to a therapist’s bizarre combination of Jung with Masters and Johnson.

her inability to fathom his behaviour deeply threatening precisely because it questions her view of the world and with it her sense of self.

In this respect the first description of Sylvia's reaction to the music is fascinating. It is clear to her that Mauricio is not whistling a *Beatles* melody, the sort of thing she would have expected of him and which at least would have been within her ken, but something altogether more disturbing: "No era de esas cosas que están de moda y que silban los chiquillos, eso es lo... no sé, lo terrible del asunto" (209). Her attempts at definition cease altogether as the music overwhelms her, silencing her thoughts and she ends up listening for five minutes "sin pensar en nada" (202).⁵⁸ Not surprisingly she is unsettled by this and it is not coincidental that as she comes out of the state of consciousness induced by Mauricio's whistling the narrative adopts the first person, presenting us with an "I" that can be read as a reaffirmation of self after the disorientating disruption of her normal stream of consciousness. Apart from the implied first person in Mauricio's encounter with the man in the park this is the only other time in the novella -other than in the dialogue, of course- that the first person form of the verb appears:

Sylvia, despertando, pudo formular por fin lo que sentía: rechazo hacia la música que su hijo silbaba. No la entiendo. Está situada más allá y a la vez más acá de todo. ¿Qué le pasa a este hijo desconocido que ha caído con todo su peso de adolescente de dieciséis años en mis brazos? (204)

In hermeneutic terms Mauricio is almost a living modernist work, an emblematic figure who, through his unique mastery of technique, defies his bourgeois mother's attempts to categorise him and reveals the limitations of her cultural competence through his elitism. He refuses to be bought by her offers of trips, money and possessions and despite his youth the magic circle of the music seems to endow him with a precocious maturity:

un círculo tan extraño, tan unitario, tan difícil de comprender, tan complejo... y sí, por qué no decirlo, tan terriblemente maduro que era como si Mauricio lo conociera todo y fuera capaz de manejarlo todo (208).

Such descriptions take us far beyond the limitations of an adolescent identity crisis. Indeed, the psychological depth that would be needed to allow us to focus on Mauricio as a portrait of a disturbed adolescent is almost completely lacking in the novella. Instead, his

⁵⁸In contrast, when Sylvia and Paolo have effectively cornered Mauricio in the sterile white light of her dining room her chatter has the opposite effect on Mauricio, stopping him from summoning the music to cleanse him: "No podía silbar para ahuyentar a su madre y sus palabras atropelladas impedían que la música brotara", (233).

behaviour disturbs and defamiliarises, reminding Sylvia that not all is fixed and comprehensible in the world she inhabits. A sudden realisation of this, a sudden awakening, is so disturbing that it is difficult for her to assimilate. In Sylvia's case it is enough to make her cling to the most conventional of roles for fear of being swept away into a chaos of uncertainty. For all her supposed contempt for traditional role-playing Sylvia is so upset by her confrontation with her son that not only does she finally slip into the mother-child relationship that she had previously professed to despise, but she desperately wants it:

Sylvia se refugió en los brazos de Ramón, llorando, repitiendo que debía aprender a tener relaciones normales con su hijo... no alterarse... no preocuparse... tratar a Mauricio como el niño común y corriente que era... (250)

There are typically modernist overtones in the idea that when people are pushed to their limits they reveal something fundamental about themselves. Indeed, one of the aims of modernism was to peel away the layers of social conditioning in order to discover the essence beneath. The basic premise behind this project may be open to question –after all why should we claim that what we reveal when we are under tremendous pressure is our true self?– but perhaps makes more sense in the context of modernism's desire to challenge, destabilise and disrupt bourgeois certainties. Unlike Marta and Roberto in «Átomo verde número cinco» Sylvia does not crack altogether but she does show us that in a moment of crisis she prefers to banish her fear and confusion by taking refuge in one of the traditional roles available to her, a role for which she previously professed a certain amount of contempt. She has reached such a state of confusion that she is no longer prepared to continue attempting to understand the obvious strangeness in Mauricio's behaviour and instead wills it out of existence. In other words, rather than confront the anxiety caused by facing the unknown, Sylvia retreats to a place of safety.

In order to understand the significance of Mauricio's bizarre behaviour it is important to distinguish between the point of view of the character and that of the narrator or implied author orchestrating the text. It is not that Mauricio sets out to deliberately disturb those around him through a process of defamiliarisation. On the contrary, it is clear that he has no rational idea of what he is doing:

todo en él tenía una forma y obedecía a un plan. Aunque él no conocía esa forma y no sabía cuál era el plan, su existencia en alguna parte lo hacía caminar siempre hacia él. Esa forma lo estaba atrayendo desde un punto fijo. (211)

Nonetheless, in the overall context of the novella his peculiar brand of revolt acquires a powerful symbolic value. In the light of the frivolity and superficiality of Sylvia's world Mauricio's oddness acquires a resonance that is reinforced by the artistic references provided by the author. These intertextual clues involve the reader in an attempt to work out the significance of his actions that, although better informed, to some extent parallels his mother's anguished efforts to make sense of her neglected child's idiosyncrasies.

From a realist perspective the solution to the problem of Mauricio is to claim that he is just a disturbed adolescent. This, for example, is the interpretation proposed by McMurray when he claims that Mauricio is a schizophrenic, a position rightly rejected by Swanson as largely irrelevant.⁵⁹ I would argue that the fantastic disrupts the realist reading of the novella just as Mauricio breaks into Sylvia's cosy world. To see the novella as simply a study in aberrant adolescent psychology, therefore, is to ignore the fact that it is full of clues that suggest other ways of interpreting Mauricio's behaviour.

An interesting point of departure for an analysis of the deeper implications of Mauricio's revolt against convention is the examination of the role played by language in the novella. This is a good place to begin because it is here that we begin to realise that it surpasses any interpretation of it as a Rousseauian revolt against the corrupting effects of a particular society. Mauricio's search is far more radical, far more uncompromising. He wants to transcend the social world and discover an absolute freedom beyond (there are vague echoes of Kesey's "Furrther" here). He associates conventional relationships of the type that he abhors with names, labels that evoke the whole system of pigeonholing that was the target of a great deal of 60s excoriation, and it is therefore no coincidence that what he thinks of as a "violación" comes specifically from "todos los que tenían alguna relación *con nombre*" (225, my italics). Names are a symbol of what Mauricio feels he is being expected to endure because like the roles he refuses to play they are imposed from without. They are not self-chosen identities and Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat rightly points out that in «Gaspard de la Nuit» "[e]l nombre propio es ajeno, un punto de referencia para los que han llenado de antemano las prescripciones del rol social", a comment that he backs up by citing the phrase: "Mauricio permaneció solo, [...] prisionero de su nombre, de su dirección, de su padre, de

⁵⁹"Mauricio, like Humberto Peñaloza in *El obscuro pájaro de la noche*, is a victim of schizophrenia" (McMurray, George, *José Donoso*, Boston: Twayne, 1979, p. 141). For Swanson the reading of Mauricio as a schizophrenic "seems to indicate an unnecessary desire for a realist explanation to an essentially non-realist tale" (*The «boom» and beyond*, p. 113).

abuelis" (225).⁶⁰ This view of the name as an imposition explains the reference to the Romantic poet Aloysius Bertrand, who changed his name to Aloysius from Louis, an act of self-determination that Mauricio himself wants to emulate:

Paolo, es verdad, había hablado demasiado, pero no dijo sólo tonterías: el autor del texto de GASPARD DE LA NUIT había cambiado su nombre de pila, Louis, y descartándolo había adoptado un nombre verdaderamente suyo, Aloysius. A él le faltaba tanto para completar la sustitución, que a veces le costaba trabajo inventar lo que el otro Mauricio había inventado (238)

There are also tantalising echoes of Isamu Noguchi, who in 1924, at the age of twenty, started using his father's Japanese surname rather than his mother's Gilmour. With regard to this question of nomenclature there is a further ironic contrast between Bertrand and Paolo who changed his name to Paolo Rosso from Pablo Rojo («Chatanooga choochoo», 78). Although this represents a kind of freedom in so far as it shows that Paolo has the will to change what he was given, there is a hollowness in his transparently obvious attempt to fit in with the sophisticated pretensions of his group through the absurd italianisation of the simple Pablo. In fact, the relationship between his characters' names and their sense of identity is frequently probed in Donoso's fiction, especially in the case of proletarian or petty bourgeois characters who long to be the bearers of an aristocratic name that they wrongly equate with the possession a real social identity. These characters, who are all ultimately revealed to be mystified by the values of the elite, stand in sharp contrast to Mauricio, the bourgeois rebel who is moving in the opposite direction as fast as he can by seeking to free himself from everything that goes with his privileged position, up to and including his name.

Like Brando's ageing libertine in *Last Tango in Paris* (Bertolucci, 1972), a man who does not want names to intrude on his sexual idyll, Mauricio does not feel he needs to know the name of the girl in *Galerías Preciados* whose benevolence was such an important factor in allowing him to make Ravel's music his own (231/253).⁶¹ For him it is the person that counts not the label, a laudable if predictable position when stated in this banal way but which acquires intriguing resonances as he takes this insight to bizarre extremes. His urgently perceived need to avoid confusing the person with the name introduces a defamiliarising element into the novella, representing a paring down of the concept of identity through a

⁶⁰*Impostura e impostación*, p. 64.

⁶¹It is intriguing that Donoso crossed the border from Spain into France to see this film with Jorge Edwards and Mario Vargas Llosa round about the time he was writing the story (Edwards, Esther, *José Donoso: voces de la memoria*, Santiago: Editorial Suramericana, 1997, p. 195). Norma Helsper, who was in Barcelona at the time also mentioned that everyone was seeing this film ("Dismantling sexual politics", p. 57).

change of perspective that is not only relevant to the romanticism represented by Bertrand but also both to modernism's emphasis on the socially constructed nature of reality and to the closely related fascination of the surrealists with simultaneously underlining and undermining the conventional nature of our perception of the real. All of these themes were taken up and powerfully reformulated by the contemporary counterculture of the late 60s and early 70s.

«Gaspard de la Nuit» also approaches the details of linguistic identity. The recognition that regional differences in speech are an important but arbitrary form of social bond underlies the comments made about Mauricio's Madrid accent by Rosa Mary, the Catalan teenager he meets at Vallvidrera. His reply reminds her that her perspective is relative and that from another perspective she too 'talks funny' but her response underlines that this is another area in which prejudice can become so firmly entrenched that the relative assumes the guise of the absolute:

-[...] ¿De dónde eres?
 -De Madrid.
 -Por eso hablas raro.
 -Tú también.
 Rosa Mary rió:
 -Yo no hablo raro. Tú hablas raro. Yo soy catalana. (240)

The novella further explores the issue of linguistic pigeonholing through the character of the Basque funicular operator (252). As he is not identified by name it is not clear how Mauricio knows he is Basque other than through the peculiarities of his use of language. This character, defined only in terms of his job and accent, is again linked with the theme of linguistic identity when Mauricio's double leaves Vallvidrera after the exchange of identities and is afraid of speaking too much to him "por temor a que se diera cuenta que había una diferencia en su manera de hablar" (266). When Mauricio, now in the guise of the vagrant, meets him the Basque shows his own limitations by interpreting the new Mauricio's appearance in equally clichéd terms and avoiding the gaze of a social inferior: "desdeñó su mirada, que ya no era la del muchacho distinguido" (272).

When Mauricio finally finds his double the latter's fears of betraying himself by the way he speaks highlight the fact that language poses special problems for the final exchange of identities at the end of the novella because, as Gutiérrez Mouat points out, the two boys

never speak.⁶² Part of the fantastic aspect of the novella's ending, then, is linguistic as the new Mauricio assimilates the pronunciation and vocabulary of Sylvia and Ramón with incredible speed ("Repetía las palabras como aprendiendo a pronunciarlas como las pronunciaban ellos", 267), no mean feat given that class has such an important influence on linguistic identity.⁶³

It is not just the tribal nature of linguistic identity that confines Mauricio, however, but the very nature of language as a system. His whistling enables him to get away from words, the ultimate carriers of conventional meanings. Language, after all, is made up of a system of conventions that is an absolute necessity rather than a pernicious limitation on individual freedom. And just as the meanings of words change most if not all other conventions are not set in stone but change with time. Mauricio, however, feels so beset by conventions of all kinds that he does not trust words, feeling that they lead him into a series of relationships that inhibit his freedom and threaten his sense of self. More than this, Mauricio's strongly irrationalist streak, typical of romanticism, surrealism and 60s counterculture, stems from a desire to break the mould of conventionally directed perception by getting away from the words that make everything seem real and familiar. There is an implicit attack in this on the rationalism associated with the type of reality sense that we can see in Sylvia. The lack of precision that Mauricio actively seeks to attain, the vagueness that so infuriates and disturbs Sylvia, is motivated by a desire to place himself beyond what he perceives as language's normalising power. His whistling allows him to establish a non-verbal link with others and makes possible the relationship with his double that finally frees him from the burden of identity.

In seeing words as limiting and coercive rather than enabling Mauricio's vision goes some way towards the paranoid view of language that finds its most melodramatic expression in the later work of Roland Barthes. In an address to the *Collège de France* Barthes' argument counterposed the subversive space of literature to what we might think of as

⁶²*Impostura e impostación*, p. 63.

⁶³On a visit to Liverpool University in 1987 Donoso suggested that *TNB* was partly written in order to parody the way a group of Catalan bourgeois used Spanish. What stands out, however, is the comic intrusion of *chilenismos* like "vieras" (211) into the text. In an interview a few years later he commented that "yo ya no pienso en chileno y todavía no pienso en español", *Literatura y sociedad*, p. 112). It is interesting that he notes the parallels between *TNB*'s bourgeois and the Chilean ones he previously wrote about in the same interview: "Hay, pues, un desligarse de Chile, pero no completamente, porque hablo de un tipo de gente que ya conocía en Chile antes de encontrarla aquí en España, de tal modo que si no hubiera conocido ese tipo de gente en Chile no habría podido calarlos tan bien como los calé en España" (p. 112)

“ordinary language” (if such a definition were possible) claiming that: “la lengua, como ejecución de todo lenguaje, no es ni reaccionaria ni progresista, es simplemente fascista, ya que el fascismo no consiste en impedir decir, sino en obligar a decir.”⁶⁴ This claim reveals a radical distrust of language which it sees as a system that not only allows us to communicate and analyse the world but actually forces us to see things in a particular way by channelling our experience along predictable lines. There is also a suggestion that we are trapped inside the linguistic system, incapable of getting outside it, and that our only hope of finding freedom comes from distorting the system in an attempt to “outplay” it. This is a much more radical, decidedly postmodern vision of convention than Sylvia’s view of it as the values of the traditional bourgeoisie. Convention here is associated with the ideological creation of a sense of the real and the sinister power of propaganda.

«Gaspard de la Nuit» seems to concur with Barthes at least to the banal extent that it points out that language plays a central part in forming its creators. The obsession with mutual imposition in this story, and for that matter elsewhere in Donoso’s work, centres on the demands that we, just like Sylvia and Ramón, make of each other as we reinforce a shared vision of the world. However, the implication is that as well as sharing with others a world view without which we could have no sense of our own identity we also internalise limiting routines of thought and behaviour. In other words, as we talk to others we confirm that the world is as we think it is, reinforcing our prejudices, and when we are alone we maintain this vision by continuing the talk in our minds. Unlike Barthes, however, Mauricio does not want to use language against itself to break the grip of convention. Instead, his whistling is an attempt to subvert the hold that language has over perception and still the normalising chatter. This attitude, common in the 60s after having been popularised in the 50s through the work of beat writers like Kerouac, went hand in hand with the attempt to liberate the imagination from conventional meanings. However, Mauricio’s version of it in the context of «Gaspard de la Nuit» also reminds us of his lineage as a child of the avant-garde. The whole point of the surrealist concept of automatic writing, for example, was to liberate the mind from the grip of the rational categories embodied by language

The limited number of options available to the crowds of people that Mauricio meets in the park can be read as a metaphor for the way experience is channelled and limited by a

⁶⁴Barthes, Roland, *Lección inaugural de la cátedra de semiología literaria del collège de France, 7 de enero de 1.977*, Mexico City, Siglo XXI, 1987, p. 120.

pre-set list of linguistic and cultural options. The following extract focuses on those who have accepted and internalised the conventional, thus coming to regard it as natural:

Allí el gentío era inmenso, pagando taxi, regañando a la hija, subiendo al taxi, estacionando el seiscientos, comprando helados, comentando lo recién visto o lo que iban a ver según se lo proponían los letreros en forma de flecha: Zoológico, Museo, Jardín Botánico, Salida, Aseos... tantas cosas para elegir, todas con nombre (216)

Mauricio sees these people as faceless actors in a pre-written script. To behave like them is to be one more character in a huge role-play game in which the possibilities of action are determined beforehand, defined in this case by the names written up on the signs. It is precisely this need to choose from a menu of pre-established options that Mauricio wants to escape. The situation which prevails for the visitors to the park is the reverse of that in which the inhabitants of Macondo find themselves in *Cien años de soledad* when, threatened by the loss of language, they have to resort to writing the names of things on tags which they attached to them in an attempt to stave off the collapse of their new-born world. Primitive beings in a universe which has only recently emerged from chaos, they struggle to preserve the analytical, enabling power of language. Mauricio, in contrast, longs to do the opposite and free himself from the constraints of an environment overburdened by conventional meanings.

Something similar lies behind his observation of the people out on a Sunday as they try to make the most of their free time:

Querían entretenimiento con nombre este domingo: cine, fútbol, amor, moto, excursión... eso exigían esas miradas impenetrables y esas risas invitadoras que a él no podían invitarlo a nada porque él no sabía ni quería definir, lo único que sabía ahora era que no quería esta plaza con un obelisco. (216)

The idea of "Sunday" itself is an example of an arrangement of reality whose conventional nature is usually hidden. There are, after all, no Sundays in nature, only in culture, yet what could seem more familiar or solidly real than Sunday and all that we associate with it? The experience and the imagination of the people Mauricio meets on his wanderings is shaped and limited by a series of similar cultural conventions as they perform the rituals of yet another Sunday, with all its contradictory connotations of momentary freedom from work and collective tedium.⁶⁵ The appropriation of this romantic/modernist *topos* emphasises Mauricio's scorn for the conventionally-minded mass and points out that

⁶⁵Donoso's earlier novel *Este Domingo* takes up the same theme, referring not just to any Sunday but to a particular moment that has acquired pivotal importance in the characters' lives.

like the people in the park these people's imaginations present a strictly limited range of options: cinema, football, romance, motorbikes, outings. Mauricio sees them as zombies denied any true engagement with life as their unassailable and above all conventional sense of the real condemns them to stumble towards death like sleepwalkers. Their frozen perspective fails to consider the day as a unique, unrepeatable moment. Instead, it is just one more of a seemingly endless cycle of Sundays, a sense of repetition that contains an implicit refusal to recognise the fact of their own mortality. However, the suggestion that on some level they intuit that their empty lives are being carried away by the ceaseless flow of time lends considerable pathos to the scene. The reference to their anxiety as they feel that the earth is about to suck up the precious seconds is a powerful image of despair: "ese terror dominguero de que el tiempo fuera tragado como gotas de agua por la tierra seca" (236/237). In contrast, Mauricio is open to experience and free of preconceptions about whom he is and what he should be doing. And, as we shall see, his relationship to time is also very different.

A consideration of «Gaspard de la Nuit»'s treatment of language raises the problem of representation. As we witness her attempt to describe it in terms that make sense to her we realise that Mauricio's whistling disturbs Sylvia because she is incapable of assimilating it within her existing view of the world. A significant part of this problem of categorisation is her need to find language adequate to her purpose and in this sense it seems to me that Sharon Magnarelli is right in suggesting that Donoso presents Sylvia as "the realistic, naturalistic writer or reader" who "seeks the right words to name and describe events, people, objects, emotions and sensations", although I would not agree with the relativism of the second part of her statement, which suggests that there are no right words, just words.⁶⁶ The important thing is that Sylvia's conventional categories for describing the world are challenged by the music. Her attempt to define it in terms that she can understand amounts to a realist attempt to find a direct correspondence between what she is hearing/experiencing and her language. Yet she cannot find a satisfactory way of describing either what Mauricio does or what she feels when she sees and hears him doing it. Thus while her encounter with the unknown elicits tentative descriptions of her experiences the precise definition she

⁶⁶*Understanding Donoso*, University of South Carolina Press, 1993, p. 131. Gutiérrez Mouat also notes that Sylvia wants a verbal explanation of Mauricio's behaviour, citing the key passage that points out she wants "alguna explicación que definiera con palabras su destreza perturbadora para silbar esa música desconocida". Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat, *José Donoso: Impostura e impostación*, Gaithersburg, 1983, p. 62. It is interesting that Sylvia wants a name to place on the music. Once she knows that it is Ravel she stops having to worry about what it really sounds like. She has categorised it and it is no longer a threat.

urgently seeks repeatedly eludes her. In a way this perfectly suits the demands of narrative development because as readers see or rather hear Mauricio from Sylvia's limited perspective they begin to build up a suggestive but tantalisingly incomplete picture of him.

In a sense, however, there is a conflict within the novella between the evident aim of wittily revealing Sylvia's limitations and the narrative's need for her to have a degree of credibility in order to further the development of the story. Thus although Sylvia is portrayed as pushing against the boundaries of her limited conceptual categories she cannot be a totally inept witness. On the contrary, her attempts to describe the music have to be competent enough for readers to begin to piece together their own view of what Mauricio is doing:

Lo que Sylvia estaba escuchando tenía una coherencia cuyas causas se escapaban del limitado conocimiento musical de Sylvia, diseñando una forma completamente nítida y desesperadamente angustiosa, no porque fuera trágica, sino porque era tan... tan... ¿cómo decirlo? (203)

Sylvia produces a series of approximations that tend to be straightforward adjectives, or at most similes, none of which satisfy her. Her failure revealing the limits of her highly conventionalised world. She cannot find a direct correspondence between her verbal categories and what she is hearing and she is not capable of producing a satisfactory metaphor. In effect, we are witnessing an ironic representation of the failure of what, with a great deal of licence, we could refer to as the realist imagination:

¿Esto era lo que silbaba su hijo entonces? No, no era simple. Era lo contrario de simple y eso era lo terrible... era algo tan final, tan sofisticado, y por eso tan... tan ¿triste? ¿solitario? ¿terrible? (202)

The complexity of what Mauricio is doing is the cause of her fear. It is final yet sophisticated and therefore... what? Her reasoning breaks down and her attempts at definition become even more uncertain, questioned as soon as they appear (sad? lonely? terrible?). The focus on the music itself is vaguer still yet it is effective in adding qualities that are also "under question" for the reader, qualities which are approximations of something that cannot be defined. This tentative, provisional use of language that seems to suggest that even as it is being used it fails to grasp what it is trying to represent, resembles the Derridean concept of "sous rature" the use of a word "under erasure" in order to underline its inaccurate, or rather, inadequate nature.⁶⁷ The implication is that although each of the words chosen tells us something about Mauricio's whistling none of them is sufficient in itself. This also brings to

⁶⁷Derrida, Jacques, *De la grammatologie*, Paris: Editions de minuit, 1967, p. 31.

mind Myrna Solotorevsky and Augusto Sorrochi's remarks about the extensive use of simile in Donoso's work which note that this figure maintains the ultimate difference between what is being described and what it is being compared to.⁶⁸ Like yet still unlike. This observation seems relevant here, as Sylvia's attempts to categorise what she is experiencing are limited to statements that simultaneously maintain the notions of similarity and non-identity. In other words, they implicitly recognise that she is incapable either of categorising what she is experiencing in familiar terms or of creating an imaginative trope that will allow her to understand it in some other way.

To be fair to Sylvia the attempt to describe the emotional and imaginative landscape created by listening to music is a notoriously difficult exercise that has always challenged the limits of language. As I pointed out above, she lacks the words or cultural references that would enable her to at least try and represent the picture that Ravel/Mauricio is painting in sound. We are reminded of Wittgenstein's famous proposition "*The limits of my language means the limits of my world*", and in particular the sentence that follows: "All that I know is what I have words for".⁶⁹ In this case the difficulty of putting certain aspects of experience into words amounts to a challenge to realism and a vindication of other kinds of art, a harking back to the 19th century emphasis on synaesthesia that was also of great importance in the *fin de siècle* and in modernism—in the work of Proust, for example—with its emphasis on the need to use all the faculties and therefore all the arts to apprehend and express reality. In the 1960s there were other challenges to the capacity of "realist language" to describe reality, especially through the use of drugs, a new version of Rimbaud's "*dérèglement de tous les sens*" and many nineteenth century artists' extensive use of opiates, cannabis and cocaine.⁷⁰

The clearest formulation of Sylvia's response to Mauricio's music comes at the end of this passage. For a time she is transported by his whistling and her attempts at categorisation cease but when she recovers her thoughts, or as the narrative puts it, on 'waking up', her reaction to the music is unequivocal: "Sylvia, despertando, pudo formular por fin lo que sentía: rechazo hacia la música que su hijo silbaba" (204). There is no trope

⁶⁸ Augusto C. Sorrochi, *Simbología en la obra de José Donoso*, Santiago: La Noria, 1992, p.322

⁶⁹ *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, London: Routledge, 1922, proposition 5.6.

⁷⁰ Rimbaud, Arthur, *Lettre du voyant. Un coeur sous une soutane. Album zutique*, Paris: Presses du livre français, 1950.

here, just an emotional response as she is finally unable to express anything more than a definitive rejection of what she is hearing. Ironically, this emotional, anti-intellectual response to what she experiences is exactly the kind of reaction that a certain kind of modernist artist wanted to provoke. As Clive Bell wrote:

We have ceased to ask 'What does this picture represent?' and ask instead 'What does it make us feel?' We expect a work of plastic art to have more in common with a piece of music than with a coloured photograph.⁷¹

Sylvia's last attempt to define Mauricio's music fittingly ends in a paradox which sums up the inability of her conceptual categories to accommodate it: "Está situada más allá y a la vez más acá de todo" (204). The challenge presented by Mauricio's behaviour defies the ability of her language to deal with it which in turn questions her sense of self as the music takes her beyond the boundaries of the known. The failure of her attempts to understand leads to bafflement, panic and finally to a cry for help, first to Ramón and later to Paolo.

One of the many ironies of «Gaspard de la Nuit» is that Mauricio's actions also pose problems when they are represented by the narrator. Thus when he walks the streets of Barcelona we are told that "no iba exactamente silbando ONDINE", (214). 'Whistling', the narrative implies, is the wrong word and it is followed immediately afterwards by a very precise attempt to explain what he did, as if the narrator were trying to make up for the word's representational inadequacy. This urge to portray a reality faithfully could be regarded as typical of the realist author's creation of the illusion that his narrative is a reflection of reality. In this case, however, while maintaining the illusion that it is portraying a reality that exists independently of the text the narrative draws attention to its inability to capture through words what it seeks to represent. Words are used to show the inadequacy of words, emphasising the fact that they do not provide us with a reflection of the world but an approximation of it. The attempt to use them to represent faithfully therefore merely underlines the difficulty, even impossibility, of any such enterprise. All of this is redolent of the modernist tradition of the ineffable, the attempt to push forward the boundaries of formal invention in order to define aspects of reality that had previously been undefinable. Like the inadequacy of the word "whistle" the repetition of phrases like "buscaba sin buscar" (215) and "seguía sin seguirlo" (220) echoes Sylvia's paradoxical description of the music as "más

⁷¹*Modernism*, Kolocotroni, Vassiliki, Goldman Jane, Taxidou Olga eds. *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998, p. 192.

allá y más acá de todo” revealing a tension in the words that suggests that there is another way of doing these things or even that there is an activity that is like these things that words cannot grasp. We are confronted by a typically modernist or avant-garde wrestling with the limits of language, which on the one hand can be seen as an attempt to define the nuances of meaning that cannot be described in typical realist language and on the other as a destructive, defamiliarising attempt to break up conventional language patterns.⁷² Ultimately, however, we are left with the abiding impression that language fails to grasp the world. By the same token, Donoso seems to be engaged in a paradoxical attempt to define without defining, as simile rather than metaphor continues to dominate. The narrative gives the impression that it is skirting the imagined referent without being able to identify (with) it. How we react to this is in part dependent on the reading strategy we adopt. In the crudest possible terms one could argue that a modernist reading would seek to understand what was being pointed at behind the words whereas a postmodernist interpretation would accept that the referents themselves are constructed by discourse. Thus from a modernist perspective the novella would be understood as struggling to define a reality beyond words while a postmodernist approach to the text would regard the implied existence of an extra-discursive referent as simply an illusion. Rather than taking the attempt to define seriously this second reading would suggest that Donoso is simply playing the ineffable game that consists of hinting that one is thinking of something so profound that it cannot be described and then letting the imagination of one’s interlocutor do the rest.

Part of the problem of representation centres on the free indirect style itself. Although this technique is used to allow us access to the character’s thought processes there are times when the point of view and source of expression becomes blurred as we cannot be sure whose words are describing events. At others the presence of the narrator hidden behind the characters reveals itself. The complexity of this issue is exemplified by a passage which describes Sylvia listening to Mauricio’s whistling:

Sylvia escuchó otra vez. El silbido de Mauricio continuaba. Ordenaba espacios y notas complejísimas, sonoridades muy suaves que parecían surgir y agotar con su lentitud y su elegancia todas las posibilidades del teclado. (203)

⁷²Schulte-Sasse, for example, refers to André Breton’s attack on Dostoyevsky as a “modernist” attack on realist language patterns. See foreword to Peter Bürger’s, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984, p. xv.

We are experiencing the event through Sylvia's perceptions: she is the one who is listening to the whistling and most of the descriptions appear to refer to her own personal feelings about it. The reference to the "teclado", however, seems to be the narrator's because at this point she is confronted by an unknown piece of music that only the narrator and perhaps the reader recognise as a piano piece.⁷³ As the points of view alternately fuse and separate the awareness of the existence of another perspective that maintains an ironic distance from the character forces us to consider the problem of representation. What seems to be a straightforward narrative procedure therefore turns out to be a complex and ambiguous technique by means of which Donoso explores the possibilities of the novella form, bending it into unusual shapes. There is, for example, an intriguing symmetry in the fact that the characters' fictional struggle to represent to themselves what they experience is paralleled by the reader's struggle to understand this story's disturbing evocation of an unusual and deliberately distorted world. In short, the structural peculiarities of the novella themselves draw our attention to the problem of how language represents the world, a matter of some urgency in the fictional world being brought to life before our eyes

If we were to sum up their attitude to language in rather crude terms Sylvia and Mauricio seem to represent the conflict between realism and modernism. Sylvia makes the mistake of believing that words are simple, transparent representations of things. Her need to remain within conventional boundaries, summed up by her desire to have a verbal explanation of what she is experiencing and her dislike of music—"me parece que las cosas son tan aburridas cuando la gente no habla" (232)—is confronted by Mauricio's desire to get beyond the linguistic to an absolute that lies beyond words, a desire apparent in his scorn for those like his mother who deal only in words ("sólo traficaban con los nombres de las cosas", 229). He wants access to a reality that the words fail to convey and to experience an absolute both in terms of personal freedom and perception. Yet although he recognises the conventional, socially constructed nature of Sylvia's idea of the real he does not take the next step, as postmodernists do, and suggest that all realities are socially constructed. Words are problematised and there is no suggestion that they can simply capture reality but neither is there any hint of the postmodernist suspicion that it is the words themselves that are creating the reality that is being described. Unlike Donoso, Mauricio is not interested in the

⁷³Bendezú, for example, refers to a whole orchestra rather than to the piano alone. In Cornejo Polar, ed., *La destrucción de un mundo*, Buenos Aires: Francisco Cambeiro, p. 169.

complicated relationship between words and their referents but in an absolute that he intuits beyond language.

This is in keeping with Allen Thiher's suggestion that modernism's view of language is still essentially representational, while postmodernist language is thoroughly non-representational and self-reflexive.⁷⁴ Again, however, it comes as no surprise that, given the confusion over the terminology, some theorists see this the other way round. For example, in describing what she categorises as a postmodern view of the relationship between language and discourse Linda Hutcheon comments that: "The real exists (and existed), but our understanding of it is always conditioned by discourses, by our different ways of talking about it".⁷⁵ Leaving Hutcheon's potential objections to one side for a moment, however, we could say that Mauricio's attempt to vault over the conventional, limiting nature of language to an absolute beyond, is a decidedly modernist search that challenges Wittgenstein's claim that our worlds are decisively delimited by language. The implications of all this for their respective views of freedom is that while Sylvia remains trapped within her conventional world Mauricio's desire for a transcendent guarantee of personal autonomy leads him to embark on a mystical, modernist quest to free himself from language altogether.

Mauricio also challenges his mother's conventional world view through a process of defamiliarisation. It is a truism that cultural conventions are often seen with most clarity through the eyes of a stranger, a concept that Edward Said sums up in *Culture and Imperialism* by citing the words of a 12th century monk from Saxony, Hugo of St. Victor: "The person who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign place".⁷⁶ This idea, crudely encapsulated in the 60s by the evocative banality of Jim Morrison's "People are strange, when you're a stranger", is certainly present in Mauricio's detached perspective. Experienced through him the most mundane scenes seem bizarre. The Sunday football match at Vallvidrera, for example, becomes an alien ritual, a hieratically solemn event with its description of the energy and emotion crystalising around an essentially absurd event as the seconds of these people's lives tick by:

⁷⁴Thiher, Allen, *Words in reflection: Modern Language Theory and Postmodern Fiction*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

⁷⁵*The Politics of Postmodernism*, London: Routledge, 1989, p. 157.

⁷⁶Said, Edward, *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Vintage, 1993, p. 407.

la multitud de rostros, hombros, espaldas, brazos, sombreros, cuellos, pelos, manos reunidas alrededor de la pequeña mancha parda entre los pinos donde veintidós hombres divididos en dos bandas intentaban humillar a los otros según reglas preestablecidas que perderían su vigencia cuando terminara el tiempo acordado (242).

What might have been seen as a banal Sunday football match now seems as exotic as the Mayan ball game, and in the light of the description in which it is embedded it seems almost as solemnly numinous. There is also, however, an elitist feeling of distance from those who can become suddenly excited by this conflict, a hint of scorn for the need to feel attachments that can be projected in what are suddenly revealed to be such absurd ways. At the same time, however, there is a suggestion that the reason they seek to discharge their frustration in events like the football match is because these comforting rituals take place within clearly established boundaries and according to clearly established rules. Mauricio on the other hand does not want to define. Instead he wants to be open to experience, “unprejudiced” and therefore more free. The parallel with surrealism is apt given that one of this movements’ principal aims was to break down the conventional perception of the real and seek to attain a superior state of consciousness. Mauricio’s whistling keeps his imagination fresh and his impulses free, in keeping with the surrealist concept of “disponibilité”, the openness to chance that can provide a glimpse of the superior reality of the surreal. This is almost programmatically expressed in one of the key descriptions of the function of his whistling:

caminaba largas horas por las calles, silbando apenas [...] repitiendo las largas, lentas frases musicales para que su complejidad anulara todo lo que contenía su cabeza, y al concentrarse en la difícil ejecución de la música, su imaginación quedara fresca y sus impulsos libres (pp. 211-212)

Donoso’s strange adolescent protagonist is open to the acceptance of impulse from elsewhere. The surrealist decision to interpret fortuitous events as though they were significant through the concept of “hasard objectif” sheds light on the apparently schizoid episode when Mauricio feels that it was the slide machine itself that suggested he go to Vallvidrera. This could be regarded as a magical, animist, or even schizophrenic way of seeing but it also has something in common with the surrealist idea of the “merveilleux”, a strong hint of the way in which the avant-garde influenced the birth of what was to be magic realism:

Pero quizá no todas las miradas, pensó Mauricio, permanecían en la superficie anecdótica de la tarde. ¿Por qué, si no, la sugerencia de la máquina que lo había mirado a la entrada del Zoológico para incitarlo a que mirara dentro de ella? (240-41).

But Mauricio's attempts to get beyond the conventional, particularly in terms of language, lead us to an even more enigmatic aspects of his search for freedom. In her description of Mauricio's whistling one of Sylvia's first intuitions is that it is "como ante un acto religioso" (202). When she later speaks to Ramón she uses the simile again, this time adding that there is something vaguely Oriental about it:

Era otra cosa completamente distinta, más parecida a algo como, bueno, como religioso... mágico. No, no seas tonto, no era ni Bach ni Vivaldi, ni esas cosas... más como chino, se me ocurre. (209)

What does she mean by Chinese, we might ask. I doubt whether any reader familiar with Ravel's work would note any obvious similarities between "Gaspard de la Nuit" and Chinese music. Indeed, Sylvia admits that it is not any direct comparison that motivates her description of the music in these terms when she says "¡Claro que no sé cómo es la música religiosa china!" (209). As far as Sylvia herself is concerned there is no apparent correspondence on this first and most obvious level and her categorisation of Mauricio's music as oriental is a stock reference to that which is so alien it cannot be understood. For her it really amounts to a failure to categorise as it connotes the unknown, the culturally alien ("It's all Greek/Double Dutch to me"). In spite of this, however, the subtly loaded nature of the narrative is again apparent as without knowing it her description of Mauricio's whistling actually mentions one of the most important features of Zen music, a Chinese form later transplanted to Japan:

Era lo que siempre había silbado: algo muy simple, pero no en la forma en que una melodía popular es simple, sino frases musicales, notas con mucho silencio entre ellas ordenándose de manera que esos silencios fueran tan importantes como la música misma. (202)

A reader with the necessary cultural competence will immediately make the link and understand that Sylvia is right even though she does not know it. In Zen music the silences are indeed regarded as as important as the music itself such an emphasis being designed to disrupt habitual ways of listening to music. Thus although it is virtually impossible to make parallels between Chinese music and Ravel's composition Donoso's triply mediated version of *Gaspard de la Nuit* (the author imagines Sylvia hearing Mauricio's rendition of it) establishes a significant link. This aspect of Sylvia's description can also be read as a knowing reference to Ravel's collection of oriental *bric-à-brac*, typical of the

well-documented orientalism of many of the writers and artists of the *fin de siècle*.⁷⁷ In addition to this it also opens up to interpretation the similarities between Mauricio's actions and the oriental, especially Buddhist, beliefs that were disseminated to a mass public in the 1960s. The links that are established between his apparently eccentric behaviour and the practice of meditation, a dimension of the story that has largely been ignored by existing criticism, are particularly intriguing because the view of the subject proposed by certain schools of oriental thought bears a resemblance to the postmodern scepticism about the unity of the self. The linking of the three epithets "religioso", "mágico" and "chino", therefore, seems to be more than just a coincidence.⁷⁸

In fact, there are several ways in which Mauricio's odd behaviour bears comparison with Buddhist thought. For example, one of the aims of certain Buddhist practices is the disruption of the practitioner's normal thought processes through the unusual use of language in order to bring about a change in consciousness. The desired shift in awareness can occur when the grip that language has on the practitioner's preconceptions is loosened. This particular version of defamiliarisation is effected above all through the use of paradox. Mauricio's own practice is similar in that he wants the language of 'the gaze that didn't gaze' (241), an apparent oxymoron that recurs several times in the narrative. In fact, this figure occurs repeatedly in «Gaspard de la Nuit». Here are some further examples:

buscaba sin buscar (215)

cuando buscaba era siempre cuando menos encontraba (216)

lo seguía sin seguirlo (220)

observándolo sin mirarlo (219)

su mirada [...] aceptaba otra mirada que no miraba en alguna parte (242)

sus ojos, sin buscarla, buscaban (254)⁷⁹

⁷⁷My source for this are Max Harrison's sleeve notes for Ravel's "Pavane pour une Infante Défunte" (Deutsche Gramophon).

⁷⁸Myrna Solotorevsky mentions this in her *José Donoso: Incursiones en su producción novelesca*, Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, 1983. In note 41 on page 94 she remarks: "Nos parece que la visión de mundo del texto es relacionable con ciertas concepciones orientales" and goes on to cite Alan Watts' *El camino del Zen*, concluding with a reference to Bakhtin's concept of the role played by Carnival: "Recordemos que el Carnaval implica una reacción contra el logocentrismo occidental."

⁷⁹We could also add the way that Sylvia notices that the silences in the music seem as important as the notes (p. 202). While not really being a paradox it is another way of perceiving, an unfamiliar perspective.

In each of these examples there is something unusual about the action that differentiates it from what we would normally recognise as looking, following or seeking. Yet there is no explanation of what this might be. Rather, the paradox seems to suggest that the explanation is not to be found in further analysis or discursive thought. This process of linguistic defamiliarisation appears in close association with a kind of anti-rationalism that is in some key areas strongly reminiscent of Oriental philosophy. The aim of a Rinzaï Zen koan, for example, is to concentrate the rational mind's efforts on resolving an irresolvable logical contradiction in an attempt to disrupt the habits of thought that in the context of «Gaspard de la Nuit» we could term conventional thinking. There is also an emphasis in some kinds of Buddhist meditation on not striving for the desired experience (in itself a paradox) which is strikingly similar to Mauricio's aimless search and the surrealist concept of "disponibilité". He seems to have no preconceptions about the experience he is seeking but approaches it in a spontaneous and open-minded way, an attitude that in some schools of Buddhism is referred to as "Beginner's Mind".⁸⁰ In this respect he is the opposite of Sylvia who tries to integrate everything she perceives into a pre-existing framework.

Mauricio's whistling, too, seems to have something in common with meditational techniques. Repetitive activity has long been used in many different cultures as a way of altering conventional states of consciousness and as such one of its aims is to disrupt the inner dialogue that we mentioned earlier as part of the representation of Sylvia's consciousness. This constant chatter confirms to us that the world is exactly as we think it is. Buddhist meditation, however, seeks to alter our relationship to this inner discourse, a function fulfilled for Mauricio by his whistling:

caminaba largas horas por las calles, silbando apenas [...] repitiendo las largas frases musicales para que su complejidad anulara todo lo que contenía su cabeza, y al concentrarse en la difícil ejecución de la música, su imaginación quedara fresca y sus impulsos libres (211-12)

la concentración que le exigían las dificultades expulsaba todo lo demás de su mente, y así, aunque caminara por las calles atestadas o por los parques desiertos, permanecía como una página en blanco, listo para recibir algo desconocido que de alguna parte tenía que venir. (254)⁸¹

Although the emphasis here is on the difficulty and complexity of what Mauricio does rather than the repetitive simplicity of a *mantra*, the hypnotic, defamiliarising power of

⁸⁰Shunryu Suzuki, *Mente de principiante*, Medellín: Universidad de Antioquia, 1983.

⁸¹This represents a change in awareness, not simply an act which guarantees oblivion as suggested by Morell when she writes "su arte exquisito de silbar Ravel[...] es para él tan sólo una forma de anular la conciencia". (*José Donoso y el surrealismo*, p. 94)

Mauricio's music has some of the same effects on his sense of self as meditation has on its adepts.⁸² Just as in meditation his identification with the activity is so complete that it seems to blot out his conventional stream of consciousness as he seems to become fused with the activity in which he is engaged. This unity of practitioner and practice is referred to on several other occasions in the novella. For example, the passage that describes Sylvia's discovery of Mauricio in the flat alone, whistling, emphasises the way the sense of a separate individual identity disappears as the doer dissolves into the doing: "Tendido con las manos cruzadas detrás de la cabeza, existía sólo como una tenue película de música que separaba la nada de la nada" (256).⁸³ Isamu Noguchi described a very similar process when referring to his way of working:

I become that which I am doing. I know from what I am doing what I am doing.⁸⁴

The loss of ego implicit in such remarks is surely significant in a novella in which personal identity and individual freedom are such prominent themes, especially as it provides another link with surrealism, a movement for which Eastern thought had great attractions. In her work on André Breton, for example, Mary Ann Caws refers to "the ideal detachment from Western individualism characteristic of the Eastern thought to which they were attracted".⁸⁵

In the case of the whistling, however, it is not Mauricio alone who is affected but also those who listen. As we saw earlier, its effect on Sylvia is extremely powerful, leaving her incapable of thought as the music silences her inner dialogue: "Sylvia no podía pensar en nada" (204). This change in awareness is a recurrent theme in meditational texts. An important part of it is the transformation of the subject's perception of time from that of existing in an ever shifting moment from which one looks back on the past and forward into the future to a sense of being suspended in an eternal present. Those who practice meditation may feel that they have escaped from time, leaving behind their habitual sense of self in the process and Mauricio's whistling allows him to achieve a similar state of awareness: "él

⁸² Not all meditation techniques depend on simple repetition, in any case. The mental reconstruction of a *yantra*, for example, has some of the disciplined reconstruction of complexity that we find in Mauricio's whistling.

⁸³ The loss of self associated with the music would seem to question Gutiérrez Mouat's view that music is not only an "apertura hacia lo otro" but "un lenguaje que lleva a la constitución de un sujeto verdaderamente libre" (64) unless we understand the concept of subject in a radically different way.

⁸⁴ *Isamu Noguchi*, Phaidon Video, Whitgate Productions, 1980.

⁸⁵ Caws, Mary Ann, *André Breton*, New York: Twayne, 1996, p. 10.

quedó anulado...ocho...diez horas tendido en el sofá repitiendo las oraciones musicales que lo suspendían, sin ver ni oír, fuera del tiempo” (256).

Another feature that his whistling shares with meditational techniques is that it is not a goal in itself but a means to an end.

- [...] es como si fuera tu esencia, el único rasgo que muestras...
- No es mi esencia, no...
- ¿Qué es, entonces?
- No sé, un camino...
- ¿Camino hacia qué?
- No sé. Si lo supiera no silbaría. (258-9).

When the definitive exchange of identities with his double is finally achieved the technique is left behind. In his new identity as vagrant Mauricio no longer feels the need to whistle (270) while his double's whistling, stripped of its intent, has lost its capacity to disturb. Instead Sylvia finds it beautiful for the first time (270). This ability to leave things behind without sentimentality parallels the Buddhist idea of non-attachment. In the course of the novella we see him divesting himself of clothes, language, family, even his name. Unlike the bourgeois of «Átomo verde número cinco» who are terrified at this loss Mauricio embraces it. As Sharon Magnarelli puts it, Mauricio “actively seeks dispossession before he is passively dispossessed.”⁸⁶

The movement away from language has a radical impact on Mauricio's perceptions. It is not surprising, therefore, that in a last ditch attempt to understand what he is doing Sylvia wonders whether he may have been using drugs:

- ¿Qué te pasa, hijo?
- Nada.
- ¿Estuviste fumando marihuana?
- No.
- ¿Ni LSD? Hay que tener más cuidado con eso. (257)

This, perhaps, is the nearest she comes to understanding her son's behaviour as the disruption of conventional thought processes caused by drug use bears some similarity to the effects achieved through meditation. Yet her enquiry is ultimately just another way of attempting to explain his behaviour from within a conventional frame of reference. She associates him with his generation's use of drugs but shows no understanding of why it does

⁸⁶*Understanding Donoso*, p. 124.

so. Instead she limits herself to a predictably liberal position, implicitly accepting cannabis while giving him a prudent warning about LSD.

The state that Mauricio achieves through his whistling is supposedly free from the conventional evaluations of culture. It is akin to what has been described as experiencing reality "as it is"⁸⁷ an idea that is in keeping with what Linda Hutcheon refers to as the "modernist pretense that the referent could be brute experience".⁸⁸ Our present consensus is probably that experience is irredeemably mediated by discourses yet in the context of the search for freedom Mauricio's desire for an absolute does make some kind of sense. It is a search for a freedom of perception, a refusal to embrace a world view that limits in advance the possibilities of any engagement with the essentially unpredictable nature of reality and in this regard he is a descendant of a whole line of rebellious heroes and antiheroes, modernist in the broadest possible sense, stretching back to the romantics, who rebelled against the bourgeois sense of the real.

In spite of the obvious difficulties raised by the suggestion that we can have unmediated experience of reality the description of Mauricio's wanderings at Vallvidrera suggests a new-found clarity of perception while at the same time remaining allusive, even cryptic:

⁸⁷ Morell's view of this state as "una vivencia semejante a la niñez" is not incompatible with the idea of experiencing reality "as it is". It is also not uncommon for users of hallucinogens such as LSD, mescaline or psilocybin to describe their experiences in this way. Robert Ornstein, the American psychologist who investigated states of awareness of this type in the seventies, suggested a way of understanding what this might be:

"The statement is often made that one can have *direct* perception of reality. Whether one can perceive 'reality' directly is not yet a question for science, but some comment within the terms of psychology might be made. The ability to 'mirror', to be free of the normal restrictions -of the tuning, biasing, and filtering processes of consciousness- may be a part of what is meant by 'direct' perception.

"This state can best be considered in psychological terms as a diminution of the interactive nature of awareness: a state in which we do not select or 'bet' on the nature of the world, or sort it into restrictive categories; rather, a state in which all possible categories are held at once. It has also been described as a state of living totally in the present, of not thinking about the future or the past; a state in which everything that is happening in the present moment enters into awareness." Robert Ornstein, *The Psychology of Consciousness*, Penguin, 1975, pp. 152-3.

Ornstein radically revised this work in later years but it is significant that views such as those expressed here were very much in vogue in the period when Donoso was writing «Gaspard de la Nuit». Donoso's comment to George McMurray that he wanted to "achieve all the possibilities of awareness or consciousness in the world" (McMurray, *José Donoso*, p. 391) is indicative of the contemporary emphasis on "consciousness expansion".

⁸⁸ Linda Hutcheon, *The Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 152. In the same book Hutcheon also refers to Rorty's idea of "lumps" and "texts": reality presents itself to us as lumps but we can only understand them as texts (p. 145). To claim otherwise is about as far as one can get from the orthodox deconstructivist line. As Christopher Norris points out in his discussion of what he sees as popular misreadings of Derrida: "Derrida's point -familiar enough at least since Kant- is that we cannot have *direct or unmediated* access to the real, since our knowledge thereof is ineluctably structured by the terms of our sensory, perceptual, cognitive or linguistic grasp. To suppose otherwise is to confuse ontological with epistemological issues, and hence find oneself driven -like Hume- into all sorts of fargone sceptical doubt." Norris, *Reclaiming Truth*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1996, p. 228.

Remontó un poco la ladera entre los pinos y se tumbó a la sombra, mirando el agua desde arriba. Nadie. Árboles. Cielo claro. Y la música generándose sola y repitiéndose hasta limpiar todo de su interior. Nadie. Era el silencio privilegiado de las mañanas en que los adolescentes no van al colegio. Los árboles, las cosas, las piedras, los rumores tenían sólo estructuras naturales que no dependían de ninguna inteligencia formalizadora. (253)

Firstly, the emphasis on the natural is contrasted with “la ficticia naturaleza del parque” (220). Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat refers to the Vallvidrera that Mauricio experiences here as “el Edén anterior a la estructuración de las convenciones sociales” while Hortensia Morell claims that “el protagonista consigue por fin llegar al punto inasequible donde cesan todas las contradicciones, más allá del derecho y el revés que son los mundos complementarios de la convencional burguesía madrileña de su padre y abuela, y la igualmente convencional antiburguesía barcelonesa de su mamá”.⁸⁹ It is not just the contradictions between Madrid and Barcelona that cease, however, but all the conceptual dichotomies on which a linguistic description of the world is necessarily based. By definition such a state of awareness cannot be expressed through words but the deliberately general and imprecise nature of the description – ‘the trees, the things, the stones, the sounds’ – corresponds to an attempt to avoid as far as possible the exclusive definitions of language. Language cannot define without defining but the poetic vagueness of this paragraph seems to be an attempt to do something of the sort. The passage suggests that through his whistling Mauricio achieves a perception of the world in terms of its ‘natural structures alone’, independent of the analytical categories suggested by the reference to the ‘formalising intelligence’. In a similar way the loss of a sense of self is again alluded to through the reference to the music’s ‘generating itself’ in his mind. Again there is no trace of a subject willing the action, and there is consequently no outpouring of Romantic sentiment in a passage that has more of the atmosphere of a “haiku” than a Romantic nature poem. If we had to make a comparison with poetry this would be Juan Ramón Jiménez rather than Victor Hugo.⁹⁰

⁸⁹Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat, *Impostura e Impostación*, p. 64) and Hortensia Morell, *José Donoso y el surrealismo* p.27. In an earlier article Gutiérrez Mouat talks of “Un yo periférico, marginal, y, por lo mismo, inmune a las categorías sociales que encerraban al yo antiguo” (“El disfraz figurado: Coronación y Gaspard de la Nuit”, *Hispanamérica*, Takoma Park MD, vol.22, 1979, p. 95.

⁹⁰In his article on *La Desesperanza* Dieter Saalman makes some apt comments about the emotionally charged description of the flora of Santiago’s “barrio alto”: “The protagonists seem to merge with the vegetation in a rhetorical passage of mellifluous and sonambulist verbal magic. Their experience recalls the anthropomorphic tendencies of romanticism with its effortless intermingling of the human and natural realms in a green sanctuary of organic, but threatening, relationships” (Saalman, Dieter, “José Donoso’s Novel *La Desesperanza*, and contemporary Chile: a note of musical dissonance”, p. 427). This is the opposite of the sort of description we have here.

In the parallels between Oriental practices and Mauricio's actions we have a meeting between contemporary culture, the fashionable 60s' counter-cultural fascination with Eastern philosophies of mind, and the well-documented Orientalism of the *fin de siècle*.

Romanticism itself was already steeped in mysticism. Bertrand's Gaspard is a kind of mystic who likens himself to the Rosicrucians and their search for the philosopher's stone "l'art, cette pierre philosophale du XIXe siècle".⁹¹ The search for an absolute, an epiphany, was also part of the symbolists' continual search for transcendence, summed up by Rimbaud in his "Lettre du Voyant" as the artist/voyant's struggle to turn himself into the "supreme Savant". In Latin American *modernismo* – a totally different phenomenon, of course, from European and North-American modernism – there is the figure of the poet Julián del Casal, a friend of Darío's who was influenced by the French Parnassians and obsessed with Japan.⁹² In addition there are the examples of Borges and Cortázar who were also interested in Buddhism, and Octavio Paz's well-documented links with India.

However, while there are striking similarities between certain forms of meditation and Mauricio's behaviour it would be overstating the case to suggest that Donoso's protagonist is following the path of the meditational philosophies, the disparities between which are notable in any case. They do, however, provide some insight into the view of the self that we encounter in «Gaspard de la Nuit». Buddhist philosophy in particular produced a sophisticated discourse on the contradictory nature of what we think of as "I" two thousand years before Descartes' *cogito*. The loss of self experienced as meditation transforms the practitioner's consciousness is the source of the deep scepticism, in most schools of Buddhism at least, about what is thought of as an essential self. Just as «Gaspard de la Nuit», therefore, tends to present the self as a social construct, so Buddhist thought over the last two and a half thousand years has tended to regard the idea of the self as a necessary fiction. Most Buddhist texts deny the existence of an essence or soul, referring instead to the *skandhas* or "bundles of characteristics", the shifting mental states on which we impose the conceptual unity that is the self.⁹³

⁹¹Bertrand, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, p. 45.

⁹²The following excerpt from Julián del Casal's "Autobiografía" reveals a typically elitist sensibility:

"Porque me alienta el formidable orgullo/ De vivir, ni envidioso ni envidiado,/ Persiguiendo fantásticas visiones, Mientras se arrastran otros por el fango/ Para extraer un átomo de oro/ Del fondo pestilente de un pantano."

Poesías completas y pequeños poemas en prosa, Miami: Ediciones Uni, 1993, p. 142

⁹³Paul Williams' commentary on the Madyamaka Sutra sums up this vision:

"The Self must be either the same or different from the mind-body collection. But mind and body are constantly changing. If the Self were the body then it would be unconscious. If the mind, then which of the constantly

Hortensia Morell suggests that Mauricio's "marcha sin camino parece aún fuera del alcance de la voz narradora".⁹⁴ This is hardly surprising as the free indirect style is a verbal discourse that describes the contents of a character's consciousness. If that character is to be imagined as beyond language what is there for it to say? The text, itself made of words, cannot answer the question of what kind of self exists beyond language. If Octavio Paz's concise summing up of Benveniste's view of the subject – "el sujeto es una cristalización más o menos fortuita del lenguaje"⁹⁵ is correct then Mauricio has ceased to be a subject in the conventional sense. What is left when culture has gone? The text, inevitably, fudges this issue, taking refuge in vague references such as: "el silbido surgía desde el fondo mismo de lo que Mauricio era" (245). What constitutes this depth is no clearer than what is to be understood as Mauricio's centre when the narrative describes him as: "uniéndose con su centro mismo" (257). These comments are as deliberately vague as the 'something undefined but which existed' (214) that Mauricio is supposed to absorb from his victims, a straying off into the realm of the ineffable, an inarticulate gesturing in the direction of some transcendent realm. What we in fact end up with is the loss of any identifiable sense of self: beyond language, beyond convention, beyond Ravel's music, beyond culture, beyond the realm of the recognisably human, and it is fitting that at this point he is described as like "un animal en su senda" (271). That this should be the case complicates the claims of the likes of Helen Calae de Agüera that Donoso is using the idea of lack of unity of the personality to criticise "los mitos de la sociedad y los temores burgueses: la supremacía masculina, las formas civilizadas y la necesidad de una identidad"⁹⁶ because exactly how the need for an identity can be regarded as a specifically bourgeois myth is unclear.

Mauricio, then, really is a weird misfit, a mixture of difficult adolescent, modernist worshipper at the altar of difficulty, *flâneur*, Symbolist seeker after transcendence, surrealist alive to the possibilities of "hasard objectif" and esoteric adept. The overall impact of the

changing mental states is it? The present state has instantly ceased, and thus, if the Self were the present state it would already have perished. If it were the present state at whatever time one says the word "I" then there would be a whole series of Selves, and already the notion of one enduring self has collapsed. If the Self were the whole series of mental states from birth to death then the Self would cease to be unitary and become a collection, most of which has either perished or not come into existence.[...]

"As with causation, the Madhyamaka is not saying that we do not exist, or that we should not use the word "I". Rather, we do not exist in the way we think we do, as inherently existent, independent monads. The correct way of understanding our existence is as conceptually created entities superimposed upon our changing mental and bodily states." (Williams, Paul, *Mahayana Buddhism*, London: Duckworth 1986, p. 67).

⁹⁴José Donoso y el surrealismo, p. 109.

⁹⁵Paz, Octavio, *Los hijos del limo*, Bogotá: Oveja Negra, 1985, p. 139.

⁹⁶Calae de Agüera, Helen, "Desintegración de la personalidad", p. 487.

presentation of this character, however, is to underline that what begins as an affirmation of the individual's right to autonomy, based on the idea that the individual is an absolute value, is transformed by a recognition that the godlike autonomy of the Romantic "I" is a fiction. Our sense of ourselves as a cohesive, enduring whole is imposed on the continually shifting reality of our lives. Much of what we think of as the self is a creation of society and language, a convenient term for a variety of characteristics, a multiple reality. Ironically, Mauricio's affirmation of individual identity is subverted by a process that ends up in the loss of conventional notions of self, a *satori* that swallows up the individual identity. This is not so much a Romantic expansion into nature as a recognition of the essentially contingent and conventional nature of the self.

Mauricio's escape from the conventions that would not only govern his social behaviour but also his perceptions dramatises a theme that had immense resonance in the 60s and early 70s with its fascination with writers like Hesse (mentioned in «Chatanooga choochoo», p. 72). One of the questions that the novella asks is how we react in the face of something that is outside our experience. Sylvia panics and turns her back on what she has discovered. Morell rightly points out the importance of childhood for the surrealists and we see that here. For a child everything is new, a discovery just like "el mundo fino y fresco del otro Mauricio" (237). When everything is familiar we get stale, bored and boring. What is handed down to us as received truth can condition our experience in a negative way if we accept it unquestioningly, blinding us to other ways of seeing by overdetermining our experience of the real. Much of the thrust of the 1960s attack on convention started from the idea that the world could be imagined in other ways and therefore changed.

This is very different, however, from saying that convention is inherently negative. On the contrary, it ought to be clear that conventions are an absolute necessity. They make language and social life possible, in short they make us human. Without the ability to analyse, categorise and generalise we are nothing. Conventions, in fact, are often the result of experience and insight, and represent imaginative and useful ways of understanding the world that have been codified in order for us not to forget them. Taken in its most generalised sense convention has a more grandiose name: culture. Yet if convention were all there were then there would be no culture because there would be no change. The sixties emphasised the need for experience to be freed from the constant weight of expectation, both in terms of the routes we take through our social lives and in the ways in which we perceive our world. There is a complex interplay between convention and experience. New

experiences challenge convention and enable society and all of culture to change. Therein lies the importance of those who rebel and allow imagination to free them from the bonds of convention. Mauricio is one of these characters. The experience that he seeks and the barriers that stand in his way anticipate the dichotomy between Dynamic Quality and Static Quality to be found in Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974), a work which appeared shortly after *Tres Novelitas Burguesas* and which shares something of the spirit of the time.⁹⁷ Indeed, Pirsig's theory of Dynamic Quality has a point of similarity with some aspects of «Gaspard de la Nuit». For Pirsig, Dynamic Quality is the undefined source of experience, the reality the perception of which Mauricio wants to protect from being swamped by Sylvia's conventionalising opinions. Static Quality, on the other hand, is essentially a description of the conventional picture of reality that is left as a result of previous human encounters with Dynamic Quality. As such it is vital, but if we cling to it in the face of everything we limit ourselves unnecessarily and, perhaps more importantly, fail to renew the shared area of human experience, whether that is general culture or scientific progress, by not renewing and reshaping our conventional picture of the real. From this perspective Mauricio could be seen as someone impelled to seek it out, whereas Sylvia takes refuge in the static patterns of what used to be Dynamic Quality. In his refusal to make contact with others, however, Mauricio would not be so much a romantic hero as a solipsist lost in the narcissistic pursuit of individual fulfilment.

Whether such a view is regarded as modernist or postmodernist depends on the theorist you happen to be talking to. What is at stake is a view of constructivism. In his remarks on *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* Philip Swanson claims that "[a]ll categories for defining reality are arbitrary mental creations by humans so that reality can never be any more than 'eso que llamaban la realidad' ([*El obsceno pájaro de la noche*] p.493)"⁹⁸ However, such a far-reaching view of constructivism contains within it a problem for Swanson's overall thesis in *The boom and beyond* that Donoso's work figures a struggle between the artificial order of human constructs and the chaos of reality. If reality is a construct how do we know that it is also "really" chaos? And is not the idea of reality as chaos itself not just another human construct, as Adorno pointed out?⁹⁹ Furthermore, is there

⁹⁷Pirsig, Robert M., *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, London: Vintage, 1991.

⁹⁸*Landmarks in Modern Latin American Fiction*, p. 191.

⁹⁹ "Sheer chaos, to which the reflective spirit downgrades the world for the sake of its own total power, is just as much the product of spirit as the cosmos which it sets up as an object of reverence." Theodor Adorno, *Against*

really no difference between a category such as “hot” and one like “politically correct”? Swanson’s claim would seem to put him in the same camp as radical cultural relativists like Sharon Magnarelli when she claims that “reality is what we’ve been told it is; we see (perceive) what we have been told is there (‘they say’) by some ‘authority’ whose authority is another linguistic construct, ad infinitum”.¹⁰⁰ Although convention does play an immensely important part in our perceptions this claim suggests that our experience is entirely linguistic. Yet if we see reality only as we are told to, why is it that our vision of reality changes? What causes our discourse about reality to change, mere discourse itself or our relationship with non-linguistic reality? Doesn’t my experience of touching something hot affect my view of reality? The way we react to these different ways of thinking will to an extent affect the way we read Mauricio. The lyricism of the passages that deal with his search for transcendence suggest a modernist sensibility, but in the background there is a sneaking postmodernist cynicism in the face of such an enterprise. Again, however, it is important to remember that the neatness of the dichotomy breaks down in the face of the unruliness of the terms used. Linda Hutcheon, for example, associates the view of reality as *only* a construct, dependent on arbitrary conventions, with modernism.¹⁰¹

Those who search for Dynamic Quality challenge the certainties of others. In general people do not like having their certainties challenged, a fact that is fictionalised through Sylvia’s reaction to her son’s behaviour which for her is inexplicable. Her failure to understand means that she wants him to receive therapy:

a ti no te entiendo. Si vivieras conmigo, en vez de con el reaccionario de tu padre, te llevaría a consultar con un psicoanalista. (259)

The irony in this is that she too was branded a “loca” by those who expected her to conform to their way of seeing and their way of doing things. Here the draconian edge of an impositional culture is evident. The ultimate response of an intolerant group is to suggest he is mad and needs treatment, a step taken, ironically enough by those critics who want to naturalise the story by claiming Mauricio is mad. (It is also intriguing that Paolo refers to Antono Gaudí as mad, a we shall see below). We should be aware that if we decide to interpret Mauricio’s behaviour in this way we are proceeding like interpretative counterparts

Epistemology, Oxford: Blackwell, 1982, p. 18.

¹⁰⁰ *Understanding Donoso*, p. 109.

¹⁰¹ *The Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 146.

of some the most intolerant characters in Donoso's fiction. One of the more sinister ways of removing the threat posed by those who refuse to conform is to label them mad and there are repeated examples in Donoso's stories of the attempt to marginalise and silence rebels in precisely this way.¹⁰² As critics we ought, perhaps, to feel slightly uncomfortable about engaging in this interpretative equivalent of confining the dissidents to the mad house. Donoso's interest in antipsychiatrists like R.D. Laing would certainly suggest that he would have wholeheartedly opposed such an idea and the image of the asylum reminds us again to Breton's character Nadja, institutionalised by an uncomprehending society because she refuses to give up on the attempt to fuse dream and reality. At the same time, however, the dark side of Mauricio's behaviour evokes the disturbing side of romanticism and surrealism, the nightmare that existed alongside the dream.

The kinds of visions of the self under discussion here also have political overtones. It is therefore intriguing to ask what sort of political interpretation the novella might give rise to. To begin with we might note that Donoso's choice of title itself can be interpreted in a number of ways. As both Gutiérrez Mouat and Morell have mentioned, the use of the word *bourgeois* is reminiscent of 19th century works like Balzac's *Les petits bourgeois* and suggests the social satire that we do indeed find in the novellas.¹⁰³ For her part Hortensia Morell suggests we interpret the title from the ironic perspective of surrealism, a contradictory narrative that is surrealist but masquerades under a bourgeois title.¹⁰⁴ Another way of interpreting the title would be to relate it to the novella's form. These could indeed be read as ironic tales directed at the bourgeoisie: readable yet technically progressive and definitely modern, attractive, in short, to the sophisticated middle-class reader while at the same time launching a vitriolic attack on bourgeois pretension.

Whatever our view of the title, however, the questions of subjectivity and individual freedom are obviously political issues that demand interpretation. One of the inescapable features about these novellas is their emphasis on consumerism. Sharon Magnarelli sees the defining feature of identity in *TNB* as possession but although in general I agree with the

¹⁰²For example, in «Sueños de mala muerte» Andrés suggests that his parents have gone mad. The same claim is made against Blanca in *La misteriosa desaparición*, against Judit in *La desesperanza*, and against Sebastián in «La puerta cerrada».

¹⁰³*Impostura e impostación*, p. 70.

¹⁰⁴José Donoso y el surrealismo, p. 13.

points she makes I would prefer to change the defining term from possession to consumption.¹⁰⁵ This theme is perhaps more prominent in Donoso's work than in that of most of his boom contemporaries. Nearly every major work mentions repeatedly the makes of cars and watches, the designer labels of clothes and perfume, the brand names of alcoholic drinks, and even the specific types of sleeping pills that the characters use. The frequently grotesque social climbing of Donoso's characters is noted through this obsession with the markers of status and belonging, and his deft evocation of bourgeois values owes much to an eye for socially significant detail that is reminiscent of some of the great nineteenth century novelists.

In *TNB* as a whole the idea of consumption is a central part of the characters' sense of identity. Their intellectual pretensions are emphasised by the fact that their consumption of culture is what sets them apart from their economic peers in the conservative middle-classes. Their desire for modernisation, a rejection of the legacy of Franco's Spain, is apparent through their willingness to open themselves up to the kind of foreign cultural influences that fascism regarded as decadent and contrary to its ideology of national identity. Yet although in many respects this is an indisputably positive development, we are reminded that despite their pretensions these people's values are still deeply bourgeois and their approach to art and culture is little more than another configuration of the traditional bourgeoisie's obsession with consumption as a marker of status and belonging, a parallel between the two groups that reminds us again of Mauricio's view of Sylvia as just another version of "abuelis" (227).

This consumerist view of culture is symbolised by Sylvia's reaction to Mauricio's music. Faced by her son's weird use of Ravel Sylvia wants to win him over by buying him the Cassadessus recording of GASPARD DE LA NUIT. This gesture makes the mistake of ignoring the music's magical significance for her son and instead commodifies it, turning it into something you can buy and consume at leisure, reducing its prodigious difficulty to something that comes on at the flick of a switch, not something that takes weeks or months to master. The description of Sylvia "conjugando velos y transparencias como cualquier ondina de buena marca" (247, italics mine) perfectly sums up her relationship to culture and ironically figures this bourgeoisie's reworking of the consumerist practices of the traditional bourgeoisie that they reject. Mauricio recoils in horror from her gift because it is the practical dimension of his own performance of the work that interests him. While it might be deemed

¹⁰⁵ *Understanding Donoso*, p. 125.

ironic that he had access to it through *Galerías Preciados*, a symbol of democratic consumerism, it is important to remember that that in itself was the result of an aberration in the shape of the kindly shop assistant who let him listen to the record for hours although he obviously had no intention of buying it.

As I mentioned above, the kind of bourgeoisie represented by Sylvia assimilates all sorts of art at a superficial level yet understands nothing. Such an attitude to art might be regarded as postmodern but even in the heyday of modernism the bourgeoisie's ability to consume the most radical forms of artistic expression was a reality. Indeed, the attitudes of Donoso's bourgeois bring to mind the following words from George Grosz, written in 1925:

Formal revolution lost its shock effect a long time ago. The modern citizen digests everything: only the money chests are vulnerable. Today's young merchant [...] ice-cold, aloof, hangs the most radical things in his apartment... Rash and unhesitating acceptance so as not to be 'born yesterday' is the password. Automobile –the newest, most sporty model. Nothing said about professional mission, obligations of wealth; cool, objective to the point of dullness, sceptical, without illusions, avaricious, he understands only his merchandise, for everything else—including the fields of philosophy, ethics, art— for all culture, there are specialists who determine the fashion, which is then accepted at face value.¹⁰⁶

There are striking similarities between the 1920s bourgeoisie described by Grosz and Sylvia's 1960s radical chic, particularly in the references to its hunger for novelty and its signal failure to engage with art in anything other than a superficial way. We have already noted Paolo's role as cultural commissar and his dismissal of Ravel, despite his recognition of his qualities, as out of date. In this he is a version of Grosz's specialist, providing advice to the eager bourgeois on the correct (i.e. fashionable) cultural artifacts to consume, advice that comes with a seductive patina of culture and a veneer of independent judgement, qualities summed up by Paolo's witty description of Gaudí's Sagrada Familia as "esa tarta de novia hecha por un loco" (235) or his claim, strangely resonant in the context of «Gaspard de la Nuit» that "[n]adie tiene personalidad ahora, supongo que no se usa" (79).

While the bourgeois of the title are evidently satirised, however, what about Mauricio himself? One of the most intriguing features of his revolt is the tension that is established between elitist exclusivity and compassion. The most salient feature of Mauricio's attitude is its solipsism. He is not a typical 60s counter-cultural rebel although there are 60s elements in the creation of the character. He is a modernist hero, if anything, an elitist seeker given up to a cult of difficulty, not facile *peace 'n' luv*. He does not smoke joints, listen to the *Beatles*

¹⁰⁶Modernism, p. 289.

and drop out. He shuns any real contact with others and there is a Romantic exclusiveness about the novella's emphasis on the difference between his perception and that of the people he encounters during his wanderings. On the other hand, however, it is important to remember romanticism's revolutionary sympathies. In an interview for the Latin-American service of the BBC Donoso pointed out that the romantics were also tribunes with a marked political role and he sees them as providing the model for Latin American intellectuals engagement with social issues.¹⁰⁷ Thus while Mauricio's vision of the mass can be disdainful there are also passages that are full of compassion. There is an undoubted scorn for the "gente endomingada" as well as for the thoughtless philistinism of the hordes who invade the peace of the woods at Valvidrera, leaving their litter everywhere (237), and at times he almost seems to adopt his grandmother's sneeringly elitist view the women with "peinados de peluquería" (216). On the other hand, this scorn seems to be principally directed at the perceived mindlessness of mass culture. Mauricio's sensitivity to the pressures on people to fit into predetermined social roles results in a poignant vision of the emptiness of life for those he meets in his wandering. The contradictions between these positions is evident in a key passage which merits quoting at length:

Era que todos estaban tan ávidos por buscar algo que marcara ese día y lo detuviera en sus memorias para no perderlo...que no se les fuera a escurrir el día.... ese terror dominguero de que el tiempo fuera tragado como gotas de agua por la tierra seca. Por eso tarareaban los muchachos. Por eso agitaban sus cabelleras lacias las muchachas. En busca de eso iba toda esta gente, los futbolistas de camiseta amarilla querían que el día de hoy marcara un triunfo en el partido contra los de la camiseta lila, las señoras con «peinados de peluquería» querían marcar esta tarde con el primer diente que se le cayó a Mariana, por ejemplo, aunque costara sangre y llanto, y guardarían el diente con mucho cuidado, igual que los demás que iban buscando cualquier cosa que guardar para que este domingo no se muriera sin la dignidad ritual de «haberse divertido». (236-237)

The pathos in these images is undeniable. The boys humming is a pale reflection of Mauricio's whistling, devoid of power but all the more melancholy in its vain attempt to fill the emptiness of their lives. The women wrapping up and keeping their children's milk teeth are a gentle echo of *El obsceno pájaro de la noche's* viejas and their hoarding of rubbish in packages, a Beckettian filling in of the pointless void of existence. This is a similar view to that expressed in «Chatanooga choochoo's» reference to "la intimidad de la hora de espera entre acontecimientos de importancia que marcarían el día y lo harían digno de recordar" (73). Mauricio sees the people out trying to make the most of their leisure time as

¹⁰⁷Interview with Elena Cegade for the series "Los escritores y la política en América Latina", Servicio Latinoamericano de la BBC, January, 1986.

interchangeable units, devoid of significant individual features. While at first this seems to be similar to Sylvia's view it is actually the opposite. Whereas his mother wants to be able to categorise people in these terms Mauricio is looking for an individual who does not fit in with the mass of conformist zombies whose sense of identity has become so inextricably bound up with their jobs that to all intents and purposes they have become their social roles. This vision is extremely important in the early Donoso and it is powerfully expressed in «Gaspard de la Nuit» whether it be in the description of “los ojos nubosos de un hombre fatigado que llevaba un maletín, un empleado al que le tocaba hacer otro turno dominical odioso” (212) or in the contrast between Mauricio's as yet temporary liberty and the alienation and lack of freedom of others:

Todos en el pueblo trabajando, o abajo, en la ciudad. Como su madre y como Ramón cumpliendo con sus obligaciones, confundiendo sus fisionomías con las actividades que les habían borrado las facciones. Él, en cambio, tenía el privilegio infantil de no hacer nada, caminando con las manos en los bolsillos, pateando un guijarro, por el bosque de Vallvidrera. (252) ¹⁰⁸

Mauricio's view of the adults around him as alienated cogs forced to fit into the general economic system provides a perspective from which we can again reevaluate an important aspect of Sylvia's beliefs. «Gaspard de la Nuit» foregrounds an internal conflict within bourgeois culture, subverting Sylvia's claim that “sólo por medio de su trabajo encontraría por fin su independencia, su dignidad personal” (193) by framing it within the broader context of social relations in this kind of society. There is an ironic contrast between the way Mauricio becomes one with his whistling, an activity that liberates him from conventional relationships, and the manner in which Sylvia, Ramón and all the other bourgeois are limited and conditioned by their social roles. As Gutiérrez Mouat puts it: “Esta denuncia de la confusión entre actor y rol es irónica porque desmiente indirectamente el proyecto independentista de Sylvia, que es justamente liberarse de un rol (tradicional) y

¹⁰⁸The process being described here is commonly referred to by theorists of the left. In a passage in his “Messages in a bottle” Theodor Adorno makes the same point before going on to attack the vision of the autonomous subject:

“Powerless in an overwhelming society, the individual experiences himself only as socially mediated [...] You feel yourself to the marrow a doctor's wife, a member of a faculty, a chairman of the committee of religious experts -I once heard a villain publicly use that phrase without raising a laugh- as one might in other times have felt oneself a part of a family or tribe. You become once again in consciousness what you are in your being in any case. Compared to the illusion of the self-sufficient personality existing independently in the commodity society, such consciousness is truth.” Theodor Adorno, “Messages in a bottle” in *Mapping Ideology* Slavoj Žižek (ed.), London: Verso, 1994, p. 35.

realizar todo su potencial de individuo en un espacio libre de restricciones".¹⁰⁹ Although, as we have seen, there is a way in which Sylvia and her like are creating a sector of freedom in the prison of totalitarian Spain Mauricio's perspective points out that the freedom she has found is a relative one, and even another kind of slavery. In fact, her declaration of autonomy seems to be an example of what Jacques Lacan, in a moment of lucidity, was referring to when he wrote of "the freedom which never claims more authenticity than when it is within the walls of a prison".¹¹⁰ Again, Mauricio's perspective reveals his genealogy that can be traced back to a whole series of bourgeois rebels, from the romantic outsider appalled at the rise of bourgeois society, to the modernist and avant-garde artists appalled at the voracious consumerism of modern society.

With respect to all of this there is also a formal issue which warrants comment. In his influential work, *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson claims that certain literary techniques themselves embody the false sense of the unity of the self. Unsurprisingly, these include techniques that were developed with the express aim of better representing the experience of the individual subject. Thus he tells us that "Jamesian point of view" and "Flaubertian *style indirect libre*" are "strategic loci for the fully constituted or centred bourgeois subject or monadic ego". These are techniques which "produce and institutionalise the new subjectivity of the bourgeois individual"¹¹¹

Whether it can be claimed that they "produce" the subjectivity Jameson is talking about is debatable but is nonetheless interesting to consider his claims from the perspective of *Tres Novelitas Burguesas*, particularly as the management of the free indirect style is a key structuring component of all three novellas. Given the theoretical framework provided by Jameson, what better way to represent the bourgeois sense of self which is one of Donoso's aims in this collection? However in «Gaspard de la Nuit», a work written a hundred years after those cited by Jameson, the technique is used in a narrative which seeks to question, complicate and even undermine the idea of the centred subject rather than to reflect and

¹⁰⁹ *Impostura e Impostación*, p. 66.

¹¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror-Phase", reproduced in *Mapping Ideology* p.98. The first part of the quotation is also interesting:

"At the climax of the historical attempt of a society to refuse to recognize that it has any function other than the utilitarian one, and in the anguish of the individual confronting the concentrational form of the social bond which seems to arise to crown this attempt, existentialism must be judged by the account it gives of the subjective dilemmas which it has indeed given rise to: the freedom which never claims more authenticity than when it is within the walls of a prison ..."

¹¹¹ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 154.

propagate it. In this respect Donoso's narrative, like that of many modern and postmodern writers' use of well-established techniques subverts and extends the conventions which it seemingly observes. Thus although the use of the free indirect style in «Gaspard de la Nuit» is intended to approximate certain aspects of Sylvia's consciousness the irreverence of the approach destroys any sense that the technique is being used to capture some absolute value that must be respected and preserved. Ideas are of the first order rather than psychological detail; the reason for approximating some of Sylvia's thoughts is to show the inconsistency of her attitudes and the contingent nature of much of her awareness, not to hold up the "capturing" of consciousness like some phenomenologist's grail. In fact, there is also a certain irony in the narrator's intrusion into the consciousness of the characters as it parallels the invasive actions that Mauricio so fears.

Before concluding this discussion of «Gaspard de la Nuit» I want to return to the question of irony. The prejudices with which all readers approach any text are clarified by the choices they make when dealing with irony. No other narrative strategy is so dependent on the reader's value judgements. A good example of the way our expectations and critical prejudices affect our reading is Richard Callan's Jungian interpretation of the novella which is certainly original but in my view difficult to defend.¹¹² Callan regards the novella as the story of how Mauricio overcomes his adolescent identity crisis, breaks free from his mother and is finally inserted into the community as a well-balanced and happy consumer. At the end of the novella the figure of the double means that Mauricio "has turned into the well-adjusted materialistic youngster his bourgeois mother wants him to be, untouched by any transcendent aspiration".¹¹³ Mauricio's initial stage of psychological development is linked to Jung's idea of the "dragon fight", the moment when the adolescent has to break free from the influence of the mother. Apart from the fact that Mauricio has not spent a great deal of time with Sylvia and his conflict with his mother is therefore an unusual one, the emphasis on the process of psychological adjustment leads Callan to see the figure of Mauricio's double as a positive one. The implicit assumption that an acceptance of and an integration into society is an ideal means that he fails to see any irony in the description of the group of children in the

¹¹²Richard J. Callan *The Creative Process in the Works of J.D.*, Castillo-Feliú ed., Winthrop Studies on Major Modern Writers, 1982.

¹¹³"Gaspard de la Nuit: crucial breakthrough in the growth of personality", p. 137.

funicular on the way to Vallvidrera. Callan responds to the description of these “diez niños bulliciosos, excitadísimos con la importancia de ostentar la insignia del Club Excursionista Patufet” (236) with the comment “No identity problems there!” (134) and approves of what he regards as the boys’ break from the mother that is expressed through their belonging to a larger group. For my part I read this as a highly ironic passage, particularly the reference to “la importancia de ostentar la insignia del Club”. For me the word “ostentar” is a clear invitation to re-evaluate this phrase, an ironic marker that suggests not only that it is not at all important to belong to the Patufet Excursion Club, but also that belonging to this apparently innocuous little group nonetheless symbolises the kind of smothering of the individual’s identity by the group that Donoso’s work most powerfully attacks. It is not surprising that the young boys are later described as “como una bandada de pollos” (236), that is to say, totally lacking in any individual identity. Callan passes over this, I think, because it would be at odds with the conclusion he wants to reach, namely the idea that Mauricio achieves a successful integration into society at the end of the novella. I suspect that this is also why he offers no comment on the image of the “foldable grandfather” other than saying that it represents “the opposite end of the life span” (134) from the young boys. His overall conclusion comes from imposing the edifice of Jungian psychology with its emphasis on integration and individuation onto the novella, although exactly how an acceptance of Sylvia’s stifling world would fit in with the Jungian scheme of things I am not sure. After all, far from breaking free from his mother the mendicant who assumes her son’s identity is quickly revealed to be completely in thrall to her.

On the other hand, as Linda Hutcheon points out, “[i]t would seem to be the case that there is no such thing as a marker that would allow us to determine *with certainty* the presence (or absence) of irony”.¹¹⁴ In other words it is impossible to say for sure that we are correctly interpreting a passage or utterance as ironic. Irony is in the eye of the beholder and all sorts of things may therefore lead us to reinterpret a text. At first we have to interpret each scene as we encounter it but as we read and reread any work, looking for patterns, we begin to form an overall picture of it that may begin to impose itself on the interpretation of specific incidents at a local level. The basic if naive urge to solve the puzzle is after all a powerful one and may lead us to suppress important aspects of a text in favour of a

¹¹⁴ *Irony's Edge*, p. 149.

non-existent ideal of global coherence. This is particularly true when we have an overall impression of the direction being taken by an author's work.

An example of this process is Philip Swanson's reading of the double's return to Sylvia's apartment after the transfer of identities at Vallvidrera. He suggests that this section "smacks of sentimentality" as she bursts into tears when her son (in the guise of his double) calls her "Mamá" for the first time (268).¹¹⁵ Again I read this passage as highly ironic, the apparent sentimentality a blackly humorous parody of the happy ending that once again reveals Sylvia's limitations. The lack of any ambiguity that could make us think it was another part of Mauricio himself that is finally beginning to "relate" to his mother, rather than the double who fears that "lo hubieran descubierto por una frase mal dicha" (268), means that the focus is on Sylvia's adoption of a clichéd role. I do not think that there is any textual evidence to support Swanson's claim that Donoso is coming to see the value of "the human construct" (110) and I suspect that his reading is imposed by his overarching thesis that the decrease in formal complexity in Donoso's work corresponds to an increasingly resigned and well-integrated view of the world. The same could be said for his claim in his interview with Donoso that "Sylvia [...] consigue un tipo de satisfacción".¹¹⁶ This is undeniably true, but to my mind the significance of Sylvia's satisfaction can only be understood if we see it as a darkly ironic commentary on the kind of child she wanted rather than as an example of the author's gradually mellowing existential outlook.

We encounter a similar divergence of critical opinion when it comes to making an overall judgement on the characters. How far do we criticise Sylvia and how far is the figure of Mauricio ironised? A lot of critics are entirely negative in their interpretation of Sylvia. Hortensia Morell's view of Sylvia, for example, is succinctly summed up by her claim that "[s]u rol social ha desplazado de ella cualquier dimensión humana"¹¹⁷ and Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat is equally harsh in his assessment of her. At the start of his analysis of the story Augusto Sorrochi seems to be as negative as any of the other critics with his reference to her willingness to give her son "todo menos el respeto a su propia individualidad"¹¹⁸ but then we see that his reading of the story transfers Callan's focus onto Sylvia with his claim that "con el transcurrir novelesco va surgiendo una Sylvia Corday diferente y se descubre lo verdadero,

¹¹⁵ *The Boom and Beyond*, p. 110.

¹¹⁶ Swanson, Philip, "Una entrevista con José Donoso", *Revista Iberoamericana*, vol. 53, no. 141 (1987): p. 997.

¹¹⁷ *José Donoso y el surrealismo*, p. 94.

¹¹⁸ Sorrochi, p. 193.

lo auténtico: ansía ser una madre como las demás, que desea el afecto y el respeto del hijo".¹¹⁹ This is interesting in its shifting of the novella's theme of transformation from the son to the mother but I do not think for a minute that it stands up to scrutiny. In the last instance Sylvia is a conformist, a consumer of approved goods and cultural artifacts and this is the world into which she introduces the new version of her son, an obedient and malleable clone.

Philip Swanson's reading of Sylvia is ambiguous although it has something in common with Sorrochi's as it back-pedals from an initially critical position. At first he mentions the "falsity" of Sylvia's life and recognises "the gap between the shallowness of [Sylvia's] stance and the integrity of [Mauricio's] quest for a truly honest mode of existence".¹²⁰ He then changes tack and criticises Gutiérrez Mouat for what he regards as an excessively harsh view of Sylvia:

Undoubtedly there is an element of irony present in the tale, but to suggest, as Gutiérrez Mouat does, that the novella is an out-and-out attack upon Sylvia's outlook does not do justice to the characteristic ambiguity with which Donoso tells his tales¹²¹

The problem with this is that having attacked Sylvia strongly himself he has no real way of showing that she is not such a negative character other than through recourse to the external authority of his reading of the rest of Donoso's *oeuvre* as fundamentally ambiguous. His suggestion that "we" identify with Sylvia is essentially a permissible rhetorical move with which in this instance I strongly disagree. Thus when he says that "Donoso is, in effect, gently criticising his readers' too ready identification with the outlook of the first section: he cleverly reminds us that our own attitude is generally like that of Sylvia; by making us question Sylvia's attitude he is really making us question our own"¹²² I think he is commenting on his own initial identification with Sylvia. Although it is certainly a possible reading I do not think there is anything in the text that justifies his claim, and the only real evidence he puts forward is that he thinks we identify with her because we see things from her point of view, something that would surely only hold true for very naive readers.

In my view Sylvia remains a negative character throughout the novella. The fantastic element of the story removes any realistic identification with Sylvia as she, Ramón, and

¹¹⁹Sorrochi, p. 194.

¹²⁰Swanson, *The boom and beyond*, p. 107.

¹²¹ *The Boom and beyond*, p. 110.

¹²²Swanson, p. 109.

ultimately all the bourgeois of *Tres Novelitas Burguesas* are ultimately two-dimensional, emblematic figures, a fact that rules out any real sympathy for them. I do not think that there is any doubt that the novella values Mauricio more highly than Sylvia. Its powerful criticism of the latter is continued and even strengthened at the end because we see her through the sort of son she wanted and gets in the shape of Mauricio's double. The new Mauricio is a mindless consumer obsessed with things:

Detuvo la moto. La limpió con un trapo. Se encucilló para examinar su motorcito y mirar los detalles de las ruedas, probando la flexibilidad del manubrio y ajustando el asiento... atentamente... atentamente... como si fuera una joya (273)

A further irony is imposed as we learn that he is whistling as he does this. The ultimate symbol of purity is degraded to the level of a simple accompaniment to this image of bourgeois consumerism, this undignified pride in possession. As part of her focus on the importance of possession Sharon Magnarelli notes that while Mauricio does not want anything the *gamín* does and thus allows Sylvia to define him.¹²³ In short, Mauricio's replacement is a crass materialist who rides a Vespina, a mass-produced symbol of consumerist conformism, rather than the motorbike that symbolised 60s rebellion. Crucially we are told that Mauricio, now in the role of "el muchacho" sees a fear he does not like in his the new Mauricio's eyes:

Al pasar, Mauricio levantó la vista y las miradas de los dos se cruzaron. El muchacho vio un miedo que no le gustó en la mirada de Mauricio. Sus propios ojos estaban limpios. (273).

The question to be asked here is who says they are "limpios"? Although we cannot be sure this seems to be the narrator's view of him, not his own, suggesting that the narrative seems to approve of him rather than the new Mauricio. In Myrna Solotorevsky's words: "El miedo que en el desenlace el muchacho capta en la mirada de Mauricio, testimonia el sistema apreciativo del texto, que comparte las preferencias del hijo de Sylvia".¹²⁴ Unless, of course, Mauricio is also being ironised. Even more damningly, the new Mauricio is used as a pawn in the unsavoury game Sylvia is playing with her ex-husband and his family:

Tenía dieciséis años. Su madre, al comprarle esta moto, le había prometido que en cuanto cumpliera los dieciocho y pudiera sacar permiso de conducir, le regalaría un coche: un seiscientos al comienzo... y después un mini, si se quedaba con ella para demostrarle a la familia

¹²³ *Understanding Donoso*, p. 124.

¹²⁴ *José Donoso: Incursiones en su producción novelesca*, Valparaíso: Ediciones Universidad de Valparaíso, p. 98.

de su marido que hasta un niño de la edad de Mauricio se ahogaba en el ambiente de carcas en que lo obligaban a vivir (273).

The obedient, docile adolescent is open to this kind of bribery and blackmail and by the end is beginning to accept her view and participate in the way she wants:

-No sé como podías soportar la vida antes, allá...
-Yo tampoco, mamá. (273)

This is doubly ironic because it ignores the fact that she had left him with no choice in the matter. He had to either sink or swim in Madrid on his own even though she rationalised her choice to abandon him by means of an absurd psychoanalytical alibi: "No le pareció tan espantoso, entonces, dejar a Mauricio en manos del padre para que así por lo menos tuviera una figura paterna fuerte con la cual identificarse o contra la cual rebelarse" (193). In my view Morell correctly sums up the relationship between Mauricio, his mother and his double by saying that "Mauricio rechaza las metas pragmáticas y degradadas de la burguesía, encarnadas en las máscaras de su mamá Sylvia y en la existencia que acepta su doble sobornado por ella" (109).

Which brings us to Mauricio himself. Eduardo Bendezú sees the story as a straightforward vindication of Mauricio's stance: "Mauricio [...] estaba solamente esperando la aparición de un alter ego para echarse a vagabundear por los caminos libres del mundo, lejos del chato y frívolo ambiente burgués",¹²⁵ a view that is echoed by Gutiérrez's claim that: "[e]l verdadero rebelde es el hijo, y ante él el discurso liberado de Sylvia se revela finalmente como retórica" (67). While I find it difficult to regard Sylvia as a positive character, however, I am not entirely sure that the validation of Mauricio is as obvious as some critics have confidently made out. Is Mauricio really free and is he an entirely positive character? His single-minded search for transcendence is seductive and fascinating but there are important ambiguities that relativise our view of him. He seems to reach his ideal of freedom at the end of the novella, finding his personal grail in the figure of the nameless beggar. Yet the kind of figure that is described for us is highly problematic. The fact that he has to go so far to be free reminds us of all the factors that condition us. By adopting the perspective of a character driven by an overpowering urge to escape everything that would fix him as a subject the novella highlights the limitations on individual freedom. The fascination with language's

¹²⁵Eduardo Bendezú, in *José Donoso: la destrucción de un mundo* Fernando García Cambeiro: Buenos Aires, 1975, p. 169.

conventionalising power that characterises much of Donoso's fiction is certainly present in this story as Mauricio rejects language because it is charged with the conventional meanings he seeks to escape. The problem remains, however, that without the conventions of language what kind of meaning can there be? And without language what kind of a subject could there be? These questions remain unanswered as Mauricio's escape takes him beyond words, to a place where conventional notions of the self become hazy. Paradoxically, then, to be free would seem to depend on surrendering anything we might conceive of as a self. It is important to remember that this is not to claim that there is no such thing as "I", simply that this "I" is an unstable and shifting reality, not the coherent thing we make it in the narrative of our lives. In this we move away from the modernist obsession with the exploration of the unique sensibility of the artist-creator and much closer to postmodernist scepticism about the autonomous individual subject. This ironic sensibility behind the story, therefore, would seem to be postmodernist rather than modernist.

In conclusion, then, it seems clear that despite the fact that in terms of its formal complexity «Gaspard de la Nuit» is much more straightforward than a novel like *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* it is nonetheless a strange work that resists easy categorisation. Indeed, in many ways it is a contradictory and ambiguous story. Its use of fantasy destroys a simplistic realist reading and makes us look elsewhere for the key to its protagonist's bizarre quest for freedom. And in spite of Donoso's open dislike for "novels of ideas" it seems that in this case he was using the experimental hothouse of the short story form to explore certain key ideas, a feature of the novella that in fact brings us back to D.L.Shaw's assessment of the early Donoso as "ante todo un hombre de ideas".¹²⁶

«Gaspard de la Nuit»'s starting point is the belief in freedom of a character who turns out, like the vast majority of us, to be governed by convention. In its exploration of the relationship between convention and freedom it is very much of its time, embodying the 60s' obsession with counter-cultural and anti-conventional modes of being. Its irrationalism, particularly apparent in its distrust of words and of that solid sense of reality that is linked to bourgeois conventionalism, fits the contemporary cultural context perfectly. Its hero, however, is not a dope-smoking hippy but a throwback to a previous period, a modernist aesthete who practices a cult of artistic difficulty. In this «Gaspard de la Nuit» looks back to

¹²⁶Shaw, Donald L., *Nueva narrativa hispanoamericana*, Madrid: Cátedra, 2a edición, 1983, p. 147.

the early years of the century and the avant-garde, especially in its protagonists' distrust of words. Mauricio's attempt to break the mould of bourgeois convention through a process of defamiliarisation thus hints at a genealogy of revolt that invites the reader to make connections stretching from romanticism all the way to the counterculture of the 60s.

Indeed, he is part of a long tradition of rebellion against mainstream bourgeois culture by bourgeois artists and intellectuals, a compendium of that tradition that can be roughly categorised as the modernist movement, stretching from romanticism to surrealism, including Ravel's source Bertrand, Baudelaire's *flâneur*, impressionism, symbolism, the avant-garde (taking the ivory tower of modernism into the streets), and eventually the 60s psychedelia that flourished alongside Latin American magic realism. He is a particularly effective figure because he combines the elitist superiority of art-for-art's sake with an adolescent vulnerability that is qualified by an astute vision of the way power relationships function both within the family and in society as a whole, a vision that hints at a darker side in him that reminds us of the nightmare that coexists alongside the romantic and surrealist dream.

Yet while the nostalgic lyricism of the description of Mauricio's search for transcendence is a modernist characteristic, the way the novella harks back to previous periods, subtly hinting at the similarities between the various moments of artistic and social revolt against bourgeois conformism is a decidedly postmodernist trait. Indeed, it could be persuasively argued that the global sensibility of the novella is perhaps best understood in terms of postmodernism. This is probably inevitable, a matter of contemporary cynicism rather than anything else. And its apparent simplicity yet obvious concern for form, its subtle mockery of the bourgeois reader who unwittingly stumbles into the text to discover a sophisticated, parodic use of the indirect free style that problematises rather than celebrates the status of the individual's inner world, again makes it easier to place within the conventions that many theorists describe as postmodernist.

This reliance on irony, the extent of which is not easy to determine, brings out the importance of different reading strategies. As far as its conceptual framework is concerned the critical fault line would seem to be the tension between several approaches to the bizarre events that take place in the novella. The realist one, put forward by Callan, and to a lesser extent by McMurray, seeks to naturalise Mauricio's behaviour by translating it into something that we can understand in terms of his psychological development and ends up by suggesting that the story's supposedly felicitous resolution celebrates the integration of the conformist Mauricio into his allotted place in the social hierarchy of consumers. The

ironic/modernist reading of critics like Morell and Gutiérrez Mouat focuses on the reinterpretation of Sylvia's pretensions to autonomy and uniqueness in the light of the lyrical presentation of Mauricio's quest for freedom. And the final possibility, that we could tentatively think of as postmodernist, is to read it as a work in which not only Sylvia's neo-conventionalism but also Mauricio's radical search for freedom is ironised at the end.

The novella, then can be seen to contain a variety of modernist and postmodernist elements. This not surprising as so many twentieth century works can be read both ways. The irony of the story leaves the choice up to us, firmly underlining the fact that the terms modernist and postmodernist have as much to do with reading strategies as they do with as styles of writing. In any case, the final definition does not amount to much in itself. Splitting hairs over whether a post-structuralist reading like Magnarelli's that says the story is really about writing is compatible with the supposedly greater accessibility of postmodern works is a purely taxonomic exercise, exactly the sort of thing that Mauricio hated in Paolo's discussion of Ravel. The fact of the matter is that «Gaspard de la Nuit» is a complicated story that can be read on many levels. While it can be read as a story written in favour of individual freedom that ruthlessly satirises the conformism that is such a huge part of most of our lives it is also a work that dramatises the postmodernist uncertainty about the status of the subject. The straightforward exaltation of the individual that characterises both the ideology of vulgar bourgeois individualism and the romantic reaction against it, the view that Cornejo Polar rightly identifies as a cornerstone of modern discourse, is complicated, subverted and ironised beyond all recognition. In pulling off this trick the novella questions the posturing of the contemporary proponents of facile self-expression and points out the inconsistencies inherent in the 60s' cult of self-expression which co-existed with the desire to escape from the materialist and conformist selfishness of the previous generation

The novella moves from an emphasis on the power of social constraints in determining the individual's sense of self to a serious questioning of the meaning of freedom. Its basic structure hinges on the tension between a need to preserve liberty in the face of social demands and an acute awareness of the factors that limit the autonomy of the individual. The hollowness of Sylvia's pretensions is exposed: if you belong to a group that makes rigid demands on its members you cannot claim with any conviction to believe in individual freedom and self-expression, even if one of the demands is that you profess such a belief. She is ultimately a limited character and even if we go some way towards Philip Swanson's position and accept that there is a level on which we can identify with her it is

only to see our own blindness. The group she has joined is a deeply unattractive, trendy clique, and for all its importance in the changing Spain its obsession with novelty is superficial. The superficial discoveries made under the sign of fashion soon fade, just as today's exciting new discovery becomes tomorrow's received wisdom, channelling energy and attention along well-trodden paths. Even to proclaim the value of escaping from convention eventually becomes a convention in itself. Of course, this could be the epitaph to all those movements in the arts that have emphasised the value of originality and formal innovation. Ironically, «Gaspard de la Nuit» suggests that an imaginative change in perspective can indeed make the world new but it is a process that is mastered by Mauricio, not those whose obsession with change for change's sake obscures any genuine insight. Yet in the end Mauricio's perceived mastery may be no more than a fantasy.

This oscillation between the lyrical and the ironic modes is unsettling for the reader, and may have been equally so for the author. Irony being a central issue in the novella the way we read it partly depends in what we divine about authorial intent. This itself might be enough to make the novella seem predominantly postmodern. At the same time, however, there is a definite feeling of nostalgia for the modernist quest for the absolute that would be in keeping with some of Donoso's earlier novels like *Coronación*. Maurice Ravel's comments about the creation of his own *Gaspard de la Nuit* are interesting in this regard. Looking back over the process of creation the French composer remarked that "[m]y intention was to create a caricature of the Romantic period, but instead it seems to have overwhelmed me."¹²⁷ One of the most intriguing aspects of «Gaspard de la Nuit» is that despite the ways in which Mauricio's quest might be relativised the lyricism of the passages that express this misfit adolescent's point of view is such that it is tempting to suggest that Donoso too was overwhelmed by the romantic power of his creation. That does not stop us reading it with an ironic sneer on our lips but that just might be our loss. Although it is a fantasy it is nonetheless a potent symbol of revolt against the smugness of a bourgeois ideal of normality. In this it betrays part of its lineage and represents the revenge taken by the avant-garde on the bourgeoisie that sought to turn its production into one more item for consumption. Down the years the demons of the *fin de siècle* and modernism still have the power to disturb, even if it is only through the peculiar figure of an adolescent misfit. Watched over by a motley band of guardian angels that includes Aloysius Bertrand, Antoni

¹²⁷This is from an internet site on Ravel set up by Jura Margolis: <http://ravel.margolis.jura>

Gaudí, André Breton and above all Maurice Ravel, Mauricio's mystical, modernist quest for freedom is almost enough to overcome our contemporary cynicism.

Indeed, the range of criticism that exists on the novella suggests that its readers are not immune to its lyricism, either, and that the "fiera salvaje del romanticismo" is alive and well. One of the features of the novella is that we occasionally find ourselves in the position of Sylvia, trying to define the undefinable. Like another novella in which music plays a central role, Julio Cortázar's «El Perseguidor», «Gaspard de la Nuit» seeks to remind us of moments when our routines are disrupted by extra-ordinary experiences. In this case that experience is like Johnny Carter's music, something that can be experienced but not verbalised. Talking about it is what the parasitic critic Bruno does for a living. The origin, however, is other and words can only take us away from it.

Todo crítico, ay, es el triste final de algo que empezó como sabor, como delicia de morder y mascar.¹²⁸

The importance of music in the story reminds us that there are aspects of experience that cannot fruitfully be talked about, at least not directly. Similarly, we run the risk of being victims of the story's irony when we theorise too much about it. Just like Sylvia and Paolo whose constant chatter reinforces the reality of the prison in which they live, in doing so we continually lay ourselves open to the accusation that it might be said of us too that "sólo traficaban con los nombres de las cosas" (229).

¹²⁸ Julio Cortázar, "El Perseguidor", *Ceremonias*, Seix Barral, Barcelona, 1977, p. 222.

Chapter two: Art and political commitment in «Los habitantes de una ruina inconclusa» and *La desesperanza*.

“Yo no creo que el escritor tenga que comprometerse, sino que uno está comprometido, no más. Uno está con el agua al cuello y tiene que gritar.”
José Donoso, interview with Elena Cegade for the series “Los escritores y la política en América Latina”, Servicio Latinoamericano de la BBC, January 1986.

“La política se ejerce en un nivel fatal, al menos en mi continente, ya que América Latina no deja de ser un peón de los Estados Unidos. La política es un verdadero caos y existe la sensación que estamos siendo engañados.” (José Donoso, interview with Luis Méndez Asensio in *Cambio 16*, October 30, 1995).

The relationship between writers and politics in Spanish America has historically been an important and problematic one. The political realities of the region have placed a heavy burden on the shoulders of its literary figures and the majority of them have responded in some way. The Boom writers' exploration of Spanish American identity certainly included a significant political element and the emancipatory enthusiasm of the sixties has generally been regarded as providing an important part of that generation's sense of cohesion. Although in retrospect this generalisation is open to question the public pronouncements throughout this period of Vargas Llosa, García Márquez, Fuentes and Cortázar were consistently critical and left-wing. However, their work was often extremely complicated and sometimes not overtly political at all. Indeed many of the novels that these authors wrote during this period of political effervescence reveal a far more ambiguous attitude to politics than their public pronouncements would suggest.

In *Historia personal del «boom»* Donoso comments on the central contribution made by politics to the sense of unity shared by Spanish-American writers in the mid to late sixties and simultaneously dissociates himself from this early enthusiasm by referring to his “innate” “tibieza política”. Indeed, when *HPB* was published in 1972 the notorious “caso Padilla” in 1971 had put an end to the uniformity of the Boom writers' support for the Cuban Revolution and by the late seventies the political attitudes of novelists like Vargas Llosa, Fuentes and García Márquez had evolved definitively away from the original consensus of support for radical movements in Latin America. Julio Cortázar alone became increasingly radicalised as time went on, as he showed through his support for the Nicaraguan revolution and his continued links with Cuba. This ambivalence to the left led to Gerald Martin's claim that

when the chips were down the Boom writers preferred to accept the *status quo* rather than side with popular movements for social change:

Most novelists wrote increasingly "deconstructed" texts whose real message was that they were not prepared to confront the powers and the authorities they saw only too clearly around them, on behalf of the peasants and workers of the continent, since, in an age when populism could no longer even appear to provide solutions, their own interests as bourgeois intellectuals were on the other side. And this can be seen very clearly indeed if we examine the sales and distribution of their books, including translations, after 1960. The paradox was that it was the Cuban revolution itself which had given Latin America "sex appeal" in the capitalist West, even if the realities of Cuban socialism and its intentions rapidly clarified the real position of Latin American bourgeois intellectuals in a way that had never happened before, and certainly not in the wake of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-17. What had come to an end was not a "myth of authority", as Roberto Echevarría has claimed, but a myth of multiclass writing.¹²⁹

More recently Santiago Colás has reformulated this critical view of Boom writing in a stronger form, accusing it of being "the elitist aesthetic expression of a petit-bourgeois liberalism wedded more to foreign values of modernity than to those of revolution".¹³⁰ Such attacks, repeated by some members of a younger generation of writers like Antonio Skármeta may in some respects appear to be excessively dogmatic but they do highlight a genuine ambiguity in the boom writers' treatment of political themes.

Some of the vitriol, of course, is due to the high public profile of the boom. The most obvious example is Vargas Llosa's conversion from social radical to reactionary apologist for the neo-liberalism that has wreaked havoc in Latin America over the last decade or so but recently García Márquez has provided a more interesting and contradictory example.¹³¹ Despite his much trumpeted friendship with Fidel Castro and his close involvement in Cuban cultural projects such as the film school at San Antonio de los Baños his latest political pronouncements have been highly ambiguous. The sycophantic tone of his treatment of Castro finds a peculiar echo in *Noticia de un secuestro*'s treatment of notorious politicians like Julio César Turbay Ayala.¹³² To read descriptions of such figures in typically Marquesian terms is almost enough to make one think that the whole book is an exercise in self-parody. Unfortunately this turns out not to be the case as the author adopts a breathlessly respectful

¹²⁹ *Journeys Inside the Labyrinth*, London: Verso, 1989, p. 243.

¹³⁰ Santiago Colás, *Postmodernity in Latin America: The Argentine Paradigm*, Durham, Duke UP, 1995, p. 25.

¹³¹ A characteristic 1980s attack on Vargas Llosa comes from Jacobo Timerman, also a critic of García Márquez's supposedly pro-Castro stance: "Mario Vargas Llosa wearies his days denouncing only Cuban and Soviet intervention in Latin America [...] yet he omits to point out that U.S. troops are not only in Grenada, but also in El Salvador and Honduras, and that the United States maintains a mercenary army that has been unleashed, so far unsuccessfully, on Nicaragua" (*Death in the South*, New York: Vintage, 1988, p. 55).

¹³² Gabriel García Márquez, *Noticia de un secuestro*, Barcelona: Mondadori, 1996.

tone towards a Colombian political class that has played a generally shameful role in the country's current political crisis. Coming after this flawed venture into human interest journalism García Márquez's support for the Conservative presidential candidate Andrés Pastrana in the 1998 election was another eccentric move, an endorsement of a politician who for many people epitomises the corrupt *bipartidismo* that has stifled the development of any political activity other than that sanctioned by an elite whose self-serving inertia has allowed the country's violence to go unchecked for decades. Indeed, the crowning irony of this bizarre episode is that the boom writer who is now criticising Pastrana's presidency is none other than Vargas Llosa.¹³³

All of this was a long way from the socially progressive García Márquez of the 1960s but we might be tempted to ask why an author's pronouncement should be regarded as so significant. Such a question, however, disregards the burden of expectation that Spanish-American intellectuals have traditionally been expected to shoulder, something that is particularly true in García Márquez's case. Thus, although literary history provides many examples that show that the personal politics of authors and the impact of their work is not always the same, the question of commitment, and public commitment at that, still has to be resolved by Spanish American writers. This remains true even though the political excitement of the sixties is now but a faint echo and the ideological struggle of the Cold War period has been replaced by the triumphalism of the neo-liberals. As Mempo Giardinelli, an articulate spokesman for a younger generation of writers, points out:

For societies like ours only memory and intellectual honesty allow us to go on dreaming utopias and fighting to make them into realities. When a society gives itself over to the control of corruption and lies, frivolity and ignorance prosper. We intellectuals have to act. When a society has not learned from its own history, it leaves itself open to the return of violence. And in societies like ours, where art and literature are the patrimony of elites, those elites also appropriate memory and distort history. The result is manipulated societies, which are genuine time bombs.¹³⁴

Unlike many Western intellectuals for whom the collapse of the Soviet empire was like some Copernican revolution that revealed that the market was after all the only rational way of organising economic life, those Spanish American writers and thinkers who have not yet taken refuge in foreign universities are reminded on a daily basis of the grim realities of a New World Order that in many cases could more accurately be described as more of the

¹³³ See, for example, "Los sicarios", *El País*, (Madrid), 4 de octubre, 1999.

¹³⁴ Giardinelli, Mempo, "Reflections on Latin-American narrative of the post-boom", *Review: Latin American Literature and Arts*, vol. 52, 1996, p. 84.

same only worse. Despite some positive features such as the disappearance of most of the regions' dictators the overall picture is still grim. Fujimori continues his constitutional dictatorship in Peru, Colombia has over a million internal refugees as a result of its undeclared civil war, Ecuador is in turmoil as price rises provoke riots, unemployment in Venezuela reaches 24% as Chávez embarks on his populist reforms, and Central America has been hit by a series of natural disasters that have only emphasised the inefficiency and corruption of its regional governments. The fantasy of economic prosperity seems to be disappearing along with the current recession, a further indicator of the inability of local economies to compete in the so-called free market. In Chile the miracle seems to be running out of steam as growth is down and unemployment is up to 12%. And in the background is the awareness that although the Cold War pretexts that lay behind US intervention in the region may have gone forever they have been replaced by spurious rhetoric of the so-called "War on Drugs",

It is for reasons such as these that someone like Giardinelli can point out that history and politics still demand that the Spanish American writer adopt a position towards them. In writing and rewriting history literature inevitably moves on to political ground which is why Giardinelli suggests that Latin American writers are closer to Sartre than Fukuyama, claiming that "[e]ach writer simply tries to explain –by explaining himself– the time and place in which he lives and produces his writing".¹³⁵ At the same time, however, the Argentine writer's scepticism towards grand schemes and totalising solutions has a knowingly postmodernist tone:

In this world of post-modernity, neo-existentialism, dispiritedness, and disdain for "moral values", we Latin Americans have become rather indifferent to grand emotions. We're skeptics in the Nietzschean style when considering change, and we've become experts in defeat. My generation witnessed the utter defeat of the dream of Latin American social revolution, and will probably see the same happen to the culture of democracy. (85)

This reference to postmodernity brings out into the open the complex relationship between art and politics that has such a prominent place in attempts to define modernism and postmodernism. The latter has been accused, most notably by Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton, of a supine acceptance of the capitalist order by giving in entirely to the commodification of art, producing in Jameson's words: "new kinds of texts, infused with the

¹³⁵Giardinelli, "Reflections on Latin American Narrative", p. 85.

forms categories and contents that very Culture Industry so passionately denounced by all the ideologues of the modern".¹³⁶ Eagleton, for his part, sees modernism as turning away from the real in order to avoid being consumed¹³⁷ while Jameson interprets modernism's turning away from history as itself evidence of a historical sensibility as it reflects social change through its sense of crisis. Linda Hutcheon, however, regards postmodernism as contributing to oppositional political debate, as does R.L. Williams in his vision of a Latin-American postmodernism that has always been political.¹³⁸ Theorists who see postmodernism in a positive light tend to criticise modernism for indulging in an elitist aestheticism, as well as for the reactionary sentiments of some of its major figures, Eliot and Pound being the obvious examples.

As ever, the schemes throw up major and seemingly insuperable difficulties. One could even claim that they are all internally consistent in this regard because of their very different ways of defining modernism and postmodernism. There are undoubtedly examples of exploitative commercialism and superficiality in what has been defined as postmodern writing, as well as a facile delight in post-structuralist relativism and antifoundational thought. Thus Jean Franco has suggested that post-structuralism, often closely linked with postmodernism if not always identified with it, has "liberated thinking from the old disciplinary boundaries and crippling dichotomies such as originality/imitation, modern/traditional, public/private, national/cosmopolitan" but it has also popularised a vulgar Derrideanism that at times borders on nihilism.¹³⁹ Yet while it is certainly a relief to get away from the more dogmatic certainties of the Cold War mind-set it is difficult to see how we can think of the local without thinking of the universal any more than we can think of the fragment without reference to some concept of totality. Such attitudes, however, are a characteristic part of a new political correctness and critical orthodoxy that can be noted in a

¹³⁶ "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Capitalism", *New Left Review*, 146, (July-August, 1984), p. 54.

¹³⁷ See Eagleton, Terry, "Capitalism, Modernism and postmodernism", *New Left Review*, 152, (1985): 60-72.

¹³⁸ *The Postmodern Novel in Latin America*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

¹³⁹ "Re-mapping culture", *Americas: New Interpretative Essays*, Oxford: OUP, 1992, p. 174. Yet these polarities inevitably find their place in current cultural criticism even if they have been relativised. Indeed, it is ironic that in discussing García Márquez in the same essay Franco goes on to establish a distinction between the private and public which seems to depend on one of the categories from which she supposedly feels liberated. In this respect there seem to be two Jean Francos, one who sees *Yo el Supremo* as "a revisionary version of nineteenth-century Paraguayan history from a poststructuralist perspective" ("Re-mapping Culture", p. 174) and another who says that "novels such as Roa Bastos' *Yo el Supremo* [...] defy facile recuperation as national allegory or as the postmodern [and] demand readings informed by cultural and political history" ("The Nation as Imagined Community", *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veaser, New York: Routledge: 1989, p. 210). It is hard to see how these positions can easily be reconciled.

many contemporary analyses of Latin American literature. Thus while in recent times there has undoubtedly been a move towards historicism, this has been of a very particular kind, constrained by the residue of poststructural theory and a postmodern suspicion of traditional dichotomies.

The political interpretation of Donoso's work has certainly proved to be a controversial area at times. Although some of the early studies of his fiction presented him as a writer with a strong social message, succeeding generations of critics have often seemed uncomfortable when dealing with politics. While this unease has something to do with the author's prickly response to the reductionist tendencies of some early critics, it also reflects trends that have focused on fiction as a linguistic construct to the detriment of the consideration of its relationship to historical and political reality. This is a strange state of affairs when one considers the importance of politics in Spanish-American writing as a whole.

The best of the linguistic approach is exemplified by Sharon Magnarelli whose sophisticated and well-argued readings of Donoso's fiction consistently play down the political in order to privilege its self-reflexive and metafictional dimension.¹⁴⁰ In his early analyses of Donoso's work Philip Swanson also minimised the importance of the political in favour of a metaphysical reading influenced by the work of D.L. Shaw. More recently, however, his comments have been more receptive towards the sociopolitical dimension of Spanish-American literature. Contrasting what we could think of as the contextualising and universalising tendencies in the criticism of Latin American literature he claims that:

many, if not most, modern Latin American novels can be read both ways. To be sure, they must be read both ways. And many more ways too. It is often a feature of criticism, which likes boxes and categories, to try and fit relatively random phenomena into an ordered pattern. But the reality is that the whole history of the new novel in Latin America is riddled with contradictions, contradictions which may be ultimately mutually exclusive.¹⁴¹

In the same study, however, he continued to claim that many major works by Donoso "are not obviously political in any strong sense"¹⁴², a view echoed by Laura A. Chesak who criticises political interpretations of Donoso's work as "el primer lugar común de la crítica

¹⁴⁰ See *Understanding Donoso*.

¹⁴¹ *The New Novel in Latin America*, Manchester University Press, 1995, p. 7.

¹⁴² *ibid.*.

donosiana".¹⁴³ In the face of this scepticism I find Norma Helsper's comments refreshing when she takes issue with Pamela Bacarisse's suggestion that the political dimension of Donoso's work is somehow more superficial than its other aspects:

Bacarisse, while admitting that *Casa de campo*, for example, shows "an interest in society and politics on the part of the author", chooses to discount this interest in her search for "the deeper level of Donoso's fiction" (319). I, in contrast, choose to focus on the social significance of the attitudes displayed or depicted in Donoso's work. In both cases it is the critic's interest that determines the focus of the criticism: either "level" can be chosen for special attention, and it does not seem evident that one or the other is necessarily "deeper".¹⁴⁴

One of the problems here seems to be that some Donoso critics have regarded the political as a superficial or first level of interpretation. Any notion of complexity has been transferred to other areas and the interpretative leap from the political to the linguistic, metaphysical, or psychological has therefore tended to be regarded as evidence of an increased level of profundity in the critic's analysis. However, to move in the other direction, as sociologists of literature have always done, at times with disastrous results but on occasion with genuine insight, was rarely attempted. In Donoso's case such a move from the metaphysical to the political would be regarded as dogmatic, typical of obsessively contextualising left-wing critics. Up to a point this is an understandable reaction to the tendency of some critics to wheel out a familiar battery of interpretative procedures in order to translate a text into a predictable frame of reference. This can be particularly tedious when we know where we are going to end up before we start, as, for example, when we are told how what is apparently metaphysical is really an expression of social tensions. Yet other interpretative approaches are equally open to this sort of criticism. When we start an essay by Sharon Magnarelli, for example, we know that however well argued –and most of Magnarelli's work is extremely cogent– it will sooner or later lead us to the problem of representation and the ways in which the text in question foregrounds the problems of its own production. And we also know that if issues of power are confronted at all in her analysis it will be from a generalising Foucauldian position.

In this chapter I hope to redress the balance somewhat by analysing the sociopolitical dimension of two works by Donoso, «Los habitantes de una ruina inconclusa» and *La*

¹⁴³ Chesak, Laura A., *José Donoso. Escritura y subversión del significado*, Madrid: Verbum, 1997, p. 55.

¹⁴⁴ "Dismantling Sexual Politics in «José Donoso's Chatanooga choochoo»", *Confluencia*, vol.10, part 2, 1995, pp. 56-57. The page reference in the text is to Pamela Bacarisse's article, "Donoso and Social commitment: *Casa de campo*", *BHS*, vol.LX (1983), pp. 319-332.

desesperanza.¹⁴⁵ Both works were written after the author's return to Chile and represent important fictional responses to his experiences of life under the dictatorship. «Los habitantes» is amongst other things a thinly veiled political commentary on post-coup society while in *La desesperanza* Donoso openly confronts the personal and political realities of life in Pinochet's Chile. Up to now the small amount of work that has been done on «Los habitantes» has tended to see it in universalising terms so I am going to attempt to work away from a generalising reading of the novella and relocate it in its political context, not in order to devalue other readings, but to give the story back some of its potency as a polemicising work written at a time of political crisis. In the case of *La desesperanza*, an overtly political novel, I want to examine the conflict between art and politics that to some extent mirrors Donoso's own conflictive relationship with the political. In the process I shall consider the way the themes of gender and race are brought into the picture to complicate and enrich the novel's treatment of politics which not only deals with the contemporary political crisis but also with an ideological representation of social difference that existed long before the coup and clearly still exists today.

As usual, Donoso's own comments about the political dimension of his work always tended towards ambiguity. Looking back through interviews one can discern two apparently contradictory strands in his declarations on the subject. The first of these is a vehement expression of distaste for politics and a denial of any interest in social issues, often accompanied by a declaration of the artist's need to be independent of any political ideology. The first strand is obvious in remarks such as the following:

No tengo ninguna visión social. Es un ejercicio interior. No hay ninguna actitud o propósito mío con respeto a la sociedad [...] la crítica está ausente de mi obra.¹⁴⁶

Tengo miedo a cualquier forma de falta de libertad, incluso a la falta de libertad que significa abrazar una ideología. Tengo miedo a cualquier cosa que me impida ejercer la función -destructiva y creativa- de la crítica [...]¹⁴⁷

En las novelas de tesis se termina en una actitud moralista o pedagógica. Y yo no soy un hombre de ninguna ideología. Soy un ácrata completo.¹⁴⁸

[...] no se ha formado aún la revolución en términos nuevos que derrote los antiguos beatos [...]¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ *Cuatro para Delfina*, Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1982, and *La desesperanza*, Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1986.

¹⁴⁶ Entrevista con Guillermo Castillo-Feliú, *Hispania* 54 (1971), p. 958.

¹⁴⁷ Interview in *Visión*, 28 de julio, 1979, reprinted in *Hispania*, 65, Dec 82, p. 645.

¹⁴⁸ *Hispania*, 65, December 1982, p. 644.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Elsa Alana Freire in "Los pájaros de la noche de José Donoso", *Plural*, (74), p. 67.

I'm not interested in politics, it's something nobody can accept. Politics has not formed a deep vision in me.¹⁵⁰

While Donoso's consistent criticism of the bourgeoisie placed him within a tradition of opposition broadly associated with the left, he distanced himself through comments such as these from the views of those who sought to portray him as a writer whose view of the world was essentially political. These statements amount to an outright rejection of the idea that writers ought to subordinate artistic freedom to the demands of a political creed and suggest that novels written with a specific political agenda in mind are essentially moralising and didactic, the implication being that this is not only patronising but artistically limiting. Donoso's rejection of pamphleteering fiction is linked to a view of ideology as a limiting set of values that trap the committed writer within a straitjacket that stops him or her from speaking with an independent voice. However, although this defence of individual freedom laid him open to accusations of "bourgeois individualism" from the more dogmatic sectors of the left, the critical function that he sought to defend was precisely what placed him at odds with the right. Indeed, one of the most striking things about Donoso's treatment of politics in his fiction is its almost exclusively negative nature. We almost never see power being wielded in a beneficent way and this generally pessimistic tone is in keeping with his description of politics as "una forma institucional de la inmoralidad".¹⁵¹

One of the ironies of Donoso's literary career was that someone who was so sceptical should have been obliged by events to take a political stance. After all, Chile's polemical recent history is difficult to ignore. In fact, however, there are signs that even the supposedly apolitical Donoso was interested in the changes that Allende began to implement in Chile. For example, when the *vía chilena* began to attract international attention Donoso considered returning to Chile to experience at first hand some of the changes that were taking place there. In a letter to his old friend Alberto Pérez he wrote:

No sabes hasta qué punto me tienta, a veces, regresar a Chile en este momento tan interesante, un momento de cambio tan radical y posiblemente de sangre. ¿Pero puedo? Posiblemente no. [Because he is ill and lacking in energy]. Desde aquí, y por conductos laberínticos, se oye decir que Chile está en la ruina, que un pánico total y una desorganización monstruosa y una quiebra general y una fuga de capitales está destruyendo el país desde que Allende ganó las elecciones.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰Interview with Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat, *Review*, 1992, p. 14.

¹⁵¹Tuscón and Valentín, (eds.), *Literatura y sociedad en América Latina*, Salamanca: San Esteban, 1981, p. 106.

¹⁵²Letter to Alberto Pérez, September the 13th, 1970, quoted by Esther Edwards in her *Voces de la memoria*, Editorial Sudamericana Chilena, (Santiago), 1998, p. 178.

During this period he asked for a Guggenheim scholarship to return to Chile to write a musical about the affair between the Bavarian artist J.M.Rugendas, who lived in Chile between 1834 and 1845, and Carmen Arriagada, a woman from Talca. According to Esther Edwards he intended to make use of this experience later and produce a prose work about "la experiencia de producir una comedia musical en tiempos de Allende".¹⁵³ In the event, however, he was unable to carry out his project and was still living in Spain at the time of the 1973 coup. When the news reached Spain the Chilean writer Mauricio Wacquéz, a close friend, noted the profound impact the military takeover had on Donoso:

El más hundido era José Donoso, desolado como un niño perdido en la muchedumbre... siempre tuvo un sentimiento agudísimo de la decencia política, de la justicia y de la libertad, reflejado perfectamente en sus obras, pero nunca se acercó demasiado a los centros reales del poder. Él se conformaba con sus venerables diputados y senadores pues sabía que el cinismo y los peligros de la fuerza eran inherentes a la condición humana y que cualquier cosa podía resultar de su frecuentación. Tenía cara y actitud de huérfano.¹⁵⁴

Faced with the brutality of the military repression Donoso was in no doubt about his political position:

Yo soy un hombre completamente apolítico, nada metido en la política [...] Pero con eso de Pinochet, ha cambiado todo. Es el desastre; y hasta un grado difícil de tolerar [...] No se puede imaginar; la pobreza, la miseria, el reino de la oligarquía otra vez; una visión completamente enloquecedora [...] En cambio en Chile son dos fuerzas contrapuestas, clarísimas; y es horrible. ¡Realmente horrible! El mal absolutamente. Yo nunca he tenido una visión del mal más sentida.¹⁵⁵

Two years later his comments on Latin-American dictators were equally blunt: "son la decadencia y destrucción de América Latina",¹⁵⁶ as were his somewhat naive comments on the relationship between the United States and Chile: "They put him in, so they should take him out".¹⁵⁷

In many respects, however, Donoso found himself in a difficult personal position at the time of the coup. He had not lived through the turbulent times which preceded it and was very much on the sidelines, a spectator whose previously non-committal views seemed weak when compared with the suffering of those tortured and exiled for their political beliefs. At a

¹⁵³ Edwards, *Voces*, pp. 190-1.

¹⁵⁴ Edwards, *Voces*, p. 195.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Mercedes San Martín, *Caravelle*, no.29, (1977) pp. 196-197.

¹⁵⁶ Interview in "Visión", 28, July 1979, reprint *Hispania*, 65, December, 1982, p. 645.

¹⁵⁷ *Death in the South*, p. 35.

juncture when anything other than unconditional support for Allende's Unidad Popular government was regarded in many quarters as a fudging of the issues, life was certainly far from easy for someone who habitually referred to himself as politically lukewarm.

Even the pre-coup Donoso has been criticised by Antonio Skármeta for what the latter regarded as *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*'s grotesque deformation of reality, and despite a return to Chile in 1981 that was partly conceived of as an act of solidarity he was still being accused in some quarters of undue political reticence, accusations that were later echoed in more muted form by Jorge Edwards.¹⁵⁸ Edwards, a friend of Donoso's, made some rather ironic comments about his political position in an interview with Andrew Graham Yool:

José Donoso wrote a great deal during this time. His novel *A House in the Country*, published in 1978, was his allegory of the September 1973 coup. He took a country house, which is Chile, with some children, who are revolutionaries, some grown-ups, who represent order, and a butler, who represents General Pinochet. When a Chilean critic interpreted this in *El Mercurio*, Donoso felt afraid. He had thought that his symbolism wouldn't be understood. So he went and hid under the bed, so to speak. [...] During the campaign for the 1987 plebiscite, he openly backed the No side, which was against indefinite rule by Pinochet. He also joined a party for democracy. He was not very active in it but he did take sides.¹⁵⁹

This criticism strikes me as unfair as it is hard to imagine even the blindest censor failing to pick up on *Casa de campo*'s obvious political allegory. The general thrust of such criticisms, however, plainly suggests that Donoso's opposition to the Pinochet regime was too timid and that the critical dimension of his fiction was not vigorous enough. Indeed, there is no doubt that much of the Chilean left regarded Donoso as an untrustworthy bourgeois intellectual. Sceptical and ironic, in his attempt to exercise critical freedom his fiction attacked every part of the political spectrum, not only the right. The satirical depiction of the national political scene that Donoso embarked on in *La desesperanza*, for example, was extremely critical of just about everyone involved and can have won him few friends.

Donoso's first literary response to the coup was *Casa de campo* (1978), the novel mentioned by Edwards, a political allegory that satirised the leaders of the coup and the inequalities of the social, political and economic hierarchies in Chile since the conquest. It

¹⁵⁸"La grotesca irrealidad que funda Donoso conforma un mundo autónomo frenéticamente ajeno a la mirada cotidiana", *Más allá del boom: literatura y mercado*, Mexico: Marcha, 1981, p.273. Skármeta's criticism was also noted by D.L.Shaw in "Three post-boom writers and the boom", *LALR*, Pittsburgh, vol.XXIV, no.47, Jan-June 96: "For Skármeta, that is, the Boom writers of the 50s and 60s were taking refuge in what he calls *fantasia morbosa* (100) from the pressure they felt when they were trying to deal in their work with rapidly changing social and class situations" (Shaw, p. 9) The page reference in the quotation is to Skármeta, "La burguesía invadida: Egon Woolf", *Revista Chilena de Literatura* (1971) 4: 91-102.

¹⁵⁹Quoted in Andrew Graham Yool's *After the Despots*, London: Bloomsbury, 1991, p. 49.

also produced an Orwellian parody of ideological discourse in general aimed at exposing the absurdity of political propaganda. This was followed in 1980 by *El jardín de al lado*, a novel which dealt with the experiences of a middle-aged Chilean couple living in self-imposed exile in Spain. Unlike *Casa de campo* this work did not foreground politics but the Chilean political situation and the experiences of exiles was nonetheless an important part of the background, particularly the crisis of identity of a generation brought up abroad and the posturing of some of the left-wing opponents of the dictatorship. The political ambivalence that was clear in *El jardín de al lado* was compounded by irrational feelings of guilt at having failed to participate directly in a national trauma that Donoso was to deal with later in *La desesperanza*.¹⁶⁰ Partly as a result of his political uncertainties but also for personal reasons he returned to Chile in late 1980. His experience of life under the dictatorship was such that for the first time in his life he became politically active and although, as Edwards says, his involvement was limited not only did he take part in the campaign that opposed Augusto Pinochet's continuance in power but he was even arrested and briefly detained for attending a meeting in Chiloé in 1985, an event that he fictionalised in *La desesperanza* through the arrest of the novel's protagonist, the protest singer Mañungo Vera.¹⁶¹ Not surprisingly, therefore, politics was uppermost in his mind during this period and in interviews he hinted at the essentially political nature of earlier novels like *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*.¹⁶²

Some of the sophistication of the political dimension of Donoso's work lies in the fact that it rarely treats political issues in a direct way. Instead it relies on the political

¹⁶⁰It is interesting to note that Donoso was writing part of *La desesperanza* at the same time as *El jardín de al lado*. Gina Canepa has even suggested that one might see *La desesperanza* as the sort of novel Julio was trying to write in *El jardín de al lado* ("La narrativa del exilio en *El jardín de al lado* y *A partir del fin*", *Revista Interamericana de Bibliografía*, vol. XLIV, no. 1, 1994).

¹⁶¹There is a witty account of this absurd event by Carlos Alberto Trujillo in "José Donoso: entre *El retorno del nativo* y *Vidas paralelas*", *Revista Chilena de Literatura*, vol. 51, 1997: 131-137. While on Chiloé Donoso attended a meeting of solidarity with some schoolteachers who had lost their jobs organised by the CODEPU (Comisión de Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo). Donoso, "a quién los policías –por su barba blanca y por su aspecto de afuerino– imaginaron un importante líder de oposición" (134), was arrested and held for several hours before being released. The incident ends with the surreal confirmation of Donoso's obsession with the social significance or insignificance of names when a local policeman, unaware of the identity of the person on the other end of the line, calls a superior with the words "un tal Felipe González pregunta si está detenido un tal José Donoso" (135).

¹⁶²Both Jacques Joset and Pedro Meléndez Páez have noted Donoso's remarks in an interview with Philip Swanson which contradict the latter's desire for him to play down the political significance of his work. Instead he suggests that the driving force behind novels like *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* was after all political rather than psychological or existential. Joset in note 2, p. 175, notes Donoso's reply regarding *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*, *El lugar sin límites*, *Este domingo* and *Coronación*: "Creo que eran desesperanzas sociales, y no desesperanzas metafísicas o de identidad. En el fondo eran novelas políticas ésas". The original quotation comes from Philip Swanson, "Una entrevista con José Donoso", *Revista Iberoamericana*, vol. 53, no. 141, p. 997.

implications of its treatment of the relationship between the individual and society. The themes of conformism and revolt, for example, clearly have political connotations. Donoso also complicated the idea of the political by bringing issues of race and gender into the picture and inviting his readers to consider the way that these are deformed by ideology. The central force that animates the political vision that we encounter in Donoso's writing, however, is a visceral dislike for bourgeois complacency. Indeed, his exquisitely ironic attacks on the self-regard, materialism and narrow-mindedness of privilege made him one of the greatest chroniclers of bourgeois pretension in Spanish-American fiction. What made these attacks possible is the fact that he knows the world he describes so well. His rejection of many of the values of the class into which he was born goes some way towards explaining the obsessional emphasis in his work on the need to break with convention, a fixation that goes hand in hand with a paranoid fear of surrendering to a conformist view of the world. This is interesting because while the working-class's absence from Donoso's fiction is not complete—one thinks of some of the *Cuentos*, *Coronación*, or *Este Domingo*—the rigidity of the social boundaries between the affluent middle-classes and the poor is frequently insisted on in his work as a whole. And while much of *El obscuro pájaro de la noche* seems to stem from the distorting effects of the ideology of the elite on the petty bourgeois some of the other stories focus on the middle-classes' indifference to the reality of life for the poor. This in part seems to be a result of his own experience of middle-class existence in a country like Chile. As he commented in an interview with Amalia Pereira:

I do not know the Chilean commonfolk [sic], almost. I am familiar with the upper middle class, with the intellectual class and with the servants' class.¹⁶³

Donoso never tried to hide the mixed feelings about the class from which he came, feelings which led to the obsessional reworking and subversion of its system of values to be found in practically all his fiction. Shortly before his return to Chile Donoso spoke of this aspect of his work in unequivocal terms:

Mi novela [this refers to his work in general] surge de un enorme sentimiento de culpa por ser un burgués, aunque, por otra parte, hay —que duda cabe— un gran goce de los privilegios de la burguesía, un disfrute de las cosas que me gustan, el haber tenido una serie de ventajas a las que otra gente ha tenido que llegar con esfuerzo mientras que yo las he mamado. Pero sí, existe un enorme sentimiento de culpa por esas mismas cosas.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³Pereira, Amalia, "Interview with José Donoso", *LALR*, Pittsburgh, vol.15, 1987, p. 61.

¹⁶⁴*Literatura y sociedad*, p.113. Compare the following: "Uno de los grandes terrores míos [...] es el terror a la destitución, de la abyección, de la no-existencia, de la reducción a la nada, del ser que se autoelimina, de la

In fact, most of Donoso's novels and stories seem to be tinged with the sense of "bourgeois guilt" referred to here. In the same interview Donoso mentioned "la violencia que siento con respecto a la burguesía"¹⁶⁵ and in his writing there are times when he seems to take an almost masochistic pleasure in presiding over the degradation of his bourgeois characters. Indeed, one of the most constant features in Donoso's fiction is the excoriation of the self-satisfied prejudice of the well-to-do. This can be appreciated by any reader living in a modern consumer society but in the Spanish-American context the especially brutal contrast between haves and have-nots adds an especially mordant edge to Donoso's ironic portrayal of his bourgeois characters which frequently ends in the complete demolition of their comfortable way of life, a fictional punishment for their *hubris*. The *Cuentos*' finely detailed portrayal of the narrow-mindedness and hypocrisy of the middle-class is an important part of novels like *Coronación*, *Este Domingo* and *El lugar sin límites* and plays a very important part in *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*, a work in which the obsessive social climbing of the petty bourgeois is exaggerated to the point of delirium. More was to follow with *Tres Novelitas Burguesas*'s sardonic assault on the pretensions of sectors of the liberal Spanish middle-class.

Then came Pinochet's coup. The Chilean bourgeoisie's initial connivance with the military and its supine acceptance of the dictatorship that followed could only have increased Donoso's anger towards the attitudes of the class from which he came. This sense of revulsion may have found its first fictional expression in *Casa de campo* but it is also one of the central themes in *Cuatro para Delfina (CD)*, a collection of novellas that was written between October 1981 and March 1982 during his first year back in Chile. Although these stories are open to interpretation on many levels they undoubtedly represent a corrosive commentary on post-coup society.

«Los habitantes de una ruina inconclusa» is a fascinating, veiled critique of certain sectors of the Chilean bourgeoisie. It focuses on the closed world of a middle-aged couple, Blanca and Francisco Castillo, who live a comfortable, sheltered life in what seems to be one

explotación del ser humano por el ser humano, en todos los planos, de la destrucción [...] Siento que también soy víctima; que si he victimizado a miles de personas en ese sentido, voy a terminar en *clochard* sin ninguna protección, viviendo a la intemperie" ("La novela como 'Happening'", *Revista Iberoamericana*, nos. 76-77, 1971, p. 521) or the vision of *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* as "una rendición simbólica de una burguesía latinoamericana..., una agonía en su propia mierda" Entrevista con Mercedes San Martín, *Caravelle*, no. 29, 1977, p. 197.

¹⁶⁵ *Literatura y sociedad*, p. 106

of the select residential districts of Santiago. Their two children have grown up and left home, leaving their parents to a life that centres on small pleasures such as playing bridge, tending their garden and walking their dog. To all intents and purposes their contentment is summed up their nightly strolls around their self-contained world as they savour its jasmine-scented freshness. As is so often the case in Donoso's fiction, however, this privileged and secure place is soon threatened by external forces.

The upheaval begins with the setting up of a building site next to their house and the construction of a high-rise block of flats that is abandoned before it can be completed. This in itself makes them uneasy as they feel that their private space has been invaded and that they are being spied upon from within the uninhabited shell next door. Things are complicated by a chance encounter with a mysterious stranger in search of a local address that to Blanca and Francisco's frustration turns out not to exist. They feel strangely attracted to this foreigner, whose language they cannot understand, as if he represented all the unrealised possibilities of their lives and they establish a peculiar non-verbal relationship with him that ends up with him coming to their house several times. All of this coincides with their heightened awareness of the beggars and homeless who invade the city streets at night and when the stranger leaves a package in their house they open it to find within the shabby dress of a couple of vagrants. Gradually they begin to transform themselves into down-and-outs, leaving work and all their other concerns behind. They begin to visit the deserted building at night and find that it is now frequented by dozens of tramps. In the novella's climactic scene they are judged by a beggars' court that passes down a strangely inconclusive verdict which leads to them being abandoned in the empty building, unharmed but with scarves tied around their necks. However, in an epilogue we learn that they are later found hanging from the railings, presumably having committing suicide.

Published in Spain, the novella does not openly criticise the contemporary political situation in Chile but instead provides the reader with a series of allusions that clearly anchor it in the country's history. The futuristic, dystopian ending with its reference to a global cataclysm that has supposedly ended the economic crisis, doing away with poverty, does little to obscure its status, on one level at least, as a cleverly constructed political commentary. Most of the current criticism on «*Los habitantes*», however, stresses its universal characteristics, although the critics do make some significant comments on its possible political import. Lucrecio Pérez Blanco's eccentric reading of the novella sees it in very general political terms, divorced from contemporary Chilean reality. He interprets it as a

parable in favour of an almost medieval social immobility, claiming that the novella tells us that “el hombre debe aceptar siempre su identidad social (rico/pobre), su destino”.¹⁶⁶ For him the empty building is a project waiting to be finished, a representation of *patria*, and the story as a whole warns against the dangers of violent social change.¹⁶⁷ Philip Swanson picks up on Pérez Blanco’s idea of the importance of accepting limitations but produces a more sophisticated reading that concentrates on the tension between the stultifying power of convention and the characters’ desire to break free. He sees it as an essentially dark tale that suggests that “[g]iven the fragility of the human personality, the pressure of social alienation may provoke the emancipation of man’s irrational side, resulting in the annihilation of the unity of the self”,¹⁶⁸ a reading that is similar to Helen Calae de Agüera’s interpretation of *Tres Novelitas Burguesas*’s «Átomo verde número cinco». Rosemary Geisdorfer Feal also mentions this story and compares the two couples quite effectively, suggesting that we read «Los habitantes» as a tale about how a couple give in to the lure of the unknown with disastrous results.¹⁶⁹ In the most recent published work on the novella Laura A. Chesak presents a somewhat woolly interpretation based on the vaguely poststructuralist/ Bakhtinian idea of the subversion of a monological official code. According to this reading, which seems to be a half-digested version of the more sophisticated, better-argued analyses of *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* by the likes of Sharon Magnarelli, the novella affords the reader: “unas aperturas hacia una pluridimensionalidad de significados, cuestionando también los valores asignados a cada oposición falsamente binaria”.¹⁷⁰ Once again we encounter the poststructural fantasy of textual play as liberty. While Donoso’s works undermine any attempt to impose univocal readings on them the pleasure to be found in the interplay of meanings is actually to look for some rather than to impose a nightmarish theoretical view of indeterminacy on the text. It seems to me that such analyses are a million miles away from Derrida’s subtle, against the grain readings of the tensions and contradictions within texts that started off this kind of criticism.

As Swanson points out, the novella can certainly be read from a universalizing perspective, although his interpretation of it as an expression of the need for the characters to

¹⁶⁶“Dos lecciones ‘deleitosas’ de José Donoso para Delfina Guzmán”, *Discurso Literario*, 1.2 (1984), p. 280.

¹⁶⁷“Dos lecturas ‘deleitosas’”, p. 281.

¹⁶⁸“Alienation and resignation in Donoso’s *Cuatro para Delfina*”, *Studies on the work of José Donoso*, Adelstein (ed.), New York: Edwin Mellen, 1990, p. 165.

¹⁶⁹“«In my end is my beginning»: José Donoso’s sense of an ending”, *Chasqui*, vol. 17, part 2, 1988.

¹⁷⁰Chesak, Laura A., *Escritura y subversión del significado*, Madrid: Verbum, 1997, p. 69

accept their limitations is open to debate. It undoubtedly has much in common with works like «Átomo verde número cinco» in its suggestion that people cannot hide from change however much they try to protect themselves from it. And again as in the *Tres Novelitas Burguesas* the power of convention and conformism plays an important part in the novella's development. Indeed, although the Castillos are at first dismayed when mysterious forces begin to intrude on their idyll they nonetheless feel some satisfaction in fulfilling a repressed urge to be free of the social rules that bind them. There is something poignant about their fascination with the book of photographs of Tsarist Russia that provides them with a rare glimpse of adventure, a fascination that can be interpreted as a powerful symbol of their repressed desire to transcend the conventional boundaries of their world. Although this longing for adventure had previously always been stifled by their deeply ingrained conformism¹⁷¹ the novella charts the process through which they manage to break out of their routine existence and gratify their thirst for new experiences. In the end, however, they end up paying for this audacity with their lives.

Alongside this characteristic investigation of the relationship between the individual and convention, however, I shall argue that a specifically political reading of the story is possible. Indeed, in my view the political reading of this work is irresistible and there are aspects of the story which cannot be fully understood without taking into account the historical context in which they were written. In «Los habitantes» Donoso produced a subtle yet powerful critique of postcoup society and the failure of critics to read the story within the context of contemporary Chile almost appears to be a wilful and politically loaded decision to avoid any engagement with political reality.

When reading «Los habitantes» it is important to bear in mind that Donoso explicitly underlined the importance for him of politics during this period, a fixation that was to grow into a full-blown obsession in the face of the longevity of the regime. For example, in an interview with Guillermo Castillo-Feliú he commented that:

Creo que estoy en un momento de crisis; todo el país está en un momento de crisis pero, específicamente yo. Este [*Cuatro para Delfina*] es mi primer libro escrito en Chile. [...] Aquí me siento o, estoy sintiendo cosas distintas. Me siento tan "involved", tan completamente

¹⁷¹In contrast to those who want to read some political meaning into the choice of Russia it is worth comparing Mauricio's vision of freedom that looks across the Pyrenees to a wider world, his vision ending in "las estepas de Rusia y de Asia donde el viento arrastraba hielo y arena y caravanas y razas desconocidas... todo partiendo desde los pies mismos del muchacho que él era ahora" («Gaspard de la Nuit», p. 271). The Russian steppes, then, seem to be a conventional symbol of freedom and otherness in Donoso's work.

comprometido con la cosa. En España, creí que me iba a poder salvar de este "involvement", que iba a poderme retirar un poco, ¿no es cierto? Y no; aquí no hay posibilidad de escribir sin algún tipo de "involvement".¹⁷²

From the outset «Los habitantes» establishes the parameters within which its political commentary will be made. We are taken to a quiet street in an exclusive residential district of a "pobre capital latinoamericana" (101), a haven of flowering shrubs and shady tranquillity reminiscent of Santiago's Las Condes, Los Domenicos or Providencia districts.¹⁷³ This setting is crucial to the development of a novella that focuses on social apartheid and the sense of bourgeois contentment that at first seems to characterise Francisco and Blanca Castillo's lives is quickly summed up in the description of the street where they live as "una de las calles arboladas más tranquilas de la parte madura de los buenos barrios residenciales" (95). At the same time an examination of this phrase leads us to consider Donoso's expert handling of the free indirect style which once again plays a pivotal role in the development of the story. With characteristic subtlety the characters' perception of events is expressed through a third person narrative that allows us access to their thoughts and makes possible an ironic reassessment of their prejudices and fears. The use here of the word "bueno", for example, is doubly significant because it suggests both that these areas are pleasant places to live and that they are inhabited by the right kind of people. Indeed, we are left in no doubt as to the importance for the Castillos and their privileged neighbours of dealing with people of their own kind. For example, the block of flats under construction next door not only undermines their sense of security by bringing an army of workers into the area but also threatens their future peace of mind with the prospect of the arrival of "gente inclasificable a esta calle hasta ahora habitada por gente de toda la vida" (95). The local residents' initial concern is in some measure placated by the builder's assurances that the flats will be for "gente muy seleccionada" (96) and they are further pacified by the architect, in whom they place more trust precisely because he is known to them: "era una persona conocida" (96). More evidence of this snobbish preoccupation with social exclusivity is apparent in the Castillos' feelings about their son's marriage to someone outside their social circle: "se había

¹⁷²Interview with G.I. Castillo-Feliú, *Hispania* 66, 1983: p. 422. The interview took place on the 11th of January 1983, in Santiago, a week after the opening of the stage version of «Sueños de Mala Muerte», the first of the novellas in *Cuatro para Delfina*.

¹⁷³Although the context is deliberately vague there is no doubt that it fits Santiago perfectly, not least in its references to the city's sunsets as an "hoguera química" (103, 144).

casado con la hija, preciosa y muy inteligente por otra parte, de gente no conocida" (97). This patronising scorn is only reinforced by their gratitude that Andrés has had the sensitivity not to insist that they get to know their suspect in-laws any better: "sensato y cariñoso, no les exigía que los conocieran más" (97).

The physical exclusivity of their area with its gardens protected by "matorrales inexpugnables [...] rejas de fierro y mastines" (96) is also under threat from the kind of housing development that is planned. In a district made up of houses the idea of flats is frowned on, even if they are "departamentos de gran lujo" (96). This, one suspects, is not simply because of the effect on the local architecture but also out of a snobbish desire to conserve a tradition of living in houses that separates the upper middle-class from the petty bourgeoisie. This suspicion seems to be half confirmed by Blanca's declaration that "por ningún motivo ella moriría en un departamento" (98), although the alibi of gardening is adduced to explain the vehemence of her reaction. In fact, an important ideological aspect of the story is the bourgeoisie's belief in private property and the characters' refusal to share what is theirs. This is reinforced by the rejection of collective living implicit in their description of blocks of flats as "beehives" ("esos edificios que parecían colmenas", 102), an image carrying a threat to the bourgeois individualism that is partly expressed in the need for a private space to call one's own.¹⁷⁴

Prior to the construction of the new building Blanca and Francisco's lives are uneventful. Their pleasant evening strolls with their cocker spaniel bitch are gently territorial exercises that precisely delimit their world. The narrator's description of these evening rituals, however, highlights the narrowness of their experience and suggests that what lies beneath this genteel behaviour is no more than animal instinct:

Era peligroso asomarse a ese mundo que comenzaba justo más allá del territorio que Marlene Dietrich, noche a noche, marcaba como suyo con su orina. (101)

Passages of this sort underline the clearly defined, even claustrophobic nature of the world they inhabit. While the emphasis on the narrowness of their horizons undoubtedly has existential implications it also has powerful political connotations. Blanca and Francisco inhabit a privileged world, a charmed place far removed from the ambiguities of the

¹⁷⁴This being Latin America we are not talking about state housing: the flats that appal them are probably private properties available for rent to petty bourgeois families. This does not alter the exclusivity in their rejection of communal living, however.

downtown area where the territories of rich and poor overlap or the deprivation of neighbourhoods like El Chanco where their maid Rita's family live (97, 135). That the latter has not visited her relatives for twenty-five years emphasises both the paternalism of a social system in which the poor, forced into domestic servitude, live with their masters as one of the family, and the bourgeoisie's desire to be as insulated as possible from the depressing realities of poverty. For their part, the Castillos feel a patronising affection towards their servants, summed up in their amusement at Rita's uneducated attempts to pronounce Marlene Dietrich, the name that they have chosen for their pet spaniel (97).

The new building that represents a turning point in the lives of Blanca and Francisco also has immense political significance for anyone familiar with Pinochet's Chile. It dates the events of the story quite precisely to the time of boom and bust in the Chilean economy when the junta's "Chicago boys" were given a free rein to experiment with their Friedmanite free-market policies. During the boom times Santiago was filled with American-style high-rise developments, many of which were left abandoned during the recession that followed. There is an enlightening description of this period in *La desesperanza*:

el gobierno, en ese tiempo, propiciaba otro estilo, lo opulento, lo nuevo, y Santiago se confitó de inmuebles cristalizados con vista panorámica[...] y cuando de la noche a la mañana se disipó ese sueño megalómano, los edificios quedaron varados en las riberas de las nuevas avenidas incompletas, saurios de otra época paleontológica descartados de una siniestra opereta de cartón piedra (24).

The fact that *La desesperanza*, as we shall see, focuses on events that can be dated as happening in 1985, combined with the placing of the passage cited above as a description of the situation "[h]ace cinco años" (24) means that it refers to the period around 1980/1, which was precisely when Donoso was writing «Los habitantes». This, of course, is not necessarily relevant to the first story but it does provide circumstantial evidence that Donoso was thinking of the contemporary political scene when he wrote it. In this extremely difficult period for the Chilean economy many companies went to the wall in the vain struggle to cope with the twin evils of a massive devaluation of the peso and a high level of foreign debt. Needless to say, the effects for workers were equally catastrophic, with thousands being laid off.¹⁷⁵ The fact that work begins on the building indicates that the story starts on the cusp of

¹⁷⁵“By 1982, the dimensions of the crisis were undeniable and the private sector was facing its crisis since the great Depression. Industrial production plunged 21 percent, and 810 companies went bankrupt, five times more than during the 1975 recession. Between 1980 and 1983, a total of 2,151 enterprises declared themselves insolvent” Constable and Valenzuela, *Chile: A Nation of Enemies*, New York: Norton, p. 208. Compare with

this recession, a time when there was still a sense of satisfaction about the early success of the post-coup economy, hinted at in Blanca and Fernando's perception that "las cosas en el país parecían haber terminado por ordenarse" (96). Given the implicit invitation to recognise Chile at a particular historical moment this statement can be read as a subtle condemnation of the relief felt by the middle-classes at the recuperation of the economic privileges in exchange for which they had been prepared to surrender their political freedom.

Against this historical background «Los habitantes» can be read as a portrayal of how the political and economic realities of Chile under the dictatorship are brought home to the previously insulated Castillos. An essential part of this process is the recognition of the brutal social transformation undergone by Chilean society that is hinted at in the novella through a number of references to major social and economic changes. Sometimes, as in the case of the comments on the clothes worn by "los jóvenes de ahora" (104), these seem to be innocuous references to the generation gap but it quickly becomes apparent that the question of time schemes is highly significant. Looking at the workers on the building site, for example, Blanca is impressed by the neatness that she contrasts with the "los harapos de los obreros de antes" (99), a comment that in the context of post-coup Chile does not go unnoticed. When, we ask ourselves, was "antes"? It might be the period of the Allende government, here contrasted unfavourably with the short-lived prosperity that construction workers enjoyed during the boom, but given the greatly improved conditions for workers under the UP government that seems unlikely.¹⁷⁶ Rita too harks back to a previous time when she says that the person who delivered the mysterious packet to the Castillos' house looked like "un hombre alto [...] tan pobremente vestido como los cesantes de otro tiempo" (119). The question, "¿a qué tiempo se refería?" (119), which comes from the Castillos' point of view, underlines the uncertainty and insecurity occasioned by talking about the past. She could not be talking about the improving employment prospects of the Allende years, so we have to assume she is referring to the inequalities existing at some time before the UP government.¹⁷⁷ To voice such views in Pinochet's Chile was, of course, decidedly risky.

Timerman: "In 1985 the Chileans consumed 15 percent less than they did in 1970, although the 20 percent of the population that is in the upper income bracket consumed 30 percent more in 1985 than in 1970 and the 40 percent of the population that constitute Chile's poor consumed 50 percent less in 1985 than in 1970. Yes, 50 percent less." (*Death in the South*, p. 53).

¹⁷⁶ Again, in *La desesperanza* Lopito refers to a brief moment of economic success (101).

¹⁷⁷ Even strong critics of the Allende regime like historian Marc Falcoff recognise that the only economic indicator that improved throughout Allende's government was that of employment. See Falcoff, Marc, *Modern Chile: A critical History*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 1991, p. 68.

In her book of Donoso memoirs Esther Edwards make some interesting connections that help to contextualise these references. Commenting on the high number of vagrants in Santiago in the early 80s she writes:

A nadie le gusta recordar que a comienzos de los años ochenta las esquinas de Santiago estaban pobladas de mendigos. [...] En las calles del barrio alto los había con derecho de propiedad sobre ciertas áreas. Muchos se limitaban a detener a los automovilistas, levantado a sus hijos en brazos para provocar más compasión; otros tocaban los timbres de las casas pidiendo dinero o comida, tal como José los había visto en su infancia, medio escondido tras el delantal de su nana. El observó muchas veces el espectáculo de los menesterosos de Galvarino Gallardo por la ventana del dormitorio; y Pilar supo que esa visión se transformaría en cuento. Así fue, se llamó **Los habitantes de una ruina inconclusa** y formó parte de las *nouvelles* que Donoso escribía en Cachagua con la disciplina y concentración de un estudiante aplicado, sin permitir que nada lo distrajera.¹⁷⁸

Following the hint from this passage, then, one could plausibly argue that “[a]ntes” refers to the depression years that had made such an impact on Donoso as a child in the 30s.

The comments concerning the generation gap between the Castillos and their children, Andrés and Pía, also seem to figure significant sociopolitical changes. Andrés in particular is an important secondary figure, immediately recognisable as one of the new generation of economists and entrepreneurs who took advantage of the Pinochet regime’s neo-liberal economic policies. Lucrecio Pérez Blanco puts forward what I think is an indefensible reading of Andrés as a positive character, claiming that “Andrés triunfa porque es el visionario verdadero del cambio permanente en la realidad, y porque ha sabido comprender que éste no se logra con la sola contemplación de una esperanza, de brazos caídos.”¹⁷⁹ This extraordinary view is dependent on a failure to read the irony that would still be an important structuring feature of the story even if we read it out of context as a complete fantasy. Surely the final view of the rapacious capitalist Andrés buying up empty properties is a negative one, something that would not have been lost on any contemporary Chilean reader who would have realised that this is no fantasy but a realistic assessment of what was going on in the country at this point in the Pinochet dictatorship. A shrewd businessmen with a love for electronic gadgets (140) and an eye for the main chance Andrés is unmistakably a creature of the regime.¹⁸⁰ The first description of him immediately puts us on our guard as we

¹⁷⁸ Edwards, *Voces de la memoria*, pp. 251/252.

¹⁷⁹ Pérez Blanco, Lucrecio, “Dos lecciones «Deleitosas» de José Donoso para Delfina Guzmán”, *Discurso Literario*, vol.1, no. 2, 1984, p. 281. This defence of Andrés seem as bizarre as Callan’s positive appraisal of the materialism of Mauricio’s double in «Gaspard de la nuit».

¹⁸⁰ This was typical in a period in which electronic consumer goods were all the rage. Mentioned by Timerman: “Consumerism was the great pharaonic work of Pinochet. He kept the country happy for almost ten years with colour television set from Hong Kong, dolls from Taiwan, automobiles from Japan, electronic games and

are told that “después de una adolescencia fácil floreció en una juventud de compromiso real con los temas económicos típicos de la nueva generación” (98). This again helps to place the story through its parody of the regime’s ideology, further caricatured by both Andrés and Pía’s adherence to a new thinking that is little more than the cynicism of the triumphalist new right in the years after the coup. In this respect the story’s inversion of the generation gap is particularly ironic as the Castillo’s children turn out to be far more reactionary and conformist than their parents. Indeed, Blanca’s diatribe against her son’s values represents another scarcely veiled reference to the monetarist policies of the regime: “¡Tú estás tan malo de la cabeza que nosotros, creyendo que tus benditos porcentajes y prórrogas lo van a solucionar todo!” (124) and it is therefore no surprise that at the end of the story we see Andrés as a cynical opportunist taking advantage of the effects of the global catastrophe that has left his parents’ neighbourhood in ruins.¹⁸¹

The abandonment of the building is the first step in the process indicating that the recession has begun. At first the only sign of change is the absence of the night watchman and his dog which greeted Marlene Dietrich on her evening walks. Soon, however, the second significant event in the novella occurs, Blanca and Francisco’s encounter the “andariego”, a mysterious figure who becomes increasingly important as the story progresses. At first, however, neither the stranger’s symbolic significance nor the link between his appearance and the empty building is apparent. Instead, Blanca and Francisco encounter a foreigner who does not speak their language. Although Blanca initially takes him for a “pordiosero” (102) they decide that the traveller, who is searching in vain for a local address, is not a down-and-out, a conclusion they reach because as good bourgeois they are ever alert to the signs of class, which in this case amounts to noticing that he is wearing clean Adidas trainers. However, their inability to establish any real communication with him means that they are able to do little more than fantasise about his identity and plans, projecting onto him

computers from the United States.” *Death in the South*, Vintage Books, New York, 1988, p. 79.

¹⁸¹ In this respect Vargas Llosa’s comments on Donoso after his death are revealing:

“*Pregunta*: Parece que había una gran divergencia en sus puntos de vista político y económico. El era muy crítico del liberalismo económico chileno, opción que usted defiende a rajatabla.

Mario Vargas Llosa: El jamás podría haber aceptado el liberalismo que yo defiende y propongo, porque esa idea de dejar que la economía funcione librada a la iniciativa individual, que el intervencionalismo estatal sea mínimo, que el individuo sea el eje de la vida social y de ninguna manera el Estado, eran nociones que Pepe no conocía, no podía aceptar y contra las que tenía un rechazo casi visceral. Era un hombre muy apegado a la tradición, y era crítico hacia esa política nueva de apertura, de funcionamiento de mercados.” Interview with Mario Vargas Llosa, *¿Qué pasa?* 1340, (Santiago), 13 al 19 de diciembre, 1996. Also note “Creo que ni la política ni la economía le interesaban lo más mínimo, salvo cuando estaba en juego algo esencial, como la libertad o los derechos humanos atropellados” (ibid.).

the longing for a world beyond their limited horizons that had previously found its only outlet in the book of photographs of Tsarist Russia.¹⁸²

There are existential issues at stake here but the true political significance of the “andariago” gradually emerges through his close relationship with the down-and-outs. As he acquires the clothes and shambling demeanour of the beggars who people the Santiago streets his strangeness comes to be seen in social rather than geographical or cultural terms. Indeed, the fact that he appears as a traveller could be interpreted as a convenient *deus ex machina*, a trap laid for them by Donoso’s imagination that plays a similar role to the strange occurrences in «Átomo verde número cinco» that lead to Roberto and Marta’s downfall. After all, a couple like Blanca and Francisco would have been unlikely to talk to a “pordiosero”, a figure that many people of their class barely consider human. Nonetheless, by the time he leaves their house he is beginning to assume the characteristics of the dispossessed Chileans with whom they are all too familiar and Francisco watches him “casi arrastrando los pies como un vagabundo cualquiera de los que hay por miles en la ciudad” (113).¹⁸³

Francisco and Blanca’s chance meeting with an unlikely representative of the marginalised poor begins to induce the beginnings of a feeling of guilt about their privileged existence, an important aspect of which is their insulation from suffering. When Blanca feels that the stranger might be keeping watch over them from the neighbouring building there is an ironic insight implicit in Francisco’s exclamation “¡Cómo si hubiéramos hecho algo malo!” (104). Francisco proclaims his innocence but there is a ironic suggestion of the complicity of the bourgeois with the regime through their lack of action. As the story develops Francisco’s certainty begins to falter. When he suspects that the “andariago” had been watching them with their daughter and grandchildren he feels ashamed that the stranger should have witnessed such contentment: “Francisco se avergonzó de que hubiera sido testigo, quizá envidioso, probablemente dolorido, de tanta paz” (109). This feeling is

¹⁸² This book, explicitly identified in the text (p. 100) as Chloé Obolensky’s extraordinary collection, *The Russian Empire: A Portrait in Photos*, published in 1979 by Random House (New York), provides us with another circumstantial way of dating the story.

¹⁸³ Another brief look at Jacobo Timerman’s work on Chile under the dictatorship enables us to put all of this into context:

“In any of the *poblaciones* (shantytown settlements) outside Santiago, four out of every five young persons are unemployed. They walk the few miles that separates them from the city early every morning. They beg, which makes them liable to be arrested for vagrancy [...] they are looked upon as intruders in the prosperous neighbourhoods and risk a night in a police cell if they are found “loitering” there. (*Death in the South*, p. 68).

immediately replaced by an aggressive response to the fear of being judged: “Y lo odió por violar su intimidad, por vigilarlo y quizá juzgarlo” (109). Later, looking at the stranger, Francisco feels that he experiences “algo a lo que él nunca podría llegar: estaba en peligro” (112). From the reader’s point of view this will later be revealed as an ironic foreshadowing of the end of the novella but for Francisco it is a recognition of the privileged nature of his life. The essential point being made is that this couple who think of themselves as “tranquilos burgueses fortuitos que desconocían la experiencia de la dureza” (118) might not be as innocent as they seem.

We learn that the Castillos are cushioned from the negative effects of the recession that leads to the appearance of more and more destitute people on the streets. In fact we are even told that the economic downturn furthers some of their goals:

Para ellos, claro, esta crisis era positiva porque significaba que ya no demolerían otra casa buena para construir esos edificios que parecían colmenas, como estuvo sucediendo en otros sectores privilegiados, y así los jardines espléndidos seguirían tan espléndidos como toda la vida. (102)

Nonetheless, the brooding presence of the empty building coupled with the feelings unleashed by their meeting with the stranger continue to have unexpected effects. One of the most striking of these is the way the destitute become more visible for them. Blanca’s reaction to this is both deeply conservative and irrational, just as it was when she let the stranger into her house: “Nunca más va a pisar una persona como ésa mi casa” (113). She feels blind terror at the sight of beggars, a fear that is quickly translated into aggression: “Ultimamente he estado viendo demasiados mendigos por la ciudad, no quiero verlos, los odio, los odio” (114). Francisco, however, also dwells on the problem and starts to come up with some disturbing conclusions:

La verdad, claro, era que en este país siempre hubo mendigos y vagabundos, sólo que ahora que todo sufría de tan terrible inestabilidad uno se fijaba más en las señales de la miseria, y por eso las *veía* más. Con este asunto de la recesión que tenía tan angustiada a todo el mundo resultaba difícil, por simple, clasificarlos de asociales y locos. (115)

Even though there is a peculiar refusal to accept that the numbers of beggars has actually grown the recognition of the existence of the ‘anguish’ of others is disconcerting in a world in which passive acquiescence is the norm. Their world, it seems is no longer immune to the ‘terrible instability’ that is affecting ‘everything’ (society?; their way of life?; their values?) and having taken this first step Francisco is immediately struck by an insight that

allows him to begin to see through the ideological mystification that had previously blinded him to social reality:

sí, sí, *eran*, sin duda, asociales y locos, pero se hacía apremiante precisar que el hecho de ser asocial, el hecho de ser loco, estaba profundamente vinculado, a través de esos seres trashumantes y aterrados, con la locura de todo lo que estaba pasando, y eran su emblema (115)

This passage allows us to follow the debate going on in Francisco's mind with the internalised voice of the regime's propaganda that would seek to persuade him that the increasing numbers of the destitute are on the streets because they are incapable of integrating themselves into society rather than because they are jobless and starving. He is beginning to question this view even though he still accepts part of it. The most significant and tantalising words in this extract are "todo lo que estaba pasando", a tentative reference to everything that the bourgeois shuts out from consciousness because it is too uncomfortable to countenance: the coup, the dictatorship, the deaths, disappearances and economic violence.

From this point on the conflict between the generations comes to the fore, exposing the full extent of Andrés' cynicism. Both Blanca and Francisco begin to question the limitations of their bourgeois lifestyle and start to behave in what their conformist children regard as a decidedly eccentric way. When Francisco grows a beard he provokes Andrés' outraged and sarcastic question, "Como un *hippie*?", (122) and when Blanca puts on the silk scarf she finds in the mysterious parcel Pía comments in similar vein: "un poco demasiado *hippie* para una señora como usted" (126). Shortly afterwards Andrés more accurately likens his father's appearance as that of a beggar: "¿Y usted, hecho un limosnero?" (124). Blanca upbraids Andrés for his narrow-mindedness, giving voice to the previously unsayable as she recognises the corrupting effect of the current political and economic situation:

No tienen otra visión, la gente joven. Eres incapaz de aceptar que este envoltorio pueda significar algo para alguien, ni comprender que haya códigos distintos a los tuyos [...] No, no, no entiendes nada porque eres uno de esos hombres que este triste tiempo de la historia ha despojado del espíritu que cuando niño parecía que ibas a tener... (123)

Andrés's response to his parents' unheard of behaviour carries an implicit threat:

No quiero que mi mamá y usted se vuelvan locos! ¿No la oyó divagar, recién? ¿Y usted, hecho un limosnero con barba de una semana, no se da cuenta que están... mal? (124)

This reaction is typical of a series of intolerant characters to be found throughout Donoso's work. As we saw in the previous chapter it is common for his conformists to dismiss as mad a pattern of behaviour that fails to fit in with what they regard as acceptable. This view of the mad as at least partly victims of the intolerance of society is not far from that of "anti-psychiatrists" like R.D. Laing who regard madness itself as socially defined, thus providing us with an example of a role that is rarely assumed willingly (an unusual example would be Andrés in *Coronación*) but which is attributed by the group. The sinister side of this tendency is that if the rules are not accepted then the person who rejects them can be regarded as needing treatment and in extreme cases may be institutionalised. This is precisely what happens in *Casa de campo* when the Ventura elite, representatives of the Chilean oligarchy, seek to silence Adriano Gomara (who represents Allende) by shutting him up in a tower and sedating him, an intolerance taken to its extreme conclusion in the real world with the old Soviet regime's incarceration of dissidents in mental institutions.

Andrés' first reaction is to deal with the people he feels are affecting his parents' lives by calling the police, an eloquent example of the authoritarianism of post-coup society underlined by Blanca's comment that: "Ustedes todo lo arreglan ahora con la policía" (123).¹⁸⁴ However, when a policeman does arrive after the murder of one of the down-and-outs in the building next door he is not presented as a violent enforcer of orthodoxy but as a propagandist, which if anything makes him even more sinister. There is a certain logic in this as he is dealing with bourgeois characters for whom an ideological response is more adequate than the violence meted out to the poor, another process emphasised in *Casa de campo*. He gives us an insight into the official version with which Francisco had previously been carrying on his inner debate, a propagandist view that would have them believe that rather than as victims of a failed economy and an uncaring society the beggars should be regarded as psychologically disturbed. There is a delightful irony in the policeman's words as he blames the indigent for their own misfortune. They are:

personas frágiles, expulsados de la estructura social por abajo, generalmente debido a problemas de personalidad psicopática, a la temible tara de ser incapaces de incorporarse a una sociedad ordenada. Era inútil tratar de rescatarlos o hacer algo por ellos: siempre terminaban evadiéndose. (129)¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴It also underlines another difference between the generations as the older Castillos belong to a generation who believed that to call the police "era señal de deterioro" (129), an allusion to an age in which the need to keep up appearances suggests a different order of snobbery rather than a greater moral probity.

¹⁸⁵Again Timerman provides a useful insight: "The Chilean military identify poverty with Marxism and are convinced that misery is an ideological choice." (*Death in the South*, p. 68).

The violence disguised as paternalistic concern that accompanies his characterisation of the dispossessed suggests that anyone unable or unwilling to conform can be classified as mentally ill by a regime that wishes to silence all voices but its own. The new orthodoxy has recourse to the idea of the ‘sick personality’, an intolerant view typical of the sort of totalitarian regime that demands conformity by appealing to the common good in the shape of an ‘ordered society’ (a euphemism for a cowed and docile one). In the neo-fascist discourse of the regime an individualist –understood as someone who refuses to conform rather than as someone who is out for him or herself– is necessarily sick. This rhetoric reveals a vision of social relationships that is absolutely intolerant of any deviation from the ideologically constructed norm and which demands that everybody at least appear to conform.

Francisco’s tentative attempts to resist this nonsense by redefining the terms –“No es la locura, entonces, lo que se está transformando en problema social? ¿O el problema social en locura?” (129)– are met with a mixture of straightforward lying and further mystification:

El oficial se puso pensativo, serio: dijo que no había notado últimamente ningún aumento de vagabundos [...] pero que en todo caso la sociedad no podía reconocerlos como sus víctimas: se trataba de gente discolia que rehusaba integrarse pese a las facilidades que con frecuencia se les ofrecían, nihilistas negativos, individualistas enfermos, caóticos, ácratas incapaces de reconocer orden alguno, seres anárquicos, desesperados (129/130)¹⁸⁶

For the moment, at any rate, there the matter rests. Although Blanca and Francisco discuss the matter with some of the other neighbours the issue is defused and pushed away with a vague reference to the recession: “era posible que se viera más vagabundos por la ciudad –claro la recesión mundial– [...] todo era tan distinto ahora” (130).

A vital feature of the story is the couple’s inability to communicate with the stranger. Like the natives in *Casa de campo* and the working class in *La desesperanza* the marginalised have no voice in «Los habitantes», or at least no voice that is intelligible to the bourgeoisie. Despite the rare moments of comprehension when they see the “andariego” as a fellow human being rather than as a figure onto whom they can project their fantasies they never understand what motivates him. He remains as much of an enigma to them as the language he speaks and the next time he returns all hope of communication has gone: “El

¹⁸⁶It is interesting that the word “ácrata” is used here, the same term that Donoso applied to himself in one of the quotations at the start of this chapter.

andariego se alzó de hombros con el desolado gesto de los que saben que los que no son como ellos no podrán comprender" (133). An interesting question here is who perceives this difference between the "andariego", the class he has come to represent and 'those who are not like them'. The indirect free style suggests it is the Castillos' view, and this description therefore underlines their socially exclusive values. They are literally incapable of communication with a representative of the dispossessed.

Like the rest of the novella's major themes, therefore, the question of communication is overtly linked to social difference. It is no coincidence that Rita empathises with the visitor, noting his hunger which the bourgeois do not even know how to recognise:

-Este hombre tiene hambre.
 -¿Cómo sabes?
 -Eso se nota. (133)

When the memory of her younger brother who was also fugitive leads Rita to let the stranger escape the police Blanca is furious.¹⁸⁷ In retaliation Rita stops turning up for work but when Blanca answers the phone she hears her speaking the stranger's incomprehensible but instantly recognisable language (135). This fantastic development in the plot, typical of Donoso's tendency to suddenly abandon realist conventions through the inclusion of bizarre twists, not only suggests that Rita's humble station allows her to communicate with the enigmatic messenger from the dispossessed but is also a typical symptom of bourgeois paranoia. This incident has several implications, on one hand suggesting that the bourgeois turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to the suffering of those who are not like them and on the other evoking their fear that their social inferiors are plotting against them. Although Blanca cannot imagine life without the servant ("no podía concebir la vida sin la Rita", 135) who brought up her daughter (136), and despite her pleas that their servant absolve them of their sense of guilt ("ten compasión de nosotros que no hemos sido malos contigo", 135), Rita refuses to return. The next time they see her is in the beggars' court where they are "tried" for their crimes, in itself an ironic scene given Francisco's profession as a lawyer.

Before this however, they are almost completely submerged in the world of the destitute. Their transformation from *bons bourgeois*, insulated from the suffering of others,

¹⁸⁷There is a trace in this of Teresa Vergara crying at the death of a down-and-out who reminded her of her brother (see *Review* 9, p. 26). Such anecdotal and autobiographical information clearly has no direct bearing on the story but it is circumstantial evidence that Donoso was again working through a theme of bourgeois guilt that had a particular personal significance for him.

into beggars nears completion when on one of their forays into the empty building, which is now beginning to fill up with vagrants, Francisco picks up a apple from the floor:

Francisco agarró una manzana mordida que encontró en el suelo junto a sus pies, se la ofreció a Blanca, que enterró en ella sus dientes y saboreó, devolviéndosela luego a Francisco para que él comiera el resto. (138)

The forbidden knowledge that they share as a result of eating this particular fruit is a more complete understanding of the experience of indigence. Now they know what it is like to live like down-and-outs. At the same time this change in status is almost an adventure, a kind of social tourism, as the people around them are equated with those in the book of photos of Tsarist Russia: "Los lujosos personajes harapientos del libro de fotos estaban aislados, mudos, tranquilos allí" (138). On the one hand they realise the realities of dispossession and on the other almost enjoy the exhilarating vertigo of this final release from the limited values that had previously imprisoned them.

In keeping with Donoso's preference for striking final images rather than expositional resolutions their trial is stylised and theatrical. The keys to their house, an obvious symbol of property, are taken from them and after being berated in the unintelligible language of the outsiders they are left with nooses around their necks. However, the beggars court imposes no immediate sanction on them and they are left alone, looking out over a city that is "tan condenada como ellos" (144). At this moment they notice their overgrown garden and remember their past lives. They seem to revert to type, complaining about their servants, including Rita, in terms that emphasise the class divide:

-La cocinera podía preocuparse un poquito
-¡Rota más floja!
-Y te diré que la Rita era igual. (144)

What follows is the futuristic ending, another fantastic feature of the novella that momentarily projects it into the realm of science fiction through its reference to the global catastrophe that ends up in a victory for cynical opportunists like Andrés: "Andrés Castillo declaraba a los periódicos que gracias a ella [la guerra] había desaparecido casi por completo la recesión mundial que antes aquejaba al mundo" (145).¹⁸⁸ We discover that the story is being told from this future perspective, years after the demolition of the house and the death of the architect of the empty building, and in the time of the grandchildren of the original

¹⁸⁸Note that Lucrecio Pérez Blanco also sees it as a reference to some imagined event: "Ha pasado un tiempo en el que el país o el mundo ha vivido una guerra que liquida a los pobres", "Dos lecciones deleitosas", p. 279.

builders. The neighbourhood has been abandoned by its old inhabitants who had felt threatened by the invasion of beggars that preceded the social cataclysm and now live in “bunkers” in the hills (146).¹⁸⁹ His parents, we are told, were found hanged from the railings of the abandoned building on the day before hostilities broke out (145). The way this came about is deliberately left open. If they were not murdered by the vagabonds then how did they die? While we can only speculate about this we do know that their sheltered world with its houses and lovingly tended gardens is swept away by a tide of change while the cynical Andrés flourishes. The values of the old bourgeoisie have been replaced by those of a more rapacious class of speculative exploiters.¹⁹⁰ The irony here is that the bourgeoisie allowed the military to take power, remaining largely inactive and silent while firstly left wing militants and then the poor took the brunt of the actions of Pinochet’s thugs, in the hope that its old privileges would be restored. But Donoso’s futuristic nightmare predicts a different fate and imagines a different world in which the old certainties have no meaning and naked greed is the only watchword. In this respect Chesak makes a convincing point when she claims that the reference to “la ciudad [...] tan condenada como ellos” refers to a whole society.¹⁹¹ The blame, in other words, belongs to the majority who remain silent and collude in the repression.

Two powerful political symbols function within this novella. The first is the building which indicates the bourgeoisie’s attempts to keep separate, to demarcate their privileged space and hang on to it at all costs. In Francisco and Blanca’s case this means avoiding contact even with the petty bourgeoisie. But the boundaries first become porous and then collapse altogether as the destitute, who are there primarily due to the indifference of the bourgeoisie, begin to flood into the *barrio alto*. The other symbol, linked to the first, is the complete lack of communication between this upper middle-class and the poor, symbolised

¹⁸⁹ This invasion of the rich barrios by the dispossessed is a fantasy that is repeated in *La desesperanza* with the imagined invasion of the *barrio alto* by vagrants: “Los jirones de humanidad que hurgaban en la basura eran la sigilosa avanzada que de noche se introducía en esta ciudadela para reclamar los despojos del privilegio, la basura que era parte del banquete, mientras la ola que finalmente rompería sobre todo esto [el *barrio alto*], llevándoselo, acumulaba fuerza para efectuar la penetración definitiva” (*La desesperanza*, 120).

¹⁹⁰ “Among affluent urbanites, a fast new status-symbol culture emerged, departing markedly from Chile’s tradition of upper-class modesty. Peugeots were replaced by flashy BMWs, shopping malls and condominiums sprouted in the affluent suburbs, and lavish residential developments crept up the Andean foothills. [...] The growth of high finance generated a new breed of entrepreneur known as the *cuesco cabrera*, a rough equivalent of ‘yuppie’. These eager young deal makers spoke a language different from that of Chile’s traditional manager [...] and their razzle-dazzle style made the trials of grubby hubcap or underwear factories seem déclassé. Whole fortunes were being manufactured out of paper, and every moment wasted was potential profit lost”, Constable and Valenzuela, *A Nation of Enemies*, pp. 204-205.

¹⁹¹ Chesak, *Escritura y subversión del significado*, p.68

here by Blanca and Francisco's inability to communicate either with the "andariego" or Rita. At the end of the story the cheerful presence of the workers on the building sites, "los jóvenes obreros, con sus canciones y bullanga de siempre" (147), provides a note of continuity rather than any real hope, merely confirming the point that although its precise configuration may change the exploitative nature of society remains the same.¹⁹²

The rich layering that typifies Donoso's work means that the political dimension of «Los habitantes» is linked with familiar existential and psychological concerns. The romantic theme of individual revolt against limiting circumstance is clearly once again important here. However, it seems strange that this story, written at time when the contemporary political situation was uppermost in its author's mind, should have been interpreted in ways that have ignored the importance of its historical context. The apparent vagueness of the novella's chronology seems to me to be a result of Donoso's awareness of censorship, and the kind of political caution that Jorge Edwards noted in his fellow author's approach to political activity. Indeed, although his fiction was published outside Chile and therefore not subject to direct censorship by the military authorities his comments in an interview with Guillermo Castillo-Feliú reveal a genuine concern that seems to support this view: "[h]ay ciertas cosas que yo no puedo escribir, que escribiría pero que no puedo escribir [...] hay una censura, absolutamente."¹⁹³

Thus the reference to some vague future seems designed at least in part to take the story away from the realms of contemporary political reality. Yet, as we have seen, it is clearly located in the contemporary state of national crisis. The themes of bourgeois guilt and punishment are strongly profiled and enable us to understand some of the more ambiguous and otherwise inexplicable aspects of the plot. Indeed, the image of the invasion of the privileged areas by an army of beggars was to be used in Donoso's next novel, *La desesperanza*, in which the marginalised are imagined taking revenge on the indifferent and complacent bourgeois who accepted the benefits of the regime.¹⁹⁴

Chesak suggests that the novella shows how "[e]l mundo narrativo de Donoso persigue la ruptura con el discurso monolítico y falsamente 'realista' que pretende explicarlo

¹⁹²Donoso certainly did not speak of hope in his interview with Gazarian Gautier, suggesting that the end of «Los habitantes» represents repetition rather than hope: "There is some repetition, not hope." (*Interviews with Latin American Writers*, p. 75).

¹⁹³Interview with G.I.Castillo-Feliú, *Hispania* 66, 1983: p. 422.

¹⁹⁴*La desesperanza*, p. 120.

todo, para indagar en las posibilidades más auténticas del lenguaje y la manera en que refleja la esencia siempre cambiante de lo humano".¹⁹⁵ What I find irritating about this, the concluding sentence of her analysis of the novella, is its mainly rhetorical nature. It seems to claim a belief in some essential human nature that is nonetheless continually changing. How then can it be an essence? And while her global analysis notes a pessimism about social relationships that is undoubtedly present in Donoso's work as a whole the peculiarity of Chesak's interpretation is that she turns the story into a general commentary on power while precluding its being a commentary on Pinochet's Chile. That is to say, she denies Donoso his immediate political relevance in favour of a generalised critique that may be more acceptable in the ivory tower of American academic criticism but would have been an obvious example of blindness to any contemporary Chilean reader seeking some respite from the dreariness of oppression in a country suffering under a military dictatorship. The irony of Chesak's reading is both that it is at its most convincing –and it would be unfair to disregard the fact that there are several well-taken points in her analysis– when it comes closest to recognising the contemporary relevance of the novella and contrasts the 'code' that Blanca and Francisco share with "el discurso oficial", a phrase that begs to be interpreted as a reference to Pinochet's government.¹⁹⁶ Similarly, she goes on to deny that the futuristic ending could be interpreted as a projection of the story into science-fiction, for whatever reason, on the grounds that it is "[d]emasiado enraizada en una época más o menos contemporánea".¹⁹⁷ Why, therefore, should it be incumbent upon us to interpret the story solely in a universalising way, noting its investigation of language, and its critique of power relationships? We could, after all, accept the futuristic ending as a pessimistic vision that projects the specific details of the commentary of post-coup society onto a broader canvas. Although, as my reading of «Gaspard de la Nuit» demonstrates, I would be the first to agree that Donoso often emphasises the general rather than the local, the time has surely come to reject the current critical orthodoxy that seeks to play down the political reading of certain important works. This has more to do with the continuing influence of the kind of poststructuralist dogma that in itself has come to constitute a pernicious form of political correctness. The fact that postmodernism is seen by some critics (but not, significantly, by theorists like Hutcheon) as being fundamentally wary about politics means that they steer

¹⁹⁵ *Escritura y subversión de significado*, p. 69.

¹⁹⁶ *Escritura y subversión de significado*, p. 67.

¹⁹⁷ *Escritura y subversión del significado*, p. 67.

clear of what, to me at least, seem to be aspects of the work that are clearly relevant to contemporary politics and history.

Five years after the publication of *Cuatro para Delfina* Donoso again dealt with post-coup society. Like «Los habitantes» *La desesperanza* is the aesthetic result of Donoso's personal experience of Chile under the dictatorship and some of the novella's themes are taken up again, especially the geographical exposition of a system of social apartheid that underlines the indifference of the privileged in their leafy suburbs to the suffering of the ubiquitous vagrants that symbolise the social and economic collapse of a society under military rule. This time, however, we are no longer dealing with a coded text in which the clues, although heavily signposted, still have to be discovered, but with a novel that boldly approaches a well-defined historical moment.

Given the frequent references to the despair felt by the characters at the apparent solidity of the military regime the title of the novel seems easy enough to interpret. However, although this despair is clearly associated with the declaration of a second state of siege by the Pinochet government, it is not only political but also personal and existential. That said, it is also true that contemporary political reality plays such a central part in the characters' lives that these aspects of their experience tend to be subsumed into the general sense of political crisis, a situation that in itself is a major cause of disillusionment and despair. The suffocating reality of life under the dictatorship brings their personal problems into relief and at the same time overshadows them, threatening to devalue their individual hopes and fears by contrasting them with the collective political tragedy. At the same time the novel recognises the social, political and cultural conflicts that existed before the dictatorship and which have outlived it. *La desesperanza*, therefore, is more than just an attack on military rule but also confronts the bitter realities of social exclusion as well as the dogmatism and intransigence of important sectors of the Chilean left.

The novel's plot, divided into three sections that bear the significant titles of "El Crepúsculo", "La Noche" and "La Mañana", centres on the return of an exile after thirteen years in Europe. Mañungo Vera, the protagonist, is not just any exile but an important national figure, a protest singer closely associated in the public imagination with the revolutionary aspirations of Salvador Allende's Unidad Popular government. This choice, a highly emotive one given the iconic status for the left of protest singers like Víctor Jara, Angel Parra and Patricio Manns, underlines Donoso's wish to confront directly the political attitudes of the opposition to the Pinochet regime. Mañungo's return, however, is motivated

by a crisis of identity that is cultural and personal as well as political and exemplifies the close but conflictive interrelationship between public and private life. After twelve years of self-imposed exile Mañungo feels unable to continue with the roles he had been playing in either sphere. As a national political figure the loss of the commitment that inspired his music, symbolised by his embarrassing break-down on stage in front of 40 000 fans, is extremely difficult for him to come to terms with. This ideological crisis is mirrored by his "fracaso matrimonial" (79), his break-up with his wife Nadja which has left him in charge of their seven-year old son Jean-Paul. Mañungo's fraught relationship with his almost entirely French-speaking son sums up some of the difficulties faced by the Chilean diaspora as the children of many political exiles grew up identifying more with their new homes than with the intense political memories of their parents' generation. In Jean-Paul's case this loss of contact between two cultural realities means that he speaks English better than he does Spanish (213). All of this emphasises the cultural dimension of Mañungo's personal crisis that is further complicated by the fact that he comes from the southern island of Chiloé which with its indigenous myths and superstitions is very different from Santiago. Thus the conflict between the European and the American that is seen in the contrast between France and Chile is also figured as a split within Chile itself through the references to the cultural abyss that separates the Europeanising *criollo* elite from Mañungo's native Chiloé.

Although his commitment to revolutionary politics is on the wane Mañungo feels a strong sense of political guilt for not having experienced either the coup itself or the repression that followed. His return coincides with the death of Matilde Urrutia, Pablo Neruda's widow (he arrives the night before her funeral), an event that is pregnant with both political and personal meaning. The poet's literary fame, left-wing political commitment and longstanding friendship with Mañungo mean that the central issues of the singer's identity crisis begin to crystallise around Matilde's funeral. One of the most important conflicts in the novel is the struggle over the significance that is to be attributed to this event, a struggle that is complicated by Matilde's supposed final wish that a priest say mass at her funeral. Lisboa, the representative of the Communist Party, wants to exploit to the full the political potential from such a high-profile public event. At the same time, however, he wants to hush up Matilde's final request so that the party rather than the Church will be seen as the main force of opposition to the dictatorship. In contrast to this many of the dead woman's friends want her funeral to be a more personal affair and would like her last wishes to be honoured, a

decision that would in any case be politically significant as a potent symbol of unity in the opposition to the regime.

Although we continually move back in time through the characters' thoughts the essential events of the story cover Mañungo's first day in Chile in the course of which he meets various figures from his past. The most important of these is his ex-lover Judit Torre Fox. Prior to the coup Judit had rejected her wealthy family in favour of a life of political militancy but the woman Mañungo encounters on his return is a changed character, indelibly marked by her experiences of arrest and psychological torture after the coup. She therefore has to live with a personal trauma far worse than Mañungo's, although Donoso's novel suggests that such comparisons may be otiose and even destructive. As in Mañungo's case an important part of Judit's personal crisis is an irrational feeling of guilt. While the women who shared her captivity were brutalised and raped, one of them by a trained dog,¹⁹⁸ she was spared by her obviously patrician origins and instead forced to undergo a simulated rape by her torturer, an experience that added to her feeling of guilt because she felt masochistic pleasure at being humiliated. Since then she has gone through a period of exile in Venezuela and now works with the women who were tortured with her and plan to take their revenge on the man who abused them. In this project they are aided by a bizarre network of informers made up of freakish "cartoneros", recyclers who go through the rubbish of the rich in an attempt to survive and whose destitution, as in «Los habitantes», represents the destructive and exclusive nature of the right-wing economic policies of the dictatorship.

Although the novel privileges the point of view of the two principals a cast of lesser characters plays an important part. Amongst them are the "costumbrista" novelist Fausta Manquileo and her partner, the minor poet don Celedonio, both of whom were friends of Neruda and his wife. Other important characters include the failed poet Lopito, an alcoholic friend of Mañungo and Judit's, Lisboa, the party member in charge of sections of the Communist Youth party, and Judit's cousin Freddy Fox, an opportunistic supporter of the regime who is also a wealthy entrepreneur and dilettante. The story follows Mañungo as he arrives at the Nerudas' house, then on through a night in Santiago in the company of Judit in which they resume their affair, break the curfew and have an extraordinary encounter with

¹⁹⁸Timerman reports both the case of women being raped by dogs (*Death in the South*, p. 30) and women undergoing simulated rape (op.cit.25).

Judit's torturer. In the aftermath of this meeting they plan to leave for Paris in order to escape the bitter political realities of Pinochet's Chile.

On the following day they attend Matilde's funeral together. During this climactic event their friend Lopito is arrested during a confrontation with the police, and later dies in custody. Lopito's death is the culmination of an absurd chain of events that is set in motion when he insults the policemen who had insulted him by laughing at the ugliness of his daughter, La Lopita. For Lopito this is the last straw and the political frustration built up over years of dictatorship comes out in a tirade against the police's role in the repression. His crime is "haberse deslenguado" (314), the crime of speaking his mind that leads to his arrest. While in custody he collapses and dies from a heart attack after being forced to pull a roller over a basketball court. The absurdity of Lopito's death, a result of the police's casual humiliation of Pinochet's opponents, is emblematic of the general inhumanity and injustice of the regime: "encarnaba el dolor general por la impotencia de todos ante ésta y mil situaciones" (315). It has a decisive effect on both Mañungo and Judit and they decide to stay in Chile rather than taking refuge in a self-imposed European exile.

At first sight *La desesperanza* is one of Donoso's most realist novels. He himself referred to it as "la obra de las mías, que más conectada está con la realidad", a view that is reinforced by the original conception of it in his notes as "criollista" or "paisajista".¹⁹⁹ These are interesting comments because they are relevant to the novel's strong political content and its treatment of cultural identity. The geography of modern Santiago provides the background against which the events unfold and the references to real characters and places certainly lead us to believe that we are dealing with a novel whose mode is primarily realist. This desire to portray a real place seems to lie behind Donoso's use of what Jean Gilkinson calls "technical vocabulary" to reinforce the specificity of his descriptions of place, a feature that is especially prominent in the passages that evoke the flora of Santiago's "Barrio Alto" or the misty seascapes of Chiloé.²⁰⁰ As Pedro Meléndez Paéz notes in his excellent article on the novel *La desesperanza*'s naming of real places and people has something in common with the historical novel.²⁰¹ Unlike most historical novels, however, the relationship established in

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Patricia Guzmán, "El Pájaro se convirtió en cuervo", *Vanguardia Dominical*, Bucaramanga, November 30th, 1986, p. 2. Mary Lusk Friedman comments on Donoso's notebooks in "The artistry of *La desesperanza* by José Donoso", *Hispania*, 78, (March 1995): 13-24.

²⁰⁰ Jean Gilkinson, *BHS* LXXV (1998): 517-537.

²⁰¹ Pedro Meléndez Paéz, "El desgaste del exilio en *La desesperanza* de José Donoso", *Chasqui*, (Williamsburg), vol. 23, pt.2, (1994): pp. 66-73. Paéz refers to Brian McHale's concept of "dark areas", the periods when little is

La desesperanza between fictional and real characters is one of contiguity rather than of co-existence. Both Pablo and Matilde are dead and our only access to them is through the memories of the fictional characters. With the exception of Fausta's version of Neruda's comments about Judit (85) no words are actually put into their mouths and rather than seeing them as living actors in the world described they remain in the background, although they continue to provide an important point of reference for the rest of the novel.

In formal terms, *La desesperanza* is characterised by the third person narrator's presentation of multiple points of view in order to create a panoramic vision of events, a technique that is common in what we might term the mainstream 19th century novel. At the same time, however, it also parodies the realist narrator's manner. An example of this is the generalisation of a subjective opinion that we find in the section introducing Santiago's Parque Forestal: "Quien no haya estudiado exámenes bajo los plátanos del Parque Forestal ni se haya acalorado defendiendo sus pasiones [...] no conoce la deslumbrante novedad de ser adulto y libre por fin." (216). Such interventions are familiar features of the nineteenth century realist novelist's appeal to a shared knowledge of the world beyond the text in order to dissolve the barriers between fiction and reality. While this is so, however, it is also true that the novel parodies the sort of realist technique that draws the reader's attention to its fictional nature. In this respect it is important to bear in mind that we are dealing with a sophisticated view of realism and not the straw target set up by poststructuralists. Realist novels of the 19th century, for example, frequently employed techniques that for a moment broke the illusion of reality and focused directly to the relationship between author and reader. An example of this is the underlining for the reader's benefit of the links between events, such as when the narrator points out that "[l]a mujer cuyo cortinaje de pelo ocultó sus facciones de la vista de Mañungo era Judit Torre" (82). These intrusive narratorial devices suddenly remind us that we are reading a fiction in which an omniscient narrator is marshalling events and to a large extent controlling our approach to the text. A further example of such parodic omniscience comes in the brief reference to the revolutionary priest who would have said mass at Matilde's funeral if the news of her final wish had got out: "Un sacerdote de izquierdas perdido entre la gente, el que debió haber oficiado la misa para Matilde pero no lo hizo porque finalmente nadie llegó a proponerle nada" (271). Here the

known about the doings of real characters and so their encounter with fictional counterparts will seem more plausible.

narrator not only transmits his knowledge about what actually happened in this world but also about what would have happened if things had gone otherwise, revealing an omniscience that holds good not only in this world but extends into other possible worlds.

There are also occasions when such realist conventions are subtly modified through the use of the indirect free style. This is the case of what appear to be paradigmatic narrative interventions which actually turn out to be dependent on the viewpoint of the characters. One such example is the description of the judge who signs Judit's release papers – "tenía el cutis seboso del casado joven a quien su mujer ya domina por el estómago" (159) – a generalisation actually attributed to Fausta, while another is the comment that "si bien a las mujeres normales la realidad no se les hace real hasta comentarla con una amiga, ella [Judit] jamás comentaba nada con nadie" (83) which comes from the perspective of an anonymous "they" ("Decían", 81).

Alongside this self-conscious imitation of realist clichés the novel also uses a series of narrative procedures that are not normally associated with the conventions of realism. Federico Schopf, for example, mentions "a mask which covers the grotesque".²⁰² One of the first things that we might note in this respect is that although the novel is not allegorical in the sense that it uses fiction to parallel real events and satirise real people it does contain within it what we might consider an allegorical tendency to the extent that we suspect that some of the fictional characters have correlates in the real world. At the same time other figures are notable by their absence, most obviously Augusto Pinochet and Salvador Allende to whom there are very few references. They are both mentioned in passing when the crowd at Matilde Neruda's funeral shouts "Se siente, se siente: Allende está presente" (271) and "El que no salta es Pinochet" (273), while Allende is also mentioned in Judit's consideration of Fausta's political attitudes, but the fact that an avowedly political novel about Chile under the dictatorship should mention the central figures of the coup so infrequently has an undeniable effect on its ability to create an illusion of reality, even though the apparent omissions may have been the result of some external limitation on what was written.

There are also isolated examples of the use of techniques that would normally be associated with the experimental novel. For example, in her article on *La desesperanza* Hortensia Morell comments on the unusual use of narration in the third person to tell the story of Judit's political background that we later learn was related to Mañungo by Judit

²⁰²Federico Schopf, "El lugar de la desesperanza", *CH*, October, 1989, p. 154

herself: “Es curioso el sistema que emplea de narrar la historia de Judit desde una perspectiva de omnisciencia neutral, refiriéndose a ella con las marcas de la persona persona gramatical, en el Capítulo 20, para sorpresivamente reasumir al principio del 21, ‘la historia que Judit contó’”²⁰³

Another example of what we might think of as technical sophistication is where the narrative moves from the impersonal third person to Judit’s first person inner monologue (129/130), a typical feature of Donoso’s work after *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*. This movement from the third to the first person narrator tends to happen, understandably enough, at times of heightened emotional tension.²⁰⁴

Lloraba y gritaba que la dejara [...] el rodar atronador del patín de don César en sus oídos [...] que la dejara, qué sabía él, imbécil, que la soltara de ese abrazo que le impedía moverse, no quiero que me abracés, no quiero que me toquen, no quiero que me toquen a la flaca, dice al verla debatirse en los brazos del bruto que la sujeta, no me la toques, no quiero que nadie me toque a esta flaquita que he estado mirando desde que llegó y es para mí: ¡déjamela! Judit, la intocable. La intocada. [...] ¿Por qué no me dejaste correr la misma suerte que las demás mujeres encarceladas? [...] La voz de Mañungo trata de calmarme pero me revuelco y pataleo [...] (129).

From “Lloraba” to “oídos” we have third person narrative that moves close to the indirect free style with its reference to the “rodar atronador” that is perceived from Judit’s point of view. From “que la dejara” to “moverse” we are dealing with the indirect free style as it uses the third person but adopts both her point of view and particular turn of phrase. It seems that this utterance represents actual dialogue that we are to imagine is taking place with Mañungo as interlocutor and it is immediately followed by a change to what could either be the reporting of actual dialogue, again with Mañungo as interlocutor, or a representation of a thought –“no quiero que me abracés”– that is silently addressed to Mañungo. With “no quiero que me toquen a la flaca” we are now following Judit’s thoughts as she remembers her torturer’s words. The status of the following section “Judit, la intocable[...] La intocada” is not entirely clear but seems to correspond to her view of the way she is perceived and the recognition of the fact that she alone was not raped during her interrogation. The narrative then returns to the exposition of Judit’s thoughts in the first

²⁰³Hortensia Morell “Fe en *La desesperanza* de José Donoso”, *RCEH*, Vol. XVI, 1, otoño 91, note 5, pp. 94-5.

²⁰⁴By referring to technical sophistication I am not trying to claim that realist discourse is primitive, simply that in this novel Donoso freely uses both the techniques of realism and those of the so-called experimental novel with equal ease and depending on his need.

person as she mentally interrogates her interrogator and follows her stream of consciousness as she notes that Mañungo is next to her trying to calm her down.

Another example of formal complexity is a section that apparently starts out as a passage in the free indirect style detailing Lopito's thoughts: "El vino tibio era lo único que por el momento aliviaba las triviales heridas de amor que lastimaban su corazón de borracho acometido por la pena" (289). This, however, is immediately followed by a question from Ada Luz: "¿Pena de qué, pues, Lopito?" (289), a juxtaposition that leaves us wondering when these thoughts were supposedly verbalised. This procedure is similar to that used in *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* when the old women respond to what had appeared to be the narrator's thoughts.²⁰⁵

In formal terms, then, *La desesperanza* is more complicated than it first seems. Although realist techniques predominate there is actually quite a rich variety of formal devices that are used knowingly and parodically. In *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* Donoso used the sophisticated management of the point of view in order to "destruir el caparazón clásico de la novela"²⁰⁶ whereas in *La desesperanza* the variety of technical resources on display seem to represent what Peter Bürger characterises as a typically postmodern recognition of techniques as a collection of procedures available at a particular time rather than as the expression of the author's unique creative genius and the innovative dynamism of his work.²⁰⁷ From this perspective Donoso's choice of narrative technique can be seen to be driven by his desire to deal with a particular political reality. The parodic recuperation of realism, for example, fits in with the need to portray a specific moment in history but the combination of techniques that create the illusion of reality with markers that subtly underline the novel's status as fiction reminds readers that it is an imaginative work of art rather than a social document.

The single most important structural element in the novel is the use of multiple points of view, a technique that is deftly managed in order to evoke the emotional and ideological landscape of Donoso's Chile. This procedure creates a multi-faceted impression of Santiago

²⁰⁵"voy a llamar a la Madre Benita que dirá lo que hay que hacer en un caso así, yo no me quiero meter en boches, capaz que después me echen la culpa a mí...

—¿A ti, Mudito?

—Si no eres más que un pedazo de hombre." (*El obsceno pájaro de la noche*, p. 45).

²⁰⁶"Entrevista con Castillo-Feliú", *Hispania*, 54, 1971, p. 959.

²⁰⁷Bürger, Peter, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984. There is an interesting article referring to Bürger from a Spanish-American perspective by José Eduardo González, "¿El final de la modernización literaria?: técnica y tecnología en la crítica de Angel Rama", *MLN*, 113 (1998): 380-406.

at a particular time but it is not by any means a comprehensive and totalising vision. The Santiago we find in the pages of *La desesperanza* is undoubtedly recognisable as a representation of a real place but the novel never lets us forget that this evocation of place is mediated not only by its appearance in a work of art but by the way it is filtered through the consciousness of the characters. This remains a literary description of place, an artistic transformation of the real. The evocative power of the senses and the projection of feelings onto external objects is a central part of *La desesperanza*'s description of landscape and we are constantly reminded of this as Donoso's characters' personal obsessions colour their response to what is around them. The description of the death of Mañungo's mother, for example, passed down to the singer through his father's recollections, underlines the distorting, impressionistic influence of other people's memories in the shared phenomenon that is the past: "el pasado no suele ser una experiencia propia sino una experiencia refractada por la memoria de otros" (115). In this case Mañungo receives a mythologised image of his mother's body as it was when it was taken out of the water after the seaquake that caused her death. The description of "el cadáver cosmogónico de su madre, fosforecente [sic] de lampreas y coronado de cochayuyos y huiros, como lo sacaron de la ensenada la noche después del cataclismo" (115) is emblematic of the many ways in which we see through the eyes of others. It parallels our situation as readers when we encounter other people's interpretation of the world, whether that is Mañungo's vision of Pablo Neruda, the versions of place associated with any of the characters or Donoso's evocation of Chile under Pinochet. Again this *caveat* that history is a text, constantly open to renarrativisation, is a trait that theorists like Hutcheon would identify as a decidedly postmodern trait.²⁰⁸

Closely related to this is the fact that *La desesperanza* presents us with a psychological topography rather than a portrayal of a physical landscape, an experience of place that includes an awareness of the distorting impact of memory and ideology on the characters' perceptions. Even the descriptions of the characteristic greenery of the "Barrio Alto" that Jean Gilkinson finds so transparently evocative of Santiago's wealthy residential districts are powerfully metaphorised, rhetorical figures like Judit's vision of this area as the "*ghetto verde del privilegio*" (120) with its "*verdor absorto en sus propios aromas*" (120), a description that symbolises the uncaring arrogance of upper-middle class privilege that exists

²⁰⁸ "As Paul Veyne has argued, even the event closest to us personally can be known to us afterwards only by its remains: memory can create only texts. There is no such thing as the reproduction of events by memory." (*A Poetics of Postmodernism*, pp. 153/154).

in the midst of the hatred and squalor of the *poblaciones*. Mañungo for his part projects his crisis of identity onto his surroundings, generating an image that says as much about his state of mind as it does about the scene: “¿O esta calle drogada de madreselva y jazmín era sólo una representación del follaje perteneciente a la experiencia de alguien que aún no era él?” (113).

In *La desesperanza*, therefore, the intrusion of the characters’ subjective appreciation of their environment warps the description of place and undermines any pretence of objectivity. An important part of this process is the way the irrational emerges and contaminates the narrative through the obsessions of characters who in one way or another have been pushed to their limits by twelve years of military rule. An extreme example of this is Judit’s violent reaction to the pack of dogs that she and Mañungo meet during their wanderings after the curfew. The dogs are pursuing a small white bitch on heat, a scene that triggers in Judit an almost psychotic outburst that culminates in her shooting the bitch to avoid its imagined “rape”, an interpretation of events that is entirely determined by her experience of psychological torture. The nightmarish atmosphere of this incident contaminates the entirety of the ‘Night’ section of the novel. When in the early part of their wanderings together Mañungo sees Judit teasing a Dobermann on the other side of the railings of a garden in the “Barrio Alto” his description of the animal as having “colmillos fosforescentes” (121) prefigures the hallucinatory aspects of Judit’s outburst. This image is reminiscent of the scene in *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* in which the narrator imagines he is being torn limb from limb by don Jerónimo’s hounds, a vision that later seems to be deliberately paralleled in the description of Judit’s handbag as like an organ (193). The overall impact of such passages is twofold, on the one hand creating the impression that as well as being caught up in the nightmare that is Santiago during the curfew the characters are also descending into the darkness of their unconscious fears, and on the other pointing out the way that Donoso is reworking some of the most disturbing images from his previous fiction in his treatment of contemporary Chile.

During the first part of the novel Judit’s psycho-sexual trauma is a kind of straitjacket that imposes on her a particular interpretation of reality. The fact that her experiences establish an interrelationship between the political and the psychological accounts for the importance of the grotesque and caricature in the novel. These disturbing aspects of the narrative are present not only in the figures of the “cartoneros” who people the Santiago night but also in Freddy Fox, Lopito and, to some extent all the other characters. The hallucinatory

images of the recyclers rummaging through the rubbish of the rich ("Sombras desgajadas del miedo y de la culpa, figuras encorvadas arrastrado carricoches fantasmales, tosiendo, agotadas, escupiendo sangre", 120) with their detailed description of grotesque deformities are paralleled by the descriptions of Freddy Fox ("un proyecto de inmenso bebé lubricado con aceites fragantes" 50) and Lopito (38, 47, 60). Indeed, Lopito (60), Judit (284) and Jean-Paul (208) are all seen at some point as monsters. In this respect Mary Lusky Friedman aptly talks of "the spiritually damaged, Goya-esque monsters of Donoso's fictional Santiago" and suggests that the characters seem to have been infected by Chilote myths in which deformity is common.²⁰⁹

Another interesting feature of *La desesperanza*'s erosion of the boundaries between genres is that although its dominant realism can be contrasted both with *Casa de campo*'s deliberate artificiality and with «Los habitantes»'s exploitation of the sort of fantasy that we find in «Gaspard de la Nuit», it also contains elements of magic realism. These come through the imagery associated with the superstitious beliefs of Chiloé, a view of reality that in spite of its irrationality, or perhaps precisely because of it, plays an important part in Mañungo's imagination. Lisboa, the communist youth leader who took Mañungo under his wing when he first arrived in Concepción from Chiloé observes that: "traía ofuscada la cabeza con los resabios de los mitos de su isla, hacia los cuales, con atractivo pintoresquismo, solía derivar su pensamiento y su música" (64). Amongst the irrational aspects of his system of beliefs is the conviction that he can hear "la voz de la vieja", the characteristic sound of the sea in the strait between Chiloé and the mainland that he feels is calling him in exile in Paris (17/18). Another element of Chilote folklore provides one of the novel's most important symbols, the Caleuche (85, 113, 116, 123, 187/8, 328), a magical vessel that takes people off either to an enchanted land or to their deaths and which is closely associated with the novel's central theme of transformation.

Thus the perceptions of *La desesperanza*'s most important character are liable to be affected by the powerful mythologising tendencies of his native lore. Although at first this aspect of Mañungo's beliefs is presented through his own recollection of his ex-wife Nadja's dismissive view of what she regards as the irrationality of his feelings of nostalgia for his homeland this balance changes in Chapters 23 and 24. In the former the narrative adopts the magical world view of the inhabitants of Chiloé including that of Doña Petronila, the local

²⁰⁹"The Artistry of *La desesperanza*", *Hispanamérica* 78, (March 1995): p. 15.

“artista” or witch and presents us with the sort of apparently unquestioning acceptance of the supernatural that characterises magic realist discourse. We read, for example, that “[s]e había levantado un vientecillo insidioso, de esos arrastrados que se meten por debajo de las polleras de las mujeres ganosas y las embarazan” (186). Ulda, the school teacher who played a key role in Mañungo’s intellectual and emotional development, also shares this mind set.

Although she is an educated person, a school-teacher and a Marxist we are told that “la Ulda no ignoraba que encontrarse con doña Petronila en una calle desierta era de mal agüero” (186). The main focus, however, is on Doña Petronila who feels Ulda’s desire for Mañungo to return and decides to make her most potent spell to bring him back from the north (187):

Canelo. Piures. Miel de ulmo. Pelo de pudú. Caca de choroy. Y uña del pie de su hijo mayor, que le cortaría esta noche durante su sueño, cuando sin saberlo el muchacho estuviera duro con visiones de las mujeres desnudas que frenéticas bailaban en el Caleuche. (187/8)

This immediately finds an echo in Chapter 24 when Mañungo dreams that a woman in black is walking towards him, leaning over him and cutting his toenail (190), an image obviously related to the witch’s spell that is supported a few pages later by the reference to the evocative smell of smoke that in the same dream reminded Mañungo of Ulda’s hair (213). Although we could claim that Mañungo’s dream and Petronila’s spell are merely coincidental and therefore unrelated their contiguity in the novel suggests a link between the two events. In these passages, therefore, *La desesperanza*’s presentation of the fantastic as commonplace is typical of magic realism. The fact that this cross-referencing of a fantastic element is not developed any further, however, contributes to the impression that it is a parodic reference to the work of writers like García Márquez, a suspicion that is strengthened by the ironically self-reflexive comments on the Colombian author and his imitators that follow don Celedonio’s observation that Fausta could use her voice to shatter not the traditional champagne glass but a pitcher of “chicha”: “observación muy García Márquez, aunque, en fin, era tan fácil imitar a García Márquez, y todos lo estaban haciendo” (45).

La desesperanza, then, underlines its own fictional nature and reminds the reader that it is not an attempt to present contemporary Chilean reality from some supposedly objective perspective. The self-reflexivity present in the references to magic realism as a narrative genre is in itself significant and is paralleled by the many other references to a wide range of literary works that further imbue the novel with a sense of knowing self-consciousness.

Hortensia Morell and Jacques Joset have commented on the role of other art forms and the importance of the theme of transformation.²¹⁰ Furthermore, in her article on the novel Hortensia Morell notes a series of references to narrative genres that include don Celedonio's Marquesian description of Fausta (45) mentioned above, and the comparisons of Mañungo with the heroes of post-existential film (84) and of Freddy Fox with "el villano de un dramón" (49).²¹¹ She also points out that Mañungo says that Judit's plans sound like a "película de pistoleros" (144), that Mañungo and Judit's awakening is like that of "personajes de cuentos de hadas" (171), that Jean-Paul thinks of the curfew as like something out of Dumas (214), and finally that Lisboa and Ada Luz's relationship remind Freddy Fox of a Marivaux farce (246).²¹² We can even see a parody of naturalism in the presentation of Lopito and the physical descriptions of some of the other characters, while the fact that Mañungo thinks of don César as an "esperpento" (118) is not only an indirect reference to Valle-Inclán but a deliberately unrealistic feature of the novel that is very important in what it tells us about the values of the Chilean elite, as we shall see below.

Alongside these echoes of other genres are many and varied references to artists and art forms. Neruda obviously plays the most prominent role, followed by the Schumann and Böcklin motifs but there are also mentions of Shakespeare, Quevedo, Dickens, Merimée, Flaubert, Georges Sand, Anaïs Nin, Henry Miller, Gerald Brennan, Virginia Woolf, Camus, Sartre, García Márquez, Cortázar, Keats, Mallarmée, Whitman, Lorca, St. Jean Perse, Huidobro, Eluard and Donoso's uncle, Juan Emar. From painting there are Juan Gris, Rivera, Kahlo and Botero, from sculpture Noguchi, and from architecture Eiffel and Mies van der Rohe. Orchestral music is represented by Schubert, Richard Strauss, Mahler, Rachmaninoff, Fauré and Ravel, cinema by Bogart and Belmondo and from an eclectic selection of "popular" music that includes French chanteuses, La Nueva Trova, Chilean protest music and rock we have Joan Baez, [The] Police, Juliette Greco, Edith Piaf, Pablo Milanés, Intillimani and Quilapayún. In a final nod to mass culture we are even told that Ada Luz has a Betty Boop tablecloth.

Alongside these references to other artists there are also many intertextual gestures in the direction of other works by Donoso himself as he reactivates a series of characters,

²¹⁰Jacques Joset, *Historias cruzadas de novelas hispanoamericanas*, Iberoamericana, Madrid, 1995.

²¹¹See Morell, Hortensia, "Fe en *La desesperanza* de José Donoso", *RCEH*, vol. XVI, 1, otoño 91 p. 90.

²¹²"Fe en *La desesperanza*", p. 91.

images and motifs from his fictional imaginary in order to explore the nature of oppression.²¹³ We have already mentioned some of the passages that seem to refer to *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*, Donoso's most experimental work to which we could add the anarchic nature of the women's group (37) that is reminiscent of the *viejas*, as well as Fausta's story of marriage to the indigenous foreman of her wealthy father's estate which has obvious similarities with the earlier novel's story of the *niña bruja*. Lopito parallels *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*'s Humberto Peñaloza in his generic name, which for some reason changes from Pedro López (39) to Juan López (269, 300), his hunger for the possession of an aristocratic woman (39), his literary failures (101) and his ulcer, while his "sonrisa arcaica" (40) is like that of «Gaspard de la Nuit»'s Mauricio. Judit's delirious stream of consciousness (130/1) is strikingly similar to the narrative delirium of *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* while doña Petronila is a version of the same novel's Peta Ponce (185). The motif of the dogs is another recurrent theme in Donoso's work, appearing not only in *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* but also in the *Cuentos*, *El lugar sin límites* and *La misteriosa desaparición de la marquesita de Loria*. The brows of the policeman on duty in the cemetery are like Mauricio's in «Gaspard de la Nuit» ("la golondrina negra de su ceño unido" 263), while Judit's view of Mañungo's similarity to postexistentialist cinematic heroes (84) is a cliché that is used to describe Mauricio's father in «Gaspard de la Nuit». The "angelote rubio" who appears at the Nerudas' house parallels *El jardín de al lado*'s Bijou (48) and some of Freddy Fox's statements ("no podía ser que los chilenos siguieran siendo tan incivilizados", 53) identify him as an unsavoury literary relative of the same novel's cheerfully cynical Pancho Salvatierra. Finally, the beggars that people the Santiago night are the most ubiquitous motif in Donoso's work.²¹⁴

La desesperanza's constant references to other works of art underlines its protagonists' possession of a particular kind of culture but it also emphasises that one of the novel's main concerns is the status of art itself. The artist's ability to transform reality is an important aspect of the theme of change that is developed in the novel. The concept of artistic metaphor itself becomes a symbol of the transformations desired by the characters,

²¹³ Ramón Soto, says: "en *La desesperanza* sólo se insinúa tal ficcionalidad por medio de sus referencias oblicuas a los fantasmas y monstruos —máscaras, perras, niños y brujas— que constituyen algunos de los constantes de la poética donosiana", "Sobre poética y referencialidad en *La Desesperanza*", *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hisanoamericanos*, vol.19, pt. 2, 1995, p. 390. Soto also cites Magnarelli's comments in *Understanding Donoso*, pp.176-7, but neither deals with the more obscure parallels.

²¹⁴ Donoso's tendency to recycle images, situations and characters continued after *La desesperanza*. For example, Don César and his story of losing his legs in an accident with a train prefigures his final novel *El Mocho*.

both on a political and personal level, an idea reinforced through the strong motif of the artist as “brujo”. Mañungo is fascinated by the suggestive possibilities in the Chilote description of “brujos” as “artistas” and fuses the two terms in his own personal image of the Caleuche, the ship of art. Even when it is not representing Mañungo’s point of view the narrative plays with these parallels, noting, for instance, that Doña Petronila, the Chilota witch, is rumoured to have been aboard the Caleuche as a young woman (186), and suggesting that like an artist she can make her lies come true because she possesses “el don de transformar sus mentiras en verdad” (187), a phrase that points to fiction again as it inevitably recalls Mario Vargas Llosa’s celebrated references to “la verdad de las mentiras”. In this she parallels Neruda of whom Freddy Fox says: “Pablo, como buen artista, era muy fabulador” (53) and it is no surprise that Mañungo imagines both the poet and himself as one of the passengers on board the magical vessel:

En ese buque se embarcó el cantante con los demás brujos, Pablo y Matilde como pasajeros principales, entre tantos ilustres mascarones. Mañungo hacía música para poetas búlgaros de paso, o actrices cubanas, o celebrando una victoria en las urnas (116)

This view of art as a kind of magic is further developed through the description of Neruda as “este brujo de la poesía” (234). Don Celedonio regards him as a poetic alchemist with the ability to take objects and transform them into something more valuable –“transcontextualizándolos, dotaba a estos objetos carentes de mérito intrínseco, de un lirismo, de una ironía que llevaban el personalísimo sello de su invención” (25)–, a creator of versions of place of such imaginative power that they seem to supplant the real ones:

un gran inventor de geografías: Isla Negra, que uno sospechaba que jamás hubiera existido sin él, un Valparaíso completamente suyo que sobreimpuso al real borrando todos los otros Valparaíses, un Temuco donde llovía como jamás había llovido en Temuco [...] Incluso esta América nuestra a que nos había condenado la maravillosa poesía nerudiana, era más nerudiana que verdadera, cosa que por otra parte le daba todo su interés (25)

Donoso was to return to this theme of transformation through art in *Donde van a morir los elefantes*. Amongst several passages which retrospectively sum up the approach he adopted in *La desesperanza* Neruda makes another appearance as the arch-alchemist –“Ya no existen esos crepúsculos, si es que alguna vez existieron fuera de la imaginación de

Neruda”²¹⁵ – although the central idea of the artist’s appropriation of reality is extended to embrace other literary transformations of place:

La Nueva York de Dos Passos, el París de Proust, la Lisboa de Eça de Queiroz, la Viena de Musil.
 Todo un repertorio de esperpentos vitales que el bosque del presente ofuscaba (160).

In all of this we see once again the hand of the artist who practices “la perversa profesión de cambiarle el nombre a todas las cosas” (17) and are reminded that *La desesperanza* provides us with a literary version of reality, a particular imaginative perspective of the sort that Gustavo Zulueta in *Donde van a morir los elefantes* refers to as “una bella subjetivización del mundo”.²¹⁶ Donoso’s Chile is his own imaginative and above all subjective vision of his country at the time of the declaration of the state of siege.

Within this self-consciously artistic framework *La desesperanza* confronts the contemporary political situation. In the contradiction between the urge to depict and comment on a reality that is well known by the novel’s prospective readership and yet maintain a certain level of autonomy for the work of art as a product of the imagination there is a tension that some theorists might regard as typically postmodern. What repeatedly breaks down this conflict, however, is the simple, inescapable, all-pervasive fact of the dictatorship. The urgency of the need to deal with an immediate economic and political crisis is such that it rules out any attempt to make clever points about the unreliable nature of our access to the past.

The despair of the title is amongst other things a result of the reality of the Pinochet regime and the novel is consistently critical of the authoritarian ineptitude of the military government. The violence on which the regime is based is hinted at through the references to extrajudicial executions being carried out during the curfew – “crímenes legales a esta hora limpia de testigos para abandonar víctimas en las aceras” (138)– and to the fate of liberation theologians who work in the “callampas”: “esos curas que terminan baleados por seres que nunca llegan a identificarse, y su deceso deja un agujero de bala anónimamente rodeado de un círculo de tiza en el muro” (247/8). These murders take place as a dramatic counterpoint to the careless and routine brutality that ends in Lopito’s death.

²¹⁵*Donde van a morir los elefantes*, Madrid: Alfaguara, p. 159.

²¹⁶*Donde van a morir los elefantes*, p. 408.

As well as this there are references to the paranoid intolerance of the regime's anti-communist propaganda. We learn, for example, that Fausta was denied the national prize for literature because she had been accused of being a communist, which she was not "o por disidente, que la demagogia oficial definía como lo mismo" (42). The narrative ironically notes that "ninguna ordenanza prohibía aun que se pudiera reír" (133) while Judit dismisses Freddy Fox's suggestion that the Party wants to ship Neruda's collection of papers and artifacts off to Moscow as "lugares comunes paranoicos y ridículos" (222). In spite of the absurdity of some of its propaganda, however, the feeling of despair amongst the opponents of the regime results from a suspicion that its capacity for self-regeneration is infinite. As Fausta sees it: "por desgracia parecía no tener nada de estúpido porque se había sabido mantener durante trece años de mentiras, violencia y desastres económicos" (49).

Fausta's last point is important because the novel as a whole stresses the poverty and economic decline of Chile during this period. Donoso wrote *La desesperanza* at the time of economic failure that came before the regime began to receive praise as a neo-liberal utopia. That the country's leading novelist could write a novel about the state of the country only four years before the end of the regime and emphasise its absolute economic failure is a timely reminder for those apologists of neo-liberalism that have recently been drawing attention to Pinochet's economic record as a factor that is somehow supposed to mitigate his atrocious human rights record. In fact, 1985 was the first year of steady growth after the recession of the early 80s, the beginning of what came to be known as the Chilean economic miracle.²¹⁷ The initial boom of the seventies was over and with nothing left for the government to privatise except for debt the economy collapsed with disastrous results, leading to a forced devaluation of the *peso*. The period of belt-tightening during the recession that followed the boom is a constant factor in the background of the novel. We learn, for example, that not many people are eating out because "las cosas no estaban como para gastos superfluos y era preferible atenerse al plato de lentejas familiares" (87); that there are no jobs "aquí, donde los filósofos andan de chóferes de taxi porque no tienen trabajo" (90); and that Mañungo has heard that the city is now dangerous as a result of unemployment: "¿No decían que con el desempleo la ciudad se había transformado en temible [...]?" (118). The economic failure of the period played its part in the creation of Lopito's own personal hell as the advertising agency in which he worked during the boom times went bust (101). Judit tells

²¹⁷ *A Nation of Enemies*, p. 245.

Freddy she too is feeling the pinch: “Y económicamente apenas sobreviviendo, como casi todo el mundo en Santiago menos los sinvergüenzas como tú” (220) while Don Celedonio mentions the irony of the communist Neruda’s wealth compared to “los banqueros, economistas y empresarios, quebrados por su propio sistema y llenos de deudas” who support “este régimen que está en vergonzosa bancarrota” (235). The most damning image of all comes from Fausta’s point of view as she thinks of the regime as a kleptocracy, encouraging crooks like Freddy Fox: “uno de los sinvergüenzas que contribuyó a enredar el país en la ruina irracional, robando tantos millones con el beneplácito de las autoridades que se decía que era uno de los culpables del espantoso descalabro económico nacional” (49).

As usual the recession hits the middle and working classes hardest while the rich get richer because they are able to take advantage of the situation. In this respect Pedro Meléndez Páez rightly mentions the “vitalidad histórica” of opportunist entrepreneurs like Freddy Fox.²¹⁸ Significantly, Fox is presented as clever enough to avoid what is described as “un peligrosísimo paso por la cartera de Economía cuando la autoridad estuvo a punto de nombrarlo” (51). The implication is that the poisoned chalice of the economic portfolio has wrecked previous careers:

Él, en ese momento, viajó para mostrar su tácita negativa, colocándose afuera del alcance de la maledicencia antes que pudiera rozarlo públicamente. (51)

The fear of making a mistake is characteristic of life under absolutist rule, and hints at Pinochet’s simplistic attitude to the economy which was essentially to bring people in to take charge of it and sack them if they failed.²¹⁹ Far from being a personal disaster for Freddy, however, the recession allows him to amass greater possessions and potential wealth by buying up anything he can get his hands on: bankrupt firms, land, half-finished building projects (the parallel with «Los habitantes» is obvious) as well as art: “de empresas y fábricas, de tierras, de construcciones a medio terminar, de cuanto estuviera herido o agónico o trizado” (51). Judit thinks of him as someone for whom everything and everyone has a price: “para él no había nada ni nadie que no estuviera en venta, sobre todo los objetos y las personas heridas, y que ella estaba herida no era secreto” (220). Like the elite of *El obscuro pájaro de la noche* or *Casa de campo* for whom identity is almost entirely a matter of social

²¹⁸ Pedro Meléndez Páez, “El desgaste del exilio en *La desesperanza*, de José Donoso” *Chasqui-Revista de Literatura Latinoamericana* v. ol XXIII (1994): 69.

²¹⁹ This approach was exemplified by his sacking of Finance Ministers Sergio de Castro in 1982 and Luis Escobar in 1985, *Chile: A Nation of Enemies*, p. 210.

status Freddy cannot understand why Judit should support “una cantidad de rotos que nadie sabe quiénes son” (223) but despite this old-fashioned snobbery he is a cynical and power-hungry figure quite capable of adapting himself to the changing times. In this he is similar to «Los habitantes»’ Andrés, because even though he comes from the old landed oligarchy he represents a new class of entrepreneurs willing to take every opportunity afforded them by the military regime. While he looks down on the hangers-on who would do anything for “un mendrugo del poder” (218) his own driving ambition is to stay in power at all costs: “quedarme con el poder, defenderlo, no soltarlo por ningún motivo ni por ningún precio” (249). This hunger is born of his ruthless but illuminating understanding of Chilean history: “todo en Chile, finalmente, se relacionaba con la política y quien no actuaba con el poder se quedaba fuera del fluir de la historia, tan tormentosa, tan sucia como la corriente del pequeño río urbano” (218).

At the other end of the social scale the impact of the recession on the weakest members of society is outlined in the dreamlike passages that describe the urban poor who inhabit the burgeoning shanty towns on the outskirts of the city. These dehumanised, ghostly figures scabble through the rubbish of the rich in the search for survival while the latter protect their property with iron railings and dogs. The territorial divisions that embody the social barriers in Chilean society are obvious when, like Blanca and Francisco, Judit and Mañungo take a night time stroll through the “Barrio Alto”. The difference is that the latter perceive the scene from the outside and are immediately aware of the social meanings inherent in it. All of this is evident in the passage in which Judit refers to “el *ghetto verde* del privilegio”:

Este era el *ghetto verde* del privilegio, le explicaba como si Mañungo no lo recordara, que aunque emocionante de susurros estaba sitiado por poblaciones veinte veces mayores, cien veces más hostiles, donde el rencor suplanta esta extática quietud de frondas aromáticas y arquitectura de cenotafio, un mundo que crece afuera y se extiende, su odio amenazando con la extinción a todo este verdor absorto en sus propios aromas. (120)

Such passages emphasise the obvious complicity of the rich with the dictatorship. The self-absorbed greenery of Providencia, las Condes and los Domenicos is a metaphor for their indifference to the suffering of the poor and their determination to hang on to privilege at all costs. The description of “una reja que sin duda protegía la lujosa privacidad de un jardín, de una familia, de una manera de vivir” (133) gives an idea of the sense of

mission that underlies their world view, the need to protect a tradition of wealth, privilege and a particular kind of culture.

A similar example comes in the last part of the novel when Mañungo and Judit escape from the partisan fervour of the funeral for a moment to look for the Torre Fox family mausoleum. The description of the cemetery lays out in simple spatial terms the class structure and social identity of Pinochet's Chile. The brutal juxtaposition of the unidentified graves of those who died in 1973 with the stately mausoleums of the rich is a reworking of Donoso's obsession with the continuance of social divisions even in death, a theme that not only appears in *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* but also provides the basis of «Sueños de mala muerte». The reassuring solidity that Judit finds momentarily overpowering is in fact the insidious reality of privilege and inequality. As she and Mañungo walk first through the section of the cemetery in which the poor are buried, passing the graves of those killed during the coup –“Las cruces apenas identificadas con un nombre o con NN y 1973” (277)– Judit's reaction to these pathetic vestiges betrays the extent to which she has been influenced by the values of her caste. She feels that this area represents:

una pesadilla de seres con identidad pasajera, vigente sólo hasta el alcance de algún recuerdo personal, después perdida con el desenlace del tiempo por el cual se compró la sepultura, los restos condenados entonces al océano oprobioso de la fosa común. (277)

As they reach the tombs of the wealthy, however, her mood changes:

Éste era un sueño sin miedo, le explicó a Mañungo riendo, un letargo ceremonioso, porque al adquirir sepulturas de esta categoría las familias también compraban el privilegio de establecer un contrato imborrable para su sueño eterno. (277)

Judit wavers for a moment as she is confronted by the promise of security offered by this apparently solid tradition. She tries to explain to Mañungo what she feels:

¡Qué difícil es transformarse para irse a París contigo, cuando una comienza en algo tan sólido como esto! Piedra de pelequén. Rosada. ¿Te das cuenta? El equivalente nacional del mármol de Carrara. (284)

This is the sort of blandishment to which *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*'s oligarch Jerónimo succumbs by allowing his identity to be finally determined by his caste. Judit, however, is only seduced for a moment and on seeing that a place amongst the dead is already reserved for her she recoils, rejecting the entire edifice and the privilege that it represents with the exclamation: “¡No estoy entre los muertos! [...] No quiero tener nada que ver con esta gente que me encierra en un nicho de mármol!” (284). Her refusal reminds us of

the many occasions on which Donoso's work attacks the right's demand for tradition and caste be placed before individual freedom.

It is ironic, however, that it is immediately after all of this that she looks at herself in the mirror and exclaims "Estoy hecha un monstruo" (284). Monstrification in Donoso's work has deep ideological connotations. *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*, for example, has a well-documented theme of monstrification running through it: the monsters are both the subaltern who appear monstrous as their image is refracted through the deforming prism of the ideology of the elite and the powerful themselves who are disfigured by the need to conform to the rigid code of their caste. At the time of writing *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* Donoso himself felt deformed and twisted by this set of values and the fact that the grotesque also creeps into *La desesperanza* stems from a similar ideological figuring of social relations through physical description, as we shall see below.²²⁰

Part of *La desesperanza*'s despair, then, stems from the continuity of the old structural inequality that afflicted pre-Allende Chile, and was re-established in particularly ferocious fashion by the military junta. Mañungo sums up the state of Chile on his return in his conversation with Jean-Paul about the curfew. When his son asks if the curfew is the same thing as in Dumas his father replies: "Comme dans «Vingt ans après». Mais ici c'est douze ans après, et pire qu'au début" (214). During the second part of the novel, fittingly entitled «La noche», the weight of oppression seems to bear down on everything, twisting it into grotesque shapes, transforming even Mañungo's generally hopeful image of the Caleuche into an apocalyptic vision of defeat:

Fausta gimiendo con sus vestiduras manchadas de vómito, don Celedonio encadenado a su remo, Judit agónica después de haber sido violada por los tripulantes, Pablo y Matilde pudriéndose de peste en un rincón, Nadja gimiendo de hambre y Jean-Paul de miedo con el resplandor estrafalario de los mástiles, Lopito tiritando en la intemperie del barco que crujía al avanzar por el huracán de olas colosales, el espinazo de los volcanes albos enrojeciendo el cielo con su lava, y desde las islas los habitantes clamando para que se los lleven porque no saben que en estos tiempos que corren el Caleuche sólo lleva a sus pasajeros al exterminio (122/3).

Donoso's uncontroversial condemnation of the regime sits side by side with a more contentious portrayal of the opposition to Pinochet's rule. The novel deals with the effects of the dictatorship on all Chileans but particularly on those who oppose it, as it chronicles the

²²⁰ "en el tema de los monstruos, me parece que he querido deshacer, demoler, aclarar hasta qué punto es algo que me puede haber entorpecido la vida y que me ha monstrificado a mí. Digamos es el reflejo de mi propia monstrificación", "La novela como «Happening»", p. 519.

divisions between liberals and communists and the collapse of the ideological convictions that motivated the characters during the heady days of the UP government.

One of the most obvious features of the description of the opposition is the deep ambivalence towards the Communist Party. When Donoso was writing the novel there was a great deal of confusion as to the best way of challenging the regime. The first successful wave of public protest against the military government came with 1983's demonstrations out of which grew the Christian Democrats' *Alianza Democrática* and the Communist-led *Movimiento Democrático Popular*.²²¹ During this period the Communist Party, which had exercised a moderating influence on the policies of Allende's government, supported the armed struggle against the dictatorship, which although not very effective nonetheless carried out a considerable number of actions including an assassination attempt on Pinochet's life that was very nearly successful. In August 1985 came the "Acuerdo Nacional para la Transición a la Democracia", a united front made up of eleven parties opposed to Pinochet and the terms for a plebiscite that had been set out in the 1980 constitution, although it was not until December 1986, after the publication of *La desesperanza*, that the Communist Party renounced the armed struggle.²²² The contemporary situation, however, was one of division within the ranks of the opposition and uncertainty as to how best to combat the military regime. Underlying this was the legacy of the past, the complex mixture of factionalism, suspicion and guilt with which the parties viewed each other.

Allende's UP government is only mentioned briefly in *La desesperanza* and there is no real analysis of its period in power. The first reference to it comes in the mention of Neruda's conversations with don Celedonio that included "la esperanza en la política de la UP o de Cuba" (13) while the role it plays in the collective imagination of young left-wingers is of purely mythical proportions:

esa mítica Edad de Oro que para la juventud de la izquierda fue la Unidad Popular,
ese entusiasmo paradisíaco sin multas ni límites, puro aceleramiento, impulso,
velocidad, que ellos no conocían más que bajo la forma de una embrujadora leyenda a
la que todos querían volver (71)

Judit certainly has many positive memories of Allende's government as she thinks back to "los jubilosos días de la Unidad Popular, el rejuvenecimiento, la osadía, la vitalidad"

²²¹ *A Nation of Enemies*, p. 276.

²²² *A Nation of Enemies*, p. 271 and *Death in the South*, p. 39.

(145) and a time when “todo el mundo parecía feliz” (145). Fausta too remembers the years when “todo parecía tener una coherencia tan grande que el caos y el entusiasmo eran de una sola pieza pese a las peleas y las diferencias” (85). This nostalgia, however, does not hide the fact that these are decidedly rosy views of Allende’s time in power and it is left to Lopito to sum up some of the erstwhile militants’ ambivalent feelings about the U.P. government when he mentions the fate of a book of poems that he published at that time:

la edición de mis poemas que publicó la Unidad Popular fue de tan mala calidad, como todo lo que hizo la Unidad Popular con el criterio de que eso debía bastar para el pueblo, que sería un gobierno de mierda pero era nuestro gobierno, que mis pobres libritos se desencuadernaron (101).

Lopito is not afraid to confront some of the weaknesses of the Allende presidency but there is still a genuine affection for the popular government beneath the sarcasm. In *La desesperanza* as a whole, however, this affection is accompanied by an unflattering portrayal of significant sections of the Communist Party. Lisboa, the militant in charge of sections of the party’s youth wing, is a caricature of the dogmatic left-wing extremist who single-mindedly tries to turn everything to his political advantage. While according to Judit (90) he is merely a minor functionary in charge of some sections of the Jota, his air of political superiority annoys don Celedonio who thinks of him as belonging to “esa nueva raza de los «yo-estuve-exiliado-y-por-lo-tanto-soy-mejor-que-ustedes»” (28), an attitude that is paralleled in the argument between young communist cadres that ends with an accusation of inverted snobbery: “¿Te crees mejor que yo porque vives en una población?” (73). In spite of his supposedly egalitarian ideology, Lisboa is a Stalinist control freak who approves of the discipline of the young members of the party, something that he sees as a necessary part of the party’s strategy in its attempt to lead the people “a cierta meta” (67). It is hard not to reject such paternalism, particularly when it is heavily underlined through the narrator’s mocking description of him organising events as if they were a “gymkhana” (28) or behaving, in Judit’s eyes, “como un jefe de *boy-scouts*” (37).

In fact, Lisboa is a rather contradictory character because he himself seems to lack the discipline that he approves of in others. His complaints about the Party’s current alliance with the Church, (33, 35, 36) and the extremism inherent in his approving remembrance of the advice of his “cell” leader in Belgium that “*Nous serons modérés quand nous serons vainqueurs*” (76) does not accord well with the Chilean Communist Party’s record as a disciplined and above all pragmatic organisation. At the same time the novel insists on his

role as party bureaucrat, portraying him as a negative figure whose political vision is too limited for him to be able to recognise that his desire to cover up Matilde's last wish plays into the hands of the regime. Freddy Fox, the shrewd political opportunist, makes it clear that what the authorities most fear is that a revolutionary priest should say mass at the funeral, an act that would be interpreted as a powerful symbol of the unity of the forces opposing Pinochet's continued rule (248).

In contrast to Lisboa's blinkered political beliefs the political attitudes of the protagonists are ambivalent and often contradictory. We are told that Mañungo's performances used to be marked by "una llamarada de certeza total" (14) but even so we learn that he never actually joined the party and had ideological doubts from the very beginning. The intellectual influences that he regarded as most important exemplify a certain heterodoxy:

Marx sí, lo necesario. Pero más Bakunin. Más Lenin. Aunque sobre todo Sartre con su cuestionamiento de las cambiantes certezas de la juventud, sedimento casi olvidado por la enajenación de su carrera que copó su tiempo, pero cuya enseñanza había seguido nutriendo el pobre légamo de donde creció (114).

Mañungo's distance from the Party hints at previous rifts in the left and it is significant that both Judit and Mañungo were linked to the idealistic, anti-Stalinist and violent Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria.²²³ Since their days of militancy, however, the protagonists have experienced a crisis of faith, a loss of conviction that is not debated in rational terms but simply presented as a reality. In Mañungo's case we are told that "el convencimiento que le daba temperatura a su melodía [...] terminó esfumándose quién sabe cómo y por qué" (15) and that "se le extinguió el convencimiento" (15). Judit, a militant in

²²³ This choice is not gratuitous and helps to explain some of the mixed feelings that Mañungo had about the Communist Party from the beginning. The MIR, made up of a range of far-left elements, from Trotskyites to anarcho-syndicalists, was opposed to what it regarded as the Stalinist centralism of the communist party and what it thought of as the "traditional left". Its most important characteristic was its rejection of Allende's Chilean road to socialism and his commitment to carrying out radical reform within the framework of existing democratic institutions. Instead the MIR favoured a commitment to direct and often violent action which it regarded as the only way to bring about real revolution. The movement was therefore a thorn in Allende's side although in principle it tried to limit its violent actions during the UP government and establish links with the left wing of his Socialist Party. An interesting feature of the MIR was that many of its militants were idealists from the middle-classes who hoped for a rapid transition to socialism. After the coup the movement was targeted by the military and suffered devastating losses. Its leaders were killed and in the conferences that followed in the 70s and 80s it was torn apart by factional disputes that led to its virtual disappearance as a viable political force. The idealism that motivated its militants was shattered and they found themselves in much the same situation as the protagonists of *La desesperanza*. As a Portuguese discussion of the MIR on the internet points out: "um número importante de militantes optou para a reconstrução de suas vidas privadas em silêncio" (<http://www.mir.portugues.html>).

the MIR until her arrest and torture by the political police, returns from exile in Caracas “con los despojos de ideología disuelta por los años y la lejanía” (178). When she tells Mañungo about her past she puts down the change in her political attitudes to the loss of contact with the other members of a group that gave her a sense of belonging and identity that was itself based on an irrational ‘faith’ in the ‘myths’ she had shared with them:

En el año y medio que viví en la clandestinidad fui perdiendo poco a poco contacto con mis compañeros de partido hasta quedar completamente aislada de los pocos que quedaron manejando la ideología y la esperanza, de los compañeros con quienes había compartido los mitos, el peligro, la fe, la aventura, el hambre y la cama, hasta perderlos de vista y quedar intolerablemente sola: el régimen nos había desarticulado, no quedaba nada, nadie, ni siquiera algo con que comenzar a armarnos de nuevo (146).

For Lopito, the third character who represents the revolutionary enthusiasm of the young at the time of the UP government, the withering of his political commitment was just one more part of the general collapse of his life that took place after the coup. With his characteristic mixture of clairvoyance and self-pity he does not blame the government for everything –“aquí de todo le echan la culpa al régimen, que es cierto que tiene la culpa de casi todo, pero no tiene la culpa de que yo sea una mierda” (101)– but having lost his job in the recession that followed the initial boom he descended into alcoholism, which in turn led to his expulsion from the party. Since then he has given in to despair:

Todos estamos igual que yo, contándonos el cuento de que el pueblo unido jamás será vencido cuando hace más de diez años que nos tienen más vencidos que qué sé yo qué, pues, Mañunguito. Esto es la derrota total. Nos jodieron.(102)

Part of the despair felt by all three characters, then, is their loss of faith in the ideology of the left and the solutions it proposes to the Chilean situation. This explains the mixed feelings that they have about the Communist Party which are best expressed in a long passage that describes Mañungo’s reaction to the behaviour of the members of the Jota at Matilde’s funeral:

Sabía que estaba haciendo mal en dejarlos adueñarse del ataúd -¿pero qué hacer, él solo, cómo y con quién actuar y en nombre de quién justificar su acción?- y hacer de sus emblemas los protagonistas del funeral que ya estaba adquiriendo el significado tan temido por aquellos que quisieron propiciar la misa de Matilde como antídoto a toda esta desventurada efervescencia partidista. Pero él no estaba en ánimo de entablar una lucha cuando su propia posición era tan fragmentada, tan endeble: además, los conocía tan bien, a estos bienintencionados rabanitos, desde hacía mucho, mucho tiempo, desde la universidad, o blandiendo indignado los periódicos con noticias de Chile en los cafés del exilio... Y sin embargo..., sin embargo..., sí: a veces sus palabras, sus trágicas voces ahogadas por las certezas que se esforzaban por mantener en su lugar a pesar de todo, sí parecían ofrecer un acercamiento más realista

a los cambios totales deseados por tantos, que él, sin embargo, se negaba a compartir justamente por esto que estaba sucediendo ante sus ojos, por esta pecha y exacerbación, y atropello y dogmatismo y demanda de un vasallaje ciego ante todo y de todos. Decididamente, ellos no eran ese «todo» que ellos pretendían, empujando y apoderándose vorazmente de la escena, aunque claro que eran una parte de la que sería criminal prescindir no incluyéndolos en un diálogo. Pero sus exigencias, su totalización, le parecían igualmente nocivas que cualquier sistema que prometiera el cielo a cambio del vasallaje (272).

We learn a great deal from this. Mañungo regards the demand for submission to a party line as too high a price to pay in return for the promise of a socialist utopia. The reference to the offer of “el cielo a cambio del vasallaje” represents an attack on the totalising claims of the left and is one of several references to Marxist ideology as a secular religion. Fausta uses a term with religious connotations in drawing a distinction between Neruda and the dogmatism of the ideologue when she points out that the poet was not “un sectario esquemático, eso jamás, ni un beato con el puño en alto como única respuesta a todos los problemas” (49). This is exactly what one would expect, of course, from someone with Fausta’s political views (one of the subtleties of Donoso’s treatment of politics in this novel is that most of the opinions expressed have a defined source) but it is a view that Mañungo shares. He cannot accept what he regards as the communist left’s demand for conformity to a party line that brooks no criticism. He sums up his own position in much more diffident terms: “Me atrevo a dudar y a titubear y no siento que eso me destruye” (72).²²⁴ At the same time, however, his view of the Jota is not entirely negative. Although he condemns the “efervescencia partidista” of the funeral which suggests he wants the opposition to the regime to present a broad front, he nonetheless recognises that the orthodox communist left is the most active part of the opposition to the regime. In practical terms his own position is absurdly weak and in this there is an implicit rebuke to the disorganised and ineffective nature of any other resistance to Pinochet’s tyranny. The weakness of the centre and the apparent lack of alternatives to the dogmatism of the party is also lamented by the revolutionary priest who would have said mass at Matilde’s funeral:

opinó que era indebido que la izquierda criticara a los comunistas por vocear sus consignas sólo porque los otros eran incapaces de gritar las suyas. ¡Qué las gritaran! ¡Aquí tenían la ansiada oportunidad para manifestarse! ¿Por qué los radicales, por qué los democratacristianos no levantaban sus voces cobardes? ¿Por qué todos menos los comunistas eran débiles, de identidad precaria, fracturados, temerosos de la actuación? (271).

²²⁴In this he is just like Wenceslao who after the Mayordomo’s coup can contemplate rebuilding “cualquier cosa menos certezas por saberlas peligrosas”, *Casa de campo*, Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1978, p. 358.

The definition of the left here is very broad and includes the radicals and the Christian Democrats. In mentioning these parties Donoso is not only commenting on the contemporary political scene but also looking back to the 60s and early 70s when the radical sectors of the Christian Democrats sympathised with much of Allende's programme of social reform.

La desesperanza, then, puts forward an emphatic criticism of the dogmatism of sectors of the left combined with a more muted criticism of a fragmented and ineffective centre. Fausta Manquileo and don Celedonio, for example, are described as part of "el otro extremo de la izquierda, que se confunde con el centro tolerable para este régimen, y no los molestaban aunque no dejaban de vigilarlos" (147). Yet while Fausta showed courage in taking part in the early resistance to the dictatorship (45) she runs upstairs "con la cara empapada de lágrimas de terror ante este acto de violencia" (252) when Freddy Fox rips out the phone line to stop the news getting out about Matilde's last wish. This reaction is hardly congruent with the bravery of someone who was prepared to face Pinochet's police but it does suggest the weakness of the bourgeois opposition to the regime. The fact that she was denied the National Prize for Literature by the UP because she had been a landowner and by the dictatorship because she was accused of being a communist (151) indicates both regimes' imposition of ideology on art rather than any political principle on her part. Indeed, the narrative's ambivalence toward her is established in the first part of the novel through the recognition that she too enjoys "la manipulación de premios y prebendas para prodigar entre sus protegidos y los de don Celedonio" (42), an impression that is compounded by the mention of her acceptance of a literary prize from the hands of Freddy Fox (50). For her part, Judit notes the absurdity of some of Fausta's political positions. For example, while her hatred for the Christian Democrat president Frei is understandable in that he was responsible for the expropriation of most of her land, her liking for the more radical Allende whose reforms took the rest of her holdings is based on the fact that she had once had dinner with him in the Nerudas' house (148). In other words, in this important matter Fausta allows a personal grudge and trivial social niceties to count for more than rational analysis.

The last point brings us to the conflict that the novel sets up between the private and the public realm, symbolised by the struggle over the meaning of Matilde Urrutia's funeral. Several questions have to be resolved, most importantly, as we have seen, whether it is going to be a moment for private grief or a political event. Another problem is that given the importance of politics not only at the time of her death but throughout Pablo and Matilde's lives it is virtually impossible to separate the personal and the political.

The novel begins its exploration of this issue through its presentation of the militants of the Marxist left as zealots who believe that any sensitivity to personal problems is a bourgeois neurosis, an example of precisely the kind of “[i]ndividualismo pequeño burgués” of which Mañungo rather disingenuously accuses himself during his days of political commitment (63). Mañungo’s ex-wife Nadja is an example of this rigid orthodoxy. She thinks of Mañungo’s tinnitus as the manifestation of a typically bourgeois neurosis (17) and rejects the word “enamorado” (19) for much the same reason: “«enamorado» era una palabra que Nadja rechazaba, equiparándola con el desorden, clasificándola entre las neu-ro-sis, junto al tinnitus” (19). The same values are apparent in the discussion of Judit’s early political involvement. Having liberated herself from the straitjacket of the values of her privileged family it is ironic that during the period of the UP Judit embraced a new and equally dogmatic conformism:

Suscribía a todos los decálogos: era necesario ser optimista y gregaria y entusiasta y despreciar a los burgueses exquisitos e intelectuales, rechazar depresiones psicologizantes, europeizantes y estetizantes, y se debía venerar a los grandes bebedores, comedores y amadores para servir de espejo y estímulo a la clase obrera (119).

Amongst the concerns which she comes to consider as bourgeois is her preoccupation with her inability to fully enjoy her sexual relationships. Rather than freeing her from the sense of guilt engendered by what she tellingly regards as “su fracaso femenino” (119), a trauma that she believes is due to an early experience she had with Freddy Fox, she comes to feel even more guilty about her personal problems because they do not fit in with the approved ‘vitalism’ of the party: “¿No era lo que los vitalistas triunfales denunciaban como problema burgués, morboso y decadente?” (119). This is further compounded by her sense of guilt at having felt masochistic pleasure during her experiences of psychological torture and simulated rape.

Judit’s fellow militants’ dogmatic prioritization of the collective over the individual manifests itself in their disqualification of any art that focuses primarily on these issues. Judit could not love her militant partner Ramón because of this single-minded seriousness of intent, this “ceguera estética [...] de tal densidad moral que dejaba una suerte de espacio en blanco para lo estético” (84). Such comments are representative of the novel’s attack on a particular kind of left puritanism, the lack of humour and general joylessness that Terry

Eagleton defined as "that grim-lipped deferment of happiness at which the traditional male left has been so depressingly adept".²²⁵

Years later Judit no longer wants to feel that she has to define everything in political terms and this is the principal motivation behind her decision to leave Chile with Mañungo:

No quería estar ni un día más aquí. Freddy y Ricardo Farías y don César rondándola machaconeando igual que Lisboa que ella no era sola, sino que pertenecía a un momento histórico y a una lucha, y la vida era verdaderamente personal sólo cuando uno se definía respecto a qué ángulo de la historia era el de la lucha propia. (285)

Mañungo feels a similar anger at being defined and limited by the political situation:

que el amor y la canción y la risa no poseyeran más que esa única traducción y que todo dolor personal debía proponer una lectura política por lo menos subyacente, fue algo que [...] Mañungo [...] tuvo que aceptar como se acepta el golpe definitivo de un vencedor: no existía la vida privada entonces, porque si no era más que eso, era una frivolidad. Él no estaba dispuesto a someterse a estas coordenadas: irse inmediatamente, ahora mismo, en cuanto se solucionara este enredo. (302)

As usual in Donoso's fiction, however, things are not that simple. While there is an element of truth in Mary Lusk Friedman's suggestion that "[i]t is the private self that Donoso champions, against ideologies of all stripes"²²⁶ it is also true that in Pinochet's Chile a personal life is what the characters have as a compensation for being politically impotent. When oppositional political activity can only take place under the constant threat of persecution and torture it is tempting to try and forget about politics altogether and take refuge in what Jacobo Timerman referred to as the "alternative life".²²⁷ Yet to take such a step is to accept that one is politically powerless.

We can therefore see *La desesperanza*'s presentation of its characters' desire to escape from the political from two perspectives. On one hand it represents a justifiable reaction against the pernicious infringement of personal freedom by the political, and on the other a deliberate and possibly cowardly retreat into personal space in the face of a hostile social environment. This moral dilemma is a particularly acute problem for the middle-classes because it is easier for them to adopt the second strategy and turn their backs on socio-economic reality. Yet however strong the desire to turn away from politics may be the continuance of the dictatorship ensures that the political constantly intrudes on the

²²⁵Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, p. 64.

²²⁶Mary Lusk Friedman, "The Chilean exile's return: Donoso v. García Márquez", *The Americas Review*, vol. 18, part 2, p. 216.

²²⁷*Death in the South*, chapter two.

characters' lives. As we have seen, as Mañungo and Judit walk through the streets of Santiago the latter points out the shadowy figures of the recyclers everywhere around them in the darkness, scratching a living from the bins of the rich (120). Thus their love affair is rekindled against a background of destitution and injustice. At the end of the novel Lopito's death changes everything, forcing both Mañungo and Judit to recognise that they cannot stand aside from politics in the face of the barbarism hidden behind the regime's progressive image.

As well as considering the personal from a political perspective *La desesperanza* also inverts the terms and considers the political from the point of view of the personal. Although politics impinges on the characters' inner lives to such an extent that at times it seems to blot out everything else, *La desesperanza* also stresses the role played in politics by irrational factors. Mañungo's complaint that Nadja is "ingenuamente intolerante de las cosas no racionales" (20) is a reminder of the influence of the irrational in human behaviour, an idea that is borne out by the repeated references to the ways in which the characters' political attitudes are determined by their personal idiosyncracies. We have already mentioned Fausta's somewhat irrational feelings about Frei and Allende but there are many more cases. Judit, for example, initially gets involved in politics as a palliative for her personal difficulties, driven by "un anhelo de ordenarse desde afuera por incapacidad de hacerlo desde adentro" (119) while don Celedonio suggests that Freddy Fox's obsession with acquisition is rooted in his weird upbringing. This is a particularly odd case because when he was a child Fox's parents put a ring of dummies round his neck that he was able to suck whenever he wanted and Celedonio interprets his insatiable collector's appetite as a desire to add more "chupetes" to this grotesque symbol of neglect (55). Although this comment is typical of the bourgeois trivialisation of psychoanalysis that we encountered in chapter one it is nonetheless true that in one way or another the irrational plays a role in the resolution of all of the major issues in the story. Lisboa behaves like an emotional terrorist in his relationship with Ada Luz, finally using sexual blackmail to stop her from passing on Matilde's last wish. That she accedes, however, also says something about the obscure psychological details of her sexual persona. And as I mentioned above, Mañungo's final decision to stay is a result of the emotive impact of Lopito's absurd death, an event which clarifies his feelings more effectively than rational political argument. Even Lopito's death itself stems from his inability to control his emotional response to the policemen's mockery of his daughter. The regime's economic policy is seen by Fausta as "la ruina irracional" (49) while the despairing

violence which constantly threatens to erupt can also be interpreted as an irrational reaction to the claustrophobic political environment. At times the characters' personal obsessions and neuroses threaten to destroy any sense of a united opposition to injustice. This is exemplified at the funeral when for a moment the group of main characters are gripped by a typically Donosan outbreak of paranoia and start to argue:

Se había erizado una hostilidad de todos contra todos en el grupo, cada uno en desacuerdo con el otro, todos enemigos, odiándose, despreciándose, cuestionándose, cada defecto del otro agigantado haciendo imposible la reconciliación, todo acuerdo impensable ya que sería arrasado por tempestades de irracionalidad: resultaba imposible entender cómo pudieron ser amigos hasta hace tan pocos minutos, cómo pudieron creer que integraban el mismo bando. (270)

The pressure exerted by the regime's apparatus of control pushes them beyond their limits, allowing them only to see the worst in each other. Unable to vent their frustrations on a government that has made them politically impotent and equally incapable of integrating their rational dislike of the regime and the private fears and hopes that drive them their violent feelings are turned against each other, driving a wedge between them.

The conflictive relationship between the political and the personal is paralleled by *La desesperanza's* dramatisation of the struggle to define art's relationship to society. In fact, there are two extreme views of art in the novel. The first of these is art as pure commodity, measured solely for its commercial value by the likes of Freddy Fox. He is incapable of appreciating it on other, more imaginative levels, "incapaz de dar el salto tal vez mortal hacia la imaginación" (240), and instead seems to be indulging in a sophisticated form of conspicuous cultural consumption that parallels the material status symbols of owning BMWs and luxurious mansions. Judit feels that it is "como si para ellos fuera imposible admirar o amar algo que no pudieran adquirir" (225), an intuition that reinforces the initial image of Freddy Fox looking round and pricing everything in the Nerudas' house (51). Thus while Lisboa's desire to turn Matilde's funeral into a political circus is described by don Celedonio as like someone stealing the gold teeth of a corpse Freddy's melodramatic entrance --self-consciously alluded to as such (49)-- is like that of a second rate auctioneer. For Freddy everything is up for sale, including radical art. This commodification of art is reminiscent of *Tres Novelitas Burguesas* and its characters' obsession with what consuming particular forms of art with art says about their social and intellectual status. In Freddy's case collecting artefacts is rather like stamp-collecting, as rarity value seems to dictate his tastes.

Don Celedonio's comments sum up his opposition to Freddy's view of art:

Debe ser terrible ser como tú, pobre Freddy, que sólo sabes cuánto cuestan las cosas y sólo por eso las aprecias. ¿Cuánto cuesta un soneto de Quevedo, por ejemplo, o una oda de Keats? Nada: es la superioridad de la literatura que no cuesta nada. (239)

Although Don Celedonio is trying to preserve the integrity of art from the rapacious commercialism of the likes of Freddy, his own vision is reminiscent of the modernist attempt to turn art into an absolute by removing it to some eternal region of the spirit where it exists in glorious isolation, untouched by grubby socio-economic realities. However, *La desesperanza* sidesteps the argument about to what extent art's formal and thematic structures are determined by socioeconomic issues and points out that art as an institution is not as autonomous as its defenders would like to make out but on the contrary depends on the patronage of those with power, in this case the corrupt and corrupting agents of a brutal regime. In Pinochet's Chile the management of culture is in the hands of the likes of Freddy Fox and the compromised position of certain artists is summed up in the prize he awarded Fausta, the origin of which the novelist would like to hide:

Lo siguieron con la mirada para verlo saludar a don Celedonio, que lo abrazó, besar a la autora de *Nidos* a quien le acababa de conferir un premio que en esta casa la literata hubiera preferido disimular, y preguntarle algo a un pintor hiperrealista y ofrecerle patrocinio a uno de la transvanguardia (50).

Whether you are a "hyperrealist painter" or a member of the *transvanguardia* your work will prosper with the approval and support of powerful cultural managers like Freddy Fox. That these characters do not have any names suggests their mediocrity while Donoso's sarcastic use of terms redolent of cultural exhaustion implies that the apparently avant-garde is just a trendy label for an art that is no longer oppositional but complicit in its acceptance of the patronage of the regime and an all-embracing market culture.

Mañungo's personal crisis is in part due to the fact that he himself is involved in this process of commercialisation, packaging and selling a revolution in which he had not taken part and in which he no longer believes. As Lisboa puts it "vendía revolución aunque no la conocía" (63), the irony being that it is the demands of the capitalist market that determine the continued charade. He has been compromised by what could be described as the Che Guevara syndrome, the commodification and commercialisation of images of revolt that gathered pace in the seventies and eighties as the market set about digesting the cultural products of hippydom and left radicalism, emptying them of their political content and reducing them to the level of a fashion statement. The careful descriptions of the values embodied by Mañungo's choice of clothes and general appearance are important in

explaining an inner crisis that is not only due to his loss of political faith but also to his awareness of his complicity in this process of commercialisation:

era fácil clasificarlo entre los marginales más o menos artísticos de un post-hippismo que él sabía ya extinto en Europa [...] Los más jóvenes –y los más viejos– no comprendían este código de la disconformidad, sensibles sólo a la semiótica del amanerado atuendo. Pero muchos de la generación de Mañungo Vera siguieron luciendo ese sello rabioso porque sus conciencias habían nacido con un *ethos* rebelde. El conservaba estas insignias no sólo por fidelidad a su propia historia sino porque formaban parte de su imagen pública, y su agente le imponía seguir explotándolas pese a que a los treinta y cuatro años se consideraba demasiado maduro para atavíos que gustoso hubiera atenuado (10/11).

The last part of the final sentence contradicts the previous suggestion that Mañungo kept up his image out of fidelity to his past and shows that it is simply imposed on him by the economic demands of an agent with a product to sell and a target market in mind. The once committed artist has been sucked into the system against which he fought and now finds himself thoroughly compromised, subject to the dictates of an agent and a record company. From Lisboa's point of view he is now seen as "más un nombre, una marca, que una persona" (65). The image of Mañungo's face framed like a poster in the taxi window ("recortado en el vidrio trasero como en un póster", 11) suggests not only the obvious power of fame, but also the way in which Mañungo has been fixed by his public persona and consequently denied the right to transform himself. While it is important to bear in mind that this is a personal choice we are again reminded of Donoso's insistence that although the acceptance of a role can confer power, the role also makes demands on the individual. In fact, it is the role and not the individual that is the source of that power.

Lopito's comments about Fisher-Diskau's [sic] management of Deutsches Gramophone [sic] –ironically described as "una dictadura musical" (204)– being a money-making vehicle for the promotion of his own career ("En el fondo es un vulgar mercader", 204) may be an exaggeration but they nonetheless reinforce the generally critical view of the commercialisation of art, pointing out that so-called high culture is not immune from this process.

In contrast to this commodification of art the novel also examines the figure of the committed artist. The view of a domesticated art hitched to the chariot of revolution is subjected to a devastating attack, partly through the more absurd pronouncements of its proponents like Nadja and Lisboa. Nadja, for example, thinks that Mañungo is no longer a great artist due to his "ablandamiento político" (17), an impression shared by Lisboa who feels betrayed by the singer's failure to live up to his hope that "como todo gran artista

sirviera de instrumento para salvar el mundo" (64). During Matilde's *velorio* Lisboa wants Mañungo to sing "Santiago ensangrentado", a song that is "la biografía de toda una generación" (74), rather than Neruda's love poetry. Although he is not immune to the poignancy of hearing the poet's expression of love in these circumstances he wants to maximise the political impact of Matilde's death:

No se trataba de que Lisboa fuera insensible a esta bonita canción [...] Al contrario: esos sentimientos también él los compartía. Pero la diferencia, la diferencia determinante, era que esos sentimientos se cargarían con su potencia máxima si se inscribían sobre la pauta inexorable, rígida, popular, lejana a la poesía de un *Y va a caer, y va a caer, el pueblo unido jamás será vencido*, que era lo que quería oír mañana en el cementerio (77).

Ironically it is Neruda, the committed communist, who provides the counter-example. For the members of the Jota the poet's iconic status is entirely determined by his political commitment: "no debía ser, no podía ser otra cosa que el símbolo de la revolución y la voz del pueblo" (27). The movement from "no debía" to "no podía" exemplifies the ideological limits that political dogma imposes on the imagination as the idea that Neruda could be conceived of as something other than a symbol of revolution and the voice of the people goes from being highly undesirable to being simply unthinkable. It is left to don Celedonio, one of the poet's intimates, to put forward a different opinion:

Ellos [los comunistas], claro, son los que menos comprenden a Pablo, sobre todo porque el mundo de la ideología es un mundo esencialmente puritano. Para los ideólogos, el placer no tiene un lugar ni en la vida, ni el arte, ni en la poesía, y tampoco lo tienen la emoción ni la sensibilidad —a no ser que sea *cierta* emoción, *cierta* sensibilidad—, porque para ellos los artistas no deben ni jugar ni dudar, ni contradecirse, ni ser ellos mismos, sino enchufarse directamente con una «verdad» dada. Todo es deber, utilidad, puro tanatos, nada de eros. (241)²²⁸

In contrast to the demand that art serve a politically useful function Mañungo adopts a position very like Donoso's own defence of critical freedom cited at the start of this chapter:

Estoy con Cuba, con la UP, con la revolución, pero estoy demasiado confuso [...] ser artista significa rechazar todos los rótulos [...] ¿Individualismo pequeño burgués? Puede ser. Lo asumo con dolor aunque también con deseo de redimirme. Comparto todos los entusiasmos populares de mi generación, pero todavía no estoy listo para encerrarme dentro de una sola idea. (63)

²²⁸Neruda's own mockery of critics of all persuasions in "Oda a la crítica" includes a telling reference to those who would reduce his work in accordance with political structures: "otros se habían/ enredado en la frente/ de Marx y pataleaban en su barba" (*Odas elementales*, Madrid: Cátedra, 1982, p. 103).

He wants to escape from what he perceives as the rigid ideological framework that demands that all art be filtered through the prism of a vulgar Marxism:

Ser serio, para ellos, era cantar de revolución y política, novelar de revolución y política, vivir de revolución y política, pensar de revolución y política, hundidos en la tragedia colectiva, desterrando y maldiciendo cualquier atisbo de modesto problema individual (126).

In contrast to this Mañungo again echoes Donoso's own position in the seventies: "Quiero ser dueño de mis dudas para solucionarlas desde adentro [...] ser artista significa rechazar todos los rótulos" (63). On one level, then, art is a symbol of the characters' desire to preserve the integrity of their private worlds from the threat of encroachment by the political. As we have already mentioned this idea of the aesthetic domain as a place where one can seek respite from political realities has something in common with the modernist view of autonomous art. However, rather than seeing such an approach to art as a sophisticated attempt to avoid the relentless commodification that threatens to engulf the entirety of the cultural sphere *La desesperanza* ultimately portrays the attempt to escape into the aesthetic as an acceptance of a division between art and life that is entirely congruent with the goals of the military government. Pushing intellectuals away into the realm of the spirit and thereby divorcing art from political reality is exactly what dictatorships want. The irony is that the junta's attempt to neuter the opposition and ban all political activity has the opposite effect. As Judit puts it "la dictadura ha impuesto a la política como único tema respetable en todas las conversaciones" (108). Even classical music becomes politicised in Pinochet's Chile. Judit, for example, jokes about Mañungo's "Latin-American" interpretation of Rachmaninoff:

Judit rió, también muy bajito, felicitándolo porque interpretaba a Rachmaninoff latinoamericanamente, le dijo, con contenido antiimperialista y todo..., quizás porque se trataba de una canción sin texto (123).

The joke hides the serious point that the national political obsession influences the characters' interpretation of areas of experience that would not normally be considered from a political perspective. When Judit was in hiding after the coup she took refuge for a while with Fausta and don Celedonio where one of the luxuries she indulged in was listening to music. Her reaction to Schumann's music encapsulates the dilemma experienced by *La desesperanza's* artists and intellectuals. As she listened to Schumann's "Papillons" the ethereal nature of the music made her long to escape into a space free from the intrusion of politics but the dark "Kreisleriana" brought back her political anger, her overriding "rencor"

(150). The context finally wins out, demanding that even Schumann's romantic orchestral music be interpreted in terms of the national political crisis. The struggle between these contradictory emotions is paralleled by Mañungo and Judit's initial decision to leave and their final determination to stay and contribute to the fight against the dictatorship. It is also figured, as we have seen, in the scene in the cemetery in which Judit rejects the advantages offered to her by accepting her identity as a member of the elite.

The artist is in a difficult position here, trapped between the devil and the deep blue sea. Mary Lusk Friedman's image of the ship of art having to steer a dangerous course through a stormy political sea is an apt one.²²⁹ In response to this challenge *La desesperanza* rejects the demands that the political makes on art while also ironising its commercialisation. In both cases it seems to defend art's autonomy from the socioeconomic world while accepting the contingencies that make that freedom a relative one. It makes no general comment on the question of artistic commitment. Mañungo is on the point of leaving Chile and decides to stay at the last minute, not as a result of a clearly understood political and philosophical position but in the aftermath of the murder of his friend. As a public figure he accepts a degree of responsibility just as Donoso himself did in writing the book. But these are personal choices, not moral norms prescribed for the committed author.

Even at the moment of Lopito's death Mañungo's feelings are initially ambiguous. He interprets it as a symbol of the repression, an absurd death that comes about "simplemente porque un buen día ya resultaba imposible seguir soportando las cosas y uno gritaba un poco más de lo prudente" (317). Shortly after this there is the comment that "no quería seguir viviendo ni un momento más en un país capaz de matar al imbécil de Lopito" (318). This suggests that he wants to leave, but another way of interpreting this heartfelt reaction is to see it as the seed of his decision to stay in order to help to find ways of bringing about change in Chile. At first he shies away from this option but the impact of Lopito's death destroys any hope of escaping into the world of art and private emotion by turning his back on the collective misery that is Chile under Pinochet: "Nada significaba nada, ni París y caminar en la noche bajo las sacras ventanas de Sartre rumbo al Sena con la mano de Judit en su mano, ni una visita a la lápida de Cortázar en el cementerio de Montparnasse" (318). His decision to stay comes almost immediately afterwards "después de veinte horas en mi país puedo asegurarles que nunca he tenido nada tan claro como que me vengo a quedar" (323).

²²⁹This image is implicit in "The artistry of *La desesperanza* by José Donoso".

Judit has a similar experience of the intrusion of politics into her personal life. To accept the inevitability of the eclipse of the purely personal is in a way to embrace despair, a despair that has been forced on them by a regime that allows them no choice other than to place politics first:

¿Era preciso utilizarlo todo, entonces? ¿No permitir que ni una gota de dolor se escurriera? ¿Era necesario metabolizar en la forma más útil, y por quien primero se avispara, los pobres restos de Matilde, la muerte de Lopito, el sueño destrozado de la Lopita, el dolor de Mañungo por su amigo [...]? (320)

In this case, at least, the answer to her rhetorical questions is yes, and when Judit sees Lopito's body she feels he is telling her to stay (322):

Los labios de Lopito se movieron al susurrarle: no te vayas a París con Mañungo [...] no se puede escapar [...] La concordia no es más que una abstracción bonachona ante tanta sangre y tanta muerte, y con una especie de hambre Judit recordó los viejos tiempos del peligro diario y de la clandestinidad que fugazmente la había dotado de una forma (322).

For both the protagonists, then, the political is finally inescapable and the circumstances demand that they take a position in the face of repression. This, significantly, does not condemn out of hand the communists commitment to the armed struggle. As Mañungo says: "No justifico las bombas. Pero las comprendo" (323).

One of the features of *La desesperanza*'s treatment of the politics of identity that might be considered postmodern is that it does not cover class alone but also deals with race and gender, the other two terms of what Terry Eagleton refers to as the postmodern trinity.²³⁰ The exploration of the intersection of these different ways of defining personal and political identity contributes greatly to the novel's complexity. As far as gender is concerned the "machismo" of the regime itself is embodied by the torturers who cheer on the dog used in the sexual torture of one of Judit's fellow detainees: "los ladridos se confunden con las palabrotas avivando el triunfo del Zar con risas y bravatas masculinas, pura brutalidad" (122). But it is not only the agents of the regime who are presented as brutal chauvinists in their dealings with women. Lisboa subjects Ada Luz to a form of psychological abuse and it is ironic but apt that she fears he is going to interrogate her mercilessly over the question of Matilde's mass: "Iba a seguirla para someterla al más despiadado interrogatorio" (65). This description that however metaphorically equates the communist bureaucrat with Pinochet's torturers is one of the first indications of the division between the sexes that is part of the

²³⁰*The Illusions of Postmodernism*, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 57.

fragmentation of the left. Lisboa conceives of the Party as a monolithic institution capable of expressing the aspirations of all those who oppose the Pinochet tyranny and there are several times when he uses the pronoun “nosotros” to refer to the party in an inclusive way. However the presumption of his comprehensive “nosotros” is overtly challenged by the gendered perspective of Ada Luz’s “nosotras”.

—Es que la gente podría usar lo que dijo la señora Matilde para cualquier cosa, y resultar negativo para nosotros.

—A mí no me meta en su «nosotros», Lisboa. Nosotras no tenemos nada que ver con nadie. (36)

Lisboa’s response is patronising: “¡Tan anárquica que son usted y sus mujeres!” to which Ada Luz replies with a defiant: “—¡Y a mucha honra!” (37). Despite her initial resistance, however, she ends up becoming a passive victim of Lisboa’s *macho* attitudes as he bullies her into obedience. He not only threatens not to have sex with her (231) but finally forces her into the party through shameless emotional blackmail (“que no la quiere más, le dijo, si no se mete al Partido”, 294). She is not entirely devoid of blame in her own subjection, however, as there is a peculiarly masochistic undertone in her perception of their respective roles in this relationship:

Lisboa se sentía su superior no porque le hizo el amor anoche —razón de superioridad hasta cierto punto aceptable—, sino por su asqueroso triunfo de matón que la había obligado a obedecerle de no comunicar a nadie el deseo de la señora Matilde: te mato si se lo cuentas a cualquiera, ¿me entiendes? (242)

As well as the obvious violence in Lisboa’s threat her acceptance of a submissive sexual role (“razón de superioridad hasta cierto punto aceptable”) hints at her own connivance in her subjection. This fits in with the masochism that is implicit in Judit’s feeling that “todos los hombres le parecían respetables, incluso los que hacían de ella su objeto” (39) and explicit in her feelings of sexual pleasure when she is sexually degraded by her torturer. Donoso’s presentation of masochistic female characters who are partly complicit in their own degradation is anything but politically correct and he compounds this by creating in Mañungo a male protagonist who is aroused by the thought of Judit being raped (“Mañungo no se sintió canalla al experimentar un estremecimiento de placer con la idea de que Judit fuera violada”, 140). And when Mañungo gets together with Lopito he also indulges in typically misogynistic comments about women getting pregnant when it suits

them (97) while we learn that Lopito is prone to fits of violence in which his victims are his daughter and wife (41).

The most complicated of the many strands that make up *La desesperanza*'s exploration of identity is that of race. Despite the novel's focus on the multiple crises of identity that are brought into relief by the extremity of the political situation most critics have avoided the racial issue, perhaps because it is rarely mentioned explicitly. Yet the repeated references to racial characteristics throughout the novel are one of its most insistent motifs and as such cry out for analysis. Race, of course, also has a political dimension and was one of the central symbols of *Casa de campo*, a constant reminder of the initial violence of the conquest that founded an unequal and exploitative social order. In *La desesperanza* this obviously political aspect of indigenous identity is briefly noted in the description of Fausta's father, "un potentado en su tiempo, dueño de cuantiosas tierras arrebatadas a los indios en Temuco" (43). Fausta, for her part, establishes her liberal reputation by breaking the apartheid-like racial divisions of the period through her marriage to the farm foreman and adoption of his Indian name (43).

Indigenous identity, however, is presented in other more significant ways. Most important amongst these are the physical descriptions that repeatedly associate Amerindian traits with ugliness. These allusions, combined with the novel's explicit recognition of the ideological nature of such physical images of identity, make this one of its most intriguing themes, a basic contradiction that runs like a geological fault through Donoso's vision of post-coup Chile.

Flora González Mandri briefly mentions the problems raised by such descriptions when she deals with Lopito's daughter, la Lopita: "Mañungo and his son, unable to identify with any but the highly fortunate such as themselves, see her misfortune in aesthetic terms: she is ugly".²³¹ There is much more to be said about this, however. In fact, *La desesperanza* sets up a systematic division between European beauty and indigenous ugliness. The first hint of this comes from don Celedonio's point of view as he appears to nod off during Matilde's *velorio*. Looking over to the coffin he observes that: "Habían sustituido a la bella Virginia Woolf, esta tarde más Virginia Woolf que la familiar Ju, por un muchacho aindiado, sin otra expresión que la voluntad cuadrada de su mandíbula adornada por una pelusilla oscura" (30). In this description an attractive (if one happens to find Virginia Woolf attractive),

²³¹"Personal and political transformations", p. 219.

European-looking woman is contrasted with a clichéd image of Indian impassivity that seems to wipe out any individual traits. In isolation this might not amount to much but there are a significant number of other instances which betray the presence of an ideologically weighted hierarchy of beauty. What is more, they are particularly striking because they come from a variety of sources.

Let us take, for example, chapter 23's descriptions of the inhabitants of Chiloé. The third person narrator's description of the passengers on the launch that crosses lake Huillínco mentions the "mujeres de achatadas facciones polinésicas" (184) before turning its attention to the emblematic figure of doña Petronila, the local "bruja". She is "Una señora gorda y corta, de tetas apretadas por refajos, de tez amarilla [...]" whose indigenous features are further defined through her "ojos chinos" (184) and "abultado rostro asiático" (186). Although these descriptions are not in themselves necessarily negative they undoubtedly create a series of negative overtones. Why the brusqueness of the use the word "tetas", for example? This is a view of a race and a culture that are radically different, for whose women the word "seno" is too sophisticated and in some sense too human. It is no accident that the description of the grotesque figure of la Lopita also highlights indigenous traits such as "[l]a antigüedad asiática de su cara larga y oscura como la de su padre" (256) and the "ranuras achinadas de sus ojos [...] tan estrechas que al principio Mañungo no alcanzó a divisar su alma en ellas" (256). The reference to the soul is important because it again suggests that the divide constructed by the dominant racial group is so immense its members entertain doubts as to whether the subaltern are really fully human. This would seem absurd if there were not for the existence of far too many well-documented examples of such prejudice throughout Latin American history. This particular description is heavily ironic in this regard, referring us back to de las Casas and the debate about the true nature of the indigenous peoples after the Conquest. Above all, it is a knowing, self-conscious comment that reveals that Donoso was quite aware of what he was doing in these descriptions, a point we shall be returning to later.

The portrayal of the people on the boat remind us of Mañungo's nightmarish vision of the Caleuche in which the magical vessel is crewed by "forasteros de ojos mongólicos" (122). This is a decidedly odd choice of terminology, particularly as the narrative goes out of its way to emphasise the asiatic features of the indigenous population of Chile. Why are they outsiders if they have the eyes associated with the aboriginal inhabitants of Chile? And why

should Mañungo, who in spite of his atypical physical traits is a native Chilote, see them in this way?

There are other instances of this sort of ideologically loaded description. The racial characteristics of the policeman at the funeral, for example, are also emphasised:

El uniformado era muy moreno, de mejillas ásperas por las cicatrices de un acné adolescente no muy lejano. La golondrina negra de su ceño unido ocultaba sus ojos, delegando toda la vida de su rostro a la jeta africana, blanda y naranja como un molusco bivalvo, y a su gentil sonrisa (263).

A different but equally disturbing series of clichés are reactivated here.²³² As we noted above the policeman's eyebrows are like «*Gaspard de la nuit*»'s Mauricio's, a generally positive character, and this favourable impression is reinforced by his "gentil sonrisa". Yet his mouth is described as a "jeta africana", a dehumanising term whose negative impact is refined through an equally unpleasant description of his thick lips, an image that is taken up again when he laughs at la Lopita, his mouth now referred to as "el molusco de su *innoble* boca color naranja" (290, italics mine). Although this may be because of what his behaviour represents the choice of words here is significant both in racial and class terms.

These descriptions would be powerful enough on their own but they are reinforced by the novel's positive valorisation of European characteristics. The references to Judit's appearance are an obvious case. Critics like Flora González Mandri have mentioned the clichéd, chauvinistic comparisons of her to well-bred animals ("una muchacha rubia de deslumbrante belleza equina", 28) on which, in another moment of self-awareness, she comments directly (131).²³³ But race is once again an important issue. She is blonde and light-skinned, "tan rubia, tan delgada, tan inteligente" (39), characteristics that are obviously equated with her social status as "el espécimen perfecto de la mujer de clase privilegiada latinoamericana" (82). The description of her daughter Luz (who prefers to be known as Marilú) with her "facciones de buen cuño que eran el aporte genético de su madre" (267) is revealing because it explicitly accepts the ideological connection between beauty and breeding that in the Chilean context is a matter of both class and race. The implication here is not only that we can tell people's class by their facial characteristics, a dubious claim in

²³² Earlier the notion of Africanness was seen positively through Judit's eyes when she thinks of Mañungo's voice and his long arms and legs as almost African (p. 74). Here, too, however, we are talking in terms of clichés.

²³³ "Personal and political transformations", p. 216.

itself, but also that the families of the rich are pre-disposed by their genes to be attractive. If this is so one is tempted to ask what went wrong in the case of Freddy Fox and what happened to the fact that the intermarriage of the oligarchy is itself a cause of the sort of genetic problems that Donoso overtly treats in *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*.

At the same time the irony of this allusion to genetics should not be lost on us in the light of the description of Mañungo's son Jean-Paul. The boy's blond hair is greatly admired by Luz/Marilú ("jugueteaba admirativamente con el pelo rubio de Juan Pablo", 267) and there is an earlier reference to his "cabeza de oro húmedo" (214). Yet both Nadja (19) and Mañungo (318) have black hair. Of course, the fact that they are dark-haired does not rule out the possibility of their son being blond but the descriptions of Jean-Paul are significant in so far as they represent one more in a series of examples of the positive description of European traits. This works its way right down to trivial details such as the fact that amongst the things that attract Ada Luz to Lisboa are his blue eyes: "sus ojos azules porque era hijo de españoles" (59). Why she should particularly favour blue eyes may be a matter of personal taste, an irrational liking, but in the context of a novel in which physical description is so significant one wonders whether it does not further exemplify the local sense of inferiority.

This descriptive hierarchy is mirrored by the fact that the positive characters who are clearly associated with the indigenous are in some way physically transformed. Thus Ulda, Mañungo's teacher and lover on Chiloé has "maduros ojos negros" but a "cara blanca y fresca" (186) while Mañungo himself does not look like the Chilotes but is noted for his "palidez" (62). Indeed, although Mañungo is described as having a touch of the exotic and the indigenous about him – "cierto ingrediente indio o exótico que no alcanzaba a transformarlo en pieza de interés etnológico" (85)– it is *only* a touch because his traits are generally not indigenous. Thus while he has the "porte señero" of "la diminuta raza chilota" (234) he is actually tall – "Era muy alto, Mañungo, rara estampa para un chilote" (262)– and appears as a "silueta señera en la multitud achaparrada" (262). The use of a negative term like "achaparrada" to describe the people at the funeral once again implies a perspective that values European characteristics such as tallness while denigrating the local and the indigenous.

Judit's long description of Lopito is an important example because it introduces the issue of miscegenation that would explode such trite polarities:

se pasó una mano desde su frente calzada hasta su mentón prognático y fue como si con ese gesto bajara una cortina que transformó su mueca sonriente en una máscara

de tortura. ¿Fueron –se preguntó Judit al ver una vez más el cambio que conocía desde hacía tanto tiempo– estas señales de un dolor ancestral, residuo de experiencias brutales acumuladas por civilizaciones primitivas clausuradas para ella, lo que la impulsó una vez, pese a la fealdad y la mugre de Lopito, a acostarse con él al entrar en la universidad, cuando ambos militaban en el MIR? (38)

Judit's feelings about Lopito give us a first insight into the importance in her political motivation of a sense of guilt for having been born into a privileged family, what Mañungo refers to as "idiotas deudas de clase" (218). In this case, however, her guilt is expressed in terms of race because Judit views Lopito from the perspective of the privileged criollo elite for whom race and class are closely interrelated. The irony is that although she consciously transgresses the social and racial prejudices that are designed to keep each group in its place her view is still an outsider's view of indianness as something so radically different that it cannot be assimilated or understood. Thus the enigmatic impassivity of what Judit perceives as Lopito's "sonrisa [...] fija y arcaica como la de un huaco" (38) again links him to Chile's indigenous peoples. The fact that these thoughts come over her as she watches a friend she actually knows very well shows the power of such representations of the indian other in her social consciousness.

A further irony is that during her interrogation and torture she is spared physical if not psychological violation by the very barriers that she had previously gone out of her way to break. Whereas the other women in her group are brutalised by a man whose voice expresses a violent and domineering attitude with her he adopts a different approach:

Pero voz vulnerada. Esa voz no se atrevió a acercarse a mí. Con los demás y las demás era autoritaria, soez, empelótala, sácale la mordaza para que grite y suéltale al Zar. [...] Pero al dirigirse a mí, sin que los demás lo notaran pero yo sí [...] esa voz inconfundible perdía sus aristas y se le desprendía algo como una corteza... (124).

Ricardo Farías shares some of the characteristics of Humberto Peñaloza, one of the incarnations of *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*'s twisted narrative voice. Humberto constantly fantasises about having sex with the aristocratic Inés de Azcoitia not because he desires her sexually but because he sees such a union as the ultimate validation of his fantasy of social success. Yet each time he seems to be on the point of attaining this goal his imagination denies him and he is left frustrated and impotent. Significantly, there is a suggestion that Farías suffers from a similar sexual dysfunction:

¿Impotente siempre? ¿O porque ves algo en mí que te hiela y temes? [...] En el momento que pusiste tu mano sobre mi rodilla algo me debe haber definido repentinamente como símbolo de un mundo reverenciado por tus carencias vergonzantes, produciéndote un vértigo de inseguridad. (130/131)

In other words the values that Fariás, like Peñaloza, has internalised do not allow him to violate a woman who clearly belongs to the elite (176/177). As well as the recognition noted by Ariel Dorfman in his analysis of Chilean testimonial literature that “those who carry out such dirty work are also victims of degradation” there is also a suggestion that this man’s psyche was twisted out of shape by the ideology of the ruling elite.²³⁴ An added refinement here, however, is that we see this through Judit’s eyes.

These tensions are dramatised in the important scene in which Judit and Mañungo, fresh from their narrow escape from Fariás and his colleague, come across a pack of dogs in pursuit of a small white bitch. Judit’s experiences of torture lead her to interpret this event in a highly irrational way. She tries to protect the bitch from the pack and when she fails she shoots it rather than allow the other dogs to mate with it. Having killed the white bitch she then spends the night protectively cradling its body in her arms. This unhinged behaviour, clearly the result of her traumatic experiences under torture, jeopardises both their safety as it risks drawing the attention of the police to the fact that not only are they out during the curfew but that they are also in possession of an unauthorised firearm.

This richly suggestive passage has given rise to a variety of interpretations, most of which regard the scene as a cathartic event in which Judit identifies with the white dog and by killing it either takes revenge on her torturers or kills that part of herself that was somehow complicit in her torture.²³⁵ One interesting feature shared by most of these interpretations is that the critics feel the same emotion towards the bitch and her pursuers as Judit. Like her they anthropomorphise a natural scene in which the animals are only doing what comes naturally. Flora González Mandri’s comments are representative of such an interpretation when she claims that: “she [Judit] endangers her life to protect a small female dog in heat from the onslaught of a pack of hounds”.²³⁶ These emotive words capture the intense psychological pressure suffered by Judit as a result of her post traumatic stress but they do not begin to analyse her interpretation of the scene.

²³⁴Dorfman, Ariel, *Some Write to the Future*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991, p. 149.

²³⁵Magnarelli, for example, sees it as “an inverted revenge (perhaps all too human) taken not on those who “deserved to die, undifferentiated males sticking to her [the white bitch] and sullyng her (193) but rather on those with whom she identifies– the white bitch, symbolically herself.” (*Understanding Donoso*, p. 170). Flora González Mandri claims that “By killing her, Judit objectively kills her own desire to be the victim”, “Political and personal transformations in José Donoso’s *La desesperanza*,” *Revista Hispánica Moderna* XLV (1992), p. 216.

²³⁶“Political and personal transformations”, p. 216.

This is because González Mandri's account fails to consider a fascinating and neglected aspect of these passages, that is to say, the projection of racial and class prejudices onto the scene. She does note that Judit tends to be reduced to what she describes as a "race and class cliché", but does not pursue this interesting observation.²³⁷ While the similarity between Judit and the bitch undoubtedly establishes the psychological significance of her actions the existing criticism has not dealt with the social values that play such an important role in this scene. The concept of violation that is central to it is intimately linked to the transgression of class and racial boundaries. The dogs are on the point of breaking the taboos that prohibit the union of an aristocratic woman with a social inferior, the same rules that Farías the torturer had internalised, thereby saving Judit from physical rape if not from the psychological violation that takes its place. The small white dog is clearly identified with the refinement of the ruling class from which Judit comes. In an inversion of the previous figure in which Judit is described as a well-bred animal, firstly a "una caballo de raza" and then a "galgo afgano" (214) she is described in anthropomorphising terms as "la frágil perra blanca de pelaje liso y fina cara empolvada" (191). She sits down "delicadamente" (191), urinates "con remilgada expresión" (191) and observes the scene ironically "como si todo esto transcurriera en un salón digno de su alcuernia" (193). The dogs that pursue her, in contrast, are described in a way that emphasises both their plebeian and mixed-race origins: "quince, veinte perros levantiscos de variadas razas entremezcladas y genealogías confusas y pelajes diversos, predatarios, gruñendo" (191). When a large dog, "un dogo overo" (significantly this is the adjective used by Lopito to refer to his imaginary children with Judit) attempts to mount the female this act too is presented in class terms, as Judit fears that her alter ego will be impregnated by its "groseros espermatozoides" (191).²³⁸ In a final twist the matter of gender is brought into the picture as well as class as Judit wants to shoot the dogs that she sees as sully the bitch: "Todos debían morir, machos indiferenciados que adheridos a ella la ensuciaban" (193). This is exactly what she had just felt in Farías' living room when she aims at Mañungo as well as her supposed tormentor: "Levantó su brazo en la penumbra [...] ¡Morir! Eso quiso para ellos en ese instante: la consumación de que jamás había sido capaz" (179). This scene, then, is a further example of the impact on Judit of the ideologically loaded portrayal of racial and social difference perpetuated by her class, which in this

²³⁷ *ibid.*

²³⁸ This is the inverse of *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*, when the bitch is plebeian and the dogs are patrician.

moment of unbearable psychological tension becomes inextricably mixed up with the memory of the abuse she underwent during her imprisonment.

The irony here is that in the scene that symbolically reenacts her experience the social inferiority complex that Judit suspects underlies Farías' inability to rape her is paralleled by her own feeling that class barriers that are meant to be respected are about to be broken. In the case of the dogs' attempted "rape" of the white bitch, therefore, she finds herself interpreting the events taking place before her in terms of the values from which she has struggled so long to escape. In this moment of crisis she does not want the "plebeian" males to violate the "aristocratic" female. Yet these are the very barriers that she consciously broke herself by sleeping with Lopito, incidentally paralleling Fausta's infraction of the same rules of social apartheid through her union with an indigenous man.

This sociopolitical dimension provides another level of ambiguity to an already complex scene. There is an element of doubt over Farías' original motivation in sparing Judit the treatment meted out to her fellow prisoners: was it really a question of class or is it another example of the residual effects on Judit of the values which taught her to see the likes of her torturer as social inferiors? Whatever conclusion we arrive at in this regard, Donoso is evidently focusing on a system of social apartheid that has deep historical roots. In an intriguing article Hernán Vidal examines the historical background in Chilean society of such images of the sexual transgression of social and class barriers, linking them to the idea of monstrification.²³⁹ Referring to Retamar's vision of Caliban and the Latin American subject's "historical monstrosity" (285) Vidal traces the importance of the sexual domination of the other back to the war of conquest between the Spaniards and Mapuches.²⁴⁰ Without wishing to fall into the trap of establishing facile parallels between literature and society, it is nonetheless clear that a similar symbolic weight is given to the sexual domination of one class/race by the other in much of Donoso's work.

Early on in *La desesperanza* the omniscient narrator deliberately points out the existence of the hierarchy of beauty, overtly acknowledging the existence of the sort of racial images that have long been a mainstay of Latin-American advertising agencies' with their positive portrayal of light-skinned families. This comes in the narrator's ironic commentary

²³⁹Vidal, Hernán, "Postmodernism, postleftism, and Neo-Avant-Gardism", in *The postmodernism debate in Latin America*, Beverley, Aronna and Oviedo eds., Duke University Press, London, 1995: 282-307.

²⁴⁰In this regard he mentions Rolf Foerster's "'Terror y temblor' frente al Indio-Roto", *Revista de Crítica Cultural*, no.3, year 2 (1991): 39-44.

on the regime's eugenic fantasy of the blond families who were imagined filling the tower blocks built during the initial boom:

el gobierno [...] propiciaba otro estilo, lo opulento, lo nuevo, y Santiago se confitó de inmuebles cristalizados con vista panorámica para guarecer a mil familias rubias, a mil hipotéticas tiendas, [...] mil peluqueros/as unisex (24).

The interlinking apartheid of class and race inherent in this image is ironically evoked by Lopito in his telephone conversation with Freddy Fox:

tienes tres hermosos sobrinos Lopez Torre, overos, por desgracia, por lo blanca de la Ju y lo negro yo, lástima que no resultó la tonalidad café con leche que es tan exótica (206).

Similarly, Marilú's admiration of Jean-Paul's (European) beauty and rejection of la Lopita's (indigenous) ugliness is identified as part of a local desire to reject the indigenous aspects of the self and transform them in conformity with an alien cultural ideal. As a result her trivial plans for the future are dependent on her friends' ingrained sense of cultural and racial inferiority:

La Marilú tomó al niño rubio de la mano con la intención de alejarlo de ese grupo compuesto por viejos y por esa chiquilla fea [la Lopita]: ella cuando fuera grande, iba a ser cosmetóloga, en su barrio ya maquillaba a sus amigas poco agraciadas y las dejaba convertidas en princesas. (267)

This is a particularly suggestive image. On the one hand it refers to the sort of crude attempt at physical transformation that is also present in the 'cinematographically' (171, 181) blond hair of Liliana, Farías' female colleague, a desire to refashion oneself in the image of a foreign other that is the logical result of an ingrained sense of cultural inferiority. On the other, it points out that at this time of economic crisis the children of the middle-class were forced through lack of opportunity to do this kind of job. It is precisely to this pauperization of the middle-classes that Jacobo Timerman refers when he comments drily that: "The girls want to be flight-attendants or manicurists".²⁴¹

Scattered throughout the novel these references invite us to reflect on the distorting effects exerted on the characters' self-image by the values promoted by powerful elites. The subaltern's internalisation of the values of the masters manifests itself in a mental oppression that in some respects parallels their material exploitation, but these distortions are in fact

²⁴¹*Death in the South*, p. 73.

most noticeable in Donoso's bourgeois characters' view of the poor, the marginalised and the indigenous. Indeed, in general it is the bourgeois "Europeanised" characters who see the poor, "indigenised" ones and it is therefore significant that in Chapter 23 the omniscient narrator assumes a similar outsider's perspective.²⁴²

The emphasis on the point of view of the principals means that the novel "sees" in a peculiarly slanted, ideologically twisted way. In indian or *mestizo* characters ugliness is directly related to racial and class identity, whereas Freddy Fox's repulsiveness is not linked to his social position and racial characteristics. The dominant ideology's overpowering tendency to portray difference as so complete, to regard indigenous traits as necessarily ugly, to see the poor as incapable of comprehending, and to transform the aboriginal inhabitants into virtual foreigners speaks volumes about the inequality of Chilean society. Its strength, moreover, is such that it infects others too. Mañungo's increasing "aburguesamiento" is the reason why his nightmares are peopled by 'foreigners with mongol eyes'.

The political implications of this unequal relationship are clearly negative. Judit's earlier attempts to escape from the legacy of her birth by plunging herself into political activity are meaningless if she is unable to liberate herself from the conceptual straightjacket of her prejudices. The structural inequality that underlies this hierarchy of beauty goes beyond the immediate crisis of the military regime and returns us to Donoso's pre-coup novels and stories which obsessively re-worked these myths. The dictatorship highlights these concerns, emphasising the snobbery and suspicion with which the middle classes regard the Chilean *roto*. This is crucial because *La desesperanza* suggests that the unity of a variety of sectors of society is the only way forward in the attempt to undermine Pinochet. For this to be achieved the prejudices ingrained over generations must be confronted. While what separates people is still seen as such an insurmountable barrier the chances of any real progress towards a more integrated, democratic society are slim.

The values that we find in *La desesperanza*, then, date back to Chile's history of conquest, colonialism and economic dependence. The visions of the self and of the other that are manipulated in this novel therefore have political implications that in some measure parallel economic and political structures of domination. On one hand we have a Eurocentric

²⁴²Such a vision can also be found in later work of Donoso's *Donde van a morir los elefantes*: in the epilogue, Gustavo as the novel's writer comments on his son: "Nat, un negrucho feo, igual a mí" (385), Rolando's comments about him being "sumamente racial".

criollo elite who ape dated European modes, ironised in the snobbery of Freddy Fox's comparison of Judit and her sisters with less privileged local girls:

vestidas de organdí y hablando francés con la mademoiselle a la hora de la siesta, hacían *petit-point* sentadas en los sillones de mimbre blanco del prado, el hazmerreír de la criolla chiquillada de los fundos vecinos que se caían de los caballos y tenían impétigos y se bañaban en los tranques barrocos y había que raparlos al cero porque les pegaban piojos (56)

The other side of the coin is the mythologising indigenous past that is seen as radically different by the European elite. Judit's view of Lopito is one example but the way she sees Mañungo is also representative of this distance: "¡Qué irreductible era, con su historia mitológica heredada de una antigüedad altiva en la que ella no iba a poder aclimatarse!" (190). This perception of the exoticism of pre-Columbian culture raises the question of whether magic realism sees the world it describes with such deadpan acceptance as a viable alternative view of the world or, as Edwin Williamson has pointed out in his article on García Márquez,²⁴³ whether it looks on with ironic amusement at the picturesque beliefs of people who interpret reality in this way. If it is the latter then it is indeed a further example of the imposition of unrealistic images of identity on the indigenous other by a Eurocentric elite. The fact that the negative images of Doña Petronila appear precisely in the chapter in which the narrative supposedly adopts a Chilote point of view means that the shift in perspective is revealed to be little more than the kind of "atractivo pintoresquismo" (64) that Lisboa noted in the youthful Mañungo's tendency to interpret reality from a Chilote perspective, a patronising vision imposed on the indigenous other from without. It also suggests, somewhat controversially, that when it comes to representing such aspects of Latin-American reality there may not be quite such a distance between magical realism and the *criollismo* against which the later writers rebelled.

In fact, *La desesperanza*'s pages are filled with clichés and stereotypes. Thus an important aspect of Mañungo's view of Europe is encapsulated in his description of Nadja's intolerance of the irrational (20) cited above. The idea that Europe in general is the home of dogmatic rationalism is made explicit shortly afterwards in the reference to "Europa, donde la explicación era una esclavizante manía para descomponer y componerlo todo y volver a

²⁴³Williamson, Edwin, "Magical Realism and the theme of incest in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*", in McGuirk and Cardwell eds. *Gabriel García Márquez: New Readings*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 45-63.

armar el mundo según esquemas diversos" (21), a tendency that was later exported to other corners of the globe, as Mañungo discovers in his first taste of Marxism at the University of Concepción. This familiar dichotomy, positing as it does a split between a rationalist Europe and an intuitive America, is nonetheless quite complex. On the one hand it seems to stem from a sense of inferiority in the face of the technological achievements of Europe while on the other it attacks the analytical tradition that made these developments possible in the name of a more integrative and emotional connection with the world. More significantly, perhaps, Mañungo's experiences in Europe have led him to think of it as a place where one becomes both pampered and hardened to the suffering of others, something he fears might be true of himself as he worries about Judit's contact with don César: "¿Era tanta su propia europeización que temió para Judit el contacto con este fragmento de hombre [...]?" (118). Finally, these generally negative views are tempered by one final positive reference to Europe as a place where at least men have been affected by the social advances made by women as Mañungo washes up the cups in Judit's flat "muy a la europea" (208).

As a counterweight to these comments comes a barrage of negative references to the peculiar mixture of envy, reverence and scorn that colours the characters' view of the outside world. The trendy barrio of Bellavista, for example, is regarded as a fake version of foreign models "todo reducido a mezquina escala chilensis" (23). This was in fact Donoso's own personal view of Bellavista, ironically attributed here to "los reventados y malditos de siempre" (23). In a similar way Lopito makes the defensive comment to Mañungo that they have heard of psychoanalysis in Chile:

¿Qué prefieres? ¿Gestalt, Lacan o un terrible kleiniano? Mira que aquí, aunque esto sea el culo del mundo, también hemos oído hablar de esos señores (79)

Judit adds to this sense of local inferiority by commenting that Lopito's ironic vision of "Lisboa descending the stairs" is a copy of Duchamp by some "pésimo imitador latinoamericano que no se dio cuenta que estaba haciendo cubismo" (37). Jean-Paul refers to "este maldito continente de cataclismos, funerales y revoluciones" (211) and Freddy Fox thinks that the Neruda Foundation would be a shambles in Chile because Neruda's papers would be badly stored or even stolen "en este país de salvajes" (224). Don Celedonio is disgusted at what at first seems to be the opposite, the local tendency to exaggerate the value of everything homegrown. This attitude too, however, he attributes to a sense of cultural inferiority:

como no tenemos nada, creemos que todas las atribuciones, las «escuelas de», los esbozos de mala época, son una gran cosa y no nos queda otra cosa que inflar, como dicen los muchachos ahora, todo lo nuestro, desde nuestros tenistas y futbolistas hasta nuestros terremotos y nuestras revoluciones (238)

Of the few positive characteristics mentioned are that taxi drivers are nicer in Chile than in Europe (210) and that Mañungo wants his son to experience a gentler culture after the European rigidity imposed by his mother and the competitiveness of the schools Jean-Paul had had to attend (210). Judit thinks that “[e]n este país [...] todo se hacía por influencias y compadrazgos, todo el mundo se sentía cerca de poder y con derecho y obligación de manejarlo” (244)

A disturbing feature of the novel is that these two-dimensional images of identity are all the characters have to hang on to in a world that not only is no longer homogenous (if it ever was) in terms of the old myths of belonging but is now subject to the disorientating effects of the (post)modern technological revolution. For example, when he arrives in Chile Jean-Paul seems to be heading for the typical fate of the kind of postmodern subject who appreciates the technological aspects of a stereo system rather than music’s artistic qualities (20) and has the materialistic mentality of the modern consumer: “Orgullosa de la posesión e indiferente a la música: poseer cosas no era un vicio que Nadja le hubiera inculcado sino algo que el pobre niño bebió en el maldito aire de nuestro tiempo” (20). He enjoys visiting the temples of consumerism “*les grands magasins* que les gustan a todos los niños” (21), watches “Dallas” (78) and is bribed into good behaviour by being allowed to use his father’s camera (216). The initial image of him, therefore, is of an alienated child taking refuge in the technological gimmickry of (post)modern consumerism from the difficulties inherent in a background that would have been awkward enough without the break-up of his parents’ marriage. By gliding from TV programme to TV programme and from gadget to gadget he can forget about any crisis of identity, a living example of the insight that while we may do things with technology, technology also does things to us.

In Chile itself the impact of the forces of international consumerism, what we could call corporate globalisation, on local culture is already beginning to be felt. *La desesperanza* gives a strong impression that under Pinochet all sorts of ugly things are being done to Chile in the name of modernisation. Apparently trivial details are important as they contribute further to the picture of a country in a state of cultural as well as political and economic crisis. The novel’s concern with the symbolic representation of the conflict between cultures

is foregrounded when at the funeral the characters have a choice between “mote con huesillos” and Coca-Cola. La Lopita hesitates when faced by “la seductora botellita helada de importación” (260) before finally following her father’s example and buying the local product. This is not just an image of cultural difference but also of economic dependence, symbolic of the aggressive inroads being made into the Chilean economy by foreign companies. Similar economic realities impinge on chapter 23’s quasi-*costumbrista* presentation of Chiloé as Doña Petronila sells her “cochayuyo” to the Japanese (185), who during the Pinochet years acquired an almost mythical status as investors in the Chilean economy, while back in Santiago Judit’s daughter Luz wants to be called Marilú and is only interested in designer gear: “Lo único que le interesan son las tiendas de Fiorucci” (144). In short, the question of cultural difference is also linked to economic and political issues, another example of the way in which politics intrudes on every other sphere in *La desesperanza*.

Beneath the stereotyped images of Europe, Chile and Chiloé, is an anxiety about cultural identity. A homogenising consumer culture, capable of triturating national differences, is even beginning to intrude into the textual space that represents the previously irreducible redoubt of indigenous identity. This is unsettling because while for both the Eurocentric elite and the *mestizo* mass indigenous culture may not be “us” it is definitely not “them” either which is why it can be turned to as an identifying feature, unequivocally “ours”, not “theirs”. This confused sense of cultural identity is apparent in some of Donoso’s own statements:

Yo creo que hay dos momentos muy importantes en la literatura y en la conciencia latinoamericana. Uno es el momento de *rebeldía contra lo extraño*. Nosotros somos indios, odiamos a los españoles, odiamos lo europeo. Ahí se produce toda una literatura y una pintura indigenista que no tuvo mayor trascendencia ni vigencia fuera del país. Pero después vino la rebelión de mi generación –sin que nosotros supiéramos que iba a ocurrir así– cuando nos dimos cuenta que también pertenecemos a la cultura occidental. *Nosotros no tenemos una cultura propia.*²⁴⁴

For someone like Donoso to be able to say “somos indios”, even in this context, may be even more phoney than the average *andaluz*’s identification with the gypsy subculture of the south of Spain, but in times of crisis such images are extremely potent, providing a measure of comfort in a world in which cultural barriers are threatened by the ease of modern travel, the rapid transfer of information and the inescapable influence of an international

²⁴⁴ *Literatura y sociedad*, p. 114.

consumer culture. At the same time it attests to the fact that identity is not a racial but a cultural issue.

La desesperanza establishes a complex series of polarities around the theme of national and regional identity. On the one hand there is a dislike of what is seen as the commercialism of global culture while on the other myths of national purity are also challenged. Indeed, one of the reasons why exile is so important in *La desesperanza* is because it breaks down such notions of cultural purity even as the exile tries to reinforce national stereotypes as a protection against the threat of the erosion of his or her cultural identity. What is Mañungo's true identity on his return from exile, and what is Jean-Paul's? It is impossible to say. Whether they like it or not they are essentially hybrid figures, a feature that emphasises what in any case is an essentially Latin-American trait. As Jorge Rufinelli puts it "el rasgo central de la cultura hispanoamericana es su heteroglosia, su variedad, su posibilidad de diálogo, su constitución europea y al mismo tiempo indígena, con aluviones inmigratorios de la Europa pobre".²⁴⁵ Jean Franco also suggests that this is what makes Latin America postmodern *avant la lettre*, claiming that "[t]he hybrid, copy, pastiche that have always been features of Latin American writing are now commonplaces of contemporary culture".²⁴⁶

La desesperanza's treatment of the reality of such hybridisation, however, is complicated by the fact that just like everything else it is seen as irremediably mixed up with political issues. An important aspect of this is the problem of inauthenticity, a recurrent motif exemplified in a passage in which Judit wonders about the houses she sees in Bellavista:

¿cuáles eran auténticos, se preguntaba Judit, obra de la clase media del barrio que jamás siguió la moda que los descartó, y cuáles pura afectación y *revival*? Imposible distinguirlos aunque seguramente los de mentira tenían más gracia que los verdaderos (87)

Donoso seems to be deconstructing his own insecurity about identity here. Beneath the characteristic hint of snobbery lies a more important issue. It is not the artificial itself, something that Donoso's fiction often associates with art and therefore values highly, that seems to be the problem. Instead *La desesperanza*'s concern with the phoney seems to be motivated by an awareness of the use to which certain representations are put. There is an

²⁴⁵Rufinelli, Jorge, "Los 80: ¿Ingreso a la posmodernidad?", *Nuevo Texto Crítico*, vol.III, no.6, segundo semestre, p. 35.

²⁴⁶"Remapping culture", p. 185.

immense difference, for example, between the artificial nature of art which might be seen to contain within it “la verdad de las mentiras”, and the lies of advertising and political propaganda. The most obvious example of such ideologically motivated manipulation comes at the end of the novel when Fausta and the children visit *Chile en miniatura*, the regime’s three-dimensional representation of Chile which exaggerates its positive attributes, creating a falsely idyllic picture of “su pujanza, su orden y su limpieza, y la incansable industria de sus ciudadanos libres viviendo en paz junto a volcanes nevados, bosques siempre verdes y lagos eternamente azules” (325). Given what the novel has already revealed to us about contemporary Chilean reality this sinister vision of the nation is a blatant attempt to cover up the violence of Chile’s recent past. Literature’s make-believe, in contrast, is generally not at the service of any such power.

The political dimensions of *La desesperanza*’s images of inauthenticity become evident in its critique of an especially pernicious form of consumerism. Judit, for example, sees:

familias sentadas en sillas de plástico a las mesas de sus comedores o en incongruentes cocinas «estilo americano» compradas a ruinosos plazos, lo que establecía la atmósfera melancólica de las cenas, apenas mitigada por la televisión (87).

This form of consumerism is not just criticised for its inherent idiocy but also for its significance in the social scheme of things in Pinochet’s Chile. Timerman points out that “[t]he energies of the majority of the population who rejected, although only passively, the dictatorship were spent on consumption”²⁴⁷ while Constable and Valenzuela comment that “between 1977 and 1980, spending on consumer imports more than doubled, to \$1.2 billion. Santiago stores were crammed with French cosmetics, Japanese radios, and Italian refrigerators.”²⁴⁸ In Donoso’s frightening, dystopian image the idea of consumption is linked to the subjection of the disenfranchised to a desire for a degrading foreign ideal, an ersatz model of US consumer society promoted by the military regime. The obsession with consumption as a mark not only of status but almost of being is apparent in the realisation that Ricardo Farías has allowed himself to be made a tool of the regime, brutalising others and himself in order to be able to toast his friends in Chivas Regal and not some cheap local brand. This simple banality of the evil afflicting the country could not be better conveyed.

²⁴⁷ *Death in the South*, p. 79

²⁴⁸ *A Nation of Enemies*, p. 204.

Nonetheless, some positive features do emerge out of *La desesperanza*'s peculiar broth of images. There is, for example, the symbolic union of supposed opposites in Jean-Paul's friendship with Lopita, and there are other versions of synthesis that resist the clichéd dichotomies. Fausta, for example, was transformed in her youth from María Angélica Rosales into Fausta Manquileo, acquiring indigenous characteristics along with her name, as we can see in the description of her as "esta princesa autóctona de tez demasiado morena y cabellos tirantísimos en las sienes" (44). Given her origins as the daughter of a prominent landowner we might ask why is she "autóctona". However, the association of her father with the indigenous through his poncho—he wears "un poncho de vicuña"—suggests the mixed nature of Chilean identity, the assumption of a *mestizo* reality that challenges views of racial purity. This becomes clear at the end of the novel as Fausta, dressed in her "vestiduras mitológicas" (328) is surrounded by Jean-Paul, la Lopita and Luz, three children who come from very different racial and social environments. Moreover Mañungo's singling out of la Lopita for special treatment at the end of the novel is not only a natural reaction to her father's death but also a symbolic raising up of the dispossessed which stands out in a novel in which images of native inferiority are so common.

Indeed, Mañungo himself unites some of these supposed antinomies. On one hand he is the product of his Chilote background but in many other ways he is an anomaly. As we have seen he is physically unlike his peers and after his years first on the mainland and then in Europe he has become an exotic and idiosyncratic figure, with a cultural imaginary made up of such disparate strands as Chilote superstitions, Marxist positivism and the romanticism of Schumann. This, however, is in some respects a more realistic image of the sort of hybrid (post)modern identity that was forced on exiles than the fantasies of cultural and racial purity that appear elsewhere in the novel. His vision of the Caleuche is a powerful syncretic image, a personal ship of art that results from the meeting of the mythology of his native Chiloé with the European ship of fools, Böcklin's *caïque* and Rimbaud's *Bateau Ivre*. And it is surely significant that this central image of transformation, this entirely positive example of creativity and vitality, is rooted in the adaptation of an indigenous myth. Mañungo's ability to accept and to some extent integrate disparate cultural references reaches its culmination in the symbolic union of opposites implicit in his relationship with Judit, which involves a sharing of each other's personal histories that goes on throughout the novel but begins to

stretch back to include their very different cultural backgrounds when they go to the cemetery (280, 281).

The ambiguities created by the issues mentioned above explain why critics have not agreed on whether or not *La desesperanza* ought to be regarded as a pessimistic novel. Dieter Saalmann, for example, interprets it from a negative perspective, while for readers like Federico Schopf it is a failed attempt at dealing with the political situation because its protagonists do not represent any significant groups in the contemporary political landscape.²⁴⁹ Up to a point I would say that the uneasiness felt by critics like Schopf is a result of a misunderstanding of the conventions at work in the novel. Taken from the viewpoint of straight realism some of the imagery and characters are absurd, especially the fantastic figures of the recycler underworld. The idea that these characters could be involved in anything other than the daily grind for survival is not convincing at all. But Donoso is not interested in straightforward realism –literary convention and his previous imaginative representations of Chile are important too, although clearly not as important as in some other works. I think, therefore that we do have some grounds at least for questioning Philip Swanson's claim that "it perhaps lacks the literary panache of some of his previous works".²⁵⁰

Other critics, unperturbed by the novel's lack of verisimilitude, nonetheless see it in a rather negative way. Mary Lusky Friedman compares Donoso's work to García Márquez's testimonial recounting of film director Miguel Littín's clandestine return to Chile claiming that "Donoso sidesteps the need for action in the political realm, while García Márquez idealizes too much Allende's government".²⁵¹ In contrast to this position Pedro Meléndez Páez claims that the division of the novel into three parts, *El Crepúsculo*, *La Noche* and *La Mañana* suggests the possibility of a hopeful transformation.²⁵² And although Flora González Mandri sees both Mañungo and Judit as "neurotic and highly individualistic" characters who are "incapable of either empathizing with the masses who risk their lives in pursuit of actual change, or of acting in any effective way that would not be immediately neutralized by the

²⁴⁹Dieter Saalmann, "José Donoso's Novel, *La desesperanza*, and Contemporary Chile-A note of Musical Dissonance", *BHS*, LXX (1993): 425-434 and Federico Schopf, "El lugar de la desesperanza", *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, Oct. 1989: 153-6.

²⁵⁰*Landmarks in Modern Latin American Fiction*, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 187.

²⁵¹Mary Lusky Friedman, "The Chilean Exile's Return", *The Americas Review*, vol 18, parts 3-4, Houston, 1990, p. 216.

²⁵²Pedro Meléndez Páez, "El desgaste del exilio en *La desesperanza* de José Donoso", *Chasqui*, (Williamsburg), vol. 23, pt.2, 1994: 66-73.

military forces",²⁵³ her overall interpretation of the novel is positive because she thinks that Donoso's aim was "to jolt them (and himself) from their exclusively private concerns into the realm of the public and political" (223).

Broadly speaking, I find myself in agreement with González Mandri and Meléndez Páez, although I think that the overall conclusion is rather darker than either critic suggests. Donoso's political commitment is reluctant, to say the least. His presentation of the conflict between the regime and the Chileans who suffer it is uncontroversial, while his critical but not entirely unsympathetic treatment of the dogmas of the left is also completely in keeping with the general direction of his previous work. For me, however, the most intriguing aspect of the novel's treatment of a grim political scene is what has not changed under the regime, namely the social apartheid, the bourgeois insensitivity to the plight of the poor and the power of ideology. The fact that his middle-class characters move in a world partly shaped by distorted images of less privileged Chileans is a subtle and persuasive touch. The power of this particular work lies in its protagonists complicity with the very forces against which they struggle. This, allied to the fact that yet again in Donoso's work the working class poor have no voice adds up to a powerful criticism of the complacency, snobbery and prejudice to which Donoso himself was not immune.²⁵⁴ This does not mean, however, that his bourgeois are incapable of any action, as his own example showed. His return to Chile, his writing during the period of the dictatorship and his political activism, however limited, all represent acts of no little courage.

In fact, in *La desesperanza* we witness an interesting conflict between a typically Donosan urge to sympathise with the characters' desire for autonomy and their realisation that in this situation they have to make a commitment. While the novel takes on a particular brand of Marxist dogmatism and joylessness, and criticises the subjection of art to ideology

²⁵³"Political and personal transformations", p. 211.

²⁵⁴Indeed, some critics have commented on what they perceive as a strong personal element in the novel, something that Donoso accepted when referring to the parallels between Mañungo and himself: "Dije que esta es la novela de mi dolor particular porque aunque los personajes son ficticios reconozco en mí mismo el complejo de culpa del protagonista por no haber vivido la represión" (Patricia Guzmán, "El pájaro se convirtió en cuervo", *Vanguardia Dominical*, Bucaramanga, noviembre 30, 1986, p. 2). Flora González Mandri suggests that Donoso is safely hidden behind the figure of Mañungo, but how safely? To project oneself into such a figure is undoubtedly a bold move. In so doing he seems to figure a split in himself. In fact, it could be argued that we can see Donoso splitting himself into many parts in this novel as he follows his obsessions in the shape of a variety of other characters. He is also Lopito, a failed alter ego, Judit in her conflictive relationship with her class, even Fariás suffering from a version of Humberto Peñaloza's identity crisis and the horror of his own monstrification. In the end, however, to look for explanations in the immediately autobiographical is surely a regressive step in that it takes us too far beyond the work itself and ultimately amounts to little more than speculation married to a considerable dose of cod psychology.

in a way that reveals that Donoso's essential position regarding the relationship of art to politics had not changed substantially since the 70s, it does also militate for some kind of effective action against the dictatorship. In a way this is one of its weaknesses: we see the immense power of "Santiago ensangrentado" but we can only guess as to the potential efficacy of Mañungo's transformed art. That, however, is characteristic of Donoso's fiction's general valorisation of ineffective truth above ideologically loaded lies. This fits in with some of Carlos Alonso's assumptions about Spanish American postmodernism, what he refers to as "the rhetoric of the postmodern" which includes a "suspicion of rigid ideological commitment" an "affirmation of local circumstance" and a "depiction of a heterogeneous sphere for political agency".²⁵⁵

In concluding this analysis of «Los habitantes» and *La desesperanza*, it is important to point out the obvious differences between the two works' relationship with Pinochet's Chile. Despite its clear political implications «Los habitantes» is a critical fable in which the fantastic makes its appearance, and in this it is typical of a series of Donosan works that portray the disruption and even destruction of comfortable bourgeois worlds by bizarre events. As in «Gaspard de la Nuit», then, one aspect of the story is the revenge taken on bourgeois complacency that is made possible by the appearance of the fantastic. The use of the indirect free style is crucial to the story's development as we see events through the eyes of the bourgeois and therefore come to understand the system of values that makes up their world view. «Los habitantes» is an almost entirely negative story, a gloomy commentary on the selfishness of the bourgeois at the end of which things are actually worse than they were at the beginning. The story's political dimension represents an investigation of the social tensions unleashed by the coup, a vision of the crisis of an old conservatism that finds itself being swept aside by the rapid pace of change after the coup. While Blanca and Francisco learn enough to feel a sense of bourgeois guilt, and their death could be seen as either a symbolic expiation or a symbolic act of revenge, there is a deep pessimism at work here as Donoso turns his attention to the new class of opportunistic entrepreneurs that profit from a climate of brutal and unregulated competition.

²⁵⁵“The Mourning After: García Márquez, Fuentes and the Meaning of Postmodernity in Spanish America”, p. 253.

La desesperanza is another matter, a much more difficult, even risky enterprise.

Donoso deals head on with the political question that is imposed on a nation by the nature of its government. Living under the dictatorship has stifled him and he has to find a way of expressing his sense of impotence, guilt and despair. He does so by creating an acidic commentary on the participants in the contemporary political scene. Rather than approaching the problem allusively as in most of his fiction there is a strong current of realism in the novel, identifying real places and referring to real people. At the same time, however, this bold move is tempered by the explicit warning that fiction transforms reality rather than just reflecting it, a reminder that this is Donoso's Santiago, an emotional and aestheticised description of place.

In fact, both of these works seem to be political in the sort of postmodernist way suggested by Linda Hutcheon. In *La desesperanza* in particular we encounter a resistance to power that is accompanied by a recognition of the characters' level of complicity with it. This is not a crass view of the oppressed as somehow always conniving in their own oppression, however, as some poststructuralist or postmodernist critics would claim, but a commentary on the difficult relationship of privileged bourgeois intellectuals with the material conditions of that privilege and the ideological assumptions of their class. This point is most powerfully made through the emphasis on the fact that the political is not only a question of class struggle but also a matter of gender and race. Rather than privileging a particular term, however, Donoso's novel examines some of the ways in which they are interlinked within a sophisticated ideological system. What much of Donoso's fiction achieves with a great degree of success is not to allow the issues of gender and race to obscure the critique of injustice, arbitrary social hierarchies and inequalities of wealth that not only categorised Pinochet's Chile but equally typified Chile before the coup. In admittedly different form we come across the ideology of beauty and the concomitant fear of monstrification that takes us back to the modernist experimentalism of *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*. He shows how these issues are manipulated by an ideology that supports the unjust social hierarchy, a weapon for keeping the downtrodden in their place. Indeed, the social and racial apartheid that exists in the country can be seen as perhaps the greatest obstacle to change in the long term. Thus although Flora González Mandri is partly right when she suggests that both *Casa de campo* and *La desesperanza* "envision a revisionary

rather than a revolutionary process"²⁵⁶ there is an implied criticism of the structural inequalities of Chile that makes Donoso more than just an apologist for some ideal of democratic and civilised political life that existed before the coup. Rather, his work is dominated by a deep unease about the class divisions that dominated Chilean society, divisions that were deepened but not created by the coup.

The uneasy relationship between art and politics in *La desesperanza* brings us full circle to the question of the writers of Donoso's generation and politics. In the struggle between politics and art there is a sense in which art, associated in one way or another with the protagonists, seems to be a predictable winner. But the view of art put forward in the novel is rather more sophisticated than that. At times art as institution seems to be as ineffectual and complicit in the political situation as the protagonists. In this sense it is highly significant that the process of transformation in the novel works in another, hidden way that has not been mentioned by most critics. The characters who could have spoken for the dispossessed have been transformed into bourgeois. At some point in their lives they have all imbibed a high ("modernist") culture. Thus despite Judit's snobbery about Mañungo's inability to recognise Böcklin, she shares with him and with Lopito a culture that includes, for example, Schumann and the details of psychoanalysis. This cultural change is explicitly mentioned in Fausta's mocking comment to Lopito that he can hardly put himself forward as a representative of the working class with his taste for Schumann and Duchamp, a suggestion that simultaneously underlines their common culture and reveals the unconscious cultural snobbery that assumes that the poor are incapable of assimilating such exalted cultural artefacts (269).

Judit's wincing at Mañungo not knowing who Böcklin was, or her definition of herself in terms of Schumann and Mies van der Rohe, is as powerful a way of distinguishing herself from the poor as driving a BMW or a Mercedes. Thus when Judit, in answer to don César's question about why Lopito lost his head, says "Algo... que usted no entiende" (298) her words underline what she perceives as the cultural chasm between them. In this sense it dramatises the crisis for the Latin American intellectual, the problem of communicating with his or her audience. Even the boom novelists were not mass communicators in the way that radio or television was, and in this respect it is interesting to note the desire amongst them to

²⁵⁶ José Donoso's *House of Fiction: A dramatic construction of time and place*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1995, p. 144.

get involved in projects associated with a less elitist audience that is apparent in their relatively unsuccessful involvement in film and theatre, and their much more successful tendency to “go pop” in the period that has come to be known as the postboom. In other words, the problem of cultural elitism, so often associated with modernism, was an issue that these writers constantly confronted. In *La desesperanza* that artistic elitism confronts itself but reaches an impasse: how is it to communicate and how is it going to be politically effective, particularly when Donoso’s novel shows only too well that art can be regarded as something to be consumed? In this respect Donoso’s text notes the failure of modernism to resist the sort of commodification that theorists like Jameson claim it resists through its difficulty. We are left with Mañungo’s vague hopes but no clear project.

Once again, then, we can see what could be regarded as both modernist and postmodernist tendencies in Donoso’s work. There is a realisation that the obsession with great modernist works of Europe and North America culture that dogged the boom writers and opened up new artistic vistas to them, promising an escape from what they perceived as the leaden social realism of their respective narrative traditions, also contained the danger of moving into too rarified a realm and losing the role of the tribune which they wanted to retain. Donoso was arguably the most reluctant political commentator of them all but his work is nonetheless politically relevant. In his treatment of Chile’s national tragedy the problems he confronts illuminate some of the contradictions in the work of the writers of the region and their role within their own societies. This is not the writer as “superstar in a global culture” as Jean Franco would have it, but someone who does indeed feel responsible to a specifically national culture. Donoso questions and probes this dichotomy through the figure of Mañungo, ironically an artist whose greatest power lies in the immediacy of his mass appeal. The international dimension of Mañungo’s fame is revealed to be little more than a commercial attempt to make money out of his image and once this fleeting popularity has passed his real significance is primarily national. As he begins to extricate himself from corporate, commercial and ultimately fake stardom and effect significant personal change it is on the national stage that his actions acquire true meaning. Paradoxically, however, it is by being less “popular” and more private that he hopes to make a contribution to the national political debate. Even as they seem to invert it—and note that it is Mañungo’s appropriation of modernist culture that is almost always to the fore in this novel—these antinomies figure the problem of the Spanish American writer’s role in national life and the split between the desire to be seen as part of an elitist, cosmopolitan tradition and yet still communicate with a

broader society. This also goes some way towards explaining the anxiety about mass culture and the exasperation at what is perceived as a “dumbing down”, a process that makes the task more difficult.

Finally, however, what gives these anxieties their weight and their urgency in the narratives discussed here is the political crisis caused by the dictatorship. And while Jean Franco claims that postmodernism gives the “marginalized” “permission to speak” Donoso’s (postmodernist?) novel points out their lack of a voice.²⁵⁷ The inarticulacy of the “andariego” in «Los habitantes» and the lack of a voice for the poor in *La desesperanza* are characteristic of the silence of the truly marginalised in Donoso’s work as a whole. The strength of these stories is that they underline the fact that while the comfortable middle-classes in Chile continue to see the “roto” as a foreigner then no real political change is possible. However much Donoso’s bourgeois try to hide their existence by ignoring it or take refuge in a world of elitist art and purely private pleasure the poor are always with them, rummaging through the detritus of a consumer society in which people as well as used goods are seen as disposable.

²⁵⁷“Re-mapping culture” in *Americas: New Interpretative Essays*, Oxford: OUP, 1992, p. 182. It is interesting that Jean Franco deliberately puts the word marginalised between inverted commas, as if it were an outdated term.

CONCLUSION

In bringing this study to a close we need to bear in mind that it would be a mistake to generalise too much about Donoso's work as a whole from the limited number of works examined here. Nonetheless there are some limited conclusions to be drawn and some tentative projections to be made.

In analysing «Gaspard de la Nuit», «Los habitantes» and *La desesperanza* from a formal perspective it is clear that we are dealing with what can be thought of as a post-*El obsceno pájaro de la noche* Donoso, a post-boom or even a postmodernist Donoso. Whatever conclusion we reach after the quibbling over the exact terminology, however, one fact is obvious: the desire to impress through purely technical wizardry has gone. The most important narrative feature of the works discussed here is the role of irony that flourishes as a result of Donoso's consummate mastery of the indirect free style. This technical assuredness will be carried through to later works like *Taratuta*, *Donde van a morir los elefantes* and *El Mocho* in which again we will again encounter the juxtaposition of sophisticated techniques, but no urge towards experiment for experimentation's sake. That said, it soon becomes apparent that the use of the free indirect style is in itself a very complicated and sophisticated procedure. The problem of working out exactly what is being represented and the formal ambiguity that was such an important part of *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* is therefore still present in Donoso's work although in attenuated form. In their ironic approach to the problem of form, the works discussed here display what we could think of as postmodernist tendencies.

Inevitably we encounter a reformulation of some of the most important Donosan obsessions that have been repeatedly reworked from the *Cuentos* to *El Mocho*. The sense of immediate existential anguish that dominated some of the early work may now exist in a more attenuated form, but the overarching sense of a crisis of values remains. The difference is that Donoso, like the rest of us, has learnt to live with it. The precarious nature of the self and the difficulty of the relationship between the individual and the group, two themes that have always been recognised by critics as playing a central role in Donoso's portrayal of his characters, are treated in a partly lyrical and partly ironic fashion in the course of Donoso's examination of the problem of individual freedom in «Gaspard de la Nuit», an evocative presentation of what can be interpreted as a modernist nostalgia for lost certainties. Its sophisticatedly ironic approach puts the burden of interpretative responsibility squarely on the reader, revealing the importance of the reading strategies that critics adopt in order to

account for its idiosyncrasies. Like many modern works it can be read from what we might crudely think of as modernist and postmodernist perspectives, depending on how far we decide to take the novella's potential for irony. The sheer lyricism of Donoso's portrayal of Mauricio is headily seductive, not least, we might surmise, for the author himself. But there is a level on which Mauricio is ironised and with him his irrational and potentially destructive search for the absolute. What makes his search so poignant, and our choice so hard, is that Donoso really does not give us much to choose from in this story. On the one hand we have the self-satisfied hypocrisy of the conformist Sylvia and on the other the uncompromising attitude of her son. Perhaps the best way of understanding this conflict is to interpret it as an ironic reworking of the revolt of the bourgeois intellectual against the stifling conformism and materialist consumerism of his own class. Indeed, we can think of the younger Donoso in these terms, particularly in the light of his self-portrait as an iconoclast in *Review*.

The presentation of the self that we encounter in «Gaspard de la Nuit» may be regarded as either modernist or postmodernist, depending on how one constructs the difference. What is clear is that Donoso's obsession with both the strength and the fragility of the personality is explored through this novella. Although Mauricio is a far stronger character than the paranoid narrator of *El obscuro pájaro de la noche* the suspicion and fear created by his awareness of the power of social convention is reminiscent of that novel's terrifying view of the invasive power of the values of the group. His perception of those around him as conformist, semi-conscious zombies results in a frightening solipsism that casts a shadow over the rest of the novella and sits uneasily with some critics' desire to romanticise him.

My aim in this study has been to make a case for a variety of readings to be applied to Donoso's fiction. In particular, I think that it is important to reiterate that the author's problematic relationship with his class plays an important part in his construction of imaginary worlds. I do not want to go in the direction of sociologists of literature and say that it is the most important, ultimately explanatory "level" on which all else must rest, but I do think that its significance in the interpretation of Donoso's later work has been underplayed. The fact that Donoso often discounted political interpretations of his work should not be used as an alibi which allows us to ignore the illuminating potential of contextualising readings of his fiction. Indeed, I think it is clear from both parts of the present analysis that the difficulties inherent in Donoso's characters' relationship with the collectivity can best be understood in terms of the middle-class intellectual's difficult position as product and critic

of the consumerist bourgeoisie, a position that is made even more difficult in the case of Spanish American artists by the urgent demands made of them by politics. Donoso did take a stance against the dictatorship, not only in his political activity but also through his fiction and although he does so in a characteristically subtle and aesthetically mediated way what we could describe as the architecture of his work does not allow the element of social commentary to be entirely subverted, as some critics claim and would clearly like. I think we ought to give Donoso a certain amount of credit not only for his opposition to dictatorship but also for consistently questioning the liberal self-regard of the social group that includes the vast majority of his critics. That being the case, I cannot quite push away the impression that some critics feel the need to take political interpretation onto such a vague level that it becomes almost meaningless because they do not want to engage with some of the more problematic and provocative aspects of Donoso's fictional worlds. At the same time, however, this the urge to generalise seems to be a throwback to a period when Latin American literary critics thought of political criticism as being in some way compromised by the committed *indigenista*, *costumbrista* or *paisajista* novels of the past. This was a hang-up born of an inferiority complex, part of the desire to show that Latin American literature could deal with "universal" themes. But this sense of inferiority should have been overcome by now, particularly given the current postmodern scepticism about overarching narrative explanations of reality. Another reason, probably a more powerful and possibly pernicious one, to my mind, is the influence of the post-structuralist critical orthodoxy that currently dominates North American work on Donoso, at its best exemplified by Sharon Magnarelli, that seeks to promote a discussion of the linguistic aspects of literature. I am not by predisposition averse to this, but rather like Donoso himself I object to being told how I can read a text. For all their emphasis on play, some post-structuralist critics of Donoso seem to be demanding that the rest of us play the game by their rules.

While accepting that the term postmodernity is a complicated one for Spanish America that is not so as far as literary postmodernism is concerned. In the first chapter of this study, for example, we dealt with a novella written by a Chilean living in Spain that contains references to French works written in the last century. This in itself foregrounds the whole question of cultural identity. Donoso is a hybrid, as Latin-Americans have always been and as most of us are rapidly becoming. The experience of exile for thousands of Chileans after the

coup only served to accentuate this reality. In the figure of Mañungo Vera in particular Donoso confronts his own identity crisis, the result of decades of self-imposed exile.

I want to conclude with a final comment on modernism and postmodernism. Like many of the great modernists whose work he loved, José Donoso was a man devoted to literature, a writer with an extremely broad knowledge not only of literature but also of music and the plastic arts, all of which is apparent in his writing. Nonetheless, he can hardly be described as a modernist in the sense meant by some theorists. His experimentation, I suspect, was to a great extent a result of a desire to "make it" in the eyes of his peers rather than what has been perceived as an attempt to achieve absolute truth through his art. And despite the apparent elitism of some of his artistic and literary references he did not attempt to dazzle or confuse the less erudite through his cultural references or through an ornate or baroque use of language. There is nothing in Donoso that begins to approach *Paradiso*, for example. The overall impression of Donoso as a postmodernist, although in many ways a dubious label, seems to be more fitting. His sly irony is typical of someone who is unable to give himself over to idealise is anything but a fanatic. But at the same time his work is both riven by nostalgia and also utterly opposed to the cynical machinations of power. In this respect he is a typical product of the postmodern cultural age, an ideological orphan, in search of some way, to paraphrase Samuel Beckett "of accommodating the mess". Modernism's attempt to erect Art into the new religion may have failed but from the perspective provided by the works discussed here we can see that Donoso viewed this failure with a poignant mixture of irony and nostalgia.

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Appendix One:

Interview with José Donoso. This interview took place on the 14th of February 1989 at Donoso's house in Providencia, Santiago de Chile.

—*Usted se ha referido al papel del autor como crítico y a la libertad crítica que exige que no esté comprometido de antemano con una ideología. Esto indica quizás una no-creencia en los sistemas ideológicos cerrados. Sin embargo, la crítica literaria de su obra ha sido y sigue siendo en gran medida una búsqueda de estos mismos sistemas, un intento de clasificación casi taxonómica [...] ¿Cree que esta va a ser una falla constante de la crítica que es en cierta forma inevitable? Se me hace que la crítica dice "Donoso hace tal cosa" mientras que los libros funcionan al revés, se me hace que los críticos siempre están buscando clasificarle, diciendo, bueno, Donoso habla de tal aspecto de la situación sociológica, o Donoso juega de esta manera...*

JD: Yo voy a contestar que no tengo el hábito de decir, bueno, esto es imposible, o esto no es posible. Yo tengo tan poca ideología, ¿vía?, que no puedo decir, bueno, realmente la gente que se dedica a hacer crítica, digamos, científica está toda equivocada y la verdadera crítica es la crítica impresionista, eso tampoco sería mi situación... creo que en todas las críticas hay una parte de aburrimiento... notable... y una parte de *excitement*, creo que gran parte de las cosas que se han escrito sobre mí sufren de lo que los franceses llaman *l'air du temps*... está en el aire en este momento el asunto de la crítica científica, está en el aire Bajtín, todo el mundo que habla de cosas habla de la cosa carnalesca, lo lúdico... no solamente porque han leído a Bajtín o porque han leído a Huizinga, sino porque son herramientas que están en la mente de la gente y no porque mis novelas sean particularmente o lúdicas o carnalescas, sino porque es un instrumento que tienen para mirarlo todo, entonces van a ver las mías como lúdicas y carnalescas... pero si analizan a Doris Lessing, por ejemplo, que no tiene absolutamente nada de lúdico y absolutamente nada de carnalesco, pero también van a ver lo lúdico y lo carnalesco en ella porque es el instrumento que tienen para...

—*Es un poco como decir que la crítica está diciendo más sobre la crítica misma que sobre su objeto...*

JD: Por cierto, por cierto, pero los críticos no se fijan mucho en la obra literaria... en este momento están mucho más metidos con crear una crítica que con explicar, ampliar, que sé yo, hacer cualquier cosa con ... Los críticos que sí me gustan son los grandes críticos intelectuales... me gusta mucho la crítica de T.S. Eliot, por ejemplo... me gusta mucho la

crítica de Edmund Wilson, el de Lionel Trilling, incluso de Virginia Woolf me gusta mucho, la crítica de Yeats, de Pound, esa gente como críticos me gustan mucho, pero generalmente son escritores escribiendo sobre literatura más que críticos.

—*Pues, en fin de cuentas tendiendo hacia el lado del impresionismo también, ¿no?*

JD: Bueno, bastante, digamos, ilustrado...

—*Los que hacen literatura sobre la literatura...*

JD: Yo entiendo más, ciertamente, entiendo más a Tolstoy leyendo, por ejemplo, a Isaiah Berlin que leyendo a cualquier crítico que trata de analizarlo desde el punto de vista bajtiniano, por ejemplo.

—*OK. [...] ¿No cree que en cierta forma se ha visto condenado a siempre buscar el mismo camino, a ir repitiendo críticas, actitudes, quizás cambiando de situaciones pero...?*

-JD: De cambiar, un libro no se parece al antecedente... "I enjoy to stump the critics", es una cosa que me ha gustado siempre, pero no me siento un gran explorador... me siento un explorador en el sentido de que "I'm a survivor", digamos... "I have to use all of myself to keep above water".

—*¿En el plano de que hay bastantes problemas sin ir a buscarlos?*

JD: Yeah. I would define myself as a liar... I do not think of myself as a big man. I would think of myself as a very private man. And very far from power. I am not interested in power and I tend to shy away from anything which brings me into contact with power.

—*Hablaba del tono menor, privado y personal que es el suyo, y en algún momento llegó a llamar esto una limitación, creo que fue en una entrevista, no me acuerdo. ¿Es realmente una limitación personal, o más bien una cuestión de que la novela como forma ha ido buscando este estilo desde hace tiempo y se adecua mejor a este estilo, o sea que, para decirlo de otro modo, hasta cierto punto la novela es la forma que se ha desarrollado como respuesta a la necesidad o deseo de expresar estas cosas privadas?*

JD: Mira, yo creo que una de las cosas que ha sucedido en estas últimas dos décadas con la novela latinoamericana es que casi todos los escritores hemos tratado de escribir novelas imprescindibles, y yo aspiro a escribir una novela prescindible.

—*¿Y de hecho lo hace?*

JD: ¡Creo que no, porque me heriría mucho pensar que mis novelas son prescindibles!, pero quiero decir en el sentido de que de nuevo me negaría del poder y me negaría de las abstracciones... para mí la labor del escritor es una labor muy concreta, es como trabajar con barro, con pintura, una cosa muy concreta, es como si ... que lo que hago no tiene significado

o no tiene trascendencia o no tiene predicción. Creo que sí, porque creo que el encontrar una forma es darle trascendencia a un trozo de la vida, o a un trozo de la imaginación. Entonces no, entonces no, creo que ... ¿qué era la pregunta?

—*Si era no una cosa personal sino precisamente...*

JD: Creo que una de las cosas que ha sucedido en la novela latinoamericana es que el escritor era un instrumento público. Hay una gran tradición entre los escritores latinoamericanos que viene desde el siglo XIX en que los escritores se transforman en personas públicas y de que la novela es un instrumento de mejoramiento social. Es el papel no de la novela en sí, sino el papel de la novela, el papel cínico de la novela, que muchas veces importa mucho... entonces, si bien no querría perder eso completamente, me gustaría crear el otro lado.

—*Sí, pues, buscar un equilibrio es bastante difícil...*

JD: Es difícil, sí...

—*Yo tenía una pregunta también sobre eso en el sentido de que creo que algunos escritores, los que se me ocurrieron eran Fuentes y García Márquez, si tomamos este lado de la representación de una realidad específica, de un país o de una cultura, o lo que sea, esa búsqueda de una identidad de lo que se ha hablado hasta la saciedad —ellos hacen eso muchísimo más, pero en su obra esto se trata de una forma muy universal pero a la vez muy personal. O sea, toda la gente tiene esas experiencias de tener un hogar, un punto de partida, y entonces uno va evaluando esto a la luz de lo que pasa y de lo que uno va aprendiendo... pero no solamente una cosa de acá, como mirar los efectos de la Revolución Mexicana o ir mirando la Guerra de los Mil Días o lo que sea y... en su obra yo encuentro dos cosas, una cosa muy privada, eso sí, pero también más universal, quizás, porque en fin de cuentas lo histórico es menos universal, interesa más a un país...*

JD: Lo histórico es anecdótico... es una cosa como la acumulación de anécdotas, y son interesados en estar al tanto de las conexiones que tienen esas anécdotas con la realidad mayor... entonces creo que la vida privada, creo que el novelista privado tiene la capacidad de... eso es lo que llama la limitación, que no es... es una palabra con *catch*, ¿no es cierto?, porque cuando digo limitación, no digo limitación, sino que digo limitación en el sentido casi geométrico, es el que tiene una forma. Ahora, un cuadrado tiene un espacio limitado, pero puede ser de este porte, pero puede ser gigantesco también, pero a lo que me refiero yo es al

cuadrado, es al hecho de limitar un espacio cuadrado. Entonces cuando hablo de limitación es en ese sentido.

—*O sea como de una elección, más bien...*

JD: Como de elección. Y una cosa que me da una identidad que puedo manejar, que es una de las cosas tristes que ha pasado en la novela latinoamericana, es una despersonalización, esta despersonalización que existe a pesar de todas las glorias de la novela... pero hay esa cosa de vida privada, de limitación, de forma manejable, de elección de cosas, de decir esto sí, esto no, y lo que es no... yo que sé, bueno, *I'm giving certain things up*.

—*En cuanto a la novela en general, usted ha hablado de la importancia de novelas escritas en países que no son tradicionalmente productores de la novela. ¿A qué se debe esto? ¿A alguna moda por lo exótico en los editoriales? ¿O a algo más profundo, o quizás un agotamiento de la novela en Europa o en Estados Unidos?*

JD: Yo creo que sí, yo creo que hay una sensación de que en Estados Unidos, por ejemplo, hay un, decididamente, un amaneramiento de la novela. Hay un manierismo, hay un limitarse a sí mismo, esa prosa sí que gusta en Estados Unidos, de la vida absolutamente diaria, de esas cosas que... digamos, que propicia un *scene* mediocre, esos cuentos, no tanto mediocres sino más bien accesibles, ¿no es cierto?

—*Claro. Y también, no sé, evoca un poco un trabajo bien llevado a cabo, pero donde no se nota, digamos, el arte.*

JD: Claro son novelas... entonces yo diría que por un lado hay un agotamiento de la novela en estos países. No es solamente la búsqueda de cosas exóticas, es una forma de... una sabiduría en el sentido de que, bueno, "necesitamos un poquito de fertilizante".

—*That's right!. Pero también podría haber en cierta forma un cinismo por parte de los editoriales: ya llegó la novela latinoamericana, la gente está muy contenta, ahora hay que buscar un africano...*

JD: ¡Claro que sí, no hablemos de eso porque eso es una cosa que no... eso ça va sans dire, ¿no es cierto?, eso se cuenta porque todo es una maniobra editorial. Evidentemente, está agotado, la edición de... qué se yo, de los novelistas jóvenes ingleses o los franceses del *nouveau roman*, o lo que dejó el *nouveau roman* en su *wake*, entonces... claro que van a ir buscar a Timothy Mo, claro que van a ir a buscar a [...], claro que van a venir a buscar a los latinoamericanos. Y claro que van a venir a buscar....

—*Claro, Europa Oriental también.*

JD: Europa Oriental, y que van a buscar a Nadine Gordimer... Porque es otra pasión, otra manera de ver las cosas, son otras cosas las que les importan...

—*Estuve pensando un poco más en este tema de lo "parochial"... en cierta medida, un escritor puede estar intentando decir algo sobre una cosa con la cual se identifica, pero el mismo hecho de estar reflexionando sobre eso, a veces lo aleja del objeto mismo. [...] Es una cosa que se siente como de reojo, ¿sí?*

JD: También un poco lo que sucede con todos los escritores: el exilio de los escritores, cómo es necesario el exilio.

—*Claro, aunque no te vayas a ningún lado.*

JD: Claro. Hay una tradición de que todos los escritores en la vida, han vivido fuera de sus países durante largos tiempos. Eso es una cosa que no es... piensa en todos los americanos en París, piensa en los románticos ingleses en Italia, en Europa, piensa en los latinoamericanos en París o en donde sea, piensa que todas las novelas de mi generación en Latinoamérica fueron escritas fuera del país, todas las grandes novelas, todas, todas, todas, escritas fuera de aquí. Piensa en Cabrera Infante, piensa en Carlos Fuentes, piensa en García Márquez, piensa en Roa Bastos, piensa en Vargas Llosa. Pero ¿por qué? ... hay la necesidad de tener dos visiones: la ironía es como dos ópticas que usamos, que una significa la otra, entonces si no se tiene ironía, no se puede escribir.

—*Sí, pues, yo diría que tu obra no existiría sin ironía, entonces es lo central, ¿no?*

JD: Claro, es el meollo...

—*Pero tampoco se siente que se nota la presencia de las dos visiones a la vez, o sea, el truco es identificarse con un punto de vista y después...*

JD: Discutirlo.

—*O dejarlo ahí tirado... o sea...*

JD: O que la persona que lea, digamos, efectúe el proceso irónico de inversión.

[...]

—*Pero... ¿qué iba a decir? O sea el tópico de la participación del lector me hace pensar también en Casa de Campo y un comentario de que ahí se entrega todo hecho al lector... y bueno, tenemos realmente este problema en la narrativa moderna de pérdida de inocencia, digamos, por parte... por ambos lados: del escritor y del lector también... y lo que yo quería preguntar, ¿no cree que ahora existe un gran problema? Porque hubo el tiempo de la experimentación, de la vanguardia, y ahora hasta cierto punto muchos escritores quieren volver a una manera más sencilla de contar las cosas, el lector ya no confía en ellos, ya tiene*

miedo... como en Casa de Campo... bueno, ya sé que eso ya no es una cuestión de contar algo de una manera muy tradicional, pero ahí el lector no quiere recibir lo que tú le ofreces, ¡no hombre!, ¡qué va!, ¿cómo se te ocurre, no?.

JD: Bueno yo creo que eso es un poco de postmodernidad... la experimentación, la búsqueda de la realidad moral en la forma es esencial a la modernidad.

—*¿Realidad moral?*

JD: Claro, claro... pensando en términos arquitectónicos -que tú estás interesado en el fondo- la postmodernidad... en la modernidad en la arquitectura hay un planteo moral de la pureza de la forma. Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, tienen todos un proyecto de ladrillo desnudo: la falta de adornos, la falta de comentarios, de citas históricas, la cosa funcional, todos esos son comentarios morales. En la postmodernidad hay una visión del comentario moral que tiene el arte... entonces yo creo que si bien en la literatura nosotros los experimentalistas de mi generación buscamos una forma que fuera pura, una cierta pureza de la forma, sacada de la pureza en sí, tiene una carga moral muy fuerte. Yo creo que la generación nueva y lo nuevo en literatura, de Manuel Puig para acá, digamos, incluso del último Vargas Llosa, si es muy bueno o malo, pero, digamos, hay una no creencia en la moral que tenga la forma, pero hay un mensaje moral de la forma.

—*Me has contestado una pregunta ahí también... yo quería preguntarte sobre esa cuestión de la moralidad, y en cuanto a la temática, eso es una lucha contra una moralidad ya caduca, una moralidad que no sirve... pero lo que yo quería preguntar es ¿qué viene para reemplazar eso? Y a veces pensando en ese tema del temor, del miedo, de sentirse desamparado por todo lo que te han dado a la fuerza, además, es un poco eso, es casi un miedo de ir a buscar nuevos horizontes...*

JD: Yo creo que se buscan nuevos horizontes por otros lados... por el lado del *kitsch*, por ejemplo, es una búsqueda muy clara. Hay una búsqueda por el lado del... ¿cómo se llama?... del eclecticismo histórico, hay una búsqueda por el lado de la cita literaria dentro de la literatura, de la literatura sobre la literatura.

—*La intertextualidad...*

JD: Claro, la intertextualidad. Hay búsquedas por esos lados, lo que pasa es que ya la otra búsqueda como que se enfrió ya. Entonces viene la búsqueda por otro camino...

—*No me siento muy convencido por eso, porque me parece una manera de compaginar dos cosas que no son, que no se pueden combinar en cierta forma...*

—*¿Cómo?...*

—*Pues tenemos por un lado el fracaso, la derrota total de esa misma moralidad... pero, ¿por el otro lado qué tenemos? Es como una manera de ir amontonando diferentes cosas, ¿cómo puede estar sucediendo?*

JD: El postmodernismo es una montaña. Es exactamente lo que es.[...] *It's like a beach littered with different things.* Es la historia, es la chatarra, es Andy Warhol, es kitsch...

—*Quería preguntar, citando a Julian Barnes: "a quota system is to be introduced on fiction set in South America. The intention is to curb the spread of package-tour baroque and heavy irony. Ah, the propinquity of cheap life and expensive principles, of religion and banditry, of surprising honour and random cruelty. Ah, the daiquiri bird which incubates its eggs on the wing; ah, the fredonna tree whose roots grow at the tips of its branches, and whose fibres assist the hunchback to impregnate by telepathy the haughty wife of the hacienda owner; ah, the opera house now overgrown by jungle. Permit me to rap on the table and murmur 'Pass!'"*

JD: [...] Ahora, lo que pasa es que no vale la pena rechazar todas las formas, es decir, "de ahora en adelante no se hace más novela barroca latinoamericana, de ahora en adelante se va a propiciar la novela *set in the Antarctic*," ¿no? porque la novela es una cosa tan mágica que de repente cuando menos lo esperas, sale una obra maestra, entonces como que no es programable, no es programable, nada programable. Entonces ahora que el señor Barnes está hasta las bolas con todo esto no, y yo encuentro que tiene razón. Porque *it's been far too successful...* Entonces, tiene un poco de asco, ¿no? es como haberse comido veinte merengues...

—*Es como chistoso también porque hubo un tema muy pronunciado en tu obra, es esa cuestión de las modas... en fin de cuentas nos estamos riendo de nosotros mismos, estamos condenados a eso, exactamente ahí. Pero me gustó la cita esa...*

JD: Ah, sí... ¿de dónde salió eso?

—*Eso es de Flaubert's Parrot.*

[...]

—*¿Y ese interés por la psicología, por esos acontecimientos simbólicos, raros, también me parecen muy líricos al final de La misteriosa desaparición de la marquesita de Loria, o esas cosas medio sobrenaturales que estan en Veraneo ¿cómo ves esas cosas en tu obra? ¿es otra parte del juego o es como un...*

JD: No... hay cosas que..que.. ¿por qué no? De nuevo, es mi negación a ponerle límite a las cosas, mi negación a ponerle.. las cosas hasta aquí no más.... Yo no creo en eso pero...

who am I to say?... las cosas pueden tener muchos aspectos, estas cosas trascendentes, apenas atisbos, además, no se puede decir que mis novelas tengan un... ¿cómo se llama?... que se lleva una predicción de tipo metafísico, ... ¿pero quién en la vida no se ha tenido la sensación de que es más grande que lo que es...?

—Claro, o sospechar.

JD: O sospechar cualquier cosa...

—Es otra cosa, sí. Hay una mezcla interesante porque, pues, yo me fijé mucho en esas cosas al principio, digamos, comparado por ejemplo con Córtazar, uno habla de Córtazar y incluso ha llegado a notar toda una explicación basada en el Zen, o lo que sea... sobre Córtazar, donde está mucho más marcado... pero, pues eso figura en tu obra, y la gente casi nunca comenta eso...

JD: Tienes razón, tienes razón...

—Se sienten incómodos porque no saben qué hacer con eso...

JD: Claro, porque el hecho del materialismo en mi obra, digamos, no tiene lugar... *It won't dovetail...*

[...]

—Llegando a lo inevitable quería hablar un poco de lo político, porque... pues pensando en unas entrevistas que usted hizo hace tiempo donde no quería saber para nada de eso... ha vuelto a Chile, ha escrito sobre la situación, pero ¿cree que los cambios políticos en Chile van en cierta forma a agravar la situación del artista, del intelectual?... digo los cambios de ahora por el plebiscito. Porque en Europa a la gente le da la impresión de que bueno, Pinochet como mito, como símbolo, como figura, ya se jodió y las cosas van para arriba, pero lo que me dice la gente es, que, bueno, que todo queda por decidir...

JD: Es una cosa muy chilena... no hay nadie como los chilenos para hablar de política... si no pueden hablar de política no tienen nada de que hablar... entonces... la política es el tema más fácil, es lo obvio, es lo que saben todos... es el único tema del cual está diariamente informado uno, todo el mundo está diariamente informado en política...

—Y todo el mundo puede meter mano ahí...

JD: Todo el mundo puede meter mano ahí. Ahora... ¿cómo te puedo contar eso?... de nuevo con mi posición frente al poder, desde mi posición tan... tan... riñosa...de... de lo que es la política. Creo honradamente que la cosa va para mejor. Creo que las cosas se están complicando... las cosas políticas en Chile siempre han sido complicadas... y siempre han sido más que complicadas, enredadas. Entonces, no se acuerdan, digamos, que antes había

una camara de diputados en el senado con veinte partidos políticos... y que coexistían... y la gente se peleaba y se tiraba los libros por encima de la cabeza, en el senado. Y se insultaba y se insultaba a la familia, a la madre, y a la mujer... en el senado. No vamos a llegar a una planicie en el que se va a ver el horizonte y todos vamos a reír allá porque está el sol, ¡no! es una cosa completamente distinta...va a seguir la pelea, se va a pelear, *a sort of mad scramble on the street corner...*

—*Pero ¿sabes que tienes un papel en eso, entonces?... ¿o no?*

JD: Yo no quiero tener un papel eso...

—*Porque es cuestión del poder...*

JD: No me interesa acercarme a eso... me interesa cumplir con mi deber de ciudadano [...]

Appendix Two:

Isamu Noguchi's *Undine* (1925):



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