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Rhetorical Imperialism

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A Thesis

Presented to

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In Partial Fulfillment

of The Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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By

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### Abstract

José Donoso's *The Obscene Bird of Night* is often described as a grotesque labyrinth of symbols and images representative of the Latin Boom literary moment. The novel's purposefully ambiguous construction opens itself up to two opposing readings that reveal discrepancies and conflicts in postcolonial and globalization studies, and as such, my project explores both sides of this. Initially proposing a reading of the novel as an assertion of marginal identity onto the world stage, ultimately upholding the indigenous native as a source of strength. Here, the novel's appropriation of the folklore works to subversively challenge imperial and global power structures through the native's own narrative. Ultimately, the second half of the project proposes an alternative view, understanding of the novel's cultural appropriation as an exploitative commodification of marginal identity. Here, the novel privileges imperial power by creating a narrative that functions as a continuation of imperial ideology and control through narrative. Both readings, however, work to understand the power of narratives and rhetoric to uphold or alter global power structures. Ultimately, the novel assists in revealing a disjuncture between the rhetoric and practice of contemporary narrative, establishing the paradox of postcolonial thought to perpetuate that which it works to condemn.

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## Chapter One: Centering The Margins

Conversations surrounding *The Obscene Bird of Night* tend to focus on the grotesque and monstrous imagery, often citing the work as a labyrinth of vulgar spirituality, central to the formation of the Latin Boom. It is easy to become distracted with the novel's unapologetic construction of its violent imagery; however, closer readings reveal the novel to be a beautiful projection of indigenous folklore and myth onto the global stage.

Originally published in Spanish in 1970, this novel has been heralded as Donoso's greatest work and is seen as a cornerstone of the Latin Boom literary moment. First published in Santiago, Chile, the novel relies heavily on the folklore and myth of Chile's indigenous population, the Mapuche. Working with the myths of monsters, witchcraft, and marginalized struggle, Donoso builds a world entirely governed by the folklore of the Mapuche, and projects their culture onto the world stage. The history of the Mapuche is riddled with stories of oppression and struggle against Spanish colonialism, a dictator, and even democratic leadership. In response, Donoso creates an alternate world, grounded in Magical Realism that subverts these power structures. This world is not only governed by the principles of indigenous folklore, but it is also one where the native is upheld as a source of strength and autonomy with the power to overthrow his colonial oppressor.

In the face of increasing globalization, discussions of a shift toward a single homogenous identity are becoming more relevant in a contemporary understanding of world cultures. Many see this shift toward hybridity as a progressive step on the way to global equality; however, most view this as a threat to the smaller and more marginalized cultures of the world that might be lost to the dominant world cultures. José Donoso's *The Obscene Bird of Night* functions to resist this threat by projecting the smaller, marginalized cultural identity of the Mapuche onto the world stage, forcing it into the national identity of Chile's historical narrative. Through this framework, the novel works to preserve the folklore, and ultimately, culture, of the Mapuche in written record. And it is through this understanding that we can see the novel as a subversive act of narrative resistance to both historical colonial oppression, and neocolonial acts of cultural subjugation.

## Reading Indigenous Myth as Literature

Before we begin to understand the larger function of this novel, we must first understand the incorporation of folklore into the myth. Donoso's text is intricately built upon a foundation of Mapuche folklore to construct the plot. And a few of the most widely circulated stories of monsters who permeate Mapuche society are incorporated to serve as the guiding logic of Donoso's literary world. The novel focuses on the life of Humberto Penalzoza as he struggles to find his place and identity working as the janitor of a Catholic orphanage. The plot follows his relationships with the nuns of the orphanage and its aristocratic owners, the Azcoitia family. As Humberto, also known as Mudito, navigates his role in this society, he slowly turns into the various monsters that plague and govern this world. Through his embodiment of these monsters, Humberto gains power and control over the Azcoitia's patriarch, Don Jeronimo, ultimately bringing the family lineage to an end.

A seemingly inexplicable piece of Humberto's identity struggle, which begins early in the text, is the confusing shifts between genders. Throughout the book, Humberto's identity seems to shift from being genderless and castrated to being the only virile male with the power to impregnate women. Humberto's seamless shift between genders throughout the novel reflects the common theme in Mapuche culture for Shamans and tribal leaders to become gender-neutral, manipulating their gender for

ceremony. Ana Mariella Bacigalupo is a Cultural Anthropologist who has worked extensively with the culture and practices of the Mapuche people. Discussing the journey of a Mapuche Shaman, Bacigalupo describes the process of this gender manipulation as a Shaman: “Her identity challenges conventional notions of transvestism, transgenderism, and homosexuality linked to a sexed body and offers new perspectives on the relationship between personhood, gender and sexuality” (Bacigalupo 3). Just as the Shaman challenges gender differences Humberto seems to challenge the roles throughout his life. Bacigalupo continues, “even normative gender identities are multiple and discontinuous and that transvestite gender performances are not always parodic” (3). Donoso plays with this concept of a ‘normative gender identity’ and uses it to contextualize Humberto’s role as a cultural representation throughout the novel. Humberto’s identity constantly shifts from being cast as feminine in the beginning as a witch, being castrated by Don Jeronimo and Ines, and then impregnating Ines with a masculine identity. This shift among identities becomes crucial to the depiction of Humberto as the Mapuche shaman.

Another critical mythical legend prominent within Donoso’s story is the figure of the Imbunche, or sometimes Invunche. Ingrained in the mythology of Mapuche legend, the Imbunche is a speechless and senseless creature of witchcraft that haunts the children of Chile and the characters in the novel. This creature becomes critical to the foundation of the story, as Donoso casts Humberto’s struggles with identity as his journey to

becoming the Imbunche. This monster is described in Chilean folklore as a

‘Master of Hide’...that inhabits a cave that can be accessed only through a tunnel going under a lake. The Invunche never leaves its lair but has a minion...that lures young girls swimming or getting water from the edge of the lake. These victims are then abducted and taken under the lake to the Invunche, who drains them of their blood like a vampire. (Rose 190)

The Imbunche figure changes in character throughout the progression of the Mapuche folklore; however, it remains a monstrous image of evil. Also, it is almost always linked to children and witchcraft. The Smithsonian study of Chilean folklore presents a slightly different, yet hauntingly similar account of the monster. In this account, the Imbunche is created from a child through manipulation of witchcraft:

When the Sect needs a new Invunche, the Council of the Cave orders a Member to steal a boy child from six months to a year old. The Deformer, a permanent resident of the Cave, starts work at once. He disjoints the arms and legs and the hands and feet. Then begins the delicate task of altering the position of the head. Day after day, and for hours at a stretch, he twists the head with a tourniquet until it has rotated through an angle of 180 degree, that is until the child can look straight down the line of its own vertebrae. (Dash)

Dash continues to describe the process of turning the child into the Invunche and discusses the speech function and intelligence of the monster: “Neither the chivato nor the Invunche received any sort of education; indeed it was said that neither ever acquired human speech in all the years they served... the Committee of the Cave” (Dash). This depiction of the Invunche is strikingly similar, not only to Donoso’s discussion of the Invunche in the novel, but also to Humberto’s characterization as a deaf/mute.

Donoso incorporates this figure into the foundation of his novel and ultimately characterizes the journey of Humberto as the child being turned into the Imbunche. The discussion of the Imbunche in Donoso's novel recreates the sect of witches with the nuns. The council of witches scheme to steal the baby from the pregnant orphan, Iris, and turn it into the Imbunche. This version of the Imbunche is similar to the various accounts surrounding the monster; however, its characterization differs slightly to incorporate Catholic beliefs of Sainthood. The narrator outlines the purpose of the Imbunche for the casa:

It's the only way to bring up a baby to be a saint, you have to bring him up so that he'll never, not even when he grows up to be a man, leave his room, and nobody will even know he exists...The *imbunche*. All sewed up- eyes, mouth, anus, sex organ, nostrils, ears, hands, legs...Once all his body's orifices were closed up and his arms and legs trapped in the strait jacket of not knowing how to use them, yes, the old women would graft themselves onto the child in place of his limbs and organs and faculties, ripping out his eyes and his voice and robbing him of his hands, rejuvenation their own weary organs in the process and living a life other than the one they'd already lived, ripping out everything in order to renew themselves by means of the theft. (Donoso 48)

The child in this image is manipulated and mutilated into becoming the Imbunche. And the council of witches will then work to steal powers from the child, just as in the original folklore: "That's why Brigida cooked up this scheme to rob the child Iris carries of its eyes and hands and legs; they want to hoard it all in a great common pool of power they'll use someday, who knows when or for what purpose" (Donoso 49). Throughout

the novel, this image of the Imbunche haunts Humberto's journey; and although the Imbunche and Humberto seem to be separate characters throughout, his characterization as deaf and dumb, disfigured, and sexless hint at his fate as the Imbunche.

In the end, Humberto is characterized as the child the witches have coveted, and one of the final chapters discusses the process of the council of witches turning Humberto into the Imbunche and for what purpose:

They put me inside the sack. The four of them kneel around me and sew up the sack. I can't see. I'm blind. And others come over with another sack and put me in it too and sew me up again, droning prayers I can barely hear, so that I'll perform the miracle when I will it...I feel another wrapping of darkness coming up around me, another layer of silence that muffles the voices I can barely make out, being deaf, blind, dumb, a small sexless package, all sewn up and tied with strips of cloth and strings, sack and more sacks...imploring me because they know that I'm powerful now that I'm finally going to perform the miracle.  
(Donoso 423)

Donoso constructs an image of the Imbunche that is inherently based on the original myth of the monster; however, he has altered it to include traditional Christian symbols of sainthood, prayer, and miracle. The narrator also incorporates biblical language into his discussions of the Imbunche, including the words "blaspheme" (413), "savior," and "holiness" (412). In the Mapuche origin of the myth, the Imbunche is simply a product of witchcraft and evil; In Donoso's text, the Imbunche is blended with Christian, specifically Catholic myth, and becomes a source of salvation and hope. This ultimately creates a hybrid identity between local folkloric tale and Catholicism that is common to a

cosmopolitan Chilean identity.

Similar to the use of the Imbunche, Donoso also explores the myth of the Chonchón, or a “group of evil supernatural monsters or vampires in the folk beliefs of the Arucanian<sup>1</sup> people of Chile” (Rose 80). The Chonchón is commonly depicted as a human head that flies through the sky at night to bring bad luck to the people who see it:

When manifested in visible form, they are described as resembling human heads with enormous fangs and ears so enormous that they are used as wings. The Chonchónyi seek and prey upon humans who are old or sick. They wait until these people are left alone on moonless nights; then they flap down, leap upon them, and drain their life away. There are some secret ways in which these monsters may be defeated; these involve reciting certain chants and prayers, making the sign of a Solomon’s seal in the earth, or laying clothing out in their path in a certain manner. According to one story, after a Chonchónyi had been dealt with by someone who knew a secret chant, an enormous birdlike creature fell from the night sky. The villagers immediately decapitated it and gave the head to a dog; then the body was thrown on the roof. The following day the dog’s body was horrifyingly swollen, and the village gravedigger reported the burial of a headless person. (Rose 80)

It (What does “it” refer to?) is often described in connection with a vampire, and exhibits similar traits. And like the Imbunche, it begins as a human who has been transformed into the monster.

These depictions of the vampire-like bird and the dog resonate throughout Donoso’s text. Similar to the Imbunche, the Chonchón seems to haunt the characters and blur the lines between beast and human. In the beginning of the story, a giant paper mâché head is used to trick Iris into sleeping with various men. This head is depicted as

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<sup>1</sup> The Mapuche are also often referred to as the Araucanian people.

the Chonchón and mirrors the monster's origin in witchcraft and representation of evil spirits: "When Romualdo started taking off the head, Iris howled, '*Chonchón, chonchón!* Don't let him fly off! Witch, evil one!'" (Donoso 72). Neighborhood children eventually destroy the head and it becomes conflated with the identity of the narrator in this scene:

My head flies through the air, Anieto catches it, he tosses me and Antonio catches me, he too throws me, I fly, I fly my sinewy ears beating the air above the kids, who play with me like a huge ball. . . Iris screams in terror: the *chonchon*, it's the *chonchon*, Romualdo's a witch and he turned my Giant into a *chonchon*. (Donoso 87)

Just as the original myth depicts the head as falling from the sky and the creature being killed, the Giant's head falls to the earth and is dismantled. The Giant's head becomes a crucial image in the novel for the masculinity of Humberto and Don Jeronimo, as well as an omen of destruction. Once the kids in the neighborhood destroy the head, there is rampant death and mutilation that resonates throughout the rest of the novel.

The image of the Chonchòn also becomes conflated in this scene with the identity of the narrator, Humberto. The narrator speaks in the first person as if he is the head being tossed by the kids. The speaker shifts to include both Humberto and the Chonchòn head, suggesting the two are one. The image of the dog eating the head of the Chonchòn after it falls from the sky is also mirrored in Donoso's account of the myth, and this dog continues the ambiguity of Humberto's identity. Throughout the novel, the Yellow Bitch stalks the characters. In one of the earlier scenes, the dog interrupts one of the sexual

encounters of Iris, also named Gina, and a man wearing the Giant's head. The man describes,

She laughed the whole time because a dog got into the Ford and watched us from the window and then got out and licked her leg and started tugging at my pants... Then when I thought I had pinned her good, with her panties down and her legs open, because we thought the dog had gone away, it showed up again, looking at us from the window, like it was laughing... That yellow bitch dog's always trailing her around and I hear it loused it up for other guys too. (Donoso 82)

In this scene, the appearance of the dog is also conflated with the image of the Chonchòn. Throughout the story, the appearance of one almost always signals the appearance of the other. The novel's depiction of the monster and the dog reflects the closeness of the previous myth where a dog is believed to have eaten the head of the monster. That moment inextricably links the monster and the dog, and Donoso carries this throughout his text.

In addition to Humberto's alternating identity as the Chonchòn and the Imbunche, Donoso further complicates his identity with the image of the Yellow Bitch. A scene at the end of the novel depicts Humberto as becoming the dog and forcing the witches to chase him: "I'm always the yellow bitch, I can't shake her off, I'm forced to make her run through forests and down the roads and over the countryside...I won, I won. The yellow bitch won again because she can't lose" (Donoso 362). Humberto is a shape shifter throughout the novel and embodies the identity of the various monsters. He

inhabits an ambiguous identity as all of the monsters in the novel, casting him as the figure with the most power over the other characters. All of these monsters originate in folklore as representations of evil and are all signs of impending trauma. Humberto's embodiment of all of these essentially alters his perception with the reader. It then becomes impossible to view him as the marginalized and abused janitor, forcing us to see him a source of turbulence, evil, and change. Here, Donoso creates a world where the subjugated native embodies the indigenous folklore as a tool to becoming the most powerful figure in society.

## Donoso and Subversion

Many have seen *The Obscene Bird* as a reaction to the turbulent history facing Chile in the late 1960s, and many commonly discuss Donoso's fervent opposition to Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship with his writing. As Donoso was an outspoken critic of the unstable Chilean government, self-exiling after the publication of *The Obscene Bird*, many argue that all of Donoso's writing should be understood as political and subversive. Critic Philip Swanson takes this view of the novel, categorizing *The Obscene Bird* as an act of resistance and "one of the classics of the boom...where the novel's tortuous, distorted structure functions as a mirror image of plastic symbol of chaos and terror of existence" (520). He sees *The Obscene Bird* as the last example of the grotesque subversion before a direct shift in both the Boom and Donoso's body of work. For Swanson, the novel's incorporation into the moment of the Boom situates him as an author critical of imperial Latin American power structures. As the Boom is commonly seen as a challenge to the traditions of the Western canon, the assumption of the novels contained in the boom is that they are also working to challenge the politics of imperialism. Thus, these assumptions lead to Donoso's work as being commonly seen as anti-colonial.

Critic Michael Ryan similarly views Donoso as a subversive writer, working to challenge the dominance of religion in thought. He states:

Reading the novel makes belief in the spiritual life impossible, unless it be the

spiritual life of witchcraft, black miracles, and normal, perverse, human demonology. Total skepticism, Donoso has remarked, is one of his intentions; skepticism toward religion, reality, class, and especially towards the unity of the personality. (Ryan 75)

For Ryan, the novel's focus on witchcraft and alternate spirituality works against societal constructions of religious identity, while simultaneously categorizing Donoso as a champion of resistance against all social norms. Juan Carlos Lértora takes this analysis a step further, arguing the quintessential Latin Boom writers, Márquez and Cortázar, all embody this skepticism, characterizing the Boom as a genre of subversion and resistance:

From the outset, Donoso's narrative fiction has challenged the institutions and conventions that regulate language and determines our response to it...In Donosian fiction characters who defend (and believe in) an apparent order of the world are relentlessly destroyed. Tragedy is brought on by the search for rational meaning in a world dominated by instinct and irrationality. (Lértora 260)

For Lértora, Donoso's texts do more than simply challenge the conventions of social existence, like class, race, or religion; they create a world that systematically dismantles the structures of society and power.

Flora González Mandri similarly associates Donoso's work and the boom within the context of challenging traditional forms of social narrative and rhetoric. Citing Donoso's own discussions of his work, she establishes that Donoso believed in the Boom's power to subversively challenge the norm:

Although there are countless definitions of what constituted the 'Boom' and who should be included, Donoso himself defines it as a group of writers whose works

abandoned a mimetic desire to represent the geography and idiom of their individual countries. (Mandri 14)

Donoso's own definition of the boom as a break with tradition echoes the endless criticism viewing Donoso and other authors of the boom as subversive.

These critics all view Donoso as a progressive writer, working to challenge the validity of social aspects such as social class, economic power, and cultural subjugation. And in this context, it is possible to read the novel as a piece of literature that stands in defense of marginalized cultures, like the Mapuche. If we read the novel as such, the use of the Mapuche folklore and culture as the foundation for the plot of the novel becomes a preservation of the culture, rather than an objectification.

The novel then becomes an interesting example of culture and nationalism in the context of the Mapuche struggles with colonialism, modern dictatorship, and an increasingly globalized world of hybrid and homogenized culture. Thus, Donoso thrusts the traditions of the Mapuche into the discourse of global literature and culture as a resistance to external forms of hegemony. This ultimately projects upon the world a new form of multiculturalism and indigenous inclusion into the world culture. Pheng Cheah's "World Against Globe" establishes the ambiguity of the term "world literature" and functions to understand the place of transcultural borders for literature. He argues for an inclusion of these texts into the discourse:

For example, one must examine the global production of Western cultures and literatures, particularly from the perspectives of empire and postcoloniality, and

include the literatures of formerly colonized regions written in European languages. The comparative enterprise should also take into account postcolonial literatures or orature in non-European vernacular languages in a study of transcolonialism. (Cheah 304)

Donoso answers this call to project marginal cultures into the discourse of global literature, reacting against the Eurocentric foundation of comparative literature. And for Cheah, this leads to the emergence of a diverse global consciousness.

Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* works within the confines of postcolonial discourse to discuss the importance of cultural identity and expressions in newly independent countries. He also discusses a crucial goal of postcolonial discourse is to act as resistance to all forms of cultural, economic, and political hegemony. He asserts the form of the novel to be the key form of cultural expression, and an important piece of this resistance:

I have looked especially at cultural forms like the novel, which I believe were immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences...I consider it *the* aesthetic object whose connection to the expanding societies of Britain and France is particularly interesting to study. (Said "Culture" xii)

For Said, the novel is the ultimate expression of culture, and if we replace his emphasis on the culture of Western powers, we can begin to understand the aesthetic value of Donoso's text to the cultural representation of Chile. Said continues, "Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that" (Said "Culture" xiii).

Humberto's journey to becoming the Imbuche is ultimately a struggle to find, understand, and accept his identity; and in Humberto's case, the reliance on Indigenous myth reflects Donoso's desire as a citizen of a former colonial country to recapture the previous cultural identity and stand against the worldly image of a homogenous identity. Said explains:

In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state, this differentiates 'us' from 'them,' almost always with some degree of xenophobia... These 'returns' accompany rigorous codes of intellectual and moral behavior that are opposed to the permissiveness associated with such relatively liberal philosophies as multiculturalism and hybridity. (xiii)

Donoso's novel subverts these ideals and projects the Mapuche culture and Chilean identity against the concerns of nationalism. The novel, then, functions as a return to the Mapuche folklore of the past, bringing it into the forefront of modern Chilean literature. Ultimately, this creates a form of resistance to this hybridity, and ultimately to the hegemony of global influence.

Homi Bhabha's concerns about what it means to be postcolonial become increasingly more relevant with these discussions of cultural projection. For Bhabha, overcoming the colonial power and inhabiting the postcolonial space begins with resistance. And the practice of utilizing narrative to respond to these powers and rewrite the history from the colonial perspective is a powerful form of resistance. For Bhabha, moving past colonial power means inhabiting a space, he calls, the beyond:

Being in the 'beyond,' then, is to inhabit an intervening space as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell in the beyond is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to reinscribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality. (10)

Existing in the beyond means moving past oppression, but also working in the past to correct the cultural history that was seemingly lost during imperialism:

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living. (Bhabha 10)

Existing in the beyond means working in a revisionary time, and for Bhabha, the strongest form of resistance against hegemonic world power is the revising and publication of narrative. Writing in response to the traditional narratives portrayed through imperialism becomes a necessity for Bhabha. This process pays respects to the history of those who have been affected by colonialism, by reaffirming the cultural identity that had previously been oppressed.

Further, the need to reaffirm cultural identity through narrative becomes a pervasive necessity in the face of a globalized world. A common concern when discussing cultural hybridity and globalization is the fear that world cultures are becoming subsumed into a single identity:

The most common interpretations of globalization are the idea that the world is becoming more uniform and standardized, through a technological, commercial, and cultural synchronization emanating from the West, and that globalization is tied up in modernity. (Pieterse 65)

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the concern of a single, homogenous identity is not unwarranted. Many within discussions of culture argue that smaller cultures, like that of the Mapuche, will be lost within the global influence. Here, it is not enough to assert a cultural identity in the face of colonial or governmental authority. A homogenous global identity threatens the existence of a culture, and thus, texts like Donoso's function to push back against traditional colonial power, but also this globalized threat. Thus, *The Obscene Bird* not only creates a novel that asserts indigenous culture as dominant and powerful, it also functions to preserve the culture through narrative. In an interview with Donoso, he echoes this process of preservation. He argues that authors must serve this purpose, ““to do with preserving human qualities such as the faculty for understanding, and for measuring and balancing. The writer's role has to do with conserving pleasure, and knowledge for knowledge's sake” (62). The novel preserves the knowledge of this culture into the written record, asserting its power against the threat of homogeneity.

Political philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri echo Bhabha's belief in the power of re-writing narrative; however, they also insert themselves into the

conversation of a homogenous global identity, arguing that it would serve a larger role in the global grab for power. For Hardt and Negri, resistance is also embodied through countering narratives, and these narratives help to challenge the threat of centralized world power. In their theories, global powers are working to construct a system of power structures, through which they are establishing a global empire. And resistance to this power comes from movement throughout different cultures and narrative. The multitude, or the body of subjects who work to counter the power of the Empire, do so through a construction of their own reality and their own worlds:

When the multitude works, it produces autonomously and reproduces the entire world of life. Producing and reproducing autonomously means constructing a new ontological reality. In effect, by working, the multitude produces itself a singular singularity that is a reality produced by cooperation, represented by the linguistic community, and developed by the movements of hybridization. (Hardt & Negri 88)

The multitude gains authority to create its own world and power structures through the reproduction and manipulation of language. Through language and the production of narrative, it becomes possible for the multitude to challenge the power structures that have previously restricted their autonomy with similar control over language. Thus, if we read these two theories of historical revision and linguistic resistance together, it becomes clear how Donoso's text directly challenges the systems of power responsible for limiting the autonomy of the Mapuche. Further, looking outside the example of Latin America

literature to challenge imperial ideology, another subset of resistance becomes clear. The novel does not simply function as an example of a colonial power writing against its colonial center, it also situates the discussions from the bottom to the top.

It is important to also recognize that power structures, like class and social position that exist within the colonized subject. Thus, while Spain, the Catholic Church, and other contemporary global powers may be exerting control over Chile, the Chilean government and aristocracy also works to exert control over the Mapuche. Texts like Donoso's function to situate the argument against the larger centers of power as existing from the bottom levels of these societies.

Robert Young believes that previous theories of postcolonialism fall short of understanding these power dynamics, and become less effective as a form of resistance when they do not include discussions of the subaltern identity. Young uses the example of Gandhi to understand the willingness to exclude subaltern or indigenous identity in contemporary discussions about agency and postcolonialism:

The historical legacy of the liberation struggles has been to foreground the later resort to a politics of violent revolution, represented by Fanon, over Gandhi's earlier non-violent resistance and, it could be added, resistance to all forms of conflict, including those of class and gender. (Young 337)

For Young, these additional identities of class and gender are continually overshadowed with discussions of a national identity. Discussions of postcolonial resistance typically

involve binarily opposed national identities; for example the Spanish Colonial identity, vs. Chilean. However, for Young, the actual issue stems from the way the smaller identities involved in the resistance clash with the nationalistic identity; for example, the Chilean vs. the Mapuche.

Postcolonial feminist writer Gayatri Spivak works to understand similar questions of marginality and agency. The issue of class and social status within a postcolonial society becomes an issue when looking at structures of power:

The colonial subject is seen as emerging from those parts of the indigenous elite that have come to be loosely described as 'bourgeois nationalist.' The Subaltern Studies group seems to me to be revising this general definition and its theorization by proposing at least two things: first, that the moment (s) of change be pluralized plotted as confrontations rather than transition (they would thus be seen in relation to histories of domination and exploitation rather than within the great modes-of-production narrative) and, second, that such changes are signaled or marked by a functional change in sign-systems. (Spivak "Deconstructing Historiographies 205)

Spivak points to a shift in postcolonial studies. Where previous postcolonial theories have failed to understand how change and resistance has been largely implemented from the top. And once again, the vehicle for this shift is the control over language and narrative. Those who hold an elevated standing or higher levels of education have driven the majority of the field, while little has been written in regard to the marginalized groups in these societies.

For Spivak, the question returns to discussions of conflicting narratives:

This is not to describe ‘the way things really were’ or to privilege the narrative of history as imperialism as the best version of history. It is rather, to offer an account of how an explanation and narrative of reality was established as the normative one. (Spivak “Subaltern Speak” 25)

For Spivak, the definition of a subaltern identity is inherently grounded in the resistance against dominant narratives. Subaltern studies works to change discussions of global power as challenging all previous narratives of dominance. In this definition, I believe, we can classify Donoso’s *Obscene Bird* as not only an anti-colonial resistance narrative, but also as a subaltern piece of fiction that usurps traditional postcolonial theory to include all levels of resistance. The text’s assertion of the powerful native over the Colonial hegemony and the Chilean aristocracy suggests it challenges all normative realities to create its own. Donoso’s text shifts the perspective of the colonial subject to that of the most marginalized members of society. Humberto is an Indian janitor of the orphanage, who is presumed in the beginning to be deaf and mute. He is the quintessential image of the subaltern colonial subject. However, Donoso constructs his identity as the power powerful by telling the story through Humberto’s perspective. Thus, Donoso creates a world that is depicted and constructed entirely from the perspective of a subaltern colonial subject. Thus, while many debate whether the Subaltern have been given the agency and ability to speak for themselves in the postcolonial world, the character of Humberto seizes that authority and answers with an undeniable affirmation.

## Mapuche History of Struggle

Mapuche history depicts a constant struggle for sovereignty against global threats, war, and domestic rejections of their practices and culture. The Mapuche tribe is a group of rural, mountain dwelling people in southern Chile, parts of Argentina, and Patagonia. Their history of struggle for sovereignty extends far beyond the reaches of traditional historical accounts, extending into, and reforming, the myth and folklore of the region. These mythic accounts and folkloric figures have been shaped by their history to allegorically present their history in a way traditional historical narrative falls short. The spiritual beliefs and subsequent folklore it embodies are the Mapuche resistance and response to their subjugation.

Bacigalupo's article, "The Mapuche Man Who Became a Woman Shaman: Selfhood, Gender Transgression, and Competing Cultural Norms," she discusses the history of the Mapuche peoples as troubled and constantly facing external threat: "Mapuche history is punctuated by Spanish colonialism, missionization by Catholic priests, resistance to Chilean national projects of assimilation and development, and the incorporation and resignification of Chilean majority discourses" (Bacigalupo 441). These struggles have shaped the histories and myth of the Mapuche people, and continue to shape representations of their culture.

The Mapuche have been consistently disenfranchised and trapped on the bottom

of the state's power structure. The history of the Mapuche' struggle against the state intensified during Spanish colonialism and continue until today:

Once accomplished geurilla warriors who resisted the Incas and Spaniards, the Mapuche were finally defeated by Chilean armies in 1884 after Chile's independence from Spain. These armies seized the Mapuche's territories and massacred their people. The survivors were placed on reservations with small plots of eroded land in the Mapuche heartland...The landless Mapuche now have to work as wage laborers for farmers or forestry companies or migrate to the cities, where they become impoverished secondary citizens...The Mapuche suffered further assimilation and expropriation of their land under Pinochet's dictatorship. (Bacigalupo 503)

Throughout the many changes to Chile's government and leadership, the Mapuche have continuously suffered as subservient members of Chilean society. Each government, through colonial powers, dictatorships, and democracies have all struggled with assimilating and containing the Mapuche.

One of the ways these various governments have attempted to contain the Mapuche in Chilean society has been to romanticize the culture. Joanna Crow's "The Mapuche in Modern Chile: A Cultural History", argues the Mapuche are often romanticized as the embodiment of Chile's cultural history. Idealized images of the Mapuche tend to appear in travel brochures and political propaganda. Discussing late 1800's photography of the Mapuche, just before they were removed from their land, Crow believes these images were cast with Euro-centric ideals of the native Indian:

Together, they portray a romanticized, rural idyll – inhabited by an imagined mixture of bellicose Arucanian warrior of colonial times and the tamed Indian of

the present – that was destined to disappear as the Chilean nation marched toward ‘progress and modernization. In a sense, such photographs erased indigenous historical agency. And yet, at the same time, the Mapuche people photographed here were actively partaking in the performance of indigenous identity... No one could miss the studio setting and the European garden-like background of some of these prints. (Crow 2-3)

These images mark the beginning of a recorded history of the Mapuche. As Crow is concerned, the history, then, is shaped and contextualized, from the beginning, as a Eurocentric ideal of the Indian, rather than an authentic portrayal of their culture and struggles.

Crow continues to discuss the history of the Mapuche as being shaped by a history of rejection and displacement, both by Spanish colonialism and Independent Chilean politics. Once again, Crow points to the romanticized images of colonialism as an instigator of rejection:

The romantic images of the Mapuche, which emerged during the colonial period and were reinforced during the early independence years, endured well into the twentieth century. Most existing scholarship suggests that the heroic Araucanian warrior had disappeared from official discourse by the late nineteenth century, and that Chilean state authorities were highly racist in their attitude toward and treatment of contemporary Mapuche. (Crow 23)

The issue for Crow surrounding these depictions of the Mapuche centers on their misrepresentation and appropriation by the governments that continually oppress them. Presented under the guise of appreciation, this fetishizing of the culture is merely an attempt to control the population. Bacigalupo similarly discusses these attempts, and

believes these images ultimately harm the culture:

Since colonial times, Chileans have dealt with Mapuche in any of three primary ways: by ‘folklorizing’ them, by marginalizing them, and by attempting to assimilate them... Each approach involved its own set of stereotypes of Mapuche, particularly of *machi*.<sup>2</sup> The negative images that gave rise to and were created by the marginalization of the Mapuche – that they are barbaric, ignorant, dirty, and so forth – are the same images that assimilationists aspire to overturn by educating the Mapuche, de-Indianizing them, and converting them to Catholicism. (Bacigalupo 506)

Bacigalupo is discussing the creation of a false narrative surrounding the Mapuche that ultimately justifies the oppression of their populations. Whether the narrative surrounding the Mapuche is a Eurocentric, romanticized image of strength and masculinity, or their depiction as uncivilized heathens who require salvation, these narratives have formed lasting histories that lead to objectification and oppression.

These histories of displacement and rejection have become a crucial piece of the overall historical representation of the Mapuche tribe and their legacy in Chilean culture. The darkness of these oppressions and struggles can be seen throughout the myths and folklore that comprise the Mapuche tradition.

As in the majority of world cultures, the Mapuche religion and cultural practice centers around a structure of myth and legend, depicting their histories through allegory. The majority of Mapuche myth and folklore is based in depictions of magic, witchcraft, and monsters. A large reliance on the authority of shamanic practice and ancient

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<sup>2</sup> Mapuche Shaman

spirituality dominate the lives of Mapuche populations. Bacigalupo's text "The Creation of a Mapuche Sorcerer" follows the construction of a Mapuche shaman and his subsequent condemnation and removal from the practice. For Bacigalupo, the various myths and depictions of sorcery are directly reflective of the turbulent history of the Mapuche people: "*Kalkutan*, or sorcery, reflects the Mapuche people's historical struggles and contemporary experiences. Beliefs about and representations of sorcery have been shaped and constrained by local, social, and religious norms" (Bacigalupo 319). The history and evolution of these myths is inexplicably connected to the emergence of Catholicism, introduced by Spanish missionaries:

Mapuche sorcery is tied closely to the history of Spanish colonialism, missionizing by Catholic priests... The destructive powers of colonization are still expressed through the Mapuche's belief in two evil *wekufe* spirits – the *Witranalwe*, a Spanish man mounted on a horse, and his blond wife, *añchümalleñ* – who suck Mapuche blood and identity dry and bring illness, misfortune, and death. (Bacigalupo 320)

The misrepresentation of their culture and the oppression under Spanish colonialism has infiltrated the Mapuche folklore, ultimately creating a counter narrative to those proposed by Chile's various political powers.

The figure of the *Witranalwe* also finds a place in Donoso's *Obscene Bird*. The figure of Don Jeronimo Azcoitia, the patriarch of the aristocratic family, takes on the foreboding image of this legend. In the story, the *Acoitias* are closely linked with the

Catholic Church's presence in Chile, as well as one of the wealthiest families in the country: "The Chaplaincy founded by the father of the lay sister whose beatification Inés tried to promote in Tome has kept the Casa in the Axcoitia family for a century and a half" (Donoso 35). The family is a direct representation of an external Colonial power. The beginning of the novel tells the story of how the family obtained their status, and this family constructs them as an extension of imperial power: "This story, popular throughout the entire country, originated in the region south of the Maule, where the Azcoitias have been feudal lords since colonial times" (Donoso 31). It is then assumed the family received their power and status as a representation of Spanish colonialism, rather than Chilean. The Axcoitias do not see themselves as governed by the folklore of the Mapuche that dominates control over the world contained in the novel; instead, they answer to the authority of the Catholic Church, whose presence is also a direct representation of Spanish colonial power in Chile. Throughout the novel Don Jeronimo subjects Humberto to various tortures and manipulation, and is easily cast as the evil figure of the Witranalwe who is meant to bring destruction and death. In the beginning of the novel, Humberto has nightmares about what will happen to him inside the Casa:

Frightened to death, covering my mouth with one hand and holding my throat with the other, I ran down the street that my voice has turned into an abyss filled with the face of people who all resembled Don Jeronimo...and then they'd take away my keys, the ones I use to lock myself in here so that no one will catch or find me out, yes, they'd call up the Archbishop and he'd get in touch with Don Jeronimo to come and get me...as if I'd forgotten that Dr. Azula's going to gouge out my eyes and keep them alive and seeing, in a special jar, to be turned over to

Don Jeronimo and then, only then will Don Jeronimo forget about me and let me return to the trash heap where I belong. (Donoso 64)

The constant repetition of Don Jeronimo's name in association with a fear of his authority is directly reflexive of the myth of the Witranalwe. Humberto has internalized a belief that he belongs in a trash heap in contrast to Don Jeronimo's authority, mirroring the fear and relationship between colonized and colonizer.

Humberto's fear, however, slowly evolves throughout the novel to redirect these power structures. Humberto begins following Don Jeronimo and casts him as the subjugated Other. His fear turns into pity as he learns more about his employer:

On the contrary, I felt sorry for Don Jeronimo because, ever since I left him so many years ago, he tries anything, even the wildest things, to recovery his potency, which I keep under guard in my eyes. He's not so young anymore... You know it's useless, Don Jeronimo, without my consent. And the poor devil remains locked up in his own shell, unable to break out, his sex organ as limp as an empty sleeve. (Donoso 72)

Humberto uses his status as the various monsters to exert control over Don Jeronimo. Seemingly through witchcraft, Humberto is able to control Jeronimo's virility, and ultimately his family lineage. Here, Jeronimo is also likened with the image of the devil, mirroring to the characterization of the Witranalwe as evil.

This relationship between the myth and the novel becomes increasingly clear with a depiction of Don Jeronimo on a horse, before Humberto kills him. Rather than meeting

with Humberto, Jeronimo leaves the Casa without explanation: “But the next morning he had them saddle a horse for him. He rode out alone, over the paths of his estate, past the ponds, fringed with rushes” (Donoso 393). Thus, Don Jeronimo’s character is directly described as the evil monster riding in on the horse to bring destruction.

At the end of the novel, Humberto’s identity as the Imbunche helps him to overthrow the Azcoitia’s power and kill Don Jeronimo, ending the family line, and the authority of the Azcoitia family over the region. Jeronimo’s body is found floating in the pond at a party, soon after Humberto escapes the containment of Don Jeronimo’s employees. Humberto, the narrator, then ironically describes Jeronimo’s death as an accident: “And, upset by the gravity of the accident suffered by the senator, who perhaps, at his age, shouldn’t have had so much to drink at a masked ball” (Donoso 407). It is implied that Humberto had a direct role in the death, and the narrator continues to stress the result of his death is the end of the family lineage: “A heavy iron chain sealed the grille of the mausoleum where, within a few hours, the flowers would begin to rot. The gentlemen in black turned their backs on him and slowly disappeared among the cypresses, lamenting the end of such a noble line” (Donoso 407). Early in the novel, Humberto seemingly uses witchcraft to control the virility of Jeronimo. And throughout the novel, he slowly manipulates this power over Jeronimo to kill him and end his family line completely. Here, Humberto, the monstrous native, takes control over the

representation of colonial and governmental authority, ultimately asserting his strength over the power structures that oppress him. Reading the novel in this way helps us to understand the importance of novels such as these to alter the narrative. Donoso has created a world in direct contrast to the reality of the Mapuche, where their distinct cultural identity, expressed through folkloric narrative and myth, makes them powerful. In this world, the indigenous is upheld as a symbol of strength and autonomous control over his own fate. Donoso's construction of Humberto's identity resists commonly romanticized ideals of the Mapuche by embracing the monstrous images of the folklore. Rather than denounce the grotesque folklore as 'uncivilized' or simply focus on the perceived strength of the Mapuche warrior, Donoso creates a character empowered through his cultural history, and not defined by it.

## Magical Realism as a Subaltern Genre

Through these readings of the novel, we can begin to understand Humberto as not only an assertion of cultural difference, but also the identity of the subaltern. This shift in perspective and rebuff of Western tradition is mirrored through the genre in which the novel is written. Although the text is wholly strange and original in its construction, it also works within the conventions and forms of Magical Realism. The concept of Latin American Magical Realism is entirely grounded in the belief of the strange and surreal as a more accurate representation of indigenous life than previous European or classical literary conventions. Magical Realism rests on the premise that there is value in an alternative world. And it is through this premise that the majority of Latin Boom writers, like Donoso, construct these alternate existences.

Critic Philip Swanson's analysis of Latin American narratives, *The New Novel in Latin America* works to understand the genesis of Magical Realism as a representation of shifts in Latin American history and culture: "The magical element therefore represents freedom to imagine an alternative destiny" (Swanson 12). It is the freedom to create an alternate world that is free from the realities of the real, while simultaneously being a more accurate representation of the real. Critic David K. Danow sees Magical Realism's surreal form as a more accurate depiction of the world. The forms and imagery contained within magical realism actually provide a reality as it is more closely recognized from

those existing in the margins:

That 'magical dimension' is hypostatized in literature by the superimposition of one perceived reality upon another, as seemingly fantastic events that may nevertheless appear to the indigenous, heterogeneous peoples of the region as an indisputable norm are embedded within what outsiders perceive as distinct, exclusive, and the only 'true' reality... This absolute disjuncture in basic perceptions of the world is situated at the core of a transnational literature designed to account for events and possibilities that are immanent, even uniquely inherent, to the southern hemisphere of the Americas. (Danow 71)

For Danow, the concept of the magical as a real experience for the indigenous populations of Latin America is natural to production of Latin American literature. It is sensible then to link the production of magical and surreal depictions of reality to indigenous populations with large spiritual beliefs and a close connection to the natural world:

Magical realist texts derive from a host of Latin American realities... The geographical proximity of the jungle to the city elicits a related omnipresent sense of the closeness of the prehistoric past to modern life, of myth, or primordial thinking, to scientific thought. Yet that closeness, filtered through a creative human imagination nurtured on a mix of the traditions and beliefs of the native Indians, as well as those of the transplanted Africans and Europeans absorbed into that world of prolific cultural hybridization allows for a seemingly inevitable portrayal of the fantastic as factual and realistic. (Danow 71)

The link between the reality of indigenous life in Latin America and the form of Magical Realism should not be ignored. Danow attributes the form as a cultural hybrid, bridging literary convention with indigenous reality. Here, the genre of Magical Realism takes on

a larger purpose within the literary studies world. If we view the Latin American Magical Realism as a direct representation of reality for indigenous populations, we can see the genre as an expression of the subaltern imaginary. The genre has the ability to redefine literary tradition and construct narratives that more accurately define and create identities with indigenous inclusion. And in Donoso's case, the use of magical realism and the novel's inclusion into the Latin Boom has shifted discussions of a subaltern cultural identity.

## Conclusion

Through this understanding and contextualization of the novel, we can begin to understand the emergence of a new form postcolonial literature. Here, it is not enough to ‘write back’ toward the colonial, nor is it enough to resist against the history. José Donoso’s *The Obscene Bird of Night* functions as a crucial example of the importance of maintaining cultural identity within an increasingly neo-colonial, globalized world. As world cultures shift to constantly redefine our conceptions of world literature, we must work to understand the importance and power of marginal identities like the Mapuche, and *The Obscene Bird* exemplifies the complexity of this issue. Donoso’s work upholds the distinct identity of the Mapuche in direct resistance to the hegemonic forces that attempt to control and exploit it. And further, it constructs a narrative of resistance that affirms the subaltern identity as a crucial piece of postcolonial rhetoric. Donoso creates a world wholly governed by the indigenous folklore of the Mapuche, and employs it to elevate and empower the figure of the native. Here, Donoso creates beauty from the monstrous depictions of the Imbunche and the Chonchón, pushing the margins into the center. And this understanding of Donoso’s text alters discussions of marginality, opening the possibility for a greater understanding of cultural appropriation in a globalized, and seemingly postcolonial world.

## Chapter Two: The Paradox of Multiculturalism

Contemporary understandings of cultural authority and narrative are becoming increasingly contentious topics, specifically when working to understand how Postcolonial Studies have changed perspectives on culture and the imperial moment. While many argue the expressed purpose of Postcolonial Studies is to understand and condemn the practice of European imperialism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the field becomes complicated with a better understanding of globalization's impact on cultural identity. It is my goal to navigate both these discourses to understand the power structures responsible for defining, appropriating, and controlling a cultural identity, specifically one within the margins.

While it is tempting to hope that postcolonial discourse has changed the way marginalized cultures have been represented in literature, the reality remains that the same power structures responsible for imperialism are still functioning to oppress and control these identities through the use of narrative. José Donoso's *The Obscene Bird of Night* represents a key example in this struggle over cultural identity. Donoso's text incorporates folklore and mythology central to the identity of Chile's indigenous population, the Mapuche. And while many, myself included, have argued for a reading of the novel as postcolonial literature that understands the appropriation and projection of culture as a necessary form of resistance against global hegemonic power structures, I

also feel the necessity to understand the more sinister aspects of this form of cultural appropriation.

Our world is wholly defined and constructed through narrative. These narratives have the power to expand, limit, or create ideological perceptions. And these are almost wholly political in nature, as they are created through a series of complex structures of power. Although postcolonial discourse relies on a premise of existing in the post of the colonial society, a closer understanding of the narratives formed by the imperial and globalized power structures reveal contemporary narratives, like Donoso's, perpetuate similar imperial ideologies and strengthen their economic and cultural control over marginalized identities.

In this paper, I will work to fully understand the incorporation of Mapuche myth into José Donoso's novel and locate it within larger discussions of cultural hybridity, misrepresentation, and constructed narratives of benevolence. Although the novel was written in the 1970s, it continues the tradition of misrepresentation commonly associated with works written at the height of Imperialism. The novel removes the authority of the indigenous voice to speak for itself, while working to commodify and market the culture as authentic and exotic. Through a closer examination of this work, we can begin to understand the cyclical paradox of postcolonial and globalization studies to strengthen the power structures they condemn.

These issues present a disjuncture between the perception and reality of postcolonial discourse. Through the utopian universalism presented as the goal of postcolonial thought, we can begin to see a new narrative form emerge. This narrative form breaks from the previously condemned practice of indigenous misrepresentation in the name of European benevolence. Instead, it creates a new rhetoric of benevolent ideology through the construction of multicultural ideals that promote hybridity and universalism. And just as benevolent rhetoric functioned during the colonial period to gain support for its actions, our contemporary rhetoric has concealed the imperial structures of oppression and exploitation while creating the perception of progress for human equality. This disjuncture between perception and reality functions to strengthen the imperial forces of a global empire and perpetuate the oppression of marginalized cultures, like the Mapuche.

Although the claims made in this paper are made in resolute form, there is no easy solution to the issues discussed here. In this paper I will not attempt to speculate or provide a solution for how to handle cultural appropriation, or make valued claims over the validity or legitimacy of other forms of cultural appropriation. Nor is my goal to condemn the work of Donoso or other writers who employ similar techniques. My goal is simply to understand the processes by which this cultural appropriation happens, why and by whom, and the power structures that make it possible.

## Hierarchies of Power in Narrative

In order to understand the ideological and imperial forces surrounding *The Obscene Bird of Night*, we must first understand the novel's appropriation of folklore and myth from Chile's native Mapuche population. The novel is a staple Latin Boom magical realist literature, and is intricately built on a foundation of Chilean monster legends. The story follows Humberto Penalzoza, a marginalized native who works as a maintenance worker in a Catholic orphanage, and his relationship to his employer, aristocratic imperial power, Don Jeronimo. The novel ends with Humberto being turned into the folkloric monster of the Imbunche and the ambiguous death of Don Jeronimo. However, the novel's complicated construction creates a question of Humberto's identity that remains central in the struggle for power, either on behalf of the native or the imperial system.

To begin answering the question of Humberto's identity, we must first start with an understanding of Don Jeronimo's aristocratic imperial power. The second chapter of the novel retells a myth about a powerful family who are plagued by the appearance of a witch in their home. This myth is told in the beginning of the novel, and seems to tell the story of how the Azcoitia family came to control the region, and acts as a guiding principle over the plot.

The myth tells the story of a landowner and his nine sons who kill a witch they

believe is threatening to kidnap their daughter. After they remove the witch from their society, they are rewarded with ownership over the orphanage, or also the Casa, and become a dominant power in the region for generations: “The story, popular throughout the entire country, originated in the region south of the Maule, where the Azcoitías have been feudal lords since colonial times” (Donoso 31). The people in the small community believe their misfortune is being caused by the witch and begin suspecting her as an evil spirit preying on the young daughter: “Whether it was because of the privileges her closeness with the girl accorded the nursemaid or because the blame had to fall of someone, since nothing seemed to explain so much misfortune, and bad times breed bad ideas, the rumor began circulating” (Donoso 24). The father and his nine sons accuse the nursemaid of being a witch and also associate her with the image of folkloric monsters of witchcraft, the Chonchòn, a bird-like head which flies through the sky as an omen, and the yellow bitch, the dog who follows the Chonchòn.

In describing the scene where the men arrive to kill the woman, they yell, ““Grab her, don’t let her go, it’s the yellow bitch trying to get into the house, the Chonchòn can’t be too far away”” (Donoso 27). The speaker then tells the story of the woman’s violent death and fate of her body:

And the ten men rushed to surround her like in a roundup and cut off her escape and catch her and whip her to death on the spot. The horses reared, whips cracked, the bitch was lost in the cloud of dust raised by the hooves that could stop her from slipping past and disappearing in the uncertain light of dawn. The farmhands were ordered to look for her. They were to find her, whatever the cost, because

the bitch was the nursemaid and the nursemaid was the witch. They were not to dare to come back without her. They were to kill her and bring her hide. (Donoso 27)

The men in the story locate the witch as the source of their problems, and thus, they kill her and float her body down the river until they reach the ocean:

She was neither alive nor dead. She might go on being dangerous; burying a witch's body poisons good croplands for miles and miles around, so it has to be gotten rid of some other way, the landowner said. He ordered them to lash the body to a tree and whip it until the woman woke up and they could all hear her admit her crimes... Then since there was nothing else to do, they chopped the tree down with axes. And the nine brothers...hailed the witch's body to the Maule river and threw it into the water. (Donoso 28)

The story continues to discuss for what purpose the men believed the woman was planning to kidnap the girl. And not only do the men consider the witch to be both the Chonchòn and the yellow bitch, they believe she was planning to turn the girl into the monster image of the Imbunche, a kidnapped child whose body is contorted, disassembled and rebuilt as a vampire-like monster:

This time the witch hasn't been able to steal the landowner's lovely daughter, which is what the witches were after, to steal her and sew up the nine orifices of her body and turn her into an imbunche, because that's the reason witches steal poor innocent children, to turn them into imbunches. (Donoso 29)

This myth and its characterization of all the major monsters in the novel is crucial to understanding the plot. This story of the landowner sets the premise that the Ascoitías

descend from this mythic landowner and his sons. And although the myth establishes that the family fears the authority of the witchcraft to govern their lives, the later characterization of the family asserts their strong Catholic allegiances. As Humberto describes the Azcoitías and tells the story of how they came to own the Casa, he closely mirrors the previous myth:

When the chaplaincy was founded, no one dreamed a day would come where there wouldn't be a male to inherit the family name and pass his rights on, for according to the contemporary records that I was careful to include in the dossier Inés took to Rome, the founder had nine sons who could marry and like, everyone else, have many sons and grandsons and great grandsons. (Donoso 36)

It is assumed that the founder with nine sons is the landowner from the myth who kills the witch. And this description of how the Azcoitías came to control the orphanage closely ties them with the authority of Rome and the Catholic Church. Where the family had previously feared, and thus valued the authority and role of witchcraft to govern their society, the family has now seemingly replaced it by looking to the church for authority.

Thus, the novel can be read as a characterization of the two opposing authorities of witchcraft and Church doctrine struggling for dominance. In this sense, it is simply an extension of the struggle between aristocratic imperialist and native Other; the difference, however, between the two readings concerns itself with the dominant force left standing in the end of the novel. And while previous readings of the novel assert Humberto's native dominance over Don Jeronimo, taking this myth into account, as well as a closer

examination of other ambiguities, it becomes possible to also read Humberto as not native, but as an extension of this imperialist family.

The way we read Humberto's character almost wholly determines the actual power structures of the novel. If we read Humberto, as I have previously suggested, as the powerful native overthrowing his colonial oppressors, the novel is clearly an anti-colonial narrative. If, however, we look further into Humberto's identity, not just as a representation of the native, but also as the monstrous son of Don Jeronimo, the novel's actual ability to subvert the colonial power is weakened.

The close association between Don Jeronimo's identity and Humberto's becomes a crucial detail in determining whether he is in fact the son. In describing a meeting Humberto has with Jeronimo once a year, he associates himself as becoming whole when they are together: "And he, Humberto? Happy? Don Jeronimo's solicitude made Humberto feel that this was a reunion with the other part of himself, and that he could be a complete man like this only once a year" (Donoso 198). The narrator depicts Humberto's identity as being whole with Jeronimo, as a son would look to his father as a formation of his identity. This bond between the two becomes strengthened after Don Jeronimo's son is born and housed in the Casa. Humberto is given a more elevated status in the orphanage, as he is increasingly connected with the image of Jeronimo's son. After Jeronimo's male heir is born, he is devastated to learn that his son is a monster:

When Jeronimo de Azcoitia finally parted the crib's curtains to look at his long-

awaited offspring, he wanted to kill him then and there; the loathsome, gnarled body writhing on its hump, its mouth a gaping bestial hole in which palate and nose bared obscene bones and tissues in an incoherent cluster of reddish traits was chaos, disorder, a different but worse form of death. (Donoso 209)

Here, the son's depiction as a monster directly links him to the ambiguous identity of Humberto. Specifically, the child is depicted in similar monstrous language as the Imbunche depicted in the beginning of the novel:

The *imbunche*. All sewed up- eyes, mouth, anus, sex organ, nostrils, ears, hands, legs... Once all his body's orifices were closed up and his arms and legs trapped in the strait jacket of not knowing how to use them, yes, the old women would graft themselves onto the child in place of his limbs and organs and faculties, ripping out his eyes and his voice and robbing him of his hands. (Donoso 48)

The boy is constructed through the same processes that create the Imbunche. The constant manipulation and reformation of the boy ultimately elevates his born status as a monster to that of the Imbunche. After the son is born and the doctors fear he will not survive, Don Jeronimo hires Dr. Azula to keep his son alive so that he can inherit the Casa, and these efforts continue his characterization as the Imbunche:

As soon as he arrived, he got down to the work of supplying Boy with imitation eyelids, patching up his face, composing a mouth he could use, correcting the capricious anatomy that placed the child's life in danger... before his consciousness could record the artificial sleep during which Dr. Azula hacked and sewed him up to organize, in the jumble of his anatomy, the associated organs essential for the functioning of his body. (Donoso 196)

The novel ends with the revelation that Humberto is the Imbunche. Thus, the construction of both the boy and Humberto as the monster raises questions about the actual identity of Humberto.

Further than the shared role of the Imbunche, the end of the novel reveals Humberto's identity as the monstrous heir himself. The beginning of the novel states the purpose of maintaining the Casa was to house and protect the heir of the Azcoitía family, and only hints at Humberto's characterization as this heir throughout. The final chapters, however, reveal false pregnancy of Jeronimo's wife, Inés, and reveal the real identity. She states,

Mudito's the son we waited for, such a long time, and he was born such a long time ago that there's nobody here in the Casa who can remember when he was born, that's why succeeding generations of old women have been bringing him up, the obedient child does only what we let him do, the child's a saint and he always remains a child. (Donoso 411)

Mudito, or also Humberto, is revealed as the son the story revolves around discovering, and thus, alters the trajectory of the plot. While this revelation changes the plot structure, as the heir of the Azcoitía family has been present throughout the novel, the power structures also change dramatically. Humberto as the son can no longer be seen as the subordinate native, or even the powerful native; rather he is cast as the only character with the power to continue to legacy of power and control on behalf of the Azcoitias. Here, because he is depicted as both the son and the Imbunche, he takes on traits of the Mapuche folklore, while remaining inherently a continuation of the Imperial legacy.

Further, the dominance of the family is even shown through the construction of the novel. The novel is a non-linear story line that begins with Humberto as an adult, and

ends with his birth and journey to becoming the Imbunche. The purpose of this dislocating plot structure can actually be explained through the text and Don Jeronimo's attempts to make his monstrous son feel normal. To accomplish this, Don Jeronimo fills the Casa with various monsters so that his son grows up in world of his peers:

For Boy was to grow up believing that things came into being as his eyes discovered them and died when he stopped looking at them...that other forms of *birth* and *death* didn't exist, and, so much was this the case, that the most important among the words Boy would ever know were all those signifying *origin* and *end*. No whys, whens, outsides, insides, befores, afters; no arriving or leaving, no systems or generalizations. A bird crossing the sky at a certain hour was not a bird crossing the sky at a *certain* hour, it wasn't headed for other places because other didn't exist; Boy must live in an enchanted present, in the limbo of accident, or the particular circumstance, in the isolation of the objet and the moment without a key or a meaning that could subject him to a rule and, in subjecting him to it, cast him into the infinite void it was necessary for him to avoid. (Donoso 198)

Don Jeronimo constructs the entirety of Humberto's existence and his understanding of the world. Thus, Humberto's narration is disjointed from a reality, and seems to resist the formulation of any meaning. Humberto lives in a constant "enchanted present" and "limbo," so ultimately the reader exists in a similar state as they follow Humberto's journey. Therefore, although Humberto is the narrator and seemingly in a position of power, his story is merely a representation of Don Jeronimo's control over his world. And although Humberto's power over the Azcoitia family to continue its legacy would also seem to place Humberto in the ultimate position of power, his entire identity is

created and defined by Don Jeronimo and this constructed world. Thus, even though Humberto seems to kill Don Jeronimo in the end of the novel, leaving him to declare, “I’m free before this woman” (Donoso 410), Humberto remains trapped in the world and identity created on his behalf.

This intricate power structure establishes the novel as a further assertion of aristocratic and imperialist dominance, not only over the marginalized or native populations, but also over the reader. Here, this world incorporates the folklore of the Mapuche, and simply follows in traditions to appropriate and exert force over it. The family, with its loyalties to the church has then simply contained and appropriated the image of the Imbunche, furthering their Imperial power over witchcraft. Thus, the novel subverts the power structures once again in favor of the dominant imperial voice.

The setting of the novel takes place in a Catholic orphanage, and also establishes Catholic imperial dominance over the environment in which Humberto lives. The courtyard where he sleeps contains multiple statues of saints in poor condition. The beginning scenes of the novel describe these statues and their presence throughout Humberto’s journey. One scene describes the nuns moving throughout the statues with happiness after Humberto does them a favor:

They moved forward, with shouts of joy, among headless St. Francis; St. Gabriels Archangel minus their pointing finger; maimed and crippled St. Anthony of Padua; Virgins of Mount Carmel... saints with faces all gone; a monster with his arm girdling the world under a pair of feet that Brígida said she’d keep because they were part of a Virgin. (Donoso 51)

Here, the images of the saints and the monsters become blurred through the depictions of their brokenness. And while it may seem that their depiction is a commentary on the antiquity and lack of purpose, it seems to me to be a commentary on their power. Even through their brokenness, they exert a power over the nuns. And while the nuns also seem to function as the sect of witches protecting the Imbunche, they still work to uphold and rebuild the Catholic influences over the Casa. The nuns refuse to dispose of the Saint pieces, respecting their sacred power above all else: “you can’t just throw out fragments of objects that have been sacred, they must be treated with respect, they can’t be thrown into the garbage, along with scraps of food or the sweepings of the house, no” (Donoso 52). The sacred right of the statue fragments is held in higher regard than the upkeep of the Casa, ultimately placing Church doctrine as the highest governing order.

This power structure becomes increasingly problematic with discussions about the Catholic influence over the folklore itself. In the original image of the Imbunche, no purpose for its existence is given; it is simply a practice of black magic, sometimes varying to include providing a source of youth and life to the witches who create him. In Donoso’s text, however, the Imbunche becomes a religious symbol of salvation. In the beginning description of the text’s Imbunche, the belief in the sainthood of the monster is present: “It’s the only way to bring up a baby to be a saint” (Donoso 48). The image of

the Imbunche becomes conflated with that of the Catholic Saint. And further, Humberto as the Imbunche is described as a becoming the source of a miracle. One of the nuns tells the other, “look at those saucer eyes of his, look at the way he’s looking at us as if to tell us to wait a little longer because he’s going to perform the miracle any time now, to have patience” (Donoso 419). In the text the image of the Imbunche cannot stand on its own without serving a larger purpose; and for Donoso, the purpose must be spiritual. And just as Spanish Imperialism of Chile depended on the use of Catholic missionaries to establish control, Donoso also incorporates Catholicism as a way of showing dominance over the Mapuche culture. Further, by incorporating the concept of a miracle, Donoso is embarking as a similar missionary, working for the salvation of the monstrous native.

### The New Narrative of Benevolence: Multiculturalism

The novel's assertion of aristocratic imperial authority and Church doctrine over the role of witchcraft and the native is problematic when working to understand cultural power relations in a seemingly postcolonial world. Although academic postcolonial studies have worked to condemn the practices of imperialism, reading the novel this way suggests that narrative power relations between the colonial center and the margins have changed very little.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* was a crucial text in defining and condemning the role of the narrative in the colonial experience. He describes the process of cultural hegemony as the means by which European powers explained and furthered their economic agendas through the construction of narratives. As the new world was being discovered and increasingly depicted through these narratives, the European voice constructed a system of power, placing their cultural identity in a superior position to others: "In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (Said 7). The West has catalogued and organized aspects of Oriental culture in order to further its domination; and for Said, the biggest issue of these practices was the misrepresentation and "inaccuracy produced by too dogmatic a generality and too positivistic a localized force" (Said 8). The

inaccuracies to which Said points as problematic are the narratives that depict the native populations as uncivilized, savage, and inhuman. These narratives were perpetuated as the justification for Imperial force in areas previously outside of European control. For Said, these ideologies of superiority were spread through the construction of narratives aimed at categorizing, defining, and controlling the Orient.

Said spends the majority of his text discussing these narrative practices as commonplace throughout the literature at the time of Imperialism. However, although these practices have been widely condemned and critiqued throughout the early onset of postcolonial theories in academia, novels, like Donoso's, published in 1970, seem to continue this tradition of misrepresentation and domination. Returning to the understanding of Humberto simultaneously oppressed by the Imperial aristocracy and inhabiting a position of power as the native son of Don Jeronimo, we can see the power structures defined by Said, as re-emerging in relatively contemporary texts. The imperial structures engage in a series of encounters in the text and never cede the upper hand. Although Humberto somewhat inhabits a position of power, he is still the native described through monstrous imagery and subject to the imposition of Church doctrine. And although Donoso's text is commonly upheld as a subversive resistance to colonial authority, the reality is that the novel is simply a continuation of the ideological narrative, depicting the native as inhuman, monstrous, and something to be controlled.

One of the ways this control is accomplished is through the construction of a hybridized culture. Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha champions the concept of hybridity as a resolution to the struggles of Imperialism. In *The Location of Culture*, he describes the processes we see playing out in *The Obscene Bird* as a ‘new internationalism.’ He describes the aftermath of the colonial process as incorporating marginalized cultures, like the Mapuche, into the national: “The ‘middle passage’ of contemporary culture, as with slavery itself, is a process of displacement and disjunction that does not totalize experience. Increasingly, ‘national’ cultures are being produced from the perspective of disenfranchised minorities” (Bhabha 8). Thus, the national identity of Chile is working to rebuild itself from the histories of the minor Mapuche culture. Here, Donoso’s text works to incorporate Mapuche history and folklore into the national consciousness, however, not necessarily from a position of equality or inclusion as Bhabha proposes. This incorporation functions wholly to continue the national and Imperial power over these cultures in an effort to strengthen their national identity, and thus, their position within a global power.

For Bhabha, this process of hybridity is necessary for the nation to move past its colonial history: “The Western metropole must confront its postcolonial history, told by its influx of postwar migrants and refugees, as an indigenous or native narrative *internal to its national identity*” (Bhabha 9). As postcolonial theories of resistance and

condemnation have changed the narrative surrounding Imperialism, the West has had to confront its history and answer the counter narratives' claims being levied against them. Here, they respond by almost seeming to incorporate their histories into the national identity almost as an apology. Bhabha continues to argue that these counter discourses have forced the legitimacy of marginal and subaltern narratives into the social consciousness of a society:

Such cultures of a postcolonial *contra-modernity* may be contingent to modernity, discontinuous or in contention with it, resistant to its oppressive, assimilationist technologies; but they also deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to 'translate', and therefore reinscribe, the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity. (Bhabha 9)

For Bhabha, the process of hybridity and postcolonialism works in connection with modernity to work toward becoming decolonial, and change the social imaginary from one of imperial ideology to one of hybrid inclusion. Similarly, theorist Chris Tennant argues the connection between postcoloniality and modernity in relation to the hybrid inclusion of indigenous identity. For Tennant, the native is not only something the west must face and incorporate, but also a representation of the authenticity the West lost through the process. He makes a distinction between what he calls the noble and the ignoble primitive, pointing out their shared function:

The ignoble primitive is the central image of the immediate post-War period, a period in which progress, development, and the integration of indigenous peoples into national societies are largely unproblematic. The ignoble primitive represents the antecedent state which the West has had to overcome, assimilate, and destroy

in order to become modern. The noble primitive is the predominant image of indigenous peoples in the more recent literature. The noble primitive represents what the world has lost in becoming modern: a locus of authenticity and community. Both images, the noble and the ignoble, share the same function: marking the boundaries of a space and a time for the West to inhabit.  
(Tennant 6)

The incorporation of the indigenous identity into the dominant consciousness operates under the postcolonial discourse of inclusion and equality. Both the noble and ignoble primitive represent similar opportunities for power within the cultural colonial system. And although one is meant to be destroyed, and one is upheld as a powerful symbol of authenticity, both are external to the colonial power structure, and as such, ultimately pose a threat to the West's hegemonic control. And therefore, they must be appropriated.

Tennant's argument hints at an important aspect of this cultural power structure. The West has not only appropriated marginalized cultures as a form of control, but also a practice of its own subjectivity. Edward Said's definition of the oriental Other and its contribution to the identity of those defining it becomes increasingly relevant when talking about contemporary forms of cultural appropriation. Throughout the post-enlightenment, while European identity and society became increasingly de-stabilized, the West relied on creating a new form of identity opposite of the oriental Other. For Said, the process functions as a self-reflexive form of national subjectivity:

One cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce- the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during

the post-Enlightenment period...European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self. (Said 3)

In the search for their own identity, the European west constructed a system of defining and controlling the perceived Oriental culture that simply created the opposite of their own desired identity. And while this concept has been widely reiterated throughout the course of Postcolonial studies, my purpose for reinstating it here is to show how contemporary texts are still operating within this structure of power. The difference, however, is that Western powers are no longer simply reflecting the opposite of the perceived Oriental identity. Instead, texts like Donoso's construct a seemingly elevated position of the culture, valuing its diversity as the center for its own search for authenticity. And while the depiction of the Othered culture has changed to become something valued rather than devalued, the purpose is the same. The West continues to build its own identity in direct relation to the Other. This process often happens, as it does in *The Obscene Bird*, through a misrepresented and idealized image of the other.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's study *Decolonizing Methodologies* echoes the belief in understanding Western identity through the process of native representation:

Discoveries about and from the 'new' world expanded and challenged ideas the West held about itself. The production of knowledge, new knowledge and transformed 'old' knowledge, ideas about the nature of knowledge, and the validity of specific forms of knowledge, became as much commodities of colonial exploitation as other natural resources. (Smith 59)

This production of this knowledge changed the way the West felt about itself, but also seemingly justified their presence and purpose for imperialism. This distribution of knowledge became an export of these areas alongside the physical resources, and it further established the West's dominance over these regions:

Bhabha continues this line of thought, drawing a distinction between the practice of constructing an identity and the purpose for which it is used. While working to understand the constructed stereotypical Others, Bhabha concludes the inherent power of this ambivalence to provide the constructed identity its power by questioning its presentation. He states:

The analytic of ambivalence questions dogmatic and moralistic positions on the meaning of oppression and discrimination. My reading of colonial discourse suggests that the point of intervention should shift from the ready recognition of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the *processes of subjectification* made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse. (Bhabha 95)

Bhabha posits the importance of understanding the purpose, rather than the practice of constructing stereotypes or Othered identities. The practice is merely a symptom of the power structure in place, working to maintain the dominance of Western ideal over native identity. For Bhabha, the importance does not rest in the depiction itself, but in the processes that created the image. Alternately, the image also functions in a cyclical

pattern to the process, working to uphold its power to create its image.

Smith's study focuses on these colonial power structures and how they have continually marginalized and oppressed indigenous populations. For Smith, the processes of Anthropology have worked in connection with literary narratives to create ideologies that helped maintain imperial attitudes. She connects contemporary forms of imperial control to the same systems put in place during the Enlightenment. For Smith, the Enlightenment is inextricably linked with the process of becoming modern, and was the period of time responsible for creating the ideological constructs necessary for becoming imperial. Like Bhabha, she believes that understanding the systems of power is key to understanding colonial thought, and for her, these are all linked with the distribution of narrative:

Whilst imperialism is often thought of as a system which drew everything back into the centre, it was also a system which distributed ideas and materials outwards. Said's notion of 'postcolonial superiority' is useful here for conceptualizing the ways in which knowledge and culture were as much part of imperialism as raw materials and military strength. Knowledge was also there to be discovered, extracted, appropriated and distributed. Processes for enabling these things to occur became organized and systematic. (Smith 58)

The imperial process created and distributed narratives that became responsible for cataloguing and re-representing culture to Europe, as well as the native populations through which they were derived. These narratives control the mind of the native as well as the European population to perpetuate a certain belief in an imperial right. Smith

states, “The knowledge gained through our colonization has been used, in turn, to colonize us in what Ngugi wa Thiong’o calls the colonization ‘of the mind’ (59). In doing such, imperial narratives re-wrote histories and stories from these populations through an inherent belief in Western superiority: “It is through these disciplines that the indigenous world has been represented to the West and it is through these disciplines that indigenous peoples often research for the fragments of ourselves which were taken, catalogued, studied, or stored” (Smith 59). These new historical narratives have had a lasting impact on native populations long after the physical colonization has ended. Smith continues,

History is also implicated in the construction of totalizing master discourses which control the Other. The history of these colonies, from the perspective of the colonizers, has effectively denied other views of what happened and what the significance of historical ‘facts’ may be to the colonized. (Smith 67)

These totalizing narratives built upon reductive binaries of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ worked to create a justification for the imperialism as well as a process through which to accomplish it.

While imperial narrative and ideology shaped the minds and perceived histories of colonial subjects, it also played an important role in justifying imperialism to the mass European populations. As briefly mentioned earlier, the native was historically depicted as ‘uncivilized’ and ‘monstrous,’ and these images furthered an inherent belief in European superiority.

Said's *Culture and Imperialism* touches on the prevalence of the images constructed about the native:

What are striking in these discourses are the rhetorical figures one keeps encountering in their descriptions of the 'mysterious East,' as well as the stereotypes about 'the African (or Indian or Irish or Jamaican or Chinese) mind,' the notions about bringing civilization to primitive or barbaric peoples, the disturbingly familiar ideas about flogging or death or extended punishment being required when 'they' misbehaved or became rebellious, because 'they' mainly understood force or violence best; 'they' were not like 'us,' and for that reason deserved to be ruled. (Said I)

It is through these misrepresentations of that Europe justified its Imperial actions. The widespread belief that Europe was helping the native populations by civilizing them and providing salvation through the spread of Christianity was mainly created through the construction and distribution of narrative. This ultimately created the ideological environment possible for the implementation of colonial control.

Thus, returning to Donoso's *The Obscene Bird*, and its depiction of Humberto as the monstrous native under the authority of Don Jeronimo, we can begin to understand the problematic construction of the novel. A scene in the beginning of the novel depicting Humberto breaking into Don Jeronimo's house and stealing a book seems to address these concerns of narrative misrepresentations:

Mother Benita, yes, I stole something from Don Jeronimo's house, look, this small volume with a greenish spine, only one volume, although I wish I could have brought a hundred copies with me...the thing to do is save what can be saved, I'll reach out for my books, in the place where those hundred copies have always been...and my name up there, over the text, on all the left hand pages:

Humberto Peñaloza, Humberto Peñaloza, that reiteration of my name destined to conjure its shame away, to console my father, to mock my mother, to convince me that, after all, with my name in print so many times, no one could question my existence. (Donoso 118)

Humberto breaks into Don Jeronimo's library and finds a book about himself. After this passage, it becomes unclear if Humberto wrote it or if it had been written by Don Jeronimo; however, the existence of the book, and the fact that it has been owned by Jeronimo without the consent of Humberto seems to allegorically represent the struggle to own narrative in a colonial system. The book that contains the identity of Humberto is inaccessible to him, even after he steals it; he does not have the authority to represent himself or own his identity created through the narrative. For Said, the inability to control narrative equates with a loss of power: "The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism" (Said "Culture" xiii). This loss of power seems to mirror the secondary depiction of himself in the novel. Don Jeronimo constructs the world through which Humberto understands his identity, as well as literally owning his narrative. And Donoso constructs the identity of both, controlling the overall depiction of the native as powerless. The theft of the book only seems to blur the lines between ownership of this narrative, and Humberto ultimately cedes control, returning the book to the Casa and back into Don Jeronimo's ownership.

The ambiguity between whether or not Humberto contributed to the construction of this narrative contributes to a larger discussion of subaltern identity. Gayatri Spivak's studies in the subaltern, or marginalized colonial identity, works to understand the complications that come with native voice and narrative construction:

For the 'true' subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation. The problem is that the subject's itinerary has not been traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual. In the slightly dated language of the Indian group, the question becomes, How can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak? Their project, after all, is to rewrite the development of the consciousness of the Indian nation. The planned discontinuity of imperialism rigorously distinguishes this project. (Spivak "Subaltern Speak?" 27)

If the construction of narrative is imperative to maintaining imperial control, then the production of counter narratives from those being misrepresented is the logical way to resist. The question, however, remains, who is speaking on behalf of these voices, and if the resistance does not come from the most oppressed within the society, can it still function as a counter narrative? Spivak addresses these concerns by establishing the uneven representation of these marginalized populations: "The colonial subject is seen as emerging from those parts of the indigenous elite that have come to be loosely described as 'bourgeois nationalist' (Spivak "Deconstructing Historiographies" 205). She points to the shift in postcolonial studies to better understand the class and social hierarchies

within a colonial society, and rebuff the tendency to assume all levels of a colonial society have experienced the same amount of repression. The subaltern voice represents these struggles; however, the simple recognition of these hierarchies is not enough to alter the misrepresentation in the narrative: The issue, is the tendency within postcolonial studies to advocate the right of the subaltern to speak on behalf of their own resistance, while actually speaking for them.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith addresses this problem in theories of representation, arguing that the higher social classes within a colonial society generally experienced lesser oppressions than the more marginalized classes, like women, or indigenous populations. Stating her intention is to resist efforts to tell the story of colonization through the history constructed by the colonizers,

but rather to draw that history down into the colonized world, show the relationship between knowledge, research and imperialism, and then discuss the ways in which it has come to structure our own ways of knowing, through the development of academic disciplines and through the education of colonial elites and indigenous or 'native' intellectuals. (Smith 59)

Thus, contemporary discussions of postcolonialism have already questioned and condemned the constructed narratives and histories written through the ideologies of imperialism. However, for Smith, the field has failed to acknowledge the difference between a marginalized colonial subject and the elite.

*The Obscene Bird* directly reflects these challenges and these tendencies. While it

is easy to understand the novel as an assertion of indigenous identity, and thus, as a counter narrative to the power structures of imperial control, the validity of this reading remains unclear when incorporating discussions of subaltern and elite colonial identities. Donoso, the son of a doctor, was born and raised in Chile's elite Bourgeoisie, and thus his representation of Mapuche marginalized identity is potentially problematic. He studied at elite private schools while in Chile, and came to the US, receiving his B.A. from Princeton in 1951 (Pereira 57). His status as a wealthy, elite member of Chilean society becomes problematic when considering the scope and voice of his novel. Entirely written from the perspective of Humberto, the indigenous native inhabiting the identity of several monsters found in Mapuche folklore, the novel problematically constructs representations of the indigenous struggle on their behalf. And more problematic, incorporates their mythology as the foundation, almost as if he is taking ownership of the culture. Further, he appropriates this folklore in a way that upholds traditional representations of the native as monstrous and evil. Even if we were to read this novel as a beneficial preservation of the marginal culture in response to a global homogenous identity, this reading still assumes Donoso's right to take authority over this record. Donoso even reflects these assumptions in a 1986 interview. When asked what he believed the role the author should play in society, he states,

I suppose that the answer has to do with preserving some of the human qualities in a world that is purely a struggle for power. It has to do with preserving human qualities such as the faculty for understanding, and for measuring and balancing.

The writer's role has to do with conserving pleasure, and knowledge for knowledge's sake. (Pereira 62)

Literature, for Donoso, must take the responsibility of preserving knowledge and culture, regardless of its origins or the author's relation to that culture. While discussions of cultural appropriation and ownership are contentious topics throughout academia, for this example, it is important to note how and where the author became introduced to the culture. In the same 1986 interview, Donoso states,

I know very little about Chilean folklore. I know it inasmuch as it was told to me by the servants in my house when I was a small boy. I do not know the Chilean commonfolk, almost. I am familiar with the upper middle class, with the intellectual class and with the servants' class. Therefore, my contact with the commonfolk has always been through the servants; the servants are the ones who related the folkloric stories to me... The memories I have are very affectionate, very loving. These stories are surrounded by a world of affection for me. (Pereira 61-62)

Donoso's knowledge of the Mapuche culture is incredibly defined through his class relation to his servants. And while it may seem that the novel is simply a noble preservation of culture, rather than an economic exploitation, for Linda Tihuwai Smith, the two arguments are not mutually exclusive when working with indigenous culture: "The idea that collectors were actually rescuing artifacts from decay and destruction, and from indigenous peoples themselves, legitimized practices which also included commercial trade and plain and simple theft" (Smith 61). For Smith, the arguments for

preserving a cultural identity have historically been attempts to justify the economic gain. The belief in preserving the culture on behalf of the native population creates an unequal economic power structure, hidden with the perception of a positive and beneficial intention.

Turning the culture into a commodity by which to gain wealth and power is the central topic of concern for Graham Huggan's book, *The Postcolonial Exotic*. Here, Graham makes the central claim that in our contemporary postcolonial thought, the figure of the native is marketed as authentic and exotic for profitability. Huggan notes the concept as 'commodity fetishism' and situates it within a discussion of the exotic's marketability in the West: "Yet, as the process of commodification clearly illustrates, cultural difference also has an aesthetic value, a value often measured explicitly or implicitly in terms of the *exotic*" (Huggan 13). Ironically, the value of exoticism stems from the same difference also looked down upon by Europeans as 'savage' or 'uncivilized.' For Huggan, understanding the process by which the postcolonial exotic is marketed today also relies on looking back at the previous marketability and perception of exoticism during the initial colonial period:

The exoticist production of Otherness is dialectical and contingent; at various times and in different places, it may serve conflicting ideological interests, providing the rationale for projects of *rapprochement* and reconciliation, but legitimising just as easily the need for plunder and violent conquest. (Huggan 13)

Here, Huggan touches on a similar concept of justification for the transaction. The justification, however, stems from an underlying perception of the West's reconciliation for their actions. Contemporary exoticism markets and establishes the exotic as valuable through a process similar to the colonial period, specifically through belief in a positive intention. The difference, however, establishes the process of marketing and commodifying the exotic as a favor meant to seemingly apologize for the past. Thus, perpetuating an ideal of equality and respectful appreciation for the exotic as a marketing strategy.

This issue becomes increasingly complicated when factoring in the divisions of power that take place within the colonial system. The value of the culture as a commodity has long been established with the practices of imperialism, where "knowledge and culture were as much part of imperialism as raw materials and military strength. Knowledge was also there to be discovered, extracted, appropriated, and distributed" (Smith 58). Culture and knowledge has thus been commodified as an export of the colonial system since its beginning. In fact, the initial purpose for exploring the 'new' world came from the Enlightenment and a desire to learn about new cultures and humanity. Thus, we can begin to understand imperialism as less about the extraction of physical resources, and more as a knowledge driven enterprise.

These issues of commodification and value are becoming increasingly important

to the study of culture; however, contemporary postcolonial theory is limited when discussing the aspects of modern global relations. Simon Gikandi attempts to reconcile these differences by talking about the intersections between postcolonial theory and theories of globalization. He states,

Global culture linked with the postmodern (the subject of postcolonial theory) has brought us to a point where the traditional association between national spaces and cultural practices cannot be sustained: there no longer seems to be a clear relationship between cultural practices and localities. (Gikandi 113)

If culture in a globalized world can no longer be contained within the limits of the nation-state, the opportunity for marginal cultures to reach European markets is greatly increased. Here, the breakdown of the national boundaries makes it increasingly easier for more powerful markets to gain control and ownership over other cultures for economic gain. The increasing global connections mark the proliferation of cultural commodities, and one of the most common, and most powerful forms of cultural expression is found in literature: “No doubt, the most powerful signs of the new process of globalization come from literary texts and other works of art” (Gikandi 112). Gikandi is not the only one to locate the distribution of culture in the novel. Discussing the role of narrative in the formation of imperial attitudes, Said also attributes the importance of understanding the novel as the ultimate form of cultural expression:

I have looked especially at cultural forms like the novel, which I believe were immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences. I do not mean that only the novel was important, but that I consider it

*the* aesthetic object whose connection to the expanding societies of Britain and France is particularly interested in studying” (Said xii).

Although he is primarily interested in the spread of literature throughout the time of imperialism, the novel retains this importance in our contemporary, globalized world. And while Gikandi and Said both privilege the literary text as the ultimate expression of culture, Gikandi also points to a shift in the production and consumption with the break down of the imperial system. Building his argument on the assumption that the power structures present during imperialism disappeared with the independence of the colony, he argues that new productions of literature privilege the postcolonial:

In addition, it is easily assumed that globalization is primarily a mode of transformation of cultural or structural relations in the West itself. And yet, global culture is a result of the transformations in both ‘First’ and ‘Third World’, and especially transformation of the institutions of knowledge production, and even the enunciative situations, in both zones...the rise of the new globalism, like the denotative shift from ‘Third World’ to ‘Postcolonial’, reflects a significant shift in the speech community in which claims about colonialism and nationalism are introduced and discussed. (Gikandi 115)

What Gikandi fails to address is that the power structures of imperialism have not completely disappeared with these shifts in knowledge production. In an increasingly globalized cultural market, these shifts to discuss the claims of colonialism are also controlled economically by the same structures that perpetuated the atrocities. Huggan argues that the shift to privileging postcolonial discourse has itself been marketed and

commodified:

Counterhegemonic thought arguably constitutes the new academic orthodoxy as different interest groups fight it out to make the margins their own...Marginality is no mere abstraction of course, nor is it to be found only outside the academy. But the cachet that the category brings indicates something other than a social burden – it suggests that ‘resistance’ itself has become a valuable intellectual commodity. (Huggan 83)

For Huggan, as the cultures at the center of postcolonial studies become increasingly commodified, the postcolonial discourse is also becoming highly politicized. Just as the knowledge of the colonial period was as much a commodity as the material resources being extracted, today’s knowledge of that imperialism itself is being commodified as well: “One need only consider the hypercommodified status of the ‘multicultural’ ‘or ‘Third World’ writer, or of literary categories such as magical realism or – often conflated with it – the Latin American ‘Boom’ novel” (Huggan 19). Thus, returning to a discussion of Donoso, we can begin to see more clearly how the incorporation of the Mapuche folklore becomes an objectification. Donoso has not only turned their exoticism into a marketable commodity, but also furthered the commodification of the postcolonial discourse itself. Conceptions of genres like the Latin Boom simply create a marketing technique for constructing an identity of the native, while allowing it to operate under the perceived benevolence of postcolonial rhetoric. However, in simple and reductive terms, Donoso’s text steals, markets, and profits from the struggle of the Mapuche. Thus, if

historical European imperialism perpetuated the control and production of knowledge, and contemporary cultural and academic practice also relies on the control and production of knowledge, the validity of the premise that we are living in the post of the colonial experience is directly called into question.

If we are to understand this paradox of postcolonial thought to perpetuate the power structures of imperialism while working to condemn them, the question remains: Why don't we recognize these examples as imperialist?

The answer begins with understanding the power relations of an increasingly globalized world. For political theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, the world can no longer be defined with opposing binaries of East and West. Instead, the larger world powers are working to build a global empire, subsuming all identities and nationalities into a single, localized power:

The imperial machine lived by producing a context of equilibria and/or reducing complexities, pretending to put toward a project of universal citizenship and toward this end intensifying the effectiveness of its intervention over every element of the communicative relationship, all the while dissolving identity and history in a completely postmodern fashion. (Hardt & Negri 115)

This totalizing force of Empire is working to redefine the boundaries of the nation state and distinct cultural identities. And while this may seem like the similar concept of homogenous identity texts like Donoso's are said to be working against, this conception of a globalized power works with these counternarratives to perpetuate the structures of

power:

The love of differences and the belief in the universal freedom and equality of humanity proper to the revolutionary thought of Renaissance humanism reappear here on a global scale. This utopian element of globalization is what prevents us from simply falling back into particularism and isolationism in reaction to the totalizing forces of imperialism and racist domination, pushing us instead to forge a project of counter globalization, counter-Empire. This utopian moment, however, has never been unambiguous. (Hardt & Negri 115)

Postcolonial literature actually seems to stem from similar utopian beliefs. Rhetorical strategies of postcolonialism rest on the belief of uplifting every person and creating a harmonious world order where one cannot control another. This depiction of Empire is arguably similar to the homogenous identity texts like Donoso's are said to be rebuffing with a projection of 'particularism.' However, for Hardt and Negri, contemporary power structures work to contain and control all aspects of life, including the differences:

Society, subsumed within a power that reached down to the ganglia of the social structure and its processes of development reacts like a single body. Power is thus expressed as a control that extends throughout the depths of the consciousnesses and bodies of the population – and at the same time across the entirety of social relations. (Hardt & Negri 24)

All aspects of consciousness, for Hardt and Negri, are subsumed through the existence of a global empire, including the counter narratives and resistances.

This theory of a new global Empire existing in the post-imperial space does not stand alone in postcolonial thought. Bill Ashcroft's *The Empire Writes Back* and

Bhabha's conception of a 'Third Space' also construct a somewhat utopian view of the global world. As Huggan points out,

Utopian theorizing such as this aims at recuperating marginality in order to challenge, and work toward dissolving, imperial structures, modes of vision, and habits of thought. It appropriates the discourse of imperial incorporation in order to set up its own transformative agenda and work toward its own emancipatory social goals. (Huggan 21)

This vision works to subsume all aspects of marginality into the center as an attempt to bridge the differences established by imperial modes of power. The issue with these depictions of a global empire, however, is the disconnect between the perceived aim and the actuality.

To return to the example of José Donoso, the text is generally perceived as a positive projection of culture that stands in resistance to both imperial power structures and contemporary modes of globalization. However, upon a closer reading, we can begin to see this reading fall apart into revealing a novel that is ultimately a narrative of hypercommodified culture that subjugates and exploits more than it resists. This reveals the disjuncture of postcolonial thought: "If exoticism has *arrived* in the 'centre', it still *derives* from the cultural margins, or, perhaps more accurately, from a commodified discourse of cultural marginality" (Huggan 20). And if it extends from the margins into the center, it ultimately becomes a piece of the structure it resists. We can see this through the figure of Donoso. Because he is a citizen of Chile, he is generally seen as an

authentic voice of the colonial native's struggle. According to Huggan, this helps establish the marketability of his narrative: "Access to these experiences is through the *consumption* of literary works by much-travelled writers who are perceived as having come from, or as having a connection to, 'exotic' places" (Huggan 19). However, these readings ignore his status, to return to Smith's term, as a 'native intellectual.' His economic and social class elevate him far above the struggles of the Mapuche, and his extensive North American Ivy league education has brought him into the center of this global power structure. Thus, it is easy to see Donoso as a product of Western thought, and thus, its agent. And if his work does seem to subjugate and exploit the Mapuche, while projecting a form of resistance that can be upheld in postcolonial thought as 'progress,' it ultimately strengthens the global 'imperial machine,' and perpetuates the exploitation of indigenous populations.

The question, however, remains, why don't we recognize texts like Donoso's as imperialistic, even when situating it within contemporary postcolonial thought? The answer reaches back to the inherent difference in perception and reality of an imperial, global world. Postcolonial discourse relies on the utopian premise of inclusion and understanding. Its goal is to bring discussions of the marginal into the center and resist against forces of subjugation and oppression. The issue, however, lies with the presence of totalizing forces of control, like Empire. Here, the two goals align with the utopian

beliefs in a universalized and inclusive world. And similar to historical colonialism, the existence of these power structures relies on the creation of an ideological narrative. Previous narratives have relied on the misrepresentation of the native as ‘uncivilized,’ and ‘inhuman’ to foster a belief in European exceptionalism and superiority. And as Said establishes, “the rhetoric of power all too easily produces an illusion of benevolence when deployed in the imperial setting” (Said “Culture” xvii). This rhetoric justified colonial control under the premise of a belief in religious right and European responsibility to act on behalf of the native to bring them civilization and the religious teachings of Christianity.

Although postcolonial thought has extensively studied and condemned these practices, contemporary narratives seem to reflect a similar ideology. New visions of the global structure, like Bhabha’s Third Space, or Ashcroft’s multi-centered world, and even Hardt and Negri’s Empire, work to establish a benevolent rhetoric of multiculturalism. This rhetoric underlies the entirety of a postcolonial discourse, and establishes the stage for the creation of texts like Donoso’s. Here, this rhetoric of benevolence distracts us from fully understanding the commodification of postcolonial discourse, the appropriation of culture as a theft, and the ways in which these texts foster an imperial environment. The ideologies and power structures of imperialism have continued into our contemporary thought, the only difference being the narrative we employ to justify it.

Just as most Europeans believed in the morality of 'civilizing' the native, contemporary thinkers, like Donoso, believe in the morality of fostering multiculturalism and hybridity. Thus, while multiculturalism is promoted as the solution to global problems of racism and oppression, it also functions to distract us from the realities of contemporary imperialism while promoting an inherent belief in the benevolence of its actions.

## Conclusion

Although this reading of Donoso's *Obscene Bird* promotes a negative understanding of its structure and cultural appropriation, my goal has not necessarily been to condemn it or other authors who employ similar techniques. Artistically and aesthetically, the book functions to create a magical world that consistently engages the reader's imagination. There is no easy answer to the question of cultural appropriation's role in contemporary thought, and I'm not sure the arguments will become any less contentious in our globalizing world. However, the prevalence of imperial power structures to continually manifest through narrative is undeniable, as long as we begin to recognize it as such. Pushing the reading of the text past the conventional dialogue of postcolonialism, we can begin to see the inherent paradoxical structures of these discourses to perpetuate what they aim to condemn. Donoso's text easily lends itself as example of the seemingly positive intentionality of postcolonial writing and discourse to in fact conceal larger issues of autonomy and cultural representation. Here, we can begin to understand the appropriation, commodification, and exploitation of marginal identities, like the Mapuche as a symptom of larger issues in the struggle for global power and dominance, as well as something that must be recognized and addressed moving forward.

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