

CRITICAL APPROACHES TO LATIN AMERICAN FICTION

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- CONCIENCIA Y LENGUAJE EN EL QUIJOTE Y EL OBSCENO PAJARO DE LA NOCHE. By Hector Calderón. (Madrid: Pliegos, 1987. Pp. 234.)
- MYTHOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE FUTURE: JOSE MARIA ARGUEDAS. By Claudette Kemper Columbus. (New York: Peter Lang, 1986. Pp. 191. \$33.70.)
- STUDIES ON THE WORKS OF JOSE DONOSO: AN ANTHOLOGY OF CRITICAL ESSAYS. Edited by Miriam Adelstein. (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1990. Pp. 208. \$59.95.)

Commemoration of the encounter between Europe and the Americas has provided critics with fertile ground for exploring the cultural, social, anthropological, and psychological factors that have influenced Latin American narrative over the last five hundred years. In Spain, demographic and economic upheaval uprooted medieval thought. But it was the spiritual and intellectual awakening of the Renaissance that hastened the emergence in Spanish literature of the personal and individual "I." This new kind of character began to question traditional authority and to manifest an unhappiness born of frustrated certainty. The narrating "I"—the various ways of representing the speech of characters and the modes of explicit or implicit presence in the narrative of narrator and reader—has progressed from Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra's *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quixote de la Mancha* through the integration of the narrative "I" into the "collective consciousness" of a nation in José María Arguedas's *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* (1971) and on to its total disappearance in José Donoso's *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*.

In *Conciencia y lenguaje en El Quijote y El obsceno pájaro de la noche*, Héctor Calderón follows the evolution of the "I" from its Spanish beginning in Cervantes to its twentieth-century demise as exemplified in contemporary Chilean narrative. Calderón focuses on two aspects: the philosophical ideas that flourished in seventeenth-century Spain and modern psycholinguistic theory. In support of his thesis, Calderón finds a common link between Cervantes and Donoso in their interest in the complex relationship between "soma" and "psyche."

Across the centuries, thinkers and writers have relativized the human subject in terms of economic, social, cultural, historical, and psychological factors. Latin American fiction has reflected all these factors but has generally left out indigenous cultures because their legends, oral traditions, myths, and language were considered inconsequential or “marginal” by many writers. Claudette Kemper Columbus points out that Arguedas accused such writers of elitism, of using Indian themes merely as an intellectual exercise that created the illusion of understanding but not understanding itself. Her creative study *Mythological Consciousness and the Future* shows how the native peoples’ experience, their language, culture, myth, and legends were incorporated into narrative by Arguedas. She demonstrates that the Peruvian writer successfully portrayed the Indians’ constant struggle with a hostile world whose technology and political turmoil served only to exacerbate their cultural and social predicament.

Unlike many Latin American writers, Arguedas and Donoso chose not to alienate themselves from their culture. In their search for inspiration, they turned to a common source: the long-silenced voice of their culture, the “collective unconscious.” In its most basic elements of orality and myth both novelists found the means to challenge the steadfast pillars of Western thought: reason and logic. Scrutiny of Cervantes, Arguedas, and Donoso reveals that they used language not only as a means of reflecting social, cultural, and political reality but also as a way of exploring dimensions of reality concealed from consciousness. They realized that only via language can human beings master their environment, represent themselves, name themselves.¹

Calderón’s critical approach is much more flexible than that of Columbus. He tries to come to terms with a highly complex literary tradition that comprises European and Latin American components. The five main chapters of *Conciencia y lenguaje* are divided in two parts, the first dealing with Cervantes’s masterpiece, *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605–1615), and the second with Donoso’s *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*. Calderón begins by explaining that when “logos” became separate from “epos,” myth became the less valued oral tradition.² He also points out a

1. Fredric Jameson believes that literature has perpetuated a single voice in a class-dialogue and that peasant cultures cannot be assigned a place in the dialogical system without restoration or artificial reconstruction. *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* and *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* could easily be placed in the reconstructed category. In these novels, the framework of their reconstruction takes place in what are essentially peasant cultures, in their folk songs, fairy tales, popular festivals, and occult and oppositional systems (magic and witchcraft). See Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981).

2. The term *logos* is generally associated with truth or absolute meaning. Umberto Eco indicates that logos often manifests itself as a governed code of political, ideological, and cultural power that imposes its preordained interpretation by functioning as a form of social

significant change in narrative discourse: the time when the meaning of the word *psyche* shifted from its original meaning of *ghost* to signify the discovery of human thought, the rational *anima*.³

According to Calderón, Cervantes followed a long line of thinkers, critics, and writers who had pondered the effects of environment, culture, and history on the individual. Calderón offers the premise that Cervantes's character, Don Quixote de la Mancha, acted as a catalyst for exploring the "self." The mad Castilian thus became the harbinger of many modern novels that rely heavily on the use of psychological theory, opening to speculation the relationship between body and spirit, between soma and psyche.

Calderón explains the tremendous impact of philosophy and medicine on Cervantes, who was influenced by Juan Huarte's *Examen de ingenios para las creencias* (1575–1594) and Alonso López Pinciano's *Philosophía antigua poética* (1596).⁴ *Don Quixote* challenged the accepted concept that human beings were unified entities and introduced the idea that the individual could be affected by his or her environment. It must have been difficult for Cervantes to liberate his character from the medieval limitation of the ecclesiastical concept of "self," which was highly anonymous and undifferentiated from a hierarchical and theocentric world order. But once liberated, Don Quixote became the "I" who questioned tradition, authority, and even the validity of his own perceptions. In a sense, *Don Quixote* became the first fictional challenge of accepted concepts of reality, thus beginning a lengthy evolution of the "self" that, according to Calderón, reaches its climax in Donoso's *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*. Calderón describes the Chilean novel as "a violent text whose writer is alienated from himself and his own culture" (p. 138). Donoso's use of multiple points of view and fragmented narrative combine with the total lack of chronological or spatial unity to alienate the reader. Unlike *Don Quixote*,

control. He defines *epos* as the realm where "languages speak to themselves." It is the extrasubjective and extratextual realm of mystical thought that produces and denotes visions endowed with vague images and meanings that cannot be anchored to any pre-established code. *Epos* hence is the poetic side of human nature that remains open to interpretative keys. Its meaning lies outside the boundaries of preexisting social, political, or ideological frameworks incorporating language, myth, oral tradition, mysticism, symbolism, and metaphor. See Eco, *Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 163. In *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*, the written *logos* was separated from memory and from the formulaic style of the oral tradition in this way: the old women of the casa represent repressed memory, or *epos*, while the psychotic writer Humberto Peñazola represents writing, or *logos*.

3. To clarify this point, see Eric Havelock, "Preface to Plato," *Psyche or the Separation of the Knower from the Known* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1963).

4. Huarte dwelled on the psychological aspects of human nature, while Pinciano dedicated himself to studying aesthetics (*Conciencia y Lenguaje*, p. 17). Huarte defined *ingenio* as a mental power associated with reason and discourse whose by-product was poetic language. Cervantes also used Huarte's concept of "anima," the spiritual side of human nature that could differentiate between good and evil.

El obsceno pájaro de la noche has mythical and psychological elements that blur the reader's concept of reality rather than clarify it. Hence the reader must try to "bridge" the gaps created by Humberto-Mudito, a schizophrenic character whose multiple personalities reflect a complex and confused subconscious. In Calderón's opinion, the novel's chaotic and multiple images reflect Chile's colonial past, myth, legends, and superstitions, and thus the novel became Donoso's way of rejecting the Chilean social reality, especially that of the 1950s.

El obsceno pájaro de la noche also reflects a "cultural and personal crisis" (p. 138). Calderón emphasizes that Donoso and Cervantes both perceived writing as an act of communication. Calderón draws an intriguing analogy: Cervantes and Donoso belonged to two peculiar historical periods in which literature became widely available to the masses. Donoso himself referred to a "cultural phenomenon" that influenced "the new novel." In Calderón's opinion, this cultural change recalls the Siglo de Oro in which Cervantes was writing: "In both cases, a new wave of professional writers appeared who addressed themselves to a new reading public" (p. 144).

During the seventeenth century, Spain experienced a kind of "boom" following the technological advance of the printing press. Like the Latin American "boom," the Spanish counterpart reflected not only growing disenchantment and cynicism about existing social and cultural standards but also a new awareness of what it meant to be a Spaniard, or for that matter, a writer. Calderón believes that Donoso's Humberto-Mudito symbolizes the institution of writing in Latin America. He personifies the "I," the individual writer constantly under assault from convention and tradition (p. 168).

Both Cervantes and Donoso sought to express a unique sense of reality. Donoso's preoccupation with the "self," which is not unlike Cervantes's exploration of the individual perspective, was influenced by psychological theory (particularly Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*). Revelation of the existence of the "subconscious" made it possible for Donoso to eliminate the omniscient narrator, a change that had taken three hundred years to evolve. In *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*, the reader is confronted by Humberto-Mudito, a deformed creature who embodies the quintessence of the "unreliable narrator." The reader must overcome this narrative obstacle by putting his or her own perception, memories, imagination, and critical understanding to the test to discover whether the text reflects reality, fantasy, reason, or madness (p. 158).⁵

5. Humberto-Mudito assumes many personalities: Jerónimo; a witch; the seventh woman in the circle of old women in the casa; a slave when he assumes the identity of Iris Mateluna's dog; a virile and powerful papier-maché giant; the miraculous child (the awaited Messiah to the women of the casa); and finally, disappearing into the mummy-like folds of hemp, *el imbunche*, a human child who, according to Chilean oral tradition, was sacrificed by witches in order to serve as an oracle.

A common dilemma linking *Don Quixote* and *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* is that their main character's madness and personal crisis represent the same major human frailty: the inability to come to terms with one's personal reality. The basic difference between the fates of Don Quixote and Humberto-Mudito is that seventeenth-century tradition dictated the triumph of logic and reason. Hence before Don Quixote dies, he regains his sanity. By the late twentieth century, however, no such requirement existed. In *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*, the fictitious writer Humberto-Mudito is sacrificed, his narrative voice and textual presence totally obliterated from the text.

Although Calderón's *Conciencia y lenguaje* is a scholarly text, it avoids overburdening or confusing the reader because of its meticulous research and impeccable analysis. The argument is skillfully developed, and Calderón guides his reader through this exacting text with constant efforts to simplify difficult concepts. He also provides well-documented notes and a complete bibliography.

Columbus's *Mythological Consciousness and the Future: José María Arguedas* familiarizes its reader with the complexities of Arguedas's work, especially his posthumous novel, *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* (1971). She explains that Quechua and Aymara, indigenous languages of Peru, have remained virtually unchanged since the conquest. For the Aymara and Quechua peoples, mythical consciousness was never meant to fill an intellectual need to recreate reality—this awareness was reality itself. The fox-characters in *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* are symbolically and metaphorically rooted in Andean myth because, according to Arguedas, myth is the means of "trying to cope with the relationship of present to the future" (p. 2). According to Columbus, mythological consciousness acted for Arguedas "as source and as empowerment" (p. 131).⁶ He believed that in Andean myth, which is "still in the process of being made by way of an on-going collective oral tradition," the Indian and Peru itself would "find a way of trying to cope with the relationship of the present to the future" (p. 2).

According to Columbus, the great value of Arguedas's narrative is that "it is addressed to life rather than to literature" (p. 5). Thus *Mythological Consciousness and the Future* is an engaging text for those unfamiliar with Peru's cultural and linguistic reality. Arguedas was raised by Indians who spoke Quechua and Aymara, an experience that proved to be a lifelong influence. Columbus indicates that the indigenous languages of Peru were crucial to Arguedas's artistic creation because "it is the secret, quasi-mystical power of colloquial language which most critics equate with the savage/pagan mind which in Octavio Paz's words revived Latin

6. For more information on this subject, see the introductory note to *Inframundo: el México mexicano de Juan Rulfo* (Mexico City: Ediciones del Norte, 1983), 14–15.

American Literature" (p. 90).⁷ Arguedas considered the Quechua and Aymara languages to be polymorphic, onomatopoeic, "gerundive," and emotive, or what Columbus terms "concrete language[s] deeply dependent on context." In contrast, Arguedas considered Spanish and English as lexical abstract languages that are relatively free of context (p. 9). The idiosyncrasies of Quechua and Aymara do not lend themselves well to rigid narrative structures. Rather, Columbus argues, Arguedas used a "relativist language" that is inclusive, bewildering, and highly metaphorical.⁸ For example, such language allowed the "altiplano" and "costero" foxes to become what she terms "linguistic shifters."⁹ These transmuted foxes became a linguistic representation of "gods, founding ancestors, whores, gangsters, cheats, transgressors, and animals" who follow different ontological paths and alter the reader's perception.¹⁰

At the same time, Arguedas's use of animals avoided a "restrictive anthropomorphism," thus freeing the fox-characters from "human limitations."¹¹ Instead, his foxes are "anthropocentric and competitive creatures who are geocentric, explanatory, and probative": "Arguedas's foxes explain nothing, but create other contexts for understanding" (pp. 80, 88). According to Columbus, their primary function is not to portray a singular aspect of reality but a multifaceted reality; they are the "semiotic representation of literary consciousness" (p. 89). The foxes' meaning is not empirically based but "deeply implicated in language, linguistics, and rhetoric" (p. 86).¹²

7. Umberto Eco states that the modern novel presents reality as contingent and "meaningless" in reaction to conventional habits of perception. In this way, the modern novel releases reality from the illusion-making structure of memory so that the reader's imagination can be manipulated and even reoriented. See Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 25, 140, 142, 144, 145.

8. Most critical approaches have given preference to social or cognitive approaches. For one example, see V. N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, translated by Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986). In contrast, Benedetto Croce considers language a purely aesthetic phenomenon. See Croce, *The Essence of the Aesthetic*, translated by Douglas Ainslie (n.p.: Folcroft Library Editions, 1974). For an approach that encompasses the cultural and cognitive aspects of language, see Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 87–112, 136–63.

9. For more on language and primitive societies, see Roland Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), 164–65.

10. Quechua and Aymara are languages whose identities have been preserved by the constant altering of their forms. On this subject, see *Metaphor and Thought*, edited by Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 267.

11. Claude Lévi-Strauss has pointed out that when a symbolic animal appears, "we confront not the clan and the animal" but a reference to real society. See Lévi-Strauss, *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui: Mythes et religions* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962); and *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

12. Arguedas's foxes are hybrid creatures because, as Mikhail Bakhtin indicated, "hybridization" is the mixing of different linguistic consciousnesses. But the foxes are also "polyglossic" in that they express the simultaneous presence of two or more national languages interacting within a single cultural system. See Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, translated by Caryl Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 428–29.

Although Columbus does not deny that *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* is linguistically paradoxical, she explains that every text contains a zone in which potential “dialogics” becomes possible.¹³ In this novel, the “dialogic zone” is created by the constant interaction between the multitude of voices uttered by the “altiplano” and “costero” foxes.¹⁴ But she is quick to admit that the reader’s difficulties will not be totally eliminated by this dialogic zone because *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* is not a mere text but “a transcultural crisis.”

Columbus asserts that Arguedas’s text is permeated with “gaps,” calling it “a porous text” that the reader must overcome and interpret.¹⁵ She also labels *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* an “orgasmic” and “anarchic text.” In this instance, Columbus may be using the term *orgasmic* to designate the reader as “producer of the text.” But the term may also refer to Roland Barthes’s idea that “the orgasmic text [*texte de jouissance*] dislocates the reader’s historical, cultural, and psychological assumptions . . . and brings to a crisis his relation with language.”¹⁶ *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* is also an “anarchic” text because, as Columbus indirectly points out, it has abandoned a “primitive state” and created a language that can pass from “nature” to “culture,” a language that “blurs” and even erases the logic of modern society and paves the way for an eventual return to the mythical.¹⁷

The one troublesome aspect of *Mythological Consciousness and the Future* is its inherent negativism toward Western thought (its “anti-Eurocentric” view), which in my opinion weakens the text. Many highly subjective comments are made without proper justification. For example, Columbus early on comments, “the mythologies of the Western World implement heroic ideologies which have poisoned the planet” (p. 2). Although I partially agree with Columbus that with the “formalization” of language, Western thought has lost much of its “metaphysical quality,”

13. Ernst Cassirer indicated that symbols enable readers to perceive a given world because symbols do not embody any of the qualities or properties of the existing reality. For more on this topic, see Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, translated by Susan Langer (New York: Dover, 1946); and Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 1 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1953).

14. On “dialogics,” see Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogic Principle*, translated by Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); and Michael Holquist, “The Politics of Representation,” in *Allegory and Representation*, edited by R. Baily, preface by Stephen J. Greenblatt (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981). On “collective we-experience,” see V. N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 88; and Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*.

15. Columbus warns her readers not to rely on Norman Holland’s psychoanalytic approach. See Norman Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York: Oxford, 1968). On “bridging,” see Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

16. Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), 25–26. It was published in English as *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

17. See Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge*, 170–71.

I disagree with her assumption that this elusive quality can be found only in languages labeled as more complex and participatory because of their strong mythical component. This elusive quality characterizes all languages and is not exclusive to indigenous languages such as Aymara and Quechua. Moreover, all cultures have undergone similar linguistic modification in their gradual evolution from "intuitive" to "formal."¹⁸

More specific criticisms can also be made. For example, the chapter entitled "The Ex-istence of the Storied Fox in the Scissor Dancer's Dance" would have benefited from reference to the ideas expressed by Jacques Lacan on semiotics and by Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco on the subject of mirrors. Also, the comparison between Charles Dickens and Arguedas adds nothing to the study. Finally, *Mythological Consciousness and the Future* lacks a proper bibliography of primary and secondary sources, and the body of the study is flawed by the author's annoying habit of mentioning authors as sources without providing specific information on the texts being referred to. This lack of information severely hampers following up on Columbus's research and takes a heavy toll on the reader's patience.¹⁹

Studies on the Works of Jose Donoso: An Anthology of Critical Essays, compiled by Miriam Adelstein, consists of eleven essays: "Literature as an Exploration of Self: *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* and the Role of Narrator Agent" by Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman; "José Donoso: Farewell to Resemblance" by Lelia Madrid; "*El jardín de al lado*: Rewriting the Boom" by Oscar Moreno; Adelstein's "The Insubstantial Country of the Mind: *Cuentos* by José Donoso"; "The Dynamics of Psyche in the Existentialism of José Donoso" by Donald Gordon; "On Mothers and Power and How Not to Run a House in the Country" by María Salgado; "Disappearance under the Cover of Language: The Case of the Marquesita de Loria" by Sharon Magnarelli; "*La misteriosa desaparición de la Marquesita de Loria*, or The Frustration of the Erotic" by Myrna Solotoresvsky; "'Gaspar de la nuit': Crucial Breakthrough in the Growth of Personality" by Richard Callan; "Alienation and Resignation in Donoso's *Cuatro para Delfina*" by Philip Swanson; and "Closing Commentary: The Layers of Masks in the Work of José Donoso" by Marie-Lise Gazarian-Gautier. This collection will be very informative to readers unfamiliar with Donoso's work. Adelstein comments that the essays reflect various views of Chile's social and

18. In the languages that Eco considers "intuitive" (in this case, Aymara and Quechua), metaphors and symbols are more easily created and understood, producing narrative images that embody emotional, social, and cultural states. See Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 142.

19. The endnotes are extremely hard to follow. A number of authors are mentioned without specific references, and some of the Spanish citations are incorrect and riddled with typographical errors. Most annoying is the repeated use of what looks like an inverted letter c instead of Spanish accent marks.

cultural reality as well as the ontogenetic dilemma of the persona and of existence: isolation, alienation, and loneliness.

Adelstein states that “the author’s preoccupation with the individual and his or her anguish before the face of human existence has not only been infrequently acknowledged, but less commonly discussed.” Yet *Studies on the Work of José Donoso* scarcely represents the first time that this kind of critique has been attempted. Unfortunately, some of the essays in the collection are repetitious and lacking in originality, although others display much creativity and novel approaches to Donoso’s fiction.

For example, Oscar Moreno’s “*El jardín de al lado: Rewriting the Boom*” avoids the platitudes often found in essays dealing with Donoso’s narrative. This refreshing exception to the rule explores the human and artistic dilemma of a writer living in self-imposed exile. Moreno shows how Donoso’s persona emerges from that of a fictitious Chilean writer, Julio Méndez. A lonely and alienated human being who has been torn away from his own tradition, Méndez (like Donoso) lives in self-imposed exile in Madrid. According to Moreno, the fictitious writer’s difficulties parallel Donoso’s own struggle to belong to “a new breed of Latin American writers” (p. 27). Like his character, José Donoso found himself confronted with a painful choice: to yield to marketplace demands or to stick to his own determination of what constitutes a worthy text, one that will leave its indelible mark on literary history. Moreno observes that “a beautiful cypress from the garden next door becomes for Julio the sign of the unattainable discourse he desires, one that would transform history into art” (p. 31). Away from his roots, Méndez does not trust even his own memory: gazing at the garden next door, he questions politics, Allende’s fall, his own life and exile, and history.

María Salgado’s essay departs from tradition in using a feminist approach to analyze *Casa de Campo*. The title of her piece, “On Mothers and Power and How Not to Run a House in the Country,” expresses her disagreement with the widespread opinion that the portrayal of women in Latin American fiction continues to follow predictable patterns. Salgado’s opinion may be debatable, but one must acknowledge that many contemporary Latin American novels challenge female stereotypes, including Sergio Galindo’s *Otilia Rauda*, Laura Esquivel’s *Como agua para chocolate*, and the many novels of Elena Garro.

Salgado also disputes Luis Leal’s radical polarization of the female role as either saint or prostitute. Salgado correctly asserts that, like it or not, the role of women in Latin American fiction is changing—and criticism along with it. Her essay demonstrates that almost any Latin American novel can be analyzed from a feminist point of view. For example, her analysis of the house illuminates its ambivalence as a symbol. The house can convey happiness, security, sorrow, or alienation. To men, it usually symbolizes law and obedience, but to women it generally represents

blood relationships and telluric (earthly) alliances. Salgado supports her analysis by pointing out Donoso's ambivalence toward the sexes, especially as expressed in novels like *El lugar sin límites*, *El jardín de al lado*, and *Tres novelitas burguesas*. In Salgado's opinion, Donoso's ambivalence reflects the failure of the patriarchal system.

Sharon Magnarelli's highly imaginative essay explores Donoso's short novel, *La misteriosa desaparición de la Marquesita de Loria*. Magnarelli offers three distinct approaches in discussing this work as an erotic novel, a mystery novel, and a masterpiece of Spanish American Modernism. She also explores the possibility that the "erotic" label placed on this novel by many critics hides the fact that it "conveys a serious message as it reflects many of the same topics and preoccupations found in Donoso's other texts."

Lelia Madrid's "José Donoso: Farewell to Resemblance" deals with the complexities of language in an intriguing but sometimes baffling manner. It is difficult to know what to make of statements such as "Magic is not a reversal leading to animist and/or analogic power of words; it is plain disorder" (p. 101). How does Madrid explain the fact that so many contemporary Latin American writers search for meaningful answers to individual, social, and historical questions in the magic elements that permeate myth, legend, and oral tradition? Is she suggesting that Latin American writers believe that the answer to their personal, artistic, social, and historical dilemmas will be found only in the negated aspects of myth and orality that have been ignored for so long?

Madrid also states, "The most appalling discovery is that the specular relationship (the imaginary realm in the Lacanian sense) is not found [in *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*]. The imaginary order, the acknowledgment of oneself in another by means of resemblance, does not take place as such . . . ; the self is many others" (p. 16). In my opinion, Lacanian theory applies particularly well to Humberto-Mudito, the frustrated writer in *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*. Lacan indicated that the mirror stage of adult development must be interpreted as a metaphor for a desire for harmony within a subject essentially in discord. As Ellie Ragland-Sullivan has explained, "The subject is a network of identificatory and linguistic relations formed by the effects of the external world as they correspond to survival needs and demand for recognition."²⁰ Lacan insisted that individuals make the world of their thought equal to their own conscious understanding of it. Retaining assumed meanings often provides the comfort of resolution but only the illusion of understanding.²¹ Hence it would be somewhat imprudent to attempt to codify Lacan's psycho-linguistic theory, something he himself avoided.

20. See Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 7, 16–27.

21. *Ibid.*, p. x.

The critics contributing to the three volumes under review faced the formidable task of incorporating into their analyses the paradoxical relationship between soma and psyche, conscious and unconscious, history and myth, culture and language, power and gender. Their eclectic approaches allow them to depart from conventional norms of interpretations in challenging Western pragmatism, increasing the reader's awareness, and revealing unique individual and collective realities. Whatever the limitations of these studies, their common purpose is the laudable one of making readers aware of the complexities of contemporary Latin American fiction, and at times these works succeed in offering insights that are helpful in negotiating such challenging narratives.