THE UNDERSIDE OF POWER: READING THE FANTASTIC IN THE WORKS OF THE
CHILEAN WRITER JOSÉ DONOSO

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the fantastic in the work of the Chilean author José Donoso (1924-1996). My thesis is that Donoso’s invocation of the fantastic in these narratives, subverts social constructs and power structures, specifically those associated with identity and sexuality. Via textual analysis, I argue that narratives such as “Santelices” (1956), El obsceno pájaro de la noche (1970), El jardín de al lado (1981), Naturaleza muerta con cachimba (1990), El lugar sin límites (1971), and Lagartija sin cola (2007) invite us to rethink how we see ourselves as we interact with his characters, often portrayed as tormented souls in hellish spaces. I am interested in the manifestations of power in Donoso’s works with emphasis on those forms which may compel us to reexamine our own identities and world views or to rethink Donoso’s life experience as an author who survived self-imposed exile and life far from his beloved home of Chile. I maintain that Donoso’s characters and use of the fantastic decenter individual and collective discourse with regard to identity, sexuality, gender roles, and other constructs created principally through language and culture.
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INTRODUCTION

The works of the Latin-American Boom Generation of the 1960’s and 70’s have boasted a global audience and a wide gamut of critical attention for their accomplishments in portraying the irrational, unaccepted and mysterious aspects of life more commonly described as the fantastic, a term defined by Mikhail Baktin (1973) as a “provocation” or “testing” of the truth (94). Tzvetlan Todorov (1973) calls it a form of “hesitation between the real and the imaginary” which readers experience (36). This idea has been revisited by recent cultural theorists and literary critics such as Cynthia Duncan (2010) who sees the fantastic as a mode of fiction, a genre in and of itself, or even a hybrid space where cultural differences collide. A marked emphasis is placed on the fantastic in the works of the Boom writers who lived and worked in culturally and politically charged environments during the 1960’s and 1970’s in Latin America. Adrian Curiél Rivera suggests that writers such as José Donoso, to whom he dedicates an entire chapter in Novela española y boom hispanoamericana (2006), find their creativity rooted in the fantastic, and focus on two aspects of life, the imaginary and the lived or experienced (Curiel-Rivera 304). In this fashion, he contends they are rebelling through a rebuilding of reality which highlights their disagreement with the world around them and with prior, realist literary traditions. He exemplifies this generation of writers by citing authors like Mariano Azuela, Ricardo Güiraldes, Romulo Gallegos, and Miguel Angel Asturias; he labels their work in general

\[1\] See Cynthia Duncan pp. 18-23.
as the “novela primitiva.”² I believe that Donoso’s preoccupations with fantasy and space are representative of his concerns with marginalized groups, such as the servant class, which played an important part of his childhood, those who are shunned for being different from the majority, and those who do not neatly fit into the roles which are imposed upon them by a patriarchal culture. A clear fascination with the ephemeral is seen in the author’s texts, which span roughly fifty years of his career. Another persistent theme in his writing is art, more specifically literature, although references to painting are abundant in his later novels. In Donoso’s writing, technique, form, voice, and perspective are as important as plot and theme. Readers of Donoso see that his work often avoids direct reference to any verifiable reality and emphasizes tone, composition, interplay of human relationships, and the interior world of human beings. In fact, Donoso’s textual reality is often splintered, and voices of authority are repeatedly muted or undercut. The persistent representation of hollow spaces throughout his work represents, among several interpretations which I will address, a fascination for the inherent hollowness of language and art, the ambiguity in words, and socially imposed labels and identities.³ Reality in his writing is portrayed as multiple, slippery, and subjective, seeking to project the human mind, the imagined.

The title of my dissertation, The Underside of Power: Reading the Fantastic in the Works of José Donoso, begs an examination of whom or what is on this “underside of power,” a phrase turned by José Donoso in a 1992 interview by Ricardo Gutierrez Mouat. Donoso said, “I’ve always been very attracted by poverty and by what I call the underside of power. I’m interested in the clochards, hobos, the servant class, in people with no means

² See Adrián Curiel Rivera, pp. 297-301, for a discussion on “novela primitiva” versus “novela creativa”.
³ See Sharon Magnarelli, Understanding José Donoso pp. 11-12.
who have nothing because they are afraid to be stripped of everything” (Gutierrez Mouat 16). With this perspective, power becomes an important focal point of my investigation as I examine a selection of Donoso’s narratives in different genres from over a period of roughly fifty years. The texts, which I analyze, are representative of Donoso’s entire body of work, and they allow me to sample his writing, persistent themes, and preoccupations across his career. My thesis is that Donoso’s invocation of the fantastic in these narratives, subverts social constructs and power structures, specifically those associated with identities and sexuality.

I argue that narratives such as “Santelices” (1956), El obsceno pájaro de la noche (1970), El jardín de al lado (1981), Naturaleza muerta con cachimba (1990), El lugar sin límites (1971), and Lagartija sin cola (2007) invite us to rethink how we see ourselves as we interact with his characters, often portrayed as tormented souls in hellish spaces and circumstances. I am interested in the manifestations of power in Donoso’s works, with emphasis on those forms which may compel us to reexamine our own identities and world views or to rethink Donoso’s life experience as an author who survived self-imposed exile and life far from his beloved Chile. I maintain that Donoso’s characters and utilization of the fantastic, decenter individual and collective discourse with regard to identity, sexuality, gender roles, and other constructs created principally through language and culture.

Donoso’s protagonists are marginalized, rendered powerless, confined to limited spaces, muted, and in some cases destroyed. They are domestic servants, artists, writers, dancers, clergy, prostitutes, lesbians, homosexuals or latent homosexuals, and often middle-aged or elderly. They frequently rely on daydreams or fantasies as a type of escape from the oppression imposed upon them. Given these preliminary observations, I will
propose a broader interpretation of the fantastic, one which underscores its subversive properties. This dissertation, which employs textual analysis, seeks to exact a critical view of the human condition and its power struggles via a perspective of the fantastic in the many spaces (textual, physical, and psychological) in Donoso’s narratives, over time, and literary genre.

**Donoso in the Context of the Boom**

Among the Latin American writers of the 1960’s and 70’s there seemed to be at least two common goals with their generation: to break free of the realist traditions of the prior generation of writers from Latin America and to grow a more global readership.⁴ In order to achieve such goals, they faced the task of creating a new product, reinterpreting reality in a distinct way. The fruit of their labor would become known as the New Latin American Narrative, commonly known as the Latin American Boom novel, or as Curiel Rivera suggests the “novela de creación.”⁵ José Donoso Yáñez (1924-1996) has become known as an author of texts with intense psychological development with respect to his characters who are, in differing ways, tortured souls. Donosian characters tend to struggle between their inner, psychological world and the outer world; and as we will see, they often lose their grasp of the latter. Writers in Latin America of this general period collectively turned their focus inward and away from nationalistic and realistic themes in order to

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⁴ See Adrian Curiel Rivera, particularly his chapter “El boom visto por sí mismo”, pp. 259-332.
⁵ See Curiel Rivera p. 297, where he discusses “novela primivita” and “novela de creación”.

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appeal to global readers in what George McMurray calls an “irrealista” quality (McMurray 19).

Regarding Donoso’s career, it is important to know that his emergence on the Latin American literary scene takes place as early as the 1950’s, but gains its momentum with the more popular commercial wave of the Boom writers of the 1960’s. The Boom traditionally includes Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez; most all of these were supported, promoted and published by Carlos Barral in Barcelona. Donoso’s narratives frequently critique the ignorance and greed of Chilean bourgeois society, but critics, like Sharon Magnarelli and Donald Shaw who have already studied Donoso across various texts, agree this is only one of many readings his writing sustains.

Readers of Donoso would find it difficult to miss the obvious breech between the interior and exterior spaces developed in his texts. As a writer of short stories, novellas and novels, Donoso has come to an elevated status for his experimentation with narrative technique and, along with other Boom authors, his dissatisfaction with the literary and social status quo. In comparison with other Chilean writers of his generation, Donoso has been called “the most outstanding and prestigious” in the words of George McMurray. With regard to the clan of Boom writers, Donoso has been affectionately labeled “the fifth man” and has been somewhat underappreciated by comparison.7

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6 See Josè Vicente Saval “Carlos Barral y el boom” (2001).
7 See Donoso’s obituary by James Kirkup in The Independent, Saturday December 14, 1996.
In the years following his death, there was a gradual decrease in the critical attention which his works attract until in 2007 when his editor, Julio Ortega, published a posthumous novel found in the writer’s personal papers, *Lagartija sin cola*. Then in 2009 his daughter, Pilar Donoso, published *Correr el tupido velo*, a collection of the writer’s creative notes, papers, letters, and personal diary which sparked a short-lived, although renewed, critical interest in Donoso’s writing. I find that Donoso’s texts transcend time as they deal with human psychology, sexuality, and in more general terms, with power struggle. These are the themes that have drawn my attention to look more closely at Donoso over time. I believe that Donoso’s writing has by and large gone underappreciated, perhaps misunderstood, or possibly overlooked because of its complexity, its radical and subversive qualities.

The focus of this dissertation deals specifically with Donoso’s use of the fantastic and how as literary genre, theme, or mode, it permits the author to engage polemics such as gender roles, sexuality, exile, and others which otherwise would have been impossible to tackle for a Chilean writer of his generation and sociopolitical circumstances. As we shall see, the fantastic frequently manifests itself in Donoso’s writing in the form of dreams, daydreams, works of art, gardens, oral tradition, and drug induced psychoses. It is pertinent to my research to note, as Sharon Magnarelli has done previously, that Donoso was keenly interested in the process of writing and artistic creation:

> For him style and technique are as important as his thematic concerns. How we perceive is as much as issue in his prose as what we perceive. That is why the questions of art, artistic techniques, and artistic materials are so
frequently the subject as well as the material of his work. (Magnarelli, Understanding 4)

Art and writing, or even the inability to write or create, are common subjects in Donoso’s longer, more elaborate texts, but these barely scratch the surface of the various themes presented along the length of his career. For example, we can obviously see his emphasis on art in the novella *Naturaleza muerta con cachimba*, and in the novel *El Jardín de al lado*, wherein contemplation on paintings and the act of writing, take the thematic spotlight. Other themes into which he delves have been those of the exile experience, rejection in various forms, multiple approaches concerning poverty, wealth, aristocratic families, servants, prostitution, transvestitism, masks, communication, miscommunication, and power. The common denominator among these themes and his varied settings is a focus on man’s multiple inner realities in stark contrast against his outer, more tangible reality. Such thematic thrusts allow us to begin to appreciate the highly psychological quality of his writing. My contention is that an analysis of the functions of fantastic in Donoso’s texts will further elucidate our understanding of his fiction as seen across his career and in short stories, novellas, and full-length novels. Through such an analysis I seek to highlight his concern for those on the “underside of power.” I also seek to demonstrate how Donoso’s writing evolves over time, yet still draws attention to several themes which repeat themselves and seem to have haunted the writer all his life.

At this juncture, it is relevant to establish the importance of Donoso’s generation of writers and the impetus for their collective thrust in literature, before entertaining the particulars of Donoso’s writing. What exactly did Boom writers do differently than the generation before them that brought such notoriety and world-wide fame? Adrian Curiél
Rivera informs us that writers such as José Donoso had their creative roots planted in the fantastic. This, he suggests, is a method through which they exalt “dos dimensiones de lo humano: lo imaginario y lo vivido” (Curiel Rivera 304). In this fashion, he explains, they are rebelling through a reconstruction of reality which divulges their disagreement with the world around them. This begs for the investigation of some sort of social commitment shared by the Boom writers, even though Donoso denied any political commentary in his work. Curiél Rivera quotes Carlos Fuentes when describing the Boom Generation, which he terms the creativos, held in contrast to writers from the prior realist generation, termed primitivos: “sería mejor decir que en los nuevos autores la concepción de la realidad es más ancha que en la novela primitiva, pues abraza no sólo lo que los hombres hacen, sino también lo que sueñan o inventan” (Curiel Rivera 303). This quality led to the internationalization and hence the broad popularity of the Boom narratives. Readers were clearly attracted to the cerebral qualities of the texts. They not only described man in his environment, but also reconstructed his reality by placing emphasis on the psychological qualities, one of the many functions of the fantastic pertinent to my investigation. Donoso openly confessed that the intimate, interior world of his characters interested him. In Conjeturas sobre la memoria de mi tribu (1996), an autobiographical text not included in the sample of texts in the present study, Donoso discusses his fascination with this interior world evidenced in the following excerpt:

Para mí la casa es el espacio donde ocurre la fábula, donde supercede la novela, el lugar de acción y la pasión, del orden y las reglas, y del

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9 See the interviews of Donoso by Gutierrez Mouat (1992) and Guillermo I. Castillo (1970)
catastrófico [. . .] Insisto en el tema porque soy, esencialmente, un hombre de casas. [. . .] Tengo que contar las riquezas que de esas habitaciones he derivado: una sensibilidad para captar las estructuras humanas que produjeron esas habitaciones. [. . .] Esas habitaciones tienen una voz, y hablan, y uno puede reconstruir a los habitantes a partir de astillas y trapos. Uno recrea relaciones y estructuras, inventa armamentos y sensibilidades y emociones (267-268).

This fragment evidences Donoso’s view of realistic description as only part of his repertoire. The splinters and rags found in the confines of a home are one technique for gaining access to the sensibilities and emotions of those characters in them, which are essential for my approach to Donoso. He admits: “Dicen los críticos que en el centro de todos mis libros existe, como un espacio cerrado, una casa, el palacete modernista de Coronación, el burdel de El Lugar sin límites, la mansión de Marulandia en Casa de campo y tantas otras” (Donoso, Coreer 440). In this quote, taken from Pilar Donoso’s 2009 text, which reveals her father’s personal memoires, the author admits his predilection for interior spaces, in particular the houses of his past and how they influenced his writing. What strikes me as particularly revealing however is his mistrust for the concept of reality, for its lack of coherence, and the description of literature as a marvelous, painful, adventure. Perhaps among his personal papers written along the length of his career and left for his daughter to read later in life, is a compass for reading Donoso’s work, or even a warning to Pilar about life’s inherent difficulties. I see it as yet another indicator of Donoso’s consistent infatuation with the interior or psychological journey, which is decidedly a focus of his writing.
In considering the writing of the Boom Generation from a broader perspective, it is particularly illuminating to consider the critical work of Donald Shaw at this point in order to better understand how, as a group, they sought to innovate Latin American letters. In his article “Which was the First Novel of the Boom?” printed in *Modern Language Review* (1994), Shaw focuses on the novels published during the popularity of Spanish-American fiction and compares three different lists of characteristics for which Boom writers such as Donoso his colleagues were known. The first of Shaw’s lists, attempting to enumerate the qualities of the boom novels, is his own creation and includes the following characteristics which I have summarized below: disappearance of the old Creole novel with the emergence of the metaphysical novel; tendency to subordinate observation to creative fantasy and the mythologizing of reality; tendency to emphasize the ambiguous, irrational and mysterious aspects of reality and personality at times pointing to the absurd; tendency to distrust the concept of love and the emphasis on the miscommunication and solitude; tendency to simplify the concept of death; rebellion against all forms of moral taboos above all those related to religion and sexuality; emphasis on the somber qualities of our secret life; use of humoristic and erotic elements; tendency to abandon the linear, ordered and logical structure of the traditional novel, replacing it with another structure based on the spiritual evolution of the protagonist or based on experimental structures; the tendency to subvert the chronological, linear concept of time; tendency to replace realistic scenery as that seen in the realist novel and focus on imaginary spaces; tendency to exchange the omniscient third person narrator with multiple or ambiguous narrators; a greater use of symbolic elements (362).
While an extensive list, Shaw’s contribution is indispensable for the purpose of my investigation as it attempts to catalog the literary strategies of Donoso’s generation. I find that all the tendencies he suggests are aptly descriptive of Donoso’s longer texts, while several also serve to confirm an overall dependency on fantastic elements as a generation-wide reaction to the realists, or what some call the primitive novels of Latin America’s past. He informs us that Boom writers collectively sought to question the role of authors and to examine how we perceive reality (363). Curiél Rivera, contrary to the efforts of Shaw, claims there is no such common denominator when it comes to Boom writers. He writes: “Su semejanza es, justamente, su diversidad” (Curiel-Rivera 302). I tend to agree more with Shaw in that one can see clear similarities among the Boom authors, but I will discuss this at length, at a later point in the present study. Regardless of the debate, my primary interest is the effect of Donoso’s use of fantastic, a term I define in chapter one. The effects of the fantastic, and how the writers emphasize these, are key to understanding Donoso’s writing.

As we narrow our focus specifically to José Donoso and his writing, it is pertinent to first have some inkling of the writer’s personal life, as this becomes more important in my sampling of his writing across time. Born in 1924 in Chile to an upper middle class family, Donoso began his studies at home with an English governess and claimed to be primarily raised by a family servant, given that his father was a medical doctor often busy with work or his passion for horse racing. When the English-speaking governess and tutor left the Donoso family, he was enrolled in an English day school. He later majored in English language and literature at the University of Chile and in 1949 received a fellowship which allowed him to study at Princeton University in the United States. In the U.S., he
published his first two short stories which were written in English and was very active with the school’s literary magazine.

After his experience at Princeton, Donoso returned to Chile and published his first short story in Spanish “China” (1954) and soon after, a collection of short stories Verano y otros cuentos (1955). His second anthology of short stories El Charlestón y otros cuentos (1971) contains a selection of short narratives, which along with “Santelices” (1962) and “China”, were collectively published in the anthology Los mejores cuentos de Donoso (1965). These stories generally portray individuals living in fixed, unyielding social circumstances who enjoy little opportunity to rebel against those socially accepted lifestyles of this time and space in Latin American history. Donosian characters who defy the social norms seldom thrive or prosper by the end of the narrative. There is a persistent preoccupation on behalf of the characters in Donoso’s short fiction with exclusion or rejection for going against the social grain because of desire, need, or ambition. Obvious emphasis is often placed on the spatial contrast between interior and exterior planes in these short stories and as we shall see, this preoccupation carries over to Donoso’s character development. In many cases, we begin to see the contrast between the lived and the imagined, which I explore in the present study. Magnarelli notes the dearth of critical attention to Donoso’s short stories but qualifies them as “valuable works” that “foreshadow the author’s later works” (Magnarelli, Understanding 15). Others go as far as claiming that “Santelices” is “one of the finest examples of the craft of short fiction in Latin America” (Fein 89). This solidifies my own opinion that the text deserves further discussion and therefore will be used to introduce my own approach to Donoso.
Contributions to the Field

The primary contribution of this dissertation will be to locate and examine the fantastic in Donoso and how it allows his narratives to disrupt common views on such notions as gender roles, sexuality, art, literature, and identities such as that of exile, woman, and man. I aim to explore the fantastic in Donoso’s writing as a subversive quality which allows readers to better understand the workings of power, specifically on themes of sexuality, gender roles, and discourse. Through such a study, I can identify themes and characters that are repeated, but also are amplified and refined along the Donoso’s life and writing. I believe this donosian archetype, reveals personal issues that concerned Donoso along his life.

My critical analysis of Donoso’s writing scrutinizes a body of his work which I have specifically selected hoping to demonstrate his evolving engagement with the fantastic in short stories, novellas, and novels. The framework of my study includes literary and theoretical approaches to Donoso’s most evocative fiction. This approach allows me to uniquely understand the development of his characters who collectively deal with big questions about human nature and power struggles that have challenged mankind for ages. My research offers a new way of looking at Donoso’s writing as it aims to generate questions and discussions that ask us to rethink cultural or social ideals that have become institutionalized, universally accepted, or even unnoticed in our own identities. My dissertation will expand upon and contribute to the understanding of fantastic as an active way of interrogating authoritative truths and hierarchical notions of power. I see it as a type of subaltern space which seems to evolve in Donoso’s texts across time and literary
genre as we see the fantastic qualities of his texts further developed and amplified from his short stories leading up to his longer fiction. Another contribution of this project will be seen in my analysis of the little-studied posthumous novel *Lagartija sin cola* (2007), which has received scant critical attention since its publication. This novel therefore presents a unique opportunity to examine a more recently-published text as part of my research.

Given this task, I begin by discussing the short story “Santelices” as part of this introduction. Its protagonist is a frustrated man named Santelices who can temporarily escape the oppression of his immediate surroundings by way of a secret photo collection, of questionable content, discovered by readers in part one of this short story. Where his landlord, don Eusebio, admits he would rather find Santelices rifling through a secret stash of photos of naked women, he instead discovers a guarded collection of images. The existence of which he describes as a “cosa de loco” and “muy raro” –clearly deviant behavior from his perspective (Donoso, “Santelices” 254). The protagonist in “Santelices” lays the foundation for a series of Santelices-like characters that reappear and are observed in a variety of Donoso texts. This short story serves as a point of departure for this dissertation as it brings themes such as power relations, sexuality, and gender into focus in the writer’s earlier, short fiction. I go on to probe such themes in the writer’s lengthier texts in the remainder of this dissertation, which I will outline below.

**Overview of Chapters**

In Chapter one, I lay out the theoretical foundation for my dissertation and review the pertinent literature that contributes to my approach. Here, I critically review a selection of works by Judith Butler, Nancy Chodorow, and Michel Foucault in regard to power and
identity. I also engage with Cynthia Duncan, Rosemary Jackson, and Tzvetlan Todorov among others, in my discussion of “fantastic” and its role in Donoso’s work. I review some of the previous critical work done on José Donoso as it pertains to power, Otherness, and the fantastic. A comparison and contrast of my interpretation of “fantastic” with other notions frequently associated with the Boom writers, such as “magical realism” further elucidates my unique approach to Donoso.

In Chapter two, I begin my analysis of Donoso’s novels with El obsceno pájaro de noche (1970); a text which is often considered his literary masterpiece. Expressed from the point of view of an ambiguous and changing narrator who eventually is muted and sewn into a burlap sack or imbunche by the end of the novel, Obsceno tells the fragmented and twisting story of an aristocratic Chilean family and oligarchic society in ruins wherein the women of the family and the retired female servants threaten patriarchal order. This novel was completed after many years and versions, through Donoso’s surgery for an ulcer and treatment with morphine. A hallucinatory novel, it demands multiple readings and has received the most critical attention among Donoso’s work. While those who have analyzed this narrative tend to disagree on any primary theme or message, in reading Obsceno, I contend that we should not try to analyze one voice, character, space, or theme above others because the novel ultimately contradicts any hints of hierarchy. My reading emphasizes the writer’s use of the fantastic as I examine power relations in discourse, sexuality and patriarchy. A Foucauldian approach to the fantastic qualities in this novel reveals how characters who initially seem powerful become disenfranchised, as the underlings, the servants, the old women of the casa, undermine the order with a twisted version of control.
I seek to divulge how this relates to Donoso’s views on power as they pertain to gender discourse in a patriarchal society.

My examination of *El Jardín de al lado* (1981) makes up chapter three. In *Jardín*, Julio and Gloria Mendez are a Chilean couple living and writing in exile, in Spain, after the coup of September 11th 1973, during which Salvador Allende was ousted by the Chilean Military. This novel, about their experience in Spain, speaks to us about the protagonists’ past and present, dealing with loss, identities, and the negotiation of these as part of the exile experience. In a play on dictatorial authority and writing as a creative process, Julio’s seemingly-first-person narration is the one which prevails above all over voices in this novel, permitting the reader to better understand his thoughts, especially in the extended fantasy sequences of this novel. Herein the narrator negotiates past and present while battling a mid-life crisis which is compounded by his failing marriage and status as an exile. In this chapter, I examine how the fantastic, in *Jardín*, allows further exploration of the trauma of exile, and I highlight therapeutic qualities of a fantastic engagement with trauma. *Jardín* foments a discussion regarding the suffering of those who may have been officially exiled in times of a dictatorship, or as Donoso himself, have lived through self-imposed exile. Though various critics see *Jardín* as highly autobiographical, at the very least it marks an existential turn toward a consideration of the ways in which man deals with suffering and rejection.¹¹

¹¹ See Paula Simon (2007) and Ramón Garcia-Castro (2002)
Donoso once again shows his penchant for the eccentric, single male living an unfulfilled life in *Naturaleza muerta con cachimba* (1990) in Chapter four. In this novella, which in very concrete ways recalls the short story “Santelices,” Marcos Ruiz Gallardo is unhappy with his work, his role as the head of a local art appreciation society, and with his relationship with a local girl named Hildita Botto. One of Donoso’s less labyrinthine narratives, *Naturaleza* is a novella wherein I study how the protagonist relies on fantasy to “escape” misery and the banality of his circumstances in post-dictatorial Chile. In this text, the protagonist dreams of taking on the identity and lifestyle of an artist who once lived in high society European art circles. What he finds though, is his material and social ruin. Here, I compare the protagonist of, Marcos Ruiz Gallardo, with the Donosian archetype first seen in “Santelices.” I also reexamine the plausibility of some of the critical interpretations which have been hinged on this text.

In Chapter five, I discuss subjection and sexuality in *El lugar sin límites* (1995) and *Lagartija sin cola* (2007). With these two novels, both published toward the end of his career, I can trace the development of Donoso’s treatment of fantasy, space, and power in the creation of his most poignant characters. In *El lugar sin límites*, la Manuela’s fantasies along with her dance routines as owner and dancer in a local brothel in the village of Estación el Olivo, ultimately lead to what can be read as her demise because she challenges the locals’ understanding of gender roles and sexuality. The jaded painter Armando Muñoz-Roa, in *Lagartija sin cola*, suffers psychotic episodes and experiences deeply-seated feelings of alienation and rejection, both personally and professionally. He is cast aside by the artistic community of the big city and reduced to an outsider in the realm of a scenic Spanish pueblo, in which he seeks refuge. These two novels form the central focus
of the culminating chapter of my dissertation because they offer Donoso’s most thoroughly-developed characters who test the boundaries of sexuality. These works also display Donoso’s most disconcerting use of language, and solidify his continued use of the fantastic in style and content. More importantly, both novels examined in this chapter deal with dominant notions of sexuality and gender roles as Donoso’s characters struggle against and seemingly look to subvert them. These texts inspire my discussion of the writer’s play on open and enclosed spaces, another Donoso constant.

In the conclusion of my dissertation, Looking Back and Looking Forward, I review the main arguments in my examination of Donoso’s works, the manifestations and functions of fantastic in his writing as it pertains to his treatment of power. Here, I conclude my discussion of the donosian archetype, its constancy and possible evolution along the writer’s career. I also include a brief discussion of Donoso’s memoirs, published by his daughter in 2009, and suggest ways in which the information it offers may provide new and deeper understanding of qualities I have highlighted in his writing. Such qualities, I believe, help us to better understand Donoso’s writing and technique. Lastly, I outline my future interests in researching the fantastic, specifically in Donoso’s first two publications published in the United States, in English, and how they may further elucidate themes which inspired the writer from onset of his career.

“Santelices” as a Point of Departure

I would like to discuss the short story “Santelices” as a starting point for my analysis of the fantastic in José Donoso’s writing. This story was first published in the collection Los Mejores cuentos de José Donoso (1956), and is highly indicative of his writing across
time and genre. It also showcases some themes which become constants in Donoso’s lifelong writing such as the psychological dimensions and struggle of the human condition. Specifically, we see a man at odds, caught between his intimate, inner being and that demanded by the world at large.

This dissertation was conceived as an exploration of a lesser-studied approach to Donoso’s writing, specifically by calling attention to power struggle and the oppression imposed upon us by our world by those around us. Thus, as we begin to look at the psychological spaces portrayed, we are also reminded of the struggle that almost all Donoso’s characters endure. These are physical and mental in the case of Santelices, the protagonist of this short story. In Donoso’s early writing, specifically his shorter fiction, the main characters often rebel in some fashion—they struggle against society’s expectations of them. Although they are often unsuccessful in this rebellion, a clear divide is established between desire and the strict limits placed upon them by culture, by the people around them, by tradition. This divide is developed spatially in the story as well, and seen in the writer’s frequent plays between inside and outside, closed and open, light and dark. Such qualities, present in “Santelices”, are more completely developed in the writer’s lengthier texts.

I contend that Donoso develops a critique of this outer, oppressive space as it leaves little room for any deviance from prescribed, cultural norms. “Santelices” offers an example of this critique in a well-written narrative from the 1950’s when Donoso’s artistic focus was geared toward writing short stories. Santelices, the protagonist, offers us a model to which I compare Donoso’s subsequent, main characters.
Santelices is a middle-aged, single, middle-class man who lives in a pensión under the vigilance of Bertita and don Eusebio, daughter and father, as well as the owners of said establishment where Santelices rents his room. Of greater importance is the fact that Santelices is dissatisfied with his life and seeks some sort of relief or way out of these displeasing circumstances. One sees this again and again as a reader of Donoso and these connections first caused me to question the importance of this pattern. The story is divided into three parts: the first narrates the discovery, by don Eusebio, of a secret that Santelices has kept hidden in the bottom cubby of his chest of drawers, but has now suddenly decided to take out for his viewing pleasure. The second elucidates the secret as a compilation of exotic photos which Santelices has collected and ends with Santelices’ discovery of a lower-level balcony and the inhabitants, a young girl and her kitten, of an apartment located just below his office window. The last informs us of the increasing tensions in the pensión and ends with a climax wherein the protagonist throws himself from his office window toward this balcony about which he has repeatedly obsessed in recent days.

The narrator is third-person, seemingly-omniscient, but we as readers soon discover there is something more to this narration. Perhaps more important is the focalization or perspective of this narrator. Beyond a simple third-person narrator, the focalization is founded on some character that can see what he or she is narrating. Possibly coming from another character in the story or one from an outside perspective, this linked narration adds another dimension to the text. The effect enriches our understanding of the characters. In “Santelices,” the focalization is complex; it has varying access to the thoughts of the characters in the story: “Era imposible comprender que don Eusebio hablaba tanto si los vencidos músculos de su boca desdentada parecían incapaces de producir otra cosa que
débiles borbotones y pucheros” (Donoso, “Santelices” 257). As we see here, the narrator appears as the third-person omniscient type which I have mentioned. Yet it adds another level of understanding to the reading. Later in the short story, one notices the narration is linked to, or principally supported by Santelices, however this link isn’t consistently maintained. In the last part of the text, the perspective changes quickly to that of Bertita: “Lívida, la Bertita acezaba como si algo estuviera haciendo presión dentro de ella, llenándola, hasta que se estalló” (281). This fragment evidences a link to Bertita’s thoughts, yet it explains as if viewing the scene from a third-party position. Further along, the narrative perspective returns to that of Santelices, and through this more intimate perspective, we come to know him and understand his frustration. We are able to empathize with his difficulties. This is an important characteristic of Donoso’s narration; it allows the reader access the intimate thoughts, the fantasies of his characters.

What do we know about Santelices from the text? He is a middle-aged, office worker who lives in the tedium of his daily routine, and in the boredom of the pensión, surrounded Bertita and don Eusebio. Work, for Santelices, is repetitious and tedious as an office clerk. At home, he is subjected to nightly canasta games with Bertita and her father. He is quiet, neat, and is considered part of the family in the pensión, where Bertita dominates both men. In flashback style, we learn that Bertita has nursed Santelices back to health after a previous operation for an aggravated stomach ulcer: “Pero sin que él pudiera oponerse, la Bertita lo instaló en el piso bajo cuando él estaba todavía demasiado endeble… ahogándolo, vigilándolo, viendo en su menor gesto un deseo existente, un significado que él no quería darle, un pedido de algo que necesitaba” (269). Santelices, dominated by Bertita, begins to look for different ways to escape the banality of his life. His escape, we
discover, is a collection of secret photos for which he obsesses, the subject matter iris never clearly defined. The story opens when he has been caught in a display of this “abnormal” behavior. Don Eusebio enters Santelices’ room and catches him tacking his collection of questionable photos on the freshly painted walls of his rented room:

¿Qué le entró de repente por clavar todos esos monos tan feazos en la pared?
¿Y de dónde diablos sacó tantos? Francamente le diré que lo encuentro un poco raro… como cosa de loco. . . Si los cuadros fueran mujeres en traje de baño…fíjese, que yo lo comprendería. (258)

While the true content of Santelices’ “strange” collection of photos is never clear in the text, at times the images are referred to as monkeys, and other times beasts or wild cats. From this sequence, we do know that the object of his fantasy is not what don Eusebio, and later Bertita, would expect from someone as special as Santelices, whom they consider almost a family member. Garcia-Castro, in a study published in 2002, claims the ambiguity in the contents of these photos of beasts which drive Santelices crazy, suggests pornographic contents, and likens them to a secret stash that a closeted homosexual might hide in fear of being discovered, “estos animals parecen estampas pornográficas de beefcake, que un homosexual tuviera escondidas y que solo las sacara al acostarse con intenciones no muy santas” (García-Castro 43).

If we stick strictly to the text, it simply tells us the photos portray some sort of beast, and in no uncertain terms, they offend the sensitivities of Bertita and her father. While we aren’t completely sure of the photos’ contents based on the ambiguous language of the writer, I believe that Garcia-Castro’s interpretation, while difficult to support strictly based
on textual analysis, is an intuitive extrapolation. We do indeed know that don Eusebio is shaken by the fact that Santelices has these strange, shameful photos and secondly that he has used tacks or nails to hang them on the freshly-painted walls of his rented room. Don Eusebio admits he could possibly understand if Santelices’ photos were of scantily clad women, as this would be culturally accepted behavior for a typical man, but they aren’t. The photos do however point us toward Santelices’ otherness, specifically in the case of this uncommon attraction to which don Eusebio takes exception. Bertita then takes the photos and destroys them because they are simply unacceptable, unspeakable.

Because of this, Santelices is angered and escapes to his office where he is frequently engrossed in a balcony scene below his office window. Leaving his duties to the side, Santelices watches a little, blonde girl play with her kitten on a balcony below. Each reference to this balcony suggests a growing number of cats:

Estaban solo él y la muchacha incauta entre los gatos, cinco pisos más abajo. Las sombras se hundieron, cayendo bloque sobre bloque en el patio exiguo iluminado por el fulgor de ojos verdes, dorados, rojos, parpadeantes. Santelices apenas divisaba las formas que pertenecían con la ayuda del anteojo. Los animales eran docenas que circulaban alrededor de la muchacha: ella no era más que una mancha pálida entre en medio de todos esos ojos que se encendían al mirarla codiciosos. (Donoso, “Santelices” 280)

The balcony scene here is important in two ways. First it represents Santelices’ dependency on daydreams as a type of mental escape. Second, the multiple and growing
number of eyes in the little girl’s balcony are indicative of some sort of vigilance, perhaps in Santelices’ case they echo the judging eyes of Bertita and don Eusebio. Later, the kitten or cats, become beasts, and the balcony is described as increasingly surrounded by the growing vegetation, compared to a jungle. Each time the little girl comes out to play with her kitten, Santelices takes the opportunity to watch. He even borrows don Eusebio’s binoculars one day so that he can return to view the scene more effectively, this is part of his escape from the encroaching tedium of life, and it becomes a habit.

In the meantime, Santelices returns home to Bertita and don Eusebio’s pensión. He again assumes the passive, more amenable, role of the pensionista that his two landlords can tolerate. They welcome him back with caution, but soon the tedium of card games and movies with the two landlords becomes too much for Santelices to bear. After an argument with Bertita over the last remaining photo of his secret stash, which she has cunningly framed and hung on a wall in her own bedroom to taunt him, Santelices flees to the office so that he may watch the girl and her cat/s on the balcony below to escape from the stifling atmosphere at home. As he gazes toward the balcony below, his fantasy takes over. He then sees himself as part of the balcony scene where the cat has evolved and multiplied into wild cats, plural now, which threaten the life of the girl. Overcome with anxiety he decides to throw himself from the office window into the scene he has imagined in order to save the girl from the beasts:

Santelices contuvo la respiración; era ella; sí, ella que le pedía que le rescatara de ese hervidero pavoroso. Animales cuyos nombres ignoraba se arrastraban trepándose por las ramas estremecidas... Allá estaba esperándolo; tal vez gemía; no podía oír su voz medio del trueno de los
rugidos gritos, pero tenía que salvarla. . . y dio un salto feroz para alcanzarla.

(283-284)

His jump marks the conclusion of the story. As readers, we are left to assume that Santelices has thrown himself into his fantasy world, and in doing such has possibly committed suicide. He has acted on this fantasy, a plot twist and conclusion which are repeated in other more elaborate texts by Donoso, around similar themes. The ambiguity of this final scene is also repeated in subsequent works. The reader is left wondering if Santelices has physically jumped to his death or if he has descended into his own insanity.

Santelices models an archetype, which we find repeated in other works along the length of Donoso’s career, both in his novellas and novels. Donoso’s narrative technique of allowing the reading into the protagonist’s thoughts is recycled but also refined in later works. In this first example, we see that power, or at least power struggle, is an obvious theme. Sexuality and non-traditional desire are lesser obvious themes here, compared to the writer’s later work. Santelices is in a constant grapple with society, here with his landlords, but also with his own secret desires. He wants to be satisfied with nightly dining and card games in Bertita’s apartment where he is cared for and where he is welcomed to relax –Bertita even offers to let him take out his dentures. She wants to dote over Santelices in a motherly way as we see she has accommodated him with special care after his ulcer surgery. This is obviously not what Santelices wants, however to express any other desire would render him, as Bertita and don Eusebio would say, “strange,” a “shame.” Society’s norms repress Santelices and drive him to his room where he breathlessly pulls the photos from his bottom drawer, essentially immersing himself in fantasy. As we see in the end of
the short story, the pressure he experiences pushes him to leap into his fantasy, in short throwing himself toward death.

Santelices is a soul who struggles to fit into society, but is never able to conform. He is shunned, unaccepted, marginalized. Fantasy here is a mental activity, a window for the reader, and also a temporary escape from the protagonist’s encroaching frustrations. We see when Santelices is no longer able to tolerate the pressure of his physical life that he acts; he plunges into his fantasy world. Although his leap at the end of the story breaks the cycle of repression cast upon our main character, we the readers are left to assume his destruction. I find that most of Donoso’s texts deal with these same struggles between the psychological, inner spaces, seen here in Santelices’ seclusion in his rented room or his lonely gaze from the office balcony and the outer, oppressive world, evidenced here by the public areas in the pensión. It would be difficult for readers of “Santelices” not to take notice of a breach between the inner, psychological and outer, oppressive world in this text. However, I suspect that Santelices and his suggested suicide are indicative of underlying and ongoing preoccupations of the writer.

Part of my thesis claims the existence of a recurring and developing model. This is what I have come to call the donosian archetype. In the character Santelices, I see the early vestiges of this recurring character: first the protagonist is male, second he is middle-aged, third he is highly unsatisfied with his life as it is in the narrative present, fourth he is not only unsatisfied but also highly frustrated with his circumstances, fifth he is constantly aware of others who scrutinize him like the many eyes on the balcony, sixth he is considered strange or at least uniquely different by others, and lastly he turns to his daydreams or fantasies in order to escape his circumstances.
As part of my dissertation I intend to show, through textual analysis of a selection of works, how Santelices has not simply leapt from his office window into a void. In fact, I have found that Santelices, as foundation for a donosian archetype, repeatedly returns to haunt Donoso’s readers in most of his other texts yet in varying degrees. Todorov has claimed that fantastic allows writers to engage many of the themes we see developed in “Santelices,” taboo themes, while also avoiding institutionalized censorship and auto-censorship on the part of the writer.¹² For me this is essential to understanding Donoso’s reliance on the fantastic and this general, stylistic form across his writing.

In this chapter I will develop the theoretical framework for my investigation of the “fantastic” in selected works of José Donoso. Whether it is a narrative mode, a genre, or content, my argument is that the fantastic facilitates a disruption of hegemonic views of power, and identity. The fantastic uninhibitedly communicates that which is lacking or desired. The literary theories developed by Tzvetlan Todorov and Michel Foucault recently interpreted by Rosemary Jackson support the fantastic’s uniqueness as standing apart from cultural, literary, and linguistic norms in its subversion. Looking specifically at Donoso’s writing, I have found that notions of identity are examined, scrutinized, and even critiqued via the fantastic. Power is also afforded a new perspective when examined through the lens which fantastic provides. In the primary texts examined in this dissertation we see that power, in characters, space, and discourse, is often found where we initially perceive its absence. It is my contention that the fantastic is endowed with unique, subversive qualities which I seek to frame by first revisiting the theories which inform my approach.

Identity may stagnate and become fixed as a notion of some overarching truth or absolute and the formation of absolute truths tends to have an excluding effect on people who do not subscribe to particular identities or either do not neatly fit within their popular
interpretations. The tensions which result from inconformity are part of a system that is charged with power which merits further investigation as it is evidenced in Donoso’s writing. Power, its presence, and notions of superiority may be observed in all aspects of human life if we are first cognizant of it if we follow the arguments of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault. No space or text is completely void of power and a well-trained eye can spot its perceived manifestations. Subjection influences the social and individual psyche. Individuals, cultures, relationships, and diverse institutions including family, school, the church, literature, and tradition all exhibit the influences of hegemony and subjection. Such are manifestations of power which I seek to study in the Donoso texts I have selected for this dissertation. By looking closely at the notion of power in Donoso we may elucidate how his characters may appear silently complicit with those who seem to hold power over them, but possess a disguised form of power which struggles against oppression and hegemony. This becomes more evident when I consider the theoretical approaches to power which presuppose a transactional and multidirectional model, such as Butler and Foucault describe, which I am able to discern in Donoso’s writing.

José Donoso denied any social or political commitments in his writing. Yet, as we have seen, the author confessed that in his writing he was interested in those people on the underside of power. Given this, I will begin with a discussion of fantastic and its disruptive potential, primarily drawing from the theories of Cynthia Duncan in Unraveling the Real: The Fantastic in Spanish-American Ficciones. Duncan’s text traces the history of fantastic and is primarily based on the theoretical work of Tzvetan Todorov. She also incorporates more recent literary criticism such as that of Rosemary Jackson who sees the fantastic as a type of feminist practice. As part my theoretical discussion I include the work of Nancy
Chodorow who indicates that fantasy and feelings are contributing factors in identity. Here I establish how my project seeks to gather and build upon the contributions of these theories as I formulate a working definition of the fantastic in view of its function in Donoso’s narratives. My overall goal in this research is to elucidate variations on power struggle in these texts and examine the role of fantastic as a strategic, narrative resource employed along the length of this writer’s career. Therefore, theoretical views of power, subjection, and identity are key to my examination of my sample of Donoso texts. This approach allows us to see the subversive potential of the marginalized, seemingly-muted characters which frequent Donoso’s writing and as such fit into a description of what I have suggested as the donosian archetype.

**What is the Fantastic?**

Once one has a better grasp of what fantastic is then it becomes apparent how it can serve as first a critical tool and secondly as a lens for reading the Donoso texts in my sample. I assert that it provides an active way of interrogating authoritative truths, static views of power, and fixed notions of identity. I propose that the fantastic frames an alternative space developed in Donoso’s writing, often in the form of a void. While often portrayed symbolically, in the texts I study here, the void, whether spatial, physical or represented in art or power, expands and evolves along José Donoso’s career. I will explain, with textual examples throughout this research, that such a space highlights characters like those the writer has referred to as being on the underside of power.
Rosemary Jackson and Cynthia Duncan coincide in that defining fantastic is a complicated task, perhaps even a futile endeavor: “Readers naturally expect critics to provide them with clear definitions that they can apply to the study of specific texts, but in the case of fantastic, they are often left wanting” (Duncan 3). For the purposes of this dissertation it is essential to come to some consensus through reading various literary scholars and theorists in search of a working definition. Duncan has made the task more manageable, especially for someone like myself who seeks to examine fantastic literature in a contemporary Latin-American context. Her *Unravelling the Real: The Fantastic in Spanish American Ficciones* (2010) provides ample background in studies on the fantastic and offers a sound theoretical starting point for literary research in this general field. Duncan’s text leads us through foundational studies on this topic, but also suggests more contemporary approaches. She discusses the fantastic as genre, stylistic mode, and content. First, I discuss some of the history behind fantastic, then I will summarize her most useful points as they pertain to my research. Later, I revisit other scholars whose works also contribute to my focus. Lastly, I will expand on these in my own definition of fantastic as I see it applies to Donoso, and specifically pertaining to its ability to, as Rosemary Jackson (2003) writes, “disturb ‘rules’ of artistic representation and literature’s reproduction of the ‘real’” (Jackson 14).

Until the 1970’s many believed the fantastic was a genre limited to stories of the uncanny. Frequently they were gothic accounts of the bizarre: ghost stories, legends and tales of the supernatural. These stories first came from North America or northern Europe and eventually found popularity in certain circles in the rest of the Americas, mainly as
elitist literature. Duncan describes and explains the importance of fantastic in terms relative to Latin American literature. She writes:

In Spanish America, the fantastic is wedged into a space where cultural tensions come together, smoothing over surface divisions while at the same time threatening to undermine the foundations on which the culture rests. It is for this reason that so many fantastic stories from the Spanish-speaking Americas ultimately strike us as subversive work. (Duncan 7)

As genre in a Latin American context, the fantastic has been viewed as antagonistic to realist narrative traditions which were frequently socially or politically charged. Having been picked-up more recently by popular Latin American writers, specifically those considered part of the so-called Boom Generation, the fantastic texts and writers have come to represent an opposition to this realist tradition, what Roland Barthes called “writerly texts” (2). Such works tend to grasp the reader’s attention and then gradually they “dismantle long-standing assumptions about fiction and reality” (2). This is the quality which first attracted me to José Donoso’s writing. Reality or what is sometimes referred to as the “real” is questioned here, because what is considered real may shift. In my examination of Donoso’s writing, I follow Duncan’s lead and rely on an implied understanding of what is natural or possible in any given context. She suggests this strategy, as it allows critics to “focus only on the markers inside the text that signal a break with our perception of the world around us” (5).

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13 For an historical perspective of fantastic literature see Rosemary Jackson (2003) and Cynthia Duncan (2010)
Viewing the fantastic, as a type of lens for literary interpretation, reveals how it can be the proverbial double-edged sword. It leaves us questioning how we come to understand the world around us, our literature, and our function as readers of these. Duncan expands on this idea:

Obviously, there is something about the fantastic that invites us to engage with it, even when it eludes us. It frustrates us, it challenges us, it makes us think. It is not unique in this way, of course, but it has played an important role in the formation of our ideas about literature and the role of the reader in the creative process. (5)

This last point which Duncan makes regarding the reader’s role is worth further discussion as it reflects previous work by Jackson (1981) and Todorov (1970) when fantastic literature was still at its peak in Latin America. Todorov writes:

Either total faith or total incredulity would lead us beyond the fantastic: it is hesitation which sustains its life. . . The fantastic therefore implies an integration of the reader into the world of the characters; that world is defined by the reader’s own ambiguous perception of the events narrated. . . The reader’s hesitation is therefore the first condition of the fantastic. (Todorov 30-31)

The hesitation which Todorov purports as a byproduct of fantastic can be caused by fear or doubt: “In the first case, we were uncertain not that the events occurred, but that our
understanding of them was correct. In the second case, we wonder if what we believe we perceive is not in fact a product of the imagination” (36).

In my view, Donoso’s writing feeds from this “hesitation” in which we as readers, and sometimes even the characters within said texts, are doubtful of what is real or imagined. It is not uncommon for Donoso’s characters to lose grasp of the line between the imagined and the concrete world’s point of reference, as I discussed earlier with my example of “Santelices.” Time is also an elusive subject in Donoso’s texts as their plots tend to be non-linear, often told in flashback style and from varying perspectives. Such a narrative technique also introduces further hesitation into the reader’s experience as the narration switches back and forth between memory, fantasy, focal characters, and narrators within the text.

The inherent hesitation injected by way of the fantastic into the reader’s experience points us toward something that is missing, often seen in the gaps produced between what characters yearn for and what they physically experience. With Donoso’s writing this hesitation is manifest in the veil of doubt to which readers are exposed. Thus, it becomes evident that we cannot discuss the meaning of a text without considering the reader’s contribution to it.

The reader’s experience is an idea which we see developed more in reader-oriented theories such as those of Wolfgang Iser and others who claim that as we read the text becomes part of our own experience and therefore has the potential to affect the way we view our surroundings: “A sort of oscillation is set up between the power of the text to control the way it is read and a reader’s concretization of it in terms of his or her own
experience – an experience which will itself be modified in the act of reading” (Selden 55). Likewise, it is commonly thought that the reader brings his or her life experiences and world views to the text and these interact. This supports my view of fantastic as a power-wielding, critical, narrative strategy. The text does not stand alone, but rather is acted upon by the reader and in this very transaction between text and reader, meaning is produced – in essence another manifestation of power. Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson in Contemporary Literary Theory (1993) further explain this interplay:

The reader’s experience of reading is at the center of the literary process. By resolving the contradictions between the various viewpoints in various ways, the readers take the text into their consciousnesses and make it their own experience […] This situation produces the possibility that the reader’s own ‘world-view’ may be modified as a result of internalizing, negotiating and realizing the partially indeterminate elements of the text: to use Iser’s words, reading ‘gives us the chance to formulate the unformulated.’ (57)

Todorov informs that the “reader’s individual experience” with such a text is fundamental to understanding how fantastic works (34). Further, David Sandner (2006) claims that the fantastic can “mark” us or “change us, unalterably” (Sandner 297). This altering and interactive quality of the fantastic is foundational to my insistence on the powerfulness of Donoso’s writing.

The narrator as defined in Gerald Prince’s A Dictionary of Narratology, is “the one who narrates, as inscribed in the text” (65). It is important to point out the differences
between narrator, implied author and focalizer. The former two are defined by Prince in the following passage:

The implied author of a narrative text must also be distinguished from the narrator: the former does not recount situations and events (but is taken to be accountable for their selection, distribution, and combination); furthermore, he or she is inferred from the text rather than inscribed in it as a teller. (42-43)

In Donoso’s fiction, the narrators have access to the thoughts and actions of characters. The focalized characters may offer different perspectives on events through rendered thought or speech. In both, we can examine an omniscient narrator who utilizes the option of choosing the characters on which to focalize and may choose to render what they think and feel. The doubt, or as Todorov might say hesitation, produced by this type of narrative strategy goes hand in hand with the qualities of fantastic which I highlight. Specifically, in Donoso’s narrative style we sense a struggle for power as seen through the visions and versions offered to us by a sometimes-dubious narrator. In other words, the hesitation creates a space where power is challenged within the text and between the text and its reader.

Todorov’s work on the fantastic reminds me of other pertinent functions, specifically its invitation to transgress culturally established lines of propriety, for both writers and readers, which I will now discuss. This is also supported by Duncan and Jackson in their subsequent works regarding fantastic. As I have already established, much of Donoso’s writing deals with themes on sexuality, namely sexuality that is not the
culturally-accepted, heteronormative type. His texts highlight the breach between
gendered and non-gendered role play. I have observed that these themes tend to occupy
Donoso’s texts from the onset of his first short stories down through his posthumous novel
*Lagartija*, which I examine in chapter five. Todorov indeed proposes the fantastic serves
as a narrative strategy for writers who wish to delve into taboo themes. He writes:

The fantastic permits us to cross certain frontiers that are inaccessible so
long as we have no recourse to it. . . Take for example, the “themes of the
other”: incest, homosexuality, love for several persons at once, necrophilia,
excessive sensuality . . . It is as if we were reading a list of forbidden themes,
established by a censor. . . Apart from institutionalized censorship, there is
another kind, more subtle and more general: the censorship which functions
in the psyche of the authors themselves. . . More than a simple pretext, the
fantastic is a means of combat against certain kinds of censorship. (Todorov
158-159)

Publishing first as a student in the United States, Donoso later returned to Chile to
continue his writing career. We know that he experienced a self-imposed exile in both
Mexico and Spain after becoming a well-known writer within Chile. In this politically-
charged environment of dictators, coups, assassinations, and kidnappings, I believe Donoso
found in the fantastic a lucrative stylistic tactic for avoiding external or institutionalized
censorship as well as the less obvious, self-imposed, or unconscious forms of auto-
censorship. In this he found a subtle way to criticize without seeming obviously critical of
the injustices experienced in his own life and of those around him. Specifically, we see a
pervasive preoccupation with the injustices acted upon characters which lend themselves to the qualities I have suggested in the pervasive character type that I describe as the Donosian archetype. Characters such as servants, women, tormented artists, and the sexually ambiguous are often shunned to the margin of society yet seek to break free of this repression. The fantastic as mode, often establishing itself through dreams, daydreams, and other mental vagaries within Donoso’s writing, allowed the writer to address themes which otherwise might be avoided by male, Latin-American writers of his generation.

When Rosemary Jackson writes about the functions of the fantastic, she builds on Mikhail Baktin’s theory in *Problems of Dostoevskv’s Poetics* which she clarifies in the following fragment:

> As Baktin puts it ‘The fantastic serves here not in the positive embodiment of truth, but in search after the truth, its provocation and, most importantly its testing’ . . . He points toward fantasy’s hostility to static, discrete units, to its juxtaposition of incompatible elements and its resistance to fixity. Spatial, temporal, and philosophical ordering systems all dissolve; unified notions of character are broken; language and syntax become incoherent. Through its ‘misrule’, it permits ‘ultimate questions’ about social order, or metaphysical riddles as to life’s purposes. . . It tells of descents into the underworlds of brothels, prisons, orgies, graves: it has no fear of the criminal, erotic, mad, or dead. (Jackson 15)

Fantastic narratives tend to question and confound; this is part of their appeal. They frequently claim that what they are telling is real and then they break that assumption of
realism by introducing something we would consider unbelievable into the text. They pull the reader from familiarity and security of the “true” or “real” into something less recognizable. In Donoso’s work this characteristic is pervasive in the fantasies, daydreams, works of art, dreams, memories and even drug-induced psychoses which abound. With a Donoso text, the reader enters into a world whose improbabilities are closer to another realm, one normally associated with the uncanny or marvelous, specifically this is the case with Obsceno. In Donoso, this breach between real and fantastic is sometimes nebulous. That is to say, within the text itself, the narrator may be no clearer than the protagonist about what is happening, not to mention the reader. That which is being seen and recorded as true or real is tainted with doubt. Such is the instability I have found often in Donoso’s works and theory supports my view of this style as being hostile to notions of the real, the socially-acceptable, or traditional. It is combative to accepted truths. In short it is a subversion of power found in his work.

In no other Donoso text is this more obvious than in Obsceno. In chapter one, I explore the vagaries of authority as it is repeatedly presented and continuously undermined resulting in a text which invites us to ponder our own views of truth, custom, tradition, reality, history and identity. Jackson writes:

like any other text, a literary fantasy is produced within and determined by its social context. Though it might struggle against the limits of this context, often being articulated upon that struggle, it cannot be understood in isolation from it. (3)
As we shall see, this approach to the fantastic runs parallel to power and subjection theories. The fantastic also goes hand-in-hand with, and augments the reader’s experience; it is hostile to absolutes and fixity. Jackson argues that the literary fantastic is different in that it “seeks that which is experienced as absence or loss” (3). In this way, it seeks to pinpoint such “loss” as a result of “cultural constraints” (3). The fantastic has a way of acting upon us as readers and our multiple reactions to this can be better explained through viewing power, which is what I will examine in the following section of this chapter.

**Power and Subjection**

When first considering power, we may think of it as something which one possesses or lacks. In the second case, we would assume that the absence of power necessitates suffering. We may even think of power as emanating from some ultimate source, acting in an oppressive way on those who lack it. This simplistic view of power is often described as a vertical or top-down model. While this conception of power is theoretically erroneous, in any given Donoso text such interpretations may seem plausible at some point or another, especially when we are first presented to his protagonists who, like the character Santelices, are often caught in some compromising position. However, when we want to examine power in Donoso’s writing, I find it is best scrutinized by imagining a chain reaction or a web of transactions in the sense developed by Michel Foucault, a “multiplicity of force relations” (Foucault, *History* 92). In this view, power as it is treated across Donoso’s writing, reflects and withstands theories of power and subjection as articulated by Foucault.
and Butler. There is a constant tug-of-war for power in Donoso; it is at once stifling and fleeting.

Foucault suggests that power is a “moving substrate of force relations” which forms something like a chain (92-93). Such a system, as he describes, is made of struggles and confrontations. He warns that such systems and their “crystallization” form social hegemonies, can be found in law, and in what he calls the “state apparatus” (92-93). From this transactional, repetitive perspective of power we can begin to imagine whom José Donoso envisioned when he referred to those stuck on the underside of power. We must not forget that Foucault insists that power is in everything, is repetitious and self-replicating, “it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (93). I suggest the best way of thinking about power in Donoso’s writing would be to consider it as transactional and free-flowing, as this view allows us to keep in mind its omnipresence and ongoing trajectory. We might for example, think of la Manuela in Lugar, a character whose deepest desire is to overcome her biological sex and openly live her inward identity as outwardly female. As I examine further, in chapter five, she constantly yearns for light and freedom, dressing as a female and insisting that her daughter call her mother; while her daughter continues to call her papá, both she and others refer to her with derisive words such as fag or queer which have become part of popular discourse. One may read this as mere repression, but the power in that repression is equally returned in her transvestite insistence through what Foucault calls a “passionate attachment.”¹⁴ He insists that there can be no subject without a deeply held dependence on

¹⁴ See Judith Butler, Psychic (1997), in her section with the same title, “Passionate Attachment” pp. 6-10.
those by whom one is subordinated. Butler expands on Foucault’s idea of passionate
attachment when she writes:

To desire the conditions of one’s own subordination is thus required to
persist as oneself. […] It is not simply that one requires the recognition of
the other and that a form of recognition is conferred through subordination,
but rather one is dependent on power for one’s very formation, that that
formation is impossible without the dependency, and that the posture of the
adult subject consists precisely in the denial and reenactment of this
dependency.” (Butler, Physic 9)

We can say in the case of la Manuela, those forces which confine her, on the inverse also
define her, as well as perpetuate her struggle, they make it possible. This leads us to
consider the role which power plays in subjection since in most of Donoso’s writing we
center our reading on protagonists who are oppressed or, at least, experience some form of
oppression in the reader’s perspective.

Butler’s discussion of subjection in The Psychic Life of Power is fundamental to
my approach to power’s role in self-identity. Subjection is the state of being subject to, or
under the domination of another, it is a form of power per Butler. Informed by Foucault,
she tells us that we depend on power and our resistance to it for our own existence. In
other words, our struggle against those whom we perceive as oppressing us influences and
to some extent creates the self. She explains that power is imposed upon us but is weakened
by our opposition to it. Our opposition to power is then internalized and forms who we
are; it becomes part of our identity. She clarifies this in arguing that “In each case, power
that at first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject’s self-identity” (Butler, *Psychic 3*). In short, both Foucault’s and Butler’s theories argue that the seat of power is always dubious. It is never found in one position while completely absent in another. Such theory suggests that we should view power as a web or a system of force transactions, dependent on one another, in a form of tug-of-war. The perceived stagnation or fixation of such power systems forms what we call hegemony. However, subjection theory, as developed by Foucault and Butler, suggests that as we struggle against and in opposition to power which oppresses us, we turn that power inward, it is incorporated in our psyche, and is the source of our protest. Butler writes: “power acts not only on the body but also in the body, that power not only produces the boundaries of a subject but pervades the interiority of that subject” (Butler, *Psychic 89*). In this way, we can say that power has a formative quality and the potential to turn against itself; it is both creative and destructive.

Still there remains the question of how the subject is produced through language; this is where Foucault informs my research. He claims that it is the discourse of power that creates the subject, that it reaches its cultural intelligibility through the words we use. According to Foucault, power and knowledge are naturally intertwined. The way we produce meaning, the way we talk about certain topics, and our perceptions of right versus wrong, or normal versus abnormal, accepted versus rejected, are controlled by dominant discourses. This of course is informative of the way we perceive power.

Where power may at first seem to root itself in a Donoso text, it will also eventually be found lacking. Power, as we shall see in Donoso, is confounding and surprising, but
also destructive and formative; it is part of a complex system which Donoso repeatedly establishes in his writing. One example of this interplay or juxtaposition of power can be seen more obviously in *Obsceno*, which I analyze in chapter two. Whereas the wealthy oligarch and patriarchal figurehead of the Azcoitía clan prepares to have his family history formally recorded for posterity by his assistant Humberto Peñaloza, we also experience an alternate, contradicting, and interspersed version of this family history in the oral traditions exchanged by the women and witches mentioned throughout the novel. The effects of this interspersed, oral, and female version of the family history result in the un-telling of the more formal version which Don Jerónimo de Azcoitia seeks to perpetuate. We will see this more concretely as I study theme and narrative technique in the various primary texts I examine in this dissertation.

**The Power of Feelings and Fantasy**

If we recall the example of Donoso’s “Santelices”, we know that for the protagonist in this short story his fantasies were an important part of his own reality; they are a sort of coping mechanism for Santelices’ own alienation from those who surround him and who seek to influence his behavior. However, when Santelices is no longer able to distinguish between fantasy and the concrete world he meets his death, or at the very least lowers himself into insanity. In the primary text, we know that Santelices ends-up throwing himself off the balcony, which can be interpreted as his death. In this case, fantasy is his escape from the encroaching pressure of his environment, more specifically from the expectations placed upon him by those in his surroundings at home and at work. Based on
In *The Power of Feelings*, Chodorow offers an original theory of the way we look at society and ourselves. She contends that the individual, subjective meanings which we bring to our life experience are just as important as universal and cultural meanings. Even gender and what she calls gender meanings are influenced by feelings and fantasies, in other words from personal experience, equally as by other influences such as culture and language. This happens through the processes of projection and introjection. Projection takes aspects of one’s on internal view of the world and projects them onto external subjects. Introjection occurs when one takes on or incorporates into himself the behaviors or attributes of external objects, especially in the case of other people. In this approach, gender and gender meaning in essence are shaped by the emotional self, fantasy, as well as one’s surroundings. Chodorow explains:

> Like other processes of psychological creation of meaning, gender identity, gender fantasy, the sense of gender, and the sexual identifications and fantasies that are part of this identity are formed and reformed throughout the cycle of life. Senses of self, the tone of individual feelings, and emotionally imbued unconscious fantasies are as constitutive of subjective gender as is language or culture. (Chodorow 72)

Let us recall again Santelices’ predicament as we dialogue with Chodorow’s view of power. Donoso uses several different words to describe Santelices’ posters, so their
contents are never clearly specified for readers and honestly are not important to my reading. However, what is telling in this scene is the fact that Santelices’ physical attraction to the posters’ content is rejected by his landlords, highlighting their own fixed notions of behavior, sexuality, and of course propriety. Society’s view of what is appropriate for Santelices is limited and limiting, while on a personal level Santelices’ identity, his fantasies, personal meaning, and feelings, place him outside the confines of what is considered acceptable in this setting. This relegates Santelices to the position of Other. From this point forward in the text, fantasy becomes increasingly important to Santelices’ existence. In Chodorow’s view, we could argue that Santelices’ personal meaning and feelings regarding this fantasy are just as important to his identity as the expectations imposed upon him by Bertita and her father.

My argument here is that Donoso is calling our attention to personal meaning, fantasy, unconventional identities, and how in a powerful way they oppose cultural constructs and widely-held notions of propriety. Santelices’ thoughts communicate his desire for something that is unconventional, and hence rejected by those who surround him. Chodorow states:

Emotional meaning, affective tone, and unconscious fantasies arise from within and are not experienced linguistically interact with and give individual animation and nuance to cultural categories, stories, language. Individuals thereby create meanings according to their own unique biographies and histories of intrapsychic strategies and practices –meanings that extend beyond and run counter to cultural or linguistic categories. (125)
As we consider power here, we see that the writer’s emphasis on Santelices’ identity and fantasies work against, or as Chodorow would say counter to, the cultural pressures he experiences. It is not culturally-accepted for Santelices to pine over the questionable content in the photos. Fantasy here subverts fixed notions of identity, it sets Santelices’ intrapsychic strategies and practices against cultural norms and highlights how personal meaning plays a role in how we define ourselves. The fantastic critiques monistic views of identity, character, and works against normalizing discourses, fixed identities and relations. We know that Santelices neither feels like he belongs at work and at home; he experiences the scrutiny of those around him, and is frustrated by this. Curiously enough, these experiences seem to repeat themselves in most of Donoso’s protagonists as we see suggested in my discussion of Donoso’s archetypical main character.

From this approach, I am able to link the fantastic to what Foucault says about its critical potential in my understanding of it. In “Two Lectures” within the work *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault claims that it is the role of criticism to work in the “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” as it challenges dominant discourse, he writes:

I also believe that it is through the re-emergence of these low-ranking knowledges (such as the psychiatric patient, of the ill person, of the nurse, of the doctor -parallel and marginal as they are to the knowledge of medicine -that of the delinquent etc.) and which involve what I would call a popular knowledge (le savoir des gens) though it is far from being a general commonsense knowledge, but is on the contrary knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with
which it is opposed by everything surrounding it, that it is through the reappearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work. (Foucault, *Power* 82)

Donoso’s fantastic writing seems to systematically uncover the low-ranking, unqualified or disqualified knowledges of characters such as la Manuela, the homosexual transvestite, in *Lugar*, the old maids and the oral traditions from *Obsceno*, and the rejected artist Muñoz-Roa, in *Lagartija*, to highlight their uniqueness and inferiority in the hierarchy of discourse. “Santelices” is a short story about the main character’s desire, how it challenges and makes those around him uncomfortable, and about his frustration in the recognition and ultimate rejection of himself as Other. In this way, we can understand how fantastic communicates that which is missing, that which is not known nor aggregated to popular knowledge, like that of the psychiatric patient, la Manuela’s perspective is cast aside, she is marginalized. This is a theoretical view of how the fantastic explodes.

**The Fantastic, Approaching Culture’s Unseen**

At this point I believe it would be beneficial for us first to recapitulate some of the theoretical highlights I have already discussed with respect to the fantastic as I come to formulate a working definition of it. By examining prior theories on the fantastic I first discussed the difficulty in any attempt to pin it down; we are informed that it has a fleeting quality about it. It is seen as genre, a stylistic mode, as content, and as a lens for literary
interpretation. It permits writers to escape censorship, both self-censorship as well as the sort coming from third parties such as such a government regime or social norms, and it opens a door for writers to engage with taboo themes which they would otherwise be unable to treat. I tend to view the fantastic in literature similarly to the way I view the subjunctive mood in grammar; it points out the non-existent, that with is hypothetical, desired, or dubious in a format which beckons our attention. The fantastic, in similar fashion, problematizes and subverts monistic views of identity; it is hostile to static units of measure and quality. It provokes, frustrates, and challenges, and yet it invites the reader to continue engaging, with it. The fantastic introduces doubt or hesitation into our reading experience, luring us into the text.

From my synthesis of the theoretical basis for fantastic we can see how it has an explosive effect. Rosemary Jackson, citing Helene Cixous, suggests “The machine of repression has always had the same accomplices; homogenizing, reductive, unifying reason has allied itself to the Master, to the single, to the stable, socializable subject…” (Jackson 176). Jackson claims that fantastic splinters this coherence; continuing her citation of Cixous she writes: “The subject flounders here in the exploded multiplicity of states… spreading out…transegoistically” (176). The “multiplicity” and the “splintering”, to which they both allude, refer to those identities that do not fit into the labels applied to us by our culture. Working against the repression, the fantastic celebrates multiplicity, it highlights difference. She explains this by calling the fantastic a literature of desire –desire for something excluded in our culture, it is subversive, a subversive literature:

The dismissal of the fantastic to the margins of literary culture is in itself an ideologically significant gesture, one which is dissimilar to culture’s
silencing of unreason. As an art of unreason, and of desire, fantasy has persistently been silenced, or re-written, in transcendental rather than transgressive terms. Its threatened un-doing, or dissolution, of dominant structures, has been re-made, re-covered into moral allegory and magical romance [. . .] From a rational monological world, otherness cannot be known or represented except as foreign, irrational, mad, bad. [. . .] The other expressed through fantasy has been categorized as a negative black area – as evil, demonic, barbaric – until its recognition in the modern fantastic as culture’s unseen. (173)

Jackson posits fantastic as the art of unreason and desire, this position reinforces my own view of it as explosive or caustic to the marginalization of certain social groups that appear in Donoso’s texts such as women, certain classes of people such as servants or the poor, and those whose sexual desires do not mimic those largely accepted by tradition. The fantastic also calls attention to nontraditional speech and behavior. Again in Donoso’s texts this is exemplified by his attention to oral, feminine, and queer discourses, most poignantly seen in his masterwork Obsceno and popularized in his novel Lugar.

The fantastic also has a formative tendency; this is the negative area of which Jackson writes, and the void which I have described. Symbolically, it is represented in Santelices’ little rented room in the short story “Santelices,” where he retreats from his landlords to enjoy his beastly photos. Also in this same text, it is symbolized by the open courtyard below Santelices’ office balcony, where he stares down into the open courtyard and into the balconies below. It is a safe space, where he is able to live-out his fantasies without judgement, scrutiny or repression. The void, that which is missing, is represented
in many other ways in Donoso’s writing, and I will elaborate on these in the coming chapters with analysis of primary texts. If fantasy articulates the imagined, that which is desired or missing, then the fantastic can be described as a literary manifestation of fantasy. Viewed in this perspective, we can better imagine how it is a narrative strategy that highlights the negative side it frequently exposes. We could say this is the underside of power referred to by Donoso.

Jackson’s work on the fantastic is particularly useful to examine the pervasiveness of these negative areas exposed in Donoso’s writing. She pulls from the work of Jean Paul Sartre (1947) when she informs us of the following:

Sartre’s essay on Maurice Blanchot’s early Kafka-esque fantasy, *Aminadab*, defines the modern fantastic as a language of peculiarly empty utterances, of non-signifying signs. These signs, claims Sartre, no longer lead anywhere. They represent nothing, compelling recognition only through their own density. They are means without ends, signs, tokens, signifiers, which are superficially full, but which lead to a terrible emptiness. The “object” world of the fantastic, found for example in Kafka’s fiction, is one of semiotic excess and of semantic vacuity. [..] This accounts for the labyrinth of corridors, doors, and staircases that lead to nothing, the signposts that lead to nothing, the innumerable signs that line the road and that mean nothing.’ (Jackson 40-41)

We have already seen a literary example of such a void in “Santelices,” which calls the attention of readers of Donoso to something that is missing. Specifically, I discussed in detail the void seen in the space of the open courtyard where the main character,
Santelices, takes his ultimate plunge when he can no longer tolerate a world which rejects his otherness. Representation of this type of negative area is seen throughout Donoso’s work which is spattered with negative and hollowed spaces, like that located at the center of the *imbunche*, the mythical being of feminine mastery pressed into nothingness beneath multiple layers of a package created by a witch-like character in *Obseno*. Likewise, I shall consider the void in *Jardín*, the forbidden area of the rich neighbor’s open garden upon which the main character gazes as he ponders his life’s circumstances, as well as the paintings, voided by a heavy blue wash of paint inherited by the main character in the novella *Naturaleza*. As we are pushed toward an area of nothingness, we are also subtly guided toward the unmentionable, the nameless, the unthinkable in Donoso’s literary world.

The fantastic, as I shall exemplify in Donoso’s narratives, creates a mechanism which allows the writer to reach beyond the limitations of hegemonic and non-inclusive discourses. Fantastic texts “erode the supports of logocentrism, idealism, theologism, the scaffolding of political and subjective economy” according to Jackson (176). She goes back to Todorov to support this claim:

As Todorov pointed out, fantasy is located uneasily between ‘reality’ and ‘literature’, unable to accept either, with the result that a fantastic mode is situated between the ‘realistic’ and the ‘marvelous’, stranded between this world and the next. Its subversive function derives from this uneasy positioning. (180)

In Donoso we will see specific examples of how fantastic tends to have a desubjectivizing tendency. On a textual level this may be perceived only temporarily, as
in the case of la Manuela in *Lugar*, who dreams of escaping the confines of her run-down village where her habit of cross-dressing and effeminate mannerisms are met with violence and disdain. It allows Donoso’s characters to transgress both cultural and self-imposed repression into an imagined realm that exists outside conventional thought and discourse. The inherent fragmentation in conventional thought, discourse, and ideas about community in Latin America is discussed by Gareth Williams (2002). He writes:

> The contemporary crisis of modern ideologies of national community, national identity, and national political organization has brought about such enormous rifts in populism’s foundational discourses that it appears that we must now confront the fact that Latin American post-colonial social hegemonies have always been at best fragmented and at worse illusory. . . (Williams, *The Other* 72)

Donoso’s writing consistently calls attention to those left outside of the Latin-American ideal of community. His texts repeatedly highlight those who are rejected by those around them as seen in my initial detail of the Donosian archetype, a concept I will revisit in subsequent chapters regarding each of the primary texts I have chosen to analyze. The fantastic, as a literary tool, points out complex views of power that run counter to stabilization and homogenized views of identity in Latin America. As Jackson contends,

> A characteristic most frequently associated with literary fantasy has been its obdurate refusal of prevailing definitions of the “real” or “possible”, a refusal amounting at times to violent opposition. [. . .] Such violation of dominant assumptions threatens to subvert rules and conventions taken to be normative. (Jackson 14)
This dissertation was conceived to provoke a contemplation of the functions of fantastic as a type of lens for viewing power struggle in a selection of Donoso texts representing the author’s maturation, through different genres, and spanning the length of his career. By first embracing the hostile and critical nature of fantastic presented in the theoretical discussion in this chapter, we are then able to shift our focus to how Donoso specifically offers his interpretation of the psychological and sociological dimensions of human existence and suffering through both subtle and heavily-encoded narration. His texts often lead us on journeys which push us toward the margins of society, leading to a breakdown of patriarchal order wherein women, witches, queers, and oral tradition frequently transgress traditional power structures centered around pervasive male, heterosexual, and Christian dominance.
CHAPTER 2

MAIDS, MAIDENS, WITCHES, & MONSTERS

Women, witches, monsters, bitches, forgotten servants, and oral tradition all work against patriarchal dominance in José Donoso’s widely-read novel, *El obsceno pájaro de noche* (1970). Often considered Donoso’s masterpiece, *Obsceno* is a complex novel which invites the reader to rethink traditional views on literature and power by reminding us that so much of what we believe to be truths are little more than constructs based on longstanding belief systems. Leave it to Donoso to create a narrator of multiple personalities and then sew his mouth, eyes, ears and other bodily orifices shut by the end of his novel, creating a mythical creature called the *imbunche*. Some critics read *Obsceno* as an anti-novel because it so completely deconstructs traditional concepts of the novel which the unsuspecting reader may bring to his reading.\(^{15}\) Fantasies, splintered identities, multiple personalities, and voices unweave the reader’s grasp of the narrator-protagonist. We might come to the same conclusion with respect to any one thematic thrust in the novel, stories may seem independent at once and interrelated at another point in the text.

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\(^{15}\) George McMurray 1979 writes: “Donoso joins the ranks of those anti-novelists such as Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortazar, John Hawks, John Barth, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Samuel Beckett who abandon traditional plot, character, and thematic development in order to depict today’s world in a more spontaneous and meaningful way… The grotesque fantasies, multiple identities and disintegrating personality of the novel’s central figure undermine conventional logic… and reflect the tragic condition of modern man threatened by the abyss and nothingness” (108).
The reader of *Obsceno* gains a mistrust for the narrator, and consequently for the writer, as little-by-little the novel begins to undermine its own story. The work is a mix of contradictory voices, identities, and discourses. Sharon Magnarelli (1993) describes the novel as “Kaleidoscopic. Labyrinthine. Chaotic. . .” (Magnarelli, *Understanding* 93). In the introduction to her discussion of *Obsceno*, she writes that Donoso took many years to write the text, going through many versions while taking morphine for the pain resulting from an ulcer and subsequent surgery which troubled him throughout life, suggesting that this contributes to the novel’s “hallucinatory” nature (93). George McMurray (1979) also partially attributes the novel’s “schizophrenic” and free-flowing style to the author’s use of drugs; in addition, he highlights a generational emphasis of the Latin American writers of this time who explored the human condition through “depiction of dreams, states of madness, and hallucinations” (McMurray 110). The contradicting qualities of the text point us to the validity of multiple readings of *Obsceno*. It is difficult to target our reading of the novel on any particular voice or thematic focus, but this is a tradition with Donoso who as a Boom Generation writer tends to deal with inner realities instead of any one, singular, distinguishable, outer reality. *Obsceno* is the most polyphonous among the texts I have included in this study. Magnarelli calls the novel’s plurality and oscillation of themes, voices, and characters a “game to be enjoyed” by the reader (93).

After first discussing critical approaches which inform my own reading, I then identify and summarize four main plot threads woven into the text. As the narrator, or narrators, draw/s us into their fantasies, dreams, memories, multiple personalities, spaces, and times we gradually become aware of Donoso’s game of cat and mouse, wherein we question “who is speaking?” or “this is not how this was described in another section of
the novel”, “how can he be this person and later another?” Ironically and perhaps comically, Donoso renders his narrator completely-mute by the end of the novel. His mouth and other orifices are sewn shut, contained in a witch’s sack wrapped in layers of refuse, the *imbunche*. I will discuss the myth of the *imbunche* with more detail, later, but as the narrator tries to poke his way out of the burlap sack, stuffed beneath layers of filth and packing, a pair of knotty hands sew the holes shut. Even the name of one of the principal narrators in the text exemplifies this game of oscillating narrator and focalization which Donoso invites readers to play. *Mudito*, one personification of the narrator, is the masculine form of the Spanish translation for “little mute boy”; in itself his name is a slight jab directed at discursive power. The muting of the narrator underscores how it is difficult to trust any one character or value one theme, voice, or narrative unit beyond others in *Obsceno*.

Donoso often brings our reading back around to nothingness, or some sort of void at the end of his works, like Santelices’ suicidal leap into the space beneath his office balcony in the short story I examined. In this novel, the narrator is contained in the *imbunche* and his voice fades as he dwindles into nothingness. Many characteristics of Donoso’s writing, present in his earliest short stories, we see carried over to his longer texts. Given these narratorial manipulations, I seek to unmask Donoso’s take on power struggle seen in various manifestations throughout *Obsceno*. This can be discursive power manipulation, power struggle between characters, between men and women, between written and oral tradition, between noble land-owning family members and poor, broken down servants. The game, to which both Magnarelli and I refer, is one of constant doing and undoing.
Critical Reception

The novel was first published in Spain in 1970 by Seix Barral publishing. Having undergone several versions, it did not escape the influence of Spanish censors. There was no copy of the text available on the date of its debut, but Donoso “deleted a few sentences with double meanings” and could continue with its release soon thereafter (Magnarelli, *Understanding* 93). The text’s openness to interpretation has resulted in a wide gamut of critical essays, dissertations, and books. Magnarelli goes through great effort to methodically lay out the various readings by looking at plot and structure of the story. She details possible interpretations with respect to the text’s sociopolitical, literary, and psychological themes. She attributes its openness of interpretation to the writer’s orderly negation of everything constructed within. She tells us: “in this text everything contains and is part of its opposite” (114) as she enumerates the apparent antitheses within the novel and demonstrates how a void runs just beneath the surface of many items mentioned therein.

Augusto Sarrochi (1992) has written a lengthy study of the symbolism in *Obsceno*. In his work, he pays special attention to the various buildings, the dogs, the masks, and costumes as well as mythical elements maintained through oral tradition within the text. Ricardo Guitierrez-Moaut (1983) is interested in carnavalesque qualities outlined initially by Mikhail Bakhtin within the text. His work draws focus on the inverted and deformed versions of culture represented in the text, and suggests the distorted mirror-like relationship between a culture and its carnavalized version. Lorena Amaro’s 1997 article “Mito, silencio y poder en El obsceno pájaro de noche” delves into the functions of myth within this novel. She scrutinizes the character Mudito and how the old women of the casa
maintain several legends which run through the plot, via oral tradition, which I will also discuss. Lastly, Miriam Adelstein (1990) published *Studies on the Works of Jose Donoso An Anthology of Critical Essays*, in which appears an article about *Obsceno* by Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman. Kostopulos-Cooperman approaches the novel claiming that the need for a “new order of existence” (1) is Donoso’s overarching message. Her reading extracts the idea that man “is a victim of a repressive society which annihilates all manifestations of singularity” (1) and he is bound to return to a void. She writes about Mudito as if he were the central focus of the novel, but does conclude that he is another manifestation of Humberto Peñaloza, another character within the novel. She cites the possibility that man’s loss of faith in God is echoed in the text’s structure given its complexity and the myriad of readings it inspires.16 George McMurray’s (1979) work is a psychological reading which highlights existential threads in the novel. He posits that *Obsceno* “achieves new levels of contact with reality” (McMurray 137) by delving into human psychology, and in doing so calls my attention to the functions of the fantastic, which here, is my primary focus.

I find that critics of *Obsceno*, such as the ones I have previously mentioned, tend to oversimplify its varied themes. Their tendency is to make generalized statements about man’s supposed erring ways. In my study, I seek a different approach, looking instead more closely at themes we see Donoso repeat during his lifetime. Despite the plurality of interpretations, the unity among these is their affirmation that our writer tends to dwell on

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16 Kostopolus-Cooperman overlooks the fact, however, that Mudito confesses that he has become the seventh witch therefore also becoming a woman. These are points I will discuss further along in my analysis of the text.
mankind’s dark side, the unconscious, as an obvious play on hierarchical view on power and conflict.

My focus differs in that I look to the fantastic as a type of prism through which we may view power struggle with respect to the novel’s socio-cultural thread, specifically that which is afforded to the female or non-traditional male characters in opposition to the patriarchal establishment. Along with Donoso’s message on the process of the artistic creation of writing, I examine some of the lesser-studied manifestations of power in this novel, including some that are overlooked or glossed over by critics such as those I have mentioned.

While many would label *Obseno* as labyrinthine, kaleidoscopic, and difficult to follow, its plot does have a distinguishable structure. This becomes apparent for the careful reader, perhaps after several readings, once one accepts what Magnarelli has called the game. The various plot threads of the text do revolve around a narrator, who calls himself Humberto Peñaloza at times and Mudito among others names. To this effect, McMurray writes:

Humberto Peñaloza’s phantasmagorical world, however, is the very antithesis of that portrayed by the realistic social novel, emerging rather as a series if surrealist visions generated by the schizophrenic mind. A literary movement which reacted violently against the horrors of World War I, surrealism rejects the tyranny of rationalism and, inspired by Freudian psychology, explores the subconscious through depiction of dreams, states of madness, and hallucinations caused by the use of drugs. (110)
Here the order is rather disorder, what McMurray labels “schizophrenic” above. After first trying to read the novel in a linear fashion and seeking a logical plot line, I began to think of the text as a type of collage. This collage is composed of reflections, dreams, nightmares, and fantasies belonging to someone whose obsessions change at random. Time, space, and characters are interspersed in what may appear as a rambling order which reflects the splintered identity and mind of the narrator-protagonist across its thirty chapters and five hundred fifty pages.

This unconventional weaving of plot threads is seen in other writers of Donoso’s generation and reminds us that it is man’s complex, interior world which he seeks to convey through writing. This novel is also considered to be Donoso’s great anti-novel, therefore the confusing units of narration intentionally interweave and interact, at times in a puzzling way. We can read *Obsceno* with the intention of discerning which character appears before the others or whose narrative authority supersedes that of another, but all of this ultimately depends on the whim of our author. Although the word “unit” is difficult to apply to the novel for all reasons mentioned above, making an effort to understand the general narrative segments in the novel makes an easier task of discussing the text. This is what I do in the following section.

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17 See Curiel Rivera p. 304, where he mentions authors such as Cortazar, Lezama Lima and Carpentier as writers of the *novela creativa* or Boom.
Narrative Units within the Novel

The first narrative unit is that which makes-up the story of *la Casa de Ejercicios Espirituales de la Encarnación de la Chimba*, that I will simply refer to as Casa, the primary space of interest, and plot unit, in my reading. The Casa is an old, cavernous mansion built initially as a convent, belonging to the male heirs of the wealthy Azcoitia family. This is our first hint of the patriarchal power mentioned in the text. I emphasize the cavernous quality of the Casa because this comes up time and time again in the novel. Donoso’s motif of layering or wrapping narratives is seen herein more obviously in the myth of the *imbunche* and in the structure of the house, itself left “enquistada” by the village streets:

Se organizaron callejuelas miserables que fueron desplazando más y más lejos las chacras cuyos tomates y melones nutrían a la ciudad, hasta que las callejuelas de la Chimba, al avanzar, se transformaron en avenidas con nombres de reivindicadores de derechos obreros, y al rodear y dejar atrás la Casa de Ejercicios Espirituales de la Encarnación de la Chimba, la enquistaron, muda y ciega, en un barrio central. (Donoso, *Obsceno 50*)

The wrapping or layering motif is also seen in the packages which the old servants keep beneath their beds as keepsakes, in the space within the Casa, which Mudito has prepared for Gina’s¹⁸ unborn baby, and in the metatextual myths and legends which are peppered throughout the novel. The Casa is a maze of corridors, courtyards, and cloisters. Having been converted into a type of nursing home for old servants and as an orphanage.

¹⁸ Gina is one of several orphans who are interned in the Casa.
once a source of pride for the Azcoitía family, yet as I have mentioned, it belonged to only
the males of the Azcoitía clan. Now, however, because of the lack of a male heir, the last
reigning man in the Azcoitía family, don Jerónimo, has ceded control of the Casa to the
local bishop who threatens to have it torn down.

What remains of the Casa is a series of rambling passages that are closed-off or
boarded-up by Mudito, interior courtyards which are the collection spaces for broken
statues and other undesirable possessions of the land-owning family. Basically, it is their
garbage deposit—the Casa has become a type of dump wherein the wealthy members of
the family seldom enter. The only Azcoitía in recent years to step foot in the Casa was don
Clemente,\(^1^9\) an insane relative of Jerónimo, who was sent there to live out his last few years
of life.

It is here where we find a mix of castoffs which include a group of three nuns, six
old servants who no longer work, five orphans with no other options for a home, and
Mudito, the little mute boy, whom we come to know as one of the narrators/protagonists
of the novel. As expected he is another personality, or perhaps a fictive creation of
Humberto Peñaloza who narrates another unit in the novel. He also claims to be accepted
as one of the old women’s clan, frequently referring to himself as the seventh witch,
Humberto Peñaloza and a dog. Mudito is a servant of servants who also tended to don
Clemente’s bodily functions, which we are told occur without warning. Mudito sees

\(^{19}\) We are told that don Clemente was the brother of don Jerónimo’s father, that the
family has produced mainly females with each generation and that the male line is
gradually weakened.
himself, among many identities, as a member of the lowest class of society and expresses as such repeatedly.

Mudito has been playing “yum yum” with the orphan girls resulting in one of them, Gina at times referred to as Iris, becoming pregnant. She does not know the identity of the father of her baby because Mudito wears a giant mask when they have sexual relations, or as they say, play yum yum. The mask belongs to Gina’s boyfriend Romualdo who meets with her only at night when she escapes from the Casa for a few hours at a time to romp freely about the village of La Chimba. She is unknowingly watched by Mudito, the caretaker who looks after the Casa and the old servants who live there. Romualdo rents his mask to Mudito first, and later to other men in the village, including don Jerónimo, so they too can have sexual relations with her. Mudito/Humberto knows that Gina’s baby is biologically his, but is enthralled with the fact that Jerónimo will believe also it is his own: “Una vez, vi bajar de su Mercedez Benz a don Jerónimo de Azcoitia, hablar con Romualdo, pagarle y ponerse la cabeza. No tuve miedo: el útero de la Iris ya pertenecía a mi hijo” (96).

Mudito’s child will become the next Azcoitia heir; but this is his hope, not the reality as the pregnancy is later revealed to be psychosomatic. This is another echo of the void, the negative space which runs through Donoso’s work. The old ladies of the Casa, however, have faith that Gina’s/Iris’s pregnancy is a sort of Immaculate Conception. Mudito quietly goes along with their idea. They anxiously await the birth of Gina’s/Iris’s child in hopes the baby will take them away to heaven. At one point, we are told that the old women want to graft themselves onto the baby in an extreme act of possession. We find in the end however, that the old women/witches are merely carted-off to another home, and Mudito ends-up bound into an imbunche. His nine body orifices are sewn shut. Closer
to the end of the text, the *imbunche* is burned by a witch-like character. While I discuss this later in this study, much of my focus on female power, legend and oral tradition is inspired by this, the first of four narrative units.

The second narrative unit is the story of an alternate space to the Casa, this is the family’s mansion, Rinconada. Perhaps it is that the Casa is an alternate space to Rinconada, it could be that the Casa preceded Rinconada, or a story created by Mudito’s counter-ego Humberto. We are unsure of the order or hierarchy in these spaces and narrative units. It’s possible that those who are indeed sure of such priorities in their critical responses are probably oblivious to Donoso’s manipulation of opposites, of constant constructing and deconstructing.

This part of the novel centers around Humberto Peñaloza. He is the narrator of this unit. Rinconada is the stately home of don Jerónimo Azcoitia, his wife Inés Santillana, and later the baby named Boy who is born a severely-deformed, monstrous-looking baby who is deemed unfit as heir to the family dynasty. As alluded to by the narrative voice, all the males mentioned thus far are at times interchangeable. Even Boy is at times Jerónimo, Mudito, and Humberto.\(^{20}\) The name of the family’s mansion is also worth mention, and provides further evidence of the game to which both Magnarelli and I refer. Rinconada is a compound name composed of the Spanish words corner and nothing. As such, we go into the reading knowing that this rich family’s main house is perhaps not as impressive as the name suggests; it is the corner or space of nothing. Humberto Peñaloza has been hired

\(^{20}\) See *Obsceno* chapter 5. On page 90 we read of these multiple personalities as Mudito/Boy/Humberto narrates how he dons the Giant’s mask – yet another identity assumed by the changing voice and identity of the narrator. I discuss this in detail on pages 70–75 of this study.
by don Jerónimo to write his family’s official history, serve as administrator of this property, and later will become the only non-monster in the house as Jerónimo seeks to protect Boy, the severely-deformed son, from the prying eyes of the “normal” world who will completely forget his existence.

Jerónimo does not kill Boy, but instead populates Rinconada with other people with physical deformations so that Boy will never understand the uniqueness of his malformation nor experience the ridicule of others. Humberto, the hired author and overseer of don Jerónimo’s highly-ordered life within Rinconada, in an ingenious plan of role-reversal, therefore becomes the only “monster” in the eyes of Boy. Boy eventually develops an understanding of the world around him and of his severe deformities; he is deformed in every possible way. Our narrator informs us:

La gente olvidó a Boy porque resultaba más cómodo hacerlo. Acordarse de él hubiera sido reconocer que un hombre tan dotado de armonía como Jerónimo, que representaba con tanta altura lo mejor de ellos, puede contener la semilla de lo monstruoso, y entonces la convivencia amistosa con el senador resultaría no solo inquietante sino terrible. Al fin y al cabo,
Despite Jerónimo’s great efforts to create the perfect environment for the deformed child, Boy eventually learns to long for the outside world. Don Jerónimo intercedes again by hiring a Basque surgeon to remove the child’s memory of his father and of what he has been able to learn about the world outside Rinconada. His plans for creating a monstrous normal, within the confines of the mansion, fail and even the monsters within come learn to hate him. We see this motif of wrapping or enclosing things in multiple layers repeated throughout the novel. The end of this segment of the novel’s plot is marked by the drowning of Jerónimo in a pool on the mansion’s grounds.

The third plot thread, of lesser importance to my reading, is the story of Humberto Peñaloza’s background, the influence of his father, and how these drive his desire to align himself with don Jerónimo Azcoitía. Humberto’s father, a hard-working teacher, always encouraged him to become a gentleman, to make something of himself. As Jerónimo’s hired biographer and secretary, he does take on the control which Jerónimo exercises in Rinconada, per his request. He sees that don Jerónimo’s orders are carried out and communicates regularly with him. He becomes involved with Jerónimo in a sexual game of observer and observed. We are told that don Jerónimo cannot achieve sexual arousal without the watchful presence of Humberto. In a sense, he becomes Jerónimo’s eyes, voice, and sexual potency. Humberto later tells the reader that he left Rinconada to become Mudito, the narrator of the first plot unit. In fact, all three male characters are interchangeable and their identities are blurred at times, the patriarch of the family oversees...
everything. Through this extension, don Jeronimo’s omnipresence is exercised on all the family’s properties.

The fourth narrative block also ties-in with the textual space of Rinconada. This is mainly the love life of don Jerónimo, his wife Inés and the various characters which interplay with the identities of these two characters. The young wife is sometimes replaced with her old witch-like maid or nanny, Peta Ponce, who also is at times a perra amarilla and others the Chonchón, a mythical flying head. Peta Ponce with her witching ways could be the manipulator of everything we experience in the novel. In fact, the ending sequence of the novel is manipulated by an old woman who is dressed in rags accompanied by her bitch dog. It is noteworthy also that in the end a female controls the action whereas seemingly-male narrators have dominated the rest of the text. Is this witch-like character, the Seventh Witch, Mudito? Is it Peta Ponce? In classic Donoso style, these questions are left to the reader’s interpretation. By the end of the novel, the reader is the game’s only participant left.

As the characters go through mutations, so does everything else in the novel: the voices, the narrative focalization, perspective, spaces, and time. These elements play havoc with the way we read the text. Dreams and fantasies are transposed with any perceived reality which the reader manages to wring-out of the text. Seemingly-lucid thoughts of the narrator are eventually cancelled-out by myth, dream, fantasy, and history. This great plurality is Donoso’s masterplan of inversion, substitution, opposites, meta-text, and polyphony. As I have mentioned briefly, the novel begins and ends with an old woman. I

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21 I discuss a similar overthrow of male dominancy in Donoso’s El jardín de al lado in chapter three of the present study.
suspect it is Peta Ponce, the nanny and witch of legend who is manipulating the text from beginning to end, but I shall discuss this later. In the final scene, Mudito/Humberto/the Giant/the Seventh Witch is bound by the old woman in a burlap sack to contain or control him. Peta Ponce, or some other nanny/servant/witch-like character packs the burlap sack with rags and paper while Mudito becomes smaller and smaller within the sack; he is eventually burned. One interpretation of the text can never be one hundred percent correct or complete, just as the legends and myths within the text have varying, yet equally valid versions as part of this novel. While there is much to discuss regarding these questions, I attempt to unpack it in the following sub-section of this chapter, where I engage more closely with the fantastic.

A Closer Examination of the Fantastic

Before examining the fantastic within the novel, it is meaningful to consider Donoso’s epigraph to the text. It is a quote, written in English by Henry James Sr. James writes:

Every man who has reached even his intellectual teens begins to suspect that life is no farce; that it flowers and fructifies on the contrary out of the profoundest tragic depths of the essential dearth in which its subject’s roots are plunged. The natural inheritance of everyone who is capable of spiritual life is an unsubdued forest where the wolf howls and the obscene bird of night chatters. (Donoso, Obsceno front matter)
Obviously, the source of Donoso’s choice of title, James’s quote also highlights the writer’s insistence on the void always hidden just beneath what we perceive as reality. The image created by the quote is that of a forest, and life is equated to a plant or tree with its roots planted in the nothingness below – a dark place. This void is echoed time and time again, more obviously seen in the wrapping or layering motif carried throughout the text and most obviously in the *imbunche* or perhaps in the inner courts of the Casa with its courtyards filled with broken statues and worthless items – layers and layers with a center of nothing. Perhaps Donoso hints at the emptiness of life here. Is he telling us that our identities are flimsy constructions based on little more than ideas? Does he beckon us here to look at the novel as a layered collection of words with little at its core -like Gina’s highly-anticipated pregnancy? The answer is yes and no for Donoso –he never offers answers. He does seem to point us toward something dark and unknown hidden within everything and everyone. Donoso’s epigraph, like most other things in *Obsceno*, leaves us with only more questions. It vaguely points us toward a feared, unknown, and dark place like that of the subconscious. Donoso’s choice of words in the epilogue also points us toward my own focus of the fantastic in *Obsceno*.

If the prior discussion of the novel’s intertwined plot units and characters therein does not convince us of its fantastic qualities, that which emphasizes the imagined, we can look at other uncertainties introduced within the text to solidify this characterization. To begin, our inability as readers to identify the source of the narrator’s voice which morphs into those of multiple characters produces the reader’s hesitation. Hesitation is one of the first qualities which Duncan attributes to the fantastic; it is frequently likened to a gap, a void, or a fissure. This is often evidenced metaphorically with Donoso. In *Obsceno* it is
echoed in various ways. Mudito has confessed that he is Humberto and has left Rinconada to live in the Casa at some point in the past. However, when he places the Giant’s mask on his head to conquer Gina/Iris one evening, he tells the reader about his multiple identities; the mask is yet another layer resting atop others. As a narrator, he starts out on shaky ground, but in chapter five, as he dons the mask he tells us:

Me la pones por encima, ritualmente, como el Obispo mitrado coronando al rey, anulando con la nueva investidura toda existencia previa, todas, el Mudito, el secretario de don Jerónimo, el perro de la Iris, Humberto Peñaloza el sensible prosista que no entrega en estas tenues paginas una visión tan sentida y artística del mundo desvanecido de antaño cuando la primavera de la inocencia florecía en jardines de glicinas, la séptima bruja, todos nos disolvimos en la oscuridad de la máscara. (90)

Counting that of the Giant, one can identify at least six different personalities described in the quote above. He becomes the Giant and father of Gina’s/Iris’s baby by donning the papier-mâché mask lent to him by Romualdo, Mudito, Jerónimo’s secretary, a dog, Humberto the writer of the pages we are reading, and lastly the seventh witch. Mudito’s psyche is in flux, he has lost that which gives him a sense of identity, both as subject and as narrator.

This crisis allows him to reposition himself in the ordering of things; by becoming a witch, now he belongs to a group of old women. Among them, one witch eventually renders our narrator mute, turning him into an imbunche. His, or her, actions subvert patriarchal order. Male authority and voice are hushed, contained; his mouth, and all
orifices are sewn. A male narrator who seeks to belong to a group of witches or who approaches nothingness as he is sewn into muteness within a witch’s sack constitutes a paradox in the view of Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (2008). She says “Women are the sex which is not one. Within a language that is pervasively masculinist . . . women constitute the un-representable[. . .] Women are the sex which is not one, but multiple” (Butler, *Gender* 13). Therefore, the narrator’s multiplicity of voices and embrace of himself as the seventh witch provide a point of departure for the writer’s critique of phallogocentric unity, authority, and truth.

In subjection, the aforementioned crisis would be the recognition of oneself as something or someone different, the Other. Who is Mudito? Like him the reader can’t be sure. This disintegrated or nullified narrator reflects and amplifies our doubt about what is happening plot-wise and about who is narrating; the fragmentation of the novel parallels the breakdown of meaning in the text itself. This is similarly reflected in the prior quote of Mudito. For example, the Spanish verb “disolver se” means to dissolve, break-up, or come to an end. The verb tells us that we break-up or dissolve ourselves when we put on the mask. Our reading brings mistrust for the narrator and mistrust of the writer. Is it that Mudito is the narrator and the sensitive writer of the faint pages which pine for an era long-gone? Cynthia Duncan (2010) writes:

> There is always a gap between the signifier and the signified, through which absolute meaning escapes us. This problem is especially acute for the narrator of a fantastic tale because the words he uses do not correspond to the objects they supposedly designate. . . given the fact that these objects have no reality outside of the text. (150)
Mudito’s notion of self has been decentered. Herein we see another theme found in almost everything mentioned in Obsceno. It suggests that language is an incapable, imperfect system of representing the world in which we live. Identities, like the words we read in a novel, are inadequate constructions of the world around us and therefore like the world proposed in Obsceno. The layers and layering, of words, like the strata of the different identities which Mudito claims, are not unlike the interposed plot units of the novel which I have already described.

We are first made aware of the layering motif early in the novel. Magnarelli calls this Donoso’s “Chinese box effect” which reflects his philosophy on human personality or selfhood wherein he always sees a series of masks or disguises which are “ever-changing and ever interchangeable, with no ultimate coherence or integrity” (Magnarelli, Understanding 4-5). In Obsceno we first encounter this in chapter one, which begins with the death of one of the old women in the Casa, Brigida. Mudito and Mother Benita enter Brigida’s room in order to empty it. They tell us about the packages the old women, former servants, collect beneath their beds as they enter Brigida’s cell. Mother Benita and Mudito narrate the sequence:

Abramos los paquetes, Mudito, no vaya a haber algo importante, algo que .
. . es incapaz de concluir su frase porque teme amarrar con ella una idea que carezca de coherencia y, en vez, comienza a jugar de suponer que, desatando nudos, desenvolviendo trapos, abriendo sobres y cajas, va a encontrar algo que vale la pena salvar. No, todo a la basura. Trapos y más trapos. (Donoso, Obsceno 31)
Similarly, at the heart of the imbunche, wherein Mudito narrates his last few lines, there is nothing. Bound in the package or sack among layers of filth, Mudito tells the reader:

. . . soy este paquete. Estoy guarecido bajo los estratos de sacos en que las viejas me retobaron y por eso mismo no necesito hacer paquetes, no necesito hacer nada, no siento, no oigo, no veo nada porque no existe nada más que este hueco que ocupo. La arpillera, los nudos torpes, las puntadas de cordel me raspan la cara. Tengo los hoyos de la nariz llenos de pelusas, también la garganta. Mi cuerpo esta encogido por la fuerza con que cosieron los sacos . . . si hubiera otra forma de existencia tendría que haber también pasado y futuro, y no recuerdo el pasado y no sé de futuro . . . he olvidado todo y todo se ha olvidado de mí. (544)

Like the packages of trash beneath the beds of the old servants who live in the Casa, Mudito our narrator is rendered mute beneath multiple layers of filth and sewn shut in a burlap sack. At the heart of Brigida’s packages there is just more garbage to be thrown into the trash. At the core of the imbunche is also nothing; there is neither past nor future. The narrator can no longer speak, but somehow the text continues for a few lines. In essence, the male voice is subversively rendered silent by a female, the witch. Such an ending builds further doubt on our already tenuous hold on the narrator. We eventually learn that Gina’s/Iris’s highly anticipated pregnancy yields no child. Metaphorically, the womb of Gina/Iris becomes another package with nothing at its center. Cared for and tended to like the old ladies tend to the packages beneath their beds, also like the imbunche which is minded by the witch, it is yet another void surrounded by layers in the story. This
does not completely summarize the complexity nor the multiple layers built into the story; in fact, the further we look, the more layers we find.

Textually, we have seen that the plots lines are layered in *Obsceno* and that the narrator claims multiple identities. The spaces constructed within the different plots are layered as well, like the winding corridors of the Casa with its inner courtyards filled with refuse. Let us not forget that in another narrative unit that Rinconada is a mansion built to house the baby, Boy, who turns out to be severely deformed. The world within Rinconada is a world of monsters – layers of protection carefully constructed, yet surrounding a forgotten, useless soul as he is described.

Another textual stratum which informs our examination of the fantastic in *Obsceno* is that appearing in the form of legends and myths. The tale about the witch is relayed to us through our changing narrator. Originating as an oral tradition, this adds another layer of doubt to its veracity. While the legend has various versions, and contains still other texts such as a song within, the heart of the tale we are told stays essentially the same and is kept alive by old grannies. After finishing the *conseja*, or tale, Mudito informs the reader of its dubious origins:

Esta conseja, difundida por todo el país, es originaria de las tierras del sur del Maule, donde los Azcoitía han poseído sus fueros desde el coloniaje. Inés, claro, porque al fin y al cabo tiene sangre Azcoitía por el lado de su madre, también sabe una versión de este cuento. La Peta Ponce se la debe haber contado cuando Inés era niña . . . Pero la conseja sigue viviendo en las voces de las abuelas campesinas que invierno tras invierno la repiten,
alterándola cada vez un poquito, para que sus nietos acurrucados al brasero vayan aprendiendo lo que es el miedo. (44-45)

First, we know that the conseja has various versions which circle around through oral tradition. Mudito even says “la he oído tantas veces y en versiones tan contradictorias, que todas se confunden” (44). We are also told that it continues to live through old grannies which use the tale to scare their grandchildren, and that is altered a little each time it is told. Within the Azcoitía family it is maintained, possibly by Peta Ponce. Peta Ponce, we know is a nanny who is also at times characterized as a witch, maybe the one who manipulates the entirety of the text as it is narrated mainly through Mudito or one of his many personalities which includes membership in the group of old ladies in the Casa. Doubt is thoroughly introduced into the veracity of this meta-text, a text of dubious origin that is maintained by women, yet communicated to us through a narrator who is neither here nor there, past or present, man and woman. Text over text, layer on top of layer, the myth of the family which is manipulated and retold time and time again. This could also be true for the text surrounding the conseja. The novel itself has no definite center, no central voice and its layered stories and timelines are distorted. This unexpected arrangement pulls us into the novel and compels us to question what we are reading and how we are doing it.

Donoso agreed that Obsceno was an exercise in perspective: “Del yo, primera persona, puedo construir las más increíbles variedades de punto de vista. La última novela . . . es el punto de vista desarrollado, exacerbado, lucido, complicado, jugado en todas las posibilidades” (Castillo 958-959). Whether we see the distorting qualities of the fantastic in the presence of the witches, the legends told by the old grannies of the child witch, the monsters, the imbunche, the chonchón, the multiple voids and gaps, the psychosomatic
conception of Iris/Gina, or oscillating identities and realities, the fantastic not only suggests a darker and inverse side to everything, but also keep us engaged, and invites us to examine how it is that we perceive these things. The fantastic brings forth the unthinkable; this is its unsettling quality. In this way, it signals to readers that there are changing realities, many truths and various interpretations to be seen in almost everything depending on one’s perspective. Duncan maintains that the fantastic “is a subversive type of literature that calls attention to the indeterminacy of man’s relationship to a universe that he has so systematically attempted to order and bring under control.” (Duncan 200). She adds that “it is worth noting that the fantastic as a literary form validates language that gives rise to uncertainty, confusion, and hesitation as the very element that bring the genre into being” (201). Whether we see the fantastic in Donoso’s stacking doll-like rendering of social order, classes, identity, personality or in his text-within-text style, we know that it sits apart from dominant cultural axes. This quality of the fantastic therefore provides ample room for further examination and therefore carries us into my discussion of power in the novel.

**Power Struggle in the Novel**

Let us not forget that our theoretical perspective of power is based on a fluid model which posits it as transactional and multidirectional. We are reminded not to see power as merely being bestowed on one character, narrator, group, class, sex or type of discourse *ad infinitum*, but rather acting often in an opposing force which branches-out like a web; it cannot be seen in complete isolation. One could generally summarize power struggle as it is portrayed in this novel as a continuous reaction of push and pull, of building and
deconstructing as Donoso undermines power everywhere it is first perceived within the
text; male power is diluted systematically. Part of the genius of Obsceno is that power is
so methodically and obviously interrogated by way of the fantastic.

The wealth, influence, and noble genealogy of the Azcoitía family is our first hint of a web of misrule and disruption to be developed in the text because with Donoso we should know that appearances are always deceiving and that just below the order is chaos. The prestigious Azcoitía family has been in Chile since Colonial times living in the region of Maule, according to the family’s genealogical history which Inés has prepared to take to Rome in order to have a relative, also by the name of Inés, canonized. The dossier also tells us that the many sons of the family, specifically nine of them, proudly rode horses and organized a mounted revolutionary phalange known for their fierceness in the War of Independence with Spain. The Spaniards found them so formidable that they were unable to pass into the countryside south of the Valley of Maule. Such is the legacy which don Jerónimo has inherited.22

The extent of the family’s wealth is further developed in narrative units one and two wherein we come to know the vastness of the family homes, Rinconada and the Casa at La Chimba, which ramble-on infinitely in mazes of corridors, courtyards, and levels. But the family line and its influence are not left intact; the birth of Boy seals don Jerónimo’s fate. Humberto/Mudito narrates, from the perspective of don Jerónimo’s, the last patriarch’s thoughts when he first sees his monstrous son.

22 See the family legend in Obsceno chapter 2 pages 35-44.
Muy bien: esta burla brutal significaba, entonces, que lo abandonaban para siempre las potencias tradicionales de las que él y sus antepasados recibieron tantas mercedes a cambio de resguardar Su orden sobre las cosas de la Tierra. (Donoso, *Obseno* 260)

The Spanish noun “potencia” translates to power, potency, and prowess. Perhaps don Jerónimo sees all of these meanings of power unfolding before his eyes as he beholds the monstrous body of his son. Another interesting point seen in the quote is the purposeful capitalization of the Spanish possessive “Su”, which in this form refers to God. The same goes for “Tierra”, when capitalized refers to the planet Earth, but in the lower case refers to land. Whether referring to the order as God’s order on Earth or his, don Jerónimo’s, order over his vast landholdings, we see that patriarchal and Godly order have both been compromised in the text. The blessings which his family has received over the generations have ceased. Without a “normal” male heir; the system is dissolving. The weakening of patriarchal power and order within the family has been happening for some time though due its female progeny:

Y mientras el poder de la familia cundía, oculto bajo generaciones de mujeres emparentadas pero incapaces de transmitir el apellido ni conservar la unidad de la familia, la línea masculina de los Azcoitia se fue debilitando: cada generación producía muchas mujeres, pero un solo hombre, menos en el caso del clérigo don Clemente de Azcoitia, hermano del padre de don Jerónimo. El apellido corría el peligro de extinguirse, y con él prebendas, derechos, posesiones, poder, sinecuras, honores, que al repartirse entre
primos de otros apellidos disolverían la fuerza de ese único Azcoitía necesario en cada generación. (51-52)

The same dossier, communicated to us through Mudito, informs readers that the Azcoitía’s powerful male line of heirs has been significantly cut short starting with the War of Independence in which the nine brothers fought. Successively, each generation has seen fewer male offspring and more females who are seen as powerful, but in an inverse or underhanded way. Described as beautiful, rich, and virtuous the women of the Azcoitía line are conversely also described as a “maldición”, connecting the family to high society but “por la sabana de abajo” (51). The pejorative undersheet of the bed delineates the position of women in the eyes of our narrator, in various ways. Although Azcoitía by birth, these maidens spread the Azcoitía line in a way which undermines patriarchal order and family tradition; they are a curse. In a submissive position beneath the male in bed, she is also guilty of diluting the strength of the family line; she belongs to another world and wields the power which comes from the gathering wires of her brazier:

[...\]manejando el poder que emerge del corrillo junto al brasero, moviendo los hilos tenues que enredan a los hombres con sus cuchicheos y murmuraciones, con ese beso nocturno que rige el sueño de sus hijos, con la sonrisa de despedida que destruye o preserva reputaciones y tradiciones, mujeres discretas, silenciosas en su mundo de costuras y servientes y enfermedades y visitas y novenas. (51)

Beneath the male so to speak, she is placed in an inferior and passive position. She does not and should not understand the men’s conversations according to the narrator. Like
the maids, she understands simple things such as if the local priest is an effective speaker, how to pull a needle and thread, and always she is relegated to a world of sewing, servants, sickness and prayer. This characterization of the Azcoitia female places her in an extreme polar position when compared to that of the male. But let us be careful not to see the females of the aristocratic family as dispossessed or powerless because with Donoso powerlessness is also a mask. It is a pattern with Donoso that the character who seems to be at first powerless, is far more powerful than suspected and vice versa. While the male members of the family tend to business, land, rights, position, and honor, the female is practically a servant. Male power is characterized as noble, God-given, and interpreted as part of God’s intended plan, but its female opposite is painted in a less than noble light but nonetheless does exist. She is a manipulator, a dark weaver whose threads and brazier wires are intended to lure the male down to her level. Instead of concentrating male power, she dilutes it among the cousins with different surnames. She is male-threat, personified, luring him into the bed; her lower position in the bedclothes pulls him down into the original sin, carnal desire, evil. This is the dark, chaotic void which Donoso seems to position beneath the orderly surface of all things. My view is that her presence is an intentional move on Donoso’s part to undercut the appearance of male order therefore subverting patriarchal culture. This position is what Donoso meant with reference to the underside of power.

This structure of power, or inverse, is methodically and completely repeated throughout the novel, but it is never more obvious than in the world of the retired servants who occupy the space at the Casa. While the female aristocrats of the Azcoitia clan are likened to servants, the servants are compared to and, in fact, labeled witches. Mudito,
narrator and servant of servants in the Casa, wins over the affection and acceptance of the six old maids who remain in the cloisters and tells us “[. . .] quedé aceptado y me permitieron ser la séptima bruja” (48). For our narrator, the words for old woman and witch seem to be interchangeable. Peta Ponce, the old nanny of doña Inés de Azcoitia for example, is described as a witch in both direct and indirect ways below:

Meica, alcahueta, comadrona, llorona, confidente, todos los oficios de las viejas, bordadora, tejedora, contadora de cuentos, preservadora de tradiciones y supersticiones, guardadora de las cosas inservibles debajo de la cama, de desechos de sus patrones, dueña de las dolencias, de la oscuridad, del miedo, del dolor, de las confidencias inconfesables, de las soledades y las vergüenzas que otros no soportan. (213)

This connection between woman, witch, maid, weaver, and guardian of all the aforementioned human emotions, traditions, and inconveniences in this quote has at its root in the sexism inherent in patriarchal culture. Juan Eduardo Cirlot (2008) in his *Diccionario de símbolos* writes the following in his entry beneath the heading “mujer”:

En sus aspectos inferiores, como Eva y Elena, instintiva y sentimental, la mujer no está al nivel del hombre, sino por debajo de él. Es acaso cuando se realiza a sí misma. . . tentadora, que arrastra hacia abajo, coincidente con el símbolo alquímico del principio volátil, esto es, de todo lo transitorio, inconsistente, infiel, y enmascarado. (320)
While some critics disagree on the importance of symbolic meanings in Donoso’s writing in general, Cirlot’s entry validates a tradition of mistrust directed toward the female as well and her inferior relationship with respect to the male. Likewise, it establishes her link to the uncanny while also recalling Donoso’s motif of layering and masks. The volatile, inconsistent, and dark world of the female works against that supposed orderly world of the male.

The long-awaited baby which could consolidate the power and influence of the Azcoitía family is born an aberration; Boy is essentially a monster and the order which Jerónimo creates around Boy in the family mansion is ultimately turned into chaos, pulling him below. Chaos, disorder and the unconscious per Cirlot are part of the symbolism linked to the monster in literary tradition: “Símbolos de la fuerza cósmica en estado inmediato al caótico, al de las potencias no formales. En el plano psicológico aluden a las potencias inferiores que constituyen los estratos más profundos de la geología spiritual” (314-315). Instead of strengthening to power of the male heir, the female who cannot bare male offspring weakens his influence bringing him closer to the threat of disorder. Rosemary Jackson supports this view of the female, the monster, the witch, the imbunche and the conseja of the women as a threatening otherness or evilness, which in Obsceno works against the male order which is presented to the reader through Don Jerónimo and his official family history:

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23 Magnarelli affirms that Donoso “refuses to deal with symbols” (4). Augusto Sarrochi (1992), in his 259-page study dedicated to the symbolism in Donoso’s writing, informs us “De los símbolos destacan: el laberinto, las máscaras, y los perros. . . Todos poseen una significación maléfica” (259).
A stranger, a foreigner, an outsider, a social deviant, anyone speaking an unfamiliar language or acting in unfamiliar ways, anyone whose origins are unknown or who has extraordinary powers, tends to be set apart as other, as evil. Strangeness precedes the naming of it as evil: the other is defined as evil precisely because of his/her difference and a possible power to disturb the familiar and the known. (Jackson 52-54)

Weavers, embroiderers, tellers of tales, and preservers of tradition and superstitions bring us around to a discussion of a text within the novel which is upheld through oral tradition and as I have briefly mentioned above, undermines the surrounding story. Mainly told and retold by women, the conseja or legend closely parallels the Azcoitía family history, it is related to us by our narrator of splintered identities and comes from what he has heard others say. In most instances the fragmented legend begins with the words “they say. . . they say.” This serves two purposes. It sets the legend apart from the rest of the text and reminds the reader of its precarious orality. The conseja appears in its most complete form in the second chapter, but is mentioned and retold in various places and versions through the novel.

In short, the conseja takes us back to the era before independence and to the estate of a wealthy landowner, living near Maule, who had nine sons and one daughter that was extremely pious and beautiful. The daughter was corrupted by her nanny and the brothers eventually heard rumors that their sister flew around at night with the nanny bringing ruin upon the lands, practicing the dark arts. The daughter supposedly flew around as the chonchón, a mythical flying head with large flapping wings like that of a bat but with her pretty face, and the old nanny with warty hands became a perra amarilla which resembled
the old servant who accompanied her. The landowner eventually being informed of the gossip, carried out a plan to catch the two women in the act one night. When the *chonchón* and the yellow bitch, who transforms into a witch, returned to their bedroom, the father opened the doorway, gasped, and spreads the wings of his cape to block the others’ view of the scene before him.

The old witch was tied to a tree and beaten. She was neither alive nor dead, so the nine sons chopped down the tree with the witch tied to it and dragged it down the river and out into the ocean; the regions would be spell-free, babies would be born normal again, and the flooding would stop. It was said that the father took his daughter to the capital and had her shut up in a convent and she was never seen again. But no one ever finds out what the father saw when he covered the entryway with his cape. Some say he saw the head of the *chonchón* linking itself to his daughter’s head. Others say the patriarch saw his daughter giving birth to the illegitimate son of a local farm hand. Another version tells us that the yellow bitch was never caught and that the *campesinos* presented the landowner with the hide of another animal. This would of course leave the bitch/witch alive. Both in chapter two and chapter twenty-one the narrator discusses the legend’s varying versions and alludes to its dubious source:

Dije que esa noche en la cocina, las viejas, no me acuerdo cuál de ellas, da lo mismo, estaban contando más o menos esta conseja, porque la he oído tantas veces y en versiones tan contradictorias, que todas se confunden. . .

Solo lo esencial siempre permanece fijo: el amplio poncho paternal cubre una puerta y bajo su discreción escamotea al personaje noble, retirándolo
The popular version of the legend, the narrator tells us, is the one of the daughter/witch, while the Azcoitía family has maintained another version, that of the daughter/saint. Peta Ponce, the elderly nanny of doña Inés, also called a witch, has taught her to remember the version of the daughter/saint. The popular version problematizes manifestations of power in several levels, it undermines the family’s link to sainthood and to ecclesiastical power; it works against the absolute power of the father figure as both head of the family and protector of order within the house; outside of the home the women of the community keep the legend alive telling it in their quiet fireside moments with children. Lastly and at the level of the novel, it unravels what the narrator has previously told us about the Azcoitía family and consequently compromises the text surrounding it. Female discourse and female power systems as well as orality, in these contexts, erode the exclusivity of male discourse, authority, and power. With the legends, the storyteller is female, she passes along knowledge to her children at night near the home fires. Donoso’s untraditional stance on female authority leaves us imagining a female as the ultimate manipulator, weaver of legends, writer, and possibly God – who else could be left manipulating the last scene of the novel once the narrator is muted and burned in the sack?

Still another unassuming, inverted power structure can be seen within the order of the Azcoitía household. As we have said before, Donoso often shows how the seemingly powerless become powerful in unassuming ways. In the following example servanthood is equated with the power of the aristocracy but in its inverse form:
A veces siento que a pesar de que las viejas deberían estar durmiendo, no duermen, sino que están atareadísimas sacando de sus cajones y de debajo de sus camas y de sus paquetitos las uñas y los mocos, las hilachas y los vómitos y los paños y los algodones ensangrentados con menstruaciones patronales que han ido acumulando, y en la oscuridad se entretienen en reconstruir con esas porquerías algo como una placa negativa no sólo de sus patrones a quienes les robaron las porquerías, sino del mundo entero: siento la debilidad de las viejas, su miseria, su abandono, acumulándose y concentrándose en estos pasillos y habitaciones vacías, porque es aquí, en esta Casa, donde vienen a guardar sus talismanes, a reunir sus debilidades para formar algo que reconozco como el reverso del poder: nadie va a venir aquí a arrebatárselo. (66)

Like a photographic negative, the maids compose a reversed power structure fueled by the very items which the aristocrats reject. The body fluids and filth of their masters are accumulated, and in this collection of waste the servants are free from the prying eyes of their masters: “Don Jerónimo jamás vendrá a buscarme, porque les tiene terror a los callos que las viejas cortaron y guardaron, a los pelos que taparon el desagüe del lavatorio y que ellas conservan envueltos en trapos y papelitos” (67). By appropriating the unwanted and revolting bits and pieces of their masters, the servants avoid any conflict because they know that their master is sickened by all the filth they are obliged to sweep away and, in doing so, reinforce the power they hold over the masters in classic donosian reversal – the rejection of that which is rejected:
Ellas acumulando los instrumentos de la venganza porque van acumulando en sus manos ásperas y verrugosas esa otra mitad de sus patrones, la mitad inútil, descartada, lo sucio y lo feo. . . ¿Cómo no van a tener a sus patrones en su poder si les lavaron la ropa, y pasaron por sus manos todos los desórdenes y las suciedades que ellos quisieron eliminar de sus vidas? (65)

The interplay of antitheses in the novel is most obvious in Donoso’s representation of the servants as power-wielding entities. Magnarelli calls this the “power of the disenfranchised” (Magnarelli 112). Taken to its extreme, as we I have already discussed, this type of representation of the female servant portrays her as the typical witch of legend who can spoil the lands, waters and everything else under the sun. Everything contains its polar opposite and yet is also part of its polar opposite in Obsceno; thus, the impotent domestic servants of the household, become powerful beings in the game. The most influential and trusted maid among the group of servants is the nanny whose role is also to raise the children of her master. In this vein of thought we understand how Peta Ponce, the nanny, becomes the most-feared witch. We see a similar interplay on power in the representation of Peta Ponce as doña Ines, her very own mistress, when she sucks the pain from doña Ines’s stomach as a child and engulfs part of her identity. She inherits her pain and engulfs part of her being. In a 1971 interview José Donoso stated the following with respect to his interest in servants and servanthood:

La sirviente es otra parte, otra encarnación, a otro nivel, de la patrona. Es la patrona, la dueña, la víctima, y victimada. Es patrona y es sirviente. Es decir, esa distancia que había entre patrona y sirviente ya no existe. En realidad, ya no existen las sirvientes. Sin embargo, a mí me apasionan como
síntesis de esta complejidad humana, dolorida, interior, involucra; de raíces que se agarran, que no se sabe dónde empieza la raíz, donde empieza el árbol, donde empiezan las hojas, esta confusión existe. (Rodríguez Monegal 526)

What Donoso offers in Obsceno is a distinct discourse which takes its root in the world of servants. The power of the women, servants, and witches in the novel creates a new reality, a truth that is seen developing as the ordered, beautiful world of the Azcoitia family seems to fall into chaos. The servant in an inverted incarnation of the master introduces that which is ugly, monstrous, and evil into ordered patriarchal world of the Azcoitia. Servants who sweep away the waste, clean their soiled sheets, and cut away their masters’ calluses and nails, gather these secrets in what the narrator calls a reverse power. Any “truth” initially perceived at the level of the story, becomes a hodge-podge of conflicting discourses.

Established power, in Obsceno, in this case patriarchal power, is constantly eroded, being pulled in various directions. First the unifying voice of the narrator, especially that of the realist tradition of Latin-American writers, is splintered into many differing voices and identities, eventually mutating into that of an old woman and ultimately a witch. Then we learn that the long-awaited male heir to the Azcoitia family is born a monster – the product of a mother who cannot provide a suitable heir; the monstrous, representing chaos, threatens the family line even more. Next the legend of the witch, a text within the text, underrides the story of the Azcoitia clan established by the novel’s overarching plot. This is a product of oral tradition, conserved and repeated by old grannies around their fires through generations. Besides being told by women, we know that it is changed in some
way each time it is told; its reliability is multiply-dubious. The female servants, equated also with witches, collect the family’s refuse, filth, and secrets and store them in collection of threat. God’s intended order, something we might call the established patriarchal regime, is scrambled and turned on its head as the influence of the female servant and witch is uplifted in Donoso’s text. Lastly, we cannot forget that the narrator, Humberto/Mudito, is contained in a burlap sack at the end of the novel, and in order to keep warm an old woman whom we assume is the witch burns the contents of the sack or *imbunche*. The ashes of her fire are blown into the wind, fall into the river and are carried away. Even in this last scene our theoretical understanding of power still rings true.

Power is ongoing and ever-changing; it is inverted just as we see it portrayed in *Obsceno* in theme, technique, story, and narrative. This is to say, rather than something that is bestowed in one place, or given, power is already everywhere and working in obvious and not-so-obvious ways. The fantastic in Donoso’s writing, pulls our attention away from dominant hierarchal systems in a provocation or testing of authority, as Cynthia Duncan suggests, allowing for the interrogation of patriarchal and authorial power. Donoso warns us that just below the seemingly-ordered surface of what we perceive as reality, and in what we accept in social convention, lie unknown forces and unheard voices in a space where the night bird sings.

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An exiled pair of Chilean writers living in Spain are the protagonists of *El jardín de al lado*, Donoso’s novel published in 1981. Released roughly a decade after Donoso’s maze-like *El obsceno pájaro de noche*, *Jardín* is a less chaotic read. Comparing the two texts, we can see in *Jardín* that the writer has lost his enthusiasm for totalizing, anti-novels particular of the Boom, in exchange for a measured reader-friendly style. While less-challenging to read compared to *Obsceno*, *Jardín* is still very much classifiable as a fantastic text in both theme and style. Among its fantastic qualities, in this study I consider a delayed change in narrator which leaves readers dangling in a metafictional and very donosian twist on the narrator’s identity in the novel’s last chapter. Also, throughout the novel a neighbor’s garden becomes a time portal allowing the protagonist to ponder his own identity and position as a Chilean exile living in Spain. It is here that identity’s fixity gives way to something more ambiguous as readers become aware that the protagonist’s wife has assumed his job as writer of his great, Chilean, exile novel and therefore may also be manipulating the very text we are reading. This reflects the writer’s insistence on identity as a non-static, many-layered perception that also parries with patriarchal traditions of Latin American and Western culture. As such, the garden’s fantastic qualities and influence on the novel’s plot become apparent after chapter one when the narrator and his wife Gloria have taken on tenancy of a Madrid apartment for
the summer.

While not the focus of my critical approach in this study, the novel does give the impression of being autobiographical. Sharon Magnarelli in her discussion of Donoso’s 1981 novel *La desesperanza*, asserts that Donoso himself commented that “once one returns to Chile one cannot write or speak about anything but the sociopolitical situation there” (Magnarelli, *Understanding* 164). In addition, Oscar Montero goes to great length to equate *Jardín* to a fictional version of Donoso’s *Historia personal del boom*, a text in which Donoso includes himself in the group of Boom writers. Montero writes:

> In a sense, *Jardín* is a narrative version of *Historia personal*, a new version of the Boom centered on the failure of Julio Méndez, a write not unlike the Donoso of *Historia*, yet quite unlike the Donoso, whose success as a writer was insured by *El lugar sin límites, El obsceno pájaro* and his subsequent novels. (Montero 25)

It is also pertinent that we see a return to the donosian archetype. As I have mentioned in the introduction to this study, the donosian archetype is a pervasive character in Donoso’s writing. Its presence throughout his work, across time and genre, leads me to believe that such a character reveals deeply-personal preoccupations of the writer. In the case of *Jardín*, we are given access to the protagonist’s infatuation with his status in exile, his fear of scrutiny, his incapacity to write the great Chilean exile novel, frustration with his marriage, and his budding awareness that we are far more complex than the gender roles which our culture and tradition impose upon us.
Plot in *Jardín*

The narration in *Jardín* concentrates on the conflicted voice of a narrator, Julio Méndez, who seeks to characterize the difficult experience of exile through writing while in the throes of a mid-life crisis. As I alluded earlier, Julio’s voice does not prevail in the end; it is displaced by that of his wife, Gloria, who overthrows her husband’s authority as narrator in the last chapter’s metatextual twist. To be specific, like the novel described by *Jardín*’s protagonists, the last chapter of *Jardín* itself contains this exact same shift in voice from that of Julio to Gloria. The novel’s plot centers around Julio, writing in exile in Spain. He’s had little success in Spain recently, but is working on a novel about the great Chilean experience, the first draft of which was rejected by a premier editor of Spanish literature, Núria Monclús, whom he both admires and dreads. Below, Julio discusses his exile predicament in Spain and gives us an idea of the type of person Núria is:

Al abandonar Chile a raíz del golpe militar – perdí mi cargo universitario después de seis días en el calabozo porque se me acusó de haber albergado a un primo perteneciente al MIR antes de que lograron cazarlo –, me establecí con mi mujer en Barcelona, sede de los grandes editoriales españolas y sobre todo de Núria Monclús, legendaria capomafia del grupo de celebres novelistas latinoamericanos en ese momento todavía respetados con el mítico nombre del boom, esa literatura con alardes de experimental que ahora interesa poco a las nuevas generaciones, que miran más allá del puro esteticismo. Se murmuraba que esta diosa tiránica era capaz de hacer y deshacer reputaciones.[. . .] Yo tuve la pretensión de poner mi futuro en esas manos. (Donoso, *Jardín* 45-46)
Gloria however is slowly plodding through the translation of a book which she finds to be an arduous task and obsessively pours over articles about sexism in her free time, perhaps a hint of her narratorial domination to come. Her husband’s disdainful tone leaves the reader to believe that she is only capable of keeping herself busy with translations, while it is Julio’s place to write the great novel of the Chilean experience. Julio is largely dissatisfied with several aspects of his life and suffers a crisis mediated only through drug-induced sleep and prolonged daydreams inspired by the neighbors’ garden. Back home in Chile, his mother is dying. In Spain, his marriage to Gloria is crumbling, his relationship to his son Pato is shaky, and he and Gloria live a meager lifestyle relying on the kindness of friends who lend them a modern flat in Madrid as a seasonal escape from the hordes of tourists where they normally live, in Sitges. Interestingly, it is typical of Madrileños to escape the heat of Spain’s capital during the summer months. For many it is customary to travel to the surrounding countryside, to the coast, or to the mountains. While this could not be widely-known to international readers, this bit of information highlights the couple’s status in exile, as foreigners in Spain, and foreshadows the unconventional surrender of a male narrator to a female voice in the last chapter. Instead of following this custom of the locals in Madrid, Julio and Gloria move in an opposite direction escaping the coast to move into a Madrid apartment for the summer months physically and spatially highlighting their otherness.

Julio, who is faced with his own impotency as a writer, repeatedly takes the reader along on his mental wanderings via reflection on the garden located next to their summer apartment in Madrid. Chapters one through five are told through the voice of Julio, but an external and omniscient narrator does exist. The author adds the voice of another, unknown
narrator who is removed from the events of the narration. This establishes ambiguity and a plurality in voice while challenging our concept of narrator and voice of authority. Although the reader is allowed access to the voices of various characters, he or she is reminded that there is yet another perspective, that of someone who is manipulating the story beyond the level of Julio’s words and thoughts. This is an important tool which allows readers to access intimate thoughts and fantasies of characters within the novel, in essence a medium for Donoso’s unique character development. This narrator, who is beyond Julio’s words at times, can be read as Julio in chapters one through five. However, in chapter six we learn that his wife of more than twenty years, Gloria, comes to the foreground as the narrator; she has also taken over Julio’s great Chilean novel with his consent and has succeeded in convincing Núria Monclús to have it published.

Chapters one through five narrate, with flashbacks, Julio and Gloria’s story, each one of these chapters contains one highly dramatic episode which informs the reader of Julio’s increasing frustration. In chapter one we read an episode where Julio physically assaults Bijou, his son Pato’s friend, for whom Julio seems to develop physical and emotional attraction, another hint at Julio’s otherness. In chapter two, there is a sexually-tense encounter between Julio and Bijou as they attempt to make an illegal long-distance telephone call from a rigged, pay telephone. Chapter three contains an embarrassing encounter with Marcelo Chiriboga, another Chilean exile and acquaintance of the family who seems to thrive in exile unlike the protagonist. The fourth chapter narrates a dramatic episode wherein Julio and Gloria attempt to erase some politically-charged graffiti containing curiously Chilean phrasing; they suspect this is Bijou’s hand. It is the second rejection and scorn of Núria Monclús for Julio’s novel that dominates chapter five. This
series of negative encounters highlights Julio’s pessimistic view on life. With this chapter-by-chapter repetition, Julio’s negative outlook is engrained into the reader’s experience. Chapter six is not divided into sections as chapters one through five are, and therefore gives a greater impression of unity. This marks the end of the chain of narration after which the narrator is revealed as Gloria, whom we first encounter preparing a study on “discriminación sexista” at the beginning of the novel (Donoso, Jardín 21). Julio’s wife has overtaken the responsibility of finishing his own novel and accepted a brand of mellowed resignation in her less-than-exciting relationship with her husband. Nonetheless this gives her renewed focus and energy which she directs toward her own writing. In this way, chapter six disturbingly breaks the tension built in the first five chapters and lends additional credence to the assumption that the change in writer in Julio’s novel is additionally echoed extra-textually in Donoso’s Jardín. Additionally, we see that the marriage of Julio and Gloria, which up to this point has been headed for failure, is recuperated, though not with gusto. Julio’s insistence on being a superior artist yields to his acceptance of the couple’s interdependency. At this point, Gloria is now a valued writer and proves that she may become the real author and bread-winner in this unconventional couple. It is her voice which narrates the last chapter of Jardín, and possibly chapters one through five, bringing order and control to a project which seemed all but abandoned by her husband. The female voice reigns supreme.
Critical Influences on My Reading of Jardín

Critical studies of the novel abound, mainly in the form of journal articles, reviews, and dissertations although they appear less frequently in recent years. Of the substantial, critical works which look at Donoso over time and in multiple texts referenced in this study, none of them offer a detailed analysis of Jardín. George McMurray (1979) of course was published before the release of Jardín, but Miriam Adelstein (1990) and Sharon Magnarelli (1993) make only cursory allusions to this novel as their works focus on different Donoso texts. Phillip Swanson (1987) first posits the stylistic form seen in Jardín as Donoso’s rejection of some tenets of the “new novel”, referring to the Boom’s reaction against the prior generation’s realist literature, and perhaps a quest for inner peace on the part of Donoso, he writes:

[. . .] use of a traditional form may be in itself a method of renovating what Donoso sees as the spent forces of the new novel which – paralleling the transition of the hippies in The Garden Next Door from non-conformism to effective conformism – aims to destroy the classical novel but forges another type of classical novel. (524)

While I would argue that Jardin’s protagonists are not the only characters in Donoso’s work subsequent to Obsceno to resign themselves to their life’s situation, I value Swanson’s observation that the text is organized and written in a more straightforward fashion. This may suggest a possible evolution or change in the writer’s textual organization. In my view, it is really a return to the former styles and thematic concerns of the writer unlike his totalizing anti-novel. It is possible that Obsceno was simply Donoso’s
most uniquely-written, strangely-organized, and most reactive Boom novel. Therefore, it is credible that as a text published subsequent to Obsceno, Jardín would understandably appear to transition back to previous styles employed by Donoso and therefore seem more straightforward. Swanson is on-point though when he calls attention to the quote in the dedication of Donoso’s novel which reads in French: “un instant encore, regardons ensemble les rives familières.” (Donoso, Jardín 7). Jardín does in fact mark a turn back to a more personal novel, a stark contrast to Obsceno, and yet a style which Donoso seems to prefer from my own observation of his work over time. One may conclude that Donoso, by this point in time, has decided to write himself out of the Boom if we follow what Gareth Williams (2002) postulates:

the Latin American ‘boom’ novel, together with its aesthetic models of magical realism and of the marvelous real, became gradually incorporated into North American and European liberal pedagogical networks as the privileged form, technique, and imagination of Latin America’s singularity, backwardness, and potential cultural modernization. The Boom was soon understood to be Latin American literature’s universalizing moment. [. . .] It was emblematic of the productive gains that could be made as a result of the successful suturing of transculturation to capitalist modernization. (Williams, The Other 63)

I believe Donoso turned back to the shorter novel at this point because he found that the fantastic works better in shorter fiction where development of a particular character lends to the psychological themes which he emphasizes. Likewise, it is credible to believe that
Donoso simply settles back into his literary niche after the arduous process of writing his great Boom novel, but this is something I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter.

A. Alejandro Bernal (1985) alludes to the importance of the garden when he writes: “El contacto con Chile y su historia política se da a través de la ventana que da al jardín de al lado, a la ensoñación artística y al pasado representado por la añoranza de la casa paterna y la juventud” (Bernal 54). Bernal calls attention to the contemplative and dream-inducing powers of this space as Julio’s link to Chile without clearly referencing its fantastic qualities. Pointing us in a similar direction are the words of Jean-Marie Lemogodeuc (1993) wherein he asserts:

\[ \text{E.J.A.L. puede ser considerada entonces como una novela que prolonga la reflexión emprendida en \textit{Historia personal del “boom”}. En este caso, la escritura novelesca puede funcionar como la verdadera cura terapéutica de un paciente neurótico. La enunciación y el enunciado del texto “donosiano” muestran cómo en el enfrentamiento entre la luz y las tinieblas, el silencio y la palabra de la escritura, el deseo de Julio (¿Donoso?) tropieza constantemente con el instinto de muerte. (Lemogodeuc 389)} \]

Lemogodeuc suggests a therapeutic function to the act of novel writing, which I will address, and suggests the autobiographical nature of the text as well. I see a clear link between this and the fantastic space of the garden in \textit{Jardín}, as others like Bernal have suggested, it is the garden which is Julio’s direct link to Chile. Therefore, his escape, contemplation, and access to his memories in Chile are accessed through this fantastic space, in effect becoming a lesser-acknowledged character or presence in Donoso’s novel.
Rosemary Geisdorfer Feal, in her article “Veiled Portraits: Donoso’s Interartistic Dialogue in *El jardín de al lado*” (1988), discusses the various works of art mentioned in the text, however in addition she also mentions the therapeutic and fantastic nature of the garden. She writes: “Donoso tells us that we must go through the way of ignorance and dispossession to arrive at a vantage point from which we may contemplate the hallucinatory garden next door or within. . .” (416). The neighbor’s garden oasis serves several purposes in *Jardín*, both meta-textually and extra-textually, in that it provides a type of healing space and impetus for contemplation where the narrator, and possibly Donoso himself, can process events from two extreme poles of his life span. However strictly at the textual level, we know that the narrator eventually surrenders the finishing and publication of his novel to his wife who is therefore converted into the family’s bread winner, the writer of novels to come, and perhaps a greater part of Julio’s identity than he cares to accept in chapters one through five.

To summarize how these critical studies of *Jardín* inform my own approach to the novel I offer the following. First, we see that the novel is understood as being more personal, if not more obviously autobiographical compared to other Donoso texts. This supports my own view of Donoso over time with regard to the donosian archetype I have proposed early on in this study. Secondly, we see the garden as having a hallucinatory effect on the narrator which allows him the perspective to consider and negotiate his current life circumstances in exile with his memories of the past. The acts of writing and contemplation, inspired by his garden-induced daydreams, are regarded as therapeutic as we know Julio’s and Gloria’s novel is finally published, and they both come to peace with their relationship. Theoretically the fantastic allows this, especially regarding the Latin-
American experience which often deals with historical conflict and national identity. It allows characters to trespass boundaries, “reinvent themselves, or recover what is lost” as is the case in *Jardín* with Julio and Gloria Méndez (Duncan 106). Julio subjects himself to a rigorous self-examination which by chapter five leaves him ready to abandon his wife and walk-off into the night streets in search of something which he cannot, or does not wish, to name. Duncan reminds us of the fantastic’s subversive nature when she writes:

> Travel in time and space is a familiar theme in fantastic literature, often linked to science fiction, but in the stories to be examined here, travelers move through time and space without the help of technological marvels and supernatural powers. They slip and slide between two worlds as naturally as if they were walking down a city street. The fantastic becomes a discourse that challenges Western notions of time as chronological and linear and dismantles the notion of history as a series of events that move forward and backward in time. The characters find the past and present coexist and are intertwined because of unresolved issues from the past continue to influence the present. (106-107)

In *Jardín*, we encounter a dull, middle class, couple going through the ups and downs of a monotonous life, but our knowledge of them is punctuated by the presence of the garden. Julio’s encounters with the garden change our perspective of who he and Gloria are along the length of the text and we learn that they are far more complex. The fantastic allows us to see how the past can affect the present. Duncan says that the fantastic “opens a dialogue with history and reminds us that any confrontation between past and present ‘involves an acknowledgement of limitations as well as power’” (107). It is not until Julio
has embraced his links to home and to his ailing mother that he can continue writing and dealing with family. This change in Julio is initiated by the alluring garden.

Noteworthy also, the feminist undercurrents of this novel wherein the authority of the male, omniscient narrator is superseded by that of his wife. This lends credit to the view that it is Gloria who has been narrating the story all along in chapters one through five as she and Julio are both narrators in addition to protagonists. The difficulty which the male narrator finds in writing his novel yields to a female voice in the end. In this vein of thought, the fantastic narratives can be viewed as an explicit militancy against female silence. Duncan says that fantastic works function

[...]

to provide serious explorations and dramatizations of issues at the heart of human existence. They raise profound questions about the nature of identity, about the limitations surrounding the earthly experience, the restrictions of body, mind, space, and time, the distinction between life and death. The expression of these concerns is by no means limited to fantastic texts written by women. (180-181)

Duncan affirms that fantastic is like feminism in its reverse discourse because it undermines the authority of traditional male powers and regimes of truth upheld by culture. Referring to Michel Foucault, she maintains that this type of language challenges “normalizing powers” and “regimes of truth” created and upheld by patriarchal tradition (180). Feminist approaches to Jardín are highly-applicable readings, they highlight of its subversive and reactive positioning regarding male dominancy, particularly revealed in Gloria’s prior-mentioned literary coup. Julio accepts that Gloria represents a part of
himself, a fact that he rejects early in the novel by belittling her works as a mere translator. Because of the symbiotic relationship between the fantastic and feminism, many of Donoso’s novels easily support feminist perspectives on power, identity, and discourse, including *Jardín*. as well as *Obseno*, wherein the male narrator’s dominant voice is muted and placed in a dubious light. Duncan’s underpins this conclusion when she says

> Whether the fantastic is more threatening when it issues from the pen of a woman is a question open to debate and merits further study. What is clear, however, is that women feel a strong attraction to the fantastic as a mode of expression precisely because it allows them to voice concerns about the way mainstream, patriarchal culture has traditionally limited their access to discursive power. (200)

Julio is not the great writer of the Chilean exile novel without the contributions of Gloria who picks-up the novel where he has fallen short, edits what he has written, produces a viable ending to the text, and charms his publisher into nothing less than excitement for their novel. The text being written within the plot of *Jardín* is mimicked in *Jardín* itself. Donoso, as a male writer, pulls the underpinning away from typically, authoritative, male voices in his work. *Jardin* like most of his works, decenters this authority and hence its accompanying, discursive power. Facilitated by its fantastic qualities, the text points to the validity of other voices and therefore highlights Gloria’s take-charge attitude and Julio’s embrace of it.
Viewing the Garden as a Fantastic Space

The first mention of the garden occurs in chapter two where the narrator awakens, conscious that he is now installed in the Madrid apartment belonging to his friend Pancho Salvatierra. A ray of greenish light filters-in from the garden outside the bedroom window making both the presence of the garden and the narrator’s attraction to it known. The light described in this scene and its green reflection are hints of nature’s and the garden’s power of enlightenment. Hovering between alertness and drowsiness he is increasingly aware that the garden beckons him with its magical greenness:

Adivino que igual que en ese allá y en ese entonces, a través del pentagrama de la celosía, una luminosidad verde está hundiendo este dormitorio ajeno que el sueño de una noche hizo mío, en una quietud subacuática donde mi conciencia puede flotar aun un rato más sin que nada la roce, porque faltan unos minutos para que los pasos de Pato hagan crujir en forma inconfundible el parqué: entrara a darme un beso en la frente y a pedirme dinero para el autobús... “En mi pantalón”...”, le contestaba todas las mañanas, igual que mi padre a mí: me despierta la elocuencia de los suelos de otra época, perdida hace ya tantos años... Reconozco los pasos de mi mujer que me trae el desayuno a la cama. (Donoso, Jardín 66)

This mention of the garden does not include a physical description of it, yet as the narrator awakens we become aware of the effects it has on him. Although he has not viewed the garden at this point in the novel, its mere presence and effects on the narrator are impressed upon the reader. Its green luminosity constitutes a cocoon of quietness which
reigns over the bedroom. Hoping for a few more minutes of solitude in which he can remain a bit longer, it is a sinking feeling that he experiences and enjoys, likened to an underwater silence. Literary tradition holds the window as a symbol of conscience or awareness, of penetration, and of distance\textsuperscript{25} thus evoking the mental and physical state of exile, as that of the narrator’s case. Here, Julio is aware that he is waking in a strange bed, far from home and far from Chile. The silence may be seen as a welcome refuge away from the bustle of daily life, it can also be a reminder of his impotency in writing the novel: “En vista de lo cual dormí una siesta drogada, interminable, para que empalmara con la noche y no verme así obligado a enfrentar la consuetudinaria disyuntiva planteada por mi máquina de escribir” (12-13). As he slowly awakens, the sounds of the strange apartment take him back, either in conscious fantasy or in dream, to the sounds of his home in Chile when Pato was a schoolboy coming to ask him for spending money. The obvious reading here is that Julio longs for his homeland and for simpler times long gone. The penetration or portal symbolism of the window signals a desired breakthrough in his novel. We see the garden seems beckon Julio, its green light slipping-in from around the window shades bodes of something powerful and possibly transforming to come.

Julio’s viewing of the garden allows another shift in time that is not distinguished in the text. To be specific, this daydream recalls his mother and the garden at his parents’ home in Chile. Duncan has claimed that the fantastic allows characters to move between two worlds, and the quote below demonstrates two functions of the fantastic powers of the garden seen here. First it shows how the garden takes Julio back to his maternal home; second it is associated with his mother; even her voice can be detected in the text. One

\textsuperscript{25} See Juan Eduardo Cirlot (2008) p. 462.
might say the garden activates memory which is incorporated in a stream-of-consciousness type of narration. Here, Julio narrates first from within Salvatierra’s apartment in Madrid, but soon the text trespasses time and physical boundaries, even voices. The change in voice becomes clear with the use of the word “mijito.” We should also note the length of Donoso’s sentences in this fragment. While the following quote is lengthy, it contains only three sentences. Sentence length, here, highlights the dreamlike fluidity with which Julio moves between the two extremes of his life experience, exile and home, in a trance-like state:

Mientras Gloria termina de abrir la cortina me levanto de la cama y miro: si, un jardín. Olmos, castaños, tilos, un zorzal – o su equivalente en estas latitudes; no me propongo aprender su nombre porque ya estoy viejo para integrarlo a mi mitología personal – saltando sobre el césped no demasiado cuidado: el duque es un gandul. La formalidad con que las espadas de los lirios destilan a lo largo del muro casi velado por el boscaje. Florecillas inidentificables brotan a la sombra de las ramas – ¿juncos?, ¿cinerarias?; no, esas son flores de comienzos de primavera, pues, mijito, y estamos a comienzos de junio aunque allá en España la primavera recién acaba de terminar –, parecida a la sombra de las ramas de un jardín de otro hemisferio, jardín muy distinto a este pequeño parque aristocrático, porque aquella era sombra de paltos y araucarias y naranjos y magnolios, y sin embargo esta sombra es igual a aquella, que rodea de silencio esta casa en que este mismo momento mi madre agoniza. (67)
The first sentence of this passage communicates Julio’s presence in Madrid and allows the reader to know that he is aware of the garden; it seems to have some type of supernatural pull on Julio. The second sentence names varieties of trees which Julio has learned at home in Chile and also makes reference to his age; this is important later in my discussion of the Donosian archetype. He doesn’t plan on learning the names of the native trees of Spain because he’s apparently too old to learn them. Similar to the trees he can name which thrive in his homeland, he feels that he too does not belong in Spain. He is like the Spaniards around him, but acknowledges that he will never fit perfectly in this setting. The third sentence, the longest and most complex of the three quoted above, contrasts his parents’ garden with the one he is viewing at this moment, yet it also compares its shade to the shade which wraps his mother’s home.

Here we also notice a very typical Donoso motif, that of wrapping or layering, most highly represented in the packages of the old servants and the imbunche of Obsceno which I explored in chapter one. Usually at the heart of the wrapping in such a donosian construct, like the interior of the packages belonging to the old women, there is found a void, nothingness. In her Chilean home surrounded by a garden, his mother is dying. This is probably a reference to Julio’s preoccupation with the quality of his mother’s life at this stage as we later learn that she is slowly starving herself, becoming smaller and smaller with time, not unlike the narrator of Obsceno. Likewise, in Madrid, the duke’s beautiful garden shades and surrounds the building in which Julio is living a hollow, meaningless life in exile. This may also be Julio’s comparison of the exile experience to that of his mother’s suffering. Here the writer informs us that the experience of exile not only affects those forced out of their native country, but also those who are left behind.
No tengo acceso a ese mundo, quizás por temperamento, quizás porque el ventarrón de nuestra historia nos llevó a otras cosas, pero soy capaz de contemplarlo desde lejos: es enigmático como un gato con los ojos cerrados, que descansa, pero no duerme. [. . .] La mínima parcela del parque vecino vista desde mi dormitorio, será mía hasta la hora impensable en que caiga Roma al caer de mi madre. Va a desaparecer ese muro que entreveo más allá el encaje anhelante de las hojas del tilo, el muro rozado por la hilera de los lirios. (70)

The garden outside his bedroom window is barely out of Julio’s physical reach, then again his mother’s garden is just as inaccessible, yet it is thousands of mile away. The effect of the garden on Julio is that of a constant reminder for that which he cannot have and as such marks the beginning of his obsession for this space. Julio’s struggle in exile is a many-headed beast and the garden recalls the things that are off limits to him in this state of limbo. Thus, the garden projects this tormenting contradiction onto Julio and is the tension readers experience in the bulk portion of the novel. Does he overcome the difficult memories of the past and forge ahead with a new life, or does the garden become an umbilical cord which binds him to the past? Like most answers offered by Donoso, it is neither of these two extremes.

In chapter four, Julio recounts how one night when he is unable to sleep he decides to call his mother’s home, where it is about ten o’clock at night. He expects to speak to his mother and instead talks to his brother, Sebastian, who informs Julio that their mother, suffering from self-inflicted anorexia, had recently passed. Even this he processes via reference to, and in images of, the gardens both in Madrid and in his maternal home:
Ahora no soy nadie: ahora yo soy tronco, yo soy raíz. Ahora me tocará el turno a mí. [...] Ahora que mi madre ha muerto podría volver sin miedo a quedar atrapado allá por mi emoción, y habitar el auténtico – no el reflejo en esta artificiosa agua de lujo – jardín de al lado. [...] No puedo volver. ¿Cómo? ¿Sin un libro publicado en España, con la cola entre las piernas, sin trabajo, sin reintegrarme a la universidad de la cual me despidieron? [...] Esta novela que estoy escribiendo es lo único que importa. Avanza un poco a medida que avanza este agosto en que ha muerto mi madre, después de que esa heráldica presencia dorada deja vacío el jardín, adquiriendo una forma que puedo manejar y un idioma en que me reconozco. (171-173)

The first part of the quote exemplifies the potency of symbolism associated with trees. In Julio’s case, now that his mother is dead, he envisions himself as the trunk or even the roots of his metaphorical family tree. The tree, long associated with longevity and growth in literary tradition, has been changed by his mother’s death. He no longer belongs to the branches of the tree, but has moved closer to its core, perhaps its root as he approaches old age. This view of the tree allows us to better understand Julio’s preoccupation with his own mortality and legacy in contemplation of the garden. Shortly after mentioning the tree he begins to worry about this, referring to the unfinished novel. Rhetorically, he asks how he can return to Chile with his tail tucked under, without a book published in Spain. Such would be surrender; it would be his ruin. Later we see the novel is the only thing that

matters to Julio at this point in life and that it has progressed a little now that his mother’s aristocratic, golden presence has vacated the garden at home in Chile.

The glimpse of his neighbor’s trees in the garden takes Julio back in time. Duncan recalls that the fantastic allows characters to travel through time:

Common motifs in fantastic fiction, such as time travel or parallel universes, can be appropriated by Latin American writers to reclaim the past and examine history through another lens. Chronological time breaks down and blurs into a continuum without precise boundaries. [. . .] They slip and slide between two worlds as naturally as if they were walking down a city street. The fantastic becomes a discourse that challenges Western notions of time as chronological and linear and dismantles the notion of history as a series of events that move forward and backward in time. (Duncan 106-107)

The death of his mother causes Julio to lose his interest in returning to Chile; this is also conveyed in his recollection of her garden:

Uno sueña con el regreso a su país, abstracción materializada, más que por lo fortuito del lugar de nacimiento, porque el sueño del regreso se refiere a cierta ventana que da a cierto jardín, a un tapiz de verdes entrelazados de historias privadas que iluminan relaciones de seres y lugares: éstos configuran el cosmos que hice nacer en el jardín al que ahora me asomo, hace ya medio siglo. (Donoso, Jardín 68)

The death of his mother may also be what actually encourages Julio to finish the novel, and soon he does exactly that, perhaps also as a benefit of his contemplation on the garden and
its quality as a sort of time portal and reflexional space. He and Gloria both reread the finished text and hastily decide to send it to Núria Monclús, who only rejects it a second time. Not only does she reject it, but she also belittles Julio as a writer adding: “No puedo dejar de serle franca y decirle que a todos les ha parecido un error de perspectiva y de gusto. Era mejor, me parece, la otra versión, la primera, ésta es como ésa, pero hipertrofiada, enferma, declamatoria, chillona” (232).

Wounded by a second rejection, Julio resorts to fixating on a painting instead of sharing the unthinkable news of his literary defeat with Gloria. He spots a small yet valuable painting in one of the rooms in Pancho’s apartment. The painting inside a silver frame, which is not dissimilar to the window opening onto the garden outside, fascinates Julio and fixes his gaze:

Es el único que veo porque me absorbe la mirada desde el momento de entrar: un bello cuerpo de mujer desnuda, sentado, pero invadido por cientos de insectos meticulosamente pintados que cubren como joyas la carne fresca y bella de esa mujer, cochinillas, libélulas, moscardones, escarabajos, grillos, saltamontes, arañas. La figura sentada tiene un bataclicio sobre una rodilla, de modo que cubre el sexo. [. . .] El marco es un listón de plata que decapita la figura, cuya cabeza queda fuera del cuadro. (235)

Of notable importance, the dragonflies, flies, beetles and other creatures in the painting recall the atmosphere of a garden, while the metal picture frame decapitates the female subject therein. He is entranced with the beheaded garden muse and her surroundings. The artistic gesture of decapitation in the painting parallels Julio’s desire to render both Gloria
and Núria mute as they are the characters who repeatedly reject his own writing. Julio is held in captivation of the work of art as he calculates what he can do in light of his publisher’s scorn for the novel. He wraps the artwork, changes its title, and pawns it to a shady-looking collector on the streets of Madrid for money.

In chapter six, told from Gloria’s perspective, we learn that Pancho has recuperated the painting and made amends with Gloria, accepting that Julio stole it out of mere desperation for money. But chapter five marks the end of Julio’s and Gloria’s summer in Madrid, as well as any significant, fantastical references to the hallucinatory garden next door. Julio takes the money gained from the stolen painting and flies with his wife to Marrakesh to see their son Pato. He has invited them to see a play in which he is starring. This is probably a grandiose gesture meant to distract Gloria’s attention from his novel’s failure. With their marriage still in jeopardy of dissolving, the trip to Marrakesh marks the pinnacle of tensions within the novel’s domestic plot and brings the reader to a decisive point in Julio’s marriage. During this last evening in Morocco, Gloria sees Julio preparing to go out again after they have returned to their hotel room. It is late at night, and she imagines he is going to disappear forever. Similar to his trance-like pull toward the garden window in Pancho’s Madrid apartment, what is happening outside the hotel room’s window beckons Julio into the streets. He imagines that Bijou, his son Pato’s friend for whom he has an obsession and physical attraction, is there waiting on him. Julio continually denies his own attraction to Bijou throughout the novel. This all because it is not accepted for men in his culture and place in society to entertain such thoughts. He is torn between his own attraction and what his culture allows:
Sí, estoy dispuesto a despojarme de mi traje occidental, que dejaré aquí, con mi mujer y mi fracaso. Bijou me guiará por las callejuelas que conoce tan bien como las de Sitges y como las de todos los laberintos – dos siluetas monjiles, ocultando raza, edad, condición, gusto, bajo la parda chillaba – para llevarme en busca de lo que me apetece, no sé qué es, no sé, pero por cierto hoy no es la espalda de una señora de cincuenta años que he visto toda la vida haciendo lo mismo: para ponerse el camisón alza sus brazos, y el camisón cae alrededor de su cuerpo, ocultándolo. (252)

Julio sees Gloria’s lack of concern in his preparation to go out, and imagines that she thinks he will be back within ten minutes. He does walk out. This cliffhanger marks the end of chapter five and the end of the substantial portion of the novel told from Julio’s omniscient perspective.

While I have already explained that chapter six marks a drastic and revealing turnabout in the narration of Jardín, it is pertinent to first consider the reappearance of the Donosian archetype before discussing Gloria’s metatextual/extratextual coup. From many references within the text and seen in the quote above, we are made aware of Julio’s and Gloria’s age as being fifty-something; he is unsatisfied with his state of exile, his marriage with Gloria, and his inability to publish the promised exile novel – a Rayuela-like anti-novel of the Boom Generation.27 Also, inferred from the quote above, is his sexual

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27 The Rayuela reference is one voiced by Julio’s wife Gloria, in Jardín. Rayuela (1963) is Julio Cortazar’s great anti-novel of the Generation of the Latin-American Boom. This lengthy text, is much like Donoso’s Obsceno pájaro de la noche because if its purposeful disjointedness. It can be read in a sequence other than the novel’s sequential numeration of chapters and states as such in the text’s introduction.
frustration with Gloria’s less-than-attractive body, compounded by his infatuation with and appreciation for Bijou’s beauty. Bijou embodies an unexplained, sexual and paternal allure to Julio. Julio admits his desire to shed his Western notions, in this case traditional heteronormative sexuality, to be free to explore the streets of the unknown city with the younger man. Ramon Garcia-Castro (2002), in his queer reading of the novel, astutely notes the dubious sexuality of several of Donoso’s protagonists including Julio Mendez. He writes: “Esta ambigüedad de narradores en El jardín de al lado no es la única manera cómo Donoso saca del closet a los personajes a la vez que niega su homosexualidad” and concludes that Donoso rejects masculine and patriarchal dominance with this novel (Garcia-Castro 33).

Núria Monclús, Julio’s editor and potential publisher, who rejects his work repeatedly, is a constant representation of his fear of scrutiny and a reminder of his inability to write. As a self-proclaimed writer of Latin-American Boom novels, now out of vogue, and as an exile living in a state of constant uncertainty in economic, sexual, marital, paternal, political, and professional terms, Julio is painfully aware of his uniqueness to those around him. This uniqueness is both a blessing and a curse, for it allows him the potential to write a very specific exile novel and still it foments his fear of failure. The fantastic, as represented with references to the garden, the window opening to the garden, objects such as the painting, and people in the garden, is exemplified twenty-six times in chapter two of the novel, and discussed in the quotes I have examined above. This is where the magical garden is first mentioned and most highly-developed in the text. The painting of the insect-covered muse with no head, also reminiscent of the garden, is a fantastical text within and of it itself. Like the garden, it transports Julio and temporarily stifles his
fear of failure. Thus, reliance on fantasy as an escape for Julio is hammered into the reader’s experience. Given that Julio is a male, we therefore see all the seven qualifications of the Donosian archetype, originally identified in the introduction to this study, developed in the protagonist of Jardín.

Julio’s cliffhanging, nighttime venture into the unfamiliar streets of Marrakesh as he follows the imagined call of Bijou, would be in keeping with other typical endings in Donoso’s career, specifically those seen in the short story “Santelices” and the novel El lugar sin límites. In these texts the protagonist, a Donosian archetype, is quite obviously the center of attention in a well-developed character study. Given the uniqueness of the last chapter in Jardín, its dramatic turnaround in narrator and uniformity indicate that chapter six could have possibly been a last-minute revision of the novel on the part of Donoso though no other critical studies or reviews I have read hint to this. It is my suspicion that the reappearance of this archetype, as I have described him, leads us to consider a longstanding, existential preoccupation on the writer’s part and as such parallels a character who seems to pervade Donoso’s writing. It also lends credence to critical views, such as those of Garcia-Castro (2002), Geisdorf-Feal (1988), Olszewski (1992), Simon (2007), and Swanson (1987), which postulate this novel’s autobiographical nature and, as such, the archetype reveals recurring and personal themes which Donoso engages throughout his career.

For experienced readers of Donoso, chapter six is unexpected to say the least. Gloria’s resurgence and professional breakthrough as author of Julio’s exile novel and narrator of the text we read evidence a surprising fragmentation in Julio’s identity. It is a
splintering in the narrator’s authority and a play on the writer’s preoccupation with art, 
writing, and perhaps more importantly, identity. Swanson contends:

The achievement of inner peace from turning to a more traditional, personal 
literature is personified by Gloria’s change of role. She says that, while 
Julio is obsessed by imitating from other contemporary sources, she has 
found a sense of salvation in the assuming a perhaps unfashionable low-key 
tone. (Swanson 525)

After chapter five’s end in Marrakesh, Gloria confesses in an intimate tone: “Estoy 
escribiendo esto a muchos kilómetros y a muchos meses de distancia de esa noche en el 
Hotel El Minzah, después de la cual todo ha cambiado, y se ha vuelto, por decirlo de algún 
modo al revés” (Donoso, Jardin 258). Since Marrakesh, she has taken over Julio’s novel 
and is about to have it published by none other than Núria Monclús. Things have turned 
around for her and Julio, indicating that they are still together and have been able to cope 
with life’s circumstances in exile. Gloria tells us: “No es solución: me sirve, en todo caso, 
para seguir adelante y no pensar continuamente en los corrosiva que es la inutilidad. Eso 
yá es bastante” (272). Julio’s great novel about the Chilean experience, what Gloria calls 
his own Rayuela, has been usurped for Gloria’s low-key, evocation of a memoir written in 
a confessional tone. Gloria narrates the end of her novel which she recounts to Núria over 
lunch one afternoon while discussing her literary success. The conclusion to her novel, 
which Núria admits needs something to tie all its loose plot threads, narrates what occurs 
after the episode of the night in Marrakesh. Gloria recounts what happens with Núria 
during their luncheon:
Y como toda mujer a su marido que ha llegado a la cama después de una noche de juerga, le olí la boca, la cara, por si encontraba olor a alcohol, a kif, a perfume de alguien que no fuera yo: nada. […] Me levanté en puntillas de la cama, abrí la puerta de nuestra cuarto, y puse por fuera el aviso para la camarera: *Please do not disturb*. Volví a la cama, colocándome en ella muy apretada a su cuerpo. . . Me quedé dormida instantáneamente. (274)

Núria is captivated by Gloria’s story, energetically suggesting that this is the conclusion which her novel is lacking and encourages her to continue writing the next great novel. The obvious feminine voice of the paragraph above stands in stark contrast to Julio’s sexist comments toward Gloria, her lack of writerly talent, and her repeated inability to stimulate Julio sexually in chapters one through five. But let’s not confuse the subdued, feminine tone seen in the quote above, wherein Gloria accepts Julio into her bed “como toda mujer” after a night out rambling in the streets, with her triumphant feminist one. Although this does not find a voice until the last chapter, it is hinted in several places in the text prior to the sixth chapter. For example, in chapter three, embedded in dialogue, Gloria tells Julio: “¡Si supieras cuantas novelas no escritas tengo encerradas dentro de mí, como gatos locos en un saco, que pelean y se destrozan” (121-122)! Can the reader imagine Gloria as the successful, talented writer and bread-winner for the family? For the major part of the novel, this is unthinkable if we trust Julio’s judgement of her. Gloria’s authority and right to produce her great exile novel is repeatedly negated in most of the text, principally by Julio who sarcastically calls her an “escritora frustrada” (122). Chapter six turns all of this on its head wherein Gloria makes an impressive and assertive confession seen in the fragment below, demonstrating her newly-found authority:
Quiero dejar muy en claro que, al enterarme del rechazo de Núria Monclús a su novela, mezclado con mi compasión y mi dolor sentí, a la vez, un componente de vengativa alegría ante su fracaso, el fracaso del macho de la familia cuyo deber es el triunfar que saca a los suyos de la pobreza y del anonimato, misión ante la sociedad que ambos despreciamos . . . pero de cuya forma todavía dependemos. Fue esta derrota final de Julio lo que me ayudó a salir de mi depresión: necesitaba verlo menos fuerte (265-266)

Gloria’s recovery of Julio’s novel asserts that their union is an important part of his identity and career, something heavily-veiled in the first five chapters of his book. Demonstrating the plurality in the narrator’s voice and the masks behind which Julio hides, her success not only evidences the interdependency of the couple, and also the validity in a female perspective of the exile experience, but it also reminds readers that power is always present in unexpected places. Specifically, in this case, Gloria, who is presented as the subservient, underappreciated spouse barely capable of completing translations of other great works, in the end is the character to eventually recuperates the voice which her husband has lost. The patriarchal vision of the father as the bread-winner, the authoritative male voice, in Julio’s case, is incapable of successfully communicating the exile experience. Julio’s voice falters, giving way to Donoso’s long-standing view of identity as a plural quality thus outlining the exile story told in Jardín as a communal, perhaps feminine one. By the end of the novel, Julio realizes that he is nothing without Gloria. He also recognizes his attraction to men and is ready to walk-off into the streets of this foreign city in search of something he wishes not to name but describes as “algo que me apetece . . . que hoy no es la espalda de una señora de cincuenta años” (252).
As I have argued here, Donoso’s use of the fantastic, mainly seen in Julio’s contemplation on the garden next door, provides a portal and a space of self-examination which allows the narrator to cross the distance between his exile in Spain and his homeland in Chile. We have seen that the neighbor’s garden in Madrid takes Julio back in time to the garden at his maternal home. Like the packages so often seen in other Donoso texts, the garden wraps something at its core thereby hinting at the importance of the interior. Julio’s and Gloria’s feelings of uselessness and lack of voice are repeated across the Atlantic, and take on the form of his ailing mother who is also suffering, but also enclosed by her own garden. Allowing Julio to negotiate the space between Chile and his exile, the garden ultimately facilitates Julio’s contemplation on his situation which yields very specific memories of home, parents, and family experiences. In the process, he learns that the past which he so desperately seeks to avoid, may actually be something he should embrace if he wants to find the voice he lacks in order finish his story. That fantastic qualities in the text, mainly associated with the garden are also present in the writer’s treatment of windows and, as I have detailed, in one case a work of art. Both are portals to another view.

The fantastic activates memory, serves as an accessible bridge between past and present, provides Julio a temporary escape from his creative impotency, and offers him a therapeutic experience. Gloria’s overthrow of the narrator’s voice in the last chapter of Jardín reveals the masks behind which Julio has hidden in chapters one through five. Her story communicates the couple’s interdependency and usurps the perceived power of the male, omniscient narrator seen prior in the novel. Julio’s Rayuela-like novel about the Chilean exile experience with himself as the central voice is superseded by Gloria’s more
confessional, feminine version; this is further solidified by Núria’s excitement to publish it. Her consolidation of voice at the end of the novel successfully narrates the corrosive sense of uselessness one experiences in exile, undermines male authority in the text, marks the female character as the one who restores control and order, and therefore crowns the female as the successful writer and provider for the family. Thus, Donoso’s stylistic move away from the totalizing novel, common of the Boom and referred to by Gloria as Julio’s *Rayuela*, is evidenced on several levels.

Evidence of the donosian archetype repeated in this novel indicates a type of character which seems to occupy the author’s body of work across time. If we give credence to what other critics have written, this may suggest certain autobiographical qualities which Donoso did not want to express in a revealingly direct fashion. Stylistically we see in *Jardín* that Donoso seems to reject the exaggerated, anti-novel reaction of his generation better seen in *Obsceno*, but retains his stronghold on the fantastic, specifically found in the contemplation triggered by the garden, through windows, and in works of art. As I posit in chapter one of this study, the fantastic articulates that which is desired or missing. In Julio’s case this is embodied in the neighbor’s forbidden, inaccessible garden from his position in the house next door. Not only a negative space between the houses of his summer in Madrid, the garden allows Julio to reach beyond his physical constraints and, in the words of Duncan, “slip and slide” between the present of Madrid and the past of his childhood home in Chile. The dubious voice of the narrator and protagonist is further

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doubted when we discover that it is Julio’s wife Gloria who has taken on his role as writer, edited his great novel, and managed to have it accepted by the publishers when before it was only met with rejection. Suffering in exile, Julio contemplates the enigmatic garden next door and in the process, comes to terms with his dependency on Gloria, the important part she plays in his life, and his own non-traditional, sexual attraction to Bijou. Duncan insists:

Reason has been constructed as a masculine domain that is divorced from and deemed superior to the senses, emotion, and imagination. The fantastic deconstructs this domain and interrogates the limits that have been imposed not only on the way we think but also on the way we see, the way we use language, and the way we respond to literary texts. (Duncan 201)

In this text, Donoso shows us that the hallucinatory garden is not to be found just outside in yard, nor somewhere across the ocean, but within. With regard to art and writing, Jardín suggests that fulfillment is not found in merely completing a work but somewhere along the process of creating it. The head of the family who seeks to provide and maintain order accepts that he is merely a part of this unit and in doing so accepts that his wife occupies an important part of that shared identity. Although this novel offers fertile ground for it, I have not entered into detail on themes of sexuality here, it is a preoccupation of Donoso and as such is a topic which I will engage in the last chapter of the present study with other texts. We do, however, see that the protagonist’s sexuality is a focal point here, in highlighting his attraction to Bijou, the handsome, young, acquaintance of his son. The otherness of this familial unit is echoed in Gloria’s success as the writer of the great Chilean novel and embodies a concern for women’s traditionally-limited access to discursive
power. Donoso is intent on exposing a departure from traditional stereotypes. He does this not to exalt dominant notions of gendered roles and familial cohesion, but rather to subvert the roles that patriarchal society has imposed upon them as Julio realizes that he is more than a patriarchal figurehead, he is attracted to men, Gloria embraces her own voice, the exile’s predicament is shown as a shared experience, and Julio’s ties to home, family, and his past within Chile are highlighted through the garden’s portal.
CHAPTER 4

A PALE BLUE SUICIDE

_Naturaleza muerta con cachimba_ (1990) is a lesser-known Donoso novella which exhibits various thematic commonalities with the writer’s short stories and full-length novels. Admittedly not as colorful as some of Donoso’s other works, this novella is informative to my research in that it offers a detailed, character study of the donosian archetype. He is a Santelices-like character who spans the length and breadth of the writer’s career and found in varying degrees, settings, and circumstances, yet is invariably accompanied by similar thematic preoccupations and stylistic tools of the writer as seen in the works I have already discussed. Of great consequence is the fact that fantasy in _Naturaleza_ provides an escape from suffering, if only mentally and temporarily for the protagonist, Marcos, and his girlfriend, Hilda. This type of fantastic escape echoes that which we have seen in chapter three of my dissertation with examples from _Jardín de al lado_ discussed in the prior chapter.

Despite Donoso’s insistence that he avoids broad-sweeping social or cultural commitments in his writing, some see this text as a critique on the various shortcomings of post-dictatorial, Chilean culture (e.g. Castedo 1999, Femenias 2007, Montamoro 1990). As I briefly hinted earlier, in _Naturaleza_ we find that the writer is wrestling with many

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29 See Guillermo I. Castillo, p. 958.
ideas, obviously those of artistic creation, identity, and desire, which tend to be mainstays for Donoso. It is clear that Donoso leaned toward a metaliterary style, as I have noted in *Jardín*. In his work as a whole, we are continuously reminded of the various versions, mutations, truths, and layers which we perceive as reality. The shaky foundation of reality and the nothingness just beneath the surface of things onto which we tend to hold as truths or constants, are reopened to expose a gaping void in this text. A painting, like a piece of fiction, is a series of layers or washes beneath which there lies nothing. This is comparable to the mansion in *Obsceno* where in the center of its maze of rooms is a collection of garbage, as well as the mythical creature called the “imbunche” in the same work wherein the narrator is compressed beneath layers of cloth and stuffing until his voice is completely muted.

If we take a step back to “Santelices,” the void beneath the protagonist’s office window into which he leaps in a fit of madness is yet another example. In *Naturaleza*, this nothingness or void is echoed in the words of the Larco Museum curator don Felipe, who ironically turns out to be the ageing artist, Felipe Larco. We discover this near the novella’s end as old Larco mockingly sings “Art isn’t worth a fart” (Donoso, *Naturaleza*, Trans. Gregory Rabassa 150). Donoso’s preoccupation with art, and equally in writing, is a theme which I will again discuss in this chapter because of its role in the text. Having already discussed art to some extent in prior chapters, we are reminded by Magnarelli of Donoso’s long-standing views regarding art and literature claiming that art and reality “mutually” influential (Magnarelli, *Understanding* 12). In her view Donoso maintains that art is not a simple mirror for reality; the two are intertwined. The limits of language to name, limit what we perceive: “an inability to name leads to erasure or disappearance that so often
marks the conclusions of his work” (13). The emptiness of language is echoed in the multiple hollows, holes, and voids in Donoso’s work.

As discussed in my analysis of *Jardín*, we often see the painting in Donoso’s writing as an invitation to another world, another frame of mind the frame of the painting physically mimics the frame of a door inviting its viewers to enter. Like the framing of doors, and windows, Donoso’s embedding of stories within stories and manipulating layers of narration distinguish an alternative reality as well; this tends to highlight that both are reproductions, without fixity on any truth or essence. This is part of the reason why we see the void re-presented throughout his work. Also, it is because the fantastic points us to a void, a lack of something, or something for which a character yearns. In Donoso’s writing, the imagined is just as important as the lived. Like the exiled writer in *Jardin* who gazes through the back window of his summer apartment in Madrid onto the garden of his next-door neighbor being transported through time and space to his memories of home, in *Naturaleza*, I discuss a similar situation. Here the protagonist gazes at pieces of an undiscovered art collection and imagines himself finding a way to escape the misery of his life’s circumstances, this time with Chile as the setting.

In this novella, the egocentric protagonist Marcos Ruiz Gallardo develops an obsession for the works and lifestyle of a deceased artist whom we come to know as Larco. Larco was an eccentric painter, who years prior to the beginning of the plot, had abandoned the life of high-society European art circles to live in the anonymity of Cartagena, Chile bringing along his collection of unattractive and misunderstood, surrealist paintings. His works are on display in the Larco Museum in Cartagena where his assistant, don Felipe, lives and serves as curator and manager. It is noteworthy that Donoso specifically mentions
Chile in this text. Here, unlike in many of his works, he specifies the name of his native country and some cities therein as they pertain to the protagonist’s journey. For me this lends credibility to some prior-mentioned critics’ insistence on Donoso’s satirical or even critical tone toward Chile’s post-dictatorial transition, which I will consider later in this chapter. In the coastal resort of Cartagena, Marcos and his girlfriend, Hilda Botto, first come across Larco’s collection of paintings when they decide to take a walk around the seaside resort. This is also where Marcos is inspired in his scheme to escape his mediocre existence, upon which hinges the tension of the entire text. In this chapter, through textual analysis, I revisit the notion of the donosian archetype in Naturaeza as well as the functions of fantastic, this time in a novella. Fantasy, dreams, and art as a coping mechanism in the human struggle, are hallmark Donosian techniques or even themes; they uphold a Foucauldian view on power which I discuss later in this chapter. In addition, Larco’s manipulation of a still life painting and the complete voiding, with a pale blue wash, of other works in his collection merit discussion as they communicate a subtle and unsuspected commentary on life in Chile and hint at changes in Donoso’s writing strategy.

The title of this short novel is also that of the still life which is central to its plot. Translated to the English, the painting whose title means “Still Life with Pipe”, has caught the attention of Marcos whom we come to know as a middle-class bank clerk with typical problems at work, ups and downs in his love life, an obsession with how others view him within society, and a deep-seated dissatisfaction with the general direction in which his life is headed. In essence he is a restless soul. With a desperate yearning for fame and financial success, Marcos seeks a leadership role in a local art association with enrollments and participation, both already in decline. The goal of his organization is to promote the
national artistic heritage in Chile. It is in this capacity that Marcos comes across the Larco Museum during a romantic getaway to the seaside with Hildita. Via the Museum’s caretaker, don Felipe, Marcos is lead to believe the artist has previously died after installing his collection of paintings and residence in Cartagena. With the help of don Felipe, he becomes familiar with the painter’s life events, works with the aid the aging curator to bring Larco’s paintings to the public eye, and simultaneously earn his position in the limelight of this hefty art discovery for the art association. Although Marcos cannot muster great, aesthetic attraction to Larco’s art, he appreciates that it is somehow culturally relevant. He is attracted to one particular painting and that is the still life for which the novella is titled. If he can carry-through with this project, he will be the renowned discoverer of the Larco collection. Marcos comes to believe that his own aspirations of fame and wealth are just within reach if only he can manage to align his art association, and of course himself, to Larco’s surrealist body of work. His dissatisfaction with his own life begins a journey which transports himself, Hildita, and the reader toward a possible, material transformation which he hopes will improve his circumstances.

Critical Approaches to Naturaleza

Elena Castedo (1999) likens the protagonist’s transformation to a “transfiguración” (157). Transfiguration is a word commonly associated with the metamorphosis of Jesus Christ into radiant light in Old Testament gospels. The use of the word highlights the protagonist’s unattainable goal, one that evokes a change of form into a more beautiful or pleasurable state of being. In short, Marcos seeks to reinvent himself and, like other
Donoso characters, absorb the identity of another. Similar to the artist Larco, taking on the fictitious identity of his own assistant or curator, we find that Marcos conversely wants take on the identity and lifestyle of the artist himself. However, as we shall see through examples within the text, he cannot achieve this ultimate transfiguration for which he pines, he does not end the process in a better place, emotionally, socially or economically, at least in concrete terms. Therefore, unlike Castedo’s take on Marcos’s wish to change or even exchange his life for that of another, I do not consider his transformation a “transfiguración” as she labels it, for his desire to improve his quality of life never comes to fruition. Although he does experience a “reinvención vital” (157), if anything, he is ruined, both materially and mentally, by the whole Larco debacle. On another level, we do eventually see that he has been able to physically obtain the artist’s legacy via material fashion by first attempting to purchase this odd collection of paintings and later through a bequest from don Felipe of the still life which does manage to pique his attention. No one in his art association likes the paintings or finds any aesthetic pleasure in them whatsoever. Blinded by dreams of fame and fortune, Marcos ultimately loses his job, his girlfriend, the admiration of his potential in-laws, the respect of his co-workers, the support of the members of the art association, and his savings in his quest for ownership of the paintings. Toward the end of the text he assumes responsibility and ownership of the Larco Museum, which surprisingly has been bequeathed to him by don Felipe. He turns out to be Felipe Larco himself, the forgotten artist who sought to live in the anonymity of Cartagena because no one seemed to appreciate his avant-garde style of painting in Chile.

Structurally this text is informative when considering Donoso’s genre choices. The publication of this novella, as well as Jardín, marks a return for Donoso to a shorter-length
genre after having some success with his rambling anti-novel, *Obsceno*. Like other Donoso texts, specifically in recalling “Santelices,” we see that *Naturaleza* begins in *medias res*. This formula evidences a pattern for Donoso as we know that his first incursions into the literary world were publications of short stories received with critical applause. *Naturaleza*, published in 1990 along with another novella in this collection, *Taratuta*, represent a return for Donoso to a shorter genre, after already having published some of his best-selling novels which contain lengthy if not labyrinthine plots. Perhaps, as critics have claimed, Donoso found shorter texts to be a more fertile genre. Specifically, B. Matamoro (1991) writes: “En su última entrega, Donoso vuelve a un género que le resulta manejable y feliz, el de la nouvelle” (Matamoro 144). Others wisely point out that the publication of this novella marks the year of Chile’s return to democracy after seventeen years of military dictatorship and suggest Donoso’s return to a shorter genre is a stylistic choice wherein he sought to “…volver la mirada sobre aspectos de la sociedad que estaban siendo ignorados, desvalorizados y para él son claves en el desarrollo de la cultura y de la sociedad” (Femenías 69). From this evaluation, we see Femenías suggests that Donoso’s longer fiction could not boast the values of shorter, more manageable texts. Whatever the reasons for Donoso’s return to short fiction at this juncture in his career, we also see that he returns to some recognizable narrative patterns, specifically the technique of beginning the narration with the protagonist already in a compromised position as well as his preoccupation for art.

In *Naturaleza*, we come to know an already-defeated Marcos in the first chapter, who in a confessional tone relates the events which he hoped would lead to a total life transformation. Instead of changing his life for the better, by the end of the novella the
reader finds Marcos residing in a tiny, back room of the Larco Museum. He sleeps in the deceased artist’s cot, smokes the artist’s pipe or cachimba, and obsesses over what can be done with the paintings for his own benefit. The last pages of the text inform the reader that Marcos and Hildita are attempting to restore Larco’s paintings which the ailing artist, disappointingly and unexpectedly, sabotaged with washes of blue exterior paint just prior to his death. However, as the reader recalls, the first chapter of text tells the end and that is Marcos’s ruin. We can safely conclude that a true escape does not occur. A real transfiguración, in the words of Castedo, does not take place: “Me sentí abandonado porque me di cuenta de que a nadie le importaba nuestra corporación, y tampoco el arte, ni Larco, y a menos nada mi destino personal. No llamé a nadie más. ¿Para qué?” (Donoso, Naturaleza 100). Marcos’s is a more cyclical journey, ending with the same misery in which the reader first meets him. If any transformation were to be found in this text, I would argue that it is an emotional escape, achieved only temporarily. This further draws my attention to the value of fantasy in the case of Marcos Ruiz Gallardo, and consequently to the use of fantastic on the part of the author.

Having established José Donoso’s return to a shorter, more-manageable genre at this point, it is credible that Donoso had something of great importance to convey with this text, given the political changes occurring in Chile at this time and the insistence of literary critics. It is a possibility that he chose the shorter genre in order to more concisely deliver a political or social critique directed toward the up-and-coming bourgeois class in Chile, represented here by Marcos. On the other hand, if we choose to believe what Donoso has vehemently insisted about not having political or social commitments in his writing, his return to the novella at this point may simply inform us of his affinity for the genre or
perhaps a need to produce something to be quickly published. My suspicion that this a purely stylistic return on the writer’s part is reflected in what Duncan has proposed regarding the effectiveness of the fantastic in shorter genres. She states:

> Whether the fantastic can appear in any kind of literary text is a much-debated question, but looking at the works that best illustrate the fantastic in Spanish America, it is clear that the short story is the ideal vehicle for this kind of writing. Because the short story can be read in a single sitting, and the economy of the form permits writers to create a compact, tightly controlled fictional world, it lends itself to the kind of tension required to bring the fantastic to life. In the short story, there are no distractions, no detours, and no motivation for readers to put the text aside and let the effects of the fantastic dissipate before reaching the story’s end. [ . . . ] Although a novel may have some elements we could identify as fantastic, the work in its entirety cannot maintain the same kind of tension that we find in a short story without completely exhausting its readers. (Duncan 7)

This is informative to my focus on Donoso in a broader perspective. As I have already insisted, Donoso began writing with celebrated success in publishing his short stories and graduated to novels. Donoso’s return to writing shorter texts after *El obsceno pájaro de noche* (1970) coincides with Cynthia Duncan’s assertion that the fantastic “is best represented in short fictional narratives” (Duncan 9) and supports my view that it is a vehicle for Donoso’s success with short stories and novellas. Having written both short stories and rambling novels up until this point, it may be the case that Donoso was eager to turn back to a proven formula for success, and maybe for selling books in Chile, by re-
embracing the fantastic and proven patterns for storytelling. With regard to Donoso’s change in style, it could be the writer has abandoned what is don Felipe’s insistence on “pintura de élite, para entendidos, no para las masas incultas” (Donoso, *Naturaleza* 119).

If we turn our focus now to the importance of the fantastic specific to this novella, we should keep in mind something that Nancy Chodorow (1999) reminds us that the individual, subjective meanings which we bring to our life experience are just as important as universal and cultural meanings: “our inner world of psychic reality helps create, shape, and give meaning to the intersubjective, social, and cultural worlds we inhabit” (Chodorow 14). As such, when we begin to examine the fantasies and daydreams of Ruiz Gallardo, we should keep in mind the weight of these sequences to the text. Marcos is not a well-educated patron of the arts, he is not an expert on Surrealism, yet he wishes and aspires to be. He is driven to believe that by associating himself with high-brow art, artists, and those in such social circles, that he is physically and materially approaching this desired lifestyle and social rank. As a reader of Donoso, I find that the imagined realm of the protagonists in a Donoso text is frequently the most amusing, engaging part; Duncan would say “it invites us to engage with it” (Duncan 5).

**Further Evidence of Donoso’s Archetype**

Before delving into the fantastic qualities in the text, I first want to establish the commonalities which Marcos Ruiz Gallardo shares with the donosian archetype. In chapter two of *Naturaleza*, Marcos narrates the bulk of his biographic information:
Debo explicar que me llamo Marcos Ruiz Gallardo. Tengo treinta y un años y si bien soy soltero, antes de estos acontecimientos estaba comprometido para casarme con la Hildita Botto Gamboa. . . En los tiempos no muy lejanos de que estoy hablando yo era un bancario de rango más bien modesto, pero tenía fundadas esperanzas de merecer un ascenso muy pronto… mis superiores sabían valorar mis cualidades, sobre todo mi pulcritud y mi cumplimiento. Mis compañeros de trabajo solían mofarse de estos atributos. . . llamándome “el viejito Ruiz”. (Donoso, Naturaleza 101)

In this excerpt, the reader is able to draw several comparisons with my idea of Donoso’s pattern for central characters. Like Santelices, a character from roughly twenty years prior to this text’s publication, Marcos is a male, thirty-five years of age, but his colleagues at the bank call him “little old man”, or at least a man nearing middle age. Our protagonist here is keenly aware of what others think of him, a fact which becomes even more pronounced as the plot continues. If we think back, we can recall the multiple and increasing number of eyes that Santelices imagines in the jungle of the balcony below his office as his eccentricities become known to his two landlords. They witness what he is doing and he is tortured by the awareness of this scrutiny. Here, Marcos is portrayed as being different from the other employees in the bank. We are informed that he is considered unique or strange. He is not satisfied with his current position at the bank and seeks a raise in the future. His ongoing wish and struggle is to change his condition; he wants fame, admiration, and a different, more exotic lifestyle, like that of the artist, Larco.

Thus far, these qualities satisfy five of the seven basic tenets which I have proposed as essential to the Donosian archetype.
Frustration is a sixth essential quality, which for the reader becomes apparent shortly after the sequence above, within the same chapter. In a markedly-deflated tone, Marcos directly addresses his mixed feelings regarding Hildita Botto, his fiancé:

Trató de reunir fuerzas para levantarme y telefonear a Hildita otra vez, muchas veces, hasta hablar con ella y rogarle que comprendiera por qué me sentía tan ofendido y desilusionado. ¿Quién mejor que ella, al fin y al cabo, si ella vivió gran parte de estas experiencias conmigo? Pero un peso muerto me impedía levantarme. La verdad es que paralelamente a mi necesidad, sentía un gran rechazo por el compromiso que adquirí con el corazón hinchado de amor, de unir mi destino al suyo. ¿Cómo había llegado a amarrarme así...? ¿Cómo liberarme? ¿No tiene uno un derecho a cambiar, entonces, a desarrollarse, a crecer...? ¿Cómo dejar de rebelarme después de conocer aspiraciones tan distintas al asomarme al universo de Larco? (102)

Marcos’s feelings of being trapped in his own life’s circumstances are evidenced in the prior quote. Frustration satisfies another quality of the archetype which I have proposed. His engagement to Hildita seems like a weight around his neck. He questions how he came to tie himself down with her and laments how these circumstances limit his ability to change, develop, grow, or otherwise escape his predicament. His real frustration is best expressed in the last sentence quoted above, wherein he communicates an inability to stop rejecting his life once he has learned about a polar alternative Larco’s world and lifestyle. Communicated here also is a yearning for release, for freedom when he asks “¿Cómo había llegado a amarrarme así...? ¿Cómo liberarme?” (102) He feels tied to Hilda and the
circumstances of his life prior to coming into the social circles of Larco. While settling into the married life with Hilda Botto and his mediocre job were once enough to sustain his ambition, now these seem like impediments to a greater existence, as Marcos rhetorically asks “¿No tiene uno derecho a cambiar, entonces, a desarrollarse, a crecer?” (102).

Yet another layer of tension from Marcos’s unsuccessful attempts to have a physical relationship with Hildita adds to this frustration, this time it is sexual frustration. Chapters four and five narrate episodes of unsuccessful attempts on Marcos’s part to conquer Hildita physically. First in Hildita’s parents’ living room on an uncomfortable wooden sofa which bore into their flesh, Hildita refuses his amorous advances because of her parents’ proximity in the bedroom next door:

En el cuarto de al lado… Pronto apagaban la tele, sin embargo, pero era como si lo hicieran con el propósito de atracar la oreja al tabique que nos separaba. El mueble de asiento más grande del salón es un sofá antiguo, de modo que nuestro amor se veía limitado por incomodas maderitas talladas en forma de rosas que incrustaban en las partes más delicadas de nuestras anatomí as. (107)

Mental and physical frustration are both communicated in the example above. Similarly, here we are reminded of Marcos’s uneasiness with the constant scrutiny he experiences. He feels the ever-present vigilance of Hildita’s parents. Even when he and Hildita are alone he senses and imagines their ears pressed against the wall which separates the living room where they are and the bedroom where her parents have supposedly retired for a
night’s rest. This takes on a physical manifestation in the form of the knotty ornamentation on the love seat where he and Hildita make-out once the old folks are in bed. The wooden carvings on the antique furniture bury into Marcos’s and Hildita’s skin making any physical consummation of their attraction unbearable it is a physical impediment.

Marcos’s frustration is amplified in chapter five when he is physically rejected by Hildita, this time in a seaside hotel room far from Hildita’s parents. Hildita has even lied to her parents about her weekend plans with Marcos so that they could be physically together in a more comfortable setting: the purpose of the getaway is to have sex. She secretly checks into a seaside resort in Cartagena with Marcos under a false name so that they can finally satisfy their urges to be intimate in the comfort of a private room, on a real bed. But this does not happen either; Hildita rejects his amorous advances even in the hotel room. The power of his potential sexual conquest is nullified. Here, Marcos narrates an account of his fruitless quest:

No quiso descansar en mis brazos. Quiso vestirse inmediatamente. Lo hicimos cada uno a su lado de la cama, dándonos la espalda como enemigos, separados por el revoltijo de sabanas como por un campo de batalla abandonado. (111)

Marcos is frustrated both physically and emotionally. Like other Donoso characters, he feels trapped in his circumstances both at work, at home, and in his romantic life. Success, in several respects, seems eternally just beyond reach. A feminist view would highlight Hildita’s rejection of Marcos’s repeated, amorous advances as she were the focus of what he seeks and desires up until he comes into contact with Larco’s art collection and the
curator of the little Larco Museum in Cartagena. Their whole trip to Cartagena was a ploy to get Hilda alone for a night, away from the constant scrutiny of her parents where she could feel safe to engage in sex without having her parents listening in the room next door. Hilda has rejected Marcos’s advances repeatedly and by doing so has maintained her position in an advantageous way. As in other texts by Donoso, this female character seems to keep the protagonist in check, at arm’s length, and away from his goals. Here, Marcos senses that he is a victim of forces beyond his own control, yet he has the desire to break free from his ties to his destiny with Hilda and his mediocre job. Desire, marking that which he lacks, is evidenced textually by the writer’s use of the fantastic. The fantastic manifests itself by way of the main character’s reliance on fantasies and daydreams; later we see this mirrored by the effects of Larco’s painting on the protagonist. The reader’s discovery of the protagonist’s tendency to fantasize away his life’s problems also occurs early in the text, in chapter two, where we read his biographical account.

Evidence of the Fantastic at Work in Naturaleza

The first textual evidence of Marcos’s reliance on fantasy satisfies the seventh and last quality of the Donosian archetype as I have detailed above. Marcos informs us:

¿Cómo no comparar todo lo mío con lo suyo, el trabajo del banco con el trabajo del artista, Santiago con París, ahora con entonces, mi vida con la suya, a la Hildita Botto, por último, con la baronesa Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, la sugestiva danesa que fue el gran amor de Larco, y del brazo
opulento chileno se lucía por los bulevares de París con su melena adornada con latas de sardina para escandalizar a los burgueses? (102)

The passage above provides evidence of Donoso’s use of the fantastic here showing Marcos’s reliance on fantasy for escape from his mundane work and love life. Here as we read autobiographical information being narrated to us via the voice of the protagonist, we see that he yearns for Larco’s grandiose lifestyle in Europe. One also deduces that he has fantasized often about these same details as he asks “¿Cómo dejar de rebelarme después de conocer aspiraciones tan distintas al asomarme al universo de Larco?” (102). His fantasies have lead him to think, to become frustrated, and to question his own position. Whenever Marcos entertains thoughts of the museum or of its contents, he is taken away with thoughts of Larco’s grandiose lifestyle.

Chapter three of the text takes us deeper into the story of how Marcos has come to his ruin after the public debacle regarding Larco’s work. Here Marcos admits to his reliance on dreams. Talking to us, as narrator to reader, about his disdain and lack of sincere appreciation for Hildita he says “Podía pasarme muy bien sin su ternura y soñar noche tras noche con sardinas y Dinamarca” (106). In other words, he easily could let go of Hildita, the promise of marriage to her, and be satisfied with dreaming about the possibilities of an elite lifestyle, such as the one that Larco was purported to have enjoyed among other artists in Europe. Later in the same paragraph he adds:

¿Y tener en mis manos la joya de arte que tan claramente me corresponde pone a mi alcance un universo distinto a cualquier cosa antes sonada? Es
verdad que esos sueños me cambiaron. . . ¡Pero no pretendan negarme los momentos que me aproximaron a la auténtica grandeza! (106)

Narrating in past tense, he knows that his chances for a true, lifestyle change are only reachable through dreams or via meditation on a painting. In the last sentence of the above quote, he rhetorically begs to at least retain his memory of the moments where he almost reached greatness.

At this point we should reconsider one of the functions of the fantastic described by Cynthia Duncan, the “disintegrating” effect takes places in the world we see constructed around our central figure in Naturaleza (Duncan 133). The disintegrating effect here, is seen through the character’s inability or unwillingness to resign himself to the social order around him. She tells us that as we examine the ways a subject is deconstructed, we become more aware of the construction process through which it comes into being: “By examining the ways in which a human subject can be deconstructed, the fantastic graphically illustrates the construction process through which subjects come into being”(133). Marcos feels trapped in his middle-class, mediocre, banker’s job with a less-than-satisfactory relationship with Hildita Botto. Our reading of Naturaleza progresses through the unravelling of our protagonist/narrator. Here it is difficult to ignore the similarities between Marcos’ and Santelices’ frustration. As we follow his story of transformation or disintegration, however one choses to see it, we realize that the order of society decrees that he cannot simultaneously be a famous, carefree artist and a middle-class, banker. We know that by the end of the novella he has assumed, if only mentally, the identity and lifestyle of the retired artist. Larco, in a mirror-like inverse to Marcos, started out as a great artist in the narration, but by the end he dies poor and in anonymity.
The fantastic qualities in Naturaleza shatter the established order and show us that the concept of self is constructed, and not simply defined by social order nor determined at birth. This breach or void as Duncan calls it, introduced in the reader’s interaction with the text, points us to what is missing or desired, later evidenced in the artist’s act of erasing his art collection with a pale blue wash of exterior paint. It is a constant in Donoso’s writing that where power is at once perceived, it will be found missing. This is Donoso’s game of cat and mouse to which Magnarelli repeatedly refers. The potential for sexual satisfaction with Hilda is thwarted in her rejection for Marcos in the Cartagena seaside resort. The power for him to transform his life with the paintings is wiped away by the blue strokes of the painter’s artistic suicide.

Chapter eight contains a long sequence that is important to my reading of Naturaleza. Here we can experience Marcos’s thought process as he makes his way through the Larco Museum and comes across the still life painting which most appeals to him amid the dull images of his body of work. More importantly we see how the one painting and main focus of his attention, like fireworks, sparks a series of thoughts and temporarily shifts him away from reality:

Paseé por la vista de los cuadros, uno por uno, intentando empapar mi atención de ellos, con el fin de hacer coincidir las frases de los estudiosos que leí en los tratados. . . Me detuve ante “Naturaleza muerta con cachimba”: era el resumen de esta casa y por extensión de todo Cartagena, aunque nada fuera una representación real de nada. . . ¿Eran importantes estas relaciones o eran un juego que no debía atraer la atención de una persona seria? ¿O era, en verdad, una mierda el arte? ¿Cómo iba a ser una
mierda si la realidad artificial de este cuadro tenía la fuerza para absorber la realidad e toda esta habitación e incorporarla, y a mí, como uno de sus tantos trastos? (Donoso, *Naturaleza* 125)

This disharmonious passage exemplifies how Larco’s painting transports and absorbs Marcos, while it also evidences the inner battle which he experiences. Is this meaningful art? Is it everything that I imagine it to be? Or is art worthless? We experience Marcos’s inner battle. Should he let himself be transported by the painting? Or should he give credit to what others have said about the art collection?

The doubt is planted this is the rupture or fissure created by the fantastic. Magnarelli writes:

In this novel, as in Donoso’s earlier *El jardín de al lado*, the interartistic referents are paintings and specifically avant-garde or surrealistic paintings. Naturaleza muerta mentions a number of painters from surrealism, a school whose artists were determined to “live” what they proposed for art as both Larco and Marcos do: Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Juan Gris, Hans Arp, and Jacques Vaché, among others. And in addition to evoking a painting (still life), the title of the novella, with its reference to the pipe, may well be an allusion to Rene Magritte’s 1926 painting, *Ceci n’est pas une pipe*, in a gesture that forwards the artificiality of all art forms (Magnarelli, “Seeking” 35)

Magnarelli’s reference to the Magritte painting highlights the gap between language and meaning. In the Magritte painting, which she likens to the still life of Donoso’s novella,
the artist combined the words in the title of his 1926 painting within the painting itself, just beneath an obvious image of a smoker’s pipe one see’s words of his title painted in dark script. The combination of the words with the image of the pipe in this way forces viewers to question the value of the word. The word “pipe” is no more a real pipe than Magritte’s painted likeness of it. The image cannot be used to smoke tobacco. We will see the doubt regarding the value of art, expressed several times later in the text. Conveying semantic vacuity, the fantastic often exposes a void in Donoso’s work and it is important to note the close ties that the fantastic shares with the Surrealist movement. In Naturaleza, the symbolic embodiment of the void is exaggerated in Larco’s rendering his paintings blank, with a blue wash. Duncan’s theories on the fantastic remind us of the importance of the void when she writes “The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and absent” (Duncan 23). I will discuss the blue-washed paintings of Larco when I address the end of the novella.

In chapter nine, Marcos again exposes his propensity to daydream about the artist Larco and the one painting which has caught his and Hildita’s attention in the decaying Cartagena museum: “Casi no pensé en la Hildita en toda la semana porque el pensamiento de Larco no le dejaba lugar” (Donoso, Naturaleza 127). With this quote, the reader sees Marcos’s growing obsession. His daydreams about the painting have become a stand-in for routine, daily thoughts. He is consumed by the painting and its potential to change his life. Looking at the painting transports him, provides an escape, and gives him a coping mechanism for his dissatisfaction. Lastly in his own words, Marcos admits the painting and his fixation with it leaves no room for Hilda in his life. As we have seen, it also triggers
a break from his current circumstances. Marcos likens it to a sort of magical door in the following quotation. He says:

El resto de la semana lo pasé soñando vagamente, ardientemente, como un adolescente sueña con la mujer amada, con mi “Naturaleza muerta con cachimba”. Me hablaba a mí mismo del cuadro, o a veces le hablaba a la Hildita, explicándose más que nada para convencerme a mí mismo, dándole una dimensión heroica a los amores de Larco con la baronesa Elsa von Freytag-Lorinhgoven - ¡cómo me gustaba paldear ese nombre al pronunciarlo, como un abracadabra que me abría las puertas a tiempos más prodigiosos que el presente! (134)

Like the effects of a magic trick, abracadabra, Marcos is transported to some realm that is more pleasing than his current circumstances. He speaks to himself and to Hildita about the painting and yearns to immerse himself in the world it evokes; he obsesses over it and imagines himself in the shoes of the artist. Even Hilda’s name is diminished by the aristocratic name of Larco’s female partner.

**On the Recurring Theme of Art**

The last two chapters of the text narrate the series of events during which Marcos becomes owner of the Larco Museum and its contents. Don Felipe, whom Marcos now knows to be Felipe Larco the artist, is on his deathbed, and he has bequeathed everything to Marcos. Just before falling ill, he has been given a sum of money from Marcos and his art association to restore the Larco Museum in order to protect its precious contents which
include some of Larco’s belongings and of course the collection of misunderstood and underappreciated paintings. However, with this money don Felipe purchases a quantity of bright blue, exterior paint and hires someone to come and paint the outside of the museum, remodel the interior bathroom, and do some other odd jobs unauthorized by Marcos. Later Marcos returns to the museum and is instantly offended by the garish, exterior paint and the way in which his money has been spent. However, this is not the biggest problem he faces. Once in the inside the museum, Marcos is immediately crestfallen. He discovers that the bulk of the collection of paintings, on which rests his desire for fame and fortune, has been rendered blank by a series of intentional washes administered by the caretaker/artist which almost completely deface his work. All of the paintings have been blue-washed except for *Naturaleza muerta con cachimba* on which the artist has, according to Marcos, tastelessly added two miniature portraits in Italian Renaissance style, in dedication of Marcos and Hildita.

Sobre el diario del envoltorio, una mano temblorosa había escrito en grandes letras azulinas: Para Marcos Ruiz Gallardo y Su Novia. [. . .] Lo deposité sobre el hule de la mesa lentamente lo fui abriendo: claro. . ., mi “Naturaleza muerta con cachimba.” Los rombos y cuadrados grises y pardos y verduscos desordenados como siempre, pero con un cambio deslumbrante: en el ángulo derecho, arriba, donde la ventana se abría sobre chimeneas estilizadas, todo había cambiado. [. . .] En colores profundos. . . de medio perfil como en los retratos italianos del Renacimiento, en traje de princesa recamarado de pedrería, la Hildita, bella como solo los ojos de ese hombre.
que vieron, se volvía hacia mi. Al lado derecho... estaba yo, de jubón de terciopelo color guinda, vuelto hacia ella. (151)

Like a mirror image of Marcos, the portraits are painted into the corners of the masterpiece as if the painting had been dedicated to members of some royal family. Marcos can’t believe what he sees. Here, he tells us that the artist scripted in blue paint “El caballero Marcos Ruiz Gallardo y su dama” (152). The paint and the artist’s signature are still wet upon discovery. At last, Marcos has achieved his desired position, but only in a thin coat of painting, and at the cost of a precious, surrealist work. There the gaudy image stares back at him, mirrorlike. Larco’s last coherent sentence before being taken to the ambulance is “¡Que aprendan estos hijos de puta!” (150). As the ambulance drivers arrange to carry away the dying artist, he turns his head and Marcos hears him singing softly “El arte no vale nada, nada, ni una limonada, nada, ni una limonada...” (151).

Difficult to ignore, these ironic and unexpected turns of event lead us to more questions. What, if anything, could Donoso have possibly intended to convey via Larco’s romantic, artistic suicide with blue washes, and his existential turn against the value of art? Perhaps, as several prior-named critics claim, Donoso wanted to critique the up-and-coming, consumerist, middle-class in Chile. One cannot turn a blind eye to the negative portrayal which the writer gives to Marcos because of his insistence on owning the painting. If Marcos cannot use Larco’s paintings to benefit his own social status in a concrete way, then he is driven to at least obtain physical possession of the work. Here, Donoso in his own creative way, additionally asks his readers to consider the artistic process. What is the value of art?
Gregory Rabasa’s English version of this novella translates Larco’s ironic song about the meaning of art in the following way: “Art isn’t worth a fart, not a fart, not a tart…” (Donoso, Trans. Rabassa 150). Donoso’s original Spanish version, in my own literal translation, reads “Art isn’t worth anything, not even a lemonade, nothing”. Whatever the translation, the effect of Larco’s song does not go unappreciated; it humorously invites Donoso’s reader to examine the value we place on artistic creation, be it literature or painting. Does art imitate life? Does life imitate art? Donoso would agree that neither of these queries convey the true, nebulous relationship between life and art.

Sharon Magnarelli assures us that the themes of art and language are present in every Donoso work (Magnarelli, Understanding 13). Her observation is that:

Western aesthetics, particularly since the nineteenth century, has generally viewed art as a reproduction or mimesis of reality, but Donoso continually demonstrates the degree to which the opposite is also true: reality (or what we perceive as and then insist is reality) is frequently the reproduction or mimesis of artistic works. For this is the reason, in many of his works the principal action is presented as fiction, as fantasy even within the work. (12)

The fantastic is at work in Naturaleza, and Magnarelli’s opinion confirms my own view.

Here the fantastic manifests itself specifically through Marcos’s daydreams, induced by Larco’s paintings. The fantastic functions by allowing Marcos to transgress those forces which the protagonist feels restrict him, if only temporarily. Specifically, we have noted the following restrictions: the watchful eye of others, the frustrations he feels both physically and emotionally in his relationship with Hildita, the success and fame for
which he constantly yearns, the constant feeling that he is unique or different, and his longing to live a life of a celebrity the fabulous qualities he attributes to Larco’s life in Europe. A careful observer will notice that in Donoso’s work often the presence of the fantastic within the text itself is echoed with some sort of physical representation, a fissure or gap; again, this is the blue-washed erasure of Larco’s art collection – voided blank paintings covered in a celestial blue suicide. The choice of a pale blue wash, and not a simple white wash is interesting. A quick consultation of J.E. Cirlot’s *Diccionario de simbolos* (2008) reveals that blue is often associated with the heavens and with thought: “por regla general…, el color azul -color del espacio y del cielo claro- es el color del pensamiento” (140). This would reinforce a wish on Larco’s part for Marcos to consider his reason for obliterating his art work or perhaps even to underline the importance of Marcos’s fantasy.

The last paragraphs of the novella disclose how Marcos has been somewhat successful in removing the blue-wash by carefully cleaning the canvases with turpentine to reveal the already, well-dried, Larco paintings beneath. As he restores each painting he takes the blue paint, purchased for the museum’s exterior, covers a new, blank canvas of the same size, and replaces it in the painting’s spot in the museum. He then hides the restored original beneath his bed. He admits that he will sell the restored paintings to an art dealer he knows, one-by-one as his need for money arises. He has decided to send Hildita to the capital to buy paints so that they can restore what has been lost: “. . . nos ocuparemos en restituir las chimeneas en el lugar que ahora ocupan los príncipes de pacotilla que ya no dijeron todo lo que tenían que decir” (Donoso, *Naturaleza* 158). In the last few lines, Marcos fantasizes again that Hildita looks as beautiful as the Baroness Elsa
in her silken kimono, both he and she are “. . . parte de la visión de un artista verdaderamente singular” (159).

This ending may lead readers to believe that Marcos has permanently adopted the identity of Larco. However, we know from chapter one, which is narrated in retrospect, that this fantasy is fleeting:

Me sentí abandonado porque me di cuenta de que a nadie le importaba nuestra corporación, y tampoco el arte, ni Larco, y menos que nada mi destino personal. No llamé a nadie más. ¿Para qué. . .? [. . .] Me acosté de nuevo, y como se había pasado la hora de la cita colgué el cuadro frente a mi cama y me hundí en uno de mis habituales duermevelas. (100)

At this point we understand that the paintings, although we do not know specifically how many Marcos has kept, function as an object of contemplation, but also as objects to be sold as commodities of capitalism, commodification of art and personal gain. Perhaps as I have specified, they are like a door which allows him to slip through into his fantasies and trespass his physical surroundings to those of Larco when he lived in Europe alongside the Baroness Elsa. Although Marcos is resigned to his fate, as far as the reader knows, he is accustomed to taking out a painting now and then as a medium through which he relives this Larco-escape fantasy.

Let’s reconsider the questions I posed earlier when considering Donoso’s possible message about the value of art. Does art imitate life? Or does life imitate art? Both textually and theoretically we have seen at least in a Donoso text it is both and neither. Literature, like art, is dependent on the reader or the observer in the second case. As a
reader of literature or an observer of art, I create meaning as I interact with the creation itself.

Jacques Rancière (2010) contemplates this as he discusses the relationship between political art and life, and he proposes that art manipulates our perspective of what can be seen, said and therefore done:

There is no ‘real world’ that functions as the outside of art. Instead, there is a multiplicity of folds in the sensory fabric at the common, folds in which outside and inside take on a multiplicity of shifting forms, in which the topography of what is ‘in’ and what is ‘out’ are continually criss-crossed. . . There is no ‘real world’. Instead there are definite configurations of what is given as our real, as the object of our perceptions and the field of our intentions. The real is always a matter of construction, a matter of ‘fiction’ (Rancière 148)

Thus, art cannot be separated from life and as Rancière suggests, it allows for a reframing of what can be done, or what is possible. Art does not exist in isolation from life. In a related way, we find it difficult to pin-down how the fantastic works. We have seen that feelings and emotions play a large part in our perception of what is reality; our perception of what is real is negotiated, it changes just like the fantastic. Magnarelli expresses this idea best when she writes: “Donoso suggests that art is not merely a mirror of some external reality” (Magnarelli, Understanding 12). I hold that the fantastic does the same. In Naturaleza, we have seen how Marcos’s daydreams and Larco’s paintings provide Marcos with a coping mechanism, a go-between, an intermediary, a medium through which
he negotiates his identity and copes with his own financial and social ruin. It is a portal for Marcos to better times and marks a breach with his perceived reality, perhaps more importantly it marks that which is lacking or missing while also highlighting power struggle.

While I have already established Donoso’s return to a shorter genre, I would like revisit Duncan’s discussion of the fantastic when she says: “the fantastic is best represented in short fictional narratives” (Duncan 9). While we find fantastic elements in longer fiction, she holds that it is best maintained in the shorter genres. B. Matamorro (1991) leads us to think Donoso’s selection of the novella genre for *Naturaleza* reflected a lack of dexterity or literary stamina on the author’s part for sustaining longer fiction. Matamorro’s review of the novella states that his genre choice “le resulta manejable” (Matamoro 144). Claudia Femenías claims that because of key cultural changes occurring in Chile at the time of publication this was a stylistic choice on Donoso’s part that the collection which includes *Taratura* and *Naturaleza*: “parece marcar in giro con respecto a la novelística previa. Sin embargo, esta aparente distancia de la contingencia y el cambio de estilo solo responden a una necesidad de Donoso por volver la mirada sobre aspectos de la Sociedad” (Femenías 69). To me it seems that Donoso by this point, has identified a key pattern for his literary success in the structure and form of his shorter fiction. It is likely that the fantastic, as genre or even mode, offers Donoso a system that works for his particular tastes in writing. Rosemary Jackson claims that the fantastic is the most literary of all literary forms:

A reluctance, or an inability, to present definitive versions of ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ makes of the modern fantastic a literature which draws attention to
its own practice as a linguistic system. Structured upon contradiction and ambivalence, the fantastic traces in that which cannot be said, that which evades articulation or that is represented as ‘untrue’ or ‘unreal’. By offering a problematic re-presentation of an empirically ‘real’ world, the fantastic raises questions of the nature or the real and unreal, foregrounding the relationship between them as its central concern. It is in this sense that Todorov refers to fantasy as the most ‘literary’ or all literary forms, as ‘the quintessence of literature’, for it makes explicit problems of establishing ‘reality’ and ‘meaning’ through a literary text. [. . .] It is constructed on the affirmation of emptiness . . . uncertainty arises from this mixture of too much of nothing. (Jackson 37)

The highly literary and slippery qualities of the fantastic are fuel to the arguments of critics such as Femenías who writes that Donoso’s criticism in Naturaleza was aimed a cultural and political changes occurring within Chile at the time of its publication. These same qualities of the fantastic allow Donoso to write about topics, such as art and class struggle, that are near and dear to him. As I will discuss in the last chapter of my dissertation, through examination of El lugar sin límites and the posthumous novel Lagaratija sin cola, this ‘system’ to which Jackson refers, allows the writer to treat non-traditional identity and sexuality from the safe distance of literariness. These are two topics which remained taboo in Latin America in the last decades of the 20th Century and in my own experience outside of academics, remains a taboo. While I have already compared the structure of Naturaleza to his short story “Santelices,” this format is central to other Donoso texts. Specifically, we see the frustrated, middle-aged, male protagonist caught in
some uncompromising position, the Donosian archetype par excellence, to some degree in all the texts examined in this dissertation.

Through textual analysis, we have seen how the protagonist in *Naturaleza* satisfies all the characteristics which I have proposed for a Donosian archetype who seems to appear in his novels as well as short stories and novellas. The fantastic qualities, which appear in form of daydreams, fantasies, and mental trips induced by the Larco paintings in this text, allow us to better understand Marcos and his problems. Donoso doesn’t propose any tangible end or solution to his protagonists’ problems as in the case with Marcos. He invites us to ponder the issues exposed in his text. Donoso’s writing is unsettling if anything it leaves us with more questions this is why I am drawn to the fantastic qualities in his writing. In this text the topics of art, creation, and consumption are called into specific focus.

In *Naturaleza*, Marcos Ruiz Gallardo’s reality is never given to us in a straightforward fashion. Powerful at one point in the text becomes powerless in another; reality seems to be a series of potential destructions and recreations in the case of this text. Marcos wants to engulf the identity of the artist, but the artist’s legacy is ruined, and his art is washed out with blue paint by the end of the story. The paintings which seem to take Marcos to another plane, promise him a different lifestyle and replace his love for Hildita, are eventually washed with blue paint. The only remaining Larco painting is sarcastically altered with a tacky portrait of Marcos and his girlfriend dressed as princes in opposite corners of the canvas. It is clear to readers that instead of bequeathing his entire collection of Surrealist paintings to Marcos, an uncouth, money-hungry consumerist, Larco would rather render his paintings blank. The Surrealist movement which began in the 1920’s
upheld painting techniques which allowed the unconscious to express itself. Dadaists and Surrealists believed that excessive rational thought and bourgeois values had led to cultural decay in Europe and even possibly to World War I. Therefore, it is befitting that Larco’s blue wash should nullify his collection’s material value before being passed along to Marcos.

While one may see this as a critical gesture toward the selfish pragmatism of Chile’s rising consumerist class, the spiteful gesture on the part of Larco also upholds a Foucauldian perspective of power and of course a quiet nod from Donoso to the importance of feelings and inner reality. All these ideas reflect a view that power is simultaneously present and absent in everything, and that very little is as it first appears. As previously discussed, Foucault viewed power as a moving substrate of force relations, like a network that is creative and destructive at once. We see this exemplified in Donoso where the viewer is also the viewed; he who creates later destroys; the dreamer eventually resigns to ruin; the painting which begins inspiring finishes wiped-out by a pale blue wash. With Donoso, power is not bestowed in one place and maintained there, it is constantly pulled away and even exhausted because of a constant push and pull; power is everywhere in Donoso. He never suggests that one form of power is stronger or more valuable than the next. The architecture of power structures seen in Naturaleza, carries over to his other works.

Through engaging with the fantastic qualities of the text, we see how Donoso’s characters perceive reality and maneuver through difficulties. Their obsessions often

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make-up what we see as socially significant in his writing. Reality, like art, is perceived. They both are created with layers, of words or paint, and power is non-static, always fleeting. The bleak existential thread, seen here and running throughout Donoso’s work, paints the picture of a troubled soul who time and time again seeks to vent his frustrations through his writing, while inviting us to consider themes on art, power and representation. Overall Donoso asks us to ponder how it is that we see anything (life, art, literature, etc.) in an objective way. Perhaps the protagonist in *Naturaleza* is viewing a mirror image of himself or one of his own desire when he looks at the altered rendition of the still life he once admired so much. However, readers are aware that Larco’s gesture falls on deaf ears in the case of the protagonist here.

**The Last Larco Painting**

If we consider the altered Larco painting which is gifted to Marcos just before the end of the novella, we should observe that the artist added a very uncharacteristic, romantic portrait of Marcos and Hildita over the surface of his initial plane of the work, creating a very harsh and unpleasing, surrealist composition. In chapter eight of the novella, Marcos describes Larco’s original version of the painting. I would like to revisit the protagonists initial reaction below:

Me detuve ante “Naturaleza con cachimba”: era el resumen de esta casa y por extensión de todo Cartagena, aunque nada fuera una representación real de nada. La guitarra más parecía una sierra, la botella estaba ladeada, unas cuantas letras del periódico magnificadas eran proyecciones de las gafas, la
We see that Marcos is not a cultured connoisseur of high forms of art. Like the members of the local art association, he never manages to fully appreciate Larco’s complicated style. However, Marcos is savvy enough to realize that the realistic portraits of both himself and Hilda, “retratos italianos del renacimiento” do not coincide with the sophisticated style of the original composition over which these are superimposed (151). The artist’s romantic-style portraits painted across the bottom of his prized still life, a final slap in the face to his unsophisticated, Chilean public, taunt Marcos’s and Hilda’s simpler tastes in art. This bitter retaliation and reaction to the public’s misunderstanding of his body of paintings reminds us of Donoso. After publishing his highly-misunderstood Boom novel, El obsceno pájaro de noche, Donoso returned to recognizable patterns of writing first mastered before he aligned himself to writing anti-novels of the Latin American Boom. Naturaleza and Jardin are evidence of this return to a simpler, shorter form that hinges upon the fantastic for its success. Similar to Larco’s paintings which went misunderstood in Chile and completely, underappreciated by Marcos and his group of art enthusiasts in search of a cheap profit, here, I believe Donoso echoes his frustration with his own body of work.
CHAPTER 5

SEXUALITY, REPRESSION, & HETERONORMATIVITY

In this chapter, I continue my investigation of the fantastic in Donoso’s writing by analyzing *El lugar sin límites* and *Lagartija sin cola*. With these two novels, published in two different periods of Donoso’s career, I am able to examine how the writer employs the fantastic to challenge the repression in patriarchal dominance and traditional views of sexuality. *El lugar sin límites* was published a year after *El obsceno pájaro de noche*, and therefore exemplifies a change in style, a return to familiar Donosian structure and length seen before *Obsceno* and going back to his short stories. In other words, it is not a rambling, totalizing, anti-novel. While *Lagartija sin cola* (2007) was never published until after Donoso’s death, it was found in the writer’s personal papers and later sent to press by his editor, but stylistically is also unlike *Obsceno* and therefore is like the broad swath of his other writing. Donoso’s preoccupation with rejection and ostracism, notable in all his work, is of course central in both texts analyzed in this chapter.

La Manuela, the protagonist in *Lugar*, has a desire for the town brute, as owner of, and entertainer in a local brothel in the village of El Olivo, her desire leads her to violent destruction. La Manuela is a cross-dressing, homosexual male and prostitute who considers her dance routines as artistic creation. The painter Armando Muñoz-Roa, the main character in *Lagartija sin cola*, suffers from psychotic episodes and experiences deep feelings of alienation and rejection, both personally and professionally.
The novels I have chosen to study here offer the most provocative and well-developed characters seen in all Donoso’s writing and provide poignant examples of Donoso’s treatment of Otherness, specifically as it pertains to sexuality. I argue that these two novels exemplify the functions of the fantastic as both content and stylistic tool which the author utilizes to expose themes involving the formative and destructive tendencies of power. Specifically, we see how non-heterosexual desire and non-traditional views on sexual identity challenge patriarchal values and culture. They suggest a constant preoccupation on the writer’s part with interior spaces, and support my conclusion of Donoso’s reliance on an archetypical protagonist, which I have proposed as part of my thesis. With these two narratives, I elucidate how Donoso critiques dominant notions of sexuality and gender-anchored roles, echoing themes in “Santelices” and in Jardín. Is Donoso able to undermine traditional views of sexuality with these two texts via the fantastic? Do the characters therein offer a forum for the otherwise mute voice of society’s Other? Does Donoso show a consistent view of power in these novels, published after Obsceno? These are three general questions which I seek to explore through textual analysis in present chapter. First, I will consider Lugar.

**El lugar sin límites**

Upon close examination of Donoso’s *El lugar sin límites*, originally published in Spanish in 1966, we find a fine line dividing eroticism and violence, particularly in the case of the novel’s protagonists. La Manuela is a cross-dressing, homosexual male who runs a brothel and entertains the guests with her famous Flamenco dances. Pancho Vega

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31 First published in 1966 in Mexico, I will cite the 1998 Alfaguara edition.
is a repressed homosexual who outwardly lives as a crass, macho brute and frequents la Manuela’s brothel. This text solidified the author’s global fame as a 20th Century Latin American author and “received more critical attention than his earlier work” (Magnarelli, Understanding 67). Noteworthy is the fact that Lugar was developed into a film in 1977 by the Mexican cinematographer Arturo Ripstein, making it possible for the text to reach a broader audience and foster a renewed popularity.32 The novel captures a short yet impressive journey into the life of la Manuela, the cross-dressing homosexual protagonist whose fantasies are sadly marred with masochistic desire. The setting is a once-thriving, wine-producing village, considered widely by literary critics as a microcosm of what was once the main social and economic structure—Chile’s crumbling latifundio system and changing culture.33

La Manuela and the brothel which she and her daughter, Japonesita, run jointly are the very center of life in the tiny train-stop town of El Olivo. This offers sufficient evidence to suggest its symbolism for a society falling from the intended order of God’s will for others.34 The supporting characters in this novel such as Ludovinia, Japonesita, and Don Alejo are not as complex and multi-layered as the protagonists which I will examine. However, they do provide readers with a context and point of reference for examining the lives, performance, and more importantly, the secret desires of la Manuela and Pancho Vega. My reading of Lugar analyzes the writer’s use of the fantastic to uncover ways that

32 I should note that film is a genre for which there is neither time or space to consider in the present dissertation and is of course a distinct adaption of the novel.
33 See Sharon Magnarelli (1993), Kristin Nigro (1995), and Hernan Vidal (1972). Magnarelli goes as far as to say it is a “satire” of the latifundio system and its bourgeoisie controllers held in place since colonial times. See pages 67-68.
34 See George McMurray 1979.
he subverts heteronormativity and its related suppression. It underscores how any deviance from the gender binary, upheld by traditional culture, leads to violent results against the Other. I seek to pinpoint how the writer criticizes fixed notions of sexual identity, gendered role play, and the stigma assigned to non-heterosexual desire by using the support from the prior-discussed theories in chapter one of this study, specifically those of Judith Butler, Nancy Chodorow, and Michel Foucault.

La Manuela and the object of her affections, Pancho Vega, unknowingly find love, happiness, and success are impossible outcomes in their immediate surroundings. Most impressive is the fact that flagrant otherness, such as that surrounding the transvestite protagonist who lives openly as a female, has no possible outcome apart from destruction. Yet la Manuela does achieve her escape of this repression, if only temporarily, through her fantasies. A troubling end for characters who tend to destabilize a heterosexual axis is not uncommon in popular literature and film even today.35 Therefore, novels such as Donoso’s Lugar (1966) deserve re-examination as they identify a deep-seated tradition for violence,

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35 One example is the novella Brokeback Mountain by Annie Proulx (1998) which later won three Oscars in its film version directed by Ang Lee (2005). Another recent, box office hit of similar nature is the feature film Moonlight by Barry Jenkins (2016) which communicates the difficulties of a young, African-American boy who deals with the blowback of accepting his own culturally-reviled sexuality and the resulting isolation he suffers set in Miami during the 1980s and 1990s. Transparent is an American comedy-drama web television series which debuted in 2014. Written by Jill Soloway for Amazon Studios, Transparent tells the story of a Los Angeles family which unravels as its father figure learns to embrace his own desire to cross-dress and undergo the uphill path toward crossing the gender boundary within the context of family and community. Texts like these tend to surround their LGBT protagonists with sadness, destruction, broken relationships and incurable illness. The negative portrayal of this minority group perpetuates the stigmas associated with non-traditional lifestyles. While a more positive view of minorities is desirable in the popular film and literature of today, the exposure of such protagonists in pop-culture is at least a beginning.
culturally-engrained repression, as well as other negative attitudes toward minority groups that continue to struggle for equal rights and acceptance well into the 21st century.

First it is befitting to discuss the title of the novel, which leaves much for interpretation in its original Spanish version. This vagueness, probably intentional on the author’s part, is our first hint of the writer’s gift for formulating a subtle yet pointed allusion to the injustices which characters like la Manuela must experience. I see the author’s title selection as a strategical decision made to catch the potential reader’s attention. *El lugar sin límites* simply translates as “the place without limits”. The title suggests a preoccupation regarding space, borders, and boundaries in some general way. Readers anticipate that the novel should answer questions such as: what exactly is this “space” to which the writer alludes from the onset of the text—in the very title? Where is it? Is it a mental realm or a tangible space? The English version of the text, published in 1972, carries a very different title which specifies this unnamed place in the original Spanish as “hell” – “Hell Has No Limits” being the English title. The anglicized title inserts the Christian notion of the word “hell” in the translation of the original “space”, and in doing such detracts from the text’s openness while also associating the idea of hell with its LGBT protagonists, la Manuela and Pancho Vega. In Lugar, there is no mention of afterlife nor association between the two protagonists’ lifestyles with any notion of sin. Instead we see that Donoso depicts everyday occurrences and suffering in the downtrodden town of El Olivo while portraying the impossibility of la Manuela’s and Pancho Vega’s dreams and desires in a typical rural setting in Latin America.

The novel is composed of twelve chapters with an epigraph where, Donoso cites a portion of act II of Doctor Faustus written by the 16th Century English playwright
Cristopher Marlowe. In Marlowe’s tragedy, the protagonist sells his soul to the devil in exchange for fame and material possessions. Donoso writes in the inscription: “…el infierno no tiene límites, ni queda circunscrito a un solo lugar, porque el infierno es aquí donde estamos, y aquí donde es el infierno tenemos que permanecer” (Donoso, *Lugar* Front matter). We should acknowledge that Donoso studied English literature at Princeton and perhaps wished to tout his literary prowess with this quote, but more importantly, I believe it warns the reader that hell, or simply “suffering”, takes place here on earth or even mentally, and that it is to be portrayed somewhere in his novel. Also in the inscription, the Spanish verb “permanecer” translates in English “to remain” and warns of someone or something destined to stay in such a place of suffering. In Marlowe’s tragedy, it is Dr. Faustus who is torn between good and the evil. In *Lugar*, it is la Manuela who makes a pact with Japonesa Grande, a stout, ultra-feminine prostitute living in the brothel with la Manuela, and entertains the guests with her dance routines. Japonesa Grande bets la Manuela that if she can somehow manage to seduce her that she will jointly share the ownership of the brothel and the building where it is found with la Manuela. Japonesa Grande has also bet don Alejo, the local land owner, that if she can manage to sexually excite the transvestite with all the erotic experience for which she is famous, that he will give her outright ownership of the establishment –she will then be owner of the little brothel and share it equally with la Manuela. Japonesa manages to accomplish this task and thus becomes pregnant with la Manuela’s baby. Japonesa is already deceased by the time the action in the novel begins. la Manuela and Japonesita, the offspring of her sexual encounter

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36 La Manuela is biologically male, but assumes the life and outward identity of a female.
with Japonesa Grande, now must remain in El Olivo, and supposedly suffer in similar fashion to the protagonist in Marlowe’s work.

While this mythical or symbolical reading of the novel is another valid approach, it establishes a binary through which critics, such as George McMurray (1979), have viewed it and copiously documented manifestations of good versus evil within the text. From such a reading as McMurray’s, we understand how la Manuela can be viewed as the mythical Dr. Faustus type —the fallen angel who must face her Maker. While this approach is certainly part the many possible readings of Lugar, I believe Donoso wished to convey something more profound and more controversial, something for which Donoso was ahead of his time, a critique of traditional views on sexuality, gender-based roles, and identity via the fantastic. I maintain that this approach allows us to better understand Donoso’s broader message about man and his struggle between the interior or personal and the exterior world with regard to socio-cultural norms, gender roles, and power.

Latin American Boom writers of Donoso’s generation, have boasted a wide gamut of critical attention for their accomplishments in portraying the irrational, unaccepted, and mysterious aspects of reality, more commonly called fantastic. As previously discussed in my introduction, Adrián Curiel Rivera concurs that writers like Donoso have their roots planted in the fantastic and other human dimensions. This, he suggests, is a method through which the Boom authors exalt specifically two human conditions —the imaginary and the experienced. Specifically, in Donoso’s case it is obvious that the writer appears to rebel through a reconstruction of reality that highlights his disagreement with the world.

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37 See Curiel Rivera p. 304.
Carlos Cerda lends further credibility to this argument in his study, *Donoso sin límites* (1997). Cerda asserts that Donoso’s novels create a fantastic world that revolves around a real axis which allows us as the reader to view the real world in a different way: “…para él la realidad no está en la novela sino fuera de ella…es un mundo fantástico que gira en torno a un eje real, o si se prefiere, un cuerpo imaginario que tiene su centro de gravedad fuera de sí, en el hecho histórico, real, a que alude” (Cerda 26).

Here, I look closely at those sequences within the text which allow readers to enter the thoughts, dreams, and fantasies of la Manuela and Pancho Vega. Stylistic techniques such as the text’s changing or ambiguous narrative voice and the abundant contrasts between closed and open spaces, compliment the fantastic’s various functions. An unfixed narrator who seems to vacillate between an exterior, third person perspective to one of first person intimacy grants the reader a more informed understanding of Donoso’s protagonists and undermines traditional narration. Donoso’s physical spaces complement the mental spaces which he explores by way of the fantastic. Therefore, as part of this analysis I also briefly discuss the author’s treatment of space as it adds depth to my perspective of power and its treatment in this novel. Absence, loss, lack, and desire are words readily associated with both la Manuela and Pancho Vega in *Lugar*. Along with other characters living in the fictional town of El Olivo, we experience them in a space where cultural tensions, unfulfilled desire, and absence ultimately lead to violence, loss, and suffering. Stylistically speaking, the utilization of fantastic, through Donoso’s particular form of narration, allows his writing to exceed the traditional, mimetic representation of reality seen in Latin American literature before the Boom. Hence, I focus on the functions of the fantastic in
Lugar and how an understanding of its role in this novel provides a distinct reading which allows us to more clearly see power struggles and repression in the text.

**Plot in Lugar**

The plot of the novel rests on the last 24 hours of la Manuela’s life, incorporating various flashbacks told from differing perspectives. Such a format allows us to understand la Manuela’s circumstances and position in El Olivo. She is a middle-aged, homosexual transvestite who assumes the clothing, mannerisms, and discourse of a female. The action of the novel begins on a Sunday morning and concludes the next morning following la Manuela’s beating, by Pancho Vega and his brother-in-law Octavio, both are patrons of the brothel run by la Manuela. Although the end of the novel is somewhat unspecific, we are lead to believe that la Manuela may possibly be dead, left beaten somewhere in or around the vineyards, outside the limits of El Olivo. This is yet another example of the dubious ending, similar to that that I have already discussed in “Santelices”, wherein the nebulous state of the protagonist leaves the reader hanging at the end of the text. This cliff-hanging closure, part of Donoso’s repertoire, complements the fantastic qualities at work here. La Manuela’s dreams and fantasies for freedom and light, unattainable in the concrete world of El Olivo, are only realized mentally, and if physically, they are achieved in an intimate, closed setting such as that of the inside of the little brothel where she and the other girls live and work. The fact that we are not sure about the physical location and condition of the protagonist highlights that her potential for fulfillment and happiness as a homosexual transvestite is always surrounded with doubt outside the limits of the dilapidated brothel.
Most notably we see this at the very end of the novel, where we are left with no concrete information regarding la Manuela’s physical location or whether she is in fact dead or alive, and yet life continues in the same surroundings.

**Tracing the Fantastic in la Manuela’s World**

From page one of the text, we become aware of a third-person, seemingly, omniscient narrator who speaks first of la Manuela as she awakens tired from a busy night of entertaining in the brothel: “La Manuela despertó con dificultad sus ojos lagañosos… alargó la mano para tomar el reloj. Cinco para las diez. Misa de once. Frotó la lengua contra su encía despoblada: como aserrín caliente y la respiración de huevo podrido” (Donoso, *Lugar* 11). Hung-over and reeling from a worrisome evening with clients, her first thoughts turn toward the town bully, Pancho Vega, an infrequent patron of the establishment that la Manuela and Japonesita jointly run. We should note that she is toothless, not infrequent in Donoso’s protagonists, marking an advanced age, and tastes the effects of the prior night’s alcohol in her mouth as she greets the day with a shock. “Dio un respingo –¡claro!– abrió los ojos y se sentó en la cama: Pancho Vega andaba en el pueblo” (11). In flashback style, we are made aware of la Manuela’s obsession, attraction, and simultaneous fear of this man. The narration at this point, omniscient but clearly linked to la Manuela, provides access to her thoughts as she begins another day in the brothel. Narrative style is important here and is our first real hint of the fantastic qualities found in *Lugar*. The dubious voice of the narrator is a stylistic choice of Donoso which facilitates the readers experience in knowing la Manuela. Stylistically Donoso reacts to traditional
narrative forms prior to the Boom. Here it is not limited to one perspective, nor to one character as commonly seen in prior literary trends in Latin American literature which Curiel Rivera labels “novela primitiva” (Curiel Rivera 298). In *Lugar*, the narrator vacillates from third person, to first person, and at times, incorporates the voices of la Manuela, Japonesita, and even Pancho Vega along the course of the novel.

The mental vagaries of the protagonists are told in present tense, while other parts of the narration are often communicated in past tense. Within one page’s length, the reader encounters la Manuela speaking in first person. However, in the text, her words are not always set-off by quotes. Sometimes they are indicated by ellipses. Sharon Magnarelli claims that the use of this polyphonic narrator is Donoso’s way of rejecting “narrative limitation”. She concludes that we as readers can never be sure that we have the whole story: “There is no definitive, reliable, authority, implicit or explicit, to which the reader can turn” (Magnarelli, *Understanding* 78). The doubt, so inherent to the fantastic, is present even in Donoso’s use of voice and perspective. One of Magnarelli’s conclusions is that it may all be “the linguistic artifice that is the novel” (78) and further indicates the many layers of disguise found within the text, citing specifically the masked identity of la Manuela who is biologically male. The effect is a splintering. Duncan explains how this is an important characteristic of fantastic literature:

The fantastic does not merely suggest we replace one set of ideas with another or that we reject the tenets of classical realism and embrace instead, a fantastic vision of the world. It fact, it shows us a multiplicity of meanings can coexist, that contradictions cannot always be neatly resolved, and that a
literary text that takes upon itself the job of imparting knowledge is only imparting, at best, a specific perception of the world. (Duncan 104)

This mixed narrative style, while certainly a novelistic trick, pointedly echoes and highlights la Manuela’s comingled emotions toward Pancho Vega, to which we are made privy within a short textual space. It also mimics her trespassing the boundaries upheld by patriarchal culture between male and female. From a prior experience, recalled further along, we learn that she finds Pancho Vega brutish, repulsive, and dangerous. She obsesses in flashback style to a scene from the year prior:

La Manuela se levantó de la cama y comenzó a ponerse los pantalones. Pancho podía estar en el pueblo todavía. . . Sus manos duras, pesadas, como de piedra, como de fierro, sí, las recordaba. El año pasado al muy animal se le puso entre ceja y ceja que bailara español. Que había oído decir que cuando la fiesta se animaba con el chacolí de la temporada, y cuando los parroquianos eran gente de confianza, la Manuela se ponía un vestido colorado con lunares blancos, muy bonito, y bailaba español. ¡Cómo no! ¡Macho bruto! ¡A él van a estar bailándole, mirenlo nomás! Eso lo hago yo para los caballeros… [. . .] Entonces Pancho y sus amigos se enojaron. Empezaron por trancar el negocio y romper una cantidad de botellas y platos y desparramar los panes y los fiambres y el vino por el suelo. Después, mientras uno le retorcía el brazo, los otros le sacaron la ropa y poniéndole su famoso vestido de española a la fuerza se lo rajaron entero. (Donoso, Lugar 12-13)
This demonstrates la Manuela’s frustration with her role in the brothel and also exemplifies the author’s unique narrative style, shown above as varied, mixed, and with the ability to transport back and forth between time, tenses and perspective.

We note also the use of simple ellipsis to set apart la Manuela’s thoughts from the words of the narrator. We should observe that the quote begins with what seems an omniscient narrator, changes with limited grammatical indication to the words of la Manuela, and ends returning back to the removed narrator. Carlos Cerda calls this an omnipresent narrator:

No solo sabe mucho más que sus personajes acerca de los acontecimientos que va a narrar, sino que irrumpe continuamente en el relato formulando juicios, añadiendo comentarios a la acción narrada, ejerciendo sin restricciones su omnipresencia. (Cerda 33)

This, Cerda claims, establishes the fact that we are not merely reading fiction but a novel and therefore reinforces the text’s distance from realism. I would say this type narration warns the reader that we are entering a fantastic space where even he or she, the narrator, is in some way a character who manipulates and adds another level of interpretation, and perhaps doubt in Donoso’s case, to the text. The doubt induced into our experience as readers undermines traditional narration and opens a space for la Manuela’s own reality to be seen as Duncan would claim. Important also to the plot, this quote allows us to see that la Manuela is unhappy with her life circumstances and her clientele. It is where we learn of her obsession for the town brute and object of her fantasies, Pancho Vega. Appearing early in the text, this fragment may falsely indicate that la Manuela is simply afraid of
Pancho’s violent behavior, of the consequences it may have for her, her household, and the business therein. Later we learn of la Manuela’s attraction to Pancho, despite the fact that her only interactions with him seem to result in physically aggressive behavior on his part, emotional and physical harm on hers.

At this juncture, it is befitting to examine how others in El Olivo view la Manuela. So far, as readers know that la Manuela refers to herself as female. In addition, we see that she and the narrator at times being incorporated in the same voice, refer to herself as “la Manuela”. Noteworthy is the utilization of the superfluous feminine article “la” which precedes her name as this is not considered standard Spanish. Magnarelli states: “Like the characters, the reader too is duped by the word, the feminine adjective that seems to denote a female character but that effectively ‘masks’ a male character” (Magnarelli, *Understanding* 79). This is a recourse adopted by the writer to show how la Manuela linguistically overcompensates for her biological maleness as the reader understands she is a transvestite performer at this point in the reading. La Manuela is obviously a female name, the “la” amplifies her outward identity and reinforces her demand to be known as female. For others in the pueblo, we see that la Manuela is not particularly male or female, but something else, an Other. This ambiguity reflects the ambiguous position for people like la Manuela in patriarchal society. She reveals a fantasy or daydream that recurs in various places throughout the text which speaks of this otherness:

Tanto hablar contra las pobres *locas* y nada que les hacemos… y cuando me sujetó con los otros hombres me dio sus buenos agarrones, bien intencionados, no va a darse cuenta una con la *diabla* y lo *vieja* que es. Y tan enojado porque una es *loca*, qué sé yo que dijo que iba a hacerme. […]
Ahora, si estuviera en la calle con el vestido puesto y flores detrás de la oreja y pintada como mona, y que en la calle me digan adiós Manuela, por Dios que va elegante mijita, quiere que la acompañe… Triunfada una. Y entonces Pancho, furioso, me encuentra en una esquina y me dice me das asco, anda a sacarte eso que eres una vergüenza para el pueblo. Y justo cuando me va a pegar con esas manazas que tiene, me desmayo. (Donoso, Lugar 26)38

One of my favorite sequences in Lugar, this fragment is most indicative of my reading of the novel. First, it reveals la Manuela’s secret desires and secondly informs us of the language used to define her.39 Here, we must take note that the narration is being told from what seems to come from a first-person perspective, supposedly that of la Manuela. However, in the fragment above, she quotes the townspeople and Pancho alike. The word choices she uses, “loca,” “diabla,” “vieja,” “triunfada,” to define herself are all feminine adjectives. The feminine direct object pronoun “la” is used. Lastly, the noun “mijita,” a version of “mi hijita,” in English is “my sweet/little/female child”. Duncan affirms that this is where fantastic become part of the equation: “whenever socially constructed ideas about gendered identity begin to crumble, the fantastic inserts itself into the text like a wedge, dismantling many of our assumptions about what is possible and

38 Emphasis here is mine.
39 Edith Dimo (2002) suggests that this sequence conveys Japonesita’s thoughts and desires. While this is a matter of interpretation, I would argue that the narrative focalization oscillates between an omniscient narrator and la Manuela’s thoughts here. We know that la Manuela has been frenzied by Pancho’s visit from the moment she awakens. Further, I read that it is la Manuela who has suffered through the cold winter since Japonesa’s death having already alluded to the heat of her massive body earlier in the novel, specifically in the sequence where Japonesita was conceived.
real” (Duncan 155). However, we should notice that the noun “loca,” translated as “fag” in English, is a derogatory term used to jeer homosexuals. “Loca” in Spanish has a couple of different meanings. First, as an adjective, it means “crazy,” “insane.” Secondly, it is used as a noun, a derogatory term which both I and Jill Levine, the translator, have interpreted here as “fag.” Used in this context, I think both definitions coincide here referring to la Manuela. Hence the term “loca” takes on a doubly-negative meaning that communicates society’s contempt for homosexuals. So here the marker “they” refers to others, possibly the townspeople, it is an indicator of the marginalization she experiences as part of society’s Other and perhaps indicative of her awareness of such rejection. We should note that la Manuela incorporates the word choice of the others as part of her own discourse when identifying herself. She has absorbed the identity of “fag” or “loca” as a result of this linguistic marker. Moreover, we note here that she refers to herself primarily as feminine, a woman or girl. The linguistic ambiguity of the term “loca” lends well to Donoso’s use of it here; she is considered both crazy, in her otherness by those around her, and labeled “fag”, which communicates the disdain which homosexuals experience in patriarchal, heteronormative culture. The reader sees that she realizes, and hears from others, that she is ugly and old. She readily embraces the identity of “loca” as her own.

Chodorow has written about how we appropriate our own gender and gender identity in unique ways that reflect culturally situated practices and discourses. In the case of la Manuela, we see that her gender is not necessarily a fixed type of identity by looking at the grammar points which I have highlighted and discussed above. Through the lens of

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40The English version of the same text, translated by Jill Levine as *Hell Has No Limits*, la Manuela states: “They talk about poor fags so much and we haven’t done a thing to them…” (Donoso, *Hell* 24).
fantasy and the aid of a mixed narration linked to la Manuela’s thoughts, we are able to see that the protagonist incorporates the language, the qualifications of others, as well as their expectations in her own identity. Chodorow contends:

The capacities and processes for the creation of personal meaning described by psychoanalysis contribute to gendered subjectivity as do cultural categories and the enactment or creation of social or cultural roles. Clinical work demonstrates that all elements of existence . . . are refracted and constructed through projections and introjections and the fantasy creations that give them psychological meaning. (Chodorow 90-91)

Here we see that la Manuela’s desire, her fantasy, is riddled with violence. Society’s limits and linguistic markers, as a sexual being, are unconsciously incorporated into her identity and thus reflected in her fantasy. Just as Pancho is about to club her with one of his huge fists, la Manuela faints. Let me emphasize, this is part of la Manuela’s daydream this is her fantasy. She longs to put on the red dress for the purpose of shocking Pancho and the others and we come to understand here that she wishes to provoke Pancho and speaks of him as utterly masculine, macho. Note, however, that the physical damage, which we have seen repeated already within the text, does not matter to la Manuela. When speaking to her friend Ludovinia in chapter two, she describes Pancho as “ese hombre grandote y bigotudo que venía al pueblo el año pasado en el camión colorado” (Donoso, Lugar 23). This sentence conveys the obvious masculinity associated with the figure of Pancho. He is physically imposing in size, wears a beard, and drives a red truck, a phallic symbol par excellence. Donoso is setting-up the character of Pancho Vega here, associated with manliness and virility, later we discover that he is sexually attracted to la Manuela.
While she is physically attracted to Pancho, la Manuela knows that the only circumstance in which she can act on her fantasy is one that involves physical violence and harm to her person. She has somehow accepted this repression as it manifests in her secret thoughts. Similarly, in chapter four, the night before la Manuela’s anticipated encounter with Pancho, we are given access to la Manuela’s fantasies again. This time, the language she uses is more pointed.

Un año llevaba soñando con él. Soñando que la hacía sufrir, que le pegaba, que la violentaba, pero en esa violencia, debajo de ella o adentro de ella, encontraba algo con que vencer el frío del invierno. Este invierno, porque Pancho era cruel y un bruto y le torció el brazo, fue el invierno menos frío desde que la Japonesa Grande murió. (50)\(^{41}\)

Here I would like to point out that la Manuela has been dreaming about, or fantasized about Pancho for a year since her last encounter with him. He twisted her arm and ripped her famous red flamenco dress with the white polka dots. But in this, more recent fantasy above, she dreams that Pancho makes her “suffer,” that he “beats” her, and that he “rapes” her. It is in the twisted, masochistic promise of physical contact that she claims to have found a warmth which allows her to make it through the prior winter. She admits that it was in fact the warmest winter since the death of Japonesa Grande –her friend, business partner, and the biological mother of her daughter Japonesita. The painful experience inflicted by Pancho is a recurring fantasy in the text. She is aware that in her culture the only physical contact she can allow herself to have with another male is one laced with

\(^{41}\) Emphasis here is mine.
violence and aggression. She is willing to give-in to her physical attraction to Pancho even though she is highly aware of its powerful repercussions.

This takes me back to Judith Butler’s discussion of subjective power. We frequently think of power as something that is forced upon us or something that controls us. As in the example of la Manuela however, we may need to ponder the discursive power of the townsfolk that describe her. Such cultural manifestations of power both limit la Manuela’s fantasies and how she may physically act or not upon them –they repress. This, Butler assures us, is only part of what power does. It works like a double-edged sword. The power which we may see as limiting or controlling also defines us, it sustains our struggle: “power that at first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject’s self-identity” (Butler, *Physic* 3). As a homosexual transvestite in the little town of El Olivo, la Manuela is obviously limited, or “subjected” to her culture’s view of identity and gender roles. She may prefer to refer to herself as a “girl” but she also incorporates that notion of “other” as we have seen in its linguistic manifestation of the word “loca”. In her daydreams we see that she may at least mentally resist or rebel against the limits that are imposed upon her, but she is also highly aware of the physical consequences of such actions. She is both defined by and defines herself with this struggle. As Butler states, “to desire the conditions of one’s own subordination is thus required to persist as oneself” (9). Power in this case appears to work in an ironic, self-perpetuating cycle in which patriarchal society triumphs, particularly in terms of the cultural norms of gender and sexuality.

While we are not able to characterize la Manuela as an active or vocal opponent to her society’s repression against homosexuals or those who do not limit their own gender
roles to those prescribed by their culture, we do find disruptive resistance within her
daydream and in her identity. As is the case with other Donosian archetypes, la Manuela
is middle-aged, biologically male (although lives the life of a female), is unhappy with her
circumstances, and finds some temporary escape of her situation through daydreams or
fantasy. Is she able to achieve happiness by acting on her fantasy? Does she employ a
voice to speak for others subjected to her situation? Clearly the answers here are no.
However, we do see that her daydreams are described in detail and we have access to these
through an ambiguous narrator. We also see that she is able to slip away mentally and
temporarily through these daydreams. Unlike the character Santelices, the object of la
Manuela’s fantasy and physical attraction is specified as a man, not the collection of
dubious photos or drawings kept in her nightstand’s lower drawer which I interpret as
coded fantasy. La Manuela is able to openly discuss her attraction to Pancho with others
around her, and indeed eventually acts on it. She is famous for her flirtation with the men
in the brothel and in neighboring towns. These are however actions which more obviously
subvert heterosexual normalcy, but we come to find that acting on her desire carries a costly
price.

In chapter eleven of the novel during what we read as the last night of her life, la
Manuela leaves the brothel accompanied by Pancho and his brother-in-law, Octavio,
walking arm in arm as the three of them head toward the house of Pecho de Palo, a meeting
place or bar, to continue their drunken soiree. As they leave, both men have their arms
around her waist: “La Manuela se inclinó hacia Pancho y trató de besarla en la boca
mientras reía. Octavio lo vio y soltó a la Manuela” (Donoso, Lugar 124). Octavio holds
la Manuela while Pancho begins to beat her. It is key, to note that at this point in the
narration, that la Manuela suddenly realizes her maleness, even the narrator abruptly begins to refer to her as “he”: “la Manuela despertó. No era la Manuela. Era él Manuel González Astica. Él. Y porque era él, iban a hacerle daño y Manuel Gonzáles Astica sintió terror” (124-125). The break from la Manuela’s ongoing fantasy of herself as female, is echoed in the narration which has referred to her as la Manuela, up until this point. Here, she temporarily escapes, running through the brambles but is caught by a barbed wire fence, torn to shreds, and is found again by the two men. The brambles puncture her skin, just as the word “he” notably cuts into the narration. As I have mentioned in the synopsis of the novel, we are never actually informed if la Manuela dies or not. We do know that she was left beaten by her attackers somewhere in or around the vineyard near the river and the last concrete detail about her that we are given as readers is that she, now “he” can no longer see. Recalling Santelices’ plunge from his office balcony into the jungle he imagined below, la Manuela is indeed like him in that acting upon her fantasy eventually leads to her textual demise. Yet, throughout the novel, this same daydream at times serves as an escape or even a pressure valve, allowing her to continue.

She is also similarly locked in a power struggle of resistance and repression even though we should note that Donoso’s treatment of her fantasies at this point in his writing career are more detailed, less heavily coded or more obvious compared to the example from “Santelices,” such as the use of “loca” to describe the protagonist in this text. In her case, Donoso never obviously states any overt messages about homosexuality, but rather he allows us to experience her sexuality through the ongoing, continuous fantasies of his character via narrative manipulation as we read the perspectives which offer a view of her actions from both within and without. The narration barely marks any distinction between
the omniscient third person narrator and la Manuela’s own thoughts. As we look at power struggle from an exterior view of *Lugar*, we come to see its subjective and formative tendencies. The power of cultural norms and discourse which represses la Manuela is necessary for her to push back and necessary for her very existence as a subject in Butler’s view. Culturally and linguistically we see that these power dynamics endure, that is to say the acceptance of gender roles and labels placed on the other without question, form hegemony.

**The Man in the Big Red Truck**

Turning our focus to Pancho Vega now, we know that he is one of la Manuela’s first thoughts as she awakens, in the beginning of the novel. There is an obvious antagonistic relationship established between them from early-on in the text. We know from la Manuela’s flashbacks, that he is infamous for causing problems in the brothel. He has tortured la Manuela and has sworn in sadistic fashion to “montar” both la Manuela and Japonesita. “Montar” literally translates as “to mount” in English, Levine translates it “to screw” in her English version. Both associations however bring to mind a violence-laden assault. Pancho is portrayed as brutish, with a thick neck like a bull. He drives a snub-nosed red truck with two oversized rear tires and has the reputation, among the women in El Olivo, to have a different woman in every city where he delivers freight: “Pues eres como marinero en tierra Pancho, ahora con la cuestión de tu camión y tus fletes: una mujer

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42 Sharon Magnarelli repeatedly insists on the symbolic value of Pancho’s truck. She interprets its presence as a phallic symbol and reports similar interpretations of his red vehicle by numerous critics. See Magnarelli (1993) p. 80.
en cada puerto” (32). Pancho is infamous for his womanizing ways and his violence toward la Manuela, which I see underscores his outward masculinity. However much of Pancho’s masculine guise is mere hearsay, the bragging words of Pancho himself and the talk of others around town. We must carefully consider this character as his sadistic actions directed at la Manuela and his efforts in hiding said desires—not dissimilar to la Manuela’s character—undermine compulsory heterosexual normalcy and gender-based roles.

Given his antagonistic relationship with la Manuela and repeated references to his masculinity, I find Pancho’s behavior scandalously refreshing. Pancho’s character adds another twist to Donoso’s message about sexuality in this novel. Here, Donoso reminds readers of the inherent misconception found in stereotypes. Specifically, his message debunks the image of the fag or loca as an effeminate male. Pancho is what the people in El Olivo call “rough,” a “brute” who drives a big red phallic symbol and honks his horn at all hours of the night in drunken fits, yet he is attracted to la Manuela. Beneath the outward appearance of aggressor which he exudes, he is physically aroused by her and seeks her attention. I have come to regard Pancho Vega as the more scandalous and perhaps more interesting, of Donoso’s two protagonists. The stereotypical macho man who secretly, or even unconsciously, desires sexual contact with another man. This also relates to my insistence on Donoso’s Foucauldian view of power: where we first perceive power, it will eventually be found missing in Donoso’s texts. In Pancho Vega, where we expect to find constant rejection of the openly homosexual la Manuela, we are surprised that he is secretly attracted to her. Pancho’s masculinity is a mask, or as we have seen on previous works, another layer under which something is missing.
We should keep in mind the time frame of this novel however as we continue, so as not to lose the broader scope of my approach to Donoso. Written in the late 1960’s this novel was not published in Donoso’s native Chile, but rather in Mexico. We can assume that as a Latin-American male writer of his era, Lugar may have been a gamble on the author’s part as it juxtaposes and highlights the interior world of fantasy and plays it against the exterior world. Lugar exemplifies two leading characters whose masculinity is overtly questioned. Both characters challenge traditional views on sexuality and fulfill the characteristics I have proposed in the donosian archetype. The only difference between la Manuela, Pancho Vega, and Santelices is the fact that the object of the latter’s desire was never specifically named. In Lugar, Donoso takes it a step further and names the object of their desire as another male. La Manuela is lured to Pancho Vega openly, Pancho Vega seems to reject this outwardly, but covertly desires to sexually conquer her. The stance of such an archetype decenters patriarchal culture and compulsory heterosexuality in that it opens the doors to marginalized discourses of those whom the system seeks to exclude. The pervasiveness of this repeating character throughout Donoso’s writing lends credence to his importance for the author.

Working our way through the novel, we learn more about Pancho’s sexual desire toward the end of the text. In chapter eleven, there is a sequence which communicates a clear division between Pancho’s physical arousal to la Manuela’s dance, his resulting reaction to his own body’s response, and his reputation as a “macho brute.” Pancho and his cohort Octavio have come to the brothel seeking entertainment. He watches her performance:
Pancho, de pronto, se ha callado mirando a la Manuela. […] Pancho se deja mirar y acariciar desde allí… el viejo maricón que baila para él y él se deja bailar y que no da risa porque es como si él, también, estuviera anhelando. Que Octavio no sepa. Que nadie se dé cuenta. Que no lo vean dejándose tocar y sobar por las contorsiones y las manos histéricas de la Manuela que no lo tocan, dejándose sí, pero desde aquí desde la silla donde está sentado nadie ve lo que le sucede debajo de la mesa, pero que no puede ser no puede ser y toma una mano dormida de la Lucy y la pone allí, donde arde. (121)

As seen in other examples, the narrative voice is mixed, oscillating between a third person omniscient narrator and the first-person intimacy of Pancho’s own thoughts. Pancho becomes quiet and serious, he doesn’t laugh at la Manuela now. He allows himself to enjoy the show and become physically aroused. He mentally caresses la Manuela from a comfortable distance in the audience. Under the table, so that no one can see his obvious excitement, he grabs the hand of one of the prostitutes sitting next to him to conceal his physical arousal inflicted by la Manuela’s sensual routine. His inner thoughts are “this can’t be, this can’t be” as he mentally denies his own sexual arousal. No one must notice that la Manuela’s dance has had this physical effect. The reader is the only person privy to this knowledge. Given this information, we can begin see more clearly the contrast between Pancho’s fantasies and his public mask of heterosexual male.

If we consider power in this sequence, we are reminded, as in the vineyard scene discussed above, of its dual or cyclical nature. The repressive power of what others might think of Pancho, if they should realize he is physically aroused by la Manuela, produces a physical response in him. The repressive action of culture, what others may possibly think
of him, is answered by Pancho physically hiding his obvious erection with the hand of a nearby prostitute. This simple movement is an action which highlights an ongoing, continuous subjection which defines what Pancho Vega sees as himself and consequentially projects outwardly. Let’s remember that la Manuela projects herself as female and she dresses that role, whereas Pancho Vega’s homosexual tendencies are masked by his macho brute reputation which he exaggerates. Subjection theory supports a reflexive transference of power. Recalling what Butler has said, we know that “power imposed upon us becomes our own emergence” (Butler, *Physic* 198). Repressive power does not just act upon us, forcing us to conform or give-in. We turn that same power around in the formation of our own ego. Our identity is dependent on this paradoxical view of subjection, and the back and forth volley of power echoes the ongoing struggle that we see la Manuela and Pancho Vega experience in *Lugar*. Pancho Vega can only give-in to his secret desire to be with la Manuela through sadistic violence, while on the opposite side of this coin, la Manuela as I have observed, can only realize her fantasies for Pancho unless it is through masochistic encounters.

In this line of thinking we should recall what Foucault has stated about power:

> power must be understood in the first instance as a multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses them; as the support for which these force relations find one another, thus forming a chain or a system. . . as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design
or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. (Foucault 92-92)

In this fashion the sadistic/masochistic cycle is upheld. Butler’s theory and the hellish cycle of suffering in Lugar exemplify Foucault’s theory which claims that power is everywhere and in everything; it is repetitious, as I have noted in chapter one. Repression, in la Manuela’s and Pancho’s world, limits their lifestyles; it curtails the possibilities of living out their desire. Nevertheless, this same repressive power formulates their own identities, it defines their everyday struggles, and makes them who they are. Thus, Donoso queries the impossibility of acting on one’s desire in a specific place and time by highlighting the hellish consequences for acting on desires that do not reflect traditional, gendered roles and compulsory heterosexuality. If we recall my discussion on the title of this Donoso’s novel which suggests a hell, a limitless place of eternal suffering, we may come to better understand perhaps what the author is trying to tell us as la Manuela and Pancho seem to live a hellish life of constant struggle between their desire and tradition. Non-heterosexual desire is likened to sin and therefore physically relegated to a hellish realm.

Thinking back to the title, it is important now to consider Donoso’s treatment of space in Lugar. The novel’s title, El lugar sin limites, informs us of some preoccupation with borders, limits, spaces a motif that we have seen in the other primary texts in the present study. In Lugar, one notices a clear emphasis placed on the contrast between closed and open spaces, upon inside and outside, and certainly we may extrapolate this as a reflection on psychological spaces played against an exterior world. Similar to other works, such as “Santelices” for example, we should note that when la Manuela ventures
outside of the physical confines of her little brothel she meets what one may interpret as her end. At the end of the novel we know that she was beaten by Pancho and Octavio and left broken and senseless somewhere out in the vineyard.

In *Lugar*, la Manuela is able to wear her flamenco dress and entertain the gentleman callers who come inside the little brothel with no consequences. She wears female clothing and asks Japonesita to call her mother when she insists on calling her Papá around the house. The world inside reflects her psychological world, one in which she may exist as female. Similarly, when she goes to visit her widow friend Ludo in chapter two, within the confines of her tiny home, filled with boxes and packages stuffed with forgotten memories, she feels just as comfortable as in her own home, because Ludo treats her without ambiguities:

> Ya estás vieja para andar pensando en hombres y para salir de farra por ahí. Quédate tranquila en tu casa, mujer, y abrígate bien las patas, mira que a la edad de nosotros lo único que una puede hacer es esperar que la pelada se la venga a llevar. Pero la pelada era mujer como ella y como la Ludo, y entre mujeres una siempre se las puede arreglar. Con algunas mujeres por lo menos, como la Ludo, que siempre la habían tratado así, sin ambigüedades, como debía ser. (Donoso, *Lugar* 24)

Here we read that la Manuela appreciates the company of la Ludo, who has always treated her as a woman, how it should be. Outside of the limits of home, la Manuela is not accustomed to being addressed as a woman. Being in Ludovinia’s home and in her company, makes la Manuela feel at ease. But Ludo’s words here interestingly foreshadow
what is to come for la Manuela. It appears in the form of friendly advice. Note that she warns la Manuela to stop traipsing around thinking about men, to stay at home and wrap up her feet, the only thing that women their age should do while waiting on death to come take them away. Ludo’s direct address to la Manuela is to treat her as a woman, but she warns her to keep within the confines of her home. La Manuela isn’t complacent with these limits and pushes the boundaries of what is accepted publicly and privately. We know that la Manuela does not conform to la Ludo’s advice and even finds it boring to be with her friend now that she has become old and forgetful:

Ya no era divertido chismear con ella. Ni siquiera se acordaba de qué cosas tenía guardadas en la multitud de cajas, paquetes, atados, rollos que escondía en sus cajones o debajo del catre, o en los rincones, cubriéndose de polvo detrás del peinador, metidos en el ropero y el muro. (22)

In this quote the narration is that of la Manuela’s thoughts about her friend. Also we find an interesting treatment of space in the forgotten packages. Ludovinia’s packages bring to mind a closed, forgotten space as they are usually found in a setting with old, retired servants in Donoso’s writing –as seen in the case of El Obsceno pájaro de noche. The many bundles that Ludovinia has collected and stashed away in the corners of her house reflect the memories she has made and forgotten with time as she is part of the dying servant class. These packages are part the writer’s critique of the labels that both our culture, and therefore we, impose upon ourselves. They also lead us to contemplate the many layers that we carry around with us as part of our own identity and the limits we are forbidden to trespass. We ourselves are complex bundles composed of our own fantasies, hopes and desires wrapped in layers that make us more presentable for the world in which
we live. Just as la Ludo’s bundles, those things which makes us who we are now, those things which we appreciate the most in the present, with time and pressure from the outside, are covered with a protective layer, passed over or perhaps relegated to a forgotten space. Furthermore, by thinking about space and fantasy as they are treated in Lugar, we see that Donoso establishes the reality that non-traditional identities and thought, in regard to sexuality and gender roles, are limited to closed, interior spaces.

As I have stated, la Manuela does not heed to la Ludo’s advice. She does not resist her inner desires to pursue men, to live outwardly as a woman, to flirt with the town brute, or to refer to herself with feminine discourse. La Manuela is not content with living the life she desires within the confines of her brothel. She seeks to break these limits. She is unable to mask what she knows as her own identity and repress her feelings behind a mask like Pancho does. La Manuela acts on her fantasies, she seeks to free her inner identity. In chapter eleven, going out with Pancho and Octavio, during that infamous last evening, she meets a violent end, somewhere out in the wilds, beyond the limits of what others consider appropriate for her. The night of la Manuela’s flamenco dance number, when the Victrola suddenly broke and the party began to disperse, she begged Pancho and Octavio to take her away:

Ya vamos mijito, llévenme que tengo el diablo en el cuerpo. Me estoy muriendo de aburrimiento en este pueblo y yo no quiero morirme debajo de una muralla de adobe desplomado, yo tengo el derecho a ver un poco de luz yo que nunca he salido de este hoyo. (122)
She begs the men to take her to see the lights she yearns to enjoy. La Manuela isn’t satisfied any longer confined to the limits of El Olivo and even less within the crumbling walls of her adobe brothel.

In the last chapter of the novel, we learn that it has been hours since a Manuela’s disappearance with Pancho and Octavio as they headed out to continue their evening soirée. The narrator here seems to be third-person, omniscient, and from the perspective of Japonesita, informs us that Pancho Vega has left town and will never return. This change of style on the part of the narrator, in my view, is another textual hint of la Manuela’s demise. Likewise, Pancho Vega’s disappearance is a clue to an obvious link between her death and his guilt. The treatment of space in the last few lines of the novel brings us back to the topic of power, repression and its cyclical tendency as we are informed of Japonesita’s actions: “Entró en su pieza, y se metió en su cama sin siquiera encender una vela” (134). Japonesita who, by this point has contemplated replacing la Manuela as the madam of the brothel, retreats to the darkness of her bedroom to another enclosed space within the crumbling adobe building. This action that both mimics the cyclical nature of subjective power and underscores the repressed emotions and fantasies symbolized in Ludovinia’s many forgotten bundles. Japonesita, as the daughter of la Manuela, is confined to this same space. Culturally she is associated with la Manuela and her insistence on trespassing forbidden boundaries.

As evidenced in Lugar, the repercussions of acting on fantasies which deviate from the norm are many, among them violence its rippling effects. At the end of the novel we are left to assume that la Manuela has died having vanished long before. It is made clear that Pancho Vega felt compelled to flee from the scene of his crimes never to return, and
Japonesita is left to worry how her life and business can continue without her only remaining parent and business partner. What is it that Donoso achieves through his use of the fantastic and treatment of space in regard to questions of identity and power? Through a constantly changing narrator with access to the desires and dreams of la Manuela and Pancho Vega, Donoso shows us that, at least in El Olivo, for the non-heterosexual who openly flaunts her sexuality, acts on those fantasies and seeks to break the cycle of subjective power, violence or death are her only possible outcomes. La Manuela’s daydreams are tainted with violence taking on masochistic undertones. She is denied any possible hope for a healthy relationship amenable to her own desires and consciously or unconsciously she is aware of this as we have seen in her fantasies which are sometimes self-repressed. On the other side of the coin, we have the publicly macho Pancho Vega, who seeks to mask his own desire for la Manuela and can only achieve the physical contact he desires through aggression, a cover for his own physical attraction to the same sex.

Donoso’s treatment of space seems to parallel and compliment what we have observed in the function of fantastic in the novel. This adds another dimension to the writer’s statement about sexuality, gendered role play, and power struggle. There is great emphasis placed on the contrast between closed and open spaces, both physically and psychologically. What is possible in the enclosed spaces of the rooms in the brothel is not allowed in the open, public, or natural spaces in the text. For example, la Manuela dances her seductive number with a captive audience within an enclosed space, inside the brothel. However, when she seeks what she calls “light,” by insisting on going out with the boys, this is when she meets her attackers’ physical aggression. Also, we see that when she seeks
to be carried away from the boredom of her home, and tries to kiss Pancho Vega in a public space, she is brutally beaten perhaps to the point of death.

As I have indicated, Ludovinia’s many forgotten packages, rolls and bundles represent personal, intimate fantasies. In the present, they are treasured, but they are often wrapped in protective layers and stowed away, consigned to the neglect and omission that come with time. Such bundles, as presented in the Donoso text, remind us of those repressed beings who are shunned to the edges of society and contained in compressed, closed spaces. This leitmotif is seen across Donoso’s writing and most obviously, as I detailed, in my analysis of Obsceno. In short, we can say that otherness, flagrant or otherwise, is not left uncontrolled by the environment in this Donoso novel; it is contained. In my reading, the author does not achieve any sustainable voice for those repressed by the society which he portrays, yet la Manuela’s presence is made visible for readers. Even his title suggests an eternal suffering. However, in many ways we see that he underscores the loss and endless subjection for those caught on the underside of a repressive cycle of power via the fantastic. By portraying such repression in the little town of El Olivo, Donoso’s use of the fantastic is subversive to dominant notions of sexual identity and gender roles. Although the suffering he depicts is not subtle in any way, it can be easily misinterpreted by those who cannot see past traditional views of sexuality and gender roles. Traditional literary values are challenged as well in Lugar, as we see evidenced in the varied perspectives of a trans-narrative voice who points us toward many truths. Admittedly, la Manuela’s voice is neither triumphant nor resounding, however it does allow us to see that reality is personal, sometimes multiple, and many-layered.
Of noted importance is the fact that very little was known about José Donoso’s personal life when literary critics were still keen on his writing in the 1980’s and 1990’s. After Donoso’s death, his daughter, Pilar, published *Coreer el tupido velo*, a scandalous memoir for the Donoso family, which suggested her father’s own personal torment in matters of sexuality. In essence, these are reasons why many papers have been published purporting various versions of the biblical fall of the little town of El Olivo, the ungodly ways of its inhabitants, and even an alleged breach between the forces of good and evil. Critics were simply not aware that Donoso may have been writing all along about a very intimate and personal struggle of his own life experience. Since I began studying literature, has it become more accepted, almost fashionable in literary criticism, to look deeper into the personal lives of prominent writers when examining their texts. In the latter part of this chapter, I will revisit the topic of literary criticism, and that of the importance of Donoso’s memoir, after first analyzing his posthumously published novel *Lagartija sin cola*.

*Lagartija sin cola*

Donoso donated a collection of his personal documents to Princeton University in 1972. An unfinished draft of *Lagartija sin cola* was in this collection and his estate arranged to have it published posthumously in 2007. The text was said to have been fragmented, unorganized, even possibly forgotten by Donoso. The author’s daughter Pilar, along with Donoso’s editor Julio Ortega, assembled the manuscript with limited changes and revised the title for publishing purposes. In the third paragraph of the article “La traducción de una obra póstuma de José Donoso gana el premio PEN” published in *El País*
on September 4, 2012, Eva Sáiz reports that Donoso’s longstanding translator believes that Donoso did not seek to publish the novel because of its highly autobiographical content: “La tensión erótica y el subtexto homosexual también eran fascinantes en el sentido que Pepe estaba saliendo del armario.” Given this information, I believe that examining the fantastic in this novel will serve in my endeavor to understand power and identity struggle in Donoso across time. Likewise, in this way we may be able to pinpoint omnipresent themes which further elucidate Donoso’s inspiration to write. Like other donosian archetypes, Armando is a middle-aged, frustrated character who seeks to flee from his life’s pressures via fantasy. He is keenly aware of and troubled by, the scrutiny of those around him. At this point in my research I am all but convinced that the donosian archetype is, if not a highly-autobiographical figure, at the very least is the embodiment of some very personal concerns of Donoso which follow him throughout his life. The omnipresence of this figure in the work I have examined attests to this conclusion.

Plot Summary of Lagartija

Originally thought to have been written in the 1970’s, this novel is mostly set in Barcelona and in a fictional country village called Dors, somewhere in the mountains of Aragón or Cataluña, if we go by the mention of known geographic locations within the text. It narrates the memories of a disillusioned, fifty-year-old painter from Barcelona who has stopped painting and denounced all associations with his fellow artists. Like the lizard
that sheds its tail when caught or in danger, Armando Muñoz-Roa\textsuperscript{43} has publicly severed his ties with the \textquotedblleft Informalistas\textquotedblright group, seeks the respite of a vacation, and swears to never paint again. Immediately this character reminds us of the frustrated writer in \textit{El jardín de al lado}, the aging artist who blue-washes his surrealist paintings in \textit{Naturaleza muerta con cachimba}, as well as other donosian archetypes I have highlighted in my research. Armando and Luisa, his intermittent lover since puberty, cousin, and benefactor, escape the city for a vacation somewhere along the coast of Cataluña. They find its hoarding masses of tourists and increasing commercialism repulsive and decide to look for a quieter, relaxing beach which they never find. Taking a turn in the opposite direction from the beaches, they end up in Dors, a fictitious Romanic village with an alluring hilltop castle built of stone, called Calatrava. The circular plot occurs in typical Donosian style with flashbacks of a narrator we assume is Armando. We begin in Barcelona in the narrative present, travel back in time through flashbacks, and end again in Armando’s Barcelona’s apartment where he cocoons himself from the outside world.

\section*{Style, Space, and Characters}

Alone by his own choosing and gloom-stricken in his Barcelona apartment years after the experience in Dors,\textsuperscript{44} the retired painter is tormented by his failure as an artist: his

\begin{footnotes}
\item[43] We see later in the text that the narrator, Armando Muñoz-Roa, refers to himself with the pseudonym Antonio Núñez-Roa in correspondence related to art and with certain people, mainly those who discuss art with him.
\item[44] Donoso has admitted that he is a writer of interior spaces – old mansions, packages, and the human mind. We see this in his highly psychological writing as well as his obsession with houses. I believe the name of the fictional village “Dors” is an intentional play on words on the writer’s part recalling “doors” and therefore alludes to interior spaces –
\end{footnotes}
failed relationship with Luisa, his broken marriage to Diana, his attempt to penetrate the local culture of Dors, and a thwarted project to restore the old-world-charm of the little village where he lives for six years. The cyclical, flashback-style narration echoes the protagonist’s unending search for himself as well as the writer’s treatment of power, specifically as I have indicated in my prior readings *Lugar* and “Santelices.” Barricaded from all social contact in his Barcelona apartment, the artist obsesses. Chris Moss (2012) in his review of the novel, writes: “he finds himself time and time again reflecting on the ‘hellish’ nature of hope” (Moss Par. 3). As I have noted, obsession and hellish suffering are themes to which Donoso repeatedly returns. Therefore, we are not surprised by their weight in this text and I will address these in the following discussion with textual examples.

Soon after the novel’s release in 2007, literary critics writing about *Lagartija* begin to highlight Donoso’s suspected disapproval of the downfall of Spanish culture caused by urban speculation and even his critique of Spain’s modernization movement after the fall of the dictatorship. It is known that Donoso lived in Spain for a long period during his self-imposed exile from Chile. Some tend to see the text as a criticism of the commercialization or vulgarization of the art world. Eva Sáiz (2012) cites a biographical link with Donoso’s own disillusionment with the other Boom writers as well as with the Boom phenomenon itself. While also looking at longstanding preoccupations evidenced indoors. We must also remember that his college major was English literature and that his first short stories were written in English.

45 See Chris Moss 2012, specifically paragraph two of this book review, where he refers to the “blighting of the ‘Costas’”.
in Donoso’s writing, my approach to this text attempts to query power and identity struggles via the fantastic and complimented with his treatment of space.

Known for his highly psychological character development, recurring themes and careful control of dialogue, in *Lagartija* I find that the writer adopts a stream-of-consciousness style that is more exaggerated than in most of his earlier-published works. *Lagartija* is characterized by long sentences, with paragraphs which can run more than a page and mimic mankind’s way of thinking and obsessing. The text is divided into four chapters or sections, with an epilogue. The first chapter ends with a paragraph that runs for more than four pages. In the fourth chapter there is a paragraph that is three pages in length. The first page of this paragraph contains only nine sentences, other pages in the text contain as little as three to four sentences. These stylistic choices affect the reader’s experience and echo stylistic changes reminiscent of *Obseno*. Not only do they attract the reader’s attention, but also have an unsettling effect on the reading process. Of course, this is part of the reason why Latin American Boom writers have stood out as being so completely different from prior literary traditions. Curiel Rivera informs us that the Boom writers broadened to scope of writing: “en los nuevos autores la concepción de la realidad es más ancha que la novela primitiva, pues abraza no sólo lo que los hombres hacen, sino también lo que sueñan o inventan” (Curiel Rivera 303). The psychological qualities of the Boom novel amplify the anxiety and delirium experienced by the narrator/protagonist and therefore affect readers in similar fashion.

Thus, readers are drawn into Muñoz-Roa’s obsession, brought on by paranoia, drug-induced delirium, and possible insanity. I offer the following quote as an example of this stylistic quality:
Me tapé los oídos, negándome a oír más, nunca más, clausurarme para siempre, cerrar los ojos para no ver nada nunca más, reventármelos, sacármelos, sellármelos… primero la admiración por A.N.R. en los periódicos y dos semanas después los insultos a A.A., la banda de jóvenes barbudos abucheando a A.N.R. en la salida de un cine de arte y ensayo y la piedra que rozó a Luisa, que me acompañaba… las voces conocidas de los de Dau al Set cuchicheando en los cafés, en los teléfonos, en las galerías, bajo los árboles de un chaflán… todos cuchicheando apenas porque prefirieron actuar a través de sus agentes y ellos solo cuchichear para lavarse las manos frente a “su” público, cuchicheando como ahora cuchichean este hombre y esta mujer mientras yo tengo los oídos tapados, y los insultos a gritos, yo no los he autorizado para resucitar nada, no tienen derecho a agredirme, yo no les pido nada, no me importa morirme de hambre en una esquina o internarme en un asilo con tal que retiren sus inmundas esperanzas no autorizadas. (Donoso, Naturaleza 211-212)

This exemplifies my point about style and sentence structure on the reader’s experience. It evidences Donoso’s fascination with the contrast between interior, enclosed and outer, open spaces. Interminable sentences and extended paragraphs echo the narrator’s exaggeration and pull us into the cycles of hellish suffering and obsession. Armando wishes to cover his ears, to enclose himself, to gauge his eyes and seal them; we understand his need to be in a protected, enclosed space. This reclusion he craves protects him from the whispers of public, from the art critics, and from everyone’s desire for him to revive his painting career. Hope, for Armando, appears to be nothing but a chance to fail again. At a
safe distance from everyone’s unsolicited “hope” for him to succeed, he seals himself in the apartment in a space where his mind appears to run wild. The interior quality of the space highlights the fantastic qualities of the text in such passages. They allow readers to crisscross the boundaries of the exterior world and the interior thoughts of the narrator/protagonist. In such spaces readers experience the mental vagaries of the characters as they trespass the boundaries limiting the world around them and the imagined within. Here, we are reminded of the garden in *El jardín de al lado* which allows Julio to travel back and forth between the present in Madrid and the memories of his mother’s garden at home in Chile. The narration in the quote above reminds us also of the rented room in “Santelices” where the protagonist escapes in order to take out his animal photos and even the brothel in *Lugar* where the cross-dressing la Manuela can live life as a woman without the fear and threats of her persecutors in the public spaces of El Olivo.

Often, in Donoso’s writing, interior spaces highlight passages that contain highly reflective text and mark the invocation of its fantastic qualities. The author reflected upon his writerly fascination with interior spaces:

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Todas son las casas de que me evadí, eternamente, en todos sus posibles avatares y con los disfraces de sus personajes que son ecos de las personas de mi pasado, estoy condenado a crearlas, y recrearlas en mis libros, a crearlas y recrearlas en las casas de mi trashumancia. (Donoso, P. 440)
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In similar fashion to the way we come to know la Manuela and Santelices, as readers we learn more about Armando and his thought process when he feels protected in this interior space, physically indoors. The space shields him from the persecution of others, and yet it
amplifies the self-marginalization he endures. Inclusion and exclusion, inside and out, are constants in this highly psychological text where this duality is reflected in Armando’s disorientation. If we recall in Lugar, la Manuela felt free to dance her Flamenco dance routine inside the little brothel, outside of the walls of the house she was beaten and eventually takes missing at the end of that novel somewhere out in the vineyards surround the little town of El Olivo.

Another way that Armando experiences exclusion is on a professional level, as an artist and member of an elite professional movement. After an art exhibition, which the local critics berate, Armando writes a protest letter to a popular art magazine promising to never paint again. According to him the value of art has been lost to the whims of commercialism. He feels slighted and rebels, similarly to the artist Larco in Naturaleza, through these printed words appearing in the article he submits:

No, yo no pintaría más, dije, porque la pintura estaba acabada, porque no era más que un instrumento de la burguesía comercial, porque todo era falso, porque yo me prestaba más para estas cosas, esta inmundicia, esta superchería que mistificaba al mundo sobre la esencia de lo que es la pintura. . . y yo me mataba para seguir siendo puro… para no venderme. (Donoso, Lagartija 33)

After this act of professional suicide, he confesses: “aunque el tiempo que siguió a mi abandono de la pintura, el dolor y el desconcierto eran horribles. . . era simplemente como la paralización de todo un sector de mi cuerpo” (35). The confusion and the hurt which follows his break from painting in effect paralyze part of his body. He refuses to be sold
to the whims of the all-consuming public. He is held captive by this decision and hence begins the recurring obsession to belong, to be a part of something which he deems important. He compares his artistic rejection to a lizard losing his tail: “Como lagartija, que ante el terror y amenaza de desprender voluntariamente de su cola” (16). He has lost an important part of his own identity and escapes with Luisa instead of working through his rejection. Like certain lizards, in the presence of danger, he leaves part of himself behind, and does this over and over again.

It is ironic, at this point in the narrative, that Armando and Luisa decide to take a trip to get away from his defeat in the art world of Barcelona. Away from the beaches packed with tourists, they are enchanted with a small Romanic village in the mountains of what could be Aragón. In effect, they begin another journey toward failure. Armando falls in love with the little village of Dors, he buys an ancient stone house, and decides to dedicate himself to the preservation of an historic sector of the town which boasts a mysterious castle with a sealed entrance, terraces, and houses all made of stone. He begins by restoring the house he has bought for himself, and little by little plans on inviting all of his own friends to move to Dors. By doing this he can protect the village from the encroaching land developers and threats of the tourist hordes seen up and down Spain’s coasts. He wants to invade the town, take control of its old quarter, and establish his own little village composed of friends and family in order to preserve its unspoiled qualities. Nevertheless, this project also fails. Every subsequent chapter seems to end with another one of his multiple failures personal, intimate, and professional.

Somehow Armando can never overcome the barriers which to him seem to impede his success and happiness. His encroaching fear of what others think about him prevents
him from ever allowing himself the freedom to uninhibitedly enjoy any project such as the real estate venture in Dors. Another example of his self-proclaimed failure is his renewed romance with Luisa, who as I have explained, is both his cousin and sporadic lover. It is after his split from the art community of Barcelona that he casually encounters Luisa one day and they become intimate once again. She encourages Armando to escape the city and they begin their journey to the beach, eventually ending in Dors. After some time together in the little village, Armando becomes bored with Luisa and sends her back to Barcelona so that he can fully take on the task of restoring his house in the old quarter. When she is gone, Armando is alone again and recognizes his frustration with almost every aspect of his life: the real estate project, the young people of the village who exclude him from their habitual gatherings, and his own rejection of Luisa – social exclusion:

Sentí una horrenda sensación al despreciar esa magnífica mujer de casi cincuenta años un goce en mi crueldad al negarme a ser pareja de Luisa porque eso ahora era humillante, como relegarme por voluntad propia al territorio que la gente joven y deseable no toca. . . Luisa no siente esta necesidad que yo siento por la juventud, esta sed de asaltar su libertad excluyente, y penetrarla y apoderarse de eso que ya no está a nuestro alcance más que por miedo de la fantasía de amor. ¿Cómo no sentir la excitación del hecho de ser joven en Dors, si durante los últimos dos veranos se juntaba allá una colonia de muchachos siempre creciendo?… nos excluía a nosotros los mayores. (196-197)

It is interesting to note that on the two pages of this same sequence, partially quoted above, there are sixteen references to “exclusion,” either by direct use of its noun form,
verb, or some rephrased variance thereof. By allowing himself to love Luisa, Armando believes he is relegated to an older generation which therefore excludes him from the group of young hippies who meet for ongoing parties and orgies along the outskirts of the village:

Cómo caminaban… cómo se vestían… cómo bailaban… las cosas que hablaban, inconexas, incomprensibles, alusiones a seres y a valores tan distantes de nuestro mundo…su indiferencia, su libertad… las variedades increíbles de sexualidad no genital a que se entregaban y de las cuales hacían proselitismo; sí, ese goce por el goce nos excluía a nosotros los mayores.

(197)

He distances himself from Luisa in order to penetrate the group of local youngsters who are in various ways out of his reach. Pleasure for Armando has become something foreign and unattainable because his powerful fear of failure has enclosed him in an interior, psychological space which permits no freedom of movement in or out. In effect he is sealed behind layers of fear, in a space similar to those developed in Obsceno and Lugar. Ironically, inclusion for Armando automatically leads him to exclusion as we see he equates his bond to Luisa with rejection from the group of young people. He goes out at night, leaving Luisa behind to take part in the activities of the townsfolk, but these actions distance himself from them further. He feels like an outsider. While the hippies partake in orgies out in the woods, he would feel satisfied simply in establishing friendship. This does not happen immediately.
We see other more obvious juxtapositions between inclusion and exclusion. In the following sequence, Armando seeks access to the hippie gathering in the old castle at the top of the mountain:

En las noches, desde la torre de la iglesia, apostado en la bifora más alta, contemplaba el interior del Castillo de los Calatravas, forestado y derruido como un cuadro de Claude Lorrain. Las puertas estaban tapiadas con ladrillos y las ventanas eran demasiado altas para escalarlas. Pero por muy poderosa que fuera mi obsesión por descubrir y finalmente participar en los ritos, y aunque esta obsesión me llevara a encaramarme con frecuencia al campanario para espiar, no todas las noches podía hacerlo, y era seguramente en esas noches cuando celebraban mi exclusión y su triunfo con sus ritos. (197)

As we see from the prior quote, Armando is haunted by threats of exclusion and a desire for inclusion. The castle doors sealed with brick and mortar, and windows too high to scale, are concrete manifestations of his delirium. His isolation, while mainly self-induced, echoes his obsession with the rejection his art received in Barcelona. He imagines that the nights he cannot go to the bell tower to spy on their celebrations are the most joyous as they celebrate his exclusion. The recurring theme of exclusion and inclusion again reminds me of Larco, the misunderstood surrealist artist in *Naturaleza*, who returned to Chile after having lived in Europe and died in the anonymity of the seaside resort of Cartagena. Larco, as I have observed in chapter four of the present study, experienced the Chilean public’s lack of interest in his art and withdrew into the back rooms of his humble museum.
Donoso’s constant attention to outer and inner spaces throughout his writing further suggest an ongoing concern with acceptance or the lack thereof.

After the accidental death of Bartolo, his young carpenter, inside the ruins of one of the stone buildings in Dors, Armando abandons his restored home and the real estate project all together. In spite of his efforts to protect the little village from the onslaught of a growing tourist industry, the crowds arrive in increasing numbers, another act of exclusion. As a man of many contradictions, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion, it is important to recall Armando’s plan to save Dors:

Mi misión en un principio junto a Luisa, para salvar Dors, había sido traer más y más gente, pero elegida por nosotros, que respondieran al gusto nuestro y a la manera de vivir nuestra. Colonizar Dors con gente más o menos prominente, más o menos famosa, con poder… había que salvar y civilizar en nombre de la estética que creíamos que también era ética. (185)

Like other plans composed by Armando, this one too is flawed. A conscious effort to include his own prestigious, powerful friends in “civilizing” Dors would automatically exclude the native inhabitants of the little village. A contradiction in itself and Foucauldian play on power dynamics, Armando’s scheme reminds of us Donoso’s ongoing portrayal of power. Where the protagonist first sees potential to change or improve the little village, eventually is found the potential to destroy it. Armando fears the people of the village will blame him for young Bartolo’s death and returns to the Barcelona completely abandoning his restoration project in Dors.
Back in the apartment, he reflects on his experiences, completing the circular plot. Here he refuses any contact with the world outside as the limits between what is real and oneiric are blurred by crippling anxiety and habitual use of a powerful sleep-inducing drug:

Regreso a mi butaca para lanzarme otra vez, como un abismo, al fondo de mis obsesiones, pero siento otro ruido afuera como si el patio estuviera poblado, y entonces mi tensión se quiebra: me acerco a la persiana y la abro un poco. Miro. Sombras de unas piernas: ellos. Empuño mi bastón para defenderme de ese ejército de vestidos de pana negra. Me dirijo a las estanterías, lleno un vaso de agua y tomo mi primer Valium 10. Camino un poco por el piso para que el tranquilizante haga efecto, mientras el patio se puebla de las piernas colgantes de los hombres que han venido de Dors para asesinar a... alguien está recogiendo los pantalones que han colgado en la cuerda para secar... no hay piernas que temer... Esta noche no quiero café. En cambio, antes de dormirme, tomaré inductor de sueño para blindarme en la oscuridad hasta mañana, aunque todo vuelva a comenzar igual otra vez, terminando en este mismo miedo. (198-199)

Armando’s self-exclusive retreat to his apartment in Barcelona, itself a sealed bundle, provides a layer of protection between himself and the world outside. As readers, we already know that he is not a particularly trustworthy narrator, a man of many contradictions. He avoids those around him, runs from challenges as well as opportunities, seeks inclusion in the local culture of Dors, and yet he wishes to re-create Dors with an elite population composed of friends and family. In the narrative present, he prefers to exist in a protective bubble where he can continue to brood over his so-called failures.
Several layers of hesitation are induced into our reading, which I have argued following Cynthia Duncan, is an important component of the fantastic in Donoso. Armando is blinded by a debilitating fear of the outside that is to say of failure. In the above passage, he is panic-stricken when, through the blinds of his apartment window, he spots a pair of pants hanging on the clothesline assuming that an army of men are coming to extract him from the apartment and punish him for the accidental death of Bartolo. To further protect himself from this mental torture, which recycles itself day in and day out, he takes Valium as well as sleeping pills to ensure that he is secured by way of sleep, layer upon layer of protection. His delusions, whether brought on by psychosis or the effects of powerful drugs, remind us to question his credibility as a narrator. We are misled time and time again in Lagartija, and readers are left to find our own answers. In this position, we are left to query the veracity of what is happening and therefore doubt what the narrator tells us. Likely to dismiss the ravings of a paranoid recluse who takes sleeping pills to escape reality, we see how Donoso is able to subvert the narrative process here. This function of the fantastic challenges our concept of what is real or true and in a broader way decenters traditional narration. Here, it causes us to question the words of the narrator, is he delusional or affected by the drugs he takes. Perhaps he is fantasizing again. Is he a trusted narrator? Duncan assures us that this is fundamental to what I am examining as fantastic in Donoso’s writing overall: “the fantastic, as literary form, validates language that gives rise to uncertainty, confusion, and hesitation as the very element that brings the genre into being” (Duncan 201). Armando, who flees from the outside world into this multi-layered retreat, shows us that there are various realities and ways of seeing and being seen. It is quite possible that those around Armando do not see his life as a sequence of
failures and therefore want him to continue his work instead of running every time he is faced with negativity. Multiple layers of self-exclusion protect him from meaningful social contact, from the chance of further failure, and yet underscore his own personal struggle. Reality in Donoso’s texts is certainly nothing easily-grasped. I would propose that Donoso viewed reality as something very subjective, perhaps even varied or changing, like the narration in his writing. Whether through dreams, psychosis, or drug-induced delusion I would never say that Armando is one with a firm grasp on reality, if such a thing does exist in a Donoso text.

**Delving more deeply into the fantastic of *Lagartija***

Looking at the fantastic qualities in *Lagartija* also adds a deeper understanding to our examination of sexuality in this text, and therefore provides additional perspective when looking at it in Donoso’s work across time. Let us further examine the case of Armando from this approach, keeping in mind that he is a man of contradictions. Knowing that sexuality is a recurring theme in Donoso’s work; we will analyze the mental wanderings of the protagonist as they are frequently charged with erotic tension. In chapters two and three of *Lagartija*, when Armando is in Dors, his sexual fantasies always include boys, groups of young people or other men. The most striking sequence of this type occurs in chapter three. The characters in this scene are Bartolo, Armando’s young carpenter and business partner in the Dors restoration venture, and Muñoz-Roa himself. Although this is a lengthy quote, it is essential to my analysis of the author’s treatment of sexuality. The scene takes on an intimate quality even though the action therein is that of
The two men cutting logs for Antonio’s wood-burning stoves, a sharp contrast in itself. In my reading, this scene accentuates the sexual tension between the two characters and even imitates sexual intercourse. The narration is first-person coming from Armando. We enter the scene narrated through two layers, Armando’s memory and a recalled daydream:

El ruido furioso de la sierra detuvo de inmediato toda posibilidad de comunicación por medios que yo supiera manejar. Pero sujetando los troncos sobre el caballete para que Bartolo los cortara, sentí al ver su bello perfil a través del humo y del aserrín que volaba, que era un ser poderoso que se proponía para que yo me uniera a él de algún modo, si me atrevía a llevar sus últimas consecuencias el diálogo entablado por los leños que yo le ofrecía y le volvía a ofrecer, y que el volvía y volvía a cortar con su irresistible sierra hirviente. A través del humo escudriñe sus ojos para cerciorarme de que él estaba sintiéndome como yo a él. […] Nos quitamos los jerseys y seguí sustituyendo leño tras leño sobre el caballete: la camisa húmeda de Bartolo pegada a su pecho. […] ¿Y cómo iba a dejar de mirarlo yo si en su desatención recogí la certeza de que esas dos figuritas que desde la torre de la iglesia vi refugiadas una noche en el interior del castillo impenetrable?… eran las de Bruno y Bartolo que conocían el secreto para entrar al castillo… (Donoso, Lagartija 212-214)

The power, heat, smoke, noise, spewing sawdust, and cutting action draw our attention to Bartolo’s “irresistible,” electric saw a central prop in this scene. Similar to la Manuela’s attempt to sneak a kiss from Pancho Vega, Armando dares to put his hands close to the saw at the risk bodily harm. As one reads this quote aloud, the sound of the repeated
Spanish “r” throughout the quote imitates the noise of the sound of the saw itself and centers the reader’s focus on this undeniably phallic tool. Armando decides not to tempt the saw. The exaggerated repetition of the two men, back and forth, moving and cutting the firewood, call up the image and action of two lovers. The power which Armando senses in Bartolo’s body and the wet shirt sticking to his chest make it impossible for him not to look and desire the young man. His admiration and attraction to Bartolo’s physical power and youth are evident. While concentrating on the Bartolo’s form, Armando recognizes that shape as one of the men he has seen one night as he was spying inside the ruins of the Calatrava Castle. He yearns to penetrate the doors of this old, stone landmark, not unlike the invasive action of Bartolo’s tractor moving up through the foggy, narrow streets near Armando’s house, and the logs which, together, they prepare to be inserted into his wood-burning stove.

A few pages later the narrator has a similar observation of the same young man. He mentions his dark hair, his beauty which is rare in a town like Dors, his athletic shoulders, all with a positive quality: “notable… no para mí, sino para todos… para las invitaciones que le gritaban desde el bar mismo algunos hombres, que él contestaba con una sonrisa completa” (83). Similar to a desire to buy the old stone houses in the old quarter, the narrator has a strong need to possess Bartolo. This desire isn’t revealed immediately, despite his repeated allusions to the beauty he sees in the boy. When Armando walks around the Calatrava Castle one evening during a festival, he senses the voices of a couple inside the castle and admits his jealousy:

Una pareja de enamorados, me dije, que de alguna manera se han introducido al castillo. [. . .] Luego, vi aparecer entre el follaje, a la pareja:
ella, de pantalones, delgada con el pelo corto. . . y él, sí, sí: era él, el hombre gato-negro, el hombre todo musculatura a la vista. . . me di cuenta repentinamente que no era mujer, que era Bartolomé, el joven… Una perversa sensación de celos, de rabia, de expoliación efectuada sobre mi persona y siendo el culpable el hombre-gato negro, se asentó en mí, sintiendo que la historia de la vida me había llevado a la exclusión del palacio… (93-94)

We continue to see Armando’s obsession with being excluded in this fragment. The walls of the castle here represent the barriers against which the narrator has struggled his entire life. His need to enter the mysterious walls of the castle echo his own denial of a sexual desire he cannot allow himself to experience, that for another male. He wants to take the place of a stranger he calls the black-cat man, and as a result participate in this secret rendezvous and be welcomed by the group of young hippies who take part in nightly pleasures in the gardens of the old castle. But let’s remember that Armando removed himself from the circle of artists in Barcelona, fled to the country, and also rejected Luisa’s advances. He abandoned his restoration project and the work he was doing in his home in Dors.

Even more obvious than his unfulfilled sexual desire, his need to be included repeatedly turns and twists on itself, resulting in unending exclusion repeated throughout the novel. Donoso is reminding us of the cyclical nature of subjection here noted by Butler and Foucault. The power that first represses us is turned around on itself and fortifies our own struggle against it. As we saw earlier in the words of Foucault, this power is seen in “ceaseless struggles,” it “transforms, strengthens and reverses them” (Foucault 92). This
chain or cycle he suggests, becomes institutionalized in social hegemony is “self-reproducing” and manifested here in Armando’s reclusion, a result of his fear of what others will think of him (93). Similar to the struggle of la Manuela in Lugar, here Armando is caught in what seems like a chain of bad luck, what Butler calls power’s “traumatic and productive iterability only by occupying being occupied by that injurious term can I resist and oppose it, recasting power that constitutes me as the power I oppose” (Butler, Physic 104-105). Involved in the formation of the subject, is a power scheme which I have exemplified presenting itself thematically and spatially in Donoso’s writing. This is communicated in Donoso’s juggling and contrasting the inside and outside spaces within his writing. Butler refers to Foucault’s “history of bodies” and writes: “In this formulation, he suggests that power acts not only on the body but also in the body, that power not only produces the boundaries of a subject but pervades the interiority of that subject” (89). What Donoso portrays as hell or hellish suffering in both of the works studied in this chapter, is a literary rendering of what we see in theories on power. Society’s rejection of any sexual contact that is not between a man and woman, keeps Armando from acting on his personal desire. It therefore compounds his feelings of exclusion and a desire to control, again here at play Donoso’s fascination with the contrast of within and without, as well as rejection. Let us recall that in Lugar, la Manuela finally acted on her attraction for Pancho Vega and was destroyed. Armando never acts on his homosexual impulses. He simply runs away from them, thus trapping himself in a cycle of self-hate and fear through, boundaries, limits, framing, and layering that are among Donoso’s favorite leitmotifs.
Shortly after the erotic episode with Bartolo’s saw, we learn of Bartolo’s death. Armando remembers and reminds the reader of what happened from the cloister that is now his flat in Barcelona:

Y Bartolo está muerto: un arco del castillo se desmoronó sobre su cuerpo desnudo con gran estruendo una noche, y todo el pueblo despertó ante lo que se suponía había estado ocurriendo dentro del castillo tapiado, culpándome a mí de todo, a mí que fui exiliado. ¡Qué larga es la línea de la vida en mis palmas! Entre mis piernas, mi bastón cae inerte sobre la alfombra. No hay un asilo para pintores fracasados? ¿Un espacio donde en la miseria del anonimato y el olvido, hambrientos, ateridos, cubiertos de harapos inmundos, entre rémoras de profesión y clase, podamos hacer competir las crueles fantasías de nuestras envidias y omnipotencias? (Donoso, Lagartija 215)

Here in chapter four of the novel, is where we find Armando’s last recounted memories of what has happened to him in Dors, and the quote above underscores several ideas repeated in the novel. First, the mention of Bartolo’s death which in Armando’s eye makes him an exile although he did not cause the young man’s death. The words “fui exiliado” help us to understand that Armando sees himself as a victim because he “was exiled” by a third party or entity, not of his own agency. Second, he reverts back to the narrative present, observes the exaggerated length of his life line and the fallen walking stick between his legs. These two observations for me recall Armando’s repetitive suffering and his inability to achieve sexual satisfaction. Next, he inquires, rhetorically, about the existence of an old-age-home for failed artists which further indicates his ongoing
regret for abandoning his passion for painting. Lastly, he invokes a non-existent space, again by way of rhetorical question, where fantasies of what we are denied in life and all that we can achieve compete with one another. Would such a fantastical space be some eternal realm of competing opposites? My best guess here, would be that Armando alludes to an eternal hell which is his own mental anguish, recalling the suffering of la Manuela both inside and outside the walls of her little brothel in El Olivo, in *Lugar*.

The epilogue to *Lagartija* seems out of tune with the rest of the novel. A superfluous addition to the text by Donoso’s editor, it takes us back, before the narrative present to Armando’s adolescence, where in the attic of a family mansion he and Luisa begin their incestuous sexual exploration. Armando has been sent to this solitary home in the country to prepare for upcoming exams. Luisa is there recuperating from a bout with chicken pox. They pass their days in the recesses of the old home’s attic, lounging on broken sofas and furniture of days gone. Armando contracts the virus and together they pass their days of recovery inspecting one another’s bodies for blisters, collectively resisting the urge to scratch. The epilogue becomes bothersome by breaking the narrative cycle which is really completed in chapter four where Armando, in the narrative present is left obsessing about his impotencies throughout life similar to chapter one. On the other hand, this addition does explain, with great detail, his incestuous relationship with Luisa. It also reminds us of the writer’s obsession with the interior spaces, of crumbling family mansions, and reflection on life from differing perspectives and times. Lastly, it proves that the protagonist is simply a sexual being, not strictly homosexual or heterosexual in his actions. Armando resists the labels placed on individuals based on cultural norms, which by Butler and Foucault’s views act on the body in a cyclical, perpetual fashion. Perhaps
this epilogue was a move on Donoso’s editor’s part, either to maximize readership or profit, if indeed he felt that the rest of the novel’s sections, written by Donoso at an earlier time, were too garishly queer. As I have noted, even Donoso’s translator deemed the book too risky, too revealing to publish and hints that such an act would have pulled Donoso out of the closet, so to speak.

What does Lagartija tell us about power and sexuality? I would not describe the protagonist as a power-wielding individual, but rather as someone who is caught in the cycle of subjective power which I have discussed in fragments taken from the text. If we recall the protagonist’s insistence on his inclusion and exclusion as well as the contrasts between interior and exterior spaces, it is possible to better understand the writer’s allusion to the “hell” he mentions in the inscription I discussed earlier from Lugar. The reader can imagine a place without limits, indicated in the above quote by Armando’s long life line, where what he is denied by cultural standards and what he longs to be, both pull against and feed one another in a circular power scheme. Since Donoso exemplifies the difficulty surrounding any form of non-heterosexual desire in most all his writing, it is therefore beneficial for us to conclude that he wishes to portray the suffering that characters like Pancho Vega, la Manuela, and Armando experience as hellish and unrepenting.

Butler informs us that subjective power is repetitive and “traumatic” (Butler, Physic 104). Knowing this, we understand how Armando’s desires, namely his sexual attraction to Bartolo and his need to be included, are respectively met with impotence and exclusion, the cycle doesn’t end. Armando pulls away from the “informalists” yet obsesses about being included in something. We see concrete examples of such a desire to be included in the hippies’ nightly activities and in his desire to push through the castle doors. This
pushing and pulling motion is echoed throughout the novel in many of the scenes discussed in my analysis. Armando is limited by his fear of what others think of him. Here I am specifically referring to the common cultural values that limit his sexuality which he both imposes upon himself unconsciously and consciously feels as a repressive force from his surroundings. Whether in his professional or personal endeavors, Armando finds himself time and time again on the losing side of power struggle. The text is explicit that one must lose the hope to which one stubbornly clings and assume the despair imposed upon us. In this, Donoso seems communicate a pessimistic view on those whose struggle against repression. The fantastic qualities of his writing allow us to experience this torture, share in their suffering, and dreams of overcoming cyclical, culturally-engrained repression.

As I have argued, the fantastic in these two works is significant as both theme and stylistic recourse which together elucidate power and identity struggles by delving into that which is experienced internally, mentally. It is thematic in the that the character’s psychological struggles occupy the heart of the plot and stylistic in the fact that we as readers gain access to these struggles via such “fantastic” or mental spaces, mainly in flashbacks and daydreams. The cyclical format of the plot in *Lagartija* reinforces Armando’s continuing mental suffering and indicates the unlikeliness of any relief, therefore also portraying the cyclical nature of repression which Butler elucidates and is girded further by Foucault’s web-like view of power. Unlike la Manuela, who, only through death can escape her struggle, in *Lugar*, Armando speaks to us from the narrative present, where we are allowed entrance to the text via his unending suffering. The novel ends with Armando still alive, looking back on his failures. Similar to the lizard which is able to escape the threat of danger by shedding its tail, our protagonist always runs away
from the difficulties in life, leaving an important part of him behind. The fantastical space, about which Armando queries rhetorically near the end of the text and seen in the quote above, is a psychological realm, a psychological space which he has inherited as a human being. Here, repression works cyclically as suggested by subjection theory; its power is both stifling to and formative of the subject. It is unending and portrayed as hellish in both of the Donoso texts examined in this chapter and crystallized into a system we can describe as hegemonic.
LOOKING BACK & LOOKING FORWARD

Looking back at Donoso’s writing throughout this research and my experiences with his writing in my previous graduate studies, I come to a place now where I may be expected to communicate some articulately-drawn maxim regarding the writer across decades and thousands of pages of narrative. While this study does allow me to make some conclusions about long-running thematic concerns and technique, I believe that any attempt to summarize Donoso’s work, in a general way, would be naïve if not impossible in view of its complexity. I liken the reader’s experience with a Donoso text to that of viewing fireworks, wherein one explosion leads to others in rapid succession; one spark producing many colors, shapes, and patterns in sequence.

The reader of Donoso often bounces back and forth between characters, narrative focalization, and personalities to arrive at a place which allows us to examine our own view of the human condition. Marginalized characters such as Santelices, la Manuela in El Lugar sin límites, Mudito in El Obsceno pájaro de la noche, and Muñoz-Roa in Lagartija sin cola, among others, allow us to relive experiences in life when we have been excluded, pushed to the side, frustrated, hushed, or repressed in some form or another. They exhort a reexamination of our way of life, our values, and those forces which we perceive as hindering us. Let us consider the recurring masks and layering motif seen in Donoso’s texts that exemplify a mechanism which human beings unconsciously use to cope with life’s difficulties. Within Donoso the masks and layering highlight his ideas regarding
identity as a complex social and personal construct composed of many strata. Applying this idea to his writing, we can see the mask even mimics the multiple layers of narration, hierarchies of truth and credibility in that narration, as well as space and semantic vacuity. In the works I have examined, the masks or layers echo the plurality Donoso saw in identity, perhaps it is better to say identities. This concept in Donoso’s works is not static. In the case of la Manuela, within the dilapidated brothel where she lives and dreams in El Olivo, she is female dancer, an artist. Outside the confines of her home, she reverts to her biological maleness and is subject to the physical torture of Pancho Vega and his cousin Octavio. Although the range of primary texts examined in this study represents Donoso across time and in three different genres, I believe that my focus offers a unique approach, via the fantastic, and it touches on key themes, techniques, attitudes toward power, and characters that are hallmarks of his style.

I have suggested that Donoso’s writing communicates a view of power proposed by Michel Foucault, who views it as constantly moving, in a complex, web-like system. While it may seem that power takes on a top-down orientation in the primary texts studied, I found that it is more complicated as I moved through each work. While power may seem to simply repress us, we internalize that power as part of our identity as subject; yet said power also resists, opposing cultural constructs and widely-held notions of propriety in its pushback, as Nancy Chodorow suggests. Viewing the fantastic as the literary form of fantasy, as both mode and genre, or whatever literary recourse Donoso chose to emphasize the imagined, we know that it communicates a void, that which is missing. This void is echoed in the hollowness of language and art, or even in the gap between words or images and what they represent. Cynthia Duncan maintains that the fantastic has an explosive
effect, pushing back against those forces which repress us. The misruling quality of the fantastic extends beyond censorship according to Tzvetlan Todorov, allowing writers such as Donoso to maneuver topics that are considered taboo, censored from some outside entity, such as a state or regime, or even self-censored. In its push-back, the fantastic reaches beyond a contaminated discourse, and communicates that which is left out. Through textual analysis, I have enumerated some of the fantastic qualities of Donoso’s writing seen in six of his narratives.

My starting point was a brief analysis of the short story “Santelices”, first published in a 1956 anthology, wherein I identified fantastic elements primarily in the main character’s collection of prints for which he obsesses and one day nails to the walls of his boarding house room, much to the shock of his landlords. One cannot deny the fantastic qualities of the jungle which Santelices imagines in the balcony below his office window. Both the posters and the jungle in his office’s courtyard serve to transport the main character away from the difficulties he experiences on a day-to-day basis. While they both mark a divide between the physical word and the imaginings of Santelices, they also physically offset what is desired and what are his limiting surroundings. The beastly prints are set off by the frame of the image, the jungle is framed by the inner courtyard of the buildings where he works. Frustrated by the pressures which life has presented him, Santelices leaps into the void below his office window in the last lines of the story. While valid as an early example of Donoso’s reliance on the fantastic, the short story also provides the foundation for a repeated character whose seven qualities I expounded in my discussion. This repeated character, which I propose as the donosian archetype, recalled later in my analyses of Jardín, Naturaleza, Lugar, and Lagartija is, as I have noted, highly
similar to the protagonist Santelices. Although one can see certain characteristics of the donosian archetype in several characters within *Obsceno*, a novel so uniquely unlike Donoso’s other narratives, the text resists any emphasis or hierarchy in its characters and therefore does not support my insistence on this model protagonist. However, the four remaining texts included in my project document consistent reliance on this archetype and therefore establish clear thematic preoccupations across the author’s fifty-year career.

Through a queer reading of three Donoso works, Ramón García-Castro (2002), asserts that the writer oscillates between remaining in the closet and opening the doors to go out and play. He maintains that the closeted Donoso wrote in clave or code. He writes:

Los hombres del mundo occidental que se erotizan y se enamoran de otros hombres llevan catorce siglos teniendo dificultades para satisfacer sus deseos sexuales y afectivos. Por eso da tristeza ver como un gran artista como José Donoso justifique su extraordinaria labor creativa . . . culpando a la cursilería. Resulta irónico ver que otros escritores – Julio Méndez en *El jardín de al lado* – se frustren como tal, posiblemente por no poder aceptar sus deseos por otro hombre. (Garcia Castro 46)

While I agree with this evaluation to some extent, I am not driven to sadness by Donoso’s artistic creativity in avoiding censorship. Instead, I believe that this is part of his genius in employing the fantastic in order to point out the otherness of such characters during a period in time when world markets were not poised to embrace writers of what could otherwise be considered overtly, gay themed literature.
In *Correr el tupido velo* (2009) by José Donoso’s only child, the adopted daughter Pilar Donoso, narrates several episodes which communicate a point of contention regarding her father’s sexuality. Commenting during a family dinner one evening, she expressed that she lamented that a young writer and friend of the family was homosexual, that she had found him attractive:

Hubo entonces un gran silencio que se prolongó en el tiempo y quedo detenido por la sombra del dolor. Mi padre se levantó disimuladamente, como un fantasma. Pero ahí vino la tormenta. Mi madre me miró y me dijo:

- Le has causado un dolor muy grande a tu padre con ese comentario. [. . .] ¿Es que acaso no sabes que tu padre tuvo experiencias homosexuales cuando era joven? [. . .]

De pronto, al conocer otra de sus máscaras, una de las más ocultas, lo vi más humano, más terrenal ante mis ojos de hija, de manera que simplemente comprendí o quizás también preferí correr el tupido velo. (Donoso, P. 190-191)

While Donoso’s sexuality is not of significance to my analysis of his texts, I think it does play an important part in my interpretation of the themes he often portrayed in his writing and, perhaps more importantly it reveals a passion and deeply personal understanding for those pushed to the margins of society. As such, it lends credibility to the recurrence of the donosian archetype, and shades my understanding of Donoso’s reference to the “underside of power” in the prior-quoted interview, regardless of his sexuality.
In his extensive body of work, a type of sensibility is evidenced via the donosian archetype, a middle-aged male who is unsatisfied but also frustrated by his life’s circumstances. He feels unique and keenly experiences the scrutiny, if not the persecution, of others. Daydreams, dreams, sleep, and trance-like contemplation, often through windows, on paintings, and on garden scenes convey a mental reliance on fantasy. I do not examine sexuality in all the six works in this study, but themes surrounding homosexuality are frequent in almost all his work and are most openly seen in *Jardín, Lugar*, and *Lagartija*. If Donoso were a closeted homosexual writing in code, as Garcia-Castro argues, this fact would only lend further credit to his talent as a writer who had the unique ability to understand the function of mankind’s many layers, masks, and desires from within a close-minded, patriarchal culture.

In my analysis of *El obsceno pajaro de la noche*, I traced Donoso’s Foucauldian portrayal of power. Patriarchal power is threatened and weakened by the women of the mighty Azcoitia clan, by the retired maids of the Casa, and by a metatextual legend which is reportedly maintained through oral tradition via the voices of the old grannies of the region. The common pool of threat, gathered and reproduced by the old servants, allows us to see that power is not always ordered in the way it is perceived. Donoso shows us that those who are at first seen as the weakest and most vulnerable, often become the strongest and most resistant in his world. Patriarchal order and authority as well as narratorial veracity are jeopardized by the feminine and the oral; both are closely associated with the dark qualities of the fantastic, the subconscious, and the unknown. No one version of the truth of the Azcoitia family is left untouched by threat; order and voice are replaced by chaos and silence.
In comparing the six primary texts in this research, I maintain that _Obsceno_ is the work most unlike his other narratives. Perhaps Donoso’s antinovel answer to Cortazar’s _Rayuela_, _Obsceno_ is not as personal as the other texts I have studied here. It is most distinct to his other works which in varying fashion are all extended, character studies focusing mainly on the mental anguish of one particular character.

_El Jardín de al lado_ is a novel in which some critics claim Donoso exhibits a change in style and form from his prior novel _Obsceno_, however I have argued that _Obsceno_ is the most uncharacteristic of Donoso’s writing, making _Jardín_ a mere return to his own, prior-established style, marked by intense character development with emphasis on a main character. With this novel, I emphasized the therapeutic nature of the fantastic within the text. I detailed how the fantastic sequences in this novel can be frequently recognized by the writer’s unusually long, almost stream-of-conscious sentences and dream-like contemplation narrated by our protagonist, a character who exemplifies the characteristics of the donosian archetype. When the protagonist realizes that the only way to cope with the trauma of exile is to maintain connection with his roots in the Chile, he is then able to finish his manuscript. However, it is the feminine voice of Gloria, his wife, who is able finish his great novel, and she who also takes over the narration of the novel we are reading. This marks her triumph, her glory in finally reworking Julio’s rejected lines into a publishable novel, eventually accepted by his implacable agent Núria Monclús. We see how when Julio accepts that he is undeniably linked to Gloria and to his mother’s garden back home by the time the novel finally reaches its publishable conclusion, although it is rewritten by Gloria. While sexuality was not a focus in this chapter, I noted that Julio comes to terms with the fact that he is attracted to another male character in the novel,
Bijou. This desire for Bijou represents a very Donosian theme which I examined with detail in chapter five with two different texts. So, it is with an obviously-feminist flare that Jardín ends in Gloria embracing her own voice and publishing the exile novel of her husband. One could say that he and Gloria swap roles.

In chapter four, I identified the protagonist as a complete match for the donosian archetype in the novella *Naturaleza muerta con cachimba*. Among the protagonists whom I have studied in the works addressed in this dissertation, I assert that Marcos Ruiz Gallardo is the most Santelices-like character. His daydreams and contemplation on various works of art by Larco allow him to escape, if only temporarily, the difficulties of his mediocre lifestyle. Although his dreams of escape never come to fruition, he does undergo a transformation of sorts, which unlike others have claimed, does not transport him to a better social, professional, or economic position. The cyclical structure of the text, beginning in *medias res*, echoes the cyclical journey of Marcos, the web-like workings of power, and possibly the writer’s less-than-hopeful perspective of post-dictatorial Chile. The chain of creation and destruction in *Naturaleza* demonstrates a world with little coherence or fixity. The many washes of the paintings exaggerate Donoso’s view of identity in a world where very little stays the same or remains as we first viewed it. Marcos first imagines himself potentially surrounded by great art and great people enjoying a lavish lifestyle, but ultimately finds himself in painful isolation equaled in its intensity by his impotence to change anything, including his love life.

Donoso novels are not soothing, they are more irritating. They raise questions and perturb the reader. Often his writing does not take us to a mythical world of the uncanny, except of course in the case of *Obsceno*. Strangely enough, his writing appears to be more
realistic than fictitious, afforded by the writer’s use of the fantastic seen in mode, technique, or even genre. The fantastic draws us in, grants access to the characters’ thought processes, and in doing so invites us to examine our own views of life, identity, and suffering. His protagonists are not models of propriety or correctness but rather imperfect, afraid, and pressured by the society in which they live. Characters like la Manuela from Lugar and Armando in Lagartija show us the inherent suffering of our humanity. Donoso demonstrates that the hell of Western and Christian traditions does not exist in some realm beyond death, but rather here on earth, where both physical and mental anguish are fundamental parts of life. He writes of repression and its dual nature in both restricting us and fomenting our own struggle against it. The realness of his characters asks us to reexamine our own, multi-layered identities while demanding an examination of how these are articulated and supported both linguistically, culturally and through tradition.

I cannot find a resounding voice in these characters which speaks on the behalf of society’s marginalized Other, yet Donoso does call attention to it through the prism of the fantastic. In fact, Otherness is enclosed or contained in these Donoso texts. The protagonists in the two texts, examined in chapter four, are destined to continue suffering. The only escape seems to be death. La Manuela’s conscious fantasies about Pancho Vega, if we recall Lugar, are laced with violence as she knows that her desire is not tolerated by the society in which she lives; outside the brothel her flirtation is met with physical violence. On another level, Donoso’s texts decenter traditional narration and narrators through the use of varied and changing perspectives which allow his readers to have access to the minds of his main characters and their struggles. There is no one voice which keeps
the reader anchored to any particular truth. In fact, Donoso’s reality is maintained just beyond our grasp.

With regard to sexuality and gender roles in both of the texts studied in this chapter, I suggested that Donoso’s characters exemplify the suffering that individuals experience when they do not fit the traditional roles and labels imposed upon them by culture. From the sample of Donoso texts in this study, it is clear that he enjoyed writing about sex, identity, gendered roles, and the comingling of these themes. Based on the frequency and passion which he repeatedly invests in these topics, I have suspected that his narratives reflect a very personal and intimate struggle. Having been careful to limit myself strictly to textual analysis up to this point, recent information regarding the writer’s personal life may offer a new perspective to understanding ideas the writer has written about along the course of his career.

I began to read Donoso in the late 1990’s, long before any of his personal papers in Correr el tupido velo (2009) and the posthumous novel Lagartija sin cola (2007) were released. I was curious as to why a prominent, Latin American, male writer would attempt to publish narratives focusing on non-heterosexual desire and empathize with characters such as his own, without having a strong, personal investment in these themes. While Donoso never spoke publicly about his sexuality and never admitted any personal ties to his characters in this regard, his daughter, Pilar Donoso, changed all of this in 2009. She confesses that she came to understand what her father tried to tell her when he would talk to her about masks, in Correr el tupido velo. She quotes her father:
Lo que hay detrás de una máscara nunca es un rostro. Siempre es otra máscara. Las distintas máscaras son una herramienta, las usas porque te sirven para vivir. No sé qué es eso de la autenticidad. Lo que sé es que la vida es un complejo sistema de enmascaramientos y simulaciones.

*(Donoso, P. 189)*

As indicated in my analyses, these masks are seen thematically throughout his fiction, particularly noticeable in the protagonists I examined in chapter five regarding *Lugar* and *Lagartija*. Donoso’s allusion to masks recalls la Manuela’s flamenco dress and Pancho Vega’s outwardly brutish façade. It also brings to mind Santelices’ photos of wild beasts, perhaps a thematic mask crafted by Donoso in his early years of short story writing. As we see in the quote above, Donoso viewed mankind’s masks as tools used to make life more palatable especially if we consider the hellish way he portrays it in his writing. We must remember what Donoso’s translator, Jill Levine, admitted to *El País* in 2012 wherein she claimed that *Lagartija* was never published because of its autobiographical qualities compared to his prior novels. This admission is important in several ways. First it is essential to note that Levine sees *Lagartija* as an overt “coming out” for Donoso, a man who never publicly discussed his sexuality. Second, she observes that this quality is more obvious in *Lagartija* as compared to *Lugar*. Third, it conveys her opinion that both *Lugar* and *Lagartija* were revealingly-autobiographical texts. This information helps us to understand the many functions of the fantastic in Donoso’s writing, specifically as a literary mode for writing about themes near and dear to his person.

The fantastic works to point out those things which are lacking, missing or denied to us in everyday life. My argument has been that Donoso’s many layers, spaces, and
masks are thematic as well as stylistic recourses in his attempt to call attention to repression as well as patriarchal and masculine violence known to exist both in Chile and in Western society in general. They also suggest that Donoso was a man who felt compelled to write about sexuality, repression, and heteronormativity during a period when this could be done more subtly by engaging the fantastic. The texts studied in this dissertation uphold a view of Donoso as a writer drawn to interior spaces and elaborate character studies. Each of the works analyzed here demonstrate that Donoso was no stranger to suffering. We see this specifically in the evidence I have presented for the existence of a donosian archetype, in texts that span a career of more than fifty years of writing short stories, novellas, and novels. For the writer, those on the underside of power are often rejected by mainstream society; they are frequently represented by the elderly, the middle-aged, the sexually ambiguous or unaccepted, servants, and women in his works. The ephemeral, the fleeting, that which is unwanted, is fodder for Donoso’s writing.

As I finish this analytical and interpretative study of Donoso’s work focusing on a sample of texts meant to represent his writing over time and in three genres, I can clearly see cohesion in his work. For Donoso, man’s inner and outer realities are not absolutes. Rather, reality is composed of various layers: it is complex, rambling, and non-static, if not chaotic. Fantasy provides a type of escape valve. However, totally surrendering to the fantasy sometimes leads to the ultimate escape, death. Yet fantasy has been evidenced to have a therapeutic quality as we saw most notably in Jardín. While Donoso insisted that his works were not politically-charged, we do see evidence that Donoso was frequently pointing us toward Chile and mocking the up-and-coming bourgeois class.
The most common characters in his writing are pathetic individuals, frequently battling existence between two worlds, the imagined and the lived. His protagonists are often male, middle-aged, figures in the throes of changing their circumstances. The donosian archetype, as I have outlined, is pervasive and important to Donoso’s technique. A void runs through the center of his work. It is represented in various, creative ways and recalls the writer’s fascination with the breach between words or art, what they intend, and how they are interpreted. Semantic vacuity, among other donosian themes, is represented in this void, and echoes Donoso’s treatment of power. Treated in true Foucauldian style in Donoso’s texts, power is constantly fleeting and never quite where you expect it to be. The void also constructs non-hegemonic spaces that exist outside of normalized power structures, such as la Manuela’s safe space within the brothel, Santelices’ room where he retreats to view his beast photos, or even the contemplative garden in Jardín. Lastly, Donoso’s narrators are usually multiple and trans-voiced, like perceived manifestations of power in his work, his narrators oscillate between perspectives and voices.

Donoso’s writing will follow the reader forever. His writing is so unique that it is not easily forgotten. Some texts leave us with a smug feeling of fulfillment and the joy of having finished a work. This is not the case with Donoso. This haunting quality in his writing is what drew me to further study his work so that I could better process the literary legacy he has left us, wherein he questions how it is that language can define our existence. Perhaps this rumination is what will keep his name on the tip of the tongues of readers of the Latin-American Boom literature for generations to come. Because fantastic literature draws upon different elements of mode, genre, theme, character, and voice, and encompasses so many variants in storytelling, Donoso will provide a subject for constant
examination and revision for literary research. The fantastic’s evidence is in Donoso’s affinity for the ephemeral. It is mode, genre, technique, symbols, perspective, themes, and whatever tools the writer may employ to emphasize that which is mentally experienced.

While I have admittedly scratched the surface of Donoso’s complexity and appeal to so many readers, looking forward I see great potential in researching Donoso’s first short stories written in English, while he was studying at Princeton. “The Blue Woman” (1950) and “Poisoned Pastries” (1951) may still withhold information regarding the roots of my donosian archetype, the writer’s dependence on the fantastic, and a preference for the shorter genres. Likewise, Donoso’s poetry, which has all but escaped critical attention, may also hold important information regarding the long-term obsessions which I have documented in his prose. I am interested, as part of my research on Donoso in different genres, to see what his poetry shares in common with his prose. Released while living in Spain between 1972 and 1976. *Poemas de un novelista* (1981),\(^{47}\) is Donoso’s only collection of published poems. My suspicion is that because of the poetry genre’s inherent conciseness, one may easily find evidence of the themes I have identified in the six texts I have considered here. I expect to find poems on themes such as art, sexuality, identity, love, rejection, and suffering. Likewise, I predict his fascination with inner and outer spaces, unheard voices, dreams, and fantasy would translate to his poetry as well. Given the author finally published *Obsceno* in 1970 after many years of work, various drafts, as well as having written about writing in his great novel of the Chilean experience, I predict that Donoso’s turning to poetry at this time in life would be the result of his weariness with

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longer texts. Therefore, it would not surprise me to qualify his poetry as an exercise in condensing complex thought and feelings. Perhaps a polar extreme to the lengthy *Obsceno*, his poetry may contain, in condensed form, evidence of Donoso’s affinity for shorter texts, and contain hints of his shorter novels published later in the 1980’s and 1990’s. In addition, Donoso’s personal papers, in the archives of Princeton and The University of Iowa, may hold similar clues to understanding Donoso’s published texts and therefore provide opportunities for further research.
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