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**Marco Antonio de la Parra:
Recovering the Past to Create a Future**

Regina Faunes
St. Edwards University

Marco Antonio de la Parra's novel *La secreta guerra santa de Santiago de Chile*, published in 1989, confronts themes regarding the question of identity and the protagonist's attainment of a stable sense of self. The author, a psychiatrist by training, has held positions ranging from medical doctor to cultural attaché to the Chilean embassy in Spain during the first democratically elected government following the years of the military dictatorship. He is the author of several novels and more than twenty plays, and is widely known for some of the latter which have received critical acclaim in Chile. His training as a psychiatrist influences his writing, as his plays and novels tend to deal with questions of identity and the psychic impact of external factors on the human mind. Because *La secreta guerra* narrates its protagonist's struggle to achieve a stable sense of self during a time of rapid cultural changes, one of the elements

associated with traditional coming-of-age novels is radically altered; the protagonist is neither an adolescent nor a young man. The reason for this particular alteration has to do with social changes brought about by rapid modernization and the imposition of a neoliberal economic model. In a period of compressed modernization in which social mores change rapidly, and identity becomes a project to be undertaken by individuals instead of something ascribed at birth, the coming-of-age process is made more difficult. In the case of Chile and other Latin American nations, modernization occurs enmeshed within a time of unprecedented technological changes that allow individuals access to a range of foreign models on which to base their identity. The influx of images related to foreign lifestyles through both print and broadcast media allow for individuals to construct their sense of self based on cultural patterns far removed from traditional practices, which in the case of de la Parra's novel leads to the protagonist undergoing a second coming-of-age process. After having mistaken what José Bengoa calls "*gadgets de la modernidad*" (23) for elements capable of ascribing a stable and fulfilling sense of self, the protagonist must go through a second rite of passage that leads him back to his cultural moorings.

The novel's main character, Tito Livio Triviño, is an adult who has been married and separated from his wife. He is the father of two girls, and a successful advertising executive, a position that allows him to participate in the benefits of the Chilean economic boom of the 1980s.¹ Owing to his professional success, Tito finds himself living the life of the jet set, a life style far removed from his roots in a lower-middle-class neighborhood, and one that is vastly different from the daily reality of the majority of the Chilean population. The plot of *La secreta guerra* revolves around Tito's passage from a state of latent adolescence to adulthood through his participation in a covert war being fought in Santiago. The ongoing battle in which the protagonist finds himself suddenly immersed is between the forces of good and evil, tradition and modernity, and capitalism and

¹ For a detailed discussion of the economic conditions leading to a cycle of booms and downturns during the Pinochet regime, see Oppenheim, Lois, *Politics in Chile: Democracy, Authoritarianism, and the Search for Development*. (Colorado: Westview Press, 1999).

socialism, and Tito's involvement in the underground war stems from his father's previous role in the same conflict.

The novel deconstructs history, focusing events through the lens of those living on the periphery, and uprooting the notion that interpretation of events falls solely within the purview of the conqueror. The world presented in the text oscillates between one which presents characteristics associated with an era prior to what Anthony Giddens calls "high modernity" as well as large swaths of Santiago steeped in features included in Jameson's description of a postmodern or post traditional society:

New types of consumption; planned obsolescence; an ever more rapid rhythm of fashion and styling changes; the penetration of advertising, television and the media generally to a hitherto unparalleled degree throughout society; the replacement of the old tension between city and country, center and province, by the suburb and by universal standardization; the growth of the great networks of superhighways and the arrival of the automobile culture. (*Postmodernism* 124)

In *La secreta guerra*, de la Parra describes a city in which the *barrio alto* of Santiago encompasses the features noted by Jameson on the one hand, while at the same time large sectors of the capital maintain characteristics of a prior era. Throughout the text, Tito's coming of age is linked to his need to unravel the process by which this division between modern and postmodern, old and new, and traditional and contemporary has occurred. Through the use of irony and a return to widely known historical facts presented from a radically different perspective, the links between Chilean history and world history, as well as the connections between Chile and the era of globalization, neo-liberal reform, and transnational capitalism are re-interpreted. The process of revisiting the past from a different perspective is carried out in the hopes of realizing a future that allows for stability within a framework of authentic cultural practices. As Madelena Gonzales points out, "A different future obviously depends on a different past and the ability to visualize the present critically" (110). Tito's failure to achieve a stable sense of self despite his age is linked to a present devoid of cultural foundations. To attain these cultural moorings he must journey into the past and re-interpret what he finds there. He also casts a critical eye on the present.

Regarding Latin American postmodernism, Néstor García Canclini notes that “We conceive of post-modernity not as a stage or tendency that replaces the modern world, but rather as a way of problematizing the equivocal links that the latter has formed with the traditions it tried to exclude or overcome in constituting itself” (9). De la Parra’s novel problematizes these links through a revision of history as well as by recapturing traditional practices, such as the practice of religion in a setting of post-modernity, one in which “The level of time-space distancing introduced [...] is so extensive that, for the first time in human history, ‘self’ and ‘society’ are interrelated in a global milieu” (Giddens 32). The text delves into the links between the industrialized, developed world and Chile. At one point on his journey toward initiation, Tito is told by a character who calls himself Sigmund Freud, but is a Chilean named Roberto Romero:

Esa es la tragedia de Chile, ser una aproximación a un país, una imitación, un pastiche, una parodia, una eterna versión criolla del mundo externo, un microclima. Cuando iluminado terminé mi obra, me tramitaron, me dijeron que esperara, que esto, que aquello. Cuando logré comunicarla a voz en cuello, metiéndome a la fuerza en los organismos oficiales los encontré celebrando a un vienés que decía lo mismo que yo. Lo que escribí ya estaba escrito, lo que pensé lo pensó de inmediato, al unísono, un autor europeo, allá donde pasan cosas que les importan a los historiadores, donde se emiten las imágenes de las que somos un reflejo, el hemisferio norte que pone los nombres a las gentes, a los autores, a las cosas. (112)

The relationship between the first and third world, and the former’s influence on the latter’s evolving identity is deconstructed for Tito by this character. It is of crucial importance to Tito’s coming of age, to his success in finding an identity and a stable, satisfying role that he come to terms with this aspect of his personal history. Tito is a product of that process described by the Chilean Freud as “ser una aproximación a un país, un pastiche, una parodia, una eterna versión criolla del mundo externo” (112). For this protagonist, growing up has involved leaving his roots in a traditional, lower-middle-class neighborhood in Chile and moving on to a life style more like that of many people living in the United States or any other country in “el hemisferio norte” (112). As Lois Oppenheim observes, after neoliberal reforms were put in place by the Pinochet regime:

New life-styles emerged, especially for the rich. Elegant housing developments were built in formerly wooded areas, consisting of

large, private homes with expansive lawns and inner courtyards, all protected by high fences and gates. Behind the gates were signs of a new kind of conspicuous consumption previously unknown in Chile—saunas, Jacuzzis, and swimming pools. (163)

It is this rapid movement across time, essentially a move from an existence in tune with a more traditional life style to life in an era of late capitalism described by Miyoshi as one in which “The world wide project to restructure industry for the maximum profit reorders society and culture” (49), that problematizes Tito’s coming of age.

Despite the fact that Tito’s age places him in the realm of adulthood, the narrator emphasizes the fact that he exhibits adolescent or child like behaviors and reactions. At the beginning of the novel readers encounter Tito in Villa Alemana, a small town in the Chilean countryside where a statue of the Virgin Mary is believed to be conceding miracles. The protagonist has arrived in the town because he wants to write a serious novel; he feels that what he does in the advertising world is deeply unsatisfying. He describes to a friend how he came to leave Santiago hours before, while he was at a discoteque in Santiago with his girlfriend: “Y a mí me viene entonces el corto circuito, el gringo MacPherson, la mina, Pinochet, la dictadura, el guatón Aspillaga, los clientes mirándome, la misma mierda, y le digo, Mina, oye, voy al baño... y me vengo acá. A Villa Alemana” (10). It is apparent that Tito’s approach is that of a child; unable to face the repercussions of his sudden decision to leave, he lies to his girlfriend and, like an adolescent, he behaves rashly, leaving everything to act on a sudden impulse. The emphasis on his childlike traits is prevalent throughout the novel. In Villa Alemana, shortly after telling his friend the details regarding his departure from Santiago, Tito goes to the restroom to urinate and, giggling, writes with urine on the wall “su consigna más personal” (12). During the battle between good and evil, when Tito meets God in a cheap restaurant in the old district of Santiago, the latter notes that he is a “niño chico” (65). The protagonist himself recognizes that he is stuck in a phase of latent adolescence, “Ese infierno de la pubertad donde Tito temía a veces haberse encallado a cadena perpetua” (201).

In this novel, the age of the protagonist breaks with the pattern described by Buckley regarding the traditional Bildungsroman.² The reasons for this have to do with the fact that he is living in a society that has undergone rapid transition, where a seemingly endless array of possibilities has opened up in terms of professions and social roles, creating a situation in which “The self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made. Yet this task has to be accomplished amid a puzzling diversity of options and possibilities” (Giddens 3). At the point in history that forms the backdrop for *La secreta guerra*, the neoliberal reforms put in place by the Pinochet regime had led to an opening of the markets and a tremendous influx of foreign goods, companies, and media. Lois Oppenheim points out that “Lowering of tariff barriers meant that Chileans were able to buy all kinds of imported products, from Barbie dolls and GI Joes to Reeboks and computers. Foreign investment and ownership increased. Multinational corporations became firmly established in the country...” (164). The protagonist himself works for a U.S. advertising firm that promotes U.S. products, and bases most of its ads from spots created in developed countries: “Un cartel enmarcado de la campaña de Lipton a sus espaldas...en la copia chilena de la campaña internacional de Don Meredith. *La copia feliz del Edén*. Desde el himno nacional todo nos condena: copiones” (24). Through Tito, the text reflects on the adoption of foreign patterns of consumption as well as the creation of a desire for these products through the use of mass media.

The protagonist’s profession is linked to the reasons for his failure to assume adult traits, in that it is the effects of the advertising campaigns Tito puts together which further fuel the ability of foreign interests to destabilize and reconstitute traditional culture. In a discussion of the consequences of advertising and fashion on society, Douglas Kellner notes:

² Buckley, Jerome. *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1974). Buckley’s text focuses on the nineteenth-century European Bildungsroman; he notes that the protagonists tend to be young men in their late teens or early twenties. In later coming-of-age novels, particularly those written in societies undergoing a compressed process of modernization/industrialization, this pattern changes as the process of finding a stable sense of self becomes complicated owing to the opening of options that were once closed to most people.

The inexorable trends of fashion and the new advertising campaigns undermine the previously forged identities and associations by circulating new products, new images, new values. And so it is that advertising, fashion, consumption, television, and popular culture constantly destabilize identity and contribute to producing more unstable, fluid, shifting, and changing identities. (172)

Hence, Tito chooses a profession that is central to issues of identity and cultural uniqueness. At one point he wonders whether he should tell his American boss what he truly believes regarding the work they do: “¿Digo lo que pienso? ¿Digo que es un soberano papelón vender algo que no interesa si lo compran, que destruimos valores, cultura, lenguaje, costumbres, que es francamente inmoral lograr venderlo” (27).

Tito is the product of a society that in relatively short period of time has gone from a market-driven, capitalistic system which, however, retained its sense of cultural authenticity, to a post-traditional, neo-liberal society operating within the tenets of late capitalism. The protagonist can be described as a citizen of what Kateryna Longley calls the Fourth World, defined as “indigenous people who are colonised by a different culture and, although living in their own land, are uprooted from their own tradition by another civilization” (22). Owing to rapid advances in technologies related to transportation and communication, the effects of neoliberal reforms, which allow transnational corporations freer access to a given society, coupled with a rise in the importance of mediated images created a situation that led to a rapid destabilization and alteration of traditional culture. At one point the protagonist analyzes his position in the system which has so radically changed his world: “Y tú Tito Livio, presidiendo la juguera del magazine que todo lo mezcla, que anula tiempo y espacio, ideas y valores, creando esa hermosa majamama, el puré de la cultura, la historia hecho zumo” (48). Tito is an offshoot of the changes in society brought about by neoliberal reforms and advanced technologies, and he is also a cog in the wheel that drives the system bringing about those changes. The connection between advertising and its effects on identity formation are stated by Don Slater, who points out that “One can define the entire function of advertising and marketing as the redefinition of market structures and relations through the substantive cultural redefinition of goods” (45). In light of this, one could say that Tito’s choice of professions

is at the heart of his troubles. The protagonist's inability to successfully traverse the threshold to adulthood, even as his age would indicate he surely must have, is a product of his having to come of age and find a role, and a stable sense of self, in a society that has undergone rapid transformation, one in which a wealth of possibilities is now available in terms of identities and professions.

Chile's rapid alteration is described through the constant oscillation between descriptions of areas of Santiago that represent the old, traditional Chile, and others which refer to the new Chile. By way of the protagonist's movement between different sectors of Santiago, from the traditional areas of his upbringing to the *barrio alto* where his life has led him, the novel paints a clear picture of the differences between traditional and contemporary; differences which go beyond simply physical characteristics. At one point, while Tito is taking a bath in an old house in a traditional area of Santiago, the narrator describes the differences between the new Chile where he has been living and the world of his roots:

Un califont paleolítico jadeaba como un Ford T para calentar la tina prometida. Una enorme bañera de patas de león, como en ilustraciones antiguas, como en una añosa casona donde alguna vez habría alojado con sus padres, con su hermano... Sesteó un poco con la cabeza apoyada en el borde. Esas sí que eran tinas, para su tamaño, para realmente dejarse estar en medio de la tibieza deseable y lenta del agua caliente. Silencio: apenas alguien a lo lejos que escuchaba un programa matinal de radio con canciones de moda y del recuerdo... Una escoba llevaba a cabo su faena cerca de la puerta. Cerró los ojos a ese mar de sonidos tan distintos a los de su departamento donde escuchaba flamear los autos último modelo o fiestas en alta fidelidad o televisores frenéticos repitiendo la misma febril amenaza: *alto o disparo, cualquier cosa que usted diga puede ser usada en su contra...* (147)

Tito reflects on the differences between his previous life, represented by the old sector of Santiago, and his present existence, which, as he emphasizes in the last lines of his reminiscence, is permeated by technology and imported images. With respect to the effects of this type of alteration of social space, David Wood asserts that "dramatic changes in conceptual or social space can block or transform our capacity to remember, and, just as interestingly, our capacity to draw on the past as a resource for self-interpretation and motivation" (198). There is a moment in the novel that

crystallizes Wood's assertion when, upon returning to the lower-middle-class neighborhood of his childhood, Tito exclaims: "Qué horror, no saber cómo huele su propio barrio, no ponerle nombre siquiera" (198).

The economic policies of the Pinochet regime had the effect of changing society, especially for those who, like this protagonist, benefited financially from those policies. For many of those who derived financial advantage, the development within their neighborhoods was such that they offered "a vast array of services, which would put those of many U.S. cities to shame (Oppenheim 163). The neo-liberal policies implemented had the effect of doing away with cultural strictures against excessive consumption and the open display of wealth through excess and opulence: "Over time, the market approach would affect not only people's behavior but also, eventually, their basic values" (Oppenheim 155). For the protagonist of *La secreta guerra*, the move from his old neighborhood in a traditional sector of Santiago to the *barrio alto* leads him down a path of discarding the old for the new, and toward a life style prone to conspicuous and excessive consumption:

La casa: blanca, grande, de senador si los hubiera, de artista de cine si tuviéramos cine... Tito Livio de blanco a través del gran salón donde flota como un resto del último glaciar el piano albo... un jardín inundado por el volteador perfume de la glicina... Al centro un camino de adoquines (poco le falta para ser de ladrillo amarillo) asciende por una leve inclinación hacia una puerta de cristales biselados y madera color caoba que sella como una caja de música el sonido que ahora lo envuelve... Están ahí vestidas con trapos brillantes, salpicados de lamé, escotes asesinos...Mucho gusto. *Glad to meet you*. Te lo juro, me saludan en inglés, te lo juro, me besan las mejillas y son aromas de esencias del oriente... (47)

For episodes occurring in the wealthier areas of Santiago, what the novel depicts is the relaxation of societal strictures regarding the extravagant display of riches, something which points to a change in traditional culture, one effected in large part owing to foreign influences resulting from neo-liberal reforms: "Antes de 1973 el consumo conspicuo era casi imposible, por los controles a las importaciones, pero también por las condenas morales que suscitaba" (Moulián 109).

Shortly after the reader encounters him, Tito begins his journey of initiation into adulthood. He starts the process in Villa Alemana when two

oddly dressed men ask him to accompany them. These two men offer no introduction, and give no reason as to why they want him to go with them; one of them simply states: “Lo estamos esperando” (12). It is clear, however, that Tito’s journey toward initiation has begun. Almost immediately after encountering these two men in Villa Alemana, Tito begins to probe into his past. Their presence acts as a catalyst opening the floodgates of memory for the protagonist: “¿Qué diablos hago acá? ¿Por qué no fui al doctor como quería mi madre? ¿Por qué me quedé con ella cuando se separaron los viejos? ¿Por qué me separé yo? ¿Por qué dejé a las niñitas solas con Ana María? ¿Por qué me metí con Graciela, y con Isabel, y con Nicole, y con Mina?” (13) For the protagonist, the appearance of these two mysterious men marks the beginning of his coming-of-age process. The two men who issue the call to Tito are poorly dressed, suggesting poverty and a lowly status: “Ambos de terno entre gris celeste y verde oliva, perdido el color original por el lustre que daba el uso a mangas y perneras. Usaban sombrero y sendas corbatas tejidas, delgadísimas, muy arrugadas” (12).

The outcome of the battle between good and evil depends in large measure on the protagonist’s performance in combat. The conflict, on whose outcome hinges the future of the country’s cultural identity, requires Tito’s probing into the roots of Chile’s present state of affairs. The reasons for its relative underdevelopment and poverty, as well as the underpinnings of the present state of what Tito calls “el puré de la cultura” (48), are investigated as he traverses the path toward adulthood. The protagonist, a self-confessed coward and man of weak, child-like character, has to bridge the gap between the old Chile and the new one, between the traditional and the modern, and between the chasm dividing sectors of excessive wealth and others of supine poverty, and he must do this while his life is in constant peril. During this process, the protagonist’s inquiry into these elements, as well as into his personal history, leads to a fusion between his past and that of his country, which ultimately gives him a sense of cultural identity. Speaking about another of de la Parra’s works, Pedro Bravo Elizondo notes that “el asunto y tema confluyen en la crisis de identidad de una sociedad postmoderna, donde todo es fragmentario” (291). In fact, the theme of the struggle for identity in conditions where change has occurred

at an unprecedented pace, and where history seems lost is a common thread running through much of de la Parra's writing.

Once Tito realizes that the men who appeared to him in Villa Alemana are not part of Pinochet's secret police, but instead are in some way connected to his estranged father, he moves in and out of realms in a manner which will appear completely impossible to him, as well as to the reader. He meets God in a cheap restaurant in La Vega, a large market in a very old, traditionally lower- middle-class area of Santiago. He also returns to a nightclub his father frequented in yet another old section of Santiago. However, this nightclub had closed its doors and been turned into a mechanic's garage; indeed the entire neighborhood, once a hot bed of nightlife, had evolved into a strip catering to the automotive industry. Tito not only returns to the nightclub but also meets Lili Salomé, a legendary dancer who had an affair with his father. He sees this woman metamorphose from an old lady into the beautiful dancer she once was, and he watches her perform at the nightclub, which had been destroyed: "Un gesto de su cabeza sacudió su cabellera. La anciana se esfumó. Una mujer madura, voluptuosa, dulce en su lugar. Los pechos le flotaban entre lentejuelas. La sonrisa se le iluminaba como al gato Cheschire" (104). After living through several such impossible, supernatural events, Tito examines the possibility that he is having a nervous breakdown: "La idea de la locura se le configuró a Tito Livio. Por un momento le pareció la única alternativa cuerda. Pensar todo como venido de un traspie psíquico del agotamiento, de un traumatismo encefalocraneano, de las angustias propias de la supervivencia en una situación social tan inestable" (110). Tito's explanation for a possible nervous breakdown hinges on the unstable social situation, as if, at a subconscious level, the protagonist understands that his failure at achieving certain benchmarks: an adult perspective, a satisfying profession, a stable sense of self, and a long-term, solid relationship, is rooted in the larger social scape. Jameson describes the bind faced by societies in transition, a bind reflected in the texts written by authors living in these countries, which he refers to as "La angustia de valores importados que al ser aplicados a la industria, la medicina y la guerra parecen haber tenido resultados pragmáticos positivos, en oposición a los valores

tradicionales, que prometen esa evasiva cosa llamada identidad” (“de la sustitución” 117). The protagonist of *La secreta guerra* is caught in this trap of exchanging identity for development, and only through a reconstruction and a revisiting of historical facts is he successful in attaining a sense of his cultural roots, which ultimately enables him to pass the threshold into adulthood.

It is also at the nightclub where Tito meets the character who acts as a father figure for him, guiding him in his journey toward manhood. The character whose job it is to lead the protagonist through the perils of the coming-of-age process calls himself the Chilean Freud. Tito goes to the *boite* in search of his estranged father, who makes a brief appearance at his apartment to warn him of his involvement in something bigger than he is and quite dangerous. At the nightclub he meets his mentor, who is the first to initiate him into the nature of the ongoing, covert battle in Santiago, essentially a battle for the cultural integrity of Chile and what it means to be Chilean. Freud takes Tito on a journey to a library where he is forced to look at history through the lens of underdevelopment. The library holds texts written by Chileans, but ignored by history, which, according to the explanation given by Freud Romero, accounts for the present state of underdevelopment: “Aquí están todas las obras de la cultura occidental, las escritas a destiempo. Tan precoces o tan tardías que ya nada importaban... Este es nuestro subdesarrollo” (114). Freud goes on to outline for Tito how all the famous discoveries attributed to citizens of the developed world were in fact, at either an earlier or later date, also arrived at independently by Chileans:

Marcelito Aceituno, el Proust de Las Condes, que descubrió que la memoria solo sirve para recordar lo inútil... Jaimito Froilán Joyce, ciego de por vida, que narró peripecias insondables en la jerga de los dioses... Ernestito Einstein de Conchalí, genial pero tardío... La Isadora Duncan de Vivaceta... Madame Curie de Quilpué... descubrió cosas que ya todos sabían. (112)

Ultimately, Freud clarifies for Tito the dimensions of the battle in which he is involved when he tells the protagonist that all accumulation of knowledge is leading to the discovery of “El Tetragramatton, la palabra sagrada [...] que cuando se descubra terminará con Dios y con el diablo, creando una sola raza. De malditos según unos, de dioses según otros. Cuando el

hombre se haga a sí mismo será su epílogo. Dicen que hay ya tres letras descifradas y que la cuarta circula inocente” (115).

With these words, Freud outlines Tito’s position in the ongoing battle; he must find and disable the Tetragrammaton. Freud’s words to Tito hint at globalization as the beginning of the end of Chile’s cultural independence. It is, according to him, the creation of “una sola raza” (115) which Tito must resist. For Tito, this implies a radical change in his life, since those who would seek to homogenize cultures are the transnational companies which, through foreign advertising agencies keep him employed. Tito’s advertising career contributes to the problem that his guide in the coming-of-age process describes as pernicious; the process by which “Destruimos valores, cultura, lenguaje, costumbres... ” (27). Ultimately, Tito’s mission throughout the novel is not only to overcome all obstacles put in his path on the way to securing and disposing of the Tetragrammaton, but also to know himself in order that he reach a decision in the matter of which type of social order he can accommodate into; a homogenized “majamama” (48), or a society which still retains a degree of cultural independence. Referring to the coming-of-age novel and the process by which characters assimilate into their respective societies, Franco Moretti notes that it “is... necessary that, as a ‘free individual’, not as a fearful subject but as a convinced citizen, one perceive the social norms as one’s own. One must internalize them and fuse external compulsion and internal impulses into a new unity until the former is no longer distinguishable from the latter” (116). For Tito, it is essential that he come to know himself by way of a thorough inquiry into his past; he must return to the places he left behind when he moved to the *barrio alto*, with its emphasis on foreign forms of organizing space and time. Along with the task of rediscovery of his persona, Tito must choose which type of societal strictures he can accept as not only legal, but legitimate: those imposed by traditional Chilean values or those brought from abroad. Within Chile there are essentially two distinct social systems operating, and Tito must make choices regarding which one he can live with. As Susan Gohlman points out regarding the Bildungsroman: “At the heart of it lies the notion of the individual in contact with a world whose meaning must be actively shaped

and reshaped from within up to the point when the hero is in a position to say, 'I think I can live with it now'" (25).

When Tito feels that he understands nothing, it is Freud who tells him that: "Yo creo que, por el contrario, recién está comenzando a entender" (121). It is also Freud who acts as Tito's guide in his rite of passage. He rescues Tito when he is on the verge of a blunder which could cost him his life, and Chile its cultural independence, and he does not allow Tito to go beyond what his capabilities at a particular moment allow; he steps in when it is necessary to limit Tito. The father role is something the protagonist senses immediately: "Romero, cercano, cálido...Como todo un padre, pensó Tito" (117). From the first pages of the novel, the protagonist is depicted as someone in search of a father figure. Tito and his father have been estranged since the parents' separation, and there are many references to the son's search for someone to fill this void. One of the men who have occupied this role works at the agency with Tito: "El guatón lo adoptaba. Cada vez que había un desastre el guatón lo designaba como hijo adoptivo. Se transformaba en padre" (25). The agency itself takes on the role of a family for Tito, owing to the fact that living in the *barrio alto* he has limited contact with his own family. Tito refers to his position at the agency as "en familia en la oficina" (25). At times the protagonist openly asks for his father: "¿Dónde estás ahora, padre difuso, impalpable? ¿Dónde?" (19).

In a discussion of the patterns associated with the traditional European Bildungsroman, Buckley notes that "The loss of the father, either by death or alienation, usually symbolizes or parallels a loss of faith in the values of the hero's home and family and leads inevitably to the search for substitute parent or creed" (19). In *La secreta guerra*, the loss of the protagonist's father does the opposite, it marks the beginning of his return to the values of his home. In this novel, the process has come full circle, from venturing into the tides of change to a return to the safe harbor of traditional culture. Instead of the Bucklean pattern in which loss of the protagonist's father prompts a search for something new, here the death of Tito's father is what speeds the protagonist toward a reconciliation with the past, toward his roots, and toward a value system he had left behind when

he moved to the *barrio alto*. By the end of the novel, when the battle is most intense and Tito is closest to acquiring the Tetragrammaton, he has also become most like his father: “Era el espíritu de su padre que corría a su lado, encauzaba el viento, le seleccionaba los trayectos adecuados, se había transformado en buena suerte, intuición, sentido común. Estaba dentro de él, cuidándolo... Su padre lo calmaba por dentro” (256). At this point in the text, his apprenticeship nearly complete, the protagonist is no longer guided by a stored inventory of incidents and responses secured from the mediatized images and sound bites of pop culture. Once Tito loses his father, he comes to terms with his roots: “Tito para sí: el hijo de, ni mi nombre importa ahora sino mi linaje, soy el hijo de mi padre, el que debí haber sido, no saco nada con negar mis ancestros como hasta ahora lo he hecho” (236). At this point Tito has come a long way with respect to acceptance of his personal history and his roots. Early in the plot, before his father’s death, the protagonist thinks about his past in quite a different manner: “Piensa en su ancestro de clase media superado para siempre...De repente, eso sí, le cae como sal en la herida la imagen de su padre. Viejo radical de mierda, ajado y hediondo, qué sabes tú lo que va a ser mi vida, socialistoide resentido” (40).

Although the protagonist is an adult, it is clear that he has been unable to complete a successful bildungsprozess. He is adolescent-like in his behavior, and once he begins the coming-of-age process he admits as much to himself. Using Freud Romero as his spokesperson, Tito’s father informs him that he has been unsuccessful in attaining a stable, satisfactory sense of self because he has taken the wrong route. Freud Romero will recount to Tito what his father believed: “Hablaba mucho de usted...Sentía que llevaba un rumbo equivocado. Quería dejarle algo de herencia, algo verdaderamente importante en que usted pudiese reconocerse” (190). His mentor’s words suggest that something valuable for Tito would be that which would allow him to recognize himself, which points toward locating the root of the protagonist’s problems in his having lost all traces of his heritage, to the extent that he is unable to recognize himself. The failure to achieve a stable identity is something Gohlman finds common in contemporary novels, in which “The protagonists actually pass through two

apprenticeships, the first being the conventional one [...] and the second being the *true* apprenticeship during which the protagonists must come to terms with life in a world in which absolute truths must either be rejected or totally reassessed” (xi). Tito’s conventional apprenticeship is one which has failed him in terms of a stable sense of self, and has left him with a feeling of dissatisfaction with his role in society. The protagonist’s first apprenticeship revolves around completing college and securing an upwardly-mobile position with the U.S. advertising agency. However, his profession does not allow Tito to feel satisfied with his role. His choice of profession leads him toward a betrayal of his true self. It also leads him away from his roots and into a world dominated by foreign interests. Moretti notes that the role of work in the traditional, European Bildungsroman “is fundamental [...] as noncapitalistic work, as a reproduction of a ‘closed circle’. It is an unequalled instrument of social cohesion, producing not commodities but ‘harmonious objects,’ ‘connections’. It gives a homeland to the individual. It reinforces the links between man and nature, man and other men, man and himself” (29). By the time that Tito is coming of age, his work involves being a cog in the engine which is destroying his homeland and unmooring him from his cultural roots. In *La secreta guerra*, work leads to destruction of Tito’s culture and dissatisfaction with his life.

The protagonist’s unhappiness with his life is reflected in his restlessness. Tito is constantly searching for something to fill a void within him:

Lo invadió ese vacío... La misma depresión que después conjuró cambiándose de carrera, de polola, de oficina... con una fe ciega en el cambio, año nuevo vida nueva, la fe con que empezaba todo huyendo de esta sombra de este desasosiego que no lo abandonaba y lo volvía a alcanzar una tarde, una mañana, un despertar, hasta la próxima enloquecida fuga hacia otro trabajo, otro jefe, otra cadena de éxitos que se le iba entre los dedos sin poder saciar esa sed intolerable de no sabía qué... (215)

Another expression of his lack of satisfaction with life is a constant state of anxiety and fear: “se sintió diminuto, extraviado, niño perdido en el Tren Fantasma” (66). The psychic malaise experienced by the protagonist is connected to the transformation of Chilean society from a traditional

community that adhered to long-established rituals, such as the practice of Catholicism, to a full-blown consumer culture, which, particularly for those members of the higher social classes living in the *barrio alto*, exposes the populace to new, imported ways of life and a vast array of new products for consumption through advertising and marketing, which “[i]ncreases the individual’s experience of risk and anxiety by offering ever more choices and images of different identities, and by increasing the sense of social risk involved in making the ‘wrong choice’” (Slater 85).

Tito exemplifies the extreme situation of a fragmented personality, who suffers anxiety due to the risk associated with a daily, and in some cases hourly, managing of his persona. He has a seemingly endless array of social masks he can choose from depending on the situation. Transparency is impossible for him owing to the social risk it would involve, as is the admission or demonstration of deep emotions such as love: “El amor se le hacía deleznable, lo aniquilaba con juegos de lenguaje, con ingeniosismos, todo lo que era cariño se le antojaba cursi, de tarjeta *Hallmark*, una estupidez más con que volver más loco a un mundo esquizofrénico” (211). Tito is permeated to such an extent by mediated images, which play out every emotion and its variant, that to feel an emotion and believe in its authenticity is impossible. The protagonist himself notes that “Ya no hay misterio en el misterio, ya es patrimonio público, ya nadie se puede hacer el inocente. La erótica ha muerto bajo el peso de la publicidad” (57). He is unable to manage emotions without referring back to how they have been marketed on the screen, in his advertising campaigns, or in products such as Hallmark cards. Kellner notes that “The TV self is the electronic individual par excellence who gets everything there is to get from the simulacrum of the media: a market-identity as a consumer in the society of the spectacle; galaxy of hyper-fibrillated moods [...] traumatized serial being” (144).

Tito’s reference to Hallmark as the brand which he connects with the process of marketing emotions to such an extent as to make the attainment of authentic feeling almost impossible is itself a commentary on the depth to which the market has been overwhelmed with foreign products. Prior to neo-liberal reforms, Hallmark would not have been the

brand with the greatest market share in Chile, instead Village would have been the brand associated with cards for any occasion. Village cards, a national brand, was overtaken after the advent of neo-liberal reforms, and replaced with the imported brand, Hallmark, which markets emotionally charged cards for every situation. However, Hallmark cards express emotions as they are seen through the prism of U.S. culture. Martín Hopenhayn comments on this aspect of the reconstitution of culture when he says that “La cultura se politiza en la medida que la producción de sentido, las imágenes, los símbolos, íconos, conocimientos, unidades informativas, modas y sensibilidades, tienden a imponerse según cuáles sean los actores hegemónicos en los medios que difunden todos estos elementos” (72). Tito’s reactions to different situations, his habit of referring to television programs produced in the United States and movies made in Hollywood, as well as his reference to Hallmark and advertisements for U.S. products speak of a society in which hegemony with regard to the media is in foreign hands.

Tito’s repertoire of social masks comes from television and other mediated expressions of pop culture. Throughout the novel the protagonist manages every situation into which he is placed by passing it through a lens of mediated pop-culture images and sound bites. When he finds himself alone on the streets of Santiago, running from danger he notes: “había escogido las más transitadas avenidas seguro de estar más protegido. La idea la había rescatado de alguna teleserie americana” (129). At one point, Tito has to confront Freud with a gun because he is unsure of who is there. Tito’s words to Freud are a direct copy from something on television: “Hágalo bien si quiere vivir—dijo Tito. La frase era celuloide pero quien haya tenido una Magnum en la mano que trate de no imitar a Clint Eastwood” (181). The protagonist’s father, in his brief visit to his son’s apartment in the *barrio alto*, refers to this aspect of Tito’s persona: “¿Hasta cuándo plagias la televisión, Tito?” (33), and his girlfriend, who will turn out to be one of the enemy forces, will also point out that he is not authentic but rather a pastiche of things he has heard and seen in the media: “¿A quién le robas ese libreto, Tito? ¿A qué radioteatro?” (92). The protagonist of *La secreta guerra* exemplifies a character who has derived a weak and

fluctuating sense of self from television and other mass-mediated forms of cultural interaction, which “[p]lay a key role in the structuring of contemporary identity” (Kellner 148).

During the course of his involvement in the covert war, Tito makes forays into sectors of Santiago which represent another era. He witnesses the transformation of an auto repair shop back into the night club it once was, and he watches Lili Salomé metamorphose from an old woman into the stunning dancer she had been. He notes that Lili Salomé’s home is one in which “Un gobelino con leones testificaba que la sociedad de consumo santiaguina no había entrado en ese cuarto” (124). Not only does Tito make incursions into the older, traditional sectors of Santiago where the effects of globalization and neo-liberal reforms are far less visible, but he also makes his way back to religious traditions he had left behind. In his struggle to find his place in the world, a struggle bound up with the ongoing battle in Chile, Tito fights against “[c]ircumstances that gradually moved reason to a central place in the organization of our society and our lives, exiling in the process the irrational forces of tradition and religion from their accustomed role” (Linden 121). In the context of Tito’s dissatisfaction with his life in the *barrio alto* and his inability to assume a stable and satisfying role, it is no accident that the protagonist’s rite of passage involves a return to the past, to a time when traditional cultural practices, such as the practice of Catholicism, were important components of life, and the influence of television and advertising was not as great.³ The protagonist’s call to adventure is issued at a place where a statue of the Virgin is said to be conceding miracles. His escape from Santiago to Villa Alemana heralds the beginning of his rite of passage, and the first sign given to him is issued by an ethereal, beautiful woman who appears out of nowhere and whom Tito describes as possessing an other-worldly beauty. This woman points Tito toward his car, which also appears out of nowhere, and he notes that despite her stunning beauty “no le dieron ganas de piropoarla, ni silbarle, ni embaucarla” (14). In Villa Alemana it is the Virgin herself who sets Tito on the path to his coming of age.

³ For a discussion of the effects of the weakening of traditional practices on Chilean society, see Tironi, Eugenio. *Crónica de viaje: Chile y la ruta a la felicidad*. (Santiago: Aguilar, 2006).

Another major step in Tito's finding his self involves his participation in a ritual paralleling that of the Catholic celebration of the eucharist. Late at night, Freud leads Tito to a bakery called "La Academia Escolástica de San Pablo," where Freud is unable to open the door. However, Tito utters the words "Viva la Madre Superiora" (235), and the door opens. It is at this point that the last steps in Tito's coming-of-age process occur. Without knowing why, intuitively, Tito has faith that the secret words to make the door open had been given to him by a couple of drunks on the street, something Freud could not believe. Even before passing through the doors of the bakery, the protagonist is moving away from the total dominance of reason and toward the wellspring of myth and intuition, of which religion is an expression. Tito's progress is noted by Freud, who shortly before entering the bakery tells the protagonist that he is "un adolescente crecido, un inmaduro insoportable y un cobarde de exposición" (228), and when Tito utters the words that make the door open, says to him "Ya se está pareciendo a su padre" (235). Inside the bakery, Tito helps bake bread in the form and size of a human being, along with "El jefe, Gran Panadero" who is in charge of the process and whose presence takes Tito back to a time long before the present: "Su voz merece mención aparte pues tenía un timbre único de campana de bronce de tonos bajos sonando en una explanada medieval" (236).

Participating in the kneading of the dough, the baking process, and then partaking of the bread gives Tito the insight he needs to decipher the Tetragrammaton locked in a photograph his father left after his death. In order for Tito to understand what is in the photograph he must first discover that "No es la cabeza el centro del pensar y del conocimiento" (237). Eating the bread allows Tito to go back to a time before tradition and myth were exiled in order to put reason in their place. Once Tito participates in this ceremony, which parallels the offering of the eucharist in a Catholic mass, he is able to perceive what was hidden to him when he was operating solely under the aegis of reason. The starting point of his coming of age, as well as the final steps in that process, involve a return to the traditional practice of Catholicism. This protagonist, whose life has been wrapped up in sound bites and televised, mass-marketed images with

foreign roots, returns to the traditional practice of myth, as it is embodied in religion, as an aid in finding his self. Kellner notes that “Television today assumes some of the functions traditionally ascribed to myth and ritual (that is by integrating individuals in the social order and celebrating dominant values)” (148). In this novel, the protagonist must turn away from this contemporary method of socialization and back to more traditional methods of achieving acculturation in order to successfully complete his bildungsprozess.

At this point, the trajectory of the coming-of-age novel has come full circle. Instead of a movement away from a provincial town and toward a larger metropolis triggering the coming-of-age process, something noted by Buckley regarding the typical nineteenth-century Bildungsroman, in this novel it is a movement toward the provincial town and toward the sectors of Santiago which retain a more provincial character that sets off and makes possible Tito’s bildungsprozess. Friedman notes that “What has been referred to as postmodernism is but one aspect of a more general shift of identity towards roots, identity that is somehow culturally fixed and a value in itself” (238). In this novel, Friedman’s observation is made evident in that the protagonist is unable to secure a stable sense of self until he flees the city, and specifically the *barrio alto*, the seat of progress where development is defined in material terms, which can be measured and codified rationally, and which is also saturated with foreign influences.

At all points along the protagonist’s coming-of-age journey, the forces of good are associated with traditional cultural values and goods; even such details as what he is offered to drink and eat at the *boliche* where he meets God affirm the local over the influx of the foreign: “¿Una Bilz? ¿Una papayita?... ¿Un sanguchito? ¿Arrollado, malaya, mortadela, un aliado?” (62). There is no mention of hamburgers or pizza, or even of coca-cola, a complete difference from the places he frequents with his girlfriend, which have names like “Le Bistró” (89). Tito’s coming-of-age process is suffused with the past and with recapturing local customs and traditions in the face of the effects of globalization and the change to a consumer-driven society. The reasons for this have to do with the difficulty of attaining a sense of self and crossing the threshold of adulthood in a technologically-

driven world in which identity is tangled up in consumption rather than on one's sense of belonging to a particular community through practice of rituals and traditions. In a discussion of the effects of this type of society on the self, Kenneth Gergen points out:

It is not only a coherent community that lends itself to the sense of personal depth. It is also the availability of others who provide the time and attention necessary for a sense of an unfolding interior to emerge... In the techno-dominated world, one must keep moving, the network is vast, commitments are many, expectations abound, and time is a scarce commodity. (142)

For Tito, the experiences with Freud, and his involvement in the conflict between good and evil afford him the time away from his jet-set life in the *barrio alto* in order to reflect on who he is and what he wants.

Ultimately, Tito wins a final and decisive battle in the soccer stadium where his father spent most Sundays with his friends, cheering on his favorite team; a place in the heart of a traditional sector of Santiago and steeped in childhood memories of a time prior to the onslaught of foreign influences. The battle is against Donkavian, the most important publisher and advertising executive in South America. At the moment of his victory, Tito hallucinates images which visually portray the dangers his mentor, Freud, had been warning him about:

Vio cómo avanzaban los buques y los carros y los ejércitos y entendió la amenaza venidera, entendió el mal y su fuerza... Vio mentiras matemáticas, mentiras cibernéticas... y grandes pantallas de televisión con la figura de la Gran Bestia esperando la señal para atacar la tierra disfrazados de cantantes, predicadores, artistas, políticos, periodistas, científicos. Vio todas las máscaras del bien al servicio del mal. (299)

The ending of the novel suggests a return to the protagonist's roots as a method of attaining a sense of self. He finds his way to the central market, icon of an entirely pre-neoliberal world. It is Sunday and around him people follow the age-old ritual of going to the *mercado central* to breakfast on seafood after a night on the town. In this setting, Tito does what custom would have him do; he breakfasts on fish and wine and reflects on his situation. He decides to quit writing jingles and designing advertising campaigns and write a novel instead. He also reflects beyond his personal situation, something which heralds his having passed the

threshold into adulthood. Tito projects the impact of what he has learned on future generations: “La micro se detuvo delante de ellos. ¿Cuánto tiempo que no usaba transporte colectivo? Sus hijas no conocerían ni por asomo el deleite de viajar en micro, su olor a piel, a pueblo chileno de veras, su ruido de radio a transistores, de cantantes improvisados y voceadores de aspirinas” (303). Through a process of recollection of the larger historical past of the society, Tito has come full circle, back to his roots, to the *mercado central* instead of places like “Le Bistró,” to the *micro* instead of his Toyota, and to a cultural rootedness from whence he can project himself as who he is, a Chilean with a stable identity and a new-found sense of purpose.

Alterations to the traditional pattern of the Bildungsroman in de la Parra’s novel reflect changes within Chilean society, and point toward an evolution of the genre. *La secreta guerra* includes elements associated with the Victorian coming-of-age novel, which Buckley describes as “frequently the equivalent of a conduct book” (21), as well as a salient feature noted by Moretti, which he refers to as the notion of exchange as the incarnation of bourgeois thought, and the driving force behind individual accommodation to society. While de la Parra’s novel includes features of a conduct book, and mimics this role of the Victorian Bildungsroman, the text relegates this process to a position of little importance. Tito Livio has achieved the goal of climbing the social ladder when the reader first encounters him, and the steps he has taken to do so are narrated briefly. The novel’s emphasis is on deconstructing this process, and questioning the exchange value that has gone into it. Instead of portraying a set of steps leading to success in climbing the social ladder and finding a niche within society, or laying out an acceptable exchange-value system in the context of sacrificing individuality for social accommodation, de la Parra’s text sets a paradigm for the genre through prism of Chile’s accommodation into the world of nations. The text questions the pattern of exchange in the Bildungsroman, described by Moretti as “You would like such and such values to be realized?—fine, but then you must also accept these others, for without them the former cannot exist” (17). *La secreta guerra* examines what exactly is being bartered in terms of identity, and in the process the text

shifts the focus of the coming-of-age process from the individual to the nation.

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