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Into the Chilean Mines: The Dialectics of Land and Work in Baldomero Lillo's *Sub terra*

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One soon forgets that the ground on which he or she treads is not solely 'natural,' but rather necessarily a product of human work. This is true both where humankind has actively worked on the earth and also where the land has been left untouched. Over the course of the twentieth century, human geographers have worked to underscore the dialectical relationship between people and place, to bring it to our attention that the landscape is a human construction, a material expression of our unique immaterial sociocultural worlds with further constitutive force. As Don Mitchell (2000) notes in his *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction*, "Landscape is best seen as both a work (it is the product of human labor and thus encapsulates the dreams, desires, and all the injustices of the people and social systems that make it) and as something that does work (it

acts as a social agent in the further development of a place)” (93–94).¹ In 1925, when one of the pioneers of cultural geography, Carl Sauer, published his seminal article “The Morphology of Landscape,” landscape was being approached by academics as active, if not already in relation to human cultural production, and not merely as the static backdrop for human history. On the heels of both discursive and visual practices of the nineteenth century which, as expressed through realist/naturalist literature and also in landscape paintings, had rationalized the consumer of art’s symbolic power over the seemingly passive earth, one Latin American author in particular penned a number of captivating short stories whose central concern was precisely this intimate connection between the ‘natural’ and the ‘cultural.’ The stories of mining life written by the Chilean author Baldomero Lillo (1867-1923) and published in a collection titled *Sub terra: cuentos mineros* (1904) function simultaneously as both a document of the squalid conditions of his surrounding social context, and also as a critique of socioeconomic practices he believed could and should be changed. Combining sparing prose and simple but compelling plots with a flair for poetic description and enduring images, *Sub terra* delves underground in order to advance a dialectical understanding of human work. Lillo’s triumph in these stories is to deliver an elaborate picture of how the immaterial sociocultural notions which guide our production of the landscape create a built environment which then, in turn, impacts the way we think about ourselves. Like the Marxian dialectical premise holding that we transform ourselves through our work, the stories in *Sub terra* comprise a lengthy meditation on the importance of seeing our own reflection in landscape—ultimately providing the opportunity to revalue and internalize the reconciliation of our seemingly ‘natural’ material realities with our purportedly ‘cultural,’ immaterial thoughts.

¹ In highlighting the relation between landscape and human work, Mitchell makes reference to Marx’s idea of “dead labor,” to David Harvey’s (1982) return to this idea noting that dead labor can affect “living labor” (94), to the idea of Carl Sauer (1925: 343) that landscape is “fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group” (102), and to that of Alexander Wilson (1991) that landscape is “an activity” (102) or a relationship between people and place.

The present inquiry thus necessarily launches from Lillo's work toward a fusing of disciplines (literature/geography).² These two approaches are themselves not irreconcilable. A reconfigured 'naturalist' perspective on Lillo works alongside a geographical reading of his works. Although Baldomero Lillo has been canonically labeled a 'naturalist' writer who adapted aspects of Emile Zola's literary aesthetic to his Chilean reality (see Englekirk, Leonard, Reid and Crow; H. Fraser 25; Lindstrom 40-42; Zarate 267-73; more recently see Rotella), his relationship with naturalism has been reconsidered by a limited number of recent studies (B. Fraser, "Baldomero"; Ramos [José], Spicer-Escalante, "El Chiflón"), while Hispanic naturalism itself has been recontextualized, most notably by J. P. Spicer-Escalante and Lara Anderson. In the introduction of their recent edited volume—titled *Au Naturel: (Re)Reading Hispanic Naturalism* (2010) and containing essays by some seventeen contributors—Spicer-Escalante and Anderson rightly foreground the intimate relationship between art and ideology, drawing on work by Matei Calinescu to stress that:

Cultural production in the Hispanic context, therefore, must be seen from the vantage point of the socio-economic realities that have shaped and continue to shape cultural production from the colonial period throughout the present day. The pace of the ideological imprint of Art on Hispanic Society became more apparent, however, as both Spain and Hispanic America—in the aftermath of the collapse of the Spanish colonies—made their abrupt and spasmodic entrance into the age of modernity in the nineteenth century, a modernity that has both bourgeois and aesthetic characteristics. (5)

To accept such a view of both Hispanic cultural production in general and nineteenth century Latin American works specifically is to refuse to see naturalism (whether in Chile or elsewhere) as a special case of artistic production. It follows that the short fiction published in *Sub terra* stands not only as "a critical counter-discourse" (8) to colonial and postcolonial discourses of power but also as a point of departure for what Spicer-

² Gayatri Spivak in her *Death of a Discipline* points to this sort of disciplinary reconciliation as an important part of the emerging paradigm of contemporary comparative studies.

Escalante and Anderson term “socio-aesthetic criticism” (9).³ In the present essay, my move toward a similarly “socio-aesthetic” critique of Lillo’s life and work employs lessons digested from years of scholarly work spanning both literary criticism and social and cultural geography.⁴ Those lessons have all suggested the fundamental importance of landscape.

Throughout *Sub terra*, the Chilean author masterfully portrays the earth not merely as the passive ground for human activity but—drawing upon a metaphor that operates throughout his French naturalist influence Emile Zola’s novel *Germinal* (1885) where the mine is named ‘Le Voreux’—as an active even monstrous creature, much as even contemporary geographers have envisioned capitalism itself to be a monster (Lefebvre).⁵ At the same time, Lillo highlights that, wherever humankind is concerned, the landscape is always-already social, coming at once to both express social relationships and also to define and limit them. In many of the Chilean’s stories, particularly in “El pago,” “Los inválidos,” “La compuerta número 12,” “El Chiflón del Diablo” and “Juan Fariña,” the earth functions not merely as the mirror where humanity comes to confront itself and its ongoing negotiation of priorities, but rather also an evocation of a shifting and contradictory modernity. Although the concept of Latin American modernity as employed in contemporary scholarship is multi-dimensional (see also Ramos [Julio]), this essay dwells on one of its particular manifestations. This is a Marxian notion of modernity, one that is decidedly at once social and economic, material and immaterial; one that, most importantly, has found a new expression and modulation in the contemporary thought of human and cultural geographers.

A greater understanding of the contradictions of this modernity awaits us as we travel underground into the mines, pushed along by Baldomero Lillo’s compelling prose. Along the way, this essay shifts from

³ None of the essays included in the collection by Spicer-Escalante and Anderson focus on Baldomero Lillo, although the Chilean author’s name is briefly mentioned in an endnote on p. 35.

⁴ Many of my other published works center on the intersection of landscape and culture. See particularly Fraser, *Henri Lefebvre*; “A Snapshot”; “Madrid’s”; “Toward”; “Why”; “Re-Scaling” and “Introducción crítica.”

⁵ In *Rhythmanalysis*, Lefebvre writes that “The brave people [...] not only move alongside the monster [that is capital] but are inside it; they live off it” (54-55).

literary analysis to the larger methodological questions that frame late twentieth-century and contemporary twenty-first century human and cultural geography. In this way, I hope to engage the cultural studies tradition as conceived by Raymond Williams. Looking backward in a 1986 lecture titled “The Future of Cultural Studies,” Williams characterized the still developing approach as exercising “the refusal to give priority to either the project or the formation—or, in older terms, the art or the society” (152). While Lillo’s stories are of value—as a whole tradition of literary scholarship has pointed out—not merely on account of their stylistic/aesthetic qualities but also because they function as social documents of a sort, those advancing this insight have not succeeded in dialoguing with either a cultural studies approach or a Marxian geography. In the subsequent sections of the essay that follows, it will be important to establish “Baldomero Lillo’s Social and Geographic Context,” before discussing “Dialectics and Capitalist Contradiction” and finally “Landscape: Contemporary Considerations.” Along the way, the relatively autonomous (semi)fictional worlds portrayed in Lillo’s stories will be given the same attention as their extra-fictional counterpart: namely the context specific to Chilean mining in Lota as seen through various non-fictional accounts contained in Octavio Aztorquiza’s encyclopedic but nonetheless problematic work *Cien años del carbón de Lota (1852-septiembre-1952)*, among other sources. Returning to *Sub terra* today from a perspective emphasizing dialectical relationships (Marx, Harvey, Lefebvre) ultimately permits a more vivid understanding of the methodological questions at the heart of contemporary research in geography.

Baldomero Lillo’s Social and Geographic Context

Although Lillo’s literary output should not be approached purely through recourse to his biographical information, there is much of interest to be unearthed there. Baldomero (6 Jan. 1867, Lota, Chile-10 Sept. 1923, Santiago, Chile) was one of two children born to José Nazario Lillo and Mercedes Figueroa in the city of Lota, bordering the sea at the country’s western limits—in fact in the mining zone of Concepción, an area that critic Fernando Alegría (“Introducción”) has called “dinámica y progresista”

(247). His father José had himself traveled north to participate in the California Gold Rush for two years during 1848, and during Lillo's youth was employed by the area's mining Company. Lillo of course became a short story writer, and his brother Samuel became an accomplished poet. Fernando Alegría ("Introduction"), drawing upon published interviews with Samuel, paints the picture of the young Baldomero as a captivating storyteller. His health problems ('whooping cough,' Alegría, "Introduction" xi) kept him from much physical activity, and even from regularly attending school, but he managed to acquire work early in the Company's store and became an avid reader—of Pereda, Galdós, Dostoevski, Tolstoy, Maupassant, and of course Emile Zola. Despite the fact that he was not cut out for mining work, Baldomero was able to draw on his own first-hand knowledge of life in the mining communities to craft the fascinating tales for which he was becoming known. Lillo married Natividad Miller, had a number of children and gained notoriety almost despite himself. Samuel writes that his brother had to be convinced to begin to write his stories down, and that he was forced to read the latter's celebrated "La compuerta número 12" on his behalf at the Ateneo, for Baldomero would not dare (Alegría, "Introduction" xv).

Lillo subsequently wrote and published numerous short stories and articles that were published in such venues as *El Mercurio*, *Zig-Zag*, *Pacífico Magazine*, *Las últimas noticias*, *Revista Cómica*, and which he himself later grouped together in order to form *Sub terra* and subsequently *Sub sole* (1907). In terms of quantity, ultimately Lillo's literary production was relatively modest. Apart from *Sub terra* (1904), he later published only *Sub sole* (1907). His other short stories were only posthumously collected in two other volumes titled *Relatos populares* (1942) and *El hallazgo y otros cuentos del mar* (1956), and although he did start the project, he never managed to complete an intriguing novel motivated by the massacre of saltpeter workers in the Chilean North titled "La huelga." Nevertheless, the attention he received within Chile was astounding, and he is commonly listed among the nation's greatest authors. The relatively recent release of a film motivated by the stories in *Sub terra* (directed by Marcelo Ferrari, 2003) testifies to his enduring significance within Chilean culture and the

potential of a wider audience for his fiction.⁶ Nevertheless, although Lillo is a canonical Chilean author, he is relatively less well known to scholars working in Latin American Studies more generally.

Although Baldomero Lillo died from tuberculosis in 1923, his stories served as a prescient attempt to call attention to and change the base and exploitative nature of mining work and were subsequently considered instrumental in effecting social change inside Chile. *Sub terra* resonated profoundly with the social shifts that were taking place in the country shortly after the turn of the twentieth century. Along with the country's slow but steady industrialization, the progressive harnessing of its material resources, there was also a growing social consciousness, an awareness of the new systemic inequalities that unfolded unevenly over Chilean soil. While the middle class ascended to power (due, in part, of course to the exploitation depicted in Lillo's stories), the lower working class was dynamized into political thought and action parties such as the Liberal Alliance, the Radical Party and the Socialist Party. It is important to note that the seed for such change was certainly sewn before Lillo was born (the Chilean philosopher Francisco Bilbao [1823-1865], for example, had founded the Society for Social Equality and published, among other works, *Sociabilidad Chilena* arguing for a more just Chilean society). Nevertheless, Baldomero's stories provided further impetus for change—according to

⁶ The film itself is intriguing as it is set in Lota, Chile in 1897 and includes an aristocratic family named Cousiño—the very same name that appears in the non-fiction work by Aztorquiza on the mining industry there (discussed below). The opening voiceover states the intention of the film to mirror the class concerns of the stories published in *Sub terra* “Aquí, bajo el mar, miles de hombres, generación tras generación, debían extraer toneladas de carbón para la compañía minera” (min. 01:49-1:59); and a fade to black with on-screen text announces that the film is “Basada en la obra homónima de Baldomero Lillo” (min. 04:06). While it perhaps succeeds as a dramatic film in its own right—foregrounding the real dangers of mining work such as the deadly and explosive natural gas (*grisú*) the harsh conditions faced even by children, and the effects of such work on the families of miners, as had Lillo's stories—as an adaptation of those written stories it fails, however, in that *Sub terra* the film does justice neither to the author's poetic sensibilities nor to the formal properties of their intertext. This is, of course, true of many films that strive to adapt written texts and yet end up translating only the content of those works as part of a push to make them accessible to the necessarily wide cinematic audience, emphasizing dialogue and plot development over atmosphere and style (the latter elements are fundamental in Lillo). All things considered, it is a strength of the film that a somewhat biographical Baldomero himself appears also as a character in the film, and that his concern for the miners is palpable, arguably coming to constitute even a catalyst for socialist change.

popular opinion directly contributing to and motivating the many mining reforms instituted in the country shortly after his death.

A closer look at the environment of his youth will help to orient the reader of these pages before getting into the stories collected in *Sub Terra* and subsequently questions more literary and geographical. Since he grew up around mining communities in the Chilean south during a time of rapid industrialization, it is not hard to see why many of his stories focus on the harsh realities of mining life. The town of Lota was, during Lillo's youth, home to 6,000 people, the vast majority of whom were connected with the mines. Chile's coal mines in the south and the salt mines in the north were producing progressively more and more wealth, which was inequitably distributed among the country's newly industrialized working poor. Though he was not employed as a miner himself, Lillo gained an appreciation for the harsh lives of those in the town who were. Although references to the area appear in records of the Conquistadors dating back to 1550 (Aztorquiza 73), Lota was founded in 1662 as Santa María de Guadalupe on the gulf of the Arauco on the western coast of southern Chile. George J. Mills reported in 1914 that "Coal-bearing strata are found along the Chilean coast from about 36° S. lat. Southwards into the Magellanic lands. Those which have been explored so far and are now being vigorously worked lie between the bays of Talcahuano and Arauco, and the most important mines are at Coronel, Lota, Curanilahue, and Lebu" (Mills 154). Population increased with the advent of mining in the area and Lota became a town in 1875, and a city in 1881. Lota was ultimately to become one of the most important mining locations in the country. As Octavio Aztorquiza describes it in *Cien años del carbón de Lota (1852-septiembre-1952)* (first published in 1952, recently republished in Santiago by Orígenes, 2005), coal production at Lota was "el nervio que anima la marcha del país" (11). The Compañía Carbonífera e Industrial de Lota was formed the 9th of September, 1852, by Don Matías Cousiño (1810–1863), described as "un visionario que soñó con los ojos abiertos" (Aztorquiza 11). The site was first manned by 125 operators and yielded an initial production of 7,815 tons of coal (Aztorquiza 11, 13). The coal-mining industry begun by Don Matías, the "Visionario del carbon" (Aztorquiza 37), was carried on by Don Luis

Cousiño and later Don Carlos Cousiño—who together came to constitute what the critic calls a “Magnífica trilogía, ejemplos de chilenos de empresa” (Aztorquiza 61).

Production skyrocketed as dependency on coal increased, and the mining companies of Lota and Coronel went on to produce 294,000 tons of coal in 1906, and 494,000 tons in 1919 (Chavarri 7). Not surprisingly, the wealth produced in the mines of the area did not at once bring a stable economy or a notable increase in quality of life. As Gilbert Butland notes in his *Chile: An Outline of its Geography, Economics, and Politics* (3rd ed., 1956), the area was at one time a place where “one-fifth of babies die before they reach one year of age” (22). The epic tone of the volume *Cien años del carbon de Lota*, content as it is to uncritically praise the visionary qualities of Cousiño, the laudatory state of the education of miners in 1952 and the replacement of miners by machines that now do the work of a thousand men (Aztorquiza 13, 14), is somewhat predictably dismissive of Lillo’s literary work. One of the book’s selections from the first printing of 1952 by one of Chile’s top critics who went by the name, in the original Spanish, ‘Alone,’ bemoans what is, effectively, *Sub terra*’s lack of boosterism.⁷ Alone’s brief description of a trip down through the mines of Lota and up again (in Aztorquiza 15-20) is a transparent attempt to elide a century’s history of conflict. Already in 1952, the critic prefers an image of Lota without struggle, where exaggerations and legends have lamentably replaced hard-working men aiding in the construction of a modern industrial Chile. Near the end of his piece, after a tour of the mines has come to an end, he moves so far as to relate that:

Ninguna lamparilla alumbró en parte alguna espectáculos siniestros, muchachitos pálidos y atados, llorando; caballos ciegos, operarios consumidos por la obscuridad, restos de catástrofes dramáticas y peligros amenazadores. ¿Qué se hicieron las víctimas? ¿Están en el pasado? ¿O nunca existieron? (20)

The implicit intertext for his statement is, in fact, constituted by stories authored by Lillo and discussed in more detail over the course of this essay:

⁷ “He ahí un elemento ausente de las asociaciones que suscita Lota. No ha contribuido, por su parte, a divulgarlo nuestra literatura, que, siguiendo la pendiente, suele preferir otros efectos. Basta, en esa esfera, mencionar los relatos, ciertamente admirables, de Baldomero Lillo, para advertir el tono que los autores nacionales han impreso al vocablo” (16).

the “espectáculos siniestros” of the tale “Juan Fariña,” the “muchachitos pálidos y atados” of “La compuerta número 12,” the “caballos ciegos” of “Los inválidos”—all of which testify to the history of dehumanizing and quite dangerous mine work. Lamentably, in the same volume (Aztorquiza) the Chilean writer and contributor Luis Durand describes the ill effects of mining as merely transitory, disappearing with the light of day. The mine’s workers are, he admits, skinny and pale—an admission followed by a significant qualification: “Su palidez es impresionante. Sin embargo, es solo el efecto de la prolongada estada en la obscuridad. Pronto el aire, la tibieza del sol, el calor de la comida con que los esperan allá en el hogar, les reconfortan y los transforman” (24)—bring them out of the mines, he seems to suggest, and all will be resolved. Later, outside the mine and cleaned up, with their hair neatly combed, he professes, the miners are hardly recognizable as their former selves. Both Alone and Durand unfortunately provide a history of the mining zone of Lota that is too tidy, too superficial to be accurate. Driven by a suspicious boosterism—the need to project a cleansed image of the mining region—Aztorquiza’s volume tends to accentuate the positive without presenting the pervasive and significant negative aspects of the lives of the area’s coal miners.

Certainly there were non-systemic positive outcomes of the coal industry—profits were used “en la realización de grandes obras públicas: se abren caminos, se construyen ferrocarriles,” and Don Carlos Cousiño famously left 9 million pesos to charities upon his death (Aztorquiza 45, 63). Yet these ‘grandes obras públicas’ are, of course, meant to offset and distract from human costs of increasing coal production—Cousiño the capitalist would have not had 9 million pesos to donate had it been shared more equitably with the people mining the coal. When read against the backdrop of such convenient histories of mining as those in Aztorquiza’s volume, the testimonial aspect of Baldomero Lillo’s literary output becomes all the more significant. Where Alone’s historical memory approaches its limits, where Durand’s analysis is insufficient, Lillo’s stories step in to supply a necessary corrective. Contrary to what many apparently believed in 1952 (if Aztorquiza’s volume is any guide) life in Chile’s mining communities was and is hard. As Lillo saw so clearly, its risks were many,

and its ill-effects lasted a lifetime, if they did not ultimately cut that life short.

Just as did Chile's social reality, the geography of Chile also directly influenced Lillo's life experience. To gain an initial appreciation of the way his socio-geographical context motivated Lillo's writings, it is informative to take brief look at a paper published the same year as *Sub terra* (1904) by J. Russell Smith in the *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* titled, appropriately, "The Economic Geography of Chile" (1904). The article reveals a curious parallel between the geographically material and immaterial in the Chile of Lillo's time. The geographical contrast between the country's icy mountainous highs and expansive desert plains ("Chile is a country of geographic extremes," 1), parallels a steep discrepancy in social wealth between rich and poor ("The property of the country is in the hands of a few," 4). Smith writes of the Chilean mining class that "the unlettered and shiftless labourers are in a state of semi-serfdom because of continuing indebtedness" (4-5). The trials and tribulations of such workers, trapped as they are in a system of semi-serfdom, comprise the narrative action of Lillo's stories just as they earlier had for Zola's classic mining novel *Germinal*.

Likewise, Smith mentions that Coronel and Lota (as per Millán, two of the places where Lillo lived) are the shipping ports for "the only mining centre of importance [which] is between Concepción and Levu" (19). Smith continues: "Some of the mines are directly on the seashore, and coal is actually raised from under the Pacific. The mines are from 500 to 1,000 feet deep, and working veins from 2 to 5 feet thick" (19). Already in Smith's report one can see the raw materials for Lillo's literary exposition. Into *Sub terra* figure the class conflict of the region as well as the peculiar mining landscapes particular to the area. In the extra-literary Chile as in the Chile of Lillo's stories we witness the construction of mines under the sea itself—which will figure in the stories "Juan Fariña" and "La barrena"—but also the literary potential of the landscape to evoke a contradictory modernity. The dual nature of this Chilean region's landscape is reflected, on the one hand, through the mining stories of his *Sub terra*, and on the other,

through his water stories of *Sub sole* and, posthumously, *El hallazgo y otros cuentos del mar* (1956).

Even if one admits a rudimentary correspondence between Lillo's stories and his own socio-geographical environment, it would nonetheless surprise many of Lillo's international readers (and critics) to learn of how his stories connect with specific places and events. The underground gate at the center of "La compuerta número 12," for example, quite likely his most well-known tale, was taken directly from a site Lillo visited in the mine known as Buen Retiro.⁸ Similarly, in "La barrena," Lillo references a digging competition amongst miners from Playa Negra and Playa Blanca, two locations on the gulf of Arauco (see Aztorquiza, map insert between pages 112 and 113). Then there is also the story "Juan Fariña," which as a note published in the original version of the story in the *Revista Católica* (1903) states, was written as a fictionalized explanation to the very real collapse of the mine of Puchoso Délano in Coronel (see Bocaz). Finally, "El Chiflón del Diablo," the title of one of his most engrossing stories (61), foregrounds a common regional term used to denote 'mine'—'chiflón,' and as discussed later in this essay, is in fact a name subsequently given to a mining area in Lota (the glossary titled 'Diccionario de vocablos mineros' included in Aztorquiza's book defines Chiflón as the "Galería principal de la mina" 270). Certainly the story's title suggests a more literary origin, as 'the Devil's whistle' is an enviably evocative moniker, summoning up for the reader not merely the visual image of the wind whistling harshly through the mining tunnels, symbolically reflecting the intense work experience suffered by the miners, but also by contributing to a haunting dramatic expectation in the reader's approach to the story. To wit: in the tale "El Chiflón del Diablo," the mere mention of the pit's name causes the reassigned miners of Lillo's story to imagine their own deaths: "Entre morir de hambre o aplastado por un derrumbe, era preferible lo último: tenía la ventaja de la rapidez" (63). It is important, in this regard, that the reader of Lillo's stories today approach them not merely through the terms of a literary or metaphorical journey, on par with Dante's descent into hell (one

⁸ As related by Baldomero's brother Samuel (see Alegría, "Introducción" 251–52).

critic has noted that *Sub terra* depicts an abstract realm of “hell on earth,” (Ball Jr.), but rather the hellish aspects of a specifically Chilean reality.⁹ That is, reading *Sub terra*, it is important to keep in mind critic Rafael Millán’s contextualization of the stories collected therein as the product of two of Lillo’s educational influences—not solely knowledge gleaned from reading works of literature, but also the author’s direct knowledge and experience of the mining environment of the Chilean South.

Las largas noches lluviosas del sur chileno, tan frecuentes, las ocupó con la lectura de sus autores preferidos: Zola, Maupassant, Dostoiewski, Tolstoi, Flaubert, escritores que—unos más, otros menos—tendrían posteriormente marcada influencia en la obra de Lillo; y es evidente que la lectura de los más realistas, unida al conocimiento de primera mano que de la tragedia cotidiana de los trabajadores de las minas de carbón y de sus familias, su miseria, las condiciones en que viven y mueren allá abajo—sub terra—(Baldomero bajó a las galerías, ojos y oídos atentos, aunque de tarde en tarde y como visitante nada más), serían los ingredientes básicos de su obra futura. (8)

Moreover, blending literary analysis with advances in the field of contemporary human and cultural geography allows a chance to dwell on the intimate connections between human work and the land, between thought and representation.

Lillo, of course, was neither the first thinker nor the first author to suggest such a dialectical premise. The reconciliation of the natural and the cultural was one of the key legacies of nineteenth-century thought, broadly speaking. From the philosophical-economy of Marxist dialectics to the contemporary praise of nature by American authors associated with *The Dial* (Thoreau, Whitman), from Darwin to later even the ‘philosopher of poetry’ Henri Bergson, a gamut of mid- to late nineteenth century thinkers worked to reconcile the inner processes of humankind with their external environments. In no way, however, did this far-reaching conscious reconciliation come to constitute the bedrock of western societies. This fact is, lamentably, the unfortunate consequence of a pernicious mode of human thought whereby the thinker from the outset separates him or herself from his environment. As spatial theorist and urban geographer

⁹ The zone was also arguably important for another great Chilean writer—José Donoso. A visit there supposedly prompted his last novel *El mocho*.

David Harvey (“What’s Green”) has recently explained, such thinking has strangely come to subtend many strains of even modern environmental movements themselves, such that ecological processes are quite shortsightedly if not altogether incorrectly seen to be discrete from human processes. He writes that:

For although [much ecological discourse] claims that everything relates to everything else, it does so in a way that excludes a large segment of the practical ecosystem in which we live. In particular, it excludes the ecosystemic character of human activity in favor of a curious separation, inconsistent with its own biocentric vision, of human activity. If, after all, biocentric thinking is correct, then the boundary between human activity and ecosystem must be collapsed, and this means not only that ecological processes have to be incorporated into our understandings of social life; it also means that flows of money and of commodities and the transformative actions of human beings (in the building of intricate ways of urban living, for example) have to be understood as fundamentally ecological processes. (“What’s Green” 330-31)

One of the reasons it has proven to be so tempting to extract human activity from ecological processes may in fact be due to the enduring legacy of nineteenth-century visual practices, which have adhered strongly to our now twenty-first century social consciousness. Whereas the landscape art of centuries past provided the bourgeois a commanding view of a pre-existing and virgin nature to be exploited if not at least visually possessed, the enduring cultural legacy of such viewing practices lives on in more widespread understandings of today’s rural and urban landscapes.

The practices of landscape production most visible in the urbanized world of the advanced capitalist countries today center on channeling the visual consumption of urban landscapes this way or that, providing an infrastructure for its development and encouraging city-dwellers, urban tourists, local governments and multinational corporations to conceive of city-space itself as a product destined for consumption—an investment in and of itself (Harvey, *Justice; Spaces*). Landscape continues to be something to be appreciated aesthetically, as if it were the flat-background of experience; a product to be possessed just as the nineteenth-century bourgeois learned to visually possess the viewed image through landscape portraiture; the passive ground for our human activity. Nevertheless, the accumulated wealth used to reproduce today’s landscapes more in the

image of the immediate if shifting goals of capitalistic speculation remains tied to an accumulation of material wealth and raw materials (both pre-existing and simultaneous) that takes place quite far indeed from today's urban centers of consumption in the advanced capitalist countries. Historically speaking, one of the most significant sources of this accumulated wealth is, interestingly enough, mining activity. The next section delves further into the stories from *Sub terra* themselves just as it foregrounds the dialectical relationship between humans and their landscape and the contradictions central to capitalism in preparation for the final section of this essay.

Dialectics and Capitalist Contradiction

Critical consensus maintains that Baldomero Lillo's fictional stories were in great measure intended as an instance of Naturalist literary/social critique, even if they have transcended the frame of naturalism to incorporate aspects of modernism (B. Fraser, "Baldomero"; Ramos [José]). He cared deeply about the fate of the miners who worked on, beneath and within the land, not merely as beings who shed light on an abstract 'human condition' of frailty, but specifically as workers necessarily participating in an international capitalist system of production and wealth accumulation on location in Chile. Fernando Alegría ("Introducción") admirably describes this period in history:

Ese mundo minero, tal como lo conoció Baldomero Lillo, fue durante una época fuente de grandes riquezas, que no siempre sirvieron para el progreso del país. Sus dueños, ambicionaban el poder y la fortuna para incorporarse a la lujosa decadencia europea de fines de siglo. Cuando quisieron trasladar ese lujo a la tierra nativa e incrustarlo como una corona sobre el pequeño imperio negro de sus minerales, el país había adquirido ya conciencia de sus contradicciones sociales y económicas. (247-48)

Still, the characteristic decadence of the late nineteenth-century industrializing transatlantic west had a flip side. Whereas centralized governments and explosions of capitalistic enterprise saw the accumulation of vast amounts of wealth, this came at a cost to the capitalists, as Alegría goes on to explain: "el absoluto dominio político que ejercía una clase social privilegiada, llevaron a las masas del país a interesarse en los programas

revolucionarios que patrocinaban el socialismo y el anarquismo europeos” (“Introducción” 249). Although Lillo himself was not a declared socialist during the period of revolutionary process spanning from 1890 to 1920 (see Alegría, “Introducción” 249), his stark depictions of mining life were consistent with the claims of both socialists and anarchists that a better quality of life and a fairer distribution of wealth were necessary. In fact, Lillo was a celebrated figure among socialists and those pushing for deep social reforms. To wit, José Santos González Vera (1964) tells us that “Este libro [*Sub Terra*], además de señalar un avance en la literatura chilena, fue bandera del socialismo naciente, y se presume que influyó en el mejoramiento de los mineros. La edición se agotó en tres meses” (266). It is easy to find resonance with such ideas in Lillo’s text. In the story “La compuerta número 12” he composed a poetic salvo against the evils of child labor. In “El Chiflón del Diablo” he railed against the lack of benefits suffered by miners in his contemporary Chile. Across a number of stories he spoke to the very real risk of injury and even death faced by the miners both poetically through descriptions such as that of the horse Diamante facing his own death (“Los inválidos”), and more succinctly through the miners who are abruptly killed in mining tragedies (involving gas in both “Juan Fariña” and “El grisú,” being crushed in “La compuerta”). Accordingly, his stories reflect not merely questions of literary style but moreover the class struggles Chilean miners faced at the time.

From the perspective of human geography, there is much to be gained through an exploration of the stories in *Sub terra*. This work—just as does its precursor, Zola’s *Germinal*—treats the land dialectically as both the product of human work and at the same time a galvanizing force for a particular reshaping of humankind’s social reality. In the story “El Chiflón del Diablo,” for example, Lillo manages to draw out the intimate relationship between human beings and the earth with a literary flourish. The Chilean writes of one worker’s cough with the lexicon of the mining environment as “una tos breve y cavernosa” (69). Immediately afterward, the man produces “un escupitajo negro como la tinta” (69), symbolically (and through synecdoche) reproducing the image of the mine producing and hauling up the mined black coal—which could then be made into ink

(to give just one example)—and sold. In addition to these and other such artistic embellishments, the more consistent description of the mine in terms of human activities (above, throughout both *Sub terra* and of course its precursor, *Germinal*) contributes most to emphasizing this relationship. Just as does Zola's aptly named 'Le Voreux,' Lillo's mines relentlessly gobble up life after life—not merely the miners themselves, but also their families and their children.

In "El Chiflón," however, there is yet another way in which Lillo goes beyond Zola in his appropriation of the metaphor mine=voracious human being. The main character of the story, known as Cabeza de Cobre is killed in a mining accident in the treacherous title mine.¹⁰ Once his dead body is finally brought to the surface of the mine and into the light of day where a crowd of villagers is gathered, the narrator relates that: "Por entre los pliegues de la tela que lo envolvía asomaban algunos mechones de pelos rojos que lanzaban a la luz del sol un reflejo de cobre recién fundido. Varias voces profirieron con espanto: —¡El Cabeza de Cobre!" (73). His hair constitutes the man's most recognizable trait, but here also evokes the routine procedure through which—whether coal, copper, or other such substance—precious materials are routinely produced and expelled from the mine. This time, however, the 'product' is not coal, but rather the cadaver of a miner, stressing the emotional impact of the reality that deaths and accidents are in fact an unsurprising outcome of such a dangerous job. The nature of the stark difference between this human product and the mine's more routine production of primary materials for trade is reflected by the howling scream of Cabeza de Cobre's mother, who herself produces "un clamor que no tenía nada de humano" (70) before throwing herself to her death in the very same pit.

Lillo is far from committing the fallacy of much ecological thought noted by geographer David Harvey ("What's Green"; above at the end of the previous section of the essay). The earth is not merely the backdrop for human struggles—instead, it is one part of a negotiation that goes on

¹⁰ The character of Cabeza de Cobre has been discussed in depth in Spicer-Escalante, "El Chiflón" 71-78. The critic rightly judges that the story under discussion is "particularmente relevante en términos de la desmitificación del mecanismo capitalista de producción que Lillo manifiesta" (70).

between human beings themselves. Ultimately, in reshaping the earth, as Lillo's stories suggest and as Marxist dialectical thought holds, the people in Lota are in fact reshaping their own social relations and are ultimately recreating themselves. The newly created society is, as Lillo's stories document, a quite horrendous one, showing how the value of human life is necessarily and quite brutally devalued in the pursuit of wealth accumulation. As the land is mined and destroyed, so too are the men who destroy it also destroyed in the process. "El Chiflón" mentions that a miner named "Juan" has just died there (66), and that benefits for the mine's workers are at this time non-existent (66, above). The mining landscape of Lota, refashioned by the mine owners in their quest for wealth, is the third term in a Lefebvrian triad (land-labor-capital) that (re)produces a class distinction—one class rises to power only on the backs of another. Lillo is quite conscious of this sort of exploitative relationship, as he makes clear in his text: "¡Cuántas veces en esos instantes de recogimiento había pensado, sin acertar a explicárselo, en el porqué de aquellas odiosas desigualdades humanas que condenaban a los pobres, al mayor número, a sudar sangre para sostener el fausto de la inútil existencia de unos pocos!" (66). The workmen must pay for their daily bread by in fact risking their lives ("[sus] vidas eran el precio, tantas veces pagado, del pan de cada día!" 66). Appropriately, just as did the Frenchman before him, the Chilean here (albeit more indirectly) references the socialist struggle against capital that must come to inform any treatment of the realities of twentieth-century landscape—even if this is more overt in Zola's chronicle of the burgeoning socialist consciousness of the main character of Etienne, the newcomer to 'Le Voreux' who soon finds himself at the head of a general mining strike. Notably, however, the frustrations of Lillo's fictitious workers do not lead to any sort of collective action—a fact that somewhat faithfully represents the Chilean context during Lillo's time. *Sub terra* was published in 1904, but it was not until 1920, in the wake of the general strikes of 1918-19 that reverberated throughout numerous Western countries, that Lota had its first strike. Perhaps resonating with the political complexity of Zola's *Germinal* more deeply than with the reluctance of Lillo's work to explicitly embrace a political agenda, the miners in Lota were divided amongst two

groups that Chavarri (7) identifies as 'Reds' (anarchists / Zola's Souvarine) and 'Yellows' (more moderate socialists / Zola's Etienne). It seems that the very absence of organizing activity in Lillo's stories is not merely a tactic used to emphasize his acceptance of a stylized naturalist literary aesthetic, but instead a faithful representation of what was going on (or what was not going on) at the time. *Sub terra* is—to return to a point made earlier—at once both a literary experiment and a social document.

Common to the perspectives of both Marxism and contemporary cultural geography is the notion that humankind's activity reshapes the land which then has the effect of recreating humankind's social relationships, which again feed back into the subsequent production of landscapes to square with a given (and evolving) set of social relationships. Lillo's stories are thus equally a part of a dialectical circuit. Literature has always been able to influence 'real' life, but in Baldomero Lillo's case, this relationship is particularly interesting. Lillo was undoubtedly influenced by his upbringing and surroundings, and yet reciprocally, his literature also had an enormous effect on working conditions in the country. The critic Jorge M. Chavarri, for example, gives Lillo much credit for the social advances in Chile since 1924, beginning shortly after his death in 1923. Although Lillo has not offered any plan for improvement (9), Chavarri argues that in the critic's mind the author of *Sub terra* should receive "direct credit" for the progress made after the publication and divulgation of his stories (7-8). As he explains:

Es difícil darse cuenta de la influencia formidable que Baldomero Lillo tuvo en las masas trabajadoras, y entre los representantes de ambas cámaras, para adoptar leyes protectoras, especialmente en lo que se refiere a las condiciones del trabajo en las minas de carbón. Por eso es que ya en 1924, Chile pasa su primera ley social, con énfasis en el liberalismo socioeconómico, que aporta grandes beneficios a la clase media y al pueblo en general.

Se formula un reglamento de salarios, horas de labor, trabajo de la mujer; se prohíbe la labor infantil; hay protección para accidentados, para la salud y la vejez. Se reconoce la legalidad de los gremios de trabajadores y el derecho que tienen a la huelga. Se legalizan las sociedades cooperativas, y, en un dos por tres, gracias a la influencia de Lillo, Chile llega a ser el primer país en este hemisferio de crear un sistema de seguro social, el más avanzado que hay, aunque constituye un peso formidable en su estricta economía nacional. Lillo fue el primer escritor chileno que se

preocupó en sus cuentos de los problemas sociales de los mineros.
(5)

Lillo's prose is here directly credited with advances in the rights of Chilean miners. His stark depictions of the base conditions in which miners worked and lived had a lasting legacy—despite the fact that he was so infrequently mentioned throughout the work *Cien años del carbón en Lota* (16, 23),¹¹ a book that unfortunately replaces history with boosterism, instead of more accurately speaking of the social conditions of miners in the area.

Lillo's focus on obsessive mining activity itself functions as a critique of the pernicious nature of the dehumanizing accumulation practices whose effects were displaced through the ideological veil of industrial capitalism—which during the time was gaining a substantial foothold in Latin America. The story “La barrena,” which although not included in the original 1904 edition of *Sub terra* was appropriately included in subsequent editions, serves as the Chilean's most direct indictment of this process. As in other stories in the original edition of *Sub terra*, the narrative action of this tale takes place below the ground in the mines. In “La barrena,” two competing mining groups take ever more drastic measures to outmaneuver each other and thereby gain exclusive access to an as of yet unmined area. As the old unnamed narrator tells to a boy who is presumably his grandson: “Entonces fue cuando los de Playa Negra quisieron atajarnos corriendo una galería que iba desde el bajo de Playa Blanca en derechura a Santa María. Nos cortaban así todo el carbón que quedaba hacia el norte, debajo del mar” (127). The old man describes his own bosses who unhesitatingly take on the role of military strategists, “Entretanto, nuestros jefes no se contentaban sólo con mirar. Estudiaban el modo de parar el golpe, y andaban para arriba y para abajo, corriendo desaforados con unas caras de susto tan largas que daban lástima” (128). The old narrator is soon directed to choose his ten best men and begin drilling at Alto de Lotilla. This arrangement is made specifically in order to outwork the other group and win access to the prized wealth more quickly:

¹¹ The 2005 reprint includes a short literary biography of Lillo (263–68) republished from *La compuerta número 12 y otros cuentos* (Serie del Nuevo Mundo, Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1964).

lo que exigía de nosotros [...] era abrir un pique en el sitio donde estábamos y en seguida una galería paralela a la playa que cortase en cruz la línea que traía la de Playa Negra. Pero para que tuviese éxito este plan, era necesario llegar al cruce antes que los contrarios. Y aquí estaba lo difícil, porque la distancia que ellos debían andar era menos que la mitad de la que nosotros teníamos que recorrer para ir al mismo punto por debajo del mar. (128–29)

The work is brutal, the heat underground intense, the pace furious; but even so the miners are willingly driven to the brink of exhaustion in order to cut off the other group's tunneling trajectory and lay claim to the as yet unmined area ("Algunos se desmayaban y cuando el pito del capataz nos indicaba que había concluido el turno, una niebla nos oscurecía la vista y apenas podíamos tenernos de pie" 129–30). The miners' strong competitive urges push them on to victory, and when the other (losing) team's drill breaks through their own existing if freshly-dug tunnel, there is a surprise lying in wait. All the victorious miners scramble out of the mine as the foreman tosses a fistful of chili on a lit pile of coal. Safely outside, they celebrate as they watch the workers from the "enemy mine" ("la mina enemiga") brought up to the surface at a distance, reeling from the effects of the aspirated chili: "una extraña tos los sacudía de pies a cabeza" (134). The victory, however, is fleeting. The chili is so slow in dissipating that the tunnels collapse before work at either camp can be resumed: "El techo de la galería, apuntalado a la ligera, se derrumbó, dando paso al agua del mar" (135). There the story abruptly ends.

Certainly, given its decidedly naturalist style, the tale effectively functions as a parable of capitalist accumulation—much as did other Latin American modernist stories (Darío's "El rubí," for example; see H. Fraser). In contrast to delivering a harsh indictment of factors external to humankind—as canonically naturalist authors did by charting the determinist influence of psychological, social truths through literary experimentation—Lillo's story clearly (and in a more immediate sense) pits one group of men against another. The story does not, for example, document the exploitation of a young boy by devastating socioeconomic factors beyond the control of his father (as in Lillo's "La compuerta"); nor does it reference the severe inequalities of the pay system at the mine (as in "El pago"). Here the Chilean's crisp writing and his expert exploitation of a

genre more apt at developing a single thought or image (the short story) packs a punch. What it does show clearly is how two groups of miners who are, in point of fact, equals, each working for their respective foremen, take it upon themselves to compete, and how that competition leads to injury and ultimately to destruction of the working environment itself.

Through this story, as through many others, Lillo establishes a multifaceted critique of the many internal contradictions of modernity. First, as Marx sought to divulge, it is contradictory that a system of wealth accumulation should contribute so little to those who actually make the accumulation of wealth possible, leaving them mired in poverty and facing an uncertain death (“El pago,” “Los inválidos”). Lillo’s work as a whole speaks strongly to this Marxian critique even if it does so implicitly rather than explicitly. Here is a group of stories that brings to life the writings of self-proclaimed Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, who maintained that capital was a monster, and that the people worked inside the monster itself, not seeing its true dimensions (*Rhythmanalysis*). Lillo’s miners are so mired in the day to day struggle of earning money for food (“El pago”) that they have little time and energy for questioning the unfair operating procedures and inequities of the society in which they are immersed. Second, it is contradictory that whereas Chile as a nation may have benefitted from the growth of the coal industry started by Don Matías Cousiño, it was able to do so only at a great cost to its people. It is this very cost that is so suspiciously absent from *Cien años del carbon de Lota*, and it is this same cost that forms the foundation of Lillo’s stories. Cousiño is persistently portrayed in saintly or heroic¹² terms, as in the following typical (and lyrical) example:

Pero es 1852 la fecha decisiva para la industria carbonífera nacional, cuando don Matías Cousiño, con resolución inquebrantable, sin desaliento ni vacilaciones, inicia en vasta escala la explotación de los yacimientos carboníferos de Lota, introduciendo en las minas las primeras máquinas, contratando los primeros técnicos adecuados y fundando la ciudad actual y sus principales servicios, revelando con ello extraordinaria visión del futuro. Merced a sus esfuerzos, la industria carbonífera es hoy una gloria para su estirpe, un orgullo

¹² Cousiño’s role is compared explicitly to that of B. O’Higgins in the struggle for Chile’s independence (109).

para la técnica y el capital chilenos y una fuente de riqueza y de progreso para la patria. (98–99)

Throughout the book there is no discussion of the serious problems of mining, of the tuberculosis from which Lillo, as well as numerous Chilean miners who worked long shifts underground, died. Instead, we find an unproblematic, even triumphant description of Cousiño as himself a conquistador, rapidly luring fishermen and campesinos to abandon more traditional forms of life and become miners.¹³

The book is motivated by a boosterism that seeks to celebrate, for example, the Company's 90th anniversary, Lota's triumphant survival of the earthquake of 1939, and the visits of Chilean President González Videla and earlier American vice president Henry A. Wallace to Lota (on the 3rd of November, 1947; on the 30th of March, 1943). At times it is a self-congratulatory yearbook, having a number of sections devoted to the administrators of the Company, replete with photographs (127-48). Accordingly, there is a brief and obligatory attempt at praising a select group of loyal workers: a list of miners who have worked more than 30 years of service (149-50), an award given to "el minero más meritorio" (151). Despite the fact that the book seeks to take on 100 years of mining activity in Lota, the discussion, where it is not reduced to pure hagiography (of the trinity of Cousiños), concentrates on a more modern period of the mine's history. Even this focus on the last 20-30 years recurs to statistics only when flattering. There is even a pie chart depicting the injuries and deaths at the Lota company during the year 1951 stating that only 0.27 percent of accidents were fatal, 2.24 percent were serious, and 97.49% were merely light (232)—the percentages themselves seem quite cold and abstract, and the decision to use percentages over numbers in the graph seems to be hiding an ugly reality.

Where can one turn for a glimpse of this ugly reality? To Lillo's *Sub terra*, of course. Lillo's stories were written and presumably take place not during the early years of Cousiño's Compañía but during one of the first

¹³ "Otra de las dificultades que en los primeros tiempos tuvo que vencer don Matías Cousiño fue la de formar mineros en una zona donde todos los brazos eran campesinos y pescadores. Pero los interesó con buenos salarios y otras conquistas, tales como habitaciones y mejores condiciones de trabajo, logrando convertir rápidamente en minera una población que era esencialmente agrícola" (109).

periods of remarkable growth: “De 100 mil toneladas de carbón que se extraían anualmente al iniciarse sus tareas, la explotación llegó a 318.000 toneladas en 1905” (Aztorquiza 112)—one year after the publication of his collected stories in 1904. Even Aztorquiza’s laudatory volume mentions from the perspective of 1952 that the attempt to reach a “solución de los problemas obreros,” to vastly improve Social Welfare through the construction of libraries and schools, and to create “más favorables condiciones de trabajo” was only the focus of “los últimos treinta años” (i.e. since 1922; 116). It turns out that the book’s author, Octavio Aztorquiza, was, in fact, the director of Bienestar Social for 25 years, ending in 1948 (198), a fact that may almost certainly compromise the volume’s purported objectivity. This perhaps explains the high level of praise for the Dept. of Social Welfare and the suppression of the sordid details of mining life both before and after the creation of the department. “El Departamento de Bienestar es [...] el crisol donde se plasma el porvenir de días mejores” (197). The graph included in the text that charts the development of Bienestar Social runs only from 1942 to 1951, squaring with the text’s own admission of the relatively late development of a concern for the miners as not only workers but human beings in their own right, “Con la experiencia de los años se ha llegado a la conclusión de que una de las bases de la estabilidad de la industria la constituye el bienestar social que hoy, prácticamente, vela por el trabajador desde su nacimiento hasta su muerte” (195).

The story “La barrena” is also, however, an allegory for the internal contradictions inherent to capitalism. As Marx, and later Marxist thinkers such as Lefebvre and Harvey have all emphasized, the self-interest of capitalists routinely leads to crises in capitalism. As capitalists strive to accumulate wealth, this wealth is only partially reinvested into the circuits of capital—too little reinvestment and there is too little work or remuneration for workers, which leads to crises of overaccumulation/underproduction. Due to a systemic individualism, both capitalists and labor often work against their own interests. Capitalists often work in direct opposition to their class interests merely by accumulating too much wealth and thus limiting opportunities for work,

and moreover limiting the buying power of the very class that sustains their production from below. Similarly, workers often go against the interests of their own class, either by siding with capitalists or management or being forced to accept whatever working conditions prevail due to the fact that their lives are more rooted in place (on 'militant particularism' see Harvey, *Spaces*). As an allegory for these contradictory processes, in "La barrena" the drive for accumulation actually leads to a crisis where accumulation is, in fact, short-circuited. Neither can the capitalists reap the benefits of the unmined area, nor can the workers be employed there—each 'camp' loses as the competitive system destroys the built environment for production¹⁴ and surplus capital lies stagnant.

Landscape: Contemporary Considerations

The contemporary landscape of Lota offers further reason to dwell on the contradictions characteristic of modernity. It is strange that the very spot which was once the site of back breaking labor is now the leisure destination of many tourists to Chile. It is the landscape of Lota itself that is the text for the boosterism of tourism. As is clear from Don Mitchell's landmark text *Cultural Geography* (2000), such a process is not particular to Chile, but is instead a strategy of the modern post-industrial world where locations that were once hubs of production attempt to remake themselves as a product to be sold on the international market. In what may be considered a classic example representing a more general process, Mitchell considers the case of Johnstown, Pennsylvania in depth. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Johnstown was one of the most important steel producing cities in the United States. By the 1980s, however, the steel industry famously left for more advantageous locations. This occurred during a time marked by a more flexible model of capital accumulation (see Harvey *Spaces*). Upon visiting Johnstown today, the tourist finds hardly a

¹⁴ Moreover, as Marx and later Lefebvre so clearly point out through their critiques of ideology and alienation (Lefebvre, *Critique* vol. I 249), one of the key problems of capitalism is that, through ideology, the true function of the beast of capital is hidden from those who suffer most under it. Marxist philosopher Lefebvre's four volume *Critique of Everyday Life* (*Critique* vols. 1-3, *Rhythmanalysis*) in effect updates Marx's critique of capital for the postwar years, and even for the post 1973 sea change in flexible accumulation in describing how "daily life has been colonized" (*Critique* vol. 2).

trace of the area's history of worker exploitation. There is hardly a reminder of the chaotic relation between labor and management that shaped the industrial landscape of the area. Instead, the history that Johnstown chooses to sell to tourists is that of the city that survived the Great Flood of 1889. The story now sold is that of a city that was able to reconstruct itself from the very mouth of disaster (see Mitchell 95). In Johnstown—a representative example of the intimate relationship between capital and space that is applicable, also, to sites outside of the US context—the turbulent history of the struggle between labor and capital has been wiped away and replaced with the flattened image of a vague and distant industrial past.

In just the same way, the town of Lota has similarly recreated itself as a product. In contrast to the brute physicality of the mining world of early twentieth century Chile—a world of quantities, of bottom lines, of sweat, toil and physical hardship for the working classes, of physical luxury and possessions for the landowning classes—the discourse of the mining region of Lota that exists today (the signifier), has been curiously uprooted from the material world of the mines (its signified). Following Marx, all that is solid melts into air. The Lota that was once a hub of Chilean production had, of course, initially been seen as a model city, representative of the early twentieth century industrial modernity. Mills (1914) writes of the area's evolution toward such a productive hub in triumphant terms: "The development of Lota from a fishing village to a busy mining and manufacturing town of 15,000 inhabitants, a model of its kind, is one of the romances of Chilean enterprise and organising power, and deserves a more detailed description" (154-55).¹⁵ This triumphant view has certainly not been an uncommon one over the years as Chile has struggled to gain recognition in a fickle and constantly shifting world market. Yet beneath this image of a successful Lota, as Lillo's stories show, there was always another world where men were rendered beasts, where both beasts and men spent much of their lives working underground in dangerous and

¹⁵ Although a decade after the publication of *Sub Terra*, Mills's continued description of a modern Lota is illuminating, "The great underground (and undersea) galleries are lit by electric light and served by electric tramways, and are well formed and organised in every detail" (Mills 155).

dimly lit passages without seeing sunlight, where each was essentially a cog in the great machine of production, where pay was scarce and making a living was a constant struggle.

After the closure of the once highly successful Lota mines, just as in the case of post-industrial Johnstown, there has been an attempt to turn the chaotic history of the mining area into a tourist destination. Perhaps out of joint with their subject matter, Toby Green and Jani Janak, the authors of a popular travel guide for Chile, write of the area somewhat candidly: “Even before the mine’s closure in April 1997, the town was known to be one of the poorest in Chile and, although the government has invested in retraining for the miners and trying to open up Lota to tourism, the city still suffers greatly from poverty and neglect” (296). As one might expect, tours of the coal-mines, which run almost entirely under the sea, are now offered by former miners to curious visitors. An interesting manifestation of this post-industrial tourist interest in Lota can be found, also, online. Clarence Fisk (2004) has posted a fifteen-paragraph commentary in Spanish on his trip to the area, ending it with a cheery “¡Vamos todos a Lota!” Data about the mining area’s history, dimensions and locations are interspersed with practical travel advice—for example, “Este paseo [a Lota] debería hacerse en dos o tres visitas para conocerlo bien.” One paragraph is devoted to the Museo de Lota, from which Fisk supplies tourist photos that await his readers just a click away. But the center of the short piece is a description of the trip into the mines. “La parte más interesante de este paseo es la bajada a una Antigua mina de carbon llamada, ahora que es atracción turística, ‘El Chiflón del Diablo’. Con este nombre bautizó los socavones y piques de la mina Don Baldomero Lillo en su obra magistral ‘Sub Terra.’” The descent, of course, as anyone who has visited a mine will know, requires donning the miner’s outfits, complete with hats and lamps (“cascos y lámparas a batería”). A sense of authentic experience pervades Fisk’s narration, as when he writes that “Me encuentro con ropa de calle dejada por los mineros colgada de rondanas en los tejados (no existían los lockers).” The guide for Fisk’s experience is, Don Roberto Rojas, a former miner for 18 years who became a tour guide when the mine closed in 1997.

The production of leisure space in Lota, interestingly, was already in process under the initial reign of Cousiño's mining company:

Much of the Cousiño fortune has been spent on the creation of the great park above the town, one of the wonders of Chile, and among the most beautiful in the world. It contains trees and plants from all quarters of the world, with wild animals, a great aviary, lakes, fountains, and statues (including the well-known statue of Caupolican, by Nicanor Plaza). In the centre Señora Cousiño built, at enormous expense, a magnificent palace, which, though roofed at her death was unfinished internally, and has since remained unoccupied, a melancholy example of a great dream unfulfilled. (Mills 155–56)

This contrast between the Lota of leisure and the Lota of work was the explicit point of introduction highlighted by Fernando Alegría (“Introducción”) in an academic introduction to Lillo's work.

En el sur de Chile, en las cercanías de la dinámica y progresista ciudad de Concepción, hay una costa de dramáticas configuraciones: allí se ven Colinas plantadas de pinos, lujuriosamente verdes, cubiertas por viejos helechos, acantilados abruptos, suaves y escondidas playas bañadas por una marea tupida de cochayuyo y otras algas marinas, apacibles botes pescadores trezados en una vasta acumulación de redes; allí las gentes transitan en una atmósfera de paz y lejanía, y, a menudo, se pierden en dunas solitarias. En ciertas zonas se alzan construcciones gigantescas donde reina una actividad que el observador no identifica de inmediato. En la cima de unas amplias colinas existe un parque fabuloso: el Parque de Lota; y entre plantas de vieja alcurnia chilena hay una fastuosa mansión del más depurado estilo dieciochesco. La mansión está permanentemente vacía. Nunca fue ocupada por sus dueños. Entre los senderos floridos se divisa un muelle. Una inmensa maquinaria lleva, entre el fragor de grúas y cadenas, la carga que se van tragando lentamente los barcos: el oro negro, el carbón chileno. Esa mansión vacía y ese muelle sumido en nubes de vapor y de hollín, son el símbolo de un mundo que encontró su expresión en la obra del escritor más patéticamente vigoroso que ha producido la literatura chilena: Baldomero Lillo. (247)

Ultimately, the landscape of Don Matías Cousiño's Lota was riven through by contradiction—what is often referred to by geographers as the ‘uneven geographical development’ of capitalism. “A poca distancia del hermoso parque y de la principesca mansión, existía un mundo de diferente carácter, dantesco en las proporciones de su miseria: era el mundo de los mineros” (Alegría, “Introducción” 248). As Lefebvre writes in *Rhythmanalysis*, work and leisure must be understood as two abstractions wrought of a dialectical

pairing. There can be no measured quantification of the working day (such as the spatialization of time denounced by Marx) without an implicit conception of leisure as the night side of work. Just as there was to be a built environment for production, there was also, necessarily to be a built environment for leisure.

Ultimately Lillo's stories capture the contradictions of modernity. Certainly he drew attention to this through a naturalism that sought to denounce the plight of humankind more generally, but also through a more place bound denunciation of the ills brought by a growing capitalist industrialization to Chile. On top of this, he incorporated Modernist elements into his stories that more poetically heightened the force of this denunciation by pointing to an escape to a world of qualities and dreams that subsequently injected the possible into Chile's literary and even social landscape.¹⁶ But moreover, Lillo's stories acknowledge the fundamental complexity of worlds, like our own, that are at once material and immaterial, achieving a literary rendering of the very uneven landscape that motivated his stories. Pointing to the contradictions between rich and poor, work and leisure, the coexistence of hope and despair, the environments we have created versus those that we might have alternatively created, *Sub terra* speaks at once to all of these contradictions of modernity. Nearly one hundred years later, Lillo's stories still speak to us of the inequalities that continue to structure the uneven landscapes of our cities and postindustrial tourist creations and cities.

In addition, it is quite interesting (if unsurprising) from a Lefebvrian Marxian perspective that just as Lota's landscape has been changed into a tourist/leisure space—effectively turning its past history of class conflict into yet another commodity—Chile's uneven geographical development has continued to see the sort of mining tragedies that motivated Lillo's prose denunciations. The globally-televised aftermath of the mining disaster in Chile's Atacama desert in August 2010, where 33 miners were trapped underground for more than 2 months in the San José mine, shows that the potential dangers of such capitalistic practices persist

¹⁶ Contradiction was, of course, at the very core of Modernism itself as Ned Davison's seminal work explored: "The aesthetic of Modernism is, in its essence, contradictory" (Davison 6; see also H. Fraser; B. Fraser, "Baldomero").

even today (see Lewman 2011). Most importantly, the unique fusion of denunciation and hope we find in Lillo's collection implicitly taps into Marx's vision of a new society. Zola—in *Germinal*—had explicitly spoken to this vision:

A new society would emerge in a single day, as in a dream, a great city shining like a vision, in which each citizen would be paid the rate for the job and have his share of the common joy. The old world, already rotten, had crumbled to dust; and humankind, newly young and purged of its crimes, would be one nation of workers [...] And the dream would grow ever grander and more wonderful, and the higher it reached towards the impossible, the more beguiling it became. (Zola 171)

In *Sub terra*, however, Lillo evokes a landscape that is at once material and immaterial, the product of suffering, imbued with hope. It is this aspect of his work that is the real triumph. In refusing to portray the subjugation of humankind to capital as definitive, he bucks the Naturalist tendency to show how we are definitively shaped by the current contours of our physical and social environments. *Sub terra's* Modernist inflections expose a world which coexists with that of the naturalist, one in which the possibility of an alchemical change of perspective is very real. He poignantly uses the earth itself as a mirror held up to society. In shaping the earth, humankind re-shapes itself. Lillo's description of mining life shows us the depth and breadth of our own productive power. Delving underground, thought that is driven by the phantom of wealth production shows us how such activity leads only to great destruction, of the worker, of the mine, of our humanity itself. Yet it is in reaching the surface that Lillo shows us the poetic dawn of a new world forming. It is our imagination that must provide the spark that will lead us to collective action.

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