

Finding Historical Truth: How Literature Interrupts National Narratives and Exposes Delusional
Thinking

By

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In the short story “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”, By Jorge Luis Borges, the main character is introduced to an old encyclopedia edition that contains an almost limitless amount of information about a different world and planet named Tlön. This encyclopedia includes fantastical details of the geography, language, and culture of Uqbar and Tlön, revealing major differences between the Earth that we know and Tlön. As the narrator learns more about this world, he discovers that it is a complete fiction that was invented by someone in the seventeenth century. After the contents of the encyclopedia become public knowledge and widely available to everyone, people begin to forget the difference between Earth and Tlön. Despite the fact that the culture, languages, and practices in the encyclopedia were a complete fabrication, the history of Tlön gradually invades and mixes with the history and culture of Earth until both Tlön’s and Earth’s history are essentially the same. This short story is a powerful example about the dangers of capitalism and globalism, idealist philosophy, and the depth to which humans can be entranced by ridiculous beliefs. It reveals not only how history can be constructed but also how the present is manipulated to conform to a certain narrative. Tlön does this because, according to Borges own literary theory “it [Tlön] is about fiction invading reality...it is a reality that pushes through and puncture’s fiction. And somehow makes the possibility of fiction invading reality more plausible” (Diaz, *Between History and Eternity*, 60). The power of fiction to invade reality is, for Borges, the true power of narrative and the true purpose of nationalist and even globalist myths. Because Tlön’s reality seeps through into Earth’s, the power of national narratives is unmistakable.

Though this story by Borges is indeed a work of fiction, we can find examples in our own national histories that represent delusional thinking and the blurring between fiction and truth.

Both the United States and Chile that have nationalistic narratives that either skew the truth or only tell one side of the story. This is evident in the novellas by Roberto Bolaño *Distant Star* and *By Night in Chile*, which detail the power of delusional thinking and reveal the violence and horror of life under the Pinochet regime. Similar to “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”, Roberto Bolaño’s novellas blend reality with fiction so well that reader cannot tell the difference between the two. This paper closely examines Bolaño’s novellas finding specific scenes where this tension between reality and fiction is evident. Each of the novels have parallel scenes or characters that are analyzed, compared, and contrasted. These pairs of scenes are loosely categorized and titled as 1. The Party Scenes 2. Poets and Critics in Dictatorial Chile 3. Revelations and Epiphanies 4. History, Fiction, and Contextual Deferral and finally 5. Repetition, Doubling, and Contextual Deferral. It is through these examples of the mixing between fiction and reality that the power of literature is revealed, contextual deferral occurs, and a-topical thinking (ruinous thinking) helps create a space for the historical imaginary. And it is only with this historical imaginary and development of contextual deferral that the search for truth and healing can begin. Throughout this essay, I will use Bolaño’s novellas *Distant Star* and *By Night in Chile* in conjunction with contemporary world literature theory to reveal that literature can expose our own self-delusions and interrupt previous historical beliefs, and hopefully through this irruption create a space for the historical imaginary.

The five main concepts that are the foundation of my thesis are the historical imaginary, ruinous/a-topical thinking, world literature, contextual deferral, and Gramsci’s theory on intellectuals. This first concept of historical imaginary by Alberto Moreiras is an integral part of his book *The Exhaustion of Difference* (2001). In this book, Moreiras argues for an “irruption of

thinking” that allows for a theoretically informed account of readings and texts (18). This concept of ruinist thinking is the active deconstruction of one’s previously accepted worldview. Ruinist thinking means to think in the ruins of another narrative power, to think non-nationally without replacing the national perspective with another national or global perspective (22-23). A reader can “ruin” their thinking by exposing themselves to narratives outside their own country or cultural background.

By ruining our place-based identity and accepted national narratives, we can begin to dig through the rubble of truths that have been destroyed and begin to find healing. This irruption or ruining of thinking is a part of how readers begin to create historical imaginary (20). Only after our previously accepted beliefs are destroyed is there space to find and search for the truth outside of national and self-narratives. Literature, Moreiras says, is particularly well-suited for this imaginative difficulty more so than film, music, or art, because literature allows for a detached engagement. In order to deconstruct our delusional thinking, literature and cultural studies have to work together, and the way this manifest’s is through fiction (12-13). National narratives tell the story of hegemony, and the only way to do counter this is through the ruins of reason. The goal of Moreiras is not to reconstruct history but rather to dig through the rubble of reason searching for the truth.

One way to interrupt our thinking and beliefs is through an engagement with world literature, as David Damrosch discusses in his book *What is World Literature* (2003). Damrosch explains that world literature is not a genre of text or type of literature, but rather a way and mode of reading texts. Damrosch says that “at any given time, a fluctuating number of foreign works will circulate actively within a culture” some of these works will be canonized and some

won't, but the readers blend the canonical and non-canonical works together creating an ideal detachment (296). Because world literature is a large a multilayered group of works that people experience individually, the texts themselves exist both together and alone as each book is interpreted for their own different purposes. Since world literature is not just a genre of text, a reader can actively engage with worlds outside her own place and time. As a text circulates the globe and as it is read by hundreds of people that are situated differently from each other, they discover another part of the truth and begin to question their own national narratives.

This is why my project is one of world literature, because I am an American student situated in North America, I have had to learn how to read world literature with the sort of “detached engagement” that Damrosch presents. I have had to specifically educate myself on Latin American history, culture, language, economics, and politics. From critically engaging with both of Bolaño's novellas, previous beliefs and narratives of mine have been interrupted, and I have learned about both the Latin American and Chilean perspective in relation to America.

For instance, prior to this project I was unaware of the depth to which the United States took part in and knew about the dictatorship regimes in Chile. Throughout my research and reading of history books as well as fiction, I learned that the U.S. did not only know about the crimes against humanity in Latin America, but we helped implement the governments that committed those crimes. I have learned that Americans have persuaded ourselves to believe that our narrative of the U.S being a benevolent world power is the true perspective, even when Latin America has directly suffered at the hands of our economic and political imperialism. Through this project, my own nationalistic narratives have been destroyed, and I am slowly putting together pieces of the truth to reveal the United States' true historical narrative. A narrative that

counters the belief that we are the “saviors” of the world and reveals instead a politically selfish nation that almost always acts out of economic gain.

The specific world literature texts that I have read and centered my thesis around are *Distant Star* and *By Night in Chile* by Roberto Bolaño. Born in 1953, Roberto Bolaño was a Chilean novelist and one of the most influential Spanish-Literature voices of his generation. As a child, since his father was a truck driver, his family moved around often. But once they settled in Mexico City, Bolaño dropped out of high school and “dedicated himself to poetry and the leftist cause” (“Bolaño, Roberto”). According to his own accounts he went back to Chile in 1973 to take part in an impending socialist revolution; it was also during this time that he was captured by Augusto Pinochet forces and jailed for several days. Interestingly, this fact is contested by some of his friends and contemporaries claiming that he was never imprisoned, and he never even returned to Chile. Much like the fictions he writes, Bolaño’s biographical history is blurry and has questionable details. This is significant because most of his work contains autobiographical elements and fictionalized versions of his own history. From this, it is hard to distinguish the real facts of his life from the fictionalized autobiographical versions.

Bolaño’s literary history began around poetry, but after little success with publication he eventually changed to prose. This is also the point in his life, the year 1990, when he moved to Spain, was married, and had a son. Before he was successful, Bolaño held several low paying jobs as a dishwasher, custodian, bellhop, and garbage collector (“Bolaño, Roberto”). After the birth of his son, Bolaño’s health began failing and he started to pour himself into writing fiction, which resulted in ten full length novels and three-story collections, all of which were completed in the last decade of his life (“Bolaño, Roberto”). His best-known novel, which won the

prestigious Rómulo Gallegos prize, is *Detectives Salvajes* published in 1998. His other noteworthy and acclaimed publications include *Distant Star* (1996) and *By Night in Chile* (2000). These novels launched Roberto Bolaño into the public sphere because they are “portraits of 20th-century Latin America that blend the real with the fantastic and are wildly imaginative, idiosyncratic, and often violence-filled” (“Bolaño, Roberto”). Bolaño has become increasingly popular because his novels are vague, visceral, and darkly realistic and starkly contrast the previous magical realism movement throughout Latin American literature.

His book *Distant Star* is a short novella that takes place around the rise and fall of the Pinochet regime (1973-1990). Like many other novels by Bolaño, this book contains autobiographical features, reoccurring themes and characters from his other novels, and details about life under the violence of the military junta. *Distant Star* follows the narrator, Arturo B., as he tells the story and investigation of a man named Carlos Wieder. Carlos Wieder is a serial killer and pilot for Pinochet regime, who uses the death of many people to enact his “new poetry” and fascist beliefs in Chile. The government ignores Wieder’s murders until he makes it public, content to let him profit off of the violence and murder that was already happening on a larger scale throughout the country. The book blends real and fictional events to reveal the depth of the horrors within the Pinochet regime and the involvement of the U.S.

The other book that is crucial to my discussion is the novella *By Night in Chile*. This novel is similar in many ways to *Distant Star* but uses the main character, Father Lacroix, to illuminate self-deception and the untrustworthiness of national literature. As Father Lacroix lay dying on his death bed, he recounts his involvement in the Pinochet regime and tries to justify his innocence before god and the wizened youth. As a member of the clergy as well as a literary

critic, Lacroix was an instrumental figure who aided and supported the extreme right-wing military government under Pinochet. But Lacroix does not believe that he is guilty of any immorality, and adamantly preaches his innocence to himself, to god, and to the wizened youth. In the final scene of the novel, it is revealed that the wizened youth is in fact Lacroix's guilty conscience whom he finally comes to terms with at the very end.

Both of these novellas are rife with literary devices that convey the purpose of the novel. Contextual deferral is one of the most prominent ways reality is revealed throughout the book and is a concept discussed by Hernan Diaz in his analysis of Jorge Luis Borges' texts. Diaz wrote a short book titled *Borges, Between History and Eternity* (2012), detailing the literary themes, devices, and importance of Borges' fictional works. To Diaz, contextual deferral is "the interposition of mediations, and the succession of layers of realities" (45). With this framing, in Borges' fictions Diaz says that, "his conceptions of literature, metaphysics, and politics, come together and reveal their tight interdependency" (45). Because contextual deferral is the layering of realities upon realities and truth upon fiction, it can paint a particular picture. The power of fiction is its ability to impose belief and its ability to simulate reality, which Bolaño's novels do through contextual deferral. Like "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" both *Distant Star* and *By Night in Chile* are so layered with complex fictions and slightly different realities that truth begins to shine through. Through Bolaño's intentional creation, complexity, and layering of multiple fictions, reality begins to emerge in his fictional works. Contextual deferral also demonstrates how irruptive thinking can operate, because of everything comes together (i.e. metaphysics, politics, and theology) readers can think outside the bounds of what we have been taught socially

or academically “disrupting” previous beliefs. Thus, contextual deferral links to irruptive thinking, and if we bring all things together then the possibilities that can open up are endless.

The last concept that is important throughout my essay and in reading the novellas is Antonio Gramsci’s theory on the formation of intellectuals. According to Gramsci, intellectuals are types of people rather than individuals, and these two types are the organic and the traditional intellectual. Organic intellectuals are formed based on a social group and produced by that group; they are the revolutionaries in society. Traditional intellectuals on the other hand, have always existed and are aligned with certain institutions such as the state, the church, or academia. Both types of intellectuals are the political products of society, and we must first evaluate society and the political climate before judging the individual. Within society, the traditional intellectuals hold more power because they are aligned with institutions and the organic intellectuals have less because they exist outside the higher-class institutions. Organic intellectuals must attempt to win over traditional intellectuals by inserting their own narratives into the longstanding narratives of the institutions of law, the clergy, etc. Gramsci explains this problem by saying that “The problem of creating a new stratum of intellectuals consists therefore in the critical elaboration of the intellectual activity that exists in everyone at a certain degree of development, modifying its relationship with the muscular-nervous effort towards a new equilibrium, and ensuring that the muscular-nervous effort itself, in so far as it is an element of a general practical activity, which is perpetually innovating the physical and social world, become the foundation of a new and integral conception of the world” (*Norton Anthology*, 933). This tension between the two strata of individuals results in hegemony within society. Gramsci argues that every person has the

ability to be an intellectual, not just those society deem acceptable due to their alignment with an institution.

In *Distant Star* and *By Night in Chile* there are both traditional and organic intellectuals. One aspect of the Pinochet regime that is revealed throughout the books, is the suppression of certain intellectuals due to the narratives that they attempt to make hegemonic. It is also evident in the books, that organic intellectuals attempt to become traditional intellectuals by aligning themselves with an institution to gain credence and legitimacy. The power struggle between the two groups and the hegemony present in the relations between the United States and Latin America, as well as the hegemony within Chile's own borders is exemplified within the novels.

1. The Party Scenes

The most pivotal scene in both of the novellas *Distant Star* and *By Night in Chile*, are scenes of a "big reveal". They are the turning points in both books and the point to which the narrator is exposed to a grim truth. The two parallel party scenes represent the moment in the novellas where ruinous thinking begins and the depth to which people delude themselves is evident. This ruinous thinking destroys accepted narratives and begins to create a space for the historical imaginary. These scenes are the most pivotal in the novellas because they are the scenes that shatter a delusion to display the dark underbelly of the Pinochet regime. Through these scenes the violence within the dictatorship as well as the amount of its support by United States is uncovered.

In both situations there is a house, a dark sinister room categorized by death, and a social party. Although each party is slightly different, one major similarity is the supposedly innocent gathering centered around a discussion of poetry, literature, and ideas. In *Distant Star*, the party

is focused on the display of Wieder's poetry, where in *By Night in Chile*, it is a clandestine meeting after curfew between poets and writers. But at each party, at one point during the night there is a discovery of death and destruction.

The main scene in the book *Distant Star* that is most recognizable, as well as the main comparative aspect with Bolaño's other novella *By Night in Chile*, is the scene where Carlos Wieder finally reveals his "new Chilean Poetry" in a photo exhibit. After Wieder has debuted his new type of poetry in several sky writing performances and his hugely successful journey to Antarctica, he is at the height of fame in Chile. Because of this he was called upon by the government to create a spectacular and noteworthy performance in the capital city of Chile, Santiago. While in Santiago, Wieder simultaneously socialized with the elite and governmental officials while preparing his photographic display that was to be held in the spare bedroom of the flat, he was renting. On the day of the exhibit only select individuals were invited to witness his performance and display, that list included pilots and young army officers, journalists, artists, a right-wing poet, a young socialite woman, and Carlos Wieder's father. All the careful consideration of guests, space, time, and city for Wieder's biggest display emphasized his desire for poetically impacting his guests.

Throughout the scene various things go awry at the beginning of Wieder's skywriting section of the night. It storms relentlessly throughout his performance making it hard for the writing to appear visibly in the sky, and for the spectators to stand outside and witness. But nevertheless, Wieder continues on with his aerial performance, furiously inscribing poetic messages on the sky.

Death is friendship

Death is Chile
Death is responsibility
Death is love
Death is growth
Death is communion
Death is cleansing
Death is my heart
Take my heart,
Carlos Wieder
Death is resurrection

All these phrases are scattered throughout his sky performance as he struggles to write through the imposing storm clouds and rain (*Distant* 80-82). His spectators are losing interest on the ground as he fights against the storm and begin to retreat under the airplane hangar. Although he is signaled to land repeatedly, Wieder is forever committed to his art and finishes out his performance. The phrases are part of Weider's "new poetry", a poetry that declares his views not only on death itself but how death functions within Chile. Wieder wants to revolutionize Chilean poetry through death and believes that a new Chile can be born from this death. His phrases like *death is responsibility*, and *death is cleansing* point towards the fascist themes throughout the book. Even though Carlos believes he is "revolutionizing" reality with his "new" thoughts on death, in actuality they are actually just repetitions of old fascist mantras. The belief that society will be better after eliminating certain people is not new historically, but it is new in how Carlos Wieder links it to the Chilean dictatorship globally and economically.

The next scene that follows is the climax of the story, and the section where Wieder finally reveals a new aspect of his poetry. After several hours of talking and drinking, at the stroke of midnight Wieder climbs onto a chair to announce that people can finally begin to go into the room with the photographs one at a time. The only woman present, the Chilean socialite,

enters the room first and in less than a minute later re-emerges visibly shaken and leaves immediately. After this, the rest of the guests hesitantly continued through to the exhibit each one singularly being forced to confront the subject matter of the photos, the display of murdered people, most of whom were women. Police officers finally show up after someone gathers enough courage to alert the officials to investigate the scene, and Carlos Wieder is led away, supposedly under arrest.

After that night no one exactly knows what happened to Carlos Wieder, the narrator references some rumors about his whereabouts or activities thereafter, “according to some rumors he was expelled from the air force at a secret court martial...He was seen wandering around Santiago...He changed his name...etc.” (94). The bottom line from this conjecture and the shadowy retelling of the infamous photograph exhibit is that after Wieder’s murders were discovered, no one knew exactly what happened and any immediate repercussions were minimal. Wieder even continues writing and producing literature, poetry, and screenplays. His art continues to revolve around death and destruction, and in one particular play that he wrote where the main characters, Siamese Twins, are repeatedly tortured. Arturo explains that the thesis of the play “is somewhat simplistic: pain is our only connection with life; only pain can reveal what life is” (95). So, Wieder does not completely give up his art or his mission after the photo exhibit incident, but rather continues to preach death and destruction through different mediums of art. Which is also how Arturo B. is able to track and find Wieder later in the narrative.

This lack of truthful accounts and repercussions exposes the depth of the corruption and cruelty within the Pinochet dictatorship. Until the journalists, socialites, and government members were forced to face firsthand the murders of Carlos Wieder, everybody turned a blind

eye. In fact, it seems as though until Wieder unashamedly displayed his killings as “new Chilean poetry” the government was content to let a serial killer run wild, capitalizing on the death and disappearances that were already happening to thousands of people across the country.

Bolaño’s novels force the reader to think critically because his fictions reach across space and into the real and tangible world. Although Wieder’s photography exhibit was a fictional occurrence it mirrors historical events that did occur in real time. Particularly during the early years in the Pinochet regime, the human rights violations were widespread. These violations included “included arbitrary arrests, raids on private households, imprisonment, extrajudicial executions, torture, and exile” (“Chile, State Terrorism In”, n.p.). The reason many of the people tortured and killed was for “political” reasons, which basically meant any left-wing or political party members who were a threat of any kind to the Pinochet regime (“Chile, State Terrorism In”, n.p.). According to an article titled “Sexual Violence, Torture and Chile’s struggle for Historical Memory”, many of the “political” prisoners were women most of whom suffered from sexual violence, electroshock, beatings, hangings, Russian roulette, and asphyxia (n.p.). Women were a particularly vulnerable population because they held virtually no power under the right-wing regime.

These occurrences align with the photo exhibit display put on by Carlos Wieder because most of the people in his photographs were women, whom he had clearly beaten and abused. The main difference between Wieder and the other government officials is the clandestine nature of the government’s tactics. Until he displayed his deeds publicly, Wieder was virtually safe to commit his crimes as an agent of the Pinochet dictatorship. If we just look at title of the book, *Distant Star* and at one of the very first pages that quotes William Faulkner, “What star falls

unseen”, the function of the novel is even more obvious. Carlos Wieder and his poetry were operating as distant stars, accepted and appreciated from far away, but once people stood up close and saw that his poetry was actually killing people, they were horrified. The government and the Chilean citizens chose to ignore Wieder’s needless cruelty until they were no longer able to look away. When Bolaño quotes Faulkner questioning which star falls unseen, he’s asking an important question of what kind of people in Pinochet’s Chile were mercilessly killed without anyone noticing or caring.

The parallel party scene in *By Night in Chile* is at María Canales’s house. During the lockdown, after curfew was imposed by the Pinochet regime intellectuals would gather at a woman’s named María Canales’s house. She was a pretty, young, up and coming writer, who hosted late night parties where all different kinds of writers would gather to talk and discuss current literature. She had a big house, was married to a North American named Jimmy, and had two sons the ages of three and eight months. Throughout the story that Father Lacroix tells, he never fully elaborates on what María and her husband’s politics really are, but we do know that “when she [María] talked politics she was absolutely sure of herself, and her voice rang out clearly making her opinions known in no uncertain terms” (*Night*, 113). There are also hints throughout that suggest they were right-wing supporters, for example, Father Lacroix tells us that when a young writer would begin to recite his poetry that was against the regime “she would suddenly appear carrying a tray piled high with empanadas” (109). Which leads the reader to believe that María and her family leaned right and supported the Pinochet regime. She was a generous host and all the guests immensely enjoyed going to her soirees. But throughout these meetings, there are subtle implications that there is something more happening at the house other

than the parties. Which is significant because these secrets that María Canales is hiding while hosting these parties is exactly why Bolaño distrusts national literature. It's an example of Bolaño finding something rotten and untrustworthy within national literature and its writers.

For example, when Father Lacroix has an interaction with the three-year-old son, Sebastián, he notices that something is amiss “He looked at me over the shoulder and it seemed to me that those wide eyes were seeing something they did not want to see” (110). From that point on whenever Father Lacroix sees Sebastián, he notices a haunted and drawn look about the child, as if he has seen unspeakable horrors. There are also implications that Sebastián was not the child of María and Jimmy Canales because he “didn't look like either of his parents, as opposed to the younger boy Jimmy, who was the spitting image of his father” (108). This could mean that the boy Sebastián is actually the child of a disappeared dissident and has suffered unspeakably at the hands of the government and the people with whom he lives.

Another subtle implication throughout this section that leads the reader to believe the parties were problematic, is the defensiveness in which Father Lacroix claims that he didn't attend the parties very often. From the start of this particular story, Lacroix is adamant that he was an infrequent guest, someone who rarely showed at the Canales' house. This is apparent when he says “By we I mean the group. I didn't go there every week. I put in an appearance once a month. Or even less often” (109). He also states that “They even claim that I was a true habitué, present every week without fail. Or twice, three times a week! But even the wizened youth knows that is patently false” (110). These claims and his belief that he was an infrequent guest, even when others claim he was there every week, further reveal the deluded state of Father Lacroix. The exposure of the torture basement, and the parties at the house of a known DINA

(secret police) agent seems to be the event that tarnished Lacroix's name the most, and the event he feels most called to deny. But, the whole book, the whole justification wouldn't have happened if Father Lacroix was not an integral figure during the parties; if it wasn't evident that he was an extreme right-wing supporter, and regularly frequented the house of an agent of the regime. Shortly thereafter, during a party one night, a guest stumbles upon a basement room while looking for the bathroom. In this room, at the end of a dimly lit corridor, there was a man tied to a metal bed abandoned in the basement. The man was alive, but obviously suffering from physical harm and signs of torture (120).

The exact events of this night, and the nature of the discoveries in the torture basement are not concrete, they are vague, and Father Lacroix tells at least three different versions of the discovery with varying amounts of detail. One description says "he opened the door and saw the man tied to the metal bed, blindfolded, and he knew the man was alive.... but he wasn't in good shape, for in spite of the dim light he saw the wounds" (121). This reveals that, like the photo exhibit with Carlos Wieder, there is not one true and clear picture of events of the nights where the horrible truth was exposed. But that readers will have to do the critical work and research necessary to find pieces of the truth.

Decades later, after the end of the Pinochet dictatorship, María Canales's family was investigated, and it was revealed that her husband was actually an American agent who was part of Operation Condor. Operation Condor was a complicated, sophisticated, and secret enterprise that covered multiple dictatorship countries throughout Latin America. Backed by several governments they were responsible for the kidnapping, torture, and death of thousands of South Americans. Operation Condor effectively integrated and expanded a state of terror across South

America during the cold war. With the support from the military governments in control and encouragement from the US, they erased democracy across the continent.

Most people who were captured by the operatives disappeared forever in secret torture centers or shoot outs, but as discussed in the article “Operation Condor: the cold war conspiracy that terrorized South America” enough people survived “to tell stories that, when matched against a growing volume of declassified documents, amount to a single, ghastly tale” (“Operation Condor: the cold war conspiracy that terrorized South America”, n.p.). Even though the horrors of Operation Condor were committed in Latin American countries, the U.S. actively backed their campaigns. In fact, George H.W. Bush (the CIA director in 1976) knew the details of Operation Condor, but his agency still joined the Chilean propaganda efforts (“Letelier, Orlando”, n.p.). The knowledge and involvement of the U.S. is also evident in the story of María Canales. Because we are told that her husband was a North American, and that it was he, himself, who was responsible for the killings and torture that occurred in their basement. During the investigation years later, it was revealed that Jimmy had travelled to Washington and killed one of Allende’s ex-ministers and a North American woman who happened to get in the way” (Bolaño, *Night*, 121). Jimmy was not just some low-level agent, but he was personally responsible for multiple assassinations, and was a key agent of DINA. He was tried and convicted in the United States, but in his confession revealed important information about Chilean generals so he was placed into witness protection. This left María alone in Chile without friends, family, and her community of writers.

These disappearances, killings, and justifications behind all the horrible crimes was not a secret, but rather it was widely known as is obvious in the short essay “The Corridor with No

Apparent Exit” by Roberto Bolaño. In this essay, the narrator, Bolaño, attends a dinner party at the house of a well-known writer Diamela Eltit, and government official Jorge Arrate. The woman, Diamela Eltit invited Bolaño to dinner at her house, and her fiancé was the minister Jorge Arrate, socialist and spokesperson for the Frei government. Throughout the night the narrator, who has just returned to Chile, is stressed over the lack of safety the minister and Eltit have in their middle-class suburban home. Because Arrate is a socialist and was exiled during the right-wing dictatorship, Bolaño is worried about “the prospect of a gang of Nazis bursting into the house to kill the minister and, while they're at it, killing my wife and my son” (“Corridor”, 164). This essay is significant because Bolaño and Eltit are both well-known Chilean writers, Bolaño discusses his beliefs about nationalist literature, and because this piece is an overlap between reality and fiction.

Bolaño notes to the reader, “And now, to conclude, a true story. I repeat: I did not make this up. It's real. It happened in Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship and just about the whole world (the small and faraway "whole world" that is Chile) knows it” (167). The story he tells is of a young right-wing sympathizer woman who marries a North American agent of DINA. She hosts writing workshop at her house every other night, where people can gather in safety outside of curfew. One night, a party guest wanders down the wrong hallway and discovers a torture room and a man who had been tied and beaten (167). This story directly compares to the events at María Canales’ house in *By Night in Chile*. Not only does this story expose the reality of the brutality of the Pinochet regime, but it is yet another reflection and connection between Bolaño’s works of fiction. Even though this essay is separate from *By Night in Chile*, it grounds the novella’s main event in real Chilean history and furthers the contextual deferral happening.

At the end of this essay Bolaño also notes “that's the way the literature of every country gets built”, He emphasizes his distrust of national literature because it is caught up in a narrative of power. Through this story Bolaño demonstrates that within in nationalist literature only the story of the powerful is told. This is evident in both the essay “The Corridor with No Apparent Exit”, and *Distant Star*, through the stories of the characters Stein, Soto, Lorenzo. These characters are exiled by the Pinochet regime for their beliefs and positions in society, and consequently their poetry and stories are ignored. Right before Bolaño says “that’s the way that literature in every country gets built”, he concludes the story of the young woman’s house with the torture basement by saying “In fact, she, the hostess, wins a short story or poetry prize offered by the only literary magazine that kept running in those years, a magazine of the left” (168). This suggests that the prize for literature that she won was not based on merit, but political gain. This is why Bolaño distrusts nationalist literature, because it is a skewed one-sided version of the truth that contributes to the suppression of the marginalized.

2. Poets and Critics in Dictatorial Chile

Throughout both novellas by Roberto Bolaño it is obvious that he discusses the horrors of the Pinochet regime and the power of national narrative. A way he does this is through his characterization and discussion of authors and critics. In conjunction with real major literary works, Bolaño places both real and fictional authors and literary critics front and center in his novellas. This blending of fiction and reality leads to the development of contextual deferral which furthers ruinous thinking and the creation of the historical imaginary. These authors and critics are also analyzed with one of the foundational concepts in my thesis, Gramsci’s theory of intellectuals. This theory and the tension between organic and traditional intellectuals help

explain the power dynamic and hegemony present within both Chile's own borders and the United States and Latin America. Which is significant because the historical imaginary seeks to find truth outside of national narratives defined by hegemony and oppression.

Though intellectuals are present in both books, they manifest differently because *Distant Star* revolves around the poets and writers themselves as we see with Carlos Wieder and Arturo B. where in contrast, *By Night in Chile* focuses on literary critics as both Father Lacroix and Farewell are known critics within Chile (albeit for the Pinochet dictatorship). Not only does this ground the works in reality and within the canon of literature, but also affirms Bolaño's discussion of the oppression of intellectuals under the Pinochet regime. Due to their support of left-wing policies based in Marxist and communist principles, after the coup d'état and the rise of the military regime, many intellectuals both organic and traditional were severely persecuted.

The important characters in the book that reflect the power and corruption within the Pinochet regime, are the poets Juan Stein, Diego Soto, and Lorenzo. These three fictional men represent a triangle of 'intellectuals' as discussed by Gramsci, two of which are traditional and one of which is organic. Though each of their characters are radically different from each other, they have all been repressed as intellectuals by the Pinochet regime. Each of these three characters tell the story of Chile's repression toward intellectuals and the history of Chile's dictatorship as a poetic history. Each of these characters spend their lives combatting fascism and the effects of their militaristic government, despite of radically different choices.

At the beginning of the narrative the character Juan Stein, is a university lecturer but by the end he will become a revolutionary figure and leader throughout Latin America. He begins as a traditional intellectual teaching a poetry workshop in Concepción, a workshop that both the

narrator and Carlos Wieder attend. But then later in the novella, Stein becomes a more prominent character as Arturo B. elaborates on his life, written works, and involvement in the socialist left-wing resistance. Juan Stein was an avid reader and writer of poetry, writing many works influenced by Nicanor Parra and Ernesto Cardenal. When back in school, both Weider and Arturo B. learned of Stein's military history and relation to one of the greatest generals of the second world war, Chernyakhovsky. According to the novel, Chernyakhovsky had "innate talent, he was loved by his men and he was young, and one of the few high-ranking officers to die in the front line" (Bolaño, *Distant*, 50). More than his actual military prowess, Chernyakhovsky was a figure of power and resistance to Juan Stein, and likewise, Juan Stein himself became a figure of both power and resistance throughout Latin America that existed more in conjecture than reality. This is important to note because Stein becomes involved with socialist radicals and helps lead revolts against the governments of Latin America. After the coup many people thought that Juan Stein had been killed by the government, not only because he was an intellectual but also because of his Jewish heritage. But, throughout the years he kept appearing at sites of resistance "wherever desperate, generous, mad courageous, despicable Latin Americans were destroying, rebuilding, and redestroying reality" (57). Juan Stein continues to appear in history and across the Latin American region at sites of resistance, for example, he was rumored to be part of Columbian and Namibian guerilla groups. Eventually though, according to the narrator's friend, he was killed in the FMLN's final offensive where they took control of San Salvador. They only identified Stein's body when the battle was over because among the dead there was "a tall fair-haired man...with scars from old wounds on his arms and legs, and a lion rampant tattooed on the right arm" (61). This idea of Stein destroying, redestroying, and rebuilding reality perfectly

aligns with Borges's idea of narrative power. Stein is constantly re-writing and re-building the revolution against fascism. He moves from country to country changing names, titles, and positions to fit whatever that country needed. The story of Stein and his revolutions was incredibly powerful for the people of South America because it gave them hope that someone could exist outside of the dictatorship regimes, regardless of whether or not all the stories about Stein were even true. It is precisely because of the uncertainty and morphic character of Stein, that his story became more powerful than that of a national narrative. No one was ever entirely certain that the professor Stein and the revolutionary leader Stein were the same person. Stein evolved from his status of a traditional intellectual as he left the university and became organic as he existed outside of any formal institution and was at the center of action leading guerilla battalions or brigades against fascist governments and dictators.

Another poet-teacher of the narrator and Bibiano was a man named Diego Soto, who rather than becoming the leader of a revolution, fled to Europe and succeeded in living a comfortable, middle class life. Soto was a devout catholic who was coincidentally Juan Stein's best friend and rival, and they both disappeared at the same time. Radically different than Stein, Arturo B. notes that when Soto disappeared, he was not missed mostly due to the fact that he was not a socialist and leftist extremist but rather a sympathizer who "didn't even faithfully always vote socialist" (66). The lack of care towards Soto's disappearance was also because of an "aesthetic desire to get rid of him", which Arturo B. says is because people knew he was far more intelligent and knowledgeable than then them and he lacked the social grace to hide it (67).

But, like Stein, Soto reappeared again in exile as he tried to scrape together a living in Europe by translating and teaching Spanish and English. But in contrast to Stein, when things got

difficult in Chile and Latin America, rather than staying to fight he disappeared to Europe. Stein struggled both as an intellectual and as Chilean in Europe, and to earn a living. He attempted to live in Germany but left after he was hospitalized due to a beating. He then travelled to France and barely support himself by translating Spanish and English. Eventually, he marries a French woman and lands a job teaching at a university that allows him the funds and time to write and do research. So, rather than evolving to an organic intellectual after leaving his post teaching at the school, Soto continues to be a traditional intellectual by aligning with institutions even in exile. Even the narrator notes this by saying “it wasn’t so much that Soto had become middle class: he had never been anything else...if books and reading are what count” (68). With his professorship, Soto was able to comfortably read and study literature at his leisure, regularly attend meetings of Chilean writers, and contribute to poetry magazines in Chile and Argentina. In all, Soto was able to lead a squarely middle-class life in both financially and in the safety of his literature and writings. He wasn’t too left wing or extremist but focused mainly on translation and reviewing other people’s work. One unfortunate night though as Soto was travelling back from a conference, he stopped in Rousillon and while he was waiting for the train to take him back to Paris around 1:00am, he stumbled upon three neo-Nazis. These young neo-Nazis were kicking and beating a young woman and when Soto tried to intervene, they stabbed him to death and ran away. This is a sad, and somewhat ironic fate for Diego Soto, as he tried to escape fascism in Chile by fleeing to Europe but ended up dying at the hands of Neo-Nazis. Neo-Nazi’s directly trace their origins back to Adolf Hitler, but manifest throughout the world in different groups and names (“neo-Nazis” n.p.). Neo-Nazis share white-supremacist and anti-Semitic sentiments and are characterized as a modern hate group (“neo-Nazis” n.p.). This is significant

because neo-Nazis represent the return of extreme right-wing beliefs, just like the Pinochet dictatorship was also a return of right-wing extremism and human rights violations.

After completing the stories of Juan Stein and Diego Soto, Arturo B. turns to his last poet, the most unconventional, and the most important, a man named Lorenzo. Lorenzo was born in Chile and when he was younger had an unfortunate accident that cost him both his arms. Because Lorenzo lived under the Pinochet regime as a cripple, the narrator says, “he also grew up in Pinochet’s Chile, which turned unfortunate situations into desperate ones” (Bolaño, *Distant*, 72). Not only was Lorenzo armless but he also discovered that he was homosexual, which furthered his oppression in Chile. Both because of and despite of not having arms, Lorenzo became an artist and worked to improve himself by singing in the streets. Lorenzo was a hopeless romantic who continued to fall in love despite his station in life and was continuously humiliated and rejected. This reveals Lorenzo’s status as an organic intellectual, he isn’t aligned with an institution like the church, state, or academia, but rather becomes an artist whose life is poetry and exists outside the traditional bounds.

After all these failed love attempts, he tried to commit suicide. One late summer evening Lorenzo, after all the humiliation of rejected love, jumped from a rock on the Chilean coastline into the sea. He tried to drown himself, but his legs involuntarily sent him to the surface. With his life flashing before his eyes, it dawned on him that committing suicide in this political climate was redundant and it was better for him to become an undercover poet (73). If Lorenzo had succeeded in killing himself, he would have been bowing down to the dominance of the military junta and finishing what they started. An undercover poet in Pinochet’s Chile was far more rebellious than killing himself. They wanted Lorenzo to die, and because he was poor,

armless, and homosexual he represented a population of Chile that Pinochet wanted to suppress. So, from that day on he was not only a poet, but a painter, a dancer, and a musician, striving to save up enough money for leaving Chile. Lorenzo's art defied the usual boundaries, he learned to paint and play piano with his toes, he danced in the street, and even wrote poetry (although it is not explained *how* he wrote it).

Eventually, he was discovered by an actress or actor who had been given the task to find a mascot to represent Petra, the emblem of the Paralympics. Lorenzo became a crowd favorite and wowed the media during a string of interviews (76). From this, Lorenzo was able to earn a comfortable enough living and accrued a small amount of fame. Later on, we find out that he died of AIDS in either Germany or South America. Though these three men are all radically different, according to the narrator, they represent the three most important poets of the revolution in Chile. Through their separate stories the reader learns of Chile's repression of intellectuals, of whom Lorenzo was repressed the most due to his poor, handicapped, and homosexual identity.

One similarity between the men is the theme of exile; Bolaño has written extensively on exile and Chile and it is a theme throughout several of his novels. In a speech he gave, he discusses his own thoughts on the relationship between literature and exile, "Literature and exile, I think, are two sides of the same coin, our fate placed in the hands of chance" (Literature and Exile, n.p.). Bolaño is against nationalist literature that expresses one's nostalgia for their own homeland and country, particularly from Latin America and other impoverished and exploited countries. Questioning the nostalgia, one feels for a country of pain, intolerance, arrogance, and injustice, he intones "Books are the only homeland of the true writer, books that may sit on

shelves or in the memory” (“Literature and Exile”, n.p.). Bolaño adamantly distrusts nationalist literature, believing that in order to write great poetry about a country or a land you don’t need to originate from that country.

In his speech, Bolaño professes that the three greatest poets of Chile are a Spaniard and a Nicaraguan. Two people, who were exiled travelers. Because Stein, Soto, and Lorenzo fled from Chile due to their oppression, they became Chilean poetry in their lives and their verse. As they are forced to speak about their existence outside of their home country because throughout nationalist literature the marginalized are ignored. This is why the narrator says that Lorenzo was the most important poet at the time; he becomes a mouthpiece for the oppressed people in Chile through his atopic writing, ruinous thinking, and irruptive potential because it represents a different side of Chile, the side of Chile that gets forgotten in nationalist literature. Borges rejects the narratives of the powerful, the narratives of the nation, because they only tell one side of the story.

This is precisely the reason that Bolaño declares that the nostalgia for impoverished and traumatized nations is a lie, the story of those people who have been hurt won’t be told---so why feel bound to this country? He blames writers for “singing this horrid refrain” and pushing this obligatory sense of nostalgia for a country that has done nothing but harm its poor, vulnerable, and marginalized people (“Literature and Exile”, n.p.). Great writers follow Borges and never believe the stories of the homeland, they question nationalist narratives and find true stories throughout many different kinds of books and literature. Their writing works against the narratives of power of both the homeland and the imperialist nation.

Another way that Stein, Soto, and Lorenzo are similar is by the book that the narrator links them all together with, “Stein may have read it, Stein certainly did, and Lorenzo devoured it enthusiastically...the book was called *Ma Gestalt Therapie*” (Bolaño, *Distant*, 76). Through this quote we see that Arturo B.’s connection of all the men through this book is mostly conjecture, but still just as important and symbolic as if it had been one hundred percent true.

This connection with *Ma Gestalt Therapie* is important because it is an actual book and psychoanalytic method that focuses on an individual’s present life and challenges rather than exploring past experiences. Gestalt Therapy emphasizes the principles of present-centered awareness and immediate experience (“Gestalt Therapy” n.p.). It is about the story of what you tell yourself and how you tell yourself about the events in your life by focusing on the present in order to discover what your history means to you now. The allusion then to this psychoanalytic practice, is important to consider in understanding how in 1996 (when *Distant Star* was published) the story we do or don’t tell about Chile in that period affects the world. This book overall helps reveal the fact through conjecture and ruinist thinking that the story itself is more important than historical certainty.

Bolaño’s books are attempting to change the story of Chile and look to the present so that the country can begin to heal without forgetting its history after many years of oppression and dictatorships. All the poets suffered from this forgetting, Stein and Soto were forgotten as soon as they went into exile, and Lorenzo was never recognized because of his extreme marginalization. Carlos Wieder was also forgotten, even though he killed so many people and wanted to revolutionize Chile through death. Through Arturo B., *Distant Star* is an investigation into the forgotten. Bolaño writes to discover and uncover past histories that have been swept under the

rug in an attempt to heal Chile, but in order to serve justice to the people who suffered under Pinochet, the nation needs to try and remember the past while it heals. And one final note is that we need to realize the importance of Arturo B.'s comment "As far as I know it hasn't been published in Spain yet" (Bolaño, *Distant*, 76). When the narrator makes that comment he is recognizing that similar fascist governments exist in Spain, who has yet to begin to heal from their dictatorial trauma by hearing the story of its people and focusing on changing the present.

In *By Night in Chile*, the main intellectuals discussed other than Father Lacroix are Pablo Neruda and Farewell. This discussion highlights a tension between reality and fiction, and the suppression of certain intellectuals. Father Lacroix first meets Pablo Neruda at a dinner party on his friend Farewell's estate. Father Lacroix actually meets Pablo Neruda just before the dinner party in one of the gardens on the estate, "There was Neruda and there a few meters behind him was I, and, between us, the night, the moon, the equestrian statue, Chilean plants, Chilean wood, the obscure dignity of our land" (Bolaño, *Night*, 12). The narrator is shocked, and a little star struck to see Pablo Neruda standing in the garden at Farewell's house, not only is he a famous writer and poet in the novella, but Neruda was also actually one of Chile's best-known poets. Father Lacroix then brings it back to the wizened youth, boasting of his experience with Pablo Neruda, him standing there in awe watching Neruda recite poetry to the moon, and daring the wizened youth to have claim to such an experience. Father Lacroix even admits to reading Neruda's work, albeit in secret and in gloves, but he has read them nonetheless and is starstruck because of this "And there was I, tears in my eyes, a poor clergyman lost in the immensity of our land, thirstily drinking in the words of our most sublime poet" (13). After that Father Lacroix

goes on to the dinner with Farewell, another young poet, and Neruda and his wife, which he doesn't remember most of since he is still reeling from the scene in the garden.

The considerable amount of mention that Pablo Neruda receives by Father Lacroix in *By Night in Chile* is interesting because of Lacroix's political associations. As we know, Lacroix was a right-wing member who actively helped the Pinochet regime fight the left-wing dissidents Pablo Neruda on the other hand, was not just a famous Chilean poet but an incredibly political figure and an active member of the communist party. According to a biography published, detailing the life of Pablo Neruda, he returned to Chile in 1938 after a long career as a diplomat to other countries in Latin America. In 1943 he was elected to the senate and publicly joined the communist party. He held a position there until the right-wing Pinochet regime came into power where he was removed from his senate seat and subsequently went into hiding. In 1952 when the government ended the arrest warrants for any leftist writers, he came back into the public sphere and was dubbed the "people's poet" because he wrote for public and private concerns, and then in 1972 won the Nobel Prize for literature ("Neruda, Pablo", n.p.).

It is evident that there are political tensions between right-wing members and left-wing members, throughout the book. For one, Father Lacroix is aligned with the right-wing Pinochet regime and actively teaches them how to understand and fight communism, and for two the torture basement that was discovered in María's house was used against left-wing supporters and sympathizers. So, it is interesting that Father Lacroix should have such a poetic moment with Pablo Neruda, a man who stood for and against everything that Lacroix supported. But also, a man whose work Father Lacroix read in secret, when all left-wing intellectuals were under threat.

When Neruda was awarded the prize, it was “for a poetry that with the action of an elemental force brings alive a continent's destiny and dreams" (“The Nobel Prize in Literature 1971”, n.p.). Neruda’s work capitalized on his own working-class roots, relating to the common Chileans who fought to survive in Pinochet’s Chile (“Neruda, Pablo”, n.p.). It told the story of an ascendant Marxism that exposed the violent oppression of the social classes and reflected upon the socialist commitment of the Allende government (“Neruda Pablo”, The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, n.p.). This is why it is important that Pablo Neruda not only appears in *By Night in Chile* but is integral in grounding the novel to reality. Because he was a real person and poet who spoke truth about his country, he directly contrasts against the narrator.

But, like the character of Pablo Neruda throughout the novella, Father Lacroix is a voracious reader of all literature, which is why he even dared to read Neruda’s work. Because Father Lacroix is not just a member of the clergy but a member of academia, he is well read on the canon of ancient and modern literature. He hypocritically finds solace within books and poetry, he even is a book reviewer for the right-wing dictatorship, supporting their political agendas with the written word. This aspect of *By Night in Chile* pushes through to reality because Lacroix references literature that has been incredibly influential in our own world, authors like Jüing, Engels, Euripides, Aeschylus, and of course Karl Marx. Because he discusses these texts in conjunction with historical events in Chile, like the rise and fall of Allende, the line between fiction and reality begin to blur. These authors as well as Pablo Neruda push through the fictional aspect of the book, grounding Father Lacroix to real life.

The other prominent character that represents a right-wing intellectual who has sided with Pinochet, and right-wing dictatorship is Farewell. Farewell is Father Lacroix’s friend and

confidant, who is an avid reader and famous critic throughout Chile. As mentioned, it is at Farewell's house that Lacroix first meets Pablo, because Farewell is known for hosting dinners for his favorite writers and protégés. Farewell is a prominent character from the very start of the novel, "it would be an honor to spend the weekend at the estate of the Chile's greatest literary critic" (Bolaño, *Night*, 5), who heavily influences Lacroix. If the wizened youth is Father Lacroix's guilty conscience, then Farewell (though real enough) is the devil on his shoulder. Farewell is an agent of the military junta supporting their agenda through literary means, and drastically overestimates the threat of communism on Chile. This is especially evident when he first learns of Neruda's claiming the Nobel Prize in Literature, "Pablo is going to win the Nobel Prize. And he said it as if he were sobbing in the middle of an ashen field" (51). He furthers Lacroix's delusion of communism taking over, perceiving communism as the biggest threat to life in Chile.

These six intellectuals represent types of people according to Gramsci and his theory on the formation of intellectuals. Through this lens, Stein, Soto, Lorenzo, Neruda, Farewell, and Lacroix himself are all products of their society. Whether they are aligned with institutions or revolutionarily exist outside the bounds, these men are a product of living in Pinochet regime. In order to understand these men, their beliefs, their exiles, and their literature the reader has to evaluate the meaning of their political environment—right wing extremism and violence. Each of their radically different situations functions to further the untrustworthiness of national narratives and produce a reality effect. Because their situations and suppressions echo that of real history, and some like Neruda are actually real figures, the book simulates our perceived reality and becomes tangible to readers.

3. Revelations and Epiphanies

An element that's been discussed to some degree already, but which is prevalent throughout both novels is delusional thinking and exposure of truth. Besides the party scenes that help the reader experience a destruction of delusions, the characters in the novels experience this irruption themselves. The characters own destruction and realizations reveals to the reader the power of nationalist narratives and the importance of counteracting hegemony through a destruction of beliefs. Father Lacroix and Arturo B. experience these revelations or epiphanies as they come face to face with the truth about themselves and their country. Similar to the party scenes, through these revelations the historical truth of the depth of U.S. involvement during the Pinochet dictatorship begins to be revealed.

But the main narrators in the novels also contrast each other because Father Lacroix is completely delusional throughout the majority of the novel, where Arturo B. is actively trying to piece together a fragmented truth. Because Arturo is a poet, he sees reality subjectively and knows that truth is not found in the whole, but in pieces. Father Lacroix on the other hand, fervently believes that he was on the "right" side of history and in his own complete and true innocence before god. Both novels work in conjunction to discuss truth as their characters experience a comparable ruining of their previously known beliefs in the last scenes of the novels.

At the novella's conclusion the doubling of the author and the narrator (Roberto Bolaño and Arturo B[elano]) is re-complicated when the narrator becomes the double of Wieder, the novella's subject. This doubling is evident when Arturo B. has finally found Carlos Wieder and sits across from him in a pub, after Arturo B. and Romero have finally narrowed down their

search to a place where they believe Wieder lives and to the pub he visits frequently. Because the narrator has seen Carlos Wieder and attended the same poetry workshop when they were in school it was his job to sit and wait in the bar for Wieder to show up. Arturo B. though, is tormented by feelings of guilt and regret for getting involved in the whole investigation in the first place and when he asks Romero what will happen to Wieder when he's caught, and what is in it for the guy who hired Romero, he replies "You're better off not knowing, but you can guess" (136). This only strengthens the narrator's anxieties about both his job and whether or not Wieder will recognize him, but nonetheless he moves forward with the plan and waits for Carlos in the pub.

The most interesting part of this section of the book is when Wieder eventually arrives and the narrator notices his normality and the similarities between the two of them, "he had aged. Like me I suppose. But no, much more than me" (144). The picture that the narrator paints of Wieder is that of an old, sad, adult Chilean man, not of an infamous serial killer who killed, beat, and abused many Chilean individuals. The narrator notes that it is precisely because he doesn't seem to be sad that Wieder has this sort of infinite sadness to him, a man who had been hardened by the world and didn't have very much in the way of things at all. In short, the famous killer-poet of Chile looked like any other worn-down individual on the street. After this scene, Wieder leaves the bar and the narrator is filled with a feeling of freedom by "having finally solved the problem" (145). Arturo B. had been working tirelessly to find Weider through a literary trail. Reading through many books and magazines, he had to identify the different personas that Wieder occupied and followed his actions around the country till they could identify where he was currently (136).

Romero then arrives and the two characters continue on their way with a job in mind. As the narrator is relaying all the information to Romero he asks if Romero is going to kill Wieder, and then pleads that “it’s not worth it. It’s over now. No one needs to get hurt now” (147). But Romero continues on with his plan while Arturo waits outside. The narrator’s emotions here parallel to the rest of the book, particularly to the photo exhibit scene by revealing the depth to which people will ignore something right under their noses. If they aren’t forced to confront the truth face to face, they won’t, precisely because it is the easier option. Even though Arturo knows logically that Carlos Wieder is an awful man who has committed terrible crimes, he is still horrified at the role he played in the kidnapping and/or death of Carlos Wieder, and is fearful that his part in the probable torture and killing of Wieder will make Arturo even more similar to him.

This turn of events is particularly interesting because of the narrator’s attitude toward the whole ordeal and Carlos Wieder himself. Suffering from guilt and anxiety the narrator is stressed as he waits in the pub for Wieder and then when he finally sees him is struck by their similarity and how average and sad Wieder looks. This depiction of Wieder challenges the readers perception of what a serial killer should or should not look like. Reflecting on what we expect to be true, or that what we think we see might not be a good testament of what is actually true. Arturo is tempted to ignore Wieder and think of him as how he sees him, a sad old person who it’s hard to believe committed all those crimes in the past. This contrasts to the maid’s testimony, because when she speaks about Wieder, she sees him not as a man, but as this powerful deity-like force of evil. But in the narrator’s account and in this novel Wieder is conveyed as just a man, which is why this novel is caught up in its own uncertainty and why this the end to the novel is anticlimactic. This ending begs the question, which Carlos Wieder did Romero deal with? Did he

kill the beaten down old man sitting alone in a pub? Or was it the suave, mysterious, god-like force and symbol of evil? The novel ends on an ambiguous note questioning justice, reality, and perception.

The most important scene from *By Night in Chile* for analyses of contextual deferral and ruinist thinking is the very last scene in the book. From the end of the novel we are able to take into account the meaning of the true identity of the wizened youth. At the end of the narrative, Father Lacroix lay dying on his bed contemplating his life decisions and wrestling with his memories. He has just been remembering the funeral of his old friend Farewell and realizes that the wizened youth, the figure that has tormented him throughout the book, has finally gone quiet. At first, Father Lacroix thinks that the power of his own thought has stopped him, or that it was history because “the wizened youth has always been alone, and I have always been on history’s side” (Bolaño 128). Which, if true would’ve meant that Father Lacroix did not support the Pinochet or fascism. Because, if we look back at history and World War II it is true that the fascist countries did not win the War, and that the anti-fascist governments did.

After this though, Father Lacroix begins to unravel and remembers visiting Farewell’s old estate where he meets one of the young writers who was also at María Canales house, and who denies his knowledge of her when Lacroix inquires. Throughout this section the phrase “is there a solution” follows the lines where Father Lacroix is being exposed to his delusions (Bolaño, *Night*, 128-129). Afterward the realizations begin to pile up:

“I asked a young left-wing novelist if he knew how María Canales was getting on. The young man told me he had never met her. But you must have, you’ve been to her house, I said. He shook his head several times and changed the subject immediately. Is there a solution?” (Ibid.)

Throughout this section he realizes that the estate has changed, he recognizes nobody, and that the workers whom he believed worked on the land actually worked in a factory. When he addresses the young writer and asks about María, Lacroix is disconcerted at his denial and deflection. These instances of confusion for Father Lacroix, reveal the untrustworthiness of Father Lacroix's memory. The reader doesn't know whether or not the young-left wing writer actually knew Canales or not but can assume Father Lacroix's "remembering" him there is just another attempt at self-justification.

But, with the phrase "is there a solution?" reality creeps toward Father Lacroix as he begins to realize the many ways in which he was wrong. Eventually Father Lacroix asks himself "where is the wizened youth?" "why has he gone away?" and then he slowly begins to see the truth, he watches it rise like a dead body from the sea, its shadow growing every second and then finally it strikes him, "am I the wizened youth?" he asks. Then the book ends with its first paragraph break and the iconic line "and then the storm of shit begins" (Bolaño 130). This is important to note because up until now the book had been a stream of consciousness writing style that had no chapters or even paragraph breaks. Which allows for the novella to feel even more so like a rushed and adamant self-justification of a dying man trying to prove his innocence. It is also significant that the book ends with a storm of shit beginning, because up until now the whole book has been framed around an ending. The ending specifically of Father Lacroix's life "I am dying now, but I still have many things to say" (1). From the start of the novel, the very first line, Lacroix knows he is dying so he writes this confession as his last words and justification. What happens though, is that at the end of the novel, rather than finding peace by saying his last words, he erupts and destroys his deluded perception of himself.

This is the major climax of the story, because when Lacroix lay dying in his bed, he is finally faced with reality and his delusions come crashing down. The wizened youth is his own guilty conscious, who throughout the length of the book tries to destroy the Father Lacroix's carefully crafted justifications and delusions so that he might rest easy and believe in his own goodness. But we learn at the end that is not the case. Father Lacroix is a guilty man, he did help the Pinochet regime in multiple ways, teaching them Marxism so that they could better catch the socialists, going to Europe to aid the rise of Pinochet, and by his own willing ignorance as he attended the parties at María Canales house where therein lived a torture basement. But, throughout the book Father Lacroix sees himself as a good man, "I will lift my noble, trembling head" (1). He thinks he is someone who is innocent in the eyes of God, "God hears them, and only God understands and judges them, so one must be very careful with one's silences. My silences are immaculate" (1). Father Lacroix believes that since he was a part of the clergy and had faith that his actions throughout his youth were God's desires. His delusions are so deep that he is using his faith and alignment within the church to justify the harm he caused.

Father Lacroix is not an innocent man even though he tried for years to delude himself of that fact, and he was eventually forced to face the truth on his deathbed. Only after this realization does it become clear that the purpose of the novel is to question the reader's own delusions and their own perceived innocence. This revelation of Father Lacroix exposes the depth to which it is possible to delude ourselves within history, and it emphasizes that a reader's own innocence before God is neither absolute nor guaranteed. Like Father Lacroix, we, the United States attempt to convince ourselves of certain false narratives because it is easier than facing the uncomfortable truths of our own history and involvement. The novella puts our own

self narratives into question, making the ideas and beliefs that we held about ourselves uncertain. Can we trust our memories? Have our own thoughts and historical beliefs been changed to fit the version of ourselves or country that we prefer to be true?

These revelations and analyses are important because it outlines the purpose of the novel as well as allowing a lens through which the reader can compare and contrast both novellas by Roberto Bolaño, *Distant Star* and *By Night in Chile*. The main characters contrast each other because Father Lacroix wholeheartedly believes his own delusions and his manufactured story, where Arturo B. recognizes that the whole truth is unknowable tries to piece together a true story outside of false narratives. Arturo B. is, as mentioned, a doubling of the author himself, Roberto Bolaño. Arturo represents an author and a writer who realizes that it's impossible to know the whole truth but attempts to piece together fragments in his investigation of Carlos Wieder through literature and poetry. This, in the same way, is what Bolaño is doing, through his literature and novellas, he is piecing together a fragmented history of Chile.

Both Arturo B.'s and Father Lacroix's realities are constructed, and their perspectives are that of a poet and a critic, but the difference is that one is aware of this fabrication and the other one is not. The belief that truth can be found in fragments and has to be pieced together is a ruinist type of thinking and contextual deferral. We cannot find a truth easily that is devoid of national or global influence but must do the epistemic work of destroying our previously accepted beliefs and putting the truth together piece by piece. A whole reality is too complicated for anyone to put together completely into one true image, even our self-images can be skewed like that of Father Lacroix's, but this is why the goal must be to find the fragments of the truth.

And why these books are not just a mirror, but an explosion. An explosion, that shatters what we believe to be true into smaller pieces where we can glimpse the truth.

4. History, Fiction, and Contextual Deferral

One strategy that Roberto Bolaño uses to employ the literary tactic of contextual deferral is the seamless blending of reality and fiction. This blending of reality and fiction challenges previously accepted historical beliefs while the irruption of nationalist narratives helps develop contextual deferral. Because a reader is engaging with world literature, fiction outside their own place and time, they are forced to think critically about national and cultural narratives. Within both novels, there are major scenes that involve a fictional event in tandem with a real event that actually occurred in Chile's history. These events represent how contextual deferral layers realities upon realities and fictions over fictions in order to paint a picture.

Through this combination of multiple fictions, Bolaño seeks to expose the truth behind the U.S. involvement in the Pinochet coup d'état. In *Distant Star* the author parallels Carlos Wieder's trial to that of the of real criminal trials that are still happening in Chile, and also parallels events in his own life to that of the narrator, Arturo B. In *By Night in Chile*, a fictional event directly mirrors a real event because in the same way that Father Lacroix actively helps and supports Pinochet, U.S. American economists aided the military junta in real life.

There is a scene in *Distant Star* after the end of the Pinochet regime, where Carlos Wieder is tried for the murders of the Garmendia sisters. This is a prime example in the novella where reality pushes through fiction and where real events blend with fictional. The night that the Garmendia sisters were killed, Carlos Wieder came to visit them at their house in Nacimiento. The twins were eager to see Carlos, who was then still going by the name Ruiz-

Tagle and invited him to stay for dinner and the night. Throughout the evening they had lively discussions, recited poetry together, ate homemade biscuits, and played the guitar.

That night, after they had all gone to bed Carlos wakes up, kills the twins' guardian and lets four other men into the house. After Wieder kills the aunt in her bed, he searches for the maid but finds her bed empty, struck by a fit of rage he lashes out, destroying her room. But luckily, he doesn't have time to look for her before he has to let the other men into the house to move on with the plan. These events happen so discretely and efficiently, that it's not until years later that one of the Garmendia sisters body turns up as evidence of the horrors of that night. This emergence of Wieder from Ruiz-Tagle (his previous name), the wealthy, suave, land-owners son, is the beginning of the repetition of fascism because it is born from the upper-class.

Based on this account of that night in Nacimiento, we can assume that the maid may have survived. More than 100 pages later Bolaño narrates Wieder's trials *in absentia* for human rights abuses and murder. And it is revealed that she did in fact survive and has now come to play an important role in Carlos Wieder's trial. In 1992, Carlos Wieder's name came up in a judicial report about the torture and disappearance of prisoners from an "independent operational group" (Bolaño, *Distant*, 108). That same year, a previous member of the air force published his memoir that included the night of the photo exhibit, and a book titled *The Warlocks Return* which detailed fascism in Latin America and featured Carlos Wieder was published. All these events lead to the trial of Carlos Wieder, which unfortunately made little headway in the way of justice. But, hopefully, remembering these events through literature, and writing allows space for justice and brings Wieder's atrocities back to light because they are accessible to everyone.

But, at Wieder's trial for the murder of Angelica Garmendia and disappearances of her sister and Aunt, the maid who had somehow survived that night made an appearance. Her account of that horrible night presented it as just one particular episode in a "long history of killing and injustice" (111). Because the maid had lived in Pinochet's Chile, she wasn't a stranger to violence, oppression, and senseless killings. In her testimony, the events of the night were told in a cyclical, epic poem that was not only the account of herself, Amalia Maluenda, but also the story of the Chilean nation in what Arturo B. says is a "story of terror" (111). This story of terror lives on in the memories of the people hurt by the Pinochet regime, in continuing personal narratives but not historical accounts since most written evidence was destroyed by the regime. Because the maid's story is not historical, but literary, it doesn't conform to the law's "narrative of power" and isn't admissible in court.

Even though these trial against Carlos Wieder happen after the Pinochet military junta fell, this trial happens in 1994 and the regime ended in 1990, there was no legal retribution. This trial happened post dictatorship, after the laws persecuting communists had been lifted, the killings in large had stopped, and during a time when the country was in a period of national reconciliation. Despite of all these things, no justice occurred for the Garmendia sisters, or many of the other victims because according to Arturo, "The country had too many problems to concern itself for long with the fading figure of a serial killer who had disappeared years ago" (111). The memory of the maid survives even though all written account of Wieder had been destroyed by the government, her stories and memory of this one night serve in place for the hundreds of people who have neither the ability nor the opportunity to tell their stories. The

book is a reaction to the failure of justice from the state that attempts to show that justice is limited by the narrative of power.

Distant Star is a novel of contextual deferral, the concept discussed by Hernan Diaz where realities are layered within and on top of one another with theories and beliefs so complexly that through creation of multiple fictions, reality begins to emerge. A prime example of this is when Arturo B is taken prisoner during the beginning of the novel, where he stays for several days and witnesses Carlos Wieder's first poetic act in the sky. In the book, at the beginning of the coup when Pinochet is rising to power, Arturo B. is taken prisoner for unknown and "banal" reasons (24). He was imprisoned for several days during which he and other prisoners would kill time in the outdoor yard of La Peña, waiting for release. But it is precisely because he was imprisoned and had no other choice than to spend time in the prison yard, that Arturo B. was able to witness Wieder's debut act of skywriting. This compares to Roberto Bolaño's own personal life and history because he too was taken prisoner during the coup d'état. After returning to Chile to support the socialist revolution, Roberto Bolaño was taken prisoner under the charge of suspected terrorism. He was imprisoned for several days and was saved from further imprisonment, death, or possible torture after being released by a prison guard with whom he had gone to school. Only because he happened to know one of the prison guards was Roberto Bolaño released from prison ("Bolaño, Roberto", *The Columbian Encyclopedia*, n.p.). Although Bolaño was not tortured during his brief stint in prison, he reportedly heard others being tortured and abused throughout the prison.

This direct comparison between the author's life as well as Arturo B's life exposes an autobiographical aspect throughout the book. This is an intentional move on Bolaño's part as he

purposefully blends reality with fiction so closely that the reader is unsure of the dividing line between the fictional Arturo B's imprisonment and Bolaño's. This scene mirrors how the novel itself is framed between autobiography and fiction, which links to Jorge Luis Borges theory on narrative power when discussing his short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius". His story circulates around the idea of "fiction invading reality" and how literature can be a reality that pushes through fiction. (Diaz, *Between History and Eternity*, 60). Although Tlön is a different story, this same theory applies to Bolaño's works as he blends reality with fiction so well that reader cannot tell the difference.

All this merging of reality and fiction lead to the continuing of contextual deferral and discovery of truth through fiction outside of national narratives. This is the power of narratives through contextual deferral, because the reader is unsure of the difference between reality and fiction throughout not only this section of the novel but the entire book itself, then the reality of life under the Pinochet regime emerges. The reality that throughout the reign of Pinochet hardly any individual was safe from being imprisoned, tortured, and killed, and the regime expressly targeted intellectuals and harshly suppressed any socialist supporters. Which is also a reality that, as a globally situated American I was unaware. In the same way that "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" exposes how much people can delude themselves, *Distant Star* works to break apart the deluded American perspective revealing the hand the U.S. had to play throughout one of the darkest moments of Chile's history.

This blending of autobiography and fictional story telling is an example of the narrative power of world literature. Because world literature is a mode of reading a piece of work, rather than a genre or type of literature, we can engage with worlds beyond our own place and time

(Damrosch, “What is World Literature”, 281). By understanding world literature and approaching *Distant Star* with a detached kind of engagement, the reader can question the narrative power in Chile, the United States, and the world. Whether or not the imprisonment of Arturo B. is a true representation of Roberto Bolaño’s doesn’t really matter, but the power the story has as it circulates the globe informing people of life under a military Junta is what matters. As *Distant Star* moves around the world, readers begin to question what they know about Chilean society, and what they know about their own.

A multi-fictional type thinking is also evident in the same prison scene of the book, where Wieder’s first sky writing experience happens. Not only is it important to the narrative of the story because it is the first time the reader is introduced to this “new Chilean poetry” of Wieder’s, but also because of all the Nazi and World War II references. Arturo B. is imprisoned with another man named Norberto (reportedly mad) who reacted strongly to Wieder’s performance not because of the poetry he was writing, but because of all the Nazism and fascism he was alluding to. For example, when seeing the plane Norberto exclaimed “it’s a Messerschmitt 109, a Messerschmitt fighter from the Luftwaffe!” (Bolaño, *Distant*, 26). This is significant because a Messerschmitt is a famous German fighter aircraft from World War II, not an airplane of the Chilean military (“Fighter Aircraft”, n.p.).

Everyone in the prison yard froze and looked toward the sky as Norberto continued to laugh and claim that the second World War was returning. It wouldn’t be third he said, but rather just another World War II, a war based on fascism and death “And it has fallen to us, the people of Chile, to greet and welcome it---oh lucky day!” (Bolaño, *Distant*, 27). Norberto doesn’t just bring up the Second World War here, but he also talks about it with excitement and anticipation.

Why is he excited about World War II returning when it was the cause of so many people's suffering? Is he excited about the possibility of fighting the Nazis again, about repeating history? It is clearer why the junta would want to repeat past fascisms, because those philosophies allowed certain types of individuals to completely dominate others. Fascism gave Germany an undeniable power, that took years and tens of millions of lives to defeat, so likewise, it's not out of reach to assume that the junta wanted a similar power and dominance in the world.

Though the Pinochet regime is a new player who focuses on globalism and economics as well as death and fascism, the base principles and fascist structure between him and the Nazi's are the same. This repetition of fascism emphasizes how *Distant Star* functions as a mirror and explosion. Because, on the second page of the novel there is a short introduction detailing the events that led up to the formation of the book. The author and/or narrator of the book notes that *Distant Star* is an extension of a previous novella *Nazi Literature in the America*, and that it is "in itself, a mirror and explosion". All of these references to Nazi Germany and World War II reveal how the military junta in Chile is mirroring and repeating World War II, and how this novel by explicitly showing these connections between the two fascist regimes is a mirror itself. The belief that Chile needs to be "cleansed" or that "death is cleansing" is a repetition of World War II. Norberto's character then, both allegorizes its own fictions by alluding to Bolaño's other novella *Nazi Literature in the Americas* and exposes larger cyclical themes throughout *Distant Star*. According to the book review by Pedro Ponce, "Review of Nazi Literature in the Americas", the book was published in 1996 and is structured as a short dictionary detailing the lives of right-wing writers throughout the Americas. In the book he discusses the lives of authors in conjunction with fascist beliefs in a collection of short entries, and the last of which is a

condensed version of *Distant Star*. Where a man names Carlos Ramirez Hoffman is an infamous sky-writing serial killer (“Review of Nazi Literature in the Americas”, n.p.). This novel, along with *Distant Star* continues the themes of repetition throughout Bolaño’s novellas. His fictions build on one another in narrative storylines, themes, and characters, continuing threads of discussion across multiple works of literature.

An example of these cyclical theme and reinforcement of fascism to Latin America, is the actual writing itself that Wieder pens in the sky. The opening lines of Wieder’s debut poetry in the sky is not original poetry, but rather the first lines of the book of Genesis from the Bible

*IN PRINCIPIO CREAVIT DEUS CAELUM ET TERRAM
TERRA AUTEM ERAT INANIS ET VACUA ET TENEBRAE
SUPER FACIEM ABYSSI
ET SPRITUS DEI FEREBATUR SUPER AQUAS
DIXITQUE DEUS FIAT LUX
ET FACTA EST LUX
ET VIDIT DEUS LUCEM
QUOD ESSET BONA ET DIVISIT
LUCEM AC TENEBRAS (25-28).*

[In the beginning, God created heaven and earth. But the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep; and so, the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, “Let there be light.” And there was light. And God saw the that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.] (The English Standard Version).

After Wieder finishes writing the lines of Genesis in Latin, he ends his performance with the word “LEARN” (APRENDE). He finishes with only the line “learn”, but in the original Spanish the word is conjugated imperatively and is written as a command. In contrast to the Latin quotes where he is declaring something in the sky, with the word “learn” Wieder is telling

the audience they must learn what he is saying to them. Though most of the onlookers in the prison yard do not understand Latin, everyone felt the gravity of this performance, and Arturo B. notes that “never in my life had I seen so much sadness in one place” (Bolaño, *Distant*, 27). If Wieder connects the coup d’état to the events that happen in Genesis one, then in Wieder’s story “god” in his reality is the military junta. The Pinochet dictatorship is the god-like figure responsible for death, change, and the creation of a new Chile. It is important to acknowledge here the power of liturgy even when in another language unknown to its congregation. This aerial performance occurs in the 1970s, and it was until 1965 all traditional catholic church masses and religious rites were held in the original Latin even if many people in the church’s congregation did not understand (“Second Vatican Council”, Britannica Academic, n.p.). This highlights the authority of liturgy and Latin in particular and further emphasizes the fact that Wieder is an organic intellectual attempting to align with the traditional intellectuals. Wieder writes lines of the Bible as his opening act so that people can understand his mission, and his promise to create a new Chile even though he is repeating old mantras and beliefs. His “new Chile” is also return to the old tension of an organic intellectual attempting to win over traditional intellectuals.

In Bolaño’s other novella *By Night in Chile*, he also blends reality with fiction and uses a fictional scene in his book to directly reference a real occurrence that reveals the depth of U.S. involvement in the coup d’état. The second most pivotal scene in the book is when Father Lacroix has returned from Europe and is employed by Pinochet and his generals to teach them Marxism and communist thought. Now that Father Lacroix has worked for Pinochet once

already, Mr. Etah and Mr. Raef¹ have another proposal for the priest. They both come to his house one day and question him on his education of Marxist theories. At first, Father Lacroix denies knowing anything about Marxism or having any communist books, but after some probing and encouragement from the two men, admits that he does in fact own several books and knows the principles of Marxism, but only for scholarly reasons. They ask him if he would teach the fundamental principles of Marxism to General Pinochet and several of his other high-ranking generals, they told him that he would be “serving in silence and obscurity to his country, far from the glitter of medals” (Bolaño, *Night*, 88). Father Lacroix does have his reservations though, and when he first arrives to teach his first “lesson” to the generals, he is wrought with nerves and feelings of fear and guilt “I felt like sitting down with the cup between my knees and crying” (90). But, regardless of how he felt at the beginning, Father Lacroix begins teaching the Junta the principles of Marxism and continues for nine whole classes.

The point of these classes is revealed days later after the classes have ended when despite being warned about secrecy Father Lacroix shares his experience with Farewell. During this conversation, he reflects on one of the first conversation he has with General Pinochet, a conversation where the General revealed why he wanted to learn Marxism, he says to Father Lacroix “The better to serve our country. In order to understand Chile’s enemies, to find out how they think, to get an idea of how far they are prepared to go” (100). This quote from Pinochet exposes why the generals wanted to learn about communism when they were completely right-wing extremists. They wanted to be educated on how their opponents think so that they can

¹ Etah and Raef are the backwards spelling of “hate” and “fear”

better catch, and kill the communist supporters, and so that they can more easily win the country by understanding the lengths their enemies will go to.

This job of Father Lacroix's parallels to a real event that happened between the U.S. and Chile. An American man named Milton Friedman taught a group of economists from the University of Chicago about a free market economy during the coup d'état. This group of economists that helped Chile and the Pinochet regime with economic policy was nicknamed "The Chicago Boys". Though many Americans believed that Friedman helped save Chile, an article titled "The Chicago Boys in Chile: Economic Freedoms Awful Toll" adamantly disagrees with this sentiment claiming that "Pinochet's Friedman-prescribed policies had caused rapid de-industrialization, a tenfold increase in unemployment and an explosion of distinctly unstable shantytowns" (n.p). They also led to a crisis of corruption and debt so severe that, in 1982, Pinochet was forced to fire his key Chicago Boy advisers and nationalize several of the large deregulated financial institutions. These Chicago economists convinced that Chilean Junta that they were prepared to supplement the brutality of the governments with their intellectual assets.

A United States agency, the CIA, helped fund the men's research for the economic measures Pinochet would take after seizing the government. Friedman himself travelled to Chile and in a number of appearances promoted his infamous "shock treatment" policy for the economy. Friedman was famous for his "shock treatments" that capitalized in national emergencies to jump start the government, and he is quoted for saying "it's the only medicine. Absolutely. There is no other. There is no other long-term solution" ("The Chicago Boys in Chile: Economic Freedoms Awful Toll", n.p.). So, like Father Lacroix, Milton Friedman and his

cronies went into Chile bringing American economic policies that would help the Pinochet regime gain and hold their fascist power.

5. Repetition, Doubling, and Contextual Deferral

Throughout both the novellas by Bolaño, there is a mirroring and reflection of reality. In each novel, there are scenes, references, and characters that reveal the authors intention of reflecting reality and exposing certain truths about Latin America. This tension between reality and fiction leads to contextual deferral which then allows the book to act as a mirror, reflecting the truth of reality not in whole but in pieces as it shatters our previous delusions and forces readers to critically think about the text. Bolaño use both history and his other works of fiction to complicate the novel and further the contextual deferral happening. As he interconnects and layers fiction upon fiction and reality upon reality readers begin to confuse what is real and what is not, which creates a space outside global and national narratives for the truth to be discovered.

Through this mirroring, the intention of Bolaño and the purpose of his novellas is revealed. Bolaño forces his readers to think critically about our history and self-delusions and recognize the power of literature through the development of fiction and contextual deferral. Bolaño discusses the purpose of the books specifically through a bible reference, a fictional event, and the names and repetitions of the characters themselves. All these techniques force the reader to think about what the novel is trying to do, and how it is a mirror and reflection of reality.

In *Distant Star*, when the detective Romero references the Bible during a conversation to with Arturo B., he makes an important claim about their investigation that alludes to the overall theme of the book. Detective Romero was hired by a third party to find Carlos Wieder and hires

Arturo B. to help with the investigation. At first Arturo does not understand why Romero wants to enlist his help with tracking down Wieder, but Romero enlightens him by saying “To find a poet, he needed the help of another poet” (Bolaño, *Distant*, 117). Because both Wieder and Arturo are writers and poets, they see reality similarly. They’re realities are subjective, influenced by the authors they admire and the strength of their imagination. Arturo is fit for the job of finding Wieder because he understands that truth is found in fragments. If he wants to understand and find Wieder there will be a lot of speculation throughout the process. But, in response to this, Arturo rejects the idea that Carlos Wieder is a poet or similar to him at all, claiming instead that he is a criminal, but Romero refutes this with the phrase “it all depends on the glass we see through” (117). This reference to perspective and glass is a direct allusion to the verse from First Corinthians 13:12, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

This is an important and notable allusion because the book is acknowledging, outside the religious implications from the Bible, that its own reality is cloudy and unknowable much like the dark reflection in a mirror. But even though, it can be hard to see through this glass, we can try to piece together fragments of the truth, which is what Detective Romero and Arturo B. are attempting in their investigation of Carlos Wieder. The book of *Distant Star* itself doesn’t clearly outline what is happening within the narrative for the reader specifically surrounding Carlos Wieder’s poetry, actions, and involvement with the Chilean government. For example, it is unclear from the start whether or not Carlos Wieder is acting on his own accord when he kills all his victims, or whether he is acting on the desires of the government. The reader has to try and

piece together the truth as the story develops. Like the dark glass in the verse in Corinthians, *Distant Star* purposefully keeps things vague, visceral, and imbued with dark realism.

As mentioned earlier, this novel as a whole is meant to be a dark glass or mirror, a story that, rather than mirror and explode others, would be in itself, a mirror and explosion, and which links together the Borgesian idea of contextual deferral and Alberto Moreiras' theory of ruinist thinking. As a mirror explodes, we are only able to glimpse many small pieces of the whole picture; which reveals how closely contextual deferral and ruinist thinking are related. Through the lens of contextual deferral, the reader sees how this novel becomes a mirror because it makes it clear that it is a fiction reflecting within another fiction, and then the real objects and truth begin to push through and shatter our preconceived ideas. Through layers and layers of multiple realities, and as we destroy our previously accepted realities, we are able to recognize that there is no entirely true picture of reality but that it is fragmented.

Bolaño writes his fictions in a way that causes the reader to see the link between Bolaño, Borges, and Diaz. If we can recognize an ideological connection as well as a political, the reader can see a space outside globalist and nationalist thinking. Since *Distant Star* is structured in a vague, confusing, and fragmented way the reader is forced to think critically and do the epistemic work necessary to "ruin" our old beliefs and ideas about history. Literature itself is the connection between Bolaño, Borges, and Diaz, because it is best suited for this kind of imaginative difficulty. Literature is reflexive in ways unlike movies and music, fiction allows the reader to see that reality is an effect, that it is changeable and malleable. By allowing our thinking to be complex, we keep our historical imagination open to the possibility of healing and rightly remembering the past.

The scene I will discuss in *By Night in Chile* that does this mirroring and destruction of beliefs, is the section of the novel where Father Lacroix is sent to Europe to write a report on the preservation of churches. Lacroix is approached by two men, Mr. Etah and Mr. Raef who tell him that they work for The Archiepiscopal College who has a problem, and he is the one who fits the bill to fix it. The Archiepiscopal College wanted someone to travel to Europe to write a report on the preservation of churches. They asked Father Lacroix because he was educated, an active member of the clergy, and a right-wing sympathizer, which was important because both Mr. Etah and Mr. Raef worked for the Pinochet Regime. Father Lacroix then leaves for Europe and begins visiting the churches “at the forefront of the battle against dilapidation” (Bolaño, *Night*, 66). Traveling around Europe, Father Lacroix notices that the largest problem the church is experiencing with their preservation efforts was pollution not cause by humans but animals, specifically “pigeon shit” (69). Due to the increase in the pigeon population it was becoming a large problem for the churches, but according to the priests a solution had been found. A weapon that was still being developed, falconry. The friars of the churches mastered the art of falconry so that when they saw pigeons near their church, they could send the falcon to attack and kill the pigeon in midair.

Through Father Lacroix’s European expedition, he learns that almost all the parishes are using this type of weaponry to kill all the pigeons in the surrounding area. At one point, at church in France, with a Fr Paul, Lacroix was watching him use the bird to kill a pigeon that had risen and flown above the town square. When the falcon swiftly killed the bird there was a murmur of surprise from the people below, and Fr Paul and Lacroix realize that they have actually killed a white dove, who was the mascot of the town’s athletic competition. There is only one Priest of

all the churches who is against the use of falcons to kill pigeons. Fr Antonio in Burgos, a very old friar (with a very old falcon), tells Lacroix that he had begun to have doubts about “using such an expeditive method to be rid of birds which, in spite of their shitting, were God’s creatures too” (72). This conviction of the priest here is the only example in all the churches where someone has shown reservations about mercilessly killing hundreds of birds just so that they don’t shit on the church walls. Fr Antonio dies that night and Lacroix accidentally releases the bird. Because Lacroix feels guilty about the bird, and is somewhat shaken by the death of Fr Antonio, a few days later while in another country Lacroix has a dream about the old priest. In his dream he sees the old friar telling him “it’s wrong, my friend, its wrong. I saw a flock of falcons, thousands of falcons flying high over the Atlantic Ocean, headed for America” (79). After this dream, Father Lacroix decides to end his trip and return to Chile to help and support his country.

This section of the novel is important for several reasons, for one it reveals how the right-wing organic intellectuals desire to win over the traditional intellectuals, the church. The Pinochet supporters want to preserve the church in Latin America and gain their overall support, but due to all the human rights violations committed, the church stayed adamantly opposed to the military dictatorship. Another way this scene is important is because it mirrors an exact process that will happen in Chile, an institution will use weaponized forces to “control” the population of left-wing, socialist supporters, as they sacrifice human lives for the preservation of their country.

Father Lacroix has willingly accepted the death of many pigeons to preserve and protect the church, as he likewise has accepted the death of thousands of people to protect his country from the perceived threat of communism. Another way this scene is significant is in the dream

that Father Lacroix had where he was warned that a flock of falcons were flying to America. Historically, in reality, it's fascism that rises in Latin America and that's who the falcons truly represent. But, either knowingly or unknowingly Father Lacroix misinterprets this sign to represent communists flying over to take his country. He exaggerates the threat of communism to Chile and believes he *must* return to his homeland, be a patriot, and work to protect his country from the threat of communism and socialism. His (purposeful) misinterpretation of the dream is just one more delusion that Father Lacroix tells himself so that he can return to Chile without a guilty conscience.

Finally, if we return back to *Distant Star*, an aspect that further emphasizes these cyclical themes of fascism and points towards ruinist thinking and contextual deferral is the actual names of the main characters themselves in the novella. The first name that does is this is Carlos Wieder, even if the reader is not knowledgeable about German or the German language, it can be inferred that the last name Wieder, probably does not have Latin American origins. The name Wieder can actually be translated into English to literally mean "again" or "repetition". This is significant because it further emphasizes the returning of fascism and destruction to the Americas rather than its new creation. Carlos Wieder's philosophies are not new, and though they are somewhat revolutionary because the world has never seen Wieder, or his performances and poetry, he is actually just repeating the fascism of World War II. Through all this signaling of a "return" to fascism, Bolaño is making the claim that it has always existed in America, perhaps under different names but it has in fact been present. It's not an ideology that just existed in Germany or Europe but something that has been in the Americas since the beginning. When Wieder tells the public that "death is Chile" and "Death is cleansing" he is repackaging fascism

for the present. The practice of hegemony between types of intellectuals, the powerful dominating the weak, and believing that the state has to kill people to maintain order is all old news throughout the world.

One discussion about this type of fascism in the Americas quotes American author Sinclair Lewis saying, “when fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross” (“The Sinclair Lewis Society”, n.p.). This is true because U.S. government agencies backed and encouraged the military coup d’état that used fascist tactics to rule the country and impose a new regime. According to the book *Latin America, An Interpretive History* by Julie Charlip and E. Bradford Burns, these dictatorship governments were not new in the 1970s and 19980s but have been supported by the U.S. since the 1930s. “The new dictators served U.S. interests by guaranteeing order. Their authoritarianism was ignored under the guise of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s new policy of nonintervention, The Good Neighbor Policy” (224). The book also notes that the brutality of the regimes was no secret to the United States, proven by the belief that FDR once said, in regard to Nicaraguan dictator Somoza, that “he’s a son of a bitch, but he’s our son of a bitch” (Charlip and Burns, *An Interpretive History*, 224). Similar to the 1930s, in Chile in 1973, because the previous government under Allende was a socialist and “communist” regime, the U.S. would support and help implement a government that was responsible for the death and torture of thousands of people.

These are important historical facts to recognize that contribute to “ruinist thinking”. As both an American and as a reader of *Distant Star*, I am forced to question nationalist beliefs and narratives about the U.S. and other parts of the world. Is the U.S. a global superpower that after emerging victorious from the Second World War, truly benevolent? How could a country who

preaches freedom and acceptance support a military junta that stripped its people of all liberties? Knowing that the U.S. backed and helped implement the Pinochet regime, shatters the belief that America is the savior of the world, and suggests that our country is just as corrupt and broken as the ones who we think are fascist or communist.

Reading the *An Interpretive History* by Charlip and Burns, was for me, a completely new education. Like the information I learned about Franklin Roosevelt, and the implications of the “good neighbor policy”, that book was filled with details from America’s political history that began to ruin my own delusions about America. In order to understand the impact of the both *Distant Star* and *By Night in Chile*, I began to educate myself on the events of the past and the tumultuous history between the United States and Latin America. For example, the reason that many countries in Latin America went through a period of military dictatorship in 1964-1990 was due to the economic ruin that they suffered. In 1965 most Latin American countries began experiencing the limits of “import-substitution industrialization”, and chronic inflation (Charlip and Burns, *An Interpretive History*, 271). Many countries began borrowing money from private lenders and by early 1970 the regions debt was \$34 billion. Even when they were able to prosper off of their exports, this money funneled straight into the hands of the elite few (270).

Basically, because of the debt accruing for most of the population, and the cold war fears that suppressed the labor movement, authoritarian governments were supported by the elite, the middle class, and the United States (271). These militant leaders stayed in power because they adopted economic strategies that seemed successful at first and the fear, they instilled in their people because of their willingness to use brutality. The military coups only came to an end when their economic policies eventually failed (274). These events and others like it led to the

historical climate that resulted in the rise of the Pinochet regime in Chile. World literature, like Roberto Bolaño's novellas, seeks to expose this history and break apart the nationalist narrative. Just from reading this textbook, I experienced the irruptive forces of literary studies, as it broke down the delusion I held of America being a benevolent and fair world power.

While Wieder's name connects the history of Chilean dictatorial literature to European fascism and the post-war global order, the narrator's name connects to the reality of the text's production. The name Arturo B. suggests the autobiographical elements of the book, due to the same number of syllables in both Arturo and Roberto, and because Arturo's last name is B. where Roberto's is Bolaño. In a later novel, *The Savage Detectives*, a main character has the surname "Belano" which is another allusion to Roberto Bolaño himself, and another example of the autobiographical elements in Bolaño's works (Bolaño, *The Savage Detectives*). This connection between the names of the author and the main character also lends to the layering of reality upon fiction within the book, because the reader is not quite sure if the main character is actually supposed to be the author even though the suggestions is there.

If Bolaño has a similar poetic sensibility and belief in the subjectivity of reality to that of Arturo B., then his novellas can challenge the accepted idea of reality. With Bolaño's poetic sensibility, he can tell a story that is truer than the national narrative, within fiction Bolaño has the power to tell multiple stories of once. The murky and confusing work it requires to tell these stories, like Arturo B., does not hinder Bolaño because he understands that truth does not exist as one complete picture.

Not explicitly stated throughout the book, we only learn the name of the narrator from the opening page of the book because it states "Arturo would have preferred a longer story that,

rather than mirror or explode others, would be, in itself, a mirror and explosion....so we took that final chapter and shut we shut ourselves up for a month and a half...and composed the present novel” (Bolaño, *Distant*, n.p.). This brief introductory paragraph explains how *Distant Star* is an extension of one of Bolaño’s previous novels, *Nazi Literature in the Americas*. The narrator of that story is himself returning to another piece of fiction that crosses with several other novellas by Bolaño. The book from the beginning recognizes that its purpose is to be a mirror and reflection of multiple themes, of fascism, socialism, fictions within fictions, and narrative storylines. This mirroring and reflecting of multiple fictions allows for the reader to experience contextual deferral and for other possible realities to open up.

Finally, the last name that furthers this theme of repetition and doubling is the name Ibacache because it appears in both novellas and is the pen name for Father Lacroix. In *Distant Star*, Ibacache is a very minor character who critiques Wieder’s poetry, but as we know in *By Night in Chile*, Father Lacroix is the main character and one of his names is Ibacache. This is another instance of contextual deferral and where Bolaño connects his works of fiction. In *Distant Star* Ibacache appears during the beginning of Carlos Wieder’s poetry career as “a certain Niciosio Ibacache, who collected antiques and was a devout catholic, which hadn’t prevented him from being a personal friend of Pablo Neruda” (*Distant*, 35). We learn in *By Night in Chile* that Ibacache is a pen name that Father Lacroix uses so that he could write and critique for political efforts under a different name “So I adopted the name of H. Ibacache. And little by little the reputation of H. Ibacache outstripped that of Sebastián Urrutia Lacroix to my surprise and satisfaction” (*Night*, 25). Because the same name occurs in both books and Bolaño has a history of repeating characters, it is reasonable to assume here that the Ibacache in both stories is

the same character. This re-appearance across different novellas further connects *Distant Star* and *By Night in Chile* reflecting the cyclical nature of Bolaño.

It is also important to note that *By Night in Chile* was written after *Distant Star*, so this begs the question of why Bolaño would use a minor character and a devout catholic literary critic to be the main character of his next novella? But it is precisely because Ibacache is a literary critic that Bolaño chooses this character to reappear. Because he is not writing but reading and reviewing literature it highlights the importance of the reader's relationship with the text. Throughout both novellas Bolaño stresses the importance of the effect of his book on the reader by comparing and questioning the reader's own delusions to those of both narrators. This is then furthered by the fact that Father Lacroix/Ibacache are book critics who read, review, and contemplate literature rather than being a writer or poet.

If we return back to the story of Tlön, because it was published in 1937 and the information in the encyclopedia eclipsed the whole entire Earth, we see that Borges was looking forward into the future thinking that nationalist narratives would be outdone by globalist ones. But, looking at Bolaño and his novellas written sixty years later, it is evident that national narratives are still the prominent narratives of power. Narratives that cause cultures to forget the truths of the oppressed and the powerless, only telling one side of the story.

Even though the military dictatorship coup d'états that were responsible for thousands of deaths happened in Latin America, it is evident through Bolaño's work that the American government is just as much to blame for those crimes as is the Chilean. Additionally, the nationalist narratives that hid the truth of this reality are not new but have been around since the start of colonialism and imperialism and continue till today. Particularly in today's current

political climate, with movements such as the Black Lives Matter movement, we see voices fighting to change the white, dominant, nationalistic narrative and to reveal the truth of oppression. They fight to change history by removing confederate monuments, re-evaluating beauty standards, rioting against police violence, and supporting black artists (Amanda Gorman).

What I've demonstrated throughout my thesis and research is the importance of supplementing our own worldviews with non-national thinking. By breaking apart these narratives of power and oppression, literature is imperative for thinking critically about our own self-image, education, and historical delusions. The way to escape globalist and nationalist narratives of power, and to support human rights movements like the MeToo campaign and Black Lives Matter in the future, is through literature and by employing contextual deferral and the ruins of thinking.

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