

Coming of Age and Exile in *No pasó nada*

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Recommended Citation

Faunes, Regina Maria "Coming of Age and Exile in *No pasó nada*." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 24.5 (2022): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3165>>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

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CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture

ISSN 1481-4374 <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>>
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Volume 24 Issue 5 (December 2022) Article 3

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<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol24/iss5/3>>

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 24.5 (2022)**

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol24/iss5/>>

Abstract: The article examines the effect of exile on the coming-of-age process in Skármeta's novel, *No pasó nada*. Through textual analysis and the application of theories surrounding identity formation, socialization, and the accommodation of the individual into society, the paper demonstrates how exile both complicates and acts as a catalyst in the protagonist's coming of age. Despite the fact that the novel was published in the second half of the twentieth century, the protagonist follows the classical coming-of-age process depicted in nineteenth-century texts, prior to changes brought about by late capitalism, globalization and the explosion of digital media platforms that allow for mediated contact with, and exploration of a multiplicity of distant others. I argue that the reason for this adherence to the classical coming-of-age process in Skármeta's late twentieth-century novel hinges on the fact that its protagonist must undergo his search for a suitable role in society, one that is in tune with his identity, as a member of a community in exile.

Regina Maria FAUNES

Coming of Age and Exile in *No pasó nada*

No pasó nada, was published in 1979. Its author, Antonio Skármeta, was born in 1940 in Antofagasta, a coastal city in the north of Chile. In 1973, after the military coup d'état that ousted Salvador Allende, Skármeta left for Argentina and Germany where he lived among the community of Chilean exiles. His experiences in Germany, as well as his roots in Antofagasta, are reflected in this novel, which tells the coming-of-age story of a Chilean boy living in exile in Berlin. Skármeta has published several other novels and short stories, and is most widely known for his novel, *El cartero de Neruda* (1985), which as the film *The Postman* (1995), directed by Michael Radford, was nominated for several Oscars. Most recently he has returned to Chile in 1989 where he conducts writing workshops; in 1992, he began hosting "El show de los libros," a program on Chilean national television.

The novel is set outside Chile; however, Chile plays an important role in the protagonist's life. By way of memory, Lucho, the protagonist, reaches across the physical space that separates him from Chile in order to complete his coming-of-age process. As one critic of Skármeta's works points out "The narrators...use memory to reconstruct their own story" (Bannura-Spiga 156). At the novel's beginning, Lucho's family is living in exile in Berlin, the city where his coming of age unfolds. Through his recollections of life in Chile, Lucho incorporates his cultural foundations, his *chilenidad*, into his self. In the novel, what it means to be Chilean in terms of lifestyle and identity is not problematic, hazy, or unstable. Reflecting a moment in history prior to the explosion of digital media platforms that permit "a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self" (Gergen 6), the novel considers, instead, the construction of a stable cultural identity in exile. For the protagonist of *No pasó nada*, what may or may not be happening across the sea in his native country has little bearing on what he carries with him as the roots of cultural identity. Although ongoing changes, brought about by dictatorship, neoliberal reform, and globalization, may have an impact on lifestyles and cultural practices within Chile, for the protagonist these changes are a moot point. What he remembers, his recollections, and his life within the family's apartment in Berlin define what it means to be Chilean for him. Speaking of identity and cultural change, Stuart Hall notes that "Cultural identities... like everything which is historical... undergo constant transformation. Far from being fixed in the past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (112). For Lucho and his family, what it means to be Chilean is indeed "fixed in the past"; as exiles they are barred from participation in the ongoing changes occurring within Chile.

As David Bost affirms in his analysis of both Skármeta's novel and the film *Machuca*, both texts "construct their narratives generally following a bildungsroman pattern..." (49). In his article, which examines how the film and the novel reflect on Chile's coup d'état, Bost confirms my argument here, mainly that the novel is what Gregory Castle refers to as a "classical Bildungsroman" (144) despite the fact that it was published at a time when, as Jed Esty points out, the genre "underwent substantial revision as the relatively stable temporal frames of national destiny gave way to a more conspicuously global, and therefore more uncertain, frame of reference" (6).

Lucho's sense of what it means to be Chilean is stable throughout his coming of age although his initiation is marked by the need to overcome difficulties in interpreting the new world where his coming of age unfolds. Kalaga Wojciech uses Kateryna Longley's term, "Fifth World," to describe the situation of exiled peoples, and he notes that "the key and decisive moment accompanying displacement into the Fifth World is annihilation of the ontological role of interpretation, which now, deprived of its own semantic universe, simply cannot take place at all" (55). Lucho's journey through the coming-of-age process involves overcoming the possibility of annihilation and finding an effective role for himself by learning to decode a new semantic universe.

Because the protagonist's core cultural identity is not in question, but instead is reaffirmed throughout the novel, Lucho's journey more closely resembles the pattern described by Buckley with regard to the traditional nineteenth-century bildungsroman. He leaves Chile for Germany, a move that mirrors Buckley's description of the protagonist moving from a provincial town to a more developed city, what Ericka Hoagland refers to as the "village/city trope," which she characterizes as "a device rooted in the European Bildungsroman tradition" (223). He experiences two love affairs, paralleling Buckley's description of "one debasing, one exalting" (17), in Berlin he will "make his way independently in the city" (17), with "direct experience of urban life" (17) playing a large part in his coming of age. Because core cultural identity is not unstable in this novel, the pattern of the protagonist's initiation is similar to the earlier, German prototype in which "The hero was... to serve as a model for German youth" (Buma 3). The protagonist of *No pasó nada* is the model for an exiled youth who must find a role for himself, who lives outside his country but carries, crystallized within him, a sense of self, one which emanates

from his memories and from cultural practices within his home. Commenting on Lucho's role in the novel, Grinor Rojo notes that "To the extent that *No pasó nada* includes a discourse on exile, the protagonist's attainment of adulthood is unequivocally linked to the discovery of a purpose, one that is reasonable and also politically desirable for life in exile – both for him and for other members of his community" (69).

The first lines of the novel make clear to the reader that the events of the coup d'état changed Lucho's life forever. He notes that his dreams of being a musician were cut short by the coup; his guitar remained at his aunt's house upon the family's departure for Germany, and was later sold in order to help his aunt, who lost her job shortly after Lucho's family was exiled. Thus, Lucho's development, his future persona, is deeply influenced by his condition as an exile. Shortly after he narrates the story of the guitar, he notes: "It doesn't matter to me anymore that they sold the guitar and that I was never able to play it because I don't want to be a singer anymore" (26). Evidently, his dreams most likely would have changed had he been able to play the guitar. However, Lucho must redirect his interests without the opportunity to explore this particular aspiration. Once his family is living in Germany everything about his life is altered, and Lucho finds himself in a situation defined by economic hardships, a precarious political situation, and the difficulties associated with being unable to comprehend the language spoken around him. Some opportunities are cut off while others open up, new tasks are thrust on him, and he is conscious at all times of his status as a foreigner. His coming of age is abruptly redirected, and the person that emerges from this process is intertwined with his condition as an exile.

Soon after his arrival in Germany, Lucho's traditional role within his family is upset. His father maintains certain attributes that demonstrate his traditional, dominant position; he punishes Lucho and sets clear boundaries for the boy's behavior. On the other hand, Lucho takes on duties that in some measure upset the traditional role of father and son. Lucho becomes the voice of the family because he is the first to learn enough German to communicate with those around him. In the family's apartment, Lucho always answers the phone because "Dad and Mom just let the phone ring because they were ashamed to answer it" (30). In an episode clearly illuminating this role reversal, Lucho teaches his father a strategy he has learned in order to cope with hunger. The boy takes his father to the supermarket one day when they are hungry and have no money and shows his father how to satisfy hunger without the need for money: "There are always ladies in the grocery section who offer samples, and I would grab a little of this and a little of that. A piece of cheese, then a cookie, then a chocolate, a glass of wine, a shrimp. If you did a complete walk through, you could consider yourself fed for lunch" (45). It is apparent from this episode that in Germany, Lucho assumes a role vis a vis his father that he never would have had to assume at such a young age in Chile: Lucho is the teacher and his father is the grateful student. Lucho's coming of age is compressed chronologically owing to his situation. At an early age, he becomes the interpreter of their world instead of allowing his parents to act in this capacity for a more extended period of time. His father clarifies the difference in Lucho's situation after their arrival in Germany when he tells Lucho and his brother that "from now forward, our childhood was over" (43).

In Germany, Lucho is always considered as an outsider and is often referred to as "el chileno." The fact that he is identified in this manner reinforces his roots while at the same time allowing him to move through his new surroundings without having to reflexively create a self to present to the world because one is assigned to him. Peter du Preez notes that "Identities exist in systems of relations... which maintain each other. When we examine any system of identities, their reciprocal definitions become obvious. Masculine identity has its peculiar meaning in relation to feminine identity; black to white; protestant to catholic; proletarian to bourgeois" (3). For Lucho, being marked as "el chileno" defines him for the surrounding world as "Other," and also creates a relationship between his identity and that of those who surround him. He does not have to struggle for definition; he is labeled from the outset. Instead, he will have to struggle to interpret what this definition assigned to him will mean in terms of a role, much the same as the protagonists of the German prototypical novels, whose "Germanness" was not in question but nevertheless needed to find a role within society. Lucho's struggle revolves around interpreting the world around him, and finding a role within it rather than arriving at an internal sense of self. His battles occur externally instead of internally.

Coming of age in this situation creates a set of problems that do not impact the boy's sense of self as much as they affect day-to-day living with the assigned identity, as well as the question of how to be effective, how to have a significant, meaningful role in society even as he accepts the assigned role of "Other." In order to resolve these problems, Lucho must walk a fine line, one which neither annihilates his root cultural identity nor places him so far out of mainstream German culture that his mark on society becomes nullified, ineffective. Reflecting on the role of exile in the works of Conrad, Nabokov, and Bashevis Singer, Asher Milbauer illuminates the edge Lucho must manage, a place where he remains "Other", yet effective: "The complete, unqualified adaptation to and assimilation with an alien culture

leads inevitably to spiritual extinction. To feed on one's past only, to live with thoughts directed only toward this past, leads to oblivion and death" (16). The steps Lucho takes in order to succeed in his bid for a role in German society as "el chileno" include making ever greater forays into the alien world around him, and interpreting what he sees there in terms of previous knowledge while at the same time, within the space of his family's apartment, he continues to exist within a cultural context that remains unchanged from the one he left behind in Chile. Alluding to the implications of maintaining traditional cultural practices on identity, Anthony Giddens notes that "where traditional modes of practice are dominant, the past inserts a wide band of 'authenticated practice' into the future. Time is not empty, and a consistent 'mode of being' relates future to past. In addition, tradition creates a sense of the firmness of things..." (48). Lucho has a firm sense of who he is and can, from this foundation, set out to find a clear role for himself.

Lucho's first impressions of Germany, indeed all his impressions of his new world, are assimilated through the prism of his past: "Lucho's growth will take place within a force field promoted by the simultaneous pressures of a here and a there, a then and a now. Both spaces and both times meet and struggle within his young soul" (Grinor 118). Lucho apprehends Germany through the lens of Chile, a process similar to Milbauer's interpretation regarding the protagonist of Nabokov's novel *Pnin* (1953): "past and present are inseparable; whenever Pnin tries to grasp the meaning of his present existence or come to terms with it, he invariably ends up taking a journey into his past" (64). Throughout the novel, Lucho resorts to this practice as he attempts to decipher the world around him. In the first pages of the text, he describes a familiar activity, soccer, as it is placed in an unfamiliar setting. At the beginning of his stay in Germany, Lucho's capacity to interpret his surroundings is limited to activities so familiar to him that he is able to draw conclusions and make contrasts based on his memories of those activities in Chile: "My favorite player was Kosteddes...I think he is a cunning player, and watching him reminds me of a Chilean player called Caszelly...I also like how Kleinmann plays on the defense, he also plays like a Chilean called Elías Figueroa" (27). His first contact with German children his age is at school, however, Lucho's descriptions of these first encounters are limited to activities that allow for a familiar frame of reference, ones that do not require language. Thus, Lucho recalls that "I started to learn German while I played soccer during recess. They put me in as a center back, and I came out so hard that I learned different words: 'jerk', 'asshole', 'donkey leg' (35).

The protagonist's first friends are other boys whose situation parallels his own; Homero and Sócrates Kumides are two boys whose family has been exiled from Greece. Despite the fact that language is not a uniting factor, the similarity of their situations allows for communication, and as Lucho points out: "They took me to their house, they taught me how to drink wine, to dance like Zorba and, most importantly, to speak German" (37). In order to begin to successfully interpret his universe Lucho seeks out situations which he can manage through common codes that exist either because of the universality of these codes, for example in soccer, or because of a common experience, such as the experience of being exiled from one's homeland. Kalaga notes that "the subject is held in existence by semiotic systems and universes to which it relates or, to use another register, by discursive practices and institutions. The subject functions within those discursive fields because it is interpreted within the whole complex system of affiliations, differences, and interrelationships" (53). In *No pasó nada*, the protagonist's semiotic universe is upset to such an extent that in order to begin the process of apprehending his new world, Lucho must find common ground, the boundary areas where his universe touches and bleeds into the alien one around him. Lucho moves out into the German world gradually as he manages, through language acquisition and deciphering social codes, to increase the dimensions of these common areas.

In the beginning, even common, universal phenomena, such as night versus day, or the type and quality of insects are interpreted through the lens of memory: "Here, in the winter it gets dark very early. In Chile, nights are short, there are more birds than in Berlin, a beautiful mountain range that always has snow on the peaks of the mountains; there are a lot of insects, stray dogs and flies. Here in Germany, you see very few flies. People are very clean" (29). As the novel moves forward chronologically and Lucho is able to learn German, and becomes more accustomed to his surroundings, he will be assigned the role of translator and interpreter within his family. Lucho's parents, whose coming of age can be presumed complete and who, therefore, had stable professional roles and a fixed root cultural identity prior to their arrival in Germany, find it more difficult to start over. Kateryna Longley speaks of a "Fifth World" that goes beyond economic indices as the defining factor used to assign nomenclature; she describes it as the place "inhabited by uprooted and displaced people for whom it is impossible to fight their way through an almost impenetrable network of fences and obstacles" (23). For Lucho's parents, Germany is their "Fifth World," and unlike the protagonist, who is young enough to find a niche for himself in his new world, who must learn the language in order to break through the "impenetrable

network of fences and obstacles" (Longley 23), his parents exemplify an option described by Kalaga as rejecting the new universe "by setting up an impervious barrier in the form of a refusal to translate oneself into an alien language and an alien cultural discourse... This, however, would equal existential solitude and dissociation from the surrounding world" (56). Lucho's parents embody this mode of existence in Germany; their friends are other exiles, their activities revolve around the committee to oust Pinochet from Chile, and their only hope centers on returning to their native land while they rely on Lucho to act as their bridge to the surrounding world: "each time there is news about Latin America on the television, he shouts for me to come translate for him" (34).

In contrast to his parents, Lucho is on the cusp of coming of age and, although his cultural identity is not only frozen owing to his distance from Chile, but also reinforced by his nickname: "el chileno," he is still flexible enough to adapt because he is at an age where accommodation is still possible. Lucho gradually overcomes the difficulties implicit in finding himself suddenly living in a foreign land, unable to speak the language or understand the social codes, and in a precarious economic and political position. He does this by moving out into German society in ever-widening circles. From the soccer field, where he does not need language and where he is at home, through initial friendships with other exiles, he moves further away from familiar ground onto what can be described as completely German territory. An example of this gradual movement is the shift from spending time at a magazine store after school, a place he describes as "very beautiful, with foreign newspapers, comics and magazines about sports...it wasn't that I read the magazines, but it entertained me to look at the pictures" (46), to spending his time at a record store. The transition from one space to another parallels his acquisition of language, while at the same time moving him further into German society, and away from his family's home. Whereas at the magazine shop he only looks at the pictures in the comic books or magazines, and is unable to decipher enough of the language to read, once he starts spending time at the record store, he will become involved in listening to and speaking German. The record store heralds the beginning of his acquisition of enough of the language to move into German society without the crutch of the familiar. It is through music that he will become more adept at using language to penetrate German culture: "I quit going to look at the magazines when I became a fanatic of the radio. I would walk through the Kudamm with the wire in my ear, and when I was able to pick up a word, I would open the dictionary and keep repeating it until I learned it" (47).

The acquisition of language is what moves Lucho from the relative safety of ignorance into the perilous waters of knowledge, which will foster expectations, hopes, and contacts with his new world on its own terms. This moment of acquisition of knowledge has roots which go back to biblical scripture. In his discussion of this theme, Terry Otten asserts that "the fall refers neither to a historical time nor place but rather to a state of mind... it takes place within the self" (9). For the protagonist of this novel, the record store is where he transitions from relative innocence to a state of knowledge that allows him to cross the threshold leading from childhood to adulthood. The adjectives used to describe the magazine store point toward the benevolence associated with innocence, "very beautiful...cozy" (46). The clerks at this venue does not allow Lucho to indulge in activities associated with adulthood, such as looking at the pornographic magazines; it is a space associated with childhood. The music store, however, functions as a portal through which Lucho passes into the world of adulthood; one that includes sex, violence, betrayal, and deception. It is there that he meets Sophie, the girl with whom he experiences what Buckley refers to as a "debasing love affair" (Buckley 17) his outline of experiences common to many coming-of-age novels.

Lucho's relationship with Sophie, a clerk at the music store, marks the beginning of his initiation into German society, and the starting point for his coming of age. He describes Sophie as not very good looking: "Sophie's eyelashes were a complete falsehood, but not her gaze. She was the most convincing salesperson I have known" (49). He emphasizes the fact that she tells each customer what he or she wants to hear, swearing that the record in question is her favorite. He falls in love with her, and not long after they spend the night together. However, this event is intertwined with Lucho's political status, as the evening begins when Lucho invites Sophie to help him paint political posters for a march planned to mark the day of the Chilean coup d'état. The protagonist's status as someone in exile tinges everything that happens to him, including his amorous initiation. Lucho's affair with Sophie is enmeshed with his personal political status as well as with his universal condition of a boy in the process of coming of age, and discovering the opposite sex. After painting the posters, when Lucho is walking Sophie home, a group of boys pick a fight with him by taunting the girl. He beats one of the boys up badly and as a result has to spend the entire night in Sophie's apartment fearing that if he walks out of the building he will be assaulted. The night with Sophie sets off a chain of events that ultimately lead to Lucho's discovery of his role within German society, and his coming of age.

The circumstances of the evening also place the protagonist in a space referred to by Barbara Aponte in her discussion of initiation stories as one loaded with rituals and magic: "the protagonist wishes to leave the familiar area – A, and aspires to enter another different space, one that is open to the future – C. The road between A and C is a ritual laden and magical" (131). After his night with Sophie, Lucho's life changes drastically; taking him through a series of steps that closely parallel traditional initiatory rites of passage. As a result, Lucho finds ways to deal with new difficulties, both in the space associated with Chile and his cultural roots, and in the larger world around him, where he must come of age. The first thing Lucho does upon arriving home after the night with Sophie is lie to his parents regarding his whereabouts, using the slogan painting as an excuse for staying out all night, a deception which he finds shameful: "He stared at me with that proud look he has when he likes something, and his chest swells a little like a pigeon. Of course, now I had to lower my eyes and my arms because I was ashamed of the lie" (59). Lucho experiences shame for using an event as sacred to the family as the upcoming political protest to deceive his parents, which reflects the "the fall" described by Otten, and its biblical connections to the loss of innocence and the acquisition of knowledge.

For Lucho, the space between point A and point C referred to by Aponte is one of shame and fear. After his evening with Sophie, Lucho's life outside the space of his family's apartment becomes charged with fear as Michael, the brother of the boy he beat up, looks for him in order to take revenge. Michael is much bigger than Lucho; he badgers Lucho on the phone, and follows him until Lucho accepts the challenge of a physical confrontation. The interim period between the morning Lucho lies to his parents about where he spent the night, and the fight with Michael is a time of awakening for the protagonist. During this period, he realizes that Sophie betrayed him, and he participates in a class discussion which he describes as

one of the best classes I remember in my lifetime because Herr Kolberger had us discuss a work by Brecht...the work proves that wealthy people buy judges and that judges are not impartial. I am very interested in that work because in Chile judges always would condemn poor people for anything, but wealthy folks could kill others and nothing would happen to them. Over there, in Chile, judges are right wingers. I don't know what they're like in Germany. (61)

In this space of time, Lucho experiences the bittersweet taste of knowledge; regarding Sophie, he is able to remove the blindfold from his eyes on his own. Without others' input, he arrives at the conclusion that she betrayed him, and he deepens his meditations on the social system that made such a profound impact on his life. Lucho describes this time as an awakening: "During one of those moments, it seemed to me that I was waking from a dream" (68).

The fight with Michael is part of a ritual passage, the culmination of a process set off the night he stays with Sophie. Moretti refers to this as "the tragic paradigm, the pain of trauma is the price for truth: for the discovery of a violent power behind the façade of an impartial civilization" (53). It is not until after his fight with the German boy that Lucho finds his self and achieves an effective role as "el chileno" within German society. Prior to his encounter with Michael, Lucho is at his worst moment; the trauma of awakening, the difficulty that knowledge brings him is made clear: "I didn't have my homeland, Sophie didn't want to see me ever again, a guy was looking for me to beat me up, and I had sent a German citizen to the hospital. People shoot themselves for far less" (63). In a study of Skármeta's works, Ariel Dorfman points out that "Those stories introduce young characters who live in adverse circumstances, everything would seem to incapacitate the character from overcoming their situation, and yet...it does not destroy the young person, who goes through an initiation rite, a baptism..." (74).

During this period of time, which parallels the ritual and magical liminal space referred to by Aponte, Lucho goes beyond apprehending and interpreting his world in terms of what he already knows. He no longer depends solely on his previous experiences from Chile in order to interpret his current situation. Lucho has no prior experiences with women that can prepare him for the ordeal set off by his relationship with Sophie. He notes that she is "the first woman in my life and the first betrayal" (69). His interest and involvement with the events surrounding the protest organized by the Chilean community marking the coup d'état wane in light of the urgency of his own situation. During the period of time beginning with the night spent with Sophie, and ending with his encounter with Michael, Lucho is drawn into the core of German society. The process through which Lucho acquires a position within German society closely parallels the steps associated with traditional rites of passage. Solon T. Kimbali notes that "when the activities associated with such ceremonies were examined in terms of their order and content, it was possible to distinguish three major phases: separation, transition and incorporation" (vii). Lucho's coming-of-age process closely parallels these steps.

The first step in his personal journey is his removal from his native country, an event which Caroline B. LaRocque asserts is a common thread in the traditional rites of passage, which she notes "invariably open with the separation, often brutal and even fatal in tone, of the boy...from his childhood home" (54). After his arrival in Germany, Lucho begins his movement toward the second phase in the process. His acquisition of the foreign language positions him further from his family; he is able to make his way outside the home allowing him the opportunity to connect with people not associated with the Chile Comité, or in any other way associated with the community of exiles.

His ability to speak German changes his role within the family from that of a child in need of guidance to that of interpreter and guide for his parents in a foreign world, as well as leading to the experience of his first love with Sophie, an event that in turn sets the stage for his definitive positioning at the second phase of initiation, where "the initiate, now identified as an exile and outcast from his natal community...passes through a series of painful and terrifying ordeals" (LaRocque 54). LaRocque further describes this period as "the second and most critical phase of the rites: the sojourn of the initiate in the wilderness, a mysterious realm of violence peopled by fearsome and supernatural beings" (54). During this phase of the initiation process, Lucho lies to his family, further sullyng the lie by using the Chile Comité as his motive for staying out all night.

It is during what LaRocque refers to as the "outcast" or "exile" phase that Lucho finds himself out late at night on the streets of Berlin, surrounded by a group of boys who threaten and goad him leading to the fight in which he kicks one of them in the genitals and sends him to the hospital, which precipitates Michael's search for "el chileno" in order to avenge his brother. During this period Lucho loses interest in the activities of the Chile Comité, and distances himself from his family. He feels alone, apart from his family and without support. For Lucho, Michael becomes one of the "fearsome and supernatural beings" referred to by Carolyn LaRocque. In his description of the bigger boy, Lucho notes his unnaturally large size: "I realized how huge the brute's back was. It seemed as if it had been made from cement" (95). This phase of his initiation is associated with constant fear. The terror of his inexorable encounter with Michael haunts him day and night, yet he is unable to discuss any part of his situation with his parents because the events have put his entire family's tenure in Germany at risk. It is during this phase that Lucho is tempted to retreat back to his mother's protection, something which is associated with the realm of childhood. Referring to this period between separation and reintegration, Victor Turner notes that "the initiate's behavior is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint" (95). Lucho assumes this attitude with regard to Michael. Even as the larger boy threatens to kill him, Lucho acquiesces:

- I was calling to tell you that I am going to do to you the same thing you did to Hans.
- Yes - I said. I repeated yes, yes, and put on a fool's face.
- And if Hans dies in the hospital before the police get to you, I'm going to kill you. Yes?
- Yes.
- Do you understand?
- Yes.
- As soon as you leave your house, I'll grab you and tear you apart. Do you hear me, chileno?
- Yes. (67)

Lucho shows all the attributes of the initiate in the second phase of the process: not only does he seem to acquiesce to everything the larger boy says, but he thanks him when Michael offers a ride on his motorcycle in order to take Lucho to the abandoned dump site where he plans to beat him severely. For Lucho, sorely tempted to return to the protection of his mother's love, it is his situation as an exile that will act as the catalyst in the coming-of-age process. Even at the moment they are about to fight, after a journey across Berlin on Michael's motorcycle, ending at the dumpsite where Michael plans to beat him up, Lucho tries to avoid confrontation. He offers to visit the hospital where Hans is being treated, and apologize to him in person. It is only the fact that Michael reminds him of his precarious status in Germany, and points out that the result of admitting responsibility for Hans's condition would be his family's expulsion from Germany, that Lucho accepts his fate and wills himself to fight the larger boy. Once again, Lucho's position as an exile definitively effects his coming of age; it propels him over the threshold even when he feels unready to cross it.

Shortly after his arrival in Germany, Lucho is told by his father that his childhood is over. He is also warned that any misstep could result in their expulsion from Germany. Lucho's father makes painfully clear to the boy the delicate nature of their situation in Germany, a fact which will influence his coming of age. Pascal Pensena Buma notes that in marginalized segments of society "The completion of the *bildung* of members entails enlisting in the struggle to dismantle that oppressive order which, to the

hero of the dominant group, might be nonexistent" (15). Lucho is aware at all times that his position in Germany is vulnerable, and that he is not a full member of German society. When he realizes the consequences of having sent a German boy to the hospital, those consequences loom larger than they would in the context of a normal teenage scuffle. For Lucho, the implications of that night mean possible expulsion from Germany and the loss of safe harbor for his family. The days prior to his encounter with Michael, the days of awakening, are burdened by this fear. First, he tries to avoid having to meet the German boy, and his fear threatens to overwhelm his coming of age: "I turned around to face the kitchen and I felt like crying in my mother's apron, like I used to do when I was a child in Santiago" (64). For those coming of age, "as the whole process of socialization becomes more violent, regression inevitably acquires its symbolic prominence: faced with an increasing probability of being wounded, it is quite reasonable for the subject to try and make himself, so to speak, smaller and smaller" (Moretti 234). At this point in the novel, the protagonist is on the verge of a final trial, the ritual challenge that he must pass in order to enter the space designated by Aponte as "open to the future" (131). However, in order to do so he must cross the threshold by facing up to Michael and assuming responsibility for his actions during the night with Sophie without exposing his family.

Lucho's encounter with Michael is charged with symbolism having to do with his position as an outsider and a member of a marginalized group vis a vis Michael's position as a full member of German society. While he waits to be picked up by his adversary, he tries to imagine himself devoid of a personal history: "I squeezed my eyes shut and imagined myself without a past" (91). When Michael finally shows up on the motorcycle, Lucho thinks about "what we were told about when the Indians saw the Spanish conquistadors arrive on horseback, and they thought animal and man were a single beast" (92). It is evident that Lucho is afraid of more than simply being beaten physically; his thoughts moments before rising to meet his adversary reveal a fear of losing his past, of being conquered in the sense of losing his cultural bearings. The reference to the conquistadors points to his identification with his past.

The encounter with Michael takes on a mythical dimension. It occurs in a no-man's-land on the outskirts of Berlin; physically, a bridge separates the space from the rest of the city. Lucho is transported, in a surge of overwhelming terror, pain, and anger, across the threshold from childhood, and into the third stage associated with the rites of passage, which "follows the return of the boy to the community and his establishment in the world of his fathers. Here, final consummation of the rite of passage is marked as representatives of the fathers and elders bestow a new name... and new prospects upon the youth, insignia of his newly-won status within the community" (LaRocque 54). During the battle, Lucho experiences a parenthesis in time wherein he is reborn: "I had separated from my body. I felt myself floating in the sea of Antofagasta, so blue, on vacation in the north of Chile; I saw my parents turned into flames; I saw that they licked me softly, that I left my mother's body and everything was a conflagration" (103). Regarding such moments of rebirth, Mircea Eliade points out that initiation rites in general "have a well-developed scenario, comprising several moments: consecration to death; initiatory torture; death itself and finally the ritual of rebirth and return..." (32).

After Lucho's encounter with Michael, he has taken all of these steps with the exception of the return to his family. Prior to the fight, he firmly believed that he would die: "This guy is going to kill me, I thought" (95). Instead of turning back, however, he continues on his journey, a step paralleling Eliade's "consecration to death" (103). He is also severely beaten up by Michael, and at the end of the battle he experiences flashbacks of his life in Chile followed by a dream sequence in which he is reborn floating in the waters off the coast there, mirroring Eliade's description of "rebirth and return" (32). It is immediately after this event that he awakens to find Michael lying on the ground beside him. He revives the German boy by splashing water on his face, and he realizes that although he is in considerable pain, Michael is no better off.

After the fight with Michael, it is clear that Lucho has crossed the threshold of the initiation process into adulthood, or, as Carolyn LaRocque points out, "his establishment in the world of his fathers" (54). This is evident in that, prior to his struggle with Michael, Lucho had planned to visit Edith, the other girl, or "exalting love affair" (Buckley 17) in the Bucklean scheme of experiences ascribed to the typical protagonist of the bildungsroman. Lucho had taken his savings with him, expecting to buy a present for the girl. However, instead of going to her house after the battle with Michael, he will spend his time and his money eating pizza with the German boy. They will become friends, and it is clear that Lucho has won the respect of the larger boy. It is also clear that he has exchanged the realm of childhood, often associated with women, for that of men.

Not long after fighting and then bonding with Michael, Lucho will go through the last phase of initiation, a step in which his father will "bestow a new name... and new prospects upon the youth, insignia of his newly won status within the community" (LaRocque 54). This event occurs at a meeting of the Chile Comité when his father sees that Michael has arrived to show his support; he labels his son

as a "proselytizer." At this point Lucho has been assigned a name, which defines his role and is his "insignia" (LaRocque 54). The reader understands that Lucho has found his place within German society without forfeiting his root culture. He wins back the girl, Edith, by copying and translating poems from his native tongue for her, and he has won the respect of Michael, symbol of all that is German, not only by fighting him, but by discussing his country's history and culture with him. It is because of Lucho's comments to Michael regarding Chilean history and the political reality of Pinochet's regime that the German boy becomes a supporter of the cause to which Lucho's parents dedicate their energy.

The novel not only closely follows the pattern described by Buckley as typical of traditional eighteenth and nineteenth-century bildungsromane, but also adheres to the scheme of traditional rites of passage associated with initiation, as described by Barbara Aponte, Mircea Eliade, Victor Turner, and others. The reason for this close adherence to traditional patterns is the fact that the protagonist's core identity is not in doubt. Lucho identifies himself as Chilean at all times. His codes of conduct and his cultural background are not only solid but fixed. His conception of what it means to be Chilean remains frozen, fixed the moment at which he abandoned his native country. Whatever may be confusing, unstable, or hazy regarding German society does not affect Lucho's core identity because it remains exterior to him. Lucho's struggle, therefore, has more to do with how to fit into German society and have an effective role as an exile than it does with sorting out who he is and what he stands for. In this sense Lucho, protagonist of a mid-twentieth-century coming-of-age novel, has more in common with Goethe's Wilhelm than with, for example, the protagonist of many Chilean bildungsromane published chronologically much closer to *No pasó nada* than was Goethe's novel.

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