

Utopia, Archive, and Anarchy in *Los siete hijos de Simenon* by Ramón Díaz Eterovic

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The detective narratives by Ramón Díaz Eterovic (Chile, 1956) address some of Latin America's most relevant socio-political problems, such as the disappeared, racial discrimination, drug trafficking, corruption, social oppression, and ecological negligence. Critics José Promis, Patricia Espinoza, Guillermo García-Corales, and Mirian Pino have contextualized this author's work within the framework of the *neopolicial* 'new detective' novel, a predominant genre in current Latin American literature that confronts the criminality of institutions from the margins of society.<sup>1</sup> While many have emphasized specific social issues of the new detective novel and, in particular, the novel by Díaz Eterovic studied here, *Los siete hijos de Simenon* (2000) 'The Seven Sons of Simenon,' less attention has been placed on the ideological and ethical foundation from which these social issues emerge.<sup>2</sup>

The novel's protagonist Heredia, a private detective in Santiago, Chile, is a cultural refugee of the Popular Unity movement who refuses to come to terms with the end of the movement. The criminal nature of institutions and the inhospitable spaces within the narrated world imply the impossibility of all social utopias, yet Heredia maintains the utopian principle of what Lyman Tower Sargent calls "social dreaming" as an ethical stance (11). I argue that the central ideological motivation of *Los siete hijos de Simenon* proposes a renewed utopian impulse by means of anarchism and archiving. The ideological profile of this novel relates directly to a certain trend of anarchism, particularly that espoused by the Chilean *avant-garde* and workers' movements during the 1920s and 1930s. Anarchism,

like utopianism, has a long tradition in Latin American writing, and both offer the possibility of alternative ways of life. While the unifying influence of truth discourses has disintegrated, anarchism and utopianism offer multiple possibilities for social systems that need not subscribe to centralizing or authoritative practices.

The novel's anarchist utopian perspective points directly to a distorted system of values evident during the current post-dictatorial period, known as the Transition to Democracy (1990-present). In this novel, the private eye Heredia assumes an anarchist posture while investigating a murder, which soon leads him to uncover a conspiracy between government agents and a multinational entity, Gaschil. The corporation plans to construct a natural gas duct that would have devastating environmental consequences.<sup>3</sup> The murder of Federico Gordon, a fiscal attorney for the Contraloría General de la República 'Controller General of the Republic,' who had denied the proposed Chilean-Argentine gas duct, prompts Heredia's investigation.

Heredia's ideological project in confronting sinister institutions consists of a moral commitment to reestablish truth that refutes official histories. The detective's solitary nature, characterized by nostalgia and disenchantment, affords him the perspective of an outsider in his own city. Heredia's investigation diminishes the power of the central archive, and meanwhile supports a pragmatic ecological utopia. I propose that Díaz Eterovic's anarchist-utopian vision relates to the novel's incorporation of literary allusions and references to anarchist figures, forming an archive of individual resistance that empowers the protagonist's stance against official discourses.

Díaz Eterovic has popularized his principal character Heredia in eleven other detective novels.<sup>4</sup> One of the unifying themes of the Heredia novels is the pervasiveness of the character's nostalgia and disenchantment with respect to a homogenizing dominant culture as he confronts abuses of power. In the era of the recent dictatorships in Latin America and especially in the Southern Cone, detective fiction adapts to and gestures directly at its historical context. In these novels, the detective searches for truth and, in contrast to traditional detective fiction, enters the public sphere and relates with society's subordinate groups. Such a perspective considers that this literature involves itself as an active part of a larger cultural and

historical matrix, as is the case with Díaz Eterovic's novels.<sup>5</sup>

*Los siete hijos de Simenon* dialogues with anarchist ideology, suggesting that people are capable of creating and maintaining a society of peace and prosperity without an artificial administrative power structure imposed upon them. Anarchism as a social movement, according to Russian founders Peter Kropotkin and Mikhail Bakunin, proposes a new society with definite paradigm shifts.<sup>6</sup> This society, containing utopian resonance, would include voluntary relations and exchanges carried out on the basis of solidarity and belief in the collective good. Murray Bookchin defines anarchism as "a great libidinal movement of humanity to shake off the repressive apparatus created by hierarchical society" (17). In ethical terms, anarchism values the freedom to aspire toward improving conditions of existence even if that requires confrontation with society and the disruption of order.

The anarchist sentiments that are displayed in this novel link specifically to the anarchism propagated in Chile during the 1920s and 1930s. Anarchism, together with Marxism, constituted the most visible and influential social reform movements of the era.<sup>7</sup> Prominent intellectuals in Chile such as Juan Gandulfo, Alberto Rojas Giménez, and Manuel Rojas were leaders in student rebellions and anarchist movements in the 1920s, while Pablo Neruda was a university student, and were influential in Neruda's early writings. According to Greg Dawes, Rojas was Neruda's "aesthetic and spiritual leader" (331). Anarchist allusions are evident in Neruda's early poetry and continue until *Residencia en la tierra* 'Residence on Earth.' Specifically, Dawes has detailed the anarchist elements in Neruda's extra-poetic production.<sup>8</sup> The workers' movements of the 1920s-30s in Chile consisted of an ethical-social project based on anarchism's central principles found in the writings of Bakunin and Kropotkin, often recognized for their utopian inclinations.<sup>9</sup>

Jacques Derrida's concept of the archive, understood alongside anarchism, clarifies the countercultural and nostalgic utopia that is evident in the Heredia novels and especially in *Los siete hijos de Simenon*. Anarchist utopia implies a need to decenter and destabilize, while the archive consists in a physical place that contains a supposed totality of knowledge and information. Derrida develops the archive's centripetal nature in this way: "The archontic power,

which also gathers the functions of unification, of identification, must be paired with what we will call the power of *consignation* ... through *gathering together signs*" (3, original emphasis). Within this totalizing official order, the unofficial archive of memory, both individual and collective, loses active function and is perceived as something passive or impractical (similar to the common understanding of nostalgia or current society's quick dismissal of anything utopian or idealist). As long as the homogenizing centers of power maintain the archive, the subject alone has little incentive to retain memory and remains in a perpetual state of forgetfulness.

In this sense, anarchist and archivist sentiments in this novel aid in identifying the decentered utopia that Heredia espouses. Tuning in to Heredia's utopian imagination in this way also corresponds to the specific historic circumstance from which this novel emerges. The Chilean Road to Socialism and Salvador Allende's Popular Unity movement promised an effective restructuring of society that would have liberated the nation from an oppressive and exploitative system. The military coup's sudden extermination of the movement served a deathblow to this trend of utopianism as a viable alternative. In the Heredia novels, both those referring to the dictatorship period and those emerging from the post-dictatorial era, the protagonist is a solitary survivor of the Popular Unity movement situated in a political and social circumstance in direct opposition to his personal and ideological interests. Each of the Heredia novels alludes to this trauma, and the disenchanting and nostalgic protagonist clings to his utopian ideals despite the alienating and authoritative climate of the nation. He cannot reassume his previously militant role in a utopian movement that no longer exists, but his ethical and nostalgic attachment to revolutionary ideals forbids him from taking part in the euphoric performance of society in transition. For this reason, hope for an alternative order through his anarchist-utopian vision is the only remaining alternative when his past utopia failed to materialize.

Heredia explicitly attests that the country he inhabits continually moves farther away from the values and conducts that the anarchist aesthetic most appreciates and recognizes. Considering society's distortion of beliefs, he affirms:

El mundo está así. Antes las discusiones eran ideológicas, de fe y

de principios, ahora son sobre dólares, índices de ventas y apariencias. La moral se rifa por cuatro chauchas. (23)

The world is like that. Before, the debates were ideological, about faith and principles, now they are about dollars, sales indexes, and appearances. Morality is raffled for four green beans. (my trans.)<sup>10</sup>

Heredia articulates the sites of ideological and ethical erasure in a way that forms a chronicle of charges against official history.

One of the consequences of moral degradation that Heredia notes is the loss of justice in society:

Hace años la justicia dejó de ser una vara de medida. Existe en los libros, se habla de ella en los discursos, pero nada más. El circo prende sus luces, pero los payasos siguen siendo pobres. (133)

Justice stopped being a measuring tool years ago. It still exists in books, they talk about it in speeches, but nothing more. The circus can turn on its lights, but the clowns will always be poor.

The sad circus, to which Heredia refers, reflects the incongruent nature, falseness, and lack of ethical attachments of Chilean society in transition. The protagonist also criticizes the dystopian ideological circumstances under which he lives:

Este país no tiene arreglo porque cambió las utopías por la fanfarria, la verdad por los acomodados, la lucha por el consenso. Nos vendimos o nos vendieron. (133)

This country has no solution because it traded in the utopias for fanfare, the truth for neatness, struggle for consensus. Either we sold out or they sold us out.

As Heredia processes society's increasing distance from humanist values, he often employs cynicism, irony, or caustic humor in concordance with anarchist sentiment, which requires such irreverence. As an anarchist offensive, these complaints point accusingly to the archive. The institution of the archive was traditionally upheld and maintained by the monarch and, later, the modern state. Heredia's accusations are directed not only toward the state, but also

toward the post-state or non-state, the free market's demonstration of global power in Chile today.

David Miller explains that the purpose of anarchism is to reach a society not without government, but without state. He defines the concept of state as an obligatory and monopolistic body for all under its dominion. Also, according to Miller, the state is a body of coercion that reduces individual freedom beyond what is necessary for social coexistence. Its archive of laws and rules are necessary, not for the well-being of society, but for the modern state's self-preservation (5-6). This definition of state equates to the character of multinational corporations that, even more powerfully, coerce and override the interests of society in order to support self-preservation and the accumulation of power and resources.

Díaz Eterovic explains:

cuando la justicia formal, aceptada en principio por todos los componentes sociales, se pone al servicio de un estado criminal, despótico, aparece la figura del investigador privado como un héroe marginal. (qtd. in García-Corales and Pino, *El neopolicial* xxii)

when formal justice, accepted in principle by all social components, is at the service of a criminal, despotic state, the figure of the private detective appears as a marginal hero.

Also, Pino and García-Corales argue that in Díaz Eterovic's fiction, and in the new detective novel in general, the state is the enemy, unlike in classic detective fiction, which centers on the search for individual culpability (*Poder* 61). In this novel, Heredia's anarchist critiques are directed at the powers of the non-state that have infiltrated and compromised the legitimacy of the Chilean government's power. In fact, the most criminal forces at work in this novel deal directly with matters of corruption due to free market economic forces and globalization. The protagonist's anarchist project is directed mainly toward the current social permeation of late capitalist non-state forces in Chile.

Whereas anarchism once limited its criticism to the machinations of the modern state, the influences of globalized capital have loosened the nation-state's regional grip and offer a more oppressive

and monolithic system. The state is replaced by the non-state where multinational corporations displace matters of social well-being in exchange for regional exploitation and capital. This is evident in *Los siete hijos de Simenon* in that the primary villain character, whom Heredia identifies and who represents government corruption by the multinational entity Gaschil, is a high-ranking official bureaucrat named Nicolás Leal. This character's corrupt and exploitative activities characterize him as an archon, guardian of the central archive, as Derrida terms it.

Heredia's adventure consists of a struggle against non-state forces and the official archive through actions that coincide with the key precepts of anarchism: disobedience and subversion. In the following segment, with a greater degree of ironic language, Heredia synthesizes his anarchist disdain for all images of institutional power in the neoliberal non-state. The image of power in this case assimilates to ugliness, bureaucracy, and robotization, as Heredia suggests:

Pocas cosas son más peligrosas que una mujer fea con poder. Lo usan para vengarse de la vida y de los hombres que pasan por su lado sin prestarles atención. Se hacen rodear de tipos serviles, se apoyan en conocimientos que adquieren mientras otras mujeres salen a bailar y terminan convertidas en máquinas de repetir citas legales, fórmulas económicas o discursos políticos. (135)

Few things are more dangerous than an ugly woman with power. They use it to take revenge on life and on the men that pass by them without paying them attention. They surround themselves with servile types, they rely on the knowledge that they acquire while other women go out dancing, and they end up converted into machines for repeating legal quotations, economic formulas, or political speeches.

Heredia's misogynist view of the bureaucratic and homogenized society extends to the people and things around him. Instead of celebrating the possible subversiveness of powerful women, their carnivalesque potential is defeated by the homogenizing powers of a globalized non-state. To Heredia these are outward signs of an order based on a decadent free market model that conforms to, as Frederic

Jameson indicates, the “cultural logic of late capitalism” transplanted in a South American territory. Heredia refers to this situation when, after working temporarily as Cabin Manager, he returns to Santiago and sees his friend Anselmo, owner of a newspaper kiosk. Upon realizing that his acquaintance has changed over the past months, Heredia comments, “Te dejo solo unos meses y te tragas la pastilla del postmodernismo. Seguro que estás lleno de tarjetas de crédito y teléfonos celulares” (42) ‘I leave you alone for a few months and you swallow the pill of postmodernism. I am sure you are full of credit cards and cellular telephones.’ Heredia’s tone of dry sarcasm with regard to all outward signs of a technological and materialist culture further exemplifies his irreverent nature. The use of humor and the absurd temporarily displaces the seriousness of the overriding power network. Disenchantment permits the protagonist to observe and diagnose the social climate without succumbing to its homogenizing forces.

The investigation to solve the mystery of Gordon’s murder leads the protagonist to visit distinct sectors of the city. He perceives these urban spaces as divergences from consoling utopian spaces. Such urban locales include his own neighborhood, old bars and seedy hotels, the Controller General’s office, the Ministry of the Interior, and the imposing high-rise buildings belonging to the multinational corporations under suspicion. Shalisa Collins explains that in the Heredia novels,

las construcciones modernas sólo pueden existir al borrar del mapa espacios y construcciones antiguos, los cuales representan etapas de la historia de Chile. (98)

modern constructions can only exist after erasing from the map older spaces and constructions that represent periods of Chile’s history.

Heredia contemplates his surroundings with a gaze of disenchantment that forms an imaginary of an absurd and distorted world. He chronicles the loss of what he feels were more authentic urban spaces in exchange for a city in which he no longer feels at home. For example, the panoramic city views that Heredia takes in from his apartment window evoke a sense of danger and deterioration despite the city’s attempts to modernize. Heredia creates a scenario



out of his own radical discontent with descriptive segments such as the following:

Desde la ventana veía un horizonte de esmog que se recostaba, espeso y turbido, sobre las siluetas fantasmales de los edificios ubicados al oriente de la ciudad. Habían pasado dos días desde la última llovizna y sin embargo la masa gris había reaparecido a las pocas horas, borroneando de una plumada los perfiles cordilleanos y el descolorido cielo de Santiago. (235)

From the window I saw a horizon of smog that was laying, dense and turbid, over the ghostly silhouettes of the buildings located west of the city. It has only been two days since the last drizzle and still the grey mass reappeared after just a few hours, marking out in a stroke of the pen the mountainous profiles and discolored sky of Santiago.

The detective recognizes environmental precariousness behind the buildings whose presence celebrates progress. The narrator continues establishing a cautionary tone with hints of melancholy and nostalgia:

sabía muy bien que tras los edificios nuevos o las tiendas recién inauguradas se ocultaban los sentimientos de siempre, los mismos sueños e interrogantes; las mismas tragedias cotidianas que no eran titulares en los diarios, pero en las cuales, las más de las veces, penetraba para satisfacer un precario anhelo de justicia. (43)

I knew that behind the new buildings and newly opened stores hid the same old feelings, the same dreams and questions; the same daily tragedies that did not make the headlines in the newspapers, but, most of the time, I would get to the bottom of the them to satisfy a precarious yearning for justice.

This nostalgic reflection implies an anarchistic rescue of an unofficial history, lying hidden beneath the homogenizing archive of the exploitative non-state and its self-promoting discourses. Although Heredia's nostalgia for a lost utopia prevents him from implementing the sort of public demonstrations and collective mobilization

like those of the militant Chilean anarchists and workers' movements of the early twentieth century, his vocation as an investigator and his decentered utopian-anarchist perspective allow him to circulate in the margins of the corrupt and consumerist society.

Among the themes of Heredia's out-of-place utopia in this novel, García-Corales and Pino state the following:

dos de los componentes que se destacan en la configuración de *Los siete hijos de Simenon* son la atopia y la utopía. Es decir, el no lugar y la reconstrucción de viejos sueños que poseen un carácter igualmente colectivo, pero carentes del matiz programático de las revoluciones de la década del 70 en Latinoamérica. (*Poder* 151)

two of the components that stand out in the configuration of *Los siete hijos de Simenon* are atopia and utopia. In other words, the no-place and the reconstruction of old dreams that possess an equally collective character, but lacking the programmatic matrix of the revolutions of the 1970s in Latin America.

According to García-Corales and Pino, this narrative revisits the notion of the social utopia of the 1970s with a mindfulness of its loss and impossibility. I read the novel's utopian tendencies as a lament for the loss of the Popular Unity movement and as a condemnation of the cultural incoherencies of current Transition society in Santiago. The social trauma of the *golpe de estado* 'military coup' and the Augusto Pinochet years is still alive as a personal tragedy for Heredia, and, therefore, he looks back to the utopian movements of the early twentieth century for reassurance in his present work as a private investigator and as a counter-archivist of Santiago.

On one occasion, when Heredia leaves his apartment for a walk through his own neighborhood, he displays profound discomfort faced with his material surroundings. The detective despises the excessive commercial centers of Santiago that have replaced the seemingly more authentic spaces of the past, promoting a vacuous materialist behavior in its citizens. The narrator illustrates such distaste with his trademark dry humor:

Mientras caminaba hacia la oficina advertí los cambios del barrio en los últimos meses. Algunas viejas tiendas en la calle Puente habían desaparecido y en su lugar se alzaba un mall donde los

santiaguinos de medio pelo iban a endeudarse con fervor de feligreses. (73)

While I walked towards the office I noticed changes made in the neighborhood during the last months. Some of the old stores on Puente Street had disappeared and in their place they built a mall where the mediocre people of Santiago went to run themselves into debt with the fervor of parishioners.

Heredia's perspective coincides with Nestor García Canclini's remark that, in late capitalist society, the citizens' identities are reconfigured fundamentally by consumerism and depend on what the individual is capable of acquiring or appropriating (30). This uncontrolled consumerism, another effect of late capitalism, replaces the need for an individual and collective reconstructive memory that could combat the permeation of the non-state's proliferation. The protagonist's inadequacy in this urban space becomes even more evident when he interacts with more specific objects and signs in his surroundings. The detective, for example, experiences nausea upon seeing urban ornamentation and advertisements, punctuating his refusal to participate in the celebration of capitalist progress:

Una bofetada de aromas extraños golpeó mi rostro al entrar al centro comercial. Sentí que mis pasos perdían sentido. Los letreros de neón giraron a mi alrededor y como el niño que entra a la fiesta equivocada, abrí los ojos buscando un rostro amable que me enseñara a comportar en ese extraño mundo de apariencias y oropel. (238)

The strange aromas slapped me in the face upon entering the mall. I felt like my steps lost meaning. The neon signs revolved around me and, like the boy who arrives at the wrong party, I opened my eyes looking for a kind face that would show me how to behave in this strange world of appearances and tinsel.

Heredia sees himself as distant from these urban confines, and his first person narration provides a counter-archive to Santiago's official memory of commercial progress of the last three decades, lauded as the Chilean Miracle.<sup>11</sup> With anarchist irreverence, Heredia visualizes typical icons of globalization, such as McDonald's chain res-

taurants transplanted in Chile: "Traía un vaso de bebida y una caja del McDonald's de cuyo interior sacó una hamburguesa que tenía el encanto de un pericote disecado" (235) 'He carried a soda glass and McDonald's box from which he took out a hamburger that had the delight of a dissected rat.' Just as this radical modernity does not accommodate Heredia, the narrated city continues losing its signs of identity. For example, Heredia remarks that the religious and political institutional buildings are becoming masked in signs of consumerism and hedonism. Such signs of the non-state receive more scorn from Heredia than do the state institutions. The detective justifies his disenchantment by signaling outward signs of progress:

A diario los instrumentos de comunicaciones eran mejores y sin embargo, la gente cada día estaba más incomunicada y sola. La perfección de lo nuevo contenía un inevitable sentimiento de pérdida y las banderas de la rebeldía se arriaban en beneficio de la conformidad. (225)

Every day the instruments of communication were better and still, every day people were more isolated and alone. The perfection of what is new contained an inevitable sense of loss, and the flags of rebellion lowered as they yielded to conformity.

Heredia's perception of isolation, characteristic of the contemporary urban inhabitant, reflects his frustration with society's distorted values and his choice of an anarchist ethical position. The detective shares this sentiment with two friends, Olivos and Campbell, who participate in the ecological cause:

—Hasta en el Instituto Nacional, el liceo donde estudié, han puesto un enorme letrero de la Coca Cola—dijo Olivos a mis espaldas.

—Un día de estos van a poner uno igual sobre el techo de la Catedral o en los muros de La Moneda. (276)

—Even on the Instituto Nacional, the school where I studied, they have put up an enormous Coca Cola sign—Olivos said behind me.

—One of these days, they'll put up one just like it on the roof of the Cathedral or on the walls of the Moneda.

Heredia juxtaposes the ubiquitous globalizing image of Coca-Cola with that of Chile's iconic edifices that frame the Plaza de Armas. To Heredia, the threat of Coca-Cola signs being inserted throughout the capital evokes images of invasion, maybe not as viscerally shocking as the Moneda's bombardment during the 1973 coup, but just as sinister. As shown here, and as García-Corales and Pino note regarding a large part of Díaz Eterovic's narrative, *Los siete hijos de Simenon* inventories the anxieties of the perplexed inhabitant of the urban centers who is immersed in a cultural logic where destiny appears to be determined by territorial and political variables which rarely coincide with his/her interests and desires (*Poder* 97). Heredia's answer to this situation consists of an almost instinctive denunciation of the objects in his surroundings that reflect the official archive. The character formulates a degraded version—a counter-archive—of a nation that has taken seriously the entry into radical modernity and boasts of having created a technocratic society.

Heredia's rejection of a large portion of the material space surrounding him is the external expression of certain ideological and ethical variants related to his anarchist and archivist desires. According to the protagonist and the implied author, one alternative to this disenchanting state in the novel is the nostalgic reconstruction of a natural world, or, as Jameson puts it, the resurgence of nature in a variety of anti-capitalist forms (160). This recognition of nature can include a neo-anarchist utopian impulse that coincides with contemporary micro-political movements such as ecological activism (Jameson 160).<sup>12</sup> The plot sequence involving Heredia and the ecological activist Bórquez, the writer Olivos, and the journalist Campbell, emphasizes the utopian tendencies of ecologist activism. However, Heredia is skeptical:

Cerrar industrias, reducir los autobuses y vehículos, cuidar los bosques y declarar al aire un bien insustituible, parecería ser la solución. Pero esto no pasa de ser un sueño. (235)

Closing industries, reducing buses and vehicles, protecting forests, and declaring air a nonrenewable resource would be the solution. But that will never be more than a dream.

Heredia's conceptualization of the totalizing powers of globalized capital suggest that only a drastically different power system would

permit the advancement of an ecological project, and that such an experiment would not materialize within the current economic and political framework. Heredia, in contrast, opts for an individual ecological undertaking. He nostalgically and romantically resists change as the city around him transforms, and he takes refuge in spaces with more consoling characteristics.

The protagonist-narrator expresses his rebellion against progress in this way:

el mundo cambiaba de prisa y yo me resistía a cambiar con él, aferrado a una ciudad tranquila, con bares cuyas mesas fueron de madera, vehículos antiguos y trenes que llegaban siempre atrasados. (224)

the world was changing quickly and I resisted changing with it, clinging to a tranquil city, with bars that had wooden tables, old vehicles, and trains that always arrived late.

Along with pondering this idealized, simpler sphere, at a distance from the typical spaces where radical capitalism is installed, Heredia persists in work that he believes to be an ideal profession with anarchist resonances. His work keeps him at a distance from any type of limiting bureaucratic powers and allows him to circulate in the margins of a centralizing society, far from the seducing effects of money and prestige. He works "sin patrones y con horas de sobra para leer y escuchar música" (16) 'without bosses and with extra time to read and listen to music.' Heredia's work as a private detective facilitates his resistance to materialism and consumerism that appear to be the standard.

As a typical romantic anarchist, Heredia does not succumb to greed. He feels satisfaction in receiving a minimum income in order to maintain an old car and pay rent on a precarious apartment, leaving a little to purchase basic provisions for himself and his housecat Simenon and to subsidize his visits to his neighborhood bar. Heredia's nostalgia and his minimalist lifestyle exemplify an alternative to the consumerist and celebratory utopia of late capitalism.

Heredia persists in his anarchist resistance by means of a personal imaginary of a way of life projected far from his urban chronotope. With near-Luddite sensibilities, he is determined to negate

a city dominated by a

promoción de tipos que cree estar inventando la vida y arrasan con su prepotencia hueca y copiona de cosas que aprendieron mirando video clips o consumiendo hamburguesas en los McDonalds. (170)

generation of types who believe they are inventing life when they are demolishing it with their empty and copycat arrogance about things they learned watching video clips or consuming hamburgers in McDonalds.

Through nostalgic acts, Heredia resorts to other modes of life anchored in more hospitable territories. In order to evoke nostalgia in a reconstructive sense, he recalls images from his childhood on Chiloé Island:

En alguna parte dentro de mi cabeza escuché el tañer de una campana. Era un repicar grato ... desde una iglesia chilota de tejuelas deslavadas que se recortaba sobre un nítido fondo azul, después de una noche de lluvia y mientras aún se distinguía sobre los sembrados el beso enérgico de la escarcha. (118)

In some part of my head, I heard the ring of a bell. It was a gratifying peal ... from a church in Chiloe with faded shingles that stood out against a bright blue background, after a rainy night while one could still see the energetic kiss of frost on the fields.

With memories like this one that replay his romanticized vision of an immaculate rural past, the detective escapes from the chaos and ethical vacuum of the consumerist city space.

Heredia uses memory in counteracting the official archive that seeks an ideological sterilization of contemporary urban life. According to Derrida, the archive is the central place of official authority (the commandment) and is the place of commencement: the site where power originates (1).<sup>13</sup> However, elucidating Sigmund Freud's archive, Derrida also insists that the archive should consist of a place, or more specifically, the home where "the self" resides. In this way, the archive can be the central site of power, and may take the form of an individual archive by means of particular memory.

The private archive, located in the home/self, is an anarchist force that resists the official archive's tendency to control memory and contains utopian potential. Opposition between the central archive and private memory, a specific archive, constitutes a power struggle between archivist and anarchist forces. Considering Derrida's double concept of the archive as the place of commandment of order and the private site of the self, the former can challenge the latter with an anarchist impulse.

In this novel, Heredia also maintains his countercultural integrity with a literary archive. Despite his modest lifestyle, Heredia has been able to acquire a vast personal library. In fact, the preferred napping spot of his cat Simenon happens to be atop a collection of the works of George Simenon.<sup>14</sup> The private detective's books, distributed chaotically throughout his apartment, belong to the detective genre as well as world literature. Heredia demonstrates a special affinity towards authors with connections to anarchist doctrine. He constantly quotes such books as a way of confronting the prosaic reality around him as well as an imaginary form of combating his own solitude. Moreover, the character justifies his sentimental and subversive ideological posture. For example, in referring to his daily routine living with his cat, Heredia quotes a verse from Baudelaire: "El gato 'es mi espíritu familiar; juzga, preside, inspira todo desde la altura de su imperio, ¿por ventura es un mago, un dios?" (119) "The cat "is my familiar spirit; he judges, presides, inspires everything within his province, perhaps he is a magician, a god?" This reference emphasizes Heredia's romantic tendency to poeticize otherwise mundane aspects of daily life.<sup>15</sup> Heredia's personal archive functions as his utopian form of resistance within the private sphere against the proliferation of a globalized, central archive which attempts to permeate all aspects of personal and public life.

The Chilean writer Manuel Rojas, from the Generation of 1938, also offers a manifestation of utopian-anarchist thought. Heredia quotes a novel by Rojas in which the principal character says, "dame tiempo para gozar del cielo, mar y el viento" (37) 'give me time to enjoy the sky, sea, and the wind.' This quote that Heredia selects from Rojas's narrative, winner of the 1957 National Literature Prize in Chile, evokes a search for an ecological utopia and contrasts with a polluted Santiago. Heredia opts to connect himself to Rojas, who



is known for his political activism in anarchist causes for which he was detained on numerous occasions. In this light, Díaz Eterovic's association illustrates another facet of the protagonist's countercultural position in *Los siete hijos de Simenon* and underlines the connection with this specific anarchist movement.

The bitterness and disenchantment in the text combines with sad humor when Heredia refers to his preferred literary quotes:

El absurdo de un teléfono mudo y una cita de Juan Carlos Onetti rescatada desde el azar de la memoria: 'lo malo no está en que la vida promete cosas que nunca nos dará; lo malo es que siempre las da y deja de darlas' (151)

The absurdity of a dead phone and a quote by Juan Carlos Onetti rescued by chance from memory: 'what is bad is not that life promises things that it will never give; what is bad is that it always gives and stops giving.'

Heredia's anarchist position, no longer connected with a pragmatic social project, takes shape as a personal archive grounded in the recognition of society's betrayal of values. As Heredia alludes to the work of Arthur Rimbaud, the detective evokes the depth of his melancholy and his anarchist-utopian attachment to this luminary figure of modern poetry:

Desde algún rincón de la plaza creí escuchar los comentarios de alguien que se burlaba de mí. Pero sólo la imaginación. Como Rimbaud, pensé en una temporada en el infierno. (97)

From some corner of the plaza I thought I heard comments from someone making fun of me. Only my imagination. Like Rimbaud, I thought of a season in hell.

Heredia's intellectual archive, constituted by these literary references and his personal library, reflects the ideological foundation of the protagonist's anarchist-romantic sensibility, not only in the utopian significance of their content, but also in the form and circumstances in which the novel presents them. Heredia's private material archive contrasts with the abstract centralizing archive, as Derrida theorizes it, which also appears in the novel through the distinct manifestations of authoritative and totalizing non-state powers.

Heredia's nostalgia for other worlds and other sensibilities emerges through the novel's review of Heredia's private archive. His persistence in expressing and internalizing literary fragments allows him to poetically encounter his literary idols with whom he shares ideological solidarity. His physical archive of books offers a tangible presence to the intangible values to which Heredia clings. The detective does not find such solidarity in his outside surroundings, where his romantic and ethical values have been replaced by corruption, consumerism, and economic exploitation. In other words, Heredia establishes sentimental fidelity based on his ethical nature and a utopian-anarchist ideology located beyond his immediate environment.

Along with this socially symbolic act of collecting quotes with romantic and anarchist resonances, Heredia laments the physical absence of his literary and cultural figures in the City Bar, his favorite local haunt. Heredia creates a bizarre grouping of characters that offer a glimpse into the detective's past:

Tampoco están los poetas a los que solía ver en otra época—dije, observando una vez más la media docena de mesas que se ubicaban frente a la barra—Iván y Jorge Teillier, Roberto Araya Gallegos, el “Chico Molina,” Rolando Cárdenas, Germán Arestizábal, el “Mono” Olivares, Juan Cameron, Ramón Carmona y Guzmán Paredes, un filósofo que era capaz de recordar las formaciones de la Unión Española de los últimos treinta años. A veces aparecía Coloane y alguna gente más joven. Un tal Díaz, Álvaro Ruiz y un poeta gordito de nombre griego, Arquímedes o Agamemnon. Gente tranquila que trataba de sobrevivir en una ciudad triste, mientras afuera los buitres afilaban sus picos. (86)

The poets that I used to see are not here either—I said, observing once again the half-dozen tables in front of the bar—Iván and Jorge Teillier, Roberto Araya Gallegos, “Little Boy Molina,” Rolando Cárdenas, Germán Arestizábal, “Monkey” Olivares, Juan Cameron, Ramón Carmona, and Guzmán Paredes, a philosopher who could remember the formations of the Spanish Union for the past thirty years. Sometimes Coloane and some younger people would show up. A man called Díaz, Álvaro Ruiz and a fat poet

with some Greek name, Arquimedes or Agamemnon. Tranquil people who were trying to survive in a sad city, while outside the vultures were sharpening their beaks.

Heredia maintains his attachments to old utopian ideals, even if they are out of style, and to his old cultural idols, even if they are degraded and nostalgic just like the detective himself. He symbolically becomes an unofficial member of the club of literary anarchists in Santiago. Moreover, Heredia does not prefer isolation to community. He utilizes a private archive of memory as an ethical and anarchist tool to combat the moral vacuum he perceives in current society. The nostalgic evocation of these literary meetings in the City Bar offers an alternative of solidarity while the corrupt radical capitalist non-state outside appears to be destroying all signs of genuine community. Heredia internalizes his personal archive loaded with anarchist ideological convictions through recalling literary quotes and his nostalgia for literary and cultural figures of a bygone generation.

At the end of the novel, the protagonist reiterates his utopian and anarchist impulses while he remains loyal to humanist ethical values despite being presented with various temptations to compromise such values. He also manages to invert and disobey some of the codes of the corrupt non-state. After a long investigation, Heredia uncovers the facts that lead him to confront Nicolás Leal, the man responsible for the death of the attorney Federico Gordon. This corrupt high-ranking governmental bureaucrat orders Gordon's death for refusing a bribe to withhold information of the negative ecological effects that the Gaschil gas duct would have caused if implemented.

When Heredia confronts and questions Leal, the bureaucrat-archon unsuccessfully attempts to bribe the detective as well to participate in the cover-up. Upon trying to escape from Heredia, Leal is abruptly run over in the street by a truck and dies. This partially failed attempt at resolution also shows tones of irony and dark humor in the sense that Leal is able to punch Heredia and flees from him only later to find his punishment under the heavy tread of modernity. However, rectification occurs when Heredia turns over the details of the internal government corruption within the Controller General's office, which freezes the Gaschil project. This signifies

a temporal victory for those who wished to protect the ecological future of Chile, especially Heredia's friend Campbell, who saves his career by publishing an article on the investigation. Heredia's anarchist project, conducted from marginal, unofficial exercises in power, challenges the central archive by becoming part of public knowledge upon publication. The amplification of the Gaschi's international power is suspended as charges of corruption incite public outrage and growing support for environmental protection and preservation.

Finally, Heredia returns to the solitude that characterizes him, consistent with his anarchist attitude. The surprising apparition of seven tiny kittens in Heredia's apartment highlights his lack of human companionship. They are the offspring of his cat Simenon who functions as the protagonist's alter ego. Simenon is able to carry on dialogue with Heredia, further proving the character's solitude. The kittens' appearance is the only justification of the title of the novel and offers a counterpoint of collectivity and tenderness to Heredia's individual utopian project.

The conclusion of the novel, with these images of solitude and anarchist sensibility, leaves the impression that Heredia's ideals do not fully take hold in the world around him. Also, his archive of literature and corresponding values allows him to combat internalization of the late capitalist values of the narrated world's non-state at the individual level. The narrator points to such a state of mind at the end of the story: "Había comenzado a recordar mi historia en medio de una ciudad triste" (293) 'I had begun to remember my story in the middle of a sad city.' Sadness and memory, partial justice, bitter humor, and now eight cats, are his companions in an urban space where each day makes it more difficult to maintain revolutionary ideals.

This novel confronts social crises such as institutional corruption, ecological negligence, and rampant free market consumerism and superficiality, and also refers to the cultural and ideological crises instigating such problems. Proof of the legacy of the anarchist movement in Chile lies in the fact that Heredia's primary resistance is characterized by an anarchist utopian vision that resists the non-state and its homogenizing and totalizing forces of global capital. In light of Derrida's archive, Heredia's resistance takes the form of a

personal (partially material and partially imaginary) archive that he uses as an ideological weapon against hegemony. Heredia's nostalgic vision of a past-tense natural utopia fixes his place in society's periphery. His anarchist utopia is not constructed in a militant pragmatic sense, but rather rests on the proposals of alternative orders to an inhospitable present as put forth in literature. In *Los siete hijos de Simenon*, the anarchist utopia persists in the imagined ideals of its solitary and melancholic protagonist, Heredia.

#### Notes

1 For comprehensive explanations of the Heredia novels within the *neopolicial* genre, see Promis's article "El neopolicial criollo de Ramón Díaz Eterovic" 'The new detective creole of Ramón Díaz Eterovic' and Espinoza's review of *Los siete hijos de Simenon* "Trasfondo de la novela negra" 'Background of the crime novel.' Also see García-Corales and Mirian Pino's two coauthored books *Poder y crimen en la literatura contemporánea chilena. Las novelas de Heredia* (2002) 'Power and crime in contemporary Chilean literature' and *El neopolicial latinoamericano y la crónica del Chile actual en las novelas de Ramón Díaz Eterovic* (2008) 'Latin American neopolicial and the chronicle of current Chile in the novels by Ramón Díaz Eterovic,' which are the first books dedicated exclusively to Díaz Eterovic's novels.

2 The Heredia novels have gained increasing critical and popular attention in recent years. The most comprehensive studies on Díaz Eterovic's fiction include those by García-Corales, Rodrigo Cánovas, Patricia Espinosa, Clemens A. Franken Kurzen, Pino, Promis, Juan Armando Epple, and Shalisa Collins.

3 Considering its pervading theme of ecological consciousness, this novel can be considered within the trend of ecocriticism, one of contemporary literature's significant tendencies. The most comprehensive theoretical books on ecocriticism are by Laurence Buell: *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001), *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005). Other important ecocritical works are Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's *Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) and Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (2004).

4 The eleven other Heredia novels are: *La ciudad está triste* (1987) 'The city is sad,' *Sólo en la oscuridad* (1992) 'Only in the darkness,' *Nadie sabe más que los muertos* (1993) 'No one knows more than the dead,' *Ángeles y solitarios* (1995) 'Angels and loners,' *Nunca enamores a un forastero* (1999) 'Never fall in love with a stranger,' *El ojo del alma* (2001) 'The eye of the soul,' *El hombre que pregunta* (2002) 'The man who questions,' *El color de la piel* (2003) 'The color

of skin,' *A la sombra del dinero* (2005) 'In the shadows of money,' *El segundo deseo* (2006) 'The second desire,' and *La oscura memoria de las armas* (2008) 'The dark memory of arms.' *Los siete hijos de Simenon* was awarded the literary prize Dos Orillas del Salón del Libro Iberoamericano in Gijón, Spain in 2000. This novel has also been translated into various languages and editions in Italy, Portugal, Croatia, Holland, France, Germany, and Spain following Editorial LOM's publication in Chile. Díaz Eterovic also received popular attention from the short-lived television series based on the Heredia novels entitled *Heredia y asociados*. The series, consisting of eight fifty-minute episodes, was broadcast on Televisión Nacional de Chile (TVN) in 2004, and co-produced by Valcine and TVN.

5 The new detective (*neopolicial*) concept has been popularized by the Mexican writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II, as M. Paz Balibrea-Enríquez notes. Balibrea-Enríquez emphasizes that the new detective genre recuperates a social function even now when postmodern gestures question the validity of social and ethical projects (39-40). The Cuban author and critic Leonardo Padura Fuentes, in an interview with Juan Armando Epple, affirms that the new detective story presents the following characteristics: "Primero, disminución de la importancia del enigma como elemento dramático fundamental. Segundo, una preferencia por ambientes marginales para el desarrollo de las historias y la significación dramática ... Los policías, investigadores, detectives, como se les llame, son por lo general gente frustrada, jodida, y no tienen nada de triunfadores" (Epple 60) 'First, decrease in the importance of the enigma as the fundamental dramatic element. Second, a preference for marginal settings for the development of the story and dramatic meaning ... Police, investigators, detective, whatever you call them, are generally frustrated, doomed people, and are in no way winners.'

6 The political philosophy of anarchism was most prominent during the nineteenth century. Its philosophers included Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in France, William Godwin in England, and Kropotkin and Bakunin in Russia.

7 According to Dawes, the case can be made for anarchism as a more influential ideological stance than Marxism during the era of the 1920s and 30s in Chile. In this time period, Marxism was vague and diffuse, while anarchism, closely linked with unionization in this particular circumstance, was more clearly defined with more practical immediate potential (321).

8 According to most critics, *Residencia en la tierra* 'Residence on Earth' expresses the apogee of Neruda's anarchist position. Beginning in 1936, Neruda leaves behind anarchism in favor of communism and critical realism.

9 Scholars of both ideologies have elaborated on the parallels between anarchism and utopianism. Three of these studies are *No Gods, No Masters* (1965)

edited by Daniel Guérin, Sam Dolgoff's *Bakunin on Anarchism* (1971), and *Bakunin: The Creative Passion* (2006) by Mark Leier. Kropotkin specifically is known as an ecological utopianist. See his work *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902).

10 All translations from the original Spanish are mine.

11 During the 1970s and 80s, free-market policies of deregulation and privatization opened Chile to global commerce, creating rampant growth among some sectors. Milton Friedman described this phenomenon as the "Chilean Miracle," and its model has been implemented in other countries.

12 Ecological activism and ecocriticism contain inherent utopian and anarchist tendencies. Lawrence Buell's ecocritical work highlights the need for a paradigmatic change in our way of examining the world that would reorient the focus on human beings as a component to the natural world as opposed to the dominant view that includes humans at the center.

13 On the social significance of archive, Derrida presents its double conceptualization, "Arkhe, we recall, names at once the commencement and the commandment. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, there where things commence—physical, historical or ontological principle—but also the principle according to the law, there where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given—nomological principle" (1).

14 George Simenon (1903-89) was one of the most prolific detective writers in the history of the genre. It is said he wrote over four hundred books.

15 Charles Baudelaire (1812-67), one of the greatest French poets of the nineteenth century and recognized for his distance from political causes in later years, was earlier associated with socialist ideological projects. He fought at the barricades during the revolution of 1848 and in the same year he also co-founded the journal *Le Salut Public*. He was associated with Proudhon and opposed the *coup d'état* of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte in December 1851. After this tumultuous period, Baudelaire remained aloof from politics and adopted an increasingly reactionary attitude.

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