

If the myth of the *Imbuche/Ibunché* is centuries old, perhaps Donoso's reasons for selecting just this myth would further clarify the underlying purpose of the novel. There is the possibility that, besides annihilating language, Donoso is also attempting to destroy time and literary genres. Caviglia stresses that ". . . Humberto's education is synchronically present in the diachronic progress of the novel" and that there is "an author's *Bildung* that equates synchronic and diachronic distance" (pp. 43, 44). The *Ibunché* present as a belief in precolonial Chile and in a twentieth-century novel may be Donoso's way of symbolizing the destruction of time, and once time is destroyed, space has no meaning.

As for the annihilation of genres, the old woman "un poco bruja, un poco alcahueta" might be straight out of *El libro de buen amor*, a mixture of genres if ever there was one, or *La Celestina*, the novel/drama or drama/novel. The *Imbuche* as "womb" is almost a takeoff on Carpentier's "Viaje a la semilla." Humberto, in his sickroom with only a photograph to open nonexistent perspectives, parallels the ending Cortázar gave us in "Las babas del diablo." The narrative schema provided by Caviglia reminds one very much of Vargas Llosa's technique in *La casa verde*, just as the contrast between *Casa* and *Rinconada* suggests the Peruvian's use of Piura and Santa María.

I submit, therefore, that the *Imbuche* may serve as the symbol that embraces all these annihilations and is of the utmost importance for a true understanding of Donoso's objectives in writing the novel. However, no author can create completely ex nihilo, and so they must be only partial annihilations, nullifying the norms of the past in order to create new ones—just as from Narcissus grew the beautiful new flower.

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To the Editor:

Although I was delighted to see a paper on a Latin American literary topic in the pages of *PMLA*, I was disappointed to see that John Caviglia was too hasty in his scholarship to check out thoroughly the central motif of the novel—and one of the central concerns of his paper. I refer to his note 4: "Although one is intended to believe that it is derived from Chilean folklore, it is in fact an invention of Donoso, created as a nonce symbol for his novel" (p. 45).

In fact *Imbunche* is listed in the nineteenth edition (1970) of the dictionary of the Real Academia

Española with no less than four meanings, three attributed to figurative Chilean usage. The principal definition matches perfectly the sense in which the term is used by Donoso. Moreover, a quick check in Oreste Plath's *Folklore chileno* would have revealed that the *Imbunche* does, in fact, have folkloric roots. Plath's definition on page 433 (4th ed., 1973) gives the etymology of the word and its general use. And his description on pages 139–40 of the motif of the "Cueva de Quicavi" demonstrates amply the folkloric heritage of the *Imbunche*; page 140 describes in detail various aspects of the *Imbunche*.

I will leave it for Caviglia to determine the degree to which this error affects his interpretation of the novel. Nevertheless, it would seem quite significant that the *Imbunche* motif, far from being a solipsistic nonce symbol, jibes well with how the unseen forces of the world, controlled by Peta Ponce, the witch who manipulates the *Imbunche*, exact their toll on both the aristocrat and the bourgeois "intellectual" who believe that they, in fact, are the masters of the Peta Ponces.

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### Double-Reading *Daniel Deronda*

To the Editor:

You were right; Cynthia Chase's essay "The Decomposition of the Elephants: Double-Reading *Daniel Deronda*" (*PMLA*, 93 [1978], 215–27) makes hard reading, but it is worth it in the end—not so much, I feel, for the rhetorical flourish of self-cancellation at which so much structuralist criticism seems to aim, the dizzy discovery that "narrative must cut out or cut around the cutting short of the cutting off of narrative," but for some fine local insights.

I would like to comment on two of these insights, however. First, Chase discloses the "discrediting," the "scandal," the "forgery" that the double or deconstructionist reading of *Daniel Deronda* finds embedded in the text. She builds this analysis on an extension of Eliot's own terminology about the "swindle" (Meyrick's word) and the "coercion" (narrator's word) that must occur in the movement of the mind (or the "story") from simple self-involvement or self-contemplation to contemplation of itself as part of a system. If one thinks that making this movement is worthwhile, the swindle or coercion lies exactly in seeing what is not, strictly, "there": the general system of morality (see *Middle-*

*march*), the origin (see Edward Said's *Beginnings*), the goal (see Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*) will all be, as Chase correctly says of these things in *Daniel Deronda*, "referents," which exist half in, half outside, the story, since they are pointed to inside but must remain outside in order for the story, or the mind, to exist as part of a whole, rather than as the sly container of that whole. Now, it is classically art (or religion) that invites to this movement, and Chase is surely right to see the placement of Meyrick's ironic letter between the two tense phases of Daniel's meeting with his mother as one of those virtuoso moments of narration by which Eliot calls attention to the way in which *Daniel Deronda* is an exploration of art and its difficulties, swindles, and possibilities. Meyrick with his small compact paintings and Mirah with her small compact voice seem to represent a kind of art suspicious of the destroying or deluding quality of art with large ambitions. Both of them seem simply to wish to make a living and to support their families through art. Art and culture not directly tied to simple human support face the accusation that Meyrick makes in his letter—they are world-supporting elephants "expensive" for a man or a society to keep. The whimsical ironist, in turn, faces the challenge Eliot makes in *Daniel Deronda* from the perspective of the genius—a challenge made in *The Mill on the Floss*, memorably, from the opposite perspective of the worker: "good society, floated on gossamer wings of light irony, is of a very expensive production: requiring nothing less than a wide and arduous national life condensed in unfragrant deafening factories. . . . This wide national life is based entirely on emphasis. . . . There are many among its myriads of souls who have absolutely needed an emphatic belief." Through her realistic picture of the way men and women of genius deploy their coercive visions, their swindling fictions, their expensive "emphatic beliefs" on one another (light irony, as Chase admits, being not a neutral position but a coercive emphasis in its own right, and expensive, as a world de-supporting elephant), Eliot wins enough space in her novel, enough dramatic "credit," to allow herself a choice of expenses. Her choice is made, in fact, in the two scenes between Daniel and his mother that are separated by the Meyrick letter. Discrediting—that is, relaxing into and then arising out of, light irony by way of Meyrick—is a narrative preparation for the even more strenuous deconstruction of art that follows. Daniel has discovered all he needed to know factually about his identity in the first meeting, but both mother and son, feeling something unfinished, call for a second meeting. There we learn the full dimension of the choice Daniel's actress mother

made decades before in the grip of her genius: she would be neither female nor male, neither Jew nor Gentile, neither parent nor child, but an artist. "Acknowledge that I had a right to be an artist, though my father's will was against it," she demands in her passion, "my nature gave me a charter." And, "I do acknowledge that," Daniel replies, though his acknowledgment is "sustained by a resolute opposition which was the expression of his fullest self." In the light of his mother's giant-sized theory of art, which deconstructs all other social, political, and moral systems into itself, for which all visions are literally "parts" to play on the stage of the enclosing self, Daniel and Mordecai's Zionist-Socialist vision, the "Jewish section" of the novel, shrinks to the truly human scale I believe Eliot meant it to have. Acknowledging his mother the deconstructing artist, Daniel knows himself finally for something else, something indeed constructed. In opposition to the artist, he will make himself "just like your grandfather"—a Jew, a male, a lover, a father.

Which brings us to my second comment, since Chase and Steven Marcus insist, to *la chose*, Daniel's penis, his origin. History has, perhaps unfairly, reconstructed *Daniel Deronda*'s other missing referent, Daniel's goal, Zion. And it has always seemed to this reader that his story has in general reconstructed Daniel from that large, amorphously sexed figure he is in adolescence, rather his mother's daughter than his uncle's nephew, to his final "full" male self. It seems idle to speculate whether Daniel would have been circumcized at birth; surely it is no longer a romantic but a thoroughly *realistic* novelist's province to assert that a person cannot really know himself to be a man, or a Jew, just by "looking down." It seems proper to close on that note, for the moment, this phase of the discourse of women on *la chose* in the pages of *PMLA*.

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*Ms. Chase replies:*

Judith Wilt's own local insights include some sensitive and telling descriptions of how the narrator's point of view is expressed and enforced in the novel and, in particular, how certain views of art are "discredited" from the ethical standpoint of the narrator. But she fails to grasp the distinction between discrediting and deconstructing; and the issue is worth taking up, since other experienced readers of nineteenth-century novels may find themselves in similar confusion about a relatively new term. There are many ways in which the views about life ex-