

Alex

Professor Beaky

AS:300:01

November 2024

## The Chilean Cosmic Narrative

Through the lens of a telescope, one can make out the global cluster, Omega Centauri. This cluster, once looked at through the telescope's magnifying eyepiece, transforms from a fuzzy dot into a dazzling global cluster of hundreds of thousands of stars. Upon discovering this anecdote in my research, I couldn't help but pause and think about how similar this cosmic phenomenon is to what I aim to describe in this essay as *The Chilean Cosmic Narrative*. Chile's connection to the stars is woven deeply into its history, its geography, and even its literature. This connection, although fuzzy and barely visible at first glance, is simply a cluster of cosmic influence, waiting to be uncovered. To do this, I want to closely examine two separate parts of Chilean identity in which the cosmos have touched. Just as the telescope reveals the true beauty of Omega Centauri, delving into both the history and the poetry of Chilean identity and culture will allow us to develop a better understanding for just how deep the roots of astronomy go in *Chile's Cosmic Narrative*.

### Chapter One: *Chilean History, Geography, and Culture*

In a competition of "where in the world could you get a top-notch look at the stars", Chile has an undeniable lead. The absence of clouds for most of the year with 340 clear sky days, the unmatched clear view of the southern sky, and low intensity of light pollution to name a few.

However, historically, we can see that Chile's astronomical history spans centuries before Europeans started naming constellations below the Equator just over 400 years ago... In fact, evidence shows us that early Indigenous communities in and around what is now Chile used the sun, moon, and stars to keep track of time, further proving just how fundamental astronomy was to early Chilean life.

The Indigenous communities of this part of Latin America had such rich knowledge of the stars that they knew of what was referred to as "dark constellations," "pitch black sinuous dust clouds silhouetted against the Milky Way" (Schilling). A good example of this was the Incan "Yacana," or the llama. Astronomy was deeply important to the spiritual and everyday lives of these early societies, which built the foundation for future developments in Chilean Astronomy.

The Incas used the sky as more than just a slate to identify these "dark constellations" upon; their observations of the sky provided them with units of time, as well as a calendar system that helped them plan agriculture and herding activities. Incas thought of themselves as descendants of the "sun god," Inti (Jones).

Chile's unmatched geographical conditions has made it the global center for astronomy. The process of expanding on this potential started when scientists from Europe, the United States, and the Soviet Union each built a massive observatory in the country, each of them in, essentially, the middle of nowhere. The reason for this? Those stellar geographical conditions, most definitely, but also Cold War politics, and the previous history of astronomy in Chile (Silvia). Chile's historical emphasis on the cosmos has led it to become one of the countries with the "*greatest astronomical observation capacity in the world*" (Schilling).

However, it isn't just this chapter on Chilean history, geography, and culture that makes it so important to astronomers. Using the aforementioned telescope, we reveal yet another chapter in *Chilean's Cosmic Narrative*, and this one explores something just as uniquely important: Chilean literature.

## Chapter Two: *Celestial Symbolism in Chilean Literature*

It was Plato who famously said about poetry: "Poetry is nearer to vital truth than history."

Although historical accounts are just as important within this cosmic narrative, poetry, too, will offer us a glimpse into how vital astronomy is to Chilean identity. Chilean literature of all kinds very frequently reflects a deeply rooted connection with the natural world; trees, the sky, the ground, the sand. Celestial elements have been called upon to evoke themes that are both emotionally personal and philosophical depending on the feelings flowing from the poet themselves. Two of Chile's most renowned poets are two we have covered extensively in class; Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral. I combed through works from both of these gifted artists to uncover what they had to say about the night sky, and, just as importantly, why they said it.

Cosmic imagery was used as a very special and powerful tool; a tool to explore deeply complex human experiences, blending metaphor with the very, very personal. Pablo Neruda was a Chilean poet and politician who used cosmic imagery frequently throughout his work. In one of his many odes, "Ode to a Star," Neruda details how he'd carry around a sky-blue star if he were to "touch the nocturnal dome." He calls this seizing of the star "an act of extraordinary love." Neruda goes on to emphasize the brightness of the star's light, piercing through the woolen mattress, the tiles, and the roof of his house. Despite the beauty of it, Neruda uses this star to explore how such a light could grow troublesome, preventing him from tending to his duties or paying his bills.

Later, he takes the star to somewhere he calls “The Green River” where there is stillness and where it is calm. He takes the star and casts it upon the waters. It floats away, “like an insoluble fish, moving in the night of the river.” Neruda is playing with the natural world here, in many of his iconic works, revealing the interconnectedness of not only the star in the sky, but the water in which he casts it upon. He does this in another way in his “Ode to My Socks,” where he instills simple objects with a whimsy or cosmic importance. Neruda describes the socks using adjectives like “heavenly” and “glowing.” He implies that a mundane object, such as socks, are in this case, deeply profound and worthy of interest. Although combing through these metaphors could truly take up the entirety of this narrative, I found an intriguing line I wanted to draw between the sky, as described in “Poem 20” of Neruda’s *Twenty Love Poems*, and the one in Gabriel Mistral’s “Promise to the Stars.” The sky, in both works, is arguably the same one; yet the purpose it serves and the emotions it instills in the reader is dependent on the observer. In *Poem 20*, Neruda uses the sky to represent general indifference to human feelings. The sky is consistent in the face of our very inconsistent human journeys, in this specific poem, through love and heartbreak. In a similar way, Gabriel Mistral’s poem, “Promise to the Stars,” turns to the sky directly and asks the stars a question. Questions like, “do you see me pure?” “Do you see me well?” These questions will go unanswered, and obviously Mistral understands this, because the sky is a constant truth. It is consistent, and unchanging, despite what terrors and horrors we might emotionally experience in our human lives, despite anything we do or do not know the answer to. The sky, in this case, has all the answers, yet also none of them, at the very same time. The sky in these Chilean works acts as a way to pure reflection, allowing poets to play with this reflection in all

kinds of profound and unique ways.

## CONCLUSION

Like Omega Centauri, Chile's connection to Astronomy might only be surface level and blurry from afar. Under the lens of our very American perspectives, perhaps we are only able to see the connection in the huge observatories that we and other European countries have erected across Chile's landscape. However, using research, history, and literature, we are able to look through the metaphorical "telescope" and explore the rich culture attached to Chilean Astronomy. Chile is not simply land for us to extract astronomical findings from; instead, it is a land that has astronomy and the cosmos deeply woven into its identity. Through literature and art, we gain an even deeper understanding of this connection. These cultural expressions reveal to us that astronomy in Chile is more than the data gathered at these world-renowned observatories; it is a living and forever-evolving part of national identity. Using this "Cosmic Narrative," we are able to honor Chile's astronomical legacy, where the cosmos act as both a field of important scientific pursuit and a source of profound cultural meaning – an endless narrative between the skies above and the Chilean spirit.

## Works Cited

- Bauer, Brian S. "Astronomy in Ancient Latin America." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*, Oxford University Press, 28 Sept. 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.878>.
- Barandiaran, Javiera. "Reaching for the Stars? Astronomy and Growth in Chile." *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43548978?seq=21>.
- Cortés, Rodrigo, Denise Depoortere, and Lucina Maiaver. "Astronomy in Chile: Assessment of Scientific Productivity through a Bibliometric Analysis." [EBSCOhost](#).
- Moyano, Ricardo Bustamante, and Patricio. "Cultural Astronomy in Hispanic-Indigenous Contexts of Central Chile." *Journal of Skyscape Archaeology*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2021, [EBSCOhost](#).
- Neruda, Pablo. "Ode to a Star." *Hecho Poetico*, <http://hechopoetico.blogspot.com/2009/03/ode-to-star-by-neruda.html>.
- Neruda, Pablo. "Ode to My Socks." *Poets.org*, <https://poets.org/poem/ode-my-socks>.
- Neruda, Pablo. "Poem 20." *Red Poppy*, [https://redpoppy.net/Neruda\\_Poema\\_20.html](https://redpoppy.net/Neruda_Poema_20.html).
- Schilling, Govert. "An Astronomer's Paradise, Chile May Be the Best Place on Earth to Enjoy a Starry Sky." *Smithsonian Magazine*, 22 July 2015, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/star-trekking-chile-astronomy-180955798/>.
- "Astronomy in Chile." *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astronomy\\_in\\_Chile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astronomy_in_Chile).

“Dark Constellations of the Incas.” *Futurism*,

<https://futurism.com/the-dark-constellations-of-the-incas>.

“Omega Centauri.” *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omega\\_Centauri](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omega_Centauri).

ChatGPT. “Assistance with MLA Works Cited Formatting and Organization.” *OpenAI*, 23 Oct.

2024, [chat.openai.com/chat](https://chat.openai.com/chat)

Alex

Professor Frazier-Yoder

AS:300:01

November 2024

“Homosexuals for Change:” A Chronological Evolution of LGBTQ+ Rights in Chile

There is an incredibly powerful scene in the Chilean film *A Fantastic Woman* (2017) that encapsulates the harsh reality of the LGBTQ+ experience in Chile. The film, an emotional exploration of the life of Marina, a transgender woman, vividly portrays both her personal struggle with identity and broader societal tensions colliding with and complicating this struggle. In one particular scene, Marina, leaving the funeral of her former lover, is pursued by a truck full of angry men. As the men violently throw her in the car and wrap her face in tape, the camera alternates between their cruel hateful display and the driver's evident discomfort. Despite his unease, the driver continues to drive, ultimately dumping Marina in an alley, forgotten and humiliated. This deeply chilling scene represents the indifference to violence and discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Chile, offering a stark reflection of the country's evolving, but still incomplete, progress on LGBTQ+ rights. Chile made headlines in 2022 with the long-awaited passage of its Equal Marriage Law, a milestone for LGBTQ+ activists. However, the delay raises important questions about *why* such progress took so long in a country often seen as "liberal" or left-leaning. To explore this, this essay will examine LGBTQ+ rights in Chile from

a historical perspective, analyzing the slow but significant steps toward equality and the challenges that remain in Chile today.

#### Allende and Pinochet: Two Evils

Salvador Allende, Chile's first socialist president, believed that homosexuality was an ailment that needed to be cured. Allende is even quoted describing a certain "cure" rather approvingly: "It could be corrected with surgery - small holes would be made in the stomach, into which small pieces of testicle would be inserted. This would make the person heterosexual" (The Sydney Morning Herald). This obviously absurd quote is still contested, but whether or not this was truly a belief held by Allende doesn't change the fact that his party was deeply homophobic. Popular Unity was a left-wing political alliance in Chile that backed Salvador Allende during the 1970 Chilean presidential election. Contrary to what many people might believe about this left-wing party, Popular Unity had a very clear idea as to what the ideal Chilean was, and that happened to be a hard working, heterosexual, man. Masculinity and power was the image the left-leaning party favored, while the right took advantage of the image of femininity (visible in pot-banging demonstrations). Neither of these ideals paved any road for homosexuality; it was contrary to both conceptions, but especially from the political left.

In fact, as surprising as it may sound, the first ever gender correction in Chile had been done during the months leading to Pinochet's dictatorship. In March 1973, Marcia Torres became the first person to ever obtain this correction, and in May, she applied for a name change, which she received in the first months of the Pinochet dictatorship. However, this win was one of few as the Pinochet regime went on and homophobia started running violently rampant in Chile.

Despite this terrifying time, in the wake of the crisis, the first LGBTQ+ organizations began to pop up around Chile, although initially illegal and hidden.

### **The 80s: Chilean Gays Party (*And Get Organized*)**

The 80s offered a new scene for the gay Chilean: a semi public gay nightlife in Santiago!

Alongside this new and exciting nightlife, Queer organized resistance groups started making their mark on Chile in all sorts of ways. It was during the violent repression of homosexuality and the community as a whole that the first LGBTQ+ organizations started to publicly appear. In 1977, a group of self-identified homosexuals formed a group they called “*Integración*.” This group started off quiet, meeting in privacy, in homes, talking educationally about homosexuality. Soon after, in 1983, “*Ayuquelén*,” the first ever lesbian organization in Chile was formed. As more and more groups emerged, there was really only one that took public action initiative. *Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis*, formed in 1987, is described as a “radical artistic group.” They were passionate about rebelling and were known for their controversial acts of political protest. During the proclamation of Patricio Aylwin in 1989, the two main organizers of this group unfurled a large banner that read the words that moved me so much, I made them the title of this essay: “Homosexuals For Change.” Aylwin would go on to carry out his campaign, the first democratically elected president since Allende. *Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis* would carry out their campaign too, continuing to do these controversial acts of protest around Chile, like riding into buildings naked and on horses. It wasn’t until the return to democracy that followed until we started to see real tangible social changes. Chilean gays got their next big win in 1999, when homosexual acts were decriminalized.

### **Modern Day Chile: The Queer Perspective**

In the aforementioned Chilean movie, *A Fantastic Woman*, the main character Marina is shown pushing against an impossibly strong wind as she is walking down the sidewalk, a scene that represents the seemingly impossible fight for LGBTQ+ rights and recognition. As many wins as the Chilean LGBTQ+ community has picked up, hate crimes and transphobia continue to threaten LGBTQ+ Chileans livelihoods. However, despite this hate and prejudice, the recent wins of Queer people in Chile deserve recognition. In 2012, a law banning all discrimination and hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity was approved, a huge relief for Gay Chileans; especially after the brutal assault on Daniel Zamudio, a gay man killed earlier that year. In 2013, LGBTQ+ people were allowed to donate blood without restrictions, and then in 2022, same-sex couples were able to marry and adopt children. LGBTQ+ Chileans have made huge unthinkable strides, and the work continues in Chile today.

### **CONCLUSION**

The unfurling of the “Homosexuals For Change” banner was only the beginning in the fight for LGBTQ+ rights and recognition in Chile. In fact, this moment pushed only the first domino for Queer activism over, followed by more movements, more marching, and more fighting for an honorable in Chile for Queer individuals. LGBTQ+ rights in Chile, from Allende to Pinochet, was anything but a linear journey, and the struggle for full rights and recognition isn’t over. However, as demonstrated by the persistence of these Chilean activists, change is more than just possible; it is necessary and it is the future. Both the unfurling of the “Homosexuals For Change” and the production of the movie *A Fantastic Woman* aren’t just acts

of defiance, but of hope; a reminder that the fight for LGBTQ+ rights is a continuous process, one that the community carries forward with the very same passion and resilience that started it in the first place.

#### Works Cited

Wikipedia contributors. "LGBTQ rights in Chile." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 8 Nov. 2024. Web. 23 Nov. 2024.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBTQ\\_rights\\_in\\_Chile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBTQ_rights_in_Chile)

Wikipedia contributors. "LGBT history in Chile." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 23 Sep. 2024. Web. 23 Nov. 2024.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT\\_history\\_in\\_Chile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_history_in_Chile)

Robles, Victor. "History in the Making The Homosexual Liberation Movement in Chile." *nacla*. September 25, 2007.

<https://nacla.org/article/history-making-homosexual-liberation-movement-chile>

Maza, Gonazalo, et al. *Una Mujer Fantastica = A Fantastic Woman*. Edited by Soledad Salfate, Directed by Sebastian Leilo, [Sony Pictures Classics], 2017,

<http://www.aspresolver.com/aspresolver.asp?MARC:4181118>.

"Chile's Hate Crime Law Passes after Seven Years." *BBC News*, 10 May 2012,

[www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-18016907](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-18016907).

"Chilean Martyr Advocated Surgical 'Cure' for Homosexuality." *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14

May 2005,

[www.smh.com.au/world/chilean-martyr-advocated-surgical-cure-for-homosexuality-20050514-gdlb5r.html](http://www.smh.com.au/world/chilean-martyr-advocated-surgical-cure-for-homosexuality-20050514-gdlb5r.html).

"Chile: Winds of Change for LGBTQI+ Rights." *Civicus Lens*, 11 March 2022,

[www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/interviews/5604-chile-winds-of-change-for-lgbtqi-rights](http://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/interviews/5604-chile-winds-of-change-for-lgbtqi-rights).

ChatGPT. "Assistance with Organization." *OpenAI*, 23 Oct. 2024, [chat.openai.com/chat](https://chat.openai.com/chat)