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## The Importance of the Bird Metaphor

In the book, "After the Bombs", Arturo Arias talks about war, politics, violence and other things that happened in Guatemala during the 1950's and beyond through the eyes of Máximo, the protagonist of the story who at the same time tries to figure out what happened to his father, his own identity, and other events that make this narrative an interesting one. One thing that stands out from this book are the metaphors that it contains. Some examples of the metaphors mentioned are corpses and beauty. The bird, another metaphor, is represented as false freedom and has an important significance in the book. ✓

The bird metaphor relates to the history behind the setting of the narrative. At the beginning of the story, it talks about how Máximo was just a baby when the bombing of Guatemala City took place. This is where the history of Guatemala comes in. The history prior to the Republic of Guatemala was a path of violence and dictatorship as shown throughout the book. ✓ Before the bombing of Guatemala City, there were several events that led to it. Some autocrats that ruled Guatemala between Manuel Estrada Cabrera and Jorge Ubico. Estrada governed from 1898-1920 in which he was detrimental to the intellectual enemies and to the natives (Chang-Rodríguez 208-9). He also forced the natives to work while hundreds of thousands of acres of their land were given to the Germans and to the United Fruit Company. The United Fruit Company was an American corporation that had many monopolies in different countries of Latin America like in Guatemala and Colombia. The company was in charge of exporting tropical fruit (mostly bananas) to Europe and to the United States. ✓

Ubico's government lasted around 13 <sup>thirteen</sup> years (1931-44) (Chang-Rodríguez 209). His era ✓

ended when a conspiracy organized by young military men, students, and intellectuals triumphed by getting themselves arrested. This is mentioned in the book by Chingolo (Arias 137). At night, while Ubico and his guardsmen were asleep, the prisoners were freed and armed by the officers that were committed to the cause. In doing so, they were able to take control of the building from the inside and brought down the government.

After this event, Juan José Arévalo won the next elections. From 1945 to 1951, he initiated the social transformation of the country. He made improvements to the education system, created the Social Security Institute, made plans for the agricultural reform, and he allowed the natives to take a greater part in the local government (Chang-Rodríguez 209). Everything was going great until the next elections.

Jacobo Arbenz came to power in 1951. The next year, he passed the law of agricultural Reform, which favored hundreds of thousands of families. The United Fruit Company, which had invested a lot in the plantations of Guatemala, fought this law and made an international campaign against Arbenz's liberal government, accusing him of infiltrating communists in the ministries (Chang-Rodríguez 209). Because of the United Fruit Company, Washington supported them and sent Carlos Castillo Armas who in 1954 invaded Guatemala, overthrew Arbenz by bombing different places in Guatemala, including Guatemala City, and declared himself president. All of this helps better understand the bird metaphor by knowing what is going on in the story.

The bird metaphor is mentioned on the second chapter of the book. It says, "A dead bird! A dead bird! He had never seen a dead bird before. Nor a live one. Just photos of birds in the old magazine in his house. He looked at them all the time. He could remember all the pictures... But this bird, his bird. It looked like all the photos he had seen. The general shape, anyway. Smaller than he had imagined" (Arias 30). Birds can represent many things depending on the type of bird, the situation, and the culture in which it is presented. Some examples that Cheryl Mascarenhas explains on her article are that birds can represent freedom, future, eternal life, renewed life, and

good

so on and so forth. In this case, it represents freedom. This quote is about how Máximo has never seen a dead or alive bird in his life. One can take into account that it is because of the bombing of the Guatemala City. He has only seen birds in pictures. The bird, which is dead, can represent the false freedom that Máximo has. Another interesting thing about this quote is that, because of the violence and war that has happen so far, it leads to show that he has become desensitized to the corpses that laying around him. As he tries to get to the dead bird, he trips over a corpse and starts kicking it like it was just a thing, not a human being. In the book, there are also vultures and a parrot, but this bird metaphor is just in general because it is never said what type of bird it is.

The same bird metaphor from this book can be used in other readings. An example of this can be found in the article, "Central American-Americans: Invisibility, Power and Representation in the US Latino World," also by Arturo Arias. He mentions that "Despite is numeral presence, the Central American population remains nearly invisible within the imaginary confines of what constitutes the multi-cultural landscape of the United States" (170). One might think, "How is this possible?" There are some factors that are involved in this situation. Americans perceive Central Americans as "illegal" and "Communist". Also by themselves as lesser than Mexicans (Arias 178). Marlon Morales, who was born in El Salvador and migrated to the United States, mentions how he had to say that he was Mexican but born in the U.S. instead of Salvadorian whenever he was asked where he was from. He was instructed by his mother to not mention anything that had to do with El Salvador; he even wasn't allowed to talk in Spanish in public. With this in mind, Central Americans have a lot of hardships to get to the United States. With leaving their families and country behind, they also had to cope with having to pass as Mexicans. This can be good or bad. It can be good, for it can help them move right along their journey, and not be judged. The bad thing is that, as mention by Arias, "...it also forced them to adopt an identity that was not truly their own, an identity they were somewhat

familiar with, but that they do not master nor act out with the same casualness..."(178). This is where the bird metaphor from "After the Bombs" comes in. Central Americans have that sense of false freedom. They are free from the violence and poverty in their home countries, but they have to hide the fact of where they are from to not be judged or treated badly.

The movie, "El Norte" is another example of false freedom. Zaide Silvia Gutiérrez who plays Rosa Xuncax and David Villalpando who plays Enrique Xuncax, are siblings in the movie. They decide to go to the United States after their father gets killed, and their mother is taken away by soldiers. In order to survive their trip, they have to say that they are Mexican, and that they are from Oaxaca. In one part of the movie, they get caught crossing the border from Mexico to U.S.A. and a border patrol officer shows them a map of Mexico, telling them to point out where they are from. Enrique remembers what the foreman said to him before they left their hometown. In response, he starts saying the curse word 'chingada' over and over again so that border patrol believes that they are indeed Mexican. They cannot freely express themselves as Guatemalans, even in the U.S, because of fear.

Overall, the history behind the narrative helps better understand the bird metaphor and many other ones that are in "After the Bombs" by Arturo Arias. The bird metaphor has a great significance in the book, as it represents false freedom. This can also apply to other readings and movies that have to do with false freedom.

Great work. Concluding paragraph feels too incomplete.  
 (Min of five pages for essay.)  
 Could use more work. But the rest of essay is great.

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