

ACTING UP AND CARRYING ON: WOMEN WRITERS OF CHILE, 1945-2006

by

Resha Sophia Cardone  
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Chairperson

Committee members:

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\_\_\_\_\_

Date approved: \_\_\_\_\_

## ABSTRACT

Resha Sophia Cardone, Ph.D.

Department of Spanish and Portuguese, September 2006

University of Kansas

Analyses of exemplary novels, short stories, and collaborative literary activities that took place during three key historical periods (the 1950s and 1960s, the Pinochet dictatorship, and the transition from dictatorship to democracy) highlight the importance of collaboration and group formation among Chilean women writers. During these periods, female authors used art to push for the equal representation of women in political, cultural, and everyday life. In both their narrative texts as well as in their public lives as artists, the authors featured in this study typify the ways women writers of their eras worked together to create prototypes of female artists as architects of both socio-political equality and aesthetic innovation. Beginning with the first rumblings of collective political-literary activity in the 1950s and ending shortly before the 2006 presidential elections, this dissertation plots the strategies and patterns uniting three groups of female intellectual activists in a literary genealogy fashioned deliberately to advance common, liberating goals. A sustained focus on female *Künstlerromans*, which were either performed in the public sphere or published as novels and short stories, illuminates how the writers of these periods used art to create and represent oppositional views counteracting discrimination and oppression. Analyses of María Elena Gertner's La mujer de sal and María Carolina Geel's Cárcel de mujeres, novels of the Generation of 1950, show that women artists of the 1950s and 1960s began using narrative to galvanize subaltern voices. From the Generation of 1980, analyses of Pía Barros's role as founder and director of the Ergo Sum workshop and press, and short stories by Alejandra Basualto locate the apex of collective political-literary action during the Pinochet regime. Finally, readings of Nona Fernández's Mapocho and Andrea Jeftanovic's Escenario de guerra, novels which showcase the collective vision of the writers of the Group of Cultural Industry, illustrate how contemporary authors have updated the projects of their literary antecedents of the Generations of 1950 and 1980, casting female artist heroines in crucial leadership roles during the transition from dictatorship to democracy.



For Leslie Johns-Cardone—mother, mentor, model, friend—  
and in loving memory of Adolfo Ruelas Joya,  
inspiring me in life and in death.

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## Between Mistral and Bachelet

Chile is a remote and relatively unpopulated country, yet numerous ideological battles of international importance have occurred in this land. From the mid-1960s to the year 2006, social consciousness among subaltern groups grew. Women, the poor, workers, students, indigenous groups, and artists mobilized, demanding political representation and socio-economic reform. As in many other Latin American nations, the country's political pendulum swung wildly between opposite extremes, and myriad tugs of war polarized relations between sexes, classes, cultures, and political parties. Several of the nation's socio-political struggles have in fact manifested the collective experiences, energies, and traumas of the Latin American people. One of these momentous events occurred when Salvador Allende was elected president in 1970, sending a message throughout the Americas that socialism could be accomplished peaceably at the voting polls. Allende's election, however, ultimately interrupted Chile's allegedly invincible democratic tradition, splintering the myth at the core of Chilean national identity. The country immediately became a chief Cold War battleground on display for her Latin American neighbors (Loveman 368). The U.S. government continued its covert intervention against the socialist "threat" in Chile and installed General Augusto Pinochet in La Moneda in 1973.<sup>1</sup> As is well known, a seventeen-year reign of state-sponsored terror "cleansed" the nation of the perceived socialist menace, and a thriving free-market economy was put in its place. During the transition from the dictatorship to democracy in the 1990s, Chile assumed a double symbolic role as the

continent's glamorous poster child for neoliberal economic prosperity while underneath the veneer it was struggling to clean up the bloody debris left in the wake of the coup d'état and dictatorship. At the same time that the nation embodied the ideal of capitalism's triumph in Latin America, it also became an example illustrating to other nations that utopian imaginings were both futile and dangerous.

Into the new millennium Chile maintained its fearlessness about implementing untried ways of doing things and its talent for making itself a symbol. In 2006, the country reclaimed its singularity as a land of bold experimentations and dazzling political performances. On January 15 of that year citizens elected Michelle Bachelet, the first South American female president who was not the wife of a dictator or a strongman, and the only head-of-state in existence to promise gender equity in government. Soon after the elections Bachelet created a cabinet with an equal ratio of female to male representatives and placed women's issues, such as sexual harassment and salary adjustments, on center stage. Across Chile, citizens elected copious numbers of female politicians to govern cities and municipalities. As if from nowhere, Chile became the first nation in the world to attempt to institutionalize equal representation of the sexes. At first glance this experiment seems bizarrely incongruous. Chile is a notoriously sexist nation: it was the second to last Latin American nation to implement women's suffrage in 1949; divorce was legalized at the pathetically late date of 2004; abortion remains unlawful; and, as is well-known, the Pinochet regime used force to keep Chile free of women's liberation.

Given these circumstances, how might one explain Chilean women's recent wielding of political power, unmatched even by their allegedly more advanced first-world sisters? If this nation of masterful political performers conceives its role as the voice from the south foretelling things to come, why, then, is it attempting to make itself known as the world's architect of political gender equality? What forces have conspired within Chile to bring "Bachelet Presidente" into being?

This study looks to literature to find the answers to these queries. Chilean women writers, though largely invisible and virtually always uninvited, have long been engaged in a battle to be represented in public life. For some sixty years prior to the Bachelet election, female writers have been employing literary art as a catalyst to expose, mediate the effects of, and more recently, capsize their lack of visible representation in both cultural and political life. The nation's literary women have made the cultural sphere a battlefield, using it as a strategic locale to advocate for equal representation of women in public life. From the 1950s to the 2006 elections, Chilean women writers have been identifying artistic activity as a form of collective social action and political engagement. Both in their writings and in their everyday lives, the literary artists of this span have been fashioning a prototype of the Chilean woman writer as an architect of socio-political equality and aesthetic change.

This dissertation charts the circuitous journey of three closely related groups of female literary activists working to make women and women writers visible and influential in both the political and the literary spheres. Beginning with the group of writers whose literary project created the first rumblings of collective political-literary

activity in the 1950s and ending shortly before the 2006 elections, the following pages plot the strategies and patterns uniting Chilean women writers in a literary genealogy created to advance their collective struggle for liberation. Analyses of female *Künstlerromans*—either performed in the public sphere or published as novels and short stories—shows how female literati of three dramatically different historical epochs have used writing to manifest themselves and their collective views in the public sphere. Their varied portraits of the artist, I argue, have enabled female authors to envision creative ways to work in solidarity with each other to question inequality in virtually all social institutions.

The period between Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral's receipt of Latin America's first Nobel Prize in Literature in 1945 and the election of Bachelet in 2006—two rare moments when Chilean women actually achieved international recognition—brackets a particularly intense portion of a larger literary sequence in which women writers were especially abundant, prolific, and collectively engaged. These women collaborated with one another and with their literary forebears and successors. As a result, Chile witnessed three sizeable manifestations of women writers of fiction: the Generation of 1950, active in the 1950s and 1960s, the Generation 1980 (or women of the New Scene) which began to write during the dictatorship, and the Generation of 1990 (or what I term the Group of Cultural Industry), which coalesced at the time of the transition from dictatorship to democracy. Each of these groups developed a unique thematic and aesthetic mode matching the socio-historical, political, and aesthetic features prevailing at the time

that they wrote. What remains unexamined, however, is that despite the dramatically different socio-political, historical, and aesthetic contexts conditioning their work, the writers of these groups collaborated in cross-generational projects to advance common goals. The exemplary lived and fictionalized portraits of the Chilean woman writer chosen for analysis from this sixty-year period reveal the varied ways that these women exploited narrative art as a medium for constructing, authorizing, (re)defining, and representing women as key participants in socio-political and cultural debates. As demonstrated in chapter one of this dissertation, in their novels and in their outrageous lifestyles, María Elena Gertner (b. 1927) and María Carolina Geel (1913-1996), members of the Generation of 1950, galvanized women's voices during the period after World War II, a pivotal era for intellectual women worldwide.<sup>2</sup> From the Generation of 1980, analyses in chapter two of the role of Pía Barros (b. 1956) as founder and director of the Ergo Sum workshop and press, and, in chapter three, short stories by Alejandra Basualto (b. 1944) locate the pinnacle of women writers' collective political-literary action during the unlikely period of the military dictatorship (1973-1990). Finally, as detailed in chapter four, novels by Nona Fernández (b. 1971) and Andrea Jeftanovic (b. 1970) of the Group of Cultural Industry show the youngest members of this genealogy updating the representational project of their literary antecedents by casting female artist heroines in crucial leadership roles during the transition from dictatorship to democracy (1990-2006).

The post-World War II era, when women artists first identified collaboration as a strategy to enhance women's representation, was a moment of productive



frustration and pivotal change for the women of Chile and the Western world. Factors as varied as the proliferation of the Second Wave feminist views from Europe and the United States, the Cuban Revolution, and Mistral's receipt of the Nobel Prize, as well as a publishing boom in Chile produced the first cohesive and sizeable group of literary women in that nation's history. They were a group of outrageous and outraged women. Their works were bestsellers. And though they did not write fictions suitable for the nation's middle- and upper-class ladies, their stalwartly feminist, shockingly erotic, and stylistically innovative fictions were nevertheless all the rage among the women of the 1950s and 1960s. Respectable mothers devoured their books in secret, and to little avail, they hid them from their impressionable daughters. Geel and Gertner, the women of the 1950s representing their era in this dissertation, laid the foundation upon which subsequent groups continued to elaborate the image of the Chilean woman writer as an architect for social change, a voice of collective discontent, and a fearless iconoclast. They were also what Vicky Unruh has called, describing the female avant-gardes of the 1920s and 1930s, "performing women" (2-3). Geel, for instance, killed her lover before she wrote the portrait of the artist analyzed in chapter one of this work. Gertner, on the other hand, fashioned herself into an icon of the liberated Chilean woman. A multi-talented artist who cultivated an array of genres, Gertner was most known as a movie star whose nonconformist lifestyle as well as her books enthralled and inspired the women of her times. Geel and Gertner drew massive attention to the figure of the new female narrator/intellectual/activist precisely in the moment that they and their markedly

feminist contemporaries were negotiating (at times in a threatening manner) women's roles in both political and literary life. It was no surprise that they and the larger group of female authors to which they belonged produced a rippling effect that reverberated through Chilean literary history. The group of the 1980s, to date the most important and prolific group of female literary activists known to Chile, were adolescents at the time authors like Geel and Gertner were making careers in literature an attractive choice for angst-ridden Chilean teens. These strategizing women and their contemporaries not only provided subsequent groups with a legacy to follow, but they also initiated tactics of literary representation and thematic concerns that subsequent groups continued to use. In fact, this group gave rise to a chain of women writers' groups that exploited artistic activity as way to expand the feminine domain and to explore useful collective action. From the 1950s on, narrative fiction was the arena where women disgruntled with social mores, governments, or even literary convention itself, came together to shape and express their views, finding ways to represent themselves, other women and their vision for Chile.

Though some literary critics and theoreticians consider the salient features uniting historically disparate groups and movements a locus of fruitful and even indispensable critical inquiry, intergenerational literary studies are rare. Even in the postmodern era, literary criticism remains firmly entrenched in a teleological view of artistic advancement. Benchmark theoretical texts such as Harold Bloom's The Anxiety of Influence (1973) and Pierre Bourdieu's The Rules of Art (1992) describe

the model long used to understand the relationship between established and emerging literary groups. New generations, movements, and styles, they argue, are born through essentially confrontational processes in which unknown groups of artists define themselves in opposition to their forebears. Artists vying for placement in the literary world create innovative styles and themes that strategically outmode and delegitimize their consecrated antecedents to make room for their own group to become dominant. Critics such as Edward W. Said, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, on the other hand, are among those theorists who question this view of literary progression. Said suggests a need not only to observe the ruptures conditioning (literary) history, but also to notice the fruitful matter contained in “genealogical repetitive cycles” (117), urging us “to discuss the continuity, the perpetuity, and the recurrency” that the prevailing paradigm discounts (119).

Adding a feminist twist to this assertion, Gilbert and Gubar point out that organizational schemas that consider conflict as the driving force moving literary history forward impoverish the understanding of women writers who, having no consecrated precursors to oust, both welcome and acknowledge the influence of the few female forebears they can identify. In Chile, complex patterns of inheritance and repetition and inter-communal solidarity in fact condition the lives, works, and projects of women writers’ groups. The hundreds of female authors alluded to in this study engaged themselves and/or their artistically engaged heroines in lived and imagined acts of female bonding, collaboration, and community formation. These writers’ proclivities toward artistic self-portraiture, their impulse to form imagined

and lived groups of politically active, socially conscious, and creatively inclined women, their tactical contortions of social and literary conventions carried out through the implementation of strategies learned from past women writers, and their shared predilection to embed a pedagogical aspect in their works all indicate the necessity of focusing on continuity and collaboration rather than rupture to understand the depth and gravity of the proposals and experiences of Chile's female literati.

My work contextualizes these women writers and the respective literary groups in which they participated in relationship to each other and to the larger cultural, political, and aesthetic debates in which they took part. Enlisting insights from cultural and literary critics, historians, sociologists, feminist scholars and performance theorists, I interpret women's writing and lived portraits of the artist through diverse disciplinary lenses. As both a cultural and a literary study, parts of this dissertation assume an ethnographic approach in which personal interviews with authors from each literary generation become primary sources of information. At times I analyze the writers' assertions as signifying acts, as crucial to understanding their collective enterprises as their narrative publications.

In bringing to light the multiple ways Chilean women writers have used writing as a strategy to enforce cohesion among their contemporaries and across generations, as well as a tactic to create solidarity among women in general, I draw on the writings of diverse performance theorists whose work takes up notions of group formation, collaboration, and genealogy development. A focus on written and

performed *Künstlerromans* from each period interprets these women writers' propensity to make spectacles of themselves, each other, and their surroundings as tactical ploys to draw attention to the collaborative, rule-breaking new woman writer models they were generating. Grounded in Joseph Roach's concept of "genealogies of performance," or the blurring of lines between generations through collective representations, my work shows how the activist posture developed in the 1950s passed from one group to the next as new groups identified imaginative ways to cooperate with each other. At varied moments of this literary sequence, women writers formed collective writing forums where they rehearsed and performed the act of being writers. In the 1970s and 1980s, they published collective texts, galvanizing women's voices creatively by using fiction as a strategy to gather hundreds of female subjects together to enact a literary protest. Members of each group acknowledged both verbally and textually their women writer forebears and heirs, and they used narrative as a tool to bring communities of female artists and activists into being, as well as a way to train, create, and publicize woman writer figures. Bringing the collective imperative into the new millennium, the writers of the Group of Cultural Industry pushed the limits of fiction to resurrect the dead, using performance and creating community for the purpose of depicting and altering the process of collective memory and amnesia.

Among these writers, performances became strategies to redefine gender scripts enabling them to cast women in roles as producers of art and political organizers. These writers were conscious that gender, as theorist Judith Butler has

reminded us, is a social construct made through the continual and reiterative performance of gendered behaviors.<sup>3</sup> Actively challenging the gender scripts Butler identifies, these writers at times embraced, at times rejected, and at times used gendered behaviors and norms to their advantage, all in an endeavor to make new templates. They identified a transformational potential to such reiterations, using the make-believe world of performance to become participants in public life. Concepts borrowed from Bourdieu help me describe the new woman writer they were fashioning. Bourdieu's work, which demonstrates that because being a writer is a self-assigned post requiring that the artist perform a certain lifestyle—what he calls “the art of living”—illuminates these women's processes of critical self-construction (58). Their strategic refashioning recalls Richard Schechner's concept of “restored behavior,” whereby the reiteration of norms and conventions actually induces key transformations. Bringing all these concepts together, my work focuses on these women in their moments of self-creation, showing that women writers and their groups called on their literary models not only to take their places and to continue their projects, but also to provoke profound change. By fashioning and refashioning the prototype of the woman writer as an agent of persistent social and aesthetic confrontation and change, the writers' groups featured in this dissertation show that repetition and reiteration are strategies that help to undo deeply embedded traditions and conventions.

The transformational imperative underpinning the work of these writers is further understood in the context of Roach's writing, which focuses on the juncture

between public performance and collective memory. Following Roach, I interpret these writers' assorted wanderings in the past as their way of understanding their origins, not to revert to a more ideal beginning, but as a way to posit change in their present times and even alter their future. Roach views performance as a process of surrogation in which cultures attempt to perpetuate certain structures, but in fact undergo processes of repetitive reinvention where substitutes attempt to stand in for irreplaceable originals (2). He discusses the London-based "Everlasting Club" as an example from the eighteenth century that exaggerates the process of passing collective identities from one generation to the next, and whereby surrogation (or replacement) and community building encourage continuation. This exceptional club, he explains, assured its "self-perpetuating descent" using a rigid process of rotation through which successors had to be identified and comfortably installed before their forebears could take their official leave. The group reinforced bonds not only retrospectively, but also prospectively and in the present time. Rotational shifts that assured for the constant availability of a comrade built community amongst club members, creating an illusion of permanence and eternalness (18).

Though far less rigid than the Londoners passing through the "Everlasting Club," women writers of Chile also manipulated common realities to guarantee the proverbial torch would be passed from one group to the next as well as to invent spaces (prisons, creative writing workshops, fissures of silence and invisibility, the realm of ghosts) for themselves and for their successors where new women writers collaboratively fashioned themselves, simply existed, and interpellated the next

group. Not unlike the members of the “Everlasting Club,” these authors developed strategies to guarantee the continuation of the activist woman writer. Their self-fashioned patterns of inheritance and community may be summarized in the “critical genealogy” of Jonathan Arac who, in dialogue with Foucault’s and Neitzche’s writings on genealogy, describes how groups: “aim [. . .] to excavate the past that is necessary to account for how [they] got [t]here and that past that is useful for conceiving alternatives to [their] present condition” (cited in Roach 25).

Women writers of Chile have actively encouraged critics to notice that the boundaries dividing them from their forebears and successors are porous, yet even with the substantial body of literary criticism dealing with women’s writings, these relationships have remained fuzzy. Isabel Allende’s international bestseller La casa de los espíritus (1982) is the most known example of a narrative that implicitly urges literary critics to view Chilean women activists as part of a genealogical tradition. The author structures the novel on the patterns of inheritance that unite four generations of biologically related female nonconformists. A suffragist, a telepathist writer, the lover of a revolutionary leader, a student protester, and an unborn baby (invariably another girl child destined to carry on the legacy of her forebears) comprise the five generations of Trueba women whose stories allow Chile’s unofficial history to be narrated.<sup>4</sup> Much like the writers observed in this dissertation, Allende shows that, despite the fact that women have been discouraged from participating in public life, they have in fact been doing so for generations.



In the decade following the publication of La casa de los espíritus, the preference among critics and authors of Chilean literature to organize literary life according to generational schemas began to be challenged when feminist critics, anthologists, and women writers alike started to explore Chile's deeply entrenched generational categories.<sup>5</sup> Chilean critics such as Eliana Ortega and Raquel Olea argue for a need to write literary genealogies to understand fully the heterogeneous quality of women's artistic work, a project that Olga María López-Cotin initiated with her dissertation. López-Cotin's work describes a "Geneología de la novela femenina" (32-53) that identifies the evolutionary quality of Chilean women's novelistic production from the turn-of-the-century to the dictatorship. Whereas writing sparked women's individual consciousness in the early part of the century, she explains, this awareness evolved as the century progressed, finally culminating during the dictatorship when women writers gained a strong political consciousness. Though my genealogical mappings build on López-Cotin's work, my focus on a shorter historical frame reveals the commonalities and shifts amongst the groups rather than a teleological progression. While López-Cotin views the Pinochet dictatorship as the moment when women writers' political consciousness culminated, I view this period of intense collective literary activity among women as a continuation of the activist spirit generated among the writers of the 1950s and 1960s as well as a lively moment of female intellectual activism which paved the road for collective projects during the new millennium. Precisely because of the enormous interest the era of dictatorship women writers has inspired, literary critics have not yet heard the crescendo these

three groups of writers produced. There were many precursors who spawned the flurry of feminist writings associated with the 1980s, and in turn, this dynamic moment in women's literature created a noteworthy after effect.

More so than in literary criticism, since the 1950s short story anthologies have functioned as the site for erecting and tearing down generational boundaries, a unique facet of Chile's cultural milieu developed in more detail in each of the following chapters. Beginning in the mid-1980s, when the Ergo Sum group featured in chapter two started to confect clandestine short story anthologies that gathered women's writings together, short fiction collections began to be published that allude to the inter-group and cross-generational ties featured in this study.<sup>6</sup> In Salidas de madre (1996), for example, explicit and implicit linkage is created between women writers of the Generations of 1950, 1970, 1980, and 1990. In the book's introduction, critic Alejandra Rojas notes the pivotal role of the pioneering women of the Generations of 1950 and 1980 (11). She argues that there is a need to write critical studies that illuminate the congruencies and differences among literary generations, the topics latent in all of the collection's short stories, each of which deals with the dynamic relationship between mothers and daughters (13-14).

Recent scholarship about Chilean literature, particularly feminist literary scholarship, is largely concerned with the abundance of literary texts generated in response to the dictatorship. The perceived glut of studies about dictatorship-era writers gives the initial impression that the topic is exhausted. Yet almost all scholarship in this vein views this literary period primarily as a reaction to the socio-

political, historical, and economic features that appeared in the wake of the 1973 coup. These studies in fact open doors for cross-generational examinations that consider the literary origins of this booming period in Chilean writing, and now that new groups have become established, to study what this integral group of writers left behind. Alice A. Nelson, for instance, posits that “post-coup” narrators are characterized by a struggle to gain narrative power within the repressive milieu (23). In a like manner, Eugenia Brito examines poets’ and narrators’ use of the body as a stage for writing during the dictatorship and illustrates specifically how military violence produced Chile’s New Scene, a highly innovative neo-vanguard aesthetic using dissimulation as a tactic for communication (17). For his part, Rodrigo Cánovas postulates that the “New Generation” emerging in the 1980s is united through an orphaned status: because the military literally tried to sever all ties uniting Chilean intellectuals, both to one another and to their literary antecedents, post-coup narrators express a longing to fashion an inter-generational community with their literary antecedents (39-40).

My study builds on these and other benchmark critical analyses of Chilean literature, demonstrating that women writers’ literary engagement during the regime, as exemplified by my analyses of the Ergo Sum workshops and press, was not merely a response to the military imposition; rather, this was a project that began to take shape in the 1950s and that did not come to fruition until long after the fall of the military regime. Adding to Nelson’s and Brito’s work, I argue women writers of both the pre- and the post-coup period have long engaged in a collective struggle to

gain representational power, and have used and built on varied innovative literary strategies to come closer to this goal. My research demonstrates that women writers of the last sixty years—unlike the group of literary “orphans” Cánovas describes—possess strong intergenerational and inter-group affiliations. Expanding on these and other critics’ works, I posit that the dictatorship era constituted a time when women writers became cognizant about their belonging to a literary sequence and sought to give visible contours to both their imagined and lived cooperative projects. They recognized the strategic power of genealogy formation and collective enterprises, and they actively recruited forbears, successors, and contemporaries.

Using these and other literary studies as a springboard for an alternative way of imagining what binds literary groups together, in chapter one I take up theoretical notions of matrilineal literary sequencing directly, paying close attention to the way the women of the group of the 1950s and the Ergo Sum writers of the Generation of 1980 sought strategies to render women writers perceptible as well as to express their inter-generational ties. In that chapter, I create a theoretical base for interpreting the multifarious gestures of (inter)generational solidarity manifested in texts and utterances of women belonging to both groups, drawing on concepts from Latin American feminist criticism, such as Sara Castro-Klarén’s description of the way women writers construct themselves as distorted mirror images of their antecedents. The unique features of Chile’s genealogy have at times led me to create concepts such the notion of mutual magnification, the strategy that writers of Chile have fruitfully used to legitimize and publicize their work and public personas by bringing their

antecedents to the fore. Particular emphasis in chapter one on Gertner's and Geel's lived and fictionalized representations of the woman writer ground my argument that genealogies, groups, and communities of female fiction writers and activists began to emerge with the group of the 1950s. Geel and Gertner, much like their political feminist contemporaries of the Generation of 1950, identified strategies to create new roles for women, giving their enraged female protagonists positions as architects of socio-political and aesthetic change. These writers even prompted the explicit formation of a genealogy. In her novel La mujer de sal (1964), Gertner, a movie star who was the adolescent idol of many of the future authors of the Generation of 1980, provided the group of the 1980s—and, ultimately, those of the Group of Cultural Industry in the 1990s—with key lessons about how to choose adequate forebears. Gertner reinforced the messages and warnings contained in her book by representing herself in real life as a multi-talented artist calling for a dramatic reconfiguration of gender roles and the social realities creating them. In her public life, viewed by many as scandalous, she made herself into an icon of the liberated Chilean woman, giving the subsequent group both inspiration and a template for a subversive female artist prototype worth repeating. Geel's Cárcel de mujeres (1956), commonly regarded as the antecedent of the testimonial genre that gained popularity during the Pinochet regime, paved other roads for the progress of Chilean women's narratives. Concretely, Geel's groundbreaking text authorizes the woman writer to be Chile's catalyst for expressing female rage. Geel's experimental work reminded subsequent generations about how narrative contortions could tweak social realities. Through the

innovation of conventional narrative forms, Geel galvanized and fused women's subaltern voices. At the same time she created a new artist prototype whose role it was to channel, express, and represent women's collective frustrations.

The centerpiece of this dissertation, chapters two and three, describes writers' collective engagement during the dictatorship, a time when meeting in groups, publishing literature, and expressing egalitarian views of any sort were punishable by death. Despite these perilous conditions, military policies that sought to disengage both women and intellectuals unintentionally created a dynamic literary field where artists began working together to invent innovative literary strategies and publication modes to push for socio-political change. A lively feminist movement took shape and women writers assumed positions at the forefront of intellectual debates. Many such writers brought to life Geel's earlier galvanization of female voices in Cárcel de mujeres. Female artists began to meet in writers' groups where they assumed dual roles as women and as writers who opposed military violence along with the regime's posture that socio-political, economic, and gender inequality were necessary for economic progress.

As explored in depth in chapter two, workshops became a crucial meeting place for women writers, as well as the site where they staged the offensive that brought them to the frontlines of Chile's neo-avant-garde aesthetic, a movement generated for the explicit purpose of masking political critiques through the use of complex literary devices such as metaphors and baroque language. Chapter two addresses women's participation in the Ergo Sum group, at once a clandestine

feminist writers' cooperative, a press, and a creative writing workshop series devoted to collective literary activity and political activism. In describing Chile's first and largest collective feminist literary project, I posit that this group came into being not only as a response to the military regime, but also as a way to continue the liberating project of the women writers of the Generation of 1950. The group, which sought to make a material space where women's artistic talents and social consciousness could awaken, helped create the circumstances for the emergence of the Group of Cultural Industry at the turn-of-the-twenty-first-century. Serving many purposes, Ergo Sum workshops, which were started by Pía Barros in 1977, furthered women's writing skills, defined and rehearsed a subversive role for the female artist, and through the appropriation of the mini-short story as well as in the invention of cleverly fashioned handmade anthologies called book-objects, demonstrated against the art establishment, government censorship, and traditional gender roles. Significantly, the oddly shaped short story collections confected in Barros's workshops, the prime examples of the New Scene aesthetic I analyze in this chapter, challenged military censors and declared the right of the masses and women to produce art. Barros's experimentations adapted ways to unite a virtual torrent of women writers in real life and on paper, using dissimulation as a strategy to define a role for women in general as well as women writers as instigators of political and literary change within the context of the military regime.

Alejandra Basualto's short story collection La mujer de yeso (1988) is explored in chapter three as an example of the fruitful revolutionary work carried out

in the Ergo Sum group. Recalling Barros's clandestine book-objects, Basualto, who participated early on in the Ergo Sum workshops and press, artfully appropriates military tactics to create a narrative protest against the regime and sexist social mores. Like the women writing collectively and clandestinely in the Ergo Sum workshops, Basualto implements strategies to speak without speaking, using the space in-between-the-lines as a site of expression where censorship could be evaded through a tactical manipulation of traditional gender scripts centered on exposing and critiquing military brutality and sexism. Basualto's aesthetic of silence counters the suppression of both women and intellectuals within military Chile, integrating age-old tactics from a Latin American female literary tradition, as explained in the work of critics such as Debra Castillo, Josefina Ludmer, and Doris Sommer.<sup>7</sup>

Situating the Group of Cultural Industry both in relationship to the transitional government of the 1990s and to its larger literary context, my final chapter explores how two *Künstlerromans* of the new millennium revise the socio-political role of the woman writer to match the dramatic national reconfiguration left in the wake of the totalitarian government. Updating the experimental, pedagogical, and collaborative propensities of their forebears, authors of the Group of Cultural Industry create an innovative aesthetic that fuses narrative and theater to show alternative views and to engage the audience they create in a subversive collective experience. These writers re-create a national community headed by artistically engaged heroines who resurrect Chile's gory past to counter collective amnesia about the dictatorship years. In the two fictions typifying this larger group oeuvre—Nona Fernández's *Mapocho* (2002)



and Andrea Jeftanovic's Escenario de guerra (2000)—woman writer heroines unearth suppressed memories, putting ghosts and spirits on display to reenact the past that the neoliberal consumer society glosses over and hides. Specifically, in Fernández's novel, ghostly apparitions take center stage, performing the counter-memories of the past necessary for national healing. Jeftanovic's book, even further extending the theatrical aesthetic of her contemporaries such as Fernández, explicitly blends fiction with theater. She shows that memory is a performative fabrication that reinvents and links the past, present, and future. These and other narratives produced at this time demonstrate that when women writers review the past critically, they may understand the parts of the past that explain the present and that are necessary to heal and bring about change. This new generation looks to both a historical and a literary past, and transforms them both. These writers ultimately move beyond the yearning expressed by their dictatorship-era forebears to return to the egalitarian past thought possible under Allende. Thus, in the age of neoliberalism, female authors such as Fernández and Jeftanovic rejuvenated and made alterations to the literary projects fashioned by their antecedents. Their vision of a future time of active and inclusive democratic participation where women are in charge prefigured the 2006 elections. The writers of this group heed warnings expressed in novels such as Gertner's La mujer de sal by representing Chile's creatively inclined women as intellectual activists working to consolidate community and to make sure the past does not fester and stagnate, but serves broad collective interests relevant to all times. If the past is necessary to explain how women in Chile gained representation, as all of the artists in this study

insist, then we must first look to the writers who started it all, the women of the 1950s to whom this work will now turn.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Armando Uribe's and Cristián Opaso's book offers the most comprehensive description of U.S. intervention in Chile from 1962-1975.

<sup>2</sup> Though Chile was not immediately involved in the conflict, atrocities such as the holocaust and the ensuing struggle for dominance between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R deeply affected literati regardless of their country of origin. When the war came to an end, First World women who had worked during the conflict had gained an unprecedented level of independence. However, when they were expected to reassume domestic roles, many women complained. Though Chilean women did not experience the war directly, the nation's women writers participated in the collective struggle for women's liberation being generated among Western women at the time. In Chile, literature became a strategic locale where intellectual women advanced a feminist agenda.

<sup>3</sup> Butler describes how gender is constructed in two pivotal studies: Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990) and in Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex (1993).

<sup>4</sup> Though Chile remains unnamed in the novel, the historical parallels between Allende's fictional account and that of her native country make it virtually irresistible to not situate the novel in Chile.

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<sup>5</sup> Beginning in the 1960s, when benchmark histories of Chilean literature began to be written, artistic movements became firmly fixed in generational schemas. One only needs to glance at the indexes of foundational studies such as Fernando Alegría's La literatura chilena del siglo XX (1962) and José Promis's La novela chilena actual (Orígenes y desarrollo) (1977) to notice that narrative authors are understood according to the literary generations to which they belong.

<sup>6</sup> Thanks to the support of the Chilean women's magazine Paula and a publishing boom in the 1990s, financed by book companies like Planeta Chile and Alfaguara, it would be difficult to provide an exhaustive list of all the anthologies devoted to Chilean women writers.

<sup>7</sup> All of these critics argue that Latin American women writers use socially imposed silence as a strategy to reverse gender oppression and to advance women's liberation. Ludmer, for instance, describes colonial poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's strategic appropriation of wordlessness to saying without saying and to assert through negation. Castillo brings Ludmer's proposals to more recent times, showing that Hispanic women writers throughout the ages have often used sexist mores like feminine wordlessness to advocate for women's liberation. For her part, Sommer argues that the motif of silence in this region's women's writings is not only a tactic for self-expression, but also a potent weapon used inventively among writers to wear down and expose the dominant order.

Forward Looking Back, or, How Not to Become a Woman of Salt: The Generation of  
1950 and the Legacy of Transgression

“Cuando yo tenía como 12 o 13 años, leía a la Gertner, en unas novelas Zig-Zag que mi mamá escondía, porque se suponía que yo no debía leer esas cosas, que eran obscenas y para mayores.”

—Pía Barros (personal interview, 18 January 2004)

“Cuando yo era muy joven y leía estos libros [de María Elena Gertner y Elisa Serrana] que mi madre poseía, me parecían extraordinarias. Contaban historias en las que yo creía totalmente. Así era la vida en Chile, así eran las costumbres, así me criaron. Mi madre era una de esas señoras casadas, viviendo en el campo y muy infeliz.”

—Alejandra Basualto (personal interview, 16 January 2004)

“Mi gran influencia fue usted. Yo tengo eso claro.”

—Pía Barros (personal interview, María Elena Gertner and Pía Barros, 10 January 2004)

Literary historians locate the emergence of Chile’s Generation of 1980<sup>1</sup> in 1976, when university students, aspiring artists, shantytown dwellers, and other marginalized factions such as women and homosexuals began to meet in clandestine

groups devoted to cultivating oppositional art protesting the military government's attempt to disassemble the counterculture (del Río 206). Yet many key 1980s women writers who collaborated in these dictatorship-era artistic collectives have argued the explosion of female authors in the 1980s began in the 1950s and 1960s with a comparable outburst of women's narrative production. In fact, female authors of the Generation of 1980 like Pía Barros (b. 1956), Alejandra Basualto (b. 1944), and Diamela Eltit (b. 1949) have created a literary matrilineage,<sup>2</sup> claiming as antecedents key women writers of the Generation of 1950 such as María Carolina Geel (1913-1996), María Elena Gertner (b. 1927), Elisa Serrana (b. 1930), and Mercedes Valdivieso (1926-1993).<sup>3</sup> Leaving their claims uncorroborated, women writers who emerged during the Pinochet regime have provided verbal and textual clues suggesting that thematic and stylistic continuities link their work to that of their predecessors. At a surface level both generational groups use fiction writing to expose and criticize women's marginal condition within society and politics, and both highlight women's artistic self-expression as a way to ameliorate these circumstances. When 1980s authors Barros and Basualto assert that their literary roots trace back to Serrana and Gertner's work of the 1950s and 1960s, they implicitly call on critics to substantiate their claim that Chilean women's writing constitutes an interrelated lineage of female authors that has been, and continues to be, in the making.<sup>4</sup>

While it is true, as Ana María del Río argues, that artists' formation of collaborative projects during the 1970s and 1980s comprised a natural reaction to the hazardous conditions of living and writing during the dictatorship, the imaginative

inclination among women of the Generation of 1980 to expand the membership of their collective enterprises to include their Generation of 1950 female progenitors requires a more careful analysis (206). Following a brief review of efforts by women writers of the Generation of 1980 to claim women of the 1950s as their literary forebears, this chapter will investigate the social context and literary work of the earlier generation, paying close attention to Gertner's and Geel's novelistic representations of women writers who search for literary models or predecessors and collaborators. While Gertner's La mujer de sal (1964) reveals the positive and negative effects of adopting literary progenitors, Geel's Cárcel de mujeres (1956) demonstrates how experimental narrative techniques can bring female subjects together creatively, providing women with an opportunity to voice their grievances and latent rage. Finally, I will demonstrate the legacy that Gertner's and Geel's experience and literary representations of the woman writer provided to authors of the 1980s, in particular to Pía Barros and her dictatorship-era literary collective, Ergo Sum.

The intergenerational community intimated by Barros and Basualto is articulated in literary texts and activities spanning the mid-1970s to the early twenty-first century.<sup>5</sup> In 2000, for instance, Cuarto Propio, one of two feminist publishing houses that opened clandestinely during the Pinochet years, participated in the creation of this literary genealogy by re-editing Geel's testimonial novel Cárcel de mujeres, which was first published in 1956 by the Zig-Zag Press.<sup>6</sup> The Cuarto Propio edition signals an affective and thematic relationship between women writers of the

dictatorship era with those of the Generation of 1950, and it implicitly extols Geel's work as an early model of the prison testimonials written during the dictatorship.<sup>7</sup> Geel, who was already a relatively well-known author, composed her foundational work in the mid-1950s from the cell of a Chilean women's prison where she was incarcerated for killing her lover in an upscale Santiago hotel. Though the author scarcely imagined its far-reaching effects at the time, her shocking description of prison life not only presaged future writings emerging from the Pinochet regime's concentration camps and detention centers, but also initiated the thematic and stylistic concerns defining female narrative production of the 1980s. Further, Geel's inclusion of topics previously unexplored by Chilean women writers—violence, crime, imprisonment, and female (homo)eroticism—would be abundantly cultivated during the dictatorship.<sup>8</sup>

Implicitly acknowledging Geel's influence on subsequent female fiction projects, *Cuarto Propio's* new edition includes a preface by Eltit, the most renowned female author of the Generation of 1980. Affirming the legacy of Geel's text, particularly its influence on dictatorship and post-dictatorship era women's writing, the introduction links Geel and Eltit, and connects women writers of the 1950s to those of the 1980s. As Barros, Basualto, and others have argued previously, Eltit invites critics and theoreticians to examine the connective tissue uniting these two groups. Bringing to mind women writers' unlawful engagement in literary activity during military censorship, Eltit summons a relationship between the female pen and criminality, while celebrating Geel as a model: "Mujer, escritura y delito, escritura de



delito, y el delito de escribir se anudaron hasta construir un paradigma que aún, después de muchos años, conserva su plena vigencia crítica y teórica” (“Mujeres que matan” 10).

Prior to the re-publication of Cárcel de mujeres, Eltit’s contemporaries of the Generation of 1980 had already affirmed Geel’s legacy. The Primer Congreso de Literatura Femenina Latinoamericana (Santiago, August 1987), the first large-scale literary activity in which women participated publicly during Pinochet’s reign, brought together authors and critics from Chile and abroad.<sup>9</sup> At this celebratory event, some fiction writers claimed Cárcel de mujeres as an important early example of prison writing and the testimonial.<sup>10</sup> It was a time for female authors from Chile to recognize their daring contributions to political and literary debates during the unlikely Pinochet epoch. By claiming Geel and others as models, they recognized the boom in female narrative production during the regime not only responded to the military government, but also created an autochthonous female narrative project defined by breaking laws and social mores that prohibited and complicated artistic endeavors.

Even before Geel’s integration into this matrilineal literary sequence in 1987 and again in 2000, Barros, a chief organizer of women and of subversive literary activities during the Pinochet years, had already claimed Geel’s contemporary, Gertner, as an important influence on dictatorship era women’s writing. In 1977 Barros began directing Talleres Ergo Sum, a clandestine creative writing group devoted to teaching and encouraging women to publish brief fiction in spite of

military censorship and the prohibition of unauthorized group meetings. Among the many literary and political activities taking place in these workshops (detailed in chapter two), Barros prompted participants to view Gertner as their chief literary progenitor. She assigned Gertner's writings as supplemental reading and devoted time to identifying the thematic and stylistic continuities between Gertner's work and the stories that women writers were producing in her workshops (personal interview, 18 January 2004). Barros revered Gertner's fictional oeuvre as an early, local example of eroticism, the mode Barros would help popularize among the writers who participated in her workshops in the 1980s.<sup>11</sup> For Barros, Gertner's depiction in the 1950s and 1960s of promiscuous female heroines who disregard social and sexual mores captured those involved in liberation politics that were deliberately cultivated in the Ergo Sum workshops.<sup>12</sup> With Gertner as their model, Barros, her students, and other writers of the 1980s developed erotic fiction within the dictatorial context, transforming the tortured, silenced, and oppressed female body into a metaphor for the brutalized, censored nation. Updating Gertner's erotic fictions of the 1950s and 1960s, Ergo Sum participants integrated the female body into their fiction as a symbolic site of pleasure and pain which often harkened to the sadistic treatment of the counterculture. Further, women writers of the 1980s transformed sexuality into a theme to expose the traditional, and often violent, subjugation of female subjects within various socio-political contexts, including that of the dictatorship.<sup>13</sup> Barros's recognition of Gertner as Ergo Sum's muse extended her project of forming Chilean women writers' groups; this imaginative extension allowed Barros to increase the size

of the collective enterprise carried out within the workshop while at the same time motivating her students (in their majority, unpublished women) to write by making them participants in an autochthonous female literary tradition.

In January 2004, Barros proposed to materialize Gertner's contribution to the Ergo Sum group at the textual level. When the two authors met for the first time, Barros requested Gertner's permission to re-edit and publish an anthology of her unedited short stories (personal interview, 10 January 2004). Barros hoped to write the collection's prologue and to publish the work through her press, Ediciones Ergo Sum, an extension of the same workshops in which she had transformed Gertner into an icon for dictatorship era women's writing. Like Cuarto Propio's re-edition of Cárcel de mujeres, Barros's offer sought to highlight the legacy of Generation of 1950s women writers, especially Gertner's influence on Barros, and her important, if unintentional, contribution to the Ergo Sum project.<sup>14</sup>

The 1950s and 1960s constituted a period of crucial transformation for Chilean women and women writers that left an indelible mark on the writers-to-be of the Generation of 1980. Contextual circumstances began to transform perceptions about women in general as well as the female artist. When the rumblings of the second wave international women's movement began to reverberate throughout Chile with the publication of influential feminist texts such as Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex in 1949 and Betty Freidan's The Feminine Mystique in 1963, the first sizeable number of Chilean women writers began to publish.<sup>15</sup> These authors, moreover, contributed to and profited from a major publishing boom sponsored by

the Empresa Editora Zig-Zag S.A., a Santiago-based publishing house that became South America's largest press as the women of the Generation of 1950 were becoming known. In fact, the flourishing company promoted this group of emerging writers (Orellana Riera 44).<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, bourgeois Chilean women became both the preferred protagonists of a large number of the narratives published by the women of this generation as well as a sizable portion of the consumer base helping to fuel Zig-Zag's booming business.<sup>17</sup> The television and movie industries were still rather undeveloped, factors that ultimately helped to keep book sales high.<sup>18</sup> All of these circumstances contributed to the commercial success of women writers of the Generation of 1950, and, consequently, a considerable number of their novels even became bestsellers. Valdivieso's La brecha (1962), Serrana's Chilena, casada, sin profesión (1963), Gertner's Páramo Salvaje (1957), La mujer de sal and La derrota (1965), and Geel's Cárcel de mujeres, among others, were novels that exposed the frustrations of the nation's women and benchmarked their era.<sup>19</sup> For the first time in Chilean literary history, the nation experienced an explosion of successful and prolific female writers, often erratically united through a shared thematic interest in importing cosmopolitan feminist views from abroad.

In the years prior to the appearance of the women of the Generation of 1950, only a few Chilean women writers had experienced success within the literary establishment. Gabriela Mistral's (1889-1957) receipt of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954 and El Premio Nacional de Literatura in 1951 drew unprecedented attention to Chilean women writers. Soon after Mistral's national and international

recognition, female authors of the 1950s stepped into the limelight of Chilean literary life. As independent women making a living off their multiple creative and intellectual enterprises, Geel and Gertner in particular helped to create a new category in Chilean social life—that of the professional female artist.<sup>20</sup> More so than their contemporaries, they captured and sustained the interest of the Chilean masses through scandals that increased their fame. Prior to the publication of her first literary text in 1950, Gertner had built a name for herself as a theater, television, and movie actress, which made her an icon throughout urban Chile among both the literate and illiterate.<sup>21</sup> Critic Virginia Delam Trujillo concludes that Gertner magnified interest in her public persona by projecting it on screen, in her fictional texts, and in her everyday life, representing herself as “. . . a bohemian type who delight[ed] in attacking the sacred cows of propriety, especially in the areas of marriage and sexual morality” (83-84). While Gertner was creating an artistic persona by transforming herself into an iconographic feminist prototype, the sensationalist press transformed Geel’s crime into a major public scandal, presumably because she was already a known author at the time of the murder.<sup>22</sup> Mistral’s public intervention in Geel’s defense during the hearings only augmented the interest in her case, and Geel’s subsequent publication of Cárcel de mujeres drew even more attention to her.

The sudden increase of publicity about Chilean women writers from the late 1940s through the late 1960s projected an illusion that the literary establishment was opening up the profession of writing to women. During the crucial formative years of the writers-to-be of the Generation of 1980, the attention placed on female authors

and liberated fictional female heroines that literary idols such as Geel, Gertner, and Valdivieso portrayed in fiction or in real life, made a career in the arts appear to be a glamorous and exciting alternative to the dull bourgeois domesticity they saw around them. Their literary forerunners of the 1950s, on the other hand, did not have the same contact with successful local models, suggesting why Geel and Gertner, as I shall demonstrate later on, structure their texts around their fictional artist heroines' frustrations and search for models and communities. In fact, before the 1950s, only a few women writers had infiltrated Chile's literary society. These figures, who include María Luisa Bombal (1910-1980) and Mistral, entered the literary arena as anomalies of a vocation long reserved for a male elite. Paradoxically, the inclusion of a sparse number of women writers into the canon created an image of the female artist as an abnormal being, an issue explored in Geel's and Gertner's work. Their novels include unusual and solitary writer heroines who search for models obsessively, either outside national borders or within unexpected environments such as slums and jails. In opposition, the subsequent appearance of a substantial group of commercially successful female artists during the mid-twentieth century mitigated anxieties among writers of the 1980s about participating as women in public intellectual life and augmented the pressure to project an image of an abundance of female authors of Chile working for common goals found in the work of their literary progenitors.<sup>23</sup>

Gertner has underscored the important role artistic group formation played in defining the experience of both the Generations of 1950 and 1980, asserting that she

and her female contemporaries found their lack of group cohesion and organization debilitating, in contrast with women writers of the 1980s who often worked in collaboration (personal interview, 10 January 2004). Gertner has suggested the scarcity of viable autochthonous feminist literary ancestors led her to identify models from abroad, and to alter the First World feminisms of such figures as Virginia Woolf and de Beauvoir to fit within the Chilean context. Recalling her experiences as an artist in the 1950s and 1960s, Gertner has argued feminism was a “necesidad urgente,” although she has lamented the lack of an organized women’s movement to help her and her contemporaries expand their literary feminism into collective action. Women writers of her era, she explains, interwove feminist views from abroad into their fictional texts to give the impression that an organized movement existed in Chile (personal interview, 10 January 2004). As it turns out, these women’s fictive creation of a feminist movement defined a role for the Chilean woman writer to be both gender conscious and politically engaged. Later manifestations of women writers such as the Ergo Sum group in the 1980s and the more erratically united Group of Cultural Industry in the 1990s continued the trend of their forebears during both the dictatorship years and the transition from dictatorship to democracy. This legacy, which is described in the next chapter, suggests that the propensity among women writers to collaborate during the regime was a way to disobey military edicts prohibiting unauthorized group meetings as well as a continuation of the project of the literary women of 1950s exploiting artistic activity and their literary products to publicize and advance national women’s movements.

Theoretical debates about the formation of literary groups also shed light on the factors motivating women writers' of the 1980s to highlight the legacy of their literary forerunners. These discussions revolve around three chief features: gender, anxiety, and artistic self-figuration. Scholar Harold Bloom initiated this dispute in 1973 with his well-known book, The Anxiety of Influence. He theorizes that literary movements form through combative cycles akin to the contentious Freudian father/son relationship. Emerging authors vying for a spot within the literary establishment, he explains, create literary identities in opposition to those of their consecrated literary forerunners. That is, young authors metaphorically "kill" their literary "forefathers" and take over their position. Later, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar rebutted Bloom's views, arguing women writers cannot be understood through a "metaphor of literary paternity" due to their historic omission from the literary establishment (23). In contrast with their masculine counterparts who engage in this cyclical combat, they propose that female authors are "freakish outsiders" to this entire literary process, precisely because they have no consecrated literary models to induce the anxieties Bloom describes (49). They argue: "The female poet does not experience the 'anxiety of influence' in the same way her male counterpart would for the simple reason she must confront precursors who are almost exclusively male, and therefore significantly different from her" (48). In Gilbert and Gubar's view, the woman writer nevertheless suffers from an artistic pathology they term the "anxiety of authorship," or a maddening illness a lack of models produces, generating in



female authors a “radical fear she cannot create, and because she can never become a ‘precursor’, the act of writing will isolate or destroy her” (49).

Indirectly situating this debate within Latin American women’s literary history, the critic Sara Castro-Klarén argues that the propensity among the region’s female authors to “reach [...] back in time in pursuit of a progenitor” involves a less categorical process of “specular” self-figuration (6). When women writers consider the literary past their chosen forebears embody, she explains, they “identify points of implicit resemblance and affinity,” as well as traits of differentiation in defining individual artistic personages through comparison and reflection. “Contemplating gestures,” she argues, “are [. . .] more often than not deflected by the undulating surface of a mirror in which epochal, national, or gender differences seem to obstruct the emergence of a clean and sharp self-reflecting image” (6). Notwithstanding the visual refractions viewed in Castro-Karén’s metaphorical mirror, the women writers’ gaze, cast as such, augments Latin American authors’ self-awareness and facilitates their process of artistic self-figuration.

All of these assertions explain why women writers of the 1980s, in contrast with their male contemporaries, created both collaborative literary projects and literary genealogies to assert their right as women and as Chilean citizens to produce creatively. The literary pathology Gilbert and Gubar describe is the one Geel and Gertner bring to bear in their novels when they show their female artist heroines’ alternatively productive and destructive need to identify models from literary history and from worlds not often viewed as places of literary activity. These assertions

point to considerations affecting Chilean women writers' processes of self-figuration as well. The "anxiety of authorship" of which Gilbert and Gubar speak and the mirroring effect Castro Klarén describes help explain the need among women writers of the 1980s to claim their artistic forebears as models rather than competitors. Chilean authors of the 1980s occupied the space within the literary establishment they inherited from their literary forebears in part to authenticate their literary activities and their political engagement during the military dictatorship. The latter group, moreover, carried on in the thematic vein of those self-adopted forerunners who had already begun to fictionalize the process of group formation and who had created a women's literary movement devoted to advancing feminist proposals and publicizing women's participation in political and intellectual life. As we shall see, Geel's and Gertner's accounts in particular provided the women of the Generation of 1980 with behaviors, attitudes, and forms to emulate, while furnishing warnings about the possible pitfalls of acting out gender-induced anxieties and carrying on in the vein of obstructive literary progenitors. Hence, Gertner's and Geel's legacy is situated foremost in their novelistic representations of their women writer heroines' search for female literary models and collaborators.

Gertner observes a woman writer's process of artistic self-definition in La mujer de sal (1964), a narration recounting the life story of a pathetic, aspiring woman writer heroine named Amalia. The emotionally unhinged protagonist, a neurotic nymphomaniac, takes up writing as a last-ditch effort to reactivate her mental clarity after a harrowing breakup with an unnamed lover with whom she is

obsessed. Amalia's writing both exacerbates and mediates her existential anxieties, each of which traces back not only to the lover, but also to her gender, class, and, most importantly, to her fixation on preserving her memory. The story is set in Paris where Amalia moved when her lover terminated their affair and demanded she leave her native Chile to forget about him. The defiant Amalia, however, refuses to move on and forget their shared past. Instead, she becomes a nymphomaniac, claiming that sexual encounters reactivate her memory of the estranged ex-lover. Further safeguarding her recollections, she frantically writes an autobiographical memoir/novel spanning the period from her early adolescence to the day before her premature death at the age of thirty-three. As a reprieve from her obsessive literary and sexual activities, Amalia converses with Théo, her only friend in the city. During their chats, Théo attempts to calm Amalia's compulsive behaviors by relating an anecdote about another friend whose over-obsession with his lover, like that of Amalia, destroys him. Yet despite Théo's varied attempts to save her, Amalia cannot curb her voracious obsessions. Eventually, the ill-fated protagonist becomes involved with Vincent, a criminal on the run from authorities. On the same night they meet, the gangster convinces her to help him escape France illegally and trick Théo into participating in the dangerous getaway. An unidentified traitor foils their plans, Vincent returns to prison, and Amalia and Théo barely escape jail sentences and Vincent's enraged mobster friends. Rather than leave Paris, Gertner's senseless protagonist completes her novel in a feverish frenzy while Théo retreats to a rural province. Once the manuscript is complete, she leaves it in Théo's mailbox, and

commits suicide by sedating and gassing herself. Meanwhile Théo intuitively Amalia's plan to commit suicide, but his immediate return to Paris is delayed. Upon his arrival, he sees Amalia's manuscript, and realizes he has arrived too late.

In contrast with the cinematic plotline, where excitement and suspense increase as the plot progresses, Gertner employs an innovative dual narrative structure that allows Amalia to portray her own life before coming to France and gives depth to her process of artistic self-figuration, while directing the reader's attention to her literary pursuits rather than to her scandalous liaisons. Interspersed with the novel's principal action, Gertner interpolates verbatim fragments of the book Amalia writes while she composes them. That is, an omniscient narrator recounts Amalia's activities in Paris until she begins to write, at which point the third-person narrator disappears and Amalia's account takes over. Once she finishes her daily writing session, the omniscient narrator resumes the account of her life in Paris. Her autobiography, ostensibly written for the ex-lover as muse, is organized around a series of luckless amorous liaisons, beginning with her first intimate experience at the age of twelve and tracing the passage of time by highlighting key memories of her adolescent and adult relationships: a marriage and separation followed by the affair with the ex-lover. Significantly, from her formative years to her staged death, Amalia identifies literary models upon which to base her life as an artist. Gertner's work suggests, however, Amalia's presumptuous self-insertion into a genealogy of women writers is not enough to warrant her consideration as an artist. Critiquing the literary establishment as well as social structures, Gertner hints that the banality of Amalia's

bourgeois life, her blocked access to the art world, and her weepy nostalgia about dead-end female literary models lead to her debilitating neurosis and her eventual suicide, squelching her professional aspirations.

Analogous to Gertner's woman writer protagonist, the female narrator of Geel's Cárcel de mujeres is also an author whose literary project involves the discovery and appropriation of female literary models. As with Amalia, Geel's heroine in Cárcel de mujeres (1956) belongs to the upper echelons of society, yet her financial security and the relative independence it could bring her exacerbate her existential angst, particularly her general frustrations about being a woman and her response to her precarious placement in the literary field. Both the protagonists' aggravation with bourgeois propriety leads them to enact renditions of artistic ways of life in which they disobey the normative behaviors expected of upper-class women and transform themselves into artist types through their activities and behaviors, which include writing and slumming in marginal sectors of society. Similar to La mujer de sal, Geel's book innovates on the traditional autobiographical form: her employment of sophisticated literary devices transforms the account of her time spent in jail into a technically complicated testimonial novel whose mediated style and linguistic cadence transform the harsh everyday reality of prison life into a literary experience more reminiscent of vanguard art than conventional life writing or prison narratives.

Geel's Cárcel de mujeres transgresses the norms associated with prison literature and life writing. Her narrator's testimony focuses on the other inmates

rather than on herself, forcing the reader to discover the explanation for her crime by inference and through the stories she includes about the other prisoners. The author creates an artistic montage of her penitentiary experience that is only loosely plotted. She includes fragments of everyday life in prison designed to critique Chile's deep-seated social problems, particularly its rigid class structure and unbalanced gender relationships. The author's special quarters—"El Pensionado"—nevertheless recreate a hierarchy where she is placed literally and symbolically "above" the various patios in the "Pabellón de condenadas" where the poor prisoners live. Her elevated position, which also parallels that of an omniscient narrator, allows her to see and hear the commotion below, giving her ample material for her account. A private room provides her with a degree of safety and removal that advances her transformation of her circumstances into a work of art. The ruckus in the lower patios—fights, screams, and the birth of a child, to name a few—forms a cinematic and musical mosaic of the prison experience, which Geel peppers with a few scattered reflections about her own crime. She draws attention foremost to her mediated artistic portrayal of the others, presenting a shocking kaleidoscope of snapshot images of female criminality, homoerotic activity, violence and dementia coupled with a musical barrage of sounds—whispers, voices, and blood curdling screams.

Each of the novels highlights the fictional artist heroine's process of becoming a writer by way of her creation of an autobiographical text on the one hand, and her enactment of nonconformist behaviors and attitudes on the other. Both heroines craft artistic identities by being eccentrics and by living destitute lives in the slums of Paris

in Gertner's text and in the Chilean women's prison in Geel's novel. In contrast with the Latin American artist-intellectual-statesman who, from the colonial era to the fin-de-siècle, maintained state power and protected the interest of the elite class as critic Ángel Rama has described, Gertner's and Geel's female artist-intellectuals' literary slumming in the squalor of urban underworlds suggests the influence of foreign models. Standing out among these templates are the nineteenth-century French Bohemians and the American beatniks of the 1950s. According to Pierre Bourdieu, whose work focuses on the French artistic counterculture of the nineteenth-century from which the Bohemian prototype emerged, this early subculture defined itself through a performative construction of an aura of rebelliousness and nonconformity, scoffing at all things established, especially the mundane "routines of bourgeois life" (56). Similar to the Beat group of the 1950s, the Bohemians' lifestyle of emotional and financial destitution—the "material and moral misery, sterility, and resentment" of the artist—opposed hegemonic values, while it created uncomfortable living conditions inspiring the artist's work (64). Recalling the Bohemian model, critic Julio Ramos affirms the Latin American intellectual-artist began to renovate the hegemonic role of the *letrado* only at the turn-of-the-century, when artists began to assume positions against the state-sponsored discourses and hegemonic interests they had long protected (xliii).

Gertner's and Geel's representations of their protagonists' process of artistic self-figuration put into play a *mélange* of various regional and international portraits of nonconforming artist prototypes. Their respective placement of both protagonists

in slum-like environments recalls the Bohemian model as well as their beatnik counterparts of the 1950s. Indeed, both of the heroines act as artists by shunning bourgeois propriety and the ennui threatening to stifle their creativity. In contrast, the tumult and disorderliness of their chosen milieus provide the women with the out-of-the-ordinary material they seek to augment their originality. In Gertner's text, however, Amalia reassumes the Bohemian model uncritically. The protagonist goes to the homeland of the original nineteenth-century French Bohemians, the Parisian underworld, where she attempts to become a writer. Within this environment, and as she becomes more serious about writing, she slowly sheds her aristocratic garb, yet her lack of creativity leads her to choose the dated and inaccurate model of the French Bohemian, transforming her into a literary poser and a cliché. On the other hand, Geel's authentic placement of her protagonist in the women's prison provides the writer with the rich material she uses to write her book and furthers a symbolic reading of her crime and her emotional destitution. More significantly, Geel utilizes her placement within this more inspiring and up-to-date underworld to cast herself as an artist-prototype embodying the aesthetic proposals of the male Generation of 1950, a literary movement that renovated Chilean literature, making it more universal and cosmopolitan. While male writers of the 1950s such as Enrique Lafourcade and José Manuel Vergara developed an aesthetic praising foreign models which included the Paris-based existentialist writers Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, Geel represented her literary engagement by using the murder as an opportunity to formulate an artistic identity that abandoned the dated Bohemian model for a more authentic artist type as



she transforms herself in her own text into the generation's living existentialist heroine.<sup>24</sup>

This process of artistic self-figuration becomes fascinating when viewed in light of Gertner's La mujer de sal, a book that scrutinizes the practice of identifying female literary models and provides warnings about forming literary genealogies that eventually smoothed the way for subsequent groups of Chilean writers. As noted earlier, La mujer de sal emphasizes the protagonist's misguided search for a way into the literary field in which Amalia attempts to ride the coattails of models that should be eschewed rather than emulated. Amalia is a caricature whose absurd reenactment of passé stereotypes about Bohemians and creative women renders visible literary history's vacuity of viable female progenitors. The protagonist, moreover, structures her inane project using as models literary forebears such as the Bible's woman of salt (who Gertner mistakenly names Sara in the novel), Anna Karenina, and Emma Bovary, characters who prolong debilitating myths about creative women as mentally imbalanced and morally questionable.<sup>25</sup>

As noted, when Gertner published this novel, she was known across Chile as a national icon for the liberated artistic woman. Thus, her choice to include an untalented and deplorable fictional artist-heroine constitutes the creation of a satirical portrait of the artist whereby Amalia is Gertner's negative alter-ego and counter-model. Importantly, Gertner's transformation of herself into a caricature in the novel challenges sexist mores and critiques popular attitudes about female artists and intellectuals during the 1950s and 1960s. The satirical element is vital to

understanding La mujer de sal, yet literary critics have overlooked it. Only Margorie Agosín's analysis of Gertner's novel La derrota (1965) recognizes that parody is the literary device giving the author's work its feminist twist (Silencio e imaginación 71-83).<sup>26</sup> Extending her argument to La mujer de sal, I argue that Gertner proposes through Amalia's negative example that female authors should sever ties with their dead-end literary past and make new models that do not require creative women to reiterate images hampering their pursuits. Amalia exemplifies the ruinous result of accepting established gender roles; consequently, her project flounders precisely because she chooses all the wrong models and lacks the will and originality to expunge customary views. While the distorted mirroring effect transforms Gertner into a model demonstrating the need for women writers to jettison the past, Amalia's lack of creativity leads her to find inspiration in figures that trap and kill her. The biblical woman of salt, the Argentine poet Alfonsina Storni (1892-1938), and the canonical heroines Emma Bovary and Anna Karenina are Amalia's chosen progenitors. Significantly, each of these figures' supposed lack of emotional stability and alleged subversions leads them to die or to take their own lives.

Gertner punctuates the importance of literary models through the book's unique structural arrangement, whereby both Gertner's novel and Amalia's novel-within-the-novel begin, progress, and end focusing on the interrelationship between women writers' biographies and their narrative projects. The author immediately connects her narration to that of her protagonist by way of a refracted reflection viewed in the titles of their respective novels; Gertner's book is called La mujer de

sal, while her protagonist's fiction is analogously entitled La estatua de sal. The titles join the author to her protagonist and evoke a third female figure, the Bible's woman of salt. The associations the titles evoke initiate both a real and mythological process of expanding a group of female artists. These connections, however, ultimately foreshadow Amalia's destructive process of trapping herself within an archetypal biblical past. The message of warning echoes through the titles, but the hapless Amalia is unable to decode it. Gertner's placement of vital distance between herself and the mythical woman of salt, on the other hand, demonstrates the past should not be looked on naively.

On a deeper level, while the inclusion of the woman of salt in the Bible models a one-dimensional construction of women as beings prone to overlooking warnings and who easily give into temptation,<sup>27</sup> Amalia tries—and eventually fails—to turn the myth on its head. She recasts the saline woman as her muse, attempting to give undue literary significance to her otherwise self-indulgent “inability” to carry on after her breakup. Identifying herself with the woman of salt, Amalia transforms her emotional destitution and her obsession with the past into an excuse to act like a social misfit, replicating those behaviors she associates with artists. She believes her aberrant lifestyle alone will guarantee her literary fame, when, in reality, her behaviors copy dated models just as passé as her novel. Falling into the trap of her mythical counterpart, Amalia refuses to discard patterns that do not work, and thus undermines her own creative aspirations. She never moves beyond the lover, while her literary product turns out to be, at best, an uncritical repetition of literary forms

associated with women, traditionally considered insignificant. La estatua de sal is both an autobiography and a letter to the ex-lover/muse detailing Amalia's angst-ridden love life. Gertner's placement of a literary catalogue of conventional notions about women and women writers within the self-reflexive frame of the novel-within-a-novel, however, places the allegedly insignificant and un-artistic literary forms linked to women into a mediated work of art. Through contrast, distortion, and similarity—the shifting process of self-figuration Castro-Klarén describes—the biblical muse inspires Amalia to generate a trite literary product. Gertner's inclusion of the mythic figure in her work, on the other hand, warns of the tragedy of women by portraying her own protagonist as oblivious to the warning, and suggests Amalia's lack of will and her position as a follower.

Although the woman of salt inspires Amalia to write, the novel's creation of linkage between mythical, fictional, and real-life female “subversives” ultimately demonstrates the harmful impact of negative gender stereotypes that often pass from one literary generation to the next. When La mujer de sal begins, the composition of La estatua de sal is underway, yet the reader's initial encounter with Amalia reveals a sense of paranoia and panic about the book's eventual reception that threatens to squelch her literary aspirations early on in her project. As Gertner's novel opens, Amalia is convinced that her creative ambitions are futile and she should abandon them: “Será mejor guardar estos papeles, trabajar con orden..., aunque... es innecesario; nadie los verá nunca” (15). Amalia mediates these feelings (which Gertner insinuates spring from negative gender typecasting found in figures like the

woman of salt) through a misinterpretation of the messages conveyed in history's women. The protagonist identifies the biblical figure as a model for the aberrant lifestyle of the Bohemian artist prototype she believes she must emulate to become a writer, when, in fact, the woman of salt is neither liberated nor creative. Failing to heed the warning to look ahead, Amalia's reflection on biblical verses stimulates an uninspired writing process and a clichéd artistic lifestyle:

Entonces retomó el hilo de su propia historia: “Junto con el tiempo humano, compuesto de pasado, presente y futuro, Dios le regaló al hombre la posibilidad de olvidar; de abandonar viejas moradas y marchar por rutas desconocidas. Pero yo, igual que Sara (sic), no puedo dejar de mirar hacia atrás. Soy incapaz de echar llave a las puertas del pasado. Vivo desobedeciendo. (15)

Hoping to emulate the immortality of the woman of salt, Amalia attempts to use fiction to preserve herself permanently, rather than as an opportunity to stimulate her personal growth and to move away from the inauthentic masculine muse of the lover. Oblivious to the warning in the myth, Amalia fails to identify a model stimulating her to cultivate her own talents and to realize her individuality.

At the same time that Gertner's creation of a relationship between mythic and literary figures from a broad historical span eschews unviable models, the author presents an optimistic view about female artists who link their work to that of constructive literary ancestors. The author hints at the possible beneficial effects of reviewing the past critically, the way she does in her book through the hapless

Amalia. Specifically, Gertner shows how women writers of different historical frames may mutually magnify each other to reveal—and perhaps challenge—women’s conditions during a range of epochs. That is, by claiming literary progenitors, both the antecedent and the “heir” who chooses her may profit, especially when the representation of these affinities highlights the contribution the older generation makes to the new one’s identity. When newer authors redirect attention on their models, often reshaping the significance of their projects, they can revamp perceptions about women and their artistic processes. In La mujer de sal, Amalia looks to her literary past, but she does not challenge gender roles within those earlier works, nor does she explain the relevance of the past to her project. Gertner, on the other hand, brings clarity to the past through its distortion. Rather than implement prescriptive digressions, Gertner employs suggestive techniques like the novel-within-the novel structure to reveal that women writers should cast their gaze on the past only when this backtracking improves the present.

Amalia’s lack of a clear vision, on the other hand, leads her to identify with those aspects of her chosen models not worth magnifying or perpetuating. In a second failed attempt to find a way into the literary milieu, her aesthetic death, during the *dénouement* in particular, exemplifies her clumsy attempt to copy what she perceives as a stylized art of living and dying as a literary heroine. Her nymphomania and suicide bring to mind the known female literary antecedents Madame Bovary and Anna Karenina, whose predictable misbehaviors, rather than their talents, have captured and maintained the interest of readers. She rekindles these two nineteenth-

century heroines' Bohemian-like rejection of the stifling ennui of the bourgeoisie as well as their promiscuous sexuality, all in an endeavor to become and to be remembered as a literary woman. Her nostalgia about these figures, however, further demonstrates her lack of creative understanding and her inability to break away from Flaubert's and Tolstoy's disparaging portrayal of women in the nineteenth-century. Amalia accepts that theatrics and suicide may be the only way for women to be included in the collective literary imagination, and hence chooses to take the same dead-end cue that severely punishes "liberated" women such as Anna and Emma with death.

Furthering the novel's meta-literary strategy, Gertner includes Argentine poet Alfonsina Storni (1892-1938) within her experimental novel to create a sophisticated social critique of traditional gender constructs, bringing the poet's legacy to the forefront. Amalia's theatrical demise recalls Storni's dramatic suicide in 1938, which critics and anthologists have cast as a literary death. Critics tend to focus on Storni's suicide rather than on her pioneering critique of traditional gender roles in her early poetry and her innovative anti-sonnets.<sup>28</sup> Her last and most anthologized poem, "Voy a dormir" (1938), considered the artist's suicide note, builds a theatrical scaffolding that props up her literary persona, overshadowing her literary experimentations, her progressive views about gender roles, and the possibility that her diagnosis with cancer may have precipitated her untimely death. While Gertner suggests a parallel between her life as an artist and that of socially conscious and aesthetically innovative Storni, Amalia fails to read the signs again when she presumptuously identifies Storni

as her antecedent. She creates weak autobiographical parallels between herself and the poet upon choosing to make her manuscript her suicide note and to riddle the narration with gender-induced frustrations that do not add up. Amalia's hope to remain in the memories of others through theatrics rather than by building a new and original project, misinterprets Storni's message and significance. The completed novel/suicide note should—but in fact does not—explain her choice to sedate and gas herself. The circumstances of Amalia's life as she describes them in La estatua de sal hardly warrant such a dramatic passing; she bemoans the loss of nothing more than a lover who stands for the same bourgeois values that she as a "Bohemian" artist claims to reject. Through suicide she sacrifices herself for her literary persona, and by mistakenly claiming Storni as her model, she endeavors to promote herself through her forebear. However, as she attempts to capitalize on a potentially productive opportunity to publicize both herself and her claimed antecedent, she becomes a parasite, exposing again her lack of authenticity and her weak will. Gertner, on the other hand, models a more productive integration of antecedents upon claiming Storni as an antecedent to the female vein of Generation of 1950, a group erratically united through its shared preoccupation with women's roles.

Gertner contributes to the feminist proposals characterizing women's writings of this era of Chilean literary history by including several conversations between Amalia and Théo suggesting that Amalia's theatrical self-figuration—derisory as it is—springs from an internalized fear that her project will fail. Amalia's distress about the novel's eventual negative reception is not ill-founded; however, her



confession to Théo long before the book's completion about the sense of panic overwhelming her when she thinks about his reading it centers Gertner's critique on the sexism found both in literary culture and in social perceptions about women (48). Later, Gertner suggests Amalia's fears—her “anxiety of authorship,” so to speak—are not just an extension of her neurotic personality. When the police detain Amalia and Vincent at her house, an officer notices the “supuesta novela” on the desk (178). The protagonist, who views writing as her livelihood, begs them not to ruin the unfinished manuscript during their search. Vincent makes fun of Amalia's literary aspirations as the two are taken to jail. One of the officers glances at a few of the book's pages and surmises it is a trite love story devoid of aesthetic value, precisely because he takes Amalia to be a “buena burguesa” (178-179). The fragments of Amalia's book interpolated in the narration affirm the policeman's words, but Gertner's novel challenges this supposition. The author's contorted versions of sentimental love themes and genres such as the autobiography and the letter questions preconceived notions about “women's writing.” At the same time, Gertner's quick-reading, action-packed fiction possessed broad popular appeal, making it into an immediate bestseller. Cleverly, under a false pretense of “light” fiction, Gertner showcases her own critical understanding about the literary field, all the while communicating a message to an enormous audience through a mildly experimental text about the need to revamp embedded social mores. As the work of a television and movie actress known across Chile for her aberrant lifestyle, Gertner's La mujer de sal thus explains the icon's subversive critique of established values as a self-referential process where

she as an artist prompted social change through the drama of both her work and her life.<sup>29</sup>

Whereas Amalia's attempt in La mujer de sal to penetrate the literary arena warns of the negative outcome of looking to the past with an uncritical gaze, Geel's Cárcel de mujeres shows the productive result of claiming female literary models that shun normative scripts. Women's frustrations about established gender roles and their latent and potentially explosive rejection of unviable influences situate Cárcel de mujeres within the international feminist debates taking place during the post-war era. In fact, this historical context provides one of the few apertures into this otherwise hermetic novel.<sup>30</sup> Geel includes abundant scenes contrasting grotesque images of female-authored violence with tender homoeroticism, shirking the bodice-ripping fictions of women's literary past. Instead, she highlights rage as a potentially productive flip-side to alternative female desire. Anger (both her own and that of the other inmates) prompts the narrator, a fictional equivalent to Geel herself,<sup>31</sup> to jettison literary and social worlds that do not serve her or belong to her. Furthermore, the author identifies literary progenitors who form an imagined female collectivity united by a shared dissatisfaction with the condition of women, specifically the lack of tenable choices available to them. Geel neither kills herself nor falls into a trap of romantic nostalgia as Amalia does. In contrast, her writing process begins once Geel assassinates the lover, symbolically burying any potential for a masculine muse. The lover's demise puts her in a female territory where social inequity becomes garishly evident, anger and frustration thrive, and transgression proliferates.

The prison experience increases the author's consciousness about her gender, her class, and her art, leading her to link both herself as a writer and her text to the other inmates as well as to Latin American convent writers of the colonial era. As I will detail, Geel's inclusion of these references as models infused her crime with political and artistic significance while contributing to her justification of the murder. Building on analyses by Eltit, Alone, and Agosín, each of whom interprets spatial relationships showcased in Geel's book from varying angles,<sup>32</sup> I argue that the author explains the murder by elaborating on her location within the female community of the prison and the literary genealogy she creates. First, the prison world becomes a living female community of writers and criminals. Then, an obscure collective voice emerges rendering the assassination a symbolic act on the behalf of women. Geel becomes an agent and channel of an implicit rage brewing in women's literary texts and in the female masses, both inside and outside the prison. The implementation of sophisticated rhetorical strategies such as the metonymy and indirect allusions to key literary ancestors expands and unites the community of infuriated women Geel creates in her fiction. Geel's alter-ego, situated as it is within these societies, becomes a lightning rod, gathering massive public attention from the outside while galvanizing the volatile rage of the incarcerated women surrounding her.

Technical complexity and a focus on social issues situate the novel within both the feminist writings of the Generation of 1950 and the larger generational oeuvre. At the time, Geel's male contemporaries were renovating Chilean narrative to include more universal, philosophical, and erudite themes while they created a

technique-laden style that, unlike the regionalist writings of Chile's literary past, appealed to the sophisticated tastes of an international readership.<sup>33</sup> Chile's post-World-War II generation as a whole imported philosophical trends from Europe and increased the focus on style. In contrast, women writers of the group integrated European philosophy—namely the feminist proposals of such thinkers as Simone de Beauvoir—and aesthetic innovations that reinforced their focus on gender issues.

Geel elaborates the feminist proposals associated with her contemporaries through the implementation of literary strategies postponing significance, all in an endeavor to create a text as enclosed as the prison itself, where meaning is slippery and messages are elusive. The reader searches for clues to understand the author's motivations to murder her lover, yet Geel conceals her confession, forcing the reader to observe social phenomena to disentangle the message. First, the author situates herself within a literary genealogy of devout convent writers to structure a parallel between the prison and the convent; second, she takes advantage of her special quarters within her prison cell, where her placement above the other inmates enables her to see, hear, and, eventually, filter the commotion occurring below her; and, third, once she positions herself in a place of authority as a keeper of knowledge, she cedes her voice to the other prisoners, letting them—an enraged female collectivity—communicate the explanation for her crime. Thus, the novel moves spatially upwards and downwards: the omnipresent Geel reassumes the social authority the murder jeopardized by writing only to yield her voice to the collective murmurings of the prison women. The gathering together of disparate voices occurring in the novel

gradually renders Geel's account a hybrid text of diverse voices and literary templates, at once being an autobiography, a legal testimony, a testimonial novel, and a mediated work of art. Punctuating the book's hybrid quality, the scores of voices channeled through Geel—all of them marginal, all of them enraged, all of them female—suggest that the author's allegedly unwarrantable murder occurred because of social structures that leave both impoverished women as well as well-to-do women like Geel jailed and devoid of viable choices.<sup>34</sup>

Geel's validation begins as she structures blurry parallels between the jail and the convent and between her literary oeuvre and that of a few devout literary progenitors similarly cloistered due a paucity of other options. The author does not make this connection explicit, however, until a chapter she includes at the book's mid-point, once the primacy of the female collectivity of the women's prison is clear. This brief chapter exemplifies the elaborate rhetorical devices Geel employs to redirect the explanation for her crime from herself as an individual to the larger female communities she constructs. Here, she employs the metonymy to manifest the presence of the Mexican poet, intellectual, and nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-1695) and implicitly a larger group of women known for their use of the convent as a space to further the intellectual pursuits that social mores deny them. The implementation of a literary strategy that defers meaning and replicates the baroque, rhetoric-laden style of her chosen antecedents typifies Geel's manipulation of language, the tactic she employs throughout the text to confuse the reasons for the murder and to imbue her crime with symbolism.

The metonymy begins with a verbal trick indirectly summoning up convent writers without naming them. The author conjures her cloistered literary muses to her prison cell, naming them in the absence of their names, just as she does with the “confession” for the crime which she at times silences and at times over-expresses to a point of distortion. Here, as in the rest of the book, the connection is implied, certainty is postponed, criminality is linked to morality, and writing, speaking, not writing and silence are all feminized: “Cárcel de mujeres. Se piensa en ella y otro nombre acude a la mente, inevitable: Congregación de las Monjas del Buen Pastor” (63). The inevitable name that comes to mind is not the congregation of nuns, for the employment of the noun *nombre* triggers the reader to expect a person’s name. The names of literary nuns, such as Mexico’s Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, or Chile’s own devout literary women, Sister Ursula Suárez (1666-1949) and Sor Tadea Ignacia de la Huerta (1755-1827), though not identified, are summoned. Thus, Geel’s substitution of the proper noun with the metonymy “Congregación de las Monjas del Buen Pastor” links one female community to another through language and creates a spatial parallel between the women’s prison and the convent. Significantly, as the agent connecting these seemingly dissimilar environments together, Geel situates herself in the middle of a triangular relationship between nuns, prisons, and writing. She then places literary activity in the seam, stitching together the elevated spirituality of the sisters with the street-smart prisoners. As the author inches closer to her social critique, moreover, the associations recall other socio-spatial connections, such as the historically disciplinary function of the convent. As is well-known, devious female

misfits were frequently sent to convents because they expressed nonconformist tendencies or transgressed social norms, often because they rejected female domesticity or marriage. The convent was thus a place to save “imprudent” women from harming their reputations and those of their families. In Cárcel de mujeres, the spatial configuration thus links the home, the convent, and the women’s prison together, depicting them as the three environments where women may “choose” to live. Geel demonstrates, however, that all these “options” are rough equivalents to the jail.

The expansion of this spatial correlation to form a literary genealogy brings to the surface a female literary tradition that critiqued social and literary norms that have left women from colonial times to Geel’s epoch with scant options and poor choices. As is well-known, intellectual women of the colonial era cloistered themselves in convents to write. In Geel’s portrait of the 1950s, a similar pattern continues to condition women’s lives despite the passage of time. Seemingly, however, women’s rage has increased and has become more volatile. Through inference, Geel shows that social structures literally and figuratively corner women, explaining the impulsive anger looming in the prison/house/convent she constructs.<sup>35</sup>

Geel strengthens the link between criminal and religious spaces through a manipulation of the concept of the confession, a term evoked through its mutual connection to the legal and ecclesiastical discourses interlaced throughout the narrative. Geel toys with the power relationships inherent to both confessions and prison texts to advance her message and to maintain a position of authority with

regard to the reader. Like the religious and legal confessions they often include, prison accounts bring to bear the unbalanced relationships of expressive power shifting between the author/speaker (or the writer) and the public (or the reader). The liaison between the reader and the writer fluctuates within these specialized autobiographies because each takes its turn occupying the dominant position. On the one hand, the prisoner is an authority because s/he has direct knowledge about two worlds the fascinated reader has little or no direct access to; that is, the prison and the mind of the prisoner. Thus, the inmate may wield authority from within by piquing the reader's curiosity, selecting those aspects of these worlds s/he will reveal, while omitting others at will.

As Geel seems to understand, this power relationship is nevertheless unstable. The prison text, often a formal statement following an alleged wrongdoing, is similar to both the religious custom and legal act of confessing. Within this metaphor, the prisoner/confessor is subordinate to the reader, whose position as the implicit receiver of the prisoner's declaration of guilt or innocence (that is, their testimony) is akin to that of the priest, the judge, or the jury. This figurative relationship is supported in the norms of the prison texts themselves, which presuppose the writer narrates an account either to "confess" a "truth" unstated or disbelieved prior to his/her legal sentencing, or, conversely, to expose a spiritual process of redemption after the crime.

Though Geel's shocked Chilean readers awaited the alleged new "testimony" that Cárcel de mujeres should have contained, the author provides neither a legal nor a religious confession, thereby maintaining her control over knowledge. She only



“confesses” what the Chilean public already knew, that she killed the lover with the bullets of a revolver. Instead, Geel uses her opportunity to explain herself to her reader to provide a hybrid confession/explanation that blames the murder on many influences, including: destiny (80, 102), the lover’s own wish to die (81), a marriage proposal that Geel rejected (82), the author’s inexistent maternal instinct (85), a suicide attempt foiled at the last minute (97), a deliberate act that a desire to experience a feeling of power induced (99), dementia (101), loneliness (106), and pathological misanthropy (106). This continual provision of possible “truths” produces a single, yet highly unstable motive that combines a plurality of justifications, forming a more varied and nuanced, yet arguably more complete “truth.” More crucially, the multiplicity of confessions creates a structural frame of plurality Geel eventually calls upon to elaborate her sociological justification for the crime. Finally, just like the hybrid confession, the many voices of the inmates become one as they pass through Geel’s auditory and visual receptors. The author prompts this fusion, calling on the reader to view her “truth” in its slippery complexity: “Razones, causas, razones. Nada sirve de nada. Aunque hubiera ciento, ¿existe una o pesan todas ellas juntas, hasta la última, cuando en el otro lado de la balanza aparece su muerte?” (92).

The accumulation of varied confessions imitates a normal human process of reflection to suggest that “truth” is neither concrete nor singular. Geel leaves her readers dissatisfied with their search for answers, prompting them to hear the message communicated through the collective murmurings of the prisoners. Geel fails to

produce a mundane motive, frustrating the reader's attempt to catch an elusive "truth:"

Preguntas que resbalan sobre mí y que trato de retener casi ansiosa.  
 Respuestas que procuro hallar en algún rincón de mi entendimiento o  
 en mi visión de los hechos que parecen formarse y deformarse como  
 cosas que flotan dentro de un agua. Preguntas, respuestas, sonidos que  
 resbalan en la nada. (39)

Instead, the noise of the prison—"sonidos," or voices seeping into her cell from the lower patios—and images at a glance take precedence over her story as another kind of testimony begins to take shape. The autobiographical "I" that searches for answers unravels and is then re-knit as Geel cedes her individual voice to the collective feminine "we:" "Murmullo de voces, prolongado, denso y sordo en su continuidad ondulante que sólo termina con el fin del día. A espacios casi regulares lo hieren palabras sueltas, carcajadas, herejías" (23). Geel's "I"—precisely the one under question, the woman whom the readers have called on to speak—refuses, except occasionally, to speak for herself. She lets her singular "I" refract and then reconnect into the plural "we" of the inmate community. Geel hence calls on the other inmates to testify with her and in her place. Once meshed, their utterances become a single angered voice of the female collective that lends symbolic significance to Geel's otherwise wanton crime.

The amalgamation of voices that imbues Geel's personal experience with collective meaning is a technique common to Latin American women's testimonials.

As noted, Geel is regarded as the pioneer who introduced Chilean letters to the female-authored (prison) testimonial, a genre only beginning to achieve prominence among Latin American women writers in the 1960s and, among Geel's compatriots, after the 1973 coup. Critic Doris Sommer's work about other Spanish American women's testimonials provides a theoretical base that sheds light on Geel's strategic unification of her informants' voices. Contrasting the singular and heroic interests Sommer explains are often furthered in conventional autobiographies, the more collective-variant of the testimonial gains symbolic power in the formation of a collective, feminine "we:"

[I]t would be a mistake uncritically to attribute intimacy and individuation to the first-person-singular pronoun in testimonials, not a categorical mistake but a relative one that may blind us to the tension in the testimonial "I." [. . .] It appears that the tension insists on being resolved in favor of stability and community, even while the shift to first person challenges that coherence. The narrator often strains between affirming her singularity and denying it in favor of the first-person plural. "I" is the part that represents "we"; at least this is the conscious assumption made in the face of the Westernizing temptation to slide from the metonymy of the communal to the metaphor of a single subject replacing the contiguous and more collective sign. I do not wish to deny or even minimize the relevance of the heroic historical models or ideal characters for the process of self-

construction in the testimonials but simply to observe that these models are ideal because they represent communal values. And more significantly, they are necessarily destabilized, tampered with. (“Not Just a Personal Story: Women’s *Testimonios* and the Plural Self” 123)

When in Cárcel de mujeres the “confession” finally appears (“destabilized and tampered with” as it is), it is through the united “we” Sommer describes. Geel’s “I” fuses and channels the “murmullo de voces.” The combination not only creates a cadent melody of voices, but also results in a pure sociological justification for a crime and a warning supporting the interests of the female community, both within and outside the prison. Geel thus gives the crime both symbolic and political meaning, as she exposes and releases women’s formerly pent-up rage twice, first through the murder and then in its sophisticated “retelling.”

Notably, the only appraisals for the crime are made by the simultaneously unified and hybrid voice of the other inmates, extending Geel’s argument that “truth” is plural. Geel overhears the opinion of the women, filtering their disparate opinions through herself as their voices are heard blending into one another:

Sentadas cerca de ellas, en el suelo del corredor, había un numeroso grupo de mujeres que desde acá yo no alcancé a ver y que supongo se incorporaron, porque una dijo, con voz madura y ruda exactamente estas palabras: “Bueno, y qué la miran tanto; pa’lo que hizo...; lo que es yo mataba a todos los hombres juntos”. Otra contestó con voz mas cascada, algo relativo a que Dios no permite matar a la gente, a lo que

una más allá gritó que eso dependía de lo que a uno le hacían. Tuve la impresión de que discutían, en voz tan alta, con el fin, significativo por ambas partes, de que yo oyese, discusión que subió de punto, porque hablaban todas a la vez. (95-96)

The diverse subjectivities of the inmates weave together and unravel, creating a constant singular plurality. Their stories are strikingly analogous, particularly as they are gathered together in Geel's writing, which underscores that a lack of choices links them through time, space, and experience. Like Geel, all of the women have violated the law; however, the successive retelling of their stories prompts a realization that a paucity of options has contributed to their demise, creating a volatile rage in them. Among the many prostitutes and thieves, the inmates Geel showcases are: a woman who smashes her baby's glass bottle on another inmate's face in a fit of rage; a lesbian kleptomaniac who purposely cracks open her boss's head with a hatchet to return to the prison where her lover lives; an inmate who accepts all the blame for a crime she committed with her lover; the recipient of an abortion; a prisoner who goes into solitary confinement for accusing the nuns of sexual encounters with priests; and a woman who cuts her forearms whenever she becomes angry. Though these stories are linked by the common denominators of violent rage, Geel suggests that an overwhelming lack of viable options has led her and all women to both the actual prison and the "prison of life" where one views no way out.

Despite the sinister tone of Cárcel de mujeres, Geel outlines a rough plan of escape from the hopelessness she portrays. She fans the flames of the social

revolution brewing in the Chilean masses, prompting women to feel their rage, and to express it. Further, regardless of the scandal that initially placed Geel in the limelight of public life in the 1950s, the author ultimately circumvented the critical fate of writers like the hapless Amalia, thanks to contemporary authors such as Eltit who underscore her legacy as an experimental artist and as an activist. In choosing her as their muse, Geel's literary legatees release her from her proverbial shackles, giving her a role within the collective literary memory as not just the author of a mysterious crime and of an equally puzzling novel, but also as one of several inspirational artistic foremothers who demonstrate that the cultivation of art constitutes a way women can participate in and ultimately transform socio-political realities.

Although Geel paradoxically portrays herself as a pathological misanthrope in this bizarre novel, she identifies collaboration as the single most important strategy disenfranchised groups can employ to capsize social structures subjugating and dividing them. Geel's literary daughters, however, have not recognized this aspect of her legacy despite the fact that the penchant to build community and to fuse women's voices in their art works became a crucial device against the military regime, as I will argue in chapter two. When artists began to collaborate with each other during the 1970s and 1980s, they were in fact carrying on in the vein the María Carolina Geel of Cárcel de mujeres.

What makes Geel's novel truly inaugural is that it echoes not only in the collaborative projects of the military epoch, but also in novels published during the turn-of-the-twenty-first century by the members of the Group of Cultural Industry,

whose work I take up in chapter four. Indirectly renewing Geel's objective to give collective, socio-political significance to the dead, the most recent of all of these women's literary groups frequently define their female artist heroines as agents who possess a singular capacity to reveal the multiple "truths" about Chile's totalitarian past that economic and political interests were attempting to bury in the 1990s. (Again, Geel's work is marked with paradox. Upon her release from the women's prison, the author became a columnist for *El Mercurio*, the powerful right-wing newspaper that contributed to the socialist demise in the early 1970s and then backed the subsequent Pinochet regime.)<sup>36</sup>

Denying the historic voicelessness of women, Gertner and Geel knew how to generate just enough drama to capture the limelight of Chilean public life, and both of them capitalized on this attention to enhance awareness about issues complicating the lives of the women of their times. Gertner in particular, the most skilled public performer of her generation, portrays one woman writer's foiled attempt to form a female literary genealogy through theatrics. Her protagonist's failure to scrutinize the past hints at why women of the Generation of 1980 have chosen writers of the 1950s, rather than those of a previous epoch, as the starting point of their literary genealogy. Gertner's scorn for a past that was untenable for women reveals the senselessness of presenting saccharine visions about periods when social mores, often furthered in literary texts themselves, entrapped women in myths of physical and emotional fragility. This myth of female weakness was stamped out once and for all when women chose to risk their lives by being writers during the totalitarian government.

The dictatorship was a time when writers had to be astute and calculating. It was a time when grave political circumstances prompted a complete eschewal of the myth of the madwoman writer.

Indeed, the boom of women writers that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s constitutes a pivotal turning point in Chilean literary history when later groups could claim viable precursors and identify many models worth following. At least partially because of this, Chile's totalitarian period constituted an illogical moment in the nation's political and literary history, a moment when female authors moved beyond the anxiety of authorship, thanks to the many women writing and publishing at the time the writers-to-be of the Generation of 1980 were in their formative years. Gertner's and Geel's vehement critiques of the condition of women, coupled with their portrayal of the female creative process itself, made their work all the more relevant to the literary heirs claiming their influence in the 1970s and 1980s, when the government attempted to feminize the entire counterculture in an effort to silence it.

Of the many artistic groups that emerged in response to the illegalization of uncensored art and unsupervised group meetings during the dictatorship, the feminist literary collective Ergo Sum—the group that claimed Gertner as its muse—was the first collaborative enterprise to materialize Geel's proposal to fuse in writing and in real life the enraged voices of the female masses. Two decades after the publication of *Cárcel de mujeres*, the Ergo Sum writers began to meet in clandestine literary workshops where they invented the experimental book-object anthology. Recalling Geel's creative amalgamation of women's voices, their unique publications unite a



virtual barrage of female voices in cadent accord against military policy, the art establishment, and traditional gender roles. The book-objects I take up in the next chapter celebrated the “I” of the contributing authors as well as the collective “we” of the artists it brought together. Gathering women’s personal stories in an innovative, neo-avant-garde format, as we shall see later on, sought to reverse women’s lack of representation in cultural and political life at the time of the regime.

Further, the Pinochet regime’s attempt to efface the utopian values associated with Salvador Allende’s Popular Unity government (1970-1973) motivated female authors of the 1980s to revive bonds with both their political and literary pasts, explaining their nostalgic allure to the literary feminism of their chosen progenitors of the 1950s. As will become clear later on, socialist-inspired literary projects like that of the Ergo Sum group emphasized collective work as a strategy to preserve the myth of equality, which was thought possible during the Allende regime and which vanished during the Pinochet dictatorship. Capturing the optimism of their time, the group of the 1950s on the whole integrated copious allusions to the historical events transforming women’s lives during their era, such as the late implementation of women’s suffrage in Chile in 1949, the budding women’s movement taking place in Europe and in the United States, and a confidence in the possibility for comprehensive social transformation demonstrated in the 1959 Cuban Revolution. These factors prompted the Ergo Sum writers to fuel their literary protests against the restructuring of the nation on the gendered metaphor of fascism by bringing women and women writers together imaginatively and creatively to work for common goals.

The regime's sexist national reorganization ultimately backfired; it unwittingly increased the need among writers of the 1980s to advance a strong feminist agenda, further motivating them to claim those literary models of the 1950s that had fascinated them as adolescents and had inspired them to view connections between women, writing, community formation, and revolutionary ideals.

The Ergo Sum group remedied the frustrations that the lack of an organized women's movement induced in the 1950s and 1960s, evident in the texts of authors like Geel and Gertner. Perhaps more importantly, the group assured the women writers-to-be that Chile's future would have viable local literary models to call on, unlike Gertner's luckless Amalia who floundered due to a lack of authentic progenitors. Like many writers of their times, the Ergo Sum writers extended to real life the mutual magnification process Amalia attempts by claiming women like Gertner, Geel, and Valdivieso. In casting these antecedents in roles as their pioneering foremothers, they implicitly authenticated women's literary past and present, and hailed future groups to continue in their vein. All of these writers multiplied themselves in Castro-Klarén's mirror, bringing into view both themselves and a literary past that defined a role for the woman writer as an agent of socio-political and aesthetic change.

The legacy of the female vein of the Generation of 1950 is captured in their creation of a cosmopolitan collectivity of forward-looking women writers comprised of international influences such as Simone de Beauvoir, Gertner's self-proclaimed muse (personal interview, 10 January 2004). They left behind an autochthonous

prototype of a new female artist as an intellectual and an activist devoted to challenging social norms, bourgeois propriety, and traditional gender roles. For the Ergo Sum group, the creation of an assemblage of viable antecedents undeniably helped them further their goals. As this work delves deeper into the collaborative enterprises characterizing Chilean women's narrative oeuvre between 1950 and the millennium, it is finally possible to appreciate the significance of the initially ambiguous gestures among the women writers of the Generation of 1980 to claim key ancestors such as Geel, Gertner, Serrana, and Valdivieso. Barros summarized the long legacy of the women of the group of 1950 upon providing her opinion about how the members of the Generations of 1950, 1980, and the Group of Cultural Industry are linked. "Yo sigo—y nosotras seguimos—la tradición de las transgresoras," she told Gertner at their first meeting. And with the poise and elegance of a once well-known public performer, Chile's former icon of female artistic disobedience nodded approvingly and took another sip of her martini (personal interview, 10 January 2004). As we turn to those writers of the 1980s who identify Gertner and her contemporaries as their literary foremothers, it will become evident that their participation in collective group projects during the regime constituted more than just their way to act up against the military authorities; it was also a manner of carrying on in the vein of their feminist ancestors.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although the group of writers who began to produce during the dictatorship is most often called the Generation of 1980, it has also been termed the Generación del 73, the Generación post-golpe, the Generación NN, the Generación marginal, and the Nueva escena.

<sup>2</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar coined the term literary “matrilineage” in their book The Madwoman in the Attic.

<sup>3</sup> Margarita Aguirre (b. 1925), María Elena Aldunante (b. 1925), Marta Jara (1919-1972), Maite Allamand (b. 1911), and Margarita Eugenia Sanhueza (b. 1927), among other women writers, belong to the Generation of 1950, but women writers of the Generation of 1980 have not explicitly identified them as models.

<sup>4</sup> Other women writers of the 1980s whom I interviewed in January 2004 share this position, among them Sonia Guralnik and Luz Orfanoz.

<sup>5</sup> Highlighting this connection even further, while Basualto was working on her doctorate at the University of Chile, she began to write a dissertation about the women of the Generation of 1950s, a project she abandoned for personal reasons.

<sup>6</sup> María Carolina Geel is Georgina Silva Jiménez’s pseudonym. Although Cárcel de mujeres is the author’s most important work, Silva Jiménez published a total of five novels under her pseudonym.

<sup>7</sup> In “La narrativa chilena: historia y reformulación estética,” an article that explores the historical progression of Chilean narrative from the colonial epoch to the

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dictatorship, critic Juan Armando Epple situates the Chilean prison testimonial within its larger literary and political context (6). Hernán Valdés's Tejas verdes (1974), Alejandro Witker's Chacabuco (1974), and Aníbal Quijada's Cerco de púas (1976) are the three most well-known examples of testimonials written as a result of time spent in Pinochet's concentration camps.

<sup>8</sup> Several women of the Generation of 1950 published novels about male homosexuality in the 1960s, including Marta Brunet's Amasijo (1962) and Matilde Ladrón de Guevara's Muchachos de siempre (1969).

<sup>9</sup> See Escribir en los bordes, Congreso Internacional de Literatura Femenina Latinoamericana 1987 for conference proceedings and other information about the gathering, including a schedule of the event which lists the titles of all the papers read.

<sup>10</sup> In a personal interview, Barros recalled this event, although she did not clarify if the attendees lauded Geel in panels or conference papers, or if they talked about it informally (18 January 2004).

<sup>11</sup> These writers include Alejandra Basualto (b. 1944), Teresa Calderón (b. 1955), Ana María del Río (b. 1948), and Andrea Maturana (b. 1969), among others.

<sup>12</sup> Barros has re-written at least one of Gertner's erotic short stories. For instance, Gertner's "Niñita" (published only once in 1954 in the Antología del nuevo cuento chileno) critiques the spiritual vacuity of the Chilean aristocracy in a narrative account portraying a young girl's discovery of masturbation. Clearly influenced by Gertner's short fiction, in Barros's short story, "Historias para ventana" (published in

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1986 in her collection Miedos transitorios, de a uno, de a dos, de a todas), a well-to-do teenager's discovery of masturbation gives rise to a critique of the callousness of the Chilean aristocracy during the dictatorship.

<sup>13</sup> Perhaps in opposition to military practices such as rape and torture, eroticism in Chilean narratives by women gained popularity in the 1970s and 1980s as a way to reclaim their bodies. Nonetheless, narrative texts focusing on female sexuality weave throughout twentieth-century Chilean literary history, including the vanguard fictions of María Luisa Bombal, known for her focus on sexually repressed or dissatisfied protagonists who often imagine erotic encounters. For a concise overview of Chilean women's narratives published between 1930 and 1950, see Lucía Guerra Cunningham's Texto e ideología en la narrativa chilena.

<sup>14</sup> As of 2006 Barros had not begun the project.

<sup>15</sup> Spanish presses published translations of de Beauvoir's El segundo sexo in 1962 and Friedan's La mística de la feminidad in 1965. Nevertheless, in the 1950s and 1960s Chileans of the upper echelons often visited European capitals and read books in their original French and English.

<sup>16</sup> The Empresa Editora Zig-Zag S.A., became a major publishing company in 1950s and 1960s at the time that the Generation of 1950 emerged. In 1971, the Allende government purchased the booming company for the state, and renamed it the Editora Nacional Quimantú. The press continued to be a major force in Chilean publishing until military officials closed it, promptly after the 1973 coup d'état. For historical information about the press and its promotion of the literary Generation of

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1950, see the web-site: [http://www.memoriachilena.cl/mchilena01/temas/index.asp?id\\_ut=editorialZig-Zag\(1905-2004\)](http://www.memoriachilena.cl/mchilena01/temas/index.asp?id_ut=editorialZig-Zag(1905-2004))).

<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, sociological studies about the demographics of literary consumption in Chile began in the post-dictatorial epoch. However, given that many of the novels women of the 1950s wrote were reprinted repeatedly suggests many Chilean women were buying and reading them, since the themes of these novels appealed to female readers.

<sup>18</sup> The first official television broadcast occurred in Chile in 1959, but the industry scarcely grew until the 1962 World Cup in Chile. Prior to the Constitution of 1980, which allowed private interests to own television channels, broadcasts were infrequent and all of them were controlled by public universities and the state. Under the new constitution, many new channels began to broadcast during the military regime (<http://www/icarito.cl/especiales/medios/television.htm>). Silent films, on the other hand, were introduced in the late teens. In the early 1960s, under the auspices of the government, a film industry began to take shape in Chile ([http://html.rincondelvago.com/cine-chileno\\_1.html](http://html.rincondelvago.com/cine-chileno_1.html)), providing actors and screen writers like Gertner with support. Notwithstanding its creation of the Departamento de Cine Experimental in 1961 and the Instituto filmico de la Pontífice Universidad Católica in 1962, the government-sponsored film industry never experienced the boom of publishing companies such as the Empresa Editora Zig-Zag.

<sup>19</sup> The Empresa Editora Zig-Zag put out three editions of Cárcel de mujeres within the first three months of its publication, five editions of La brecha in four

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years, five editions of La mujer de sal in four years, four editions of Páramo salvaje in five years, and three editions of La derrota in four years.

<sup>20</sup> López-Cotín has also argued that the emergence of the literary Generation of 1950 changed the concept of the professional woman writer:

Si algo definió este nuevo grupo de escritoras fue precisamente el ubicarse por primera vez sincrónicamente y diacrónicamente en un contexto más amplio que les daba plena conciencia de su profesión de escribir, lo que habría que contribuir a deslindar definitivamente el oficio literario de una manifestación subjetiva personal. (46)

<sup>21</sup> Gertner began her career as an actor in the mid-1940s when she joined the University of Chile's experimental theater group now known as ICTUCH. A gifted performer, she soon became the group's lead female actor, providing her with opportunities to tour with the troupe to urban centers throughout the Americas and Europe (Trujillo 84). During the initial phase of her career, she participated in numerous theater groups, including the Teatro de Arte del Ministerio de Educación, the Teatro de Ensayo de la Universidad Católica, the Consejo de Teatro, as well as in the government-sponsored television and film industries. This intense involvement in drama, television, and the movies traces Gertner's entire artistic profession. From her early participation in experimental theater, Gertner became a movie and television actress, a director, a playwright, a television script writer, and an acting professor. When I interviewed her in January 2004, the seventy-seven-year-old was directing a drama workshop in the coastal town of Isla Negra.



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<sup>22</sup> In her study of Geel's fictional oeuvre, Gladys E. Mora mentions that newspapers published many articles about Geel's crime while she stood trial. She explains that this attention increased when Gabriela Mistral, then the Consul of Chile stationed in New York City, intervened in the case on Geel's behalf. Later, the critic Hernán Díaz Arrieta, otherwise known by his pseudonym "Alone," one of three important literary critics who supported Geel during her trial, encouraged her to write Cárcel de mujeres and helped her get it published (259).

<sup>23</sup> Johanna Russ explains "anomalousness" as one of the eleven strategies that communicates an implicit message of women writers' inferiority.

<sup>24</sup> Lucía Guerra Cunningham wrote a chapter-length study about the contextual factors leading writers of the Generation of 1950 to create existential heroes. In this study, she points out that even though Geel's early work placed her within the aesthetic and thematic vein of the Generation of 1938, her inclusion of existentialist views in Cárcel de mujeres links the author to the Generation of 1950 as well (136).

<sup>25</sup> In her exploration of literary production of African American and U.S. Latina women, Marta Caminero-Santangelo questions Gilbert's and Gubar's reading of literary madwomen as subversives. She reasons madness is imposed on women as a punishment and is: ". . . the final surrender to [dominant] discourses, precisely because it is characterized by the (dis)ability to produce meaning—that is, to produce representations recognizable as meaningful within society" (11).

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<sup>26</sup> Arguing that La derrota is a parody overturning gender stereotypes found in the mass media, Agosin critiques scholars such as Fernando Alegría who have taken Gernter's work at face value, missing the irony at the base of her novelistic oeuvre (Silencio e imaginación 71-2).

<sup>27</sup> As the well-known biblical story goes, Lot, his unnamed wife, and their two daughters lived in the treachery of a hedonistic city. When angels arrive to save their "good" family from the corrupt environment, they instruct them to flee the city and to not look back at their homeland. Upon their escape, Lot's wife glances at the city. As a punishment, she becomes a saline statue fixed in the desert.

<sup>28</sup> Of course there are other examples of women writers whose literary suicides have increased the focus on their biographies, but it is uncertain whether or not Gertner knew of these cases. The most famous example, of course, is that of the American novelist and poet, Sylvia Plath (1932-1963), who foreshadowed her suicide in the novel The Bell Jar (1963). In this alleged autobiography, the woman writer protagonist, Esther Greenwood, attempts suicide. In 1963, Plath made her fiction a reality when she killed herself with cooking gas.

<sup>29</sup> Sylvia Molloy argues that there is a tendency among Latin American women writers to use theatrics to mediate the effects of marginalization. "To those lacking representation," she explains, "mirror images are not only specular they are often spectacular. A strong theatrical stance informs many self-figurations created by Latin American women: the image becomes a role, the text a performance" (112).

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<sup>30</sup> Though post-war feminisms are most often considered in the European and Anglo-American contexts, the war also induced female intellectuals from South America to push for women's liberation. The Holocaust caused intellectuals worldwide to reflect on the human condition. Concurrent with communism's rise in popularity, female intellectuals began to question how leftist rhetoric addressed the needs and grievances of women.

<sup>31</sup> Given the clarity of the biographical parallel that links Geel to the narrative voice she creates to tell her story, I use the terms "narrator" and "author" interchangeably.

<sup>32</sup> In each of the numerous pieces Eltit has written about the book (see Emergencias and her introduction to the Cuarto Propio edition), she suggests a relationship between the women's prison and the convent. Earlier, Agosin devoted a chapter to the topic in her Silencio e imaginación (1984). Likewise, in the introduction to the first, second, and third editions of the novel, Alone idealizes Geel's incarceration as an experience that tied her to a "great" tradition of literary prisoners. However, none of these critics discusses Geel's construction of a literary genealogy by equating the penitentiary to the convent, nor do they reveal how Geel's brilliant use of spatiality explains the crime.

<sup>33</sup> In 1954, the Chilean author and critic Enrique Lafourcade (b. 1927) published Antología del nuevo cuento chileno, a compilation of short stories by the first twenty-four authors to make up the 1950's group. Lafourcade's seminal introduction names and characterizes the Generation of 1950. Once he summarizes

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their biographic and aesthetic affinities, Lafourcade explains that the new group broke with the Social Realist aesthetic of the 1930s and 1940s. During this earlier period narrative authors of the Generation of 1938 represented the proletarian struggle through a *criollista* aesthetic, reproducing the lives and struggles of the nation's workers from the proverbial ivory tower. Lafourcade argues the cosmopolitan writers of the 1950s eschewed the realist-naturalist mode for an aesthetic narrative-for-narrative's-sake, influenced by such thinkers as Spain's José Ortega y Gasset. Lafourcade defines his group as a "generación deshumanizada," "individualista y hermética," "antirrevolucionaria," "vocacionalmente comprometida," "élite," and "egregia" that willfully exchanged artifice for reality, the bourgeoisie for the worker, and universal cosmopolitan views for Chilean autochthony (14-15). Lafourcade, José Donoso (b. 1925), Guillermo Blanco (b. 1926), Claudio Giaconi (b. 1927), and Jorge Edwards (b. 1931) are the more known writers of the generation.

<sup>34</sup> I do not want to over-exaggerate Geel's advocacy for marginal groups, for as Eltit points out in her critical study of Cárcel de mujeres, one perceives a level of classism and homophobia that irritates the contemporary reader (See Emergencias: Escritos sobre literatura, arte y política 95-103). Eltit criticizes Geel, though she points out her antecedent nevertheless assumed a radical position given the times during which she wrote and the socio-political context of the novel.

<sup>35</sup> Eltit expands this spatial triad to include Geel's hermetic mind (Emergencias 97).

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<sup>36</sup> Mora develops this paradox further in a chapter about Geel that describes the two phases that separate the author's career. Geel began her career as a narrative writer with a clear feminist position; however, soon after the publication of Cárcel de mujeres and her release from jail, she became conservative. She opposed the political views of the Popular Unity in the 1970s and she worked for media sources clearly supporting the military regime until 1980 (268).

Performing Body to Book, Artist to Artifact:  
the Feminist Literary Press “Ergo Sum”

In “Hacer mundos,” an unpublished fictional account written in 2001, the Jewish-Chilean writer Sonia Guralnik (1920) describes her protagonist’s participation in Ergo Sum,<sup>1</sup> a group of activist women writers begun in 1977 as a clandestine creative writing workshop. In 1985, these writing circles expanded into the underground feminist press Ediciones Ergo Sum. The Ergo Sum project, which began during the height of the dictatorship, created a space where women could meet, develop skills as writers, discuss issues of feminist concern, and publish their work. Guralnik’s brief portrait-of-the-artist, one of few texts written about the project, reveals both the protagonist’s fixation on writing and on other, more customary forms of female creativity such as cooking, Japanese flower arranging, and fashion. The fictional artist’s memories blur boundaries between intellectual and domestic activity while emphasizing the importance of belonging to a community of women writers where she practiced multiple modes of creative expression:

Mis búsquedas, estudiar Ikebana, inglés, cocina, culminaron en el encuentro de la escritura. Por fin había encontrado algo, un espacio donde el respeto podía ser posible. Acudí a un grupo de literatura en una Municipalidad, y cada asistencia era una fiesta, me preparaba yendo a la peluquería y revisando mi closet, para estar a la altura de la

reunión. [...] [A]cudí al llamado, con otro par de mujeres de mi misma condición. (n.pag.)

Remembering her process of becoming a published writer because of these workshops, Guralnik's fictive alter-ego engages in collective rehearsals occurring in similar *talleres literarios* (workshops) where she constructs and perfects her role as a "woman" writer.<sup>2</sup> Ediciones Ergo Sum, the illegal publisher of Guralnik's first short stories, put out artisan books whose formats highlight the everyday activities of women like Guralnik who met to write, discuss, and promote their works in the *talleres*. Known as book-objects, these multi-media literary artifacts visibly transform women's domestic work into an aesthetic counteracting both military authority and literary convention. In the 1970s and 1980s, Ergo Sum workshops and the book-objects engendered social ties among female authors, created genealogies of artistic collaborators which magnified the influence of history's literary women, and engaged in a cultural, political, and artistic debate seeking to redefine women's roles in general and the function of the woman writer in particular.

In her story, Guralnik pays homage to Pía Barros (b. 1956), the now well-known Chilean feminist and narrative author who founded and directed the workshops and press. The project initiated Barros's dynamic literary career, launching a trajectory that has since transformed her into one of Chile's most prominent contemporary authors. A prolific writer, Barros has published five collections of short stories including Miedos transitorios, de a uno, de a dos, de a todos (1985) and A horcajadas (1990), as well as two novels. Her work appears in

over thirty anthologies in Spanish, English, German, and Italian. Barros is widely known among both literary scholars and the Chilean urban masses. While critics consider her an important figure of Chile's Generation of 1980, the public knows her for her popular workshops and as a vehement feminist who frequently appears on television and in print.

Barros is most famous in Chile for the dozens of creative writing workshops she has directed since Pinochet's military coup, the first being *El taller Soffia*, which formed in 1977. When Barros was a twenty-year-old university student in 1976, she attended *El taller Altazor*, a creative writing group led by Enrique Lafourcade, the writer and critic who belonged to and named the Generation of 1950. Upon entering Lafourcade's group, Barros was already a fervent feminist and militant of the Christian Left Party. While in the workshop, Barros became enraged when she noticed Lafourcade inconsiderately chatting every time the female participants read their stories (García-Cordales 395-6). After the writer insulted Barros and some of her colleagues in this rude manner, a dispute ensued, leading to the birth of the *Ergo Sum* project. Barros recalls the event:

Leí algo que reconozco ahora (como bien lo hizo notar Lafourcade) era un texto pedante y ambiguo. Entonces Lafourcade me dijo: "¿Qué se cree Ud., Cortázar, Borges o qué?", yo le contesté "la Pía Barros", y me respondió afirmando que yo era un pedante. Yo proseguí con una serie de insultos a él y le dije a la gente: "el que quiera que me siga, yo voy a hacer mi propio taller." Salieron varios participantes que



estaban muy descontentos y con parte de ese grupo disidente el año 77 formé mi primer taller literario llamado Soffia, donde llegó todo tipo de gente, la mayoría mayor que yo. (García-Cordales 396)

A number of now well-known Chilean authors participated in the Soffia group, including Elena O'Brian, Pedro Lemebel, Mireya Keller, Sonia González Valdenegro, Ana María del Río, Lilian Elphick, Luz Larraín, Emilio Torrealba, Jorge Montealegre, and Guralnik.

In contrast to Lafourcade's workshop, one of only two literary *talleres* the Pinochet regime permitted at that time,<sup>3</sup> Barros's Soffia group met clandestinely and illegally. Once her group coalesced, Barros altered Lafourcade's workshop template to fit the needs of the group's participants, mostly women hoping to begin writing careers. Unlike Lafourcade's more traditional approach, in which students wrote at home and read their assignments in class to be critiqued by the teacher, Barros highlighted literary production as a series of physical and intellectual tasks and activities achieved through collaboration within the workshop format. Barros implemented an immediate, activity-based style in an attempt to build a cohesive community of women writers and to foment what she calls "un compartir solidario" (García-Cordales 397).<sup>4</sup> She engaged students in relevant literary and extra-literary tasks which sought to create writers conversant with all facets of literary production and cognizant of women's marginality within Chile's literary establishment. Participants composed, edited, and performed short stories; eventually, they organized, published, and marketed anthologies containing their jointly created work.

All the while, a relationship between their literary activities and traditional “feminine” tasks and practices was made explicit, and a clear feminist agenda was advanced. Implicitly equating her workshops to sewing circles, the workshops generated short story writings side-by-side with hand-crafted artisan anthologies. The aspiring women writers who met there formed crucial artistic and social alliances, mediating the isolating effects of the military regime. Barros and the participants expanded the experience they were having in the classroom by taking their literary activities into the streets. They sold, distributed, and performed short story texts on city buses and on bustling corners; they published a feminist magazine; they held creative writing workshops in slums, prisons, and outlying rural sectors; and they sold book-objects to raise money to contribute to church-sponsored soup kitchens.<sup>5</sup>

Military repression marked the early development of the workshops, and forced the group to assume a clandestine profile. The first *talleres*, which were held throughout the capital in the homes of Barros and various participants,<sup>6</sup> met in secret. Hoping to protect herself and her students from the authorities, Barros frequently changed the name and location of the workshops. As students mastered narrative techniques and generated new interests, workshops ended and new groups were created that focused on different topics. Barros often taught several groups of students simultaneously to cater to varying skill levels or to focus on different genres or themes, including the short story, the mini-short story, eroticism, and the detective story.

Later, Barros worked toward manifesting textually the consolidation of a self-sufficient community of women writers upon opening Ediciones Ergo Sum in 1985, the multi-media press that was a natural extension of her workshops. Countering the institutions controlling Chilean cultural production prior to and during the regime (the publishing industry and military censors), she devoted the press to promoting women writers as well as censored graphic and literary artists. The unusual book-objects Ediciones Ergo Sum published before Pinochet's ouster in 1990 protested against both literary convention and military censorship.<sup>7</sup> The press produced short story anthologies disguised as dainty miniatures to rebel against military edicts prohibiting the publication of books without previous governmental authorization.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, these productions—each of which visibly altered and feminized the traditional format of the book itself—ridiculed Chile's culture industry, which Barros viewed as an extension of sexist social mores.

In numerous interviews and conference papers Barros has alluded to the features of Chile's literary establishment which she finds problematic for women writers. Although Chilean presses publish an almost equal number of male and female authors, she argues they are nevertheless sexist institutions created and controlled by men. Notwithstanding the fundamental contribution of presses such as the Empresa Editora Zig-Zag, which played a key role in producing the boom of women writers in the 1950s and 1960s, Barros has asserted that presses frequently publish women writers to meet the demand of female consumers who, at least for the last half-century, purchase and read the vast majority of fictional texts. Though

female consumption keeps publishers in business, she has asserted, book businesses in Chile discriminate against women writers on the basis of content, often refusing to publish “feminist” authors (Galarce 221), and by publishing only those women conforming to a fixed female canon. According to Barros, publishers release women’s fictions as long as they are entertaining family sagas, while historically women’s more innovative and political texts have remained unpublished (“Globalización, Marginalidad y Escritura” n.pag.). Compelled by these grievances, Barros opened Ediciones Ergo Sum to create an independent, female-run publishing house devoted primarily to the efforts of women writers who may not have been published otherwise. Through the workshop activities and the book-object designs, Barros sought to counteract both governmental and literary authoritarianism.

The feminist experimentations underpinning the Ergo Sum project followed the dominant artistic trends of dictatorship-era writings, defined more recently in the work of Chilean cultural critics Nelly Richard, Rodrigo Cánovas, and Eugenia Brito. Richard’s collection of essays La insubordinación de los signos: Cambio político, trans-formaciones culturales y poéticas de la crisis (1994) explores Cánovas and Brito’s early ideas, clarifying the aesthetic differences found in this period of literary production. Richard notes Cánovas’s posture that Chilean writing of this era constituted a “discurso de la crisis,” a “movimiento de combate” implementing an art practice “empanada[. . .] en el desmontaje formal de las ideologías artísticas y literarias de la tradición cultural” (70). In a similar vein to Cánovas’s and Richard’s apt characterization of the Generation of 1980, in her Campos minados (1990), Brito

terms this period in Chilean art the *la escena de la avanzada* and the *nueva escena* (the New Scene), a movement of intricate formal experimentation defined by an attempt to undo artistic, linguistic, social, and political systems (25). All of these critics underscore how the regime's hostile position toward artists and intellectuals fomented a discrete sensibility among New Scene artists which led them to view the art establishment as one of many repressive institutions prevalent in Chile at the time. They suggest that the regime's unabashed implementation of hierarchical systems provoked the counterculture to consider the unequal distribution of power in social, economic, political, and artistic institutions, all of which recall Barros's position and her motivations for creating Ediciones Ergo Sum. Furthering this notion, critic Jean Franco highlights gender consciousness as a major characteristic of Chile's neo-avant-garde: "What distinguished the so-called *avanzada* (vanguard) from the traditional left during and after the military regime was precisely its focusing on the need to disrupt the gender categories that supported both the old authoritarianism and the new" (205). As an integral part of the innovative New Scene aesthetic, the Ergo Sum project counteracted military and male hegemony by instructing women writers to be active literary participants and experimenters as well as political activists. Through the production of visually innovative publications, Barros challenged governing bodies as varied as the dictatorial government, the patriarchy, and the literary establishment.

Although Ergo Sum took part in Chile's New Scene, the group nevertheless chiseled out its own niche within this decidedly experimental artistic tendency. Like

her neo-avant-garde counterparts, Barros innovated on traditional narrative and publication forms to maneuver within military censorship. The feminist goals characterizing her project, however, ultimately complicate Ergo Sum's trouble-free association with New Scene women writers, more commonly associated with authors such as Diamela Eltit (b. 1949) whose experimental narratives baffle even accomplished readers and critics.<sup>9</sup> Contrasting Eltit's hermetic work, Barros's workshops opposed exclusionary practices in literature, calling for a democratization of both literary and political systems in Chile. She countered both the regime and the art establishment by providing everyday people with opportunities to become published writers. Barros encouraged women (and a limited number of men) of varied skill levels and backgrounds to participate as part of an effort to build a utopian literary project that rejuvenated the egalitarian premises of socialism, feminism, and democracy being stamped out by the military. As a result, few of the hundreds of participants in Barros's workshops from 1977 through the millennium have published their own narrative works, the most well-known being Alejandra Basualto, Alejandra Costamagna, González Valdenegro, Guralnik, Andrea Maturana, Ana María del Río, Carolina Rivas, and Lemebel. Recalling María Carolina Geel's experimental fusion of the voices of the female masses in Cárcel de mujeres described in chapter one, Barros made common women the protagonists of the Ergo Sum project, publishing a virtual torrent of writers of all skill levels, most of whom would never publish outside an Ergo Sum anthology.<sup>10</sup>

The profound historical and literary significance of this project, Chile's largest collective feminist literary project and the pinnacle of female intellectual activism, merit a yet unmet critical analysis.<sup>11</sup> Focusing on the project's Pinochet era phase, this chapter illuminates Barros's materialization of the political features at Ergo Sum's core in the deliberate fusion of political activity, literary experimentation, and domesticity. The workshops and the literary artifacts fashioned therein, I argue, constitute interventions designed to question the art establishment, the de facto government, sexist social mores, and the role of women and female artists within these institutional structures. I detail the literary significance of the authors' illegal meetings in workshops where, using performative techniques, they practiced being writers by rehearsing everyday "womanly" activities to assert a right as women to produce art and to participate in political debates. Through clever contortions of military edicts, practices, and the restructuring of the gendered metaphor of fascism, Ergo Sum's workshops, the printed material the Ergo Sum's press generated, and the project's appropriation of the short story genre represent the varied attempts the group made to rekindle the egalitarian communal values that were rapidly vanishing during the Pinochet regime. Finally, I demonstrate how Barros's gathering together of artistic collaborators gave rise to the feminist social and literary movement her forebears had longed for, one that demanded comprehensive social equality and representation in political and cultural life.

## Rehearsing the Writer's Role in Ergo Sum Workshops

Although Barros never defined Ergo Sum as a theatrical group per se, her project nevertheless incorporated numerous performative techniques. Her workshops constituted rehearsals (or training sessions) in which common people, particularly aspiring women writers, practiced activities and performed artistic behaviors to make them self-conscious artistic creators. The book-objects, moreover, were designed to extend the theatrical leanings of their producers. Reiterating the writers' activities, they constitute paper substitutes and tangible representations of the women writers who produced them. In contrast with the scandalous, attention-grabbing behaviors women writers of the Generation of 1950, performance as cultural practice and behavior, rather than a staged spectacle, is the focus of this chapter. Richard Schechner's concept of "restored behavior" underlies my observations of the ways these writers and their literary objects perform. He posits that performance is "twice-behaved behavior" that communities use to reiterate and transform customary cultural behaviors (35-6). In the context of Schechner's ideas, the activities carried out in the workshops and in the book-objects constitute restorations of the domestic and literary practices enacted in the meetings, all of which sought to render visible the social mores subordinating women to men on the one hand and the artistic conventions complicating the participation of women writers on the other.

The severe conditions of military repression of human subjects and the censorship of literary texts heightened the collaborative and performative inclinations of the group's literary activities and its productions.<sup>12</sup> Military officials took part in



acts of brutality in which killing, torturing, imprisoning, and exiling dissenters dramatized the potential outcome of noncompliance before its intended “audience,” the Chilean people.<sup>13</sup> Numerous artistic groups responded to the regime’s chilling theatrical modes of disciplining citizens by adapting performative techniques similar to those carried out in the Ergo Sum workshops. In fact, artistic performances and theatrical groups aesthetically protesting the regime became widespread at the time of the dictatorship.<sup>14</sup> Dramatists such as Juan Radrigán staged plays in Santiago’s ghettos and performance art groups like the Colectivo de Acciones de Arte (CADA) and Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis produced happenings and art actions throughout the city. Lemebel, the co-founder of Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis and a central figure in the Chilean performance milieu, actually began his literary career as a teenager in Ergo Sum’s early workshops. Just one year after the Ergo Sum press published Incontables (1986), Lemebel’s first short fiction collection, he co-founded his performance group. Between 1987 and 1995 he and his cohorts staged over a dozen satirical anti-military happenings in Santiago and abroad that criticized dictatorial politics, homophobia, gender discrimination, and the repression of the artistic counterculture.

The regime’s intent to squelch literary production through censorship and to weaken ties in the counterculture by outlawing meeting in groups unwittingly produced an environment where writers in particular transformed themselves into markedly self-conscious artistic performers who seized on creative activity as a form of social and political engagement in collaboration.<sup>15</sup> Artistic innovation in general

strengthened despite the striking political focus of collective group endeavors; in fact, it was the repressive stance of the military and its own employment of theatrical techniques that inspired artists to experiment with alternative art forms and modes of diffusion. Pinochet's attempts to weaken the counterculture inadvertently intensified collective projects and the counterculture's pressing need to produce art linking creative expression to everyday life during the dictatorship.<sup>16</sup>

Literary workshops were crucial meeting places for up-and-coming writers despite the regime's threatening posture toward artists and intellectuals. During the dictatorship a sizable number of budding Chilean authors defined themselves as artists as a result of their participation in workshops. Within Ergo Sum's *talleres*, writers became participants in the then underground artists' milieu, created their products, and began to build their individual artistic personas. Some of the ideas of cultural studies theorist Pierre Bourdieu illuminate this experience. Bourdieu, who speaks of the relationship between nineteenth-century French writers and the society in which they wrote, makes provocative assertions about how early artists in another context assumed their roles through a day-to-day performance of them. Though Chilean women writers emerged from a context different from the one that interests Bourdieu, his claims facilitate a deeper understanding of how post-coup women writers became artists through what he has termed "the art of living," or a series of performative acts in which artists engage to declare their belonging to the cultural field. Bourdieu argues that the artist's profession, unlike conventional occupations, requires artists to perform their roles continually to defend their precarious place

within these groups. This theatrical way of living shows that artists assume a profession as well as an aesthetic lifestyle. They declare their own belonging to the profession, they see their occupation as an activity inseparable from their everyday lives, and most importantly, they assume radical positions against both dominant bourgeois values and consecrated literary institutions. Bourdieu highlights the importance of group formation and collective reunions, demonstrating how the creatively inclined habitually develop societies in which they transform themselves into gifted exponents of their craft through rehearsals and performances of an artistic way of life (54-60).

In Chile, Barros encouraged women of diverse backgrounds to become artists by enacting creative behaviors linked closely to women's everyday activities. In a typical meeting, for instance, participants might write short stories and assemble a book-object with a needle and thread. This experimental blend of varied practices associating literary art to domesticity pinpoints Ergo Sum's contribution to the gender-conscious and aesthetically innovative New Scene movement. The workshop participants collectively broke military edicts as well as artistic conventions, adding strength and numbers to the growing underground literary milieu.

The notion that political and artistic activity formed part of the everyday life<sup>17</sup> of workshop participants distinguished the Ergo Sum writers. Moreover, their regular group meetings transformed writing from a solitary, personal activity to a form of engagement in collective protest seeking foremost to expand the numbers of female literati united against the military authorities. Unlike the women writing in the 1950s

and 1960s, who yearned for an organized women's (literary) movement, the amassing of female authors during the regime transformed creative writing into a collaborative process about making artists exist and coexist at a time when both were illegal.

The critic Soledad Bianchi stresses the symbolic (and, I would add, performative) features of the oppositional collective group efforts sweeping through Chile during the mid-1980s when Barros began to produce the book-objects discussed in more detail later. Bianchi's assertions about the street manifestations, which began in May 1983, help explain why group cohesion among the Ergo Sum writers was so crucial. Much like Ergo Sum's literary activism, in Bianchi's view, the 1983 protests eluding and ridiculing the authorities were designed to:

. . . express one's own existence[,] [. . .] to create linkages, to feel oneself a part of others, to cease being solitary in order to be united with those who experience the same pain and who, knowing they are not alone, dare to protest because they are no longer afraid, because they have suffered and they are suffering, because they are no longer willing to accept the arbitrary nature of their lives. It is a question, then, of daring to say NO so that the authorities understand that they can no longer count on a total silence based on fear, pain, or indifference. There is an act of daring to refuse, which is one of the principal forms of self-expression, so that others too may become more aware and in the near future will take part in one of these activities that will help them define their own identity. (64-65)

The Ergo Sum workshops and publications sought to contribute uniquely to the activist interventions taking place at the time, seeking a way to make art a protest and a collaborative act challenging political, social, and artistic norms. The workshop in fact brought the literary activism of authors such as Geel to life, fusing in real life (and on paper, as we shall see) a barrage of discontented female voices against military policy. Barros's workshops brought women together, identifying ways to channel, combine, and augment the force of their voices, while increasing the numbers of female "protesters" challenging the military and literary convention.

Barros was not the only writer who led workshops during the dictatorship, but she developed signature traits such as rootedness in the notion of literary production as activity, collective activism, and engagement that distinguished her workshops from those of other workshop leaders. Importantly, her project emphasized the process of making artists themselves as much as the confection of artistic products. To meet this goal, Barros transformed the tradition of the women's literary circle that, since the nineteenth-century, has been a widespread phenomenon throughout Latin America. Although these early intellectual circles at times transformed social, political, and aesthetic models, Barros hoped to augment women's active engagement in art and politics by including women of differing socio-economic and literary backgrounds as well as by identifying activities making women agents in artistic production instead of its mere consumers.<sup>18</sup> She sought to capsize artistic and political authority in the publication of a virtual torrent of women writers trained to view cultural production as a product of many collective activities. Barros's

pedagogical approach recalls the situation of early Latin American avant-garde groups who saw the practice of art in a similar manner, as a series of activities including but not limited to writing. As did these early groups, Barros placed special emphasis on the collective process of creation as well as on published products, as she redefined the social function of the artist and their activities.<sup>19</sup>

The workshops repeatedly broke with several military edicts, namely, the censorship of literature, the prohibition of unsupervised group meetings, and the formation of a faction opposing dictatorial authority and the “integrity” of the patriarchal family structure. Promptly after the coup, Pinochet declared a state of siege and assumed authority to govern through *bandos militares*, or military edicts, instituted to cleanse the nation of the socialist premises associated with Salvador Allende’s government (1970-1973). The bans not only allowed the military to control the nation during the initial moments of chaos, but also sought to disband “subversive” groups. Although women’s writing workshops and short story anthologies were not considered a significant threat to the regime and were hence never the target of violent military repression, the political and literary activities in which Ergo Sum writers engaged clearly violated many military bans.<sup>20</sup> Their activities, had officials noted and considered them menacing, could have been punished by death. That the Pinochet government in fact never targeted the Ergo Sum project despite clear violations of military edicts occurring in the workshops suggests an overall condescension toward women writers in Chile and further underscores Barros’s contention that dominant institutions pay little heed to women

writers. Notwithstanding this apparent disregard, the military's posture toward writing and other countercultural artistic endeavors emphasized a concern with controlling cultural production.<sup>21</sup>

The Ergo Sum writers' use of the workshop and press to discuss and promulgate feminist views responded to Pinochet's formal imposition of traditional gender roles. In La mujer en el Chile militar: todas íbamos a ser reinas (1987), María Elena Valenzuela explains the explicit and implicit measures the regime took to halt the women's movement, which, as noted in chapter one, became wide-spread when women of the Generation of 1950 such as Mercedes Valdivieso, María Elena Gertner, and María Carolina Geel were publishing their fervent critiques of socio-political and literary machismo. Valenzuela explains that Pinochet based his government on a familial metaphor in which he equated his position as chief-of-state with that of the Pope. As the symbolic father of the nation, he cast Chilean citizens as his children, required to follow his lead and obey. Women, she explains, played an important role in this socio-political reconfiguration which sought to stamp out the hope for political and economic egalitarianism thought possible in the early 1970s (Valenzuela 73).<sup>22</sup> The government cast mothers as model compliant citizens responsible for educating the new wave of docile children of the dictatorship. Pinochet made his wife, Lucía Hiriart de Pinochet, the leader of CEMA Chile, a center for mothers historically headed by the first lady. Once the Pinochet family had appropriated the organization, they used it as "an instrument for mobilizing a feminine social base for the regime [. . .] to restore order and harmony [...] necessary for family life" (Loveman 296).

The creation of so many multi-tiered hierarchies, however, unwittingly provided the Ergo Sum writers with an obvious enemy, spurring them to view their literary protest as a retaliatory measure against censorship and traditional gender roles. Barros set up an open door policy that, at least in theory, invited the participation of any woman interested in writing, ostensibly regardless of her political views or skill level.

### **The Text Performs: Ergo Sum's Book-objects**



Fig. 1. In 1985, Barros and graphic artist Hernán Venegas created a logo for Ediciones Ergo Sum.

Image taken from the book-object Cuentos reciclados (n.d.).

The group intervened in the cultural milieu of the dictatorship not only through its members' illicit literary and feminist activities and their "art of living" as writers, but also in the range of performative textual objects Ediciones Ergo Sum



produced. Significantly, the press's logo (Fig. 1) combines graphic and textual elements foregrounding the aesthetic and political proposals carried out in the workshops and in the book-objects it produced. The image manifests the group's blend of literary activity and political activism on the one hand, and popular artisan forms on the other. A prime example of New Scene aesthetics, the emblem conceals political messages in complex literary associations that mocked the military censors, most of whom lacked the hermeneutical skills necessary to decipher its embedded meaning. The logo intermeshes linguistic and graphic signs postponing significance through a strategic avoidance of written—and thus censored—Spanish. Significantly, the only linguistic signifiers it contains—the words *ergo sum*—are in Latin, a dead language. This phrase, of course, brings to mind René Descartes's well-known philosophical rumination: "Cogito ergo sum" (I think; therefore, I am). The chosen phrase thus highlights classical Western thought, and implicitly, a tradition that reserved thinking and writing for a select few; that is, the male elite. Therefore, the logo's replacement of linguistic signs with visual ones subtly exposes the exclusion of some groups from intellectual pursuits while prompting numerous other associations that turn this structure on its head.

The design replaces the word *cogito*—I think—with the image of a calligraphy pen. At surface level, the substitution exchanges the relatively passive act of thinking with the more engaged activity of writing. An even closer observation, however, reveals that the archaic writing device resembles a necktie. This embedded visual addition conjures up the pen's longstanding comparison with symbols of

virility, including the sword and male anatomy itself, as feminist critics such as Gilbert and Gubar point out (6). The many associations evoked in the logo thus create a palimpsest of meaning, constantly deferred, and only completed once the universal symbol of women adorns the masculine pen/cravat, literally and symbolically opening up the traditionally masculine activities of thinking and writing to women. Finally, the textual and visual combination produces a slogan which distorts Descartes'—I think; therefore, I am—to read: "I am a woman who writes; therefore, I am." Importantly, the utterance is thought of and not written out, and thus demonstrates a manipulative process of verbal communication in the absence of ordinary, written Spanish. The mixed-media logo skirts censorship and mocks it, creating a phrase existing as such only in the minds of those willing and able to play the signifying game. As will become evident later on, the logo inaugurated the broader pedagogical objective of the workshops, creating readers as well as writers actively participating in the project's manipulation of military edicts.

The publication of book-objects, all of which are adorned with the press's insignia, also derided the military's censorship of literary texts. Book-objects provided a way to create books without creating them. They comprised a means of producing meaning through visual associations that, as with the logo, demonstrate that written (and thus censored) language is not the only method of literary communication. In 1985, the Ergo Sum Press published its first literary artifact, the original anthologies of a collection that has since grown to include an array of disguised books including handkerchief, shoe, match, and wine boxes; burlap and

recycled bags; hope chests; tarot cards; packages of women's undergarments; books of postcards; suitcases; subway tickets; and letters. Since its first object, Ediciones Ergo Sum has published at least one new artifact per year, producing a collection of well over thirty short and mini-short story volumes and two anthologies of poetry. These literary artifacts question the traditional script of the book itself, citing book conventions to expose and alter them. Further, each of the miniature "books" makes a visual commentary either about the historical moment from which it emerged or about being a woman writer. The book-objects themselves advanced the collaborative and feminist posture of the project in the union of the short fictions composed cooperatively in the workshops.<sup>23</sup> Few publications feature only women writers, but female authors predominate in each publication.<sup>24</sup>

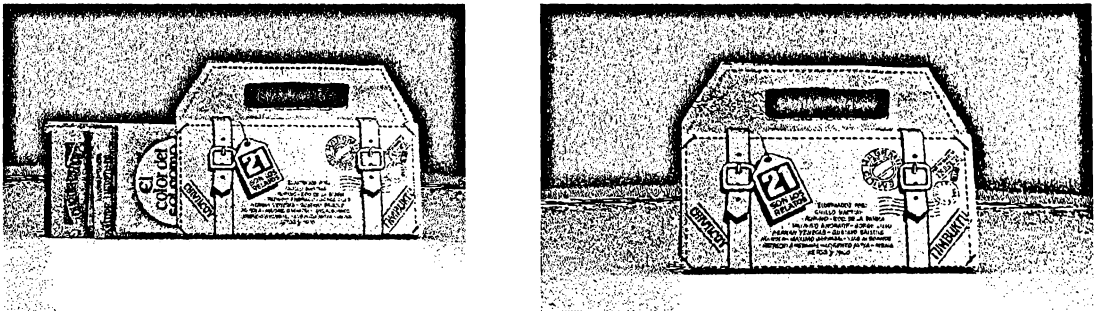


Fig 2. Photographs of 21 son los relatos (1986), a miniature suitcase containing twenty-one illustrated short stories, each by a different workshop participant. The suitcase visually commemorates Chileans living in or returning from exile in the mid-1980s. Photographs by Jon Blumb, Lawrence, Kansas.

The aperture of the Ergo Sum Press in the mid-1980s responded to an upsurge of feminist social movements beginning to gain visibility during the 1983 protests (Valdés 104). As noted earlier, on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1983, during the first national protest against the regime, women took to the streets chanting their now well-known feminist

political slogan, “Democracia en el país y en la casa.” Their mantra captured the demand of the many women’s organizations coalescing at this time, many of which called for an immediate halt to both the military government and gender discrimination. That same year female activists created two political organizations, Women in Defense of Life and MEMCH ’83, an association that rejuvenated Chile’s earlier Movimiento Pro-Emancipación de las Mujeres de Chile, begun in 1935 to “. . . make women visible as an interest group and press for social and economic reforms” (Lavrin 45). Also in 1983, Chilean feminist thinker Julieta Kirwood founded La Casa de la Mujer la Morada, a hub of feminist mobilization where women organized, edited, and published books, and took part in writing contests. Under the auspices of La casa de la Mujer la Morada, which mysteriously burned to the ground during the regime, Radio Tierra commenced, ostensibly the world’s first radio station run solely by women and devoted exclusively to issues of feminist concern (<http://www.lamorada.cl>).

Following the flurry of feminist political activity in 1983, in 1984 the now well-known Chilean feminist press, Cuarto Propio, committed to the publication of books by or about women, was born; Jimena Pizarro opened the Librería Lila de Mujeres, a bookstore providing women and women writers with a place to gather and publicize their works<sup>25</sup>; and Soledad Rojas started the yearly publication of the “Agenda Mujer”, a daily planner with a clear feminist program, noted for its inclusion of inspirational quotes, advertisements of interest to politically minded women, and calendars to chart menstruation and fertility. The increase in women’s activism and

literary activity during the risky mid-1980s suggests that despite the threat of death and torture, the totalitarian government unintentionally provoked an outbreak in feminist activism and literary activity, inciting women to produce their own bookstores, presses, and publications for the first time in Chilean history.<sup>26</sup>

The Ergo Sum press contributed to this flood of feminist literary activity and activism upon initiating its publication of multi-media book-object anthologies, launched in 1985 with the short story collection titled Ergo sum (Fig. 3). The book in disguise gathers twelve short stories written by the participants of Barros's three earliest narrative workshops (the Soffia, Kafka, and Ergo Sum groups) into handkerchief boxes the participants collected. The writers decorated the long, skinny containers and replaced the handkerchiefs with short and mini-short stories printed on pieces of butcher paper folded up into the form of pamphlets.<sup>27</sup> A censored graphic artist illustrated each of the stories, highlighting the multi-media features and the communal imperative tracing all Ergo Sum activities and products.

In the object the exchange of short stories for handkerchiefs heightens its political significance through visual inclusions that replace written language. The handkerchief motif makes a non-verbal but highly charged political commentary about the condition of Chile at the time of its publication, suggesting the state of illness and mourning of the nation. Other visual elements adorning the publication advance this message. For instance, the light-brown color of the trifold it contains recalls human flesh. These textual "bodies," gathered together as they are in the box, are united in a figurative, textual protest that represents the women writers who had

met in workshops to produce them. Extending the connection between the paper object and the human body, the literary trifolds are fastened together with a black bow to bring to mind the cultural custom of tying black bands around one's arm to display the loss of a relative. Thus the trifolds link the women writers' group to a larger community of human subjects united—literally tied together—in mourning. The object, however, challenges the customary use of the black band insofar as it is a cultural costume restricting the behavior of the mourner who wears it. Significantly, the reader of the object, who must untie the band to read the stories, becomes involved in liberating the restrained textual “bodies” from physical, social and military repression. As would be the case with each of the book objects published after this collection, the format of the object repeats the collaborative, action-based, and pedagogical goals of the Ergo Sum project, involving the reader in the completion of the healing and liberating purpose of the workshop. Once the reader frees the texts from the repressive band, the stories become an alternative to the handkerchief the implicit Chilean readers may use to work their way through a period of political and personal loss and grief. As we shall see later, as time progressed, the press continued this strategic linking of paper book-objects with fleshy human bodies.

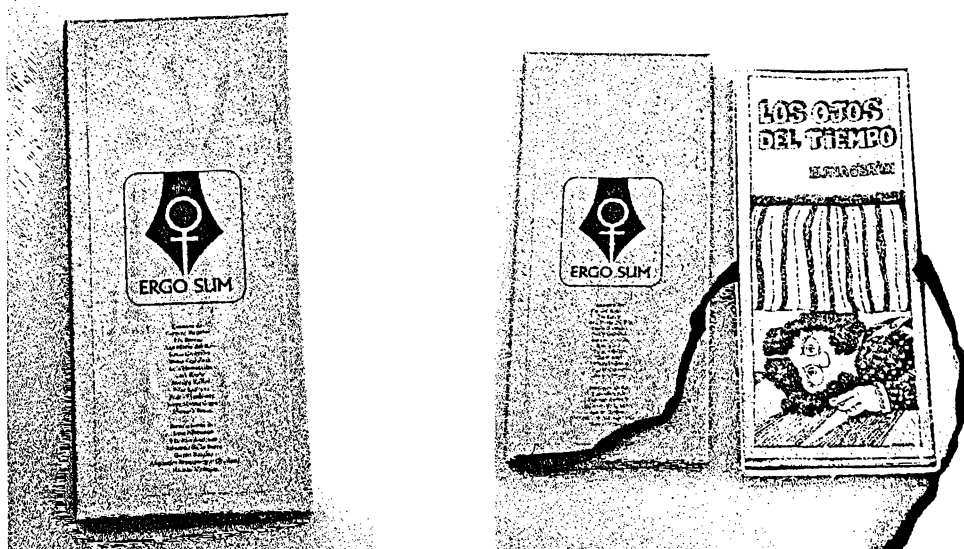


Fig. 3. Photographs of *Ergo Sum* (1985), by Jon Blumb, Lawrence, Kansas.

Other book-object designs evoke the feminist and literary concerns of the group, critiquing the regime's blatant restructuring of the nation on the gendered metaphor of the family and its imposition of traditional gender roles. The press put out book-objects in the form of envelopes, letters, and a mini-hope chest, designs clearly highlighting the predominantly female demographic of the workshop. The letter objects, for instance, showcase the sub-literary epistolary genre often associated with women and the private domain. *Ergo Sum*'s objects, however, recast letters within the neo-avant-garde book-object form to highlight the potential aesthetic value of personal literary forms while bringing to bear the practice of writing letters among exiled Chilean families. Such collections exemplify the way book-objects' designs sought to expose the immediate political circumstances of living during the

totalitarian regime while highlighting the literary establishment's discrimination against women writers prior to and during the dictatorship.

Secretos y pecados (1993) exemplifies a feminist anthology of this vein. The object, pictured in Fig. 4, is fashioned after a hope chest, the piece of furniture women traditionally use to store special household articles in preparation for marriage. Along the same line as the letter objects, the design of Secretos y pecados constitutes an affirmation of the primarily feminine make-up of the group as well as a redefinition of traditional gender roles. The chest replaces the domestic items it would normally contain with short stories, a number of which criticize the regime and sexist social mores. The object communicates this feminist revision through visual and textual means while critiquing military practices. The secrets and sins evoked in the publication's title clearly refer to human rights violations occurring during the dictatorship; the trunk, which is filled with uncountable, unspoken crimes of the then recently deposed military government, however, is meant to be opened.

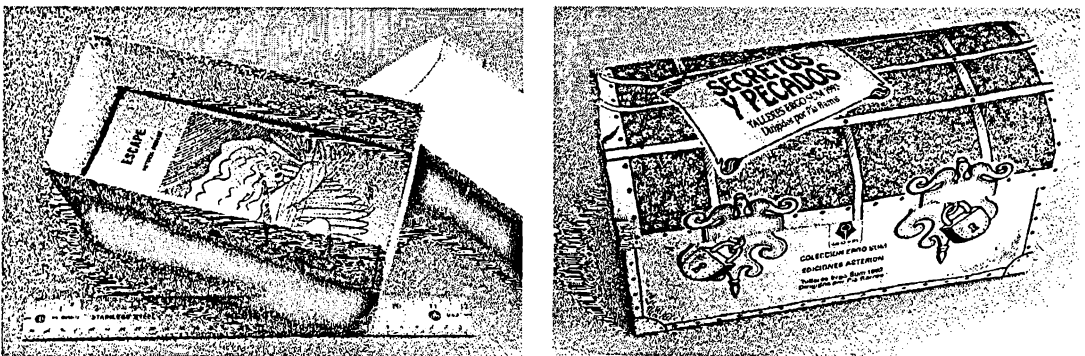


Fig 4. Photographs of Secretos y pecados (1993), by John Blumb, Lawrence, Kansas.



The book-object designs also sought to render visible the art establishment's reproduction of repressive human structures. Through visual media, they reveal how books and presses—though repressed during the dictatorship—may advance deeply rooted social, political, and economic institutions. Though visible contortions of the literary convention of the book itself, the designs show how writers who refuse to play certain literary games, whose rules are defined by the culture industry, may suffer forms of systematic exclusion or elimination. Barros, who has claimed she invented the book-object to “desnaturalizar el libro” and to “hacer un libro sin hacer un libro en una época en la que no se podía” (personal interview, 18 January 2004), sought to use her experimental formats to retaliate against the both regime and the literary establishment's repressive control over books and those who write them. Her distortion of the book form exposes the publishing industry as an establishment reproducing itself as a system, at times limiting innovation and stifling the voices of female authors by correlating literary value with male tastes, worldviews, and experiences. Through her literary artifacts, Barros did not propose to eliminate books, but to unveil the restrictive guises of the publishing industry and its control over the content and form of texts.

The press's visible denaturalization of the book resembles early avant-garde groups' predilection to capsize established artistic institutions and forms by creating productions commenting on the world through non-realistic media while calling attention to art as an institution. Peter Bürger explains this vanguard propensity to innovate on preceding models when he distinguishes between the “organic” work of

art, drawing attention away from the “mediation” of the artist, and the “non-organic” works of the avant-garde that underscore art’s role in interpreting and creating reality (55-6). Similar to the vanguards Bürger describes, the peculiar form of the book-object shows that books themselves are artificial products fabricated through human interventions that reproduce ideologies. During the regime, the social, economic and political factors controlling the publishing industry became immediately visible. The visible critique of the literary establishment extended in book-objects constituted a way for women to express grievances about the hierarchical structures controlling book production at a time when their male contemporaries, who were also suffering from systematic oppression, became more likely to empathize with their feminist proposals.

Amid the visible critique of literary tradition, book-objects implement literary conventions as needed to advance the project’s goals. The first object, Ergo sum, for example, includes a preface/manifesto pasted on the inside of the box’s lid, an inclusion that mirrors a tradition among Chilean writers to define literary generations and movements in the introductions of inaugural short story collections.<sup>28</sup> In the Ergo Sum manifesto, Barros outlines the mission of the press and the workshops and describes the project’s political and artistic objectives. Here she challenges the regime’s continuation and support of gender, political, and economic hierarchies and explains the basis of her counterattack on military and literary authority carried out through her publication of writers and graphic artists of varied skill levels and genders in an egalitarian fashion. Adding a third dimension to the double militancy

feminist activists were advocating (demanding democracy in their homes and in their country), Barros proposed a utopian democratization of politics, gender relationships, and art.

Barros advanced her egalitarian objectives upon underscoring the value of diversity in the manifesto. Her publishing project, she asserted, sought to challenge authoritarianism directly, collaboratively, and symbolically through the incorporation of diverse “minority” groups, forms of artistic expression, and materials:

Juntos, publicamos uno a uno los trípticos de esta colección como una forma de trabajo editorial interdisciplinario y prácticamente artesanal. Esto es una forma de—sin poder editar un libro—hacer un libro; también de reconciliar el papel de envolver con el arte o, como diría un amigo, de ‘convertir la miseria en dignidad’. Es una forma, así lo hemos querido [. . .] de manifestarnos—mujeres y hombres—contra las condiciones que producen la marginalidad no sólo de la mujer sino también de los artistas y de los receptores de este arte gráfico o literario. (“Preface” n.pag.)

In fact, the incorporation of a handful of male writers and graphic artists bolstered the collective’s feminist message. When Barros began to welcome a limited number of male participants into the group, a contrast was created that rendered visible the need to grant women equal citizenship in the art world. The unequal ratio of male to female participants comprised an ironic reversal of literary norms, showing women’s historically marginalized position within literary spheres. Barros clarifies in the

manifesto how the disproportionate representation of women reinforced the egalitarian goals of the project: “Con estas ediciones pretendemos difundir, principalmente, el trabajo literario ‘femenino’. Por eso esta caja con cuentos escritos, en su gran mayoría por mujeres. No únicamente, porque no se trata de marginar dentro de la marginalidad” (“Preface” n.pag.).

Few men participated solely in the creative writing workshops, but nearly all of the censored graphic artists who illustrated the short story trifold and book-object exteriors were men. Many of the graphic artists are now well known: graphic artists Eduardo de la Barra and “Palomo” (Pedro Palomo) participated; the popular cartoonist “Hervi” (Hernán Vidal) contributed many illustrations; “Rulfino” (Alejandro Montenegro), a principal illustrator of the magazine Hoy, collaborated in the project; and “El Negro” (Hernán Venegas) and Luis Albornoz designed many of the book-objects.

In 1989, Barros even directed a creative writing workshop for the graphic artists, hoping to involve them in the writing process and to compensate them for their work with a trade. Their stories and those of other male participants were published in book-objects, helping Barros to materialize her feminist opposition to the marginalization explained in her manifesto. Yet, as Venegas and Albornoz lamented, as illustrators they were granted the first opportunity to publish interpretations of the short stories instead of women artists or critics (personal interview, 7 January 2004). Despite this clear inconsistency with the goals of the project, produced by a paucity of female graphic artists,<sup>29</sup> the inclusion of men in the Ergo Sum project largely

advanced the project's liberation politics. With the readers' attention fixed on the book as an institution, book-object designs produce a visual and textual equivalent of the socio-literary and political critiques being discussed in the workshops. Barros's deliberate inclusion of a grossly disproportionate ratio of female to male authors prompts readers to reflect on female artists' relatively scant representation in literary criticism, anthologies, and in the canon, especially prior to the flurry of feminist activity taking place in the 1980s. This surprising reversal of the norm renders visible forms of institutionalized silencing that are discrete, unlike military censorship.

Book-objects further reveal Barros's objective to link aesthetic experimentation and women's everyday domestic tasks to invalidate sexist social mores. Within the Ergo Sum project sewing, cutting out, pasting together, folding up, organizing, filing papers into boxes, and the preference of beautiful miniature objects become avenues furthering gender liberation. Barros lent complexity and political significance to women's writing as well as domestic chores traditionally considered insignificant. As she recast women's activities within the experimental book-objects, she suggested the power of women's work and female creativity to revolutionize art, politics, and everyday life. Barros contorted women's daily routines, encouraging the literary potential to spring from women's allegedly insignificant labor while viewing the possibility of transforming domestic activity into a form of political engagement.<sup>30</sup>

The unique format of the short stories which book-objects contain comprises another strategic adaptation demonstrating the group's disdain for the military

government and literary convention. The use of butcher paper trifolds with a brochure-like appearance—the principal layout of the stories found inside most of these artifacts—mocked the military, further aligning the project with the oppositional, experimental, and activist New Scene movement. Significantly, the design masked the group’s illicit literary activities, precisely because brochures do not fall into the category of literature. Yet the brochure constituted another manipulation of military laws. The trifold form brings to mind pamphlet literature, a form known to include blatant political agendas. The leaflet hence furthered the press’s devotion to political causes as well as its transference of common objects into experimental art.

In featuring leaflets (and often a virtual torrent of them) in their literary artifacts, the Ergo Sum group parodied the regime’s intended inundation of the nation with messages through the mass media. Their integration of this form challenged the regime’s own use of the leaflet format to disseminate pro-military propaganda. Promptly after the coup, the military assumed control of the mass media, including television and radio.<sup>31</sup> The government was aware of the power of the press; consequently, it outlawed radio and television stations, magazines, and other print material at will, at times appropriating these venues to further its own agenda.

The leaflet form expressed the Ergo Sum group’s activist aesthetic as well as its association with other New Scene projects taking place at the time, especially the group of daring intellectual activists belonging to CADA (the Colectivo de Acciones de Arte). In 1981, CADA staged “¡Ay Sudamérica!”, an audacious multi-media

intervention that incorporated pamphlets and the military's own weaponry. The action began with a formal letter addressed to the Air Force that not only requested permission to carry out their spectacle, but also asked for the six small airplanes needed to complete it. Unsuspectingly, the government agreed to the project, and on June 12<sup>th</sup> of that year, a cadre of ex-military pilots flew the borrowed planes over Santiago. Above the city streets members of CADA on board the airplanes threw some 400,000 pamphlets from the windows (Neustadt 33-35). Much to the authorities' dismay, the pamphlets peppering the streets contained CADA's manifesto and a subversive poetic message to the people below.

Clearly influenced by CADA's intervention, in the mid-1980s Barros and her cohorts began to publish the literary trifolds eventually featured in book-objects. For example, the group printed an illustrated brochure containing Teresa Calderón's (b. 1955) poem, "Mujeres del mundo: unidos" (1985), a blatant call to political action with an obvious feminist and socialist message. Its refrain—"Arriba mujeres del mundo"—repeated with slight alterations a clear message urging both Chilean women and, by extension, the women of the world to gather in protest. Calderón's poem was distributed throughout Santiago, offering an early example of how these writers engaged in activities that linked writing, literary activity, and political activism.

Such political-literary acts occurred frequently among Ergo Sum writers. In the early 1980s, group participants even handwrote and circulated mini-short story messages and verses opposing the regime. Scraps of paper and leaflets, Barros



VERBA CUMPRON

Amigos del Gobierno de España y Juntos  
y de la Asociación de Escritores de España  
Entonces, al Gorgo y Lluvia 2000/01/02



MUJERES DEL MUNDO UNIDOS

Arriba mujeres del mundo  
la buena fe  
y la mala buena para el alma  
los momentos de los pobres y angustiados de las ricas:  
la galleta blanca y la moca a porquería  
la palma huerca y la media pelo  
la cabra leca y la alrecha a cuartos a grande  
cambiera de cabra  
y la que vale al edit  
la que se vicia cosa a mala al aze  
la que cayó en cana o al litro  
y la carta del agua  
las cenizas que para hacer y jueces de arco  
la que es en las hechas y las hojas vivas  
la que se mata a mujer  
o en cancha de otros vata

La mala loca la mala rica  
poderosa a mala  
la que no vea no vea no vea que la vea  
y la que "te da un trozo" que la se amada"  
Arriba mujeres del mundo  
la cruzada que sea los dioses del camacho  
los jones del plato  
y las cenizas con la mano del goma  
las cosas de blanco y rojo  
las de blanco  
las de blanco y negro y damas  
todas las cosas y las cosas de blanco  
la blanca de color y la perla de sangre  
la blanca que se pasa de uno y la blanca mestada  
la que se hace la torta si lo a la mano  
la que no sabe nada de nada  
y esa que se las sabe por libro.

La madre del niño sería  
madre hay una sola  
y las que se salvan de madre.

Arriba mujeres del mundo:  
la cabra que canta pidiendo lazanca  
la que como le cantan hada,  
la que se mata al en la portada.

Arriba todas las que tengan  
solo en que mundo  
la que pasa la vida  
y la que se para de vida  
la apreciada y la desapreciada  
la que se río en la vida  
y la que río último ser mejor:  
la que se ama la carne la vida  
la que se ama la vida  
la que se ama la vida  
la que se ama la vida  
la que se ama la vida  
y la que no se ama la vida  
la que se ama la vida  
o por la mano de Dios.

Que se alben las mujeres con sales  
la perdición  
y la que se las ha perdido todas  
la perdida que se pasa para la vida  
la que nada lleva ni de aponte  
y esa que apunta con las palabras.

Fig. 5. Photographs of "Mujeres del mundo: unidos" (1985), by Jon Blumb, Lawrence, Kansas.



recalled, were easy to distribute in Chile at that time; ironically, because the military had trained Chileans to be obedient, pedestrians rarely refused to accept or read materials offered to them in the streets (personal interview, 18 January 2004). Barros at times even charged a paltry sum for these mini-publications as a symbol of the continued vitality of the literary market, even with the censorship.

Despite all these utopian views, the press failed to implement effective marketing strategies and thus never made any money beyond the recuperation of yearly investments in materials.<sup>32</sup> Though the participants worked in collaboration to confect book-objects, making them by hand was laborious and slow, so the press seldom generated many of any one book-object, and typically only a sparse one hundred copies was made. Once the collaborators claimed copies for themselves, their friends, and family members, few, if any, objects remained to sell. Recalling one bittersweet failure to sell book-objects, Barros reminisced about an attempt to sell some of the objects at a Santiago bookstore during the regime. The shoppers, however, mistook the publications for window decorations (personal interview, 18 January 2004). Further underscoring inconsistencies in the project, few of the objects include basic information like publication dates, suggesting that these writers never dreamed book-objects would endure or would one day spark scholarly interest or become valuable collectibles. Their urgent fabrication of these inexpensive and ephemeral books, however, ultimately added to their novelty and critical appeal.

The press experimented with technology as basic as ditto machines, mimeographs, and hand-writing as well as with unconventional formats other than the

trifold and the book-object. It produced, for instance, a makeshift magazine called Nos=Otras, a glaringly rudimentary feminist periodical dedicated to literary criticism, political commentary, news, and literary texts.<sup>33</sup> In Nos=Otras, a tiny group of women writers, activists, and literary scholars published literary reviews, poems, narrations, and drawings. The black and white magazine consisted of a few sheets of paper folded in half. The magazine replaced colored ink and glossy paper, materials normally used to make magazines, with inexpensive, everyday materials and simple technology: white paper, black ink, drawings, and a rusty mimeograph. The use of these poor materials nonetheless illustrated the capacity of the masses to produce art and to disseminate news and ideas, regardless of the law or a lack of money.

The magazine contributed implicitly to Barros's and many of her New Scene contemporaries' creation of a genealogy of female intellectual activists. The editorial board, composed of the creative writers Barros, Carmen Berenguer and Calderón as well as the literary critic Liliana Trevizán, adopted the name of the early Chilean feminist periodical Nosotras, first published in 1931. Delia Ducoing, an influential writer and reporter who participated in Chile's early emancipation movement, founded the original journal during the women's liberation movement of the early part of the century (Lavrin 296). In recognizing Ducoing's influence on the press, the group identified another way to creatively expand its membership. Other clandestine publications of the early 1980s, moreover, such as the magazines La Castaña and Obsidiana, which Barros's husband, Jorge Montealegre co-founded in 1981 and 1983

respectively, also inspired Barros's experimental handouts, magazines, and book-objects.<sup>34</sup>

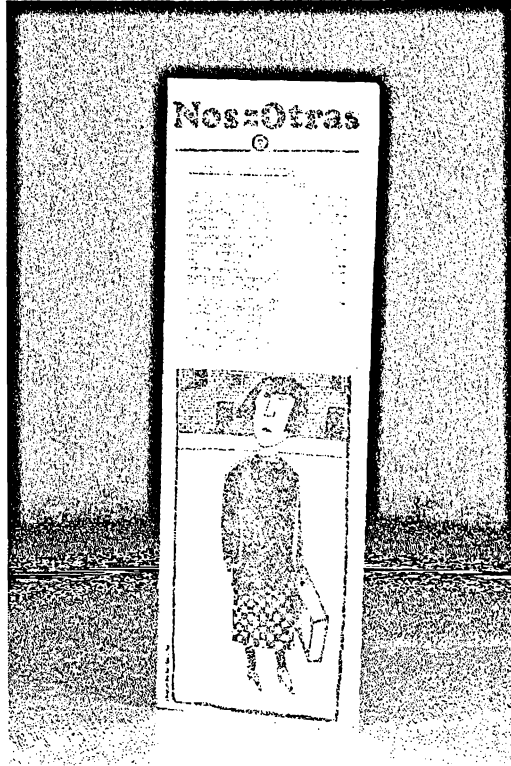


Fig. 6. Photograph of the second number of Nos=Otras (1985), by Jon Blumb, Lawrence, Kansas.

### **The Mini-short Story: a Strategic Performance of Women's Narrative Power**

A preference for the short and mini-short stories in book-objects advanced the collaborative, experimental, and political features characterizing the Ergo Sum group and publications such as the Nos=Otras magazine. Much like the book-objects' designs, which were imbued with utopian ideals and political messages, Barros developed a theory linking women's behaviors to short story telling, on the one hand, and the short story genre to the context of the dictatorship on the other. "Todas las

mujeres nacimos cuenteras,” she affirmed in a personal interview. “Cuando nos pintamos para seducir a alguien o no seducir a nadie, siempre estamos jugando a la ficción. Cuando mentimos a nuestros jefes al llegar tarde al trabajo, estamos contando cuentos. Usamos el cuento para inventarnos” (18 January 2004). Barros’s ruminations (essentialist as they are) describe tendencies all humans share. Barros encouraged her students, asserting that women in particular hone narrative skills unconsciously as a result of social conditions that subordinate them to men and force them to be inventive and manipulative. Recalling the matrilineal literary sequence being created at this time, which imaginatively united the writers of the 1950s with those of the 1970s and 1980s, Barros and her contemporaries of the Generation of 1980 strengthened their position as artists by drawing creative parallels between their work and that of other female artists. Barros’s appropriation of the short story for women was just another part of her multifarious effort to promote women writers and to provide them with opportunities to collaborate.

More pragmatically, Barros’s claim on brief fiction made the collaborative features essential to the project’s feasibility. The concision of short and mini-short stories allowed many authors to be included in each book-object, permitted the press to print both stories and illustrations on single sheets or scraps of paper, and enabled all participants to write, share, and critique a new story in every workshop meeting.<sup>35</sup> In contrast with novels, the succinctness of brief fiction enabled Barros to publish quickly with limited funds and few materials. She even concluded that the brief genres in and of themselves, regardless of the words they contained, communicated

feminist messages about the life of the woman writer before and after the regime. The domestic duties the Pinochet regime encouraged women to reassume, coupled with the contradictory need for women to generate income due to the widening economic gap neoliberal economics induced, theoretically hampered large, time-consuming projects. At least in theory, with so much to do, little time and money remained to undertake the laborious, long-term project of writing novels. Hence Barros's near-exclusive focus on short and mini-short stories in her workshops served political and economic needs, communicating messages that remained largely unstated.<sup>36</sup>

The performed declamation of short fictions within and outside of workshops constituted yet another mocking subversion of military censorship. Like the non-book book-objects, the group poked fun at the censors when they began reciting short stories. In doing so, they encountered a way for ephemeral literary utterances to replace that which was written, recalling the context of military censorship and the eradication of books. Soon after the coup Pinochet outlawed "subversive" literature and burned books in public, hoping to cleanse the nation of revolutionary ideas.<sup>37</sup> Fearful of detention, torture, and murder, many Chileans got rid of their personal libraries. The oral performance of short story writings, on the other hand, demonstrated the futility of such bans. Not only did these recitals illustrate the regime's inability to expunge dissident thought, constituting a way for the Ergo Sum writers to act out against the authorities, but public literary performances also transformed fiction writing into an immediate collective experience. Literature

became the excuse to bring people together, to expand the members of the counterculture, and to mediate the isolating effects of military policy. These performative interventions, of course, relied on the brevity of the narrations, many of which consisted of only a few sentences. The mini-short stories being recited in the workshop could be memorized, uttered in public, rememorized, and retransmitted to the audience, theoretically existing and being shared, even if left unrecorded.

The collaborative, activist nature of the project symbolically connected the Ergo Sum group to other assemblies of female artists producing political art in workshops during the regime; among these, the *Arpillerista* workshops stand out.<sup>38</sup> In 1974, women residing in Santiago's shantytowns began to attend a workshop under the auspices of La Vicaría de la Solidaridad, a liberal offshoot of the Catholic Church formed to defend the human rights of Chileans. Unlike the Ergo Sum group, heterogeneous as it was, the *Arpilleristas* were all poor women whose children, grandchildren, or spouses had been detained or disappeared by the military. Consequently, they met and began to manufacture appliqués (*arpilleras*) to share their stories and to generate much needed income in the absence of their husbands. They sewed together pieces of recycled cloth, tattered photographs, and other everyday materials onto burlap bases to tell personal stories of military violence with images and, sometimes, embroidered words. International consumers purchased their graphic testimonies, generating income for the women and their families, and augmenting national and world-wide consciousness about human rights violations occurring in Chile. The systematic removal of men from these already impoverished families

increased many women's need for financial independence, an ironic outcome given the regime's encouragement of women to reassume traditional gender roles (Valdés 104). In fact, the butchery of the counterculture increased the numbers of female heads of households, inadvertently spurring feminist consciousness and inducing women to create and take part in oppositional movements (Valdés 104-106). While the Ergo Sum writers created a space for women to write against the political and literary authorities, the earlier *Arpillerista* group recast an ostensibly insignificant "female" handicraft possessing broad historical significance for Chilean women.<sup>39</sup>

The Ergo Sum group refashioned the political and aesthetic purposes of the *Arpillerista* workshops in book-objects, rekindling the use of recycled or waste materials to produce protest art. The butcher paper used in dictatorship-era book-objects was notably the cheapest paper product available and a material that one could purchase easily without arousing suspicions. Like the *Arpillerista* group, Ediciones Ergo Sum produced book-objects with little money, though many of the group's members belonged to the middle- and upper-classes. Thus, the integration of the inexpensive, low-grade butcher paper constituted a modest gesture of solidarity with the *Arpillerista* group, a move that challenged both class divisions and the frontiers dividing "high" literary art from popular artisan forms. Fostering connections and community through art, both workshops made women's artisan creativity political; both confected clandestinely and collaboratively *objects d'art* protesting the regime; both groups' use of everyday materials illustrated the regime's impotency, asserting the right of the masses and of women to produce art; and both

combined visual and graphic elements. Further, the *arpilleristas*' confection of handicrafts—allegedly “insignificant” women’s work—modeled a way for women to become active political participants, exposing the sexist underpinnings of political and artistic institutions by adhering to and contorting traditional gender roles.

In fact, one early book-object, Ensacados: 26 cuentos ilustrados (n.d.), clearly pays homage to the *arpilleristas*, fertilizing the matrilineal sequence described in chapter one and adding to Barros’s growing collection of literary artifacts (Fig. 7). The Ensacados object gathers loose illustrated short story trifolds in a hand-sewn miniature burlap bag; it is yet another apparently inoffensive precious container highlighting the group’s female composition and its clever twisting of military edicts. The materials chosen to make this anthology—butter paper and burlap—fused the preferred supplies of both the Ergo Sum and the *Arpillera* workshops. Further, the object, as well as the short stories contained therein, carried on the thematic vein of the *Arpillera* group, constituting multi-media denunciations of military practices.

Serving many functions, the numerous unstated connotations evoked in the design challenged military practices. By maintaining the original form of the bag, the object brought to bear a known military practice of putting the corpses of the disappeared into burlap bags before discarding them in the Mapocho River, the waterway flowing through downtown Santiago.<sup>40</sup> Ensacados reversed the dictatorship’s intended erasure of the bodies of dissidents and its literal and figurative way of bagging them or “ensacándolos.” While the regime was making a spectacle of its elimination of the counterculture by displaying the bodies being carried away in



bags, Barros's book-object, which contains abundant brief narratives alluding to the stories of Chile's dead, cites the military practice to reverse it. The anthology's form and content pulled censored stories out of the bag while the words and images printed on the flesh-colored butcher paper trifolds posed as the resurrected bodies of the disappeared, come back to speak and to haunt. The design therefore performed a textual and a corporeal demonstration, suggesting a relationship between short story texts printed on paper and real human bodies. Similar to other book-object designs which also engage the reader in the collective purpose of the workshops, the layout of Ensacados invites readers to partake of the counter effort to form community and to engage in acts of collective defiance despite censorship and the prohibition of unauthorized group meetings. The burlap object called on a complicit reader to literally open the bag and thus, metaphorically, open, reveal, and confront those bodies and narratives the regime was systematically causing to disappear. Hence, the design incorporates the reader into an ever-growing imagined community of people united through art to question the regime's legitimacy.<sup>41</sup>

Barros's creation of alliances, genealogies, and solidarity that united the living with the deceased and the real with the imaginary parallels the theories of cultural critic Joseph Roach, whose book, Cities of the Dead (1996), explores the way cultural identity is formed and altered through collective performances of remembering and forgetting in the circum-Atlantic region. Roach is particularly interested in the juncture among resurrected bodies, performance, and community-formation as groups assert and redefine collective identities by revisiting their dead in public

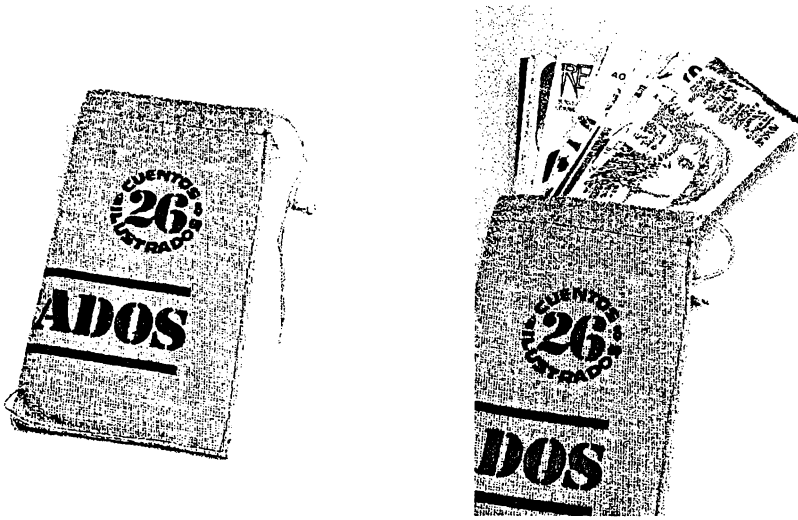


Fig 7. Photographs of Ensayados: 26 cuentos ilustrados, by Jon Blumb, Lawrence, Kansas.

performances. A similar resurrection process occurs in the book-object Ensayados, which refashions the bodies of the disappeared out of makeshift paper products. Roach's concept of the effigy, or those bodies that come alive through public performances and alter group identity, facilitates a deeper understanding of the way the improvised paper bodies in the book-object Ensayados countered the regime.

Roach explains:

When effigy appears as a verb [. . .] it means to evoke an absence, to body something forth, especially something from a distant past [. . .]. Effigy is cognate to *efficiency*, *efficacy*, *effervescence*, and *effeminacy* through their mutual connection to ideas of producing, bringing forth, bringing out, and making. *Effigy's* similarity to performance should be clear enough: it fills by means of surrogation a vacancy created by the

absence of an original. Beyond ostensibly inanimate effigies fashioned from wood or cloth, there are more elusive but more powerful effigies fashioned from flesh. (36)

Ensacados, with its corporeal contours, flesh-like butcher paper and burlap, became a surrogate, a resurrected human being, once expunged from the public sphere. These paper bodies manifest communities, symbolizing and uniting the disappeared, the Ergo Sum writers, and the *arpilleristas*. Military bans prohibiting literary production and group gatherings figuratively bagged artists, making public demonstrations difficult and dangerous. Reversing this intent through a process of metaphorical embodiment, Ensacados enabled writers to expose themselves and the deceased imaginatively, bringing out the living and dead bodies and making those systematically erased—women and the disappeared—participants in public life. Members of the Group of Cultural Industry explored in chapter four eventually expanded on and updated the ghost motif found in numerous book-objects and captured in Ensacados.

The embellishment of short story anthologies like Ensacados, doubling as artisan handicrafts and literary artifacts, enhanced the collaborative and popular structure of the Ergo Sum group, illustrating Barros's politicized fusion of insignificant "womanly" art forms and short story-telling.<sup>42</sup> Emphasizing again the creation of a matrilineal literary sequence, her workshops continued the practice among women of using either literature or domestic tasks as an excuse to get together. Though at times the press contracted factories to make its more elaborate

literary objects such as the hope chest, participants generally made each book-object manually and collectively. Gathering materials, writing, editing, folding, sewing, stapling, cutting out, organizing, pasting, selling, distributing, reading texts aloud, critiquing, conversing, acting like writers, and arranging anthologies asserted women's active role in the public and private sectors. Through their labor, the writers appropriated military tactics such as silencing and its gendered restructuring of the nation, using them ironically to maneuver as women and as artists against the regime.

In a similar vein, Margorie Agosin's analysis of the *Arpillerista* group illustrates the relationship between bodily activity, women's art, and the economics of cultural production during the dictatorship. Her reading sheds light on the Ergo Sum writers as well, particularly their motivations for publishing clandestinely, which encompassed the economic, artistic, and political empowerment of its female participants.<sup>43</sup> Agosin writes of the *arpilleristas*:

El coser, tejer, y bordar, son y representan escrituras femeninas que cuentan lo que la palabra o el habla no pueden decir. Estas artes representan escrituras que utilizan el cuerpo mismo como medio de moldear esta expresión: dedos, uñas, brazos. Así, las mujeres que bordan o cosen abandonan el rol tradicional de consumidoras de arte para convertirse en productoras que trascienden ese orden que las relegó a la marginalidad para incorporarse activamente al proceso de producción de cultura. (523)

The human body was crucial to both the *Aprillerista* and Ergo Sum groups, as both stressed art as active creation, a physical and collaborative putting together of their respective objects, and a series of bodily doings and acts exploiting femininity to cripple dominant institutions. Both groups made their bodies perform traditional, inherited, and allegedly insignificant “female” activities like sewing, yet by engaging in these tasks in the prohibited space of the workshop, they altered their political significance.

Taking this one step further, it is worth turning to Roach’s concept of kinesthetic imagination, the idea that the body stores and alters memory. An heir to specific ways of moving, gesture, and habit, the body possesses a “way of thinking through movements—at once remembered and reinvented—the otherwise unthinkable” (27). The Ergo Sum writers’ and the *aprilleras*’ embodied performances of traditional and inherited “female” activities like sewing became a way to do the undoable—that is, create art during the regime—through movements, gestures, and practices bequeathed to them by former generations of similarly creative women. In short, it constitutes a way to justify artistic practice through creative imaginings, highlighting a timeless matrilineal sequence and linking female habits and habitats (all things domestic) to high art and political participation.

The Ergo Sum group capitalized on their collective identity as women writers of short fiction living in the perils of a dictatorship by connecting their work to a classical text, The Arabian Nights, implicitly situating the origins of their matrilineal sequence at their chosen genre’s source. In this book, fiction’s first known female

short storyteller, the legendary muse Scheherazade, employs her intelligence and her narrative savvy to trick her husband, a tyrannical, misogynistic king. Before his nuptial union with Scheherazade, the king had married a new maiden each day, having her beheaded the following morning. With the help of her loyal sister and her narrative talents, Scheherazade breaks her husband's violent cycle by entertaining him with her stories. Summoning Scheherazade's infinite nightly ritual, the Ergo Sum writers gathered a torrent of female-authored short stories in book-objects. The Ergo Sum writers and their classical counterpart were all female narrators living under the tyranny of a despotic, violent, and unjust man; they used wit and intelligence to maneuver creatively, despite and because of their dangerous environment; and their projects were collaborative, their stories theoretically infinite. Like Scheherazade, who narrated for her own survival and that of the potential new marriages her stories postponed, the female participants of the Ergo Sum project viewed their artistic endeavor as an act of solidarity and survival which affirmed life over death.

Barros claimed the mini-short story genre to advance her political and literary objectives. Like her book-objects, *microcuentos*—or exceedingly brief short stories—visually represented the link between New Scene innovation and femininity being forged in the workshops and in the press's dainty miniatures. Including a bare minimum of words, mini-short stories often incorporate intricate word plays, double-entendres, and deeply embedded literary associations, making the imaginative acumen characteristic of Scheherazade as well as the decidedly self-conscious

employment of language of Chile's New Scene pivotal in mastering the genre. Tricking their metaphorical unwanted husband, Pinochet, Barros taught the writers to push language to complex extremes to conceal messages beneath a veneer of literary artifice. Humor and play eventually gained prominence in Ergo Sum publications as well, an unlikely change in focus given the gravity of the political situation at the time. The project's writers and illustrators employed comic relief and irony as strategies to maneuver within their political situation; the lighthearted comic strip-like illustrations of many book-objects and the apparently harmless feminine miniature book-objects sought to distract potential censors from the political messages embedded in the texts, the graphics, and in the book-object designs.

The *microcuentos* visually represented the link between New Scene innovation—its attraction to verbal trickery—and femininity being forged in the workshops and in the press's book-objects. In interviews, Barros has commented on her motivations for making mini-short stories the group's preferred genre:

El microcuento fue un género muy trabajado en este país debido a la situación de emergencia en que vivíamos bajo la dictadura. Tú podías memorizarlo, decirlo en un acto público y salir corriendo antes de que llegara la policía. Había todo un concepto de que era un tiempo de cosas breves. Ahora, el microcuento es un [sic] forma antigua que usa el mismo mecanismo del chiste, pero que cumple el rol de un juego imaginario de mucha intensidad. Es una demostración de inteligencia. (Galarce 225)

Barros's appropriation of the genre thus situated the Ergo Sum project within the context of the regime at the same time that it contributed to her objective to fuse popular art with high literary forms. The participants' work intermeshed poetry, the short story of "regular" length, the mass media sound-bite, graffiti, jokes, and sayings, fusing various oral and literary forms. What's more, these ultra-brief literary forms break with the lengthiness characterizing the well-known fictions of the Boom by writers such as Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa, illustrating an ability to capture collective experiences and history in a well-constructed flash story, rather than in hundreds of pages. Advancing Barros's feminist proposals again, *microcuentos* honed and demonstrated women's capacity to produce ample meaning technically, concisely, and creatively.

Several book-objects capture the significance of the mini-short story genre to Ergo Sum's overall project. As noted, many early book-objects placed butcher trifolds in various types of bags and boxes. Some book-objects discarded the pamphlet idea and employed instead tiny boxes filled with loose pieces of heavyweight paper with a mini-short story adorning one side and an illustration on the other. These collections include: Microcuentos problemáticos y febriles (n.d.), a small pink and purple box in the shape of a musical cassette (Fig. 8); Microcuentos por un zapato roto (n.d.), a miniature shoebox (Fig. 8); Cuentos para iluminarse (1997), an enormous box of matches (Fig. 8); and Microcuentos (1990), a book-object cut out in the shape of a city bus (Fig. 9).<sup>44</sup>



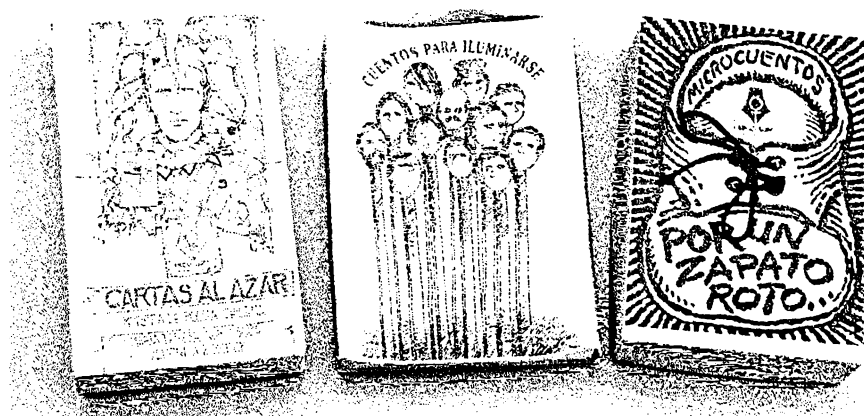


Fig 8. Photograph of Cartas al azar, Cuentos para iluminarse, and Microcuentos por un zapato roto, by Jon Blumb, Lawrence, Kansas.

Jessica Hidalgo is one of hundreds of participants who never published a piece outside Ergo Sum's book-objects. One of her *microcuentos*, printed on one of these illustrated paper scraps, exemplifies the type of story one might encounter in a dictatorship-era book-object. Her fiction sums a total of 21 words including its title, yet the author's linguistic experiment with a simple homonym produces evasive messages about the regime and the creative process. Her flash story is titled "Las plazas ya no son para leer" and it reads: "Ante mis ojos pendía su cuerpo inerte, como una hoja vencida por el otoño." The story implements the technique of the double-entendre to create a level of ambiguity centralized in the word *hoja*, a homonym in Spanish that denotes either the leaf of a tree or the page of a book. Spanning from this word, Hidalgo connects the inert human body to a literary text, perhaps censored during Pinochet's tenure. That is to say, the reader can interpret the lifeless body the narrator views in the park as a hanging human corpse or a listless page in a book the

protagonist bemoans not being able to read in the plaza. The *cuerpo*, whether it is a book or a corpse, hung and motionless as it is, brings to bear the attack on literary activity and human bodies during the regime. Further, in her decision to set the account during the autumn months, Hidalgo evokes the slow passage of time during the seemingly endless dictatorship and conjures up the physical elimination and decay of both dead bodies and censored books. She ends the story with an allusion to autumn and modifies the temporal frame of the story in the book's title with the adverb "ya" suggesting the narrator's nostalgia, perhaps for a bygone era when literary activity once occurred in the public sphere. Hidalgo was a novice writer like so many others in the Ergo Sum group; her publication nonetheless exemplifies New Scene art as well as the project producing it.

In the same vein as the other mini-short story objects adopting the contours of consumer items, Microcuentos (Fig. 9) is a miniature *micro*, a city bus in Chilean Spanish. Like other literary artifacts, the form and title of Microcuentos itself contains a double-meaning wordplay, like Hidalgo's exemplary implementation of the strategies learned in the mini-short story workshops. The book couples the double-entendre *microcuentos* with the visual image of a bus to produce an unstated communiqué about its moment of publication. Like all of the earlier book-objects' multi-media commentaries about their historical and political contexts, Microcuentos, published in 1990, the year of Pinochet's formal ouster after the 1988 plebiscite, resumes the literary transformations undergone during the seventeen-year totalitarian rule. The bus/book includes a cartoon-like cover illustrating a crowded bus jam-

packed with smiling Chileans, each of whom is reading. This jubilant and playful cover sums up Ergo Sum's coupling of linguistic and visual features to capture the historical moment when literary activity could again be practiced within the public sphere.

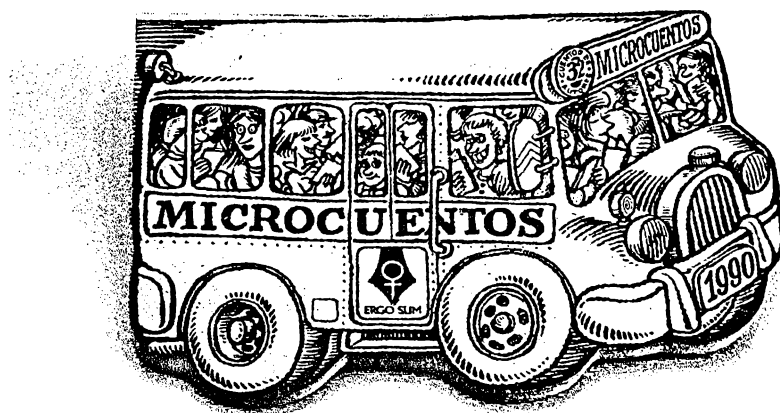


Fig. 9. Photograph of *Microcuentos*, by Jon Blumb, Lawrence, Kansas.

Ediciones Ergo Sum and the workshops spurring its conception emblemize a pivotal era in Chilean literary history when artists collectively and illegally employed their own bodies and their collaborative productions as performative works of art. Writers crafted themselves and their book-objects to question sexist social mores and to show that the regime, the art establishment, the publishing industry, and even language itself were all authoritarian institutions. Demonstrated through the complexity of Ergo Sum's political and aesthetic refashioning of gendered practices as well as the wide assortment of activities in which Ergo Sum writers engaged, Barros's project occupies an unyielding central position at the vanguard of both New

Scene and testimonial art, even though the group, in fact, accomplished few of its goals.

Many of the project's objectives were so ambitious they were difficult, if not impossible, to carry out. Many book-object designs were flawed and misunderstood. They never circulated on the large scale and thus never really challenged the publishing industry. The Pinochet government virtually ignored the Ergo Sum writers. And although each object contains fictional jewels, book-objects read like rough drafts of works in progress. Barros's feminist views, moreover, are peppered with essentialist notions that more recent scholarship considers questionable.

Yet to focus on the deficiencies of this utopian literary development overlooks its basic premises. While Barros dreamed Ergo Sum would arouse profound political and literary changes at the macro level, she set out to achieve this aspiration by transforming the immediate lives of the participants. She provided hundreds of women writers with a space where they could declare themselves artists, acquire the tools necessary for the execution of their role, see their work in print, and interact with other women possessing analogous goals and positions. For the vast majority of these writers, Ergo Sum workshops and publications would be their only foray into the literary world, yet for many of them, their experience dramatically altered their lives. Through massive female participation in workshops and in the creation of book-objects, Barros expanded the definition of what constitutes the practice of art, showing her students—female and male alike—that traditional “women's” activities, behaviors, and daily routines can be politically significant creative acts. Barros

empowered women to see themselves as artists and to recast with confidence their multiple individual positions as artists, mothers, wives, professionals, and activists. Unbeknownst to the collaborators at the time, Ergo Sum took part in a momentous socio-artistic movement transforming Chilean art and redefining the demographics of the national art milieu. Rekindling the feminist literary movement the women of the 1950s produced, Ergo Sum sponsored activities nourishing a second boom in female fiction writers of both the dictatorial era as well as period of transition from totalitarianism to democracy in the 1990s explored in the final chapter of this study.

In the early twenty-first century, Barros continues to teach creative writing workshops to the old generations and the new, and still publishes book-objects under the seal Ergo Sum. Like many independent book businesses emerging during the regime, Ediciones Ergo Sum opened to defend an unorthodox position within the literary field and to challenge art as an establishment; for this reason, Barros still refuses to legalize her publishing house or put out conventional books under the Ergo Sum label. The success of Chile's now legitimate feminist press, Cuarto Propio, attests to the tangible changes that have occurred in the Chilean literary world since the Soffia group of 1977. Ergo Sum workshops and press remain intact and active not only to remind us of a previous moment in Chilean history when art was an experiment in collective engagement, but also to continue to give the nation's women artists a room of their own in which they can be writers and produce creatively.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> Barros held dozens of workshops, many with different names. She named one early workshop Ergo Sum, transforming it into her company name years later. To simplify my analysis of the press and Barros's numerous workshops, I term the combined project Ergo Sum.

<sup>2</sup> Guralnik seems to accept that gender is not a biological category; rather, as Judith Butler has so forcefully argued in Gender Trouble (1989) and Bodies that Matter (1993), it is a social construct that subjects adopt through performative means. Guralnik's text takes Butler's ideas a step further, demonstrating the protagonist's theatrical construction of her identity as both a "woman" and as a "writer."

<sup>3</sup> In 1976 the regime permitted Lafourcade to direct a narrative workshop and Miguel Arteche to lead a group of students in poetry. Each group met at Santiago's National Library.

<sup>4</sup> Though no study to date focuses on the workshop experience in and of itself, many authors and literary critics mention the *taller* as an important meeting place for dictatorship-era literati. In the short story collection Andar con cuentos: Nueva narrativa chilena (1992), Ramón Díaz Etovic and Diego Muñoz Valenzuela stress that dictatorship-era literary artists responded to the isolating effects of the military edicts by creating abundant workshop venues, including Talleres Andamino, the Unión de Escritores Jóvenes (UEJ), the Agrupación Cultural Universitario (ACU), and the Colectivo de Escritores Jóvenes (CEJ). The literary workshop became a meeting place where the writers of the era collaborated and defined the goals, principles and

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membership of their generation (8). Expanding on these assertions, the critic Soledad Bianchi stresses that workshops and clandestine magazines “came into existence [to] bring together artists and intellectuals,” becoming a method to “overcome the drawbacks of atomized social relationships and a prevailing individualism pervading Chilean society at this time” (56). For his part, the author Alberto Fuguet asserts that the group of the 1980s was born in the “laboratorio” of the literary workshop (120), while Jaime Collyer argues literary workshops and marginal publications comprised the “única vía de salida con que contaban los jóvenes narradores para su producción incipiente” (127).

<sup>5</sup> The soup kitchens liberal priests set up in shantytowns initially failed to feed needy adults. Embarrassed, many of the potential beneficiaries (except children) refused the food, though they were starving. Writers and musicians began to read literature and play music, intentionally transforming the soup kitchen into a festive event so it would be culturally acceptable for both adults and children to accept food without feeling shame (personal interview with Barros, 16 March 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Although Ergo Sum workshops were first held in homes including Barros’s and Guralnik’s, the leader eventually rented a classroom space in downtown Santiago where she held classes until 1998 when she built a workshop at her residence.

<sup>7</sup> Though military censorship officially ceased in 1985, many writers saw publishing as potentially dangerous, even after the return to democracy in 1990.

<sup>8</sup> Bianchi points out that a new constitution, approved by plebiscite in September 1980, reinstated civil liberties restricted during the initial years of the

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coup, ostensibly halting censorship and physical coercion. She explains that the referendum nevertheless included some twenty-nine temporary resolutions that:

. . . justify[ed] and annul[ed] complete sections of the official legal text, in particular the frequently applied article 24, which dismiss[ed] fundamental human rights by authorizing arrests in secret places, by restricting the right of assembly and information, by prohibiting entrance into the country, by permitting the expulsion of certain citizens, and by approving the sentence of internal exile. (57)

The Orwellian double-speak of such documents left laws governing literary publication unclear, communicating implicitly that all civil liberties, including the freedom of the press, could be revoked at will.

<sup>9</sup> In her novel, *Lumpérica* (1983), Eltit initiated the fragmentary and often times visual narrative style characterizing her experimental oeuvre. For a comprehensive analysis of her dense aesthetic, see Brito's chapter, "Diamela Eltit," published in *Escritoras Chilenas: novela y cuento*.

<sup>10</sup> Camilo Marks points out that the explosion of workshops effectively resuscitated the literary establishment, allowing professional authors to live off their art even during military censorship. *Talleres*, he argues, nevertheless transformed too many people into artists too quickly, producing what he describes as a "grafomanía" producing an "infinita cantidad de libros que nadie lee" (19).

<sup>11</sup> In the chapter-length study about Barros's career, critic Liliana Trevizán briefly mentions book-objects, workshops, and Barros's active engagement in



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political and literary debates. A handful of published interviews with Barros provide useful information about the Ergo Sum project. See: “Pía Barros: la generación del desencanto y la pérdida de utopías” by Carmen Galarce and “Entrevista con Pía Barros” by Juan Carlos Létora.

<sup>12</sup> Alice Nelson explores the importance of collective projects in the 1980s, insisting that writers’ propensity to form groups and to create workshops constituted a response to military repression (33).

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Roach speaks of the dramatic features of violence in his three part theory about the “performance of waste.” Among humans, he argues, violence is always employed to demonstrate a point. It must “spend” or expend people and products (including human flesh) in excess, and like theater, it requires an audience to make its point (41).

<sup>14</sup> Numerous other street performance groups formed in Chile during the regime, the most famous of which is the Colectivo de acciones de arte (CADA).

<sup>15</sup> For a list of military edicts implemented between 1973 and 1987, see table 10-1 of Brian Loveman’s Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism (273-4).

<sup>16</sup> While Ergo Sum writers collaborated, power struggles in the workshops emerged, in particular when women who returned from exile attempted to join the already established groups. The chasm dividing exiled writers from their non-exiled counterparts actually led to the dissolution El taller Soffia when a number of participants opposed Susana Sánchez’s integration into the workshop after her return

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from exile in Norway. Barros abandoned her leadership of the Taller Soffia during this disagreement, but some group members kept the workshop going.

<sup>17</sup> I am indebted to Michel de Certeau's The Practice of Everyday Life (1994). Though not cited directly, his theoretical observations about everyday life inform this study.

<sup>18</sup> While women's literary circles in Latin America have frequently reinforced women's position as passive consumers of literature, literary salons sometimes became sites where women took part in politics. Many Latin American suffrage movements coalesced in the tea parlors of bourgeois women. Bonnie Frederick makes note of some alternative literary circles where women produced art in nineteenth-century Argentina (5).

<sup>19</sup> Vicky Unruh describes how the Latin American vanguards, similar to the Ergo Sum project, I would add, saw art as a "cultural activity [. . .] challenging and redefine[ing] the nature and purpose of art" (2).

<sup>20</sup> Barros confessed to not informing all workshop participants that she was publishing their work in book-objects and explained that many participants did not realize their activities were illegal (personal interview, 18 January 2004).

<sup>21</sup> The regime's anti-intellectual posture became official in September of 1976 when the publication of media and other print material without the previous authorization of military-appointed censors became constitutional. The same measure also prohibited individuals and groups that:

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. . . disseminate[d] doctrines which threatened the family, or which promote[d] violence or the concept of a society based on class struggle, or as may be otherwise contrary to the established regime or the integrity or operation of the state law, [was] illicit and in violation of the institutional organization of the Republic (reproduced by Loveman 271)

Constitutional Act Number 4, which declared a “state of defense against subversion,” allowed the military government to “restrict personal freedom, freedom of information, and the right to assembly” (reproduced by Loveman 271).

<sup>22</sup> Julieta Kirkwood takes this position one step further in her influential feminist Chilean history of the colonial era to the dictatorial epoch. An authoritarian social structure, she claims, conditioned Chilean women’s lives long before the military takeover:

Que las mujeres viven—han vivido siempre—el autoritarismo en el interior de la familia, su ámbito reconocido de trabajo y de experiencia. Que lo que allí se estructura e institucionaliza es precisamente la Autoridad indiscutida del jefe de la familia, del padre, la discriminación y subordinación de género, la jerarquía y el disciplinamiento de un orden vertical, impuesto como natural, y que más tarde [durante la dictadura] se verá proyectado en todo el acontecer social. (223)

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<sup>23</sup> Alluding to the Generation of 1980 and *Ediciones Ergo Sum*, Martín Cerda argues that the union of writers of varied ages in literary objects comprises one of the shared experiences provoking the formation of this literary generation (43-44).

<sup>24</sup> Several book-objects broke with the collective tendencies of the *Ergo Sum* group. For example, the second book-object, *Incontables*, was the first book of Pedro Maradones, the well-known artist now known as Pedro Lemebel. Barros explained she published *Incontables* because, as a homosexual, Lemebel suffered from discrimination even within literary circles (personal interview, 16 March 2006).

<sup>25</sup> While during the 1970s and 1980s women formed feminist (literary) organizations, numerous writers' groups came about, such as Sociedad de Escritores Chilenos (SECH), as well as the aforementioned CEJ and CADA, among many others.

<sup>26</sup> For an overview of women's social movements in Chile during the military epoch, see Adriana Muñoz Dálbora's *Fuerza feminista y democracia. Utopía a realizar* and Patricia M. Chuchryk's chapter, "Feminist Anti-Authoritarian Politics: The Role of Women's Organizations in the Chilean Transition to Democracy."

<sup>27</sup> I have translated "papel de envolver" to "butcher paper," a light-brown paper product sold in rolls, typically used in supermarkets to wrap meats, cheeses, pastries, and bread.

<sup>28</sup> As noted in chapter one, Lafourcade identified the Generation of 1950 in *Antología del nuevo cuento chileno* (1954). In the 1980s, Diego Muñoz Valenzuela and Ramón Díaz Eterovic characterized the Generation of 1980 in *Contando el cuento*

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(1986), and in 1996, Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez named the generation that emerged in the 1990s in their introduction to the short story anthology McOndo.

<sup>29</sup> In a personal interview with Hernán Venegas and Luis Albornoz, I learned that at least one woman, Pamela Cáseres contributed illustrations to book-objects (7 January 2004).

<sup>30</sup> In an untitled conference paper Barros gave in March 2002, she explained that in the 1980s and 1990s, book-objects and live performances featured women writing about themselves and questioning their social roles according to their own canons. This massive effort, she reasoned, contested a two-thousand-year-old tradition of women being written and determined by a male canon.

<sup>31</sup> Throughout their historical study, A Nation of Enemies: Chile Under Pinochet, Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela detail the many ways the military took over the mass media to bolster its program.

<sup>32</sup> Ergo Sum participant Marcia López explained in a personal interview that on several occasions Barros and her students sold book-objects to generate funds to donate to *ollas communes* (soup kitchens). López recalled several instances in which Barros donated book-objects to be given away at these venues (13 January 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, Barros does not recall the publication dates of the magazine or the number of issues printed. Based on an announcement of the birth of a child found in the last known copy of the magazine, the second in the series, I surmise it was published in 1985. Barros often excluded dates because her early publications were illegal.

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<sup>34</sup> Chilean poet Nicanor Parra's (b. 1914) Artefactos (1971), an innovative poetry collection in the form of a box, is clearly an antecedent to Barros's book-objects. Rather than include traditional verses printed on pages, Parra's "book" contains 242 postcards, all of which intermesh textual and graphic features. Cartas al azar (1989), an Ergo Sum book-object derived from a deck of tarot cards, includes one of Parra's early artifacts, perhaps as a tribute to the poet's contribution to the project. Other well-known Chilean poets, most notably Cecilia Vicuña (b. 1948) and Raúl Zurita (b. 1951), have also published poetry collections highlighting a mix between visual and linguistic elements. Vicuña's three-dimensional book, Saborami (1973), for instance, possesses the distinctive artisan quality she is known for. It contains letters, envelopes, and handwriting much like Barros's publications of the 1980s. Zurita went so far as to abandon the page and the book altogether when, in 1982, he undertook an ambitious project that included the inscription of fifteen of his verses in the New York City skyline with airplane exhaust. Later, in 1993, he fixed a verse in the Atacama Desert that stretched three kilometers (Rowe 216).

<sup>35</sup> Selena Millares and Alberto Madrid enumerate contextual and generational factors contributing to the unprecedented development of the short story during Chile's dictatorship (122-123). Many of their assertions illuminate the experience of the Ergo Sum writers.

<sup>36</sup> Since Pinochet's ouster, Barros has consistently taught workshops focusing on the novel.

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<sup>37</sup> For a review of the regime's censorship of literary material and its social impact, see Constable and Valenzuela's chapter, "A culture of Fear," or Loveman's chapter, "Dictatorship."

<sup>38</sup> Margorie Agosín has written extensively about the *Arpillera* group, and has published two books and an article explaining their political and artistic significance. See also Emma Sepúlveda Pulvirenti's essay, "Arte social como testimonio político: historia de las arpilleras chilenas."

<sup>39</sup> In the 1960s, singer and artist Violeta Parra crafted *arpilleras* as part of her artistic and anthropological project of rejuvenating Chilean folk traditions.

<sup>40</sup> In a personal interview, Barros claimed that Ensacados was inspired by this military practice (18 January 2004). She stressed the importance of burlap being material Chilean women have used to make art, but she did not mention the influence of the *Arpillera* workshops.

<sup>41</sup> Of course, I am alluding to Imagined Communities by Benedict Anderson, who shows that the invention of the printing press and the subsequent emergence of newspapers on a massive scale created (expanding on a concept Walter Benjamin coined earlier) what he calls "homogeneous empty time." This concept describes how people gain a sense of belonging to a national community by reading the same novels and periodicals as their countrymen. In the eighteenth-century in particular, when nations underwent a consolidation process and printing presses became more widespread, large numbers of people read the same newspapers and novels, spurring imagined communities to coalesce (See chapter 2, "Cultural Roots").

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<sup>42</sup> Tamara Kamenszain also highlights metaphors linking women's domestic chores and artisan products to vanguard literary activity (77).

<sup>43</sup> Barros explained that her original book-object project began with her and Calderón's goal to raise enough money to publish their own short story anthologies (personal interview, 18 January 2004).

<sup>44</sup> Like Microcuentos por un zapato roto, many book-objects lack basic publication information. In numerous interviews, I attempted to obtain the publication dates of all the book-objects. Most participants stated they did not remember when they had been published, and others provided vague dates that contradicted those of other participants.



### The Silent Treatment: Alejandra Basualto's Aesthetic of Censorship

During the Pinochet government, writers retaliated against censorship laws and concealed subversive political messages through elevated literary devices such as complex metaphors, comical word plays, and lofty literary allusions (Espinosa 66; Millares and Madrid 116; Osses 144; Zurita 7). As we have seen in chapter two, book-objects taught readers to decipher the in-between-the-lines of fictional texts and to interpret the visual layout of books as an alternative means of conveying meaning. Writers tested the legal confines of censorship and discovered ways to express dissent, often through the virtual elimination of language, thereby mocking military edicts. In one humorous example, a press called the Prensa Oximoro formed for the sole purpose of publishing a book entitled La hinteligencia militar (1986).<sup>1</sup> Replicating the visual aesthetic of book-objects, each of the huge number of pages the book contains is blank. The misspelled title, the press's name, and the blank pages exposed both Pinochet and his board of censors' intellectual incapacity to detect subversive messages in literary texts and demonstrated the creative ways New Scene writers had invented to confect anti-authoritarian messages through an experimentation with multiple forms of expression, including the communication of messages in the near absence of language. This defiance against censorship matched the ambiguous and inexplicit nature of the dictatorial edicts themselves, many of which waxed and waned according to Pinochet's changing political needs during his seventeen year command. The de facto government restricted print culture in contradictory Orwellian double-speak, declaring freedom of speech and the press

while at the same time censoring the media and artistic products at will.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, the regime produced a nation of docile obedient citizens through the practice of censorship and torture: long after the reestablishment of a democratic government, cultural critics speak of Chileans' inclination to self-censor their speech as well as their recollections about the years of the regime.<sup>3</sup> For art groups such as Ergo Sum, on the other hand, the military's attempt to control print culture actually spawned a rich socio-political and aesthetic movement that proposed a complete renovation of the government as well as of age-old social, economic, and artistic institutions. Furthermore, the government's extreme position against artists and intellectuals resulted in a dramatic makeover of the Chilean literary scene: the demographics of writers' groups, as well as the shape, scope, and style of their literary products were transformed. At this time a noteworthy onslaught of women writers defined a radical shift in what came out in print in the country.<sup>4</sup> Numerous artists who wrote and published in writers' workshops like those sponsored by Ergo Sum took part in this initial wave of emergent authors, signaling a new phase not only in the political literary project, but also in Chilean cultural production in general.

During the 1980s, several Ergo Sum participants were able to professionalize their literary activities before Pinochet's ouster. In 1986, Pía Barros (b. 1956) put out her first short story collection, Miedos transitorios (de a uno de a dos, de a todos), a self-edited Ergo Sum publication consisting of a sparse one thousand copies. Similarly, numerous other women involved in the project during the dictatorship also released their first books of fiction. Alejandra Basualto (b. 1944) (La mujer de yeso

(1988)), Teresa Calderón (b. 1955) (Causas perdidas (1984) and Género femenino (1989)), Sonia Guralnik (b. 1920) (El samovar (1983) and Retrato en sepia (1987)), Ana María del Río (b. 1948) (Óxido de Carmen (1986)), and Sonia González Valdenegro (b. 1958) (Tejer historias (1986)) comprise a small subgroup of Ergo Sum participants who published their own books during the risky 1980s. Still other important female authors such as Diamela Eltit (b. 1949) and Isabel Allende (b. 1942), who did not take part in Barros's workshops, augmented the sizable number of women writers who gained visibility at this time and participated in diversifying the Chilean literary landscape. While each of the women writers of the Generation of 1980 possesses a unique style and explores singular thematic concerns, they are nevertheless united by a shared interest in renovating dominant political and artistic molds. As a group, they innovated on literary models and confected narratives that sought to erode the authority of the military and overturn the subjugated position of women in general as well as female authors. During this period fictional texts women generated are characteristically self-referential: they frequently comment on the writing process itself and represent the means by which women become writers.<sup>5</sup> A number of these authors developed a self-conscious, neo-baroque, and technique-laden style allowing for the communication of political dissent despite military edicts while insuring women writers a place within the nation's budding neo-avant-garde artists' groups.

Alejandra Basualto's little-known short story collection La mujer de yeso, published only once in 1988, exemplifies a dramatic narrative redefinition of the

woman writer occurring at the time of its publication. Basualto's amalgamation of technical complexity with a demonstration of ways women writers in particular can transform repressive socio-political practices through fiction situates her collection within New Scene aesthetics. A prolific writer featured in numerous anthologies, Basualto never attained the critical acclaim of Barros or Eltit despite the fact that her work, particularly her first short story collection, exemplifies the New Scene aesthetic. In fact, Basualto's substantial prose oeuvre is overlooked entirely by literary scholars, perhaps by virtue of the small numbers of her books in circulation.<sup>6</sup> Through my analyses of three key short stories from the collection, I argue that La mujer de yeso is a decisive example of the feminist vein of the Generation of 1980,<sup>7</sup> whose members called for a complete reformulation of social, political, and artistic institutions through an intricate and mutually supportive weave of style and theme.

Basualto's narratives, and in particular the short stories selected for this analysis ("La espera," "Platón," and "1954"), propose a tactical transformation of dominant strands in politics and art through an aesthetic of censorship and silence. The art of censorship recalls the context of dictatorial repression Basualto confronts in this compilation while the aesthetic of silence, though closely related to censorship, describes the oeuvre's participation in a larger feminist cultural debate about the social function of women and women writers and their political-artistic struggles beyond the historical and geographical context of Pinochet's Chile. Basualto's transformation of silence into an aesthetic demonstrates the subversive potential of women and women writers to assume their normative position within dominant socio-

political structures as muted subjects while using this subjugation as a tool with which to wear down myriad institutions. In recalling the position of women and the counterculture during the regime, I demonstrate how the author's incessant incorporation of images of silent and absent characters illustrates that such dominated subjectivities can employ the regime's own tactics as weapons to erode prevailing structures in a cunning and stylish manner. To this end, Basualto employs high-minded artistic techniques such as complex metaphors and literary allusions as covert tactics to express a legally inexpressible critique of the regime.<sup>8</sup> Imposed auditory silences and violent physical absences (disappearances), two military strategies, become in Basualto's collection concrete modes of expressing immense meaning through a persistent reduction of language in which the author reveals an intricate textual dynamic of censorship itself. A story inscribed on a tortured and repressed female body longing to create, an extended metaphor for the Chilean nation and its writers, "La espera" showcases artists' frustrated attempts to create their work during the regime. Basualto links this historically-specific aggravation with the difficulties female authors, intellectuals, and artists face regardless of the stance of the government. In a similar vein, "Platón" links women's traditional position of exclusion to that of intellectuals during the regime, while further pinpointing concrete ways that oppressed subjectivities can erode dominant structures through the strategic employment of military and patriarchal strategies. Finally, "1954" demonstrates the imaginative means by which female artists shape intellectual and creative bonds through the formation of real and contrived communities of women

who engage in the activity of writing and challenge discriminatory social mores and institutions through their collective engagement.

Basualto's censorship aesthetic resonates with Ergo Sum book-object products in which she took part prior to the publication of her first collection. However, these communal workshop environments comprise a nominal component of her overall trajectory as a writer. Basualto entered Ergo Sum workshops an accomplished poet with considerable experience in the literary arena even before the coup. In 1970, she put out Los ecos del sol, the first of five books of poetry she has published since then. Moreover, before participating in Ergo Sum workshops between 1987 and 1988, Basualto had studied literature at the University of Chile, had attended workshops led by renowned Chilean fiction writer José Donoso (1924) between 1985 and 1986, and had received numerous literary prizes for her poems and short stories. During the author's brief participation in Ergo Sum workshops, she published numerous key short stories in book-objects she re-edited and incorporated into La mujer de yeso.<sup>9</sup> Since the late-1980s, she has collaborated with Barros on multiple literary projects and has been an important presence in Ergo Sum; however, in 1988 she began to direct her own short story and poetry workshops and opened her home-based publishing house, La trastienda.

Basualto began to compose La mujer de yeso during the height of military regime, ten years prior to its final publication by Ediciones Documentas, one of various small Chilean publishing houses in operation during that period. In a personal communiqué, Basualto retold her experience of putting out a book during

the dictatorship, shedding light on the process of publishing with a tiny press during that uneasy time:

En esa época era una editorial con mucho entusiasmo que estaba publicando a escritores chilenos emergentes. Eran valientes, es decir, se la jugaban. Su director, Fredy Cancino, es un hombre de izquierda que luchaba contra la dictadura. [. . .] En esa época ellos publicaron varios libros al mismo tiempo, y se presentaron en la Feria del Libro que se ubicaba en el Parque Forestal. [. . .] El libro se vendió en la feria y después en algunas librerías céntricas, más los que yo personalmente pude vender. La edición fue de 500 ejemplares y no hubo otra edición. [. . .] La editorial después quebró y estuvo mucho tiempo desaparecida. (e-mail correspondence, 23 August 2004)

Basualto's recollections pinpoint the ambiguities under which Chilean artists published. Paradoxically, the government permitted some literary activity, including a book fair in downtown Santiago, operational bookstores, and even a few oppositional publishing venues, incongruities demonstrating the vagueness of the regime's stance on literary production. The military government provided an obfuscated definition of censorship laws that led authors like Basualto to safeguard their critique of the authoritarian imposition through arcane literary devices. Basualto's mastery of poetic forms allowed her to win numerous literary prizes between 1983 and 1985, including a first-place in the Concurso de Cuentos Bata, one of the only operational literary contests during the dictatorship.<sup>10</sup> Basualto holds that

her strategic inclusion of poetic devices in particular gave her texts the necessary obfuscation to publish in relative safety during the Pinochet government. She explains, : “. . . la temática tenía que ser muy cuidadosa para que no se notara la crítica política y social. Por eso las metáforas que envuelvan mis historias. No era fácil ganar premios ni publicar en esa época, a menos que una fuera adicta al regimen” (e-mail correspondence, 23 August 2004).

Replicating a common literary strategy of this period, La mujer de yeso transforms self-censorship into a tactic. It requires a scrupulous reading between the lines of what each text contains as well as what it excludes. It encourages readers to consider the stories of the characters represented in the collection while imagining the accounts of those characters that Basualto evokes without incorporating them. The author urges interpretations of missing information and characters using recurring inclusions of stories that demonstrate—through thematic and stylistic choices—that silence can be an effective mode of expression and human absences can actually intensify the presence of the missing person. Basualto’s adaptation of such military strategies as censorship and disappearing illustrates such tactics can aid the literary counterculture in its attempt to dismantle established power structures.

The author’s *mélange* of poetic and narrative techniques constitutes a generational trend noted by Chilean academician Eugenia Brito. The critic postulates this group’s penchant to intermesh the political with the aesthetic and to blend literary genres, thereby underscoring an overall malleability of art that canceled out the regime’s fixation on order:



La unidad falsamente construida por el proceso dictatorial se deja invadir por la practica escritural, que va a generar [...]: un sujeto en proceso, descentrado [. . .]; un cruce entre arte y política y una interacción entre las diversas prácticas artísticas: el video, la performance, las instalaciones, la pintura, la fotografía, el ensayo, la poesía y la novela. (14)

Brito furthers her general description of post-coup Chilean cultural production and notes artists' predilection to comment on the Pinochet regime indirectly through constant deferrals and displacements. She argues an alternative system of communication arose in which artists fashioned, through what she terms the "arte de disimulo," a performative mode of communication expressed through dissimulation, "speaking" by means of physical gestures and signals rather than through speech acts (17). La mujer de yeso highlights Brito's description: in a poignant yet indirect manner, the collection includes strategic silences and absences that urge readers to consider each in a critical manner. Basualto's style is not doctrinaire: it relies on gaps and pervasive indirectness, each of which recalls censorship and the ambiance of the totalitarian Chile in which it was produced.

At a surface level the text appears to submit to dictatorial norms through its assumption of military-imposed behavior. However, a more profound reading of the book demonstrates the author's resurrection of a strategy that women and female writers have employed for centuries to transform silence into a strategic site from which to retaliate. In "Tretas del débil," Josefina Ludmer explores the way

foundational Latin American woman writer Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz tricked the church and state through a tactical appropriation of feminine wordlessness that, in her writing, she transformed into a method of breaking the silence she ostensibly embraced, eroding the logic of patriarchal dominance. Echoing Ludmer's analysis, Debra A. Castillo has outlined in her 1992 book, Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Criticism, the way women writers exploit sexist mores to further gender liberation. Castillo departs from the generally accepted premise that female subjects occupy a normative position of silent, distant, and untouchable other, illustrating that women writers such as the Mexicans Inés de la Cruz and Rosario Castellanos, and Brazilian Clarice Lispector, restructure the disadvantages of this position to overturn these same social scripts:

Under old traditional codes, the woman [. . .] remained silent and withdrawn. In the counterhegemonic response to this official silencing, she executes a dizzying dance of negativity, appropriating silence as a tactic neither for saying nor for unsaying but for concealing a coded speech between the lines of the said and the unsaid. (41)

Other critics have also suggested silence in the context of Spanish-American women's writing frequently constitutes a subversive socio-political and literary tactic. In her introduction to Women's Writing in Latin America (1991), Beatriz Sarlo states nineteenth-century female authors "pretended to speak from a 'proper' and accepted position, at the same time striving to modify the laws that defined the limits of the

appropriate” (243). Similarly, in Proceed with Caution: When Engaged by Minority Writing (1999), Doris Sommer has argued, at least within the Latin American context, readers must learn to “hear creative refusals to talk” because “[s]ilence is not simply a prison in [an] asymmetrical world;” rather, “[s]ometimes it is a tactic” (21). In opposition to the more prevalent American feminist ideal that women ought to discard the societal imposition of silence, Sommer contends wordlessness can actually constitute “flamboyant noncompliance” (126), while Castillo argues the unspoken can in fact be a politically significant linguistic tool: “[t]he revolutionary response to silencing is its resemanticization: to use silence as a weapon (to resort to silence) or to break silence with hypocrisy” (38-9).

The tactic of muting the voice of disenfranchised groups within Chile’s totalitarian government is beyond the scope of these influential feminist literary studies. Latin American military regimes silenced and disappeared women and men from a broad range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds in an extraordinarily violent and visible manner. This blatant repressive use of silence by dictatorial leaders calls for more specific theoretical musings about Latin American women writers’ use of the unspoken as a political tool during authoritarian regimes. Unlike the more covert mechanisms of normative silencing of women these critics discuss, dictatorships institutionalized communicative oppression. Censorship of the press, tactical disappearances of antagonist political groups, and a governmental demand for traditional gender behavior constitute crucial examples of the way the Pinochet government itself used silence and absence as political tactics. In a sense, the regime

gave silence and absence the tangible contours they had formerly lacked and exposed their inner workings as a repressive socio-political method.

For both the regime and the counterculture, silence and absence became multifaceted tactics bound to political power struggles. Each of these opposing groups employed strategies demonstrating their porous and malleable qualities. Whereas the regime censored texts in an attempt to erase the artistic counterculture, literary products broke imposed silences. In military interrogations, for instance, secret police demanded that political prisoners who had remained too silent speak and provide information. In these instances not talking often resulted in torture or execution. Within the counterculture, heroes were those who remained silent. Further, the Pinochet regime demanded women uphold and model their traditional role as passive subjects. Through this image the government attempted to feminize the entire nation, requiring the docility and silence of the Chilean masses. The military's placement of men in the muted role women had long occupied therefore transformed silence and erasure into topics spanning established gender borders. Within this gendered restructuring of the nation only military men could speak freely.<sup>11</sup> Yet, amid this stifling ambiance groups of women in particular made use of the traditional regime-backed image of woman as silent and submissive to justify their retaliation against such models and to protect themselves against potential military violence. Infamous are the silent protests mothers held in Chile and in neighboring Argentina to oppose the military opposition. Long after the return to democracy, silence continued to be a political strategy; in the early years of the

millennium, the aging ex-dictator Pinochet claimed a mental inability to speak or recollect the past while a concerned international community interrogated him about human rights violations that had occurred during the regime.<sup>12</sup>

Pinochet and his men's attempt to silence women and the opposition produced the converse reaction among Chilean feminist thinkers and women writers. Issues that had once described the female experience—that is, systemic modes of silencing and erasure from key social, political, and artistic groups—suddenly became overwhelmingly perceptible because of the regime's repressive policies. The ideas of post-Marxist theorist Louis Althusser facilitate an explanation of the reversal that occurred during this pivotal moment in Chile. He exposes the state as “a ‘machine’ of repression” (137) composed of Repressive Apparatuses (RSAs) that control through violent mechanisms groups such as the police, the military, and prisons carry out. Although less visible and overtly violent, societies also control through a series of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), including schools, the press, churches, and family. Although Althusser does not mention it, each of these ideological apparatuses maintains the traditional image of woman in her socially conventional condition, although this may not be visible immediately. During the Pinochet regime ideology was exposed as such, once the dictatorship fused ISAs and RSAs. This move revealed the repressive control of all social institutions and thus ripened Chile for a feminist movement since the government itself implemented myriad patriarchal models through violence. La mujer de yeso demonstrates artfully the crucial intersection wherein female speechlessness as a political tactic met Pinochet's

institutionalized form of silencing, censoring, and disappearing. The collection's exploration of wordlessness as a retaliatory weapon makes for a doubly subversive in-between-the-lines attack on the regime and, by extension, on each of the patriarchal models it upheld.

Basualto punctuates the motifs of auditory silence and physical erasure through an exploitation of the singular characteristics of the short story and the short story collection. Although each narration can stand on its own, La mujer de yeso calls on readers to interpret its twenty-one prose pieces as they interact with and support each other. Situating the compilation within the military epoch through indirect means, the narratives comprising La mujer de yeso are exceedingly brief and include mini-short stories of a few sentences as well as slightly longer, more developed short stories, most of which do not surpass several pages. The brevity of both the collection itself and the stories it contains clues the reader into Basualto's aesthetic of censorship and silence and announces the book's reductive stylistic and thematic qualities. For instance, the collection's own visibly notable succinctness suggests abundant meaning can be communicated through a continual decrease of language. The book requires readers to fill in the gaps and to decipher not just what the stories express, but also that which remains unstated. Basualto's collection, when read in its entirety, represents the Chilean nation and its people as if they were a censored, repressed and nearly disappeared book.

Furthering this notion, Basualto incorporates silences and absences constantly within each story. Lyrical prose pieces create moods and sensations with little or no

dialogue: characters are either silenced or choose silence as a response; they are dead and they die alone; individuals speak only rarely and, when they do, they are frequently misunderstood. Some stories even suggest wordlessness as an effective mode of communication. Numerous characters feel they are continuously watched and monitored. Others have separated from loved ones and long to rekindle lost relationships. Basualto repeatedly creates the sensation that someone has vanished recently in a violent yet unexplained manner. Suggestively, those left behind are afraid to ask questions. The pervasive sense of death, sudden disappearance, depression, aloneness, violence, and the inability or unwillingness to speak suggests the regime; however, Basualto only occasionally gives evidence that the stories take place in Chile. Nonetheless, the author's literary style and the repressive and discouraging ambience it reproduces recall the regime on each page and hence situate the collection implicitly within Chile's military dictatorship.

A more detailed look at a few of the collection's stories illuminates the way Basualto evokes her central motifs. In the opening story, for example, "Pasajero del 27," the protagonist struggles with the unexplained and recent loss of his lover while on a business trip to the north. In a country town where he will stay that night, he encounters another girl in a park and speaks to her "sin esperar respuesta" (13). They drink coffee, "casi en completo silencio" (14). This would all seem quite normal; however, at the story's end the man's car is puzzlingly searched by police. His affective connection with the girl, however deficient, has aroused suspicion among the townspeople and authorities. "Platón" recounts a philosophy professor's

homoerotic obsession with his student, Roberto, who disappears mysteriously from the class roster, leaving his impassioned teacher terrified to question his whereabouts at the administrative office. In “Quizás mañana domingo” a man waits in silence for his lover’s return. The enveloping quiet finally breaks in the denouement with a mysterious telephone call, which brings news the lover has vanished forever.

“Acantilado” traces the thoughts of a married woman who returns home through the streets of Santiago after her final visit to a lover while painstakingly searching for the words she will use to address her husband and children upon her belated arrival. She arrives to a welcoming and communicative silence when her husband: “[le] estrecha en ese abrazo tan antiguo y conocido. Y no pregunta” (26). Another account, “Esquina,” recounts the story of a woman who, after her husband’s sudden and unexplained disappearance, becomes a prostitute to provide for her son. “Rosas amarillas,” is about a woman who desperately searches for yellow roses in Santiago flower shops to place on the grave of her long-time friend who seemingly has just committed suicide. The theme of sudden death is punctuated in “Eso” and “Muros adentro,” two stories recounting the moments in which unnamed protagonists die alone. In the first, a listless and defeated main character relents to the oncoming waves without protest, suggesting a lack of desire to live. The second man is a fugitive in a northern desert who has been shot by the police. He retreats to an isolated hideout where he waits, stranded and alone, for his girlfriend to return with help. Without ever situating them in Pinochet’s Chile, these stories, which create a mood of disappearance, alienation, and depression, evoke the reality of everyday life



in Chile during the regime.

The book's title and epigraph also support the notion of art's capacity to communicate rich socio-political messages incongruously through unspoken messages and absent subjectivities that recall the military regime while establishing a parallel between the female condition and that of Chileans during their totalitarian government. Foreshadowing the situation of the characters within the collection (and recalling Gertner's woman of salt), the plaster mannequin Basualto evokes in her title is a muted, silent art object. Moreover, the title suggests the way artistic representations toy with the simultaneous presence and absence of their subjects. The confection of plaster figures in particular, traced upon real human bodies that are then removed and that leave only an artistic representation of them, shows art's capacity to display the interaction between human presences and absences. By making the plaster figure a woman, Basualto announces her dual narrative exploration of politics and art will focus attention on the female experience.

Attuned to the theme of silent communication, the apparently paralyzed mouth of the plaster woman, like the woman writer who contrives her, communicates meaning alternatively in the collection's epigraph, which consists of several verses lifted from Basualto's second poetry collection, El agua que me cerca (1983). These poetic lines, attributed to the art object despite its inability to speak, identify the writer's artful representation of unvoiced messages that assume the mandates of power only to transform them. In Basualto's verse corporeal gestures rather than words generate plentiful subversive meaning: "Una mujer de yeso / asoma su

impúdica mirada / y no responde” (8). In a similar vein to a great number of the collection’s stories, the subject presents a simultaneously absent and present corporeality and is also represented in a pivotal moment of communicating through her gaze and bodily gestures rather than through her own verbal language. The woman’s fleshy body is replaced by a plaster surrogate, signaling the abundance with which Basualto will present in her collection fluctuating corporeal presences and absences. The epigraph and the title urge the reader to listen to what is not said, to read the physical gestures and expressions of those presented, and to consider critically the flux between the absent and present human subjects.

This relationship between the female body and the military government constitutes a pivotal union in the conception and development of Basualto’s multifarious literary project. Basualto places “La espera,” the collection’s most elaborate and compelling example of her aesthetic of censorship, in the center of the book, highlighting its centrality to the complete oeuvre. In 1985 “La espera” received a first place in the Concurso Bata, demonstrating the efficacy of Basualto’s development of a story based on a complex metaphor to obscure her tactical critique of military practices. Similar to other short stories in the book masking a negative evaluation of the government beneath complex literary devices, “La espera” constitutes an extensive and intricate narrative metaphor hiding an involved criticism of the Pinochet regime’s practice of censorship and assassination and, by association, other repressive strategies. The circuitous features of this metaphorical story allow for multiple interpretations: an initial allegory about censorship generates an array of

social critiques that reach beyond the historical and geographical context of totalitarian Chile. The author fuses military and gender oppression by demonstrating the unjust exercise of power in Chile upon the specific locale of the female body, itself a metaphor for the quieted nation under the authoritarian regime. While the story demonstrates a strategic dismantling of a gamut of repressive institutions and practices that restrain women's creative processes, it showcases the frustrated experience of women writers who attempt to create against the social, political, and artistic institutions that silence them.

"La espera" tells the story of a pregnant woman who lives alone in the countryside of an unidentified nation. The nameless protagonist is unable to give birth for a number of years while she waits for the return of her husband who has disappeared while on an uncertain assignment to an indeterminate southern border. Her situation is parallel to that of Chileans during the regime although Basualto never mentions her native country in the narration and actually confuses geographical and historical references to Chile and the dictatorship. Suggestively, however, the pregnant woman not only awaits the homecoming of her husband, she is also incapable of delivering that which is most natural to her (the baby) in the same way that the Chilean people, during the years of military rule, could not share ideas or produce art in the open. While the woman passes the time, she attempts to express her innate yet stifled creativity in other ways. Paralleling her unsuccessful desire to give birth, her other (pro)-creative projects fail, yet each broadens the metaphorical significance of the text. The denouement leaves the fate of the family in question as

the woman continues her solitary wait in her decaying home.

The protagonist's failed attempts at re-channeling her primal creativity are central to the action developed within the short story: Basualto presents two key instances in the text that illustrate the woman's futile attempts to reproduce and create. Each example furthers the author's multi-layered critique of military censorship. In one instance, the protagonist tries to satisfy her desire to mother a human child by raising a flock of tiny chicks, nurturing them as if they were human babies. The gentle care she gives the tiny animals is similar to the devotion she gives to her unborn child. She feeds her infant flock with the best of her homegrown vegetables, giving them "[. . .] las hojas más tiernas y crujientes de las lechugas de la huerta, los tomates más redonditos y colorados, las papas más nuevas [. . .]" (41). Nonetheless, in this attempt to express her instinctive female creativity, the woman's project fails as the chicks slowly die. Finally, she decides to sell those that remain; she is unsuccessful at each (pro)-creative endeavor.

As the woman waits for her husband to return so that she can deliver the baby, she fuels her creativity in an alternative way by feverishly knitting baby clothes, beginning with white yarn and finishing only after exhausting every color in the rainbow. The protagonist's activity illustrates the woman's urgent need to create—if not a baby, then baby clothes—and the tediousness of her pastime emphasizes the length of her wait:

Pasó varias estaciones tejiendo, hasta que sus dedos palidecieron, y las venas de sus manos se trocaron en enmarañadas líneas de un azul

indefinable que se encaramaban por sus brazos hasta el pecho. Pensó después que quizá era niña, y las labores se volvieron rosa, y luego lila y amarillo [. . .], y comenzó a llenar las pequeñas prendas de flores y pájaros y franjas de todos los colores del arco iris. (38-9)

Here the creative process has the same exhausting effects on the female body as the endless pregnancy: each attempt at biological and artistic reproduction taxes the female body and ends up destroyed. Significantly, Basualto portrays the woman in the moment of her urgent need to create while mysterious outside forces prohibit her from sharing her artistic products. Her creative process can thus be read alongside that of Basualto herself who also produced creatively throughout the regime despite censorship laws that complicated her artistic endeavors.

Extending the metaphor between the woman's experience and that of the Chilean people during the dictatorship, specifically that of the nation's artists, moths eventually destroy the woman's production of knit goods, recalling the military's attempted eradication of artistic products. Despite the protagonist's abundant production, there are outside forces prohibiting the realization of her artistic creativity. There appears to be a power over her body—either censorship or self-censorship—that prohibits her from expressing herself:

Pasados cinco años, con todas las habitaciones de la casa llenas de pequeñas cajas que contenían sus primorosas creaciones comenzó a percatarse de que la casa estaba invadida por centenares de polillas que entraban y salían por las ventanas a todas horas del día. [. . .] Fue

abriéndolas una a una para constatar con dolorida expresión que dentro de ellas sólo yacían apelmazados montoncitos de lana de colores. (39)

Rather than make an explicit reference to the censorship of artistic products by military authorities, Basualto uses the particular experience of one female body and the “art” it produces to conceal her critique of the prohibitions on creativity exercised in Chile during the seventies and eighties. Moreover, her choice to have the woman elaborate the art form of knitting—traditionally considered a low and insignificant artistic form that only women cultivate—rather than the more politically subversive form of writing, suggests an alignment between the fictive protagonist’s creative endeavors and women’s creative groups such the *Arpilleristas* or the Ergo Sum writers, whose respective needle-work narratives and book-object products as well as their political-artistic projects explicitly linked domestic activity to artistic production. Both Basualto and her more closely related Ergo Sum contemporaries stressed that household labors can actually constitute unique communicative devices through which women can participate in larger social and political debates while pretending to partake in non-threatening and unimportant female tasks. Basualto’s transformation of the woman’s story into fiction constitutes an artistic act against the regime as well as a recommendation by example for other female artists to follow suit and employ against dominant structures the same tactics they use to repress artists and women.

Further revealing ways that women can employ artistic activity to transform politics, the protagonist’s creative endeavors, apolitical as they may first appear,

constitute creative acts that seemingly conform to the regime's traditional ideal of woman, but actually disarm military authority. Suggesting safe ways Chilean women can use art to transform repressive social structures like censorship or conventional gender norms, Basualto has the female body act as the symbolic space where political repression plays itself out and where the nation inscribes and questions its history. The protagonist's experience resonates with that of Chilean artists and the Chilean people at large, each of which constitute groups the regime attempted to mute. At the same time, in making the protagonist pregnant, an obvious example of an experience unique to women, Basualto broadens the feminist significance of the text. In doing this, "La espera" invites a reading about creative practice within a broad range of repressive socio-political contexts beyond that of the regime. With this in mind, the protagonist's botched creative processes can be interpreted as a latent criticism of the social and practical barriers creative women face when attempting to produce art. Consequently, Basualto's vast exploration of repressed creativity goes beyond the period of Pinochet's regime: it further suggests women's limited integration into the art establishment.

The protagonist's propensity to knit as she waits for the return of her husband constitutes yet another strategic device to conceal meaning through dissimulative means. In making silence aesthetic, Basualto includes an allusion to the myth of Penelope and Ulysses to support her critique of the regime's violent practices; most specifically, censorship and the practice of detaining and disappearing dissidents. The choice to make the woman knit while she waits for her husband is strikingly

similar Penelope's weaving of a shroud for Ulysses's father, Laertes, as she awaited the return of Ulysses from the Trojan War. Like Penelope's continual reweaving of the cloak to delay its completion, moths destroy the knit garments of the protagonist in Basualto's story. The undoing of each woman's creation as she waits for her respective husband links the two women by way of association. This literary connection highlights the Chilean protagonist's denial that her vanished husband will never return, similar to other Chilean men disappeared during the regime.

Advancing the correlation between the two stories, the absent husband forms a parallel both with the mythical Ulysses and the thousands of disappeared during the regime. Through a series of loose associations that link the two men, each of which relies on the reader's familiarity with the myth, Basualto dissimulates her ardent and dangerous position against the regime and, specifically, its tactic of disappearing dissidents. Both Ulysses and the husband are involved in a laudable struggle to preserve the integrity of the state. Through this connection Basualto bestows on the husband the praiseworthy qualities of mythical Ulysses while she strategically links both the classical character to those Pinochet disappeared, naming them all national heroes. Like the archetypal absent hero, Ulysses, and the symbolic loyal wife, Penelope, the couple represented in "La espera" embodies the fragmented Chilean nation/family in a time of war and social upheaval. Furthering aesthetic self-censorship, Basualto demonstrates that the military attempt to silence human subjects by disappearing their bodies and their creative products can be reformulated in art to produce an opposite effect: in the short story the physical absences of the husband



and child, coupled with the forced silence of the protagonist, are adapted through writing into strategic devices that actually increase the presence of the disappeared and the ability for women to participate in a socio-political debate, albeit in a muffled or virtually silent tone. Here, the literary allusion protects Basualto's during her critique of the regime, precisely because the military board in charge of reviewing literary texts likely lacked the academic background to understand the reference. Moreover, the author indirectly postulates a female aesthetic in which she alters the societal norm of female passivity into a unique form of expressing political dissent through a silent and silenced body.

To understand further the psychological aspects of the separated Chilean family represented in this story, the ideas of George Bataille can illuminate the protagonist's experience at the subconscious level. For Bataille, procreation initiates the death process of the parents: "La muerte y la reproducción se oponen entre sí como la negación y la afirmación" (59). The woman's refusal to deliver can be explained by Bataille's affirmation that birth and death are interrelated. The protagonist's body will not procreate because of the final words of the husband to his loyal wife: "... él había prometido que regresaría antes del nacimiento y aún faltaba bastante para que fuera revelado de su misión en la frontera sur..." (39). The woman's situation is complicated by the probable repressive political circumstances under which she lives. Viewing the tarnished family Basualto represents in "La espera" in the context of Pinochet's Chile and in light of Bataille's notion about the interrelatedness of death and biological reproduction, the birth of the child would

confirm the husband's death. In other words, the appearance of the baby before the father's return from the south would finalize his demise, revoking his indeterminate status as "disappeared."<sup>13</sup>

The undefined status of the husband is complicated by the dominant patriarchal and dictatorial language articulated through the television set, a voice presented in contrast with the marginalized, silenced feminine language of the protagonist.<sup>14</sup> The "imagen tamizada y eléctrica de la televisión" (39) appears as a smiling general speaks. His address prolongs the uncertainty about the disappeared and, with it, the husband's absence, preventing the woman from moving forward with the birth process. The general's televised speech, impersonal and technical, is the only voice outwardly expressed in the entire story: "Su voz retumbaba en la solitaria habitación" (39). Basualto does not name General Pinochet, yet the time and place of the book's publication invite readers to associate the unspecified military official with Chile's infamous leader. To encourage this reading, Basualto has the dictator refer to the disappeared in his speech, a fragment in the broadcast with which the pregnant woman identifies on a deep personal level: "Él la miraba directamente a los ojos y repetía sin cesar: él volverá, él volverá" (40). This promise feeds the woman's hope and links her to a larger community of people in Chile and other Latin American nations also waiting for an indication about the whereabouts of their lost family members. In the story the husband does not return, yet his wife waits for him, and by postponing the birth of the child, self-censors the creative expression of her body. The dictator's words confuse the woman and prohibit not only her ability to

communicate freely (metaphorically, by letting the child out), but also to consider possible realities outside of dictatorial discourse. This sense of confusion could be extended to the collective psyche of the Chilean people, many of whom also became psychologically paralyzed by the regime's refusal to allow the families of the disappeared to confirm the death of their loved ones and thereby enable healing. Represented by the protagonist's unusual inability to give birth, the regime's own withholding of information, its own tactical refusal to speak about the disappeared, stunted numerous human growth processes.

It is also possible to read the protagonist's aberrant inability to deliver the baby as a refusal to comply with the regime's imposition of traditional gender roles and conservative family values, contradictory as they were. Although the military's use of exiling and assassinating the leftist opposition tore apart a great number of Chilean families, the regime's official discourse reiterated traditional Catholic ethics. The military opposed abortion, birth control, divorce, and the integration of women into the workforce while it tortured and exterminated Chileans in order to increase the nation's economic mobility. The regime allowed women to participate in politics only in their capacity to mother and encouraged them to produce and educate a new generation of compliant Chileans.<sup>15</sup> Although her motives remain unexplained, Basualto's protagonist does not readily assume the maternal role the dictator on the screen prescribes for her. Moreover, the author's choice to criticize dictatorial practices through a pregnant woman's story resonates with groups of real life Latin American women who, like Basualto, used the image of motherhood the regime itself

elevated in its official discourse to strengthen their position against military brutality. In broad terms, Latin American societies often promote a sexist notion that mothers are sacred yet innately weak beings requiring the protection of the male-dominated state and family. Numerous women from the region have made use of these cultural perceptions to shield themselves from the military violence against which they protested. Argentina's Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the group of mothers who demonstrate against the disappearances of their children, clearly exemplify the strategic use of motherhood to protest against violent regimes.

Although less famous on the international level, similar collectives of Chilean mothers have employed female domesticity to justify their otherwise unwelcome participation in political debates. For instance, in the now famous March of the Empty Pots and Pans (December 1, 1971), right-wing women gathered to protest against communism and food shortages during the Allende government. Underscoring the way women intervene in political debates by intermeshing the domestic and political spheres, these women banged on pots and pans and waved Chilean flags in downtown Santiago. Claiming their right as mothers to nourish their children and families, they demanded the socialist president's ouster.<sup>16</sup> This event demonstrates Chilean women have participated in politics and demanded dramatic socio-political reconfigurations by disingenuously celebrating their relegation to the domestic sphere. During the regime left-wing women repeated this tactical exploitation of the sacred familial union to protest, this time against the military government. Between 1983 and 1986, women of the left banged on pots and pans,

transforming the earlier protest into an opposition of military practices (Baldez 146). The performance of *la cueca sola* provides another crucial example. In 1983, women met to perform a version of Chile's national dance, the *cueca*. Normally a partner dance representing the romantic union of a couple, female dancers performed it alone, creating a silent visual metaphor of the situation of Chilean families who suffered the disappearance of their male counterparts.<sup>17</sup> These three examples trace a tradition among Latin American women of justifying their involvement in politics, protecting themselves from potential violence, and bolstering the emotive quality of their messages by tactically employing their status as women and mothers.

In "La espera," Basualto's incorporation of a fictive mother to critique the regime implements the strategies employed among the Chilean and Argentine protesters. On the one hand, the protagonist possesses the quintessential qualities of motherhood: she never speaks; her life revolves around family affairs; and she is an archetypal *mater dolorosa* whose body provides for the expansion of the family and the nation. However, the protagonist's rare situation transforms the traditional image of the mother and provides an emotive political interpretation of the state of Chile and Chilean families. The fictional character does not speak, but her troubling and grotesque image transforms the traditional image of mother and reveals her body's demand for the arrival of appropriate socio-political conditions to give birth. In a similar vein, Basualto employs the charged cultural image surrounding motherhood to formulate her own protest against the regime while protecting her own body from potential military violence through the use of the fictional woman and mother as a

metaphor for the nation.

Underscoring the circuitous way that Basualto situates the story within dictatorial Chile to critique national politics, the author does not specify how much time elapses during the woman's lengthy pregnancy. However, certain clues such as references to changing seasons, a drought, and frequent mention of days, weeks, months, and years gone by indicate many years have passed. The constant references to the amount of time elapsed permits the reader to infer the woman is pregnant for five years at the very least, but not so much time that significant historical changes have occurred. It is possible to conclude as many as fifteen years pass in which this woman cannot express herself, thus establishing a temporal allusion to the years under Pinochet before the story's publication in 1988. Despite the numerous indirect references to the context of the Chilean dictatorship, particularly the bans on artistic production and the eliminated people, the woman nevertheless finds a mode of communication. The fact that Basualto wrote and published the story during the dictatorship implies the communication of a subversive idea and the ironic reversal of censorship. Basualto overturns the silence represented by the woman's choked-up body, even though the protagonist herself encounters no way to communicate. It is questionable whether or not the woman will give birth or continue her wait indefinitely, but the message of her story is expressed through the metaphor of her inability to communicate, itself an embodiment of Basualto's aesthetic of silence, in which she communicates a criticism of censorship and other repressive dictatorial acts through a subversive assumption of them. Although the woman's external

display of conventional feminine behavior makes her an apparent example of Pinochet's plan for female subjugation, her silence can be read as a creative refusal to speak, and thus a simultaneous submission to and transformation of traditional gender norms. While the woman's aberrant situation comments on the situation of Chilean artists in the 1970s and 1980s, her body can just as easily be read as an extended metaphor of a paralyzed, fragmented, and censored nation undergoing a period of momentous creative frustration.

In "Platón," a second pivotal short story within the collection, Basualto elaborates another camouflaged critique, this time of two institutions: the military government and the university. While noting their vast differences, the writer represents the similarities between the dictatorial regime and the educational institution by demonstrating that each embodies a hierarchical system of power that controls thought and creativity. In a similar vein to "La espera," which coupled a negative assessment of unethical military procedures with a profound exploration of women's issues that were relevant but not limited to the period of authoritarian rule, "Platón" exposes the military attack on universities and the disturbing disappearance of their students at the same time that it highlights the academy's own methodical system of silencing and excluding female intellectuals. In this story, Basualto recasts the woman writer as a crucial agent in overturning not only the authoritarian government, but also the sexist, undemocratic premises on which Western thought and intellectual forums lay.

The story is a standard example of double militancy, a common political

posture among women writers and activists during the regime who, triggered by authoritarian policies, argued not only that the nation needed to implement a democratic government, but also that this political philosophy should extend to the private domain of the home. Feminists voiced double militancy through a catchy slogan—“democracia en el país y en la casa”—and they chose to underscore the notion that democracy is an all-encompassing way of equitable living, not just a form of government (Kirkwood 10). In particular, double militancy called on leftist men to note the repressive behaviors they criticized in the regime in their own relationships with women and, through this observation, to see the relevance of including a program of transformed gender relations in their proposed governmental revision of Chile. As a narrative version of this demand for a complete democratic renovation, “Platón” represents the interrelationship between gender and governmental violence through the inclusion of multiple forms of repression that occur at universities. Like the parallel feminist catchphrase that expresses the need to implement democratic practices in the political and domestic spheres, the story exploits the counterculture’s indignation about the military’s violent extermination of intellectuals to advocate the rescission of the systemic exclusion and repression of women by universities and similar intellectual forums.

The story traces a single morning in the life of Joaquín, a worn-out philosophy professor whose monotonous routine is interrupted on the particular day of the narration. Continuing the dismal tone of the entire collection, the professor is notably unhappy: he suffers from severe professional ennui and recurrent nightmares, and



categorically abhors his female students. On the morning of the story, however, he awakens with an uncharacteristic optimism when he remembers that he will have a special day at work, including the only two matters that interest him. He will lecture on his preferred topic—platonic love—and will see in class his favorite student, Roberto. His brief sanguinity vanishes, however, when he enters the classroom and discovers that Roberto is absent. The teacher waits for him to arrive, but the only latecomer to appear is a secretary who gives Joaquín a revised class roster on which Roberto's name no longer appears. Disheartened and distracted by the student's nonattendance, Joaquín can barely deliver the talk. Further, the professor's peculiar reactions to Roberto's disappearance, coupled with the topic of his lecture, confuse the nature of his interest in the student. Playing on the mind-body divide Plato established in his theory about ideal love, Basualto invites the reader to ponder whether or not the professor's connection to the student is a platonic, intellectual one, or homoerotic. Further emphasizing the mystery about Roberto's whereabouts and Joaquín's interest in the young man, the final paragraph of the story shows that the professor is expressly afraid to ask about Roberto at the administrative office: “[...] un enorme qué pasó se le aloja en la conciencia. Un quizás no venga más, un no podría soportarlo siente que lo están desollando vivo, mientras se pasea, cabizbajo, atormentado, por el jardín de los aromos. Todavía se niega a acudir a Secretaría de Estudios para averiguar” (19). There are two possible justifications for Joaquín's inability to inquire: the professor may be repressing his desire to obtain more information for fear of arousing suspicion about his homosexual interest in the

student or it is possible that he censors his desire for knowledge because he is terrified of associating himself with a subversive student whom the regime has disappeared.

Basualto's choice to obscure Joaquín's motives artfully adapts the tactics of the regime and the behaviors it imposed to disrupt its authority. Like the regime, the author leaves the status of the disappeared student undetermined. Paralleling his real-life counterparts, Roberto's fate remains enigmatic, yet the open ending, instead of increasing military power, successfully augments the reader's reflection on the disappeared and, by extension, on several forms of societal and governmental repression. The story exploits the mysterious departure of Roberto and Joaquín's notable unexplained silence to reveal the psychological complexities of repressive practices in general, whether they are militaristic, societal, or related to institutions such as universities. By design, the short story incorporates the literary device of the unresolved enigmatic ending, a characteristic trait of the genre, to demonstrate how the military tactic of withholding information about the detained and disappeared aided the government to maintain authority and control over knowledge. However, unlike military officials who employed silence as a tactic bolstering their power by exploiting Chileans' fear of the unknown and reminding them that the government controlled thought the writer obscures information to erode dictatorial authority through a demonstration by example of its own tactics.

Echoing her overall technique of transforming censorship and silence into artful expression, Basualto inserts vivid allusions to the regime without a single

reference to Chile or to the military government. For instance, the inclusion of a character who has disappeared inexplicably helps to locate the narration within totalitarian Chile. Moreover, although the university is unnamed, the choice to set the story in an academic environment immediately recalls the military's eradication of leftist students from college classrooms, a routine practice at that time. Through these inclusions and exclusions, the author suggests her own fear of speaking out, paralleling the experience of Joaquín. However, unlike the professor, Basualto appeals to silence and fear to expose it as a mechanism for control that can be craftily dismantled through literature. In effect, the author's conscious and visible incorporation of military tactics constitutes a strategic dismantling of repression and censorship. She conforms to the mandates of the regime in order to expose them.

In an ironic reversal Basualto employs logic to critique the sexist practices within the universities and in institutions justifying male dominance over the so-called rational realm. The story shows that universities and some of their personnel participate in an age-old process of excluding and repressing female intellectuals through the creation of ill-founded gender divisions that give men a privileged position within intellectual forums. The university men, Joaquín and Roberto, are probable victims of military repression; however, the professor himself abuses the position of power that his job affords him to control the distribution of knowledge. Reminiscent of the classical philosophers he studies, Joaquín holds the simple and dated belief that, while men are more logical and adept thinkers, women pertain to the libidinal, irrational realm. In contrast to the profound intellectual connection he feels

he and Roberto share, Joaquín's thoughts reveal his belief that women—precisely because of their gender—are innately incapable of understanding the depth of his lectures:

Seguramente las mujeres no entenderían el limpio juego de Platón. Ellas, con sus miradas impúdicas y sus bocas libidinosas, siempre estaban preguntando tonterías. Hasta había sorprendido sonrisillas de picardía y cuchicheos durante sus brillantes exposiciones. Pero Roberto sí entendía... Claro, Roberto valía la pena. [. . .] Él sí aprecia la filosofía. Cuando pregunta, es como si afirmara, como si sólo esperara mi respuesta para confirmar lo que ya sabe. (18)

Unlike the more obscure critiques of social systems found within the collection, Basualto leaves no doubt that her protagonist claims propriety over knowledge based on his gender.

Her choice to have Joaquín discuss Plato, a prototype of Western philosophy, encourages a feminist reading of the text. The inclusions of the well-known ancient philosopher and, in particular, his concept of platonic love, constitute clear examples of the tradition defining philosophy and thought as masculine territories. It is generally accepted as fact that men have directed universities and Western philosophy while claiming as their own all intellectual sites and activities. Plato's life and works symbolize such male-dominated institutions: the dialogical format of his writings, in particular, based on a series of intellectual conversations among friends and colleagues, demonstrates the active exchange of ideas within contained communities

of select men recalling the set-up of the modern university. Plato's twentieth-century counterpart, Joaquín, discounts female participation in modern intellectual conversations while exaggerating a dated belief about women's incapacity to produce important philosophical musings and their destructive potential to hinder and distract masculine intellectual development. The early philosopher's own notion of platonic love exemplifies this view. For Plato, love is not physical; rather, it is an elevated quest for beauty and thought. The search for ideal love, if not stalled by the physical and erotic love, produces philosophy, the worship of ideas rather than material bodies. As Plato's and Joaquín's stories suggest, great thinkers need companions with whom to exchange ideas. A notion reiterated within Joaquín's thoughts is that women, with their traditional relegation to the irrational and physical realms, cannot fill this role. For him, women thwart men in their quest for enlightenment precisely because they embody libidinal rather than ideal love. The Chilean professor firmly upholds his female students' lack of ability to understand philosophy by qualifying their gestures and body parts with sexual adjectives, each of which reasserts their conventional association to the body rather than the mind. He seems to view their "miradas impúdicas," "bocas libidinosas" (18) and "dientes provocativas" as a threat to male intellectual thought (19).

Through Joaquín's undefined sexuality, however, Basualto confuses the traditional division associating men with logic and women with the irrational. In contrast with this dated perception the professor himself upholds, he ironically reacts in a physical manner when contemplating Roberto, confusing the nature of his

affection and illustrating his inability to integrate Plato's concept of ideal love into his own life. The thought of him produces "una emoción tibia que le subía por las piernas y le alborotaba la respiración" (18) that makes him "nervioso" (19). The professor muddles the divide between intellectual and romantic connectedness and uses it as a justification to exclude women from the supposed thinking realm he wishes to share exclusively with Roberto: "Allí el amor involucra al sexo masculino, más inteligente, fuerte, superior. Amor ideal, que busca no sólo el amor corporal, sino el perfeccionamiento de las almas" (18). Joaquín's own confusion about his sexual feelings toward the student, coupled with his incongruous desire to enact platonic love, suggests the university itself is based on a dated fraternal model that unduly excludes women. Basualto suggests that the systemic erasure of women does not really facilitate the successful realization of intellectual endeavors; rather, this desire to segregate perpetuates an authoritarian and undemocratic system that, like the regime, constitutes a contemptible attempt to allow one group to maintain control over who is allowed to engage in intellectual endeavors.

In "1954" the author offers a feminist evaluation of how Chilean socio-political systems prevent certain groups from expressing themselves creatively and forming communities that bolster exchange among artists and intellectuals. In this brief narrative Basualto provides a complex representation of one female artist's integration into a genealogy of real-life Chilean women writers. In this exceedingly short self-portrait of the artist that includes aspects of the author's own biography, Basualto depicts the spiritual rebirth of a girl who becomes a writer in the moment

she adopts a literary forebear to act as a stand-in for her dying biological mother. Just as the protagonist is about to become an orphan during her crucial formative years, Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957) appears to promote the professional growth of the young artist-to-be. The main character and Mistral undergo a figurative mutual adoption process that allows the young woman to claim a Chilean artistic homeland wherein numerous women stimulate and support each other's writing processes in spite of social mores threatening to prohibit their activities. To augment the numbers of Chilean authors belonging to this fictive intellectual community, the author suggests her own pertinence to the group through the inclusion of a few subtle autobiographical clues. Additionally, she incorporates in the narration several easily discerned intertexts of Chilean narrator María Luisa Bombal's (1910-1980) well-known short story, "El árbol," demonstrating the crucial influence of select artistic predecessors on her work.

Lending complexity to this alternative female-based literary family, Basualto alludes to and ironically alters two model archetypal families possessing paramount cultural significance in Chile. One image is that of the Virgin Mother and her male child, Jesus. The other, a more autochthonous family that Chile has employed since its independence to represent itself as a nation, consists of an illegitimate, orphaned mestizo child and his indigenous mother, abandoned by her Spanish lover. Basualto reconfigures these identifiable familial structures and builds a new representative national family constructed of Chilean mothers and daughters who share the activity of writing. As women, the unsanctioned and potentially dangerous nature of their

creative engagement intensifies and necessitates their intellectual and affective bond. The story criticizes both Chile and the Catholic Church's conservative view about the function of women within the family structure through an inclusion of a figurative orphaned girl who, despite her characteristic nonconformity with social norms, is actually a productive and crucial participant in the formation of a national literary identity. Here, Basualto's aesthetic of silence and censorship culminates. The story recasts women's traditional familial role as biological reproducers to that of innovative producers of art and socio-political transformation.

Divided into two sections, the story recounts the decisive transformational moment in the life of the protagonist, a young girl with an obvious vocation for writing who lives in the repressive environment of a Catholic boarding school for girls in northern Chile. The first part narrates key aspects of the youngster's life prior to a transformational epiphany that occurs in the narration's second section—the girl's encounter with Mistral and her ensuing metaphoric rebirth as a poet and storyteller. In the first part, the girl has already been separated from her biological family because of her mother's illness. At school she does not fit in: the nuns punish her incessantly for her natural proclivities to dream about, imagine, and fabricate stories. The girl is instinctively creative, nonconformist, and is drawn to literature, particularly to poetry and short stories. Although the nuns broaden her exposure to canonical figures of Latin American literature such as the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío, they discourage her own development as a writer and chastise her for using language creatively. She tells stories to her classmates; imagines horrifying and



comical fictions about the nuns, reads voraciously, and recalling the alienated female protagonists of Bombal's work, spends her life in a hazy semi-dream state. She is no more than ten years old, yet she has developed a criterion that describes her literary taste. For instance, she finds the rosary overly repetitive and unimaginative, but loves litanies for their poetic cadence. The negative assessment of the girl by the nuns and her classmates forces her to retreat further into the fictional world, her only escape from the miserable conditions she encounters at school and at home. The girl has no contact with her mother, who is confined to a bedroom she is prohibited from entering during her weekend visits home. She remembers the parent tenderly as the person who sparked her interest in literature by reading to her nightly before the illness. The girl nurtures herself in her mother's absence through literature and by spending her weekends roaming about the arid desert wasteland alone.

In the first section the protagonist is on the verge of becoming an orphan: her mother is a vanishing figure and her father, unable to parent her, has put the child into a parochial school where nuns attend to her upbringing. All but one of the sisters overlooks her overwhelming need for affection. At the end, however, the protagonist's ability to confect fictional realities allows her to adopt Mistral as a stand-in maternal figure during the poet's brief visit to grammar schools in her native northern Chile.

Recalling the heartrending biography of Mistral, who endured the tragic suicides of her lover and nephew and who lamented in her verse an unrealized desire to become a mother, Basualto characterizes the protagonist as a misfit artist whose

loved ones circumstantially abandon her. To punctuate the crucial importance of the celebrity's visit, the only moment in the story when the child feels a sense of belonging is when Mistral delivers her address. Even though the girl is estranged from the other children during the visit and finds herself so distant from Mistral that she cannot even hear her speak, she nevertheless feels that she is an integral participant in the event. Basualto obscures the exact identity of the poet by focalizing the third person narration through the young girl, who possesses only a limited and stereotyped knowledge of the famous figure and seems not to recognize or find important the name of the well-known poet. Much like Mistral, the graying woman is a celebrated national poet and schoolteacher who claims that the children of Chile's northern desert region are her own surrogate "niños nortinos" (59). Punctuating the image of Mistral as the quintessential Chilean mother who need not be named to be recognized, Basualto stresses a profound spiritual and familiar union between the poet and the protagonist. In the story the famous woman identifies and makes sustained eye contact with a special girl in the back row, presumably the protagonist, whose need for a literary mentor and maternal surrogate matches Mistral's overwhelming and unmet desire to mother a child. There is a silent and supernatural union between the writer-mother Mistral with her young protégée. The exchange consists of nothing more than a look, yet this contact produces a brilliant light enveloping the poet and her child as they observe each other, suggesting the magical experience will indeed make the girl into an artist. In that moment the protagonist becomes a part of an imagined group of women writers who, unbeknownst to the fictive literary mothers

Mistral and Bombal, will induce the budding author to convert her undeveloped ability to fabricate stories in her imagination into written texts. Supporting this prediction, Basualto includes several notable autobiographical clues that suggest that the story “1954” and the collection La mujer de yeso incarnate the child’s realization of her literary aspirations in her adult life. For instance, the author herself ended up cultivating poetry and prose while, as a child in the 1950s, she also attended a religious boarding school in the northern desert city of La Serena near Mistral’s homeland, El Valle del Elqui.<sup>18</sup>

Although the story is expressly set several decades before the military coup, Basualto’s narration nevertheless constitutes an oblique confrontation with the regime’s attempt to sever ties between artists and intellectuals and to counter the women’s liberation movement in the 1970s and 1980s. The repressive ambiance of violent discipline in which the young girl lives at the parochial school resonates with the regulatory environment of the dictatorship years. Without a single reference to the military government, Basualto uses the story to locate the entire collection within Chile while furthering her poignant and repeated critique of political, gender, social, and artistic repression that, within stories like “1954,” appear to have little to do with the immediate socio-historical context of the book’s production. It is noteworthy that the nuns uphold the rhetoric of the regime: they discipline the students to abide by and fear authority; they instruct young girls in conventional female behavior; and, perhaps most importantly, they pointedly attack each of the protagonist’s attempts to be creative.

In one decisive moment, Basualto alludes to the girl's stifled endeavor to write, yet the author does so in her characteristically dissimulative manner. A considerable fragment of the narration recounts an incident in which the nuns punish the child for eating with her left hand. Since she is physically unable to use the other hand, she instead chokes back her tears of humiliation and ceases to eat in the sisters' presence. Needing to nourish her starved body, later that day she steals a few unripe coconuts that she eats in secret while the other girls sleep. This episode recreates a repressive milieu and refers indirectly to the control of writers during the regime. Although Basualto says nothing of this in the story, it would follow that the budding author also writes only with her left hand. Through this logical association Basualto invites the reader to imagine a parallel scene where the nuns punish the child for writing. This scene is left unwritten, perhaps because it would clearly demonstrate Basualto's discontent with the violent censorship of writers in the 1980s, yet the author's lengthy exposition of the lunchroom episode evokes it nonetheless. It is therefore significant the girl finds ways in the story to maneuver within repressive circumstances. She chooses to eat in secret rather than conform to the dictates of the nuns, insinuating, as an adult writer living during the dictatorship, she will not abide by military censorship either and will find alternative ways to satiate her hunger to write. In recalling Basualto's own work and biography, this scene points to the author's own clandestine production of literature at the same time it reveals the conditions prior to the regime that trained her to conceal subversive messages beneath a glossy veneer of conformity to behaviors imposed on her by the authorities.

In a similar circuitous manner “1954” responds to the military intent to sever ties between artists and intellectuals through legal mandates: in the story Basualto demonstrates the way writers during the dictatorship reacted to the illegalization of meeting in groups by strengthening social and professional ties. Basualto illustrates this real-life reaction through her comparison of writers’ groups with the family structure. The story is about the formation of an imagined (pro)creative bond between a fictive mother and her daughter linked organically through their artistic activities and their identity as Chilean women. Basualto presents a feminist reconfiguration of an imagined lineage of consecrated national authors that privilege male writers: instead of recognizing their more famous male counterparts, Basualto singles out as models Mistral rather than Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) and Bombal rather than Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948), and thereby stresses that same sex collaborators are important inspirational figures for aspiring young women writers such as herself.

As “1954” figuratively engenders an alternative Chilean literary family composed of women, it intervenes on a dialogue taking place in literary theory and criticism that envisions literary genealogies and generations metaphorically, through the relationship between fathers and sons and the young and old. Although these seminal theories are modeled on the family, they normally do not consider female participation; instead, they describe the way that new generations emerge as they break with figurative paternal models. For instance, Harold Bloom argues in his well-known essay, The Anxiety of Influence (1973), that emerging poets engage in a

process of differentiating themselves from their (male) literary precursors. They cleanse themselves of the father's influence and void his powers in order to make space for the new group to emerge as an independent entity. In this cyclical process, when the sons take the place of their symbolic fathers, a new group emerges that expels their antecedents (87-92). In a similar analysis that divides artists' groups in terms of their establishment within the literary field, Pierre Bourdieu describes the way budding avant-garde groups define themselves through differentiation and "reject what their most consecrated precursors are and do" (240).

Neither Bloom nor Bourdieu explores the distinct intergenerational interaction appearing between divergent groups of women writers who, taking "1954" as one key example, seem to construct a different sort of relationship with their literary forerunners. As discussed at length in chapter one, due to women writers' positions as outsiders trying to become artists in unwelcoming territories, it seems necessary to observe their self-identification process within an alternate mold. Within the Chilean context of the 1980s, female authors like Basualto point to a link between the hostile anti-intellectual posture of the regime and male dominance over the literary establishment to explain emerging women writers' necessity to acknowledge and celebrate their literary origins and form imagined communal bonds with their forerunners. Recalling the creation of a literary genealogy uniting the women writers of the 1980s with their claimed literary progenitors of the 1950s and 1960s, Basualto's character demonstrates a need to assert herself within a preexistent female genealogy of consecrated women writers in order to consider herself a literary

woman. Bausalto's story thus also suggests the real-life attempt female authors made during the regime in their conscious formation of writing circles and presses for women such as those *Ergo Sum* sponsored to affirm their presence as a sizable group to be reckoned with. These female conglomerates underwent a process of differentiation, yet gender rather than age or status within the literary field constituted the crucial aspect of their self-identification as a group. Following Bloom's and Bourdieu's proposals that new groups oust old ones to take over their power, the formation of exclusive women's writing groups and genealogies in Chile points to the authority of male writers within the country's artistic sphere. Basualto illustrates through her fiction women writers of her time did not want to define themselves as a select few; rather, they sought to augment their numbers through the formation of fictive and real-life communities to strengthen their dual demand—that Chileans claim the right to produce art and the literary establishment recognize the actual and historic contribution of the nation's female writers.

In an analysis of the milieu from which Basualto wrote, Chilean literary critic Rodrigo Cánovas explores the profound impact of military policy on forming real-life and fictive bonds between generations of Chilean narrators. In this essay he demonstrates the way the authors of the Generation of 1980 reacted to the military takeover through their repeated production of fictive accounts illustrating the sentiment of isolation artists felt from each other and their predecessors, most of whom went into exile after the coup. He notes writers expressed through their activities and their writings a longing for intergenerational interaction and continuity,

and postulates they constructed a generational identity through the metaphor of a broken family. Authors belonging to the Generation of 1980 self-identified as abandoned or orphaned children seeking to reconstruct a lost national artistic lineage (40). Whereas Pinochet represented his position as chief-of-state through a converse familial metaphor naming himself the supreme father of the nation, young subversive writers placed themselves outside this familial diagram and declared their status as *huachos* or orphans as defined by their lack of a father figure. Cánovas shows the military rupture of intellectual communities produced a break among artists who refused to participate in the symbolic national family Pinochet proposed:

Es una gesta relatada desde el resintimiento y la nostalgia hacia la figura del padre, y desde el rencor hacia los falsos ídolos que la sustituyeron. [. . .] Existe también otra esfera de acciones—fijada, más bien, en un presente perpetuo, sin antecedentes ni consecuentes—en la cual la orfandad aparece ligada a los sucesos de 1973 de modo más laxo. (41)

Cánovas goes on to delineate a converse reaction of women writers in this family-based literary analysis, illustrating that their narratives reconfigure the traditional procreative role the regime assigned them: women writers, he argues, stressed their integral biological capacity to procreate, both in a familiar and literary sense. Rather than emphasize ruptured family structures as their male counterparts did, women writers expressed a marked focus on ways to strengthen symbolic family ties, as Cánovas aptly puts it:



Paradójicamente, desde este espacio existencial de huerfanía primigenia surge una imagen renacida de la mujer, desde su papel de *creadora*. Serán portadoras de un linaje que gira en torno a la mujer (es el rito del legado materno, que genera la utopía de un nuevo comienzo), y de una actividad creativa ligada al razonamiento y a la escritura, que les permita recomponer la memoria familiar de la estirpe. (43)

The figure of the orphan is not absent from women's texts. Nonetheless, there is a noticeable penchant within their writing to center on the orphan's mother, a single woman whose male counterpart has vanished. Bausalto's "1954" exemplifies Cánovas's description—her story demonstrates the figurative birth of a female artist into a family of women artists followed by that of a narrative text, the short story itself, which is a product of a familiar union of numerous Chilean women writers who collaborate through mutual support of each other's projects.

This reading of "1954" as an example of the utopian female literary genealogy Cánovas describes, however, begs for a more profound explanation of the social significance surrounding an orphaned status in Chile. The story itself invites this clarification: Basualto includes in one strategic moment in the narration the highly-charged Chilean term for "hick"—*huaso*—when the girls at the school berate the protagonist's father during his weekly retrieval of his daughter. In Chile, this term and its equally derogatory derivative, *huacho*, designate the absence of a man's father, whether the paternal figure is deceased or just does not recognize his son as his

own. To be called a *huacho* or a *huaso* signifies a man's lack of culture and his economic destitution, poor manners, and mestizo race. A *huacho* is an orphan even though, in the standard representation, his mother is present and claims him. Chilean anthropologist and writer Sonia Montecino notes that the concept of the *huacho*, despite its negative connotations, nevertheless constitutes the base of Chilean national identity since it is the one familiar model that recognizes Chile's cultural amalgamation of Spanish and indigenous origins. Further, she highlights historical reasons making the absent father a crucial figure in the national self-portrait, beginning during the conquest when a literal massive union between transient Spanish men and Indian women took place, and then later during the northern mining boom, when men worked in isolation from women, and finally in the years of the regime, when a massive break-up of the nuclear family occurred again with the considerable numbers of disappeared and exiled Chilean men and women. The adoption of this model to represent the nation through a familial metaphor limits the role of the symbolic Chilean woman to that of a single mother and procreator since there is no female equivalent to the *huacho*.

Basualto recasts in an ironic manner women's traditional role within this model version of the Chilean family. This reconfiguration augments the role of mothers in the constructive progression of national history and of Chilean identity. The author chooses to make Mistral central to the narration and underscores her status as a single mother of folds of young figurative Chilean "orphans," some of them seeking out figures on which to mold their identity as writers. Further recalling this

symbolic Chilean family, so like the budding author, Basualto equates the girl's particular search for origins with that of the *huacho*, who needs to fill the void created by the lack of a parental figure before becoming a legitimate member of society. The choice to make Mistral rather than another Chilean woman writer the surrogate mother of the young writer-in-the-making facilitates the girl's easy adoption of a maternal substitute. Indeed, a large part of Mistral's work and self-image has to do with her problematic relationship with the maternal role, which she was able to fulfill only imaginatively through her verse and public image. Mistral's need to mother is met by the protagonist's search for a surrogate parent who recognizes her need to write, unlike the parental stand-in Pinochet whom she rejects in her adult life. Like Mistral, the young girl's need to produce and consume literature and employ it as a way to fabricate familial unity helps her cope with her own process of grief and loss. This situation recalls a key function of Chilean literature during the 1980s, much of which denounced military practices and thereby provided Chileans who suffered because of the regime a way to see their experience recognized. In the story writing is linked to the material and biological productivity associated with the maternal role as well as the affective side that normally accompanies motherhood. Dogmatic institutions such as the religious school and the regime create an emotional necessity that, as Basualto seems to suggest, must be filled in real-life or in fiction for the nation to move forward.

Basualto manipulates another recognizable image of maternity to demonstrate the desirability of the alternative family unit she proposes in the story. Mixing

Catholic imagery with the poet's ambiguous self-identity as a feminist and as the symbolic mother of all Chileans, the author portrays Mistral as if she were a lesser, yet legitimate version of the Virgin Mother. Instead of depicting her with a holy baby boy who will save humanity, Basualto has a young woman artist accompany the sacred woman as if she were her child. Basualto's description of Mistral's visit to the school and her brief contact with the protagonist highlights the comparison between Mistral and the Virgin while demonstrating the profound spiritual union between her and all Chilean children, particularly the protagonist:

[. . .] la anciana se aleja del estrado y se dirige hacia los cordones que la separan de los niños. Alarga sus brazos y cientos de pequeñas manos tratan de tocarla. Alarga sus ojos y se detiene en una niña de la fila de atrás. La sonrisa de la maestra inunda el rostro de la pequeña haciéndola enrojecer, mientras crece y crece y le dan ganas de salir volando. El corazón bate vertiginosamente y los ojos resplandecen bajo el sol rotundo ahora. De pronto ha desaparecido el cansancio y la mañana se vuelve perfecta. (60-1)

The image of the children as they reach for Mistral replicates the apparition not of a literary figure, but of a magical holy presence. Even nature seems to recognize the poet's transformational capacity and contributes to her representation as a divine entity: the sun appears adorning her with a brilliant light that forms a makeshift halo, which then envelops the woman and "her" children. In linking the writer-to-be to Jesus through imagery by characterizing her as a person who is misunderstood by

those who surround her, Basualto suggests that the young woman could potentially make an extraordinary contribution to the human condition as a writer. In this manner Basualto hints at the crucial public importance of women writers, whom the Church and the government recognize mistakenly only in their passive and biological role as mothers rather than in their capacity to effect momentous socio-political change. Through her selection of Mistral as the maternal model for the young writer, Basualto complicates a facile delineation of women's social roles since Mistral's own poetic oeuvre intermeshes a contradictory desire to simultaneously uphold and dismantle traditional gender assignments. In many regards this is a similar tactic to the one Basualto employs in her own work, in which she assumes traditional gender roles in a subversive intent to say the inexpressible during the regime. "1954" suggests, rather crucially, that women writers should engage in creative processes that negotiate traditional gender boundaries. Contrary to Pinochet's men and the nuns at the boarding school, who consider writing a sullied and demonic activity, particularly for women, Basualto illustrates the moving power of women who pen their own stories and that of the nation.

La mujer de yeso constitutes a pivotal fictional unification of women and women writers that parallels the actual pursuit of aspiring female authors who, at the time the book was published, engaged in a life and death battle to assert their right to produce art. Alejandra Basualto's aesthetic of silence and censorship links generations of women who have used literature manipulatively to subvert sexist social mores. This strategic and aesthetic implementation of military strategy to

erode the regime's attempt to control each aspect of Chilean life contributed to the satchel of tools New Scene artists collected at this time while further demonstrating the far-reaching and tangible impact Ergo Sum's collective, activity-based imperative had on the Chilean socio-artistic spheres. My analyses of three integral short stories from the compilation demonstrate Basualto's singular amalgamation of technical complexity with political concerns to undermine the military imposition as well as a gamut of establishments, organizations, and practices that have attempted to subjugate Chilean women within the political, literary, educative, and familial structures. Pinochet attempted to capsize literary production through censorship and to instruct Chileans to respect authority by means of the image of the docile woman, yet he unwittingly fueled a productive and flourishing neo-avant-garde art movement in which massive numbers of women like Basualto participated. Indeed, Pinochet exposed an urgent need to transform the discriminatory practices that his own government revealed in their most grotesque form. Yet, the fact that Basualto identified cunning strategies to maneuver within censorship, where she feigns to accept silence, should not be read as a glorification of the aggressive circumstances precipitating her project. Rather, along with Basualto and others from her generation, I have attempted to expose the corrupt and antiquated premises of socio-political systems that garner power by silencing, erasing, and disenfranchising target groups due not only to gender, but also to similar factors of differentiation such as race and class that have likewise spurred cultural producers to use the pen as a strategic armament.

While the years of the regime have left an indelible mark on the Chilean nation, in the 1990s the country nevertheless underwent a dramatic makeover during its lengthy transition back to a democratic government. In large part the emergent generation of women writers now sees feminism as the struggle characterizing the work of the previous group. Worn out from the seventeen year regime, Chileans express a marked desire to take on new projects. The collective project that had brought scores of women together in workshops gave way in the 1990s to massive collective amnesia about the dictatorship years and a general apathy about civic issues. In turn, the emergent group of women writers of these years possesses an expressly different notion about the role of the woman writer within this new Chilean landscape. Their country is no longer the censored feminized nation of the dictatorship years, but the continent's neoliberal economic miracle, the prototype of the new global Latin America. Obscuring its history of repression, Chile chooses to define itself as "The Tiger of South America." Noting this, the women writers of the next literary generation, to whom I shall now turn my attention, define the function of the Chilean woman writer as a participant in Chile's complex process of collective remembering and forgetting. As we shall see in the next chapter, these women writers imagine and recount their own story: that of girls who become women writers while their nondescript nation undergoes a visible opening up to an undiscovered global society that attempts to forget the bodies upon which it has constructed its neoliberal economic miracle.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> Attesting to its popularity, the publisher, an intellectual named Sergio Pesutic, put out five editions of La inteligencia militar between 1986 and 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Constable and Valenzuela aptly describe the lack of clarity of censorship laws during the regime and demonstrate the way the military power simultaneously declared freedom of the press while censoring each form of expression in Chile. Additionally, these historians delineate the complex fluxes in military edicts during the Pinochet reign and show that repression lessened and increased frequently depending on a variety of political factors. See their chapter entitled “The Culture of Fear.”

<sup>3</sup> Nelly Richard’s Políticas y estéticas de la memoria (2000) contains 32 pieces by a variety of Chilean scholars about memory and self-censorship.

<sup>4</sup> Alice Nelson affirms the centrality of women writers when she describes the overall composition of Chilean publishing in the 1980s. I agree with her assertion that the increased interest in women writers was not just the result of women’s shifting participation in the Chilean public sphere, but was also provoked by an augmented international interest in cultural production by women. (127)

<sup>5</sup> Rodrigo Cánovas postulates this tendency among Chilean women writers to narrate their own stories of becoming authors characterizes them as a group. See pages 93-101 in Novela Chilena, Nuevas Generaciones: el abordaje del huérfano.



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<sup>6</sup> Ana María Cuneo has published a brief article about Basualto's poetry in which she provides an overview of some of the thematic and stylistic concerns of the poet.

<sup>7</sup> Numerous literary critics have outlined guidelines that place contemporary Chilean writers in literary generations based on differing standards, including the year of their birth and the moment they began to write and publish. Fernando Jerez outlines numerous proposals to name authors belonging to the pre-Generation of 1980 in which scholars have postulated that authors like Basualto, born between 1935 and 1949, do not fit into the Generation of 1980 but, rather, into the "Generación de 72," "Generación del 70," or the "Promoción emergente." I find this form of generational categorizing problematical, particularly when considering women writers and writers producing during the dictatorship. For each of these groups the publication of their books was often delayed by political and social circumstances. Given these variables, I consider Basualto's prose (as well as that of Sonia Guralnik, who was born in 1920) a part of the cultural production of the Generation of 1980 because it emerged from the context of dictatorial Chile.

<sup>8</sup> In his study about everyday practices, de Certeau makes a decisive distinction between tactic and strategy that facilitates a more profound understanding of Basualto's covert narrative maneuvers against military-sponsored censorship. Whereas strategies belong to people or institutions that already occupy a position of power, tactics belong to the "weak." Due to their position as "other," tactical users do not have the power to be strategic per se; rather, they wait for and "seize" scant

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opportunities which they then transform through manipulation and “clever tricks” into “opportunities” that allow them to “get away with things” (xix).

<sup>9</sup> Basualto published first in book-objects at least three short stories that she reedited in La mujer de yeso including: “Imbunche” (in Ensacados, 26 cuentos ilustrados), “Esquina” (in Cuando no se puede vivir del cuento), and “Muros adentro” (in 25 cuentos).

<sup>10</sup> With the exception of a few university-sponsored literary prizes for students, during the years of the regime Bata was virtually the only national fiction contest. It was sponsored by the international and Chilean shoemaker and store, Bata, in conjunction with the Department of Cultural Expansion of the National Library. Basualto participated in 1983, 1984, and 1985 and won prizes each year, including the first-place award in 1985.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 2 of María Elena Valenzuela’s La mujer en el Chile military: todas íbamos a ser reinas.

<sup>12</sup> Since November 1998, when Pinochet was arrested in England for human rights violations, the Chilean courts have determined the ex-leader mentally unfit to undergo criminal investigations. On December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2004, however, a Chilean judge ruled that Pinochet is psychologically competent to stand trial.

<sup>13</sup> In Residuos y metáforas, Richard sheds light on the psychological process undergone by Chileans whose family members “disappeared” during the regime. She notes Chileans’ “duelo en suspenso,” or the marked desire among survivors of the dictatorship to continue to remember the disappeared in order to postpone the finality

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of their death and to not take part in killing their loved ones by accepting that they are dead (35). For a detailed analysis of this phenomenon, see the chapter entitled “La cita de la violencia: convulsiones del sentido y rutinas oficiales.”

<sup>14</sup> In A Nation of Enemies the importance of mass communication to the military regime is explained:

A far more important propaganda tool was the television. Only a handful of Chileans could afford magazines; about 700,000 read a daily paper. But by 1982, with heavy tariffs of foreign televisions virtually eliminated, nearly 78 percent of all households owned a set—the one part of Pinochet’s 1980 election-night promise that was fulfilled. This was the ideal medium for the authoritarian government: it kept people home, created a direct link between the individual and the state, filtered reality through an appealing prism, and encouraged consumption instead of thought. (155)

<sup>15</sup> See chapters 2 and 3 in Valenzuela’s La mujer in el Chile Militar: todas íbamos a ser reinas (1987).

<sup>16</sup> In Right-Wing Women in Chile: Feminine Power and the Struggle Against Allende, 1964-1973 (2002), Margaret Power describes the march in intricate detail. See chapter 5: “From the Scare Campaign to the March of the Empty Pots and Pans.

<sup>17</sup> In Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love: the Aprillera Movement in Chile 1974-1994, Marjorie Agosín gives a brief analysis of the *cueca sola* and its relationship to the *arpillera* movement.

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<sup>18</sup> This biographical information was verified during a personal interview with Basualto conducted on January 16, 2004.

### The Group of Cultural Industry: Spirits in a Material World

When Alejandra Costamagna (b. 1976), Nona Fernández (b. 1971), Andrea Jęftanovic (b. 1970), Andrea Maturana (b. 1969) and Lina Meruane (b. 1970) began to publish in the late 1990s, a new group of female fiction writers coalesced.<sup>1</sup> Like their New Scene antecedents of the 1980s, who created an action-based literary project to counter the regime while it was in place, during the post-dictatorship period this budding group redefined the socio-political role of literature and the woman writer to match the dramatic national reconfiguration left in the wake of what Chilean sociologist Tomás Moulian has aptly termed a capitalist revolution (28). Seventeen years of totalitarian rule, he argues, effectively revolutionized Chilean daily life, culture, and identity at their core.<sup>2</sup> Today's leading group of female narrators from Chile, too young to recall the socialist culture their literary forerunners longed to recover symbolically by identifying collaborators and literary forebears, focuses instead on mediating the damaging psychological effects of the cultural shifts flourishing in the aftermath of the dictatorship. This is not a surprising twist given that each of these women writers grew up under the regime and began to publish during the awkward transition from dictatorship to democracy.<sup>3</sup> Integrating this unique worldview, their novels and short stories often emphasize the formative years of their protagonists—in their majority, creative young women who grapple with the painful residuals of socio-political upheaval, conflict, and war.

Literary scholars and fiction writers disagree about the name and characteristics that best define this generation of fiction writers.<sup>4</sup> Calling it most frequently the Generation of 1990, critics highlight a relationship between new and old literary trends and examine the emerging fiction's penchant for illustrating the cultural, economic, and political shifts taking place in Chile during the 1990s.<sup>5</sup> As the scholarship elaborates, these writers spotlight post-totalitarian experiences, exhibiting a confused nation in transition, tormented by a violent past but euphoric about Chile's economically and politically promising present and future. Critics' work underscores the narrative integration of such themes as Chileans' forgetfulness about the past, general apathy toward politics, and euphoric celebration of the then newly established democratic government and the alleged fiscal and technological bonanza generated by neoliberalism.<sup>6</sup>

There is, however, a scantily understood branch of this generation comprised of the five aforementioned authors whose genealogical lineage traces back to the Generations of 1980 and 1950. In separating out this mini-assemblage of women writers belonging to the Generation of 1990, the more specific and suggestive name I give it—the Group of Cultural Industry—facilitates a more precise placement of their project within a broad literary and socio-political context that emphasizes in particular the plentiful and healthy connective tissue joining their work to that of their politically engaged and aesthetically innovative predecessors of the Generations of 1950 and 1980.<sup>7</sup> This five-person group carries on their literary foremothers' dissident employment of artistic media to denaturalize and alter trends within the

literary establishment as well as in the everyday lives of common citizens. These immediate heirs to the feminist New Scene aesthetic have elaborated in their works a self-reflexive representation of the woman writer as an industrious participant in artistic tasks who includes in the definition of her labor an implicit critique of everyday Chilean culture, particularly the manipulative forces that manufacture and manage it, as if it were an industry. Continuing the legacy of women writers' groups such as that of *Ergo Sum*, the Group of Cultural Industry recasts women and women writers into active roles within the political and artistic spheres and redefines art's social function as an activity that transforms everyday life. Specific to the context in which they write, much of this group oeuvre shows that daily life in their country from 1990 on resembles the industrial production of material goods around which Chile's free-market economy revolves; their fictional accounts demonstrate the ways that dominant political and economic groups fabricate a product-oriented culture and matching lifestyle that creates and supports the consumer ideology activated during the regime. In the vein of their antecedents of the 1980s, who tailored restrictive domestic activities into subversive literary "garments," the Group of Cultural Industry—as assiduous as their fictional protagonists and their literary foremothers—also fashions alternate activities that expose and tug on the seams holding the dominant order together.

Most literary critics underestimate the trenchant stance toward Chilean politics and culture and the experimentation with narrative techniques characterizing the writers of the Group of Cultural Industry.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps this is because the manifesto-

like publications that a more cohesive branch of this generation, the McOndo group, put out in the early 1990s, a half decade prior to the emergence of the Group of Cultural Industry, captivated literary scholars and diverted their attention away from women writers' alternate project.<sup>9</sup> Focusing attention on the burgeoning technological industry, Chilean writers Alberto Fuguet (b. 1964) and Sergio Gómez (b. 1962), the leaders of this more prominent assemblage, made dramatic entrances into the literary field, inaugurating an innovative narrative project that recognizes Chile's transformed culture and economy. In the vein of their female contemporaries, the McOndo writers created an aesthetic and thematic focus to match these profound socio-political and economic alterations. However, while the earlier group jumps on the neoliberal bandwagon, these women writers tend to include similar contextual references that critique the forces controlling and conforming Chilean culture at that time. Comprised of Chilean and pan-Hispanic "artistas adolescentes," almost exclusively men in their thirties, the McOndo writers are united in two anthologies—Cuentos con walkman (1993) and McOndo (1996) (Cuentos con walkman 15). In the introductions to these collections, Fuguet and Gómez sever ties with their literary forefathers, arguing that the image of provincial Latin America that magical realism made popular worldwide in the 1960s and 1970s misrepresents the globalized post-modern milieu in which young Hispanic writers now live. The leaders propose that the changes in urban life that the free-market economy, the massive proliferation of technology, and the region's entrance into the global village generated merits a renovation of narrative theme and style to match the everyday influences of MTV,



music, movies, and the internet on the lives of “young” artists. Cutting ties with national and literary history, they have created a literary equivalent to Chile’s revolutionized culture, marketing what they call an expendable, disposable, utilitarian, and industrialized fiction (Cuentos con walkman 13).

This ground-breaking post-totalitarian literary project captured the attention of literary critics, many of whom since then define the entire Generation of 1990 according to the provocative characteristics Fuguet and Gómez outline.<sup>10</sup> This foundational group, as Javier Campos explains, nevertheless fails to appreciate the heterogeneous quality of Chilean life and art at this time. On the other hand, women writers of the Group of Cultural Industry, who are absent from these anthologies,<sup>11</sup> are defined by their critical stance toward the advent of neo-capitalist culture and the region’s unbalanced access to consumer items.<sup>12</sup> In contrast to the technological and disposable aesthetic of the McOndo group, the Group of Cultural Industry places under sharp scrutiny the uneasy foundation upon which Chile’s economic miracle is built. They unearth the suppressed past and pore over the layers of historical, emotional, and environmental wreckage that lay concealed beneath the society of “neoliberalismo maravilloso,” to use Campos’s ironic phrase, which the Fuguet-Gómez group celebrates. These women writers integrate the McOndo group’s industrial-technological milieu; however, their contrasting aesthetic exposes Chilean culture as an industry in and of itself, questioning the effects of the disposable, amnesic, and alleged apolitical culture comprising contemporary *chilenidad*.

Contrary to fashionable opinion about “young” Chilean writers of this period as a whole, the Group of Cultural Industry focuses in large part on the nation’s severed relationship with its past through metaphors that show families uncomfortably disjointed from each other and bygone eras. In broad terms, these women’s works reintegrate precisely those elements suppressed from the nation’s recorded history and from the collective consciousness and propose to create a forward-looking national myth of democracy that includes less sanitized images of Chile’s past. Updating the anti-authoritarian philosophy at the core of the *Ergo Sum* project, their narratives suggest that the amnesic consumer society of the turn-of-the-twenty-first-century extends from a fabricated dictatorial culture that fosters economic growth rather than psychological wellbeing.

The two novels this chapter features—Fernández’s Mapocho (2002) and Jeftanovic’s Escenario de guerra (2000)—typify these prevailing group views and the contextual circumstances that I argue define the Group of Cultural Industry. Through these books, I analyze the artistic trends characterizing the group’s project within its larger artistic and socio-political framework, including: an implicit critique of neoliberal consumer culture that questions the ability of the new social order to meet the spiritual and political needs of the nation during its transitional phase; a drive to recuperate and recycle elements belonging to the past that this consumer culture glosses over or hides; and a self-conscious representation of their own artistic projects as writers dedicated to these social and political goals. Mapocho and Escenario de guerra intermesh literary strategies borrowed from traditional narrative and theater

that draw strategic attention to and tweak the manipulative representational devices that the dominant neoliberal culture treated in their books employs to fabricate and maintain Chile's consumer society.<sup>13</sup> In Fernández's haunting novel, ghostly apparitions take center stage and perform visually the counter-memories belonging to the past that the new culture conceals, while Jeftanovic's book explicitly fuses fiction with theater to show that memory is a performative fabrication that reinvents and links past, present, and future times. In both of their family sagas, female artist-heroines summon spirits to spur a visual resurrection of familial memory that triggers an implied amnesic Chilean readership to recover aspects of the national past and to learn alternate behaviors that could potentially facilitate the successful and more rapid implementation of democratic practices. The inclusion of viewing audiences within their narratives links their project to that of women writers of the Generation of 1980 who formed same sex communities and highlighted the legacy of previous groups of women writers in strategic noncompliance with the dominant, authoritarian culture. Inadvertently heeding the warning to look on the past critically that María Elena Gertner expressed in La mujer de sal, explored in chapter one, the writers of the Group of Cultural Industry actually transform their literary foremothers' nostalgic longing to return to a more egalitarian socialist society during the 1970s and 1980s into yearnings for a future time of democratic community-mindedness in which the past does not stagnate, but serves communal interests pertinent to present and future times.

The enormous changes in Chilean everyday life and in publishing that took place when this new group emerged and that spurred their cultivation of alternate themes, genres, and styles shed light on the unique view manifested within the literary work of the Group of Cultural Industry. While women writers of the Generation of 1980 adapted the mini-short and short story genres to mark a territory for censored artists, the new group's emergence during more nuanced and peaceable times also shapes their work. Previously clandestine publishing houses such as Cuarto Propio clamored to support young women writers while the editors of two huge multinational publishing houses that opened in the 1990s—Planeta and Alfaguara Chile—recruited new writers to publish on a large scale (Ossa Budge 53; del Río 208). Like Chile itself, the literary establishment became market-based, and cultural production became industrialized and streamlined.<sup>14</sup> Artisan texts, self-editions, clandestine magazines, and mini-short stories were no longer an adequate aesthetic match to Chile's new cultural reality. Instead, a noteworthy shift in preference from the short story to the novel cropped up, which served market needs at the same time that it allowed new writers to develop composite representations of post-totalitarian Chile through extended metaphors of the severed familial unit similar to those authors like Alejandra Basualto wrote during the dictatorship years. Family sagas of extensive length, a form popularized internationally in such novels as Colombian Gabriel García Márquez's Cien años de soledad (1967) and Isabel Allende's La casa de los espíritus (1982), pinpoint in recent Chilean narratives by women like Fernández and Jeftanovic the troubled psychology of the country and the

contentious and painful relationship between its dictatorial and socialist pasts and the neoliberal present.

Although key members of the new group stress in personal interviews that their narrative project and art of living as women writers departs from the feminist concerns central to female authors of the Generation of 1980 (and, I would add, to the writers Generation of 1950), their fusion and proposed renovation of familial and political dynamics is in fact an up-to-date version of previous feminist-literary movements.<sup>15</sup> Rather than integrate the metaphor of the violated female body as a symbol of the brutalized totalitarian state, the Group of Cultural Industry evokes examples of damaged Chilean families. These family portraits feature young female protagonists whose yearning for a more complete understanding of the past imperfectly erased by collective amnesia is pivotal to the growth and reestablishment of the democratic national community. This intermeshing of the traditionally private domain of the familial unit with the public milieu of politics posits an alternative and important role for their fictionalized female artists, many of whom transform socio-political and economic marginalization into a powerful position where crucial cultural understanding, self-awareness, and development may take place. The young heroines in Mapocho and Escenario de guerra channel and materialize repressed collective memories, demand an explanation about the past that debunks a bogus national identity, and overturn imposed cultural behaviors that support dominant economic and political interests. Through artistic media, they show that Chilean culture is a mere fabrication that military and political officials, the media, and neoliberal

economists design to further their own interests. In turn, through the agency and talent of their female protagonists, these new women writers spotlight an alternate notion of Chilean identity that evaluates the capitalist revolution in a way that urges everyday citizens to follow the lead of their heroines as participants in the nation's reconstruction of the alleged new democracy.

These women writers include abundant contextual references to Chile's post-dictatorial scene. During the 1990s, the dominant culture constructed a profusion of symbolic images to manage collective memory and create a fiction of harmony. Jeftanovic describes the widely discussed creation of a false consensus about national identity and suggests Chile's need for artists in particular to counter government-sponsored forgetting:

El gobierno de la Concertación impuso rápidamente la etiqueta del consenso, una forma simplista, falaz y superficial que intentó borrar el conflicto; y nos impuso la idea de una sociedad en paz y rentable. El consenso de la mano del neoliberalismo suspendió el duelo nacional y bajo un modo autoritario clasificó problemas y soluciones, causas y procesos. Pareciera que el Gobierno nos quiso indemnizar de tanto dolor con altas tasas de crecimiento, con bajas tasas de interés, con malls para comprar nuestros sueños, con alianzas comerciales. Y la cultura que avaló este programa, tuvo que ver con proyectos artísticos homogeneizantes, conformistas con las circunstancias, que exploraban territorios conocidos. (3 <http://everbra.org/summer02/andrea.htm>)

Intellectuals, politicians, and select groups of everyday citizens engaged in battles to influence the reconstruction of national identity. In regard to this historical period, critic Alice Nelson explains that:

. . . the overall impulse to unearth publicly what had happened during the Pinochet years, or alternatively, to keep it underground as part of the unwritten past, was simultaneously a debate about how the future might be constructed, about who might narrate that future, about the values upon which Chilean society would be rebuilt. (22)

Fernández and Jeftanovic demonstrate their group's participation in a minority endeavor to graft the past onto the national collective consciousness by transforming Chile's product-based consumer society into an aesthetic. Their narratives challenge the alleged success and impunity of right-wing politicians and businessmen who created a memory block about past military violence by ushering in a consumer economy and culture.

Diverting attention away from the human rights violations that aided in the implementation of the new market system, the post-dictatorial Chilean government projected worldwide a more positive image that stressed its prosperous present, inviting Chileans to participate guilt-free in the new consumer culture while recruiting much-needed foreign investors to their country's burgeoning free-market economy (Moulian 97-100). In this capitalistic schema all things old, including the past, are deemed outmoded and less desirable.<sup>16</sup> Consumerism constituted Chileans' new practice of everyday life and their necessary participation in the new order

justified the impunity of the regime. Moulian's socio-historical study and Idelber Avelar's literary exploration of this period emphasize that the concealment of all that belonged to the past was not coincidental; for its own success, the neoliberal order required that consumers accept violence as a necessary sacrifice for economic prosperity. Cultural practices such as abundant television viewing and the massive consumption (largely on credit) of consumer goods the free-market system made available reaffirmed a consumer and individual mentality as both a socio-cultural and an economic base. Toying with the image-laden society it created to sell products, the political and economic right launched a campaign that urged the nation to forget the past (Moulian 37).

Meanwhile, other public performances countered Chileans' amnesic state, at times in spaces ironically ushered in and supported by the new consumer market, such as the literary establishment and the mass media. For example, during the decade of the 1990s, left-wing factions exhumed and reburied Allende's remains, documented human rights abuses in publications like the Rettig Commission (1990), resurrected monuments commemorating the disappeared, and unearthed mass graves containing the bodies of political prisoners (Moulian 66-74). At the same time, the writers of the Group of Cultural Industry—participants in a multifaceted endeavor to expose the past—began to write, publish, and gain prominence in the literary field.

Nona Fernández's work counters the effect of the interment of the past. Her professional life as an artist and her literary productions coincide with pivotal aspects that recall this transformed socio-political context as well as the larger group to which



she belongs. As a fiction and screen writer as well as a professional actor, her interests combine narrative, theater, and performance, three key elements included in her 2002 novel, Mapocho. In a personal interview, Fernández explained that her collaboration with the key figures of her generation has occurred both on the set and in literary workshops that members of the Generation of 1980 directed to train the young authors who would later compose the Group of Cultural Industry (14 January 2004). A prize-winning writer, she also appears in a variety of anthologies dedicated to recent Chilean literary production.<sup>17</sup> Her novelistic work confronts post-dictatorial Chile's consumer culture in an endeavor to dig up—through the agency of a creative heroine—elements of the past that market culture buries.

Mapocho is a chilling ghost story in which phantoms come forth to reenact their personal history. Each of their stories underscores a significant aspect of national history that the dominant authoritarian and consumer culture suppresses and everyday citizens forget. Through the incorporation of abundant living and dead characters that narrate fragments of their life stories alongside excerpts that an omniscient narrator provides, Fernández represents a society haunted by a gory past festering in the collective unconscious. The narrative present is the 1990s, during Chile's transitional government from the Pinochet dictatorship to democracy; however, within this present time, ghosts of people who died in other key moments of Chilean history appear and expose the past. In this way, phantoms embody the central premise of the novel: the present time is the cumulative result of national history, including those aspects of the past erased to create a more sanitized national

identity and functional free-market economy. The insertion of an array of ghosts from various historical frames, moreover, reveals the enduring negative effects of many governments that garnered power through violence and then attempted to suppress Chileans' memories of it. Fernández's inventive depiction of Santiago as a phantom city shows that, whereas political and economic powers may attempt to expunge events from history books, the past reappears in the form of spirits, ghosts, trash, and ruins. Further, Fernández's account illustrates that strategic state-sponsored forgetting creates not only a bogus national identity, but also a country paralyzed and fragmented because of its severed relationship to its past. The ghosts act out precisely those elements hidden from the people-at-large, erased imperfectly through the consumer culture creating collective amnesia. While revealing elements suppressed from written history, Fernández also exposes other manipulative visual media that further collective forgetting by including easy-to-discern images of the glamorous façade that covered up the socialist and dictatorial epochs during post-totalitarian Chile. She intersperses excerpts from a clandestine history book one of the characters writes among ghostly scenes that shifting narrative voices explain. Mirroring Fernández's proposal that Chile review its official history and include accounts of individuals who belong to the long silenced past, the author provides detailed explanation about the nation's haunted status through varied perspectives. Fernández makes extraordinary use of the ghost motif to serve an aesthetic and political function. The employment of the ghost story form as a literary technique substantiates the inclusion of the stories of many different ghosts, regardless of the

historical frame in which they lived while allowing the author to relate each of their accounts to the common backdrop of the period of the transition. Suggesting that unofficial histories survive and percolate throughout society, the phantom motif furthers the author's political proposal to link past, present, and future times, opposing the neoliberal consumer culture's call to break ties with the past and exposing the haunted state of the Chilean population that this culture obscures.

In the principal storyline of the account, Rucia and Indio, the ghosts of two Chilean siblings, return to their native soil after many years of exile. Shortly before their homecoming, the two become ghosts as a result of a tragic car accident that kills them along with their mother. Their existence as phantoms gives them access to stories and beings that other, living people cannot see. Once Rucia, the protagonist, arrives in Chile, she discovers previously concealed aspects of the traumatic history of her family and country by viewing other phantoms and the city of Santiago itself enact images and stories about the past. As the plot progresses, she gradually recuperates her familial history as well as that of the nation.

When the story begins, Rucia's father, Fausto, who has just received a telegram informing him of the death of his estranged wife and two children, is the only living family member. An intellectual, Fausto had been a history teacher and an aspiring writer during the military takeover. Once authorities detain him, however, he betrays his ideals and agrees to serve the government by writing a censored version of Chilean history that excludes crucial aspects of the past which compromise a positive national image. Although Fausto counterbalances his disloyalty by writing

an uncensored history book clandestinely, his imprisonment early on in the regime and his subsequent collaboration with military officials provoke his wife, Mamá, to flee to a Mediterranean fishing village with their then young children. In their isolation, Mamá attempts to erase from her own mind and that of her children all memories of her husband and homeland. The entire family is nevertheless haunted by its forgotten history. When the children ask about their father, Mamá lies to them. She unconsciously collaborates with the regime and makes Fausto “disappear,” telling the Rucia and Indio that military officials burned Fausto to death in a soccer field where supposedly he and all the residents of their old neighborhood had been incarcerated, tortured, and murdered. The truth is revealed after the accident when the childrens’ ghosts meet their suicidal father and numerous other Chileans, both living and dead. Mirroring Mamá’s fragile psychology, virtually everyone they encounter in Chile suffers from a post-traumatic disorder, manifesting the symptoms of amnesia, denial, guilt, and incomplete mourning.

The ghost motif central to Mapocho frequently appears in Chilean literature published during the transition. As in Fernández’s work, the phantoms incorporated into other texts bridge the suppressed dictatorial past with the period of post-totalitarian amnesia.<sup>18</sup> Though this motif remains largely unexplored among critics of Chilean literature, literary scholars who focus on fiction produced in the U.S. have identified the profound political and literary significance of ghost stories. One such critic, Kathleen Brogan, proposes that phantoms bridge the past with the present and reveal the continuation of collective trauma in the United States due to a blocked

relationship with the past. Fiction writers in particular, she argues, use apparitions not only to reshape contemporary perceptions about the past, but, more crucially, to alter the collective present by revisiting history. While American writers integrate ghosts to grapple with the residual scarring of such practices as slavery and the genocide of American Indians, Chilean writers like Fernández have included images of ghost to represent similar historical traumas, particularly the uneasy continuation of the dictatorial past in the present. In contrast with Chilean stories which include ghosts to alter a skewed national identity and a troubled collective psyche, in the U.S., ghostly fictions are often used to recast ethnic identity (Brogan 4). Strikingly similar to Fernández's work, the stories of cultural haunting of which Brogan speaks involve a creative recovery of minority groups' suppressed histories that allow for a more complete understanding of the collective psychology of those who live uncomfortably in the present because of their incomplete access to past:

Stories of cultural haunting [. . .] explor[e] the hidden passageways not only of the individual psyche but also of a people's historical consciousness. Through the agency of ghosts, group histories that have in some way been threatened, erased, or fragmented are recuperated and revised.

[. . .] The turn to the supernatural in the process of recovering history emphasizes the difficulty of gaining access to a lost or denied past, as well to the degree to which any such historical reconstruction is essentially imaginative. (5-6)

Fernández's incorporation of ghosts also extends from Latin American literary tradition. Yet whereas such signature ghost narratives as Adolfo Bioy Casares's La invención de Morel (1940) and Juan Rulfo's Pedro Páramo (1955) represent supernatural elements as a distinctive if not real aspect of Latin American everyday life, in Fernández's Mapocho ghosts emerge from and complicate a troubled collective imagination that an injurious relationship with the past produces. Expanding on Rulfo's novel, Fernández's specters demonstrate that unresolved and disturbing aspects of history haunt the everyday, manifesting fragments the dominant consumer culture excludes that nevertheless fester within the collective memory. In her important study about ghosts, Avery F. Gordon describes this socio-psychological situation:

If haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place. The ghost is not simply the dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. (8)

Fernández's ghosts expose a Chilean social reality wherein spirits spring from the deep recesses of a scarred national psychology.

The character Fausto in Mapocho represents this distressed emotional relationship with history. Manifested through his disturbed imagination, ghosts who

are likely to be an extension of his own consciousness reprimand him, suggesting that he has not come to terms with his complicity with the regime or his painful separation from his family. In the following passage, Fausto returns to the apartment where the spirits of history's dead he writes about haunt him, just after seeing the ghost of his daughter, Rucia, during his first visit to her grave. Fausto's tormented guilt and obsession with his and Chile's dead provokes these ghosts to appear and allows them to be real:

La muerte es mentira. [. . .] Durante mucho tiempo ha tenido la oportunidad de comprobarlo. No es paranoia como diagnostican los médicos, tampoco es una alucinación que se pueda curar con pastillas o tratamientos. Los muertos viven. Son una realidad. Resucitan a diario y vagan por las calles del Barrio. Se pasean, se instalan por las noches bajo su edificio, lo esperan sobre los techos cercanos y le hacen señas o le gritan. Los muertos viven. Él puede verlos. Puede tocarlos, hablarles y hasta consolarlos si se le acercan a llorar. Habitan bajo los puentes, en las ruinas de una casa vieja, en algún rincón solitario. Todos lo buscan, lo llaman, lo apuntan con su dedo índice. Por el día se aparecen haciéndose los huevones, se le acercan de improvisto, lo abordan con palabras, lo engañan con su cara de vivos. A algunos es tan difícil distinguirlos. Se camuflan perfecto, visten como vivos, hablan y lloran como vivos. (115)

Fausto's disquieting psychology evokes a larger national community of citizens similarly haunted by their pasts. The past continues to agitate the collective psychology because the population-at-large as viewed in Mapocho prefers not to confront the haunting presence of their history.

The precise selection of the phantoms that appear in the novel gives special importance to certain key past events that have had a damaging effect. Rucia, the book's primary focalizer and the creative heroine who drives the implicit critique of the neoliberal culture, interacts with the other ghosts more than any other character. A large number of these phantoms are precisely the ones officially forgotten, who, because of this, continue to haunt the everyday lives of modern-day Chileans. On several occasions, for example, Rucia encounters a phantom couple, wandering the city streets in a horse-drawn cart. They search for their infant, stolen from them shortly after her birth. The woman lies in the cart bleeding, her intestines hanging from an enormous gash in her stomach. A fragment of Fausto's clandestine history book included in the novel identifies them as detainees at the soccer field at the time the woman went into labor, verifying her status as "disappeared." The mother has died, victim of an unnecessary cesarean section performed by a military doctor: the baby lived, but the prisoners never saw it again. Paralleling Fausto's tormented guilt, the ghostly parents embody the psychological effects among survivors of the regime who experienced and witnessed such stunning acts of brutality. The phantom parents as well as real-life Chileans who recall such events can only imagine the fate of the child. Fernández suggests that such haunting stories persist precisely because



collective amnesia and the impunity of military leaders delay the direct confrontation of that past that could provide for closure.

While in the novel there is a recovery of the past through the device of ghosts, Fernández demonstrates that everyday Chileans and the nation's phantoms suffer from a symptom Gordon, in another context, calls "hysterical blindness," or a pathological inability to see the fear-inducing supernatural bodies surrounding them (17). In the novel, urban residents coexist with ghosts, yet they do not perceive them or, when they do, they do not realize they are ghosts. Indio's spirit manifests this condition, latent in Chilean daily life. He goes crazy after viewing other ghosts' enactments of Chile's past and attempts to return to the blissful sightlessness of common people by removing his own eyeballs from their sockets. Because he is a ghost himself, however, Indio cannot escape from the supernatural realm and he continues to see the past without eyes. The activities of the living who do not recognize the paranormal world around them, on the other hand, represent the idyllic state of denial characteristic of Chile's political transition to democracy. Rather than remember the past, the living characters within the novel defer memory by shopping, talking on cellular phones, walking hastily to and from work, and enclosing themselves in single-family homes. Just as the present is disconnected from a past, so are everyday citizens from each other and their ghostly neighbors. The inclusion of these new practices of everyday life alongside the stories of the ghosts who desperately seek recognition and community makes the reader aware of the role of

neoliberalism, consumerist practices, and technology in obscuring the collective memory.

Rucia's capacity to see those elements of the past festering beneath the glossy veneer of the consumer culture advances the social critique expressed in the novel. The protagonist becomes aware that the changed city and its populace cover up history, a process that demonstrates the way the amnesic nation has come about. At first, memories about her old neighborhood that could help situate her within the new city do not serve her. Yet, because she is a recently-arrived exile, her initial inability to recognize her surroundings eventually provides her with crucial distance to see how the city and its citizens participate in a process of manipulative cultural and architectural transformation that effaces memory.<sup>19</sup> In this way, Fernández demonstrates the new Chile as a construct in which a calculated fabrication of an alternative society is placed on top of an old one, where everyday life reaffirms and supports the amnesic break with and death of both the socialist and the dictatorial past, despite the continuation in the present of behaviors learned during the totalitarian epoch. As she searches for home during the first days of her return, Rucia witnesses the tangible objects and forms of conduct that blur the memories of her countrymen and threaten to intensify her disconnection with the past:

El Barrio está muerto. La noche cae y se cierran las vitrinas, se apagan las luces de neón, los letreros de colorinches. La función ha terminado y la gente se entierra en algún sitio para no salir. Dejan las calles vacías, se sacan escondidos los lentes de contacto, las pelucas, las

pestañas postizas, las fajas compradas en la última promoción de la televisión por cable. Se lavan el maquillaje de la cara, sus rostros quedan limpios, ojerosos, pálidos como los de un ánima. El Barrio está muerto. No se respira el aire de fiesta que Rucia recuerda. Ese olor a pichanga dominguera, a rifa, a kermesse de fin de semana. Ya no se toma el mate en la puerta de las casas, no se juega a la pelota en la calle, no se hacen historias ni magia en los escalones rojos cada tarde. Ahora todo es silencio y brumas. (59)

Through Rucia's perceptions, Fernández registers the superficial makeover of the transformed Chile. An architectural costuming covers relics of the former Santiago with skyscrapers, neon signs, automobiles, a hygienic ultra-modern subway system, supermarkets and shopping malls, all of which embody Chile's profound economic and cultural shift and provide locations where a new cultural identity is practiced and represented.<sup>20</sup> Chilean citizens' activities aid the new free-market system suspending their psychological wellbeing.

Unlike these everyday amnesiacs, Rucia is a clairvoyant spectator of the past, modeling a more useful working-through of history. She engages productively with the other ghosts and learns about historical events that contribute to the nation's current psychological unease. This has consequences for the implied amnesic Chilean readers of *Mapocho*, who parallel the living national population included in the book that customarily turns a "hysterically blind" eye to images of the past. Through Rucia's useful interactions with the ghosts, they finally view their own

history and the process of forgetting it. By way of Rucia's experience, Fernández proposes a reunion of the severed community, suggesting a productive end for the common citizen that may come about through an exchange between the living and the dead and the past and present times. Her work suggests that such temporal and affective bonds lessen the residual psychological scarring that collective amnesia causes. At the same time, the author reveals that only a limited number of citizens benefit from the state of national forgetfulness, among them the economic interests profiting from the free-market system and the unpunished military officials of the dictatorial era.

Paralleling her own literary project, Fernández gives Rucia the central role in revealing and viewing the hidden reality of the city and its ghosts, thereby casting the young artistic heroine as the primary catalyst for everyday Chileans' recuperation of their suppressed memory. Rucia wanders around Santiago observing its ostentatious and modernized cityscape in which an enormous glass skyscraper dominates her view and directs her otherwise aimless walks about town. Fernández casts her protagonist as a *flâneur* whose movement through the city inscribes a visual narrative. Rucia's aesthetic wanderings support and parallel the implicit goal of the novel to expose the underside of the Chilean capital and its new culture, in particular, those elements that dominant interests hide or downplay.

In her role as the atypical artist-heroine who creates a work of art by walking and observing, Rucia recalls Michel de Certeau's essay "Walking in the City," which compares artistic production to walking. In contrast to observing the city from

above—the authoritarian position of social control of those who see the city from the *Panopticon* Michel Foucault describes (195-227)—for de Certeau, walking in the city, the activity of everyday people like Rucia, constitutes a form of reading and narrating a place through improvised meanderings through the urban structure. Unlike the sweeping view that heights make possible, walkers choose their route, seeing fragments of the city close up. They create a “rhetoric of walking” that engages in a creative and subversive exchange with mandates from the omnipresent viewpoint above, perhaps residing in the far reaches of the novel’s own skyscraper, a symbol of the totalitarian regime’s extensive control and the dominance of the consumer system (de Certeau 99). The walkers’ proximity to the city provides for the unexpected. Thus Rucia—and by extension everyday Chileans in the book and possible readers of *Mapocho*—possess power in seeing from below, which allows them to perceive the city as “haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence” (de Certeau 108). De Certeau also explains that walkers’ views can enable them to see their environs as palimpsests where fragments of the past “that others are not allowed to read” accumulate (108). In this way, the artist-walker Rucia is both a critical spectator of a past the new order has attempted to squelch and an agent demonstrating the possibility of recuperating the past visually and in writing.

The enormous glass skyscraper the protagonist observes is the architectural center of a performance of amnesia; Rucia views how living Chileans unconsciously order their everyday activities around this symbol (28). Significantly, it is an office building with only one permanent resident—Fausto—placed there by the military to

work on his censored history book. Furthering the idea that the powerful have constructed an official version of Chile's past that strategically omits essential events, the transparent glass material of which the high-rise is made recalls a real-life attempt to do away with the past through public performances of forgetting that took place during the transition. In 1992, during Chile's period of national reconstruction, the nation represented itself with an extravagant booth at the world fair in Seville, an event so crucial to the formation of contemporary Chilean identity that both Moulian and Richard, among other observers, have analyzed it at length. To demonstrate its new-found prosperity, Chile transported a 100-ton iceberg extracted from its Antarctic territory across the Atlantic. Like the skyscraper in *Mapocho*, the booth, as Richard and Moulian argue, enacted the symbolic rebirth of the nation without antecedents, boasted of Chile's economic prosperity, and purified the nation of its bloody dictatorial and revolutionary socialist history.<sup>21</sup> Richard argues that this display, which signals the performative measures taken to redefine and sanitize Chilean identity, constituted "la primera operación de identidad que el Chile de la reapertura democrática realice (espectaculariza) para darle forma—y estilo—a su 'discurso del cambio'" (165). The transparent and clean image, repeated in Fernández's glass edifice, erases "lo residual de tiempos anteriores y suprime los espacios-sombra de lo pretérito y de lo inactual que obstruyen el flujo visual de lo simultáneo que celebra la globalización capitalista" (Richard 172).

Contrary to the clean image projected at the fair, however, Fernández's representation of the nation as a transparent glass building brings to mind the

opaqueness of ghosts, implying that the skyscraper is a haunted place. Rucia's close-up view of the glass structure, moreover, observes the building's brittle and delicate features, thereby enabling her to reveal a possibility of viewing Chile's concealed past while at the same time hinting at the impermanence of the consumerist and "democratic" society being built at this time. Like an iceberg, the national construct proposed during the transition lacked durability and, like the skyscraper in Fernández's book, Chile itself lay on unsound underpinnings. While the façade of capitalism and democracy cleans up the Chilean image and hides its rotten foundation, Fernández's work illustrates that the government's ambitious pretenses require strong support to uphold Chileans' alleged new political and economic freedoms and to substantiate the nation's new social design.

Through imagery of fragility, Fernández's work expresses a potential to erode the deliberate interment of the past, making us see that the apparently substantial building is, in fact, a fragile overlay, while her ghostly commentators have a more solid grasp of reality than their more concrete counterparts. The building ought to cover up the detritus of the past, but the artist-heroine can see through it, intuiting that the old neighborhood still exists, though buried beneath the skyscraper. Rucia then begins to view the city as a palimpsest of historical memory. The city itself becomes a visible body like those of the ghosts, whose spirit—a continuation of her memory—goes on beyond its assumed death:

El Barrio vive. Se esconde tras el grueso alquitrán con el que han tapizado sus viejos adoquines. Sus muros de adobe respiran hechos

polvo, su aliento añejo perfuma las calles cuando la polución recula después de un día de lluvia. El Barrio vive. Se le intuye más allá de las vitrinas y los anuncios de neón. Está sepultado por construcciones, por publicidades de televisión por cable y telefonía móvil. Sobre él las máquinas pasean, el tránsito se atasca a las siete de la tarde, los andamios se elevan, la gente circula. El Barrio yace bajo el paso acelerado de todos. Pero a veces, cuando la tierra se sacude en un temblor pasajero, el Barrio suspira y deja ver con claridad pedazos de su carne. (189)

Like her proverbial glass house, the author questions the ability of politicians and economists to maintain a social order requiring widespread collective amnesia about issues that possess a close spiritual, spatial, and temporal proximity to the Chilean population. Rucia's anger leads to her participation in a dual political and aesthetic project, similar to that of Fernández and her contemporaries, dedicated to questioning the surface "reality" of Chile's "recovery."

Fernández insinuates, moreover, that the free-market economy is not an effective means to reconstitute the Chilean democracy. Again, the skyscraper actually furthers Rucia's understanding of the manipulative and undemocratic powers hiding behind this ostentatious symbol. The protagonist's recurring contemplation of the building allows her to understand its purpose, which is to efface memory and the past. This realization spurs her to view those in control of the nation as fabricators of amnesia and as *cahuines*, the term in Chilean slang that describes unabashed



troublemakers. Rucia's epiphany demonstrates that the *cahuines* of the past continue to hold positions of power in the present, although they are not immediately visible. Her ability to see the past and the present that others cannot view exposes Chile's corrupt leaders:

Cahuines, puros cuentos, historias mal nacidas, enredos mal armadas, simulacros, falsedades, engaños, embustes. Mentira. [...] La mentira embauca. Se establece por escrito, seduce en cartels de neón, en vitrinas de colores, en bibliotecas, en torres altas de vidrio ahumado. Es tan fácil vivir en ella y dejarse envolver por sus encantos. La mentira respira, huele, chilla, vive como un ratón del Mapocho alimentándose de la mierda, contaminando, expandiendo la enfermedad, pudriéndolo todo, creando más mentira, mintiendo sobre mintiendo, enredando, confundiendo, cahuineando. (180-181)

Fernández's work proposes that a rediscovery of the past, regardless of how irksome it is to delve into the country's proverbial *mierda*, could alter Chile's official history for the better, enabling citizens to discuss their collective vision for the future.

Rucia's archeological digs in the city also demonstrate how everyday Chileans participate passively in the tactical and corrupt elimination of the past, thereby complicating their own necessary recovery of it. That the places are haunted suggests that the dead continue to disturb the living. On the other hand, Rucia's ability to see below the skyscraper and understand her troubled nation demonstrates that suppressed memories may be accessed. Her endeavor to materialize, confront, and

reconstruct troubling aspects of the past creates a more coherent, healthy, and comprehensive vision of the collective present and future. Moreover, the protagonist's interaction throughout the novel with phantoms from various moments of Chilean history, including the genocide of indigenous peoples during national consolidation, the dictatorial regime of Carlos Ibañez in the 1920s and 1950s, and the Pinochet government, reveals and mitigates some of the damage done by various Chilean administrations' use of violence and death as fear-inducing performances. Fernández demonstrates that the governments' theatrical strategies facilitated the rapid accomplishment of nation-building projects in the name of progress, but at the same time jeopardized the emotional wellbeing of the people. For instance, in the book, the conquistador Pedro de Valdivia beheads a Mapuche leader and warrior named Lautario during a massacre. Rather than bury him, Valdivia puts his corpse on display in the central plaza, thereby reasserting European control over Chile and dissuading Mapuches from continuing their fight. Yet, as Fernández demonstrates through the integration of ghosts, the Mapuche situation still troubles the Chilean population. Lautario's ghost—a headless body astride a phantom horse—roams the streets of modern Santiago, haunting the city and its people and continuing into the present a legacy of political, racial, and class conflict.

By making the dead reappear, moreover, the author comments ironically on “disappearance” as a mechanism of terrorist state control during the Pinochet reign. The novel includes examples of many governments that summoned and subsequently suppressed dead citizens during cycles of violent conflict, economic growth, and

peace. For instance, the Pinochet administration summoned the ghosts of the disappeared, like that of the woman who died during her cesarean section, to make everyday citizens fear violent death as a result of noncompliance. Highlighting the Pinochet regime, Fernández also depicts numerous governments as they force the same ghosts they previously resurrected into the confines of collective amnesia. In the novel, the record of Lautario, for instance, erased from the official history, only appears in Fausto's clandestine history book. Through these historical ghosts, Fernández shows that they cannot be controlled: the phantoms in the novel act beyond their initial purpose, for they continue to return to haunt the present. These ghosts reiterate their fixed stories indefinitely, yet their effects change as the present moment transitions. As Richard Schechner outlines, this sort of repetition constitutes a basis of performance that can be understood as a "restored behavior," comprised of recognizable actions, statements, and movements that have already been done somewhere by someone else: "Performance means: never for the first time. It means: for the second to *n*th time. Performance is 'twice-behaved behavior'" (36). This repetitive quality found in theater and in the ghosts, in Fernández's novel, becomes her means to an oppositional political end. Her phantoms threaten to berate alleged national heroes and repeat the pain of Chile's past until it is officially recognized.

Furthering Fernández's implicit political ideas, the ghosts in the novel repeat a recognizable past that is nevertheless unrecorded, except in Fausto's clandestine history books. Through this slightly changed duplication of the past, Fernández demonstrates a possibility of creating something new out of a transformed

relationship with history. While the specters in Mapocho (with the exception of Rucia and Indio) enact their stories indefinitely without alteration, those who view them possess an ability to change. There is the possibility of an altered collective perception of the past in the present time that the governments treated in the novel sense as a potential danger. For this reason, officials, like those who force Fausto to distort national history, appear to bury fragments of the past. In exposing this interest-imbued maneuver, Fernández encourages Chileans to cease aiding economic and political interests and instead recover their national history. In this way, the novel presents art's capacity to transform the past in the present and implies its possible strategic use for a troubled nation to create a more healthy and cohesive relationship between disparate historical frames.

As we have seen, in Mapocho, the recovery of disappeared places constitutes a means by which everyday people can mend the truncated memory and further productive social change. The image of the uncovered soccer field that is so clear in Rucia's mind stresses this necessity to transform Chileans' current relationship with places that symbolize the concealed past. In this, the soccer field is an apt choice to represent the performative nature of power. In general terms, sports arenas are theatrical places where a spectacle is made of the process by which one group asserts its dominance over another before a large group of witnesses.<sup>22</sup> Political and economic power, as Fernández demonstrates, is also established through representational means. The inclusion of the sports arena, which calls to mind the fear-generating imprisonment of dissidents in Chile's Estadio Nacional and the

Estadio de Chile during the initial phase of the coup, associates Chilean brutality during the military regime to an earlier extermination of Jews and other minority groups in Nazi concentration camps, where prisoners were murdered through grotesquely violent means. Through this association between the Nazis and the Pinochet military, Fernández proposes that everyday Chileans view their history as a repetition of previous genocides, and that they see the connection between Adolph Hitler and his Chilean equivalent, left unpunished for the torture and death of members of the Chilean opposition. This historical connection suggests the repetitive nature of history and stresses the importance of memory in reminding the people living in the present of the potential for the cyclical repetition of state-sponsored violence. Fernández takes advantage of the negative associations that the soccer field evokes and shows the regime's attempt to curtail the memory process in order to alter not only the collective memory, but also general opinion about the dictatorial epoch. This association reveals Chilean leaders' past mismanagement of power while at the same time emphasizing that Chileans living during the transition, faced with the difficult task of reinstating democracy after years of totalitarianism, need to recuperate things past in order to choose appropriate leaders and construct an alternate vision of the future that support the nascent democratic system.

Fernández's representation of contemporary Chilean society's troubled relationship to its past includes as well imagery of abundant waste—material and human—generated to put in place and maintain the free-market economy. Her incorporation of a large number of ghost-characters representing the disappeared—

humans converted into waste products, yet whose deaths aided in the regime's success in implementing a consumer-based economic order—metaphorically links the nation's buried traumas to environmental concerns. Fernández suggests through the novel that consumer society produces an excess of trash that is difficult to regulate and control. In Mapocho, the nation, infested with consumer goods, tears itself apart, causing a coexistence of a wasteful past and a hygienic present. Furthering the image of accumulation of bothersome debris from the past that pollutes the present, Fernández makes multiple temporal frames coexist uncomfortably as she does with her ghosts. For example, various scenes depict living Chileans cohabitating awkwardly with the Mapuche warrior killed to consolidate the Chilean nation, a trainload of homosexuals whom a previous dictator allegedly murdered in the early 1900s, and a number of ghosts of Pinochet's disappeared. Fernández includes plentiful images of history's dead disposed of as trash. For instance, Rucia recalls seeing the bodies of the disappeared float down the Mapocho River in bags alongside numerous other bits of rubbish cast off into the waterway. Through the protagonist's vision, Fernández gathers together the phantoms of these discarded people from many time periods to reveal consumer society's impossible attempt to rid itself of its proverbial waste. The author suggests that history, like trash, can be placed out of view for a time, but the undesirable vestiges of the past never vanish entirely.

This depiction of history as an accumulation of debris is strikingly similar to Walter Benjamin's notion of the past, which Ben Highmore analyzes as a cultural

theory that relates trash with the everyday. Highmore summarizes and expands on Benjamin's ideas, creating an aesthetic of trash:

Benjamin's approach to history is through 'trash'—through the spent and discarded materials that crowd the everyday. In this everyday material world different temporalities exist side by side: the latest version alongside last year's model. Everyday life registers the process of modernization as an incessant accumulation of debris: modernity produces obsolescence as part of its continual demand for the new. [. . .] Benjamin's project charts a time of both increased accumulation and intensified sensation. [. . .] But if modernity evidences a wealth of material goods and an intensification of sensation, for Benjamin it paradoxically displays a paucity of communicable experience. (61)

The Chilean nation as depicted in the novel is piled high with consumer items; its history, moreover, is the result of an accumulation of trash and pollutants. Cellular phones, for instance, adhere to the ears of the urbanites Rucia views upon her arrival to Santiago, diverting their attention away from the ghosts that only she notices. Such products distract and thereby aid the dominant culture in diverting attention away from Chile's past. Yet Fernández shows that history has a material aspect that accumulates in and discomforts the present time. History's tangible forms appear in ghosts, ruins, debris, trash, pollution, and memory. Things of the past that the present covers up—such as Rucia's childhood neighborhood where the soccer field is located

—remain not only in the form of memories and ghosts, but also as matter. The protagonist eventually finds the dilapidated and abandoned house she left in tact as a child. Useless to all but her, the location provides her with a home and triggers her memory. The author and her fictional heroine recycle and transform the past into useful material, facilitating a more complete understanding of the Chilean reality.

Expanding on this environmental and political critique, in the novel the phantoms have all died in the name of economic progress, paralleling the cyclical nature of the consumer-based society, which requires, on the one hand, the abundant production of material goods as well as, on the other, the conversion into trash of the same goods it produces, all in the effort to assure the continuation and reproduction the capitalistic socio-economic order. Avelar provides a more sweeping view of post-dictatorial Latin America relevant to understanding Fernández's assessment of neoliberal Chile when he states that outmoded goods and memories of the past threaten a culture based on a myth of progress (2). Fernández critiques consumer society's exaggerated drive to get rid of spent things belonging to bygone eras. However, her specific assessment of Pinochet's neoliberal economic trend as a contaminant stresses the impossibility of successfully getting rid of the superabundance of products. The novel opens with a realistic image of a polluted Santiago, where everyday citizens live amid their own detritus, unconsciously participating in an economic system that supposedly improves Chileans' quality of life. Mapocho begins and ends in the same place with the unforgettable image of Rucia's dead body floating in the sullied river in her impossible attempt to wash



herself clean of the muck she collects while walking in the city. Here Fernández initiates a political and ecological critique pertinent to Chile's present time that spans the novel while serving as bookends that support the historical digs contained in between:

Ahora mi cuerpo flota sobre el oleaje del Mapocho, mi cajón navega entre aguas sucias haciéndome el quite a los neumáticos, a las ramas, avanza lentamente cruzando la ciudad completa. [. . .] Viajo por un río moreno. Una hebra mugrienta que me lleva con calma, me acuna amorosa y me invita a que duerma y me entregue por completo a su trayecto fecal. [. . .] En la ribera un borracho lanza una botella vacía que se hace pedazos al topar conmigo. Vidrios me llegan a la cara, un hilo de sangre corre por mi frente. (13)

Fernández not only finds significance and value in the products consumer culture deems outmoded and people such as the disappeared remaindered to install the neoliberal system, but she also shows that a profound understanding of transitional Chile requires a sustained contemplation of the byproducts generated by the lifestyle of the 1990s. In Mapocho, the attention to trash suggests that Chileans begin to make collective decisions regarding issues of national importance such as environmental issues, rather than surrender their influence to political and economic interests.

Through the incorporation of ghosts and their counterpart trash, then, Fernández delineates a profound relationship between violence and waste to reveal the particular complexities of the Chilean situation that also calls to mind Joseph

Roach's theories on violence and waste. Roach uses Bataille's notion of "catastrophic expenditure" to demonstrate that "violence is the performance of waste" and excess. He argues that "to be fully demonstrative, to make its point, [violence] must *spend* things—material objects, blood, environments—in acts of Bataillan 'unproductive expenditure' [...]" (41). Violence, according to Roach, is a spectacle that necessitates an audience (even if it is merely God or the victim) in order to illustrate its point. Similar to the production of consumer goods and trash, violence replicates the excesses of market-based economies.

The waste matter artfully intermeshed within Fernández's narration—city ruins, ghosts, and trash—is the product of similar performative and ritualistic spectacles of excess that the Pinochet regime and the transitional government used to further economic progress. People who died and became ghosts because they would not comply with the neoliberal takeover reappear in Mapocho to reveal the inner workings of the spectacle Pinochet directed to create the consumer society he based on the repetitive production, consumption, and destruction of market items, including goods and people remaindered by the economic system. Through this critique of the neoliberal consumer culture, Fernández reveals the need of Chileans—citizens of a capitalist democracy in the making—to determine for themselves where their proverbial trash will go and consciously decide the ways in which the past, present, and future will interact. By recuperating the things of the past that this consumer culture devalues, she joins her work in representing the larger literary project of the Group of Cultural Industry as it brings a legacy of female intellectual activism into

the new millennium. The combination of art with everyday life, and in particular the bringing together of common-interest groups through fictional texts, constitutes a means to a dynamic political and aesthetic end.

Jeftanovic's Escenario de Guerra (2000), which came out two years prior to Mapocho, also demonstrates art's role in evaluating and exposing the neoliberal consumer culture. Whereas Fernández's novel illustrates the important socio-political function the female artist plays in recycling history's ghosts, Jeftanovic's novel focuses on a woman writer's attempt to bring past memories to the present time to expose the damaging psychological effects of individual and collective amnesia. Like Fernández, Jeftanovic turns the dominant culture's performative devices of social control against it, to subvert the practices it uses to implement a culture based on forgetting. Surprisingly, Juan Armando Epple is the only literary scholar to analyze this important publication although the young author's work was extolled by Chile's Consejo Nacional del Libro as the best novel of 2001.<sup>23</sup> This work initiated Jeftanovic's public literary career, the fruit of diverse training in workshops directed by key members of the Generation of 1980, among them Pía Barros, Diamela Eltit, Marco Antonio de la Parra, and Antonio Skármeta.<sup>24</sup> Although she has only published one book to date, she is completing a collection of dramatic monologues that crosses the boundary between the short story and the dramatic monologue (personal interview, 14 January 2004). In addition to the theatrical twist incorporated into her narrative work, Jeftanovic's atypical biography permeates her novel. She belongs to a Jewish family who arrived in Chile during her grandparents' young

adulthood as exiled escapees of an East European conflict. The author argues that the unique worldview of her minority lineage made her feel like an outsider in Chile at the same time that it broadened her awareness at an early age of issues such as exile, civil conflict, and state-sponsored violence that marked her own childhood during the dictatorship (personal interview 14 January 2004).

Escenario de guerra highlights aspects of the author's biography, revealing the spiritual traumas associated with post-war society. The portrait-of-the-artist plot traces the protagonist-narrator's cultivation of numerous artistic and communicative skills to overcome the pain and separation that a distant war has caused in her and her exiled family. In the narrative sections of the book the protagonist, Tamara, recounts a series of haunting physical and emotional separations that comprise her family's history from before her birth to her coming of age as a young woman writer. Recalling the ghosts of the past that take shape and speak through Rucia's agency, Tamara recovers muddled aspects of the family's past and memory to meet her emotional need for control and stability, a result of the continual geographic and emotional dislocations that have occur in her life. So ill-adapted to their surroundings and to each other, the family members barely survive in the unnamed foreign land. The war continues to haunt them in the new territory: Tamara's emotionally scarred parents are unable to meet their basic needs and, hence, move from place to place fleeing from a slew of economic and psychological burdens. Tamara's father, Papá, ceases to mature the moment he leaves his homeland, never recovering from his own father's disappearance during the war and from his terrifying experiences growing up

amid a brutal conflict. He stagnates in the past and places the family in the middle of his imaginary crossfire: as if they lived in the war-torn nation, he takes daily inventory of the scant provisions in the pantry and spends his days scanning newspaper headlines for reports about his country of origin where the conflict persists. Tamara's mother, Mamá, is an unhinged hypochondriac whose amnesia and depression debilitate her and prevent her emotional involvement with her family. She leaves Tamara and her father early in the protagonist's life, choosing to take only her eldest children—Tamara's half brother and sister, Adela and Davor—to live with her and her new lover. Some time later, after she retrieves the adolescent Tamara from her father's house, the mother induces in herself an amnesia that erases the previous fifteen years from her memory. Mamá's sudden inability to remember leads the protagonist—the only one of her siblings young enough to disappear from their mother's consciousness—to reestablish residence with her father in a distant town. Despite this tumult, Tamara earns a scholarship to study creative writing at a university, providing her with crucial distance from her painful childhood and an opportunity to hone her obvious talents as a writer. However, she soon replaces her abusive parents with a beau named Franz who treats her as poorly as her family did and heightens her sense of displacement. While Tamara cultivates artistic and communicative skills, and begins to confront the specters of her past during her young adulthood, Franz commits suicide for unknown reasons and Papá dies tragically in a car accident as soon as he realizes that the wars in his country have ceased. The novel ends with the last page of Tamara's book, completed during the

protagonist's early twenties and performed before a fictive audience Tamara includes in her narrative.

Recalling the accumulation of waste products in Fernández's book, Escenario de guerra presents a hyperbolic amassing of unhappy life experiences that spurs the protagonist's urgent need to write her autobiography and present it to the larger audience included her book. These activities allow her to register, understand, and eventually come to terms with the phantoms of her past. The autobiographical aspect traces a young woman writer's gradual recovery of buried familial memories through the practice of a number of communicative and artistic methods of expressing and representing her life story: she resurrects and transforms the ghosts of her past in a spectacle, in a novel, in free-writing in a notebook about her dreams, in talk-therapy sessions, and, to a lesser extent, in the contemplation of photographs. Calling to mind Fernández's performative use of the device of ghosts and trash to enact censored Chilean history and transform it into viable recycled material, Jeftanovic's novel includes an innovative theatrical structure that highlights the narrator-protagonist's process of sorting out shards of suppressed and fragmented memories into a more complete and organized whole. The original narrative structure replicates a traditional three-act play: theatrical curtains, so to speak, rise and fall separating each act wherein Tamara provides an opening performance of her life story, followed by its narrative version. During these dramatic sections, crucial to understanding the political proposals Jeftanovic makes through the novel, a viewing audience appears that observes Tamara's artistic conjuring up of her past, which she presents as both a

novel and a performance. This theatrical element lies at the heart of Jeftanovic's message about the potential for artists and works of art to transform social structures: it is crucial that the audience views, responds to, and learns from the performance of Tamara's autobiography and her development as an artist. Through a process of identification with the protagonist as she restructures her life on stage and on paper, the audience pieces together a more complete vision of the Chilean situation while they simultaneously mature and acquire skills in communication along with the young novelist/director who guides the experience. Fernández's, Jeftanovic's, and Tamara's materialization of phantom images from Chile's past and present involve an insightful critique of the shortcomings of the nation's abrupt cultural and economic shift to neoliberal consumerism; that is, the glorification of all things new and the disposal of all that belongs to the past. In Escenario de guerra, a well-crafted bridge joins memory, theater, and art to posit a crucial social role for a young woman writer as a conduit for collective memory, one whose dynamic ability to summon the past allows her to understand and explain the present. Her discovery of personal history through art spurs in her a productive project to aid her imagined Chilean audience in gaining the skills essential to craft a sustainable democracy, thereby addressing the side-effects of the dictatorship and the neoliberal culture it left behind. The inclusion of a fictive audience that views Tamara's show highlights art's important socio-political role in mending the severed ties between the past and present times, and in uniting post-totalitarian Chile's fragmented community.

The novel's three-part organization calls to mind and intermeshes traditional theatrical forms and the portrait-of-the-artist plot. The three acts of Tamara's memoir divide three essential phases of her formative years—childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood—that go hand-in-hand with her creative and communicative apprenticeship. The incorporation of varied, easily discerned literary devices such as acts calls attention to the protagonist's experimentation with pre-established artistic forms at the same time that it shows her desperate urge to find an adequate means to bring to the surface and record buried traumas and to transform her formerly concealed past into material that she can share with her viewing audience and potential readers. Structurally, each act begins and/or ends with a brief chapter in which the family members rehearse for the narrative version of their history that Tamara will narrate in subsequent chapters. Thus Tamara guides the story on two levels: as the fictive author of the autobiographical account and as the director of its theatrical version. The young woman writer is the principal agent who reworks the memory and identity of the family and the nation.

Chile is never named in the book, yet the author incorporates a number of clues that encourage a reading of the family story as a metaphor of her country's history at the time of the dictatorship and the transition. The ambiguous characterization of the three anonymous nations where Tamara lives and travels as she pieces together her family history gradually reconstructs the haunting collective Chilean experience during, and as a result of, the Pinochet regime. Papá's war-struck homeland, which Tamara visits as an adult, the country where the protagonist and her



siblings grow up as foreigners, and the distant nation where Adela moves all call to mind a historical and mental process experienced in post-dictatorial nations: war, exile, and return and, by extension, the psychological counterparts also included in the novel, painful separation, amnesia, and recognition. Further, this misrecognition of the evoked countries parallels the protagonist's own childhood development, which demonstrates through association the growth of an angst-ridden adolescent nation in transition, its growing pains of self-discovery, and the redefinition typical of formative years or of abrupt governmental and cultural change. Moreover, these countries' muddled identifications emphasize the child-protagonist's lack of understanding about her environment, suggesting a confused Chilean identity after the revolutionary dictatorship's dramatic and rapid cultural, economic, and architectural transfiguration of the nation into a globalized, consumer society.

Tamara struggles throughout childhood to understand her foreign surroundings and her mysteriously distressed parents; she reads books, magazines, and family letters that mention terms like mass graves, disappearances, and deportations, all of which explicitly recall the Pinochet regime in the mind of the reader (29). To complicate matters further, Tamara is prohibited from discovering the meaning of these words: as recent phenomena, they do not appear in the dictionary she must conceal beneath her bed, and her parents forbid her from inquiring about them, subtly bringing to mind such issues as censorship, self-censorship, collective amnesia, and paranoia (30). The author's decision to leave Chile unnamed illustrates an awkward inability to communicate freely about the social ills the novel focuses on.

Jeftanovic's construction of place evokes Chile while broadening the novel's global appeal to international readers who may also interpret the story as a more general exploration of any post-war experience.

Similar to the association between the family story and that of post-dictatorial Chile, there is also an implicit connection between Tamara's own therapeutic use of writing to understand and remedy her personal situation and the self-adopted role of real-life young women writers belonging to the Group of Cultural Industry. Their narrative work, analogous to that of Tamara, frequently includes meta-literary devices that punctuate the productive function of art and artists in revealing and remedying the troubled psychology of the larger national community haunted by the specters of its ignored past. Tamara possesses a natural attraction to writing that she begins to nurture unconsciously at an early age and adapts throughout her life as a young adult to meet her changing emotional needs. The protagonist begins writing as an antidote to her lack of place. Recalling James Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916), Jeftanovic's artistic memoir begins with Tamara's first childhood recollection, an imposed and painful separation from familiar surroundings. When she remembers her first move, she turns to art: "Estoy hundida en un sillón de felpa. Hago dibujos sobre el tapiz tornasol. Escribo una frase secreta en el respaldo. Me arrepiento y borro a contrapelo el jeroglífico" (13). As Tamara retraces her life story, she becomes progressively more mindful of her initially unconscious need to produce and consume art in order to understand her parents and thus break negative familial patterns.

Underlying the notion that painful national conflicts can be transmitted through generations, Tamara views writing as a way to survive and overcome a personal war that she inherits from her parents. Specifically, her art counters her mother's amnesia and her father's staggering obsession with the past, which prohibits his productive integration into the present moment. When she returns to her father's country after his death to collect the memories missing from her confused life story, she realizes that writing also constitutes a way to prevent the continuation of her parents' pathologies in herself. While her father's incessant consumption of newspapers did not bring him emotional relief, Tamara finds language useful to retrieve her past and to ease pain. Words allow her to speak to her father, even after his death, and explain to him the therapeutic function of language in her life: "Ahora entiendes que cuando estoy lejana, ausente, con la mirada perdida, como absorta en mis pensamientos, hipnotizada en mis libros, escribiendo febril en mi cuaderno; es porque yo también estoy viviendo mi propia guerra" (175). This familial link between past and present times places importance on the function of the writer in post-dictatorial Chile as a productive force: like Tamara, real-life writers may find means for the nation to appease the ghosts produced and defectively erased by the consumer society in order to move beyond basic survival into healing and future growth. The metaphorical novel suggests that writers such as those of the Group of Cultural Industry may guide Chile through its difficult history, healing the effects of the severed relationship to the past symbolized by Tamara's parents.

Each of the various modes of expression Tamara practices as she recuperates previously unknown elements of her past includes a performative element, explaining her own—and by extension, Jeftanovic's—motives for choosing a theatrical structure for the memoir. For the protagonist, therapy, formal autobiographical writing, free-writing about dreams, and the dramatic representation of fragments of the family's story dislodge ghost-like memories from the deep recesses of her conscious and unconscious. Artistic activity and the cultivation of non-artistic methods of communication such as counseling sessions allow her to distance herself from the recently retrieved memories in order to view, organize, and eventually understand them. This process parallels the experience of the fictive audience Tamara includes in her artistic product, who read and experience the dramatic spectacle the protagonist directs from a distant and, hence, somewhat safe location. The alternate perspectives of both the artist and her audience facilitate a more complete view of the process of retrieving memory while providing a helpful disconnection from the events that aids both writer and audience in confronting a past that continues to trouble them deeply. In incorporating the audience, the author proposes that the national community evoked through the inclusion of the fictive spectators of Tamara's show, could potentially profit from engaging in the healing communicative exercises the protagonist practices. This training, Jeftanovic suggests, could aid the national collective in gaining essential skills to support and rebuild Chile's precarious democratic government, which the consumer culture—built on a rocky foundation—threatens to tip over.

If one reads the familial dynamic as a metaphor representing the current Chilean situation, the inclusion of a fictive audience in the theatrical introductions to the novel's three acts becomes pivotal. In this reading, the author's use of the audience creates a mirroring effect in which the implied Chilean readers of Tamara's and Jeftanovic's books and the spectators of the performance view a representation of their collaboration in collective amnesia as well as the gradual and productive transfer of recollections from the unconscious level to the conscious realm, similar to Tamara's imperfect shift of memories into words in each of her artistic and communicative approximations. This meta-literary technique assesses the haunted status of the contemporary collective psyche and demonstrates a way in which artists and their works can remedy the post-traumatic disorders caused by seventeen years of dictatorial rule, especially the lack of preparation among the people-at-large to take part in the new democratic system. Significantly, the audience gradually becomes more participatory as the three acts unfold, a change that allows Jeftanovic to begin with a candid criticism of the passive compliance and amnesia of citizens associated with the neoliberal culture of the post-totalitarian epoch and to end with an optimistic view about the potential for Chileans to take on an active role in future national projects. The audience pieces the past together and becomes more participatory and able to communicate at the same time that Tamara matures and accumulates the skills in creative expression that allow her to understand, define, and heal herself.

The theatrical preambles to the first and second acts support this reading of the novel as an implicit political critique of neoliberal culture's deflation of the past.

As I explore further in the pages that follow, the audience's response to Tamara's metaphorical performance of her own and her nation's past are another demonstration of Chileans' inability to recognize and observe their troubling history. During these acts, Jeftanovic both shows and criticizes the audience's hindered cognizance about the mechanisms that sustain the authority of the dictatorial revolution during the post-war period. For instance, in the book's initial act, "Función a solas," there is no audience other than Tamara herself. The protagonist longs for a community with which to process her memories, yet this potential group of onlookers is deadened to the past, demonstrating collective amnesia and suggesting again the "hysterical blindness" of Chileans toward their ghosts. Tamara finds herself alone, with not even a small community of witnesses who wish to see the evoked past: "Me siento en la última fila. Desde aquí el resto de los asientos vacíos se extienden como hileras de tumbas" (13). Reinforcing this metaphorical reading, the first act also constitutes the performance of the protagonist's early childhood. In this early stage, both the absentee audience and Tamara lack the skills and maturity to be part of the show.

Furthering the growth of the character while hinting at the "immature" state of Chile at the time of the book's publication, the author includes scenes in which the child perceives a complex world surrounding her that she cannot understand. Jeftanovic conveys Tamara's juvenile perspective and replicates her naïveté and youth through the use in this act of simple sentences and words reminiscent of the language of children. Theatrical and visual techniques, furthermore, point at the protagonist's inexperience while forming an implicit link between her innocence and

that of the audience. This projected effect appears within the narrative section of the act, when the protagonist accidentally observes her mother through a keyhole as she engages in an act of adultery. Like the fictive Chilean audience that misses the first act, Tamara attempts to evade the painful images of the spectacle taking place before her, one that immediately concerns her but which she does not understand. Both the would-be spectators of Tamara's show and the protagonist drawn to the keyhole lack the emotional maturity and will to see and comprehend the images before them. Mirroring these absentee audiences, Tamara's observation provokes a strong emotional perplexity that furthers her desire not to see it, demonstrating one way that people tend to respond to pain-producing imagery and hinting at the reasons nobody arrives to see Tamara's show:

Me están quitando a mi mamá, de a poquito. El brazo velludo del maestro bajando y subiendo de la muralla. De pronto la brocha descansa solitaria mucho rato sobre el borde del galón de pintura. A través del orificio de la cerradura los veo balanceándose sobre la cama, y aunque me tape los oídos escucho el quejido simétrico de los resortes. (59)

The author employs this visual and auditory scene to draw a parallel between the child, Tamara, and the equally infantile fictive audience—the Chilean national collective—who possess a truncated development from selective memory and vision that further extends their resistance to upsetting issues that affect Chilean everyday life.

As Tamara matures and learns to ward off behaviors acquired from her parents during Acts II and III, the audience also becomes progressively more present, aware, and responsive. In the second act, Tamara begins to cultivate artistic and communicative skills as a young adult. She purges herself of stored memories, placing them at a distance that provides for a more complete and focused view of them. At the same time, an audience begins to coalesce to attend her show. Her diffident spectators, whom Tamara likens to inert stone statues and wolf skin, still require the prompting of the writer/director, but their participation, albeit hesitant, enables an initial viewing of the tragedy taking place around them. The preliminary reluctance of the spectators to see the haunting show is offset by the young artist, who must direct both the performance and the audience:

Entrecierro los ojos hasta acostumbrarme a la oscuridad, a la penumbra de este teatro. Retiro el cuero mudo del lobo aplastado que yace desde el primer acto en el escenario. También giro las cabezas de las estatuas de piedra. [. . .] Mamá está de espaldas al escenario. (75)

The deadened spectators need to be cajoled into seeing the metaphorical representation of their own situation, suggesting the Chilean public's complicity in the continuation of the dictatorial norm not to observe surrounding atrocities during the capitalist revolution, even after the period of conflict and danger. The amnesic audience, like Tamara's forgetful mother, remains inactive and silent about the atrocities that Tamara stages.



Jeftanovic furthers her critique of neoliberal passivity and amnesia by mirroring the larger national community in the fictive audience included in the book. In this decisive passage, the spectators of Tamara's theatrical play neglect the adolescent protagonist, who includes as part of her written and performed life history an incident in which a banker rapes her. This incident—one of a plethora of awful experiences comprising Tamara's childhood—allegorically critiques the unchecked economic and military powers governing the nation from behind the scenes, which are seemingly free to “rape” everyday citizens who, because of the lengthy regime, lack essential skills in confronting abuses of authoritarian power. Tamara's performative unveiling of her personal life reveals everyday citizens' learned complicity with authority: the audience allows her rape to occur and does nothing to stop it, a strategic juxtaposition that invites the potential reader to perceive its own passive response to acts of violence and abuses of power. Like her contemporaries of the Group of Cultural Industry, Jeftanovic dislodges and reveals forces not commonly confronted to bring much needed awareness about the uncertain political and emotional status of the larger national community at the time of the transition. The author reveals both the elements of the collective consciousness that have disappeared as well as negative byproducts such as “hysterical blindness” and amnesia which extend from the years of the regime into the consumerist and individualistic post-totalitarian society.

Jeftanovic, however, presents an optimistic end to viewing Tamara's otherwise disheartening story: she suggests that the artist-heroine serve as a potential

guide to move both the family and nation to which she belongs through the growing pains of the abrupt and then yet-to-be understood change of values, governments, and economies. Her artistic activity jumpstarts national and familial memory, while her choice to present the retrieved past through the theatrical medium brings the severed familial and national community back together in the theater, and in the book, a place of pivotal dialogue and identification. Crucial to her healing, Tamara must make her family view her unwelcome evocations of the past. In turn, she shares her art with an expanding group of onlookers who, like the family members, move from static unawareness to an ability to view and comprehend Tamara's story and their relationship to it. As she begins to reform the community and refine her artistic talents during the second act, the maturing audience and the family begin to aid the young artist in effecting productive change through confrontation, observation, and dialogue. The formerly vacant theater fills up with an audience that evolves from its initial complicit blindness into a mature group able to observe and process the performance. By the end, it actually applauds the courageous young woman: "Declamo en el escenario, escucho silbidos, después me ovacionan. En medio de las butacas distingo algunos rostros que no veo hace tanto tiempo" (75). With Tamara as its guide, the viewing public and the family coalesce and begin to cultivate critical skills to respond to the performance. This movement suggests the possibility of the national collective to grow and meet the participatory demands of democracy.

The protagonist's employment of art as a way to work through the past also suggests an unmet potential for the larger Chilean community to heal from their

haunted past through the cultivation of similar creative and communicative skills. In contrast to the young artist's urge to assist the public in a productive growth process, Jeftanovic indirectly includes a critique of unwillingness among real-life Chilean political leaders to take steps to restore collective mental health during the post-totalitarian epoch, preferring instead to obstruct any productive observations of the former military occupation that may upset the burgeoning free-market economy. For instance, by the time Jeftanovic's novel appeared the Chilean judicial system had already deemed Pinochet psychologically unfit to stand trial, despite considerable pressure from international leaders to hold him responsible for ordering military officials to torture and kill dissidents. Contrary to the events taking place in Chile around the time Jeftanovic composed her novel, the most noteworthy aspect of Tamara's recovery includes a scene in which she punishes Mamá for damaging her psychological balance. If this inclusion is interpreted as a metaphor for the nation, then Jeftanovic seems to imply that collective national healing could take place more rapidly if the government had made Pinochet and others stand trial. In reference to the staggering effect of the dictator's continued freedom on the nation-at-large, Moulian argues that the impunity of leading figures exacerbates a collective emotional turmoil so much that it defines contemporary Chilean identity:

. . . no ha habido una purificación del karma de diecisiete años de terror. Chile Actual está basado en la impunidad, en el carácter simbólico de los castigos, en la ausencia de verdad, en una responsabilidad histórica no asumida por las FF.AA. y por los

empresarios, estos últimos los beneficiarios directos de la “revolución capitalista”. (69)

Tamara’s healing process, on the other hand, involves a purification of the self through both an expurgation of memory and the public punishment and subsequent forgiveness of the perpetrators of her pain, curative processes that the Chilean people have not yet completed, but which could be brought about, as Jeftanovic seems to indicate, if authorities allowed Chileans to follow Tamara’s lead.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout her narrative performance the protagonist states that her goal is to mend her fractured community through forgiveness, but she expresses her wish to do so through deliberate recognition and confrontation. At least for Tamara, punishment is a necessary precursor to forgiveness and closure. In the theatrical aside, “Diálogo sobre tables,” Tamara does precisely the thing that the Chilean nation has not done to the proverbial national father, Pinochet: she publicly chastises her once abusive and strategically amnesic mother in front of the fictive audience:

Estamos a solas con mamá en un amplio escenario (sic). Nuestros pasos se amplifican en los crujidos del piso de madera. Cada una entra por un costado distinto. [. . .]

---[. . .] ¿Cómo fue que volví a tu memoria?

---No lo sé bien. Junté dos mitades, quedó una fisura. Te reconstruí con un montaje de fotos. Con las historias que narraban tus hermanos, otras personas hasta que un día apareciste ocupando un espacio vertical en mi mente.

---Negociemos nuestras realidades; sumemos o restemos el pasado y el presente.

---¿Te atreves a repasar nuestra fábula?

[. . .]

---Dime. ¿Cuál es la leyenda de tu personaje, su enunciado? --- pregunto.

[. . .]

---<<Yo me equivoco>>. ¿Y el tuyo?

---<<Yo recuerdo>> ---afirmo.

---¿Qué lógicas operan en ti? ---interrumpe.

---Las de la memoria. Vivo en el pasado, no alcanzo a entrar en el presente.

[. . .]

---Dame un beso ---ruega con dulzura [. . .]

Me alejo. [. . .] Niego con la cabeza.

[. . .]

Es la primera vez en esta escena que nos miramos a los ojos, las cortinas demoran en caer. Quedamos descubiertos ante nuestro rencor, sosteniendo una mueca desolada con el talón rojo de fondo. (131-133)

One wonders if Jeftanovic's inclusion of this rather typical family process is not actually a prescriptive guide for the recovery of emotional balance among the larger Chilean population, a recipe of sorts that calls for forgiving without forgetting.

The uneasy relationship between mother and daughter, moreover, illustrates the potential for pain to continue to reverberate at the national level in future times if Chileans do not confront the issues that the neoliberal culture obscures. Jeftanovic suggests that Mamá and Papá's generation, having experienced the military conflict directly, is irreversibly damaged by its wartime experience. The younger generation risks inheriting the damaging effect of the war from their parents, and hence needs the expressive release made possible by counseling or art. Through Tamara's experiences, Jeftanovic models how such interventions help youth process the ghostly wartime residuals their parents are unable to confront. Mother and daughter eventually reunite, but only after Tamara recovers an adequate portion of her memory, implying a potential reconciliation at the national level. Jeftanovic's novel proposes that art, like memory itself, readapts the past inventively, and hence can foster Chile's healing process through alternative symbolic means. Escenario de guerra suggests that if national leaders choose not to collaborate in improving the collective emotional status, perhaps others, like the nation's artists, should intervene. Jeftanovic's creation of a parallel between the woman writer's role as a leader in social transformation underscores the continuation of the legacy of women writers of both the Generation of 1950 and 1980.

The uplifting theatrical conclusion to the narrative highlights Jeftanovic's optimistic vision of a dramatically different national future. The third act corresponds to an upcoming time when the family and the nation have achieved relative wellness after purging themselves of their previously latent memories. As a group, they have

viewed and organized elements of the past and have begun to communicate with each other. As the novel closes Tamara writes the last pages of her autobiography at the same time that she prepares nervously for its performative debut. Indeed, the fictive and potential readers/viewers of both Jeftanovic's and Tamara's theatrical novels reach the end of a therapeutic artistic voyage. At this point the reader-audience perceives the performance as a road map guiding the travelers in a journey, beginning during present times, backtracking through the recesses of memory, and moving forward to the uncharted territory of a collectively imagined future. Jeftanovic closes by fusing disparate temporal frames and has each of the novel's main characters—living and dead—summarize their positions about Tamara's performance. This divisive decision to confuse temporal boundaries illustrates that performances of history—like those Fernández's ghosts enact—are as much about the present and the future as they are about the past. It also brings to mind Roach's notion that there is a triadic interaction among memory, performance, and substitution, wherein societies define themselves in the present and collectively envisage their future through public performances of the past (5). Recalling Mapocho, in the final theatrical performance included in Escenario de guerra, the living and the dead coexist and communicate, suggesting a productive continuation and re-elaboration of the past in present and future times. One glimpses an auspicious future time in which a community has formed that has adopted a new set of cultural values and practices and can engage in productive dialogue.

Jeftanovic captures this hopeful view about the national future through the inclusion of a final literary device borrowed from classical theater—catharsis. This ending emphasizes the transformational potential of viewing artistic representations about the past in the presence of others. Once Tamara purges the past from the deep recesses of her mind, there is a release of tension and emotion among all members of the newly established community, including the reunited family and the activated fictive audience:

Cae el talon. El teatro está repleto. Los espectadores aplauden, golpean fuerte las palmas. Todos los que estamos en el escenario no sabemos qué hacer. Nos movemos inquietos. El público se pone de pie, aplauden enardecidos. Baten las manos en un ritmo que se encuentra. Cada uno de los presentes observa las manos de los demás mientras aplauden. Cuando los aplausos parecen extinguirse, unos comienzan de nuevo con más brío. Desde aquí sólo vemos cabezas anónimas, puntos negros. La ovación trepa por las cortinas, por el escenario. Entonces nos miramos unos a otros, hacemos una reverencia y trenzamos las manos aferrándonos por un instante a la misma cuerda de vida. (185)

This cathartic experience hints at a potential to create a new national myth that, unlike the contemporary one, which rests precariously on a foundation of empty consumption, includes awareness about the past that is fundamental in returning to the democratic model. Jeftanovic reveals and remedies what at first appeared to be an



impossible task: to make amends within the evoked familial and national communities. She implicitly asks the fictive and real-life audiences if they believe it possible to restore a myth of equality in a nation where collective amnesia and impunity form part of everyday life. She demonstrates, moreover, that the fictive and evoked audiences are untrained in the essential communicative skills necessary to navigate within and sustain such a system. Tamara's leadership, on the other hand, illustrates methods that the haunted national community may use to process the specters of their past, aiding it in cultivating precisely those skills and behaviors necessary to stabilize a partial and unstable democracy.

Mapocho and Escenario de guerra exhibit the spiritual and governmental challenges facing a nation during its complicated transition from dictatorship to democracy. These books, to which one could add Andrea Maturana's short story "Piernabulario" (1992), Alejandra Costamagna's En voz baja (1996), or Lina Meruane's Cercada (2000), among others, signal the appearance of new aesthetic means to represent, critique, and renovate Chilean social and political life. As this chapter demonstrates, the writers of the Group of Cultural Industry take advantage of numerous literary devices—specifically, ghosts and theatricality—to question the value of Chile's neoliberal economic system by coopting strategies similar to the ones used to install and maintain the consumer culture. Unlike the trends characterizing the McOndo group so often employed to understand these women writers, their fictions create an aesthetic match to the socio-political and economic context, not to celebrate it, but rather to demonstrate precisely what is missing from the free-market

economy. Their work is a poignant attempt to fill the spiritual void the latter economic trend has created and to mediate the psychological consequences of dictatorial and post-totalitarian amnesia. The authors comprising the Group of Cultural Industry share with their politically-minded and aesthetically innovative antecedents of the 1950s and 1980s a confidence in the power of art to forge communities in which the messages that dominant discourses leave out are communicated. Chilean women writers belonging to the New Scene and to the Group of Cultural Industry in particular demonstrate a longing to reestablish community and essential methods of self-expression that neoliberal consumerism might otherwise prevent. Despite its fixation on history, the newer assemblage appears to be a vanguard group moving away from their foremothers' nostalgic yearning to recuperate a lost socialist utopia. Recalling Gertner's message of warning detailed in chapter one, Fernández's and Jeftanovic's obsessive inclusion of the past does not suggest a return to the pre-dictatorial epoch; rather it implies a yearning for a future time when Chile positions itself to recreate and support a national myth that values equality.

The writers of this three-part genealogy all demonstrate that female creativity can debunk dominant structures, teach the nation vital skills in communication and self-awareness, and substantiate the democratic promise of social equality. The family-nation metaphor, moreover, demonstrates that prevailing social structures, both large and small, extend the values and behaviors of everyday people and echo the ways in which individuals treat one another. While their fictions meet Chile's

desperate need to redefine its national identity through the inclusion of less sanitized images of the past, Fernández and Jeftanovic engage as well in the larger global context from which they emerged, capturing essences and problems that resonate with a broad international readership. The experiences of this tiny nation, isolated in the extreme southern end of the earth, remind individuals, countries, and the world-at-large of their own unfulfilled challenges and unmet needs. These books ask us to observe not only the ghosts who call Chile home, but also those young and ancient spirits who drift between temporal and geographic limits haunting us from their native soils in Rwanda, Afghanistan, England, Argentina, Iraq, Cambodia, and the United States with their troubling evocations of our collective past, seemingly asking us how long we are willing to saturate the modern world with ghostly debris.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> Maturana began to write and publish prior to other authors of her same age. As a teenager she participated extensively in Ergo Sum workshops and published her collection of short stories (Des)encuentros (des)esperados in 1992 and her novel El daño in 1997. Signaling her participation in Ergo Sum workshops, she cultivates erotic fiction, a characteristic of Barros and other women writers of the Generation of 1980. Maturana is an emblematic figure who serves as a bridge between the New Scene and the new group this chapter explores.

<sup>2</sup> Moulian argues that the Pinochet dictatorship constitutes the only true revolutionary period in Chilean history. He maintains that the neoliberal economic system supplanted socialist ideology, and stamped out the community-mindedness and collective political engagement associated with the Allende years. The totalitarian government successfully constructed a new socio-economic and cultural structure that valued the individual, technological advances, and consumerism, and made Chileans apathetic about politics. Although Moulian's ideas met some criticism after the publication of his bestselling sociological study, which he reviews at length in the prologue to the third edition, I resolutely agree with his position.

<sup>3</sup> The term "la transición" loosely describes a ten year period spanning 1988 to 1998 in which Chile moved away from a dictatorial government to a democratic one. This epoch began prior to the ouster by plebiscite of the military government in 1988 and ended around the time of Pinochet's house arrest in England ten years later. Karl

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Kohut describes these years as a difficult ones in which the new democracy was partial and precarious (9).

<sup>4</sup> Kohut's summary of this heated scholarly debate captures an overwhelming lack of consensus about who belongs to this group, what it ought to be called, and what elements may best define it (13).

<sup>5</sup> Although the name the Generation of 1990 is the term most frequently used to speak of this group, Kohut has conveniently organized the plethora of names scholars have suggested in past years, which include arguments that it is premature to name the group as well as proposals to call it: *los muy jóvenes*, *la generación mcondo*, *la generación emergente*, *la generación de 1987*, *la generación X* (13).

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed exploration of Chilean neoliberalism, globalization, and modernization, see Stefan Rinke's article, "Transición y cultura política en Chile de los noventa o ¿cómo vivir con el pasado sin convertirse en estatua de sal?" (2002).

<sup>7</sup> The selection of this name was not entirely the result of my own thinking. Barros and I dialogued extensively about a way to describe these burgeoning literary personalities and their project more precisely than the term "Generation of 1990."

<sup>8</sup> Chilean critic Juan Armando Epple, in a forthcoming essay about the female vein of this group, is the first (and to my knowledge, the only) academic to highlight the formation of a unique project among these writers, a development he agrees nurtures a relationship with the previous group of dictatorship writers. He analyzes several key works by women writers and enumerates affective and stylistic bonds joining female and male components of the Generation of 1990 to each other and to

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the Generation of 1980. In focusing on cohesiveness between generational projects, Epple rethinks popularized notions about recent Chilean cultural production and downplays the position that young writers uniformly rebel against their literary antecedents, emphasizing instead the complex foundation and proposals of today's burgeoning group of women writers.

<sup>9</sup> Despite slight age differences and minor discrepancies in the dates they began to publish, both the McOndo writers and those of The Group of Cultural Industry fall under the same broad generational labels: the Generation of 1990 and Generation X.

<sup>10</sup> Jorge Marcelo Vargas and Ana María del Río characterize the Generation of 1990 as an extension of the McOndo Group in relation to political apathy. Vargas and del Río, in my opinion, accept these characteristics too readily, as the Generation of 1990 is a diverse and complex literary project, particularly when one considers the literary production of women. Vargas's description of the young group is similar to the Fuguet-Gómez manifestos:

Nos encontramos aquí ante una nueva generación menos comprometida con la Historia y el pasado, más individualista, menos solidaria; con escritores que no se sienten representantes de nadie, —ni portavoces ni líderes— dando cuenta de espacios, costumbres y elementos de una cultura cotidiana juvenil, con más alusiones al cine, la música, el comic o la publicidad de los 90 que a una tradición literaria. Se advierte una prosa directa y sencilla, ausencia de

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referencias a un contexto social o político; en la precariedad de la existencia, son observadores más que protagonistas de un mundo en crisis, donde la amistad suple los quiebres familiares, en escrituras cada vez más híbridas, mestizas, traspasadas por los mass media. (81)

For her part, del Río defines the characteristics of the last three generations of writers in Chile: the Generations of 1950, 1980, and 1990. Her schema also reasserts the basic aspects outlined in the early manifestos and describes the prose of this generation as apathetic, closed, lacking in technique, and individualistic (207).

<sup>11</sup> In the introductions to both anthologies, the editors remark on the paucity of women writers in their books. Beginning Cuentos con walkman, for instance, the editors define the generation as male, even though several women writers appear in the collection: “Veinte jóvenes, casi todos varones (¿dónde están las voces femeninas?), casi todos periodistas, han contado su cuento” (12-13). Again, in McOndo, the editors recognize the absence of female contributors, explaining that their limited knowledge about and contact with contemporary women writers contributed to their exclusion:

Estamos conscientes de la ausencia femenina en el libro. ¿Por qué? Quizás esto se debe al *desconocimiento* de los editores y a los pocos libros de escritoras hispanoamericanas que recibimos. De todas maneras, dejamos constancia que en ningún momento pensamos en la ley de las compensaciones sólo para no quedar mal con nadie. (14 emphasis is mine)

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I question the editors' justification for leaving women writers out when they insinuate that their incorporation of them could be interpreted as a compensation to a politically-correct readership. In my mind, literary production among contemporary Hispanic women writers abounds in quality and quantity and therefore does not need the protection of politically-correct watchdogs to merit the serious consideration of anthologists.

<sup>12</sup> Javier Campos places these two introduction-manifestos under the microscope and points out that the lack of women writers in one anthology and their complete absence in another is alarming given the enormous attention female authors of the Generation of 1980 have received. The editors address this lack in both introductions, attributing it to a deficiency in talent, submissions, and numbers of young women writers at the time.

<sup>13</sup> Meruane's novel Cercada (2000) also exploits the performative and visual element integrated into Fernández's and Jeftanovic's work. During an unpublished lecture about the book that took place at the University of Oregon, the author discussed how her novel calls attention to itself as an artistic representation that, through aesthetic means, attempts to derail authoritarianism, amnesia, and impunity of military officials by incorporating varied perspectives. To my mind the most innovative and complex author of her group, Meruane intermeshes technique with politics and employs devices borrowed from performance art and cinema, such as montage, to represent the complexities of the Chilean situation during the post-dictatorship.



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<sup>14</sup> See Diamela Eltit's "La compra, la venta" for more involved analysis of consumerism and narrative production in neoliberal Chile.

<sup>15</sup> When I asked Costamagna, Jeftanovic, and Fernández about the extent of their interest in gender issues in a series of personal interviews conducted in January of 2004, they expressed feelings of indebtedness to women writers of the Generation of 1980 for their work in opening up the Chilean literary establishment to women writers. At the same time they expressed a desire to refocus their work on topics other than gender.

<sup>16</sup> Idelber Avelar explores the ways that consumer society furthers collective amnesia, relating this cultural shift to post-dictatorial cultural production.

<sup>17</sup> Despite this recognition, her work is yet to be explored in depth among literary critics, with the exception of Epple, who analyses her short story collection El cielo (2000) as part of his wide-ranging study about young Chilean women writers, and Cristian Opazo, who details Fernández's inclusion and revision of key historical texts about the Chilean past in an article about Mapocho.

<sup>18</sup> Marking this tendency, Marco Antonio de la Parra's 1998 ghost play La tierra insomne o la puta madre, for example, employs phantoms and meta-theatrical devices to stage the inner-workings of collective amnesia within contemporary Chilean society. As I explore in detail elsewhere, de la Parra's play couples meta-literary devices with ghostly characters to urge an implied Chilean spectatorship to view the process of collective forgetting represented and to reincorporate crucial aspects of the officially unrecognized past into the collective psyche (See my

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“Reappearing Acts: Effigies and the Resurrection of Chilean Collective Memory in Marco Antonio de la Parra’s La tierra insomne o La puta madre”). As de la Parra’s play and Fernandez’s novel suggest, the ghost story is currently gaining force among Chilean authors of both the Generation of 1980 and The Group of Cultural Industry in assessing the collective psychology of a nation as it phases out of totalitarianism.

<sup>19</sup> Moulían has analyzed this process, arguing that destruction of the old urban setting began on the first day of the coup when the military unnecessarily bombed the presidential palace. The dramatic explosion demonstrated in a visual and performative way the imposition of “un nuevo Estado sobre las ruinas de otro” (35).

<sup>20</sup> Argentine cultural theorist Beatriz Sarlo argues that the consumerist locale that characterizes postmodern and post-totalitarian urban Latin America intensifies the loss of collective memory. She contends that shopping malls in particular erase the historical conditions on which they are built and replace them with a new culture based on consumerism (Escenas de la vida posmoderna 19).

<sup>21</sup> For a more detailed reading of the cultural implications of the Chilean booth in Seville, see Richard’s chapter entitled “El modelaje gráfico de una identidad publicitaria” in her book, Residuos y metáforas, and the section in Moulían’s book entitled “El iceberg, escultura del blanqueo.”

<sup>22</sup> Since the late 1990s, a sizeable number of works have come out focusing on the link between soccer stadiums, national politics, and collective memory. For instance, in the 1997 documentary “Chile: Obstinate Memory,” filmmaker Patricio Guzmán retrieves collective memory by revisiting sites of military violence like the

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national stadium. A year later, Pedro Lemebel published an article about a political movement among disadvantaged Chilean youth which began during the dictatorship and gained force during the transition. He explains that groups like “La Garra Blanca” and “Los de Abajo” act out their frustrations about dominant political and economic trends by forming unofficial fan clubs devoted to national soccer teams. Club activities, which include graffiti writing, marijuana smoking, and rabbleroxing at games, contradict the hypocrisy of the Chilean economic “miracle.” More recently, testimonial writer and poet Jorge Montealegre Iturra put out Frazadas del Estado Nacional (2003) wherein he uses the blanket as a recurring symbol to recreate the dissidents’ imprisonment at the stadium.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Neustadt published a brief review of the novel that provides basic information about its narrative plot and theatrical structure.

<sup>24</sup> Jeftanovic’s academic and literary background includes an advanced degree in sociology from the Universidad Católica de Chile and a doctorate in Spanish-American literature from the University of California at Berkeley. In 2005, she completed a dissertation titled La representación de la infancia en la literatura iberoamericana: Los casos de La Troppa, Fagundes Telles, Lispector, Lobo Antunes.

<sup>25</sup> Of course I am well aware that as time passes more leading military figures are imprisoned for human rights abuses that occurred during the regime. I do, however, agree with Moulian that the incarceration of these ex-leaders, while better than doing nothing at all, can be viewed as way to scapegoat the General’s guilt onto others. For a more detailed analysis of the political motives and results of

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substituting Pinochet's incarceration with what Moulian calls "chivos expiatorios,"  
see pages 69-74 in his book.

### Endings:

The year hereafter referred to as: “You’ve Come a Long Way, Baby”

In December, 2005, just days before the first round of presidential elections in Chile, the Ergo Sum Press published a book-object titled El año en que las mujeres la llevan: diversos y estilados. This celebratory object is unlike any other. Comprised of Pía Barros’s workshop students’ writings, the object bears news that in 2005 the Ergo Sum project would reach a goal hoped for since the first workshop meeting in 1977. As always, the epistolary shell long favored by the press contains a collection of *microcuentos*, each of which is written by a different student. The outside cover, however, is unlike the many colorless butcher-paper objects found in the Ergo Sum collection. It is jubilantly decorated with rich purple hues and the short stories it protects are printed on beautiful, high-grade white paper. The usual epistolary motif, juxtaposed as it is with the obvious scaling up of materials, announces visually that it brings news of a long-awaited change.

The object was released on the eve of the elections predicting Michelle Bachelet’s victory in January 2006. Her promise to attempt a political experiment in which both sexes would be represented equally in the government signals a triumph in Ergo Sum’s agenda. Supporting this platform, the Ergo Sum production fetes the victories of trendsetting women—activists, politicians and artists—who had long collaborated to create the conditions necessary for Bachelet’s election. It celebrates the historical moment in which it was produced, the past struggles and accomplishments of Chile’s women, and it looks ahead to the nation’s promising

future. The book-object, however, is not just political propaganda; it is also a message of warning to upcoming generations stressing the need to revitalize collective feminist action.

The play on words contained in the title advances the contrasting festive tone and the message of caution contained within the book-object. Barros has explained that the object's title, Año en que las mujeres la llevan: diversos y estilados, can only be appreciated considering the vernacular of the verb "llevar," a term Chilean youth have appropriated and transformed into street jargon (personal interview, 7 February 2006). An ordinary translation of the title, which might read The Year That Women Take it (All): Diverse and Stylized, is a featureless equivalent in comparison to Barros's intention. The verb "llevar" in contemporary Chile is similar to the more known slang term "bacán," a versatile expression often used to stress the speaker's exuberance about an achievement. Barros's title could hence be more colorfully translated, The Year Hereafter Referred to as "You've Come a Long Way Baby,"<sup>1</sup> a playful version capturing the meaning embedded in the colloquialism as well as Barros's position that the elections were as much about reviewing Chile's past as they were about the nation's present and future.

On the eve of the elections, Barros and her students busily resumed the genealogical project I have described, confecting a book-object to remind readers that, thanks to collaboration among female activists, intellectuals, artists, and others, women's liberation has come a long way since the 1950s when figures like María Carolina Geel were channeling women's rage through the barrels of their pistols and

the tips of their pens. Extending this idea into the historical frame of totalitarian Chile, the object emphasizes how much has occurred since women pushed for socio-political change and demanded the fall of all authoritarian structures, from the patriarchal family, to the literary establishment and the military government. Yet the obvious symbolism in the color Barros chose for the cover, the purple of the feminist movement, advances a call to action and implicitly communicates Barros's message that the feminist struggle could not rest once Bachelet assumed the presidency. The vibrant object indicates that Bachelet's triumph would constitute a significant benchmark in the struggle for women's liberation that began in the early twentieth-century. By hinting at the uneven progress characterizing the movement, Barros indicates that Bachelet's success in the presidential race as well as during her term in La Moneda would require that the women of the left continue to collaborate as they always had.

The incorporation of street slang in the title targets Chilean youth for the news the object brings, reminding emerging generations of the newness and precariousness of women's representation in government and literature. Barros revitalizes the warning so poignantly communicated in María Elena Gertner's novel La mujer de sal in the 1960s, stressing the importance of recognizing origins in both the healing and maturation processes. She bestows a vital task on youth, charging them to look both ways as they travel forward on the path toward liberation, telling them to forge on, while warning them to not forget that their road was once paved with blood.

As described in chapter four, the emerging generations Barros targets in her title have in fact been wandering ‘back to the future’. Unlike the resolutely feminist *Ergo Sum* book-object of 2005, many of the new generation literary time travels critique feminist ideology as well as the literary genealogy that Barros, her contemporaries and forebears created. In the year 2000<sup>2</sup>, for instance, Lina Meruane<sup>3</sup> (b. 1970), a writer of the Group of Cultural Industry, published a short story titled “Sangre de narices,” a side-splitting parody of María Carolina Geel’s foundational prison narrative, *Cárcel del mujeres* (1956), a novel discussed in chapter one. Meruane’s tongue-in-cheek version thinly veils a decisive message showing that the writers of her era, like many of the female voices emerging in the twenty-first century, wish to move beyond the feminist battles marking women writers’ projects of the twentieth century. The parody, however, is left intentionally ambivalent, wavering back and forth between lambasting and lauding Geel, the longtime idol of Chile’s militant feminist writers of the Generation of 1980. For the first time since the publication of *Cárcel de mujeres*, the reputation of Chile’s venerated queen bee of experimental and militant feminist writing finds itself on shaky ground, proving that women writers, too, may also reach a level of comfort and stability when they need to drive out their progenitors in order to grow and move on. Nonetheless, Meruane’s uncertain lampooning of her literary foremother is far from a pure example of Harold Bloom’s anxiety of influence. The story recognizes Geel as a legend—talented, courageous, and daring. This purposeful ambiguity leaves only one clear message: the author suggests that it is not only acceptable, but also healthy and liberating to



scrutinize the label “Chilean woman writer.” Meruane hints that contemporary female authors no longer need quick-fix icons, idols, and symbols; thankfully, they feel they are in a position to begin new projects and may cease to strum the same feminist tunes the passage of time has rendered cliché. As contemporary writers seek new territory, they are displacing the idols of the past.

This reconfiguration of the woman writer’s role is carried out in Meruane’s parody which creates logical as well as outrageous parallels associating Geel with other twentieth century Chilean women writers as well as to a fictional alter-ego, a hamster named Georgina. Using the pet hamster as a vehicle, Meruane links Geel to the well-known vanguard fiction writer, María Luisa Bombal. At one point, Geel lovingly recalls the time her hamster killed her mate and their six babies because she could not bear the pestilent human odor left by Geel’s caresses. Absurdly, in the story, Geel and Bombal, and by association, all of Meruane’s potential literary models share Georgina’s innate revulsion of human odors, particularly those of men. The fictional heroine muses in her cell that becoming famous is just one of many reasons she murdered the lover; she opened fire on him because she, like Georgina, could not bear his humanoid stench. Extending her musings, Geel wonders if Bombal was also reacting to odor when she shot at her lover several years earlier. Meruane’s comical portrayal of these artists illustrates that such rage and militancy are not viable reactions for twenty-first century women.

Though Meruane parodies both her own literary roots and feminist ideology, her outlook is nevertheless optimistic. Her courage to critique her antecedents

illustrates that she and her contemporaries feel they no longer need to defend the very existence of female authorship and hence are in a position to review and deconstruct the category to which they belong. She defines the millennium futuristically as a moment of relief when literary women can take themselves less seriously, engage in self-critique, and enjoy the fruits of their victories.

Yet Meruane's work, when read in the context of Nona Fernández's and Andrea Jeftanovic's novels, does not advocate intellectual and political listlessness. The writers of new millennium are suggesting that the artist's role in the twenty-first century has expanded to include women's issues as well as the salient concerns of contemporary Chile: environmental degradation, the neoliberal expansion, the reinstitution of democratic practices, and the nurturing of the collective psyche. As described in Fernández's and Jeftanovic's exemplary novels, the female narrators of today are not self-reflexive; they have turned their focus outward, looking to global issues for material. These writers, of course, are yet to stand the test of time, but their project seeks to demonstrate that Chilean women have not floundered in the face of change. On the contrary, they are maintaining their post at the vanguard of Chilean public life as trendsetters and critical thinkers. The Group of Cultural Industry is expanding the role of narrative writing as a way to move women into visible leadership roles at the national and international levels. In their novels and short stories female artist heroines are not spearheading grass-roots social movements; rather, they are leaders possessing the broad vision necessary to direct Chile into the new millennium.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, when Meruane's contemporaries were renovating their forebears' project to meet far-reaching global needs, the emergent future of Chile remained indeterminate. As forecast in novels such as Mapocho and Escenario de guerra, Chile was gearing up for the symbolic national recovery that eventually occurred with the 2005-2006 elections. The elections broadcast to the world that Chile was vital enough to assume again a bold political experiment. It was a moment redefining the women writers of this genealogy into precursors of the Chile currently in the making, and an event hoping to cast this remote territory as the pioneering nation building a democracy that represents whole communities.

It nevertheless remains to be seen whether the Bachelet government will be allowed to carry out the socio-political experiment it has promised. Chileans were reminded of this during Bachelet's campaign. Thousands of citizens viewed the box office hit Machuca (2004), a film illustrating that, although Chile is a country of vanguard propensities and noble utopian struggles, its spirit is profoundly conservative. The movie is set in Santiago in the months preceding the 1973 coup. The two schoolboys who are the protagonists of the film lose their innocence at the same time that Chile loses its political naiveté. When a military coup takes over and soldiers kill the adolescent girl both boys love, all confidence in democracy and the possibility for comprehensive change comes to a halt. The boys, who allegorically represent the maturing nation, realize that the will of the majority and justice do not always prevail. As rightly portrayed in the film, in Chile the wealthy and powerful as well as imperial interests ultimately have the last word in the nation's fate. All of

these ideas were fresh in the minds of the citizens who elected Bachelet. The Chileans who voted for her promised utopia are not naïve about the potentially high price of utopian change, yet they chose to attempt it anyway. Seeing Machuca in 2004 and/or living in (post-)totalitarian Chile make the people of this nation all too aware of the potential for utopian projects to backfire.

The film argues that it would be presumptuous to make any predictions about the future of a country as polarized and volatile as Chile. This position is all the more true in the context of the twenty-first century, particularly given that other Latin American presidents such as Bolivia's Evo Morales and Venezuela's Hugo Chávez and Mexico's guerrilla leader Subcomandante Marcos are showing imperial powers and multinational companies that the Latin American people of our times do not necessarily view neoliberalism as the answer. Though Machuca is shown through the lens of 1973 Chile, the film reminds us that the new century is not just a time of hope, but also a period of violence and uncertainty, for Chile, the rest of Latin America, and the world. On the other hand, the Bachelet experiment—in so many ways made possible by the female intellectual activists of Chile I have described in this study—shows us again that there could be another way to govern and to live, but the project has only begun. The elections are hence neither a beginning nor an ending to this genealogy of female intellectual activists. While the moment holds promise, the warning of lost life lurks in the background.

No matter what Chile's future holds, the literary genealogy at hand will have to reflect it. In writing this fragment of Chile's literary sequence, I openly engage

with these authors to further the political proposals uniting their work. Challenging the prevalent Western paradigms that reproduce domination and individualism, literary genealogies are about emphasizing interrelationships and continuities. They attempt to blur the boundaries that create out-groups. Literary sequences are pleasantly unruly and inherently incomplete, and are always multiplying and accepting new change as a natural part of the growth process. Such sequences shed light on literary production as a reflection of historically specific collective longings, and show how these yearnings reverberate forward and back through history. Genealogies challenge margins and open them up, expecting horizontal and vertical expansion and growth. They hope for new additions, welcome alternate perspectives, and are not terrified by the prospect of change or disagreement.

More so than ever before, the women of the future stand to profit from these lessons in cross-generational collaboration and inner-group solidarity. All of the writers chosen to map out this sequence in this dissertation have suggested that a potential for true revolutionary change rests in their past. Underlying their message that community formation is the answer, these writers have been showing us that women possess the skills, experience, and global vision to be effective world leaders. They demonstrate that the world's largest and most varied oppressed group—women—possess intrinsic strength, not only in their numbers (which far exceed those of their oppressors), but also in their potential to unite as a common interest group. The women studied here defy social and literary mores, but most importantly, they reveal that fear is a construct socially imposed on them to keep women and the

oppressed at bay. The work and lives of these writers remind us that the women of the world abound, and that they are everywhere. Those who lie in the beds, stir in the thoughts, and live in the hearts of their oppressors have strategic power, yet nevertheless the masses remain afraid and isolated.

The women and men of Chile have taught us lessons that threaten the dominant Western paradigm. The Pinochet dictatorship even helped subaltern groups understand their lot by making it apparent that both the fear and oppression of all people are rooted in gender metaphors that, while constructed, are nevertheless painfully real. Pinochet's simple mathematics rendered visible the universal equations that describe the experience of the citizens of the world. That woman is in poverty, woman is black, woman is indigenous, woman is colonized, woman is slave, and woman is the Third World, became only too clear under his rule. The women of this remote nation are showing us that within these simple equations rests a revolutionary potential to defy accepted norms and hierarchies. The standards guiding human life for centuries necessitate fearful and amnesic subalterns because, without them, the future could belong to them. This optimistic view forward and back may be the only way to induce true change, where numerators do not simply take the place of denominators, reproducing a formula known to bring strife, but instead, to create equal proportions that bring harmony and balance.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> Martha Manier, a professor of Hispanic literature and a skilled translator who has done work on many of Barros's and her contemporaries' short story collections, suggested this translation (personal interview, 9 February 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Meruane first published "Sangre de narices" in the year 2000 in an anthology titled Con pasión. Between 2001 and 2005 she republished a revised version of the story on the internet site, Los noveles.

<sup>3</sup> Attesting to her promise as a writer, Lina Meruane, an accomplished novelist, short story writer, and columnist as well as a doctoral student at New York University, received the prestigious Guggenheim scholarship in 2004.

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