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**Neoliberalism and its Discontents:  
Three Decades of Chilean Women's Poetry  
(1980-2010)**

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2018



## **DECLARATION**

This is to certify that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

Bárbara Fernández Melleda



## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores reactions of Chilean women's poetry to neoliberalism in three chronological stages between 1980 and 2010. The first one focuses upon the years between 1980 and 1990 with the poems *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (1983) by Carmen Berenguer and *La bandera de Chile* (1981) by Elvira Hernández, which are analysed in Chapters 2 and 3. These poems are reactions not only to the violence exerted during Pinochet's regime (1973-1990), but also to the ideological purpose behind it: the overturning of the welfare state in favour of the privatisation of all public services. Both texts address these issues by developing themes of isolation and national identity. The second stage comprises the decade between 1990 and 2000. The poems selected to study this phase are *Escrito en Braille* (1999) by Alejandra Del Río and *Uranio* (1999) by Marina Arrate, which are developed in Chapters 4 and 5. Both texts express utter disillusion with their times. For these authors, the return of democracy after the 1988 plebiscite reveals that the country is not at ease with itself nor has it healed the wounds of its recent past. The poems enunciate an endless hopelessness based on the impossibility to overcome the commodification of daily life. Finally, the period between 2000 and 2010 shows the most explicit criticism of neoliberalism in the cohort, which also means that the economic model is fully functional. Both, *Copyright* (2003) by Nadia Prado and *Braceá* (2007) by Malú Urriola, studied in Chapters 6 and 7, are texts that express the discontents of living in a society ruled by neoliberalism, where those who see themselves as subjects and not consumers are in some ways alienated and deemed as freaks. This thesis proposes that women poets react to neoliberalism from a deep concern for Chilean society and its future.

## LAY SUMMARY

The present work seeks to study how Chilean women's poetry reacts to the imposition, development and consolidation of neoliberalism in Chile between 1980 and 2010. The first stage explores poems *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (1983) by Carmen Berenguer and *La bandera de Chile* (1981) by Elvira Hernández, which constitute Chapters 2 and 3. These works signpost the main ideological purpose of the dictatorship: the imposition of neoliberalism through the privatisation of state-owned institutions and services. The second stage studies *Escrito en Braille* (1999) by Alejandra Del Río and *Uranio* (1999) by Marina Arrate which are analysed in Chapters 4 and 5. The 1990s are characterised by utter disillusion and a recent past still haunts Chilean society. The hopelessness expressed in the poems studied signals the impossibility to escape neoliberal rule. Finally, Chapters 6 and 7 explore *Copyright* (2003) by Nadia Prado and *Braceá* (2007) by Malú Urriola as texts that are even more explicit in developing a neoliberal critique. The 2000s would encompass the consolidation of neoliberalism and the texts studied certainly refer to its discontents. In sum, this thesis demonstrates that the poems studied react against neoliberalism in implicit and explicit ways, and their reactions shed light on the poets' concern for Chilean society and its future.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would firstly like to thank the State of Chile for financing my doctoral studies through the CONICYT Becas Chile programme.

I should also like to thank the following:

Both my doctoral supervisors Dr Fiona Mackintosh and Professor Peter Davies for their guidance, work ethics and advice throughout these 4 years.

Dr Iona MacIntyre, Dr Huw Lewis, Dr Charlotte Gleghorn from the SPLAS Department for their support and advice.

Dr Zvi Septimus and Dr Anja Klein who helped me with my biblical readings and interpretations.

The University of Aberdeen for granting me space to finish my thesis while taking up work there. Thanks to my colleagues Jesse, Itziar, Constanza and Marian.

My poets: Carmen Berenguer, Elvira Hernández, Alejandra Del Río, Marina Arrate, Nadia Prado and Malú Urriola. I thank them for their wonderful work and for their cooperation when analysing their texts.

Elizabeth Cárdenas and *La Joyita Cartonera* who have taught me how to resist neoliberalism in concrete ways.

My friends from University: Chris, Ida, Clara, Yumiao, Julia, Elaine and Paul.

My friends from life in Edinburgh: Valeria, Pepi, Fernanda, Carolina, Consuelo, María, and Ana.

My dear parents and sister, and my aunts for their everlasting support. Rose White for being a supportive and caring mother-in-law.

My accomplice in life, my husband Gordon White for comforting me in times of need and, above all, for loving me. I thank too our wee doggie Holly for being extremely cute and lightening me up on dark days.

AWANTE



Neoliberalism and its Discontents:  
Three Decades of Chilean Women's Poetry (1980-2010)

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro</i>	<i>Bobby Sands</i>
<i>La bandera de Chile</i>	<i>La bandera</i>
<i>Escrito en Braille</i>	<i>Braille</i>
<i>Uranio</i>	<i>Uranio</i>
<i>©Copyright</i>	<i>©Copyright</i>
<i>Bracea</i>	<i>Bracea</i>
<i>El Yo Cactus</i>	<i>Cactus</i>
<i>Este lujo de ser</i>	<i>Este lujo</i>
<i>Máscara negra</i>	<i>Máscara</i>
<i>Simple placeres</i>	<i>Simple</i>
<i>Piedras rodantes</i>	<i>Piedras</i>
<i>Dame tu sucio amor</i>	<i>Dame</i>
<i>Hija de perra</i>	<i>Hija</i>



## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

### Neoliberalism and its Discontents: Three Decades of Chilean Women's Poetry (1980-2010)

*Chile entero es un taller literario*

Julio Ortega

#### 1.1 Introduction

Poetic production is perhaps one of Chile's most cherished cultural treasures. After having two great poets achieving the highest distinction for literature, the Nobel Prize, both Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda became the most distinguished figures of the nation's cultural heritage. The legacy of their poetic production can be seen in the hundreds of poets who followed their steps.

Apart from a strong and established poetic tradition that goes back to foundational poems such as *La Araucana* (1589) by Alonso de Ercilla—although Spaniard—, considered the father of Chilean literature, or the original works from Vicente Huidobro at the beginning of the twentieth Century, poetry has become Chile's most developed literary genre. In this sense, an examination of contemporary poetry needs to be understood within a wider context of production by women and men poets that have poeticised Chilenity since its earliest times<sup>1</sup>.

It is also very clear that the most decisive event in Chile's recent history was the dictatorship led by General Augusto Pinochet between 1973 and 1990. This particular period is of pivotal importance when studying the poetry written during and after the regime. I will argue that the dictatorship did not only mean a halt to a socialist agenda, but also entailed a complete epistemological break with the imposition of neoliberal policies since the 1980s. This break is also felt when reading poetry from those times and after. According to Naín Nómez, there are

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<sup>1</sup> I have chosen the term Chilenity to refer to 'chilenidad', as it has been consistently used in published critical work from Social Sciences, and in government webpages. The cultural aspect that Chilenity entails is the one I need to translate into English for the purpose of the present thesis.

tres grandes núcleos históricos [que] permean la poesía desde el Golpe hasta hoy: la del periodo dictatorial del exilio y el insilio (1973-1989); la de la transición dura, la de "los restos de fiesta" (1990-2001) y la actual que corresponde a una red desterritorializada formada por tribus fragmentadas (2001 hasta ahora) (Nómez 23).

From Nómez's categorisation, I would like to offer an alternative although complementary taxonomy. For this thesis, there will be a consideration of three distinctive decades, and how these develop a set of specific historical traits. The first one will be the 1980s. In this case, it is clear that it is part 'del período dictatorial', as Nómez asserts. However, my reading is joining both the dictatorship in itself and the 1980s as the decade in which neoliberal policies were being imposed and implemented. For Nómez's 'transición dura', the 1990s are indeed a decade in which there is a mixture between the joy of not being under military rule, but also a sense of disillusion regarding the failure to reverse neoliberal policies from the decade before. In the 1990s, it would seem that the 1980s constitution begins to play a major role when questioning the difficulties that the democratic offices elected after the regime had to undo the extreme neoliberalisation of the country. Finally, from 2000 to 2010 there is agreement with Nómez's idea of a 'red desterritorializada', as the consolidation of neoliberalism is felt acutely and the poetry from that period expresses a lack of belonging, as if their own country is leaving people behind. This latter point bears a striking importance, as one of the main consequences of neoliberalism is social alienation and very high levels of social and economic inequality.

For this project, the relationship between each decade studied and the stage in which neoliberalism is being developed is really close. I will argue that this very point is reflected in the poetry studied in both implicit and explicit ways—depending on the text. Furthermore, in order to develop this introduction, I will firstly refer to the project in itself as a proposal through a discussion of its origins, hypothesis, theoretical framework, selected corpus and methodology to then explain with more detail what is relevant from each decade considered for this study.

## 1.2 The Project

The present thesis seeks to evaluate six poetry books written by Chilean women poets between 1980 and 2010, examining the way they respond to or challenge neoliberal principles. Chile was drastically transformed from a welfare state and turned into a neoliberal country after Pinochet seized power in 1973 and, although it may seem that an economic concept such as neoliberalism bears little relation to poetic work, this thesis aims to demonstrate that there is a link between poetic writing and what the imposed new economic paradigm fosters. The analysis of these six poetic works, I argue, exposes a reaction to neoliberal ideas in a variety of ways. Therefore, it contributes to the advancement of scholarship on Chilean contemporary poetry during and after the dictatorship, reading it as responding to its politico-economic context.

The first aspect that will be dealt with is the definition of neoliberalism. According to David Harvey in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005),

neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade.  
(Harvey 2)

Harvey's general definition of this economic model lacks ideology. It is clear that the lack of use of this term relates to neoliberalism attempting to be 'neutral' when it is very ideological in its core. Since most neoliberal reforms around the world took place in the 1970s and 1980s (Harvey 14), it is relevant to consider the context of the Cold War and its ideological detonators. Ideology was the threat that the Chilean economic elite feared once socialist Salvador Allende was elected president of Chile in 1970. It is also relevant to consider that ideology in Chile has been equated with leftist movements, while right-leaning reforms were considered 'neutral', and so was the rhetoric of Pinochet's regime.

The relevance of the Chilean case when considering the rise and development of neoliberalism is high, as "the first experiment with the neoliberal state, it is worth recalling, occurred in Chile after Pinochet's coup

on the ‘little September 11<sup>th</sup>’ of 1973<sup>2</sup>’ (Harvey 7). Therefore, the Chilean case was foundational and received plenty of attention from neoliberals from all around the world. The fact that Chile became a laboratory to experiment with neoliberal policies was possible only through a dictatorship, as it was not possible to oppose to such reforms.

Studying the reactions to neoliberalism in contemporary Chilean poetry is necessary, not only with the aim of evaluating what happened with the model in theoretical terms, but also to see whether the increasing inequalities fostered by it were acknowledged in artistic creations.

### **Hypothesis and Justification**

The student movement from 2011 generated fertile ground on which neoliberalism could be challenged. This was the particular context in which this thesis was born. My hypothesis is justified by the fact that neoliberalism penetrates every aspect of human life and seeks to commodify it. It is very likely that poetry is one of the few literary expressions that escape commodification given that the publishing industry does not generally seem to profit from these productions. The authors studied do not normally publish their work in big and corporate publishing houses. It is relevant to criticise resistance to neoliberalism from a poetic realm, not only by understanding that the texts analysed have not been published by publishing conglomerates, but also through their criticism of the model in explicit and/or implicit terms.

The biggest movement of resistance to neoliberalism was the 2011 student protests. For Camila Vallejo, a leader of the movement, the struggle was not only about education, it also reflected the need to go back to “the Chilean State [as] a true guarantor of material rights, [and] that is certainly antithetical to the neoliberal capitalist vision, which turns rights into a business regulated by the market” (Vallejo *et al* 67). That particular perspective sparked many discussions that have led to some Chilean scholars become concerned

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<sup>2</sup> I have to confess my astonishment when Harvey referred to an event as unfortunate and violent as the Chilean coup as a ‘little’ version of a ‘major’ event as 9/11 for the US. I disagree with this sort of relativisation of events which in the end reify an imperialist view of US events, as if more important than others. Such categorisation is not necessary and can result in an offence for people who were directly affected by the coup in Chile and the policies of torture that the regime fostered.

with neoliberalism and its discontents<sup>3</sup>. This means that the current generation of Chilean academics is concerned with these issues and seeks to address them urgently.

Another aspect important to this thesis is the idea of demarginalising Latin American literature and Latin American literary studies. This is why the theoretical core of this thesis will draw on Raquel Olea's *Lengua Víbora. Producciones de lo femenino en la escritura de mujeres chilenas* (1998). The fact of developing a Latin American-centred analysis of a Latin American—Chilean—corpus in Scotland in particular is a gesture that bridges a type of literature that would have otherwise taken even longer to be considered in a global arena.

What is more, from a gendered perspective, this study offers another attempt to break with patriarchy. On the one hand, women writers deny their historical positioning as objects and turn into subjects who produce their own literary works. On the other, a thesis such as this one also elevates the figure of the woman as a literary critic whose work is to evaluate and question phallogocentric structures that are not only challenged through the texts studied, but also in the context of advanced scholarship that is still male-dominant.

The contribution of the present study, apart from offering a particular way of approaching the corpus selected, serves the purpose of disseminating relevant literary works because the “literatura escrita por mujeres continúa siendo un producto informal en la economía cultural chilena” (Olea 19). For this reason, this thesis is a step forward in the legitimisation of the woman poet and the woman critic.

From these reflections, my hypothesis is the following: **Chilean women's poetry does engage in a critique of neoliberalism, and this reveals tensions that arise from an economic model that reproduces and deepens inequality.**

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<sup>3</sup> A clear example of this is Carla Parraguez-Camus' PhD thesis: *Evaluating the Injuries of Neoliberalism in Chile 1973-2015*, submitted to The University of Birmingham in 2017.

## Methodology and Corpus

The main questions that need answering to justify my hypothesis are:

1. Why women's poetry?

Understanding that the study of Chilean women's poetry is relatively scarce, especially for some of the poets in the cohort, this thesis bridges the gap of a sort of poetry—women's—that has been less studied than pre-existing canonical authors—mostly men. Even though Mistralian studies are extensive, it seems that the work that analyses other Chilean women poets is insufficient. What is more, the assumption that women's writing is subversive per se generates either a ghettoization of their writing, or, it demands deeper thinking on other reasons behind the need to rebel against the establishment. In this context, studying Chilean women's poetry has been an interest of mine since my Master's thesis (2011-2013) in which I analysed the role of pornography and eroticism in three contemporary poetic works. The main idea behind this study was to prove how subversive women's poetry could be and whether the use of a pornographic and erotic aesthetic helped these poems develop a subversive response to patriarchal forms.

Neoliberalism became a constant reflection when trying to go beyond patriarchy in a traditional sense, as there seemed to be an ulterior issue with structures that were parallel to the patriarchal, but seemed elusive to define. It is also clear that there are more authors who explore a questioning of neoliberalism and they are not necessarily women. In spite of this, the analysis of women's writing can be more closely linked to a double marginalisation as neoliberalism validates itself through authoritarian rule. Here it is possible to link two structures that oppress women in parallel: patriarchy and neoliberalism.

2. Why these poets and why these works?

The six poets studied are Carmen Berenguer, Elvira Hernández, Alejandra Del Río, Marina Arrate, Nadia Prado and Malú Urriola. All of these poets have had their work recognised through either their participation in the Neruda Foundation workshop, and/or they have been awarded prestigious national and international poetry prizes.

Prestigious scholars such as Raquel Olea, Federico Schopf, and Magda Sepúlveda, among others, have studied most of these works in the Chilean academy. They have not been widely explored in a more international arena and this is one of my motivations for bringing these authors to a European context. This study would contribute a new type of approach to Chilean poetic writing, but also fill in a gap in Latin American literary studies, as it would broaden the material being researched outside Chile. The works selected have been chosen considering a careful reading of the authors' production during three decades: 1980, 1990 and 2000. It is clear that the most important women poets from the 1980s are both Carmen Berenguer and Elvira Hernández and the impact of their work, considering dictatorship times, is felt until today. What is more, the study of *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (1983) by Berenguer has reached the Irish academia for the first time thanks to some of the work carried out in this thesis, which led to a publication in *The Irish Review* journal to be released in 2018/19. Both Del Río and Arrate's works were chosen as they were published in 1999, which means that they recollect a decade of Chilean transitional times within their lines. It was very important for this thesis to get a feeling of what poets perceived after 10 years of democracy. The reason behind Prado and Urriola's poetic productions are related to the explicit way in which their poetry challenges neoliberal ideas, therefore, their works confirm that there is a neoliberal critique that becomes more radical over the years.

The corpus is the following:

Analysis 1980s:

*Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (1983) by Carmen Berenguer (1946)

*La bandera de Chile* (1981, published in 1991) by Elvira Hernández (1951)

Analysis 1990s:

*Escrito en Braille* (1999) by Alejandra Del Río (1972)

*Uranio* (1999) by Marina Arrate (1957)

Analysis 2000s:

*Copyright* (2003) by Nadia Prado (1966)

*Bracea* (2007) by Malú Urriola (1967)

In order to understand the relationship between the corpus and a neoliberal context, I have devised a timeline for illustrative purposes:



The starting point is evaluating how the poetry selected “recoge. . . esta marca histórica del lugar de la mujer: el mandato al silencio, el castigo a la voz, el desprestigio de su palabra” (Olea 15). All of the poetic proposals to study in this thesis challenge the traditional patriarchal ideal of a silent and compliant woman. They all develop their own poetic trajectories and their work “crea (sic) nuevas conexiones en la escenificación de actos diversos” (Olea 13). Thus, an introductory remark to the texts would consider them as ‘fractures of meaning’, understood as attempts to bend and challenge structures in the symbolic realm, but also developing a more concrete resistance to them in semantic and grammatical terms.

In this sense, the poetic works analysed destabilise the order imposed by both the regime and neoliberalism during and after the dictatorship. The description for each stage in the development of neoliberalism will be explained in the following sections of this introduction, with a detailed analysis of each decade.

### **Methodology**

The methodology is qualitative research based on close reading that also examines pre-existing critical work on the corpus selected. There will be a cross-examination of both local (national) and international sources. The thesis will divide the work into individual chapters that will analyse each poetic work separately, however, there will be instances in which the texts will dialogue with each other and this will be signposted throughout the chapters. There will be a more general commentary of these connections in Chapter 8, Conclusions.

The study of the corpus will develop different layers of analysis. Each chapter will have a section focused on neoliberalism, but there will also be other parts devoted to other complementary and relevant themes present in the poems, and also a review of rhetorical figures and other poetic features. The fact that this analysis is thematic does not undermine a poetic reading that also focuses on formal aspects of poetic discourse. They will be both included in all six analyses. Finally, given that “construir una lectura es dar concreción a los sentidos implícitos de un texto literario” (Olea 41), there is a clear need to revise certain theoretical notions from the Reader-Response Theory that are useful to complement the core ideas behind this reading.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This section will develop three core theoretical axes. First, it will consider further evidence of the discontents caused by the neoliberalisation of the Chilean economy and, in consequence, society. Second, this introduction will explain why women’s writing/poetry is the appropriate nomenclature instead of ‘literatura femenina’. Thirdly, I will expand upon certain useful approaches from Reader-Response theory that apply to my methodology.

## Neoliberalism and its Discontents

From Harvey's definition of neoliberalism, it is relevant to observe some of the literature that proves how neoliberalism fosters social inequality. For this, I will comment on some studies undertaken by the OECD, of which Chile has been a member since January 2010. A 2015 OECD study on inequality concluded that "in the 1980s, the richest 10% of the population of OECD countries earned 7 times more than the poorest 10%. They now earn nearly ten times more" (Keeley 5). Even though the amount can be seen as modest, it is the average for all OECD countries, including those who are not as unequal as Chile. In 2016, another OECD report confirmed Chile's position as the most unequal country of the OECD with a Gini coefficient of 0.46—and this has been a record for the last 10 years—this means that inequality is a tendency that has remained as a feature of Chilean society in the context of a neoliberal agenda<sup>4</sup>.

In spite of the above, inequality is not only to be perceived through economic studies. Society in general feels the weight of this phenomenon acutely. From this, I believe that a focus on Chilean neoliberalism reveals a deeply rooted problem generated by the dictatorship and keeps affecting Chilean citizens until these days. I believe that Chilean poetry expresses opposition to neoliberalism and what it entails.

In the case of the analysis of the 1980s it is important to highlight that it was very unlikely that both poets and common citizens knew exactly the ideological agenda behind the regime. I will consider the imposition of neoliberalism as the latest example of an epistemological break, as this model presents an ideology that changes thought and behaviour<sup>5</sup>. Such is the extent of this change that neoliberalism as a "conceptual apparatus becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to discussion" (Harvey 5). This means that neoliberalism is understood as a sort

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<sup>4</sup> "The Gini index measures the extent to which the distribution of income. . . among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution". (Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM): 2001-2002, International Labour Organisation, Geneva, 2002, page 704).

This distribution of income assumes 0 as total equality and 1 as complete inequality. The fact that Chile has achieved a 0.46 means that the level of inequality is almost 50%. The least unequal country of the cohort reported was Finland with 0.2.

<sup>5</sup> I understand this epistemological break not only since Pinochet's coup in 1973, but also in the consideration of neoliberal reforms that were implemented in the 1980s. Most of these measures needed a dictatorial context to ensure their imposition.

of *new normal* and such normalisation consolidates it as an epistemological break from a critical standpoint. It is clear that this view is a posteriori; therefore, the present analysis reads the cohort for the 1980s as if the texts implicitly show awareness of this break.

It is far clearer to elucidate a neoliberal critique in the two decades that follow. However, the 1990s are characterised by a dark environment embodied in a city that has been destroyed. This post-apocalyptic imaginary is relevant, as it tests the achievements of transitional times, whether these have brought what they promised. The immediate answer to that is a decisive no, yet the mechanisms through which the authors problematize this are poetic and discursive. It is here that my proposal becomes increasingly more relevant, given the feeling of impotence and the impossibility of reconciliation caused by the amnesty conceded to the military as a condition to submit their power back to the citizenry. In this particular context, the first decade of democracy proves to be a transitional phase of unfulfilled promises.

The 2000s show a more direct criticism of neoliberalism which can be explained from two perspectives. The first is that the feeling of self-censorship inherited from the regime was not an issue for more contemporary poets. The dictator, by then, was a senile figure and was not a threat to people anymore, whereas in the 1990s Pinochet was a Senator for Life and he remained as the Head of the Military for many years. The second is that by that decade rising levels of inequality and debt could not be slighted, and it became clearer that they were caused by the unchanged reforms that took place in the 1980s. The poetry selected to analyse this period is quite explicit in its criticism of their own globalised context, be it through a questioning of US influence and globalisation or via an exploration of what it means to be an outcast within a neoliberal society.

## Challenging 'Literatura femenina'

This section will briefly review the theoretical work of three important Chilean scholars: Julieta Kirkwood, Kemy Oyarzún and Raquel Olea.

The most important author from the 1980s in Chile regarding feminism was Julieta Kirkwood (1936-1985). In her posthumous book, *Ser política en Chile: Las feministas y los partidos* (1986), Kirkwood develops the idea that feminism can be considered as a negation of authoritarianism. This is theorised precisely during Pinochet's regime, so her claim is challenging on various levels. Kirkwood's perspective has been regarded as one of the most luminous viewpoints in Latin American and Chilean feminist thought. Hence, her Chilean-centred feminist approach will be considered the guiding thread in this thesis concerning feminism.

Kirkwood starts her argument warning her audience that authoritarianism "no solo provenía de la burguesía y de las castas militares, sino que el discurso autoritario también proviene de las clases medias—incluyendo profesionales e intelectuales—de las clases proletarias y campesinos. En realidad de la totalidad de la sociedad" (Kirkwood 188). This implies that women were facing a deeply rooted structural authoritarianism, not only the one displayed by the dictatorship. It was society in the constant reproduction and repetition of certain patterns of behaviour and moral stances that naturalised authoritarianism—and patriarchy—against women.

In Kirkwood's view: "el poder *no es*, el poder *se ejerce*" (Kirkwood 202). This means that women need to empower themselves as subjects and take action. From this perspective, women would have to take power for themselves as it would not be granted by those who have historically benefited from exercising it. Opposition to Pinochet's regime contributed in this direction. The 1980s were a time of protest and women were central to this fight; whether from theory (Julieta Kirkwood, Nelly Richard) or politics (María Antonieta Saa), or art (Carmen Berenguer, Elvira Hernández, Diamela Eltit), women had a say. By the time Carmen Berenguer had clandestinely circulated a few hand-made copies of *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (1983), Elvira Hernández was (unsuccessfully) trying to publish *La bandera de Chile* (1981).

Kirkwood directly exhorted women by stating: “HOY las mujeres podemos—deseamos—realizar una nueva conciliación con la cultura, con el poder” (Kirkwood 211). Interestingly, she does not appeal for a negotiation with power structures, as that would put women in a disadvantaged position. She rather emphasised that women are subjects that can and are able to modify current relationships with their contexts in different ways. Therefore, her claim that feminism negates authoritarianism reflects the methods of activism and empowerment that were characteristic of 1980’s Chile.

A few years later, after Chile became democratic again, Kemy Oyarzún publishes her 1993 essay “Literaturas heterogéneas y dialogismo genérico sexual” in which she establishes that the otherness that characterises Latin American cultural production has ceased being “lo Otro, aquello desplazado y diferido, abstraído and reprimido” (Oyarzún 37). It has, in turn, become “lo nuestro” (Oyarzún 37), which clearly challenges Eurocentric and neo-colonial perspectives. Oyarzún establishes Latin American cultures as being valid on their own terms and they reject being ‘other’. In this sense, there are “múltiples literaturas” (Oyarzún 39) that arise from the heterogeneous feature of Latin American cultures. This can prove challenging as to what extent literature and, more particularly, women’s writing, can be centralized within the ‘literatura [latinoamericana] femenina’ tag. For this, Oyarzún offers a compelling method:

- a) La necesidad de aislar nuestro objeto a fin de avanzar en el conocimiento de la especificidad y lo femenino y,
- b) b) la importancia de ahondar en las zonas relacionales, tanto sincrónicas (clases, etnias) como diacrónicas (distintos hitos de la trayectoria de los modos productivos) (Oyarzún 41).

Interestingly, the present thesis complies with both of Oyarzún’s conditions to develop a critical feminist work, which I install within a Latin American context. On the one hand, I isolate the works studied and they can indeed shed light on aspects of women’s poeticising processes and their need to generate new meanings that include them as subjects. On the other, this is both a synchronic and diachronic work, although the latter is the core of this research as I propose a chronology that intersects women’s poetry and the development of neoliberalism in Chile.

After Oyarzún's approach, there is a long and detailed critical book on Chilean women's writing, which is Raquel Olea's ground-breaking *Lengua Víbora. Producciones de lo femenino en la escritura de mujeres chilenas* (1998) published by Editorial Cuarto Propio. The relevance of this text is that it both theorises and studies a consistent corpus of Chilean women writers amongst which she includes Carmen Berenguer, Elvira Hernández and Marina Arrate, studied in this thesis.

For Olea, women's writing develops an alternative construction of reality that is parallel to the transitional period that followed the dictatorship. From the book's title it is possible to understand that Olea is suspicious of 'lo femenino' as a categorisation to examine Chilean women's writers, which is also the reason behind this thesis as it addresses Chilean women's poetry. Olea is very emphatic to criticise 'lo femenino' in cultural production because "al nombrar la literatura producida por mujeres indiferenciadamente como 'literatura femenina' se estaría legitimando acríticamente el constructo cultural de la feminidad establecida, sin interrogarlo históricamente" (Olea 30). This particular theoretical questioning is relevant, as it would connect to both Kirkwood and Oyarzún's perspectives.

The relevance of Olea's critical standpoint is that she makes a clear distinction between 'literatura femenina' and 'literatura de mujeres'. The latter, in her words, "literatura producida por una sujeto otra, compleja, móvil en sus múltiples roles y funciones sociales. . . aún insuficientemente historizada, aún insuficientemente simbolizada" (Olea 31-2). The otherness of this woman-subject clearly surpasses the limited and somewhat stereotypical conceptualisation of 'literatura femenina'. It is through this 'other' literature, women's writing without a given set of established expectations, that traditional patriarchal forms can find some degree of questioning and alternative responses to them.

In this sense, challenging a given order is necessary so as to "construir nuevas identidades [y] pasar un proceso de (des)generamiento de otros órdenes y de otras relaciones entre los términos de la oposición masculino/femenino" (Olea 32). Therefore, the idea of a subject that is not fixed or that is difficult to locate is at the core of this construction. In this sense, the role of ambiguity within poetic discourse is of the highest importance, as it

would blur the limits of identity and would offer new ways to consider it. In sum, Olea's approach together with Oyarzún and Kirkwood's proposals have led me to consider my corpus as Women's Writing—Poetry, and not 'literatura femenina'.

### **Reader-Response Approach**

As this thesis relies heavily on a close reading of its corpus, it is important to establish the basic criteria through which this process takes place. Apart from considerations from a gendered/sexual perspective and the neoliberal context that surrounds the corpus' production, the process of reading is in itself a complex one.

In order to develop the argument of a Reader-Response approach, the one postulated by Wolfgang Iser is of utmost importance. In his 1982 essay "La interacción texto-lector: algunos ejemplos hispánicos" we find that "el estudio de la obra literaria no sólo debe atender al texto tal cual sino también y en igual medida las operaciones que la respuesta a ese texto implica" (Iser 225). Therefore, the dialogic relationship between the text (corpus) and the reader (myself as a literary critic) provide space for a certain type of interaction that constructs meaning.

In this sense, "en una obra literaria. . . el mensaje se transmite en dos direcciones, por cuanto el lector lo 'recibe' construyéndolo" (Iser 226). From this, it can be inferred that a reading is not necessarily 'innocent', that is, without a purpose other than enjoying the text or finding out what it is about. The fact that Iser acknowledges a construction by means of a given reading confirms the relevance of literary analysis as a specific type of reading that, certainly, dialogues with the text in search for certain clues which are communicated through it while being analysed. Hence, it will be understood that "the reader has to be seen not only as the person reading, but also his or her world knowledge, background, viewpoint, reason for reading. . . must be taken into account" (Giangiulio 15). This particular view is also shared by Hans Rober Jauss, as a text's "social components and historical background must be taken into account" (Giangiulio 22), which is an important point to consider in this reading of contemporary Chilean poetry.

My reading in general also reifies the idea that different historical periods inform literary texts differently and here we get to the key point in which meaning is not fixed, nor the possibilities of interpreting a text from a given reading perspective. In conclusion, “Iser recommends that texts be and remain ‘open’ because this characteristic would challenge the reader to seek consistency and learn new things” (Giangiulio 27). Thus, my reading is installed among a multiplicity of (possible) readings of the texts selected, but seeks to add a particular element to the interpretation of them, which is the corpus’ reaction to neoliberalism. Finally, the flexibility suggested by Iser’s theory is complementary to the gendered fluidity that Olea and Oyarzún offer in their feminist approaches to literature written by women.

The following sections of this introductory chapter will be devoted to presenting a succinct summary of Chilean history and culture in three decades: 1980, 1990 and 2000.

### 1.3 Politico-Economic and Cultural Context 1980-2010

#### 1980s: Cultural Blackout and Censorship.

The analysis of Pinochet's regime (1973-1990) in cultural terms is a necessary exercise to set a context for literary writing in Chile from the 1980s onwards. The literary scene in Pinochet's Chile was characterised by authors writing covertly in order to dodge the state's new censorship apparatus. The writers and artists who remained in Chile—as many others were in exile—had to struggle against the regime's intentions to erase the country's recent history, and battle to open space for their own dissident expression.

Artists' wishes to establish their views encountered a rather hostile environment. Censorship became one of the major mechanisms the regime used to avoid opposing ideas being disseminated. In terms of the concept itself, when considering a general definition of censorship, US novelist William S. Burroughs came up with a very straightforward explanation: "Censorship is the presumed right of governmental agencies to decide what words and images the citizen is permitted to see: that is thought control since thought consists largely of word and image" (Burroughs 5). This definition can be linked to the Chilean case as the dictatorship had the monopoly of force in different ways, even with regards to what citizens could see, read or hear.

In this thesis I will argue that the monitoring and prohibition of discourses and practices that disagreed and disputed with the dictatorship can be understood from three perspectives, which I will refer to as discursive, institutional and behavioural<sup>6</sup>.

1. *Discursive Censorship*: The official dictatorial discourse installed itself as an ultimate truth, silencing opponents' discourse. The regime established that normality was depoliticised and, from its very start, the country was being purged of any leftist propaganda. According to Luis Hernán Errázuriz, "los militares buscaron erradicar las expresiones político-culturales de izquierda. . . cubrió un espectro muy amplio de acciones que iban desde la eliminación de monumentos. . . hasta el blanqueo de paredes" (Errázuriz 141). Therefore, this 'cleansing' of the

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<sup>6</sup> Thanks to Professor Peter Davies for suggesting these categories in the feedback of a draft of this chapter.

country shortly after the regime began sent an important message: the left was to be abolished, and anything related to it. Errázuriz insists that the members of the Military Junta operated “sustentados por una visión mesiánica que busca rescatar el ser nacional” (Errázuriz 154). Clearly, the definition of Chilenity was set by them. In a 1989 article by Manuel Jofré, “from 1977 to 1983 all printed material was censored” (Jofré 74) so the importance of writing in covert ways to articulate oppositional discourse increased. This level of censorship caused what is referred to as an ‘apagón cultural’, or cultural blackout. After the 1983 protests, however, complete censorship was halted, and there were new publishers opposing the regime that could start printing theoretical and literary works. Some of these are Editorial CESOC (Centro de Estudios Sociales, 1983); Editorial Pehuén (September 1983), and Editorial Cuarto Propio (1984).

*2. Institutional Censorship:* Among the first displays of violent censorship were the book burnings that took place ten days after the coup, which were also televised (Donoso 115) and had the purpose of “amedrentamiento de la población con el objeto de evitar que se ejerza la difusión de dicho mensaje [marxista] de manera clandestina” (Donoso 112). The symbolic implications of these acts generated consternation and fear in the population. They also help to explain the beginning of the cultural blackout as a phenomenon. Censorship in book publication was implemented more strongly in 1980. This type of censorship affected books prior to their publication, not after, as was the case in the book burnings. Sanctions and their reach were not clear. In general, “la forma en que más se ejerció la censura fue en la demora del dictamen de aprobación o rechazo de un libro” (Donoso 120). Hence, censorship operated at a bureaucratic and institutional level as well.

3. *Behavioural Censorship*: Another aspect to consider in this context is self-censorship. An external censor can normally be regarded as someone with the appointed authority to evaluate a text in terms of its content to allow its publication; the regime also deterred authors from attempting to send their works to be examined at the Ministry of the Interior. Self-censorship operated in the decision authors took to avoid publishing through official publication channels. The reasons for this are obvious. However, there is a surprisingly large amount of Chilean literature that circulated clandestinely. Despite the regime's censorship apparatus, opponents found ways to express themselves in self-published texts and with the help of alternative press, which was confirmed by both Carmen Berenguer and Elvira Hernández in interviews I conducted with them.

To sum up, the 1980s was a decade in which artists made themselves space in which to express their position against Pinochet's regime. This means that history directly and drastically influenced their work, and the ways in which they interacted with one another, considering that many of them had to leave the country in exile. Those who stayed in Chile had the task of denouncing the regime in a context of coercion and fear, so their attempts are not only regarded from an aesthetic perspective, but also can be considered important acts of bravery. Both Carmen Berenguer and Elvira Hernández managed to get their poems circulating, despite all difficulties, and they are now landmarks for those navigating through women's poetic writing in the Chile of the 1980s.

## **1990s: Transition, Impunity and Disillusion**

The Chilean Transition can also be understood as a process because it involved the dynamics of having to accept the dictatorship as part of the past and present of the history of the country. The regime made sure they set the rules of what Chile was going to be in the future, considering that the 1980 Constitution and many other reforms had already been established and implemented.

Right-wing ideologist and one of the writers of the 1980 charter, Jaime Guzmán, was emphatic when justifying Pinochet's dictatorship and agenda: "Pero lo fundamental reside en que siendo imposible construir las bases de una democracia estable a través de un camino plenamente democrático, no hay otro medio que hacerlo a través de un Gobierno militar 'pre-democrático'" (Guzmán 21). This quotation from 1979 implies that whatever democracy Chile achieves after military rule, it will be what was established by the regime, normally referred to by its supporters as "democracia protegida" (Vergara 46).

The process of transition had been engineered by the regime and in such a way that it led to the failure of an ever more moderate left in Chile. The democracy that Chileans regained in 1988, ratified in the election of Christian Democrat Patricio Aylwin as president a year later (1990-1994), was an exercise in window-dressing, a façade of freedom that ultimately did not undo what conservatives and the military had accomplished during the dictatorship. Walescka Pino-Ojeda recognises this problem and asserts that it is necessary to: "Reconocer que la 'Transición' representa un proceso ideológico-político en el que coexiste el desmantelamiento del régimen saliente y la instauración de uno nuevo, el que no obstante depende de modo sustancial del que ahora se busca reemplazar" (Pino-Ojeda 35). Hence, the will for change was blocked by structures and institutions that continued to exist and operate as they had under Pinochet, the 1980 Constitution being the main divisive element.

Pinochet gave up power while making sure he and his closest followers were given amnesty for crimes against humanity committed during the regime. Back in 1978 his office approved an Amnesty Law which understood amnesty as "extinción de la acción punitiva del Estado [que] tiende a suplir el rigor de la justicia, atendiendo a otros parámetros, como pueden ser la necesidad de

pacificación social” (Guzmán Vial 115). Clearly, in the context of the dictatorship, those who committed crimes and violated human rights were going to be protected, as this law:

concede amnistía a todas las personas que hayan  
incurrido en hechos delictuosos entre el 11 de  
septiembre de 1973 y el 10 de marzo de 1978. . .  
quedando como delitos beneficiados por la amnistía  
precisamente las infracciones que afectan a esos  
derechos fundamentales [humanos]  
(Guzmán Vial 116-7).

Even though there was another agreement in 1989 entitled “Pacto de Derechos Civiles y Políticos”, the 1990s in general were characterised by the impossibility of prosecuting the dictator and his supporters involved in the violation of human rights.

In addition to this state of impunity, Pinochet remained an important figure in the political scene of transitional Chile. The military was still led by General Pinochet in democracy until 1998, after which he became a senator for life, a position that was guaranteed by the 1980 Constitution. This is explained when considering that democracy was handed back to the people of Chile, but with certain conditions, “los militares chilenos no dejaron de contar con el apoyo incondicional de la burguesía. . . por lo mismo la transición chilena no podía ser sino pactada” (Pino-Ojeda 37).

Pinochet’s lingering presence during the 1990s cannot be overlooked when Chilean artists and activists were trying to re-install culture in a democratic context. In the words of Nelly Richard: “la tonalidad afectiva del clima postdictatorial y las dificultades para elaborar lenguajes que [pudiesen] re-significar la cita histórica de la violencia” (Richard 15) were factors that determined the obstacles culture faced in order to be *freed*. Therefore, the presence of the former dictator and his absolute immunity symbolically restricted the development of alternatives to a castrated or mutilated cultural environment. In spite of this, Nelly Richard expressed her hope that: “no hay normatividad del orden cuya malla de vigilancia no presente ciertas zonas de mayor relajo o distracción por donde liberar la expresividad nómada” (Richard 21). Surely, the 1990s were different from the previous decade, as new and formerly silenced voices can find a space of expression without the fear of

imminent prosecution, torture or death. The main challenge for artists is to go beyond what they could achieve in the 80s, where they found themselves in a position in the margins of what was discarded, in a residual position.

All the aspects previously mentioned have an echo in the poetry of the 1990s, especially in the works of Alejandra Del Río and Marina Arrate, to be considered in this thesis. Generally speaking, *Escrito en Braille* (Del Río, 1999) and *Uranio* (Arrate, 1999) reveal the struggle for space and the articulation of a female discourse in between masks, ghosts, and the lack of recognition of the familiar. This latter uncanniness (Freud) can be related to the newly unfamiliar familiarity of the return to democracy, with the patriarchal ascribed to the figure of the dictator, whose apparently everlasting presence challenges attempts to re-signify the symbolic. In between blindness (Del Río), silences and the dead (Arrate), it seems that women's poetry in the 1990s in Chile is not fighting against an imposed ideology, but rather has assumed its existence and power. This writing continues to bring about a literature from the periphery, approaching the traditional centre by decentralising it, and proposing a questioning of patriarchal forms. This point is also in accordance with Raquel Olea's vision of women's writing, and Richard's idea of the residual, as it now can be taken out of that rejected or hidden counter-hegemonic position to subvert patriarchy and denounce neoliberalism.

## **2000s: 'End' of Transition, the Third Way, the first woman in Office**

Ricardo Lagos became the first socialist president after the dictatorship and took office between 2000 and 2006. During his campaign, his motto was 'Crecer con Igualdad'. This message made most Chileans think that a socialist president could change what had been inherited from the dictatorship. Pinochet was still a haunting presence in the political imaginary, as he returned to Santiago in March 2000, after sixteen months being detained in London, so his presidency had to address sensitive issues that kept reappearing.

Lagos' most important symbolic political achievement was in the Constitution. Lagos' reform of the 1980 charter gave the impression that the transition was reaching an end. "Lagos estaba emocionado. Había logrado eliminar la firma del general Pinochet que hasta entonces se mantenía en el texto constitucional" (Fuentes 78). In spite of this, major changes were not accomplished. His office continued and accentuated the neoliberal framework the country was in. It is inevitable to draw connections between Lagos' will to generate social equity with a neoliberal agenda and the "Third Way", proposed by Anthony Giddens in his book *The Third Way* (1998). In this context, "el 'modelo chileno' puesto en práctica por la Concertación representa una alianza económico-estructural de las políticas de centro-izquierda con las políticas de la 'Nueva Derecha'" (Pino-Ojeda 97).

The Third Way in Chile represents the need for a political and economic pact with the far right. The third way did not change anything. In fact, it made it *natural* for Lagos' coalition and its followers to have to negotiate all reforms with former Pinochet supporters. The promise of equity in Lagos' campaign could not be achieved, and the main example of social discontent with his office and Concertación's lack of commitment with those they alleged to represent was the students' protests in 2006, 'La Revolución Pingüina'<sup>7</sup>. Secondary students from state schools, and later with the support of other students from private institutions, demanded an educational reform, as Pinochet's administration had fostered privatisation and the quality of state education kept decreasing. "Fue la primera movilización social masiva y de

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<sup>7</sup> Primary and secondary students in Chile are colloquially referred to as penguins, because of their school uniforms.

carácter nacional desde la recuperación de la democracia” (García-Huidobro 205).

Despite campaigning under a banner of addressing inequality in Chile, and after being a major leader of the No campaign in the 1980s, Lagos’ office ultimately did not differ too much from previous moderate presidents like Aylwin and Frei. “The Lagos administration came down on record in favour of maintaining the free market system and negotiating reform within the institutional confines of the 1980 constitution” (Silva 348). In the end, his constitutional reform did not reach very far. However, new hopes appeared with a political figure from within President Lagos’ closest allies, his Minister of Defence, Michelle Bachelet.

Bachelet was a rather unknown figure for most Chileans until she was designated as Minister of Health under Ricardo Lagos’ presidency as soon as he took office. Two years later, in 2002, she was the new Minister of Defence, which was indeed a victory for Latin American women, as she was the first woman in the region to hold that position. Her popularity increased rapidly and people started to pay attention to her. Her charismatic personality also paved the way for a presidential campaign. It is, nevertheless, clear that “gendered definitions of politics and political leadership provide different opportunities and barriers for female and male candidates” (Thomas 67), so it was evident that her political contenders, extreme conservative Joaquín Lavín, and moderate right-wing entrepreneur Sebastián Piñera were going to use gender as an argument to secure votes.

In spite of this, Bachelet became Chile’s first woman president in January 2006, and she “was perceived as a symbol of political, economic and social change” (Fernández and Vera 13), therefore, the expectations of her presidency were very high. The debate on abortion and emergency contraception became more explicit with Bachelet as president, although it is in her second office (2014-2018) that these issues have finally been discussed and have become law.

The ending of Bachelet's first office in 2010 marked 20 years that Chile had been under Concertación governments—3 years longer than Pinochet's regime. With Lagos and Bachelet Chile experienced, once again, a decade of continuity, which has been documented in critical work on their Offices. Regarding Bachelet's, "while there was undoubtedly some progress in many areas, there was no fundamental challenge to the neoliberal model or its social priorities" (Fernández and Vera 18). This meant that despite Bachelet's emphasis on social reform, there was little or no change that would affect previously established neoliberal policies; Pensions, healthcare and education continued to be privatised, and those who could not pay for services only had access to a much weakened state-provided assistance. The logic of the market was also installed in people's lives, and success was measured in economic terms, rather than in talent, abilities or others. In this sense, ©*Copyright* (2003) by Nadia Prado, from its very title, refers to the need to protect one's own ideas from theft, and is a sign of ownership and individuality. Hence, there might be an emphasis on individualism from an economic perspective. The author uses different types of discourse and develops a very eclectic poetry that can be considered an example of alienation within a neoliberal society, such as the Chilean one.

Malú Urriola's *Bracea* (2007) provides the idea of treading water which can be understood in the context of the action of swimming, but also as something a person would do to save her/himself in case of drowning. The book is divided into sections that present pictures of people with disfigurements, so the notion of the ideal subject is challenged from physical and symbolic perspectives. The interest in deformity can be considered a response to canons set by the media, among other interpretations to be examined in Chapter 7.

Both books deal with a subject who cannot find herself. It can be argued that the commonplace images from previous decades, including the '90s, seem not to be there in the 2000s. This may imply that instead of looking for ways to re-construct the subject—understood in a phallogocentric sense—there needs to be a consideration of the leftovers of history and what is to be generated from those remains. The 2000s show the devastating impact of neoliberalism in the articulations of poetic discourse, as the poems seem to

give account of a general crisis of the self, not only in terms of poetry, but also in Chilean society in its entirety.

In conclusion, this chapter explained the theoretical considerations that sustain this thesis as a whole; it explicitly stated the hypothesis to prove and provided a general contextualisation of the decades being surveyed. Chapter 2 will examine *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (1983) by Carmen Berenguer; Chapter 3 will explore *La bandera de Chile* (1981) by Elvira Hernández; Chapter 4 will analyse *Escrito en Braille* (1999) by Alejandra Del Río; Chapter 5 will study *Uranio* (1999) by Marina Arrate; Chapter 6 will delve into *©Copyright* (2003) by Nadia Prado; and Chapter 7 will review *Bracea* (2007) by Malú Urriola. General conclusions and connections amongst these analyses will be developed in Chapter 8: Conclusions.

## CHAPTER 2

*Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (1983) by Carmen Berenguer:

Elevating Idealism and Denouncing Abuse

*I am standing on the threshold of another trembling world.*

*May God have mercy on my soul.*

Bobby Sands

### 2.1 Introduction

Carmen Berenguer (1946) is a Chilean poet, playwright, literary critic and audio-visual artist. She was one of the organisers of the Women's Literature Congress in 1987 and was awarded the prestigious Pablo Neruda Poetry Prize in 2008. Her poetic work started with *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* in 1983, followed by many other works.

This chapter will analyse Berenguer's first poetic work *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (1983) by considering it a poem that covertly opposes Pinochet's regime. Berenguer uses Bobby Sands as a vehicle through which she can communicate her concern for those who were imprisoned during the dictatorship, but also, and more implicitly, signalling her readers that a prison is not only a place with bars, but the whole country—Chile—as it had been taken hostage by a vile regime. From this, there is an important reflection about what is actually achieved behind the horrendous display of violence of the Pinochet era.

Berenguer's writing sheds light on some of these issues that are also more explicitly addressed in *La bandera de Chile* (1981) by Elvira Hernández, also part of the 1980s corpus studied in this thesis. In Berenguer's case, the context in which the poem was produced can be considered of equal importance as the verses themselves, particularly the way in which this text was circulated, and also how Bobby Sands' death in May 1981 leads to the writing of *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro*.

## The Poem: Production, Circulation and Re-Editions

“Cuando escribí el poema en el año 1981-2. . . me incorporé a un taller en la Sociedad de Escritores. . . leí en la prensa. . . [sobre] la muerte de un poeta irlandés y me impactó. Escribí solo con esa referencia” (Berenguer e-mail). The author’s remark on how she found out about Bobby Sands’ death opens a research avenue on how she came up with her poem and how much was known about his death in the Chilean press. The poetic workshop Berenguer mentioned in her e-mail also included a short writing retreat in Punta de Tralca, at Casa de Ejercicios, a coastal lodge owned by the Archdiocese of Santiago.

Locked in a monastic cell, Carmen Berenguer thought about Bobby Sands, his imprisonment, his death and wrote the poem. After this retreat she returned to Santiago to work further on her text and added what I recognise as the most outstanding and original aesthetic element of her book: the use of graffiti. Carmen Berenguer manufactured the book herself, she typed and bound it, so her *Bobby Sands* was not only written, but put together by Berenguer’s own hands.

The author made a few copies of her book and had them circulating in clandestine literary groups that opposed the dictatorship. It is then that the book was released for the first time in 1983. The alternative press had access to her *Bobby Sands* and there were a few articles that commented on the poem, and celebrated Berenguer’s talent. There were at least three pieces which were published during the summer of 1984. The first one was an article in *Revista Análisis* by Carlos Cornejo and Pamela Pequeño commenting on the new poetry being written in Chile at that time. Both *Revista Ercilla* and *Solidaridad* had articles focused on *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro*. Scholar Jaime Quezada wrote the article for *Ercilla*, however, the article from *Solidaridad* remains anonymous.

*Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* has kept circulating until today, in different editions. The most accessible one is a PDF copy to be found in *Memoria Chilena*, a website controlled by the Division of Libraries and Museums of Chile (DIBAM); that copy dates from November 1985. *Bobby Sands* also appears in an anthology of Berenguer’s work published by Editorial Cuarto Propio in 2002, entitled *La gran hablada*. Selected verses from *Bobby*

*Sands* appear in Juan Jorge Faúndes' anthology *Poesía revolucionaria chilena: Desde el sacrificio de Allende a la resistencia política*, published by Ocean Sur in 2014. In a different format, it is possible to find a video of a fragment of the poem being recited in sign language, making her poetry accessible for people with hearing disabilities. This video also provides subtitles and a voice that reads the verses, so it can reach a wider audience, including the blind<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, there are two *cartonera* versions of *Bobby Sands* *desfallece en el muro*, one by Animita Cartonera from 2006, and the most recent one, by La Joyita Cartonera launched in December 2015. It is clear, from these different re-editions, that Berenguer's *Bobby Sands* has become an emblematic poem for Chileans. What is more, the file, the video and the *cartonera* versions share the poem in a way that is contrary to the capitalist model of production. None of these versions of *Bobby Sands* are articulated seeking profit, but rather intending to disseminate and commemorate the book, which is why Berenguer has authorised all of these alternative versions.

### **The Coverage of Bobby Sands' Death in the Chilean Press**

The relationship between Carmen Berenguer and Bobby Sands dates back to the activist's death on May 5<sup>th</sup> 1981. Bobby Sands had been protesting on hunger strike for 66 days with the purpose of being granted the category of political prisoner. In this case, the extreme measure of voluntary starvation did not bring about its expected results and, consequently, hunger striking led to Bobby Sands' slow and painful death.

Berenguer found out about his death in the newspaper and this event made a tremendous impression on her. Subsequently, she wrote her poem to honour him and, covertly, those who also suffered imprisonment for political reasons during Pinochet's regime. Interestingly, what is to be found about Sands' death from the Chilean press in those times was mostly from the accepted and official pro-regime news from *El Mercurio* newspaper. The story of Bobby Sands' death appears at least in two different sources. One of them

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<sup>8</sup> This audio-visual material is in the public domain and can be easily found on *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYjeAVzcVDM>

is *El Mercurio* and the other is *APSI*, acronym for “Agencia de Prensa de Servicios Internacionales” which was the first magazine that explicitly opposed the dictatorship<sup>9</sup> but *APSI* did not cover Sands’ story so closely as *El Mercurio*.

*El Mercurio* follows Bobby Sands’ hunger strike in detail. Shortly before his death, there were daily news items on his state. The newspaper sent a journalist to cover his funeral and had analysts explaining his case. This reporting had the purpose of describing Sands’ situation in HM Maze Prison as well as the IRA’s position and their activities. *El Mercurio* emphasised Margaret Thatcher’s stance on not granting IRA prisoners any political status. Furthermore, despite the daily’s attempt to seem neutral concerning Sands’ hunger strike, there were repeated references to Bobby Sands’ death as something useless or futile. Pedro Olave, the journalist sent to Belfast to cover Sands’ funeral on May 7 comments that: “Sands, más conocido como Bobby. . . concitó la atención mundial por lo larga, por lo inútil [que fue su huelga de hambre]” (A1).

*APSI*, in its 99<sup>th</sup> magazine, covering between May 19<sup>th</sup> and June 1<sup>st</sup> 1981, published a two-page article on Sands’ story in its international section entitled “La Irlanda de Bobby Sands”. The article refers to Sands’ death as “una ofensa, una mala pasada que se le había jugado al armónico equilibrio del legislativo inglés” (Ortiz 18). It described what was happening with Thatcher’s decision and its wide support from different political sides, but it provided an insight into Sands’ fight rather than labelling it as useless as *El Mercurio* had done: “El luchó por la liberación de su patria” (Ortiz 18). The article provides an account that allows its readers to understand why Northern Irish Catholics felt like foreigners in their own land, backing up his arguments with quotations from an eminent Irish intellectual, an expert on “The Troubles”, Liam de Paor<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> According to *Memoria Chilena*: “Cristián Precht, encargado de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad, consiguió 7 mil dólares en Bélgica para echar andar el proyecto”. (n.a. web) *APSI*’s first issue was released in July 1976 and it was its international character that allowed it to exist in a dictatorial Chile. The magazine was censored and forced to close down on numerous occasions, but it continued printing until 1995.

<sup>10</sup> “The Troubles” refer to a nationalist conflict that took place in Northern Ireland at the end of the 1960s. It is believed to have ended in 1998. This means that what happened during Bobby Sands’ hunger strike and death also belonged to this longstanding conflict.

Both *El Mercurio* and APSI shared the fact that Sands' protest had the purpose of granting him and his IRA comrades a political status, regardless of their different ideological standpoints. Carmen Berenguer witnessed having friends and acquaintances being taken for thinking differently<sup>11</sup> and who were fighting to be considered political prisoners. In an interview with *Solidaridad* in 1984, Berenguer asserted that "Mucha de la gente que conocía se había ido, estaba detenida o había desaparecido. Era una experiencia que necesitaba transmitir como un desahogo" (n.a. 16). Therefore, Bobby Sands' resilience haunted and inspired her.

### **Dedication and the Version Currently Being Studied**

The poem begins with a dedication handwritten by Carmen Berenguer, which reads: "Al pueblo de Eire". This dedication is found in all the different editions of *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro*<sup>12</sup>. The authenticity of this dedication was confirmed by the author in an e-mail exchange: "la única dedicatoria que aparece en el libro es mía que dice lo siguiente con letra manuscrita. Al pueblo de Eire" (Berenguer e-mail). Nevertheless, it is important to point out that the version being studied in this thesis is the latest edition from 2015, published by La Joyita Cartonera.

A handwritten dedication provides an air of intimacy and closeness with the dedicatee. Gérard Genette in his book *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997) conceives the dedication as an "autonomous statement . . . in the short form of a simple mention of the dedicatee" (Genette 118) which means that the dedicatee is being elevated in his/her/their mentioning to posterity. In this case, *Bobby Sands* is dedicated to the people of Eire, to the people of Ireland. When Berenguer decides to use the word 'Eire' instead of Ireland, she uses the autochthonous Irish word to refer to the whole island, then—and still—divided into Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Using Eire to refer to Ireland can indeed be problematic when the Republic seems to have had a history of issues with regards to its own name.

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<sup>11</sup> As she stated in an interview conducted on December 10, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> The only exception is *La gran hablada* (2002) in which the dedication appears but typed in italics.

In Mary E. Daly's text "The Irish Free State/Eire/Republic of Ireland/Ireland: 'A Country by Any Other Name'?" (2007), it is clear that the use of the word 'Eire' had different meanings depending on the stage of the process of Irish independence. For instance, "The 1937 Constitution changed the name of the state to 'Eire, or in the English Language, Ireland'" (Daly 76) which makes reference only to the newly independent state of Ireland. Problems began as "although Eire was translated by the British government as Ireland, it could also be employed to signify only a part of Ireland" (Daly 78). Eire and Ireland were not synonymous terms anymore.

Despite Carmen Berenguer not being aware of the particulars of using the name 'Eire', she intended to dedicate her poem to the whole population of Ireland, regardless of being from the north or the Republic. It can be understood that Berenguer sympathised with the independence cause, as she was informed of what Bobby Sands was fighting for<sup>13</sup>. What makes this book incredibly interesting is that most of its dedicatees have not read it, but those who have are Chileans who are able to understand the poem as a covert denouncement of Pinochet's dictatorship. Hence, regardless of the direct dedication to the people of Eire, Chilean readers can also feel addressed to in between the lines, and in the way the poem has survived and continued to be reprinted in Chile after over 30 years from its first appearance. From this, it could be argued that both Bobby Sands and Eire in Berenguer's writing work as a metonym for the Chilean experience under Pinochet.

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<sup>13</sup> It is rather curious, though, that even when she dedicates—and partly addresses—her text to an Irish people, they are not aware of the existence of this poem. It has not yet been translated into English nor Irish. My forthcoming article on it for *The Irish Review* is the only mention it has received within Irish Academia.

## Form: Epitaph and Closing Lines

*Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* is a poem set out like a diary. This implies a mixture between poetic form and a confessional type of writing that is self-referential. Each poem is a diary entry between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 55<sup>th</sup> day of Sands' hunger strike, as imagined by Berenguer. Pages are not numbered, so the only sense of progression is gathered from each poem's title. What is relevant here is that Bobby Sands himself kept a diary while imprisoned. Carmen Berenguer learned this when she found out about his death. She decided to use two sets of quotations from Bobby Sands' diary, which would later on be formally published as *Writings from Prison* (1998). However, information on how she got these quotations remains unknown; the only certain aspect is that she did not translate them into Spanish. The poem can be considered circular in nature, as it begins and ends with quotations from Bobby Sands' diary. It can be stated that this gesture implies a homage to Sands. The epitaph reads as follows:

### EPITAFIO

Estoy esperando la Alondra  
que en Primavera lo es todo  
para nosotros.

Ahora en mi lecho de muerte  
sigo escuchando aún a los  
negros cuervos”

Bobby Sands

The whole epitaph is a translation of two quotations from Sands' diary. The first half of this epitaph was dated on Sunday 8 March, 1981. In Sands' text the excerpt reads, "I am awaiting the lark, for spring is all but upon us" (Sands 227). The main issue concerning this translation lies in the fact that the meaning differs substantially from what Sands says in his diary. The translator's interpretation of Sands' message provides Berenguer with a

different version from what he intended to convey: 'spring is all but upon us' means that 'spring is nearly here', but this is interpreted instead as 'spring means everything to us'. As Berenguer only had access to this translated and transmuted quotation to open her poem, these are the words she adopts in order to reach out to Sands' voice and speak through it.

The figure of the lark plays a major role, as it is a bird that anticipates the coming of spring in the northern hemisphere, which in itself means that life is renewed and brings airs of hope<sup>14</sup>. Furthermore, a bird's presence in symbolic terms implies "poder ascendente (sublimación y espiritualización)" (Cirlot 357), so this bird plays an important role in both Sands' writings and Berenguer's poetic articulation of him.

The lark has had tremendous relevance in poetic tradition. In studies of the lark in English poetry carried out at different stages in the twentieth century (1913, 1950 and 1972 respectively), there is agreement that "for Shakespeare the lark is a symbol of Joy" (Baker 70). So the lark is recognised as announcing the day, in both its ascent and song, providing also the coming of spring as "the lark does not sing when it is wet or cloudy" (Bawcutt 7). Similarly, the lark in Bobby Sands' diary and in the translation used by Berenguer in the epitaph depicts an image of good times to come in spring, and perhaps freedom for Sands and his people. It is also likely that Sands' death while waiting for the lark, in both the diary and Berenguer's poem, symbolises the impossibility of reaching what is fought for. Apart from this interpretation, it can be noted that there is a connection between birds and a wider outside world. The lark can also symbolise Sands' attentiveness to what is going on behind bars. He would be engaging with nature, the city beyond and his own fate.

The second part of the epitaph develops a contrast between the lark and the crows. The original quotation from Sands' diary on March 8<sup>th</sup> reads as: "Now lying on what indeed is my death bed, I still listen even to the black crows" (Sands 227). The first aspect to bear in mind is that the lark is enunciated in the singular form and the crows in the plural. This is significant,

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<sup>14</sup> Sands' poetry collection written while in prison is collected in a posthumous anthology entitled *Skylark Sing Your Lonely Song* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1989).

as “los pájaros sobre todo en bandada—pues lo múltiple siempre es signo negativo—puede revestir significado maligno” (Cirlot 358). Given that Sands enunciates this from his death bed, the crows could be anticipating it. What is more, crows are attributed “un instinto especial para predecir el futuro. . . En el simbolismo cristiano, es alegoría de la soledad” (Cirlot 165). This confirms that the crows he expects would eventually claim his life. They seem to be able to reach him sooner than the lark.

The whole poem ends with another anonymously translated quotation from Bobby Sands’ diary:

Mañana es el undécimo día  
y hay un largo camino que recorrer.  
Alguien podría escribir un poema  
de las tribulaciones del hambre.  
Yo podría, pero ¿Cómo terminarlo?  
Bobby Sands

The original text, which appears in Sands’ diary on his tenth day on hunger strike, on March 10, 1981, reads as follows: “Tomorrow is the eleventh day and there is a long way to go. Someone should write a poem of the tribulations of a hunger-striker. I would like to, but how could I finish it” (Sands 229). Bobby Sands understands his inability to continue to express what he is going through, as the process of deterioration when dying of starvation is fast and soon the senses fail. It was only days after his death that Carmen Berenguer took up his invitation and wrote about it. The Chilean poet took this challenge very seriously, as she could not write about hunger without knowing about it. She admitted: “Yo hice una investigación médica de la descripción por muerte de inanición” (Berenguer e-mail). So the poem brings together a medically researched poetic description of hunger striking and what goes through the prisoner’s mind as he is the centre of the poem.

The fact that Bobby Sands’ quotation requesting for someone to write about the pains of hunger-striking appears at the very end of the book implies that Berenguer’s book was an attempt to do what Bobby Sands wished, so she honoured him and his hunger strike through her verses. The poetic voice that enunciates the verses is, therefore, a poetic Sands in his Northern Irish prison, as imagined by Berenguer. The author imaginatively transports

herself to the Maze prison and her poetic speaker impersonates Bobby Sands' voice during part of his hunger strike, from day 11 to 55. Poetic Sands is turned into a vehicle through which Berenguer is able to communicate vivid images of despair coupled with profound idealism. Berenguer's Bobby Sands is a figure who, despite his physical weakness, endures through his political and ideological resistance and this can clearly find an echo in circles opposing Pinochet's regime in Chile in the 1980s.

## **2.2 Analysis**

The aim of this chapter is to analyse elements that link the poem *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* with its politico-economic context. A Chilean reading of *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* exposes aspects that are contextually contingent to the time in which the poem was produced. It also lays the groundwork for future poetic analyses that follow the range of neoliberal reform that took place in the 1980s.

The analysis will focus on four points. The first, 'Physical and Ideological Starvation', will look at bodily representations of hunger striking, and how these graphic poetic descriptions provide an image of sacrifice and physical deterioration. After this 'Torture and the Breaking of Language', will develop close links with the text to the Chilean dictatorship and its use of violence. In addition, there will be an emphasis on the markings of torture on the prisoner's body. The third section, 'Symbols of Hope', considers elements such as the lark, spring times, agricultural and oceanic scenes, and the beauty of martyrdom as more auspicious images. Finally, the fourth part of the analysis, 'The Voice against the Wall: The Use of Graffiti', will pay close attention to the use of graphic images in the poem, which could be understood as calligrams and/or graffiti.

## Physical and Ideological Starvation

According to various medical sources, the most basic definition of a hunger strike is “a voluntary refusal of food and/or fluids” (Altun *et al* 35). Bobby Sands’ voluntary starvation in the poem is based on the concrete fact that the *actual* Sands used hunger strike as a means of self-sacrifice for a cause. From a Chilean perspective, Berenguer’s *Bobby Sands* is articulated with a perceptible, although camouflaged aim as well: to denounce and condemn the atrocities of Pinochet’s regime. Thus, Bobby Sands’ self-immolation in Berenguer’s poem can be read as elevating Chilean prisoners to the category of martyrs.

Bobby Sands’ starvation in Berenguer’s poem follows both the logic of a set of diary entries from day 11 to 55 as well as the annotations of an increasingly desperate subject approaching death. *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* opens with the following lines:

Undécimo día

Vacío en la lengua seca  
Habla porque es lo único  
digna lengua

On the first day in this poetic account of Sands’ times in prison, there are two key elements to consider: the tongue and the ability to speak. Firstly, the tongue is contained in his mouth, and the mouth is symbolically understood “como punto de unión de dos mundos, exterior e interior” (Cirlot 111-12). The tongue serves two purposes: it is an organ that tastes the food that enters the mouth when the feeding process occurs. However, its second purpose is as important as the first one, although it is not necessary for physical survival: it allows communication. This would allow Sands’ internal world—his mind and thoughts—to become externalised. The tongue, as part of the mouth, is an important organ in the chain of speech. Berenguer’s *Bobby Sands* exalts the importance of the tongue that both serves a biological purpose—eating, which he avoids—and another related to the expression of his subjectivity.

It seems as though the speaker is addressing his own tongue if the use

of syntax is considered to analyse these verses. Despite the ambiguity this generates when trying to retrieve meaning, odd syntax can be regarded as signalling something else: that language, in its structures and orders, is not enough to articulate the voice of the oppressed, as they are not to be mentioned, they are expelled from language. Therefore, it becomes of paramount importance to disarticulate some grammatical conventions, especially in poetry. The symbolic meaning of this odd syntax responds to the desire to break with rules that regulate and seek one type of sentence, unequivocal, and ideologically controlled by the socially powerful. When language as it is excludes so much, the breaking of some rule becomes a tool of subversion. That is why, in *Bobby Sands*, the speaker's tongue, his organ used to communicate ideas, is surrounded by an ambiguity that ends up allowing him to speak. This is also emphasized in the third line, as the tongue is dignified, recognized.

Uttering and speaking become relevant, as the speaker highlights the role of speech by saying 'único'. It is his last resource and potentially quite a powerful one; despite his tongue being dry, dehydrated while rejecting food or drink, but he never gives up on trying to speak. In this regard, it is important to examine what happens in the throat, as it is both an organ of speech and part of the digestive system. Day 13 introduces readers more deeply inside *poetic Sands'* body:

### Día 13

Saliva la entrada en la garganta  
que traga a bocanadas  
disuelta en la lengua la sal

This tercet opens with an ambiguous line. This helps to accentuate the image of the prisoner in a state of deep confusion as, from the tongue, attention is transferred to the throat. In linguistic terms, the throat or larynx contains vocal cords which vibrate and make sounds possible. In this backwards version of the chain of speech, it is possible to recognise an organ that is both the basis

of the utterance and also what allows a person to swallow. It vibrates to the outside and absorbs to the inside, being central to both linguistic and biological processes, respectively.

'Saliva la entrada en la garganta' is a line that seems to lack a verb, so this ellipsis can show that poetic Sands was also suffering a sort of verbal dehydration. At the same time, 'saliva' can also be understood as from the verb 'salivar' (to salivate) which would contradict the idea of an ellipsis and provide the image of saliva about to be swallowed. However, the question of 'la entrada' remains unanswered, as ambiguity would be transposed to that word, given that the source of that saliva may or may not be his and it is not clear whether the entrance mentioned actually refers to his mouth.

The third line, in terms of syntax, does not follow the expected order of a sentence, as the verb 'disuelta' should have its direct object 'la sal' in an adjacent position. The use of these grammar devices, such as ellipsis and syntactical transposition, are able to show a breakdown of the self or the mind of the prisoner, considering his situation.

Berenguer's imaginary trip inside Bobby Sands goes even deeper, reaching—later on—the stomach. The poem begins showing different sections of the digestive tract, as if verses were being transported from the tongue, through the throat to finally reach the stomach, where digestion itself takes place.

Vigésimo primer día

Duelen los labios del pan  
las abiertas paredes del estómago  
Duelen de risa fina

On the 21<sup>st</sup> day of starvation, the poem continues playing with the use of language, personifying bread as having lips whereas it can symbolise the exacerbation of the speaker's desperation for food. Given that he has decided to stop eating, it is bread that is personified and its lips are in pain. There is a sensorial transference from the prisoner to the food he is rejecting. The image of the open walls of his stomach provides evidence of its emptiness, Sands' lack of nourishment in the poem. Also, the reference to a painful laughter can

indicate he is having spasms, a clear sign that his body is severely deteriorated. On the other hand, it can also be likely that his lips are hurt by extreme dehydration and those lips, so accustomed to having bread, are now dry and swollen. These lines deal with the physical consequences of what the speaker has attempted to do. His bodily pain is so terrible that it is impossible to grasp any other message from him.

After reaching the stomach, the poem leads to regurgitation, in a symbolic turn that may imply a process of rejecting life in pain:

Día 34

Náuseas la náusea  
Con los labios pintados  
vomita la muerte

The nausea, which makes Bobby Sands vomit here may be related to his body trying to cope with extreme malnourishment or as a result of continuous beating of his body. Even though there is not any food in the stomach, nothing to expel from the body, what he regurgitates is his own blood and gastric juices. Apart from this, when a weakened body is tortured and subject to beating, with the lips showing blood of internal bleeding, there may be some vomiting as the nausea will anticipate this reaction in the taste of blood in his mouth. This interpretation of Sands' diary entry in the poem can be linked to the previous one, "Día 33" that ends up with the word 'Torture'. Sands' account of his nauseous state can be related to physical abuse<sup>15</sup>.

As there is also syntactic ambiguity in these lines, Sands can either be vomiting death, or death vomits him. In the first case, he sees himself in the third person, so the switch in pronouns also denotes a change in focalization. In the poem, Sands' detachment of his own self in the abandonment of the pronoun 'I' is relevant as the subject that performs enunciation. Therefore, the nausea in Berenguer's poem contains the possibility of going beyond the physical and entails the description of a break that leads to nothingness: death.

The next quotation confirms Sands' breaking in the poem, as the verses progress from nausea to the idea of death:

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<sup>15</sup> See page 54.

## Día 54

Me castigas con el hambre  
Me callas con el vientre

The speaker addresses an ambiguous other in the use of the second person. It is life itself—through his body—that is punishing him with hunger, leaving aside the fact that he made the decision of rejecting all types of food himself. He is being silenced through his stomach, his life withers, making him nothing but a body to be buried. What is not silenced is his ability to ‘speak’, as Berenguer made clear from the beginning of Sands’ enunciations. His body may be quiet, unable to express anything but pain and provide evidence of him being tortured. The only space he has which will transcend is the poetic imagery that Berenguer has created for him, as “the power of hunger strike comes from the striker’s decision to die slowly in front of the public” (Altun et al 35); in this sense, the public is formed by all the readers of the poem.

The following section of this analysis delves into torture and how it also symbolically affects the way in which language can be used to refer to it, or the impossibility of describing it. Berenguer guides readers’ understanding so that they infer that torture has taken place, but it is not stated directly.

## Torture and the Breaking of Language

The text develops bodily representations of hunger, which are in dialogue with images and wording that suggest that there are external agents involved in Sands' physical pain and life decay. The understanding of torture is related to the physical but also the symbolic. For instance, a dictatorship carries out a unilateral and antidemocratic agenda enabled by an atmosphere of terror. The use of torture can be understood as a spectacle in which a display of extreme violence seems to validate the strength of the one who is imposing power and ideology. The effect of this torture is not only on the body of the victim, but on the collective psyche of the society in which these atrocities take place. As Elaine Scarry asserts in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), "in torture. . . a person's body [is] to be translated into another person's voice, that allows real human pain to be converted into a regime's fiction of power" (Scarry 18). Torture becomes the device used by a regime to destabilise those who oppose it and to ultimately eliminate them. John Beverley, commenting on Scarry's text and referring to the Chilean case, stated that "torture in Chile became de facto the material basis of neoliberal hegemony" (Beverley 105). So the consequences of torture and horror in Chile went beyond the elimination of people who opposed the regime, it also meant a change of economic and social paradigms.

Regarding *Bobby Sands*, the poem never reveals nor suggests to readers who tortures *poetic* Sands, nor is there evidence of the specific wounds inflicted on him by his torturers. In this sense, Elaine Scarry delves into the relationship between torture and language: "Intense pain is also language-destroying: as the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language" (Scarry 35). The total dissolution of the subject is clearly an issue that language seems not to be able to address or deal with, as language itself is *not enough* to represent that which escapes from expression.

The first hint of torture that readers encounter is to be found on day 14 of *poetic Sands'* diary:

Día 14

Los ojos Los ojos  
De qué sirve el pasto  
en los jardines  
El humor vítreo  
llena las cuencas vacías

The first line of this day presents the repetition of 'Los ojos'. Both his eyes seem not to be there as his eye sockets are void. This blindness leads *poetic Sands* to question the existence and usefulness of the grass in the gardens, as he no longer sees. His only way out of that dilemma is through imagination. Nevertheless, it is possible to understand blindness as also being related to a poetic loss of sight<sup>16</sup>. The inability to see is something feasible to express rather than what is concealed behind such blindness, as that particular loss would overcome and dismantle language.

The causes of the speaker's blindness are not clear, although this new state might suggest he could have been beaten or tortured. Sands' blindness in the poem was caused by an unknown external agent in also unidentified circumstances. As, according to Elaine Scarry, torture dissolves the self of the victim and does not allow language to re-enact its practice, the poetic voice could not have described his own physical suffering if tortured. Torture is implicit, which in itself is an attempt to address it—except for one example which will be discussed in the analysis of Day 33, page 69 in this thesis. Further hints about Sands' torture follow on Day 16 of his poetic diary in prison:

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<sup>16</sup> This is addressed in Chapter 4, in my analysis of Alejandra Del Río's poem *Escrito en Braille* (1999).

## Día 16

El ojo vendado muere  
Belfast muere y vive  
enmurallada

The confirmation of him being in contact with his captors is patent in the first line as his eye is bandaged. This means an external actor was in contact with him and tried to save or protect his dying eye. His blindness is ratified when the eye dies. What he was able to see from his cell in HM Maze Prison was the city of Belfast. The poem here makes reference to the polarisation of the city. Nevertheless, Carmen Berenguer has never been to Belfast and she was not aware that the city indeed had walls surrounding parts of it. This is quite a precise coincidence between what is factual and what was imagined by her as she constructed her *Bobby Sands*. Bobby Sands himself also went blind while imprisoned, although Berenguer's text seems to be hinting towards her speaker being tortured.

Sands' blindness in the poem may refer to Berenguer's own challenge when expressing somebody else's suffering, as speaking on behalf of another. This creates tension between intentions and the attempt to give voice to the oppressed. The ways to develop this voice are elusive and, despite her medical research on the effects of hunger strike, some aspects of Sands' struggle seem hard to express—as the torture he might have suffered while imprisoned.

Another possible hint of torture is to be found on Day:

## Día 27

Fermenta el pan  
La masa hinchada de la vida  
en tu cara

This reference to the process of fermentation when making bread provides the image of the yeast rising. If, on the one hand, bread can be considered a basic element in Western diets, Sands here rejects its presence and its growth in his hunger strike. Bread is also regarded as “símbolo de la fecundidad y perpetuación” (Ciriot 360), which is the contrary of what he is doing by rejecting life. As the swollen dough of life appears, it seems as though fermentation takes place within his own body. There is ambiguity in terms of who is speaking and who is being addressed in these verses. As the last line indicates ‘en tu cara’, that can be addressing either the reader or *poetic* Sands from an external perspective. This can also be related to the speaker’s aforementioned blindness, as his perception is different. He might be addressing himself without recognising his own face, only by feeling it through touch and realising how swollen it is, as if fermented. This would imply he has suffered beating.

There seems to be a disassociation between his physical and psychic selves after becoming blind. The next lines continue with an ambiguous addressee which separates Sands into a body and a psyche.

Puro mar es tu aroma  
en mi cuarto  
Son tus fauces diente  
Es tu espuma la roca  
que tapiza tu cielo feraz

#### Día 31

As the speaker had envisioned the sea as a liberating force in previous days, while blinded, he recognises his own body’s rotting smell in the same element. It seems as though Sands perceives himself from the outside. Therefore, the ‘you’ being addressed can be himself. The smells of the sea may imply some putrefaction and the foam sprouting from his mouth may suggest electric shock is being applied to him. A patient under electroshock treatment—or torture—“foams at the mouth, ejaculates or passes urine”

(Cerletti 260)<sup>17</sup>. This would have also contributed to worsening his physical and mental state.

Sands, on his 45<sup>th</sup> day on hunger strike, enunciates:

Y yo quejándome de mi cuerpo  
húmedas grietas  
en las rodillas de la muerte

#### Día 45

Death approaches him. There is a limited time for his survival and there is a complete awareness of this in the poem. The body that contains his spirit and ideals is one that will cease to exist, in opposition to what he believes in. Berenguer's Sands endures in his convictions. His humid cracks reveal the wounds in his knees, as if he was on the edge of death and about to be swallowed by it. He is decomposing in life but he regains the pronoun 'I' to complain about the state of his body, as if he regained consciousness and does not recognise himself in that body, he can only foresee what lies ahead of him: certain death.

In spite of such a negative scenario, the poem finds ways of showing hope. Going beyond torture and Sands' struggle with his own body, the poem presents that his hunger strike is a sacrifice and that it can embody noble values. Images related to natural environments in the text also invite readers to understand that although Sands is on his way to death, there is hope beyond that in those who remain alive and that they will keep fighting injustice.

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<sup>17</sup> Ugo Cerletti was a pioneer neuroscientist who discovered the electroconvulsive therapy, known as electroshock, as a way to treat certain mental disorders. Electroshock was a common practice in torture centres during Pinochet's regime. The process took place in an "iron bedstead wired up with electric currents" (O'Shaughnessy 101) in which the captives were put on after being stripped off their clothes.

## **Symbols of Hope**

Hope is important when considering a political activist protesting through hunger striking. The striker hopes to achieve some change. Starvation is not a comfortable process; however, there are some quotations from the text that can be recognised as promising. Some of these are related to nature or its forces, and others to a more profound understanding of the idea of selfless love and sacrifice.

Despite Sands suffering and him being in permanent pain in the poem, there are a few references to better things to come. The following quotation regarding hope reveals the blending between Berenguer's articulation of Sands and the Latin American perspective.

Día 26

Débil veo el campo  
sembrado  
El maíz en la copa de los cerros

The fact that he sees the fields from a weak position makes reference to hunger as well as physical torture. In terms of the latter, this weakness is related to his partial sight as studied in Día 16 (page 56).

The first element to consider here is the field. Fields in general “en el sentido más amplio, significan espacios, posibilidades abiertas” (Cirlot 124), which is a hint of hope. Also, seeing a field can be interpreted as evidence of the cycle of life, given that the fields are sown and life is growing in them. In this case it is not only life but rather the image of food soon to

be harvested; the nourishment that Sands has purposely been avoiding by means of his hunger strike in the text. At the same time, life growing in front of him also provides an image of hope, that there is constant renewal.

Berenguer's articulation of nature is enunciated from a Latin American perspective. Her Bobby Sands seems to be more related to the Latin American subject in these lines, as one that envisions vast fields of maize in the countryside. This would imply that Berenger's *Bobby Sands* contains a dual imaginary, from a transatlantic experience in the Maze Prison in Belfast to the images of fields of maize that can find an echo in a Latin American setting. Interestingly, both 'Maze' and 'Maize' are homophones and they could have sounded similar to Berenguer, especially if she ever heard a bulletin in which the Maze prison was mentioned.

The connection to Gabriela Mistral's poetry is that she paid attention to maize as a grain that is autochthonous to the American continent. In the Mistralian case it is worth noticing that she considered maize as an element to depict her country and the whole continent, and that also represents native resistance against the Spanish conquest. In poem, "El Maiz" from *Tala* (1938), Mistral is very emphatic:

Molinos rompe-cielos  
mis ojos no los quieren  
El maizal no aman  
y su harina no muelen: no  
come grano santo (110-111)

Firstly, the mills being mentioned were built to produce flour, which normally comes from wheat, the grain that was replacing corn in the fields. The reach of this poem is Mistral's elevation of maize as the poem establishes itself as "un canto ceremonial en el que esta planta original de America, alimento esencial de todas las castas primitivas, mayas, aztecas, quechuas, se muestran en. . . valor histórico sagrado" (Urrutia 127)<sup>18</sup>. In the end, both the field and maize signal hope and bring the poem closer to both Latin America and Chile.

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<sup>18</sup> *El maíz* is generally associated to the Latin American identity as a whole because it can be found throughout the continent. There are not references to the veneration of ears of corn in Chile, considering the Mapuche cosmology, as there are in Incan and Mayan cultures.

The next quotation, from day 30, starts similarly to the one from day 26.

Día 30  
Débil llega el mar  
hasta mi cuarto  
meciéndome  
entre sus algas dedos

Despite the fact that both quotations from Days 26 and 30 begin with the word 'débil' or weak, the use of the word can be interpreted in different ways. On the one hand, in the first one from Día 26, Sands enunciated: 'Débil veo', which means he is the agent of the action, as he is the one who can barely see the fields. On the other, a different use of 'débil' implies that the sea is an element that gets to him slowly, at its own pace. It is important to note that the water rocks him, in a way that the sea is able to cradle him, as if rocking a child to sleep. In symbolic terms, the sea embodies an "agente transitivo y mediador entre lo no formal y lo formal y, analógicamente, entre la vida y la muerte" (Cirlot 305). So, once again, there is a complete understanding that death approaches. However, if fingers are considered "deidades protectoras" (Cirlot 168) from a symbolic perspective, the sea can also be a protective space, a motherly figure.

With regards to the Chilean poetic tradition, there can also be a parallel between Berenguer's poem, with its image of the sea embracing the speaker through its seaweed fingers, and Nerudian ones to be found in his most prominent poetic collection, *Canto General* (1950). Section XIV of the poem is called "El gran océano". Alain Sicard, in his seminal study on Neruda's works, concludes that Neruda constantly searches for the sea as it refers to "la imagen de Chile, ofrecido por entero a la influencia oceánica" (Sicard 457). In Berenguer's *Bobby Sands*, it is clear that Sands is tired, on the edge of survival, and it is in this moment that he allows himself to be absorbed by the ocean, through its fingers, becoming one with it which can be considered an echo of Nerudian symbolism. The image of the mother and the child found in Berenguer's poem has also been poeticized by Neruda in *Canto general*, in the poem "El hombre en la nave". Here the speaker finishes the lyrical work by enunciating: "destrúyete en la eterna maternidad del agua" (48:577). So the water is both a motherly figure and also the place where things end.

Despite Sands' desperation, he envisions the sea waters as a liberating element that will take and comfort him as a mother would. The ocean's slow approach can also be related to his slow days on hunger strike and the way death comes to him and claims his life. The oceanic embrace here is a symbol of a positive transcendence, as there is something for him beyond the realm of life.

While the poems deal with the transition between life and death, Sands' voluntary starvation also implies transcendence through sacrifice. The most iconic figure of sacrifice in the Western tradition is Jesus Christ, and *poetic* Sands develops his voice around the figure of Christ:

Día 44

Entrego mi vida como una acción de amor.  
Me entrego a una agonía lenta  
Como único modo de cambiar  
la pólvora por jardines de paz  
Como única forma de esperar la alondra  
y nuevas primaveras  
Como único sostén para limpiar  
las heridas de Cristo torturado

Love is what dictates Bobby Sands' sacrifice in the poem. That love responds to a deep commitment to a cause and its ideals. In symbolic terms, "no hay creación sin sacrificio" (Cirlot 397) and this would mean that in order to create a future, he has to sacrifice himself. Be it the end of injustice or the independence of Northern Ireland, Sands' sacrifice in the poem is understood through the pain he suffers. Consequently, Bobby Sands' agony and slow death in the poem also influenced the rhythm of his resistance. Berenguer purposely uses the word 'agony' when representing Sands as a figure of sacrifice, equalling him with the Christian saviour. The word agony, etymologically speaking, is also relevant to focus on, especially given that the poem was written in Spanish. *A New Dictionary, Spanish and English* from the XVIII century, reports that "agonía [is] an agony a man is put into by any Anguish or Passion, or the Agony of Death" (Stevens 27). According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Word Origins*, "Agony referred originally only to mental anguish. It came into English via late Latin from Greek *agonia*, from

agon 'contest' . . . to any struggle, to mental struggle specifically (such as the torment of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane)" (Cresswell n.p.). In sum, both the Spanish and English etymological versions of 'agony' make reference to the same idea.

In these lines, Sands refers to himself as the only support of Jesus while being tortured, which relates to agony. Here, Berenguer's speaker enters the biblical story of the passion of Christ, resists pain with him, and cleans his wounds. An important biblical figure that had access to Jesus' body after death was the Pharisee Nicodemus. He and Joseph of Arimathea "took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews" (*King James Bible*, St. John 19:39). Sands not only resembles the figure of the Christian saviour, he also joins him and cleans up his wounds as Nicodemus and Joseph did when preparing his burial. In Jesus' presence, Berenguer's Sands becomes one with him. This version of Bobby Sands becomes a catalyst of love in his slow path to death and thus becomes a martyr searching for peace. Sands' sacrifice can also be read as making reference to all those Chileans who went through savage torture and abuse, and who nevertheless remained faithful to their principles. Every victim of torture in Chile during Pinochet's dictatorship could have been a new Bobby Sands in agony. Like him, those Chilean prisoners had been imprisoned for thinking differently.

Finally, in his diary's last entry, the speaker bids readers farewell with the greatest image of hope, when he sees the flag of his country flying in front of the sea:

Último día

He plantado ya la bandera  
de Irlanda en los acantilados  
libre mar de mi celda

His last day, stated as “Último día”, shows that the passing of time is unclear. This final tercet shows a sort of everlasting idealism, as *poetic* Sands envisions the Irish flag by the cliffs: “el simbolismo general de la bandera como signo de victoria y autoafirmación” (Cirlot 106) establishes the ultimate symbol of hope. Here it is relevant to connect the Irish flag to the Chilean one, as it will be seen in Chapter 3, which analyses *La bandera de Chile* (1981), by Elvira Hernández. For Berenguer, the flag would embody Sands’ cause, as it transcends his own life and he dies in a state of hallucination, envisioning what he had sought. Locked in his cell, Berenguer’s Sands does not lose sight of his motivation. This point is key when providing a Chilean reading of the text, as many of those imprisoned during the regime never gave up their political ideals, and they overcame torture in their dignity. In this sense, these final lines can be read as celebrating those who never yield.

The odd syntax in the last line, ‘libre mar de mi celda’, generates ambiguity as the sea can be considered his cell, or that the open sea in poetic Sands’ vision frees him despite his imprisonment. Any of those possible interpretations can be understood in a blending process where the sea becomes a force that transcends his concrete cell and acts as a mediator in his dying process. Sands’ death is imminent, as it is his last day in the poem, and if taken by the ocean he would always be able to see the Irish flag he has planted at the cliffs. This image, of the water by the cliffs shows that it is in the water where the body also dissolves.

Neruda’s poetry personifies ocean waters while they also summon his speaker back to his country. The poem “La llamada del océano” from his posthumous work *Jardín de invierno* (1974) demands that he returns to his country, where he would feel liberated. When he comes back to the waters that will swallow him, he encounters the waters of the Pacific in Isla Negra. The poem emphasizes the poet’s belonging to the sea upon his return: “Yo quiero el mío mar” (Neruda 41). In Alain Sicard’s words this is the: “regreso a la patria en peligro, el regreso a Chile es también respuesta a la llamada del océano” (Sicard 416). The poem finishes with a strong enunciation:

Es el libertador. Es el océano,  
lejos, allá, en mi patria, que me espera.  
(Neruda 41)

What awaits Bobby Sands in Berenguer's poem is the image of the ocean as the maximum liberating natural force, which at the same time takes him with it to transcend.

The images of hope previously studied are contrasted by those that make Sands' suffering explicit in the poem. They follow a description in terms of what happens to his body deteriorating and how this affects him psychologically, considering he is on hunger strike.

The final section of this study of *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* examines the actual visual images that are present in the poem. The following examples of poetic graffiti need to be studied and understood on their own.

## The Voice against the Wall: The Use of Graffiti

Jaime Quezada's article in *Revista Ercilla* in 1984 is one of the most important articles that analysed *Bobby Sands* during the '80s. Quezada expressed that Berenguer's work was: "una poesía que se da más a través del símbolo que la palabra, descriptiva y analítica, conceptual y despersonalizada de todo yo. El verso es, en algunos casos, una especie de rayado mural callejero, un grafiti que pluraliza otras voces" (Quezada 32-33). This remark highlights that Berenguer's work in *Bobby Sands* has to be understood from a visual perspective. However, Carmen Berenguer was not the first Chilean poet to play with shapes and letters to make certain figures. This type of poem is known as a calligram and can be traced back to a tradition of Chilean poetry led by Vicente Huidobro during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Huidobro published his poetry book *Canciones en la noche* (1913) which included a section entitled "Japoneñas de Estío" in which the four poems that comprise it are calligrams: "Triángulo armónico" and "La capilla aldeana" are amongst his most famous graphic poems. It is paramount to study the forms and how these complement or support what Berenguer's poem already states. For the case of the present analysis, given Quezada's commentary on Berenguer's work as street-like, or 'callejero', the consideration of Berenguer's work as alternative and written in the margins of legality make her calligrams more akin to graffiti and that is how this paper will refer to them. This is also obviously emphasised by the work's title '*en el muro*'.

The use of graffiti in the poem implies that there is a marginalised voice trying to manifest itself. This is a hint to those that Berenguer wanted to represent. Those people were being silenced through torture during Pinochet's regime. Her poetic walls give a graphic dimension to her account of Bobby Sands' suffering and path to self-immolation. All the examples are to be shown in this section to make it easy for the reader to see the graphic forms of the poem as well as their interpretation.

The first page or wall to study reveals the chaotic situation of Sands' mind, as well as an engagement with society:

Vigésimo primer día, noche

HAMBRE

ES EL HAMBRE  
Es el hambre de las calles  
el absoluto rigor del hambre

ES EL HAMBRE  
Es el hambre de las calles  
Es el hambre de las calles  
El absoluto rigor del hambre  
El absoluto rigor del hambre

ES EL HAMBRE DE LAS CALLES  
Es el hambre

Es

ES EL RIGOR  
absoluto ABSOLUTO

DE LAS CALLES

HAMBRE

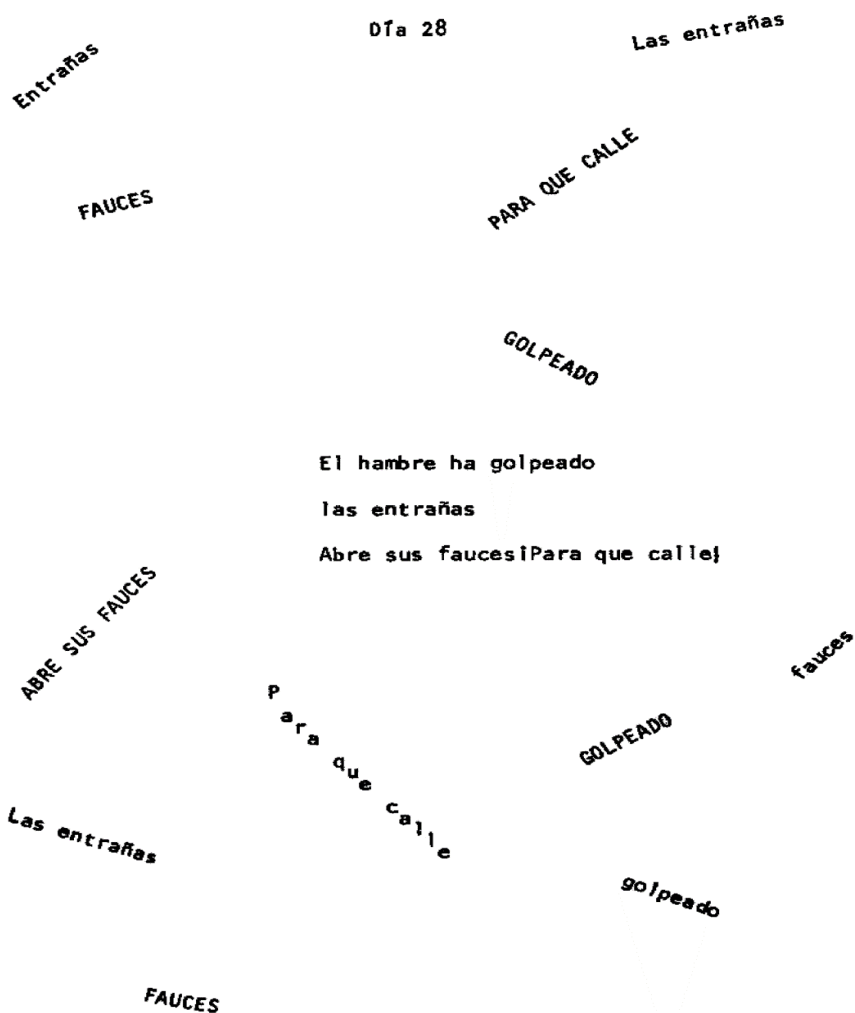
EL ABSOLUTO RIGOR DEL HAMBRE

This wall was written on the night of the twenty-first day of his hunger strike, which means this is the tenth day he has been imaginatively writing since this poetic diary started. This twenty-first day is characterised by the predominance of the word, as even the number signalling the diary entry was typed in letters, not numbers, as in an ordinal manner.

The night here, as stated in the title of this entry, anticipates the day, the light that would reveal Sands' hunger, his vulnerable state in the prison, as well as becoming the symbol of all those who suffered injustice and sought for a solution. It is at night when urban spaces relax their rigid monolithic discourses and that which is abjected during the day may appear. In this regard, the night is another dimension to *poetic* Sands' struggle as, despite his blindness, there seems to be a dialogue with the voices of society and their circumstances: his hunger is transferred to them. This may imply that it

is not necessary to be behind bars to be considered an opposing force. The capitalisation of the word 'HAMBRE' and its repetition over twenty times on this chaotic page-wall suggests a critical situation for both Sands, as a poetic voice, and for those who suffer in the street, the outcasts of society<sup>19</sup>.

The next page also resembles a wall with a multiplicity of voices repeating the same words on Day 28. In terms of content, the tercet at the centre of the page personifies hunger as having the force to inflict pain on Sands' guts. Such is the speaker's agony that he wishes and demands hunger to be quiet in the expression: '¡Para que calle!' Here, Berenguer's Sands is battling against his own will to protest, so he has a struggle with his own body as it is clearly reacting to lack of nourishment.



<sup>19</sup> Marginal characters are more directly poeticized in Malú Urriola's *Bracea* (2007) in Chapter 7.

The page—as a wall—shows Berenguer’s speaker’s desperation, how his body turns against him, again separating his psyche from his corporeal self. The use of capitalisation in some of the words such as ‘GOLPEADO’; ‘FAUCES’; ‘PARA QUE CALLE’; ‘ABRE SUS FAUCES’ make reference to how he tortures himself through starvation. In this sense it is his path to martyrdom, as seen on page 26 in Berenguer’s work, when Sands enunciates his sacrifice is at the same level as Christ’s, and his enunciation centres his actions on love and the way he gives away his own life on “Día 44”. Therefore, this graffiti foreshadows what Sands develops in the poem, and the transcendence of his fight, as Berenguer imagines this beyond hunger striking.

On Day 33 it is possible to encounter signs of oppression, with torture being explicitly verbalised in these lines:

Día 33

ALAS DOBLADAS

DOBLADAS ALAS

PAJARO

ALAS

ALAS

Orina el block H  
 La muerte  
 Las dobladas alas de un pájaro  
 Tortura

The central lines that form this poem are surrounded by a sort of broken frame repeating the words: ‘PAJARO’, ‘ALAS’, ‘DOBLADAS’, and different combinations, which are part of the third line of the poem.

With regards to content, this is the only poem of the book that explicitly uses the word 'torture'. This word confirms the hints previously explained, as Berenguer leads the reader through her lines in between syntactic irregularities and ambiguous addressivity to finally consolidate the idea that the speaker was indeed tortured. This entry seems like an eclectic list of elements tied up by the word torture, as if this term was the leitmotif amongst them. Berenguer placed her poetic Bobby Sands at the H-Block of the Maze Prison where the actual Bobby Sands was incarcerated. Here both Bobby Sands and Berenguer's Sands are intersected in the poem<sup>20</sup>.

The second line, 'La muerte', links death to the H-Block protest, while the third line conveys the image of the bird unable to fly which clearly becomes a symbolic representation of the oppressed. Also, the syntactic inversion of this verse 'Las dobladas alas de un pájaro' instead of 'Las alas dobladas de un pájaro' contribute to an ambiguity that Berenguer had been using in previous poems within this work, as it provokes a challenge when reading. Her change in the syntactic order of the sentence here can also be related to the intention of emphasising that, more than the bird or its wings, the animal was broken and it was unable to fly. As the last word of the poem is 'Tortura', the image of the broken bird is one of frustration as Sands would never be free from prison. The poem shows awareness of his imminent death after understanding that the lark symbolises hope, as seen in page 8 in the poem, and its binary opposition is a bird that does not fly. This bird represents Sands' broken spirit in Berenguer's poem, highlighting that possessing wings is not enough; they need to be good for flying, and that is a representation of lack of freedom.

Day 40 reveals Sands' struggles for survival within the text and, again, the presence of an unknown external agent that takes care of an aspect of his health:

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<sup>20</sup> The reference to urine can be related to the "Blanket Men Protest" in which some Northern Irish fighters imprisoned at Maze protested through pouring their urine out of their cells. The image of the urinating block is the only one depicting an act of resistance that actually took place whilst Sands was imprisoned.

Día 40

Dame un vaso de agua  
bebo la noche gota a gota  
tras los barrotes de Maze

On day 40 the page is turned to the left. Apart from the ideological reading of this gesture, what is being drawn also provides an image that needs consideration. As Sands is thirsty, it seems as though this image makes water last as long as possible, emphasising the speaker's physical vulnerability. As water symbolizes life, he is being allowed some of it to keep resisting.

On this wall, in both content and image, water drops fall to the ground, in a vertical manner, which the poem makes explicit by being placed in this direction. As he drinks 'la noche gota a gota', there is a hint of the

impossibility of realising the passing of time in such a deteriorated body as his. Words also fall vertically to the reader when seeing this wall. At the same time, the separation between the lines also provides the image of the bars that hold him in the cell. The speaker uses the word 'barrotes', making reference to his permanent state of imprisonment.

When Sands is not able to have an accurate account of time passing by the end of the poem, his poetic entry is entitled "Seventh Week". By now he is not sure of how many days have passed since he started his hunger strike, or when his poetic diary began:

Séptima semana  
V  
i  
d  
a  
  
n  
o  
  
m  
e  
  
d  
e  
s  
e  
c  
h  
e  
s  
  
D  
o  
n  
d  
e  
  
l  
a  
  
p  
a  
l  
a  
  
v  
e  
r  
t  
i  
c  
a  
l  
  
Lucha contra la muerte

The content of the poem, shaped as a shovel buried in the ground, turns into a tercet, as most of the poems in this work are constructed. If not a graffiti, the poem would read as follows:

Vida no me deseches  
Donde la pala vertical  
lucha contra la muerte

On his last days struggling with his own body and enduring for the dignity of his cause, Sands urges life to stay and not to dispose of him. The verb 'desechar' derives into the noun 'desecho', which in English can be understood as something that has been discarded, wasted away or rejected. That 'desecho' will be what remains of him when death turns him into a corpse. For Julia Kristeva in *The Powers of Horror* (1982), "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life" (Kristeva 4). That is when the speaker becomes matter.

Sands in the text is imprisoned, subjected to both mental and physical suffering, and his subjectivity is in jeopardy. He seems to dissolve in the microcosm of the prison and through the language-breaking practice of torture. Berenguer's Sands cries for life not to desert him as he would be at the mercy of the shovel that is ready to start digging his grave. In spite of his awareness of the fact that by hunger striking he would inevitably die, he asks for some pity, and shows fear. In anonymity, his abject corpse would be forgotten just like the abject corpses of those who disappeared during Pinochet's regime. The shape drawn on this wall works as a reminder that death is upon the speaker.

Near the end, and almost unable to express himself without the use of graffiti, Sands draws on the page that represents Day 50. This poem is a set of four commands, addressed to an unknown other. As death approached him, these lines may have been instructions for his captors, or for the readers, or from his psyche to his own body. The difficulty in identifying the addressee of this graffiti increases ambiguity. These lines cannot be evaluated from a single perspective; the multiplicity of possible readings provides a response to a monolithic discourse, as that of a dictatorship.



This last image before the ending of the poem reminds readers that both Berenguer's Sands and Chilean political prisoners were still behind bars, unseen and being tortured. The image of the cage transcends the poem and looks for an understanding of Chilean reality in the 1980s. This is probably the most powerful calligram in the whole text and acts as a reminder to those who were not imprisoned, to fight for the liberation of these men and women from the powers of the oppressors, in this case, Pinochet's institutions.

## 2.3 Conclusions

This Chilean reading of *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (1983) suggests that the poem is an aesthetic poetic attempt that, with a transatlantic reference, denounces violence and torture within a closed setting. The poem, however, succeeds in elevating the speaker's sheer idealism, the dignity of not yielding and dying for a cause. Carmen Berenguer's style is highly varied and through her tercets the reader is invited to find references between the lines. There are multiple meanings to be unveiled beneath syntactic irregularities, ambiguous references and images that make her concerns about the possibilities of representation in poetry more explicit. In this context, the reading of torture in the poem is quite a complex one, as Sands here seems to embody a subject that is dissolved or minimised—in body and mind—as a consequence of such violent practice.

The challenge faced when writing about torture is a difficult one, but as the poem develops, readers can begin to fathom how subject-destructive torture is. It not only damages the physicality of the person in pain, but also destroys his/her bonds with society through a break in language itself, obscuring the chances to express his/her subjectivity. Literature, in its use of metaphoric language, seems to be able to subvert this situation, at least in the denunciation of this issue.

Berenguer's writing contributes to shedding light on the possibilities of writing from the perspective of the oppressed and also on their behalf. In this particular case, Berenguer poeticises about a situation that she did not suffer herself. In this sense, her proposal with *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* shows that there is more to the language available in order to express a victim's suffering, especially if this individual is used by the poet as a fictitious vehicle to convey certain meanings. In this way, Berenguer's poem affirms language as a powerful tool through bending it in syntactical and grammatical terms, for instance. This also elevates women's poetry as an aesthetic proposal that subverts a monolithic system of language and signs, such as Pinochet's regime in the Chilean case.

The use of graffiti in the poem, one of its most outstanding features, shows that there can be an unhierarchical way to express alternative views.

The lack of an authoritative centre and the possibilities of multiple readings of these poems are indeed a concrete example of the triumph of poetry over a single-minded discourse, which is traditionally male-centred. The space offered by Berenguer's poem is of utmost relevance, especially considering the context in which the poem was produced and what it meant at that time. The syntax in these particular poems is uncertain, and it is that particular characteristic that makes *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* so relevant.

Furthermore, what the dictatorship was conjuring behind the scenes of a display of torture and disappearances was a serious change in the country's economic order. Pinochet made sure to legitimize his ruling by means of violence, and the voice of the suffering prisoner in this poem, despite being called Bobby Sands, represents Chilean and foreign citizens in Chile. In the end, all of them were prisoners of Pinochet's dictatorship. People who were not directly prosecuted by Pinochet's intelligence agencies were also silenced. They were controlled with the threat of what could happen to them should they oppose the regime explicitly. Consequently, most Chileans were either concretely or symbolically imprisoned.

Berenguer's construction of Bobby Sands clearly shows that she is paying homage to him as well as many other anonymous martyrs taken, executed and disappeared during Chile's darkest times. Her text celebrates sheer idealism and installs the Irish flag at the end as the ultimate symbol of victory, of freedom. In spite of all the physical pain that her Bobby Sands suffered in her poem, he died with the hope of freedom, and that consolidates the author's aim of recognising the dignity and value of defending one's ideals against oppression. That seems to be her tribute in her first poetry book *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro*.

Finally, from an economic perspective, Berenguer's *Bobby Sands* in all its different versions defies what was enforced in Pinochet's regime, as her book does not seek profit. The ideology that the dictatorship was defending is not directly or explicitly contested in the poem, as its primary aim is to denounce the fact that there was violence taking place in Chile. Berenguer sought to honour and recognize those who suffered, yet the poem's political positioning is clear. Although Berenguer manages to express her partisanship covertly, her text somehow presents the idea that

all the horror exerted by the regime helped not to only deter opposition, but also to provide ground and space for a further hidden agenda. This was ultimately carried out by neoliberal ideologues, The Chicago Boys, who planned and implemented extensive economic reforms that ultimately annihilated the welfare state in Chile.

## CHAPTER 3

*La bandera de Chile* (1981 [1991]) by Elvira Hernández  
Ambivalence and Poetic Foreshadowing

*Ay Patria, Patria,  
ay Patria, cuándo  
ay cuándo y cuándo  
cuándo  
me encontraré contigo*

Pablo Neruda

### 3.1 Introduction

*La bandera de Chile* by Elvira Hernández is one of the greatest poems written in Chile during the dictatorship (1973-1990) and is also Hernández's first poetry book. Hernández was awarded the Altazor Poetry Prize in 2012 for her collection *Cuaderno de deportes* (2010) and has been nominated for the National Literature Prize on many occasions, reflecting her longstanding career and significant contributions to Chilean poetic production. The author was awarded the Pablo Neruda Iberoamerican Poetry Prize in June 2018, while reading *La bandera* at the University of Edinburgh, invited by the author of this thesis.

Julio Ortega's interpretation that in the text "la poesía pone en crisis las representaciones de la nacionalidad" (Ortega 44) adds a clear political statement, which is largely achieved through the poem's centring on the flag. In this sense, the first point to consider when approaching the text is that it deals with gendered categories from its very title because the word 'bandera' in Spanish is a feminine word. This point is crucial when evaluating the ambivalent use of this particular word in this poem. Such ambivalence can lead us to the questioning of an emblem like the flag, but also to carefully consider what lies behind such ambiguity, be it from the perspective of grammar, gender or symbolism.

I will argue that the consideration and use of the flag in the poem fluctuates between different—and sometimes opposing—views, such as:

- a. The flag as a totemic entity that represents the military in power, that is to say, a flag that was taken to fulfil the task of a banner that gave

meaning to the dictatorial imaginary. Here the flag is also a witness to violence.

- b. The flag as a representative of those who were silenced by the regime and the way in which it exerted violence. This makes reference to the flag as being gagged, unable to express herself.
- c. The flag as a symbol that is divided into having and not having an identity of her own. That would depend on who *uses* her. This lack of representativeness is symptomatic of what takes place during the dictatorship, especially in view of its masculine dominance. The flag's secondary positioning here can resemble what Judith Butler developed in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) with the idea of the 'receptacle of the feminine' as that which is discarded from a patriarchal and heteronormative order.
- d. The flag as an emblem of identity for those who take possession of land in Santiago. This is directly related to a shanty town called 'La Bandera'. This would mean that the flag shelters those referred to as 'los sin casa'.

Following these classifications, this chapter will introduce and analyse *La bandera* in the following way: first, there will be a brief account of Hernández's time in detention as this unfortunate circumstance led her to write the poem. Then, there will be a review of what has been written about this book's path to publication, as there is a 10-year gap between its informal launch and when it was formally published. The introduction will end with a brief examination of the poem's reception in Chile and abroad.

In terms of the analysis, the first point to consider is the flag as a totemic symbol. For this, Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and other theorists, especially experts in vexillology, are key. As the current flag is not the first one the country has had, there will be a summarised examination of the different Chilean flags. All of these date back to the time of Independence (1810), so their symbolic meaning is relevant to the current flag. Additionally, there will be an examination of the meaning and use of the flag as a patriotic symbol during the regime, as well as Hernández's understanding of this meaning in her poem. For all the above, this first section of the analysis will be called 'The Flag as Totem and Symbol'. The second part of the analysis will

delve into the multiplicity of meanings found in Hernández's poetic flag, focused on how the flag is used by the military in power and how those the flag does not represent are recognised through their symbolic absence. Therefore, the title of this section will be 'An Ambivalent Flag and its Multiple Re-significations'. Finally, in accordance with the focus of this thesis as a whole, I will pay attention to the references to the changing economic paradigm that was taking place during the 1980s in a section called: 'Chile of the 1980s: A Radiography of Inequality'. *La bandera* makes abundant references to the changes the country was going through and, in her use of parody and irony, Hernández installs an economic critique, which adds an important element in the interpretation of her poem, as her assertions have an echo in what Chile became later. Her poetry, in this sense, brings back the romantic idea of the poet as a visionary because, for this reading, Hernández is fully aware of what happens in her country and she dares to project her reflections into the future, where any reader can indeed find that her visions—or economic nightmares—became true.

### **Brief Review of Hernández's Detention**

Elvira Hernández did not exist as a poetic figure until 1981. Prior to that, she was María Teresa Adriazola (1951). The reason for becoming Elvira Hernández was clear; Adriazola had to protect her identity, after writing a text of such subversive nature as *La bandera*. The story of her book began a couple of years before, when she was still using her birth name.

María Teresa Adriazola was taken prisoner by the regime's intelligence agency (CNI) in the summer of 1979<sup>21</sup>. She was taken to a detention centre called Cuartel Borgoño, located in Independencia, a district in the north of the capital, Santiago. Cuartel Borgoño was also a place that was known for making its inmates disappear. According to the website *Memoria Viva*<sup>22</sup>, in these

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<sup>21</sup> CNI: Central Nacional de Informaciones. Most of the information here was supplied by the poet in an interview I conducted with her in December 2015. The information obtained from texts will be signalled each time it is being referred to.

<sup>22</sup> *Memoria Viva* was established as a Human Rights International Project that began when General Pinochet was detained in London. Their main sources for reference are *Informe Rettig* and press opposing the dictatorship which include publications from newspapers and magazines.

barracks, “según la mayoría de los testimonios, los detenidos pasaban casi la totalidad del tiempo en un sótano del edificio, que cuenta con. . . una pieza de interrogatorio y tortura. . . [la que] estaba dotada del equipo necesario” (n.a web). Adriaola spent 3 days in the basement just described.

In her own account of events, the poet remembered that she was taken prisoner whilst she was getting off the underground in San Miguel station on the way to see a friend. As in many other cases during the dictatorship, she was mistaken for somebody else. The person in question was ‘La mujer metralleta’ whose real name was Marcela Rodríguez. She was a member of a group called MAPU which clearly supported Allende’s office and became an opponent to Pinochet’s regime<sup>23</sup> (Valenzuela 196).

In the end, it was the influence of Adriaola’s father, a former police officer, and the Vicaría de la Solidaridad that secured her release; otherwise it would not have been clear whether she ever have regained her freedom<sup>24</sup>. María Teresa’s experience in captivity in terrible conditions traumatised her so much that she decided she had to respond to this experience<sup>25</sup>. *La bandera* started to take shape a year after her experience in Cuartel Borgoño, in 1980. According to Magda Sepúlveda,

El 22 de julio de 1980 ocurrió la toma de un sector de la población La Bandera en Santiago. Adriaola comenzó a escribir lo que después será *La bandera de Chile* (1981). Se lo muestra a su profesor Jorge Guzmán, quién entiende el contenido subversivo y le pide que lo publique con un seudónimo. Ahí elige Elvira Hernández que nace junto con *La bandera de Chile* (Sepúlveda n.p.).

In an interview for *La Época* newspaper in 1997 when she was asked the reason behind that choice of a name, the poet responded: “Tal vez Elvira

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<sup>23</sup> MAPU: Movimiento de Acción Popular Unitario, or Popular Unitary Action Movement.

<sup>24</sup> The Vicariate of Solidarity was a human rights organisation that vouched for many people who were unjustly detained during Pinochet’s regime. It was started in 1976 by Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez and it had the support of Pope Paul VI.

<sup>25</sup> In an interview I conducted with the poet in December 2015, she indicated that she was followed after her release and that she got strange phone calls to her home up to a year after her imprisonment.

por lo arcaico. . . El Hernández lo adopté de una familia en cuyo hogar guardaba la tenida para cambiarme el uniforme escolar e irme de cimarra” (Hernández and Vidal 4)<sup>26</sup>. With her pseudonym, the author became a new person or, as she indicated, “no es una la que escribe, sino que es adoptada por ese nombre. Con esto eres medium, esclava de la poesía” (Hernández and Vidal 4). This statement gives the poet a mystic air, as her work goes beyond her as a woman or as a poet. Elvira Hernández is the medium that communicates *on behalf* of people who are discriminated, rejected, silenced<sup>27</sup>. This is what readers find in *La bandera*.

It is clearly surprising to realise that the poem was ready for publication in 1981, but it only reached the printing press ten years later. It is important to review what the book’s path to publication until it appeared in Buenos Aires.

### **The Book’s Path to Publication**

Even though the book was not officially published until 1991, there were unofficial copies of the text shared during the 1980s. The story behind the 10 year hiatus in the book’s path to publication is far from irrelevant. It adds to the poem’s mystique and legacy. In the words of Cecilia Vicuña, *La bandera* was “a long poem that was passed around from hand to hand until it became a banner, a cult book in Xerox form” (Livon-Grosman and Vicuña 501). This is a phenomenon that was not unique to Hernández’s work. Given the strict rules for publishing during the regime and the enactment of censorship, many poets resorted to self-publishing photocopied versions of their texts. Other clear examples were Carmen Berenguer with her first poem *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (1983) and Rodrigo Lira’s writings during the late 1970s, among others.

Marcelo Pellegrini, who studied Hernández’s case in detail, asserts that:

Cuando la revista clandestina *Vanguardia*. . . trató de publicarlo en 1982, la DINA incautó los ejemplares antes de su aparición. . . hasta que apareció en 1991. . . bajo los auspicios del sello

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<sup>26</sup> Irse de cimarra: Play hookie.

<sup>27</sup> This seems to be an element that characterises her later work too. For instance, *Santiago Waria* (1992) takes an ethnic stance, considering the voice of the indigenous communities in the capital city.

Libros de Tierra Firme, de Buenos Aires. Una edición chilena del libro tendría que esperar otros 12 años para aparecer. . . en junio de 2003” (Pellegrini 110).

The latest known edition of *La bandera* was published by Editorial Cuneta in 2010, in the context of Chile’s bicentennial. There is another edition of this book by La Joyita Cartonera launched in June 2018 in an event held at the Chilean Embassy in London. Apart from the book versions, there is a video in sign language from 2009, so this poem also reaches a broader audience in an inclusive audiovisual format. The version of *La bandera de Chile* to be used for this thesis is the 1991 version published by Libros de Tierra Firme, which can be found online in PDF format on the website *Memoria Chilena*.

The impact of this poem in Chilean letters is huge, despite its difficult path to publication. The poem is understood as a breakthrough and a liberating poem that displaces meaning and, at the same time, conveys new ones with the flag at its centre.

### **The Poem’s Critical Responses**

The first aspect to mention when reviewing *La bandera de Chile*, is that most of its critical responses are Chilean based. Despite the fact that the poem has achieved iconic status in the context of Chilean poetry written during dictatorship times, its international presence is still relatively limited.

Internationally, *La bandera* is mentioned in a few books. Chronologically, it seems that the first book in which this text was studied was *The Art of Transition: Latin American Culture and Neoliberal Crisis* (2001) written by US scholar Francine Masiello. Her treatment of Hernández’s poem recognises its power and asserts its intentions, as “Hernández evoked the Chilean flag, a symbol of patriotism and unity, deformed through its different uses in Chile by supporters of Pinochet” (Masiello 272). This implies that Masiello’s interpretation of the poem includes the idea of a multifaceted flag that can have a plethora of meanings.

*The Oxford Book of Latin American Poetry* (2009) includes a brief biography of Hernández that introduces a few quotations from *La bandera*. Hernández’s entry in that book states that “her interest is to write from the

underground, attending to the submerged spaces to ‘pick up that which is being erased. . . that which doesn’t want to leave traces’” (Livon-Grosman and Vicuña 501). Despite its brevity, this entry provides key ideas related to *La bandera*. The fact that the poet signposts that which is not allowed to leave traces is something that becomes relevant to the reading of this text. Her poem not only has the particular purpose of denouncing the regime, but also seeks to subvert its signs and offer images that allow readers to understand the dictatorial framework from the perspective of the oppressed. She writes as, and on behalf of, those being silenced.

Hernández’s work is also mentioned in an entry from *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics* (2013), edited by Roland Green *et al.* The *Encyclopaedia*’s reference to her work mentions another of her books, *Santiago Waria* (1992), but is mostly descriptive of *La bandera*, labelling it as a poem in which Hernández “empties and resignifies the national emblem” (Green *et al* 232). This perspective on the poem is, again, complementary to what this chapter seeks to develop.

In terms of the text’s reception in Chilean academia, the first Chilean academic text on this poem was its untitled prologue—for the 1991 edition—written by poet and scholar Federico Schopf. He installs Hernández’s writing within a wave of poetic production since 1973 that comprises pre-existent and new voices. He recognises Hernández’s poetry along with other poets from her times such as Juan Luis Martínez, Raúl Zurita and Tomás Harris<sup>28</sup>. Regarding the poem itself, he indicates that “*La Bandera de Chile*. . . continúa desplegando el juego versátil—liviano, alegre, ingenuo, retórico, cínico, grave—de su textura, dibujo y colores, ondulando al impulso de vientos (des)esperadamente contrarios” (Schopf II). What is interesting about Schopf’s text is that his rhetorical flourishes describe the poem as if it were physically, a flag flowing in the breeze, particularly with words as ‘desplegando’, ‘textura’, ‘colores’, ‘ondulando’ and ‘vientos’. He also refers to Hernández’s poem in a duality of meanings. For instance, he uses the words ‘(des)orientación’, ‘(des)esperadamente’, and ‘(per)sigue’ which allow the reader to infer multiple

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<sup>28</sup> She is the only woman poet in Schopf’s list of prominent poets during dictatorship times.

referents within the poem. Schopf's suggestive style was followed by Fernanda Moraga, who also commented on *La bandera*.

Moraga's essay "*La Bandera de Chile: (Des)pliegue y (des)nudo de un cuerpo lengua(je)*" describes the text as a space "donde el discurso enlaza y abraza el cuerpo biográfico de la autora, convirtiéndose en el espejo personal y colectivo de una voz cultural que se enraíza en la mujer, para dialogar y gritar, desde sus bordes y desbordes" (Moraga 90). From here it is possible to access the text from a gendered perspective as well as gathering an idea of a collective psyche that is being ignored. What is more, this visual image of the woman body draped by the flag calls to mind iconic paintings, for instance, Delacroix's work depicting the French Revolution, *Liberty Leading the People* (1830), or indeed other independence movements, where liberty is a woman draped in or bearing the flag. The woman-related imaginary of liberty or revolution can also help distinguish this poem as an exercise of resistance against a masculine order, such as Pinochet's. The regime conversely took a grammatically female concept, 'la patria', to impose a masculinist meaning to it, also reproducing the male-centred nature of both the Chilean dictatorship in itself, and authoritarianism in general.

María Inés Zaldívar also analyses *La bandera* in the essay "¿Qué es una bandera y para qué sirve? A propósito de *La bandera de Chile* de Elvira Hernández" (2003) in which she suggests that "El tono de todo el poemario. . . consistirá en desfamiliarizar al lector y la lectora de un significado convencional aceptado como verdadero, insistiendo en el desconocimiento que tenemos acerca de lo que [la bandera] realmente es y representa" (Zaldívar 206). For Zaldívar, the figure of the flag in the poem destabilises a preconceived idea of order and what is known as true or real within a particular context. This view is followed by Marcelo Pellegrini, who asserts that "la bandera es aquí el símbolo patrio vacío de sentido" (Pellegrini 111), so the poem problematizes the symbolic implication of the flag and develops new ways to criticise order and to include allusions to those who were being ostracized from history, discourse and Chilenity.

It can be argued that the text is a good example of attempting to break with what has been naturalised. The ambivalence of Hernández's flag generates multiple meanings that escape the dictatorial mandate of a single

and monolithic view of Chilean society. When Hernández's writing succeeds in reaching beyond the undemocratic and tyrannical hegemony of meaning promoted by Pinochet's regime, she shifts the focus to the entirely masculine nature of both the dictatorship and its economic ideology. She then works on her "horizonte sexo-genérico desde la relación masculinidad y feminización asociada a la bandera" (Sepúlveda n.p). Therefore, the strangeness that the flag encounters in herself can "representa[r] el territorio del no-yo como cuerpo desmembrado y siniestro" (Oyarzún 66). This uncanniness is parallel to the lack of a historicised body in a woman's own terms. All that is familiar has been previously mediated by patriarchy. Any uncanniness is a step out of that pre-conceived body. Moreover, after the flag's existence and position in the dictatorial imaginary is revealed, there can be understanding of a monolithic sign-system that establishes its own rules. However, these can be undermined and this is precisely what makes this poem such a relevant source of subversive discourse. This is also a reason why I refer to the flag in female terms as 'she' throughout my analysis.

The following study seeks to provide more evidence of the ambivalence of Hernández's flag in the poem and to reveal the poet's concern about the future of her country, especially when considering the most vulnerable members of society, the poor, in opposition to the wealthy ones who benefited from the regime's neoliberal reforms.

### 3.2 Analysis

My analysis of *La bandera* is mostly thematic. However, this does not imply a lack of appreciation of the poem in aesthetic and formal terms. With regard to the latter, *La bandera* is written in free verse and relies on a variety of poetic features that will be briefly mentioned in the following analysis. Hernández's poem is centred on the use of a sarcastic tone, especially when referring to the military (see page 94). The opposite happens when the speaker addresses the concerns of those who are marginalised from society and whose needs are never met (see page 106). Hernández uses rhetorical figures such as repetition: "no tiene en otros el territorio de sus propios eriazos / no tiene en otros el fósil de su olla común / no tienen no tienen" (Hernández 10) and personification: "ficticia ríe / la Bandera de Chile" (Hernández 13). The poem presents similes, such as the one depicting the flag as "cae como teta vieja— / como una carpa de circo" (Hernández 18). The poet also twists proverbs, as in "en boca cerrada no entran balas" (Hernández 14). The poetic qualities of these figures also reify the thematic categories studied in this chapter.

## The Flag as Totem and Symbol

An immensely important element in the analysis of *La bandera* is the understanding of what a flag—be it Chilean or any other—symbolises. For Juan Eduardo Cirlot, the flag gets its symbolism from its positioning, as “esta se colo[ca] en lo alto de una pértiga o asta. Dicha elevación es correlativa de la exaltación imperiosa. . . De este hecho deriva el simbolismo general de la bandera, como signo de victoria y autoafirmación” (Cirlot 106). The exaltation that the flag represents is not only to be found in contemporary emblems. Elements that represent values and belonging in human groups have existed since the most primitive clans started organising themselves, as Sigmund Freud described in *Totem and Taboo* (1919). According to Riley, “the totem is a symbol of the whole society which can be thought of in the same frame of reference as a modern flag” (Riley 724). Consequently, flags can be considered a totemic element because they “are treated as living, breathing, entities whose well-being must be cared for, as if they were persons” (Shanafelt 14). The main issue with Hernández’s work is that the totemic nature of the flag—as representing the whole of society—is challenged.

Part of the controversy in *La bandera* is that the poet attempts to question the core of the flag as a concept. Freud conceptualises a totem as something “which stands in a peculiar relation to the whole clan. In the first place, the totem is the common ancestor of the clan; at the same time it is their guardian spirit and protector” (Freud 3). The problem arises when the flag loses its ability to represent ‘the clan’, here the people of Chile. The flag was appropriated and taken as a symbol of the military whilst ruling the country during Pinochet’s dictatorship.

The role of the flag was central to Pinochetistas. Víctor Muñoz Tamayo argues that at the beginning of the regime, Pinochetistas were trying to construct another image of the country, “se buscaba que los jóvenes se asimilaran a una patria llena de vitalidad, de sueños y posibilidades: a una sociedad unida y ‘sana’—metáfora médica recurrente: el país estaba enfermo del ‘cáncer marxista’ y el golpe de Estado permitiría que sanara” (Muñoz n.p.). It is clear that this ideological cleansing needed an emblem, and the flag proved to be a really important one for the regime.

The song “Chile eres tú” is acknowledged as the hymn of the regime during the 1970s (González 91). It was written by former Mandrágora poet Braulio Arenas, a supporter of Pinochet’s dictatorship. It addressed young people by using the flag as a symbol. The first lines of this song are as follows: “Siempre a lo alto de flamear / Banderas que sustentas tú” (Arenas n.p.). So the appropriation of the flag as a totem is clear, it would belong to those who support the regime and take pride from it. These lines show admiration to this flag and appeals to youngsters who must protect and respect it. The chorus is even more emphatic: “Chile eres tú / Chile es bandera y juventud” (Arenas n.p.). Clearly the flag is being used in the process of reshaping the country’s imagery in symbolic terms. From this, the flag would represent the dictatorship and would allow it to validate itself on the premise that they would save the country from Marxism. The new meaning of the flag negated the existence of any other viewpoints except those propounded by the regime.

In general, “flags have long been intertwined with political hierarchy, with physical dominance and subordination, and with war” (Shanafelt 16). Hence, if they are considered totemic entities, flags can be taken over and their significations can change depending on who is in power. In line with this, “flags, as objects raised above the head, signified the power of one’s people, one’s leader, and the success of the group” (Shanafelt 17). In the Chilean case, however, the Chilean flag had stopped being an element that represented a multiplicity of lifestyles and perspectives. It became monolithic and expressive of the will of the leaders of the dictatorship, the Military Junta.

### **The Different Chilean Flags through History**

The current Chilean flag is not the country’s first flag, and this study requires a succinct review of the two designs that preceded it. The first two flags were completely different. The first Chilean flag commemorated what was referred to as “Patria Vieja” (Old Motherland), which lasted between 1812 and October 1814, date in which “El desastre de Rancagua” battle took place. Patria Vieja referred to the first independentist attempt to establish a republic free from Spanish control. The Chilean army lost the battle in Rancagua and there was a short period of Spanish rule commonly referred to as “La Reconquista”

(Reconquest: 1814-1817). After this, there was a patriotic victory that led to “Patria Nueva” (New Motherland) which developed the flag currently known as the Chilean flag (Manzo 4).

The first Chilean flag was “a tricolour flag [blue, white and yellow that] was hoisted on September 30, 1812” (Smith web)<sup>29</sup>. This flag commemorated the first Government Assembly of the Kingdom of Chile that took place on September 18, 1810 while the country was being ruled by an assembly. King Ferdinand VII was held prisoner by Napoleon’s army during this time. This first flag would replace the Spanish one and, on that occasion, the Royal shield was also changed. This new patriotic Chilean shield included two Araucanian fighters guarding an obelisk with the words “Post Tenebras Lux” under which there is a star.

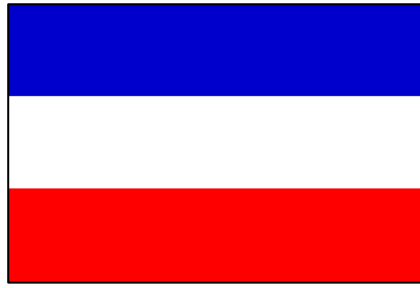


Friar Camilo Henríquez, famous for defending the cause of Chilean independence, wrote a poem praising the first flag. This poem was published in *El monitor araucano* newspaper on June 17, 1813: “Los tres colores son los tres Poderes / Majestad popular, la Ley y la Fuerza” (Henríquez n.p). This flag was used for two years until the Spanish regained control of the territory on October 1, 1814. It would take three years until there was a new attempt at designing a Chilean flag.

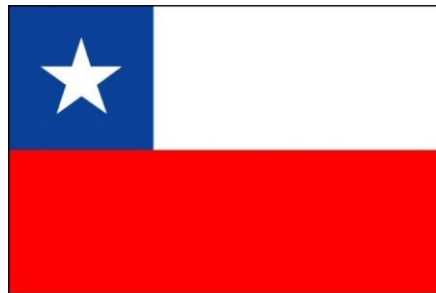
The end of Reconquista and the beginning of Patria Nueva are marked by the patriots’ victory in The Battle of Chacabuco in February 1817. This new stage, even closer to full independence from Spanish rule, led to the creation of a new flag, called ‘Bandera de la Transición’. This flag has three horizontal stripes in blue, white and red. Yellow was exchanged for red this time, as it was a more powerful colour, related to the blood shed by those fighting for independence.

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<sup>29</sup> According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.



This transitory and celebrated flag was used for five months until the current one was designed. The current flag uses the same colours as the transition flag, but it includes a star on its canton.



The star is highly symbolic due to its prominent position in the flag. “Cuenta la tradición que el propio Bernardo O’Higgins le habría dicho a caciques mapuche que la estrella de la bandera chilena también era la ‘Bandera de Arauco’” (Baradit 72). O’Higgins’ elevation of the flag was commemorated by Pinochet’s regime as they also decreed it was the most important emblem of Chilenity.

The use of the flag by the military in power during Pinochet’s dictatorship was legitimised by a decree signed by the General as Head of State in 1974. Decree 1100 declares that “La Bandera Nacional, instaurada bajo el Gobierno del Director Supremo y el Capitán General don Bernardo O’Higgins. . . es el símbolo del sentimiento patrio” (n.a web). So the regime equals its purpose to that of Chilean independence, embodied in O’Higgins.

Having chartered the contested ideological history of the various Chilean flags, it seems important now to identify the different Chilean flags that Elvira Hernández refers to in her poem to put into question a totalitarian meaning ascribed to the Chilean flag.

## An Ambivalent Flag and its Multiple Re-Significations

The poem opens with a dedication or an anti-dedication if its meaning is scrutinised. The dedication appears as follows:

No se dedica a uno  
la bandera de Chile  
se entrega a cualquiera  
que la sepa tomar

LA TOMA DE LA BANDERA (Hernández n.p.)

Pinto suggests that “A partir de su epígrafe la intención del *Poema* puede ser entendida como. . . la bandera de Chile es una prostituta” (Pinto n.p.), especially when considering the use of the verbs ‘entrega’ and ‘tomar’. However, this reading alone would be too reductionist. I propose to study this dedication in terms of Gérard Genette’s conceptualisation of a dedication as a paratext. *La bandera*’s dedication can be read either as a subversive form of addressing someone as the receiver of a text, or as a poem in its own right, or both. In the first case, the anti-dedication, Hernández takes a stance that is defiant. Firstly because it begins indicating that the flag is not dedicated to anyone, but at the same time it is offered to anyone who would know what to do with it—especially in the use of the subjunctive tense when enunciating: ‘que la sepa tomar’. The second issue here is the dedicatee. It is very ambiguous to try to decode who knows what to do with the flag and with the poem of the same title, as it could be anyone, ‘cualquiera’ as well.

Understanding this dedication as another poem from the book makes sense as the text delves into who manipulates, holds, and takes the flag. There is a chance that Hernández is not actually dedicating her poem, but rather indicating that it is not possible to do so. Her first entry, if considered a poem, signals that there are tensions in the meaning of the flag, as well as who can enforce meaning on it—by the use of the word ‘cualquiera’. This is the core of the poem, the ambivalence in the flag, depending on its presence and surroundings.

Finally, “LA TOMA DE LA BANDERA” at the end, with capital letters, apart from suggesting a title for this dedication or a dedicatory poem, takes readers to an important event in Chilean urban history, the taking of lands by the poor<sup>30</sup>. “La toma de terrenos en la Población La Bandera, efectuada el 22 de julio de 1980. . . porque fue la primera acción de este tipo realizada en plena dictadura” (Pinto n.p.). There will be more references to Población La Bandera extrapolated in the poem, which adds a social reading to it.

The ambivalence in the meaning of the Chilean flag in the poem can be understood if there is a study of the verses that make reference to the flag’s different significations. For this analysis, I will propose two categories of meaning: firstly, when the flag depicts Military rule. This will be followed by the flag as a representative of a verbalised absence in the poem.

### **The Military Flag**

The flag here is understood as an emblem that is celebrated by the military in power. However, behind glorious exaltations, Hernández makes sure that this flag, stolen by an undemocratic regime, also embodies and gives testimony to its violence. This section will consider references to the flag as patrimony of the military and the way they paid their respects to it. At the same time, there will be other quotations that will provide evidence of Hernández’s intention of exposing the crimes committed by the regime.

First, with regard to honouring the flag, the poem provides a direct reference:

se le rinden honores que centuplean los infalibles

mecanismos  
(Hernández 10)

The first element to consider is Hernández’s sarcastic tone, which is ascertained through her use of hyperbole. Both ‘centuplean’ and ‘infalibles’ emphasise her speaker’s depictions of military honours to the Chilean flag.

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<sup>30</sup> The ‘toma’ of La Bandera took place in January 1969 when a group of MIR militants and some Mapuche leaders installed their shanty town in a settlement called La Bandera—formerly known as Fundo La Bandera—currently located in the San Ramón district in Santiago (Soto López web).

The use of ‘centuplean’ comes from ‘centuplicar’, which means to multiply by a hundred; hence, the perception of military honours is disrespectful on purpose. The infallibility of the mechanisms suggests some inflexibility as if dehumanising. The mechanisms can be understood as the way in which Pinochet’s “democracia protegida” (Godoy Arcaya 18) actually legitimised itself. This can be a reference to the then recently approved 1980 constitution and to the many occasions where the flag was honoured by those who were allegedly saving and protecting the country from itself—following Allende’s overthrow.

Later on, there are more hyperbolic honours to this flag:

De 48 horas es el día de la Bandera de Chile  
los saludos de centenas de salvas  
de cincuenta carillas los discursos  
de dos y tres regimientos las procesiones  
las escarapelas los estandartes los pendones al infinito  
a la velocidad de la luz los brindis y honores (Hernández 25)

The excessive elements here are worth mentioning, as they would also shed light on Hernández’s sardonic tone. The 48 hours may refer to the national celebrations in September. On these days the military is exalted for their bravery and victories in certain battles in the past. The excess of honours to them is illustrated in the use of hyperbole, when the voice details that speeches are 50 pages long, or that the marches are more like a procession and that the flags and banners stretch as far as the eye can see. This last point is very important as the flag is reproduced in all sizes, which implies domination at micro and macro levels of society<sup>31</sup>.

What is more, the reference to the speed of light as the velocity in which toasts and honours take place is also exaggerated. Hernández’s use of hyperbole in these lines can be interpreted as a burlesque depiction of a military parade, as their irreverence highlight the army’s traditions as outdated, extravagant and irrelevant.

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<sup>31</sup> The annual ‘Glorias del Ejército’ march was nationally broadcast every year, on December 19th as was the tradition. 2017 was the last year in which this event was televised in all national channels.

The following lines use the flag to elucidate more obscured issues:

La Bandera de Chile es un pabellón dijo un soldado  
y lo identifico y lo descubro y me descubro  
del Regimiento de San Felipe (Hernández 12)

The soldier refers to the flag as a 'pabellón' which is a word that in Spanish indicates: "Bandera nacional. . . tienda de campaña. . . Edificio que constituye una dependencia de otro mayor" (*RAE web*). Clearly, the word signals the flag itself, but it would also suggest a room, be it a medical ward, or a space used as a torture chamber.

There is, though, ambiguity in the use of 'lo'. In this case, 'lo' works as a pronoun that could be either complementing 'un pabellón' or 'un soldado'. As a consequence, it is not clear whether it is the flag or the soldier being identified and discovered. It could be either of them. If the interpretation is focused on the soldier, there would be attention towards identifying him and his intentions. The location would be the San Felipe Regiment which, according to *Memoria Viva*, was a place in which "numerosos presos políticos de esa época han detallado el uso sistemático de tortura en este recinto" (n.a. web). Therefore, this flag's positioning would have been on the wall of a torture chamber, observing or bearing witness to what was happening.

This reference can be linked to the next page in the poem, through the following lines:

es increíble la bandera  
no verá nunca el subsuelo encendido de sus campos  
santos  
los tesoros perdidos en los recodos del aire  
los entierros marinos que son joya (Hernández 13)

The poem establishes the flag as the witness of the horrors that took place during the regime. The poetic speaker is also unaware of what the readers can indeed identify especially through the epithet 'increíble', which signals the paradox of having the flag up a mast, but never seeing the dead. However, by mentioning them, they are a presence that cannot be ignored. Those marine burials may refer to the prisoners that were thrown into the ocean. There are

mentions of these ways of disappearing bodies in *The Rettig Report* (1991) “by dumping them in rivers or the ocean” (National Commission 170) from aircrafts. The Armed forces confessed this in January 2001 “reconociendo que muchos de los detenidos desaparecidos habían sido lanzados al mar” (Caucoto 135). The poem refloats these bodies so they can be witnessed by its readers. In the end, the ironic stance of considering the dead as ‘joya’ brings back the idea of treasures lost at sea, similar to pirates and their shipwrecks. These lost treasures were the bodies of the many that were killed and thrown into the Pacific Ocean<sup>32</sup>.

The following lines, if considered as a whole poem, convey an even more dramatic image of the flag as an observer of violence, which seems to have become systematic in the text:

Come moscas cuando tiene hambre La Bandera de Chile

en boca cerrada no entran balas

se calla

allá arriba en su mástil (Hernández 14)

The first line implies that the flag could have acted as an accomplice of the regime. The personification depicts the flag eating flies, similarly to infest decomposing corpses. There is a lexical transference in the poem that allows this first image to be conveyed as, in the second line, the poetic voice plays with the proverb ‘en boca cerrada no entran moscas’ and transforms it into ‘en boca cerrada no entran balas’ implying that political prisoners needed to remain silent in order to survive. Or, to avoid detention, a common citizen would never engage in any sort of political activity. This is perhaps one of the only references that can be linked to Hernández’s own detention, albeit being enunciated in a rather distant tone. The totemic image of the flag is

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<sup>32</sup> The documentary by Patricio Guzmán, *El botón de nácar* (2015) shows footage of prisoners who were indeed thrown into the sea. Their bodies were attached to a piece of railtrack, which was heavy enough to make sure the bodies would sink to the bottom of the ocean. A pearl button was found attached to one of these rails, which gave testimony that someone’s body dissolved in the water, and that this practice was actually real.

emphasised with it being hoisted up the flagpole in silence. This very silence is also meaningful if the flag is depicted as both a witness and actor partaking in the regime's display of violence.

In spite of its silent depiction, the flag progresses to become an image in the following calligram:

A la Bandera de Chile la mandan a la punta de su mástil

y por eso ondea y mueve su tela

y por eso se la respeta

This is one of the few poems from this book that can be understood as a calligram. Once the flag is up the mast, she can fly, but moves according to the wind, her fabric and the length of her halyard. This would constitute a poetic heightening of the waving effect. Here it is relevant to consider the verb 'mandar'. As 'A la Bandera de Chile la mandan a la punta de su mástil', it is assumed that the flag's actions completely depend on the orders, 'mandar', of the military, as if she was another soldier. Once up her hoist, she moves and there she witnesses what happens on the ground below her. The winding lines that visually recreate the flag's movement reinforce such flow and, through an assonant rhyme in 'ondea' and 'tela', coordinated by the conjunction 'y' there is a complementary rhythmic movement that ends up justifying a respect for her after she has become a device used by the regime.

Another reference to the flag as a witness of torture is found in the following lines:

La Bandera de Chile sale a la cancha  
en una cancha de fútbol se levanta la Bandera de Chile  
la rodea un cordón policial como a un estadio olímpico  
(todo es estrictamente deportivo) (Hernández 17)

The chiasmus present in the first two lines generates a claustrophobic effect as if the flag also demarcates the area of the football pitch that is mentioned. Even though the poem does not indicate this explicitly once again, these verses transport the readers to a place that was used as a detention centre, in this case, the National Stadium<sup>33</sup>. “El estadio [estaba] convertido en un campo de concentración” (Montealegre 67). When, in parenthesis, the speaker enunciates that ‘todo es estrictamente deportivo’ there is clearly an ironic stance, as the stadiums ceased use for their main purpose, sports, and were transformed into prisons where those detained were tortured and, in some cases, violently killed. The flag is taken to the pitch and is raised in the middle of the field to witness, once more, the regime’s atrocious display of violence against those it deemed opposing figures.

The flag, after all this, seems to be finally affected by what she sees:

A veces se disfarsa la Bandera de Chile  
un capuchón negro le enlutece el rostro  
parece un verdugo de sus propios colores (Hernández 22)

The flag is disguised and is farcical. The word ‘disfarsa’ is a mixture between ‘disfrazo’ and ‘farsa’ meaning disguised and farce respectively. As the flag is used by the military to convey their view of Chilenity and society, the aim of the regime’s agenda is justified as being out of love for the flag. She then becomes an executioner wearing a black hood that is covering her face while taking some people’s lives. This would imply that the flag is present and perhaps participates in such executions. This is why she is the exterminator of her own colours. After that, everything is death. The flag as a symbol for the whole of society becomes a referent for the few and can become a symbolic executioner in the eyes of the many.

Apart from the previous image, the sinister—executioner—flag now is used as a gag:

La Bandera de Chile es usada de mordaza (Hernández 33)

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<sup>33</sup> Also, another stadium known as Estadio Chile was the place where folklorist Victor Jara was killed. Some details of his death concluded that “la primera autopsia, en 1973, revela 44 disparos. La nueva, en 2009, confirma que Jara murió por múltiples impactos” (Délano n.p).

The flag here fulfils a precise function. It performs as a gag that silences and/or chokes another on behalf of a given idea of what ‘la patria’ should be—following the narrative of those in power. The flag herself acts according to a military agenda in this poem, as if she had been an accomplice to the practice of gagging, although the flag is not ordered to do so, as in the case of ‘la mandan a la punta de su mástil’. She is used, which relegates her to a position of subordination, as she seems not to be able to refuse being used as a gag. This gag is used for silencing in a violent way. Those who are being silenced are not only those who are imprisoned, but the rest of Chilean society terrified as they silently witness fellow citizens being tortured and killed systematically.

Reaching the end of the book, the poem shows that whatever the flag symbolises for the military, as imposed on Chileans during the dictatorship, has been naturalised in the repetition of a behavioural pattern:

izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar  
 izar arriar

en la rutina la Bandera de Chile pierde su corazón

y se rinde

(Hernández 32)

This calligram illustrates the flag going up and down the hoist, being used daily and, in that routine, the atrocities she witnesses become normalised. Here she loses her heart and yields to a violent context—which is visually emphasised



as he pleases. There is a masculine hegemony and the flag is there to be defined by others. It is a female figure being unnamed, if not also controlled by another. This means that whatever the flag means beyond the reach of its meaning as imposed by the phallogocratic regime will be silenced, absented and not mentioned. The flag is a prisoner. She was taken hostage. The emptiness and vastness of the desert—as mentioned in these lines—which covers most of the northern territory of Chile, signals a state of abandonment and non-existence, as if it is an empty country or ‘patria vacía’ that does not contain those it does not represent. This desert then belongs to and embodies the flag, when the word ‘cuadrilongo’ emphasises its shape.

Hernández uses irony to suggest that the flag reacts to what she witnesses:

ficticia ríe  
la Bandera de Chile (Hernández 13)

This flag is personified by developing a fictitious laughter after its staging and all the dead she decides not to see. This flag is pretending not to know what is going on, just like the members of the army that did not help solve their own crimes when the dictatorship came to an end. This took place, as filmmaker Patricio Guzmán stated, through a “pacto de silencio entre los militares y una clase política bastante traumada” (Rodrigo and Guzmán 66). As this poem was written long before this pact, it foresees that those who hide behind the dictatorial flag will not collaborate and falsely laugh and deny any charges of the violation of human rights.

The poem highlights the need for justice towards the end of the text:

¡Con qué dignidad se cuece la descomposición  
¡sí señor! de la Bandera de Chile!

Blancos rojos y los azules revueltos  
Puro azul de la India en degradé  
la Bandera de Chile en rouge japonais claire

blanco exilio                      pendón negro

¡Con qué seriedad no se destapa la olla  
¡sí señora! de la Bandera de Chile!  
(Hernández 31)

Firstly, it is important to refer to the colours. The three colours that form the Chilean flag are mixed in a chaotic manner, as if there were different tonalities that would represent different groups. 'Blancos rojos y los azules revueltos' lacks the necessary punctuation in the enumeration of elements. The colours themselves exacerbate this mixture. 'Puro azul' begins in a similar fashion as the national anthem, 'Puro Chile' (Lillo n.p.). The connection to the anthem only occurs due to the poem's themes and the idea of the nation, as developed through the figure of the flag in the context of a Chilean reading.

The flag colours were popularised even more by a song entitled "Mi banderita chilena", written by composer Donato Román Heitman in 1935 that was sung by pro-regime folk band "Los Huasos Quincheros". "Mi banderita chilena" became very popular during the dictatorship as it defined what its colours stood for, as the lyrics state:

El azul de mi cielo  
La nieve de las montañas  
El rojo del copihue  
Y de la sangre araucana (Román Heitman n.p.)

The poem contrasts the flag's colours to the monochromatic life of those who opposed the regime. It refers explicitly to exile and the experience is embodied in a black banner. Hernández's poetry recognises the conflict of those who were forced to leave the country in order to survive, so exile is white, as their lives were spared. The 'not so lucky' ones were tortured, died or disappeared carrying the black banners that also may represent death.

Finally, both lines that begin and end the quotation are between exclamation marks. They are contrasted, as one of them refers to 'dignidad', yet the other implies 'seriedad'. The dignity seems to be on the surface, as there is putrefaction underneath 'descomposición', and the seriousness of the last exclamation plays with the 'olla' that is used for cooking, therefore, there is a link to decomposition but in a different way. Food cooking would imply a taboo of proximity between food as life-giving and death as rotting. Finally, 'destapar la olla' is a Chilean expression that means that whatever is being hidden will come to light. This pot is not being uncovered, which implies that



## The Poetics of Inequality and Economic Turmoil

As is possible to observe in any account of the dictatorial period, apart from the excessive violence that characterised the regime, there was a dramatic shift in terms of the economic approach Chile was taking. From a more social-democratic model, Chile turned to neoliberalism quite rapidly from 1981 onwards, particularly from the moment the country started the privatisation of people's pension funds and, from there, "aparece estrechamente vinculada a los fundamentos de la privatización" (Monckeberg 28), which was a process that set up free-market rules to control former state-owned institutions.

It seems as though, whether consciously or not, Hernández captures some of this atmosphere in her poem *La bandera*, as the text includes a few lines that can be interpreted in light of her concern for the future of her nation in economic terms. As her poem was to be published in 1981, her economic remarks are prior to the development of the main neoliberal reforms. In a way, it can be stated that she foreshadowed what the country would become. This last point is of vital importance, as Hernández's poetry would bring back the Romantic idea of the poet as a visionary, as someone who can predict the future. In the case of canonical Latin American poetry, two great poets deserve mention as prophetic, César Vallejo (1892-1938) and Pablo Neruda (1904-1973). In the case of Vallejo, "se habrá comprendido que durante la Modernidad el poeta se hubiera investido de una autoridad sagrada, semejante a la de un profeta" (Morales Alonso 68). The poet is understood as a superior human being, with qualities that not everyone has. With regards to Neruda, especially when considering his landmark text *Canto General* (1950), it seems as though his "papel profético al modo romántico. . . [simboliza] el nacimiento del poeta-profeta-visionario" (Gallegos 54). With these two cases clearly defending the role of poets as visionaries, the notion of the figure of the poet as a prophet takes a particular relevance. In *La bandera*, the foreshadowing interpreted in my reading is related to the effects of neoliberal reform that inflict the country. This will be illustrated with examples from the poem.

The first quotation deals with extreme poverty in the country and how this condition is understood in material terms. The poem enunciates that the flag:

no tiene en otros el territorio de sus propios eriazos  
no tiene en otros el fósil de su olla común (Hernández 10)

'Eriazos' is a word that is normally used to describe lands that are barren, but there is not much information as to who owns them. According to *RAE*, eriazo comes from the word 'erial' which means a piece of land "sin cultivar ni labrar" (n.a. web), so in this context, those 'eriazos' refer to the lands that are taken by the poor as they were evicted from where they were before—which can be understood in the context of the 'tomas' that gave birth to different 'poblaciones', especially La Bandera. Poverty is seen not only in the fact of not owning a property, but also in the conditions of people's lives in the 'eriazos'. One in particular is the earth or dirt floor, as the poor cannot afford to buy flooring. So the people inhabiting these 'eriazos' are those 'otros' who are not being represented by the flag of the dictatorship.

The other image present in these lines is that of the 'olla común'. This was the way poor people shared food so they all had a meal. As this flag neglects others through the fossilised image of the common pot, there is another segment, another social class that does not know or decides to ignore this reality. This fossil may also suggest a bygone tradition now lost through lack of solidarity<sup>34</sup>. Both references to the earth floor and the 'olla común' are clear signs of an economic crisis and that Chilean society was divided. While, on the one hand, some rejoiced in the new possibilities of the neoliberal approach; others were in such a state of poverty that they were denied any benefits from it. The poem, from the start, strikes the reader and makes him/her understand that there are many people who are not represented by the dictatorial flag who live in vulnerable conditions.

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<sup>34</sup> And another 'olla' in the poem, but this one suggests a vulnerable life, as if the poor survive together as a community, and they take care of each other by sharing food.

Another quotation that provides an insight to Hernández's social concerns is found in these lines:

dijo dijo dijo tres dormitorios  
ducha de agua caliente cocinilla con horno  
aplaudieron como locos los sin techo  
La Bandera de Chile (Hernández 12)

The repetition of the word 'dijo' three times, followed by number three, indicating the number of rooms a property has, is possibly showing an ironic stance. Pinochet's housing policy was very strict. The dictatorship ruled that "en este nuevo sistema, el tipo de vivienda al que postulaban [los pobres] tenía directa relación con su capacidad económica" (Rivera 36). So it is pretty likely that the same *others* who are not represented by the dictatorial flag are not going to live in a three-bedroom property. The amenities that the poem mentions such as a hot shower, hot water, a small cooker with an oven were luxuries for the poorest members of society, as they did not even have access to running water. The image of those that do not possess a property clapping enthusiastically portray an image of ironic happiness, as that was also being denied to the most vulnerable citizens.

This means that, according to Hernández's poem, social inequality is increasing and the new policies are only damaging those who are already troubled by poverty. What is more, between 1976 and 1978, the poor were sent to live in the outskirts of the city, generating further inequality and less access to services that were located in the city centre (Becerra n.p.).

In this context, the flag embodies a commodity as it is one that can be measured in terms of its size. In the following quotation, the flag is devoid of its common meaning as a national emblem, but rather as something that can be used to measure wealth or lack thereof:

En metros cuadrados se mide la Bandera de Chile (Hernández 18)

This line presents an attempt to criticise the need to focus on the size of private property. As the price of a house or flat is calculated in square metres, the value of such an estate also reveals the disturbing disparity between the rich and the poor. The poem clearly engages with a class consciousness and exposes what later will be an even more dramatic reality in the country, as the

neoliberal model kept privatising and commodifying different aspects of daily life.

Hernández's poem, once more, shifts her flag's meaning. Here the flag is being used as a sign of economic prosperity when placed on top of a skyscraper:

A la Bandera de Chile la tiran por la ventana  
la ponen para lágrimas en televisión  
clavada en la parte más alta de un Empire Chilean (Hernández 17)

Firstly, the expression 'tirar por la ventana' might refer to 'tirar la casa por la ventana' which is an idiom that refers to blowing a lot of money. This implies that there is a sense of opulence and a need to show off what is possessed. This is emphasised by the flag being exposed on television. In this part of the poem, this flag is now considered a symbol for those who became successful during the regime. That is to say, those who benefited from privatisations.

Hernández's lines here are visionary and, by positioning her flag at the uppermost point of a skyscraper, the flag becomes yet another symbol, as she would now witness the prosperity of the rich but also as the beacon of what the neoliberal brings. In the case of the 'Empire Chilean' skyscraper, a link to a Chilean version of the Empire State building is merely coincidence. In an interview with the author, she indicated that someone had corrected her and that she should have written Chilean Empire. To this, she responded that she was not aware of the grammatical rules of English and kept the reference in the way she wanted. In spite of this small controversy, the image of the skyscraper with a flag on its peak was something that indeed became a reality as envisioned by the poem. The largest skyscraper in Latin America is in Santiago de Chile, it is called Costanera Center and it was opened as a shopping mall in 2012<sup>35</sup>. This building was a project developed by Chilean-German entrepreneur Horst Paulmann, owner of major retail companies that share a big percentage of the Chilean market. The shape of this skyscraper is

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<sup>35</sup> Hernández's economic critique also encompasses a poetic complaint about the role of the shopping mall in the Chilean city. In her text *Santiago Rabia*, she makes a direct allusion to them by writing: "todos los caminos nos están llevando al mall / y si no estás en el mall haz como si estuvieras en el mall" (Hernández 26). For this reason, I believe Hernández poetry follows an increasingly explicit critical line with regard to consumerism and neoliberalism.

phallic, so this leads to a reflection on the phallic nature of neoliberalism, especially in the Chilean case. From the poem, the image is of a skyscraper that has a Chilean flag on a mast, nailed at the top of the building, so this flag is sustained by two phallic figures: the construction and the mast itself, which doubly represses the flag's female identity.

Another reference to the neoliberal, particularly to its consequences, takes the reflection on economic progress to an environmental dilemma:

Levanta una cortina de humo la Bandera de Chile  
asfixia y da aire a más no poder (Hernández 13)

There is ambivalence in these lines, as the fumes that appear there also refer to the staging of some situations, which were very common during dictatorship times. Therefore, both interpretations need to be addressed.

Fumes, smoke, and smog started to become a problem for Chileans, especially in the capital since the 1980s<sup>36</sup>. Unregulated industrial growth under a neoliberal set of policies implemented by the regime led to cities that produced or manufactured goods with high pollutants, poisoning the air in an irreversible manner. Even though environmental awareness became more evident in the 1990s, it was found that industrial activity, airborne dust, and transport were the main sources of pollution in Santiago. What is more, by 1997 it was established that "Santiago has severe air pollution problems" (Eskeland 1636).

On the other hand, staging of false crime scenes, 'cortinas de humo' that incriminated innocent people for certain crimes were very common. According to Fernanda Moraga, the military "lograron que el encarcelamiento arbitrario, la tortura sofisticada, las desapariciones forzadas de personas, el exilio y el *insilio* hayan sido un referente social, político y estético ineludible" (Moraga 50). The media was also a key factor in staging, as their task was to misinform citizens who, because of censorship, could not access more information (Mönckeberg n.p.). With this in mind, the poem seeks to reveal an awareness of such stagings and how they fed society with lies, when it

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<sup>36</sup> This is an aspect that is relevant for Hernández. She continues to write about atmospheric pollution in her latest work: *Santiago Waria & Santiago Rabia* (La Joyita Cartonera, 2016).

enunciates 'asfixia y da aire a más no poder' so society was being asphyxiated in both concrete and symbolic ways.

*La bandera* symbolically destabilises the neoliberal model at a moment when it was beginning to be imposed, and foreshadows its consequences in terms of social inequality, excessive opulence and pollution. This is highly significant, as the poem goes beyond its times and helps to understand the past but it also allows readers to interpret the present and the future in its awareness of what neoliberalism ultimately would mean for different sectors of the population in Chile.

### 3.3 Conclusions

*La bandera de Chile* (1981) by Elvira Hernández has been extensively studied. Most secondary literature is based on the role of the flag in the poem as a symbol that is devoid of an inclusive or collective meaning, and that became central to a critique of the dictatorship and their view of Chilenity. This interpretation has been shared by many Chilean theorists and the few foreign texts that have engaged with *La bandera*. However, my study in particular adds a very important element which is an economic reading, and this is clearly an original contribution to the scholarship on this poem.

The importance of understanding the poem as a tool through which the status quo is challenged is outstanding. First because its readership can relate to the poetic claim that the flag as an emblem needs to be returned to all citizens to represent the whole of society, and to address different issues suffered by the poor in particular. Second, by displacing meaning, Hernández's aesthetic proposal with *La bandera* indeed reinforces the idea of poetic discourse as a means to subvert signs with a particular emphasis on an economic critique. Thirdly, and related to the previous point, this poem brings back the idea of the poet as a prophet, which ultimately proves that Hernández's poem was not only a work that attempted to criticise her own times, but to show a deep concern for the future.

This Chilean flag is a feminine figure, not only grammatically, but also by virtue of its position in the dictatorial imaginary. This woman-flag is present/absent and in this duality it is possible to identify it as 'the receptacle of the feminine' as Judith Butler indicates in her book *Bodies That Matter* (1993). For Butler, the ways in which the feminine has been relegated to an unutterable sign take it away from materiality. For instance, "it is this unthematizable materiality that . . . becomes the site, the repository, indeed, the receptacle of and for the feminine *within* a phallogocentric economy" (Butler 38). This point is key, as it is difficult to fathom something more phallogocentric than a dictatorship and an economic model imposed by men. The role of women and their identity is clearly secondary and responds to what the political (dictatorial) and economic (neoliberal) dictates in the period the poem was written and beyond.

The poem establishes that the Chilean flag is controlled by the regime, obtains its meaning from it and fluctuates between being an accomplice and a witness to a ferocious display of violence. The rhetoric of the country at war against Marxism was very strong, especially during the first years of the regime. In this sense, the flag in the poem entailed that meaning, of a narrowly patriotic and anti-Marxist stance (Garay and Willicke n.p.). Therefore, in the exercise of being hoisted up and down, the flag became part of a routine that *naturalised* its role as an element that needed to be exhibited. The flag embodied that conservative ideology and, in *La bandera*, this role is questioned and destabilised. The role of ambivalence is pivotal, as it serves to destabilise what had become a monolithic symbol. There are clearly more interpretations of this flag. For this chapter, however, understanding the flag as a totemic entity and the way the poem communicates its own absence are two interpretations that deserve attention. Both aspects confirm what academics had interpreted before, but also pave the way to the second part of the analysis which is the poem's criticism of neoliberalism.

The poem shows a deep concern for the living conditions of the poor, and an awareness regarding those who were becoming wealthier, thanks to the privatisations that characterised the economic agenda of Pinochet's regime. On the one hand, the victims of the model were indeed becoming more and more vulnerable by being ostracised to the outskirts of the city, living in foul conditions. Whereas the regime's best supporters, the economic elite, was building skyscrapers and exhibiting their opulence. It seems as though Hernández's poem already knows what the model will cause, that Chile will become a very unequal country in terms of income and living conditions.

Finally, the fact that *La bandera* was finally published in 1991 means that, in general, the poem was read a decade after it was created. This does not diminish the effect of its intentions. With the passing of time, Hernández's visionary views on neoliberalism—in spite of not naming it directly—have proved true. The poem provides both a retrospective and a prospective view of Chilean reality. Retrospectively, when reading its 1991 publication, the poem provides details of what the country was going through during the hardest years of the regime. The poem is prospective when it anticipates certain effects of neoliberalism in Chilean society. This prophetic aspect is very

relevant because it allows readers to interpret the poem beyond its immediate context of production.

It is crucial to remember that Hernández's poem came to existence after the author was detained by mistake in 1979. Nothing of that appears explicitly in *La bandera de Chile*. It seems that Hernández wanted to go beyond her own experience and expose other issues that affected even more people at that time. Her poem then is a gesture of solidarity and selflessness. Her experience in Cuartel Borgoño is not the centre of the poem nor is her body, but the flag, as imagined as a female figure.



## CHAPTER 4

*Escrito en Braille* (1999) by Alejandra Del Río:

A Lamentation Signalling an Epistemological Break

*¿Qué es la vida? Un frenesí.  
¿Qué es la vida? Una ilusión,  
una sombra, una ficción.  
Pedro Calderón de la Barca*

### 4.1 Introduction

The present chapter will explore Alejandra Del Río's poetry book entitled *Escrito en Braille* (1999). According to the Royal Scottish Braille Press, Braille "is a tactile writing system made up of dots used by vision impaired people" (n.a. web) which allows me to suggest that the text will indeed play with tactile images in order to emulate the way Braille is used to convey meaning. In this sense, "[Braille] is critically important. . . as the ability to read and write in Braille opens the door to literacy, intellectual freedom, equal opportunity, and personal security" (n.a. web). The poem, from its very title, would be addressing a blind or visually impaired audience, therefore, the core of this analysis will be to attempt to ascertain who the blind are, and why they are in this position. The use of Braille presupposes that there is an addressee who would not access certain information, unless decoding the message in Del Río's poem. This very point would join Braille as a system and *Braille* as a poetic proposal.

My interpretation will consider *Braille* as a lamentational<sup>37</sup> poetry collection that delves into issues akin to the Chilean transition that criticises its politico-economic context. Through a symbolic blindness that is established as the centre of the text, for my reading, this blindness can be interpreted as an attempt to demonstrate the illusory and deceptive nature of a society ruled by neoliberalism—understood as the latest epistemological break in Chilean reality. The poem develops blindness with lines such as, "Abrir los ojos no viene a ser una esperanza. . . / una vez reconocida la quebrada bajo los pies

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<sup>37</sup> Lamentational as in the tone of a lamentation poem, such as in Jeremiah's book of *Lamentations*, and others. This will be explained with detail later on in this chapter.

/ un vacío para el que nada sirve la máscara de gala” (Del Río 16) in which the fact of ‘seeing’ is challenged by the void of existence. In this sense, my reading proposes that Del Río’s poem covertly criticises an ultimate reality that is hard to grasp—which is behind the hopelessness of opening one’s eyes. Reality would reveal an endless void surrounding the speaker. It is as if she is standing on the edge of a cliff or already falling through it. This would make reality utterly disappointing and inescapable.

This reading of Del Río’s poem offers an original approach to the text. Although *Braille* has already been examined by other analysts, such as Javier Bello or Paulina Medel, this particular study contributes with an interpretation of ways in which the poem criticises Chilean neoliberalism. In addition, I believe there has been a lack of further critical examination of this poem. This means that the present analysis will be, thus far, the most thorough study of this poem up to date.

In terms of structure, this chapter will first consider Del Río’s compositional process whilst producing *Braille*, including some remarks about her first poetry book *El Yo Cactus* (1994). There is a link between both of her first poetic productions, which needs to be briefly discussed in this introduction. Following this, I will argue that *Braille* can be considered a lamentation, which in its tone is in dialogue with a great and extended literary and religious tradition. After this, the analysis will examine the classical and traditional poetic influences that *Braille* displays in its lines. A few examples to address in this chapter will be *The Odyssey* by Homer, *Argonautica* by Apollonius of Rhodes, *The Republic* (Book VII) by Plato, *La vida es sueño* by Calderón de la Barca and some of Del Río’s Latin American poetic mentors such as Gabriela Mistral, César Vallejo and Lezama Lima.

Next, my analysis will propose that this poem can be labelled as an example of the “Impossible Witness” category, as conceptualised by Giorgio Agamben (1998). *Braille*’s enunciation reveals the witnessing of something that was taken from society and needs to be recovered. The speaker expresses that there is a voice that is to be reclaimed: “La boca es necesario recuperar” (Del Río 13). The mouth needs to be regained, in order to express the speaker’s subjectivity. In this sense, Agamben’s categorisation is a useful

tool when analysing Del Río's poem as an example of post-dictatorship writing. Following this, I will focus on the neoliberal critique that I propose is developed in the poem.

### **The Production of *Braille***

Alejandra Del Río's poetic production began in 1994, when her first book *E/ Yo Cactus* was awarded that year's poetry prize at Universidad de Chile. Following this recognition and success, Del Río wrote *Escrito en Braille*, which also achieved recognition by winning the Concurso Nacional de Poesía Eusebio Lillo in 1998.

The writing of *Braille* began in 1995, after Del Río received a scholarship from the Neruda Foundation, which consisted in participating in a 10-month poetry workshop led by Jaime Quezada and Floridor Pérez. By the time the poet was supported to write, she was 8 months pregnant. Her pregnancy is quite relevant, as *Braille* is dedicated to her son Julián. The first page of the book contains the dedication: "A Julián Emilio; él me habitó y me dejó estas texturas" (Del Río n.p.).

The poet pays homage to her son when stating "él me habitó y me dejó estas texturas" (Del Río n.p.). The choice of words here is important, as the text is guiding blind readers; the blind rely on the textures of *Braille* to read. Del Río's motherly dedication also echoes Gabriela Mistral's poem "Apegado a mí", which begins as "velloncito de mi carne/ que en mi entraña yo tejí" (Mistral 196). Furthermore, the poem begins with a quotation from a poem by Mistral called "La Otra", also rephrasing it: "Una en mí maté / ya no la amaba" (n.p.). However, the original poem reads as: "Una en mí maté: yo no la amaba" (Mistral 437). Del Río got rid of the colon and exchanged the 'yo' for a 'ya', so she changed the sense of Mistral's poem, giving it an enhanced air of temporality and a sense of self-justification. This change can be considered both homage to her and an appropriation of her words. The poem thus has a direct and an indirect dedication, the direct one being for her son, and the second for Mistral. The quotation signals that there is a psychic unfolding; it suggests that the subject comprised two versions of herself, and one of them was killed. I believe this foreshadows what Del Río's poem is concerned with,

which is having a subject going from blindness to sight, from ignorance to wisdom.

When Del Río won the Eusebio Lillo literary prize for *Braille* in 1998, this award meant having the winning poem published by LOM, a recognised independent publishing house. Nevertheless, LOM decided not to publish the book but only to print it<sup>38</sup>. Therefore, Del Río had to self-publish her new book. With the help of friends and other poets, such as Javier Bello, the book took shape. As Del Río asserted “el libro estaba cosido y era gris oscuro. Sin nombre de autor, sin foto, sin nada que fuera una pista para el lector” (Del Río e-mail). This resembles the kind of unobtrusive presentation which other authors had to adopt back in dictatorship times, yet the context was democratic in Del Río’s case. This means that LOM’s decision not to officially publish this poem demonstrated the tension that could still exist between a powerful text and the still cautious editorial policies of the day. The obvious consequent problem stemming from this publishing issue is that it is very difficult to find any copies of this text at all. There is one at the library of the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities at Universidad de Chile and this analysis relies upon a digitalised copy of that physical book.

When asked about this text, the author recognised it is linked to her first production: “No sé si has tomado en cuenta mi 1er libro *El Yo Cactus*. Esos dos van de la mano [con *Braille*]” (Del Río e-mail). *Cactus* is a collection of poetry that delves into the difficulties of articulating a female self. This self operates within certain linguistic and social constraints that do not give any autonomy to the expression of the female psyche. In this book, Del Río questions language, issues of race and gender roles in order to prove that there are many limitations when attempting to express a female perspective in Spanish. For a woman to be considered a subject, in her poem, Del Río takes up the word and destabilises patriarchal order. Her weapon is her verse and the way in which she challenges traditional structures. For example:

Yo no hablo lenguaje conocido  
Encallaron en mi garganta como aristas de fuego. . .  
Carcelero el verbo (*Cactus* 12).

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<sup>38</sup> LOM only acted as printers, which is stated in the first page of *Braille*.

This quotation provides insight into what the voice faces and consequently challenges. Her discourse is thus articulated to escape the patriarchal paradigm. The voice establishes herself from a marginalised position and denounces the entrapment suffered because of the difficulties of using language as it is, as this would mean confining her to a phallogocentric structure. The poem thus seeks to articulate an alternative female discourse.

The second quotation to be considered is related to the previous one and insists on the marginality of the female voice, confronting it with the most prescriptive lexical structure: the dictionary. The poem reads as follows,

Mi lengua no tiene cita  
Llega tarde y sin aviso  
A la lengua seca de los diccionarios (*Cactus* 12).

The voice, once again, declares that her discourse is to be articulated and found outside the norm. The line making reference to the dictionaries signals that tradition is dry and lacking life. As the speaker's tongue arrives late, unexpectedly and without an appointment, she provides the image of a subject who does not respect nor consider social conventions, as they would imprison her.

Both of these quotations illustrate that Del Río's struggle is primarily with the Spanish language and its norms, as it entails a traditional patriarchal paradigm. It seems as though the actual link between *Cactus* and *Braille* is related to a movement from a position of denouncement, as in *Cactus*, to one exploring ways to articulate the unspeakable, as it is in *Braille*. The main point here is to establish an awareness of Del Río's progression with her two first poetic books.

According to the poet, *Braille* expresses a pain, different to that expressed in *Cactus*: "porque todo eso [el poema] es el dolor de un sujeto que lleva a cuestas una infancia en la dictadura" (Del Río e-mail). The importance of this remark lies in the fact that, as a child who grew up during the dictatorship, Del Río's world was constantly changing; she had to witness injustice and stories of torture. The connection to the impossible witness seems to be quite productive in analytical terms.

## ***Braille* and Criticism**

Concerning criticism, only a handful of Chilean academics and poets have commented on *Braille* from its publication up until recently. The text is relatively unknown in an international context. In *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (2012), for instance, there is acknowledgement of the 1990s poetic generation under the entry related to Chilean poetry, but there are no mentions of any poets from that time. What is explained there is related to the writing of an unspecified corpus which characterises the works from the 1990s as “their diversity of topics and styles extends from globalization and mass media. . . material excess and commoditization” (Cushman et al. 232). Therefore, it is very likely that these poets will appear more explicitly in future anthologies and encyclopaedias once their work is disseminated internationally, hence the importance of a study such as this one.

The first critic to comment on *Braille* was Javier Bello who presented the book in its launch in 1999 and who wrote the brief paragraph that describes the text in its back cover. He emphasises the presence “del ciego como sujeto del poema” (Bello n.p.), and this will be the starting point of this reading. Considering the poem’s use of Plato’s cave and the dichotomy of light versus darkness, blindness can be understood as perceiving shadows and/or reaching out from a dark place—which I propose to relate to ignorance of the surrounding reality as well.

Cristián Gómez reviewed *Braille* in 1999, and he acknowledged the hermetic nature of this text by indicating that the poem presented “una mutación de las palabras para que una y otra se friccionen entre sí, creando de este modo un mundo nuevo a través de una nueva palabra” (Gómez 209). In spite of the fact that such a remark can describe most poetry in general, I believe it points towards understanding it as developing a very intricate net of meanings. Blindness here indicates having to rely on textures and hearing—and these are the two senses that are emphasised in the whole of the text.

For instance, blindness is surpassed by tact and noise: “Clara la risa del que no logra posada / sus días le brincan en las palmas y en los ojos / nada tiene color propio forma acabada” (Del Río 22). Laughter seems to be the sound that dominates these particular lines. Even though the word ‘clara’

refers to an unobstructed and diaphanous clarity which is normally linked to vision, here it is transferred to a gesture and a sonorous expression, 'la risa'. The passage of time is then felt in the difficulty to perceive the real world, as one that is apprehensible through vision and touch. If sight is non-existent, colours are not seen, nor possible to define. Likewise, shapes are not definite and require time to be seized, as the poem suggests in 'sus días le brincan en las palmas y en los ojos'.

Apart from Bello and Gómez's texts there is another critical reference to consider in a review of *Braille*. It is "El territorio y el testigo en la poesía chilena de la transición" (2010) by Magda Sepúlveda. In this article she delves into the main characteristics of the poets who comprise the 1990s generation, commonly known as 'Los Náufragos', or The Castaways. "Javier Bello. . . es quien crea el nombre de 'los Náufragos' para su promoción. Para ello tomó en cuenta el motivo del viaje que caracteriza los textos de este grupo" (Sepúlveda 82). Sepúlveda does integrate Del Río into this cohort, together with Andrés Anwandter, Verónica Jimenez and, obviously, Javier Bello. For her, the Castaways consider "la experiencia de la Transición como un fracaso" (Sepúlveda 86). The disappointment in the present is clear in Castaway poetry, and Del Río's *Braille* is an unequivocal example of this.

*Braille* is an example of transitional literature in which the city "ya no existe, son territorios perdidos" (Sepúlveda 86); therefore, the idea of being a castaway wandering and floating about with the hope of finding a place to be that never materializes, lies at the centre of this poem. Sepúlveda also introduces Giorgio Agamben's concept of the "impossible witness" as one to consider when analysing Castaway poetry. This will be explained in depth in the following sections of this analysis. Finally, "los textos escritos por Los Náufragos afirman que la Transición no ha terminado hasta la primera década del 2000" (Sepúlveda 90) which is an assumption that is also considered in this thesis<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> There is more detailed information on the Chilean transition in the introductory chapter to this thesis.

The most recent critical piece on *Braille* is an essay by Paulina Medel, entitled “*Escrito en Braille: tortura y memoria inscrustadas sobre la piel*”, published in 2014. Medel’s main argument is that in the poem:

se observa una voz torturada que debe construir  
nuevos modos de percepción a partir del tacto. . .  
tendrá que descifrar las huellas impregnadas en la  
piel como la opción de reconstruir una memoria que  
le permita conformar un imaginario nacional. Sin  
embargo, en la poesía de Del Río, se seguirá  
obedeciendo a las mecánicas de tortura (Medel 26).

Even though Medel’s text acknowledges blindness as the starting point of this poem, her reading of *Braille* seems somewhat reductionist. In her view, blindness is tightly linked to memories of torture, and the way the subject surveys her own wounds as a representation of a collective imaginary. In her words, “Es así como la limpieza forjada a través de la sangre y el dolor configurará habitantes que se ciegan frente a lo que podrían observar, pues abrir los ojos es recordar la tortura simbólica de la urbe” (Medel 28). Although Medel makes a valid point here, there is far more to unravel about the role of blindness in *Braille*. Medel’s study does not provide any other alternatives or hints to a deeper interpretation of blindness in *Braille*.

In addition, it is important to establish that it is the reader who is the one being addressed as blind. In this context, the voice enunciates from a position of someone who has seen the truth/light being hidden. As the poem reads: “Tú no sabes lo que es mirarte desde lejos. . . / Tú no sabes lo que es un ojo ennegrecido por la luz” (Del Río 31). The speaker would be attempting to communicate what she has seen through textures and hints in such a way that it should be possible to decipher by those who are not yet able to see the light. Opening one’s eyes in this context would lead to a realisation that there is an ultimate truth that has been concealed. According to my interpretation, seeing in *Braille* means grasping or understanding something that it is impossible to bear.

In *Braille*, it is quite evident that blindness goes beyond a bodily dimension, and Plato's cave is a recurrent and key reference to explore this. I believe that *Braille*'s speaker is back in the dark to alert others—the readers—of what she has seen and experienced outside the cave. In order to do this, she phrases her expression in a way that the blind would interpret as if reading a text in braille, adapted for their lack of sight. What the speaker conveys so hermetically, for this reading, is that there is an ultimate truth that needs to be sought outside the cave. The speaker here appeals to her readers' sense of curiosity.

## 4.2 Analysis

### ***Braille* and its Dialogue with the Lamentation as Poetic Form**

The pessimistic tone of *Braille*, together with an atmosphere of hopelessness and a cry for the dead, clearly echo the cry for the destroyed city, as in lamentations. The earliest written records of this sort of poem developed in Sumerian texts from 2,000 BC show that for ancient historians “Sumerian literary catalogues. . . contain the titles of numerous lamentations over the destruction of Sumerian city-states, including. . . Nippur and Ur” (McDaniel 198). Furthermore, “there is little doubt that it was the Sumerian poets who originated and developed the ‘lamentation’ genre” (Kramer 201). Many centuries later, it is possible to find the most well known western lamentation in *The Book of Lamentations* (VI century BC) by the prophet Jeremiah. From this, it can be stated that the lamentation as a poetic form has been accompanying human life since its first recorded documents and, as a poetic genre, is still relevant.

The dialogue between *Braille* and the lamentation is to be established in terms of three elements that demonstrate that Del R  o’s poem can indeed be labelled as one:

1. Lamentations express that a city has been destroyed: Be it Ur or Jerusalem, a settlement has been besieged and the lamentation depicts its aftermath. *Braille* does mention a destroyed city, even though it is not named, it is understood in the context of a post-dictatorship Chile, and there is an urban air to it. In the poem we see a city in chaos: “ciudades estacionadas con enloquecidas ni  as desatadas por las calles” (Del R  o 17).
2. Lamentations always express mourning. Death is the central element in this sort of poetry. In Jeremiah’s *Lamentations*, the voice describes the destruction of the city and the people inhabiting it, including women and children (2:21). In Del R  o’s poem, it is possible to identify concern for those who were killed and disappeared during Pinochet’s regime. *Braille* mourns the dead, as in “Nada responde el hueco que ha quedado / mientras t   te escarbas en las llagas / cenizas de lo sido” (Del R  o 33).

3. A significantly outstanding element is that the lamentation shows a cry caused by a traumatic situation. This trauma is identifiable in many laments. A contemporary example could be the lamentations written by women poets after World War I. However, the trauma present in Del Río's writing expresses itself hermetically in her writing. The poem does not cry in a traditional way, the speaker does not use the first person to express grief. She has rather erased herself from existence; she is the conveyor of a given meaning, a messenger to the blind. Hence, in her experience of seeing the light, her cries are expressed in the use of *ubi sunt*, as in her questioning:

Dónde quedó la memoria y su circo de cenizas  
el circo que nadie viene a reclamar dónde quedó si  
tampoco habrá nadie regando un pan delante de la  
puerta si tampoco habrá nadie para la bicicleta  
abandonada si tampoco habrá nadie dando calor a  
los sepulcros (Del Río 43).

These verses cry for those who have died or disappeared. The repetitions of 'si tampoco habrá nadie' emphasise the void, yet those who are gone are not to be forgotten. This repetition establishes the poem as a chant for the dead, in spite of not showing an interjection to express pain such as '¡Ay!'

Apart from these characteristics, I believe there is a compelling set of elements that help to support the dialogue between *Braille* and Jeremiah's *Lamentations* in particular. In a contemporary analysis of Jeremiah's book there is a convincing point that can connect his writing to Del Río's. The poetic speaker in *Lamentations* "is left without poetic resources, for he feels the grief deeply. The only simile he can find for the ruination of the city is the wide sea—chaotic, elemental, unbridgeable" (Lanahan 43). Del Río's poem articulates maritime references to represent a vast space that is chaotic but that also contains her speaker. The metaphor here would imply that, within an oceanic imaginary, there is no access to solid ground and the speaker is thus floating away without ever reaching a shore.

Other critics of Jeremiah's *Lamentations* make observations that also ring true for an analysis of Del Río's *Braille*. I refer to two specific introductory chapters to Jeremiah's book. Firstly, "Lamentations" by Francis Landy (1990)

and, secondly, “Introduction to Lamentations” by Delbert Hillers, which appears in the *Anchor Bible* (1972). In Francis Landy’s reading of Jeremiah, “The sorrow is silhouetted by the quiet of the night and the destroyed city” (330) and it is likewise possible to observe this phenomenon quite closely in *Braille*, with the line that referring to “el deshabitante adicto a cada esquina” (Del Río 22), as there is no city to inhabit anymore. Additionally, Landy delves into the function of the poetic voice by arguing that “The alienation, temporal and social, of the prophet suddenly becomes a collective experience. . . The voice simply bears witness to. . . broken images and hopes. The barrenness and desolation of the poem are, then, also matters of rhetoric” (Landy 329). If only the word prophet was poet in this quotation, this analysis could certainly apply to Del Río’s *Braille*. Firstly, the alienation expressed in the poem resembles an individual or collective phenomenon. This can be interpreted as the isolation of the Castaway poets, or the impossibility to overcome the recent past, which is both an individual and shared experience. The fact that Landy interprets Jeremiah’s poetic personae<sup>40</sup> as witnesses can also relate to Del Río’s poetic proposal, although only the latter can be considered an example of the “impossible witness”.

For Delbert Hillers, *Lamentations* “served the survivors of the catastrophe in the first place as an expression of the almost inexpressible horror and grief they felt” (Hillers XVI). This reifies the idea that both Jeremiah and Del Río’s works can be studied together. From Hillers’ analysis it can be asserted that the poet/prophet seeks to express certain feelings, or at least attempt to demonstrate that the pain is too deep to be communicated. The deliberate hermetic nature of Del Río’s poem questions the possibilities of expression and language is in itself used as a device to shed light on its own incapability of representing certain issues.

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<sup>40</sup> Understood as poetic speakers, such as the city and the soldier, to name only two within *Lamentations*. Interestingly, Del Río’s latest poetic production is entitled *Dramatis Personae* (2018), published by Universidad de Valparaíso.

The pessimistic and hopeless tone of *Braille* is an obvious aspect that accompanies the work's impenetrability and highlights how discouraging times to come can be. In Jeremiah's case, his lamentations also signalled a grim future because "the book at no point testifies to a belief that things would soon change for the better" (Hillers xviii). Therefore, it is significant that the lamentation shows lack of a sense of progression, that there will be no significant change after a traumatic situation. In both Jeremiah and Del Río's texts, one could argue that "grief tries to find expression in an order of words that will restore the dead to the human community, articulate the inexpressible, turn death into beauty" (Landy 329). This restoration is identifiable in *Braille*, and there are repeated attempts to recover something with a voice, a possibility of expression, or a tortured body.

There is a clear example of this need for restoration in the book. The first poem from the first section, "NO HAY LENGUA VERDADERA QUE NO TENGA EL CENTRO INTACTO" repeats the word 'recuperar' four times. This 'recuperar', from an etymological perspective, "viene del latín *recuperare* y significa 'volver a tomar algo perdido'" (Anders *et al* web) and this is very important considering a post-dictatorship context. In the poem, 'recuperar' appears as: "No es necesario **recuperar** los besos / La boca es necesario **recuperar**", "Así no sea necesario **recuperar** las palabras / cuando la voz sea necesario **recuperar**" (Del Río 13—my emphasis). The structuring of these lines responds to a quotation at the beginning of the poem: "En ti sólo, en ti sólo, en ti sólo" from a poem by César Vallejo entitled "Confianza en el antejo, no en el ojo" (1937).

In the case of 'No es necesario recuperar los besos', the logic from Vallejo is transported to two new referents, as the speaker turns the tables and places the relevance in the sources of speech: the mouth and the voice, relegating kisses and words to a secondary position. There is a need to empower basic elements—which is a gesture that unites *Braille* with its predecessor, *Cactus*. The importance of the word 'recuperar' can be seen as linking the poem to its dictatorial past, when all democratic rights were suspended and freedom of speech was threatened with censorship. What this recovery also deals with is, for this reading, that in spite of having a democracy

once again, it seems as though the woman poet still feels she needs to get her speech back. The mouth needs to be controlled by the speaker<sup>41</sup>. This search for discourse is also relevant in *Lamentations*, since they seek to express feelings after destruction and significant pain. Nevertheless, aside from the resonance of Jeremiah in Del Río's poem, it is important to review Latin American expressions of lamentations within the writings of José Emilio Pacheco, Gabriela Mistral and Delia Domínguez.

The first example is José Emilio Pacheco's work, as the poet seems to be "angustiado ante el mundo en que vivimos" (Xirau 38) and that anxiety clearly marks the tone of his writing: that there is no hope and that the future is uncertain and obscure. In the words of Ramón Xirau "Por ahora—en esta 'era' de las lamentaciones que Pacheco expresa con su ardor mesurado, entre los ritmos repetidos que recuerdan a los antiguos cantares mexicanos y el ardor triste de un nuevo Jeremías" (38) there is deep concern and disenchantment.

Xirau's reference to old Mexican chants can be related to the pre-Columbian great poet and king Nezahualcoyotl. In the original text, the king announced "Oíd, con atención las lamentaciones que yo . . . hago sobre el imperio, hablando conmigo mismo, y presentándolo a otros como ejemplo" (Bustamante 253). In the words of Diane Taylor, "Aztec Songs are full of lamentation" (Taylor 368). This means that, as well as other ancient empires, the lamentation was also an element of expression for Native Americans.

In terms of Pacheco's work, *No me preguntes como pasa el tiempo* (1969), presents a dialogue with an ancient and lost reality:

Atrás quedan las ruinas cuyo esplendor mis ojos  
nunca vieron. Ciudades comidas por la selva,  
piedras mohosas en las que no me reconozco  
(Pacheco 13)

Here we see a city that has suffered the passage of time, destruction, whose old splendour has been forgotten. The speaker expresses a distance with a possibly pre-Hispanic dwelling that has long been hidden in the jungle. The

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<sup>41</sup> The emphasis on the organs that form part of the chain of speech is also developed in Carmen Berenguer's *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (1983) and can be reviewed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

voice experiences a nostalgia for something that was not witnessed. The poem moves on to: “Sus habitantes miraron extrañados al náufrago que preguntaba por los muertos” (Pacheco 13). This quotation presents two aspects that can be read as in dialogue with that which Del Río expresses in *Braille*. The poem enunciates a concern about the ruined city and the presence of the castaway, and a reference that is explicit in Del Río’s work with her use of *Argonautica*.

Closer to Del Río’s own context, within Chilean poetry, there are two women poets that have used the lamentation as a cry or clamour. These are Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957) and Delia Domínguez (1931). In the case of Mistral, her poem “Los sonetos de la muerte” (1914) brings a profound lamentation. These lines express grief over the death of a loved one:

¡No le puedo gritar, no le puedo seguir!  
Su barca empuja un negro viento de tempestad  
Retórnalo a mis brazos o le siegas en flor (Mistral 83)

Even though Mistral’s poem does not resent the destruction of a city, her lines are a lamentation in their tone and can be considered as a precedent for Del Río’s work, especially in her use of oceanic imagery: ‘barca’, ‘negro viento’, and ‘tempestad’ are clear examples. The speaker here appeals to God, as expressed earlier in the poem and asks/commands that her beloved one is returned to her arms.

For Delia Domínguez the lamentation takes the shape of a cry. In her book *La tierra nace al canto* (1958), her poetic voice enunciates: “Mi verso es un gemido absoluto / un sueño que dejo ser porque me place” (Domínguez 18). Apart from the autonomous embracing of the cry as an expression of female subjectivity in Domínguez’s quotation, *Braille* offers various references to screaming or crying, when considering Domínguez’s ‘gemido’: ‘Y el verso hecho carne desde los gritos’, ‘Clamores que no la deja respirar’, ‘Luego grita el mantra de tus padres’. Del Río’s lamentations deal with visceral pain and they communicate a cry for awareness, considering the whole book’s emphasis on the exposure of a symbolic blindness.

Finally, *Braille* can indeed be considered a lamentation when studying its tone and some of the elements it depicts within its lines. The importance of darkness, the destruction of the city and hopelessness after a traumatic experience are clear aspects to find in this poem.

### **Classical and Traditional Influences**

Given that this reading of *Braille* presupposes that there is a symbolic blindness that needs to be exposed, the process of reading this text is presumably a method to generate awareness of this. Del Río uses the allegory of the cave, theorised by Plato in 380 BC in *The Republic*, Book VII. *Braille* presents blindness within the darkness of the city and, in that context, the speaker enunciates “Abrir los ojos es andar poniendo seña / o hallar la voluntad de hacerlo por despecho / por venganza a la ceguera” (Del Río 16). The poem establishes the idea that opening one’s eyes does not necessarily imply actual vision, but it can entail attempting to convey signals to raise awareness of a given situation. The word ‘despecho’, that according to the *RAE* dictionary means: “desprecio, desesperación” or “Malquerencia nacida en el ánimo por desengaños sufridos en la consecución de los deseos o en los empeños de la vanidad” (n.a. web), might refer to the speaker’s wish for revenge against blindness. This attitude also implies that the speaker has surpassed her own blindness and her expression seems to describe a way of showing dissidence.

As *Braille* borrows ideas from Plato’s book, there should be a brief description of what Book VII develops. Here, the protagonists of the dialogue—Socrates and Glaucon<sup>42</sup>—discuss the cave allegory. Socrates establishes that a society that lacks education could be understood as one that would have its people “in an underground dwelling like a cave with a long wide entrance facing the light along the whole length of the cave” (Plato 107). This means that cave-dwellers cannot apprehend whatever is outside the cave, the world, by observing reality. Reality is denied to them. In this sense, Socrates indicates “what people in this situation would consider the real world

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<sup>42</sup> Glaucon was an old Athenian who was also a philosopher.

would be nothing other than the shadows of the objects making them” (Plato 109). As the cave has an entrance that allows some light, that is the direction that points towards knowledge and understanding. However, cave-dwellers have never been beyond the cave nor have the awareness that there is a world outside of it. Whatever they get from the intelligible world, that is, reality, is in the form of the shadows they observe reflected on the wall of the cave. This last idea finds an echo in *Braille*, particularly in the section “UN TRAJE QUE TE LLEVE DENTRO”, which addresses Plato’s theory quite directly:

pues la luz nunca le será dada en su forma original . . .  
Clara la risa del que en silencio persigue  
una sombra desnuda pintada en la caverna (Del Río 22)

Plato’s text does not provide evidence of someone keeping watch over the cave dwellers. Del Río’s version of this allegory, however, assumes there is a superior structure or figure that allows—or not—light to enter the cave, especially in the use of the expression ‘nunca le será dada’. This would assume that there is someone granting—or not—access to the light. The tone of the verses here is ironic: ‘clara la risa’, as ‘clara’ can also be understood as clearly lit or visible and uses a word that can be related to clarity in vision to transfer its meaning to laughter. The following line is striking, as the blinded subject chases a naked shadow painted inside the cave, as if s/he were a cave dweller.

Apart from Del Río’s suggestion that there are certain powers that control the amount of light and shadows in the poem—which I relate to knowledge, information and truth, there are more aspects that connect *Braille* to *The Republic*. Returning to Plato’s book, Socrates wonders about the fate of a cave-dweller who, either of his own accord or after being allowed to, can leave the cave. The impact of leaving the cave to see reality would be enormous and unbearable. What Socrates focuses on here are the eyes, which are also central to the interpretation of *Braille*. When a person’s eyes are accustomed to the dark, reaching total light would be initially blinding for them. Socrates enquires if the subject had to “look at the light itself, wouldn’t his eyes hurt and wouldn’t he turn and run back to what he can see and think[?]” (Plato 111). There is a sense of fear of the unknown, which in this

case is truth and reality, and that this subject is not prepared nor ready to face light in itself.

The poem, in a section entitled “HORIZONTE DE PÁJAROS CARNÍVOROS”, uses Plato’s metaphor, appealing to a thief (salteador):

Cuídate pálido salteador  
Ahora que no abre su boca ninguna puerta. . .  
Tú no sabes lo que es un ojo ennegrecido por la luz  
En el pecho guardas sombras (Del Río 31)

The first element to consider is that these lines convey a warning addressed at the thief. ‘Cuídate’ would imply that he may get caught as the speaker now knows ‘the truth’. For this analysis, it will be established that these lines address their own political context by making reference to the thief. It seems to be a coded way to point towards Pinochet, especially through the epithet ‘pálido’ as the General was pale-skinned. He is, then, the thief of democracy, who has taken away institutions and services. He holds information—truth—that he does not wish to share, that is why the voice assumes that there are shadows kept in his chest. Here the voice addresses the thief and complains that he does not know what it means to be dazzled by the light. He lives in complete knowledge of the truth and is not paralysed by seeing it.

All of the above leads to the idea that in *Braille* the enunciating voice has already seen the light and is attempting to share what she has seen with others, that is, all of us who read the poem. The responsibility that holding the truth entails is tremendous as the poem reveals. Seeing the light would imply that the eyes “would be in great pain and. . . he would not be able to see even a single one of what he is now being told are real things” (Plato 111). Metaphorically speaking, this first encounter with the truth marks the whole experience, as it is something too great to understand, hence the effect of dazzling is proportional to the reality being faced.

The truth being implied in *Braille* proves to be inexpressible—which can also be reminiscent of the ineffability of the mystical experience as put forward by San Juan de la Cruz in Spanish Golden Age poetry. Del Río’s speaker tries to articulate a coded truth by giving hints of it, so the blind can interpret the textures of such truth. This would elevate the figure of the poet beyond the aesthetics of any individual text, but as a figure who has a pivotal

role in society that should not be underestimated. Here, Del Río proves that poets can be mediators between a harsh truth and/or reality and an individual who is unaware of either of these. Her poem brings the idea of this truth to an audience, but the information has been issued in bits, so it does not overwhelm. This implies that readers would need to see ‘the truth’ for themselves<sup>43</sup>.

As a consequence of the above, the question of memory is deeply explored in the text. The fourth poem of the first section opens with a direct quotation from Lezama Lima’s poem “Retroceder”, as it appears in his *Antología Poética* (1988): “Abrir los ojos es romperse por el centro”(Del Río 16—her italics). The reference to sight and the breaking of the subject suggest that there is something that it is not possible to bear seeing or understanding. The poem is in dialogue with Lima’s quotation, as “Abrir los ojos no viene a ser una esperanza / ya lo habrá previsto así el de las cursivas cualquier tarde calurosa” (Del Río 16). The one being mentioned as ‘the one of the italics’ refers to the author of the words quoted, Lezama Lima, and the warmth of the afternoons expressed in the poem alludes to the poet’s native Cuba. The voice enunciates that she and Lezama Lima understand that opening one’s eyes means approaching a devastating experience. This might be the reason why *Braille* is encrypted, so as not to symbolically hurt its readers. In this context, the feeling of pessimism remains throughout the poem. Being warned about a difficult or inconvenient truth somehow suggests that bearing the harshness of reality is another matter entirely.

*Braille* approaches post-dictatorship Chile in the construction of a ghostly new city. The last lines of the poem “*Abrir los ojos es romperse por el centro*”<sup>44</sup> are as follows:

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<sup>43</sup> Coincidentally, the film *The Matrix* was also released in 1999. In its own way, it addresses some key issues that seemed to have been relevant considering the emergence of the new millennium  
Neo, the protagonist, asks his leader Morpheus:  
Neo: Why do my eyes hurt?  
Morpheus: Because you’ve never used them before.  
This quotation sheds light on the fact that this film also plays with the idea of reality and being blinded from the truth. *The Matrix* is about simulation, as devised by machines. However, the notion of being awake for the first time can be indeed linked to *Braille* as well as to an older text such as *La vida es sueño*.

<sup>44</sup> Italics from the original text.

“Habría que ser tan valiente para volver” dirá en otro tiempo  
otra urbe más terrible (Del Río 16)

The ‘urbe’ is the city speaking, asserting that bravery is required when returning to confront the carnage and ideological impositions that took place during the regime. The personification of the city can signal the voices from exiles and expresses their fears. In terms of word choice, ‘Volver’ is a concept that is synonymous with ‘Retroceder’—the title of Lezama Lima’s poem previously studied. The idea of a new city can correspond to the country being democratic again after the dictatorship. As democracy ‘returned’, every citizen’s ‘return’ to it seemed to be a frightening experience given the legacy of the regime, especially when considering impunity in crimes against humanity and also regarding the first acute effects of the neoliberalisation of the country. In general terms, the terrible city imagined in the poem is the city in ruins with the many bodies of the victims of Pinochet’s regime, therefore, we can understand Del Río’s poem as a lamentation that cries for those who are dead, or in exile, and for the lost city.

The haunting recent past is central to understanding the lack of certainty about the present in the poem. Memory plays a major role when analysing the strange reality in post-dictatorship Chile, as described in *Braille*. Memory in itself has been hidden, and it is lost from sight like the bodies of those who disappeared during the regime. In this sense, there can be a link between the poem as a lamentation and the questioning for the dead/disappeared through the topos *ubi sunt*, which means, ‘Where are they?’ Magda Sepúlveda claims that Castaway poets are well versed in Hispanic peninsular literature and she adds that “se aprecia en Alejandra Del Río el conocimiento de la tradición española y barroca” (Sepúlveda 86). This is key to consolidate the relevance of the allegory of the cave, especially if considering *La vida es sueño* (1635) by Pedro Calderón de la Barca. Calderón’s work serves as a bridge to connect Plato’s allegory to *Braille* and this confirms Sepúlveda’s acknowledgement of Del Río’s understanding of the Spanish literary tradition.

The connection between Plato's cave and Calderón's play is very close. It could be argued that Plato's allegory is a foundational trope for the Spanish playwright as "the central protagonist of the play begins his/her life in a prison, which takes the form of a cave" (Gómez 87). Therefore, it is assumed that the cave is the beginning of the text, in the same way as in *Braille*. What strikes in a reading of *La vida es sueño* is that Calderón's "characters not only see the illusoriness of the world in general terms, but also. . . a paradoxical and fictitious world where things are not what they appear to be" (Gómez 91). And this is clear in the play, as the main character, Segismundo, wonders: "Luego fue verdad, no sueño; / y si fue verdad, que es otra / confusión y no menor / ¿cómo mi vida le nombra sueño?" (Calderón 2934-2938). This questioning of reality relates to Del Río's speaker fearing that reality is too unbearable to be apprehended directly, therefore, she decides to enunciate the illusory nature of reality in a way that is understood by the blind as if written in Braille.

The main difference between Calderón and Del Río's proposals when considering their interpretations of Plato's allegory is that "Segismundo's grotto does not solely function as a space of ignorance and deception, but rather provides the opportunity for him to gain new knowledge later in the play" (Gómez 92), and this is certainly not the case in *Braille*. The role of the cave there is to provide a classical understanding of it as space to host the ignorant blind dwellers. What is relevant is that the new knowledge is not provided by the fact of being in the cave itself, as the analysis of Calderón suggests, but rather it is grasped through the idea of leaving the cave and seeing what is outside of it, granting cave dwellers the opportunity to question their own reality within the cave. What is beyond it can be understood as the realisation of an epistemological break, as reality is completely different and unintelligible.

In sum, Calderón's use of the allegory of the cave helps to shed light on Del Río's own influences when shaping her own cave in *Braille*. The sense of progress between Plato and Calderón add to the idea that Del Río's poem is not only part of a widely known poetic genre as the lamentation, but it also goes back to classical ideas that had their baroque responses, such as in the

case of *La vida es sueño*. Yet, this is not the only example of *Braille* in dialogue with canonical forms.

An example of this is the use of *ubi sunt* as it is related to dealing with collective memory. The poem “Ceniza del más vasto de los mares” (Del Río 43) opens each stanza with the enquiry: ‘Dónde quedó la memoria’. This questioning is profound in meaning, as that aforementioned memory does not only wonder about those who were disappeared and/or died in the regime. This question addresses memory in the present time of the poem, so that the cave dwellers wonder about themselves and others. By doing this, they would realise their own condition and their position as subjects who cannot apprehend the intelligible world—what is beyond the cave. The poem encourages reflection:

Dónde quedó la memoria y su vocación de argonauta. . .  
la duda y la balsa escandalosa de la duda  
donde a duras penas amarrados al gran mástil. . .  
pero sigue estando atado el atado a la memoria

pero sigue tributando el Hombre a las rocas de su Ítaca (Del Río 43)

The reader—the cave dweller—is supposed to doubt his/her position in the world, to ultimately realise s/he is a symbolic cave dweller. From there, s/he would remember or wonder what was before, what remains of the old city that has been destroyed. From here, it could be understood that the old city is as such before the regime. That in particular would signal what the lost Odysseus is trying to reach. His Ithaca would act as a metaphor of the Castaway poet, and the Castaway speaker’s inability to find a port to dock.

The mixture between the use of *ubi sunt* and maritime imagery in *Braille* promotes a questioning of the past, as there is a search for history that escapes or is concealed from cave dwellers. The poem asks the same question four times: ‘¿dónde quedó la memoria?’ that has three variations: ‘la memoria y su vocación de argonauta’ (repeated at the beginning and the last stanza in the poem), ‘la memoria y su circo de cenizas’ and la ‘memoria y su traje de cenizas’. As memory is linked to a maritime vocation in these lines, the use of the word Argonaut emphasises the quest for—collective—memory. At the same time, the Argonauts’ presence can connect to the Castaways, as being cursed never reaching a port.

### ***Braille as an example of the Impossible Witness.***

The importance of memory in this text is such that, for this study, this poetry collection will be considered as an example of the “impossible witness”. This is a concept introduced in Giorgio Agamben’s book *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (1999). In spite of the differences between the circumstances and the sort of atrocities committed during the Holocaust and the Chilean dictatorship and their different epochs, in principle, there are some aspects regarding the theorisation of testimony that can be transplanted to the Chilean case.

From the perspective of Chilean scholarship, Magda Sepúlveda considered a link between Agamben’s theory and the poetry written during the first post-dictatorship decade. In her words: “uso la idea de testigo imposible para referirme al que vio todo y que, por tanto, la experiencia acabó con su vida. La voz de ese testigo sólo es posible dentro del carácter ficcional de estos poemas” (Sepúlveda 84). This view presupposes an imaginary possibility within a historical impossibility, which is also related to the poets’ age by the time the coup took place. In the case of Alejandra Del Río, born in 1972, she did not witness the first decade of the regime in the same way as an adult, but “those who were children at the beginning of the coup have clear memories of life under the dictatorship” (Ros 107). What is expressed by the poetic speaker in *Braille* is a phenomenon of a posteriori writing, as it combines perspectives on both dictatorship and post-dictatorship times.

The poem in its first section deals with this phenomenon in the following lines: “La maldición del escriba / dice la vida bailando sobre las ruinas” (Del Río 14). Del Río’s choice for the word ‘escriba’ or scribe can relate to testimony, as in the old times the scribe or ‘amaneurense’ is a “persona que tiene como oficio escribir a mano, copiando o poniendo en limpio escritos ajenos, o escribiendo lo que se le dicta” (n.a. web). This means that *Braille*’s imagined speaker poeticises her own history and, for this task being appointed to her, she feels cursed. This fictitious voice is the one in charge of leaving a document that testifies to a given occurrence. Here it seems that the speaker reflects on her role as scribe, as the ‘guide’ for those within the cave. At the

same time, 'la maldición' is also related to the temporality of what is being written or testified about.

The word 'ruinas' emphasises that the poem develops in a setting that is formed of remains as if at war or after civilisation has collapsed. Those ruins symbolically imply that there is a loss of "las ciudades, de la vida pública y de la historia" (Sepúlveda 90)—which reify that this text is an example of the lamentation genre. Since the voice expresses that writing is a curse, it seems that it is always catching up with events after they have happened. This leads to the conclusion that the voice in this poem can be labelled as an impossible witness. Magda Sepúlveda insists that "la fabricación del testigo imposible en la poesía chilena de la Transición nos habla de las dificultades que hemos tenido. . . para asumir los temas de memoria" (Sepúlveda 90). In my view, it both expresses the effects of Del Río having witnessed the turmoil of the dictatorship at a very early age and, at the same time, criticises a democratic transitional process that is deemed as a fiasco.

*Braille* testifies of this failure in the personification of order in the figure of the father. This entity would also be a metaphor to refer to the dictator:

Del Padre solo se aprende con su caída  
no lo anuncian heraldos ni lentejuelas  
al Padre se llega de golpe y porrazo  
puesta la sed en la boca de los hombres (Del Río 17)

The use of the expression 'de golpe' clearly signals the coup that took place in 1973. These verses also reveal that after the fall of the regime—or the Father—there is only learning about his rule. This would imply an awareness that democracy was not what some people expected. As there is no glamour added to the death or fall of the father in the lack of 'heraldos' and 'lentejuelas', the poem expresses a disagreement with this father's authority, especially because it is through 'golpes' and 'porrazos' that it is possible to acknowledge him. 'Puesta la sed en la boca de los hombres' can also refer to the fact that there were those who expected the regime to succeed in order to benefit from it—which is an interpretive aspect that is also shared in the analysis of *La bandera de Chile* by Elvira Hernández.

From Agamben's book, it is likewise important to emphasise that "the witness usually testifies in the name of justice and truth. . . Yet here the value of testimony lies essentially in what it lacks; at its centre it contains something that cannot be borne witness to" (Agamben 34). Therefore, poetic writing opens up spaces to attempt to express some sort of poeticised testimony about a traumatic experience that is impossible to withstand. "Este testigo habla sobre un hecho imposible de decir, de ahí lo figurativo de su lenguaje" (Sepúlveda 85) and this is key to the present analysis, as this language is at the centre of the poem's testimonial and lamentational character. The poem expresses the unsayable in codified verses, as follows:

Y acaso en el rastro que sus pies dejaban  
no te sorprendió nunca husmeando por su sombra  
y en el rumor que dejaba él en cada sitio (Del Río 29)

The speaker/witness is aware that her steps can be monitored, in the use of 'sorprendió husmeando' as if she were doing something forbidden, as a child that spies on adults. Yet, a striking aspect to consider is that the speaker is being followed by a masculine figure, 'él', which can be linked to the ultimate masculine figure explored thus far in the poem: the father. The trace being followed also signals the impossible witness in the sense that it provides the quotation with an air of fantasy, as reminiscent of a fairy tale such as "Hansel and Gretel"—as they left breadcrumbs to trace their own steps. The rumour of this man's presence in different places emphasises blindness, as it points towards hearing.

Agamben's conceptualisation of the impossible witness is useful here, because "whoever assumes the charge of bearing witness. . . knows that he or she must bear witness in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness. But this alters the value of testimony in a definite way; it makes it necessary to look for its meaning in an unexpected area" (Agamben 34). This may indicate that the impossible witness in *Braille* is aware of this impossibility, yet that does not deter the voice from attempting to shed light on what lies behind all the violence exerted during the dictatorship. What lies beyond bodily wounds and the destruction of the city is, according to my reading, the imposition of neoliberalism and its principles.

## A Post-Dictatorship Neoliberal Critique

The neoliberal critique of *Braille* is presented as a pertinent way to interpret the text. I consider it relevant to open the reading as I believe that Plato's cave indeed signals a more symbolic and abstract reading related to neoliberalism as an economic model. For this reason, the first point to make is that Del Río's poem assumes from the start that there is somebody controlling access to light in the cave she imagined. The poem reads: "La luz no le será dada" (Del Río 22). That can be considered a sign of authoritarianism, yet, within a post-dictatorship context, it is more likely to understand it as an allegory for the media and those who control it. The light could imply access to knowledge and facts that are not being shown to those in the cave. My reading suggests that readers are subjects who were blinded throughout the years and this also meant symbolically being displaced to the cave.

For this reading, the ultimate truth—or the light—that is concealed seems to be that life as it is, with increasing inequality and low levels of social mobility, plus the commodification of every service for profit—pensions, healthcare and education, to mention a few—is the natural way that life should be. This meant that paying for services that once were provided by the state became the norm. The media here plays a major role, as they respond to the "construcción de poder simbólico de los grupos de interés" (Álvarez 71) who protect their own capital and interests. In the 1990s, "durante la transición a la democracia, los grupos privilegiados con este orden heredado buscan salvaguardarlo" (Álvarez 72). As such, the Chilean economic elite are trying to do everything in their power to avoid a change of paradigm, as it would affect their businesses.

This interpretation can find an echo in the following lines, as there seems to be an unfolding of the brainwashing process that turns citizens into automatic consumers:

Nunca has salido tampoco.  
Más bien parece que una música vive encerrada en las orejas  
y no dices oídos porque a machetazos  
se han instalado los acordes en tu carne (Del Río 17)

Interestingly, the reference to a person as not having left a given place in the first line is parallel to the idea of leaving the cave. The use of 'tampoco' suggests a collective phenomenon in which it is expected that cave-dwellers do not leave the cave. The voice positions herself as from the perspective of a witness/observer who knows more than the person she is appealing to—most likely the blind reader—as the lines appeal to the second person singular in 'has', 'dices', and 'tu carne'. The personification of music living in entrapment, as if repeating the same tune conveys the idea of brainwashing. This process is violent, as in the following line it is revealed that the song is in the subject's head after his/her ears were hacked at with a machete. The ideological interpretation of this is that the subject was made to think in a given way, which became naturalised after repetition. As these lines are addressing a given 'tú' they are, in a way, focusing on the reader(s). If a subject cannot hear anything else but that tune, it is very unlikely that s/he will be able to consider other thoughts beyond that particular tune being repeated.

This is a clear image of the violent process of brainwashing, or indoctrinating, which has been orchestrated by ones who own the media and, covertly, force the viewers or readers to think in a given way. For Álvarez, the use of the media to defend their interests "constituye una forma simbólicamente violenta de intermediación cultural, diseñada, en última instancia, para generar poder simbólico para grupos de intereses, centradas en que las empresas para las cuales trabajan, acrecienten y consoliden sus posiciones de poder" (Álvarez 77). Even though *Braille* does not address the media directly, I believe it suggests an interpretation which is highly critical of it. Chileans are like the prisoners within the cave, as depicted in *The Republic* or, like Segismundo in *La vida es sueño*, it is likely to find 'reality' quite difficult to discern as the first stage would be the realisation of their own state as prisoners of their own reality.

The poem suggests the idea that the owners of the truth or the light that is shown inside the cave, personified earlier on by the 'salteador' and his acolytes, are now understood as those who control the local media and belong to the economic elite. In this context, the voice denounces the bias that characterises the 'official' account of dictatorship and post-dictatorship times:

De otro modo cuentas la historia  
pero en tu boca ninguna puerta se abrió  
nada en verdad espejeaba tu aliento  
tus ojos eran los ojos del monstruo (Del Río 30)

The poem signals the downfall of history as a process by which those who are in control distort it. These lines use the second person singular, 'de otro modo cuentas la historia', addressing whoever is in power. Here, the 'tú' switches from addressing the reader as in the previous example to appealing to the economic elite. In addition, the poem suggests that the elite have decidedly done this in order not to bring the truth to light as 'ninguna puerta se abrió'. When the poetic voice proposes this as the real, she establishes that whom she speaks to—'tú'—is the one that holds the key to the truth and history. This wording suggests that this person's breath did not convey anything truthful, hence there is a complete distrust in this narrative to the point that that person's eyes resembled a monster. This sort of bogeyman can also be considered a representation of a childhood trauma, which can be linked to the experience of the poet witnessing the dictatorship at a very young age. This particular point would connect both the author and her speaker within the realm of memory.

As the quest for truth is also a search for memory, the poem longs for a country that is gone, as everything about it has changed. In this sense, the nostalgic tone of the poem, the *ubi sunt*, and the confluence of the Greek tradition bring together the impossible witness and the Chilean case in the following lines:

Dónde quedó la memoria y su vocación de argonauta  
dónde los gestos, los gritos, las facciones  
dónde las calles andadas por dentro y todos sus monstruos  
dónde los besos, las banderas, cada pedestal de dios  
en esta noche, en este vasto mar de ceniza casi ajena  
(Del Río 43).

The use of *ubi sunt* is clear in the beginning of four of these lines as they begin with 'dónde' and this questioning concerning whereabouts goes back to an idea of a life that is long gone. For example, 'gestos', 'gritos', 'las calles', 'besos', 'banderas', among others imply that even the simplest of things are not to be taken for granted. This questioning by the speaker is after she has

left the cave. As a consequence, her realisation of a new order turns her into a castaway and she seems to be missing life as she knew it before her experience in the cave.

The Greek tradition here is relevant in the first line and in the reference to Argonauts and monsters. The impossible witness is identified when the voice expresses a distancing from the ashes that are spread in the sea. She enunciates 'casi ajena', meaning that those ashes can indeed signal others who may or may not be related to her. That last expression evidences that what is being represented was not witnessed nor lived but poetically imagined and reifies the poetic application of Agamben's theoretical construct.

Following this idea, *Braille* keeps trying to express the inexpressible, especially considering that there is a reason behind cave dwellers being kept in the cave. This is added to the distortion of history by the imposition of a given discourse, because those who own the media are the same ones that have imprinted the tune in the subject, as it was examined in previous quotations. The lack of referents is expressed through the following commands:

Dale a tu país el fruto extraño de una bandera  
pues toda esquina merece un ícono  
de madera o de metal o del viento de los peregrinos  
para que pregonen en las historias un suelo hecho de parches  
(Del Río 44).

Again, Del Río's poetic discourse plays with the addressee in the use of 'dale'. The imperative tone of these lines is in opposition to those who hold power, as they are the ones that normally give orders. The voice here takes a challenging stance. Hence, part of the reality being uncovered in the interpretation of this poem comprises the fabrication of the concept of 'patria'. The appearance of the flag is of a rather ambiguous nature, as the first verse can be understood as an icon on a corner. In any case, the flag presents some strangeness and inexplicability, so the following line reinforces the lack of a referent, as the flag is now a vacuous icon that is needed as image and not necessarily as meaning. The presence of this ambiguous flag can echo Elvira Hernández' poem *La Bandera de Chile* (1981), as discussed in Chapter 3. Hernández's poem, in an utterly ironic and foreshadowing tone, announces

that the country will keep changing and that the market will lead people's lives. The idea of democracy as an illusion in post-dictatorship Chile is further developed in this reading of *Braille*, thus the air of despondency in its verses. The second aspect to consider in these lines is that history becomes fragmented, as 'un suelo hecho de parches'. Those patches would be a symbol of a broken surface, of different segments stitched together, as something that underlies everything, a patchwork, not something concrete or uniform. The idea of 'patria' lies on that patch, on those bits and pieces that somehow resemble a flag, because it is necessary to have one, to establish a fabricated referent. Interestingly, this is possible to interpret as a follow-up of Hernández's poetic proposal in *La bandera*.

*Braille* moves on to emphasise that the newly constructed 'patria' has been shaped to serve the purpose of a profit-driven agenda, which is central to my research on a poetic neoliberal critique:

No edifiques cementerios y confíate duradero, pues en tu país la  
vida hace pagar caro todo instante recuperado de la muerte.

Y levanta tu país como una torre en el exacto lugar del llanto

(Del Río 44).

As part of the same poem from page 44 previously quoted, these lines begin with an imperative, but in this case in the negative form with 'no edifiques'. It seems as though Del Río's poem here conveys that every instant that a person receives prior to death is subject to commodification. 'La vida hace pagar caro' seems a rephrasing of the fixed expression 'Lo pagarás caro', which is understood as a direct threat in Spanish. The 'tú' being addressed in these lines is the reader. When the speaker enunciates, she uses the appellative 'en tu país' to refer to Chile, and a Chilean readership. The tone of these lines also seems ironic, signalling a struggling position with what is being poeticised. The poem reveals that in Chile all aspects of life have become assets and that every moment of life can be traded in the market. I believe this is one of the most compelling examples of a neoliberal critique in this work. What is more, it confirms the relevance of a neoliberal critique of poetry in particular.

From this example, it is possible to extrapolate that some lines are ambiguous enough to provide more than one reading. I believe these lines express the fear that history can repeat itself. ‘Y levanta tu país como una torre en el exacto lugar del llanto’—as if understanding the building as a memorial<sup>45</sup>. Hence, the importance of erecting a tower, never to forget what has happened. This particular line can be read as an economic critique if we consider that the place where the cries were silenced is where the tower of neoliberalism was built.

The criticism of the Chilean transition can be understood in an interpretation that integrates the commodification of life, which is expressed in the previous quotation. The disappointment with the transition may lie in the fact that many of the reforms made during the dictatorship were not severely changed when Chile regained its democracy.

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<sup>45</sup> This is clearly in dialogue with what Elvira Hernández did with her imagined ‘Empire Chilean’ in *La bandera de Chile*, see page 109.

### 4.3 Conclusions

Alejandra Del R o's poem *Escrito en Braille* is a compelling example of Chilean poetry that both deals with and criticises key topics within a post-dictatorship context. Firstly, its pessimistic tone makes it a lamentation, thus, the poem communicates that there is no way out of the trauma expressed in its lines. This helps situate Del R o's poem in a long-standing tradition of cries and reactions to a traumatic experience. There are striking similarities between this interpretation of *Braille* and others that were examined that studied what Jeremiah expressed in *The Book of Lamentations*. This resonance elevates *Braille* as it is not only a poem to be categorised as a Castaway poem, but also as a text that develops a form of expression that has conveyed mourning and grief for the last 4,000 years.

As Del R o's poem fits into the description of Castaway poetry, it can be argued that Castaway poetry questions the notion of history as a narrative. From this reading of *Braille*, it is possible to understand history as being in perpetual flux, because the poem expresses the idea of floating in history, with a speaker not knowing where she came from or where she is going—which can be symbolically linked to Chile's recent past. The maritime images in the poem, such as the reference to *Argonautica* and *The Odyssey* allow me to establish that *Braille* is indeed *un poema naufrago*<sup>46</sup>. The only certainty is that there is a fragmented memory that seems to be aware of violence and lack of freedom. What links the past and the present is the criticism of Chilean democracy, which began in 1990. The Castaways—not only the poet, but also the speaker and the readers once liberated from the cave—would never reach port, as there is not one, as if rewriting Homer's epic by announcing that Odysseus would never reach his Ithaca. There is no return or recovery of an idyll, i.e. Unidad Popular or Allende's times, it is forever changed by the dictatorship.

The second topic to mention is that the poem delves into something more profound than a critique of the violence during the dictatorship, which is understood in the use of Plato's allegory of the cave. In order to achieve this,

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<sup>46</sup> My italics.

the poem develops a voice that can be interpreted from the perspective of the “impossible witness”, as described by Giorgio Agamben. As the voice enunciating the poem is fictitious, she can give hints that she has been enlightened, that is, she has witnessed the blinding truth. From first being blinded by the media, she subsequently was blinded, again this time by the shining light and the horrors of the real world—she went from utter darkness to total dazzling light. The speaker attempts to share this truth in a manner that is not direct, as this would overwhelm the subjects who are still within the cave. For this reading, the truth that is grasped when feeling the textures of the poem reveals a deep concern over the commodification of everyday life and its resulting inequality, which is an aspect that is shared in other poems, such as *La Bandera de Chile* (1981) by Elvira Hernández. The main difference between Hernández and Del Río’s cases lie in the fact that the former anticipated an economic disaster and the latter was already observing the consequences of neoliberal reform. There is a sense of progression when considering a neoliberal poetic critique between the 1980s and the 1990s, which consolidates my hypothesis.

Furthermore, the poem’s pessimistic tone can also indicate a criticism of the present in economic terms. The reason for this is the unlikeliness or impossibility of reacting after knowing the truth. If the truth is hard to bear, it is even harder to find a way out of it. This implies that pessimism is necessary in order to make sure that the blindness being conveyed in the poem is understood in the way the poem means to—which I believe was achieved in the present reading—because the hopeless present was shaped by a very dark and violent recent past. Del Río imagined that her city is in sheer darkness, perhaps implying that there is no other way of imaging it.

From another perspective, it is possible to conclude that there is a sense of progression within the poem itself, which can be considered more positively. The first questionings in the poem deal with the lack of having the means to express oneself. In this case, the voice acknowledges that it is necessary to recover the mouth and the voice. Those voices are devoid of any ‘I’—, which mirrors what Carmen Berenguer did with some parts of her *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (1983)—as recovering both mouth and voice is

relevant to everybody, to all the blind/cave dwellers. The poem concludes by addressing the reader that commands him/her to say a variety of things: “Di si encenderán las praderas de la sangre /di si es que del charco o de la Fuente beberán tu imagen reflejada / . . . Di si naces vivo de la muerte” (Del Río 48). This means that the voice has been recuperated, as knowing the truth allows the reader to have his/her own opinion. The poem does not deal with what might happen after the truth is discovered, but it urges its readers to express themselves with the imperative ‘Di’. That signals that there can be a chance to overcome the symbolic castration perpetrated by those who own the media and that blindness and muteness can be surmounted. As a result, the ability to protest is there to be used. Here is the poem’s symbolic victory: the speaker paves the way for readers to decode the truth, and to subvert it through subjective expression. From ‘la boca es necesario recuperar’, the text closes with ‘Di’, and this can be considered, in its own merit, an alternative transition.

## CHAPTER 5

*Uranio* (1999) by Marina Arrate:

A Neobaroque Work Resisting Individuality through Love

*Féretros alegóricos!*  
*Sótanos metafóricos!*  
*Pocillos metonímicos!*  
*Ex-plícito!*  
*Hay Cadáveres*  
Néstor Perlonguer

### 5.1 Introduction

Marina Arrate (1957) is a Chilean poet, critic and psychologist. Her poetic work began in 1985 and, so far, she has published 8 poetry collections. She was awarded the Premio Municipal de Poesía de Santiago for her fifth book, *Trapecio* in 2003. This chapter will focus on her fourth poetry collection, *Uranio*, published in 1999.

The present analysis of *Uranio* will firstly consider the text as an example of the neobaroque. In order to situate *Uranio* in this category, it is relevant to review a general chronology of the baroque and neobaroque in the Hispanic world. From a Chilean perspective, for Luz Ángela Martínez

El barroco se presenta como expresión y legibilidad de distintas épocas y estadios de globalización en Hispanoamérica y luego en Latinoamérica, de tal manera que no aludimos a lo mismo si es que hablamos del Barroco de Indias (siglo XVI y la primera globalización); del Barroco americano (primera mitad del siglo XX); o del Neobarroco (siglo XX y XXI) (Martínez 186).

Martínez's approach is very useful to understand the development of different Latin American aesthetics that are marked by their history. When she separates the Indian baroque from the American kind, Martínez establishes a chronology that firstly describes a phenomenon caused by discovery and colonisation—which, for her, is the first globalisation. For example, a key author from the Spanish Empire—in current Mexico—was Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-1695) who was part of an otherwise “barroco literario [que] es

un monopolio masculino y una forma cultural masculinista” (Beverley 224). Sor Juana is a big example of a challenging baroque, as she is established as a part of a “barroco letrado” (Beverley 226) which at the same time generated tensions in the male-centred culture of her epoch.

What Martínez refers to as ‘Barroco americano’ is a more contemporary (first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) literature that explored the excesses of the continent—in historical, cultural and political terms—and write from within it. These texts would express the baroque but, at the same time, also define its reach. From ‘Barroco americano’ there is a more distinct detachment from the submission to colonisers’ impositions; rather, these texts would put them into question. A good example is Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980) as John Beverley clearly states, “según la conocida consigna de Alejo Carpentier, en América Latina se escribe en barroco porque el continente mismo es barroco” (Beverley 225). In this sense, in literature, “para Carpentier y Lezama, el barroco es el arte auténticamente hispanoamericano” (Galindo 88). From here, the remaining question is what differentiates ‘el barroco’ from ‘el neobarroco’ in Latin American literatures.

The latest part of Martínez’ chronology is the neobaroque and she justifies it as, “el Neo-barroco da razón de sí *como otra vez el Barroco* y repone el primer Barroco como una falla de la cultura y de la historia y. . . obliga a pensar la cultura (la nuestra) como un fenómeno de cortes profundos” (Martínez 198). From this, I would argue that ‘el Neobarroco’ in Chile is mostly the result of the change of an economic paradigm that generated an epistemological break, understood within the logic of a neoliberal society. This new paradigm would be marked by the violence of its imposition—during Pinochet’s regime—and also the violence of the inequalities that arise as a consequence of its policies. Martínez delves into this idea by indicating that “El Neobarroco chileno del periodo de la dictadura también conoce de la violencia como dispositivo rearticulador de la conciencia al régimen de un *nuevo real* y, por lo tanto, sabe de la necesidad de ir ‘más allá’ del silencio” (Martínez 205). This means that baroque and neobaroque expressions respond to great displays of violence, from the time of the colonisers, to the more contemporary influence of the US understood as neocolonialism, and to dictatorships that

reshaped the economic and cultural landscapes of the societies they dominated.

It can be then asserted that the neobaroque assumes “un arte de la contraconquista” (Galindo 88). That is to say, an exercise in both resistance and appropriating spaces colonised by the violence of certain structures, and here I would specify two of them—neoliberalism and patriarchy—at the centre of contemporary poetic scrutiny in Chile, particularly from the perspective of the corpus selected for this thesis. In this context, I argue that *Uranio* by Marina Arrate belongs to a neobaroque aesthetic because: a) Arrate writes from the residue of the deepest of fractures in contemporary Chilean history which is Pinochet’s regime. b) Arrate rewrites religious episodes and folk tales to subvert the very fracture from where the text originates, and c) the text develops what Severo Sarduy explained in his foundational essay, “El barroco y el neobarroco” (1979) by claiming that “el neobarroco refleja estructuralmente la inarmonía, la ruptura de la homogeneidad, del logos en tanto que absoluto, la carencia que constituye nuestro fundamento epistémico” (Sarduy 183). From this, it can be understood that the neobaroque text would seek to provoke tensions and breaks in traditional, logocentric meanings and this is precisely what Arratian writing attempts in *Uranio*. According to Martínez, “el Neobarroco que se desarrolla durante el (oscuro) esplendor de la economía neoliberal, cuando Chile deja de ser un laboratorio social en condiciones de borde” (Martínez 211) and it generates creations that do explore this darkness, yet attempts to find a way to overcome it. Arrate’s poetry in general could be understood as expressive of neobaroque ideas and tensions—and *Uranio* would be at the core of post-dictatorship neobaroque responses to its own context.

This chapter will provide a brief review of Marina Arrate’s poetic work previous to *Uranio* so as to understand that this text is in dialogue with her prior production. Also, there will be a survey of what has been written about *Uranio* and Arrate’s writing in both Chilean and international literary critical circles. The analysis will follow the structure of the book, as it is divided into three parts. First, the analysis of “La ciudad muerta” will engage with the neobaroque nature of the poem, including the study of biblical references. Then, in “El hombre de los lobos”, the references to sheep and wolves as part of a larger

contemporary Chilean poetic tradition, when studying the works of Manuel Silva Acevedo (1976) and Rosabetty Muñoz (1981). Finally, “El deseo más profundo” shows the poem’s proposal to resist individualism and alienation through love and sexuality. This last part will also interpret the poem as engaging in criticism of neoliberal principles.

### **Marina Arrate’s Literary Career Prior to *Uranio***

Arrate’s writing is characterised by an interest in criticising stereotypical images imposed on women. She develops a woman-centred aesthetic that confronts dictatorship and post-dictatorship contexts in terms of their masculine dominance. The main subversive feature of Arratian literature is the erotic, and from there she engages with the neobaroque, as “todo el barroco no es más que una hipérbole, cuyo ‘desperdicio’ veremos que no por azar es erótico” (Sarduy 170). This study intends to analyse such eroticism and its meaning within a Chilean context.

Arrate’s poetic literary career began when she published *Este lujo de ser* in 1986, an enigmatic work that begins with a questioning of the ideals of beauty. In “Pintura de ojos”, Arrate describes the movements for a woman to put on her own eye make-up. This slow and winding movement becomes erotic and anatomic. “Se desliza el pincel preciso / sobre las pestañas del párpado superior. / Desde el lagrimal hasta el vértice / una línea oscura se extiende aún más allá” (Arrate 4). An action taken for granted for most women becomes an adventure of precision and millimetric accuracy. The eroticism in Arrate’s writing is identified from her first poems, section 5 of “Pintura” reads:

la boca ahora se moja  
y se paladea el placer.  
El ojo negro penetra desde el  
espejo el gusto de mirarse (*Este lujo 7*)

The abundant poetic techniques found in these lines, such as echoes or the alliteration of plosives, for instance, emphasise the erotic of Arrate’s style and imagery. Her readers find a woman putting make-up on her eyes, describing the process of using mascara in such a way that the poem suggests a masturbatory scene. What is interesting about this is that there is sexuality

without the phallus—in spite of the use of the verb ‘penetrar’—in a woman who can enjoy herself even in the most mundane of activities.

*Este lujo* moves from the erotic to depictions of the city, Santiago, by writing about famous landmarks. For instance, the poem “Huelén”, which makes reference to the original Mapuche naming of current Cerro Santa Lucía, right in the centre of the Chilean capital. The city is an aspect that is also characteristic of *Uranio*, although Arrate’s speaker there does not refer as directly to Santiago as in *Este lujo*.

It is rather obvious that the most important poem in the collection is “Este lujo de ser” which addresses the issue of being a woman. The poem opens with: “Este lujo de ser / esta aparatosa maquinaria este trapecio / esta migratoria contorsión este va y ven” (Arrate 14); it seems like the irony in “Este lujo de ser” is that the subject does not grasp her own existence, she cannot define it, only acknowledge it. The lack of a place but an itinerant identity is repeated in the poem in both “va y ven”—an interesting construction when considering that the word ‘vaivén’ already implies movement. Arrate’s deconstruction of the word into three parts emphasises the idea of her speaker depicting a movement as if in a pendulum. She is in a constant movement, attempting to understand her place in the world, the meaning of her existence, yet in the end her existence is a nomadic one. It is important to note that Arrate returns to this idea in her 2002 work *Trapecio*.

What is interesting about Arrate’s first work is that, at least on the surface, she does not seem to address any aspects related to the political context the country is living. By 1986 both Carmen Berenguer and Elvira Hernández had made their own poetic statements concerning their rejection of Pinochet’s regime. Arrate’s poetry seems to be centred on challenging the traditional position of women, as her writing depicts a woman who makes the decision to wear a mask in order to be seen in public, a woman who respects her secrecy and deals with her own sexuality in the intimacy of her personal space. What is more, her writing suggests “un doble despliegue de sensación y conocimiento” (Muñoz 4) which can be an oblique reference to Arrate’s political context. Her poem’s title stating ‘Este lujo’ may be an ironic stance. In sum, Arrate seems to be directing her text towards a reflection on self-consciousness for women.

After *Este lujo*, she published *Máscara negra* in 1990. This second book is completely focused on make-up and women's stereotypical beauty. The first poem is called "La modelo rojo", and apart from the gendered ambiguity in its title, there is a degree of lesbian eroticism in the poem: "Si yo maquillo su boca / su inferior pequeño labio rojo / avanza / goloso y redondeado / y ella misma / los labios entreabiertos" (*Máscara* 15). Here, the speaker liaises with a model or mannequin, or even herself and, therefore, she interacts with another, be it a person, an object or a psyche. It is possible to acknowledge it as another woman, a transvestite—or herself in the mirror—as if considering some descriptions and movement: "Si recojo la larga / y encarnada cabellera entre mis manos / haciéndola reposar solo en un hombro" (*Máscara* 15).

The poem mainly develops the idea of a lesbian relationship or, at least, a case of agalmatophilia: "tocaría sus caderas lamería su cintura. . . / mis deseos entre sus labios y queriendo / para mí su alabastro. . . / enterraría / mis ansias a su siga" (*Máscara* 16). Here the voice enunciates a wish to penetrate her object of desire, however, this is one that is developed in an imaginary realm, as the poem closes with "En consecuencia, / y con prudencia, / he decidido escribirla" (*Máscara* 16), which implies that this desire is only concrete within the exercise of writing<sup>47</sup>. Sexuality here once more does not require a phallus, which is an aspect that emphasises a woman's sexual independence and that the male organ is not necessary to reach an orgasm. Symbolically, there is a subversive discourse, as the role of the penetrating male does not exist, nor is needed.

*Tatuaje* (1992) is Arrate's third poetry book. The text plays with references to the body, different textures, fabrics and fur. As with her other previous poems, Arrate's verses remain mostly erotic. However, the most important aspect to consider is that she is developing an even more baroque aesthetic. As a tattoo is a body inscription, the body itself is used as a surface on which to scribble or draw images. Tattoos, in principle, would also be a subversive practice if considering traditional warnings against them, as in the book of *Leviticus*, tattooing appears to be forbidden: "Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor make any marks upon you: I am the

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<sup>47</sup> This is an aspect that is explored in Chapter 6 that analyses ©Copyright (2003) by Nadia Prado.

LORD” (Leviticus 19:28). This means that from the perspective of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, tattoos would be an affront to God’s authority. Arrate’s poem though, suggests a primitive and pagan origin to tattooing, as any sharp element could eventually serve the purpose of leaving a scar, or a mark in a body:

Se taracea  
por punción  
con aguja o punzón . . .  
o con peine de espinas de palma . .  
o con huesos de ave marina . . .  
o con pincel de fibra de coco (*Tatuaje 29*)

The pyramid-like shape of the poem also signals a pagan imagery, which would be contrary to the precepts of the Judeo-Christian God. Also, the repetition of the plosive ‘p’ in these lines can highlight a sort of movement as one in which the skin is being operated upon. The subversive nature of these lines addresses God’s prohibition as tattoos would depict images from a variety of cultural roots:

Signos mágicos o conjuros  
Figuras de peces, lagartos, figuras extrañas,  
O la imagen del sol en la frente,  
O un triángulo en el monte de Venus  
O enlazadas serpientes las egipcias en los senos  
O cruces las católicas el día de la Anunciación  
O paraísos los fieros heréticos en la espalda  
O el Gran Señor furioso los samuráis (*Tatuaje 30*)

Thus far, this is the greatest example of neobaroque writing in Arrate’s work. The chaotic enumeration of cultural symbols, apart from depicting the multiplicity of possibilities in tattooing, suggests that the text presents elements from the neobaroque as “su presencia es constante sobre todo en forma de enumeración disparatada, acumulación de diversos nódulos de significación, yuxtaposición de unidades heterogéneas, lista dispar y *collage*” (Sarduy 170). It seems as though the East and the West are diluted categories, as both are within the same ‘otherness’ for the speaker, somehow indicating that all cultures are within one world and all can be considered ‘other’ or foreign. This particular point is of paramount relevance in Arrate’s work because we

encounter women's double negation as an "insilio' doble: colonización y mestizaje, por una parte; por otra, la violencia que aloja en sí el signo cultural que nombra a la mujer como secundaria, políticamente descartada en la invisibilidad cultural" (Brito 89). Therefore, Arratian writing helps to respond to this cultural invisibility.

Arrate's following book was a compilation of earlier works, entitled *Compilación de obra publicada* (1996), and included a new poem called "El hombre de los lobos" which later on became the second section of *Uranio*. So, after the production of several books, Arrate wrote *Uranio* which can be seen as a summary of her ideas relating to the female body, eroticism and the darkness surrounding her poetic speaker(s). This darkness can be understood and interpreted as an aspect that came as a consequence of the end of the dictatorship, and the difficulties of addressing memory issues in Chile. In the context of her earlier work, *Uranio* is Arrate's most politically engaged poem to date. I will argue that Arratian poetry is immensely political, although she does not refer to these issues directly. The implicitness in her discourse is also shared by Carmen Berenguer and Alejandra Del Río, authors also studied in this thesis. It seems as though Elvira Hernández has been the only poet from the cohort so far to explicitly condemn the dictatorship, its politics and suggest a tragic aftermath for it.

### **Academic Responses to *Uranio***

Most of what is available on Arrate's writing is in the form of newspaper review articles. It is important, though, to consider an article by Jaime Valdivieso, entitled "En la huella de Gabriela" (1993), in which he praises Arrate's work placing it in line with Mistral's. He asserted that "desde Gabriela Mistral que no surgía en Chile un poeta con tanta fuerza, con tanto sentido de lo trágico" (Valdivieso n.p.). His words argue that Arrate's poetry needs to be considered within a corpus that includes the most compelling manifestations of Chilean letters. In light of this, Eliana Ortega wrote a short commentary on Arrate's work for the *Encyclopedia of Latin American and Caribbean Literature, 1900-2003*:

Drawing on her experience as a psychologist and critic, Arrate's writing constitutes an exploration of female identity, possibly the darkest area of Latin American experience. Within women's poetry and the variety of national poetic conventions, her voice stands out as a liberating project, with her themes of love and eroticism (Ortega 38).

Internationally, this seems to be the only reference to her work, apart from a translation of some excerpts from *Uranio*. Clearly, Arrate's work is regarded from a gendered perspective and there is a need to pay attention to her use of eroticism, and her depiction of love. This latter point is very important to the analysis of *Uranio*, as I seek to propose that the poem establishes love as the ultimate force to battle against isolation, alienation and the individuality fostered by neoliberalism.

With regards to criticism, most articles about Arrate's work have been published by the Universidad de Concepción's literary journal *Acta Literaria*, and the majority comment on Arrate's earliest works. There is little written on *Uranio* in general. The most relevant texts that analyse this book are: "Puntada maestra y Marina Arrate poeta" by Marta Contreras (2002), "Disfraces y reversos en la poesía chilena contemporánea (el imaginario poético de Marina Arrate)" by Eugenia Brito (2009), "Sujeto, cuerpo y espiritualidad en la escritura de Marina Arrate" by Carolina Muñoz (2009) and "El peso del Uranio" by Leonidas Rubio (2009). Contreras, Brito and Muñoz' texts review Arrate's total production up to the early 2000s and only devote a few paragraphs to analysing *Uranio*. Rubio's article is entirely devoted to this work, but it is a rather short text and does not provide any quotations from the poem. Nevertheless, his article is relevant to the present analysis and will be considered as a reference. Carolina Muñoz's doctoral thesis was focused on Arrate's work, and her paper "Lectura cinética de las secuencias de unidades poéticas. El avatar en la escritura de Marina Arrate" (2009) develops a more specific study of *Uranio*. Her work, whilst containing very long quotations from the poem, is relatively brief in its analysis. The present chapter is, therefore, the most thorough study of *Uranio* to date.

## 5.2 Analysis

The first aspect to consider prior to an analysis of *Uranio* is a recollection of symbols related to the book's title. According to Leonidas Rubio, it is "un mineral, un dios y un planeta" (Rubio n.p.). In chemical terms, uranium is a highly radioactive element used in nuclear weapons, and also to generate energy. This means that it is dangerous and contact with it can lead to death. From this, Arrate's book can be considered a text to handle with extreme care. Its front cover shows the images of a scanned brain that has a tumour—which in my reading can be interpreted as the cancerous neoliberal mindset that rules the imaginary in *Uranio*. Therefore, the radioactive nature of uranium seems a good enough connection to make if cancer is considered. Secondly, the deity, Uranus is a mythological god that represents the sky. Hesiod's *Theogony* (700 BC) tells the story of Uranus (the sky) and Gaia (the earth) conceiving the Titans, deities of great strength that represented the forces of nature or some human traits. Uranus would represent ancient power. Thirdly, the planet Uranus, the seventh of the Solar system, was indeed named after the Greek god. However, there are no references to the planet or outer space in the poem.

### **The Neobaroque in *Uranio*: Examples from "La ciudad muerta"**

The first element to analyse in a reading of *Uranio* is the use of silences. "La ciudad muerta" opens after five deliberately blank pages—as do the other two sections of the book. The publishers, LOM, ensured these numbered blank pages would be considered as meaningful for any reading, as after the book's title page, the following one reads "\* Todas las páginas en blanco hacen parte de la concepción de la edición del libro por parte de su autora" (n.a n.p.). Therefore, an interpretation of this silence is in order. As the textual element opens with images of a destroyed city, the silence prior to the written poem could mean, for instance, a minute's silence for those who died and/or the silence after an apocalyptic devastation. In both cases, there is a reading related to a disastrous and destructive situation. The ruined city is a consequence of an event that the reader does not know directly, but it is possible to guess considering Chilean recent history, but unlike her own work

in *Este lujo* (1986) or Gonzalo Millán's *La ciudad* (1979), there are no direct clues to Chile or Santiago.

A neobaroque understanding of *Uranio* seems in place, for "la ciudad se descentra. . . la literatura renuncia a su nivel denotativo, a su enunciado lineal; desaparece el centro único en el trayecto" (Sarduy 168). *Uranio's* first section, "La ciudad muerta" indeed shows a decentring and that there has been a reversal in the order of its microcosm. Arrate celebrates death in a carnivalesque manner. The poem begins with the image of the mirror, a reflection of the city. Here it is important to highlight the use of mirrors as an Arratian motif that would suggest the impossibility of bearing witness to the reality being presented in a direct way. That reality would be such that it would need reflections to be approached obliquely. The poem opens:

Este es el ruin espejo de una ciudad  
vacilante entre el rumor aciago  
de aguas pudibundas y el esplendor  
carmesí de los yertos edificios (Arrate 13)

The use of "ruin" can address both evilness and the idea of the city in ruins. Interestingly, the reflection presented by the poem does not allow readers to perceive the city in itself, as it would be an image too hard to bear. In this poem, Arrate "[indaga sobre] los fantasmas espectrales de una ciudad que ha perdido lugar en el espacio nacional. . . El paisaje que ofrece la ciudad tercermundista es apocalíptico y final" (Brito 93-94). This means that the imaginary is a sort of purgatory or hell that reveals the city of Santiago after the apocalypse that the dictatorship represented. That is to say, what is depicted in "La ciudad muerta" is the Chilean transition seen from the lenses of an Arratian imaginary.

The poem guides the reading from the start, the landmark of the Virgin and the hill implied in the act of descending is a clear reference to Cerro San Cristóbal, a point from where most of Santiago city can be seen:

Ah, Virgen, continua compañera.  
Con ella bajé al paraje absurdo (Arrate13)

This localization allows the readers to decode Arrate's criticism of the Chilean transition. The absurd place is the postdictatorship capital, and its absurdity lies in what was inherited from the regime, especially the dead, as they symbolise those who were killed and disappeared by it. As a neobaroque text is subversive by definition, its reading has to consider that the neobaroque presupposes the resistance to certain types of domination. In Arrate's case it is not hard to find a criticism of postdictatorship times, and that the absurdity being poeticised can also include the realm of neoliberalism.

Arrate's previous books, such as *Este lujo* (1986) and *Tatuaje* (1992), for instance, show Arrate's production in what Eugenia Brito defined as "suntuoso. . . manteniendo un camino político de escritura, tanto en los temas como en las formas" (Brito 93). Therefore, this sumptuous work can be enhanced by a neobaroque aesthetic. This favours my reading of the text, as it seeks for a critique of Latin America from within itself, here with special focus on Chile post-Pinochet. It is clear that Arrate's political stance goes towards the criticism of the social abandonment caused by neoliberalism. She achieves this in the first section of *Uranio* by developing a carnival:

Alhajas tintineantes portaban las tráqueas paupérrimas  
Vi costillas de nácar y plata y pulseras de amatista y anillos  
de luz láser y fémures violetas, ambiguos, incandescentes  
y bamboleantes coronas de oro sobre las albas calaveras (Arrate 16)

For Severo Sarduy, the excess and the parody of opulence generate "el carnaval, espectáculo simbólico y sincrético en que reina lo 'anormal', en que se multiplican las confusiones y profanaciones, la excentricidad y la ambivalencia, y cuya acción central es una coronación paródica, es decir, una apoteosis que esconde una irrisión" (Sarduy 175). In consequence, what Arrate expresses is the anti-carnival, with all its gloss, neon lights and colours. All those dismembered bodies do not make up one complete subject. Behind all that simulation, there is the void. This void is filled by the nothingness that represents the lack of understanding of postdictatorship Chile, the lack of information about Pinochet's victims, and the lack of humanity of neoliberalism after the privatisation of all public services. The abundance of body parts and precious stones generates an imagery of horror, a celebration of the abject, the dead. The dismembering of society and the elevation of materialism, are

expressed repeatedly in “La ciudad muerta”, emphasising that “el reino de la muerte es lujoso. . . como si esos decorados fueran la única manifestación posible ante la nada” (Brito 94), which is the void I had previously mentioned. For Eugenia Brito, the context surrounding *Uranio* is a clear one: “Chile en la sociedad post-Pinochet” (Brito 94) and, from this statement, the understanding of this poem goes hand in hand with Arrate’s expression of disappointment with the new democracy.

Arrate’s speaker takes up the word and orders the bodies to move, to rise up, as if her voice was a sacred one that would fill those bodies with the life they no longer possess:

Cadáveres somnolientos, álcense de sus tumbas, álcense derrotados lázaros. Yergan sus hesitantes calaveras, respondan (Arrate 20)

Here the poem begins to dialogue with biblical texts, be it the Gospels, as when Jesus resurrected Lazarus, Ezekiel’s ‘Valley of the Dry Bones’, or as in the book of *Revelations* where it is promised that the dead will come to life in the second coming of Christ. In the case of St. John, the episode of Lazarus’s resurrection is stated as follows: “Y quitaron la piedra. Jesús levantó los ojos al cielo y exclamó: ‘Te doy gracias Padre porque me has escuchado. . . Al decir esto, gritó con fuerte voz: ‘Lázaro, sal fuera’” (*San Juan* 11:41-43). Christ verbalises the need to resurrect Lazarus and demands him to come to life. In the case of Ezekiel’s text, the prophet explains that “Yavé me hizo salir por medio de su espíritu. Me depositó en medio de un valle que estaba lleno de huesos humanos” (*Ezequiel* 37:1-2), and in that place God speaks and commands the bones: “Haré que entre un espíritu en ustedes y vivirán” (*Ezequiel* 37:3). Conversely, St John’s *Revelations* testifies that “Y vi a los muertos grandes y pequeños, de pie ante el trono. . . el mar devolvió los muertos que guardaba, y también la Muerte y el Lugar de los muertos devolvieron los muertos que guardaban” (*Apocalipsis* 20:12-13), here the dead come to life and St. John is the witness of such massive resurrection that includes the bodies of those who died, as if their bodies could be reconstructed from disintegration. When Arrate’s speaker asks/orders the bones to rise, it rewrites the Christian texts and resignifies these narratives, in a subversive gesture that reappropriates them. She positions the poetic voice as one who, through the word, can give life—just like God in the book of *Genesis*, or the

*Gospel of St John* as it opens with “En el principio era el verbo (la palabra)” (*Juan* 1:1). From this, it can be understood that Arrate’s gesture is clearly neobaroque, as it takes an originally foreign belief, Catholicism, understood as one that was imposed by the colonisers, and turns it into a poetic appropriation. What makes Arrate’s poetic proposal even more relevant is that the ‘desaparecidos’ from the regime, the bodies discovered by the speaker, are to be remembered, but not re-membered. Arrate’s poetic gesture here helps to remind readers that literature offers what reality cannot, which is the recovery of body parts that otherwise are lost to oblivion.

The poem moves on to express that there is an ultimate death, in the use of repetition:

Muerte de muertos, dije yo.  
Esas sombras que yacen bajo esas armaduras  
qué son, qué fueron (Arrate 23)

The voice assumes a position and an existence by stating her ‘I’, as little by little “es un lugar que se va conquistando” (Brito 93) which clearly hints at the positioning of the woman subject, historically negated as such. Now it is the woman, summoning the dead, asking them to live, describing the broken city. What is more, it seems as though Arratian writing paves the way for its own positioning, for its own location in a symbolic realm. She takes up the pronoun I, she gives orders, she is a woman who seeks to “instalar la sexualidad femenina, próxima al terror y la dominación. . . forzada a administrar un guión distinto al de [esta], que la llevará a otros universos” (Brito 96). This means that after the political and economic criticism, Arrate’s writing develops an eminently woman-centred imaginary that looks for ways to generate a parenthesis, a space to express gendered dissidence.

A very interesting aspect of “La ciudad muerta” is that the speaker moves around the carnival of death, unaware of her own state, whether she is alive or dead. Almost by the end of the section readers can apprehend that the poetic voice, the observer of mirrors, detaches herself from her body, as if letting it rot:

Y me incliné sobre mi arropado  
y quebradizo esqueleto y acaricié su calavera  
tibia de tierra  
y le dije lo que debía decirle  
que mi amor había sido entrañable (Arrate 28)

As the speaker separates herself from her body, she is no longer identifying herself with her remains. Apart from understanding that her state is also the result of the apocalypse that preceded “La ciudad muerta” and the silence prior to its first lines, her bones join the thousands of bones scattered around the ruined city. It seems as though the speaker sends her message, finds out that she also dead and this part of the poem comes to an end, including hers, in this inescapable landscape in an image reminiscent of Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* (1955). In *Uranio* the readers are ultimately *shown* all the devastation in the city and what happened to its inhabitants, but there seems to be no escape or solution to the situation.

The poem finishes with a song, the song of the dead, although the lyrics and melody to this song remain a mystery:

En la eléctrica, loca y lúcida hora  
En que ascendí con mi cadáver sobre las rodillas  
Y ella cantó la canción de los muertos (Arrate 29)

The image of her, the speaker, ascending towards the heavens, holding her own body, shows that she has completely detached from her own materiality and it is her spirit that prevails. In between neon lights and a lucid, yet mad moment, there is completion. She is spiritually resuscitated, as if her telling of the city in ruins was enough to release her from the purgatory that it meant dwelling there. In consequence, from a political perspective, her depiction of this underworld is what she sees as her country after the apocalyptic regime destroyed everything that was known; only leaving lights, broken skulls, a disaster, and a dead yet absurd city.

The woman, ‘ella’, that sings the song of the dead is none other than herself. In previous verses, the speaker interacts with Neuma. Pneuma, in Ancient Greek, means spirit and has been identified as “a breath of life” (Liddell and Scott web). According to *RAE*, ‘neuma’ is a musical word that depicts a “notación que se empleaba para escribir música antes del sistema actual” (n.a.

web). Both meanings help to classify the speaker's song as one that imaginatively implies a long history. Neuma's song closes "La ciudad muerta" as the speaker's spirit ascends, that is, she sings her own death song to disappear from the dead city, into the unknown. Her funerary song is her last breath. She is gone now. The poem ends up with a speaker leaving the poem, with readers having witnessed the speaker's witnessing of the mirrors that reflected the disappointing reality of Santiago in ruins. If *Uranio* ended here, it would be in the same line as *Braille*, for both would share an utter disappointment in the present and a rather negative projection of the future. In Arrate's writing at this point there is no future, the city is static, and in perennial devastation—which is an idea that can be related to Alejandra Del Río's *Braille*.

### **Of Wolves and Sheep: *Uranio* and its dialogue with previous poems**

The second section of this book, entitled "El hombre de los lobos" provides an interesting proposal on the role of wolves, sheep and the shepherd (a man). Arrate's poem is not the first to take into consideration the figures of wolves and sheep for Chilean contemporary literature. For this reason, my reading of Arrate's *Uranio* intersects with readings of two other poetry books. The first one is *Lobos y ovejas* (1976) by Manuel Silva Acevedo—Chilean Literature Prize 2016—and the other is *Canto de una oveja del rebaño* (1981), by Rosabetty Muñoz.

Before commenting on the appearance of wolves and sheep in the books mentioned above, it is relevant to consider that wolves and sheep have existed in literature for the last two millennia. I deem it appropriate to briefly review Aesop's fables and the most famous of Psalms in *The Bible*, Psalm 23, and La Fontaine's "The Lamb and the Wolf". Apart from the clearly rural connotation that wolves and sheep have now, their symbolism still stands. In the case of Aesop (600BC) there is record of many short fables that deal with both creatures, such as "The Wolf and the Sheep"; "The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing"; "The Lamb and the Wolf". These are texts that personify both animals so readers may obtain a moral lesson from the story. In every case, the wolf is pictured as an evil creature, and the sheep is a helpless yet somewhat wise animal. In "The Wolf and the Sheep", after being bitten by a

dog, the wolf asks the sheep to fetch him some water, warning the sheep that he might eat it. The sheep reacts acknowledging this danger and the fable finishes there. This means that even in a hurt state, the wolf does not change its basic killer instincts. In “The Wolf and the Shepherd”, for instance, the wolf convinces the human that he is a friend for him to leave the wolf in charge of his sheep. The wolf ultimately eats them. The moral of the story is that one must be cautious in choosing one’s friends. Interestingly, it seems that it is always the wolf that has an active role and the sheep seems to be passive and in need of supervision.

The idea of sheep being creatures unable to protect themselves is explored in the *Psalms/Salmos*—although there are plenty more references to sheep and wolves in *The Bible*—especially in Salmo 23, known as “El Señor es mi pastor”. Here, the psalm delves into the idea that God is the ultimate shepherd and that he takes care of his sheep before they die, as the shepherd accompanies them and gives them comfort—for example by walking in the darkest valley, which seems to end up in death, as “En la casa de Jehová moraré por largos días” (*Salmos* 23:6). In an imaginary such as this, the house of the Lord is the dwelling place for his sheep after dying, after the slaughterhouse. The sheep represent the people of God, a selection of people, just like a herd of sheep. Sheep here are creatures that depend entirely on the shepherd, which implies that God’s people cannot live on their own, away from His supervision and care. The sheep are normally treated as female figures, in opposition to God who is perhaps one of the utmost symbols of masculine—phallic—power. Therefore, there is a connection between passivity and femininity, in Aesop and *The Bible*, which is also explored in Chilean poetry.

Jean de La Fontaine’s famous fable “The Lamb and the Wolf” (1668) tells the story of a lamb falsely accused of calumniating a wolf. The lamb is eaten by the wolf, unjustly, and it confirms the wolf’s reputation as an animal that gets its own way. If the personification is considered, the fable warns against people who pursue their own agenda, without any regard for other people or circumstances involved. The lamb was too young to have spoken ill of the wolf, yet the wolf knew this and decided to eat the lamb all the same. Therefore, the shocking truth of this rather cruel fable indicates that the wolf’s *desires* are more important and weigh more than reason. This trait is

developed in Chilean poems, as the idea of being a wolf, being wild and adventurous seems more interesting than being a passive sheep, as the wolf is the creature that would have the strength to attack the shepherd. Even if a sheep wanted to escape the herd, or to rebel against its master, it would be hunted and slaughtered, the latter being the purpose of lamb/sheep herding.

In contemporary Chilean poetry there are a handful of examples that play with the symbolic meaning ascribed to sheep and wolves. The first one to discuss here is Manuel Silva Acevedo's *Lobos y ovejas* (1976). The quotations I have selected here explore the subversive re-imagining of these two animals. Silva Acevedo's poem questions the traditional values by which sheep are known.

Por qué si soy oveja  
Deploro mi ovina mansedumbre  
Por qué maldigo mi pacífica cabeza (Silva Acevedo 19)

The sheep here is far from being a passive creature. The word 'oveja' in Spanish is female, yet it can address both male and female sheep. Silva Acevedo's sheep begins to question its nature, its docility and withdraws from its peacefulness. This first questioning is the beginning of a process that leads to this sheep rejecting its ovine identity to become more wolf-like. It is clear that considering the poem's year of publication, 1976, this questioning of passivity might have addressed those who were not active in criticising the dictatorship.

The poem expresses the darkness surrounding the figure of the wolf, here being a hungry she-wolf:

Pero un día la loba me tragó  
Y yo, la estúpida cordera  
Conocí entonces la noche. . .  
*Me sentí lobo malo de repente*<sup>48</sup> (Silva Acevedo 23)

The sheep keeps questioning its nature, seeing itself as a foolish creature. However, after being swallowed by the she-wolf and seeing the night, the possibility of a new world away from the herd, the sheep feels the temptation to become a wolf. The use of italics suggests an erotic turn in the poem, as if being a bad wolf (male wolf) can indeed be something that is *desired* by this

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<sup>48</sup> Author's own italics.

sheep. In order to be swallowed, the sheep must have been caught by the she-wolf, or escaped the herd and was found by her. The gender shift here is interesting, as the sheep—female par excellence in Spanish—becomes a male wolf, as if this was a desired gender and animal to be able to be free and to start following different instincts.

From Silva Acevedo's text it is possible to find another reference that would connect both 'La ciudad muerta' and 'El hombre de los lobos' in *Uranio*. This is precisely the figure of the she-wolf as for Clarissa Pinkola Estés "she creeps through the mountains and the riverbeds, looking for wolf bones, and when she has assembled an entire skeleton, she sits by the fire and thinks about what song she will sing" (Pinkola Estés 283). Thus, Arrate's text could be a version of Pinkola Estés' tale in reverse, as Arrate's speaker opens the poem with an environment that is covered with broken bones that she summons to raise from the dead. Then, she sings a song to leave the dark and phantasmagorical city in which she is situated. This singing symbolically fractures the text, however, this helps to introduce the wolf as a relevant figure in the next section, as it allows the speaker to express the possibility of a she-wolf from inside a male wolf.

This particular connection allows critics to build a bridge between Arrate and Silva Acevedo's text because his poem ends with the sheep imaginatively transformed into a wolf. His work would clearly become a rewriting of the old fables and it would rebel against the great shepherd, God, as this sheep seeks its own fate:

No seré más la oveja en cautiverio. . .  
Ya tengo mi lugar entre las fieras  
Ampárate pastor, ampárate de mí  
Lobo en acecho, ampárame (Silva Acevedo 59).

The sheep has been completely transfigured. Firstly it has left the captivity that always characterised its life, as part of the herd. The sheep feels identified with wild, untamed creatures. Its desire is to become what it is not, as the sheep is a highly domesticated animal. What is paramount to consider here is the use of the verb 'amparar' in two different conjugations. According to *RAE*, it means: "Favorecer, proteger" (n.a. web). Here the sheep threatens the shepherd, warning him that he should find refuge and solace against her as now she has

a new strength in her new identity as a wild beast. She uses the same verb to ask the lurking wolf to protect her.

Silva Acevedo's text is clearly one that posits an interesting questioning of the values that are assumed as characteristic of sheep and wolves. Here wolves are understood in their traditional way, but are celebrated in their independence and wildness. However, the sheep is questioned as a passive creature from an imaginary sheep that realises its position in the world. The sheep rebels against that passivity and seeks to transform herself into an active wolf in order to threaten the person who has been controlling her life, the shepherd. This is a sheep that escapes the herd and the slaughterhouse. If the reading approaches the poem's political context, it can be understood that this sheep/individual seeks to hide and, from that concealed place, attempt to undermine the shepherd, the controller of the sheep's lives and who decides who is next in line to the slaughterhouse: General Pinochet.

Rosabetty Muñoz's poem *Canto de una oveja en el rebaño* (1981) seems to be even more emphatic in its criticism of Pinochet's regime, and less cryptic than Silva Acevedo's poetic proposal. Muñoz's poem criticises the eruption of neoliberalism—albeit not using that term—in the way that her imagined sheep are controlled by a group of shepherds who keep them in a state of self-indulgence:

Soy feliz,  
Cada cosa que deseo  
Aparece por arte de cuotas mensuales  
En mi mano (Muñoz 8)

Muñoz relates achieving pleasure and happiness to being able to afford given things. In this case, the poor can only do this through credit, which is payable monthly. This replaces the phrase 'por arte de magia' and introduces debt instead. The voice here establishes that any possible *desire* is fulfilled through credit, and establishes that a given subject is no longer a citizen but a consumer. Muñoz' work is ahead of her times; she observes and poeticises the irruption of neoliberalism. Here, the individual sheep is alienated from the herd:

Es todo lo que necesito  
y los pastores lo saben (Muñoz 8)

The poem shifts the focus from the individualistic sheep to the collectivism of shepherds who provide her with such credit and products that would satisfy her thirst for objects. This would ultimately have the purpose of keeping this sheep under control, without any connection to the outside world. This 1981 poem, then, uses the metaphor of sheep and shepherds to illustrate the allegorically totalitarian control monopolised by the economic elite of the country.

Her poem recognises that some sheep escape the passivity and deceitful nature of the access to credit:

Perdonad a las malas ovejas  
que no olvidan supuestos dolores  
y pretenden malditos ideales y libertades  
que no sirven para nada (Muñoz 10)

Here, in an ironic gesture that rewrites Jesus' famous remark "Padre perdónalos porque no saben lo que hacen" (*Lucas 23:34*), Muñoz labels idealistic people as bad sheep. As the speaker is a sheep that has fallen into the trap of neoliberalism, she does not seem to understand the importance of freedoms that existed prior to the regime. The 'supuestos dolores' point toward the negation of violations of human rights, as if they are only allegations and not verifiable acts. This is an incredibly powerful poetic stance, as it is a direct questioning of the regime and the role of the press<sup>49</sup>.

By the end of the poem, the sheep finds its way out of the cycle of isolation and consumerism:

Desde mañana  
voy a cambiar de giro.  
Trataré de propiciar  
una reconciliación con el mundo. . .  
(No hay que transar  
con el rebaño indolente) (Muñoz 25)

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<sup>49</sup> Such negations were common at the time, for example, *La Segunda* newspaper and its front covers denied the death and disappearance of many people, as well as mocking those who were exterminated whilst opposing the regime.

'Cambiar de giro' is an interesting choice of words, as giro means, according to *RAE* "dirección que se da a una conversación, a un negocio y sus diferentes fases"(n.a. web). Whenever someone begins to work, Chilean legislation calls anyone's commercial role, a 'giro'. So the poem shows the consumer using business jargon to talk about a change of direction in her life. The reach of the new paradigm is in terms of lexicon as well. When the speaker seeks to reach reconciliation with her world, it means with other sheep, the ones that have escaped the shepherd. These lines belong to the last poem of the collection, entitled: "Oveja descarriada decide camino a seguir", which clearly sounds like a newspaper headline. The word 'descarriada' in English can be understood as lost or wandering. In Spanish, the term has a connotation related to disobedience. Therefore, now the sheep has been able to free herself from the shepherds and their impositions, it could be joining the other disobeying sheep and the poem suggests that there is a way out of the system, precisely by defying authority. According to *RAE*, the verb 'descarriar', when referring to a person points towards: "Separarse, apartarse o perderse de las demás [personas]. . . o de las que la cuidaban y amparaban" (n.a. web).

It seems as though both poets, Silva Acevedo and Muñoz, use the metaphor of the sheep in order to subvert it. Be it in its relationship with the wolf or the shepherds, the sheep are no longer passive creatures, they escape, transform themselves. The idea of the shy, wary and helpless sheep as depicted in fables, but especially in *The Bible*, is questioned. Both poems, *Lobos y Ovejas* and *Canto de una oveja del rebaño* can be understood in their politico-economic context. Both texts question the figure of the shepherd as an authoritarian and power-controlling individual. Silva Acevedo and Muñoz precede Marina Arrate in their rewriting of these animals as symbolic entities. However, Arrate's poetic proposal adds up to complete the resignification of these symbols.

"El hombre de los lobos", the second section of *Uranio*, from its very title suggests a discussion of masculinity and instincts. This poem depicts a self that is fragmented and formed by different pieces that interact with each other. It could be a case of multiple personalities or identities. I shall explore each of them as they develop in different times—if considering the tenses used—and in an unpredictable order, which can also imply that *Uranio* can

indeed be labelled as a neobaroque example of contemporary Chilean/Latin American poetry.

The first identity is expressed in the past tense:

Alguna vez fui un lobo  
y aullé en la noche interminable  
junto a mis hermanos. . .  
Y mis colmillos, marfiles, eran  
lo mejor de la manada (Arrate 39)

The subject identifies himself with a wolf and his life in a pack. What is interesting is that 'alguna vez fui un lobo' presupposes that the subject could have been something else, either a person or another animal. Therefore, there is the possibility of multiple sorts of 'being' for this individual. The reference to the wolf's fangs signals its killer instincts and this wolf's role in the pack, as one that stands out.

The figure of the man—never referred to as the shepherd—appears after the wolf is identified. He is referred to in the third person, and shows a troubled mind:

El hombre sueña  
que penetra en lo frondoso de un árbol  
y cobija entre sus piernas y las ramas  
un deseo que lo aglutina y  
disuelve. Todo en él es árbol y sufre.  
Sueña con la madre que alguna vez tuvo,  
que soñó alguna vez (Arrate 40)

Here the poem enters an oneiric realm. If, on the one hand, the poem suggests an erotic setting in the wilderness, this man's desire seems to be too much for him, as he is dissolved by it. He also dreams about his mother. Apart from the psychoanalytical interpretation of the man's mother, the expression 'alguna vez' repeats itself twice in these lines. 'Alguna vez', is repeated in the case of having had a mother, but then her existence is suggested by his dreaming about her 'alguna vez'. This temporal complement brings ambiguity, as it does not refer to a particular moment.

Arrate develops a highly ambiguous setting, unlike the previous one in “La ciudad muerta” in which death dwells in a post-dictatorship Santiago de Chile. Here, the locus is unknown. It might be a rural one, considering the presence of sheep and wolves, but there is not much else. Here, Arrate’s text shares common ground with fables, as they are not set in a particular place and their meaning seems timeless. The lesson to learn from Arrate’s proposal is what would correspond to a fable’s moral.

The poem goes on to describe this man dreaming of losing one of his sheep, and going outside to fetch it<sup>50</sup>. Once he wakes up and searches for it:

Transido de una luz  
que turba mi entendimiento soy  
hombre y lobo prendido  
de una lumbre que quisiera  
yo ya devorada (Arrate 43)

The subject is both man and wolf, and ‘la lumbre’ can suggest a full moon so he becomes a werewolf. As a consequence, in his transition to his animalistic side, he resents the light. He seeks the darkness, the light he rejects is his path to becoming a wolf and searching for his sheep. This ‘yo’ enunciated is a man/shepherd who is transformed into a creature that devours his own sheep. The sheep could be eaten either by the man or by the wolf. This duality emphasises that even though the subject is suffering changes, the sheep remains the same and her role in the story or fable being poeticized is a rather traditional one.

The wolf that is presented at the beginning of the poem transforms itself into a she-wolf, again, in an oneiric dimension, after questioning:

¿Nunca más los anillos de este reino oscuro,  
el hambre, la sed,  
el júbilo de mis hermanos salvajes  
oteando las lejanías. . . ?  
Y la loba feroz que en mis entrañas soñaba (Arrate 47)

The use of the word ‘reino’ somehow directs the reader to a less ambiguous setting, ‘El Reino de Chile’ which can be linked to the book *Historia del Reino*

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<sup>50</sup> This search for a ‘loved one’, if understood as ‘la amada’ can also introduce *Uranio* in a dialogue with traditional and canonical works such as *El cantar de los cantares* by Ecclesiastes, and also “Cántico spiritual” (1622) by San Juan de la Cruz.

*de Chile. Flandes indiano* (written in 1674 and published between 1877 and 1878) by Jesuit priest Diego de Rosales<sup>51</sup>. The dark kingdom referred to can be identified with Chile, and once again there is a hint of historical appropriation, as de Rosales was a Spanish chronicler. The reference can also be recognised in the context of the neobaroque, as Arrate rewrites the idea of the kingdom as a dark one. The darkness is surrounded by scarcity: hunger and thirst, which can transport the idea of the Kingdom of Chile to more contemporary times, signalling inequality. The use of the possessive plural 'mis' suggests that the speaker is still a wolf, as his wild siblings appear mentioned as part of the dark world. However, there is a she-wolf dwelling in his guts, dreaming. This can be seen as a pregnancy in reverse. If the man of the poem turned into a wolf, and now contains a she-wolf in his bowels, he is becoming a mother, like the one he was dreaming about earlier. The 'loba feroz' also signposts the folk-tale nature of the poem, as 'el lobo feroz' is the villain of the tale "Little Red Riding Hood"<sup>52</sup>.

The reversal of values changes the symbolic order here. Apparently the wolf is pregnant of his feminine side. The poem expresses a sense of guilt after this realisation:

Acepto  
la ferocidad que me consume  
y la muerte de mi oveja acepto  
y lo impío de mis actos  
y la condena de esta condición impune  
y el error y la culpa acepto (Arrate 48)

These lines convey the idea of a confession, in the Catholic sense. The prayer "Yo confieso" is a great act of penitence, and it reads "Por mi culpa, por mi culpa, por mi gran culpa" which seems to be the direction of this poem, indicating that the subject, the speaker, accepts his dual condition of wolf and she-wolf. This would be a gendered struggle within the subject.

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51 This is not the only text to refer to Chile as a kingdom during colonial times. *La histórica relación del Reyno de Chile* by Alonso de Ovalle (1646) was the first historical description of Chile in Europe at the time.

52 The rewriting of fairy tales has been widely accomplished by women writers. In this sense, Angela Carter is a strong example, but within Latin American writing Chilean María Luisa Bombal and Argentinian Victoria Ocampo are prominent examples (Haase IX).

The speaker confesses the death of his sheep and the evilness of his deeds. It might be that the wolf attempts to accept its fate, as a wrongful creature, which is guilty for its own ferocity, and this is particularly highlighted by the use of chiasmus and repetition of the word 'acepto'. These lines can be considered to be in dialogue with Silva Acevedo's *Lobos y ovejas*, as this poem enunciates: "Déjenme la cordera / Déjenmela a la puritana / Yo soy su sacramento / A mí me espera" (Silva Acevedo 51). The religious tone of both Silva Acevedo and Arrate's texts in the use of words such as 'impío', 'condena', 'culpa', and 'sacramento' may reveal that the wolf's twofold intentions. He is either seeking redemption—by accepting his deeds in Arrate's case—, or being the catalyst of the sheep's death, not in the slaughterhouse, but in the wild, negating the shepherd his chance to proceed with tradition, which would be Silva Acevedo's subversive proposal.

Arrate's "El hombre de los lobos" finishes after the confession previously studied. The wolf returns to its natural habitat, diminishes and goes back to its imaginary landscape, that of the narrative, of its legend. The wolf goes back to the fable.

Pero vuelvo,  
al bosque vuelvo  
lobo salvaje y feroz vuelvo  
a mi patria a mi leyenda vuelvo  
a mi poema vuelvo (Arrate 49).

The voice that once indicated 'alguna vez', once upon a time, he was a wolf, is not a wolf. The use of the present tense here evokes an idea of completion. The forest is the wolf's country; motherland, 'patria'—and this can suggest a returning from exile. After confessing, the wolf is ready to fulfil its natural instincts, as the guilt was purged in that act. The wolf is both wild and ferocious and goes back to its natural dwelling place. The poem closes with the wolf going into the forest, into the dark, back to its legendary state, back to his poem, back to his fable. In the end, after the seemingly complex process of having a multiplicity of selves, the wolf finds himself and returns to his forest. It seems as though a circle is complete.

The repetition of the word 'vuelvo' here emphasises a return to nature, to a given order that was lost. This emphasis on returning may also signal a return to 'la patria', its culture and poetic tradition. 'Vuelvo para vivir' is the title of folkloric band Illapu's most famous song, which they released in 1991, after returning from exile in 1988. The connection between 'vuelvo' and the nation is a strong one, and can be clearly recognised in poetry and music. Illapu's song reads: "Vuelvo a casa, vuelvo compañera / vuelvo mar, montaña, vuelvo puerto. . . / vuelvo, vida vuelvo / a vivir en ti país" (Márquez web). What is more, the inclusion of the word 'patria' connects Arrate's poem to Alejandra Del Río's as both poems use this term, although it is understood as an almost undefinable concept that finds its referent in the flag, as Del Río signposts in *Braille* in a gesture that I believe signals towards Elvira Hernández's *La bandera*.

### **The Unstoppable Force of Desire**

The whole of *Uranio* closes with a short section entitled "El deseo más profundo". Again, after 5 blank pages, the silence that follows the wolf entering the forest brings another dimension of Arratian writing, sensuality and the power of desire.

As was discussed earlier, eroticism and hints to sexuality are characteristic in Arrate's work. From her earliest poems, she has used desire to express a feminine suggestive attitude that points towards taking up spaces to wonder about womanhood and the world surrounding a woman's existence in the text. "El deseo más profundo" expresses perhaps the ultimate desire in an Arratian imaginary, and considering the twists and topics developed in *Uranio*, it seems as though sexuality in itself is being used to challenge the principle of individualism characteristic of neoliberalism. The minimal form of collectivity is the couple, and the force that drives them together is desire. From this, it can be stated that the origins of collectivity begin in the couple.

The poem establishes a scenario in which the couple already exists:

Se mecen los amantes en el viento y arrojan  
el remolino de una enervante fragancia. . .  
donde nada comienza y todo encuentra fin (Arrate 57).

The lovers are described as making love, but also this image can remind readers of “The Lovers”, a tarot card that signals the 6th of Major Arcana. Some tarot decks depict lovers close together as if prior to intercourse. Passion here is announced in the form of a fragrance, as if the lovers’ love can be felt in a scent. The force of their love-making reaches its apex when they reach an orgasm: “donde nada comienza y todo encuentra fin”, in a dimension that can be interpreted as *la petite mort*. This could signal an altered state of consciousness if understood from the perspective of an initial collectivity. This point is particularly similar to Octavio Paz’s poem “Piedra de sol” (1957) in which the speaker enunciates that love overcomes historical catastrophes as in “si dos, vertiginosos y enlazados / caen sobre las yerbas” (Paz 991).

The couple, in Arrate’s poem, challenges individuality. “La ciudad muerta” has a wandering witness that realises that she is dead also. “El hombre de los lobos” depicts an unfolding of consciousness and a return to nature, by a lonesome creature: the wolf. However, “El deseo más profundo” brings about the need to have love, sexuality and dialogue with an *other*, here the other being the lover. Desire is indeed a liberating force that brings both lovers together to explore themselves and each other:

Toda orilla llama y es silencio  
toda pasión la invoca y cuando llega  
gala, camino de Dios, regalo,  
alborzados hundimos las manos  
en esas trémulas violetas (Arrate 57).

The focus here is on the first person plural and their joy, ‘alborzados’. They tremble and touch each other, as every corner, every place for unleashed passion seems to be an instance for celebration, a gift to enjoy. These lines are the most positive verses so far in the whole poem, as if the lovers embody an endless possibility by being together.

“Todo de mí tu ser se alimenta” (Arrate 58) is enunciated after intercourse is over. The syntactical anomaly here takes over the verse. “Tu ser se alimenta todo de mí” would be more grammatically correct. However, the meaning is still ambiguous. In a symbolic realm, the interaction/intercourse between lovers is similar to devouring, when one feeds off the other. This is the only verse that can signpost a connection with “El hombre de los lobos”,

as the wolf is the only creature depicted as fierce and able to engulf another being, the sheep. In this relationship, there is devouring, but also an understanding of a collective microcosm: “él y ella y ambos y nosotros / en el sólo haz que ya los atraviesa” (Arrate 58). Here the poem suggests the figure of the mirror, always present in Arratian writing. He and she became both and us, from an image of the couple as separate entities, him and her, to a collectivity that turns out to include the speaker, in ‘nosotros’. The beam, ‘haz’, clearly divides the image into two, suggesting a mirroring. Interestingly, Arrate’s erotic proposal still falls within a heteronormative paradigm in spite of establishing both lovers at a parallel level. What is more, it seems as though the Arratian imaginary in *Uranio* does not conceive other alternatives to love being expressed apart from the couple and their sexualised union. The poetic alternative to this is enunciated by Nadia Prado’s speaker in ©Copyright—Chapter 6, where love integrates homosexual desire.

Arrate’s poeticised sexual embrace still works as a liberating force, although constrained in heteronormative terms. I would argue that what goes beyond this point is Arrate’s conceptualisation of the collective in its most reduced possibility, two people, and the chance of subverting a somewhat pathological individuality as the one shown in previous sections of the poem that also reflect her views on post-dictatorship Chile. From this reflection, the poem closes with some hope:

Todo el ser se pega a su radio  
y el alma, que había muerto,  
vuelve a vibrar (Arrate 59)

There is great ambiguity of meaning with the use of the word ‘radio’, as it could indicate a bone, radius, located in the forearm. However, radius is also a geometrical linear segment that reaches the centre of a circumference, regardless of where it begins, and it will always be at the same distance from the centre. In addition, radium, ‘radio’ in Spanish, is a chemical element, which is radioactive, just as uranium. Here it could be speculated that the self is revived through the healing nature of radium, as it was in treatment for some sort of mortal disease, as pictured in the images that appear on the cover of the book. This also brings the image of closure, considering that the poem starts with death, and by the end it seems to suggest life, a new beginning.

'Radio' could be interpreted as a dangerous element, as it can both kill and bring life. The lovers are revived by means of their radioactive relationship, and there is new life after their intercourse, after becoming more collective. The lone wanderer at the beginning, in "La ciudad muerta" does not find a way out of there, she just dies. The wolf in "El hombre de los lobos" goes back to the darkness of its forest. It is only these lovers, once 'him and her' become a collective entity in 'us', that they reveal a renewal, a new possibility. The lost souls can find their solace in love, which opposes individuality and entails a sense of sharing that challenges social alienation, which is one of the main principles of a consumer society.

### 5.3 Conclusions

Marina Arrate's *Uranio* presents complexities that allow readers to delve into a more psychological poetic proposal. However, Arrate's writing remains highly political and critical of her society. The use of silence in the text, or voids as it were, suggest that Arratian writing develops spaces in between her sections so as to have a moment of silence and to see that there is not a clear continuity between each part that forms *Uranio*. Also, the presence of mirrors confirms an Arratian imaginary that implies a quest for the self, and that nothing is to be seen directly, but rather through reflections. This idea could be expanded upon if compared with Alejandra Del Río's stance on truth and reality in her use of Plato's cave in *Braille*.

With regards to *Uranio*, the poem begins with a section entitled "La ciudad muerta" and this clearly signposts imagery that can be interpreted as the remains of what happened after the apocalypse, the annihilation of everything that existed. Symbolically speaking, Pinochet's regime erased the past and wrote a new history, that annihilation took place in Chilean history in very concrete terms, and Arrate's poem testifies to that. The neobaroque here is expressed in the excess that characterises her depictions of a carnivalesque scene of dead and broken bodies. There are bones scattered all around, and some of them hold ornaments such as collars or bracelets, all made of precious stones. The contrast between the shine of the stones and the shadow of the city, Santiago, imply absurdity, as if a tremendous party took place and there is not enjoyment, only the rotting of dismembered bodies. The speaker realises she is one of them too, and when this is evident to her, she disappears, her soul is liberated from her body and she ascends.

The second section, "El hombre de los lobos" is entirely different from "La ciudad muerta", the imagery is as if from a fable and in connection to other poems that develop subversive ideas on wolves, sheep and shepherds. Both Manuel Silva Acevedo and Rosabetty Muñoz preceded Arrate in poeticizing them, yet each case is different and they stand out on their own. While Silva Acevedo's *Lobos y ovejas* (1976) explores ambiguity and dismantles the main ideas surrounding sheep as passive creatures, Muñoz's *Canto de una oveja del rebaño* (1981) criticises the new paradigm imposed during the dictatorship,

and how the Chilean citizenry were treated as sheep who were guided by an economic elite that blinded them from the truth. Arrate's "El hombre de los lobos" takes a different direction, although more related to Silva Acevedo's poem than Muñoz's. There is a questioning of instincts and of identity until the poem closes the circle with the wolf going back to where it belongs, in the dark wilderness of the forest. That wolf that once upon a time identified himself as one—at the beginning of the poem—is a fierce creature that finds himself as a wolf and goes to live like one, as if the self wandered and found its way throughout the lines.

Finally, "El deseo más profundo" presents powerful images that dispute the idea of the individual as the centre of the universe. Arratian writing returns to the erotic and shows that it is through love that a subject can overcome death. After intercourse, the soul is uplifted, it goes back to life. From two individual beings, there is progression to a single collectivity, in the use of 'nosotros'. Arrate's proposal suggests a solution to the problem posited at the beginning of the poem, given that the wandering subject that describes death is on her own. And so is the wolf that returns to the forest. It is in human contact, interaction and sexuality that there is a challenge to the alienation and individuality purported by neoliberalism.

It seems as though, thus far, Arrate's *Uranio* is the only poetry book that goes beyond denouncing the principles of a neoliberal society. Her poem shows concern and her last section is a lesson to reverse the order of the singular, and turn it into a plural, collective project. The battle against neoliberalism begins within the individual subject, but only once this person is able to connect to others, and from there, create a new world. So far neither Berenguer, nor Hernández, nor Del Río, have been able to go beyond the representation of a given injustice, and it is Marina Arrate who suggests that overcoming the darkness of the city—which I relate to neoliberalism—is in collective action. Arrate's writing presents the minimal form of collectivity, the couple. If the lovers are able to be alive again, imagining many more coming together would imply a different society, one that is not part of the neoliberal ideal.

## CHAPTER 6

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Denouncing the Neo-Colonial and Challenging the Neoliberal

*Tierra mía sin nombre, sin América,  
estambre equinoccial, lanza de púrpura,  
tu aroma me trepó por las raíces  
hasta la copa que bebía, hasta la más delgada  
palabra aún no nacida de mi boca.*  
Pablo Neruda

### 6.1 Introduction

Nadia Prado, or Nadia Campos-Prado<sup>53</sup>, philosopher, born in Santiago de Chile in 1966, has been a prolific poet since the 1990s. The focus of this chapter is the study of her third poetry book ©Copyright. This introductory section will offer a brief review of Prado's first two works, *Simples placeres* (1992) and *Carnal* (1998). After this, I will comment on the literary criticism that analyses ©Copyright to finally install my reading in dialogue with this critical production.

#### Prado's Work Prior to ©Copyright

Prado's first poetic production, *Simples Placeres*, was published by Cuarto Propio in 1992, and republished independently in 2002. This first book was conceived after the poet got a scholarship in the Neruda Foundation in 1991—this is the same scheme that Alejandra Del Río was offered a few years later in order to compose *Braille* (1999). *Simples* poeticises a sense of discomfort with the world and the city. This is expressed from the experience of awakening that opens the text:

Desperté  
y todo estaba allí  
(la realidad completa)  
No fue más que tomarla o

desaparecer (*Simples* 13)

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<sup>53</sup> She authored her book *Job* (2006) as Nadia Campos-Prado, prioritizing her mother's surname. This is her only work signed in this way.

The poem starts as if from sleep. It is reminiscent of Guatemalan writer Augusto Monterroso's famous micro-story "El dinosaurio" (1959) which reads: "Cuando despertó, el dinosaurio todavía estaba allí" (Monterroso n.p.). It seems that Prado's poem is in dialogue with this text, as if it were the whole of reality—not the dinosaur—that is in front of her speaker as soon as she opened her eyes. It seems as though the emphasis of that totality lies on the explanatory information between parentheses. What she does afterwards is to choose between embracing/considering that reality or disappearing from it. She seems to do both given that, as the text progresses, she criticises the world around her and, at the same time faces the dilemma of addressing it or vanishing. Here Prado transports her speaker to Buenos Aires, Argentina, but her depictions of the city can also be taken to many other metropolises in the world, including the Chilean capital, Santiago.

What Prado enunciates in *Simples* is a criticism of society that is latent in all of her work, up to ©*Copyright*, to be analysed in this chapter. Prado discloses the disarray she faces and, in writing, gives testimony of this for posterity:

Nunca hubo destino aquí  
nunca hubo protección para nadie  
no fui el único afectado

Ojos de neón secos y llenos de afiches (*Simples* 16).

Pradian writing seems to have repeating images of neon lights and publicity-saturated urban landscapes. It is in these elements that it is possible to examine a criticism of post-dictatorship Chile—and perhaps Argentina—in which there seems to be an utter discontent with the moment and the context in which *Simples* is produced. The fact that the poem expresses that there was never a destination nor is there protection for anyone leaves subjects in the deepest of depressing places, which would be within a dystopian city ruled by a neoliberal agenda.

In the end, it seems as though the book's title is ironic, as is the case of other works previously mentioned in this thesis, such as *Este lujo de ser* (1986), by Marina Arrate. In Prado's first poem there is no space for pleasures,

no matter how simple they are. Her urban imaginary shows that the pleasures offered by society are now to be linked to anaesthetising the brain from what is going on, and that leads to addiction. “Nos arrojaron muy niños acá... sobre otros niños / había droga en los caminos para ensimismarse” (*Simples* 17). This implies a process that programmes people from an early age, in a series of repetitions that can lead to a similar subject as the one that Del Río imagines as dwelling inside the cave in *Braille*. This is so especially when considering that the result of such programming is both ignorance and isolation. Prado’s speaker complains of the barrenness of her city: “me muero.....En este Far-West / ..... no hay cantina” (*Simples* 21). This image clearly links Pradian writing to a staged US imaginary, as if in an incomplete western film. Prado includes English words in some of her verses in *Simples*, such as ‘city’ or ‘society’, among others, to question and mock the power of US domination, which is an aspect that is explored and expressed even more intensively in ©Copyright.

Prado’s second book, *Carnal*, dates from 1998 and was also published by Cuarto Propio, and republished again independently in 2002. *Carnal* is a critical example of post-dictatorship writing that deals with the difficulties of history and establishes the body as a sort of surface that subverts patriarchal signs<sup>54</sup>. This book is less urban than *Simples* but far more gendered in its expression. It is dedicated to poet Malú Urriola who was Prado’s partner at the time. The book literarily supports itself by means of introducing quotations from illustrious writers such as Marguerite Yourcenar (1903-1987), Diamela Eltit (1947) and Ibn al-Farid (1181-1234) at the beginning of each section in which the text is divided. This works as a kind of literary scaffolding surrounding the poem. The book is powerful and focuses on the role of writing, and how history is being written to the point that subjects are becoming part of a macro writing process themselves. For Prado’s speaker in *Carnal* this is significant, as: “La historia me fragmentó. Me fecundó. Me ha originado una y otra vez. Me he sentado en territorios bestiales para mantener conversaciones lacerantes” (*Carnal* 18). Here the subject is fragmented through history and, at the same time, she has been fertilised. The subject’s fertility is what shapes the poem,

<sup>54</sup> It seems useful to connect *Carnal* to Marina Arrate’s *Tatuaje*—briefly mentioned in Chapter 5, as Prado’s text seems to follow an Arratian tropes.

as in fragments, in order to fragment the reading as well. The speaker's rebirth has taken place many times so there are more fragments to consider, and to bear in mind when attempting to reconstruct a body in pain. The recent past is latent and even mundane social traits as conversations seem to cause wounds. This quotation clearly shows a relevant aspect of Chilean culture and society by the end of the 1990s and early 2000s, which is one that is still struggling with memory, and a recent history that fragments the subject when facing the impossibility of it being written. The emphasis on fragmentation reifies the idea that constructing new meanings arises from the destruction of an order that the poet seeks to escape from.

Probably the main difference between this sort of writing and the examples from the previous decade—as in the cases of both Berenguer and Hernández—is that by the end of the first ten years after Chile regained its democracy, poetry seems to fight with more strength. It is not only suggesting that a subject suffers a certain entrapment, but it also shows attempts to overcome it. This seems to be the first hint of progression related to the explicitness of expressing dissent, particularly if the 1990s are compared to its earlier decade in which there were very strict censorship mechanisms which were even more dramatic in an atmosphere of complete fear. The progression I mention can be found when Alejandra Del Río urges her addressee in *Braille* (1999) to take the word and, ultimately, action, or that sexuality defeats sheer individualism in Marina Arrate's *Uranio* (1999), *Carnal* does its part by focusing on the body and its performative possibilities:

Pídele al cuerpo que no se subordine, que sea más carnal que nunca,  
que no tema.

Haz que detenga su boca llena de sangre y preparada a devorar más.  
Detén la mordida. Espera por el sufrimiento (*Carnal* 26).

The emphasis on the flesh can be related to a religious imaginary, as the speaker urges another to ask the body to be insubordinate, to break the rules that suppress the flesh, here centred on a woman's body. This would imply a call for the body performing that which is forbidden and is in opposition to righteousness. *The New Testament* warns of this and labels the flesh as a domain that is contrary to God's order and holiness. The biblical text indicates that "Pues de toda la corriente del mundo —la codicia del hombre carnal, los

ojos siempre ávidos, y la arrogancia del éxito— nada viene del Padre, sino del mundo” (1 *Juan* 2:16). Therefore, Pradian writing is mediating between the female body and her own self, trying to subvert both God and patriarchy, as she should free herself and fearlessly embrace her flesh and desires. It seems as though the body needs to be controlled by an empowered subject, a woman, as the following line urges the addressee to stop her body from devouring more flesh and her blood thirst, as if in a cannibalistic or vampiric manner. Body subversion here would be more related to expressing desire, as in opposition to patriarchy. A more cannibalistic approach to body performance can be related to a competitive ideology, as of neoliberalism, where endless consumerism generates hunger for more. *Carnal* challenges traditional views of the female body and establishes that women own themselves and, therefore, should deal with their bodies in ways which are labelled as subversive from a patriarchal perspective.

After *Carnal*, Prado has been publishing all her works with LOM Ediciones, apart from a couple of plaquettes entitled [*J*] (2012) and *Leer y Velar* (2017) that were published by Cuadro de Tiza Ediciones<sup>55</sup>. The first text published by LOM was ©*Copyright* (2003). Prado’s production after ©*Copyright* were *Job* (2006), *Un origen donde podría sostenerse el curso de las aguas* (2011) and *Jaramagos* (2016). It is relevant to mention that her plaquette [*J*] was a prelude to her latest book. In 2004, Prado was awarded the Premio del Consejo Nacional del Libro, in the category of unpublished work, for her book *Job*.

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<sup>55</sup> According to Cuadro de Tiza, a plaquette is: “una plaquette es un cuadernillo o libro breve, encuadernado con corchetes. Hemos propuesto para nuestro catálogo un máximo ideal de treinta y dos páginas. Una plaquette puede contener una sección o selección de un libro que se piensa publicar más adelante o un texto breve que fue pensado como tal.” <http://cuadrodetiza.wixsite.com/cuadrodetiza/la-editorial>

In terms of other—but related—work, Prado received a FONDART Scholarship in 2002 in order to perform an artistic intervention in Santiago<sup>56</sup>. The project, produced jointly with poet Malú Urriola—also studied in this thesis—was entitled *Poesía es +: Intervención urbana y lectura de poesía sobre globos aerostáticos*. This work entailed, in the words of Malú Urriola, “retomar el espacio cielo que había sido tomado, . . . por el CADA también en época de dictadura. . . y. . . para publicidad” (Chávez and Urriola web). This means that *Poesía es +* had the purpose of resignifying open skies as a kind of space in which people not only find the monopoly of aircrafts or advertising balloons. Prado and Urriola helped rewrite the possibilities of expression in a variety of media, be it paper—as poems were thrown down from the balloons, or acoustic intervention—as poems were recited through a megaphone. Interestingly, they performed these actions in the skies covering Tejas Verdes and Estadio Nacional, places that were used as concentration camps during the dictatorship. *Poesía es +* paid homage to those who had been tortured and killed during the regime, in an attempt to contravene the idea that Chile needs to look forward as by neglecting to accept and reconcile with its violent past. The performance signalled that the past was something that could be criticised and actually discussed. Interestingly, this project is a gesture that breaks with the difficulties of expression of previous decades and indicates that it was possible to begin the process of finding spaces to generate dialogue and criticism of Chile’s recent history.

*Poesía es +* clearly reminds us of what Raúl Zurita did with *Escritos en el cielo* in the skies of New York City in 1982. The main difference is that Zurita developed his project abroad, with funding from different US universities, but mainly from the MIT (Santini n.p) whereas both Prado and Urriola got funding from the Chilean state to express themselves. This very fact confirms that Chile was no longer such a closed country as it was before, and there was less fear and uneasiness to show an artistic stance as in the ‘80s or even the 90’s. In a 2003 interview conducted by Bolivian poet Benjamín Chávez, Prado explained

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<sup>56</sup> FONDART is the National Arts Developing Fund, supported by the Chilean State through its different institutions. The scholarship is assigned after a panel evaluates a given project. The state does not intervene in the development and execution of the projects in any way.

the nature of *Poesía es +* as it was “la necesidad de lenguaje. . . El lenguaje de la poesía trabaja en su precariedad, sabe de su difícil intromisión en un mundo neoliberal, donde se intenta poner a Latinoamérica nuevamente de rodillas frente al imperio. . . (Chávez and Prado web). The poet’s understanding of language and its social function are key to her work. Especially after this intervention, in both ©*Copyright*—published a year after *Poesía es +*—and *Job*. The link between poetic language and the market within a neoliberal context is key to Pradian literature. ©*Copyright* would become an attempt to resist and subvert certain uses of language. In this sense, it is of utmost relevance to know how Prado develops this resistance. In the same interview, Chávez asks Prado whether the experience of *Poesía es +* has taught her and Urriola anything new, and her response, interestingly, can be linked to Alejandra Del Río’s proposal in *Braille*: “nos dimos cuenta que hay una metáfora constante que recorre a Chile, esa metáfora es la mentira. Ella ha desplazado el lugar de la realización de la posibilidad de la verdad, porque esa verdad está amarrada al crecimiento económico.” (Prado n.p.). Even though Del Río’s text expressed an immense ambiguity in terms of seeing the light or finding the truth, as central to her imaginary, Prado develops the idea that there is a constructed truth that is taken as an axiomatic reality by those who are fooled by it. This means that this ‘truth’ is rooted in a pre-existing lie. Therefore, the dilemma between reality and entrapment in Del Río’s work may find an answer in Prado’s words here. In the end, both poets consider that, apart from the violent past that Chile endured during the dictatorship, there is progression in understanding that neoliberalism is at the centre of an epistemological and also concrete break in meaning and the way reality, society and art are perceived.

### **Critical Work on ©Copyright**

In relation to criticism, there is not much written on Prado's work in academic journals. Yet, her presence in Chilean newspapers is noteworthy. *Revista de Libros* is a supplement in *El Mercurio* newspaper and there are reviews of some of her works. Also, different websites and blogs have detailed posts and accounts of her book launches. ©Copyright has been studied by a couple of scholars before, Julieta Marchant (Universidad de Chile) and Cristián Molina (Universidad de Rosario, Argentina) the most prominent ones. Marchant wrote her Master's thesis on Prado's work: *El ser o su intermedio: el desmontaje del yo en la poesía de Nadia Prado* (2013), and Molina's 2014 paper, "Melancolía en los relatos de mercado de Nadia Prado" also focuses on ©Copyright. However, none of these texts analyse this book specifically. For Marchant, the environment in which Prado's speaker expresses her subjectivity in ©Copyright is within the context of "la globalización, su ruido y visualidad insoportables" (Marchant 54) which immediately allow any reader—not just a critic—to understand that a critique of neoliberalism is quite explicit. Interestingly, Marchant's study of ©Copyright—and *Job*—provides more evidence of this, given that "las palabras 'mercado' y 'globalización' son tan frecuentes que parecen vaciarse de sentido en la repetición" (Marchant 54). From here, it can be established that ©Copyright can be considered a poetic exercise in which the key terms surrounding a poetic neoliberal landscape are put to question in order to generate a response. I would argue that the most compelling example of this in the whole text is the poem "América®", to be analysed in detail in this chapter.

In the case of Molina's essay, he establishes the concept of "relatos de mercado" or market stories as aspects that "involucran la tematización del mercado de los bienes simbólico-culturales, hasta ahora fundamentalmente editorial" (Molina 215). This means that intangible goods such as ideas, theories and narratives can become entangled within a market-centred logic, which clearly points towards the commodification of these intangibles. The question remains, then, as to what art makes of itself in this scenario. It seems as though the market has taken society hostage and imposes its principles and laws until they become naturalised. Poetry seems to be the genre that resists the market the most, as it can use alternative channels to avoid the need of

editorial commercial success, which means record sales and profits to the detriment of artistic genius. This market-centred understanding of current literary practice has been discussed by Josefina Ludmer in her 2006 essay “Literaturas postautónomas” where she defines literatures that

se fundarían en dos [repetidos, evidentes] postulados sobre el mundo de hoy. El primero es que todo lo cultural [y literario] es económico y todo lo económico es cultural [y literario]. Y el segundo postulado de esas escrituras del presente sería que la realidad [si se la piensa desde los medios, que la constituirían constantemente] es ficción y que la ficción es la realidad. O, para decirlo de un modo más preciso: lo cultural y lo ficcional, en la era de la posautonomía, están en sincro y en fusión con la realidad económicopolítica (Ludmer n.p.).

From Ludmer’s explanation, it seems clear that the juxtaposition of the economic above and in control of the cultural is one of the biggest problems of our era. What is more, this rings true to the phenomenon of ‘fake news’ or ‘alternative facts’ that haunts social media. They spark a variety of reactions, among which the disorientation of subjects can be considered a clear one. This could prove to be of a dangerous nature, especially when bearing in mind that the poets studied have been aware of this for a long time. It seems as though realising this takes longer for both critics and readers in general.

An important point that Cristián Molina makes in his essay on Prado’s poems is that “un relato de mercado emerge más allá de (pero también entre) una adscripción genérico-literaria. . . aparecen en diversos formatos y disciplinas” (Molina 2015), which suggests that the concept of market stories can be recognised in a myriad of texts and artistic forms. Therefore, Prado’s books are part of a categorisation that intersects many other ways of expression. What is relevant about ©*Copyright*—and *Job*—here is that Pradian poetry enunciation brings “ese poder de singularidad de la literatura para garantizar su supervivencia en un ritmo alterno de producción capitalista. . . que abren un futuro alternativo al de la hegemonía del mercado globalizado y al de su progresiva posautonomía” (Molina 221). This would open a different avenue of resistance as the poem resists the market by being in the market, but without seeking massive sales. Even though LOM Ediciones has a long

standing history in the Chilean publishing market since 1990, a key feature of their portfolio is that they publish books that are affordable. They seek to disseminate culture widely rather than make it available for the wealthy few. From their webpage, LOM declare:

Tenemos la convicción de que el conocimiento y el acceso a la cultura es fuente de liberación, y que el libro debe ser un instrumento democratizador de nuestras sociedades. Por ello, desde los inicios, hemos apostado a una política donde nuestros títulos no tengan como obstáculo las capacidades adquisitivas de los lectores. Que el libro esté al alcance, tanto en forma, como en sus contenidos.”  
(n.a. n.p.)

This principle is relevant when understanding why Prado has been publishing with them for over 10 years. ©*Copyright* would be a text that is not expensive to buy—currently its cost is around £6—, therefore, Prado is neither betraying her principles nor her criticism of neoliberalism.

In Molina’s view,

©*Copyright* es el libro de la conciencia de la mercancía en la que se convierte no solo el poeta, sino la poesía en el contexto de una sociedad de consumo. La poeta asiste a la comprensión de su transformación en un objeto de compra a partir de las letras mismas, de su transformación en imagen destinada y dispuesta al consumo (Molina 225).

Prado’s text does not only express this from a personal perspective, it is rather a criticism of the branding of Latin American identity and the social transformations that have taken place as a consequence of US cultural imperialism, understood within the logic of neo-colonialism. This term entails “the legacy of white European colonialism, the oppressive identities they applied to American people that were internalized. . . [up to the point that the US] dominated and permeated every space of Latin America” (Barahona n.p.). In this sense, there are plenty of examples of a neo-colonial critique in the text. This point is particularly clear, yet a deeper and more detailed reading on Prado’s poetic examination of neoliberalism seems in order. For this reason, there will be a whole section of analysis devoted to this particular point.

## 6.2 Analysis

The present analysis is divided into three points: The first will be “Sexual Independence in a Neoliberal World”. Here I propose that the poem explores

non-phallic ways to reach sexual pleasure, not only as a reference to lesbianism, but also as a subversive attempt to detach sexuality from the need of a masculine figure and allow women to get to know their own bodies and selves. The second aspect to analyse is entitled “Post-apocalyptic Imaginary and a Latin American Cultural Critique”. This section will study the reach of neoliberalism in terms of neocolonialism and the influence of foreign world powers with a special emphasis on US economic and cultural imperialism in the region. Finally, “The Chilean Poetic Tradition in Pradian Writing: Mistral, Millán and Hernández”. This part of the analysis focuses on quotations that directly address Chilean culture, especially Chilean recent history and the way these references are in constant dialogue with other Chilean poets, such as those mentioned in the title.

## Sexual Independence in a Neoliberal World

There is a clear progression in terms of how 2000s poetry deals with neoliberalism in comparison with their 1990s counterparts. Here I specifically refer to the two authors considered for this thesis, Alejandra Del Río and Marina Arrate respectively. As discussed in relation to Arrate's *Uranio* (1999), the way out of sheer individuality is by collective action. Arrate proposes the couple as the minimal collective unit and sexuality as an effective way to join with another, and begin a shared experience. Prado's text, just as Arrate's, includes sexuality in her discourse, beginning with masturbation, but then establishing a lesbian imaginary that pushes away the patriarchal in the most masculine sign of all: the phallus. By removing its presence, there is a possibility to surpass historical phallic domination. Masturbation, then, is enunciated as follows:

Es un día común,  
solo que mi cuerpo y yo nos amamos  
es un día de amor  
estoy sola conmigo  
pienso atrapada en esta mano que rota hostigosamente (Prado 13).

The speaker begins an inward journey that entails getting to know her own body. This erotic image challenges the idea that sexual pleasure necessarily needs a phallic presence, or that a woman can reach an orgasm only by penetration. This sexual autonomy shows a subversive attitude to what "Luce Irigaray maintains [as] the very construct of an autonomous subject [:] a masculine cultural prerogative from which women have been excluded" (Butler 326). In this sense, Pradian writing takes a step forward by turning women into their own subjects, which in itself destabilises the traditional masculine subject as the centre of the logos. There seems to be a connection here between ©*Copyright* and some of Marina Arrate's earliest writings, as they also seem to articulate an autonomous woman subject.

What masturbation achieves in this poem is a dichotomy between a masculine phallogocentric world and a female phallic-free world, which can express itself beyond the categorisation of marginality normally ascribed to women and their writing. Here masturbation is explicitly written and imagined in order to generate an alternative reality that does not need the phallus and is

ready to fight for her space. A few lines after the quotation studied, the speaker enunciates:

A ratos alguien viene,  
no le dejo entrar,  
si entra me mata,  
si entra no le hablo más a mí (Prado 13).

It seems that the enunciation expresses the disarticulation of the female psyche as if divided into two diametrically opposed selves. While one controls the body and is both symbolically and concretely celebrating masturbation, the other seems to sanction her actions. Her judgemental self evaluates her, as if from the perspective of a masculine figure, as a penetrating one. This figure might respond to a naturalised patriarchy that also involves certain women evaluating themselves as if from a male-centred logic. This implies that part of the subject in this poem is subdued to traditional patriarchal roles normally imposed on women. On the other hand, her autonomous woman-self does not allow 'him' access to her new autonomous reality, and the self-satisfying experience of masturbation. Interestingly, the speaker expels her male-centred self in a symbolic move that provides space for autonomous sexuality and endless possibilities of being outside patriarchal norm. She warns, though, that if her socially constructed self returned to her, it would mean the end of the new woman-centred psyche. This implies that her autonomous self, the one that remains in her, must resist the advances of her capricious, traditional self, as she would go back to her traditional role within the phallogocentric ideal. The subject's duality is expressed particularly in the last line "si entra no le hablo más a mí" which is virtually impossible to translate into English. "Le" is an indirect object pronoun which is masculine or feminine depending on the context, but it refers to another person in grammar terms, however, the person being addressed is herself. This grammatical complexity is central to the interpretation of her psychic partition.

Since the speaker resists her own masculine-centred side in her solitary sexual awakening, she is ready to embark on another level of sexuality that does not need the phallus, which is lesbianism. Almost by the end of the poem, Prado's speaker devotes some lines to Elizabeth Collingwood-Selby, Chilean philosopher, in an erotic manner:

Hice para el futuro un círculo con piedras alrededor de tu cuerpo, que eran los lugares que recorreríamos.

Tus ojos brillaron y mi boca se llenó de vergüenza (Prado 88).

The complicit relationship between both the speaker and the addressee are expressed in their reactions. While the imagined Collingwood-Selby's eyes shine, provoking a sort of reflection of the speaker's image, she does not find the words to respond to the addressee gift, which is her attention and love. The stone circle around the addressee's body presumes a foundational stance, as if starting a mythical ritual that would establish their sexual relation in a newly imagined realm. Her body, then, becomes the world that is to be known and discovered. In the wake of lesbian love, the speaker feels ashamed, somehow rewriting the same felt by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after realising they were naked. It is not nudity that shames the speaker, though once they find themselves naked, her shame is a blush, and it is a gesture that expresses desire. There is a purity in the love described that challenges traditional and religious narratives that condemn homosexuality, especially in *The Holy Bible*, as it is very clear that lesbianism is considered against God's rules. "Ahora sus mujeres cambian las relaciones sexuales normales por relaciones contra la naturaleza" (*Romanos 1:26*). In this context, Prado's writing not only challenges the Christian judgement on homosexuality, it also elevates lesbian love as something pure and sensual and which is by no means an abhorrent practice.

I sustain that Prado sets a foundational rewriting of sexuality, and she achieves this in the following lines, moving sexuality from a patriarchal linguistic sign and turning it into a word-centred practice that offers a liberating experience. Prado's victory over the heteronormative tradition is that she is able to bend the rules of meaning and attempt to offer a completely different dimension to the sexual. Pradian writing does not resort to pornography; it

rather focuses on words, their erotic power and the immortalization of experience through writing on page 88:

Abrí las manos y las palabras que cayeron de ti escribieron en mí  
algo que guardo. . .

mi corazón que inquieto y alborotado dentro escribe el latido de esas  
palabras que tú me escribes cuando el tuyo se pega en mi pecho, las  
palabras nos unen y nos separan, porque escribir es el mayor artificio.

A very important aspect to consider in these lines is the transition between past and present times. The first line establishes a past experience that was shared with the addressee, yet a few lines later the poem shifts to the present tense, in its simple form, as it expresses an action in progress: “dentro escribe el latido de esas palabras” and also the declaration of an idea understood as truthful: ‘escribir es el mayor artificio’. This implies that the poem moves from a past experience into a present one that ends up with an ultimate truth. What was written at some point in the past is stored and those words then are written to unite and separate both women, the speaker and her addressee, to finally reach an understanding which is that writing is a noble activity, which in the end is something larger than what they share and feel for each other.

This particular poem finishes up with three verses that break up with everything that was stated before:

A mí también me gusta la Coca Cola, Clarice.  
La Coca Cola no es Sveglia, la Shell, sí.

Este es un poema condenado a la ruina (Prado 88).

From a poetic imaginary filled with amorous language and the elevation of writing as a great manifestation of human creation, the poem breaks into a discourse that introduces famous brands. From the intimacy of a sexual relationship we find a reference to Clarice Lispector, and to Coca Cola and Shell, two of the world’s biggest corporations expanding their shadows on what had been previously expressed. It is probable that the last line that conveys the collapse of the poem separates two worlds that are incompatible, that of love and companionship versus the neoliberal, publicity-saturated context in which that intimate world is imagined. It could be argued that this poem is in dialogue with Arrate’s *Uranio*, specifically with its third section “El deseo más profundo”, as it offers an escape from neoliberal reality. It would seem that for

Prado's text escaping is another façade, as neon lights and big corporations are not easily dismantled from a contemporary imaginary. Both Coca-Cola and Shell are references that can be understood within the realm of the pastiche, as a postmodern practice that also entails random nominalization of elements. Here, though, the shock of contrasting love and major brands goes beyond the arbitrary. In the end Pradian writing highlights the ferocity and the reach of the consumer world, and how it undermines genuine human interactions not based on business transactions.

From a consideration of inner feelings, the poem moves more outwardly to display how neoliberalism also undermines identity and nationhood, as is possible to verify in the following analytic sections.

### **Post-apocalyptic Imaginary and a Latin American Cultural Critique**

©*Copyright* is another example of postapocalyptic poetry, as it was explored in the cases of *Braille* (Del Río, 1999) and *Uranio* (Arrate, 1999). What can be highlighted in Pradian poetry in comparison with the other two works studied is that her world is within a post-apocalyptic city that was established as a poetic atmosphere that arose from an ambiguous or unknown cause. In this sense, "it becomes difficult enough to see how the cultural productions of such a [postmodern] subject could result in anything but 'heaps of fragments' and in a practice of the randomly heterogenous and fragmentary and the aleatory" (Jameson 71). Fragments, in Prado's text, reflect a lack of positioning, a decentralisation, and a statement of resistance against categorisations that establish what culture and identity are.

The first element that can be considered in a break of meaning that seeks to criticise the neoliberal is Prado's imagined city. This place is dazzled by neon lights. Their shine does not allow anyone to see what lies behind them. It is clear, from a pop culture viewpoint, that one of the places that symbolise this dazzling is Hollywood, the Mecca of contemporary global entertainment. Prado's text does criticise its influence rather directly:

Me fui a ser rebelde a holygud, la ironía es un producto, mantequilla que se derrite apenas la digo, mantequilla que se parte en dos, que dura mientras el sol aparece (Prado 19).

Prado's ironic stance on Hollywood by writing it without a capital "H" and in the way it would be pronounced in Spanish immediately shows that the poet does not believe in Hollywood as a cultural model. It compares Hollywood to butter, as a solid product that melts as soon as it gets warm. In a way, she warns that Hollywood narratives and ways of life are not to be trusted, and that its contents are not to be relied upon.

The speaker had previously expressed her concern over the way that reality is being presented, as if subjects are permanently watching a screen:

Eso no aparece en los carteles electrónicos. Tal vez era un *making off*, pero yo lo vi tan real que me confundí. Ha de ser una confusión" (Prado 18).

Here, apart from questioning reality in what is not represented on billboards, Prado's speaker wonders if everything is a rehearsal or a behind the scenes 'making of'<sup>57</sup>. The words are italicised as that concept is being questioned and because it does not belong in a Spanish-speaking imaginary. It is a foreign word which has become, though, quite recognisable. This linguistic hybridity is the opposite of what Elvira Hernández expressed in the poem "Santiago Waria" (1992), for example, as she did not express the idea that Santiago was a 'city', using the English term; she rather celebrated the 'waria', the Mapuche imaginary.

For Prado, reality becomes untraceable and the poem expresses the angst between understanding this dilemma, and its inescapability. What is more, the speaker acknowledges that she does not know the difference between the copy and the original, between reality and simulation which somehow resembles and progresses from Del Río's proposal in *Braille*. This awareness in ©*Copyright* also reflects one of the main principles of neoliberalism which is individualism and, with it, individual responsibility. The speaker falls into the trap of considering herself responsible for not

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<sup>57</sup> It seems as though "making off" was misspelt and Prado actually means "making of". There might be a confusion as in media voice over is referred to as "voz en off" in Spanish.

understanding what is around her, when this confusion seems to be there as if with the purpose of alienating the individual.

The relativity of reality, which here relates to the lack of certainty within the post-apocalyptic city, shows a mixture of elements that question certain aspects that go beyond economic variables. They rather address issues of identity and belonging, as expressed in the following lines:

En una estampita que compré en la calle rompí el resignado cielo, el que creí era cielo. un indígena cayó a mis pies. un indígena que me mostraron en otras fotografías. era el pasado de mí. el pasado silencioso y resignado (Prado 39).

The speaker explores her cultural identity and puts her past into question. First, she has purchased a holy card, which is an eminently Catholic symbol but, at the same time, as she acquired it, that transaction indirectly indicates that religion is another form of business. The holy card then finds its cultural opposite in the presence of an indigenous individual that appears at the speaker's feet—as if fallen from the sky as an 'angel caído', as if one of God's rejects. That 'indígena' is what the speaker relates to when she indicates 'era el pasado de mí'. This can be considered a symbolic gesture towards the indigenous origin of most Chileans as Chile is a racially mixed country. In general, in Latin America, "ideas of mestizaje have stood in contrast to ideas of white racial purity and anti-miscegenation historically held in The United States" (Telles and García 130). This very contrast is particularly explored and considered in *©Copyright*, not only in ethnic, but also in cultural terms. It has to be noted that an embrace with indigenous origins is somewhat suspicious, especially when relating cultural nationhood and *mestizaje*. However, this reading will not develop further on this point.

Lastly, when the speaker reflects on her identity in these lines, she enunciates that it is 'silencioso y resignado' as if the indigenous past is her own, and that their silence and submission—a heritage of Colonial rule—is something she recognises in herself. The text does question a neocolonial context, which is no longer led by the Spanish conquistadors, but the US media and corporations. In sum, what Prado does in *©Copyright* is to criticise issues of identity within a neoliberal setting that has its origins in the US and their neo-

colonial approach to Latin American countries particularly in terms of business relations and influence.

The poem moves on to provide more evidence of discontent towards neoliberalism:

Mi corazón atareado de vivir de noche observa la desidia moderna y estrepitosa del arte mercantil, la sangre sumisa y la vanguardia arrodillada, sometida y fría (Prado 58).

The first aspect that the poem highlights is the market logic embedded in art production. The social apathy that arises as a consequence of the alienation of the subject in a consumer society leads to believe that everything is to be commodified. The main issue for Prado is that 'la sangre sumisa' or, the Latin American subject, is dependent on global powers, and sees their own contemporary art as in an asymmetrical position, given that in order to become known or accepted, it needs to become part of the neoliberal machinery. The words 'sumisa', 'arrodillada' and 'sometida' are within the semantic field of the conquest; therefore, modern times are not devoid of a feeling of colonialism oppressing the Latin American subject, in this case, an artist.

A more explicit example of this is in the following lines:

En la esquina del Tercer Mundo el personaje tomó algunas fotos y las despachó como encargo. . . Las fotos fueron esparcidas y escondidas 500 años. Silenciosas fueron y vinieron en imágenes que a cada rato, a cada paso del tiempo, perdían un poco de negro (Prado 37).

It seems that Prado has a deep concern regarding the way that Latin Americans are represented. The location here is important, when she mentions that it is on the corner of the Third World, which means the farthest point within the imaginary of developing/poor countries. Chile is known to be one of the most distant countries especially when considering Europe as a starting point. The need to mention the Third World is very important as given that there is a third there must be a first (or second). As Chile is a mixed-race country the idea of being considered part of the Third World is highly problematic, as many Chileans—as well as other Latin Americans—do consider themselves white or belonging to the First World due to their partly European heritage.

This third positioning of certain countries is even more questionable because it automatically excludes these from certain discussions or influence. Being third worldly would entail a necessary marginalisation and a reality within the periphery, as those who are in the First World set the margins<sup>58</sup>. That global disparity is something that seems to be emphasised in Pradian writing, to the point that this quotation also conveys the image of a kind of explorer or tourist who takes pictures that perhaps include the image of the poetic speaker. What is relevant is that the person/character—as translated from ‘personaje’ as if she did not respect this individual—dispatches the photographs to an unknown destination.

Those images were hidden and scattered for 500 years. This poetic imaginary expresses a reality that is not historical, as photography did not exist in 1492. The relevance of the image here is to present an alternative mixed reality, as a mirror of the mixed cultural background of Latin American cultures. The 500 years hyperbole regarding the photograph makes reference to a rough estimate of how long it has been since Columbus ‘discovered’ America in 1492. Interestingly, Prado’s first book *Simples* was indeed published 500 years after that event, in 1992. Julieta Marchant proposed that ©*Copyright* seems to be in dialogue with *Simples* by considering that “Algo vuelve aquí, algo de la ira de *Simples* *placeres* contra el todo-mundo. . . Un todo de simulaciones, neones, luminarias, multitudes mansas, arte mercantil y, sobre todo, olvido general” (Marchant 52-54). So part of the rage Prado expresses in ©*Copyright* is rooted in a criticism of the First World, be it Europe or the US.

What happens with those pictures is that, after being hidden for 500 years, they would not be seen, so whatever was depicted in them, was not in existence, but only in myth. When the poem enunciates that the pictures ‘perdían un poco de negro’ means that, through time, there has been a whitening process in the region, in that corner of the Third World, in Chile. Those forgotten pictures contained something that is long gone. The poem never expresses that those photographs found a viewer and that they became

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<sup>58</sup> The terms ‘Third World’ or ‘Global South’ are two sets of conceptualisations that need to be contested from precisely those societies because they reproduce the marginalisation of certain countries and cultures. These concepts are, in my view, derogatory.

white as being erased by the passing of time. Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1980) postulates that: “What the Photograph has reproduced to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially” (Barthes 4). So, the poem suggests a questioning of the photo as an unrepeatable reproduction that has fallen into oblivion, as if its purpose has somehow been corrupted. Perhaps the photograph is a metaphor that represents a whole of people whose lives, customs and ways are forgotten just like a photo loses its colour and images with the passing of time. It seems that Prado uses this device in order to signal the domination of certain societies over those corners of the Third World, which can be better understood in a reading of global neoliberalism as sort of neocolonial way of controlling Latin American/Chilean subjects. It is also important to acknowledge that this neocoloniality is also fostered by the Chilean neoliberal state when it reproduces the invisibility of certain subjects, for example, the indigenous.

In addition, Prado’s poetic proposal in *©Copyright* highlights the need of resisting world powers, therefore, it is relevant to consider Prado’s criticism of the way that América is treated<sup>59</sup>. In her first book, *Simples Placeres* (1992), her speaker expresses concerns:

Éste es el recinto carcelario de América  
Querida América ¿dónde te has ido? (*Simples* 40).

Her words reveal the position of the continent concerning a ‘world order’, as a region that is imprisoned and seems to have lost its soul, its uniqueness. Prado’s speaker wonders where she (América) has gone, as she is not able to see her continent anymore. This could be a first approach to the critique of the cultural ‘whitening’ of the region when considering the influence of the US film industry and media, previously discussed in this chapter as Prado does disapprove of Hollywood. It seems as though both of Prado’s works *Simples* and *©Copyright* have many aspects in common, yet the latter shows some progression and a more explicit stance than the former.

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<sup>59</sup> The accentuation of América is on purpose, as I wish to make a case to resist the use of the term America to refer to the US.

In the case of a direct criticism of The United States, Prado's most eloquent expression of disagreement with global neoliberalism in the text appears in the following poem:

América®

Entramos en una ranurita, de a peso, de a dólar, de a centavos,  
tintinear a diario para comprar las cosas lindas que nos ofrecen. A  
toda hora gritan por nosotros, rezan por nosotros. Divisas en el cono  
sur, divisas para el pan y el agua.

¿Divisas algo desde aquí? Abajo de la ranura de esta alcancía que  
nos alberga, ruedo de mano en mano, soy entregada y recibida  
(Prado 96).

Prado, from the title, establishes a long-standing symbolic discrepancy with US culture, which is in the use of the word America. In Spanish, América signals a whole continent which is divided into three main parts: North America, Central America and South America. Whereas America, in English, is a shortened version of The United States of America. These terms refer to completely different imaginaries, being the Spanish one a collective reference that includes a variety of cultures and languages. For instance, Chilean folklorist Rolando Alarcón wrote and composed the song "Si somos americanos" (1965), which celebrates the diversity in the continent: "Si somos Americanos /seremos todos iguales /el blanco, el mestizo, el indio / y el negro son como tales" (Alarcón n.p.). The English example encompasses just one country and its appropriation of a term that does not include anyone but people from the US, causing a feeling of exclusion particularly for Latin American people. The famous phrase "America for Americans" characteristic of the Monroe Doctrine by the end of the nineteenth century in the US perhaps helped to perpetuate the separation between the Spanish and English meanings of these words.

Prado establishes her continent with a registered trademark sign next to it. América, then, has become a branded region, which means that its different cultures and original expressions are also subject to market fluctuation, and have become commodities to be ultimately consumed as the result of a purchase. Subjects themselves are part of a system in which they are no more than a cost. Low salaries seem to be the norm in so-called

'emerging economies', and this forces vulnerable workers to spend these salaries through the purchase of items manufactured in companies owned by those who employ them. These low-cost workers are offered products labelled almost innocently as 'cosas lindas' which seem to be desired, or at least deemed as wished, thanks to the influence of ads and mass media.

A very relevant aspect in Pradian writing here is that this poem denounces a foreign appropriation of American culture. 'A toda hora gritan por nosotros, rezan por nosotros' as if others had to speak on behalf of a silenced populace that cannot express itself. This patronising approach is exposed and criticised in these lines. The text wonders who are those who scream and pray for them. Interestingly, the poem follows with a line that refers to money and currency. In 'Divisas en el cono sur, divisas para el pan y el agua' we encounter two different meanings for the word 'divisas'. The first is the verb 'divisar' in its second person singular, in the present simple form that means: "percibir, aunque confusamente, un objeto" (RAE n.p.), which in English is understood in the verb 'to sight'. The second "divisas" is a noun, which is the plural form of "divisa" that, among other things, refers to "moneda extranjera referida a la unidad del país de que se trata" (RAE web), which in English means 'currency'. These lexical choices imply that the Souther Cone is sighted at the same time that currencies are exchanged for bread and water, the most basic of human nourishments to ensure survival<sup>60</sup>. Prado here criticises neoliberalism and globalisation by, on the one hand, expressing that American subjects are considered and traded for coins and that their work is very precarious—cheap labour. And, on the other, denouncing outsiders that seem to sympathise with these people's troubles and suffering, but do not know how that is or feels. Prado shifts the role of the 'other' to those who advocate on behalf of the subaltern who, in the end, do not need them shouting or praying but fighting for a more equal world, in which such inequalities are not the norm. Prado's text seems to be criticising white advocacy.

Between the last two examples, it would appear that Prado deeply criticises outsiders. Those who are not *mestizos* nor related to the newly

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<sup>60</sup> Both bread and water are mentioned in *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* by Carmen Berenguer.

commodified natives. Be it that they visit the continent and take pictures that suck up a country's identity to see it disappear or be traded; or that the influence of a given nation shames another, and mistreats their people on many levels. Prado seems to be protecting that which is uniquely local and far away from the reach of those who have spoiled the continent in contemporary times. She does express that such a stance is problematic and that the situation is far from being solved. The last lines of ©*Copyright* clearly signal this issue:

Abrí la puerta y no había nadie.

Este es un verso. El final del libro. El final del inicio.

América estuvo gobernada antes de su descubrimiento (Prado 98).

The poem closes with a paradox. It seems to go inwards and backwards. The first image is that of answering the door and finding that there was no one there. The paradox there entails presence and absence of another individual or entity. The image portrays a lack of hope, disappointment and disillusion, especially when considering one's expectations expressed in the metaphor of answering the door. The poem moves on to define what that part of the text is, in relation to the whole of ©*Copyright*. The metapoetic stance here poses a further enigma. The second line quoted signals the end of the book, but also the end of the beginning. Yet the book does not end with that particular line but with the following one. The paradox here is the anticipation of what comes next, and what the book's end means. The idea of the end of the beginning might imply that both colonialism and neo-colonialism need to end, and that end has just begun in her poetic imaginary. Prado's speaker announces that the beginning is gone and that the future is uncertain. Any possible ideas are then expelled by the last and closing line: América was governed before its discovery. The notion that the continent already had a given social order challenges the myth of the European discovery. Prado finishes the poem assuring that América was not discovered which, between the lines, again denounces the conquest and the lack of respect shown to those who were inhabitants of an unnamed land that Europeans decided to call América when drafting maps of the zone, in honour of Americo Vespucci's travels to the area. América as a concept, then, is somehow copyrighted to the conquerors, and that can be felt acutely throughout the poem and through time as in Pradian

criticism of the branding of the continent— particularly the Latin American region—and how it has been shaped to serve the interests of others, be it US or European based.

### **The Chilean Poetic Tradition in Pradian Writing: Mistral, Millán and Hernández**

©*Copyright* is an inherently Latin American poem. It shows questions of identity and memory, and the difficulty to address both. Nevertheless, Prado does criticise Chile in particular and she mentions her country during the text. The references are both direct and indirect, but they clearly point towards a reflection and a strong disapproval of what the country went through. The first reference to a Chilean political context is expressed in the following lines:

Me revuelco en todos, muerdo la mano que me dio de comer y digo  
que pasé hambre. Fui rebelde cuando me escondí de la dictadura  
golpeando con botellas de vino a las muchachas que no querían  
besarme. Las hojas caen (Prado 19).

Here Prado's speaker celebrates rebellion within the dictatorship. During times when opposition was prosecuted, the voice enunciates that she did try to rebel to society in general 'me revuelco en todos' and in terms of her sexuality as a lesbian 'me escondí de la dictadura golpeando. . . a las muchachas que no querían besarme'. The speaker is herself violent and imposes herself on other women who may not be lesbians, so she decides to hit them with bottles. The use of the word 'golpeando' which comes from 'golpe' and this term can also be understood as 'coup' in English. The fact that she mentions the dictatorship directly is a sign that, by the time she wrote ©*Copyright*, talking about it was possible. It is clear that the feeling of imprisonment so characteristic of the previous two decades was changing. By the decade of the 2000s, after over 10 years of democracy, the transition seemed to have provided enough ground for artists to feel safe enough to condemn the near past, specifically Pinochet's regime. When the first line establishes that she 'muerd[e] la mano que [le] dio de comer y di[j]o que pas[ó] hambre' gives the idea that the poet can be playful and also hyperbolic when expressing dissent.

Another reference to Prado's local context, understood as post-dictatorship Chile, is found in the following lines:

Un gas inerte invade la ciudad,  
me ahoga y ensucia . . .  
La historia vuelve, rebobinando imágenes que tu yo no recuerdas.  
Ésta nunca será una gran ciudad, nadie la habita.  
Tampoco será un gran país, nadie le cree (Prado 22).

When mentioning the city and its polluted air, the reference directly points towards the capital, Santiago, and an earlier and canonical poem entitled *La Ciudad* by Chilean poet Gonzalo Millán, written in 1979, whilst he was in exile in Canada. It seems as though Prado mirrors some of Millán's images of the city. For instance, section 62 of *La Ciudad* enunciates:

Nos falta el aire. . .  
la dictadura asfixia  
la dictadura ahoga (Millán 96)

The dialogue between Millán and Prado's works starts with a common ground, the lack of air, the impossibility of breathing. On the one hand, Prado's speaker expresses the idea that the city is extremely polluted as it chokes and contaminates her, which is an aspect that is shared with Elvira Hernández in different works by her. In Millán's poem, lack of air also means lack of freedom. Millán enumerates the different uses of air in section 62, such as 'el aire permite la combustión' whilst 'el aire es indispensable para la vida' but that 'el aire convierte el vino en vinagre'. Here we can see that for Millán, air is an element that can be good for life, but also helps rotting some substances. His poem moves on to indicate that the regime is both asphyxiating and suffocating, which makes the dictatorship harmful for human life as it is incredibly deadly.

From a post-dictatorship perspective, Pradian writing shifts the meaning of air pollution to a more literal sense, yet the text manages to criticise her times. That filthy air surrounding the speaker brings back some memories which are not easily recollected. 'Que tu yo no recuerdas' can be understood as the speaker addressing either herself as a twofold subject or she addresses the message to her reader. Interestingly, the verb 'rebobinar' has a technological meaning, as it means rewind, as when watching a video cassette. History, then, is constructed as a film that can be rewound. This

nostalgia can also be understood in what Fredric Jameson discusses by stating that subjects “are condemned to seek history by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach” (Jameson 25). The verses go on to assert that the city and the country are built on lies. Hence, the questioning of history. The emptiness of the city, as ‘nadie la habita’ is complemented by the unreliability of the country, as ‘nadie le cree’.

The idea that a country has lost credibility is also explored in Elvira Hernández’s *La Bandera* (1981) especially when the speaker enunciates that: “La bandera de Chile es extranjera en su propio país” (Hernández 20), somehow implying that the country was taken hostage and not only the flag but the citizens themselves would not feel at home in Chile. The criticism of the city also takes place in Hernández’ work, precisely in one of her most recent productions, *Santiago Waria & Santiago Rabia* (2016) in which her speaker expresses a concern about air pollution and its different sources: “tanta cerrazón me digo tanto solvente tanta lacrimógena” (Hernández 25). Therefore, the concern over air pollution in the city is not new, yet the interpretation of the lack of fresh air has shifted depending on contextual circumstances. During the dictatorship, for instance, it could be interpreted as lack of freedom (Millán) but in future years, it also condemns the harsh conditions of such a city and the impossibility of living there (Prado and Hernández).

Prado establishes a very clear line when criticising her national context.

©*Copyright* further explores this in her autumnal depiction of Chile:

Callo para escuchar el viento que golpea las olas que golpean mi cabeza que mira la montaña. . .

Todo está detenido, las hojas caen y a mitad de camino parecen pensar si seguirán cayendo. El aire me ahoga el sol se esconde yo no lo puedo mirar. El mar es amplio mirar el mar es amplio. Escucho para hablarme cuando el viento, las hojas, el suelo parecen callar. Chile es claro, oscuro, pequeño, pequeño y oscuro, claro es pequeño, oscuro es inmenso.

Chile quiere decir mentira. (33)

Here it is important to recognise elements which are very common in Chilean poetry that belong to a natural national imaginary. The first one is ‘montaña’, which makes reference to The Andes, and ‘el mar’ which is clearly the Pacific

Ocean. Both elements are on either side of the country, with mountains to the east and the ocean to the west, both of them isolate the country from its neighbours and from other continents. Gabriela Mistral praises both mountains and the ocean in her posthumous *Poema de Chile* (1967). The mountains are celebrated in the poem “Cordillera”,

¡Es la Patrona Blanca  
que da el temor y el denuedo! . . .  
Y ahora a causa de ti  
siempre voy a estarme viendo  
lo mismo que tú, y a urdir  
con ella veras y cuentos (Mistral 123-4)

The everlasting presence of the Mother, la cordillera, is very relevant for Mistral and in her attempt to show what Chile is like. *Poema de Chile* fulfils Mistral’s desire to disseminate her country’s natural and cultural traits. According to *Memoria Chilena*, “En abril de 1929 Gabriela Mistral señaló: ‘Nuestra obligación primogénita de escritores es entregar a los extraños el paisaje nativo’ y pareciera ser esta la constante en los 77 poemas que componen *Poema de Chile*” (n.a. web). Therefore, the presence of mountains is key to a Chilean imaginary and so is the sea.

In the same poem, “Cordillera”, Mistral’s speaker enunciates:

Aunque queremos la Ruta  
varia, ardiente y novelera  
y al mar buscamos oír  
el duro grito y la endecha  
pasa siempre que volvemos  
el rostro a la Madre cierta (Mistral 124)

As *Poema de Chile* travels through the country from north to south, it is possible to understand that the Chilean geography is marked by the presence of the mountains and the sea on both sides as if surrounding the Central Valley. This means that the two most important elements of a Chilean poetic imaginary are indeed ‘la cordillera’ and the ocean.

Prado’s text clearly, and in a very succinct way, mentions both of Chile’s most characteristic and cherished natural elements and particularly emphasises the relevance of the ocean in the repetition: ‘el mar es amplio el mar es amplio’ as if the vastness of the ocean displays its inscrutable power—

which can also be linked to a Nerudian imaginary. The text moves on to situate her speaker in autumn, as ‘Todo está detenido las hojas caen’, in a similar fashion as Gonzalo Millán’s 7th poem in *La Ciudad*:

Otoña en la ciudad  
Las hojas enrojecen . . .  
Las hojas caen . . .  
El tirano no cae (Millán 20).

Evidently, as with other examples from Millán, his poetry is devoted to destabilising and criticising Pinochet’s regime without actually mentioning him. This last quotation addresses him as ‘el tirano’—which is a rather direct reference. The autumnal setting is interesting as Prado’s text juxtaposes autumn with a feeling of suffocation and awe. The leaves in her poem seem to consider whether to keep falling and, at the same time, the speaker is feeling the effects of smog: ‘El aire me ahoga el sol se esconde yo no lo puedo mirar’. The lack of punctuation fuses the images, as the following one contrasts the speaker’s inability to see daylight—to see the sun—by asserting that the sea is always possible to observe. Then, everything is silence as ‘el viento, las hojas, el suelo parecen callar’. The speaker defines her nation: ‘Chile es claro, oscuro, pequeño, pequeño y oscuro, claro es pequeño, oscuro es inmenso’. The repetitions of the contrasts between ‘claro’ and ‘oscuro’, together with the adjective ‘pequeño’ highlight the difficulties in understanding her own context. In the end, all that is illuminated is small and what is dark is immense. The image of darkness here resembles that of having an underlying truth that is hidden. The light only shows that Chile is small. And by the end of these lines Prado’s speaker expresses this concern by stating that Chile represents a lie, that is to say, what we see is not truthful. The collapse of the subject here is clear, as she realises there is something else that is not possible to attain, similarly as Alejandra Del Río expressed her own concerns a few years prior in *Braille*.

©*Copyright* insists on describing her country as one that has many (dark) secrets and that reality is hurtful. Pradian writing also acknowledges that nationhood is a term under scrutiny and her poem is rather direct in addressing this issue:

Amanecían los bellos días para esperar que las ciudades  
amanecieran  
Cerré los ojos, pero la realidad me azotó por los costados,  
el olvido es grande y la memoria indeseable.  
He perdido mi nombre en un país extraño,  
deletreo cada día entre la multitud a ver si encuentro a la que soy,  
he perdido mi nombre y mis letras de agua. . . (Prado 44).

The first element to consider is the contradiction between the beautiful day about to start and that reality is reached by closing one's eyes. This would emphasise the idea that 'seeing' does not mean living in the real world in a clear link to my reading of Del Río's *Braille*. On the contrary, it would mean living in a lie, in a faked reality ruled by an orchestrated forgetting of the near past, where memory is not wanted. Nelly Richard has studied this expression concerning memory and/or the lack of it throughout her academic career. In her words: "El arte y la literatura saben explorar los baches del sentido, es decir, todo lo que el recuerdo oficial, la memoria institucional o el pasado mítico tienden a suprimir. . . para que no estropeen sus ilusiones de control y dominio" (Richard 182), therefore, a lack of memory obeys a given agenda, and that is what Prado's work achieves to express. The line that enunciates 'He perdido mi nombre en un país extraño' is clearly in dialogue with "La Bandera de Chile es extranjera en su propio país" (Hernández 20) as for both Hernández and Prado belonging becomes a difficult term. It would imply a defined idea of identity or Chilenity. It seems that Prado's text responds to Hernández's as if 20 or more years later, Chileans are still struggling with their country, be it that its identity is being changed—in Hernández—or that identity is no longer possible to apprehend—in Prado.

Following Richard's argument, ©*Copyright* would be part of a cohort of works that explore those 'baches del sentido', those in-betweens, spaces in which institutional memory does not access. Prado's speaker locates herself in a strange country and is not able to recognise or find herself, not even by having a name. The enunciation that she has lost her name appearing twice in these lines emphasises that she is nobody. The lack of identification in these lines echoes the idea that by having a social order built upon lies generates a crisis of belonging and of being in the subject that realises this. The subject is both citizen and person; therefore, this realisation is critical. On the other hand,

this can also be considered a step further to what Del Río established in *Braille*, as her text opens the door to understanding that there is an ultimate reality being concealed. In Prado's text, this progresses by showing what actually happens to a subject that is confronted with this simulated reality, one that expresses the absolute commodification of social life, including intangible practices and traits that would have been impossible to consider within a market logic a few years before. ©*Copyright* opens its readers' eyes to finally allow them to decide how to proceed: to either fight the battle against neocolonialism and neoliberalism, or to surrender/abide to them.

Further in the poem, Prado provides more ground to contest neocolonial reality, as if trying to convince her readers of what it means to remain passive when confronting these powers. Here she downsizes her criticism of US or European reach to one more local and distinguishable:

Estaba ciega y desnuda, primitivizada bajo la nueva elite colonial,  
centinelas de mi propia raza que forjaba mitos historias.

Estandartes modernos para la tortura, puñales eléctricos para mi  
humanidad indígena depositada en un mástil frío con sangre anterior  
(Prado 73).

Interestingly, these lines are on page 73 in the book and, clearly, any Chilean writer could make use of that number to challenge what took place in Chile since 1973. Gonzalo Millán, for instance, divided his poem *La Ciudad* (1979) in 73 parts, which turns the number into a symbolic stance, as if a totem to go back to when creating a critical work that, one way or another, aims to refer to dictatorship times.

Page 73 in ©*Copyright* can have a reading contextualised in the dictatorship, especially during those years of the shock doctrine (Klein), when neoliberalism was imposed. The first image in these lines, when the speaker finds herself blind and naked, as if in a primitive state—as she remembers former colonial impositions—by a new elite. This elite is not foreign, which is why this reading is necessarily linked to the Chilean dictatorship. She describes this elite as sentinels of her own race. This means that whoever made her primitive or belonging to a pre-historic order are other Chileans who wished to change history for good, hence “que forjaba mitos historias”. This is

perhaps a parallel to what Alejandra del R o established in *Braille* as she questioned the writing of history, as if those being favoured by the regime shaped the ways in which the dictatorship was to be seen and understood in future history books. This emphasises their power but also their mercilessness as they have not yet—until today—revealed details of the evil deeds they committed through the military in the name of ‘progress’. Prado’s text can certainly be connected to Del R o’s further in this point, as the following lines from this quotation express that this local neocolonial elite is a modern banner for torture.

A banner in contemporary Chilean poetry, I believe, can be directly related to Elvira Hern andez’ masterpiece *La bandera* (1981) whose groundbreaking style poeticized the flag, the banner, as a multiple sign. ‘Estandartes’ is also a word used in the hymn of the Chilean army “Los viejos estandartes” (1881). This lexical choice allows readers to identify that those who were involved in human right crimes were the military, therefore, they were the violent elements of the regime and they are responsible for the torture that took place during those years.

Torture is more explicitly expressed here: ‘pu ales el ctricos para mi humanidad ind gena depositada en un m stil fr o con sangre anterior’. What Prado does here is to mix two distinct processes of colonisation, two breaks of meaning, and two epistemological crises. On the one hand, the contemporary kind, embodied in the Chilean economic elite that benefited from Pinochet’s regime, and the previous and most dramatic break, that is the Spanish conquest, which affected her ancestors, those who gave her an indigenous identity. The image of a cold mast covered in blood goes back to the colonial practice of impaling, and the story of the death of Mapuche warlord Caupolic n, who died by impalement in 1558 (Cruz 356). The cold blood in the mast in Prado’s text can be Caupolic n’s as it is linked to the speaker’s indigenous belonging.

### 6.3 Conclusions

It seems as though ©*Copyright* establishes a set of frontiers to resist: the first one would be the long lasting pain of Spanish colonisation. Then, it would be a global power that devours everything on its way to finally impose a given culture and worldview, which is clearly seen in the influence of the United States. Finally, and no less importantly, the third frontier is within Chilean territory, in its own economic and racialized elite.

Prado's criticism of colonialism is openly expressed in her poem. The images that introduce an indigenous subject reminds us of the wandering of the poet and the native in Mistral's *Poema de Chile*, yet Prado's text shows a very different Chile, and a deep concern for her *mestizo* identity. ©*Copyright* goes on to demonstrate that even though it has been 500 years since colonisation, América is still under the control of a foreign power, in this case the United States. Prado's speaker criticises US culture and its approach to Latin America, which in the poem is simply América, in a more inclusive use of the word. For Prado, the cult of plastic, neon lights and Hollywood entertainment is to be resisted, and that is achieved through an inner look, to find a mixed identity that does not need to bow to foreign influence. This view is very relevant when considering that the text was published in 2003. At the time, the US was still a relevant actor in Latin American politics and economy.

Finally, the text warns its readers of the evils of the local economic elite. This point is not new to this thesis. Hernández and Del Río also emphasise this in their works. This means that there is an emphasis on alerting readers who are the ones behind the coup, who were the ones that really benefited from it. It is clear that they used the armed forces for their own purposes. Poets knew what was about to happen, yet citizens were oblivious to this. Be it for focusing on meaningless media broadcasts or shallow literature, they also remained ignorant of texts such as this. It seems as though Chilean poets are the great oracles of our times, and should be elevated as such.

Given that poetic work is not profit-driven, poetry is and will be a genre that is not read by the masses. Paradoxically, its marginal existence within a neoliberal setting allows it to develop a strong discourse that can eventually destabilise it. In order to grant these poems access to a wider readership, these need to be known and added to different syllabi, at school and university

level. It is for this reason that I believe that Pradian writing is in urgent need of further study. All of her works deserve discussion and this chapter would be a step forward in learning from her themes and poetic style to also understand the importance of opening more spaces for the study of contemporary Chilean women poets. Prado's work is rich in criticism but, at the same time, dances around the sublime and the beautiful. The poet understands the responsibilities that come with poeticizing and also celebrates and respects the word. For her, words go further than anything else, even than love and sexuality.

Pradian writing seems to be in constant dialogue with other poets, as proved in my reading of *©Copyright*. It is clear that the list is not exclusively around Mistral, Hernández or Millán, yet their influence is clear. I believe that the links to both Del Río and Arrate's works are very relevant, especially considering what this thesis seeks to prove. It is evident that in a few years to come, along with further study, Del Río, Arrate and Prado will certainly become part of the Chilean poetic corpus that is updated and acknowledges more women poets. The recognition and the placement of these poets among the greatest of Chilean poetry is necessary, as they are all as powerful and creative as Berenguer and Hernández—some of the most outstanding poets of their generation.

What *©Copyright* achieves can be interpreted as an unintentional progression from Del Río's stance in *Braille*, and this is of vital importance. I dare to hypothesise that both works are not necessarily linked; however, this analysis proves that there is a feeling towards 'reality' that needs to be reflected on. The idea that the world is a simulation of itself, a farce built upon lies, is expressed—differently—in both Del Río and Prado's texts. This coincidence is not random. It is the conclusion of what happened during and after the regime and they sustain my thesis that poetic writing does refer to neoliberalism, together with consequences and discontents.

## CHAPTER 7

*Bracea* (2007) by Malú Urriola

A Mistralian Homage to Resistance

*Me voy, montaña adelante,  
por donde van mis arrieros,  
aunque espinos y algarrobos  
me atajan con llamamientos,  
aguzando las espinas  
o atravesándome el leño*

Gabriela Mistral

### 7.1 Introduction

María de la Luz Urriola González (1967), mostly known in Chilean literature as Malú Urriola, is a renowned poet and screenwriter who has become a relevant literary figure since the late 1980s. Her poetic work is varied in terms of themes and modes of expression, mixing verse with prose fragments, photographic work, drawings, and references in other languages, such as English or French. *Bracea*, published by LOM in 2007, is her fifth poetry book, and in light of her switches of style and subjects, her first four texts need to be briefly reviewed prior to the analysis of *Bracea*.

This chapter will therefore explore *Bracea*, first, as a poetry book that follows on from its predecessor, *Nada* (2003). This poetic pair will be followed by a third poetry book allegedly entitled *Vuela* (not yet published) as part of a projected poetic trilogy, according to literary critic Gonzalo Ignacio Rojas<sup>61</sup>. As *Bracea* is supposed to be the second book in the trilogy, its role as a middle text is relevant, as its ending can mean a new beginning in symbolic terms. For this reason, the relationship between both *Nada* and *Bracea* is undeniably close, not only with regard to their titles—and the immediate semantic connection to the action of swimming—but to the writing techniques and use of images that differ from all of Urriola's work prior.

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<sup>61</sup> In Rojas' text: "Fugacidades e inanidades en *Nada* y *Bracea* de Malú Urriola" he establishes that: "Esta trilogía comienza con el libro *Nada* (2005), luego *Bracea* (2007). Queda en veremos el libro *Vuela*. Por lo tanto, la finalidad de este trabajo es la de analizar los dos libros de esta trilogía en proceso" (Rojas 34).

This section will include brief introductory commentaries to her first three texts: *Piedras rodantes* (1988), *Dame tu sucio amor* (1994) and *Hija de perra* (1998). These commentaries will be followed by a slightly deeper analysis of *Nada* (2003) in order to signpost relevant thematic and stylistic elements that are repeated and delved into in *Braceea* (2007).

The analysis of *Braceea* will thus be divided into three lines of thought: the first one will be entitled 'Understanding Monstrosity and Social Alienation'. This section will explore the idea of the monster in the poem, but also in relation to the photographic material that Urriola added to her text so as to visually engage her readers. Also, the poem presents a multiplicity of voices from Siamese twins, and 'freak show'-like people who need to be interpreted as a symbol of resistance against capitalist depictions of beauty and the symbolic implications of being 'different' in both political and cultural terms. After this, this study will focus on the figure of the mother from two perspectives through the section 'Motherhood in Mistral and the Twins' Mothers', one being the mother(s) of the Siamese twins in the poem, and also the mother in poetic terms, understood as Gabriela Mistral, who is *Braceea's* main dedicatee.. Finally, the chapter will examine the role of the periphery and escaping society. Concretely, as the setting imagined in the text and its symbolic implications by considering rural life as resisting an urban and consumerist society. This last section will be known as 'Resisting from the Periphery: Escaping (the) Capital and its Expectations' and it engages with a neoliberal critique as the whole thesis delves into this particular type of analysis.

### **Urriola's Writing Prior to *Nada* (2003) and *Braceea* (2007)**

Urriola's first book, *Piedras rodantes* (1988) was published by Editorial Cuarto Propio. The direct translation of the title means: "rolling stones", just like the rock band. Interestingly, the poem does make reference to rock stars such as Mick Jagger, Joe Cocker, Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix through quoting some of their song titles and lyrics. However, it would be reductionist to only refer to this aspect as Urriola's text also delves into very profound issues that question the poetry of her times—the end of Pinochet's regime—and also develops a catlike imaginary that is reminiscent of T.S Eliot's 1939 poetry book *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*. Both poetry books are completely different

in character, however, since Eliot's poem names and depicts different cats and their activities, Urriola's felines are anonymous. Therefore, they could represent any particular urban subject. Her cats live on the roofs of the city centre, listen to blues and spend their lives within the area but, at the same time, at the periphery that these roofs symbolise. In the words of Carmen Berenguer the poem portrays "unos gatos símbolos hacia una opereta nocturna de maullidos rodantes que circulan por bares y cafés nocturnos, por los des-centros del centro de la ciudad: su periferia. La temática transcurre en la ciudad" (Berenguer back cover flap).

Urriola's first book delivers a strong critical voice that cohabits with the world of cats, independent creatures that move around the city as they please. Urriola's voice describes them as:

Los gatos son todos iguales  
maulleros, sacadores de quicio. . .  
y se hacen los tiernos y ronronean  
se miran al espejo  
se hacen los que nada les importa  
pero no les creo  
porque luego cahuinean en el zinc  
yo los he visto (*Piedras* 17).

Urriola's cats are gossipers, they go wherever they want, and they are moody and pretend to be tender. Their lives revolve around a central neighbourhood and all of the gossip that they—being personified—share when they stand on certain roofs. The speaker becomes a 'cahuinera' herself as she enunciates 'yo los he visto' in a gesture that seems to present some degree of evidence about these cats' questionable behaviour.

From a general reading of *Piedras*, these cats could symbolise the literary scene of the time, in which poets were gathering as if cats on roofs, in underground meetings that discussed different matters. It seems as though Urriola's speaker acknowledges this reality, but she does not partake in this group, she would be a marginal figure within a group that is already marginalised from Pinochet's Chile.

Urriola's second book, *Dame tu sucio amor* (1994), was published by Surada Ediciones. As the title suggests, the poem depicts a violent story of unrequited love. What is interesting is that her second book also takes place on the streets of Santiago. The capital city, so far, is relevant to understand Urriola's imaginary and what she seeks to convey through it. Here the poems are also written in both verse and prose fragments. There are emphases made through the use of capitalisation, which can be interpreted as shouting. Violence, in the poem is quite explicit: "Alguien dice amarme y me golpea y no me doy cuenta, / tal vez yo misma me golpeo" (*Dame* 15). What these lines suggest is that there can be violence in the form of domestic abuse. The way in which the speaker suggests that she hits herself somehow shifts the blame from the aggressor to the victim.

However, there is an alternative interpretation for these lines which is suggested by Urriola herself, in a 1995 interview to *La Nación* newspaper: "Hay varios territorios que yo abordo en este libro. Está el tema del recuerdo amoroso de un otro que ya no está. . . La escritura para mí es como tener un amante, que yo tomo y retomo, pero al que estoy ligada extraoficialmente" (Urriola and A.M.R 146). From her words, it is possible to understand that the violent relationship can be interpreted as between the poet and language, in which language is the abuser and the poet the figure that gets hit or blames herself for her wounds.

Later on in the poem, the speaker's tone becomes exasperated when further addressing the lover:

NO FUE TU CULPA, NO LO FUE  
no hubo nada cerca para atarme  
NO ESTOY VIVA, NO ESTOY MUERTA PERMANEZCO LEJOS DE  
TODO (*Dame* 22)

Here, if reading the text from the perspective of domestic violence, we see that the speaker blames herself for whatever has happened; the only line that is not written in capital letters explains that she was involved with this lover voluntarily. However, her perception of herself is an enigmatic one, as she neither finds herself alive nor dead, as if in a sort of limbo, away from any kinds of activity or society. From the perspective of her relationship to writing, it seems as though she is responsible for her art and her attempt at being

original. This means she needs to lead a solitary life, away from everything, which is an aspect that is indeed explored in *Bracea* (2007), as the poem is set in the countryside, far away from reach.

Urriola's third text, *Hija de perra* (1998), was published by Editorial Cuarto Propio<sup>62</sup>. The title of the book is similar to the swearing expression, 'hijo de perra' or 'son of a bitch', but in the female form as if 'daughter of a bitch'. The photo on the cover of both Cuarto Propio and Surada editions portrays a transvestite in a famous photograph by Paz Errázuriz, from her photo collection *La manzana de Adán* (1983). The drag is called Evelyn<sup>63</sup>. In general, what is most striking about this text is Urriola's depiction of the city, Santiago. As a follow-up of her Santiago in *Dame*, the city by the end of the 1990s is hostile and the process of neoliberalisation is shown as something that shocks both the poet and the reader, when social inequality is addressed. The text expresses pessimism, just like Alejandra Del Río expressed hers in *Braille* (1999) a year later. In the words of journalist and literary critic Faride Zerán: "La ciudad, tan santiaguina, tan gris, tan down, se cierne sobre sus huesos de hija de perra aprisionando aún más sus partes vencidas y abandonadas al ejercicio implacable de la derrota" (Zerán 18).

The poem opens with a sensation of defeat:

Estoy sola y las palabras terminan consumiéndome, promoviendo en mí un estado de total decrepitud. El silencio hiende sus dientes en mi cuello como un dulce y terrorífico amante, puedo sentir. . . un abandono imperdonable. . . mientras las luces del San Cristóbal se encienden y apagan (*Hija* 13).

The voice explicitly establishes herself from a position of loneliness and words are consuming her, relegating her to a state of decrepitude, as in dialogue with her relationship to them in her previous poem, *Dame*. Here we see that the speaker is completely worn out. Silence, then, becomes a new lover, as opposed to words and language, suggesting that silence in itself is another means of expression. This was also an aspect that Marina Arrate explicitly

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<sup>62</sup> The version quoted for this chapter was the second edition, published in 2002 by Surada Ediciones.

<sup>63</sup> Evelyn's pictures are to be found in the online catalogue of both the Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid as well as the Tate Britain Museum in London. Errázuriz' work can be viewed by appointment only.  
<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/errazuriz-adams-apple-p13169>

made clear in her book *Uranio* (1999) as there were many numbered blank pages that preceded each section there. For Urriola, silence leaves her completely abandoned within a city that is full of people, but that the poem never mentions. It is always the city that wants or has something, but its inhabitants are not part of the poem, as if they did not exist. The reference to 'las luces del San Cristóbal' is one of the most obvious ones to refer to Santiago, as it is a distinctive landmark of the Chilean capital.

The city, in Urriola's work, becomes the space where the subject dissolves, yet words remain as sharp and penetrating as ever:

puedo perderme de mí... siempre me pierdo de mí... en cambio las palabras no se pierden, perforan, como el invierno que arrasan que golpea duro, duro (*Hija* 20)

After her flirtatious remarks about silence on page 13, the speaker loses herself as if she has lost her soul, as expressed in *Dame*, which also echoes her views on life as a happening in her first book, *Piedras*. The only remaining element for her speaker is words, which remain forever. As if they were physical structures, they pierce, puncture or penetrate the subject and they hit hard. This not only makes reference to *Dame* and the ways in which Urriola describes her relationship to writing and language, but also to the fact that words remain a powerful weapon. It is important here to question against whom and for what purpose.

The text presents the need for another city, as her speaker's own completely annuls her. This is clear when we recognise the ideology behind a city. In general terms, "la ciudad se diseña como un dispositivo de ordenamiento social, o sea, de disciplinamiento de cuerpos, subjetividades e identidades a partir de una organización anglo, euro y androcéntrica" (Moraga 168) and, in this context, Urriola's expression is clearly subversive. The envisioned new city would be able to accommodate her, also as a body: "quiero ver amanecer en otra ciudad, con otro cielo, otros ojos y otro cuerpo y otra boca que me quite este frío" (*Hija* 22). In previous texts Urriola's speaker wishes to disappear from everything, perhaps her destination is this new imagined city that is so different that the words that punctured and caused her wounds simply vanish. This would mean that the whole city and society have

been restructured so she, as a subject, becomes part of a city that includes her.

In the end, Urriola's work expresses that the city is corrupted by the dictatorship of capital, which is what rules post-dictatorship Chile, and continues to do so. By expressing the symbolic abyss of the dark city that Santiago is in *Hija*, Urriola's poetic proposal is a clear example of "el hastío de una generación que creció entre milicos [y], la sordidez de una ciudad de mentira que nada ofrece" (Zerán 18). This precise point is what Julio Ortega develops in his section on Urriola's work in his book *Caja de herramientas: Prácticas culturales para el nuevo siglo chileno* (2000) as he asserts that in this poem "el paisaje urbano, 'Santiago muerto', escenifica aquí el paisaje interior, desolado por la ruptura del diálogo" (Ortega 117).

### **The importance of *Nada* (2003)**

*Nada*, published by LOM Ediciones, continues poeticizing the city. Here, the urban landscape is depicted as a place that drowns its inhabitants, a place that is chaotic, mismanaged, where life escapes subjects, and it seems impossible to find a sense of belonging. Urriola's criticism is biting and more explicit than ever before:

Pasa el futuro ante los ojos y luego nada sabemos, nada.  
De cómo vendrán las horas siguientes, los días, y las noches.  
Qué gobernantes nos robarán el alma  
y nos dejarán tan aturdidos y devastados,  
que dará lo mismo quienes gobiernen nuestras horas... (*Nada* 14)

The text expresses a profound disappointment with reality and it also shows a lack of hope in the future. This seems to be explained by the political ambience that surrounds the production of this book. By 2003, Chile had been living for 13 years in the period known as *La Transición*; the failure of this period in political and economic terms is clearly patent in her poetry, and also in all the post-dictatorship texts studied in this thesis. Chile was under socialist president Ricardo Lagos when *Braceá* was published. It is important to mention this as, in this quotation, Urriola's speaker declares that it does not really matter who is in power, as they devastate society, stun people with fake promises to ultimately steal their souls. Nothing is known of the future as those

who lead the city, and the country, have their own agendas. These lines exemplify the failure of transitional times. Ricardo Lagos in particular embodies this, as his office implemented further neoliberal policies. This seems rather contradictory coming from a socialist president. In the end, those who govern are all the same for Urriola's speaker.

Again, within the chaos of the city, Urriola's writing turns to her views on poetry. This particular shift is noticeable to readers that have delved into her production in general, so they have now understood the poet's relationship with words and language:

Ah, adjetivo que no da vida, mata, Huidobro,  
y agonizados adjetivados  
como un empellón de sangre, Mistral,  
que no quiere salir, que ahoga (*Nada* 24).

The speaker seems to be addressing two of the greatest Chilean poets, Creationist Vicente Huidobro and Nobel Prize laureate Gabriela Mistral. The orality in the tone of these verses especially in the interjection 'ay' can remind readers of Nicanor Parra's emphasis on everyday language in his 'antipoesía', yet the term was coined by Huidobro in his masterpiece *Altazor* (1919) and it seems as though Urriola seeks to engage in dialogue with this particular book:

Sí desmesurado y lo proclamo sin miedo. . .  
Soy bárbaro tal vez. . .  
Poeta  
Anti poeta (Huidobro 31).

The orality in 'proclamo' emphasises the link that Urriola's text wishes to make here, as the first line addresses Huidobro directly and she also refers to his poetic production as 'adjetivo que no da vida, mata', which in the context of Huidobro's work can be understood as the need to bend language for poetic purposes.

Among the many studies of *Altazor*, there is one that delves into the way in which Huidobro shakes work categories, as "un modo de enriquecimiento léxico presente en los sistemas lingüísticos es el de hacer funcionar una palabra con una categoría gramatical distinta a la que normalmente se tiene" (Rojas 126). This particular point is vastly developed in *Altazor*, as in the following example:

Mientras la noche se cama a descansar  
Con su luna que almohada al cielo  
Yo ojo el paisaje cansado (Huidobro 94).

It is clear that Huidobro plays with his lexical choices, as the nouns ‘cama’, ‘almohada’ and ‘ojo’, in these lines are turned into verbs. From here, it seems that Urriola considered this use of language in Huidobro’s work as an inspiration, as if an adjective is not only providing a characteristic to an element, it also gives it life or kills it if used in a different way. The possibilities seem to be endless if *Altazor* is being taken as a starting point. Urriola’s lines highlight the relevance of words and their function within the lines previously quoted from page 24. The words ‘adjetivo’ and ‘adjetivados’ follow Huidobro’s shift of grammatical categorisations from the noun ‘adjetivo’ to a possible past participle of its verbal form in ‘adjetivados’. It can be argued that this example is in dialogue with Huidobro’s *Altazor*.

The reference to Mistral in Urriola’s quotation is very direct, as she did mention an ‘empellón de sangre’ in her poem “Cordillera”, which is part of *Poema de Chile* (1967). Interestingly, the same poem is relevant to the analysis of ©Copyright by Nadia Prado, and further references to *Poema de Chile* can be found in *Braceá*. Mistral’s lines read as follows:

Vamos unidos los tres  
y es que juntos la entendemos  
por el empellón de sangre  
que va de los dos al Ciervo (Mistral 126)

What unites the three characters involved in Mistral’s poem: the speaker, the indigenous boy and the deer is, precisely, blood, ‘el empellón’. Here Urriola unites both Huidobro and Mistral’s imaginaries in order to emphasise that words are as strong as blood, and their meaning either creates or destroys reality.

It seems as though Urriola is deeply concerned about creativity and how a difficult relationship with words can result in an original creation. By turning her attention to two of Chile’s most relevant poets, she exemplifies that this is achievable, and her works themselves seem to be an attempt at being original. *Nada*, then, is the foundation stone of what Urriola develops in *Braceá*. That is to say, from a word that both means ‘nothing’ and an imperative that orders ‘to

swim', she moves to a verb, 'bracear', which is also related to a particular type of swimming stroke, and also to waving as if for flying. I believe this progression is relevant and that her emphasis in challenging views of deformity and the relevance on the rural in *Bracea* brings a new and decentralised imaginary. With regards to her previous work, *Bracea's* rurality breaks with the urban air characteristic of Urriola's poetry, as it was mainly centred in Santiago.

## 7.2 Analysis

*Bracea* is a poetry book written mostly in prose fragments. This style is characteristic of Urriola's poetry, but also of other writers, especially if we consider the work of Nadia Prado and Marina Arrate, also studied in this thesis. The subversion implied in the poem's form is that there are no aesthetic limits when attempting to show discontent. *Bracea* is written as if from the perspective of a young girl—most of the time—and in the shape of a collection of thoughts or a sort of diary without any date entries. The sections in which the work is divided provide this sense of movement from the outside to the inside; to finally go away for good—as the sisters escape from their hometown. The sections that poeticise about people are complemented by visual images of them. LOM as publishers and printers did not print quality images, so it is difficult to interpret them. After a short email exchange with Urriola I was able to find out that the author selected the pictures from an internet search. According to the author: "Esas imágenes son de deformes que encontré en internet. Las junté y entonces los convertí en personajes. Busqué siamesas y empezaron a aparecer solas las imágenes en la red. Con esas imágenes tejí la historia" (Urriola n.p.)<sup>64</sup>. This information is very important, as the LOM edition of her book shows these images in very low quality and badly pixelated, which undermines the effect they bring to the text. As the author forwarded me the links through which she found the images, I am copying some of these photos in this chapter and I am also quoting their source. By no means has this exercise meant to plagiarise or to infringe copyright.

In terms of the text itself, *Bracea* begins with a section entitled "El Cardo", then goes on to "El perro", and "La Casa". All of these show that the poem opens in the garden, continues to describe the tragic story of the family dog, to end up within the home, where "Mi hermana y yo"—another section—live. There is clearly a movement from the outside and then to the intimate aspects of the sisters' lives. Here it is important to point out that they are conjoined twins, therefore, both sisters are bound to be together at all times.

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<sup>64</sup> The images found come from free undocumented sources, so there is not a clear origin for them. According to The University of Edinburgh's copyright policy, material older than 70 years can be used freely. As the web sources where these images appear are so informal, for instance, on platform *Pinterest*, I am not quoting the links. I was informed this was no longer necessary.

The following sections describe the family and their acquaintances: “J.P. Junior”, “Tres Piernas” (Three Legs), “El Padre de Tres Piernas” (Three Legs’ Father), “Nuestra Madre” (Our Mother), “Nuestro Padre” (Our Father). J.P. Junior—who does not have legs—is said to be the twins’ uncle on their mother’s side: “Se decía en el pueblo que J.P. era hermano de nuestra madre, por tanto y obviamente, nuestro tío. Y por eso nosotras éramos así” (Urriola 64). This means that deformity or monstrosity is an inherited trait. The character of Three Legs seems to be a neighbour and might secretly be the twins’ lost brother, as the text suggests that one of the twins’ mothers who, notably, are also conjoined twins, might have been involved with his father who is also a three-legged man. So again it is possible to find a mirroring image between parent and child. Three Legs is in love with the speaker’s twin, but it is unrequited love. This is why I believe that the study of this poem must evaluate the figure of the double in the text. It seems as though both mothers and daughters, and father and son, are a duplicate of the double, and this needs to be examined.

The twins’ mothers are depicted in the “Nuestra Madre” section. Their physical joint organs are not mentioned and they are ambiguous enough for readers not to fathom which of them the twins’ mothers is. This section also describes the ways they react differently to certain situations and how, one of them, seems to be close to Three Legs’ father. This section is followed by “Nuestro Padre”, the only character in the poem who does not suffer from any deformity nor has a double. The father is a figure who comes and goes, and he is the only one that interacts with society, as his wives, daughters and the rest of the community live in a quiet and remote area of the Elqui Valley. Here it is relevant to mention that the Elqui Valley relates to the experience of alienation in Gabriela Mistral’s own life as an outsider with regard to Chilean society. The link between *Braceá* and a Mistralian experience is very close and Urriola deliberately draws the readers’ attention to this link. Mistral marks this text from the beginning, as she is the first person to be addressed as dedicatee of the book, at the head of a long list. Interestingly, Urriola dedicates the text

“*A la Mistral*” (Urriola n.p.) in an informal yet close and affectionate way<sup>65</sup>. The last three sections of *Bracea* dialogue with both Mistral’s life and her work.

Finally, after being an introduction to the Mistralian setting of Montegrande—without it being mentioned but obviously alluded to, since it is a known fact that Mistral’s remains were transported to her natal town and both town and burial are mentioned on page 95—the text embarks on describing the twins’ idea of escaping their restricted lives. “La Otra” and “El viaje” sections poeticise this departure. “La Otra” is a clear reference to a poem by Mistral of the same name, and her text is quoted at the beginning of the section. Here it is interesting to evaluate what happens with the double, especially in the Siamese sisters’ experience, because their decision to leave Montegrande takes them through the Valley up to the coast in the city of La Serena, where they decide to become one with the sea.

The symbolic meaning of many of the aspects mentioned above will be discussed in this chapter, but it is not possible to develop them all, as the poem is long and contains many characters. *Bracea* is, thus far, the longest poem of the corpus selected for this thesis—119 pages long—which means that there will be a careful selection of quotations to study. The most relevant aspects of this text and their relationship to the main topic that this thesis explores, which is the presence of neoliberalism, will be central to my interpretation of *Bracea*.

### **Understanding Monstrosity and Social Alienation**

The first aspect to understand in order to analyse the speakers’ voices in *Bracea* is that of monstrosity. For Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and his World* (1968), the grotesque is the result of “the exaggeration of the inappropriate to incredible and monstrous dimension” (Bakhtin 306) that would ultimately challenge the limits of the body and the way in which “these creatures have a distinctive grotesque character” (Bakhtin 345). Monsters would be those whose bodily characteristics cause discomfort in those who are ‘normal’, hence they are considered grotesque. What is more, given the unlikelihood of finding these characters in everyday life, their freak show nature has been rendered profitable by the circus. From the different ‘monsters’ to be found, for

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<sup>65</sup> Urriola’s italics.

instance, in P.T Barnum's shows, the case of conjoined twins Chang and Eng Bunker are relevant, as their study sheds light on what Urriola develops in *Bracea*. Here I will focus mostly on the twin sisters who dialogue with each other and whose perspective is developed in the text.

There are many aspects surrounding the idea of Siamese twins that are important to bear in mind when analysing *Bracea*. The first is the perception of them, as a whole unit comprising of two people: "From the beginning, then, the twins were packaged as one unit, blurred into one set of tastes, thoughts and impulses" (Pingree 100). This is clearly a stereotypical view of this sort of twins, as if sharing certain organs connected them in the most profound of ways turning them both into one single person—although with two heads, two sets of arms and legs.

Urriola's twins are presented through the following image:



This picture appears when entering the terms "Fotos siamesas antiguas" on a Google images search. Urriola based her speaker on one of these twins called María and Ana. According to the *Conjoined Twins: An Historical, Biological and Ethical Issues Encyclopedia* these sisters were born in Mexico (or Honduras) "in 1910 and they were joined by a band of flesh. They toured extensively in the 1920s as the 'Honduran Joined Together Twins'. They were

said to have very different personalities. Mary and Anna died in 1929” (Quigley 110). It is believed that this picture was taken circa 1915. What is interesting about Quigley’s entry on them is that there is an emphasis on differentiating these sisters as they both have distinct personalities in spite of the photograph emphasising the stereotype through both sisters’ body positioning and their clothes resembling a mirrored image. Personality could be differentiated in their faces, as one of them smiles and the other seems to be more serious. This difference is also the case in Urriola’s text. They are approached through the voice of the poetic speaker describing her own life as one of the imagined Siamese twins in the poem:

Caminábamos cojeando con mi hermana. . .  
Aunque éramos bastante diestras, a veces no lográbamos coordinar  
nuestros trancos y terminábamos en la acequia. . .  
Recordamos así que nos ungían con lindano en el consultorio del  
pueblo (Urriola 32).

The first question that arises is concerning which of these two imaginary sisters is the poetic speaker of most of the text, whether the one on the left or the one on the right if taking the photo as a visual source to consider. The ambiguity in attempting to identify the voice with the image suggests that the idea of them being confused with one another is a common happening. An aspect from the above quotation that is worth mentioning is that the text provides clues to locate the sisters within a rural imaginary. This is clear especially in the use of words such as ‘acequia’, and that they were treated at ‘el consultorio del pueblo’. Another relevant aspect is that despite being joined together, they were emphatically not to be considered a single bodily unit, as their movements needed to be coordinated so they could get around, and this ended up being a highly complex task for them.

Another relevant point is the use of the word ‘lindano’. The importance of this substance being specifically mentioned in these lines is that it is a product that is both highly toxic but also used to treat lice and scabies in a small dose. It is possible to suggest that the sisters were under such treatment in order to cure scabies or lice. This means that the sisters needed to live in isolation, as either condition is highly contagious. Having scabies in particular emphasises the idea of them as monsters, as they are not only physically

joined in the abdominal area, they also have a rash that can be spread. Here there is a sense of social vulnerability when considering their surrounding areas. According to the American Society for Microbiology, “the primary contributing factors in contracting scabies seem to be poverty and overcrowded living conditions” (Walton and Currie 270). Therefore, the sisters’ alienation does not only respond to them being ‘different’ but also poor—which is an aspect that will be further developed in this chapter.

The twins’ monstrosity in the text can be exaggerated by the fact that they both look alike. This can be interpreted from the perspective of the double developed by Otto Rank. For him, the main issue is when confronting the double as a reality, “[la] aparición del doble como una persona real. . . [genera] el problema de la división y duplicación del yo” (Rank 44). This is accentuated by the fact that the double is actually attached to its original and, at the same time, it is not clear which one constitutes the original. Furthermore, the uncanniness of the double here is also emphasised by the twins’ lack of access to society or education, and their isolation. For Freud the uncanny refers to something that is “concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know about it, withheld from others” (Freud 3) and this is clearly the situation of these twins. In the poem, the speaker has a sudden revelation that their condition is perceived by others to be a monstrous one:

Mi hermana dijo que nuestro padre nos odia porque somos  
monstruosas. . .  
Somos un monstruo igual a nuestra madre—dijo.  
Nuestra madre es hermosa—contesté.  
Mi hermana dijo: Son dos. Y dos son dos.  
Por eso vivimos en las afueras de la ciudad (Urriola 41).

There is an understanding of the reasons why they live in the outskirts; it is attributed to their monstrosity. These lines show a realisation from the perspective of the speaker, that is to say, monstrosity had not been acknowledged before. The text offers the enunciation of the speaker’s shock at being confronted with the reality of her physicality, and that indeed is a negative one, as ‘nuestro padre nos odia porque somos monstruosas’, therefore, the sense of pain also in metaphorical terms is conveyed on page 42.

De súbito los días dolieron  
como un puñetazo en mitad del pecho (Urriola 42)

Both these centred lines are the only writing on page 42, so the emphasis is on 'la mitad del pecho' which depicts the pain of realising their monstrosity. It seems as though the speaker's sister had an idea of this, hence the quotation from page 41 begins with 'Mi hermana dijo'. This implies that the speaker was not aware of her own monstrosity until this was verbalised by her Siamese sister, and then that verbalisation became actual pain.

Apart from differentiating who speaks and who knows certain information, these lines offer a second double, the mother(s). 'Somos un monstruo igual a nuestra madre', spoken by the speaker's twin sister indicates that they are two, and that two are two, meaning that they are as monstrous as their mother(s), another pair of conjoined twins. There is a mirroring here and also the enigma of which of the sisters is indeed the mother of the twin daughters. It all seems rather ambiguous and there are not any signs in the poem that point towards which sister is the mother, firstly, nor which of them is the most important speaker in the text. The twin mother(s) is also exhibited in the text through a photograph taken from the internet:



This photograph does not offer a date of publication, just like the previous one. The first element worth mentioning here is that this picture depicts exactly both Mary and Anna, the sisters whose picture from 1915 Urriola used to imagine the twin girls. Now the mother(s) is/are shown as if they were a different set of twins. It is not clear whether Urriola was totally aware of these sisters appearing on both pictures during different times of their lives. In spite of this, her poetic imaginary establishes that the main speaker has a twin, and that the twins' mother is also a conjoined twin.

What is revealing from this picture is that it attempts to show a symmetrical mirrored image. Both sisters wear the same outfit but their positioning, for instance, in the way their hair is styled resembles a mirroring. Their legs are crossed in opposition with each other. The sister on the left places her right hand on her left knee, whereas the sister on the right does precisely the opposite by having her left hand resting on her right knee. What is more, if one were to draw a line at the middle of the picture it would seem as though the picture also depicts a butterfly. This would be relevant to this reading of *Bracea*. As the word 'bracea' also implies a movement as flying, as if flapping wings the way butterflies do. The speaker refers to this type of 'braceo' at the beginning of the poem:

Pasa volando una mariposa frente a estos ojos negros  
que estaban mirando el cardo.  
La mariposa bracea, y braceando se retira tan lejos del cardo  
blanco (Urriola 11).

From this, there is a sense of movement that would imply flying away 'tan lejos', and the opposition between the speaker's black eyes and the white thistle also mean a distance that becomes further with each beat of the butterfly's wings.

After the mother(s) is/are presented in the text and with a seemingly explicit and patent depiction as they appear in the photograph just quoted, there is a clearer idea that monstrosity is an inherited trait and since it is a deformity, it cannot be avoided. Monstrosity in *Bracea* is also revealed in the way the speaker feels she will be judged when in town:

Yo no creo en las cosas que cree mi hermana. Ella se evade de ser  
un monstruo. Yo no.

Las estrellas me recuerdan todas las noches que despertaré y cuando  
no estén brillando  
se burlarán de nosotras en el pueblo (Urriola 58).

Here readers can witness the main difference in the psyches of these two sisters. One of them rejects the idea of being considered a monster. However, the main speaker understands what that means and that they will be mocked when seen in town by daylight. What is more, when the speaker enunciates 'Yo no' to contradict her sister's fear of her own monstrosity, it seems as though their main difference is actually their attitude to such condition. The speaker sounds defiant to accept herself as a monster, and her 'Yo no' implies a certain feeling of pride.

In spite of their differing perspectives, both sisters can actually agree on relevant aspects of their lives. The main speaker seems to be able to talk her twin into doing certain things:

Una tarde. . . convencí a mi hermana de que nos fuéramos al mar, así  
librábamos a nuestras madres de nosotras. . . Nos echaríamos a  
nadar, hasta encontrar otra orilla, otra punta de lápiz donde comenzar  
una nueva vida (Urriola 113).

The main speaker convinces her sister to leave their mothers, to liberate themselves from them, as if they were a burden to their mothers. Their plan would be to go to the sea, swim as much as they can in order to reach another shore, where they could begin a new life. This particular point is relevant in order to connect *Braceá* to its preceding text, *Nada*. *Nada* explores the minimization of the subject in order to subvert the concreteness of the neoliberal world, where consumerism reigns. *Nada* offers a static resistance, while *Braceá* establishes a sense of progression. In the act of swimming, the dual subjects, the conjoined twins, get away from the world where they are rejected and seek a new world, where everything they represent—due to being monsters—in an alienated society does not need to exist, so there is a new beginning. Escape marks the most important movement, along with 'bracear', understood in a movement that describes swimming, like a breast stroke. This implies that the sea is a substance that liberates the individual, and which accepts whoever comes to it<sup>66</sup>. There is also a chance of failure, but this is not

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<sup>66</sup> The relationship between Berenguer's Bobby Sands and the sea is important to

important, as becoming one with the sea is also another liberating possibility, away from the world of appearances and rejections from which the twin sisters' come.

The sisters, nevertheless, are not the only ostracized characters within Urriola's imaginary in *Braceá*. Tres Piernas is as relevant as these girls. The importance of Tres Piernas is that he is also a voice and is introduced to the text through a photograph that, again, Urriola found in an online search:



The boy in question was an Italian-American called Frank Lentini (1889-1966), who became a showman that “is a well-known [case] of parasitic twins [that] incorporates . . . multiple limbs” (Quigley 2). Even though Tres Piernas in the text is not referred to as anything but as a three-legged person, Lantini's body aid include an underdeveloped twin. Interestingly, Urriola's text adds another later picture of Lantini to refer to him as “El padre de Tres Piernas”:

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keep in mind here, as he joins the sea as one with the kelps and the ocean's embrace in the text.



It is interesting that Urriola chose the same actual person in pictures from childhood and adulthood to imagine them as parents of other imagined characters in her text. As the poem develops Tres Piernas' unrequited love story with the speaker's sister, the text later on reveals that it is perhaps one of the twin mothers who is also Tres Piernas' parent, which would make Tres Piernas and his beloved actual siblings. This suggested incest can also shed light on inbreeding, and that those who are society's rejects tend to mix with each other as they only have one another to subsist.

Tres Piernas as imagined by Urriola must be just as young as the twin sisters he spends his time with. Urriola does provide him a voice in the poem, especially when he expresses his love for the speaker's sister:

Cuando la vi supe con esa certeza incierta que era un reflejo de esta vida que he sobrevivido, escuchando risotadas a mis espaldas, mientras me alejo caminando con mis tres piernas. . .

Yo les gano a los perros, a las liebres. Al tren (Urriola 72).

Tres Piernas' reflections on his connection to the conjoined twin he loves is based on the fact that he believes the girl(s) knows what it is like to live as a freak, as a monster, hearing laughter behind her back. Tres Piernas takes the

pronoun I, which is an unequivocal sign that there is more than one poetic speaker and he is given a space to express his subjectivity in this text. Nevertheless, Tres Piernas takes pride in his achievement at running fast, he indicates he is faster than dogs, hares and, ultimately, the train, indicating that his monstrosity makes him a sort of superior being in spite of being rejected and mocked. Another important point is that for Tres Piernas, unlike the reader, it is easy to differentiate between one sister and the other, as he knows which one to approach, yet: “Tres Piernas sentía esa dolorosa vergüenza de no ser correspondido por mi hermana. . . Así que para no recibir de manera tan directa el desprecio, Tres Piernas se sentaba a mi lado” (Urriola 71).

The relevance of Tres Piernas to this analysis is that it opens up the text, allowing it to be considered multivocal, that is, having more than one speaker. Even though I am not describing all the voices present in the poem, it is important—for the moment—to enumerate them: one of the twins as the main voice, the other twin, the mothers—although it is difficult to establish which one speaks—the father, and Tres Piernas. This means that there are different layers and levels of multi-voicedness, as Mikhail Bakhtin theorised in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984). In his words, “the polyphonic [text] could indeed have been realized only in the capitalist era. . . In this way the objective preconditions were created for the multi-leveledness and multi-voicedness of the polyphonic novel” (Bakhtin 19-20), and this point is particularly consistent to this thesis, as it is a study of the dialogue between literature and neoliberalism. Bearing in mind that neoliberalism is the way late capitalism has developed, the neoliberal era, again becomes the ground in which a multiplicity of voices are needed in order to express or challenge the way the world functions, especially for those who are society’s rejects. What Urriola achieves here, just like Bakhtin’s appreciation of Dostoevsky’s work, is a “gift for seeing the world in terms of interaction and coexistence” (Bakhtin 31). Therefore, these voices in Bracea coexist within Urriola’s imaginary in this alienated town in the Elqui Valley and they interact with each other in their lives—as in the text—and also with the readers of this poem.

## **Motherhood in Mistral and the Twins' Mothers**

It is clear that in *Bracea* the twin sisters discuss their mother(s) and the way they see the world. The duplicated duality of the conjoined sisters as a result of their mother's condition of also conjoined sisters remains of the highest interpretative value. Urriola's text does not only delve into the idea whether these twins are indeed one person or two, but also poses similar questions to the girls' mother(s). There are certain quotations from the poem that shed light on this, which will be studied below.

Nevertheless, that relationship with their biological mother is not the only one that readers can find in this text. Gabriela Mistral's influence as a poetic matriarch is paramount to this poem as *Bracea* develops a homage to Mistral and her work. Incidentally, Urriola's text refers to a foundational poem entitled "La otra" by quoting it at the beginning of the second to last section of this work, entitled "La otra" as well, which is where the sisters agree to leave their town and then:

Se fueron del pueblo. Un día ya no estuvieron. Se llevaron lo puesto  
(Urriola 107).

This may imply that the 'other', the one left behind is the mother, especially when the speaker enunciates: "La madre deja de padecer la historia para escribirla" (Urriola 107). Here there is a break from the emphasised duality represented by both sisters and their mother(s). The sisters left the town, as one conjoined body which comprises a twofold consciousness within the unity provided by the fact that they are together. What is more, the last line quoted does not provide any signs that the mother also had a Siamese twin. The text's focus now on the mother's potential engagement with writing as a way to escape history and its pains. From both sisters having two potential mothers, the poem is ready to close with just one mother who is decidedly ready to write history rather than experience it. 'La otra' here is nothing more than the unfolding of the double into a single consciousness, which is similar to what Mistral does in her poem, when the female psyche gets rid of a part of itself: "una en mi maté / yo no la amaba" (in Urriola 105).

In the case of Mistral, her influence in *Braceá* is perceived from the start of the text, especially in the dedication page at the beginning of the book. In italics, the dedication—addressing many poets, artists and others—opens up with homage to the Nobel Prize winner:

A la Mistral y a las montañas del Valle de Elqui (n.p.)

This line shows at least two points to focus on. The first one being ‘A la Mistral’ and the second one referring to the “Valle de Elqui”. In Castilian Spanish, the use of the article “la” before a person’s forename seems to be either informal or vulgar. However, “hay zonas del ámbito hispánico, por ejemplo en Chile, donde esta anteposición se da también en el habla culta, habitualmente en registros coloquiales y especialmente ante nombres de mujer” (n.a.15). This means that the expression ‘la Mistral’ is common to the Chilean variety of Spanish and does not necessarily imply informality, therefore, the expression seems to be communicating a given closeness to the poet laureate and also a high regard for her.

The second part of this dedication, after Mistral, makes reference to the exact place where the poet was born, the Elqui Valley, located in the Chilean ‘Norte Chico’, in the 4th Region of Coquimbo. The Elqui Valley is mentioned “in several poems [where] Mistral praises [its] fertile orchards” (Sedgwick 310) and where she commemorates the strength and resilience of its people. Apart from this celebration of the regions’ fruits and the disposition of its inhabitants, it seems as though there is further emphasis on the relevance of the mountains, hence, Urriola’s dedication to them as if at the same level as Mistral. Motherhood here would be understood as a mixture between Mistral as an influential figure to Urriola as well as the way in which Mistral interpreted her relationship to the Andes. In Spanish the words for ‘montaña’ and ‘cordillera’ are feminine, and therefore, considered as protectors of the people that inhabit the valleys, such as Elqui. In the poem “Montañas mías” from *Poema de Chile* (1967), Mistral’s speaker enunciates:

En montañas me crié  
con tres docenas alzadas.  
Parece que nunca, nunca. . .  
las perdí (Mistral 37)

Mountains are a central element for Mistral, from her own experience as being from a valley surrounded by them. Also, “the [poem] ‘Cordillera’ [represents] the poet’s mother, whom she begs for comfort and protection” (Sedgwick 313) and from this Mistral acknowledges that she would always trust and consult her wise ‘cordillera’: “Pasa siempre que volvemos / el rostro a la Madre cierta” (Mistral 124). Mistral’s Mother, her *cordillera* is central to her work, but is also a source of inspiration for Urriola’s *Bracea*, which would justify the poem’s dedication to Mistral, and also its imaginary being located in the Elqui Valley.

Moreover, *Bracea* develops its own depiction of the valley based on the twins’ visit to certain landmarks. The first one would be the area of Cochiguaz, one of the most remotely located hamlets in the Paihuano district area, which also comprises Gabriela Mistral’s old village, Montegrande—currently the Centro Cultural Paihuano. The reading of *Bracea* offers a way to map the sisters’ movements along this area and then to the sea through the city of La Serena. The first reference to an actual place from the Elqui Valley is enunciated as follows:

Me traía flores que recogía en el camino,  
Salíamos a caminar más allá de Cochiguaz.  
Me llevó a ver la Piedra del Guanaco (Urriola 73).

Interestingly, these lines are spoken by the character of Tres Piernas, and it is another example of the multivoicedness that is possible to discern in *Bracea*. Tres Piernas expresses that, even though one of the sisters did not share his love for her, they still spent time together, until he realised his love was completely unrequited: “No sé si estoy triste porque no me ama o, porque si me amara, no sabría cómo besarla” (Urriola 75). In the three lines quoted above, the elements that depict the Elqui area are two: Cochiguaz and La Piedra del Guanaco. Both conjoined sisters and the three-legged boy went on long walks beyond the remote locality of Cochiguaz, which is almost on the border with Argentina. This means that despite being together, their isolation from society and others was almost total. Secondly, ‘la Piedra del Guanaco’ is a famous landmark in Cochiguaz. This Stone contains petroglyphs that depict different local animals such as guanacos, snakes and birds. These represent three native groups that inhabited the area: El Molle, Diaguitas and the renowned Incas—who conquered as far as central Chile, many hundreds of

kilometres south of Cochiguaz. The distinctive aspect of this Stone is that it is the pathway to a sacred valley that is located 'montaña adentro'. Both these places, Cochiguaz and la Piedra del Guanaco are clearly relevant to both the people from the Elqui Valley as well as their ancestors, the natives that carved the petrolyphs and used the Stone as a gateway to a sacred area for them.

The remoteness of the Cochiguaz area is contrasted later to the central part of the valley, where the memory of Mistral fills every corner:

Mi hermana y yo bajamos al río.  
En el río del Elqui mi hermana me lee un poema. . .  
La mujer que lo escribió está enterrada aquí.  
Yo dije: Es mentira. Ella se fue de aquí.  
La envidia de este pueblo puede llegar a matar.  
Aquí sólo regresó un esqueleto (Urriola 95).

The River Elqui is also an important figure in Mistralian literature. "Gabriela Mistral often recollect[s] the Elqui River. . . The poet at times refers to [it], and to this whole general section, as her native land. This keen sense of regional pride is what the author calls *patria chiquita*" (Sedgwick 310). This implies that the whole imaginary of *Braceá* is embedded within Mistral's '*patria chiquita*' and, from there, resists the rest of the urban 'patria' which seems to be contrary to the Elqui Valley in its tranquility and ancestral atmosphere.

The sisters are sitting by the Elqui riverbank, which is very small, as rivers in the semi-desert area of the Paihuano district are very narrow, only carrying freshly melted water from the ice on top of the mountains. What matters here is that one of the sisters, not the main speaker, reads a poem and indicates that the woman who wrote it, implying Mistral, is buried in the area. The critique in these lines does not address Mistral herself but rather Chilean society in general. The main speaker replies to this indicating that what her sister said is a lie, as Mistral had left the place a long time ago and that the envy of the people can kill, therefore, what came back to the *patria chiquita* is merely a skeleton. The envy of Chileans might refer to the fact that Mistral first found recognition away from Chile. The most relevant evidence of this is that Mistral obtained the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1945, whereas she did not receive the National Literature Prize from Chile until 1951. This is perhaps a point that is key to all of Urriola's poetry, her distrust of other poets and the

literary circles that had no qualms about rejecting or slighting Mistral's talent, mostly favouring male authors. The skeleton that lies in the Montegrande memorial is indeed a landmark that is recognisable for anybody who dares to visit the sinuous roads of the Elqui Valley to find Mistral's mountains, the *patria chiquita* that she loved so much.

Mistral's work is a relevant influence in Urriola's *Braceá*, in the way in which both the poet laureate and the mountains become motherly figures that sustain the verses that bring these conjoined sisters and all their relatives and friends together in this text. The other motherly figures that are necessary to study are, of course, the twins' twin mothers. As has been stated before, both their selves are individual and their minds do not necessarily agree. Thus, it is not entirely accurate to indicate that these twins are one person, nor in the case of their daughters. What is relevant is that the main speaker—one of the Siamese twins—refers to her mother(s) as: 'nuestra madre' and 'nuestra otra madre', acknowledging two consciousnesses, both of which they recognise to be their mother. Even though one is 'the' mother, and the other one is the 'other' mother, it is never clear which is which:

Nosotras compartimos la misma habitación con nuestros padres. . .  
Hemos visto a nuestro padre llegar de madrugada. . .  
Y a nuestra madre sentir celos. Y a nuestra otra madre decirle que  
mañana... Porque nuestra madre es fría como boca de pescado. Y  
dice que así no. Mi otra madre dice que ella tampoco pueda ya  
conciliar el sueño. . .  
Hemos visto a nuestra madre llorar. Y a nuestra otra madre,  
consolarla (Urriola 28).

The father is an erratic figure during the whole poem. This means that the sisters spend most of their time with their mothers. Intimacy is an aspect related to space and social vulnerability, as is indicated that the whole family share the same bedroom, suggesting that the daughters can witness their father and mothers during sexual intercourse. The particular situation depicted in these lines shows the father arriving home in the late hours, which means he has spent most of the night elsewhere. Both mothers seem to feel uncomfortable with his behaviour, mostly because he seems to be seeing other women. There is a clear ambiguity in: 'Y a nuestra madre decirle que mañana', firstly because only the sisters have a clear idea who 'their mother'

is and the readers cannot really distinguish from the two imagined possible mothers presented in the poem through both poetic discourse and photographic input. 'Decirle' also adds ambiguity as 'le' is a neutral particle that is added as the object pronoun of the verb 'decir', which implies that, according to what is being poeticised there, either the other sister or the father, is being addressed. In the end, neither of the twin mothers can go back to sleep and this highlights the asymmetrical relationship between the father and his wife/wives.

The poem moves on to shed light on the mother's relationship with the father:

A veces había fiestas en la casa rosada. Poncheras con vino con duraznos. Y nuestra madre bailaba con cadencia de *latin woman* una cumbia con nuestro padre, al que sabíamos que despreciaba. Pero ella quería un marido y un hogar (Urriola 38).

Whenever the simple and poor house in which this family lived had a party, they shared 'ponche', and the mother—here as if she did not have a conjoined twin attached to her—danced as a '*latin woman*' which suggests some type of rhythm and a stereotypical image of a woman from Latin America. What is more, the *cumbia* that this woman—with readers collaborating in ignoring, momentarily, the fact that she dances, also, with her sister—dances with her husband somehow confirms the traditional assumptions about women and here it does not really matter whether she is a single woman or her body comprises two. The fact is the same, that no "Latin American woman [sic] can exist without the presence and approbation of men" (Wilson 136). And the poem further adds to this view in the last line, as the mother despised her man, yet she wanted a husband and a home. This means that the ultimate desire of a woman is, in spite of potentially hating her partner, to have a traditional household. This view clearly diminishes the autonomy of the woman as a subject and keeps her in a subordinate position from where she cannot escape. The answer to this is in the behaviour of the two daughters, who conspire to get away from Elqui and reach the Pacific coast in La Serena. The poem seems to convey that certain matters can change within generations and, even though the mother represents a repressed—and monstrous—housewife, the equally monstrous daughters dare to escape in order to find

freedom in water, in swimming, in a collection of thousands of strokes, 'braceos' that might take them to better shores.

### **Resisting from the Periphery: Escaping (the) Capital**

The fact that the sisters escape their house, their town and their valley is also symbolic of an escape from a bigger framework, which is society as a whole. It has previously been established that the sisters come from a vulnerable family and their house is located in a remote area of the Elqui Valley, also implying isolation and the consideration of the harshness of the Valley, as it is a semi-desert environment. Regarding the household, the main speaker enunciates:

Nuestra casa es rosada. Aunque hay sectores en que se puede ver el barroso eco del adobe confundido con la pintura rosada y la cal con que nuestra madre la pintó. . .

La pintó con cal para que no se alojen las vinchucas. . .

Esta es una casa ruinosa en las afueras de la ciudad. . .

Yo me imagino que vivir fuera de algo que no se conoce, es como vivir fuera de algo que carece totalmente de importancia (Urriola 27).

These lines express an interesting line of thought regarding the dichotomy periphery/centre. The last two lines of the quotation are key to this: 'Yo me imagino que vivir fuera de algo que no se conoce, es como vivir fuera de algo que carece totalmente de importancia'. The speaker reflects on being out of 'algo que no se conoce' which becomes dismissed in 'algo que carece de importancia', therefore, the city is deemed as totally unimportant, which can be considered a defiant stance, especially when neoliberal reality is centred on big noisy cities and consumerism. Conversely, it can also be argued that neoliberalism also pervades the rural world, but in a different way.

Concerning the rest of the quotation, there are three keywords that reveal the imagined family's utter poverty, which are 'adobe', 'vinchucas' and the adjective 'ruinosa'. The pink house where they live is made of mudbricks, which in Spanish is known as 'adobe' and "it is a mixture of salt, sint and clay, which when mixed with water. . . can be cast into the desired form" (Brown and Clifton 139) which is mostly a brick. Therefore, adobe is one of the most basic ways of construction and one of the oldest ones, dating back to the Neolithic (Brown and Clifton 139). Adobe is also made with materials that people can

find in their environment, which allows them to have a place to live that is constructed by them. This implies that the groups that live in these houses—in current times—probably exist outside of any state aid and the remoteness of the area in which the poem is set intensifies the sensation that the family and their friends are absolute outcasts of society. Another relevant point is that adobe is also seen as an old-fashioned way of building and that more affluent people have houses made of other materials, mostly concrete.

The second word I have highlighted is ‘vinchucas’ and it deepens the idea that the family is poor. ‘Vinchucas’ are insects that live in the mud bricks that constitute adobe houses and they transmit a condition known as Chagas disease through contact with its faeces, which can be mortal. Vinchucas are not restricted to the Elqui Valley area, but to the whole of Andean South America. There is evidence of Chagas disease in some pre-Columbian mummies from the north of Chile (Solari 320), so this disease is an ancient phenomenon, and it would seem that people who live in adobe houses are aware of the eventuality of being infested by vinchucas. The idea that the walls need to be treated with lime in order to avoid vinchucas also implies social vulnerability, and also sheds light on the dynamics of this family, as this was work performed by the mother(s).

The few moments in which the father appears are questioned either by the mother(s) or the daughters. For the main speaker, the father is a figure that is depicted by the mother(s):

Porque mi padre—decía nuestra madre—se gastaba todo lo que  
teníamos en cosas inservibles que vienen de la ciudad. Pero él dijo  
que era una inversión. Que la música alegraría la casa. Y la compró  
(Urriola 40).

The main aspect to consider here is that the father has total control of the funds that the family makes. This means that he is the one that works and decides unilaterally what his salary is going to be spent on. In the previous section of this analysis I studied a quotation in which it was indicated that the mother loathed the father, yet she needed a husband and a house. This means that the mother can only confess her thoughts to the daughters and she connected technology to uselessness. The previous lines describe a moment in which the

father brings a radio to the house, therefore, it is possible to assert that the family did not previously have access to any sort of entertainment nor ways to inform themselves of the world outside their remote community. When the mother relates the radio to something useless that comes from the city, she symbolically draws a line between the city and their rural reality. The father, then, was the only one that had access to towns and cities, and this is also explained by the fact that he is the only character in the text that does not have any sort of deformity. He is the symbol of 'normality', which the text relates to consumerism.

Apart from the alienating nature of monstrosity, in this passage, Urriola delves into ethnicity. Given that the Elqui Valley is an area that was populated prior to the Spanish conquest, Bracea develops the idea of being both a freak in terms of deformity but also in terms of ethnic traits. For the main speaker, apart from her medical condition as Siamese twin, she clearly recognises her indigenous identity:

Yo soy india. Creo que el clic de la cámara me roba algo que no alcanzo a definir.

Lo que siento, pienso, recuerdo, duelo, gozo, en ese momento exacto quedará plasmado en un papel. Una parte mía quedará cautiva para siempre (Urriola 55).

It is unequivocal that these lines can be related to what Nadia Prado developed in *©Copyright (2003)*, especially in the analysis of the photograph of her speaker taken by a white tourist.

The first element to focus on is the firm declaration by the speaker: 'Yo soy india'. She acknowledges herself as a native from the lands where she lives but she uses 'india', an old-fashioned term which is derogatory. This gesture is on purpose, as she did not refer to her origin as from 'pueblos originarios'. This provocative gesture has the effect of shocking the reader because the question of what 'yo soy india' means and denotes is extremely important in Chile. An example of the many uses of the word 'indio' as a term that undermines an indigenous identity is found in a 2014 interview with the Mapuche poet Graciela Huinao. There, she tells her experience at school, when she realised she was indigenous. "No recuerda bien por qué, pero hubo una pelea con otras niñas y una de ellas le tiró las trenzas. Y la llamó 'india'"

(Gaete and Huinao 24). Huinao then realised that the term was derogatory and made her feel ashamed. Later in the same interview Huinao asserts that in academia “si hay un seminario, tienen que invitar un indiecito, pero no es algo de corazón” (Gaete and Huinao 24) which clearly indicates that she is suspicious of *winka*—that is, those who are not Mapuche. The fact that the speaker acknowledges her indigeneity opens new avenues of thought, which are also related to the criticism of the cultural theft that indigenous peoples have suffered ever since the Spanish invasion.

Urriola seems to represent the threat of cultural appropriation through the metaphor of a photograph—which Nadia Prado also developed in ©*Copyright*. The insistence of this point, as expressed by two different poetic works, makes the ethnic question relevant and worth examining. The metaphor of cultural appropriation can be understood as the speaker believes that the camera shooting a picture robs her of something, which she is not able to fathom. One could assume that there is an issue related to consent. The indian monstrosity that she is, as she added the ethnic element in her enunciation, is being photographed as a spectacle, as a freakshow, or is it that her ethnicity stands out and whoever takes her picture finds her so unique that needs to keep her immortalised in that ‘piece of paper’, as she asserts. The speaker indicates that a part of her will be kept captive for good. It is not possible to project where the photograph will be, or if the photographer was a foreigner, or if her image will be part of an exhibition in a museum. Unlike Prado’s text, Urriola’s does not engage with a criticism of colonialism nor neo-colonialism. Here the emphasis is on another duality: that the conjoined sisters are both monsters and indigenous, and it seems as though both conditions are equally alienating within a Chilean context. This would reveal a lack of recognition of Chile’s own past in its indigenous cultures, and how these are regarded as defective, as their traits do not adapt to the westernised world that has ruled contemporary cities.

Lastly, the belief of photography taking part of a person’s soul needs to be explored further. This is clearly not new. An important example of photographs being put to question and rejected by Native Americans took place in Paraguay, when Italian painter and photographer Guido Boggiani (1862-1902) was found in the “Gran Chaco. . . [and he was discovered along

with his assistant] with skulls shattered and heads severed by ceremonial axes” (Di Benedetto n.p.) as the native Tumrahá did not trust the nature of photographs, and it is believed that his camera and negatives were found buried and scattered around the area. Urriola’s speaker connects with this idea of being a native exploited by photography although this art is key to understand the way that unknown tribes and communities lived once found in dense Amazonia, or in the richly and varied Gran Chaco. I believe these lines reveal, once more, the level of social alienation in which the speaker, her conjoined sister, and their family lived.

As outcasts of society, the main speaker resorts to going back to one of Urriola’s signature themes: using language as a liberating yet struggling experience. This was mentioned earlier when briefly reviewing her third work *Hija* (1998) and also when paying attention to her attempt to express nothingness in *Nada* (2003). For the speaker in *Bracea* there is a sense of freedom in words and also in the way in which they express an escape from reality. For her:

Tal vez las palabras vehementes puedan librarse y salir braceando  
como un centenar de mariposas de colores, negras y azules,  
dispersándose en el aire, liberadas de esta jaula infame (Urriola 56).

She sees the potential of words, as a liberating force and it is words themselves that become free and ‘bracean’, wave their wings as if ready to fly. The speaker relates this action to the way butterflies flap their wings. What makes this metaphor all the more powerful is the use of colour, as if words can get out of the cage which is this world in the shape of colourful butterflies. Symbolically, the butterfly can be understood as both “un emblema del alma y de la atracción inconsciente hacia lo luminoso. . . [y también que] el psicoanálisis conceptúa la mariposa como un símbolo del renacer” (Cirlot 307). In both cases it is relevant to emphasise that Urriola’s text seeks for a way out of what is a very constricted world where her speakers do not have a place, which forces them to live in alienation, away from the rest, which is also a stance of resistance to our contemporary neoliberal world.

The way in which the sisters leave their remote hamlet is by bus. Somehow, they manage to escape, get on the vehicle, and then there is a very

clear depiction of the route between the Elqui Valley and the coast by La Serena shoreline:

El bus se detiene en cada pueblo. . .  
Llegamos a la ciudad plagada de autos y ruido. . .  
Bajamos caminando hasta el Faro por el Parque de las Estatuas.  
Todas se parecían a nosotras (Urriola 114-15)

The bus ride must take over two hours as the distance between the hamlet and the Pacific is around 100 kilometres. This whole operation means that the sisters decided to leave their house, their mother(s) and the lands that nurtured Mistral's heritage.

Both sisters escape, reach the noisy and chaotic city, and stop to wander along the sculpture park, asserting that 'todos se parecían a nosotras' implying that the sculptures' lack of limbs were as monstrous as they were<sup>67</sup>. Even though sculptures can break with the passing of time, seeing one of them as lacking a nose or an arm seems to be less of a shock than seeing these conjoined sisters. The sculpture park ends by the shore of La Serena's beach which is called "Playa del faro" given the presence of the lighthouse. This is the starting point of their new voyage into the unknown, into freedom from society, from being rejected:

Flotamos la mayor parte del tiempo.

Nuestro cuerpo es como un corcho abandonado a los requerimientos sensibles de las aguas. . .

Nada—dice mi hermana.

Y nado (Urriola 119).

These are the closing lines of *Braceá*. The text closes with the sisters floating in the waters, waiting to be absorbed by the ocean. The Pacific Ocean in La Serena can be treacherous and full of currents, so the image of them just floating is merely imaginary, as in real life people cannot swim properly in these

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<sup>67</sup> This point is relevant, as the sisters have never been in the city and La Serena seems already too busy for them. This city is in fact rather small, with just over 210,000 inhabitants, therefore, comparing its levels of noise and traffic with Santiago, which has over 7,000,00 inhabitants, their reaction seems somewhat absurd.

coasts. The image of the sisters like a cork that is bobbing on the waters brings an idea of freedom, as if they give up their will and are at the mercy of the currents. Symbolically speaking, “el mar, los océanos, se consideran así como la fuente misma de la vida y el final de la misma. ‘Volver al mar’ es como ‘retornar a la madre’, morir” (Cirlot 305). The ‘braceos’, the strokes to swim, then, are illusory as the sisters go back to the mother. This is highly interesting as the twins leave their twin mothers and the memory of the poetic mother, Mistral, in order to be joined with another mother, the ocean, as if going back to an amniotic environment<sup>68</sup>. The sisters confront their death, as it is their way to resist a life in the margins, where their own being is anomalous. They are freed through dying in the sea, perhaps as an allusion to Alfonsina Storni’s own death, who also joined the sea in Mar del Plata, Argentina.

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<sup>68</sup> Carmen Berenguer’s Bobby Sands is also a figure that seems to be dissolved in the sea, which is in the end a liberating experience, the experience of death.

### 7.3 Conclusions

*Bracea* is a text that further expresses Urriola's struggle to represent that which is anomalous. Her collection seems like a rather old-fashioned and almost atemporal poetic attempt, particularly due to the reference to the arrival of a radio—purchased by the father—as if this meant a great technological breakthrough. This is somehow similar to the ice scene in *Cien años de soledad* (1967) as José Arcadio Buendía shows complete astonishment when confronting the frozen contents of a chest. In this sense, the feeling of economic progress in both García Márquez and Urriola stem from references to elements that seem common to most readers, but that are received as novelties by their characters.

This last point should be noted in the context of understanding current Chilean society in the light of neoliberal policy. Further to this, poetry seems to condemn the commodification of virtually every aspect of social life. For Urriola it would seem that the idea of conjoined sisters living as outcasts in the Elqui Valley is clearly depicting the way in which the society's rejects respond to their condition. The sisters can be read as an exploration of Urriola's own psyche and its contradictions, or the way in which she attempts to find her place in the Chilean poetic world. This latter point would not be new to her work, and the relevance of Mistral in *Bracea* seems to point toward this direction. The criticism of neoliberalism here is apprehensible, although Urriola expresses it differently than Nadia Prado. Even though Urriola is less explicit with her criticism of society than Prado in *©Copyright*, the idea of social alienation, poverty and rejection can be linked to the condition of the poet in contemporary Chile.

Social inequality in *Bracea* is depicted from one perspective, which is the perspective of the oppressed. This contrasts with Elvira Hernández' *La bandera*, which mentions both rich and poor in her poem as those who build large skyscrapers versus those who are homeless, 'los sin techo'. *Bracea* emphasises vulnerability by placing her text in a remote hamlet in the Elqui Valley, an area that has only produced riches for the few, those who own mining projects nearby or those who produce *pisco*, Chile's distilled drink. What is more, the adobe house with *vinchucas* is clearly an image of utter

poverty, and so is the lack of access to technology, only through the presence of a radio, to which the twins' mother(s) seriously objects.

The relevance of showing inequality which is not centred on Santiago, as in most other poems studied in this thesis and also central to most of Urriola's work prior to *Bracea*, decentralises the idea of the city as only considering the capital. Urriola brings a reflection on the lands of Mistral, clearly in a state of neglect by the state, relating it to the way in which the poet laureate suffered discrimination in her own country. I would conclude that Urriola's decision to send her speaker and her sister to die in the ocean is an attempt to find an alternative ending to what happened to Mistral. The poet laureate's remains are in her native Montegrande, by the mountains she so much loved, but in a country that turned its back on her until she was awarded the Nobel Prize. Urriola seems to be sending her readers a reminder that women poets still remember this shameful episode of Chile's artistic history, therefore, the body of her conjoined twins will get lost in the waters of the Pacific, in La Serena's coast so they do not ever return to the Valley.

Finally, there is a sense of timelessness in *Bracea* that deserves mention. As the poem is expressed through the voice of one of the twins, who also seems to be writing a diary—without formal entries as, for example, Berenguer's *Bobby Sands*—there is not a particular clue about the time in which the events depicted take place. The only reference to a historical event that is mentioned is Mistral's body being returned to Montegrande, as the sisters recognise her tomb. Lack of access to technology and disconnection with the outside world is quite common in remote places that face extreme poverty, so it is difficult to place the poem at a given historical time. It seems as though this timelessness can remain for good, as inequalities do not seem to diminish when the few hold on to so much at the expense of the many. In addition, those who find themselves against this social order seem to be anomalous, monstrous and feel completely alienated, like Urriola's twins.



## CHAPTER 8

### Conclusion

*Chile tiene buen lejos*  
Manuel Jofré

The six works studied in this thesis develop poetic imaginaries that challenge their own politico-economic contexts. The aim of this thesis was to establish whether my hypothesis regarding resistance to neoliberalism in poetic writing stands. After 4 years of study, I can confirm this to be true because each text selected for my corpus engages with a critique of neoliberalism either in implicit or explicit terms.

In sum, the corpus correlates to the chronology I established as the backbone of this analysis. Both Carmen Berenguer and Elvira Hernández's poems challenge their contexts by developing symbolic and poetic mechanisms to bypass censorship in the 1980s. Berenguer poeticises a fictitious Bobby Sands in *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* in order to elevate idealism, and to covertly address and raise awareness of activists that were imprisoned for opposing Pinochet's regime. Hernández used the figure and symbol of the Chilean flag to raise a questioning of national identity, representation, and to warn her readers of an unequal future. It was perhaps Hernández' defiant stance that made her 1981 work find its official publication a decade later. The fact that *La bandera de Chile* was published in Argentina is very relevant, as it highlights that Chilean culture was still struggling to open up spaces for expression after the regime ended.

Both poems from the 1990s relate to their politico-economic context by expressing an utter disappointment with the first years of democratic rule in Chile. My decision to analyse texts published in 1999 is based on the need to retrospectively evaluate the construction of two poetic imaginaries that show the experience of a failed transition to democracy. Both *Escrito en Braille* and *Uranio* depict a deadly city, implying that the recent past was still haunting society. While Alejandra Del Río's *Braille*'s pessimistic tone concludes with her speaker urging her reader to speak up—that is, to have a voice, Marina Arrate's *Uranio* finishes with a challenge that can contest a neoliberal society.

This is achieved, according to Arrate's speaker, through a collective project, as it negates the principle of individuality fostered by neoliberalism.

The 2000s show that the promises made to revert neoliberal policies were void. Both ©*Copyright* and *Bracea* are texts that confront neoliberalism even more explicitly and make reference to issues of identity and belonging. Prado's ©*Copyright* shows a deep distrust with globalisation and the branding of culture, especially in her rebellious poem "América®". On the other hand, Urriola's *Bracea* explicitly imagines a neoliberal society's rejects as monstrous people who can only live in marginalised areas and suffer under extreme poverty. Unlike the poems from the 1990s, the corpus selected to evaluate the 2000s in Chile are even more severe in their criticism of society. Both ©*Copyright* and *Bracea* conclude with images that cannot yet be fathomed as promising about the future.

In general, throughout the thesis, there have been many instances in which I have been able to recognise a dialogue between the texts analysed in light of my particular reading of them. These connections have been signposted in each chapter as they appear. There are more connections that can be further developed in future work, such as the pivotal role of Gabriela Mistral. Her work explicitly influenced Del Río, Arrate, Prado and Urriola's poems studied in this thesis through at least two poems. The one mostly referred to was "La otra" from *Lagar* (1954) and, to a lesser extent within the corpus selected, "Cordillera" from *Poema de Chile* (1967). It would be useful to consider Mistral's work as foundational for contemporary women poets, and delve into the role and relevance of this particular poem within a larger corpus of poetry.

What is more, this thesis has also been preoccupied with establishing links between the texts analysed and canonical works. Some sections of this thesis could be an adequate starting point to examine, for instance, the dialogue between these works and *The Holy Bible*, or to find more ancient texts that resonate in contemporary Chilean poetry as the ones mentioned in this thesis with Plato's *The Republic*, Homer's *The Odyssey* and Hesiod's *Theogony*, to name a few.

It is also relevant to conclude this study by indicating that this thesis is another gesture towards disseminating the work of Chilean women poets that would otherwise take longer to reach international criticism. Moreover, the theoretical apparatus established as a sort of scaffolding to the whole project is centred on the views of important Chilean women theorists as Julieta Kirkwood, Kemy Oyarzún and Raquel Olea. Further to them, Chilean women scholars such as Nelly Richard, Magda Sepúlveda and Luz Ángela Martínez have been unquestionably good sources of material but also inspiration in my quest to give both women poets and critics a bit of space within an international academic context, as represented here by The University of Edinburgh. In this sense, this thesis is a contribution towards bridging a 'brecha genérico-sexual' that has normally placed women's work as artists and critics in a secondary or subsidiary position.

Finally, I can assert that so far this thesis has generated an approach that can be expanded to the study of male poets—for example, Gonzalo Millán's *La Ciudad*—and can spread its reach to other latitudes in Latin America and the rest of the world. It would seem interesting to assess whether Argentine or British contemporary poetry, for instance, engages with a neoliberal critique. This would be in the context of understanding neoliberalism as an economic model that poses the greatest threat to art in general by its extreme commodification of social life and goods. It would be useful for future scholarship to ascertain whether neoliberalism and its discontents are poeticised elsewhere. I would a priori respond to that enquiry with a positive answer. Just as Carmen Berenguer took up Bobby Sands' challenge to write about the tribulations of a hunger striker, I summon future researchers to engage in a neoliberal literary critique to better understand the inequalities and struggles that characterise our era.



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