CHILEAN WOMEN'S POETRY UNDER NEOLIBERALISM, 1980–2020

Bárbara Fernández-Melleda

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Contents

Figures

Preface and Acknowledgements

2024 was a year marked by events that made the publication of this book even more meaningful. Regarding the legacy of contemporary Chilean women poets, we heard about the death of Carmen Berenguer on 16 May, less than a year after Malú Urriola's passing on 23 July 2023. Berenguer's poetry still requires serious study and dissemination not only in Chile but also internationally. Her work, since her first poetry book *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (Bobby Sands Faints at the Wall, 1983), studied in the present volume, encapsulates the perspectives of a woman who opposed the Pinochet regime and was looking for ways to exalt idealism. Thanks to her radical activism, Berenguer was instrumental in the development of many instances of feminist dialogue. At the same time, during and after the dictatorship, the Chilean poet was also contributing to the inclusion and understanding of sexual minorities' demands, especially through her participation in performances organised by Pedro Lemebel's queer collective Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis.

Malú Urriola's early death at age fifty-six leaves a body of work that joins poetry, performance art and screenwriting. Her poetry had been very critical of the local poetic circles. This also follows in Mistral's footsteps as an author who, at first, was not recognised and accepted by the Chilean intellectual elite. From her first collection, *Piedras rodantes* (Rolling Stones, 1988), published during the dictatorship, up to *Bracea* (Butterfly Stroke, 2007), studied in this book, Urriola questions the position of poetry in Chilean society and exposes the woman poet as a subject who can feel and be alienated. Although circumstances are now different from those in Mistral's times, the role of the Nobel Prize winner's poetic, educational and diplomatic work, together with that of other, later women poets, including Berenguer, has been central to paving the way for more visibility and consideration for women's voices in the Chilean literary scene.

2024 also provided Chilean society with another National Literature Prize in poetry. Elvira Hernández is the first woman poet to receive the National Literature Prize after Gabriela Mistral, who accepted it in 1951. An anecdotal fact is that Hernández was born in 1951. Little did she know that exactly seventy-three years later she would be receiving the highest literary award Chile can bestow on any of its native authors. Regarding her poetic production, Elvira Hernández's groundbreaking poem *La bandera de Chile* (The Chilean Flag, 1981), analysed in this book, is considered one of the most original, vocal and explicit works of literature in opposition to Pinochet's dictatorship. One is only left to wonder if Hernández will ever be nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in the coming years.

Lastly, 2024 was a landmark year as it commemorated a decade since I started writing this book. It was over ten years ago, in the city of Edinburgh, that I found myself writing the initial lines of what would become my first monograph. This book started as a humble PhD thesis that aimed at discovering links between the development of neoliberalism in Chile since the 1980s, and how this process interacted with a corpus of six women poets' works. Choosing who to study and which of their works was not an easy task, and I have to thank my own intuition for it. These poetry examples by Carmen Berenguer, Elvira Hernández, Alejandra del Río, Marina Arrate, Nadia Prado and Malú Urriola are some of the most innovative works written in Spanish in the last few decades. My critical work also felt like constructing an anthology of poetic criticism pursuant to a deep understanding of the pains and hopes of Chilean women's poetic writing at times of turmoil.

I first have to thank the Chilean ANID (Agencia Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo) for their generous support through its doctoral scholarship scheme. Second, I thank my family for their continuous faith in me after I chose to work in a field that is totally alien to them. I am extremely grateful to fate for having gifted me my husband Paul, whose love and constant encouragement have kept me focused on finishing this volume. I would also like to recognise the great work conducted by my University of Edinburgh PhD supervisors, Fiona Mackintosh and Peter Davies. I would not be who I am today without such great academic role models. I am grateful to all my friends in Chile, the UK, Hong Kong and around the world who have been involved in the writing of this book and who have supported my academic career in general; my academic institution, the University of Hong Kong, for providing me with the

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I dedicate this book to all Chilean women poets: past, present and future.

BF-M, Hong Kong, 6 February 2025

Introduction: Women's Poetry in Neoliberal Chile, 1980–2020

This volume presents literary analysis of eight poetry books written by Chilean women poets between 1980 and 2020, examining the way their poetics react, respond to or challenge the neoliberal agenda. My critical readings present a link between poetic writing and resistance to that economic paradigm. Neoliberalism started as a series of economic reforms enacted during the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990). It is still operational in Chile now.

The eight selected poetic works studied in this volume are: Carmen Berenguer's *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (Bobby Sands Faints at the Wall, 1983), Elvira Hernández's *La bandera de Chile* (The Chilean Flag, 1981), Alejandra del Río's *Escrito en braille* (Written in Braille, 1999), Marina Arrate's *Uranio* (Uranium, 1999), Nadia Prado's ©*Copyright* (2003), Malú Urriola's *Bracea* (Butterfly Stroke, 2007), Alejandra del Río's *Capuchita negra* (Little Black Hood, 2019), and an anthology by various authors including most of the women poets of this cohort, *Arde* (Burn, 2020); the last two of these are discussed in the epilogue. All the poets selected in this survey have had their work recognised by being awarded prestigious national and international poetry prizes, and they are also notable grassroots activists in different arenas. Chilean critics such as Raquel Olea, Federico Schopf and Magda Sepúlveda, among others, have studied these authors' productions in the Chilean academy, mostly in Spanish. This poetry deserves to be both enjoyed and examined internationally. This is one of my motivations for studying these works through the medium of English.

At the same time, I find it imperative that the works examined in this book should be translated into English as soon as possible if the translation has not already been published.[1] This volume contributes

[1] All the translations in this volume have been performed by Ms Rebecca Levi, US poet and translator, unless otherwise stated.

with a new type of approach to Chilean poetic criticism and also fills in a gap in global Latin American literary studies. I seek to show that the poetry collections selected are worthy of research outside Chile and Latin America. These pieces have been chosen through a careful reading of Chilean poetic works during four decades: 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. From among the great poetic productions from the 1980s, the most important women poets from this decade are Carmen Berenguer and Elvira Hernández. The impact of their works, especially considering their resistance to the dictatorship, is still felt today. Both Alejandra del Río and Marina Arrate's poetry books were chosen in part because of their 1999 publication. They speak from the vantage point of having witnessed the Chilean transition since 1990. The reason behind the selection of Nadia Prado and Malú Urriola's poetry in the 2000s is the explicit way in which their work challenges ideas; it confirms that the anti-neoliberal critique has become more radical over the years. The culmination of the anti-neoliberal stance took place in the streets of Chile in 2019, yet one can trace the increasingly explicit criticism of the economic model by following poetry written and published over four consecutive decades. The last two works from the corpus, *Capuchita negra* (2019) and *Arde* (2020), are publications that enter into direct dialogue with their immediate context: the 2019 revolt and the 2020 constitutional referendum. As a consequence, they prove that the link between poetry and politico-economic criticism in Chile is an extremely close one.

Background

When observing the convoluted nature of contemporary Chilean history, its most decisive moment in the last century was the coup d'état led by General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte on 11 September 1973. The coup started a civilian-military dictatorship that lasted seventeen years, ending in 1990. Starting the historical timeline with the dictatorship period is central to understanding the critical moments at which both Carmen Berenguer (1946–2024) and Elvira Hernández (b. 1951) wrote their resistance poetry in the 1980s. Post-dictatorship Chile since 1990 is commonly referred to as Transición a la Democracia (Transition to Democracy). The 1990s largely established the background of a poetry conveying disillusion and unfulfilment, such as the selected works by Marina Arrate (b. 1957) and Alejandra del Río (b. 1972).

Even though it would be hard to place a date signalling the 'end' of the transitional stage in Chile, the 2000s onwards show a tendency to assume that the social and economic changes brought by the regime could not be reversed. At the same time, there is also a clear indication of grassroots unrest that suggests a need for change. This unrest presented itself in different waves of protests, mostly led by young Chilean students. For example, the 2006 Penguin Revolution was headed by secondary school students, and the 2011 Student Movement was led by university students, with Gabriel Boric, Chile's current president, as the face of such revolutionary activism. The interstice between wishing things were different and encountering difficulties in imagining a more egalitarian Chile underscores the works by Nadia Prado (b. 1966) and Malú Urriola (1967–2023).

The wave of protests that started on 18 October 2019, commonly referred to as the Estallido Social (Social Uprising), is at the apex of discontent against the Chilean political and economic elite. However, in order to understand how it got to that point, we need to reminisce about what happened earlier, especially following the Pinochet years. Philosopher Renato Cristi suggests that the regime intended to 'domesticate' Chilean democracy with the aim of 'convertirla en un instrumento dócil y funcional al desarrollo de una economía capitalista' (turning it into a docile, functional instrument of capitalist economic development; Cristi 2021: 38). The immediate consequence of this process is what is now known as neoliberalism. For economist and academic Sebastián Edwards, the Chilean economic 'miracle', as it is referred to in some circles, 'had an original sin. It was put in place by a dictatorship, a regime that violated human rights and systematically persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, and assassinated its opponents' (Edwards 2023: 2). Therefore, understanding this period and its aftermath is of pivotal importance when studying literature that reacts, both implicitly and explicitly, to Chile's change of direction after the coup. There is a clear anti-neoliberal stance in poetry written between 1980 and 2020. Literary works from the four decades studied in this book express some of the frustrations and anger that ended up being poured into the streets of Chile's main cities following the October 2019 uproar.

David Harvey's definition of neoliberalism in his popular book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* establishes that

> [It] 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 2005: 2)

Harvey's general definition of this economic theory construes it as a somewhat depoliticised model. However, considering the global context of the 1970s, it is clear that neoliberalism, which diminished the state's regulatory powers, offers a contrarian view to socialist reforms. For this reason, it cannot be referred to as an apolitical model, as if not upholding any ideological standing. Despite its non-political façade, neoliberalism goes beyond mere economics; it is also 'un pensamiento politico y moral que desarrolla ideas acerca de la democracia, la constitución, el Estado y la individualización' (a political and moral way of thinking that develops ideas about democracy, the constitution, the State, and individualisation; Cristi 2021: 17). Most early neoliberal reforms around the world took place between the 1970s and 1980s (Harvey 2005: 14), including those in democratic countries such as the United Kingdom. The global context of the Cold War allows us to situate neoliberalism within an ideological framework.

The relevance of the Chilean case when analysing the rise and development of neoliberalism globally is patent, as 'the first experiment with the neoliberal state, it is worth recalling, occurred in Chile after Pinochet's coup on the "little September 11th" of 1973' (Harvey 2005: 7). Consequently, the Chilean case was foundational and received plenty of attention from both neoliberal supporters and critics globally. In agreement with Sebastián Edwards, the fact that Chile became a laboratory for experimenting with neoliberal policies was only possible through a dictatorship, as it prevented citizens from opposing such reforms. I must confess my utter astonishment at Harvey's comment on Chile's coup d'etat as the 'little September 11th'. This sort of remark further perpetuates a Global North/South divide that is unnecessary and suggests that the victims of the Chilean coup and subsequent dictatorship lasting seventeen years do not matter, or matter less than US citizens who died on 11 September 2001. Harvey's words, I assume unintentionally, invisibilise the thousands of people disappeared, tortured and sent into exile during Pinochet's regime.

A more contextualised definition of neoliberalism within Latin American studies scholarship straightforwardly refers to it as 'a political project—a veritable revolution in government intent on reorganizing society, which is informed by a political rationality based on the norms and values of the market' (Schild 2013: 207).

Without a doubt, this continues to apply to post-Pinochet Chile. Resistance to the inequalities caused by a market-oriented state and society has triggered varied protest movements, especially since the year 2000. The 2011 university student movement generated fertile ground on which neoliberalism could start being questioned; this was the juncture at which this research began.

One of the latest conceptualisations of neoliberalism, specifically referring to the Chilean case, was articulated by Sebastián Edwards. He defines it as

> a set of beliefs and policy recommendations that emphasize the use of market mechanisms to solve most of society's problems and needs, including the provision and allocation of social services such as education, old-age pensions, health, support for the arts, and public transportation. […]
>
> In Chile, the extent of the market was very large. Market mechanisms and principles were used extensively to allocate social services and to guide day-to-day life. (Edwards 2023: 14)

It is clear from Edwards's definition that scholars from disciplines other than economics would be suspicious of what sort of 'guidance' neoliberalism would impose on citizens' lives and how such a model impacts other spheres, including the arts.

The dictatorship not only meant the end of a socialist agenda—halting the Chilean socialist project of President Salvador Allende (1970–1973)—but also sustained a complete epistemological and ideological break, given the imposition of neoliberal policies beginning in the 1980s. In other words, anything could now be commodified. Neoliberal reform impacted not only the Chilean economy but also its cultural production. From a literary studies perspective, according to Naín Nómez, in the case of poetic production, there are

> tres grandes núcleos históricos [que] permean la poesía desde el golpe hasta hoy: la del período dictatorial del exilio[2] 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 2009: 23)

[2] Renowned Chilean poets in exile published works denouncing what was happening in Chile. For example: Omar Lara's *Crónicas del Reyno de Chile* (Chronicles from the Kingdom of Chile, Romania, 1976); Gonzalo Millán's *La ciudad* (The City, Canada, 1979), and Waldo Rojas's *El puente oculto* (The Hidden Bridge, France, 1981).

> three historical nuclei that permeate poetry since the coup until today: the dictatorial period of exile and 'in-sile' (1973–1989); the difficult transition, the 'leftovers' (1990–2001); and the current one, a deterritorialised network formed by fragmented tribes (2001 to the present).

I would like to offer an alternative, complementary timeline which also expands up until the present. In this volume, I consider four consecutive decades (1980s, 1990s, 2000s and 2010s) in a genealogical sense. Based on Nómez's taxonomy, I take each decade as a nucleus but seen through the lens of the literary and poetic criticism of Chile's established neoliberal agenda. The first decade examined is the 1980s, clearly part of Nómez's 'dictatorial period'. However, my analysis joins together the dictatorship and its horrors with a recognition of the 1980s as the decade in which neoliberal policies were being imposed and implemented. The poetry written and published during these times is rather cryptic, showing the impact of censorship on those poets who dared to keep writing in Chile, albeit in secret, underground circles.

As to Nómez's 'difficult transition', the 1990s is a decade of mixed emotions. First, the joy of no longer being under military rule. Second, the rage at the lack of prosecution of those responsible for crimes against humanity during the regime. Third, the disillusionment regarding the failure to reverse the neoliberal policies of the previous decade. The atmosphere of 1990s Chilean poetry can be dark, saddened, as if still haunted by ghosts of the recent past. This poetry also took charge of asking the whereabouts of the bodies of those who were disappeared by regime officials, many of which have never been found. The seeming lack of action from various democratically elected, centre-left governments during the 1990s was due to a structural blockade built into the 1980 constitution. This mechanism required a supermajority of two-thirds to approve any change to its amendments. Therefore, only one-third of parliamentary opposition was enough to halt any major reforms. Former Pinochet supporters and sympathisers holding office as senators and representatives have usually amounted to more than one-third since the return to democracy in 1990. These acolytes of the dictatorship have been able to veto any constitutional modifications that would reform neoliberalism—a protection mechanism that the 1980 constitution offered the economic and political elites who benefited the most from those same neoliberal policies.

The literary works produced during the 2000s are in keeping with Nómez's idea of a 'deterritorialised network' as they cannot be organised into categories or generations as in previous decades. By the 2000s the consolidation of neoliberalism is felt acutely, and the poetry from that period expresses a lack of national belonging, as if the country were leaving its people behind. This last point holds striking importance, as one of the main consequences of neoliberalism is social alienation and extreme levels of socio-economic inequality. Literary works from this decade explore this reality, such as the novel *Mano de obra* (Work Force, 2002) by Diamela Eltit. The novel criticises a market-centred society as one that is the victim of consumerism and in which vulnerable workers are exploited to the point of their own destruction. Thus, the anti-neoliberal stance can be found in many literary forms, and narrative texts have been studied much more than poetic ones within this frame of analysis.[3]

The 2010s were marked by significant protests, most notably the 2011 Student Movement that opened the decade and the 2019 revolt that closed it. By 2019, 'en Chile el 1% de la población más rica concentra el 26% del PIB, mientras que el 50% de los hogares de menos ingresos accede solo al 2.1% de la riqueza, lo que lo convierte en el país más desigual de la OCDE y uno de los treinta con peor distribución de ingreso a nivel global' (in Chile the richest 1% of the population accounts for 26% of the GDP, while the bottom 50% of households earns only 2.1%, making Chile the most unequal country in the OECD [The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] and one of the thirty countries with the most poorly distributed income in the world; Ferretti and Dragnic 2020: 122). This economic reality helps to explain why a seemingly unimportant event, such as a small fare increase for public transportation, brought out decades of frustration and incited the protests of October 2019. This initial catalyst was the tip of the iceberg, however; the protesters demanded a fairer country and deep social reform, surpassing the limits of neoliberalism, which protects private interests over the welfare of the majority. The poetry published during this time

[3] There has been a significant production of books delving into neoliberalism, the arts and politics in Chile, especially after the year 2000. Some recommended readings: Luis Cárcamo-Huechante, *Tramas del mercado: imaginación económica, cultura pública y literatura en el Chile de fines del siglo veinte* (Santiago: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2007); Alessandro Fornarzzari, *Speculative Fictions: Chilean Culture, Economics, and the Neoliberal Transition* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013); Grínor Rojo, *Las novelas de la dictadura y postdictadura chilena: ¿Qué y cómo leer?*, vols I and II (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2016).

continued as a 'deterritorialised network', as in the previous decade, while narrative works speculated whether the end was in sight for neoliberalism, or at least imagined its collapse. Here it is worth considering works by novelists Nona Fernández, Álvaro Bisama and Alejandra Costamagna, to name but a few. The poetry selected for analysis from the 2010s responds uniquely to the context of the 2019 revolt from the perspective of a failed revolution and, at the same time, the assumption that neoliberalism would be overcome—which was no more than a chimera shared by a minority of Chilean voters, as seen in the 2022 constitutional referendum result.

Since its implementation in the 1980s, it took forty years to generate a mechanism that could pave the way for a large-scale reform of neoliberal rule. Writing a new constitution was one of the demands that Chileans made after the October 2019 revolts, yet the draft provided by the democratically elected Constitutional Convention assembled in 2020 did not get the approval required. The proposed new left-leaning constitution was overwhelmingly rejected by 62% of the Chilean electorate in a referendum that took place in September 2022. This process did not come to an end. The vote was a rejection of the draft, not the constitutional process itself. There was a second constitutional draft, which was also rejected in a referendum that took place in December 2023. The figures show that 55.7% of the electorate said 'no' to a new constitution, this time written by mostly Chilean right-wing parties. In the end, it seems like despite Chileans' wish for change, no process should be led by any political extremes. The result of both referenda finally legitimised the 1980s constitution as the one that remains. This is also a sign that any further amendments should be settled through careful agreements. For this reason, it is especially important to internationally disseminate work that explains the lead-up to the present political juncture, and this is one of the aims of this book. The poetry studied in *Chilean Women's Poetry under Neoliberalism, 1980–2020* reflects an anti-neoliberal stance of such distrust and disillusionment that it would be difficult to consider the recent events in Chile as entirely surprising or unexpected.

Neoliberalism and Women's Poetry

I propose that the poetry that was written both during and after the dictatorship expresses opposition to neoliberalism and to what it entails. It helps to understand the build-up to the present moment

in Chilean socio-political history. A critical survey of 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and 2010s poetic works is central to understanding the current circumstances.

Regarding the 1980s, it was very unlikely at that time that poets and common citizens were familiar with the economic and ideological agenda behind the dictatorship. I consider the imposition of neoliberalism in Chile in the 1980s as the final step in an epistemological shift that began on 11 September 1973. Neoliberalism presents an ideology that changes thought and behaviour through commodification. Such were the extent of the changes brought about by neoliberalism that as a 'conceptual apparatus [it became] so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to discussion' (Harvey 2005: 5). Neoliberalism can be understood as a sort of *new normal* socio-economic framework, and such normalisation further consolidated its power, from a critical standpoint. My analysis reads both Berenguer and Hernández's 1980s poems as if the texts implicitly show some awareness of this shift.

In sum, the 1980s were a decade in which writers had to create space for themselves; that was the only way they could express their position against Pinochet's regime. This meant that the political events at the time influenced their work directly and drastically, changing the ways in which they interacted with one another—many writers had to flee the country in exile. Those who stayed in Chile had the task of denouncing the regime in an environment of coercion and fear, so their attempts should not simply be celebrated for being aesthetically avant-garde.[4] The covert publication of these works must be considered acts of the highest bravery. Both Carmen Berenguer and Elvira Hernández managed to circulate their poems, despite difficulties, and both *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (Bobby Sands Faints at the Wall, 1983) and *La bandera de Chile* (The Chilean Flag, 1981) are now landmarks for those navigating women's poetic writing in 1980s Chile.

It is easier to elucidate an anti-neoliberal critique in the three decades that follow. The 1990s, in the poetry selected, are characterised by a dark atmosphere, embodied by a city that has been destroyed. This post-apocalyptic imagery is appropriate, as it responds to the question of those transitional times: has the country made good on its promises? The immediate answer is a decisive 'no',

[4] For a more general view of the times and collectives opposing Pinochet's regime, please see Nelly Richard's *The Insubordination of Signs: Political Change, Cultural Transformation, and Poetics of the Crisis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

yet the mechanisms with which Del Río and Arrate problematise this are poetic and discursive. Because of the amnesty given to the military accused of crimes against humanity—a condition of relinquishing their power—a significant number of the Chilean people felt impotent, and reconciliation seemed impossible. As a result, the first decade of democracy proved to be a transitional phase of unfulfilled promises.

General Pinochet's lingering presence during the 1990s cannot be overlooked when observing how Chilean artists and activists tried to reinstall 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' (the emotional tonality of the post-dictatorship climate and the difficulties in developing the language that could resignify the violent historical events; Richard 2001: 15) created obstacles for a culture trying to free itself. The presence of the former dictator and his absolute immunity contributed to the castrated cultural environment and prevented the development of alternatives. Despite this, 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' (there is no regulatory power whose surveillance network does not have certain areas that are more relaxed or distracted, where nomadic expressivity can be released; Richard 2001: 21). Evidently the 1990s were different from the previous decade, as new and formerly silenced voices could emerge without fear of imminent prosecution, torture or death. The main challenge for artists in the 1990s was to go beyond what they could achieve in the 1980s, when they had been marginalised and discarded.

The poetry of the 1990s echoes these dynamics, especially in the works of Alejandra del Río and Marina Arrate. *Escrito en braille* (Written in Braille, Del Río, 1999) and *Uranio* (Uranium, Arrate, 1999) reveal the struggle for space and the articulation of a female discourse through masks, ghosts and a lack of recognition of the familiar. This uncanniness (Freud) can be linked to the unfamiliar familiarity of the return to democracy. The role of the patriarch here is played by the dictator. His apparently everlasting presence challenged any attempt to re-signify that symbol. Poetry by Alejandra del Río and Marina Arrate suggests that during the 1990s in Chile, women poets were not only expressing themselves against an imposed ideology, but were questioning, through their work, the presumed stability of the regime's legacy from the previous

decade. This writing continues to foster a literature created from the periphery, approaching the traditional centre by decentralising it and actively questioning patriarchal forms. This point is in accordance with Raquel Olea's vision of women's writing, and Nelly Richard's idea of the 'residual'—that which is symbolically discarded or displaced. The poetry selected can be removed from that rejected or secondary counter-hegemonic position; it subverts the patriarchy while also denouncing neoliberalism.

The 2000s show a more direct criticism of neoliberalism, which can be explained from two perspectives. The first is that the self-censorship inherited from the regime was no longer an issue for contemporary poets, as they found themselves writing in democracy. The dictator was a senile figure by then, no longer a threat, whereas in the 1990s Pinochet was a Senator for Life and still the Army's Commander in Chief. The second perspective is that, by the 2000s, rising levels of inequality and debt could no longer be ignored, and it became clear to Chilean citizens that they had been caused by the unchanged policies that had been imposed during the 1980s. Both Prado and Urriola's selected works are quite explicit in their criticism of Chile's globalised context, taking this criticism beyond the country's borders. Their works attempt to denounce the United States' resounding influence on Latin America. The US can be considered in a neocolonial relationship with the region (Prado). The poetry selected also explores what it means to be an outcast within a neoliberal society; that is, attempting to be outside the dictates of a profit-driven framework (Urriola).

For context, Ricardo Lagos became the first socialist president elected after the dictatorship and was in office from 2000 to 2006. During his campaign, his motto was 'Crecer con igualdad' (Growth with Equality), a message that convinced most voters that a socialist president could change what had been inherited from the dictatorship. Pinochet was still a haunting presence in the political imagination, as he returned to Santiago in March 2000 after a sixteen-month detention in London, so Lagos's presidency had to address sensitive issues that kept re-emerging.

Lagos's most important political achievement—albeit a symbolic one—was in the constitution. His reform of the 1980 charter gave the impression that the Chilean 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' (Lagos was excited. He had managed to eliminate General Pinochet's signature, which until then had been part of the constitutional text;

Fuentes 2012: 78). Despite this effort, major, concrete changes did not occur; Lagos's office maintained and accentuated the country's neoliberal framework. It is inevitable that a comparison is drawn between Lagos's desire to generate social equality through neoliberalism and the political centrism theorised by Anthony Giddens in his book *The Third Way* (1998). As Pino-Ojeda argues, 'el "modelo chileno" puesto en práctica por la Concertación representa una alianza económico-estructural de las políticas de la centro- izquierda con las políticas de la "Nueva Derecha"' (the 'Chilean model' put into practice by the Concertación coalition represents an economic, structural alliance between the policies of the centre-left and the policies of the 'New Right'; Pino-Ojeda 2011: 97).

The Third Way in Chile made it 'natural' for Lagos's coalition and its followers to have to negotiate all reforms with former Pinochet supporters elected to parliament. The promise of equality in Lagos's campaign could not be achieved, and the main example of social discontent with his office was the secondary school student protests in 2006, 'La Revolución Pingüina' (The Penguin Revolution). The students demanded 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 carácter nacional desde la recuperación de la democracia' (It was the first massive, national social movement since the return to democracy; García-Huidobro 2009: 205). This movement radically changed the way citizens made their demands heard for years to come.

Ultimately, Lagos did not differ much from previous moderate presidents like Christian Democrats Patricio Aylwin (1990–1994) and Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle (1994–2000). '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 2002: 348). In the end, Lagos's constitutional reform did not reach very far. However, a new hope appeared from within President Lagos's closest allies, Michelle Bachelet, his Minister of Defence.

Bachelet was a rather unknown figure for most Chileans until she was designated Minister of Health under Ricardo Lagos's presidency as soon as he took office. Two years later, in 2002, she was 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 charismatic personality paved the way for a swift 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 2011: 67), so it was evident that her political opponents, extreme conservative Joaquín Lavín and moderate right-wing entrepreneur Sebastián Piñera, were going to use gender as an argument to secure votes for themselves.

Despite all 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 2012: 13), making the expectations of her presidency very high. The debate on abortion and emergency contraception became more explicit with Bachelet as president, although it was not until her second term (2014–2018) that these issues were finally discussed and passed into law.

The ending of Bachelet's first term in 2010 marked the Chilean bicentennial, but also twenty years that Chile had been under Concertación governments—three years longer than Pinochet's regime. With Lagos and Bachelet, Chile once again experienced a decade of continuity, which has been documented in critical work on their administrations. Regarding Bachelet: '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 2012: 18). This meant that despite Bachelet's emphasis on social reform, there was little to no change in 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-sponsored system. The logic of the market had also been installed in people's lives, and success was measured in economic terms, rather than in talent, abilities or other 'soft' indicators. 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. The poet uses different types of discourse and develops an eclectic piece that can be considered an example of alienation within neoliberal society.

Malú Urriola's *Bracea* (Butterfly Stroke, 2007) explores the idea of treading water, which can be understood in the context of swimming, but also as something a person would do to save themselves from 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 beauty standards set by the media, and a beauty industry that keeps growing and generates exorbitant profits. Both Prado's and Urriola's poetics deal with a subject who cannot find herself. Commonplace images from

previous decades such as idealist opposition to Pinochet's regime, including the 1990s climate of post-dictatorship darkness, seem to be less relevant in the 2000s. This means that instead of looking for ways to reconstruct the subject—understood in a phallogocentric sense—there needs to be consideration of the leftovers of history and what is to be created from those remains. The 2000s show the devastating impact of neoliberalism in the articulation of poetic discourse, as the poems recount a general crisis of self, not only in terms of poetry, but in Chilean society in general. This crisis reached its apex in 2019, and its resolution is still pending even after two rounds of failed constitutional referenda.

The end of the 2010s presents an example of Chilean poetry that expresses a seemingly positive outlook in the collection *Arde* (Burn, 2020), published days before the 2020 constitutional referendum. It seems as though many poets believed that the constitutional process would bring a complete overhaul of the 1980s constitution. For those Chileans who protested and were in favour of social movements, the writing of a new constitution would secure rights and dignity for all. However, one of Alejandra del Río's latest books, *Capuchita negra* (Little Black Hood, 2019), offers a much darker and pessimistic perspective on both the present and the future. I believe that *Capuchita* sends a cautionary message, one that suggests that unshackling from the past may not be possible. In her poetry, the speaker foreshadows a failed revolution, which, considering the rejection of both the 2022 and 2023 constitutional drafts, seems to have been a fair, albeit gloomy prediction. Thus, the last two poetic collections considered in this study present diametrically opposed views which are representative of what the citizenry felt between 2019 and 2022 when facing the constitutional question.

Conceptualising Chilean Women's Writing

From a gender perspective, this book attempts to break with the patriarchy. Feminism has had a significant, widespread role in Chile, especially since Michelle Bachelet's election as the first woman president in 2006. Current feminist collectives such as LasTesis[5] are

[5] LasTesis devised the song 'Un violador en tu camino' (A Rapist in your Path, 2019) to denounce sexual violence in the repression of women when participating in protests in Chile. Their song and their performance were reproduced globally and were covered by renowned news outlets such as *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post*.

gaining global popularity. Despite this, women writers still have to fight for their place in a male-dominated literary scene. They still have to work to deny their historical positioning as objects and establish themselves as autonomous agents and authors of their own literary works, a process this book seeks to support. At the same time, this volume elevates us women literary critics, as our work is to both examine and question phallogocentric structures, which are challenged by the poetry studied in this volume.

This volume offers a novel way of approaching the selected works and serves the purpose of disseminating this poetry because, as in Raquel Olea's words in 1998, 'la literatura escrita por mujeres continúa siendo un producto informal en la economía cultural chilena' (literature written by women continues to be an informal product within the Chilean cultural economy; Olea 1998: 19). And this seems to still be the case with women's poetry today. I would not say it is quite the same for novelists nowadays, especially if I think about contemporary writers such as Lina Meruane (b. 1970) or Alia Trabucco (b. 1983).

Within internationally disseminated Chilean literary criticism, the study of women's poetry is relatively scarce, especially for some of the poets in this cohort. This book bridges the gap between women's contemporary poetry and pre-existing canonical authors, most of whom are men. Even though studies of Gabriela Mistral's work are extensive and reach across the globe, there is insufficient writing on other Chilean women poets. The analysis of contemporary women's writing in Chile is a victim twice over: marginalised by both the patriarchy and neoliberalism.

From a feminist perspective, the starting point in approaching the eight selected works relates to how the selected poetry 'recoge […] esta marca histórica del lugar de la mujer: el mandato al silencio, el castigo a la voz, el desprestigio de su palabra' (gathers together […] the historical marks of a woman's position: her mandated silence, her punished voice, her discredited words; Olea 1998: 15). All the poetic works studied in this book challenge the traditional patriarchal ideal of the silent, compliant woman. They all develop their own poetic trajectories and 'crean [*sic*] nuevas conexiones en la escenificación de actos diversos' (create new connections through the dramatisation of different actions; Olea 1998: 13). An introductory remark to the texts might consider them 'fractures of meaning', that is, attempts to bend and challenge structures on a symbolic level, while also developing a semantic resistance through their use of the Spanish language.

Furthermore, challenging neoliberalism as a patriarchal structure is of paramount importance. In cultural and feminist theory, I would like to highlight the works of three influential Chilean theorists whose works were published many years before Michelle Bachelet's election: Julieta Kirkwood, Kemy Oyarzún and Raquel Olea. First, Kirkwood is one of the most important Chilean writers on feminism from the 1980s. In her posthumously published book *Ser política en Chile: las feministas y los partidos* (Being a Political Woman in Chile: Feminists and the Political Parties, 1986), Kirkwood develops the idea that feminism can be considered a negation of authoritarianism. This is theorised precisely during Pinochet's regime, so her claim is challenging on various levels.

Kirkwood opens her argument by 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' (did not only come from the bourgeoisie and the military ranks; authoritarian discourse also comes from the middle classes—including professionals and intellectuals—from the proletarian classes and farmers. In truth, from the whole of society; Kirkwood 1986: 188). This implies that authoritarianism was a deeply rooted structure that also found expression in patriarchal customs throughout different social spheres, which affected Chilean women in general. The constant repetition of certain patterns of behaviour and moral stances normalised both authoritarianism and patriarchy. In Kirkwood's view, 'el poder *no es*, el poder *se ejerce*' (power *doesn't exist*, power *is exercised*; Kirkwood 1986: 202). In other words, women must empower themselves as agents of change and take action. Power will not be automatically granted by those with hegemonic superiority; oppressors have historically benefited from exercising such power. Opposition to Pinochet's regime contributed to this subversive direction. The 1980s were a time of both fear and protest. Women were central to this resistance, whether in politics (Gladys Marín, María Antonieta Saa), theory (Julieta Kirkwood, Nelly Richard) or literature (Carmen Berenguer, Elvira Hernández, Diamela Eltit). While Carmen Berenguer clandestinely circulated a few xeroxed copies of *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro*, Elvira Hernández was trying—unsuccessfully—to publish *La bandera de Chile*, which finally saw the light of day in 1991, a decade after its original release date.

In this context of subversion, Kirkwood directly exhorted women by stating that 'HOY las mujeres podemos—deseamos—realizar una

nueva conciliación con la cultura, con el poder' (TODAY we women can—want to—achieve a new balance with culture, with power; Kirkwood 1986: 211). Again, she does not appeal for a negotiation with existing power structures, as they would still put women in a disadvantaged position. She rather emphasised that women have agency and can change the relationships that surround them in different ways. Kirkwood's claim that feminist activism can impact authoritarianism reflects the attitude behind the 1980s' women's empowerment movement.

A few years later, after Chile regained its democracy, Kemy Oyarzún published her 1993 seminal essay 'Literaturas heterogéneas y dialogismo genérico sexual' (Heterogeneous Literatures and Generic Sexual Dialogism), in which she establishes that the otherness that characterises Latin American cultural production has ceased to be 'lo Otro, aquello desplazado y diferido, abstraido y reprimido' (The Other: the displaced, deferred, abstracted, and repressed; Oyarzún 1993: 37). That Other has, instead, become 'ours' (ibid.). This viewpoint clearly challenges Eurocentric and neocolonial perspectives, as Oyarzún establishes Latin American cultures as being valid on their own terms; the cultures themselves reject their own 'othering'. Furthermore, there are 'multiple literatures' (Oyarzún 1993: 39) that arise from the heterogeneous nature of Latin American cultures. This can prove challenging in the extent to which literature, and particularly writing by women, can be centralised under the Latin American 'feminine' literature tag. Oyarzún develops a compelling methodology to avoid ghettoising women's literature under this label by establishing two main actions:

a) La necesidad de aislar nuestro objeto a fin de avanzar en el conocimiento de la especificidad en lo femenino y,
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 1993: 41)

a) The need to isolate our object so there can be advancement in the understanding of the specificities of femininity and,
b) The importance of deepening relational zones that are both synchronic (class, ethnicity) and diachronic (different milestones in the history of productive means)

If we apply Oyarzún's theoretical framework to this volume, first, the works studied shed light on specific aspects of women's poetic process and express the poets' need to generate new meanings that

include them as agents. Second, this methodology incorporates both contextual and historical information to analyse women's poetry in depth.

Following Oyarzún's approach, there is a prominent critical book on Chilean women's writing, Raquel Olea's groundbreaking *Lengua víbora. Producciones de lo femenino en la escritura de mujeres chilenas* (Viper Tongue: Feminine Production in the Writings of Chilean Women, 1998). The relevance of this text is that it studies and theorises the work of a cohort of Chilean women writers, among them Carmen Berenguer, Elvira Hernández and Marina Arrate, whose poetry is studied in this book. For Olea, women's writing constructs an alternative reality that exists in parallel to the transitional period after the end of the dictatorship. From the book's title, one can infer that Olea is suspicious of 'feminine' as a categorisation for literary works by Chilean women. She is emphatic in her criticism of the feminine 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' (by referring to literature written by women indiscriminately as 'feminine literature', one would give legitimacy, acritically, to the cultural construct of established femininity, without historical interrogation; Olea 1998: 30).

The main relevance of Olea's critical standpoint here is that she makes a clear distinction between feminine literature and women's literature. The latter, in her words, is a 'literatura producida por una sujeto otra, compleja, móvil en sus múltiples roles y funciones sociales […] aún insuficientemente historizada, aún insuficientemente simbolizada' (literature produced by a complex other, an agent moving between her multiple social roles and functions […] still insufficiently historicised, still insufficiently symbolised; Olea 1998: 31–2). The otherness of this woman-agent clearly surpasses the limited and somewhat stereotypical conceptualisation or construction of what is referred to as feminine literature. Because this 'other' literature—that is, women's writing—does not respond to a set of established expectations: it can question, challenge and ultimately replace traditional patriarchal forms.

Challenging the order of things is necessary for women's writing 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' (construct new identities and go through a process of (de)generating other orders and relationships

formed under the terms of the masculine/feminine opposition; Olea 1998: 32). At the core of this construction is an ever-changing, slippery agent. In this sense, the role of ambiguity within poetic discourse is of the highest importance. It blurs the limits of traditionally established identity and offers multiple ways to consider womanhood.

Kirkwood's, Oyarzún's and Olea's approaches focus on women's agency, therefore they discard, categorically, the feminine. Following their conceptualisations, I consider the poetic corpus in this book as women's writing.

To conclude, this volume elaborates a literary, contextualised reading of the poetry selected within an established timeline. All analyses are updated to reflect the current political scenario, as it will change Chile for many decades to come, hopefully into a fairer and more equal society for all. In my view, the constitutional process sealed the end of the post-dictatorship Transition to Democracy in Chile.

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Part I

1980s. Confronting the Darkness in the Pinochet Era

Chapter 1

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

One may wonder why one of the most important poems written in Chile during the dictatorship is named after IRA fighter Bobby Sands (1954–1981). Little did Sands know that a Chilean poet and activist would be so moved by his resistance and death that his idealism would echo on the other side of the world. While Sands sought to be recognised as a political prisoner under Margaret Thatcher's premiership (1979–1990), her long-time friend and ally, General Augusto Pinochet, was ruthlessly imposing his rule and persecuting thousands of Chileans, many of whom went into exile. Others were murdered or disappeared on Chilean soil, their remains never to be found.

The connection between resisting Thatcher and Pinochet highlights what these figures represented: the political power to shift the economy towards a neoliberal model with anti-communist rhetoric and a clear intention to dismantle the welfare state and diminish workers' rights. 'In Chile, union officials were tortured, assassinated and imprisoned. Unions were made virtually illegal, and a "flexible" labour system was introduced which stripped them of any right to organise and bargain collectively' (Self 2013: n.p.). Of course, these changes were introduced during a dictatorship, which prevented any sort of opposition. The Pinochet regime had carte blanche to enact deep reforms in Chile. The reality was different in the United Kingdom, as Thatcher had been democratically elected; nevertheless, Thatcherite policies were pointing in the same direction as Pinochet's economic reforms in Chile. It can be said that 'in Chile, the neoliberal model was at the heart of a totalitarian project, and in Britain it was to usher in a new era' (Self 2013: n.p.). Bearing in mind that Bobby Sands's hunger strike represented a protest against his incarceration by Thatcher, and Berenguer's poetic discourse expressed dissent against Pinochet, we find ourselves at the intersection of two

similar ideologies made concrete through the deterioration of the body, whether real (Sands) or imagined (Berenguer).

It is important to point out that the Northern Irish scenario is not up for discussion in this chapter. Some inevitable comparisons are considered, especially in view of Berenguer's awareness of Bobby Sands's resistance in prison, but the focus of this analysis is the Chilean poet's work and how much of a poetic response to the dictatorship we find in her covert attempt to denounce Pinochet's regime. There is a distance between the historical Bobby Sands and Berenguer's fictitious poetic speaker for two main reasons: first, because the poetry does not engage in a dialogue with the British government of the time, and second, because Carmen Berenguer was not much aware of 'The Troubles' beyond what she had heard about Bobby Sands's hunger strike and subsequent death. Despite this, Berenguer found sheer idealism in Sands's struggle. Together with reading some of his diary entries, composed while he was imprisoned in the Maze/Long Kesh facility in the outskirts of Belfast, she felt inspired to create her own Sands to express the suffering being borne by many Chileans 10,000 kilometres away from Ireland and Britain.

Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro (Bobby Sands Faints at the Wall, henceforth *Bobby Sands*, 1983) is Carmen Berenguer's (1946–2024) first poetry collection. This volume was published just after the tenth anniversary of dictatorial rule in Chile. Berenguer became one of the most remarkable Chilean women poets both during and after the dictatorship, as well as a playwright, literary critic, audio-visual artist and activist. She was one of the organisers of the Women's Literature Congress, which took place in Santiago in August 1987. For Berenguer, this Congress conveyed a clear political statement, as the right to assembly was still being regulated by the regime. The purpose of this event was, in the author's words, to 'romper el aislamiento y el ostracismo en que ha vivido la cultura chilena estos catorce años' (break the isolation and ostracism that culture in Chile has endured for the past fourteen years; Berenguer 1990: 16). Also, as well as being a possible nominee for the National Literature Prize on many occasions, she became the first Chilean poet to be awarded the prestigious Pablo Neruda Ibero-American Poetry Prize, which began in 2004 to commemorate the centennial of Neruda's birth.

Even though *Bobby Sands* is such a relevant poetic landmark within the Chilean literary scene during the dictatorship, there has been little criticism written about it, perhaps due to its relatively unknown transatlantic reference, or the fact that Berenguer's

subsequent works, such as *Huellas de siglo* (Marks of the Century, 1986), *Sayal de pieles* (Skirt Made of Skins, 1993) and *Naciste pintada* (You Were Born with Make-Up On, 1999), resonated more with a contemporary readership. Berenguer's *Bobby Sands* is due a comprehensive study, which this chapter intends to provide to both Chilean and non-Chilean readers, especially Irish and British ones.

A Transatlantic Reference[1]

Part of this research has been possible with the help of Carmen Berenguer herself. Back in 2015 she told me the story of how she learned about Bobby Sands's death and writings while living under the dictatorship. I will be forever grateful to her for her generosity. At the same time, it was important to corroborate Berenguer's memories with factual information from that period. The poet composed the poem between 1981 and 1982 while participating in a writers' retreat in Punta de Tralca, a coastal village around ninety minutes from Santiago by car, at a lodge owned by the archdiocese of Santiago. While there, she herself lived inside a cell, in a way emulating Sands's imprisonment and imagining what the IRA fighter was feeling during his time in Maze/Long Kesh.

Once back in Santiago, Berenguer continued working on her first poetry book and added a distinctive element to it, which is the way in which the blank page becomes a wall, and the words more like graffiti than formal poetry. Shortly after the volume was published and circulated among underground literary circles, Jaime Quezada's 1984 article in *Revista Ercilla* made a direct reference to the aesthetic originality of Berenguer's work, as the poem can also be read and interpreted visually. For Quezada, Berenguer's work was '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' (poetry that presents itself more as symbol than word—descriptive and analytical, conceptual and depersonalised, without an 'I'. The piece is, at times, a kind of scribbled street mural, graffiti that pluralises other voices; Quezada 1984: 32–3).

[1] Further details on how the poem was produced and circulated are in my article 'The Presence of Bobby Sands' Hunger Strike in Chilean Poetry: The Case of Carmen Berenguer's *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (1983)', *The Irish Review* 55 (2020), pp. 49–66. Available on JSTOR.

In the meantime, in 1980–81, IRA detainees were demanding recognition as political prisoners and resorted to what is known as the 'blanket protest', in which they refused to wear inmate uniforms. This escalated into a 'dirty protest': the prisoners smeared their small cells with faeces and urine, using the walls as a canvas on to which they painted their dissent. 'From the ordeal of the dirty protests, a core group emerged who had, beyond question, demonstrated remarkable qualities of will and endurance' (McConville 2021: n.p.). Even though Berenguer may not have been aware of the 'dirty protests', the idea of a prison wall was inspiration enough, and both the actual IRA fighters and her imagined Bobby Sands used their cell walls to make bold political statements. When moved to the H-Blocks of the Maze/Long Kesh prison in September 1977, Bobby Sands 'joined his comrades, first, on the blanket protest, and then, in 1978, the no-wash, no slop-out protest' (Adams 2001: 13).

While in the Maze/Long Kesh prison, Bobby Sands wrote articles, poems and a diary. At first, he wrote under the name 'Marcella', his sister (*Britannica*). Interestingly enough, 'el mayor gesto de silencio es aquel que realiza Berenguer al ocultar su propia voz enunciante de sujeto femenino, pues emigra de sí misma para recrearse en la voz y el cuerpo de Bobby Sands' (Berenguer's greatest gesture of silence is hiding her own voice, as a female speaker, thus emigrating out of herself to into the voice and body of Bobby Sands; Gebhard 2016: 162). In this sense, both Sands and Berenguer hide themselves behind fictitious others, be it the rebel's sister or the poet's imagined Sands. The gender migration of the speaker allows readers to focus on what was urgent for both authors: the need to generate a new language to battle against their respective authorities. While imprisoned in 1977, Bobby Sands and Gerry Adams—his comrade and one of the most prominent political figures of the Northern Irish republican party Sinn Féin—began to 'write prose and poetry that spoke of the humanity of the prisoners as well as the inhumanity of their situation' (O'Hearn 2006: 172). These writings were smuggled out of the prison and published by the *Republican News*. About Sands's compositions, Denis O'Hearn states that he 'wrote surreptitiously, with a ballpoint pen refill on slick prison toilet paper, one ear cocked for approaching screws who would confiscate his writing and send him to the punishment cells if they caught him' (O'Hearn 2006: 172). These pieces were accounts of life in prison and detail both the 'blanket' and 'dirty' protests. By mid-1979, Sands had written an autobiographical account of his time in prison, entitled *One Day in my Life*, which was published in 2001 with an introduction by Gerry

Adams. The volume almost never saw the light of day, because, according to Adams, 'the Sinn Féin office in Belfast, which also housed the H-Block Information Bureau, was regularly raided […] It was only after Bobby's death that a supporter […] came forward with the manuscript […] Bobby's handwriting was recognized immediately' (Adams 2001: 18). A few weeks before his death, Bobby Sands wrote a diary as testimony of his hunger strike. The account begins the day he started his lethal strike, on Sunday, 1 March 1981, and continues for exactly seventeen days, until Tuesday, 17 March, after which he was no longer able to write. Bobby Sands died from self-starvation on 5 May 1981 at the Maze/Long Kesh prison in Northern Ireland after sixty-six days of hunger striking.

Carmen Berenguer indicated she found out about Bobby Sands's death through the press in Chile. His struggle made a tremendous impression on her, as did the anonymous translations of some of his diary entries, so she felt compelled to imagine her own Bobby Sands. It is clear that she wrote the poem to honour the IRA fighter but also to shed light, covertly, on what was going on in Chile, without making reference to the political prisoners under Pinochet's regime. The two sources that reported on Bobby Sands's death were politically opposed: on the one hand, pro-regime newspaper *El Mercurio* followed Sands's death in detail, to the point that they even sent a journalist to cover his funeral in Belfast. Their purpose was certainly propagandistic; they wanted to highlight and support Thatcher's decision not to recognise the IRA prisoners as political ones. What is more, *El Mercurio* articles repeatedly indicated that Bobby Sands's hunger strike had been a useless manoeuvre, as it did not achieve anything. 'Sands, más conocido como Bobby […] concitó la atención mundial por lo larga, por lo inútil [que fue su huelga de hambre]' (Sands, better known as Bobby, captured global attention with his long, useless hunger strike; Olave 1981: A1). Agencia de Prensa de Servicios Internacionales (Press Agency for International Services, or *APSI*), on the other hand, published the first Chilean magazine explicitly opposed to the dictatorship and counted on financial and political support from abroad. In *APSI*, Sands's idealism was taken as a positive trait: '[Sands] luchó por la liberación de su patria' (Sands struggled for the liberation of his homeland; Ortiz 1981: 18).

It is still not clear whether Berenguer encountered the reports from these two news outlets, but when I interviewed her in December 2015, she admitted that what resonated was a prisoner demanding political status. In a 1984 interview, she said that the purpose of her *Bobby Sands* was to depict 'el deseo de libertad de un

hombre encerrado detrás de un muro en la prisión, como símbolo de lo que sucede en Chile y en muchas otras partes del mundo […] era una experiencia que necesitaba transmitir como desahogo' (a man's desire for liberty while shut inside the walls of a prison, as a symbol of what is happening in Chile and in many other parts of the world […] it was an experience that I needed to transmit, to get it off my chest; 'Carmen Berenguer' 1984: 16). Just as Sands arranged for his articles, poems and diary entries to be smuggled out of prison, Carmen Berenguer resorted to typing, copying and binding *Bobby Sands* herself, by hand. There were only 200 copies (Ortega 2000: 29).

Berenguer made sure her book was circulated among clandestine literary groups that opposed the dictatorship. Its 1983 publication marked 'la emergencia de tanto movimientos contestatarios a la dictadura de Pinochet como de voces disidentes en las representaciones literarias de la época' (the emergence of both movements rebelling against Pinochet's dictatorship as well as dissident voices in the literary works of that era; Gebhard 2016: 156). Since it was her first poetry collection, there was some critical reception in local magazines and newspapers: three short pieces were published on *Bobby Sands* by the summer of 1984. The first one, an article by Carlos Cornejo and Pamela Pequeño in *Revista Análisis* (Analysis Magazine), discussed the new poetry being written in Chile at the time, a broad commentary on clandestine publications. There were two longer articles in *Revista Ercilla* (Ercilla Magazine) and *Solidaridad* (Solidarity), which focused on *Bobby Sands* itself.

Literary criticism, on the other hand, has taken its time to explore Berenguer's *Bobby Sands*. Apart from a short but erudite commentary by Julio Ortega in his seminal book *Caja de herramientas: prácticas culturales para el nuevo siglo chileno* (Toolbox: Cultural Practices for the New Chilean Century, 2000), there have been a handful of articles surrounding Berenguer's works. However, the only academic papers concentrating uniquely on *Bobby Sands* have been José Salomón Gebhard's 'Huelga de hambre. Escritura y representación: una lectura de *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* de Carmen Berenguer' (Hunger Strike. Writing and Representation: A Reading of *Bobby Sands Faints at the Wall* by Carmen Berenguer), published in 2016 in *Revista Chilena de Literatura* (Chilean Literary Journal), and my own 2020 piece, 'The Presence of Bobby Sands' Hunger Strike in Chilean Poetry: The Case of Carmen Berenguer's *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (1983)', published in *The Irish*

Review. While Gebhard's reading of Berenguer's poem completely overlooks the conditions surrounding its production and the extensive connections between the Irish and Chilean causes, there is a development of the idea of an anti-authoritarian voice that transcends a fictitious poetic testimony. In his words, 'la adopción de la figura del huelguista irlandés en el texto de Berenguer atrae conceptos como la habitabilidad de mundos subalternos múltiples; […] y cosmopolitismo subalterno' (the adoption of the figure of the Irish hunger striker in Berenguer's text brings in concepts like the habitability of multiple subordinate worlds […] and subordinate cosmopolitanism; Gebhard 2016: 158). The transatlantic connection that permitted *Bobby Sands*'s existence is one that resonates beyond Chile, and even Ireland, as this poetry appeals as a broader emancipatory project that exists in an imaginary realm. Its core would be a clear emphasis on the relevance of idealism for those who struggle against authoritarian or colonial powers.

Bobby Sands's Writings in Berenguer's Text

A strong sense of intertextual dialogue between Bobby Sands's writings and Berenguer's poem opens and closes the latter's work. There are two quotations from Sands's diary which appear, anonymously translated, at the beginning and end of *Bobby Sands*.

Another parallel between Bobby Sands's and Berenguer's writing is in the poetic form. *Bobby Sands* is also set out as a diary, which starts at the eleventh day and finishes on 'The Last Day', or the fifty-fifth day in Berenguer's imagination. Bobby Sands died of starvation after sixty-six days, which means that Berenguer's text considers an eleven-day gap between the end of her poem and Sands's death, leaving space for his actual struggle in prison. The number 11 is symbolic in Chilean culture, as General Augusto Pinochet stormed La Moneda to oust President Salvador Allende on 11 September 1973, marking the beginning of the dictatorship.

It seems as though Berenguer wanted to continue the diary that Bobby Sands himself started to write from prison in March 1981. *Bobby Sands* opens with a handwritten dedication that reads 'Al pueblo de Eire' (To the people of Éire; Berenguer 2015: n.p.). This is the only part of the book that is not typed, implying a personalised and deeply felt dedication to the Irish. The authenticity of this dedication, in Berenguer's own handwriting, was confirmed by the author in an email exchange: 'la única dedicatoria que aparece en el

libro es la mía, que [lo] dice con letra manuscrita' (the only dedication that appears in the book is mine, written by hand; Berenguer 2014).

A handwritten dedication provides an air of intimacy and closeness with the dedicatee. In his book *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997), Gérard Genette conceives the dedication as an 'autonomous statement […] in the short form of a simple mention of the dedicatee' (Genette 1997: 118), which at the same time elevates the figure of the dedicatee as they are to be remembered for posterity. *Bobby Sands* is dedicated to the people of Éire, that is, the people of Ireland. Since the book is a covert denunciation of Pinochet's regime, it is possible that it is also implicitly dedicated to the people of Chile. In this sense, Berenguer's text offers at least two readings—the one related to the surface meaning and the other to the subtextual one.

When Berenguer decides to use the word 'Éire', instead of Ireland, she is deliberately using the autochthonous Irish word to refer to the whole island, which was and is still divided into Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Using Éire to refer to Ireland can indeed be problematic considering that the Republic has had a history of issues with regard to its own name. In a 2007 article provocatively entitled 'The Irish Free State/Éire/Republic of Ireland/Ireland: "A Country by Any Other Name"?', it becomes clear that the use of the word 'Éire' has had different meanings depending on the stage of the process of Irish independence. 'The 1937 Constitution changed the name of the state to "Eire", or in the English language, Ireland' (Daly 2007: 76), referring solely 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 2007: 78). This means that the use of 'Éire' is not necessarily synonymous with Ireland.

Despite this, Berenguer intended to dedicate her poem to the whole population of Ireland, whether from the North or from the Republic. She must have been unaware of the intricate particulars of using the word 'Éire' as described above. Nevertheless, it can be deduced that Berenguer with her use of 'Éire' showed some degree of sympathy and affection towards the pro-independence/secessionist cause in Northern Ireland, as she was informed of what Bobby Sands was fighting for and his reasons for hunger striking. What is remarkably interesting about *Bobby Sands* is that most of the book's dedicatees, the Irish, have not read it. The majority of those who have read this poetry are Chileans who are able to understand it as a camouflaged denouncement of Pinochet's dictatorship. Thus, regardless

of the direct dedication to the people of 'Éire', Chilean readers can feel spoken to, between the lines and in the way this poem has survived and continues to be reprinted in Chile after forty years. It could be argued that both Bobby Sands and Éire in Berenguer's writing operate as a metonym for the Chilean experience under Pinochet.

After the dedication, the book starts with an epitaph that 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 epitaph is an excerpt from Sands's diary, dated Sunday, 8 March 1981. This translated quotation contains an ellipsis, as the original reads: 'I am awaiting the lark, for spring is all but upon us. [How I listened to that lark when I was in H-5, and watched a pair of chaffinches which arrived in February.] Now lying in what is indeed my deathbed, I still listen even to the black crows' (Sands 1997: 227).

Before commenting on the translation, it is important to point out that the poem opens from an impossible moment, as these lines emphasise that Sands's death has been foretold; the work is thus an exercise on premonitory writing. The only certainty is death, be it for Sands, who died after sixty-six days of voluntary starvation, or for Berenguer's imagined Bobby Sands, who struggled through hunger striking in her poem. Sands's personal tragedy was not written by him, but by Berenguer and the way she imagined it. The progression of bodily deterioration that Berenguer writes is also important to consider, as she admitted that 'hice una investigación médica de la descripción por muerte de inanición' (I researched the medical description of death by inanition; Berenguer 2014). Her poetry conflates a medically researched but poetic description of the hunger striker with the thoughts and perceptions that flash through the prisoner's mind as the enunciating voice of the poem.

The main issue regarding the epitaph cited above is that the Spanish translation differs substantially from what Bobby Sands expressed in his diary—one can assume, then, that Berenguer did not have access to the original text. The translator's version of

Sands's message provides Berenguer with one different from what he intended to convey: 'spring is all but upon us' means that 'spring is nearly here', but this is translated as 'the lark that in spring is everything to us'. In the end, it is these translated, transmuted words that open her poem, and these are the words she adopts in order to connect to Sands's own voice and ventriloquise 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, and with it the renewal of life, and brings an air of hope.[2] Furthermore, a bird's presence in symbolic terms implies 'the power of heightening—suggesting sublimation and spiritualization' (Cirlot 2001: 27), so the lark here plays an important role in both Sands's writings and how Berenguer imagines him, as she opens her poem with this quotation-turned-epitaph.

The lark itself has had tremendous relevance in poetic tradition. In twentieth-century studies of the lark in English poetry, there is agreement that 'for Shakespeare the lark is a symbol of joy' (Baker 1950: 70). The lark is also recognised as announcing the day, in both its ascent and its song, as well as the coming of spring, as 'the lark does not sing when it is wet or cloudy' (Bawcutt 1972: 7). One of the most famous English poems, 'To a Skylark' (1820) by Percy Bysshe Shelley, also recognises this jubilant bird:

> All that ever was
> Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass.
>
> Teach us, Sprite or Bird,
> What sweet thoughts are thine

Similarly, the lark in Bobby Sands's diary and in the translation used by Berenguer represents the better times to come in spring, and perhaps freedom for Sands and his comrades inside the Maze/Long Kesh prison. Sands's death while waiting for the lark, both in his own diary and in Berenguer's poem, may also represent a chimera—that is, the impossibility of achieving what he is fighting for. Birds connect Sands to the outside world, embodying his attentiveness to what is going on beyond the bars and his engagement with nature, the city of Belfast and his own fate.

The second part of the epitaph presents a stark contrast in the shift from lark to crow. Here the lark, or the idea of hope, is evoked

[2] Bobby Sands's poetry written while in prison is collected in a posthumous anthology entitled *Skylark Sing Your Lonely Song* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1989).

in the singular, and 'crows' or 'cuervos' are presented in the plural form. This is significant, as 'particularly flocks of birds—for multiplicity is ever a sign of the negative—may take on evil implications' (Cirlot 2001: 27). Sands hears the crows from his deathbed; they may anticipate his demise. They seem to be reaching him sooner than the lark.

The appearance of crows has great significance in Celtic cultures, specifically the Irish, which associates the crow with the mythical figure of the *badb*, 'signifying supernatural women, sometimes in the form of crows, who hover over the battlefield, foretelling the slaughter and later feeding on the slain' (Clark 1987: 225). This type of superstition fits well into Bobby Sands's cultural framework; thus, he contrasts two birds with opposing symbolisms and also heavily foreshadows his own death. The wailing of the crow can also be linked to the *banshee*, another mythical Celtic being, who, along with the *badb*, 'are female spirits who prophesy death and destruction and terrify people with their fearsome howls' (Clark 1987: 226). The fact that Sands's quotation emphasises the auditory in 'I still listen even to the black crows' implies that he is waiting to die, and the epithet 'black', which overemphasises the crows' physical description, also connotes his imminent death hovering above him.

Bobby Sands closes with another anonymously translated quotation from Bobby Sands's diary:

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

The original quotation, which appears in Sands's diary dated 10 March 1981, the tenth day of his hunger strike, 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 1997: 229). Sands wrote his diary in prose, but he calls for a poem to be written about his experience; he understands that he is unable to express what he is going through. This could only be achieved through poetry and imagination. It took two more months not only for Sands to die, but also for Berenguer to hear about him and take up the challenge to poeticise his hunger strike. What is more, the translation depersonalises

the experience of hunger striking, as the Spanish version offers an imagined poem on the 'tribulations of hunger', instead of 'a hunger-striker'—the person and body of one who decides to take this path as a means of protest. Also, use of different modal verbs changes the meaning of both the original and the translation. Bobby Sands expresses an intention and desire to write the poem in 'I would like to', as opposed to the Spanish 'Yo podría' ('I could do it'), which is an impossibility, as Sands was entirely aware that his hunger strike would inevitably lead to his death.

Sands's rhetorical invitation for someone to write about the pains of the hunger striker is deliberately placed at the end of the book, implying that Berenguer's poem is an attempt to do what Sands could only wish for while imprisoned. In this sense, Berenguer honoured him, his endurance, and his hunger strike. The poetic speaker that enunciates Berenguer's lines is an imagined Bobby Sands behind the bars of his Northern Irish cell. The Chilean author thus transports herself to the Maze/Long Kesh prison, and her poetic speaker impersonates Bobby Sands's voice during part of his hunger strike. The poetic persona of Sands becomes a device for Carmen Berenguer to convey vivid images of despair coupled with profound idealism. Berenguer's Bobby Sands is a figure who, despite his physical weakness, endures through his expression of political and ideological resistance. This latter point can clearly find an echo in underground circles opposing Pinochet's regime in 1980s Chile.

Reading *Bobby Sands Faints at the Wall*[3]

As there are various printed and digital version of this volume, the quoted one in this chapter is the 2015 edition by La Joyita Cartonera, a project that I was part of between 2015 and 2022. La Joyita's books are freely available online under a Creative Commons licence. Therefore, there are no permission issues around its use, especially with regard to two calligrams that I study here.

[3] The 2020 bilingual edition of *Bobby Sands* published by El Sur es América publishers in the United States does not read in a way that transmits many of the ambiguities of Berenguer's poetry in the Spanish original. All the translations from *Bobby Sands* in this volume have been performed by Ms Rebecca Levi. Quotations from Bobby Sands in Spanish have been compared with the original work written by him in his diary, from the book *Bobby Sands: Writings from Prison* (Boulder, CO: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1997). The 2020 translation retranslates Bobby Sands's quotations back into English without consideration of the English original.

This reading of *Bobby Sands* considers a selection of poems focusing on two key topics:[4] body deterioration and martyrdom. The bodily representations of hunger striking prove that there is a close connection between voluntary sacrifice and physical decay. This already suggests a religious reading, linked to the concept of martyrdom. My analysis will follow a chronological order, as does Berenguer in her poetry.

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. 2004: 35). Since Berenguer's apparent inspiration is Bobby Sands's invitation to write a poem about the tribulations of a hunger striker, voluntary starvation lies at the centre of the text. Together with depictions of bodily deterioration, there is a more abstract reading of what this means in the context of the Chilean dictatorship. Hunger striking can be seen as an act of self-sacrifice for a cause. From a Chilean perspective, *Bobby Sands* is a volume that presents a perceptible, yet camouflaged, aim as well. The text denounces and condemns the atrocities that were taking place during Pinochet's regime, specifically from 1973 to the early 1980s. In addition, the depiction of Bobby Sands's self-immolation in the poem can be read as elevating political prisoners to the category of martyrs.

Berenguer depicts Bobby Sands's hunger strike through the fragmented entries of a poetic diary, beginning on day eleven. This organisational conceit sheds light on the psyche of an increasingly desperate subject approaching an inevitable death. *Bobby Sands* opens its first diary entry with the following lines:

Undécimo día

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

Eleventh day

Empty on the dry tongue
Speaks as it is the only
worthy tongue

[4] Berenguer's collection comes across as a powerful extended metaphor or metonym. There are many ways to read the work and examples to connect her *Bobby Sands* with more Latin American referents and previous poets. There will be complementary readings as part of future interpretive papers.

In this first poetic account of Sands's time in prison, there are two key elements to consider: the tongue and the ability to speak. First, the tongue evokes the mouth, which is symbolically understood as 'the point of convergence between the external and the inner worlds' (Cirlot 2001: 222) and literally the mechanism for both feeding and communicating. It is through the mouth that thoughts are externalised, and the tongue is an important organ in the speech apparatus. Sands, as the speaker, exalts the importance of the tongue, which both serves a biological purpose—eating, which he avoids—and plays a key role in his ability to express himself.

The odd syntax of these lines implies that the speaker is describing the strangeness of his own situation and suggests that language and its structures do not leave space for the oppressed to express themselves. They are not to be mentioned, not allowed to speak, and ultimately expelled from language. The breaking of syntactical rules comes to the aid of the speaker, a device used as a form of subversion. This idea of speech is metaphorical, as the act of speaking is contained within the poetry. The tongue is dry, and its emptiness represents the lack of space for expression, which resonates with the political climate in Pinochet's Chile. The speaker highlights the importance of speech with the word 'only'. It is his last resort, and potentially a powerful one, even though his tongue is dry from no food or drink. In Berenguer's poem, Sands does not give up on trying to speak, to express himself through a language that pushes him into the margins.

Like all verbal expression, counter-hegemonic protest is expressed in the mouth, and the articulation of ideas is conveyed through oral speech. However, mechanisms of speech also include the throat—another important part of the digestive system. Day thirteen in the poem transports the reader from the mouth/tongue dyad further inside the hunger striker's body, into the throat:

Día 13

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

Day 13

The throat entrance salivates
gulping mouthfuls
of salt on the tongue dissolved

This three-line poem opens with an ambiguous line, at least in the Spanish original. This brings into focus an image of the prisoner in a state of deep confusion; the break in language conveying a linguistic indeterminacy allows us to understand his struggle. In biolinguistic terms, the throat or larynx contains vocal cords which vibrate and make sounds possible, and these together generate meaning. In this backwards version of the chain of speech—starting from the mouth and progressing inwardly throughout the text—the throat appears as both the basis of utterance and the means to enable a person to swallow. It vibrates on the outside, and absorbs nutrients on the inside, essential to both speaking and eating. 'Saliva la entrada en la garganta' is a line that in Spanish seems to lack a verb, which might show that Sands is experiencing verbal as well as literal dehydration. At the same time, 'saliva' can be understood as the conjugation of the verb 'salivar' (to salivate) and suggests hunger. In medical literature, 'salivation flow reflects the learning history of a subject which may sometimes be paralleled by a biological state which is called hunger' (Jansen et al. 1992: 163). In addition, the third line does not follow the expected syntactical order of a sentence in Spanish. The modifier 'disuelta' (dissolved) should be next to its noun, 'la sal' (salt). The use of these grammatical devices—ellipsis and syntactical transposition—evokes a breakdown of the self or the mind of the prisoner.

Another effect of hunger striking is blindness. In a 2006 article entitled 'The Long Kesh Hunger Strikers: 25 Years Later', Irish journalist Paul Howard interviews hunger strike survivors, among whom Bobby Sands's comrades Lawrence McKeown, Paddy Quinn and Pat Sheehan all experienced problems with vision during their strikes. In McKeown's case, he admitted to having experienced temporary blindness: 'I tried to open my eyes, but I could see only shapes and bright lights' (Howard 2006: 73). For Paddy Quinn, the effects of hunger striking on his vision were permanent: 'The light hurts [my eyes] and I can only look with one of them at any one time. The other eye's looking at nothing' (Howard 2006: 75). He went blind between day thirty and day forty of his hunger strike. Howard further explains why vision is one of the most affected senses during hunger striking: 'A body starved of food eventually cannibalises itself. The onset of blindness was the first sign that it was feeding off the protein in the brain' (Howard 2006: 75). Former prisoner Pat Sheehan remembers how a doctor warned him about the effects of his strike: 'He went on about how my vital organs were going to close down, one by one, and I'd be blind and vomiting, and my liver will turn to

mush' (Howard 2006: 86). These effects were indeed considered by Carmen Berenguer in the preliminary research she conducted on the effects of hunger striking on the human body. It is remarkable how much her poem reflects the actual experiences of hunger strikers, quoted above.

In Berenguer's poem we find that her speaker is becoming blind by day sixteen:

> Día 16
>
> El ojo vendado muere
> Belfast muere y vive
> enmurallada
>
> Day 16
>
> The bandaged eye dies
> Belfast dies and lives
> walled in

The first line immediately signals the presence of Sands's captors, as his eye is bandaged. This means someone came into contact with him and tried to save or protect his dying eye. When the eye dies, his blindness is complete. What he was able to see from his cell in the Maze/Long Kesh Prison was the city of Belfast, and the poem here makes reference to the polarisation of the city. Surprisingly, Carmen Berenguer confessed to me she never visited Belfast, and she was not aware that the city indeed had walls surrounding parts of it—quite a precise coincidence between the factual and the imagined. As in the poem, Bobby Sands himself also went blind while imprisoned, and he stopped writing diary entries after 17 March 1981, St Patrick's Day.

The speaker's blindness in *Bobby Sands* may also refer to Berenguer's own challenge in expressing somebody else's suffering, speaking on behalf of another. This creates a dynamic relationship between her intention to expose dictatorial or authoritarian wounds and her attempt to give voice to the oppressed. The full expression of this voice remains elusive, however, and despite her medical research on the effects of hunger striking, some aspects of Sands's struggle seem hard to communicate—such as the torture he suffered while imprisoned. So, too, her poetry book takes on the difficult task of representing the suffering of the victims of persecution and human rights violations during Pinochet's regime in Chile.

Berenguer's imaginary trip inside the body of Bobby Sands goes even deeper, now reaching his stomach. Readers are transported to the centre of the digestive tract while the prisoner is avoiding nourishment altogether.

Vigésimo primer día

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

Twenty-first Day

The bread's lips hurt the open
walls of the stomach hurt with
thin laughter

On the twenty-first day of starvation, the poetry continues playing with the use of language, personifying bread as having lips, which symbolises the speaker's desperation for food. If bread has lips, then it feels pain, 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. Also, the reference to a painful laughter may indicate he is having spasms, a sign that his body has severely deteriorated. These lines address some of the physical consequences of the speaker's hunger strike decision. This descriptive poetry, devoid of any 'I', demonstrates a focus on Sands's acute pain, preventing the reader from accessing his subjective voice.

These effects of hunger striking, as imagined by Berenguer, ring true with what actually happened to the surviving prisoners interviewed by Paul Howard. Lawrence McKeown reported that shortly after losing most of his eyesight, 'his bowels suddenly opened, the final indicator that death was near' (Howard 2006: 73). Paddy Quinn had a similar experience, which helps to confirm Berenguer's accurate physical and sensorial depiction of deterioration in the poem. In his case, he reported: 'My lips were sore and bleeding. I'd been chewing them while I was having convulsions' (Howard 2006: 75).

Further along, on day thirty-three, there are signs of oppression, and torture is explicitly mentioned (Figures 1A and 1B). The central lines that form this poem are surrounded by a broken frame repeating the words: 'BIRD', 'WINGS' and 'FOLDED', in different combinations, taken from its third line. In terms of content, this is the

only section of *Bobby Sands* that explicitly uses the word 'torture'. This word encapsulates the idea that the speaker may have been beaten, but there is no evidence of it. This is reminiscent of some of the techniques used by Chilean intelligence agents while torturing opponents of the regime. Berenguer placed her poetic Bobby Sands at the H-Block of the Maze/Long Kesh Prison, where the actual Bobby Sands was incarcerated, not only to be closer to Bobby Sands himself, but to create a distance between Ireland and Chile, and to be able to covertly denounce the torture she knew was taking place in her country.

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,

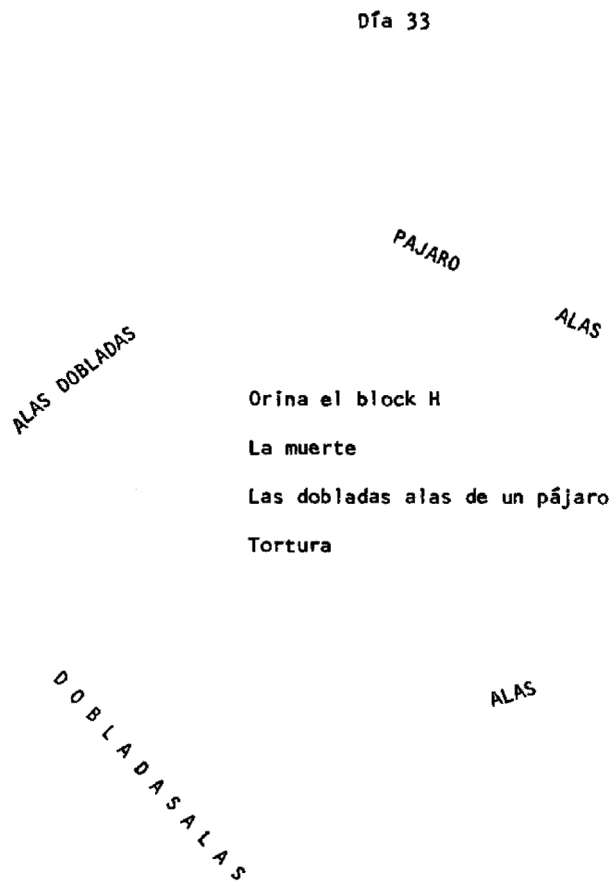

Figure 1A *Day 33, Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro*. La Joyita Cartonera, 2015 edition.

clearly a symbolic representation of the oppressed. Also, the syntactic inversion in the line 'Las dobladas alas de un pájaro' instead of 'Las alas dobladas de un pájaro' contributes to an ambiguity that Berenguer has created in previous poems within this work, one that provides a subtle challenge for the reader. The flipped syntax may also emphasise that not only the wings but the whole animal was broken and unable to fly. In addition, this is a generic bird, not a lark, erasing any last bit of hope for the hunger-striking prisoner. As the last word of the poem is 'Tortura', the image of the broken bird is one of extreme pessimism as Sands's death has been foretold from the epitaph that opens Berenguer's volume.

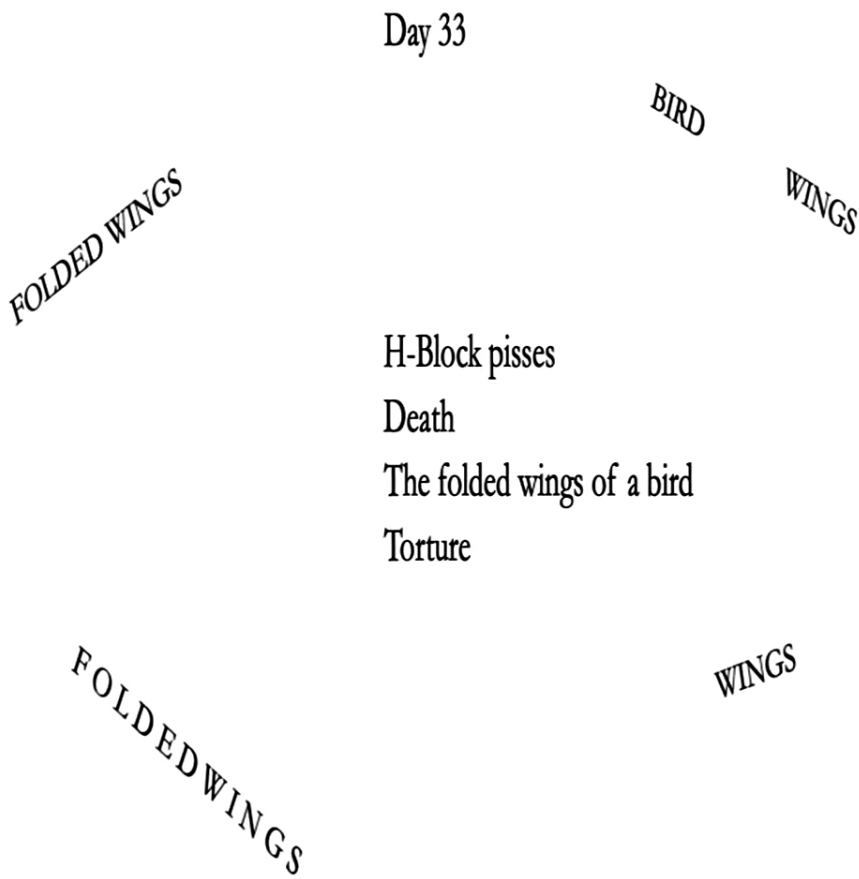

Figure 1B *Day 33, Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro*. La Joyita Cartonera, 2015 edition. Translation courtesy of Rebecca Levi.

The body continues to deteriorate. After reaching the stomach, the poem shifts to the outside, suggesting regurgitation, in a symbolic turn that implies the rejection of life through further pain:

Día 34

Náuseas la nausea
Con los labios pintados
vomita la muerte

Day 34

Nausea the nausea
With painted lips
vomits death

The nausea that causes Sands's vomiting in this poem can be related to two possible scenarios: one, extreme malnourishment; two, as the result of continuous beating. At this stage, he would be regurgitating his own blood and gastric juices. Brendan McLaughlin, another surviving hunger striker, had the experience of being 'rushed to hospital suffering from a perforated ulcer and internal bleeding' (Howard 2006: 78). Apart from this, when a weakened body is tortured and subjected to beating, the taste of blood in the mouth leads to nausea and vomiting. Here, the nausea is personified as a female figure with painted lips, as if what is vomited is blood. The poem then returns to the mouth, and from the ability to speak at the beginning of the book, we see the mouth as an exit, which purges what little there is in Sands's stomach. The body is being emptied of life.

While the text deals with the transition between life and death, Sands's voluntary starvation also implies transcendence through sacrifice. The most iconic figure of sacrifice in the Western tradition is Jesus Christ, and Berenguer develops Sands's voice inspired by 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

Day 44

I give my life as an act of love.
I give myself over to a slow agony
As the only way to exchange
gunpowder for gardens of peace
As the only way to wait for the lark
and new springs
As the only support in cleaning
the wounds of a tortured Christ

Love is what drives Bobby Sands's sacrifice in the poem, a love that evinces a deep commitment to a cause and its ideals. In symbolic terms, 'there is no creation without sacrifice. To sacrifice what is esteemed is to sacrifice oneself […] All forms of suffering can be sacrificial, if fully and wholeheartedly sought and accepted' (Cirlot 2001: 276). Sands's sacrifice in the poem is understood through the pain he suffers, which we learn in detail through Berenguer's descriptions. Consequently, his agony and slow death in the poem also influenced the pace of both his resistance and his deterioration throughout the collection. Berenguer purposely uses the word 'agony' to paint Sands as a figure of sacrifice, equating him to the Christian saviour. The etymological roots of the word 'agony' merit examination, in both Spanish and English, given that the poem was originally written in Spanish. *A New Spanish and English Dictionary* from the eighteenth century reports that 'agonía [is] an agony a man is put into by any Anguish or Passion, or the Agony of Death' (Stevens 1706: 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 2009: n.p.). In sum, both the Spanish and English etymological origins of 'agony' highlight the close connection between Sands's struggles and his sacrifice as a form of martyrisation.

In these lines, Sands refers to himself as the only help for Jesus while being tortured, which relates to the saviour's agony. Here, Berenguer's speaker enters the biblical story of the passion of Christ, endures pain with him, and cleans his wounds. An important biblical figure who had access to Jesus's 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, but he also cleans Jesus's wounds as Nicodemus and Joseph did when preparing his burial. In Jesus's presence, Berenguer's Sands becomes one with him. This version of Bobby Sands is a catalyst of love on his slow path to death, a martyr searching for peace. Berenguer's Sands here is completely detached from the historical one. Sands's hunger striking sought compromise with the colonial power (Margaret Thatcher's United Kingdom) in order to redeem for his country, Ireland. Sands's sacrifice, as imagined by Berenguer, can also be read as a 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 echoes the agony of Bobby Sands in Berenguer's text.

Near the end, on day fifty, there is a poem made up of four commands, addressed to an unknown other and written as graffiti. As death was approaching Sands in the text, 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 intended addressee of this graffiti increases the poem's sense of ambiguity. These lines cannot be examined from a single perspective, and the multiple possible readings exist in opposition to any monolithic discourse, such as

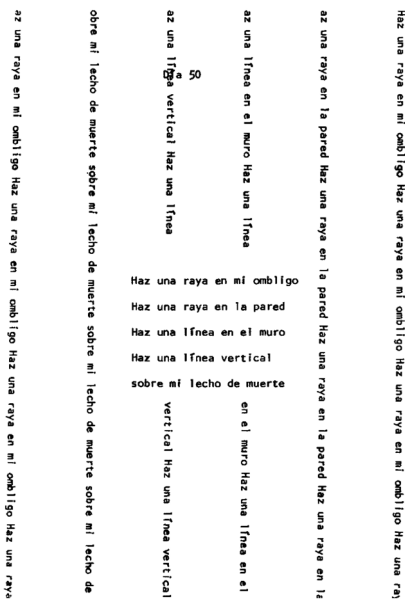

Figure 2A Day 50, *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro*. La Joyita Cartonera, 2015 edition.

that of a dictatorship (Figures 2A and 2B). This section of the poem, presented as a graffitied wall, offers an interesting tension, in which the horizontal poetic line prefigures the drawing of a vertical one. Verticality is only present in the horizontality that sustains it, which also recalls the image of the cross. The image evoked by the content of the central verses shows three lines ('rayas' or 'líneas', synonymous in Spanish) and a single vertical one that might resemble the attempt to count days on a wall. I am assuming that the fourth line is the only vertical one given that the word is explicitly used there, unlike in the previous lines, and paying attention to the imperative 'Haz una', which is repeated four consecutive times at the centre of this graffiti. This interpretation emphasises that the political prisoner is isolated from society and does not have the means to measure the passing of time. The general image drawn with letters and words on this day is clear: this is his cell.

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 what was happening in Chile in the early 1980s. This is probably the most powerful graffiti in the whole text and acts as an invitation for those

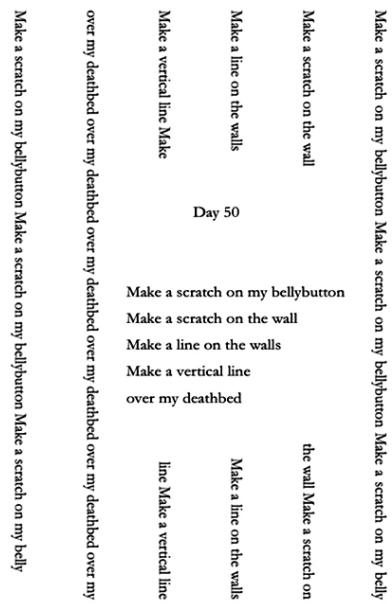

Figure 2B Day 50, *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro*. La Joyita Cartonera, 2015 edition. Translation courtesy of Rebecca Levi.

who were not imprisoned to fight for the liberation of these men and women from their oppressors—in this case, Pinochet's institutions.

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Chapter 2

La bandera de Chile (1981/1991) by Elvira Hernández

Elvira Hernández did not come into existence until 1981. Thirty years before her literary birth, she was born in the southern Chilean city of Lebu as María Teresa Adriasola (b. 1951). Hernández left out 'Adriasola' both to keep her identity anonymous, for fear of Pinochet's regime, and to make her name as humble as possible. According to the poet in an interview, she chose Elvira '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' (for its archaicness […] I adopted Hernández from a family in whose home I kept my clothes so I could change out of my school uniform and play truant; Vidal 1997: 4). In the process of becoming Elvira Hernández, María Teresa Adriasola acknowledged that 'no es una la que escribe, sino que es adoptada por ese nombre. Con esto eres médium, esclava de la poesía' (you are not the one who is writing, but rather you are adopted by that name. So you become a medium, a slave to poetry; ibid.). The creation of this pseudonym was also the result of a personal tragedy in the author's life. In the summer of 1979, María Teresa Adriasola was taken prisoner by the regime's intelligence agency—the CNI, or Central Nacional de Informaciones (National Information Centre).

According to an interview I conducted with Hernández in December 2015, the poet reported she was taken to a detention centre called Cuartel Borgoño, located in Independencia, a district in the north of Santiago. Cuartel Borgoño was also infamous for making its inmates disappear. As stated on *Memoria Viva*, an online resource established as a Human Rights International Project in the early 2000s, in these 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' (according to the majority of the testimonies, those who were detained spent almost the entire time in the building's basement, which had an interrogation and torture room, set up with the necessary equipment; 'Cuartel Borgoño'). Hernández indicated she spent three days as a captive in that basement.

The poet remembered that she was taken prisoner while getting off the Metro at San Miguel station on the way to see a friend. As was common during the dictatorship, she was mistaken for someone else—a member of MAPU, or Movimiento de Acción Popular Unitario (United Popular Action Movement), founded in 1969 in clear support of Salvador Allende's socialist project. 'Tras el golpe de Estado, en el exilio y en Chile [los opositores] se concentran en redes culturales y medios antiautoritarios y en una amplia red de ONG' (After the coup d'état, opponents of the regime both in Chile and in exile came together through cultural networks, anti-authoritarian media, and a wide web of NGOs; Valenzuela Van Treek 2011: 190). Those opponents who remained in Chile were certainly a threat to the regime and were often chased by the CNI. In the end, it was the influence of both Hernández's father, a former police officer, and the Vicaría de la Solidaridad (Vicariate of Solidarity), which advocated for many people who were unjustly detained during Pinochet's regime, that secured her release. Hernández's terrifying experience in captivity inspired her to write her first poetry book, *La bandera de Chile* (The Chilean Flag, henceforth *La bandera*), under her new pseudonym. During the year after her release from Cuartel Borgoño, the poet said she was followed constantly and received strange, intimidating phone calls at home.

La bandera: A Somewhat Dangerous Book?

Regarding its form, the book can be read as a whole poem, devoid of sections or divisions, although each page could be said to contain a poem of its own. *La bandera* as a text began to take shape in 1980, colliding with a moment of social resistance in Santiago:

> El 22 de julio de 1980 ocurrió la toma de un sector de la población La Bandera en Santiago. Adriasola comenzó a escribir lo que después será *La bandera de Chile* (1981). Se lo muestra a su supervisor Jorge Guzmán, quien 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 2013: 92)

> On July 22, 1980, residents took control of part of the La Bandera neighbourhood in Santiago. Adriasola started to write what would later become *La bandera de Chile* (1981). She showed it to her professor, Jorge Guzmán, who understood the subversive reference and asked her to publish it under a pseudonym. That is when she chose 'Elvira Hernández', who was born alongside *La bandera de Chile*.

Another surprising aspect of the history of *La bandera* is its long road to publication. The book was not officially released until 1991. In the 1980s a few unofficial copies were passed around underground circles, as in the case of Carmen Berenguer's *Bobby Sands* (1983). For poet and activist Cecilia Vicuña, *La bandera* was 'a long poem […] passed around from hand to hand until it became a banner, a cult book in Xerox form' (Livon-Grosman and Vicuña 2009: 501). Clearly, given the strict publishing rules and censorship during the dictatorship, many poets resorted to self-publishing photocopied versions of their texts. Though risky, this work was a necessity, a way to share anti-regime views nested within poetry. These books remain outstanding landmarks of resistance against authoritarianism.

Marcelo Pellegrini, who studied Hernández's first book in detail, asserted 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 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 2006: 110)

> When the clandestine journal *Vanguardia* tried to publish it in 1982, the DINA [Pinochet's secret police] seized the proofs before they could be released, until it appeared in 1991, under the auspices of a Buenos Aires press, Libros de Tierra Firme. We would have to wait another 12 years for the Chilean edition, which came out in June 2003.

I propose considering *La bandera* as a 'dangerous book' for Pinochet's regime. Unlike Carmen Berenguer's *Bobby Sands*, which disguised its critique by not speaking about Chile or the dictatorship directly, Hernández's work explicitly addresses what was going on in Chile at the time—specifically, the socio-economic changes during the first decade of the regime. Another clue to *La bandera*'s dangerousness is the fact that it was published ten years after it was written,

and in Argentina. In other words, even after the return to democracy, this book was still considered too contentious to be published in Chile. Once democracy was more consolidated, in the 2000s, *La bandera* had the chance to be published in Chile for the first time.

Today, Elvira Hernández is widely recognised as one of Chile's greatest poets. In fact, in 2024 she became the first woman poet after Gabriela Mistral to receive the National Literature Prize. Previous recognition of her work includes the 2012 Altazor Poetry Prize for her collection *Cuaderno de deportes* (The Sports Notebook, 2010). In 2018, Hernández received the Pablo Neruda Ibero-American Poetry Prize, joining Carmen Berenguer (2008) as the only two Chilean women poets to date to be awarded this prestigious prize. A few weeks after receiving the Neruda Prize, Hernández was awarded the Premio Nacional de Poesía Jorge Tellier (Jorge Tellier National Poetry Prize) by the Universidad de La Frontera in Temuco, Chile. In December 2018, Hernández received the annual Chilean Art Critics' Circle Award for her poetry collection *Pájaros desde mi ventana* (Birds from my Window, 2018). These important recognitions are testimony to Hernández's long-standing contributions to Chilean poetry, which began in 1981 with her failed attempt at publishing *La bandera* in her home country.

For Hernández, '*La bandera de Chile* fue un intento por arrancar ese símbolo que siempre estuvo en manos de los militares, que partió siendo una insignia de guerra para llevarla a otro lugar' (*La bandera de Chile* was an attempt to tear that symbol away from the military, a symbol that was born as a wartime insignia to carry to other places; Hernández 2013: 213). The displacement of the flag colours Hernández's work, establishing her first book as a new poetic proposal: both as a creative work within a dictatorial context, and as a piece that addresses the collective over the individual. The latter is achieved both by juxtaposing different meanings within the text and by connecting generations of readers through a mnemonic thread. 'El gran trabajo de la poesía durante estos años ha sido poder encontrar las palabras adecuadas, que permitan construir ciertos decires y ciertas imágenes con las cuales podamos entrar en diálogo' (Poetry's big job during these years has been to find the right words, so we can build certain expressions and images with which we can generate dialogue; Hernández 2013: 210). This also means that readings of *La bandera* will keep resonating for generations to come and will preserve memories of a troubled past in Chile. Now, it is time for this poetry collection to be disseminated internationally, thanks to its 2019 English translation by Alec Schumacher, used in this

analysis. In addition, the version to be studied in this chapter is La Joyita Cartonera's 2018 edition, available online under a Creative Commons licence. There are two calligrams from *La bandera* that I study here which are reproduced from this version.

A Reading of *La bandera*

To call *La bandera* an iconic poetic work written during the dictatorship would be an understatement. Its readings and rereadings provide testimony to the work's perennial force and validity. My interpretation of this poetry incorporates previous approaches and develops a thematic analysis of Hernández's verse along two axes:

1. The Military Flag
2. The Poetics of Inequality

Chilean academia has produced only a few, brief critical works on *La bandera*—with the exception of three relatively recent unpublished student theses by Catalina Ríos Muñoz (2017, undergraduate), Karem Pinto Carvacho (2015, postgraduate) and Germán Cossio Arredondo (2008, postgraduate). The first literary critic who wrote on *La bandera*, Federico Schopf, did so in the prologue to the 1991 edition. Positioning Hernández's work within a wave of prolific poetic writing since 1973, comprising both established and emerging voices, Schopf puts forth a list of prominent poets during the dictatorship, including Juan Luis Martínez (1942–1993), Raúl Zurita (b. 1950) and Tomás Harris (b. 1956), but no women, save Hernández herself. For Schopf, '*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' (*La bandera de Chile* keeps unfolding a versatile game—light, joyful, guileless, rhetorical, cynical, serious—of texture, line and colour, rippling with the gusts of awfully (wonderfully) opposing winds; Schopf in Hernández 1991: ii). Schopf's rhetorical flourishes describe the poem as if it were physically a flag blowing in the breeze, particularly by using words such as 'desplegando' (unfolding), 'textura' (texture), 'colores' (colours), 'ondulando' (rippling) and 'vientos' (winds). He also refers to Hernández's poem in terms of dualities. For instance, he uses the words '(des)orientación' ((dis)orientation), '(des)esperadamente' (desperately/longed for) and '(per)sigue' (persecute/follow),

which allow the reader to infer multiple meanings within her poetry. Schopf's suggestive style was a guide for critic Fernanda Moraga, who also wrote on *La bandera*, ten years later.

Moraga's essay on the tenth anniversary of *La bandera*'s publication, intriguingly entitled '*La bandera de Chile*: (Des)pliegue y (des) nudo de un cuerpo lengua(je)' (*La bandera de Chile*: The (un)folding and (un)tying of a body's tongue) describes the work as one which evokes a space where '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' (the discourse connects and embraces the biographical body of the author, turning itself into a personal and collective mirror of a cultural voice rooted in women, to talk and to scream, from their brims and their brimming over; Moraga 2001: 90). On the one hand, Moraga recognises the biographical context of the composition of *La bandera*—Hernández's 1979 detention. On the other hand, the theme of the collective that runs through *La bandera* both decentralises the emblem and appropriates it under the mark of womanhood, for example: 'La bandera de Chile está tendida entre 2 edificios / se infla su tela como una barriga ulcerada / cae como teta vieja' (The Chilean Flag is hanging from two buildings / her fabric swells up like an ulcerated belly / falls like an old tit; Hernández 2018: 26). Yet, this is a womanhood that has been reduced to the image of an undesirable woman, one that is exhibited but cannot be borne to be seen. This is also largely linked to women's struggles in dictatorial Chile, and in a literary world that up until then had been consistently patriarchal. This appropriation is also understood as operating under 'un sistema de reapropiaciones, de resistencia pero también de respuesta, la disputa por el lugar de la bandera es paradigmático del antagonismo interpretativo sobre la historia inmediata chilena' (a system of reappropriation, a resistance but also a response; the dispute over the flag's place is paradigmatic of the antagonistic interpretation of Chile's most recent history; Ortega 2000: 54), and here Hernández writes from the perspective of those oppressed by the regime. According to the poet, who reminisced about her writing process many years after *La bandera*, 'El estar acá (bajo Dictadura) significaba la fuerza de resistir, pero, por el otro, las condiciones de vida eran asquerosas, te borran todo, todo' (being here (under the dictatorship) meant having the strength to resist but, on the other hand, the living conditions were disgusting, they erase everything about you; Hernández 2013: 208).

Poet and critic María Inés Zaldívar also wrote about *La bandera* in her 2003 article '¿Qué es una bandera y para qué sirve? A propósito de *La bandera de Chile* de Elvira Hernández' (What is a flag and why does it exist? On *La bandera de Chile* by Elvira Hernández), where she suggests that 'el tono de todo el poemario […] consistirá en desfamiliarizar al lector y lectora de un significado convencional aceptado como verdadero, insistiendo en el desconocimiento que tenemos acerca de lo que [la bandera] realmente es y representa' (the tone of the entire collection will cause the reader to become defamiliarised with a conventional meaning accepted as truth, insisting on our ignorance about what the flag really is and what it represents; Zaldívar 2003: 206). Her reading of the poem complements what has been previously stated by both Schopf and Moraga, since for Zaldívar, the central presence of the flag in this book destabilises a preconceived idea of order and truth. This view is followed by Marcelo Pellegrini a few years later, who asserted that 'la bandera es aquí el símbolo patrio vacío de sentido' (here, the flag is the national symbol emptied of meaning; Pellegrini 2006: 111). Thus, *La bandera* problematises the symbolic implication of the flag and develops new ways to criticise the societal order, alluding to those ostracised from history, discourse and 'Chileanness'.

By undermining the meaning of the symbol of the flag, Hernández's writing in *La bandera* successfully resists the undemocratic and tyrannical hegemony of Pinochet's regime and takes a stand against the patriarchy as a whole. Her work shifts the focus to ultimately denounce the masculine nature of both the dictatorship and its economic ideology. This means that 'el horizonte sexo-genérico desde la relación masculinidad y feminización asociada a la bandera' (the sex-gender outlook from the relationship between masculinity and the feminisation associated with the flag; Sepúlveda 2013: 93) is put into question to release the flag from monolithic meanings in Hernández's work. At the same time, the flag moves through new terrain in its own existence within the poetry, as it 'representa el territorio del no-yo como cuerpo desmembrado y siniestro' (represents the territory of the not-I: a sinister and dismembered body; Oyarzún 2005: 66). This uncanniness parallels the lack of a historicised body on a woman's own terms; all that is familiar and visible has been previously mediated by patriarchal structures. Given the flag's position within the dictatorial imagination, there can be an understanding of how a monolithic sign system establishes and imposes its own rules. What makes Hernández's poetry fascinating in this context is its ability to undermine dictatorial symbols and generate a new,

subversive discourse. Because of this, my reading of *La bandera* will refer to the flag in female terms.

Prior to a contextualised close reading of *La bandera*, I would like to briefly outline what a flag symbolises in a more general sense. According to *A Dictionary of Symbols*, the flag gets its symbolism from its position, as 'it is always placed at the top of a pole or mast […] From this is derived the general symbolism of the banner as a sign of victory and self-assertion' (Cirlot 2001: 108). This exaltation is not only tied to contemporary emblems; it stems from the earliest human clans and how they managed their social organisation. In the past, the totem was a representative figure, 'a symbol of the whole society which [could] be thought of in the same frame of reference as a modern flag' (Riley 2014: 724). Consequently, flags can be considered totemic figures, 'treated as living, breathing entities whose well-being must be cared for, as if they were persons' (Shanafelt 2008: 14). In *La bandera*, the totemic nature of the flag is challenged, and Hernández personifies her flag as a woman, who questions her own function as the ultimate representation of Chilean military power.

Sigmund Freud conceptualised the 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 2001: 3). The problem arises when the totem or the flag loses its representative value and ceases to include the whole clan, or in this case the people of Chile. Pinochet's regime had taken the flag hostage, using it as a symbol of military rule. In an address to young people in 1975, the dictator himself stated: 'Jóvenes: deseo que la juventud chilena día a día vaya formando un solo bloque monolítico […] Ustedes tienen que ser un solo bloque. Pensando en cinco letras: CHILE' (Young people: I want Chilean youth to become, day by day, a single, monolithic block. You must be a single block. Thinking of five letters: CHILE; Pinochet in Muñoz Tamayo 2014: 197). In this sense, Hernández's work breaks entirely with Pinochet's vision by confronting the symbol of his ideal, monolithic society: the flag.

For Pinochetistas (Pinochet supporters), the flag was of utmost importance as they tried to consolidate a particular image of Chile as a country since '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' (they were trying to assimilate young people into a homeland full

of vitality, dreams, and possibilities: a united, 'healthy' society. This was a recurring medical metaphor: the country was sick with 'Marxist cancer' and the coup d'état would allow it to heal; Muñoz Tamayo 2014: 198). This was the starting point of the regime's appropriation of national symbols. Through an ideological battle against the 'sickness' of Marxism, they 'cleansed' and 'disciplined' the national emblem. The flag was taken to represent the regime and its vision of what Chile would become. Hernández evokes the opposite in *La bandera*. The poetry references the many citizens, especially women and the poor, who were not part of this idea of 'homeland'.

The regime did not only attempt to control visual and conceptual elements to justify itself and its quest to save the country, they also did it through music. The song 'Chile eres tú' (Chile, it's you) is acknowledged as the hymn of the regime during the 1970s (González 2015: 91). Written by former Mandrágora poet Braulio Arenas,[1] a known Pinochetista, the song addressed young people using the flag as a symbol. The first lines, 'Siempre a lo alto de flamear / Banderas que sustentabas tú' (Always waving high / The flags you held up), reveal a clear appropriation of the flag. It belongs to the regime, a proud representation of its ideals. The lyrics express an admiration of the flag and an appeal to young people, who must both respect and protect it. The chorus is even more emphatic: 'Chile eres tú / Chile es bandera y juventud' (Chile, it's you / Chile is flag and youth). Evidently, the flag is being used to reshape the country's image. With his 'monolithic block', Pinochet may have wished to negate the existence of any differing viewpoints. Hernández presented a challenge with *La bandera*—although such a text could not be published in Pinochet's Chile, or even in the first few years of democracy.

In general, 'flags have long been intertwined with political hierarchy, with physical dominance and subordination, and with war' (Shanafelt 2008: 16). Hence, as totemic entities, flags can be taken over and their significations changed depending on who is in power and their ideological beliefs. 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 2008: 17). In Chile, those in

[1] The Mandrágora was a Chilean surrealist group founded by poet Braulio Arenas (1913–1988). It followed in the footsteps of the creationism literary movement, initiated years earlier by poet Vicente Huidobro. Arenas received the National Literature Prize in 1984, under the Pinochet regime.

power oppressed every point of view that was minimally critical of the regime. In this sense, the flag did not represent myriad lifestyles, but rather reduced Chileanness to a single definition, under the absolute control of the regime.

La bandera opens with a dedication—or anti-dedication, as it were, if its meaning is scrutinised through Gérard Genette's conceptualisation of the dedication as a paratext. This same technique was also considered for the dedication in Carmen Berenguer's *Bobby Sands* (see page 30 in Chapter 1):

> No se dedica a uno
> la bandera de Chile
> se entrega a cualquiera
> que la sepa tomar
>
> LA TOMA DE LA BANDERA
> (Hernández 2018: n.p.)
>
> The Chilean flag
> is not dedicated to anyone
> she surrenders to whomever
> knows how to take her
>
> THE TAKING OF THE FLAG

There is a first reading that suggests that 'a partir de su epígrafe, la intención del *Poema* puede ser entendida como […] una prostituta' (starting with the epigraph, the intention of the *Poem* can be understood as a prostitute; Pinto 2008: n.p.), primarily by focusing on the verbs 'entrega' (surrenders) and 'tomar' (take). Additionally, 'cualquiera' (whomever) in Spanish is used to refer to an unspecified other. As an anti-dedication, this epigraph can be read both as a subversive form of addressing the reader or receiver of this imagined flag, and as a poem in its own right.

Either way, the stance is defiant. The text begins by evoking the idea that the flag is not dedicated to anybody but, at the same time, is offered to anyone who may know what to do with her—note the use of the imaginative subjunctive, lost in the translation, in 'que la sepa tomar'. The second issue is the dedicatee, the central but ambiguous 'cualquiera'. Who is the flag, or poem, being given to, and will they know what to do with her?

In parallel, understanding this (anti-)dedication as a poem from the book seems a sensible interpretation, as it delves into who takes control of the flag and its symbolism. In this sense, the idea of a dedication becomes moot, as it is not possible to dedicate

this flag to anyone. The last line, in capital letters, may suggest a title for this poem, and also transports its readers to an important event in Chilean urban history—the taking of lands by the poor, known as 'toma' in Chilean Spanish. Even though the original 'toma' of La Bandera neighbourhood took place in 1969 and was led by a group of MIR (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria, Left-Wing Revolutionary Movement) and some Mapuche indigenous leaders, 'la toma de terrenos en la Población La Bandera, efectuada el 22 de julio de 1980 […] fue la primera acción de este tipo realizada en plena dictadura' (the taking back of lands in the La Bandera neighbourhood, carried out on July 22, 1980, was the first action of its kind during the dictatorship; Pinto 2008: n.p.). This 1980 event, which linked anti-regime resistance to the historic actions of leftist and indigenous groups, took place while Hernández was composing the poem. In a way, just like the 'toma' of a piece of land, the flag can also be taken back, and her meaning transformed from what the dictatorship had decided she should symbolise.

The Military Flag

By inviting multiple interpretations of the flag, Hernández challenges the emblem's monolithic definition by the military during Pinochet's regime. The military celebrates the flag with pompous parades, marches and exaltations. Hernández, on the other hand, makes sure to signal that the flag was stolen by an undemocratic regime, and she embodies and bears witness to its violent rule. In the following analysis, references to the flag as military emblem will be juxtaposed with evidence of Hernández's intention of exposing the regime's many crimes.

The poem itself references the military honours paid to the flag:

> se le rinden honores que centuplean los infalibles
> mecanismos
> (Hernández 2018: 18)
>
> honors are professed that centuplicate the infallible
> mechanisms

Here, Hernández is sarcastic by using hyperbole. She uses the word 'centuplicate', meaning to multiply by a hundred, to evoke pretension and excess. The speaker is thus revealing her disrespect for military pomp. The allusion to infallibility implies inflexibility and

dehumanisation, and clearly questions these 'mechanisms', which can be interpreted as the dictatorship's methods of justifying itself. As the poem was ready for publication in 1981, Hernández had recently witnessed the process of approval of the 1980 constitution. Therefore, the flag is being honoured by those who took control of it to allegedly save the country from itself. This is understood in the context of the election and overthrow of President Allende (1970–1973).

The hyperbolic honours continue:

> 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 2018: 33)

> 48 hours is the day of the Chilean Flag
> the salutes of hundreds of salvos
> the discourses of fifty sheets of paper
> the processions of two or three regiments
> the ribbons the standards the banners ad infinitum
> at the speed of light the toasts and honours

The context of this excessiveness is worth mentioning, as it sheds light on Hernández's sardonic tone. The forty-eight hours may refer to the national holiday in September, which celebrates Chilean independence on the eighteenth, and military glories on the nineteenth. On the second day, the military is praised for its bravery and victories in past wars. The hyperboles illustrate the extravagant nature of military rituals, with their fifty-page-long speeches and their processions with flags and banners waving as far as the eye can see. The last point is relevant, as the flag would be reproduced in all sizes, signalling domination on micro and macro levels of society. It is important to point out that, until 2017, the annual 'Glorias del Ejército' (Glories of the Army) 19 September march was nationally broadcast on all television channels. Nowadays, the broadcast is optional. Many channels have decided not to showcase this event again, showing a shift in Chilean television programming and in the interests of their audience. Lastly, the description of 'the toasts and honours' given 'at the speed of light' is a clear exaggeration, a sarcastic hyperbole in a farcical depiction of a military parade. The poem's irreverent tone highlights the army's traditions as

outdated, extravagant and ultimately irrelevant, disconnected from the whole of society.

The following lines elucidate more obscure issues related to the flag's military meaning:

> 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 2018: 20)
>
> The Chilean Flag is a dwelling said a soldier
> and I identify it and unveil it and discover myself
> from the Regiment of San Felipe

The soldier speaking refers to the flag as a 'pabellón', which, according to the *Diccionario de la Real Academia*, indicates: 'Bandera nacional […] tienda de campaña […] Edificio que constituye una dependencia de otro mayor' (National flag […] a country tent […] a building that constitutes part of another, bigger building; RAE n.d.). The English translation is not able to emulate the layers of meaning of the original Spanish, and the word 'pavilion' seems another possibility of translation that would work better here. On the one hand, the word 'pabellón' signals the flag herself, but on the other, it suggests a room, be it a medical ward or a torture chamber. Therefore, these lines offer two readings: one that relates to the flag as over-exalted by the military, and another that refers to the excesses committed by the same institution within its own regiments.

There is also ambiguity in the use of 'lo', translated as 'it'. 'Lo' works as a pronoun that can refer to either 'un pabellón' or 'un soldado'. As a consequence, it is not clear whether it is the flag (I identify it) or the soldier (I identify him) who is being identified and discovered. In the case of the soldier, there would be an interest in knowing who he is and the nature of his intentions. At the same time, there is ambiguity if this interest comes from Hernández's speaker or the readers when approaching these lines. The location of the San Felipe Regiment was not chosen at random. According to *Memoria Viva*: 'numerosos presos politicos de esa época han detallado el uso sistemático de tortura en este recinto' (numerous political prisoners of that time have detailed the systematic use of torture at that facility; 'Regimiento'). Therefore, this flag could have been hung on the wall of a torture chamber in this regiment, bearing witness to the atrocities that were taking place there.

The reference to human rights abuses can be linked to the poem on the next page of *La bandera*:

> 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 2018: 21)

> the flag is incredible
> she will never see the burning subsoil of her holy fields
> the lost treasures in the crooks of the air
> the marine burials that are a jewel

With the phrase 'she will never see', the poem uses antiphrasis to establish the flag as a witness to the horrors that took place during the regime. The speaker leaves clues for the readers to identify that which is not to be seen or mentioned. Through the epithet 'incredible', which alludes to the paradox of having the flag hoisted up a mast, she is positioned as a witness who never sees the dead. However, by poetically mentioning them as 'lost treasures', or 'marine burials', they become a presence that can no longer be ignored. These are likely to be references to the prisoners who were thrown into the ocean. There are clear depictions of how people detained by the regime were disappeared by being 'dump[ed] […] in rivers or the ocean' (*Report* 2003: 170), as documented by the Rettig Report (1991). The Armed Forces confessed to this in January 2001, 'reconociendo que muchos de los detenidos desaparecidos habían sido lanzados al mar' (recognising that many of the detained and disappeared were thrown into the sea; Caucoto 2005: 135). The poem symbolically brings these bodies to the surface so they can be witnessed and remembered by its readers, further emphasising the poem's mnemonic intent.

In the end, considering the dead as jewels recalls the idea of treasure lost at sea, of pirates and their shipwrecks. These lost treasures are the bodies of the many political prisoners who were thrown into the Pacific Ocean; some of them were not even dead but severely drugged and went on to drown. Patricio Guzmán's 2015 documentary *El botón de nácar* (The Pearl Button) shows footage of this practice. In the film there is a shot of a prisoner's body attached to a piece of rail track, which was heavy enough to sink to the bottom of the ocean. The film takes its name from a mother of pearl button that was found attached to one of these rails, providing evidence that

someone's body was dissolved in the water and proving that this was one of the many terrible disappearing techniques used by the military during the regime.

The idea of a flag bearing witness is further explored in *La bandera*, adding a sense of impotence as the flag is unable to do or say anything about it. She could only observe huge displays of systematic violence. The following lines suggest that such silent witnessing can also imply complicity:

> Come moscas cuando tiene hambre La Bandera de Chile
>
> en boca cerrada no entran balas
> se calla
>
> allá arriba en su mástil
> (Hernández 2018: 22)

> she eats flies when she's hungry The Chilean Flag
>
> in a closed mouth bullets do not enter
> she shuts up
>
> high upon the flagstaff

The personification of the flag becomes a covert allusion to its complicity in the actions of the regime. The flag eats flies, perhaps the ones that infest decomposing bodies. There is a play on words in the second line, when the speaker takes the Spanish proverb 'en boca cerrada no entran moscas' (a closed mouth catches no flies) and transforms it into 'en boca cerrada no entran balas' ('a closed mouth catches no bullets', which I find a more productive translation than

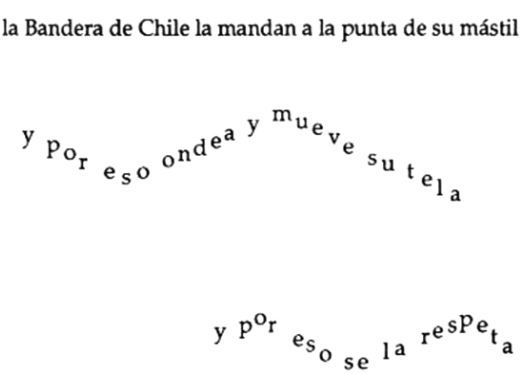

Figure 3A Calligram in *La bandera de Chile*. La Joyita Cartonera, 2018 edition.

the one provided by Schumacher), implying that the flag observes but does not tell what she sees. At the same time, this line may refer to political prisoners needing to remain silent to survive. Common citizens, too, would evade any kind of political activity to avoid being arrested. This is perhaps one of the only references, albeit a distant one, to María Teresa Adriasola's own detention, prior to becoming Elvira Hernández. The totemic image of the flag is emphasised as she is hoisted up the flagpole in silence, as both a witness and someone who, through her silence, participates in the regime's violence.

The flag flies up the mast so she can see what happens below her, and Hernández expresses this sense of movement by means of a calligram—a poem laid out to create a visual image.

This is one of the few examples of calligrams in *La bandera*. Once the flag is up the mast, she can fly, her movement depending on the direction of the wind, the type of fabric she is made of, and the length of her halyard. The image of the calligram creates a poetic heightening of the flag's movement. Here, it is important to pay attention to the verb 'mandar' (send), as she is sent to the top of her flagpole. In Chilean Spanish, 'mandar' is also a verb that is used to refer to orders; the flag receives orders, or a mission, just like a soldier does. Once upon her hoist, she moves and witnesses what happens on the ground below her. The winding lines that visually recreate the flag's movement reinforce such flow. Through an assonant rhyme in 'ondea' and 'tela', there is a complementary rhythmic motion that reinforces her presence. She becomes a respected emblem, a device for the military to symbolise their power. The translation keeps the flag's pronoun as 'it', which makes the English version less centred on her womanhood.

They send the Chilean Flag up to the top of the flagpole

and that's why she sways and moves her fabric

and that's why they respect it

Figure 3B Calligram in *La bandera de Chile*. La Joyita Cartonera, 2018 edition. Translation courtesy of Alec Schumacher.

Hernández persists in portraying the flag as a witness of violence, continuing to reference the regime's places and strategies of torture, in a sarcastic tone:

> 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 un estadio olímpico
> (todo es estrictamente deportivo)
> (Hernández 2018: 25)

> The Chilean Flag steps out onto the field
> in a football match the Chilean Flag is raised
> a police cordon surrounds her like at an olympic stadium
> (it is all strictly sports)

The chiasmus present in the first two lines generates a claustrophobic effect, but this can only be identified in the Spanish original, as the translation takes the liberty of exchanging 'en una cancha de fútbol' for 'in a football match', when a closer translation would have been 'on a football pitch/field'. The flag's positioning within the stadium would demarcate the area of the pitch already mentioned. Even though the poetry does not express this in an explicit manner, these lines would transport most Chilean readers to a sports arena that was used as a detention centre, Chile's National Stadium. 'El estadio [estaba] convertido en un campo de concentración' (The stadium was converted into a concentration camp; Montealegre 2003: 67). When, in parenthesis, the speaker states that 'it is all strictly sports', this is clearly expressed in irony. During the regime, the stadiums ceased to be used for sports and were transformed into prisons where the detained were violently tortured and, in some cases, killed. A notorious case was the murder of the folk singer-songwriter Víctor Jara a few days after the coup, although this took place in a different stadium, called Estadio Chile. Some details related to his death: 'la primera autopsia, en 1973, revela 44 disparos. La nueva, en 2009, confirma que Jara murió por múltiples impactos [de bala]' (the first autopsy, in 1973, reveals 44 gunshots. The new one, in 2009, confirms that Jara died from multiple gunshot wounds; Délano 2009: n.p.). Thus, once again, the poem places the flag in a position from which she can witness the regime's atrocious display of violence against those they declared to be its enemies.

Interestingly, after seeing all this, the flag seems to finally be affected by what she has witnessed, or has been forced to see, as she is placed upon a mast:

A veces se disfarza la Bandera de Chile
un capuchón negro le enlutece el rostro
parece un verdugo de sus propios colores
(Hernández 2018: 30)

Sometimes the Chilean Flag disfarces herself
a black hood engrievens her visage
she looks like an executioner of her own colors

The flag is disguised and is farcical. The word 'disfarza' is a mixture between 'disfraza' and 'farsa', meaning disguised and farce respectively. The English translation works quite well here to keep Hernández's play. As in other parts of *La bandera*, the flag is used by the military to convey their view of Chileanness and society; it acts as a catalyst of patriotic love. The flag becomes an executioner, as all the atrocities committed by the regime are supposedly motivated by a love for the homeland and its emblem. The black hood that would 'engrieven' the flag's face, as a personified figure, turns her into an executioner, so she is no longer just a witness but an active participant in genocidal acts. This is why she kills her own colours—white, blue and red—and turns black, also symbolising death. The flag is emptied of all representation of Chilean citizens and becomes one with the regime and its deadly purpose.

This now sinister, executioner flag is used against her own will:

La Bandera de Chile es usada de mordaza
(Hernández 2018: 41)

The Chilean Flag is used as a gag

The flag now fulfils a precise function, that of a gag that silences or chokes. Here it is clear that the flag is under the control of the military. Therefore, she follows what those in power command her to do. Again, she is an accomplice to the regime, helping in its agenda. She is relegated to a position of subordination, common in asymmetrical military relationships, but also typical in a patriarchal society where women have been consistently considered inferior and without agency. The flag seems unable to refuse being used as a gag, in the same way she could not avoid being hoisted up to watch what was happening below her. Finally, the gag implies a violent silencing—the regime silenced not only those whom they imprisoned, but the whole of Chilean society, as these acts of violence terrified the population who, like the flag, quietly witnessed fellow citizens being tortured and killed.

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

Figure 4A Poem about the Chilean flag in *La bandera de Chile*. La Joyita Cartonera, 2018 edition.

Towards the end of the volume, Hernández's poetry shows that whatever the flag may signify for the military, what has been imposed on Chileans has been the mindless repetition of behavioural patterns, as in the following example.

Readers can observe the flag is going up and down the hoist and, in that routine, the atrocities she witnesses become normalised. She loses (her) heart and yields to a violent context, visually represented by the empty space between the two columns. The normalisation of violence happens within military ranks, as it becomes normal for soldiers to use their force to torture or murder civilians. Here, the flag has lost herself; she is now devoid of meaning. This process seems irreversible because, by the end of the page, she has clearly given up. Her meaning is now entirely determined by the monolithic discourse of the regime.

raise lower
raise lower
raise lower
raise lower
raise lower
raise lower
raise lower
raise lower
raise lower
raise lower
raise lower
raise lower
raise lower
raise lower
raise lower
raise lower
raise lower
raise lower
raise lower

in the routine the Chilean Flag loses heart

and gives in

Figure 4B Poem about the Chilean flag in *La bandera de Chile*. La Joyita Cartonera, 2018 edition. Translation courtesy of Alec Schumacher.

The Poetics of Inequality

Along with the excessive violence that characterised the Pinochet dictatorship, there was a dramatic shift in terms of Chilean economic reform. From a social-democratic model, Chile turned into a neoliberal economy quite rapidly, starting in 1981 with the privatisation of civilian pension funds. Such reforms set up the free-market system that would eventually control formerly state-owned institutions and services.

Whether consciously or not, Hernández captures some of this atmosphere in *La bandera*, as the poetry includes lines that can be interpreted within a concern for inequality and the economic future of her nation. As the poetry was written before and during 1981, her economic remarks emerged prior to the development and

implementation of most of the neoliberal reforms. Thus, *La bandera* foreshadows the effects of neoliberalism in Chile.

The first example is a set of lines that depict extreme poverty and how this condition is understood in concrete terms.

> no tiene en otros el territorio de sus propios eriazos
> no tiene en otros el fósil de su olla común
> (Hernández 2018: 18)

> she does not find in others the territory of her own barrens
> she does not find in others the fossil of her communal offering

Here the flag detaches herself from the military. 'No tiene en otros' (she does not find in others) is linked to the many mechanisms and rulings the regime uses to control the country. This means that those who are using her and are in power do not seem to be interested in the underprivileged. The two key terms to study in these lines are 'eriazos' and 'olla común'. This flag does not represent the poor in their homelessness and hunger; she does not find them, as she is not supposed to see them.

The word 'eriazos' is normally used to describe barrens or wastelands. According to the *Diccionario de la lengua española*, 'eriazo' comes from the word 'erial', which describes a piece of land 'sin cultivar ni labrar' (uncultivated, unploughed; RAE n.d.); in this context, the 'eriazos' refer to the lands that are taken by the poor as they were evicted from where they lived before. This phenomenon is called a 'toma', as previously described in the case of La Bandera neighbourhood above. These 'eriazos' were also known for their poor living conditions: homes with dirt floors, as roofs are the priority and occupants cannot afford flooring. The people who live in the 'eriazos' are the 'others' Hernández speaks of in these lines, and they are not represented by the dictatorial flag.

The concept of 'olla común' is different to what was translated here, so I will refer to the Spanish original version. An 'olla común' is a 'communal pot', akin to a soup kitchen but less institutionalised and more local. Another way to refer to it could be 'shared grub'. Through an 'olla común', poor families within a community share food, ensuring everyone has a meal. Through the fossilised image of the communal pot, the poem implies that the flag neglects these invisibilised others. In other words, the regime and its supporters decide to ignore the socio-economic reality of their country, especially what affects the less affluent people.

While some were rejoicing in the new possibilities brought in by Chile's neoliberal shift, others lived in such a state of poverty that they could derive no benefit from it. *La bandera* speaks forcefully and directly to its readers, in a bid to make them understand that there are many people who are not represented by the flag, and that they live in extremely vulnerable conditions.

Hernández's concern for the poor continues:

> dijo dijo dijo tres dormitorios
> ducha de agua caliente cocinilla con horno
> aplaudieron como locos los sin techo
> La Bandera de Chile
> (Hernández 2018: 20)

> he said he said he said three rooms
> hot water shower kitchenette with stove
> they applauded like lunatics the dispossessed
> The Chilean Flag

The repetition of the word 'dijo' ('he said') three times, followed by the number three, opens this stanza with an ironic tone. Pinochet's housing policy was very strict. The regime ruled that 'en este nuevo sistema, el tipo de vivienda al que postulaban [los pobres] tenía directa relación con su capacidad económica' (in this new system, the type of dwellings to which the poor applied had a direct relationship with their economic capacity; Rivera 2012: 36). Therefore, the amenities that the poem mentions, such as a hot shower or a kitchenette, were mostly luxuries for the poor, as they may not even have had access to running water. The enthusiastic clapping portrays an ironic image of happiness, as what was described was mostly denied to those vulnerable citizens who, between 1976 and 1978, were sent to live on the outskirts of Santiago, far away from services that were available in the city centre (Becerra 2012: n.p.).

Continuing to show her concern over growing social inequality, Hernández associates the flag with a unit used to measure wealth:

> En metros cuadrados se mide la Bandera de Chile
> (Hernández 2018: 26)

> In meters squared the Chilean Flag is measured

This line directly refers to the size of private property, as if the flag herself has been privatised, measured and swallowed by neoliberal reform. Since property and plots of land are valued in terms of area, this also recalls the disturbing disparity between the rich and the

poor. I believe the translation would be more precise had 'metros cuadrados' been kept as 'square metres'. The poem here engages with class consciousness and exposes what later became an even more dramatic economic divide in Chile, one that would fuel social movements and protests such as the 2019 uprising.

Lastly, Hernández's work also shows who benefits from reforms that clearly neglect the poor. The flag can be placed atop a building as a sign of economic prosperity:

> 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 2018: 25)

> They hang the Chilean Flag out their windows
> they put it on television to solicit tears
> nailed to the highest part of a Chilean Empire

First, the expression 'tirar por la ventana' (hang out the window) may be a variation of the saying 'tirar la casa por la ventana' (throwing the house out the window), which refers to blowing a big amount of money and organising an event such as an expensive party. This reading implies a sense of opulence and a need to show off, emphasised by the flag being shown on television. Here, the flag symbolises the success of those who benefited from Pinochet's regime—such as those who acquired state-owned companies during the privatisation stage.

Hernández's poetry takes full advantage of the malleability of the flag; hung at the top of a skyscraper, the emblem takes on new meaning yet again. She now witnesses the prosperity of the rich and is a beacon of promise for the neoliberal model. In the case of the 'Empire Chilean' skyscraper, the Spanish original uses English words in a Spanish order, perhaps to refer to a Chilean version of the Empire State Building in the United States. However, in conversation, Hernández indicated that she simply was not aware of the grammatical rules in English, which is why the translator simply flipped the order in the English version quoted here.

Hernández's vision of the skyscraper with a Chilean flag on top did become a reality. Between 2012 and 2023, Chile had the tallest skyscraper in Latin America, called the Gran Torre Costanera, which also operates as a shopping mall, Costanera Center. The building has a phallic shape, lending itself to interpretations of the phallic nature of neoliberalism—a model imposed by an all-male military regime.

Even the mast that holds the flag atop this building is phallic. The flag is sustained by a double structure: the mast and the skyscraper. These symbolically repress the flag's female identity.

In conclusion, the poetry in *La bandera* establishes that the flag is controlled by the regime; she obtains her meaning from it and fluctuates between being an accomplice and a witness to its ferocious display of violence. At the same time, the poem shows a deep concern for the living conditions of the poor, as well as an awareness of those who were becoming wealthier and broadening the socio-economic gap.

Finally, this work allows readers a glimpse of how Chileans were becoming socially divided, and how the changes the country was undergoing would bring further disparity. It is unsurprising that a poem such as *La bandera* would become a cult text, one that would find it difficult to see the light of day through conventional publication. The explicitness of its expression of dissent made it a dangerous poem which even today resonates with struggles against injustice in Chile.

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Part II

1990s. Expressing Disillusion in the Early Transition to Democracy

Chapter 3

Escrito en braille (1999) by Alejandra del Río

Escrito en braille (Written in Braille, henceforth *Braille*) was awarded the Eusebio Lillo Poetry Prize in late 1998. It is the second of Alejandra del Río's poetry books, after her acclaimed debut *El yo cactus* (I, Cactus, 1994), which brought Del Río into the poetic spotlight. That year, she received the University of Chile's poetry prize, while she was a student of Hispanic literature there. Del Río began writing *Braille* in 1995. *Cactus*'s success had resulted in a scholarship from the Pablo Neruda Foundation, which consisted in participating in a ten-month poetry workshop led by Jaime Quezada and Floridor Pérez. During this period, Del Río was heavily pregnant, and this played a central role in the creation of *Braille*, which is dedicated to two men, one of them being her son Julián: 'A Julián Emilio; él me habitó y me dejó estas texturas' (To Julián Emilio; he inhabited me and left me these textures). The poet pays homage to her own son with words evoking the book's content. These 'textures' have inspired her writing and the creation of a poetic speaker whose voice guides us, her readers, as if we were blind. Del Río's motherly dedication also echoes Gabriela Mistral's poem 'Apegado a mí' (Close to Me, 1924), which opens with: 'velloncito de mi carne / que mi entraña yo tejí' (Little fleece of my flesh / that I wove in my womb). Del Río's 'textures' are part of her, like Mistral's 'little fleece'—traces of her baby that will always be in her womb. The link to Mistral is not a coincidence; Del Río also begins *Braille* with a nod to the Chilean Nobel Prize winner.

Braille is also dedicated to a man called Walter, who is Julián's biological father. The dedication reads: 'A Walter, porque asistió valiente a las horas de mi muerte' (To Walter, who was bravely present at the hour of my death). The death mentioned here can be understood from at least two standpoints. First, as 'la petite mort', the orgasm in the moment Del Río became pregnant with Julián. The second interpretation is less obvious: the childless woman dies at

the moment she gives birth, as the newborn leaves a dark space and comes into the light.

Del Río opens *Braille* with a quotation from one of Mistral's most famous poems, 'La otra' (The Other), found in the poem cycle *Locas mujeres* (Madwomen), which opens her final collection, *Lagar* (Winepress, 1954). The first lines of 'La otra'—'Una en mí maté: yo no la amaba' (I killed a woman in me: one I did not love)—serve as *Braille*'s epigraph. This excerpt takes readers back to Mistral's idea that there is more than one woman inhabiting the female psyche.[1] These multiple women symbolise the difficulties women face in trying to balance our societal roles with our desire for self-determination. Mistral's 'Other' is non-conformist, and that is the woman who is erased, or killed, in her poem. This epigraph also foreshadows what *Braille* is about: a woman who gets rid of a part of herself that was blind, to take us by the hand and show us the way into the light. This is a reversal from Mistral, whose subversive Other was to be punished; in *Braille*, the speaker's dissenting self is liberated and must bring us all, the blind, into a world of unbearable truth. The following analysis will examine what that world entails, as well as the ways in which the speaker arranges the textures for the blind reader to touch. Del Río plays with sensorial transference. Her typed poetry evokes symbolic textures, which are felt through the reader's imagination.

The 1998 Eusebio Lillo Poetry Prize awarded a publishing contract with LOM Ediciones, a recognised independent Chilean publishing house. However, as noted on the copyright page of this first edition, LOM decided to simply print the book, meaning that they were not involved in any other aspect of the work. As a result, Del Río essentially self-published her award-winning poetry book, with the support of other poets such as Javier Bello. In the words of the author via an email exchange, 'el libro estaba cosido y era gris oscuro. Sin nombre de autor, sin foto, sin nada que fuera una pista para el lector' (the book was sewn together and was a dark grey. No author name, no photo, nothing that could be a clue for the reader; Del Río 2015). This unobtrusive presentation recalls the aesthetic that other authors had to adopt during the dictatorship, even though Del Río was publishing at the end of the first decade of democracy.

[1] To access my detailed reading of Mistral's 'La otra', see my article 'In Mistral's Footsteps: "The Other" (1954) as the Substrate Poem for Contemporary Chilean Women Poets', *Literature Compass* 17.11 (2020), pp. 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1111/LIC3.12606.

LOM's decision to not officially publish this poetry collection meant that *Braille* is completely absent from its catalogue. This demonstrates the tension that still existed between a powerful text and the cautious editorial policies of the day. Let us not forget that Elvira Hernández's first edition of *La bandera de Chile* was only published in Argentina in 1991 and had to wait a decade more for publication in Chile. Del Río's case is more scandalous, since Chile had been a democratic country for the better part of a decade. It seems as if LOM were trying to fulfil their commitment without being officially linked to Del Río's collection.

It was virtually impossible to find a copy of *Braille* until December 2020 when the University of Valparaíso Press republished it, giving this poetry collection its long-awaited due, with a book design that does justice to its content. 'El libro ha sido potenciado expandiendo precisamente la capacidad sensorial transmitida por el texto, incorporando componentes materiales que movilizan sensorialidades: diversos tipos de papeles y gramajes de hojas, coloraturas y cintas' (The book has been strengthened by expanding precisely the sensory capacity transmitted by the text, incorporating materials that activate sensorialities: different paper types and weights, colourings and tapes; Mancilla 2021: n.p). This second edition provided Del Río with the recognition she deserved for such a tremendous poetic work, despite a more than twenty-year delay.

An avid Del Río reader would know that *Braille* is inextricably linked to her first poetry book *El yo cactus* (1994). *Cactus* is a collection that delves into the difficulties of using language to articulate a female self, and this is clearly in dialogue with *Braille*'s Mistralian opening. In *Cactus*, the speaker's self operates within certain linguistic and social constraints that do not give her the autonomy to develop the full expression she requires. In her first poetic work, Del Río questions the Spanish language, using it in such a way as to uncover its issues of gender and prove its limitations in communicating the female experience. She is ultimately challenging the patriarchal core of Spanish poetic expression by taking up the word and putting herself, a woman, in charge of it. Her weapon is her poetry, which she uses to destabilise traditional structures. For example:

> Yo no hablo lenguaje conocido
> Encallaron mi garganta como aristas de fuego […]
> Carcelero el verbo
>
> (Del Río 1994: 12)

I don't speak a known language
They paralysed my throat like ridges of fire […]
Verb as jailer

This excerpt provides insight into what the speaker faces and consequently challenges. She establishes herself in a marginalised position and denounces her entrapment by the Spanish language, a structure that confines her to a phallogocentric cultural imagination. The poem provokes readers into considering the creation of an alternative, women-led discourse that breaks with old-fashioned, male-dominated semantic and grammatical norms in Spanish. What she seeks to express is a language yet unknown, and the quest to make it known is Del Rio's poetic motivation. One of Del Río's latest volumes, *Capuchita negra* (Little Black Hood, 2019), to be studied in this book's epilogue, epitomises this process.

The second excerpt from *Cactus* belongs to the same poem and insists on the marginality of a woman's voice, which in the following lines confronts the most prescriptive lexical structure: the dictionary.

Mi lengua no tiene cita
Llega tarde y sin aviso
A la lengua seca de los diccionarios
(Del Río 1994: 12)

My tongue has no appointment
It arrives late and without warning
To the dry tongue of the dictionaries

The speaker insists that her discourse exists outside the norm. 'The dry tongue of the dictionaries' signals that tradition is lacking life or renewal. As the speaker's tongue is late and arrives without having booked an appointment—suggesting both impoliteness and disorganisation on her part—the personification of the tongue evokes a speaker who neither respects nor considers social conventions, as they would imprison her. She removes herself from what is seen as socially acceptable.

Both excerpts illustrate Del Río's struggle with the Spanish language, a traditional patriarchal paradigm that she decidedly challenges. From 1994's *Cactus* to 1999's *Braille*, Del Río's speaker moves from denunciation to action. In *Braille*, she attempts to express the unspeakable. This correlates with the socio-political context in Chile throughout the 1990s and reflects Del Río's age. Born in 1972, she experienced the dictatorship as a child and, by 1999, was an adult shaking off the shackles of an early life under

the regime. Furthermore, the 1990s were a decade of transition both political and poetic, and Del Río's work was clearly evolving from the perspective of women's expression.

There have only been a few published works of literary criticism on *Braille* to date, and this volume is relatively unknown in an international context. At the same time, given the text's relevance and the poetic techniques Del Río developed in *Braille*, it should not be too long until we see it translated, at least into English.

The first critic to write about *Braille* was, unsurprisingly, fellow poet Javier Bello, who presented the book printed by LOM at its launch in 1999. Bello also wrote the brief paragraph on the book's back cover. He emphasises the presence of the blind 'como sujeto del poema' (as the protagonist of the poem; Del Río 1999: n.p.), which is the starting point of this interpretation. The blind protagonist will be understood within the framing of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, to which Del Río deliberately refers throughout the book. Another critical piece from the time of the poetry collection's first publication was Cristián Gómez's 1999 book review. He recognised that the text created a hermetic atmosphere, indicating that the poetry 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' (words that have been mutated so that they generate friction between each other, thus creating a new world through a new word; Gómez 1999: 209). Although such a remark can be used to describe poetry in general, it does point towards understanding *Braille* as a work that has developed an intricate net of meanings.

Blindness results in having to rely on other senses, which are emphasised throughout the text. Here, blindness is surpassed by touch 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
> para el sagaz que no ancla su boca a ninguna
> (Del Río 1999: 22)

> Crystalline laughter of the one that can't be still
> his days bounce in his palms and in his eyes
> nothing has its own colour, a finished shape
> for the clever one who anchors his mouth to none.

Laughter is the sound that dominates these lines. Even though the word 'clara' (literally, clear) refers to an unobstructed or diaphanous

clarity which is normally linked to vision, here it is transferred to a gesture and a sound, laughter. Del Río evokes the passage of time through the difficulty in perceiving the real world, without sight and colour. Likewise, shapes are undefined and slow to grasp, as the poetry suggests in 'his days bounce in his palms and in his eyes', which isolates the blind subject as one who is not sure where he is, or when he is existing. The enjambment emphasises that visualising a shape would be almost impossible. Even when guided, the blind only partially access that which is visible.

In addition to Bello's and Gómez's pieces, there is another critical work worth mentioning, although it is not focused on *Braille* alone. Magda Sepúlveda's 2010 article 'El territorio y el testigo en la poesía chilena de la transición' (Territory and Witness in Chilean Transition Poetry) delves into the main characteristics found in the poetry of the 1990s generation, 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' (Javier Bello is the one who creates the name 'the Castaways' for the group's promotion, taking into account the motivation behind the journey that characterises these texts; Sepúlveda 2010: 82). The Castaways include Alejandra del Río in their ranks, together with Andrés Anwandter (b. 1974), Verónica Jiménez (b. 1964) and, of course, Javier Bello (b. 1972). According to Sepúlveda, the Castaways consider 'la experiencia de la Transición [democrática] como un fracaso' (the experience of the [democratic] Transition to be a failure; Sepúlveda 2010: 86), implying utter disappointment with the present, the 1990s. In both tone and content, *Braille* is an unequivocal example of this perception of failure. In a more general description of the Castaways, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* characterises their work as a corpus in which 'their diversity of topics and styles extends from globalization and mass media [… to] material excess and commoditization' (Cushman et al. 2012: 232), implying a criticism of the neoliberal paradigm ruling Chile since the 1980s.

Braille is an example of transitional literature in which the city 'ya no existe, son territorios perdidos' (no longer exists, they are lost territories; Sepúlveda 2010: 86); the idea of being a wandering castaway lies at the centre of the poem. The speaker of *Braille* guides us, the blind, through the rubble and remains of a city, an unrecognisable home town. *Braille* presents itself as testimony that the democratic transition is far from over, as the recent past and its atrocities are still fresh in collective memory. It is being passed on to

the next generation to also remind readers that there is a past to deal with, rather than to hide and forget.

In 2014, Paulina Medel published one of the most thorough studies of *Braille* to date. In her article '*Escrito en braille*: Tortura y memoria incrustadas sobre la piel' (*Escrito en braille*: Torture and Memory Embedded in the Skin), she argues that in Del Río's poetry

> se observa una voz torturada que debe construir nuevos modos de percepción a través 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 2014: 32)

> one observes a tortured voice that must construct new forms of perception through touch [...] she will have to decipher the marks permeating the skin in order to reconstruct the memories that will allow her to shape a national imagination. Nevertheless, in Del Río's poetry, the mechanics of torture will still be heeded.

Even though Medel quite rightly acknowledges blindness as the central point of this poetry collection, her reading of *Braille* seems rather reductionist. In her view, blindness is tightly linked to memories of torture, and the way the speaker surveys her own wounds represents the collective imagination. Medel's interpretation does not allow other readings of what blindness may mean or imply, and she emphasises this point by indicating that '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 rememorar la tortura simbólica de la urbe' (the cleansing forged through blood and pain will turn inhabitants into people who blind themselves to what they can observe, since to open their eyes is to recall the symbolic torture of the metropolis; Medel 2014: 34). I beg to differ with this interpretation, as the poetry suggests not only a violent past but a burdensome present that has erased everything that cannot be talked about or expressed. The blind do not recognise the past nor the post-apocalyptic cityscape around them in the present.

Del Río's speaker, who used to be blind, has had the truth revealed to her and can now see and guide others to see what was once hidden. The poem also alludes to a 'you' who would not understand her experience—that is to say, someone who has never been blind. This suggests that in the world imagined by Del Río some people are sighted, and her speaker is aware of this, having overcome blindness herself.

Tú no sabes lo que es mirarte desde lejos […]
Tú no sabes lo que es un ojo ennegrecido por la luz
(Del Río 1999: 31)

You don't know what it is to watch from afar […]
You don't know what is an eye blackened by the light

That 'you' being addressed is General Pinochet, as will be examined in the following paragraphs. He has not needed to leave the cave, nor has he been subjected to judgement. He has no empathy for the blind. 'To watch from afar'—the exercise of understanding one's own role in the world, or finding out that the world one once knew is no longer real—this was the experience of thousands of Chilean exiles who returned to a completely different country once the dictatorship ended. The Chile they left behind lives only in their memories. The new reality seems too overwhelming and difficult to understand, especially after forced economic reforms that changed the social fabric for good.

Other papers on *Braille* from more recent times are my own 'Transition and Disillusion: Women's Poetry in 1990s Chile. The Cases of Alejandra del Río and Marina Arrate' from 2017, and 'La voz del cuerpo. La luz de lo invisible' (The Voice of the Body. The Light of the Invisible), a book review on the second edition of *Braille*, published online in December 2021. Finally, the most recent critical work that includes *Braille* is Catherina Campillay's unpublished master's thesis 'Y soy el ojo de la piel que toca. Visión, mirada y ceguera en la poesía de Soledad Fariña, Carlos Cociña y Alejandra del Río' (And I am the eye of the skin that touches. Vision, gaze, and blindness in the poetry of Soledad Fariña, Carlos Cociña and Alejandra del Río). The 2020 edition has been key to the resurrection of *Braille* within the Chilean poetic canon, yet more work needs to be done for it to be recognised internationally, as a poetics rich in references to the Western tradition.

My analysis of *Braille* is divided into two main parts.[2] The first examines the classical and traditional influences that sustain Del Río's poetic exercise, especially Plato's *Republic* (Book VII), with the Allegory of the Cave at its centre. The second understands *Braille* as an example of the 'impossible witness', as theorised by Giorgio

[2] I have extensively studied Del Río's *Braille* in connection to the lamentation genre. This analysis will be published as a chapter entitled 'The Fall of Santiago de Chile in Post-Dictatorship Poetry, 1990–2020' in Christoph Pretzer (ed.), *When Cities Fall: Cultural Reflections of Loss and Lament*, De Gruyter, Historical Catastrophe Series.

Agamben. Both analytical sections provide insights that allow readers and researchers a better understanding of Del Río's poetic proposal in *Braille*. This multilayered reading of blindness reveals the complexities of 1990s Chile and opens up the imagination in order to decode criticism of post-dictatorship Chile in the decades that follow.

Braille's Classical and Traditional Influences

Given the baseline assumption that *Braille*'s readers are suffering from symbolic blindness, the experience of reading this collection can be understood as a becoming aware of this blindness. In *Braille*, the blind live their lives without knowing they cannot see reality, a social vision reminiscent of another artistic work from the same year, the film *The Matrix*.

Del Río builds the world of *Braille* using the Allegory of the Cave, from the *Republic*, Book VII (c. 375 BCE), by Greek philosopher Plato. In the darkness of the destroyed city that cannot be seen, Del Río's speaker alerts the reader that:

> Abrir los ojos es andar poniendo seña
> o hallar la voluntad de hacerlo por despecho
> por venganza a la ceguera
> (Del Río 1999: 16)

> Opening one's eyes is to give oneself away
> or to find the will to do it out of spite
> as revenge against blindness

These lines suggest that opening one's eyes does not necessarily lead to actual vision but may rather be an attempt to give a signal and raise an alarm about a given situation. Since the hermeticism of the poem does not signal any further as to what this situation may be, it is up to the reader to imagine what is hidden, perhaps using their own personal experience. The word 'despecho' (spite)—which, according to the RAE dictionary, means 'desprecio, desesperación' (disdain, despair), or 'malquerencia nacida en el ánimo por desengaños sufridos en la consecución de los deseos o en los empeños de la vanidad' (a dislike born in the spirit due to disappointments suffered in the attainment of desires or in the efforts of vanity; RAE n.d.)—explains the speaker's wish for revenge against blindness. This wish bolsters the suggestion that the speaker has overcome her

own blindness, removed all traces of her blinded life, and embraced her dissidence in the face of what she sees. Now, she needs others—the readers—to overcome blindness as well. In this context, Del Río's poetry would act as a saving or freeing device aimed at 'awakening' her readers to something they cannot perceive themselves from their position within the cave. Del Río develops her own type of braille language for us.

In Plato's *Republic*, Book VII, we find a dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon, the latter an old Athenian who was also a philosopher. They discuss the Allegory of the Cave. Socrates posits that a society lacking education can 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 1994: 107). This means that cave-dwellers cannot appreciate what is outside the cave—the world—by observing it themselves. Reality is thus denied to them. Socrates indicates that 'what people in this situation would consider the real world would be nothing other than the shadows of the objects making them' (Plato 1994: 109). As the cave has an entrance that allows some light in, that is the direction that points towards knowledge and understanding. However, cave-dwellers have never been outside the limits of the cave, nor are they aware that anything exists beyond it. Whatever they receive as coming from the real world is in the form of the shadows that they observe projected on the wall of the cave. This last idea finds an echo in *Braille*, particularly in the section 'UN TRAJE QUE TE LLEVE DENTRO' (A Suit That Carries You Within), which addresses Plato's theory quite directly. All section titles of this poetry collection are written in capital letters, as if the speaker were raising her voice. Here, she takes a Platonic standpoint:

> 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 1999: 22)

> since light will never be given to him in its original form […]
> Crystalline the laughter of the one who in silence pursues
> a naked shadow painted in the cave

As in Plato's allegory, Del Río suggests that there is a superior structure or being that allows or does not allow light to enter the cave, as evinced in the expression 'will never be given to him'. This would imply there is someone who has absolute control over access

to the light. The sensorial transference brought by 'crystalline', as examined earlier in the chapter, implies that laughter can be clear, light, clearly lit or visible, in contrast to the shadows. What is 'seen' or 'perceived' is deceptive from the perspective of the cave-dweller, who is only able to chase shadows from their captive position inside the cave. At the same time, the last line conveys the image of cave paintings, like those made by the earliest humans, themselves cave-dwellers.

Given the speaker's suggestion that there are certain 'others' who control the amount of light and shadow the 'blind' can perceive, it is possible to link this light to knowledge, information and truth. These are aspects that bring *Braille* and *Republic* closer together. In Plato's text, Socrates wonders about the fate of a cave-dweller who, with or without permission, leaves the cave and faces the real world for the first time. He imagines the impact of seeing what is outside the cave as enormous and unbearable, focusing especially on the eyes, a relevant detail in connecting this allegory to *Braille*. If a person's eyes are accustomed to the dark, sudden, total light would initially blind them. Socrates asks: 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 1994: 111). Socrates' question imagines the cave-dweller's fear of the unknown, which can be extrapolated to a person unwilling to face a harsh truth. Like the cave-dweller, they might not be ready to see the light; it would be an overwhelming experience.

In a section entitled 'HORIZONTE DE PÁJAROS CARNÍVOROS' (Skyline of Carnivorous Birds), still under the framework of Plato's cave allegory, the speaker addresses a robber by using the old-fashioned term 'salteador' in Spanish:

> 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 1999: 31)

> Be careful pale highwayman
> Now that his mouth opens no door […]
> You don't know what is an eye blackened by the light
> In your chest you keep shadows

These lines convey a warning for the highwayman—'be careful' implies that he may get caught, as the speaker now knows the truth about what he has done. The highwayman is quite likely General

Pinochet; he was pale-skinned and seen as the one who robbed Chile of its democracy. Addressing the dictator in this way is quite telling. First, because he is not named; second, the use of 'tú' instead of 'usted' indicates that Del Río's speaker shows no respect for him. The speaker does not recognise his authority, sentiments that clearly could not have been expressed during his regime. A clue that things have changed appears in the second line, where the robber seems to be powerless—'his mouth opens no door'. Contextually, this can be linked to the only time Pinochet faced justice. The former dictator was detained under house arrest in London, from October 1998 to March 2000, around the time *Braille* was published. A final remark summarises what transitional Chile was all about: 'In your chest you keep shadows' again addresses the 'highwayman', Pinochet. It also suggests that he lives in complete knowledge of his actions without being paralysed by them. So, too, the military, with Pinochet at its head, did not surrender any information, even nearly a decade after the regime ended. In a clearly subversive stance, Del Río's speaker believes herself to be morally superior to this thief, Pinochet.

'In your chest you keep shadows' is a line where the speaker turns this poem into something beyond a simple denunciation. The truth is being held by more entities now: the speaker, her imagined and unnamed General Pinochet, and the readers who little by little are beginning to understand an extremely uncomfortable truth. Seeing the light would imply that a cave-dweller's 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 1994: 111). The first encounter with the truth marks the whole experience, especially when it is something too great to understand; the effect of being dazzled is in proportion to the reality being faced.

Braille hints at a truth that is ultimately inexpressible in its entirety, even if some details can be grasped. This is reminiscent of the ineffability of the mystical experience, as expressed by San Juan de la Cruz in Golden Age Spanish poetry. Del Río's speaker tries to articulate a coded truth through hints, or textures, or shouts. These bits and pieces both protect the 'blind' readers, so they are not overwhelmed, and give them the responsibility of discovering the whole truth for themselves and deciding what to do with it. Here, Del Río proves that poets can be mediators between a harsh reality and an unaware individual, thus elevating the figure of the poet beyond textual aesthetics to a pivotal role in society—one that should not be underestimated.

Braille also explores the question of memory; the ways in which a person remembers is of utmost importance to Del Río. The fourth poem of the first section opens with a quotation from Lezama Lima's poem 'Retroceder' (Going Backwards, 1972): '*Abrir los ojos es romperse por el centro*' (To open one's eyes is to break apart at one's core; Del Río 1999: 16, her italics). Lima's quotation matches *Braille*'s central concern. Opening one's eyes and being broken suggests that there is something unbearable to see or witness. The poem continues its dialogue with Lima:

> Abrir los ojos no viene a ser una esperanza
> ya lo habrá previsto así el de las cursivas cualquier tarde calurosa
> (Del Río 1999: 16)

> To open one's eyes won't turn into hope
> he must have already foreseen this the one with the cursive any old hot afternoon

'The one with the cursive' is Lezama Lima, and the warmth of the afternoons alludes to Lima's native Cuba. The speaker and Lima understand that opening one's eyes, unveiling the truth, may be a devastating experience. Seeing can be extremely disappointing. There are no glimpses of optimism in Del Río's poetry here. The lack of hope in finding out the truth indicates that the world outside the cave is not only hard to see but also hard to accept, another reference to the utter disappointment in the Chilean Transition to Democracy.

Braille depicts post-dictatorship Chile by building a ghostly new city. The last lines of the poem 'Abrir los ojos es romperse por el centro' read:

> 'Habría que ser tan valiente para volver' dirá en otro tiempo
> otra urbe más terrible
> (Del Río 1999: 16)

> 'You'd have to be so brave to go back' says in the future
> another, more terrible metropolis

The personified 'metropolis' asserts that bravery is required when returning to confront the carnage that took place during the dictatorship. 'Another', different city implies some distance and may refer to the voices of exiles and their fear of returning to Chile. The poem alludes to the dilemma for exiled Chileans—whether in returning they would reclaim their country, or whether coming back to a destroyed city would revive their trauma. Or, worse, be a newly traumatic experience. In terms of word choice, 'volver' (go back)

echoes 'retroceder' (going backwards), the title of Lezama Lima's poem, even though 'retroceder' refers more explicitly to retracing one's steps.

Another important influence worth mentioning comes from the Spanish Renaissance. Magda Sepúlveda claims that Castaway poets are well versed in Spanish Peninsular literature. In particular, 'se aprecia en Alejandra del Río el conocimiento de la tradición española y barroca' (one appreciates in Alejandra del Río her knowledge of Spanish Baroque tradition; Sepúlveda 2010: 86). Del Río has a particularly close connection to *La vida es sueño* (Life Is a Dream, 1635) by Pedro Calderón de la Barca, a work that serves as a bridge between Plato's Allegory of the Cave and *Braille*.

Plato's work is a foundational trope for Calderón, as 'the central protagonist of the play begins his/her life in a prison, which takes the form of a cave' (Gómez 2011: 87). Just as in *Braille*, the environment of the cave opens Calderón's play. In *Life Is a Dream*, the '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 2011: 91). This is clearly expressed in the play, especially when the protagonist, 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 1985: 2934–8)

> Then 'twas truth, and not a dream;
> But if it was truth (another
> And no less confusion,) how
> Can my life be called in proper
> Speech a dream?[3]

There is a clear parallel between what Segismundo faces in Calderón's play and what Del Río's speaker seeks to explain to her 'blind' readership. This confusion Segismundo expresses gives new colour to Del Río's hermetic poetry. Her speaker describes the illusory nature of reality for those who are in the cave, while at the same time warning that the truth may be unbearable. The main

[3] Translation from https://www.globalgreyebooks.com/life-is-a-dream-ebook.html.

difference between Calderón's and Del Río's 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 2011: 92). This is not the case in *Braille*; Del Río's more classical reading of the allegory presents the cave as the home of the ignorant. New knowledge does not arrive in the cave itself, as in Gómez's analysis of *Life Is a Dream*, but rather by leaving the cave and seeing the world outside. Only then can the former cave-dwellers question their previous reality. Here, the speaker is essential, as the dwellers would not know about the world outside the cave on their own. They need a guide, someone to leave them signs and clues. That is Del Río's poetic intent in *Braille*, to give poetry and language the power to bring others out of their comfort zones or their positions of ignorance regarding the world around them.

Memory plays a major role in the depiction of 'reality' in *Braille*; what should be remembered has been hidden, lost from sight. As a result, the blind inside the cave are not able to witness the horrors of the past. It is not clear whether this violence happened with their knowledge or against their will. Del Río refers explicitly to the dead and the disappeared throughout *Braille* with the topos of *ubi sunt*, Latin for 'where are they?'. In this context, *ubi sunt* takes on collective memory, lifting the poetry beyond an individual realm. The poem 'Ceniza del más vasto de los mares' (Ash of the Vastest Sea) opens each stanza with the question 'Dónde quedó la memoria …' (Where did memory go …). This repetition has multiple layers, as the memory is not only of the dead of the recent past, but also of the present: the cave-dwellers are alive, but have they been forgotten inside the cave? By questioning issues of memory, the cave-dwellers might realise their own ignorance of the real world that lies beyond their cave. Del Río's speaker encourages reflection:

> Dónde quedó la memoria y su vocación de argonauta
> su principio de agorero y finalmente
> la duda y la balsa escandalosa de la duda
> donde a duras penas amarrados al gran mástil
> los valientes desisten de zambullirse en otra piel
> los valientes seducidos se encallan los cantos en las sienes
> sigue estando atado el atado a la memoria
> pero sigue tributando el Hombre a las rocas de su Ítaca
>
> (Del Río 1999: 43)

Where did memory go, and its vocation as an Argonaut
its doomsayer principle and finally
doubt and the scandalous raft of doubt
where, barely tethered to the great mast,
the brave give up diving into another skin
the brave, seduced, shipwreck the songs on their temples
it's still tied, the tie to memory
but Man is still paying tribute to the rocks of his Ithaca

The reader, or the blind cave-dweller, must question their own position in the world, to ultimately realise that they inhabit Del Río's imagined, destroyed city. From this realisation, they might remember or wonder what was there before, what remains of the old city before the regime that destroyed it. Like Odysseus, the 'Man' is trying to reach Ithaca, albeit unsuccessfully. Del Río's Ithaca acts as a metaphor for the Castaways, poets who are unable to find a port to dock. If their Ithaca no longer exists, they will float for eternity, and this is the harsh reality to which the speaker has guided her blind readers throughout the poems.

The mixture of the use of *ubi sunt* and maritime imagery in *Braille* encourages a questioning of the past. Searching for history is something that escapes or is concealed from cave-dwellers. The poem presents the memory question four times and with three variations:

Dónde quedó la memoria
1. y su vocación de argonauta
2. y su circo de cenizas
3. y su traje de cenizas
4. y su vocación de argonauta

Where did memory go
1. and its vocation as an Argonaut
2. and its circus of ashes
3. and its dress of ashes
4. and its vocation as an Argonaut

The use of the word 'Argonaut' paints the quest for collective memory as a voyage with its own challenges and dangers. The Argonauts' presence can be connected to the Castaways, but in Del Río's poetry they may be cursed, as they seem never to reach port, unlike in the ancient Greek myth.

Braille and the Impossible Witness

The issue of memory in *Braille* should also be understood in dialogue with more contemporary references, as well as the ideas of seeing as witnessing and developing testimony based on what is learned. A term that informs this reading of Del Río's work is the 'impossible witness', which was theorised by Giorgio Agamben in his seminal book *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (1999). Putting aside all obvious differences between the Holocaust and post-dictatorship Chile, there are some aspects regarding the theorisation of testimony that can be transplanted into the Chilean case.

From the perspective of Chilean scholarship, Magda Sepúlveda considered a link between Agamben's proposal and the poetry written by the Castaways in Chile. Sepúlveda uses 'la idea de testigo imposible para referirme al que vio todo y que, por lo tanto, la experiencia acabó con su vida. La voz de ese testigo sólo es posible dentro del carácter ficcional de estos poemas' (the idea of the impossible witness to refer to the one who saw everything, and as a result, the experience ended their life. The voice of this witness is only possible within the fictional character of these poems; Sepúlveda 2010: 84). Sepúlveda's view posits an imaginary possibility within a historical impossibility. The poets who experienced the dictatorship as children 'have clear memories of life under the dictatorship' (Ros 2012: 107). Even though Del Río did not remember the coup, as she was still a baby when it took place, she did experience her childhood and adolescence under the regime. One may wonder if stepping out of darkness and into the light also refers to the experience of growing up in the dark times of Pinochet. Then, living through the Transition to Democracy, even if this 'light' is not a pleasant experience, would show that the wounds of the dictatorship are still open and unresolved. Del Río uses writing to present a combination of both dictatorship and post-dictatorship times, making it difficult for readers of *Braille* to pinpoint when the action in the destroyed city occurs.

The speaker refers to this from the position of one who writes between epochs, between dictatorship and post-dictatorship times:

> La maldición del escriba
> dice la vida bailando sobre las ruinas
> (Del Río 1999: 14)

> The curse of the scribe
> says life dancing on the ruins

Del Río's choice of the word 'escriba' relates to testimony. Historically a 'scribe' or 'amanuense' (amanuensis) is a 'persona que tiene como oficio escribir a mano, copiando o poniendo en limpio escritos ajenos, o escribiendo lo que se le dicta' (person who has the job of writing by hand, copying or making clean copies of other people's work, or writing from dictation; RAE n.d.). Those who write about events always do it after the fact and writing is therefore considered a curse. What is to be depicted while life—personified as dancing—goes on is the aftermath of the destruction of the city. In the case of *Braille*, we know that the speaker feels compelled to write in order to guide the blind; she has committed herself to leaving a document that testifies to the horror outside the cave. One may wonder why. It would be up to the reader now to decide whether the world beyond the cave, post-dictatorship Chile, is one that can be made more liveable.

The ruins referenced in these lines reveal a collapse that the speaker may or may not have seen herself. She can only see the aftermath of a deep crisis that destroyed the city. In this sense, *Braille*'s speaker is an example of the impossible witness. As Sepúlveda writes, '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' (the fabrication of the impossible witness in Chilean Transition poetry speaks to us of the difficulties that we have had in coming to terms with the topic of memory; Sepúlveda 2010: 90). This impossibility is also turned into an instance to criticise the democratic transition in Chile, as it is deemed a fiasco.

Braille testifies to the failure of the democratic transition by speaking about a Father, which can also be understood as again another reference to General Pinochet:

> 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 1999: 17)

> One only learns about the Father from his fall
> announced by neither heralds nor sequins
> one reaches the Father with blows and punches
> thirst put in the mouths of men

From a Chilean perspective, the use of the word 'golpe' (blow) signals the 1973 coup. These lines also express that the fall of the regime, or the Father, only leads to learning more about who that Father was

and what he did. This implies that the Father falls without glamour or fanfare, suggesting the poem's disagreement with his authority. This was a violent parental figure, one that could be reached through 'blows and punches'. The last line in this excerpt refers to those who expected the regime to succeed to ultimately benefit from it; they were thirsty for power and influence. The purpose of this denunciation is to help the blind understand the world that they will now see.

In light of this, it is important to emphasise Agamben's assertion 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 1999: 34). Poetic writing opens up space to develop a figurative testimony about a traumatic experience that is impossible to fully retell. 'Este testigo habla sobre un hecho imposible de decir, de ahí lo figurativo de su lenguaje' (This witness talks about an unspeakable fact, which explains his figurative language; Sepúlveda 2010: 85). This is why, in reading *Braille*, the reader experiences a closeness to something that is unspeakable yet must be known, in the name of justice and truth.

Del Río's speaker expresses the unsayable through coded lines, 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 1999: 29)

> And by chance in the prints his feet left
> did he never surprise you sniffing around his shadow
> and in the murmur he left in each place

The speaker-witness is aware that people's steps can be tracked, in the use of 'surprise you sniffing' as if someone were doing something forbidden, like a child spying on adults. It must also be noted that the person sniffing is being followed by a masculine figure, who can be linked to the strongest patriarchal symbol in this collection, the Father. The footprint tracks provide the excerpt with an air of fairy tale, such as 'Hansel and Gretel', which further reinforces the fantastical, impossible witness. But while Hansel and Gretel left breadcrumbs to trace their own steps back out of the forest, this man leaves a 'murmur', which again emphasises the sense of hearing over sight.

Agamben's conceptualisation of the impossible witness has proved useful to this analysis 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 1999: 34). This indicates that the speaker in *Braille* would be aware of the impossibility of her bearing witness; and yet, this does not deter her from attempting to shed light on what lies outside the cave, to tell of what happened beyond the wounded bodies of the regime's victims. The destroyed, unrecognisable city, as witnessed in Del Río's poem, holds not only the remains of the tortured, disappeared and murdered, but also the erased memory of a country that used to enjoy a welfare state and is now at the mercy of neoliberalism.

In my view, the ultimate truth is concealed by the lie that life as it is—with increasing levels of inequality and little chance of social mobility—is the way things are meant to be in Chile. Even though the country is never mentioned in *Braille*, it is implicitly understood, the same way as in Berenguer's *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (1983). Del Río's speaker also addresses the commodification of every aspect of life, emphasising that the newly constructed 'homeland' has been shaped to serve the purpose of a profit-driven agenda—and providing evidence of Del Río's distrust of the neoliberal turn in Chile:

> 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 1999: 44)
>
> Don't build cemeteries and trust they'll last, since in your country
> life makes you pay dearly for every instant taken back from death
>
> And raise up your country like a tower in the exact place of weeping

The speaker expresses that every instant of a person's life is subject to commodification. 'La vida hace pagar caro' (life makes you pay dearly) is close to the expression 'Lo pagarás caro' (you'll pay dearly for it), which is understood as a direct threat in both Spanish and English. The 'you' in these lines is the reader, and with 'in your country' the speaker is clearly referring to Chile and

a Chilean readership. These lines reveal Del Río's concern about post-dictatorship Chile, in that all aspects of life have become assets, and every moment can be traded in the market. Lastly, the final line seems to propose the building of a memorial, so as not to forget what happened in the creation of this commodified society. This could also be the erection of the Chilean tower of neoliberalism, reminiscent of Elvira Hernández's 'Empire Chilean' in *La bandera de Chile*.

Del Río's criticism of the Chilean Transition in *Escrito en braille* integrates disillusionment and disappointment, but also an awareness of the commodification of every aspect of human life. Since the first decade of democracy saw a consolidation of neoliberalism more than anything else, this profit-centred society was already perceived as unlikely to change. *Braille* testifies to this, as an undeniable truth that Chileans must face and reckon with.

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Chapter 4

Uranio (1999) by Marina Arrate

Marina Arrate (b. 1957) has spent most of her four-decade poetic career criticising stereotypical images imposed on women, with a poetic aesthetic that confronts the patriarchy through eroticism and a heavy reliance on the hyperbolic and excessive. Her first poetry collection, *Este lujo de ser* (This Luxury of Being, 1986), questions ideals of beauty and challenges the male-centred gaze. For example:

> la boca ahora se moja
> y se paladea el placer.
> El ojo negro penetra desde el
> espejo el gusto de mirarse
> (Arrate 1986: 7)

> the mouth now waters
> and she savours pleasure.
> Black eye penetrates from the
> mirror the delight of looking at herself

Heightening the erotic with echoes and alliteration of plosive sounds, especially the letter 'p', Arrate portrays a woman putting on mascara in a way that suggests self-pleasure or masturbation. She presents sexuality without the phallus, despite the presence of the verb 'penetrate', and the woman can enjoy herself and her own image while in the routine act of putting on make-up.

On the surface, *Este lujo de ser* does not seem to address the political context surrounding the poetry. Yet, as well as the erotic, Arratian writing brings in the city of Santiago rather explicitly by making reference to famous landmarks. The poem 'Huelén' refers to the original, Mapuche name of the Santa Lucía Hill, as christened by the Spanish. This recognition of the pre-Hispanic name is a hint of a vision of a more varied, less Eurocentric Chileanness.

A move away from Eurocentrism also signals a more emancipatory Latin American poetry, a distancing from what is regarded as 'traditional'; certain themes that lie outside the bounds of the accepted have a starring role in Arratian poetics. Among the cohort studied up to this chapter, Arrate's poetry is the most engaged in exploring autonomous womanhood; works by Nadia Prado and Malú Urriola, examined later in this volume, also delve deeply into womanhood and the positioning of the woman poet in Chilean society. Arrate's work attempts to challenge the Chilean patriarchy in a different way from Carmen Berenguer and Elvira Hernández, who wrote about issues of idealism and nationalism while dodging censorship in the early 1980s. Though published during the dictatorship, Arrate's *Este lujo de ser* was written when there was slightly more freedom of expression. This collection depicts a woman who decides to wear a mask in public, which can be read as the need to keep one's subjectivity secret during the dictatorship. There is an intimate space that belongs to her, and she has the power to show it in public or not—clearly a stance in support of women's autonomy and agency. The volume's title can be taken ironically. Even 'being' or 'existing' is a luxury and cannot be enjoyed by all women, especially during the dictatorship with its conservative ideals. Subversive, counter-hegemonic views were only found informally or in code, such as poetry.

Arrate's second collection, *Máscara negra* (Black Mask, 1990), focuses on make-up and the beauty ideals and stereotypes imposed on women through magazines and television shows. For example, the poem 'La modelo rojo' (The Red Model) explores ambiguity in what defines a woman, a mannequin or a transsexual person. Sexuality here does not require the phallus.

> Tocaría sus caderas lamería su cintura […]
> mis deseos entre sus labios y queriendo
> para mí su alabastro […]
> enterraría
> mis ansias a su siga
>
> (Arrate 1990: 16)

> I'd touch her hips I'd lick her waist […]
> my desires between her lips and wanting
> her alabaster for me […]
> I'd bury
> my longings to follow her

Whether the speaker is attracted to a woman or a mannequin, she actively explores her desire, expressing how she would like to have sex, without any man involved. The speaker is aware of the transgression her sexuality implies, as she declares: 'En consecuencia, / y con prudencia, / he decidido escribirla' (Consequently, / and prudently, / I've decided to write it; ibid.). Arrate challenges heteronormativity, a sexual ideal strongly reinforced by the recently fallen regime.

In the same poem, Arrate writes:

> Se desliza el pincel precioso
> sobre las pestañas del párpado superior
> Desde el lagrimal gentil hasta el vértice
> una línea se extiende aún más allá
> (Arrate 1990: 16)

> The precious paint brush slides
> over the eyelashes of the upper lid
> From the courteous tear duct to the vertex
> a line extends even further

These lines suggest that

> el acto de maquillarse que se (d)escribe con pinceladas se vuelve un hecho íntimo, realizado a solas aunque se esté en grupo. En ese acto femenino tiene lugar lo doble: mientras que por un lado con el pincel se realza la mirada para que se vuelva atrayente, […] por el otro se oculta y (des)cubre sobre la piel […] el ojo en una línea donde se lo diseña nuevamente. (Sardeña 2014: 65)

> the act of putting on make-up, de/inscribed with brushstrokes, becomes an intimate act, done alone even if in a group. In this feminine act something double is at play: while on the one hand the brush highlights the gaze so that it becomes attractive […] on the other hand the eye is hidden and (dis)covered on the skin, in a line where it is redesigned.

Here, Arrate writes about the skin of the face as a surface on which this imagined woman writes her own beauty, hiding or transforming herself into someone or something else. There is a hint towards monstrosity and the excessive, too—putting on make-up is ultimately a performative act that creates a mask, a face painted on a face.

In her following book, Arrate takes on a larger canvas: the body. *Tatuaje* (Tattoo, 1992) further explores the idea of excess; in terms of style, the poems resemble the Latin American Neo-Baroque style,

as theorised by Severo Sarduy in 1976. A good example reads as follows:

> 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
> (Arrate 1992: 30)

> Magical signs or incantations
> Figures of fish, lizards, strange figures
> Or the image of the sun on the forehead,
> Or a triangle on the mons Venus
> Or intertwined snakes the Egyptians on the breasts
> Or crosses the Catholics on Annunciation Day
> Or paradises the fierce heretics on the back
> Or Our furious Lord the samurais

These lines express a chaotic enumeration of cultural symbols. Apart from listing possible tattoos, the poem encapsulates a central aspect of the Neo-Baroque aesthetic, as according to Sarduy, 'its presence is constant, above all, in the form of absurd enumeration, the accumulation of diverse nodes of signification, the juxtaposition of heterogeneous units, various lists and collages' (Sarduy 2010: 275). In this excerpt, the categories of East and West are diluted, as both coexist within the same 'otherness' for the speaker, perhaps indicating that all cultures are within one world and can all be considered foreign.

The theme of the 'foreign' finds its roots in earlier poetic works, especially in Gabriela Mistral's poem 'La extranjera' (The Foreigner), where 'la poeta da rienda suelta a la ferocidad de su pasión por liberarse de ataduras, convenciones y códigos culturales impuestos' (the poet gives free rein to the ferocity of her passion for freeing herself from bonds, conventions, and imposed cultural codes; Ortega 1998: n.p.). This motif recurs frequently throughout Mistral's work, as she breaks with the man-made definition of Woman. She challenged women's cultural invisibility in Chile, and later on Arrate continued this work, portraying spaces of exclusion in her poetry. The negation of women can be understood as an '"insilio" doble: colonización y mestizaje, por una parte; por otra, la violencia que se aloja en sí el signo cultural que nombra a la mujer como secundaria' (a double

'insile': colonisation and miscegenation, on the one hand; on the other, the cultural sign, lodged within violence, that names women as secondary; Brito 2009: 89). The mix of genders and ethnicities in Arrate's work is a response to this need to overcome women's double negation, pointing to Mistralian poetry as a beacon that has guided later poets to keep critiquing the social and literary position of women in Chile.

In Arrate's case, the emphasis on the female psyche is not a coincidence. '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, […] her voice stands out as a liberating project, with her themes of love and eroticism' (Ortega 2004: 38). *Uranio* (Uranium, 1999) continues Arrate's aesthetic exploration of the erotic but separates itself from her previous works with its depiction of suffering and devastation in an unnamed city, clearly Santiago. Interestingly, and in relation to Ortega's quotation above, *Uranio* delves into a dark area of the Latin American experience, one related not only to women but also to post-dictatorship Chile, in a coded language. This means that Del Río's *Escrito en braille* and Arrate's *Uranio*, both written in the 1990s, share an atmosphere of annihilation, isolation, and having to face the fallout of unsurmountable events that are difficult or impossible to put into words.

Unlike Del Río's hermetic poetic proposal in *Braille*, Arrate's three-part *Uranio* opens up and moves towards a hopeful scenario, unlike any of the poetry studied in this volume other than *Arde* (2020), whose hope is of a different nature. The first part of *Uranio*, 'La ciudad muerta' (The Dead City), an example of the Latin American Neo-Baroque style, establishes the speaker as a woman who creates a completely new voice to rule the world she inhabits. The second part, 'El hombre de los lobos' (The Man of the Wolves), takes the poetry to a rural realm, unlike the urban setting of the first section. In this wild context, Arrate's verse explores ideas of masculinity and instinct, associating the irrational, animalistic nature of the wolf with the male figure in a way that leads to radical transformation. Lastly, the collection closes with the section 'El deseo más profundo' (The Deepest Desire), which poetically joins the female and male speakers from the first two parts of the collection. Here, Arrate presents sexuality as a way of resisting the principle of individualism so cherished by neoliberalism. If the minimal unit of collectivity is a couple and the force that brings them together is sexual desire, this means that the two speakers' union in the third section is a comment

on community, suggesting a solution to isolation and alienation and a way to cope with a broken world.

The analysis will closely follow each part and will be divided into three sections, just as in *Uranio*, but first, we must consider the book's title and its deliberate use of silence. Uranium can be understood in three ways: as a chemical element, and from its root Uranus, both a deity and a planet. In chemical terms, uranium is a highly radioactive substance used both in nuclear weapons and to generate electricity, making it dangerous and potentially lethal. Arrate's book, therefore, should be handled with extreme care. The front cover shows the images of a brain scan that look abnormal. In conversation with the author, she confessed that the scan is hers, showing an aneurysm that ruptured in 1990. Second, the deity Uranus 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 both the forces of nature and human traits. In this sense, the title recalls an ancient power, and the theme of creation through conception can be found in the collection's last section, given its emphasis on sex. Third, the planet Uranus, the seventh of our solar system, was named after the Greek god. However, of these three possible interpretations, I leave the planetary one out, as there is no evidence to support it in Arrate's work.

As to the use of silence, each section of *Uranio* begins with several blank pages. The publishers, LOM, ensured these numbered blank pages would be noticed by the reader, with a special note after the title page: 'Todas las páginas en blanco hacen parte de la concepción del libro por parte de su autora' (All blank pages are part of the book as conceived by its author; Arrate 1999: n.p.). LOM may have refused to act as publisher for Del Río's *Braille* the same year, but their relationship with Arrate's poetry was of a different nature; they were fully engaged in the production of *Uranio*.

The first textual elements in *Uranio* are the first lines of 'The Dead City', depicting a destroyed city. The five blank pages preceding the verse may symbolise a minute's silence for those who died, or the silence following apocalyptic devastation, such as an atomic bomb. The Hiroshima atomic bomb was made from uranium, a connection that is surely not coincidental. The pages of silence prior to the two other sections of the book allow a theatrical reading of the collection as a three-act play, and this classical structuring also helps reveal a logical progression within the poetry. This organisation helps the reader to understand this poetry, unlike in the case of *Braille*, which Del Río wrote to be impenetrable.

The analysis will thus be divided into three sections: 'The Dead City' and the Chilean Neo-Baroque; The Chilean Poetic Tradition of Wolves and Sheep; and The Unstoppable Force of Desire.

'The Dead City' and the Chilean Neo-Baroque

This section opens with a city in ruins, after a catastrophic event that the reader did not witness. From a Chilean perspective, the city in question appears to be Santiago and the devastation a consequence of the dictatorship, even though *Uranio* does not name it, as in Arrate's first work *Este lujo de ser*, or Gonzalo Millán's groundbreaking poem *La ciudad* (The City, 1979), written in exile.

Nevertheless, the landmark of the Virgin Mary statue clearly hints at the city being Santiago. From the very start, the speaker guides readers down a hill, in a covert reference to Cerro San Cristóbal. From atop its peak, close to the statue of Mary, one can see most of the city of Santiago:

> Ah, Virgen, continua compañera.
> Con ella bajé al paraje absurdo
> (Arrate 1999: 13)

> Ah, Mary, constant companion.
> With her I went down to the absurd place

These allusions to place allow the reader to decode Arrate's critique of her city and of life in the first decade after the dictatorship—Santiago is the 'absurd place'. Its absurdity lies in what it has inherited from the regime, namely the dead whose bones are scattered through this empty, lifeless city.

Having situated the poem in Santiago, Arrate's speaker begins to describe the ruined city:

> 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 1999: 13)

> This is the mean mirror of a city
> Wavering between the cursed murmur
> of prudish waters and the crimson
> splendour of the rigid buildings

Although the word 'ruin' in Spanish means despicable, or contemptible, the word echoes 'ruinas', ruins. As Eugenia Brito writes in her critical paper on Arrate's production, the speaker investigates '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' (the spectral ghosts of a city that has lost its place in the national space […] The landscape that the third-world city offers is apocalyptic and final; Brito 2009: 93–4). This 'apocalyptic and final' setting—post-Pinochet Santiago—cannot be seen directly, however. The mirror in the first line protects the reader from an image that is too hard to bear. This resonates with Del Río's *Braille*, published in the same year, which confirms that these two poets were concerned with issues or memories too difficult to confront directly.

Furthermore, the mirror is a common Arratian motif, seen in her other works in images of women putting on their make-up, for instance. By showing the city in an oblique manner, Arrate's work is also reminiscent of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, as used in *Braille*, wherein the blind readers/cave-dwellers cannot see the truth from where they are. Arratian reality is mediated by reflections, too, but these can also distort and confuse, like funhouse mirrors. In this sense, allusions to carnival and excess suggest a Neo-Baroque style.

Within this aesthetic, Arrate's ultimate intent in *Uranio* is political; Brito describes her earlier poetry as 'suntuos[a …] manteniendo un camino politico de escritura tanto en los temas como en las formas' (sumptuous […] maintaining a political path of writing both in theme and in form; Brito 2009: 93). In *Uranio*, Arrate focuses on the social abandonment caused by neoliberal reform, which along with the dictatorship ruined the city and its people. She describes a deadly carnival:

> Alhajas tintineantes portaban las tráqueas paupérrimas.
> Vi las 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 1999: 16)

> Tinkling jewels worn on pauper tracheas.
> I saw the ribs of nacre and silver and amethyst bracelets and rings
> of laser light and violet femurs, ambiguous, incandescent
> and wobbly golden crowns above the white skulls

The poem venerates death in a carnivalesque manner, with jewels and bones in full colour—a parody of opulence. Nobody sees this

other than the speaker, and the readers learn from her account, becoming indirect witnesses to the horrors she describes. The rest of the inhabitants of this dead city are merely bones, scattered all over.

In Sarduy's definition of the Neo-Baroque, he writes that '[it] reflects structurally the disharmony, the rupture of the logos as an absolute, the lack that constitutes our epistemic foundation' (Sarduy 2010: 289). In other words, the Neo-Baroque brings in the unexpected, as it is created from a place outside the absolute logos, our conventional Eurocentric systems of logic. A Neo-Baroque text seeks to provoke tension, cause ruptures in traditional signs and interpretations, and decentre meaning, which becomes nomadic and difficult to locate. A recentring of meaning would defeat the purpose of a Neo-Baroque text's fluid nature.

The Chilean Neo-Baroque in particular can be linked to the great violence during the dictatorship. This violence is not only physical and psychological, considering the torture of the victims and the fear this created in the general population; it is also epistemic and economic, related to the imposition of neoliberalism and its structures that continue to oppress Chilean society in many ways. In this sense, the neoliberal turn in Chile should also be considered a radically impactful epistemological break—a previous example of such a break being the one caused by the colonisation of what is known today as Latin America. All ways of generating knowledge in Chile are mediated by neoliberal structures and programmes. Yet a new, global unprecedented epistemological break is looming, led by the development of artificial intelligence. Within the next couple of years, a new social order and ways of creating knowledge may develop new forms of oppression under the guise of opportunity.

It can be said that the Chilean Neo-Baroque school was born from a previous movement, the Latin American Baroque, understood 'para Carpentier y Lezama, [… como] el arte auténticamente hispanoamericano' (by Carpentier and Lezama as the authentically Hispanic American art form; Galindo 2005: 88). These Cuban authors, especially Carpentier in his preface to *The Kingdom of this World* (1949), defend the idea of the Americanness of the excessive and thus of the Baroque aesthetic. 'En América Latina se escribe en barroco porque el continente mismo es barroco' (In Latin America one writes Baroque because the continent itself is baroque; Beverley 1988: 225). Latin American literature written in the twentieth century, especially during its first half, explores the excesses of the continent from historical, cultural and political perspectives, and writes from within them. The main difference between this Baroque

and the Chilean Neo-Baroque would be 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' (the Chilean Neo-Baroque from the period of the dictatorship also knows violence as a device for re-articulating consciousness under the *new reality* of the regime, and thus knows about the necessity of going 'beyond' silence; Martínez 2015: 205).

Arrate's *Uranio* consistently reveals itself as a Neo-Baroque text, especially in 'The Dead City', which begins after a long silence, representing the violence that changed this world for good, leaving it unrecognisable and unbearable to look at. The remnants of such a violent, apocalyptic scenario are the bones and jewels displayed in the anti-carnival—this glossy, colourful party can be interpreted as a pretence hiding a void. The void represents the lack of understanding of the world in the poem but also the failure of Chilean post-dictatorship society to understand itself. Even to this day, we lack information about Pinochet's victims, or the location of their remains. The dismembered bodies in the poem, the (missing) dead themselves, showcase an abundance of bones and precious stones that form a picture of horror, a celebration of the abject in the Kristevan sense. The poetry emphasises that 'el reino de la muerte es lujoso […] como si esos decorados fueran la única manifestación posible ante la nada' (the kingdom of death is luxurious […] as if those decorated ones were the only possible manifestation in the face of nothingness; Brito 2009: 94). This represents utter disappointment with the new democracy; according to Brito, the context surrounding this anti-carnival is certainly 'Chile en la sociedad post-Pinochet' (Chile in post-Pinochet society; ibid.).

An important detail in the excerpt above is the witnessing of the anti-carnival, expressed through the verb 'vi' (I saw), which is reminiscent of the tone of St John's Book of Revelation. This is not the only reference that can be read from a religious perspective in *Uranio*. Here I sustain that Arratian writing challenges the positioning of a commanding voice traditionally masculine as per biblical mythology. This gesture also decentres the logos and further confirms *Uranio* as a Neo-Baroque text.

Not only does Arrate's speaker express poetically the horrors she has witnessed, but she also orders the bones to rise, in a gesture that underscores voice and language as the ultimate creative forces. In raising the dead, her words generate life, and her tone reappropriates the most well-known male creative voice—that of God, in the

Judaeo-Christian tradition, the one imported from Europe to the Americas through colonisation. The Gospel of John opens with 'In the beginning was the Word, / and the Word was with God, / and the Word was God' (St John 1:1). This means that the 'Word' is sacred and responsible for the creation of all living things. In the book of Genesis, all is created through the word of God, for example: 'And God said: Let there be light, and there was light' (Genesis 1:3). According to the biblical myth, oral speech is paramount in the creation of the world.

Arrate's speaker, in a subversive gesture, summons the body parts of the dead, the bones she had previously described:

> Cadáveres somnolientos, álcense de sus tumbas, álcense derrotados lázaros. Yergan sus hesitantes calaveras, respondan.
>
> (Arrate 1999: 20)

> Somnolent corpses, rise from your tombs, rise up defeated lazaruses. Lift up your hesitant skulls, respond.

Though somnolent after the anti-carnival, the corpses were still scattered around the dead city. From a biblical standpoint, this quotation is in dialogue with sources from both the Old and New Testaments. The first and most obvious reference is 'lazaruses', referring to the many dead people needing to be resuscitated. In the Gospel of John, Lazarus's resurrection is described as follows: 'And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. […]" And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth"' (St John 11:41–3). Here, speech is of the utmost importance. Jesus demands verbally that Lazarus come to life by leaving the cave where his body had been laid after his death. In the case of Arrate's text, the speaker asks her many Lazaruses to rise, to stand up and respond. This would mean that the scattered bones would come together and form complete beings.

Another biblical tale finds an echo in this excerpt from *Uranio*, relating to the bones of the dead being filled with life. The prophet Ezekiel tells of the 'Vision of Dry Bones': 'The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones' (Ezekiel 37:1). Ezekiel becomes a witness to horror. In that place full of bones, the prophet sees that God speaks to command the bones, something that only God can do. 'And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest' (Ezekiel 37:3). In other words, there is a clear difference between the

power of a man's speech and that of God's. Only God, through his utterance, can command the bones to live once more. 'Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live' (Ezekiel 37:5–6). Arrate turns the prophecy on its head, suggesting that a woman's voice can bring bones to life. Her speaker talks about a great resurrection, one as apocalyptic as the disaster that destroyed the city and its inhabitants.

Lastly, St John's Book of Revelation also testifies to seeing the dead coming to life. 'And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God […] And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them' (Revelations 20:12–13). That 'I saw' is the same expression Arrate's speaker uses to communicate what she witnessed at the anti-carnival. In St John's text there is a massive resurrection, an intent to save the future. The disintegrated bodies of those returned from the sea would be reconstructed. One could interpret the raising of the corpses in *Uranio* as those of the victims of Pinochet's regime, many of whom were thrown into the depths of the Pacific Ocean. Unlike the bodies from St John's tale, however, the sea never gave them up.

When her speaker orders the corpses to rise, Arrate is thus rewriting and reappropriating these biblical narratives. This is a clearly subversive poetic action that defies not only the Judaeo-Christian tradition in general, but the Catholic one in particular. Imposed by Spanish colonisers, Catholicism has been the ruler of Chilean social life ever since. The impossibility of actually resurrecting the dead and reassembling their decomposed or dismembered bodies leads to another symbolic, yet quite meaningful act: these bodies are not to be 're-membered' but 'remembered'. Arrate's poem reminds readers that literature offers something that reality cannot—the recovery of those who would otherwise be lost to oblivion, and a reconstruction of the past.

After this act of remembrance, the poetry moves forward to ask more about those who died in the disaster that destroyed the city:

> Muerte de muertos, dije yo.
> Estas sombras que yacen bajo esas armaduras
> qué son, qué fueron.
>
> (Arrate 1999: 23)

> Death of the dead, I said.
> These shadows that lie under that armour
> what are they, what were they.

The speaker assumes a position and an existence within this deadly reality by stating her 'I'. This is clearly 'un lugar que se va conquistando' (a place that is being conquered; Brito 2009: 93), which implies the historic negation of women as having agency. Now it is the woman who summons the dead and shows us around the ruined city. Her clear and subversive 'I' reveals Arrate's intent 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' (establish feminine sexuality alongside terror and domination […] forced to follow a different script from the one that would take her to other universes; Brito 2009: 96). The symbolic realm created in *Uranio*'s 'The Dead City' allows Arrate to position her speaker as autonomous and imagine her commanding corpses back to life. In her poetry in general, Arrate develops an eminently woman-centred imagination that looks for ways to generate a parenthesis within the traditional logos, a space for gender dissidence.

If 'The Dead City' were the only section in *Uranio*, the book would thematically resemble Del Río's *Escrito en braille*. They share an utter disappointment in the present, representative of the poets' feelings towards the Chilean Transition as a failed project, insufficient in bringing closure for Chilean society. But Arrate's poem continues and so does this analysis.

The Chilean Poetic Tradition of Wolves and Sheep

From its very title, 'The Man of the Wolves' suggests a discussion of masculinity and instinct. The poetry of this section of *Uranio* depicts a fragmented self, formed by different pieces that interact with each other. This fragmentation connects it to 'The Dead City', which depicts the physical brokenness of scattered bones. 'The Man of the Wolves', on the other hand, delves into the psyche of a subject who is difficult to define:

> Alguna vez fui lobo
> y aullé en la noche interminable
> junto a mis hermanos. […]
> Y mis colmillos, marfiles, eran
> lo mejor de la manada.
> (Arrate 1999: 39)

> Once I was a wolf
> and I howled in the interminable night

together with my brothers. […]
And my fangs, ivory, were
the best of the pack.

These lines suggest that the male speaker—unlike the female speaker in 'The Dead City'—acknowledges having once been something other than himself. 'Alguna vez fui' (Once I was) recalls a past long gone, much more common in oral Spanish and closer to a fairy tale opening, like 'Había una vez' (Once upon a time). The reference to the wolf's fangs signals its killer instincts and this wolf's special role in the pack.

After the wolf, the figure of the man appears; though not a shepherd as one might expect, he is evoked in the third person as having 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 en verdad alguna vez.
(Arrate 1999: 40)

The man dreams
that he penetrates in the thick of a tree
and shelters between his legs and the branches
a desire that binds him together and
dissolves him. Everything in him is tree and he suffers.
He dreams of the mother that he once had,
that in truth he dreamed of once.

The poetry here enters an oneiric realm. Arrate suggests an erotic environment with words such as 'penetrates', 'thick', 'between his legs' and 'desire'. We see this sexual desire unfolding amid the wilderness. Unlike the carnivalesque scenario of the city, these lines move inwards, in an unidentified rural setting. The repetition of 'alguna vez' (once), recalling the first line of this section, implies a difficulty in remembering, hinting at a possibly ambiguous fable.

From a literary standpoint, there is a long-standing tradition of fables about wolves and sheep. Dating from 600 BCE, *Aesop's Fables* include 'The Wolf and the Sheep', 'The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing' and 'The Lamb and the Wolf'. The personification of these animals

is meant to teach readers moral lessons. In each case, the wolf is portrayed as an evil creature, whereas the sheep is helpless and must learn to avoid the wolf's tricks. In La Fontaine's *Fables*, first published in 1668, he continues the tradition with 'The Lamb and the Wolf'. In the Bible, sheep and wolves are recurring characters, although Psalm 23, 'The Lord is my Shepherd', is one of the most famous examples. The sheep represent God's children or followers, and the shepherd is God. In the New Testament, Jesus is referred to as the Lamb as he was given as a sacrifice to take away the sins of the world.[1]

In Chilean contemporary poetry (post-1973), Manuel Silva Acevedo (b. 1942) published *Lobos y ovejas* (Wolves and Sheep, 1976). In this poem, the sheep turns into a wolf, portraying a reversal of values. The innocent creature becomes a cunning one that can deceive others.

> Pero un día la loba me tragó
> Y yo, la estúpida cordera
> Conocí entonces la noche […]
> *Me sentí lobo malo de repente*
> (Silva Acevedo 2009: 23, author's italics)

> But one day the she-wolf swallowed me
> And I, the stupid sheep
> Knew then the night […]
> *I suddenly felt a bad wolf*

The sheep realises there is a world out there beyond the herd and feels tempted to become a wolf. The use of italics suggests an erotic turn in the poem, as if this formerly innocent sheep wanted to be a bad wolf. The sheep becoming a wolf recalls the transformation that US author Clarissa Pinkola Estés describes in *Women Who Run with the Wolves* (1992), her study of the 'wild woman' archetype: the she-wolf '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 2004: 283). Interestingly, this passage also connects to the first section of *Uranio*, where Arrate's speaker calls for the bones to reassemble and to rise from the dead.

[1] Even though a landmark poem such as William Blake's 'The Lamb' from *Songs of Innocence* (1789) comes to mind, there is not enough evidence to link it to Arrate's work at this juncture.

In Silva Acevedo's poem, the sheep's transformation is complete, and she speaks:

> 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 2009: 59)

> I will be no more the sheep in captivity […]
> I now have my place among the beasts
> Seek shelter shepherd, seek shelter from me
> Wolf on the hunt, shelter me

The sheep has been completely transfigured. First, she has left the captivity that always characterised her life as part of the herd, following her desire to become a wild and untamed creature. Using the verb 'amparar', which means to shelter or protect, the sheep threatens the shepherd, warning him to find shelter now that she has found new strength and a new identity as a wild beast. She uses the same verb to ask the wolf, out stalking, to protect her. In a contextualised approach to Silva Acevedo's book, one could argue that, through her transformation, the sheep escapes the slaughterhouse. The sheep also undermines and challenges the shepherd that controls the herd and decides who will be slaughtered next. This may be a covert reference to the 'shepherd' of the Chilean regime, General Pinochet.

Also during the dictatorship, poet Rosabetty Muñoz (b. 1960) published *Canto de una oveja del rebaño* (Song of a Sheep in the Flock, 1981), a poetry collection that can be read from a more economic perspective. Muñoz demonstrates a lucid awareness of the ways in which Chile was changing; using the sheep to represent the trapped citizens, she shows her distrust in the early years of neoliberalism.

> Soy Feliz,
> Cada cosa que deseo
> Aparece por arte de cuotas mensuales
> En mi mano
> (Muñoz 2013: 8)

> I am Happy,
> Everything I want
> Appears as if by monthly instalments
> In my hand

Muñoz's speaker relates happiness to being able to afford certain things. With a play on the saying 'appears as if by magic', she implies that one's deepest desires may be fulfilled by a line of credit, turning citizens into consumers. In this sense, Muñoz's work is ahead of her time; she observes the irruption of neoliberalism and foresees the way it will control the will of the population through consumerism.

Towards the end of the collection, the sheep tries to find a way out of the cycle of consumerism and debt:

> Desde mañana
> voy a cambiar de giro.
> Trataré de propiciar
> una reconciliación con el mundo […]
> (No hay que transar
> con el rebaño indolente)
> (Muñoz 2013: 25)

> From tomorrow
> I'll change tack.
> I'll try to foster
> a reconciliation with the world […]
> (One shouldn't put up
> with the indolent flock)

'Cambiar de giro' (change tack) is an interesting and playful choice of words. In Chilean Spanish, a business activity is called a 'giro', making the sheep a consumer who uses business jargon to announce a change of direction in her life. The new economic paradigm, neoliberalism, has already changed the lexicon. The sheep's wish to find reconciliation with the world suggests that there are other sheep who have escaped the herd, and she could join these other disobedient sheep. The poem's title, 'Oveja descarriada decide camino a seguir' (Wayward Sheep Decides Which Way to Go), apart from sounding like a newspaper headline, implies disobedience in the word 'descarriada' (wayward) as it means 'separarse, apartarse o perderse' (to separate, diverge or become lost; RAE n.d.) from a group. Nevertheless, the sheep warns the reader to be wary of lazy sheep, indicating that her process of leaving the herd and freeing herself from consumerism may not be an easy one.

In both Silva Acevedo's and Muñoz's work, the allegory of the sheep is used to subvert the animal's traditional symbolic meaning and go beyond its fable-like characterisation. No longer passive creatures, their sheep escape and transform themselves. These collections also associate the figure of the shepherd with a powerful,

authoritarian individual. Arrate, on the other hand, presents a more complex characterisation of these animals and roles, as *Uranio* poses deep questions about the psychology of an ambiguous character who may be both man and wolf at once. Here, the man dreams about losing one of his sheep and searches for her:

> Transido de una luz
> que turba mi entendimiento soy
> hombre y lobo prendido
> de una lumbre que quisiera
> yo ya devorada
> (Arrate 1999: 43)

> Tormented by a light
> that troubles my understanding I am
> man and wolf ignited
> by a glow that I'd like
> already devoured

The speaker here is both man and wolf. 'Una lumbre' (a glow) can suggest a full moon, which turns him into a werewolf. In his transition to his animalistic side, he resents the light and seeks darkness; in this process he stops searching for his sheep and ends up devouring the moon, in a gesture that symbolises his complete transformation.

The speaker is transformed once more, maybe into a 'loba', a she-wolf, recalling Silva Acevedo's poem:

> Y la loba feroz que en mis entrañas soñaba
> (Arrate 1999: 47)

> And the big bad she-wolf that I dreamed in my guts

The she-wolf inside the wolf indicates that the man who has turned into a wolf contains a she-wolf in his insides, a feminine side that will begin to show. The 'loba feroz' once again signals the fairy tale theme in this poetry, as 'el lobo feroz' (the Big Bad Wolf) is the villain of the famous Charles Perrault short story 'Little Red Riding Hood' (1697).

As soon as the wolf begins expressing his feminine side, (s)he expresses a sense of guilt:

> 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 1999: 48)

I accept
the ferocity that consumes me
and the death of my sheep I accept
and the impiousness of my actions
and the sentence of this unpunished condition
and error and guilt I accept.

From a Catholic perspective, these lines read like a confession. The prayer 'Yo confieso' (Confiteor) is an act of great penitence, and it reads 'por mi culpa, por mi gran culpa' (through my fault, through my most grievous fault), which relates to the intention of Arrate's speaker here. This guilt relates to sin. Through these confessional lines, the wolf/she-wolf lists their impious acts, and Arrate's use of chiasmus and the repetition of 'acepto' (I accept) highlight the speaker's awareness of their 'error and guilt' and their loss of innocence, 'the death of my sheep'.

'The Man of the Wolves' closes soon after this confession. The wolf returns to its natural habitat and its imagined dwelling in the world of the fable or fairy tale.

Pero vuelvo,
al bosque vuelvo
lobo salvaje y feroz vuelvo
a mi patria a mi leyenda vuelvo
a mi poema vuelvo.
(Arrate 1999: 49)

But I return,
to the woods I return
wild big bad wolf I return
to my homeland to my tale I return
to my poem I return.

The use of the present simple in these lines evokes an idea of completion. The repetition of the verb 'vuelvo' (I return) implies a coming back to nature or to one's home. After confessing, the wolf is ready to follow its natural instincts, as the guilt was purged through the act of contrition. The forest, the wolf's 'patria' or homeland, signals a return from exile. The wolf returns to its mythical state, back to the fable, thus completing the circle. The verb 'vuelvo' also echoes the Chilean folk band Illapu's most famous song, released in 1991,

called 'Vuelvo para vivir' (I Return to Live). The song lyrics read: 'Vuelvo a casa, vuelvo compañera / vuelvo mar, montaña, vuelvo puerto […] / vuelvo, vida vuelvo / a vivir en ti país' (I return home, I return compañera / I return sea, mountain, I return harbour […] / I return, life I return / to live in you, country; Márquez 1991). The exiled man turned she-wolf returns home, just like those who were exiled during the dictatorship.

The Unstoppable Force of Desire

Uranio closes with a short section entitled 'The Deepest Desire'. After five blank pages of silence following the wolf's return to the forest, *Uranio* brings new, Arratian elements to the page, such as sensuality and the power of desire.

'The Deepest Desire' unites the two speakers from the first two sections. Their sexual encounter challenges the individuality that characterised the previous sections, despite the dual unfolding of the man's psyche in 'The Man of the Wolves'. If the couple represents collectivity, driven by the force of desire, this coupling in the final section of *Uranio* disrupts the idea of the alienated individual.

The section opens with the couple making love:

> Se mecen los amantes en el viento y arrojan
> el remolino de una enervante fragancia […]
> donde nada comienza y todo encuentra fin.
> (Arrate 1999: 57)

> The lovers rock in the wind, giving off
> the whirlwind of an enervating smell […]
> where nothing begins and everything finds an end.

This image recalls the tarot card 'The Lovers', the sixth of the Major Arcana; some tarot decks show the lovers close together, as if before sex. In these lines, passion is a fragrance, and its apex the orgasm, expressed as 'where nothing begins and everything finds an end', *la petite mort*. Here, love overcomes catastrophe. Octavio Paz's poem 'Piedra de sol' (Sunstone, 1957) conveys a similar idea: 'si dos, vertiginosos y enlazados, / caen sobre la yerba' (if two, dizzy and entwined, / fall on the grass; Paz 1998: 349), enjoying their love while the Spanish Civil War takes place in the background—'Madrid, 1937 / en la Plaza del Ángel' (Madrid, 1937 / in the Plaza del Angel; Paz 1998: 344).

'The Deepest Desire' closes *Uranio* by challenging individualism; it expresses the need for love, sexuality and a new dialogue with an Other, the lover. According to Arratian poetry, desire is a liberating force that brings 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,
> alborozados hundimos las manos
> en esas trémulas violetas
> (Arrate 1999: 57)

> All riverbanks call and it is silence
> all passion invokes her and when she arrives,
> regalia, God's path, gift,
> elated we sink our hands
> into those trembling violets.

This stanza, in the first-person plural, expresses total joy—'alborozados' (elated) means something that 'causa extraordinario regocijo, placer o alegría' (causes extraordinary rejoicing, pleasure or joy; RAE n.d.). The antecedent of this all-encompassing description—'all riverbanks', 'all passion'—is a flower. The lovers tremble as they touch, every inch of their bodies worthy of passion and celebration—'regalia, God's path, gift'. The endless possibilities arising from these lovers' sexual encounters render this section the most uplifting of *Uranio*; them being together not only thwarts personal isolation but also creates a new world, born of the collective.

After the sex in the poem, the speaker says, 'Todo de mí tu ser se alimenta' (All of me your being feeds on; Arrate 1999: 58). Arrate uses strange syntax here, making the meaning ambiguous. Symbolically, in sex the lovers devour each other. This certainly echoes the previous section, 'The Man of the Wolves', when the man swallowed the sheep. In the lovers' microcosm, however, the devouring is mutual: 'él y ella y ambos y nosotros / en el sólo haz que ya los atraviesa' (he and she and both and we / in the only beam that shines across them; ibid.). From separate beings, the couple has merged into a collective 'we'. The light beam divides the image in two, suggesting a mirror, as in *Uranio*'s opening image, the reflection of the city of Santiago. Despite the occasionally extreme ambiguity of her poetry, Arrate upholds heteronormativity with 'he and she'. In the next chapter of this volume, Nadia Prado's ©*Copyright* (2003) presents a poetic alternative, integrating homosexuality.

Despite this heteronormative constraint, Arrate's poetic sexuality as expressed in *Uranio* is a liberating force. The couple subverts a pathological individuality that may seem inescapable. Social alienation is a central characteristic of the neoliberal society. Loneliness was recently declared a disease, in the editorial 'Loneliness as a Health Issue', published by *The Lancet* in July 2023. According to this piece, 'societal trends towards individualism, at the expense of collectivism and feeling of belonging, risk increasing feelings of loneliness' ('Loneliness' 2023: 79). Love, affection, human touch and sexuality act as a deterrent for loneliness, and *Uranio* supplies its readers with a solution to their extreme individualism and isolation.

The poem closes with a rather hopeful approach:

> Todo el ser se pliega a su radio
> y el alma, que había muerto,
> vuelve a vibrar
> (Arrate 1999: 59)
>
> All one's being yields to its radius
> and the soul that had died
> vibrates again

The use of 'radio' is highly ambiguous. It can mean the radius bone, located in the forearm, or the radius of a circle. It could also mean the chemical element radium, which is radioactive, like uranium. Unlike apocalyptic uranium, however, radium is used to heal cancer, to shrink a tumour. Given that the Pinochet regime used 'cancer' to describe the left-wing, Marxist elements in Chilean society, Arrate's poetry may be a prescription to treat the 'neoliberal cancer'. In a way, it would bring an image of closure, suggesting a new, collective beginning.

In 'The Dead City', the lone female wanderer does not find a way out; she withers and dies. The wolf in 'The Man of the Wolves' returns to the darkness of his forest. Only the final lovers create a togetherness that brings a chance of renewal. These lost souls find solace in love, a collective force that counters the selfish nature of a consumerist society. Arrate's *Uranio* does not only challenge post-dictatorship Chile and its individualistic reality; her work also leaves a lesson on how to stand against the monolithic views of neoliberalism—by connecting to another human being.

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Part III

2000s. Depicting Inescapability and Despair in Neoliberal Times

Chapter 5

©*Copyright* (2003) by Nadia Prado

Nadia Prado (b. 1966) has established herself as part of a cohort of women writers who express the need for liberation within the chaotic, neoliberal reality that engulfs both Chile and Latin America. She has been a prolific poet since the 1990s, yet her work has not received the critical attention it deserves. This chapter focuses on her third poetry book, ©*Copyright* (2003), yet it is important to look at her first two works, *Simples placeres* (Simple Pleasures, 1992) and *Carnal* (Carnal, 1998), and examine the links and dialogue with other women poets studied in this volume, especially Marina Arrate, Elvira Hernández and Alejandra del Río.

Prado began her career in renowned pieces of performance art, such as *La refundación de la Universidad de Chile* (The Refounding of the University of Chile) in 1988. During the performance, Prado accompanied poet Carmen Berenguer and musician Carolina Jerez—Berenguer's daughter—in guiding queer activists and writers Pedro Lemebel and Francisco Casas on to the Las Encinas campus, which houses the University of Chile's Arts Department. Lemebel and Casas were riding a mare, a significant detail as their artistic collective was called 'Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis' (The Mares of the Apocalypse). In Chilean Spanish, however, 'yegua' does not only mean 'mare'; it also refers to 'mujer de conducta sexual ligera o amoral' (a woman of loose or amoral sexual conduct) or 'mujer agresiva, desconsiderada que actúa de manera ruin, perversa o miserable' (an aggressive, inconsiderate woman who acts in a mean, callous or perverse manner; ASALE n.d.). Both Lemebel and Casas were 'yeguas' in the Chilean sense of the word. For Lemebel, 'Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis es un nombre muy jodido, que lo carnavaliza todo: el nombre es un gesto irónico sobre nuestra obra, la desarma. Las Yeguas son un mito' (The Mares of the Apocalypse is a screwed-up name/pain in the ass, that carnavalises everything: the name is

an ironic gesture about our work, it dismantles it. The Mares are legend; Rodríguez Villouta 1994: 12). Through their performance, a parody of the founding of Santiago by Pedro de Valdivia in February 1541, the Mares expressed their demand for the inclusion of sexual minorities at the University of Chile. Having Berenguer, Jerez and Prado as their guides, on foot, highlighted the importance of feminist activists as allies in the queer rights movement in Chile.

Originally trained as a philosopher, Nadia Prado received her PhD in Chilean literature from the University of Chile in 2020. Her first poetry collection, *Simples placeres* (Editorial Cuarto Propio, 1992), was conceived after Prado won a scholarship to the Pablo Neruda Foundation poetry workshop in 1991—the same workshop that supported Alejandra del Río a few years later when she wrote *Escrito en braille* (1999). *Simples placeres* expresses a sense of discomfort with the world surrounding the speaker and her city. The book opens with an awakening:

> Desperté
> y todo estaba allí
> (la realidad completa)
> No fue más que tomarla o
>
> desaparecer
> (Prado 1992: 13)
>
> I awoke
> and everything was there
> (all of reality)
> It was just a matter of taking it or
>
> disappearing

This poem is reminiscent of Guatemalan writer Augusto Monterroso's famous micro-story 'El dinosaurio' (The Dinosaur, 1959)—'Cuando despertó, el dinosaurio todavía estaba allí' (When he awoke, the dinosaur was still there). Yet, in Prado's case, 'all of reality', not the dinosaur, appears before her when she opens her eyes. This excerpt also echoes the anti-dedication at the beginning of Elvira Hernández's *La bandera de Chile*—'she surrenders to whomever knows how to take her'. In Hernández's case, what is taken is the flag; Prado's poetry goes deeper, and the speaker faces two choices: 'taking' or embracing reality, or disappearing from it. As *Simples placeres* goes on, the speaker either criticises the world around her, stays silent on certain issues, or fades away. In this volume, the city depicted is the Argentinian capital, Buenos Aires. Prado's poetry, in

this sense, can be understood in a broader Latin American context. Her work also contributes a more international, global critique, centred on the insidiousness of advertising, consumerism and US cultural domination through Hollywood.

In her early works, however, Prado conceals this criticism of society within her lines. Her depiction of a barren Buenos Aires seems to be the prelude to Del Río's and Arrate's post-apocalyptic cities:

> Nunca hubo destino aquí
> nunca hubo protección para nadie
> no fui el único afectado
>
> Ojos de neón secos y llenos de afiches
> (Prado 1992: 16)
>
> This was never a destination
> there was never protection for anybody
> I wasn't the only one affected
>
> Dry neon eyes full of posters

Pradian verse contains recurring images of neon lights and urban landscapes saturated with advertising, elements that also recall a major novel from dictatorship times—Diamela Eltit's seminal work *Lumpérica* (E. Luminata, 1983). In this book, society's rejects circle a tower that shines an enormous light and are 'purified' by it. The great light means everything to their existence. Prado also uses dazzling lights, but to disorient her speaker. These lines depict a city stuck in time, an unprotected non-place ruled by advertising and consumerism, a dystopian land.

In this context, the title *Simples placeres* is certainly ironic. Only anaesthesia can offer enjoyment:

> Nos arrojaron muy niños acá […] sobre otros niños
> había droga en los caminos para ensimismarse
> (Prado 1992: 17)
>
> They threw us out here when we were just kids […] on top of other kids
> there were drugs on the paths for losing yourself

These lines suggest that the speaker belongs to a generation of symbolic orphans, medicated or drugged to avoid the world around them. Their experience can be compared to the cave-dwellers in Del Río's *Escrito en braille*, which once again highlights the 1990s as a

decade of silence, a refusal to acknowledge the atrocities committed during the dictatorship.

Prado's speaker keeps complaining about the barrenness of her city:

> Me muero..... En este Far West
> ..... no hay cantina
> (Prado 1992: 21)
>
> I'm dying..... In this Far West
> ..... there's no saloon

The extended ellipses express silence and emptiness; Prado's 'Far West' is an image borrowed from the United States, an incomplete Western movie. In those films, there is always a saloon, even in the middle of the desert, but Prado's city does not have that. At the same time, referring to the Far West also emphasises how far Buenos Aires is, at the edge of the continent, with nowhere else to go. Prado continues to weave US symbols into her poetry in ©*Copyright*, where she develops a criticism of US neoimperialism in Latin America. The poem 'América®' is the greatest example of this in the entire book.[1]

Prado's second book, *Carnal* (Editorial Cuarto Propio, 1998), exemplifies post-dictatorship writing in that it explores the difficulties of telling one's country's history and establishes the body as a surface on which patriarchal signs can be subverted. Although less urban than *Simples placeres*, its title suggests that it will be more strongly linked to sexual expression. *Carnal* is dedicated to poet Malú Urriola, who was Prado's partner at that time and whose work, *Bracea* (Butterfly Stroke, 2007), will be studied in the next chapter.

Carnal centres on the role of writing and how people become part of a macro writing process of their own history. For Prado's speaker this is significant: 'La historia me fragmentó. Me fecundó. Me ha originado una y otra vez. Me he sentado en territorios bestiales para mantener conversaciones lacerantes' (History fragmented me. It impregnated me. It has conceived me again and again. I have sat on brutal lands to keep up torturous conversations; Prado 1998: 18). Prado has moved into writing short prose

[1] I published an article on this poem and Prado's decolonial stance for the journal *Cultural Dynamics* in 2022: B. Fernández-Melleda, 'Neoliberalism and Neocolonialism in Nadia Prado's @*Copyright* (2003): Toward a Decolonial Reading', *Cultural Dynamics* 34.3, pp. 195–212. https://doi.org/10.1177/09213740221103168.

poems, narrative fragments that connect to the fragmentation of her speaker. Traditional verse would no longer be sufficient to express this internal brokenness. History fragments its subject because it is a narrative in construction, an aspect that characterised 1990s Chile. It has also impregnated the speaker and has caused her to be reborn 'again and again', which fragments her further. The struggle in collective memory makes writing history impossible; Chilean society, in post-dictatorship times, showed deep fragmentation, social division and pain, referenced in the 'torturous conversations'. The speaker seeks to escape from the destruction of the old order and to construct new meanings.

Prado's works elucidate a clear difference between the poetry published in the 1990s and examples from the previous decade, especially when considering the works of Carmen Berenguer and Elvira Hernández. 1990s poetry gathers more strength in the way it communicates discontent, and its entrapped speakers express their subjectivity to overcome their situation. This progress is felt in Alejandra del Río's *Escrito en braille* as her speaker urges her readers to speak out and to ultimately leave the cave. When sexuality defeats individualism in Marina Arrate's *Uranio*, we also find instructions on how to build community and collectivity. *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.
>
> (Prado 1998: 26)

> Ask the body not to subordinate itself, to be more carnal than ever, not to fear.
> Make it stop its mouth, full of blood and ready to devour more.
> Stop the bite. Wait for the suffering.

The emphasis on the flesh brings the poetry into a religious realm. The speaker appeals to the reader to be insubordinate, to break the rules that suppress desire, centred here on a woman's body. Prado imagines a body that performs forbidden acts that reject Catholic propriety. The New Testament warns against this type of behaviour, labelling the flesh as a territory that exists outside of God and all that is holy: 'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is

of the world' (1 John 2:16). In this sense, Prado mediates between a woman's body and her mind, subverting both God and the patriarchy by encouraging her to free herself and fearlessly embrace her flesh and its desires. Once empowered, the woman can control her body, which is why the speaker urges her to stop her animalistic instinct to devour more flesh and blood. This cannibalism can also be read as neoliberalism, the result of a competitive ideology—a dog-eat-dog world where endless consumerism generates hunger for more, leading to antagonism and further social alienation.

In 2002, Prado received a Fondart scholarship to perform an artistic intervention in Santiago. Alongside Malú Urriola, Prado co-created and organised *Poesía es +: intervención urbana y lectura de poesía sobre globos aerostáticos* (Poetry = more: urban intervention and reading poetry on hot-air balloons). The poets recited poetry through a megaphone while printed poems were thrown from a hot-air balloon. They performed this action in key places, including former torture centres, to pay homage to the victims of Pinochet's regime. A performance in the sky is reminiscent of Raúl Zurita's 1982 poetic act over New York City, entitled *Escritos en el cielo* (Writings in the Sky). One of the ideas behind Prado and Urriola's project was to use a neoliberal mechanism, a bid for funding, to give out poetry for free, thus creating a symbolic fracture in Chile's neoliberal system. Not only is poetry deemed non-profitable by the publishing industry but using the sky for a publicly funded poetic performance (instead of advertising) is certainly an act of resistance.

In 2003, a year after *Poesía es +*, Prado published her third poetry book, ©*Copyright*, with LOM Ediciones, just like Del Río and Arrate before her. ©*Copyright* is dedicated to two women: Prado's mother Irma Campos and novelist Diamela Eltit, Prado's literary mother figure. I will consider ©*Copyright* a long, heterogeneous poetic work. That is, a single poem broken into many sections that vary between verse and prose and sometimes only contain a single couplet, or a short fragment. Some pages contain lines dedicated to specific people such as philosophers René Baeza, Guadalupe Santa Cruz and Elizabeth Collingwood-Selby, or poets Stella Díaz Varín and Elvira Hernández.

Prado continues the motif of the post-apocalyptic city explored by Alejandra del Río and Marina Arrate in previous chapters of this volume. The cause of ©*Copyright*'s apocalypse is never revealed, but its world is full of neon lights, which, again, are a central element in Pradian writing and in dialogue with Diamela Eltit's work. Through

lucid wordplay, ©*Copyright* centres on 'el mercado y la mercancía, la globalización, la hipermodernidad, la ciudad inhabitable en tanto espacio de espectáculo y deshumanización' (the market and merchandise, globalisation, hypermodernity and the city, uninhabitable among such spectacle and dehumanisation; Marchant 2013: 10). The poem posits that despite its limitations, language is all there is, and ©*Copyright* uses its language to engage in a wider conversation with previous literary works and explore the woman's body in a way that liberates the female experience from patriarchal shackles. Prado's work overcomes many obstacles by using the same structures that largely oppress women, exposing and opposing them explicitly in her poetry.

The study of ©*Copyright* will follow two main themes: first, 'Poetic Chileanness', to study the connections between Prado and Gabriela Mistral, Gonzalo Millán and Elvira Hernández; and second, 'A Non-Phallic Sexuality', to explore overcoming the patriarchy and offer a glimpse into non-transactional relationships that transcend the neoliberal framework.

Poetic Chileanness

©*Copyright* addresses Chile in both direct and indirect ways. Even though there is a wider Latin Americanist intent, which I studied and published in 2022, we must analyse the specific references to Chile in the context of an anti-neoliberal reading of this work. The Chilean political context appears for one of the first times in the following lines, when the speaker refers to herself as

> Un objeto para la devoción desarrollada, un objeto latinoamericano como un fruto jugoso que cambió su acidez por un poco de aspartame. Un poema como oferta y demanda, un poema canto presidencial, un poema alegoría de un lejano y angosto país. 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 2003: 19)

> An object for developed devotion, a Latin American object like a juicy fruit that changed its acidity for a bit of aspartame. A supply and demand poem, a presidential theme song poem, a poem like an allegory of a distant, narrow country. I thrash around in everyone, I bite the hand that feeds me and say I was left hungry. I was a rebel

> when I hid from the dictatorship striking with wine bottles the girls
> who didn't want to kiss me. The leaves fall.

This poetic fragment provides evidence of a Chilean setting through terms such as 'distant, narrow country', 'the dictatorship' and 'golpeando' ('striking', but also a play on 'golpe de estado', coup d'état). Regarding the 'narrow country', this expression takes readers to the earliest Chilean epic, *The Araucaniad* (1569), by Spaniard Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga. When Ercilla describes Chile, he writes about 'un espacio del cual no sabe prácticamente nada, ya que el poeta es uno de los primeros autores en escribir su historia' (a space about which practically nothing is known, since the poet is one of the first authors to write its history; Dichy-Malherme 2012: 87). In Ercilla's text Chile is defined by its narrowness and its length. 'Es Chile norte sur de gran longura […] / tendrá de leste a oeste de angostura / cien millas, por lo más ancho tomado' (North to South, her long extension […] / From the West to East her slimness / By a hundred miles encompassed;[2] Ercilla 1968: I, 7). At the same time, Ercilla being the author of the first Chilean poem implies that Chile was somehow invented by a Spaniard, a claim that holds its own colonial weight. Later, Chilean historian Diego Barros Arana, in his *Historia general de Chile* (General History of Chile, 1884), directly refers to Chile as 'larga y angosta faja de territorio que en la parte sur de América meridional se extiende al occidente de la cordillera de los Andes' (a long and narrow strip of land in the southern part of South America that extends to the western side of the Andean mountain range; Barros Arana 2000: 33).

The reference to the dictatorship in the excerpt from Prado brings the reading to a Chilean contemporary context. There is a celebration of rebellion against the regime, as well as a direct reference to lesbianism: 'I hid from the dictatorship striking […] the girls who didn't want to kiss me'. The word 'golpeando' (striking) recalls not only the coup, but also the violence and force of the regime. Times had certainly changed; earlier poetry could never make such an explicit reference to the dictatorship and the resistance. The democratic transition had provided enough space for artists to feel safe enough to condemn the recent past and express frustration with their present.

[2] Translated by Paul Thomas Manchester and Charles Maxwell Lancaster, 'The Araucaniad', *World Affairs* 104.3 (1941), pp. 180–2. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20663624.

Furthermore, this excerpt communicates a strong sense of dissatisfaction with how the arts have become marketable products and have fallen victim to the dynamics of supply and demand. Prado's speaker acknowledges that the issue is larger than Chile with 'developed devotion', which refers to developed countries consuming 'authentic' Latin American products. In this sense, ©*Copyright* uses 'ese poder de singularidad de la literatura para garantizar su supervivencia en un ritmo alterno de producción capitalista' (the singular power of literature to guarantee its survival in an alternative rhythm of capitalist production; Molina 2014: 221), which also allows it to set up a counter-hegemonic discourse that denounces that very system. The commodification of most things, including artistic work, is virtually impossible to stop or counteract, but literary discourse allows poets to resist it, given that poetry, while not necessarily outside the editorial market, is not generally profitable. Its own existence in the market is an anomaly.

Prado's speaker continues to share her discomfort with how she has become a product for the enjoyment of others:

> En el bar los parroquianos me llaman para que haga un divertimento y recite algunas cosas. Los dueños del local se acercan para tomarse fotos conmigo, con aquella ficción se regocija mi corazón latino. (Prado 2003: 17)
>
> In the bar the patrons call on me to entertain them and recite a few things. The owners of the place come up to take pictures with me, at that little lie my Latin heart rejoices.

The speaker recites her work at a bar; poetry reading has become just another show. The idea of being famous fills her with hope, a reference to neoliberal society where success is measured in popularity and sales. The speaker knows this is a 'little lie', however. That small moment of attention is not the same as being famous. In the same section, the speaker continues: 'alguien me invita uno, dos, varios whiskys, pienso recordando a mi madre: soy famosa' (someone bought me one, two, a few whiskys, I think remembering my mother: I'm famous; Prado 2003: 17). The implied question: does poetry exist to make a poet famous, or does it have value of its own?

Another reference to post-dictatorship Chile:

> Un gas inerte invade la ciudad,
> me ahoga y ensucia […]

La historia vuelve, rebobinando imágenes que tu yo no recuerda.
Ésta nunca será una gran ciudad, nadie la habita.
Tampoco será un gran país, nadie le cree.
(Prado 2003: 22)

An inert gas invades the city
it chokes and dirties me […]
History returns, rewinding images that your I doesn't remember.
This will never be a great city, no one lives in it.
It won't be a great country either, no one believes in it.

The polluted city marks a clear reference to Santiago, infamous for its poor air quality. The excerpt also echoes Gonzalo Millán's groundbreaking 1979 poem *La ciudad* (The City):

Nos falta el aire […]
La dictadura asfixia
La dictadura ahoga
(Millán 2016: 96)

We're out of air […]
The dictatorship asphyxiates
The dictatorship suffocates

The dialogue between Millán's and Prado's works begins with a common experience, the lack of air and difficulty breathing. Prado's speaker says that the gas invading the city 'chokes and dirties' her. Elvira Hernández joins in the description of the city's pollution in *Santiago Rabia* (Santiago Rage, 2016): 'tanta cerrazón me digo tanto esmog tanto solvente tanta lacrimógena' (so much pea soup I say so much smog so many solvents so much tear gas; Hernández 2016: 25). Hernández's poetry links the pollution to other elements that characterise life in the Chilean capital, such as the tear gas deployed by the police against protesters. In Gonzalo Millán's poem, lack of air also means lack of freedom; Millán composed this poem while in exile in Canada. In section 62 of *La ciudad*, he enumerates the different uses of air. For example, 'el aire permite la combustión' (air allows combustion) while 'el aire es indispensable para la vida' (air is indispensable for life), but also 'el aire convierte el vino en vinagre' (air turns wine into vinegar). For Millán, exposure to air has different effects, depending on what it touches. His poem expresses that the regime 'asphyxiates' and 'suffocates'; the dictatorship is deadly. Millán was able to criticise the dictatorship explicitly because, in exile, he would not be persecuted for expressing dissent and opposition to Pinochet.

While Prado's post-dictatorship speaker keeps the meaning of air pollution more literal, the text expresses criticism of her own times. The filthy air surrounding the speaker brings back difficult memories, indicating that the speaker still struggles with recollections of the dictatorship. 'Images that your I doesn't remember' can be understood as the speaker splitting herself in two, or she might be addressing her reader. The verb 'rebobinar' (rewind)—which refers specifically to video cassettes, situating the poem in the previous century—portrays history as a film that can be rewound. This nostalgia can also be understood in the context of philosopher Fredric Jameson's comments on society: '[we] 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 1991: 25). Here, Prado's speaker asserts that both city and country are built on lies, implying a clear questioning of history and how it is told. The emptiness of the city, as 'no one lives in it', is complemented by the speaker's distrust in her own country, as 'no one believes in it'. The idea that a country has lost its own credibility was previously explored in Elvira Hernández's *La bandera de Chile* (1981), especially with the line 'La bandera de Chile es extranjera en su propio país' (The Chilean flag is a foreigner in her own country; Hernández 1991: 20). Hernández's poem suggests the whole country has been taken hostage and that not only the flag but the citizens themselves would not feel at home in Chile during the Pinochet era.

Prado creates an autumnal depiction of Chile, in which her speaker uses the season's characteristics to further criticise her country:

> 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. (Prado 2003: 33)
>
> I go quiet to listen to the wind that strikes the waves that strike my head that watches the mountain. […] Everything has stopped, the leaves fall and halfway down they seem to think about whether to keep falling. The air chokes me the sun hides I can't look at it. The sea is vast to watch the sea is vast. I listen to talk to myself when the

wind, the leaves, the ground seem to go quiet. Chile is light, dark, small, small and dark, light is small, dark is immense.

Chile means a lie.

This excerpt also contains elements which are indicative of a Chilean setting: 'mountain' refers to the Andes, and 'the sea' to the Pacific Ocean. Both elements, to the east and west, respectively, isolate the country from its neighbours and other continents. Gabriela Mistral praises both the mountains and the ocean in her posthumously published *Poema de Chile* (Poem of Chile, 1967). The mountains are celebrated in her 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 1967: 123–4)

It's the White Guardian
who gives fear and valour! […]
And now because of you
I'll always be seeing myself
the same as you, and to warp
banks and stories with her

The everlasting presence of the Great Mother, the Andes range, is of utmost importance for Mistral and her attempt to poetically describe what Chile is like. According to the Nobel Prize winner in a declaration from April 1929, 'nuestra obligación primogénita de escritores es entregar a los extraños el paisaje nativo' (our firstborn obligation as writers is to give our native landscape to strangers; Retamal 2021). *Poema de Chile* fulfilled Mistral's desire to disseminate her country's natural and cultural landscape, with the cordillera in a prominent position.

As part of the same poem, Mistral also writes of the sea:

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 1967: 124)

Although we want the Route
to be varied, ardent and inconstant
and at the sea we try to hear
the hard cry and the dirge
it always happens that we turn
our faces back to the true Mother.

As *Poema de Chile* depicts a visit to Chile from north to south, it is marked by the presence of the mountains and the sea, the most distinctive elements of the country, together with its length. Prado's text also recognises these elements in the lines quoted above, and her poetry particularly cherishes the ocean in 'the sea is vast to watch the sea is vast'. The vastness of the sea displays its inscrutable power—and this leads us to a Nerudian setting. About his house on Isla Negra, which directly faces the ocean, the poet wrote in his collection *Una casa en la arena* (1966) a poem entitled 'El mar' that expresses the vastness of the ocean: 'El Océano Pacífico se salía del mapa. No había dónde ponerlo. Era tan grande, desordenado y azul que no cabía en ninguna parte. Por eso lo dejaron frente a mi ventana' (The Pacific Ocean went off the map. There wasn't anywhere to put it. It was so big, messy and blue that it didn't fit anywhere. That's why they left it outside my window; Neruda 2021). The sea is broad and invincible, and its waves strike Prado's speaker while she looks at the mountain range.

'Everything has stopped, the leaves fall' situates the poetry in autumn, recalling Gonzalo Millán's seventh section of *La ciudad*:

Otoña en la ciudad.
Las hojas enrojecen. […]
Las hojas caen. […]
El tirano no cae.
(Millán 2016: 20)

Autumn she's in the city.
The leaves redden. […]
The leaves fall. […]
The tyrant does not fall.

Even though the poetry never addresses General Pinochet directly, Millán refers to him as 'the tyrant'. This excerpt suggests that even though the passing of time is evident, as the seasons change and leaves turn red and eventually fall, the tyrant is still in power. While the leaves fall, the tyrant does not.

The autumnal setting in Prado's poem is filled with feelings of suffocation and dismay. The personified leaves think for themselves, wondering if falling is necessary, if the passing of time has any true purpose. Reality seems static and unchangeable. At the same time, the speaker feels the effects of the smog: 'The air chokes me the sun hides I can't look at it.' The lack of punctuation communicates chaos, fusing the images in such a way that neither speaker nor reader is able to see the sun. Despite this pollution, the sea is always visible. Then, everything is silence, as 'the wind, the leaves, the ground seem to go quiet' in a line that respects the rules of punctuation to emphasise the clarity of this silence.

The speaker goes on to describe her homeland: 'Chile is light, dark, small, small and dark, light is small, dark is immense', in a repetitive, zigzagging list that highlights the difficulties in understanding Chile. The darkness suggests an underlying, hidden truth, 'immense' next to the 'small' light and the 'small' country. By the end of these lines, Prado's speaker concludes that 'Chile means a lie'; the little that the light illuminates is not true.

The country depicted in ©*Copyright* has many dark secrets, and facing them is harmful. Prado's poetry scrutinises the term 'nationhood':

> 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 2003: 44)

> There dawned the lovely days for waiting for the cities to dawn.
> I closed my eyes, but reality lashed me from the sides,
> oblivion is great and memory undesirable.
> I've lost my name in a strange country,
> I spell out each day among the crowds to see if I find the one
> that's me,
> I've lost my name and my watery letters

This excerpt depicts contrasting images between beautiful days about to dawn and closing one's eyes as a traumatic experience that brings back an unbearable reality. This reinforces the idea that 'seeing' does not necessarily mean facing the issues of the present, or living in the real world, in a clear link to my analysis of

Del Río's *Escrito en braille* in Chapter 3. On the contrary, Prado's work suggests that subjects live in a lie, in a fake reality ruled by an orchestrated forgetting of the recent past, where memory is not wanted. Critic Nelly Richard has studied artistic expression concerning memory or its lack thereof 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' (art and literature know how to explore holes in meaning, that is to say, everything that the official record, institutional memory or the mythical past tend to suppress […] so as not to damage their illusions of control and domination; Richard 2001: 182). In other words, a lack of memory implies a pre-established agenda, and that is what Prado's work wishes to expose. ©*Copyright* shows a complete understanding of the dynamics of forgetting in Chile, which have been designed to create a void and convince its citizens to bury their violent past so as to move forward. The greatest interruption of this agenda was the opening of the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in 2010, seven years after the publication of ©*Copyright*.

Following Richard's argument, ©*Copyright* forms part of a cohort of works that explore these 'holes in meaning', those in-between spaces that institutional memory does not (wish to) access. Prado's speaker finds herself in a strange country, nameless and unable to recognise herself. She is a nobody, a Jane Doe just like the thousands of disappeared. This anonymity could also be interpreted as a crisis of belonging and a lack of attachment to her country, symptoms of a social order built on lies.

Once Prado's speaker confronts her world as one built on deceit, she realises that everything around her is subject to commodification and part of a global order that responds to the demands of the developed world. One may either fight the battle and resist both neocolonialism and neoliberalism, or surrender and abide by these systems. ©*Copyright* provides material for the resistance:

> Estaba ciega y desnuda, primitivizada bajo la nueva elite colonial centinelas de mi propia raza que forjaba mitos e historias.
>
> Estandartes modernos para la tortura, puñales eléctricos para mi humanidad indígena depositada en un mástil frío con sangre anterior.
>
> (Prado 2003: 73)

> I was blind and naked, primitivised under the new colonial elite, sentinels of my own race that used to forge myths and stories.
>
> Modern banners for torture, electric gashes for my indigenous humanity deposited on a flagstaff, cold with old blood.

These lines on page 73 can be read in dialogue with Gonzalo Millán's *La ciudad* once more, as his poem is divided into 73 parts. The number 73 will always be meaningful in a Chilean context as the year the dictatorship began; it is a totem of Chileanness that harkens back to a specific moment of horror. Choosing to put these lines of resistance on that particular page implies a direct challenge to that chapter of Chilean history.

Page 73 in ©*Copyright* can have a contextualised reading that centres on the Chilean dictatorship, especially during those years when neoliberal economic reform was being imposed. The excerpt opens with the speaker finding herself both blind and naked, as if in a primitive state, and controlled by a new elite. This new elite is not foreign, which is why the colonial reading is not appropriate here. The dominating force is the Chilean elite—'sentinels of [her] own race', this small group of Chileans exerted total domination over the rest of the population and wished to change history, replacing the old colonial, Eurocentric system for a Chile-centric one in which they would hold all the cards. Like the ones who 'used to forge myths and stories', this elite rewrote a Chilean Genesis, establishing a new order that still rules the country today. Those who were favoured by the regime still control the way history is written or understood; they have always advocated for forgetting the atrocities of the past because they are direct beneficiaries of these atrocities. There is a sense of mercilessness in this elite, as they have not yet confessed details of the evil deeds they committed through the military in the name of 'progress'.

Certainly, the idea of the banner echoes Elvira Hernández's *La bandera de Chile*, whose groundbreaking style explored the flag's myriad meanings. 'Estandartes' (banners) is also a word featured in the anthem of the Chilean army, 'Los viejos estandartes' (The Old Banners, 1881). Prado's use of 'estandartes' 'for torture' points to the military as the ones responsible for the human rights violations during the dictatorship.

Prado describes this torture explicitly: 'electric gashes for my indigenous humanity deposited on a flagstaff, cold with old blood'. In this line she mixes two distinct processes of colonisation, two epistemological crises—the rise of the post-dictatorship economic

elite and the Spanish conquest. Prado references the colonial practice of impaling and the death of Mapuche leader Caupolicán, who was killed by impalement in 1558. As she declares herself to be indigenous, the speaker's ancestors, too, would have been affected by the Spanish conquest; perhaps their blood is now cold on the flagstaff. The Chilean elite, by contrast, is extremely Eurocentric and celebrates whiteness.

Not only does Prado's text resist the elite through her speaker's indigenous identity, but she also uses her sexuality to challenge the pillars of Chilean tradition: the patriarchy and the Catholic Church.

A Non-Phallic Sexuality

The richness of the verse is such that ©*Copyright* not only criticises Chile's recent history, but also suggests ways to move forward by highlighting and subverting traditional signs. The poem explores sexual pleasure without the phallus and portrays lesbian sexuality, in contrast to the heterosexual couple depicted by Marina Arrate in *Uranio* (1999). Detaching sexuality from a masculine figure allows women to explore their own bodies and selves outside the traditional, heteronormative framework.

In Prado's poem, readers encounter sexuality without the phallus first through masturbation, an intimate moment that nevertheless undermines historical phallic domination.

> 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 2003: 13)

> It's an ordinary day
> only that my body and I love each other
> it's a day of love
> I'm alone with myself
> I think trapped in this hand that turns tediously.

The speaker begins an internal journey that leads her to know her own body. This erotic image challenges the idea that sexual pleasure requires a phallic presence, or that women reach orgasm through penetration alone. This sexual autonomy shows a subversive attitude

to what 'Luce Irigaray maintains [is] the very construct of an autonomous subject[:] a masculine cultural prerogative from which women have been excluded' (Butler 1993: 326). Here, Prado's speaker is her own 'autonomous subject', a discursive gesture that destabilises the traditional, male-centred narrative.

This scene of explicit masturbation draws a line between a male, phallogocentric world and a female, phallic-free world. The latter liberates the female experience from the marginality normally ascribed to the lives, writing and sexuality of women. When the speaker in the poem decides to act, however, she encounters a limitation within herself, as she needs to fight a whole culture that has normalised her subordination in the world:

> A ratos alguien viene
> no le dejo entrar
> si entra me mata
> si entra no le hablo más a mí
> (Prado 2003: 13)

> Sometimes someone comes
> I don't let them enter
> if they enter they'll kill me
> if they enter I won't talk to themyself anymore

These lines depict a disarticulation of the female psyche—divided into two opposing selves, and one of them wants to annihilate the other. This poetic gesture is a clear reference to Gabriela Mistral's 'La otra', already studied in this volume in relation to Del Río's *Escrito en braille*; please see page 78.

While one of the selves controls the body and both symbolically and concretely celebrates masturbation and its pleasures, the other seems to discipline her actions. The judgemental, traditional self punishes her, as if from the perspective of a masculine figure, as if forcefully 'entering' her. This part of herself comes from the patriarchy, in which women judging each other is also normalised. This self shows little agency, having been subsumed by the many traditional roles imposed on women. The autonomous self that relishes pleasure, on the other hand, does not allow 'him' access to her new reality. The speaker expels her patriarchal self in a symbolic move that leaves space for autonomous sexuality and possibilities outside the patriarchal norm. She warns that if her socially constructed self returns to her, it will mean the end of this new, empowered woman. Her freer self must resist the advances of her capricious, traditional

self, so as not to be pushed back into her traditional role within the phallogocentric ideal. The speaker's duality is expressed particularly in the last line 'si entra no le hablo más a mí' (if they enter I won't talk to themyself anymore), which presents a challenge in translating into English. 'Le' is an indirect object pronoun that refers to another person—'to him', 'to her', 'to them'. However, the person being addressed is herself. This grammatical complexity confirms and highlights the speaker's psychic partition.

Having resisted her own patriarchal side in her solitary sexual awakening, the speaker is ready to embark on another level of non-phallic sexuality—lesbianism. Almost at the end of the poem, Prado's speaker devotes a few erotic lines to Chilean philosopher Elizabeth Collingwood-Selby:

> 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 2003: 88)

> I made for the future a circle of stones around your body,
> which were the places we'd go/go through/travel over.
> Your eyes shone and my mouth filled with shame.

The intimate relationship between the speaker and the 'you', Collingwood-Selby, is expressed in their reactions. While the imagined Collingwood-Selby's eyes shine, providing a reflection of the speaker's image, the speaker cannot find the words to respond to her gift of attention and love. The stone circle around the body presumes a ritualistic practice akin to a witch coven that establishes their sexual relationship in a newly imagined realm. Collingwood-Selby's body becomes a world, a land that is to be known and discovered, in a turn that challenges traditional heterosexuality and brings the erotic to a lesbian couple. Confronted with the love of a woman, the speaker's 'mouth filled with shame', referencing the feelings of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after realising they were naked. Here, however, it is not nudity that shames Prado's speaker. Once she and her partner find themselves naked, her shame is seen in a blush, a tender gesture that expresses desire. There is a purity in the love described that challenges the traditional Catholic narratives that condemn homosexuality. In the Bible, in the New Testament, there is a clear condemnation of lesbianism as a relationship that goes against God's mandates: 'for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature' (Romans 1:26). In this

context, Prado's writing not only challenges the Christian judgement on homosexuality, but also elevates lesbian love as something pure and sensual, by no means an abhorrent practice.

Prado embarks on a foundational rewriting of traditionally accepted sexuality as an expression of love between two women. Patriarchy is pushed away as sexuality becomes a liberating experience. Rather than presenting a simple opposition to heterosexuality, Prado establishes a completely different sexual dimension, and this is her victory. The writing relies on the erotic power of language:

> 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.
>
> (Prado 2003: 88)

> I opened my hands and the words that fell from you wrote something in me that I keep. […] my restless and unruly heart that inside writes the beating of those words that you write me when yours sticks to my chest, words unite us and separate us, because writing is the greatest device.

The transition between grammatical tenses creates a fluid movement from past to present, ending up at an ultimate truth. The first lines establish a past experience that was shared with the speaker's lover, yet a few lines later the poem shifts to the present tense—'inside writes the beating of those words'—personifying the organ of romantic love. The truth is expressed at the end of the paragraph: 'writing is the greatest device'. Writing is a noble scheme that becomes even bigger than what the lovers feel for each other. As these lines are towards the end of the poem, the reader can infer that they express Prado's view of writing, and of poetry specifically. By writing, one may say what others do not and create space for expression that would otherwise be neglected or forgotten.

In an interesting turn, this section closes with three lines that break with the amorous atmosphere that precedes them:

> 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 2003: 88)

I like Coca-Cola too, Clarice.
Coca-Cola isn't Sveglia, Shell is.

This is a poem condemned to ruin.

After a passage of passionate, elevated poetic language, the poem disrupts its own atmosphere by mentioning famous brands. After the intimacy of a sexual encounter, we find a reference to Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, to Coca-Cola and Shell. The latter are two of the world's biggest corporations, responsible for obesity (Coca-Cola) and pollution (Shell), two of the evils of this last century. These corporations burst into the poetry and ruin an otherwise sublime moment.

The last line, 'This is a poem condemned to ruin', is the nail in the coffin. The poem collapses by showing two incompatible worlds, that of love and companionship versus the free-market, publicity-saturated context in which this intimate space exists. It can be argued that this poem is in dialogue with Arrate's *Uranio*, especially its third section, which offers an escape from neoliberal reality; please see page 118. In Prado's poem this hope is destroyed; escape is but an illusion. Neon lights and big corporations are not easily dismantled. Coca-Cola and Shell may seem randomly chosen, but the heightened contrast between private love and major US brands is far from arbitrary. In the end, Prado highlights the ferocity and reach of the consumer world, and how it undermines genuine human interaction.

©*Copyright* closes with a paradox:

Abrí la puerta y no había nadie.

Éste es un verso. El final del libro. El final del inicio.

América estuvo gobernada antes de su descubrimiento.
(Prado 2003: 98)

I opened the door and there was no one.

This is a verse. The end of the book. The end of the beginning.

America was governed before its discovery.

The image of the speaker opening the door to an empty space symbolises disappointment, disillusion and a lack of hope. The metapoetic tone of the second line poses a further enigma; this is the end of the book, but also the end of the beginning. The reader is left with the anticipation of what comes next and what the book's end means; the beginning is over, the future uncertain.

Any possible ideas of freedom are expelled by the closing line: 'America was governed before its discovery'. The notion that the continent was already governed challenges the myth of European discovery. Prado closes her poem denouncing the conquest and erasure of the continent's original inhabitants and social order. The conquerors copyright America and pass down the patent to the generations of powerful people who follow them.

The beauty of ©*Copyright* lies, in part, in its dialogue with the Chilean poetic tradition. A final echo: Pablo Neruda, in his poem 'Amor América' (Love of America), which opens *Canto general* (1950), addresses America before its European naming:

> 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
> (Neruda 1992: 6)

> My earth without a name, without America,
> equinoctial stamen, purple spear,
> your aroma winds up my roots
> into the chalice I nursed, into the finest
> word still not yet born from my mouth

Prado's ©*Copyright* is a complex poetic proposal that ultimately sets frontiers of resistance. The introduction of a mixed-race or indigenous speaker reminds us of the wandering of the poet and the native in Mistral's *Poema de Chile*. Yet, Prado's depiction of her country is centred on its contemporary reality, despite constant criticism of colonial and neocolonial structures within the work. ©*Copyright* has the reader confronting the Chilean economic elite, who benefited from Pinochet's regime through both neoliberal reform and the politics of forgetting in post-dictatorship Chile.

The marginal existence of poetry within the profit-driven publishing world allows it to develop a strong discourse that can symbolically destabilise neoliberal rule from within. Nadia Prado deserves to be considered one of the greatest poets of this era; her writing is powerful and creates new worlds for female expression, sexuality and agency that merit further exploration, be it by the woman writer, the woman critic or the woman reader.

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Chapter 6

Bracea (2007) by Malú Urriola

Gabriela Mistral's poem 'Valle de Elqui' (Elqui Valley), part of her famous, posthumously published collection *Poema de Chile* (Poem of Chile, 1967), charts the poet's return to her place of origin, where she symbolically goes to live out her old age. Mistral passed away in New York City in 1957. 'Valle de Elqui' 'constituye el eje de las reflexiones que Mistral formuló durante toda su vida literaria y en particular en su vejez, en el que se hace notoria la coincidencia entre el sujeto textual y el sujeto biográfico' (forms the core of the reflections that Mistral formulated throughout her entire literary life and particularly in her old age, in which there is an evident correlation between the speaker and the poet; Muñoz Iturra 2006: 56). Mistral's work found an echo forty years later in a poetry book by María de la Luz Urriola González, also known as Malú Urriola. The closeness between Mistral's and Urriola's works is easily visible in the latter's 2007 collection, entitled *Bracea* (Butterfly Stroke), published by LOM Ediciones.

Bracea is Urriola's fifth published poetry book and forms part of a trilogy that began in 2005 with *Nada* (Swim/Nothing) and culminated in 2022 with an anthology published by the Pablo Neruda Foundation that included *Vuela* (Fly), for which Urriola received a Guggenheim scholarship in 2009. Urriola also had a career as a successful screenwriter for such Chilean television series as *Los Venegas* (1994–2008) and *El reemplazante* (2014) among others, all broadcast by Chilean National Television. Born in 1967, Urriola died of cancer in July 2023 in Santiago.

Urriola's first poetry book, *Piedras rodantes* (Rolling Stones, 1988, Editorial Cuarto Propio) appeals to a rock and roll world. The work makes direct reference to some of the genre's biggest stars, such as Mick Jagger, Joe Cocker, Bob Dylan (who wrote the song 'Like a Rolling Stone' in 1965) and Jimi Hendrix (who

famously played Dylan's song in the late 1960s). However, it would be reductionist to suppose that *Piedras rodantes* only refers to rock and roll. The collection also evokes a city from the perspective of the cats that live on its rooftops, reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939). Nevertheless, Eliot's and Urriola's books differ in character; while Eliot's text names different cats, their characters and activities, Urriola's felines remain anonymous and live in hiding. For Carmen Berenguer, this collection portrays 'unos gatos símbolos hacia una opereta nocturna de maullidos rodantes que circulan por cafés y bares nocturnos, por los des-centros del centro de la ciudad: su periferia. La temática transcurre en la ciudad' (some cats, symbols in a nocturnal operetta of rolling meows, that move through nighttime cafes and bars, through the de-centers of the city center: the outskirts. The subject matter takes place in the city; Urriola 1988: back cover flap). These cats inhabit the city but are at the same time marginal creatures; they exist beyond its economic buzz. In fact, they do not participate in it. The city acts as the background of women poets' work, while simultaneously excluding them. Marina Arrate and Alejandra del Río also depict a dead city (Arrate), whose ruins are testimony to its downfall (Del Río).

Piedras rodantes evokes life in the hidden corners of the city: 'Hey, malú, asume la vida de gato / que te toca saltar de techo en techo / […] los poetas se odian / toman juntos pero se odian' (Hey, malú, take on the life of a cat / since you have to jump from roof to roof / […] the poets hate each other / they drink together but they hate each other; Urriola 2017: 43). Here, the poem appeals to the poet herself, that she must understand her position in the world, her marginality. The theme of women's marginalisation in Chile's literary world is far-reaching in Urriola's work, and certainly in *Bracea*. Urriola addresses this issue through a direct reference to Gabriela Mistral's experience and 'how her work was much more valued internationally than in her native Chile. The most evident example of this is that Gabriela Mistral was awarded the Nobel Prize (1945) before the Chilean National Literature Prize (1951)' (Fernández-Melleda 2020: 11). With the dedication to Mistral, *Bracea* signals the poet as a figure to be reckoned with, also in terms of how difficult it was for her to be accepted and recognised in Chilean society and the literary scene of her time.

Piedras rodantes criticises the gossipy culture of the Chilean literary scene: 'los gatos son todos iguales / […] se hacen los que nada

les importa / pero no les creo / porque luego cahuinean en el zinc / yo los he visto' (the cats are all the same / […] they pretend not to care about anything / but I don't believe them / because then they gossip on the zinc / I've seen them; Urriola 2017: 20). In Urriola's poetic imagination, Chilean writers are stray cats that live on the rooftops and gossip about one another. The verb 'cahuinear' in Chilean slang means 'propagar comentarios malintencionados o infundios' (to spread spiteful or malicious remarks; ASALE n.d.), a synonym for gossip. The word has a negative connotation, expressing how toxic the environment is for Urriola. 'I've seen them' suggests that the speaker has witnessed this gossiping but has not taken part in it, implying a double marginalisation of Urriola as a poet. First, these cats inhabit a city that was not made for them; second, minorities and dissidents of any type were automatically marginalised by Pinochet's regime, still in power at the time *Piedras rodantes* was published. '[A] nadie le importa / el maldito lloriqueo / de una poeta de mierda' (no one cares / about the damned whimpering / of a shit poet; Urriola 2017: 40), laments the speaker, confirming her position within an authoritarian regime and a patriarchal society. Urriola's poetry takes a turn when it challenges these structures with a speaker who, according to Magda Sepúlveda, 'se apodera de los códigos atribuidos a los hombres: beber y el gusto por el rock' (takes over behaviours attributed to men: drinking and a taste for rock 'n' roll; Sepúlveda 2016: 178).

Urriola's second book, *Dame tu sucio amor* (Give Me Your Dirty Love, 1994, Surada Ediciones), tells a story of violent, unrequited love, anchored in the cityscape. She uses capitalisation to evoke shouting, as shown in the quotation from page 22 below. The poem expresses violence and the resulting trauma quite explicitly: 'Alguien dice amarme y me golpea y no me doy cuenta, / tal vez yo misma me golpeo' (Someone says they love me and hits me and I don't realise, / maybe I hit myself; Urriola 1994: 15). In a scene of domestic abuse, the speaker shifts the blame from the aggressor to herself, the victim. One can also read this violence symbolically, within the relationship between the poet and the language she uses. In this case, language would be the abuser, and the poet would blame herself for her wounds, as she provokes language through creative games. For Urriola 'la escritura para mí es como tener un amante, que yo tomo y retomo, pero al que estoy ligada extraoficialmente' (writing for me is like having a lover, who I take and take again, but who I'm tied to unofficially; Urriola and A.M.R. 1995: 14). *Dame tu sucio amor* explores this tense relationship.

The speaker's tone becomes exasperated when 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
>
> (Urriola 1994: 22)

> IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT, IT WASN'T
> there wasn't anything nearby to tie me up
> I'M NOT ALIVE, I'M NOT DEAD I STAY FAR AWAY FROM
> EVERYTHING

The only line in lower case explains that what has happened to the speaker is the result of her voluntary involvement with her lover. The speaker blames herself for what happened in an abusive relationship—'sucio amor', 'dirty' in part because it is a lesbian relationship. Within a traditional paradigm, the transgression of lesbianism expels the speaker from a strictly heteronormative society, like that of 1990s Chile. This idea of having no place in society leads Urriola to a deeper exploration of the female experience and what happens to women writers. Later in the book, she refers to herself as an outcast: 'la hija del vacío, bastarda, odiada por padre y madre' (daughter of the void, bastard, hated by father and mother; Urriola 1994: 79). Her loneliness is the loneliness of the woman poet—her art rejected, without a sense of belonging. Urriola continues to explore the latter theme in *Bracea*, which she sets in the Elqui Valley, far from reach.

Urriola's third poetry book, *Hija de perra* (Daughter of a Bitch, 1998, Editorial Cuarto Propio), expands her investigation of gendered limitations. The cover art is a photo of a famous transvestite, Evelyn, taken by Paz Errázuriz, from her collection *La manzana de Adán* (Adam's Apple, 1983). Errázuriz's pictures were only published in 1990, as their subversive content made them dangerous; anything related to gender dissidence was prohibited during the dictatorship.

Hija de perra also relies on the city as its locus, with a more explicit depiction of Santiago. By the end of the 1990s, the Chilean capital was seen as a hostile place; in Urriola's poetry, the social disparity shocks both the speaker and the reader. The text expresses pessimism, a characteristic shared by other works written during that time, such as poetry by Arrate, Del Río and Prado. The city is

a lost place for dissidents, for anyone deemed different. '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' (The city, so Santiagan, so grey, so depressing, looms over its daughter-of-a-bitch bones, imprisoning even more of its expired parts, abandoned to the implacable exercise of defeat; Zerán 1999: 18).

That sensation of defeat opens the poem:

> 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
>
> (Urriola 2002: 13)

> I am alone and words end up consuming me, causing in me a state of total decrepitude. Silence sinks its teeth into my neck like a sweet, horrific lover, I can feel […] an unforgivable abandonment […] while the lights of San Cristóbal turn on and off

Words consume the speaker, leaving her decrepit, an image that connects this third poetic work with the previous one in its exploration of the relationship between the poet and her own expressive language. Silence, in this context, becomes a new lover, one opposed to words and language. The speaker of *Hija de perra* is completely worn out; silence has left her completely abandoned in a city full of people. 'San Cristóbal' serves as a clue to the city's identity, Santiago.

The city is where the speaker dissolves, but words remain as alive and sharp 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
>
> (Urriola 2002: 20)

> I can lose myself from myself […] I always lose myself from myself […]
> whereas words
> don't lose themselves, they pierce, like the winter that flattens, that hits hard, hard

After her erotic description of silence in the excerpt from page 13, the speaker loses herself. Only words remind her of her own existence,

and they last forever. Urriola's insistence on the importance of the written word turns language into a powerful weapon of expression.

The poetry presents the need for another city, as the speaker's home town erases and marginalises her. The problem with the city is that '[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' (it is designed as a mechanism for social order, or rather, for the disciplining of bodies, subjectivities and identities, organised from an Anglo, European, androcentric perspective; Moraga 2016: 168). This means that any attempt to imagine a new city is inherently subversive, as it challenges a pre-established order that normalises the marginalisation of people like the speaker. The imaginary new city would give space to the speaker's body and soul: 'quiero ver amanecer en otra ciudad, con otro cielo, otros ojos y otro cuerpo y otra boca que me quite este frío' (I want to see day break in another city, with another sky, other eyes and another body and another mouth that takes away the cold I feel; Urriola 2002: 22). In linking *Hija de perra* to Urriola's previous works, the poet expresses a wish to disappear completely. Her journey comes to an end in this new city, a space that has dismantled old structures and where she feels included. This nomadic tendency is also developed in *Bracea*, although to an outcome of her speaker's apparent death.

The existing city in *Hija de perra*, the one that rejects the speaker, has been corrupted by the dictatorship of capital. Representing the symbolic abyss of Santiago, this setting evokes 'el hastío de una generación que creció entre milicos [y] la sordidez de una ciudad de mentira que nada ofrece' (the weariness of a generation that grew up amongst soldiers and the sordidness of a fake city that offers nothing; Zerán 1999: 18), an apt description of the overall tone of the 1990s post-dictatorship poetic movement. The Santiago depicted in *Hija de perra* 'escenifica aquí el paisaje interior, desolado por la ruptura del diálogo' (dramatises here the internal landscape, devastated by the breakdown of dialogue; Ortega 2000: 117), suggesting a wider concern for a society that cannot find reconciliation, even after almost a decade of democracy.

Nada (Swim/Nothing, 2003, LOM Ediciones) was published right after Urriola completed the poetic performance *Poesía es* + (Poetry = more) alongside her then partner, fellow poet Nadia Prado, in 2002. This means that *Nada* was published almost at the same time as Prado's ©*Copyright*. 'Nada', which in Spanish means both 'swim' and 'nothing', paints an urban landscape that drowns its inhabitants.

It is a chaotic, mismanaged place where finding a sense of belonging seems impossible, deepening recurrent themes in Urriola's poetry.

> 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
> (Urriola 2003: 14)

> The future passes before one's eyes and then nothing, we know nothing.
> Of how the next hours will be, the days and nights.
> Which rulers will steal our souls
> and leave us so stunned and devastated,
> that it won't matter who rules our hours.

The speaker expresses a profound disappointment in the world around her. *Nada* develops an explicit political criticism of the Chilean Transition to Democracy, now in its thirteenth year. By the time *Nada* was published in 2003, Chile was under socialist Ricardo Lagos's presidency. Despite this, the speaker declares that Chilean society is already devastated, regardless of who is in power. The present is desperate and the future uncertain. Lagos's government was characterised for not halting or reversing neoliberal reform, despite his election slogan: 'Growth with Equality'. While Lagos's office 'was able to implement health and social welfare reforms, improve the infrastructure and revise the constitution' (Riches and Palmowski 2016: n.p.), the emphasis on economic growth had Lagos reducing public expenditure 'desde un 15,1 por ciento del PIB en 2001 a sólo un 12,9 por ciento en 2005, el último año de su presidencia' (from 15.1% of the GDP in 2001 to only 12.9% in 2005, the final year of his presidency; Madariaga 2019: 98). This generated a favourable response from the country's economic elite, to the point that 'el presidente de la asociación de bancos y luego presidente de la multigremial CPC, confesó que los "empresarios aman al presidente [Lagos]"' (the president of the association of banks, later president of the CPC multi-union, confessed that 'businessmen love the president [Lagos]'; ibid.). Certainly, for those who had hopes for the first socialist president since Salvador Allende, there was a sense of betrayal.

The abandonment felt by the speaker is perceived by Marina Arrate in her analysis, 'Acerca de Nada o Sobrenadando, de Malú Urriola' (On Nothing or Overswimming, by Malú Urriola, 2004):

'Nos recuerda el concepto de Historia de Walter Benjamin: la Historia que no va a ninguna parte, a propósito del cuadro de Paul Klee que él llamó *El Ángel de la Historia*' (It reminds us of Walter Benjamin's concept of History: History that goes nowhere, inspired by Paul Klee's painting, which he renamed the 'Angel of History'; Arrate 2004: n.p.). This interpretation is supported by the poetry:

> A veces presiento que soy un algo al sur, un algo que no conoce el futuro, ni aprecia el pasado
>
> (Urriola 2003: 16)

> Sometimes I sense that I am a something in the south, a something that doesn't know the future, nor appreciate the past

It is as if the speaker were floating through time, without a future, nor a vision of her past, and her present is, ultimately, nothing (nada). Interestingly, that nothingness suggests degrees of possibility: 'El espacio de la nada es el lugar donde nada tiene lugar y, sin embargo, todos los desplazamientos y encuentros son posibles' (The space of nothingness is the place where nothing has a place, and yet, all journeys and encounters are possible; Faúndez and Salgado 2014: 48). From that complete emptiness, Urriola moves on to *Bracea*. *Nada* commands the reader 'to swim'. *Bracea* tells them to use the butterfly stroke. 'Bracear' in Spanish also means to flap one's arms, which foreshadows the title of the third book in Urriola's trilogy, *Vuela* (Fly).

This analysis of *Bracea* (2007) will be divided into two sections. The first one, 'Monstrosity and Social Alienation', explores how the outcasts of society are seen as monsters and freaks, unwelcome in the city. *Bracea* is Urriola's first poetry collection not set in Santiago; it takes its readers to the remote Elqui Valley, Gabriela Mistral's place of origin. The second section, 'Peripheral Resistance', engages with a criticism of neoliberalism, which Urriola makes explicit in her poetry. She develops this critique in a similar fashion to Nadia Prado's ©*Copyright* (2003), further emphasising the idea that the disillusionment with Chilean society relates to the imposition of an economic model that has deepened inequality.

Like most of Urriola's previous works, *Bracea* is mostly written in fragments of prose poetry. This style also characterises other poets studied in this volume, especially Nadia Prado and Marina Arrate. The deviation from more traditional poetic forms, such as verse, suggests that there are no aesthetic limits when expressing discontent. *Bracea* is written largely from the perspective of a young girl, shaped

as a collection of thoughts divided into thematic parts. These sections start from the outside and move inwards—for example, from the garden into the house—then outwards again, to the shores of the Pacific Ocean, many kilometres away. There are a few sections that include photographs of people with deformities. I approached Urriola in March 2018 via email to ask her about the images she included in *Bracea*, to which she responded: 'Esas imágenes son [gente con deformidades] que encontré en internet. Las junté y entonces los convertí en personajes' (Those images are of people with deformities I found on the internet. I put them together and then turned them into characters; Urriola 2018). The people photographed and their type of deformity have been studied as part of my research on this subject.

Monstrosity and Social Alienation

The concept of 'monstrosity' explored in *Bracea* is that of humans whose bodies cause discomfort and fear in those deemed 'normal' or 'able-bodied' by society. For philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, monsters have 'a distinctive grotesque character' (Bakhtin 1984b: 345) and are therefore difficult to look at, or to include in everyday life. Historically, people with physical deformities were often rendered profitable by the circus, most famously by US showman P. T. Barnum, who founded the Barnum & Bailey Circus in 1919. One of the most important acts was the 'freak show'—unusual humans who generally showed their real physical conditions, with the goal of shocking the audience. Barnum kept his viewers by 'perpetuat[ing] an elaborate hoax in the papers in which he built up the public's appetite for weeks […] He also knew how to promote the unusual and the bizarre' (Lehman 2013: 14). The relevance of Barnum's work here is that his show used a set of conjoined twins, Chang and Eng Bunker. *Bracea* presents its own pair of conjoined twins in a photograph.

According to *Conjoined Twins: An Historical, Biological and Ethical Issues Encyclopedia*, the twins depicted in the image Urriola selected for her poetry collection are sisters María and Ana, who were born in Mexico or Honduras 'in 1910 and […] 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 2003: 110). It is believed the picture in question was taken circa 1915.

To prove its authenticity, the photo also shows the exact part where the sisters are conjoined.

When analysing conjoined twins, there is an initial visual perception that they are a single unit comprising two people. Generally, 'twins were packaged as one unit, blurred into one set of tastes, thoughts and impulses' (Pingree 1996: 100). In *Bracea*, the speaker is one of these sisters, although it is never revealed which. Readers only know it is one of the girls from the picture, which Urriola uses as a visual cue. The speaker describes her life, acknowledging her sister as part of her:

> 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 2007: 32)

> We walked with a limp my sister and I […]
> Even though we were quite agile, sometimes we couldn't coordinate our strides and ended up in the ditch […]
> We remember that they'd rub lindane on us at the town clinic

As it is not known which of the sisters is speaking, the poetry develops an ambiguous voice and reinforces the idea of the twins as one person, denying them their subjectivity as two unique human beings. At the same time, words such as 'diestras' (agile), 'trancos' (strides) and 'acequia' (ditch) locate these sisters in a rural part of Chile. They were treated at the 'town clinic', meaning they were not in the city.

'Lindane' is a highly toxic substance that is used in small doses to treat lice and scabies. This means that the sisters had to live in isolation, as these conditions are highly contagious, becoming even more monstrous, because they suffer from a rash that can spread. These lines show the precariousness and vulnerability of the sisters' lives, as 'the primary contributing factors in contracting scabies seem to be poverty and overcrowded living conditions' (Walton and Currie 2007: 270). Their alienation is thus due to their poverty as well as being deemed 'freaks'.

The twins' monstrosity lies not only in the flesh that joins their two bodies, but also in the idea of the double. For psychoanalyst Otto Rank, seeing double causes a feeling of strangeness, since '[la] aparición del doble como una persona real [genera] el problema de la división y duplicación del yo' (the appearance of the double as a real person creates the problem of the division and duplication

of the I; Rank 1976: 44). In the case of the conjoined twins, the strangeness of the double is compounded both by their being physically attached and by the idea that one of them is the original and the other a copy. The uncanniness of the situation is increased by the fact that the sisters live in isolation, without access to wider society or formal education. In Freudian terms, the uncanny is something that is 'concealed, kept from sight […] it is withheld from others' (Freud 1919: 3). This very concealment generates both awe and fear in those who confront these strange others, and it is what may have prompted P. T. Barnum to put on a freak show in his circus. In *Bracea*, we find out about these hidden sisters through the poetry, not as an act; they live separate from the rest of the world in shame, seen by others as monsters: 'Mi hermana dijo que nuestro padre nos odia porque somos monstruosas' (My sister said that our father hates us because we are monstrous; Urriola 2007: 41). This monstrosity keeps the sisters on the outskirts of a small town. 'Urriola le da voz a la diferencia y a la vez crea la figura del padre para radicar en el patriarcado la figura del castigo' (Urriola gives voice to difference and at the same time creates the figure of the father to locate within the patriarchy the figure of punishment; Sepúlveda 2013: 269). Once again, as in her previous works, Urriola gives a voice to the voiceless.

Once the sister-speaker acknowledges her monstrosity, her life changes:

> De súbito los días dolieron
> como un puñetazo en mitad del pecho
> (Urriola 2007: 42)
>
> All of a sudden the days hurt
> like a punch in the middle of the chest

These two lines are the only text on page 42, so there is an emphasis on 'the middle of the chest', which evokes both the sisters' emotional pain and their physical point of connection. On the previous page, there is a reference to the mother—'somos un monstruo igual a nuestra madre' (we are a monster like our mother; Urriola 2007: 41)—along with another photograph of a pair of conjoined twins.

The sisters' monstrosity is inherited from their mother(s), who are also conjoined twins. This duplication of the double sheds light on the myriad impositions on women; the father, in contrast, remains single, fully human and not a monster, unlike his partner(s) and daughters. Like the portrait of the young girls, the second

photograph is a mirror image, perpetuating the mystery—which one was the biological mother? In a study of *Bracea*, Magda Sepúlveda understands the use of these photographs as elements that

> evidencian una patología que desafía la medicina, porque las siamesas están sentadas o de pie como lo haría un sujeto sin este problema […] lo presentado en fotografía como monstruoso es polemizado por la escritura íntima que la hablante desarrolla y que pone su exceso en positivo. Ella no desea separarse de su hermana. (Sepúlveda 2013: 267)

> demonstrate a pathology that defies medicine, because the Siamese twins are seated or standing as a person without this problem would […] what is presented in the photograph as monstrous is made polemic by the intimate writing that the speaker develops, which puts her excess in a positive light. She does not wish to separate from her sister.

While I agree with Sepúlveda's reading, there is one more point to make regarding these photographs: the second one shows the same Honduran sisters, María and Ana, when they were teenagers, adding an element of symmetry between the two portraits. The second photograph is also suggesting a butterfly-like figure and focuses on the symmetry the sisters present. This butterfly echoes the title of Urriola's text, *Bracea*, as meaning 'flapping wings'.

Urriola's text refers to this type of 'braceo' at the beginning of the book:

> 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 2007: 11)

> A butterfly flies in front of these black eyes
> /that were looking at the thistle.
>
> The butterfly flaps, and flapping she withdraws so far away from the white
> /thistle

There is a great sense of movement in flying 'so far away', and the contrast between the speaker's black eyes and the white thistle traces a distance that becomes greater with every beat of the butterfly's wings. The butterfly also foreshadows the third book of Urriola's

trilogy, *Vuela* (Fly). Since 'bracear' means both to swim and to fly, *Bracea* operates, according to Gonzalo Ignacio Rojas, as 'el intermedio, un entre en lo que se pretende hacer y lo que se desea lograr. El intermedio de lo que se quiere ser y lo que no' (the interval, an in-between in what one intends to do and what one wishes to achieve. An interval of what one wants to be and what one doesn't; Rojas 2017: 40), which explains why the work is so full of doubles and folding points.

Having 'mothers' who are also conjoined twins further emphasises that the sisters' 'monstrosity' is inherited and unavoidable. The speaker embraces this aspect of herself as a positive trait that makes her unique:

> Yo no creo en las cosas que cree mi hermana. Ella 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 2007: 58)

> I don't believe in the things my sister believes. She avoids being a monster. I don't.
> The stars remind me every night that I'll wake up, and when they don't shine
> they'll make fun of us in town.

Here we encounter a contrast between the conjoined twins. The speaker separates herself from her twin in terms of their subjectivity, their difference of opinion. She does not share her sister's fear of being a monster, declaring 'I don't'. In fact, it seems the speaker owns this difference with pride.

Despite their discrepant perspectives, the sisters agree on important aspects of their lives, as they are physically bound together and need to live in sync. The speaker talks her twin into leaving their town:

> Una tarde […] convencí a mi hermana de que nos fuéramos al mar, así liberábamos a nuestras madres de nosotras […] Nos echaríamos a nadar, hasta encontrar la otra orilla, otra punta de lápiz donde comenzar una nueva vida.
>
> (Urriola 2007: 113)

> One afternoon […] I convinced my sister that we go to the sea, to free our mothers from us […] We'd go for a swim, until we found the other shore, another pencil tip where we'd start a new life.

It is suggested that the sisters' inherited monstrosity is somehow a burden to their mothers. This quotation is central to understanding the connection between *Nada* and *Bracea*. While the sisters look forward to escaping by swimming, the previous volume, *Nada* (Swim/Nothing), was not so hopeful, closing with a feeling of entrapment and stagnation:

> delante de todo lo que ves,
> de lo que alcanzas a ver
> hay una vida fugaz,
> sólo que te nublan los ojos tantas nubes
> que nunca vienen ni se van,
> que nunca vienen ni se van, como las palabras
> (Urriola 2003: 100)

> before everything you see,
> that you manage to see
> there is a fleeting life,
> only that your eyes are clouded by so many clouds
> that never come nor go
> that never come nor go, like words

In *Nada*, 'se ficcionaliza el encuentro de la poeta con la muerte' (the poet's encounter with death is fictionalised; Faúndez and Salgado 2014: 43), in contrast to *Bracea*, in which the speaker wishes to travel to the city of La Serena and, from its coast, swim towards a different life. It is important to understand that this escape 'no es un suicidio, sino un reencontrarse en lo plural. En el mar, ellas son un cuerpo sin límites. Ese espacio, a diferencia de la ciudad, les permite sobrevivir en el exceso, de ahí el título "Bracea" como indicación de nadar, de salvarse' (is not suicide, but a finding of oneself, in the plural. In the sea, they are one body, without limits. That space, unlike the city, allows them to survive in excess, thus the title 'Bracea', an instruction to swim, to save oneself; Sepúlveda 2013: 270). In the sea, the sisters are liberated from a world that rejects and alienates them. They somehow coordinate their arms in a 'braceo' (butterfly stroke), unafraid of drowning, in waters that accept them for who they are. They swim away from the world of appearances and imposed notions of the 'perfect' or 'normal' body.

Urriola brings forth another case of 'monstrosity' in *Bracea*. The rural area where the conjoined twins live is also home to other ostracised characters, such as Tres Piernas (Three Legs). Like the twins, Tres Piernas speaks in the poem, and Urriola shows him to her readers in a photograph, also taken from the internet. The boy

portrayed in the photo was an Italian American called Frank Lentini (1889–1966). Born in a 'well-known [case] of parasitic twins [that] incorporates […] multiple limbs' (Quigley 2003: 2), Lentini became a showman. Even though Urriola simply refers to the boy as 'Three Legs', the theme of twins continues beneath the surface. Interestingly, Urriola includes a picture of Lentini as an adult, as 'the father of Tres Piernas', in a similar gesture of inherited monstrosity to the case of the conjoined twins.

The boy, Tres Piernas, is in love with one of the conjoined twins, the speaker's sister, who does not reciprocate his feelings. The poem later reveals that one of the twin mothers is also Tres Piernas's mother, making him the twins' brother and suggesting incest, another transgression that would eventually lead to more deformity.

> Tres Piernas jamás conoció a su madre.
> […] El padre de Tres Piernas dice que Tres piernas tiene los ojos
> /de su madre.
> Y desde los ojos de mi otra madre se descuelga una lágrima.
> (Urriola 2007: 83)

> Tres Piernas never knew his mother.
> […] Tres Piernas's father says that Tres Piernas has his mother's
> /eyes.
> And from my other mother's eyes a tear comes loose.

Tres Piernas must be as young as the twin sisters he spends his time with. He becomes another speaker in the poem, and he expresses his love for the first 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 2007: 72)

> When I saw her I knew with uncertain certainty that she was a reflection of this life I've survived, hearing bursts of laughter behind my back, while I walk away with my three legs.
> […]
> I win against the dogs, against the hares. Against the train.

In explaining his connection to the twin he loves, Tres Piernas says that he sees his life reflected in hers. He believes she knows what it is like to live as a monster, as a freak, to be mocked or bullied behind

one's back. Tres Piernas also inherited his monstrosity, but from his father. When expressing himself, he uses the pronoun 'I'; Urriola gives him space to express his subjectivity. As a young, underdeveloped man living in poverty, without access to formal education, he takes pride in his ability to run fast. In this sense, his monstrosity gives him a special gift, making him superior to 'able-bodied' humans. Also, Tres Piernas has an advantage over others, especially the readers of this poetry book. He knows which sister is the speaker and which is the one he loves. He can differentiate between them perfectly, though aware his feelings were not reciprocated: 'Tres Piernas sentía esa dolorosa vergüenza de no ser correspondido por mi hermana […] Así es que para no recibir de manera tan directa el desprecio, Tres Piernas se sentaba a mi lado …' (Tres Piernas felt that painful shame of not being loved back by my sister […] So as not to receive the slight so directly, Tres Piernas sat next to me …; Urriola 2007: 71).

Tres Piernas's appearance turns the text into a multivocal one. Although I will not refer to all of the poetic speakers in this chapter, they are: the main speaker, one of the young conjoined twins; one of the mothers; the twins' father; and Tres Piernas. This multivocality relates to the concept of polyphony as developed by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984). The coexistence of these voices provides multiple layers of meaning to *Bracea*, and it is worth linking this to the book's broader context. 'The polyphonic [text] could indeed have been realised only in the capitalist era […] In this way the objective preconditions were created for the multileveledness and multi-voicedness of the polyphonic novel' (Bakhtin 1984a: 19–20). All the voices in *Bracea*, except that of the twins' father, represent those alienated by society—the dissidents and the freaks, exiled to a remote village. These voices challenge the established order, a system that is not only patriarchal and heteronormative, but also neoliberal in its economic core. Together, these voices provide a 'gift for seeing the world in terms of interaction and coexistence' (Bakhtin 1984a: 31). What seems rather impossible in the 'real world' is perfectly expressible through this poetic polyphony.

'La unión de estas siamesas es vista como una degeneración por los habitantes de la ciudad. Pero ellas no renuncian a estar unidas. Ellas no se van a cortar el exceso como el Tres Piernas, que puso una de sus piernas en la línea del tren para quedar "normal"' (The joining of these Siamese twins is seen as a depravity by the inhabitants of the city. But the girls don't give up being joined. They won't cut off the

excess like Tres Piernas, who put one of his legs on the train track to become 'normal'; Sepúlveda 2013: 268). Tres Piernas attempts to negate his own uniqueness, unlike the sisters, who embrace their togetherness and end up swimming towards their freedom.

> […] vimos llegar al padre de Tres Piernas gritando. Se abrazó a nuestras madres sin poder hilar palabra. Falto de aire y con un gemido casi mudo, contó que Tres Piernas puso una pierna en el riel, y el tren se la ganó.
>
> Le dijo—sonriendo—que le contara a mi hermana que ahora
> /era un chico normal.
>
> (Urriola 2007: 96)

> […] we saw Tres Piernas's father coming, shouting. He hugged our mothers, unable to string words together. Short on air, in a near-silent moan, he told us that Tres Piernas put a leg on the track, and the train reached it.
>
> He told him—smiling—to tell my sister that now
> /he was a normal boy.

This scene confirms that Tres Piernas and the young twins are related, and that Tres Piernas's love for one of them is incestuous, although this is not problematised in the poetry. He tries to show the object of his affection that he can be 'normal', but in losing his third leg he bleeds to death.

> Dejamos a Tres Piernas en un nicho helado entre
> /las montañas
>
> […]
>
> Desde que Tres Piernas murió, nadie en el pueblo volvió a ganarle al tren
>
> (Urriola 2007: 97)

> We left Tres Piernas in a frozen niche between
> /the mountains
>
> […]
>
> Since Tres Piernas died, no one in town ever won against the train again

A symbolic reading of this scene in *Bracea* is that Tres Piernas represents someone who succumbs to the idea of 'normality' and changes who he is to fit into society. The moral of his story: giving up one's uniqueness to be part of the crowd leads to disappearance. The sisters, on the contrary, keep challenging the status quo, and that is their victory.

Peripheral Resistance

When the sisters decide to escape westwards to the ocean, they first leave their house, then their town, then their valley, moving from intimate spaces into open ones, where they become more visible. The dichotomy between periphery and centre is expressed in the section 'La Casa' (The House), which opens with an epigraph by Argentinian poet Juan Gelmán: 'Hay que aprender a resistir. / Ni a irse, ni a quedarse. / A resistir' (You have to learn to resist. / Not to go, not to stay. / To resist; Urriola 2007: 25). These lines imply resistance in a space, without a sense of movement, unlike the way the poetry progresses. Urriola's description of the house sets up the parameters for what is centred and what is peripheral:

> 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 2007: 27)

> Our house is pink. Although there are parts where you can see the muddy echo of the adobe confused with the pink paint and lime with which our mother painted it […]
>
> She painted it with lime so that the kissing bugs wouldn't nest there […]
>
> This is a dilapidated house on the outskirts of the city […]
>
> I imagine that living outside something unknown is like living outside something that has absolutely no importance.

The speaker challenges the idea of what is known and what is not, dismissing the relevance of the outside world, the world that rejects her, her sister, her mothers and Tres Piernas. She deems the city unimportant, in a defiant stance addressing society. Rejecting the city and its dazzling lights is also resisting consumerism. 'La vida de ellas estaba permitida en el ambiente más rural, en el norte chileno, cerca de Cochiguaz. Desde esa ruralidad enuncia la voz poética adolescente este diario íntimo. Es una ruralidad pobre y no hacendal' (Their life was allowed in a more rural setting, in the north of Chile, near Cochiguaz. From that rurality, the adolescent poetic voice speaks this intimate diary. It's a poor rurality, without estates;

Sepúlveda 2013: 268). Urriola signals this poverty through her depiction of the sisters' living conditions, especially with the words 'adobe', 'kissing bugs' (a blood-sucking bug that carries infectious diseases) and the adjective 'dilapidated'.

The pink house where they live is made of adobe bricks—'a mixture of salt, sint and clay, which when mixed with water […] can be cast into the desired form' (Brown and Clifton 1978: 139). One of the most basic and oldest construction techniques, dating back to the Neolithic Age (ibid.), adobe bricks consist of materials that people can find easily, allowing them to build their own houses. Living in this way in modern times implies living without any government aid. The adobe house, along with the remoteness of the area in which the poem is set, intensifies the sensation that these characters are absolute outcasts of society.

The 'kissing bugs' provide another clue to the family's social vulnerability. 'Vinchucas' are insects that live in the adobe bricks, and they transmit Chagas disease, which can be fatal. These 'kissing bugs' are not restricted to the Elqui Valley area, but can be found throughout Latin America, particularly in poor, rural areas. To prevent Chagas disease, the walls need to be treated with lime. Sheer poverty and the power dynamics of this family have the mother(s) performing this work on the walls, in order to protect themselves from their own house, a space that can be deadly.

Another excerpt that shows the centre/periphery dichotomy focuses on the father:

> 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 2007: 40)

> Because my father—our mother used to say—spent everything we had on useless things from the city. But he said it was an investment. That music would cheer up the house. And he bought it.

As the breadwinner, the father is in total control of the family funds and decides unilaterally what to do with them. Previously in *Bracea*, the mother made her feelings clear to the daughters as regards their father, 'al que sabíamos que despreciaba. Pero ella quería un marido y un hogar' (whom we knew she despised. But she wanted a husband and a home; Urriola 2007: 38). The mother needs stability and protection, even though this means total subordination to her husband's authority. The item he purchased is a radio—even this basic level

of technology is a luxury for the family, further emphasising their socio-economic vulnerability. The radio also brings entertainment into the house and informs the family of happenings outside their immediate vicinity. The mother makes a clear distinction between the city and the rural area they live in by labelling the radio a useless device; Urriola also draws a clear line separating the father from the other characters in the text. The father can go to the city, where society does not reject him. As the only character without physical disability, he symbolises normality.

The speaker also acknowledges another cause for her isolation—her ethnicity:

> Yo soy india. Creo que el clic de la cámara me roba algo que no alcanzo a definir.
>
> Lo que pienso, siento, recuerdo, duelo, gozo en ese momento exacto quedará plasmado en un papel. Una parte mía quedará cautiva para siempre.
>
> (Urriola 2007: 55)

> I'm native. I believe that the click of a camera steals something from me that I can't define.
>
> What I think, feel, remember, hurt, enjoy in that exact moment will remain expressed on a piece of paper. A part of me will remain captive forever.

The word 'india' ('native') in Spanish is an old-fashioned term, these days considered derogatory. Using this word is a provocative gesture, as it would shock a contemporary reader. Additionally, an explanation of why the use of the word 'indio' undermines indigenous identity can be found in a 2014 interview with Mapuche poet Graciela Huinao, in which she talks about an experience at school that made her realise 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"' (She doesn't remember why, but there was a fight with other girls and one of them yanked her braids. And called her 'native'; Gaete 2014: 24). Huinao realised then that the term was derogatory and that it made her feel ashamed. In Chilean society there is a divide between 'indios' and 'non-indios'. Urriola's speaker places herself in a position of indigeneity, which is a gesture deriving from the Mistralian tradition as well.[1]

[1] For further details, please check E. Horan, *Mistral. Una vida. Solo me halla quien me ama, 1889–1922* (Santiago: Lumen, 2022).

The fact that something was taken from the speaker in a photograph suggests cultural appropriation and that she is 'different' in a way that transcends physical disability. There is also the issue of consent, whether or not the speaker and her sister agreed to be photographed. The twins would be an extreme freak show for the photographer. They are not only conjoined twins who live in a remote village near the mountains, but they are also indigenous. The idea of captivity recalls a human museum or an exhibition, and both disability and indigeneity are equally alienating within a Chilean context, revealing a lack of recognition of Chile's roots in its indigenous cultures. Indigenous traits do not try to adapt to the Western ideal. This has been resisted for over 500 years.

When the sisters decide to leave home for the nearest coastal city, La Serena, they encounter a different world:

> 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. A algunas les faltaban los brazos, la cabeza, o parte del cuerpo …
>
> (Urriola 2007: 114–15)

> The bus stops in every town. […]
> We got to the city plagued by cars and noise. […]
> We walked down to the Lighthouse through the Statue Park. All of them looked like us. Some were missing their arms, their head, or part of their body …

The sisters have decided to leave their home and their mother(s) for the first time, on a journey with no return, an exodus of a hundred kilometres to the Pacific Ocean. La Serena is noisy and chaotic, and they stop to wander along the statue park, asserting that '[a]ll of them looked like us', implying that the statues' lack of limbs made them equally monstrous, but at the same time resembled a mirroring. The word for statue in Spanish, 'estatua', is feminine, which emphasises that women face discrimination more often. The avenue of these statues ends by the shore, near the lighthouse, a famous landmark in La Serena. The lighthouse beach is the starting point of the sisters' voyage into the unknown, freeing themselves from a society that rejects them.

The closing lines of *Bracea* show the sisters floating, waiting to be absorbed by the ocean, which off the coast of La Serena can be treacherous and full of currents. Here, Urriola calls upon the reader's

imagination, as the waters of La Serena are not calm nor safe for swimming.

> 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 2007: 119)

> We float most of the time.
> […]
> Our body is like a cork abandoned to the waters' intimate requirements […]
> […]
> Swim—says my sister.
> And I swim.

The sisters bobbing like a cork on the waters evokes the idea of freedom, even as they give up their will to swim, 'bracear', and find themselves at the mercy of the currents. The space between each line also recalls floating, stretching one's arm to take a stroke, then pulling it back again. Symbolically speaking, 'the waters of the oceans are thus seen not only as the source of life but also as its goal. "To return to the sea" is "to return to the mother", that is, to die' (Cirlot 2001: 281). The 'braceos' or strokes are illusory, as the sisters go back to the mother—one may wonder to which mother they will go. The opening of *Bracea* gives us a hint, with the dedication to Gabriela Mistral. The twins leave their twin mothers to be with their poetic mother, Mistral, in an amniotic ocean. The sisters confront their own death, their way of resisting a life on the margins.

Bracea depicts social inequality from the perspective of the oppressed, with subjects who are completely alienated and rejected. Because this inequality is not set in Santiago, Urriola decentralises the idea of the city; she imagines the lands where Mistral was born and raised, which are neglected by the state. This also means that social inequality, deepened by neoliberal reform since Pinochet, pervades Chilean society from north to south. The sisters challenge their marginalised position by taking control of their fate and leaving the town; they allow themselves to become one with the waters. Unlike the character of Tres Piernas, who dies attempting to become normal, these sisters free themselves and swim with the hope of

reaching new shores. Urriola's *Bracea* also emphasises the relevance of action and that the oppressed need to liberate themselves from their societal shackles.

Bracea criticises Chilean society and implies that Urriola saw herself as one of its rejects. She was not comfortable in the literary scene of the late 1980s, as expressed in *Piedras rodantes* (1988), and, through *Bracea*, she proposed that her poetic mother, Gabriela Mistral, was another reject whose recognition came late. Social alienation, poverty and rejection can also be interpreted as the conditions of being a woman poet in Chile. A way to solve this injustice is to move, to swim, to continue hoping for possibilities outside a world set in its patriarchal, capitalistic ways, like contemporary Chile. The timelessness of this poetry suggests that while the marginalisation of women poets in Chile may not yet be overcome, the situation can be challenged and denounced, each time reaching further and helping future writers to build a more inclusive, egalitarian literary scene.

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Epilogue: The 2019 Uprising and Beyond

Chilean women's poetry from the 1980s onwards is testament to how artists have released themselves from the shackles of the censorship imposed on them since dictatorship times. However, issues of patriarchal thought and the pervasive nature of neoliberal social alienation remain in place in Chilean society today. Despite the fact that poetic expression has become more explicit in its criticism of society, we must wonder how much we, women, have achieved. There remain structural problems in our society. Some of these became evident in the mistreatment young women and girls received by the police forces during the 2019 protests. Many of them were groomed and asked to undress, sparking even more protests. Feminist collective LasTesis condemned the police's actions through their performance 'Un violador en tu camino' (A Rapist in your Path, 2019), which became a worldwide phenomenon. It spread all over the world, showing that, sadly, many women in most societies are still under strict and male-centred patriarchal rule, far from the egalitarian society we would hope for.

LasTesis did not come to exist out of a vacuum. Their feminism is not only informed by worldwide-reaching theories, but also by the work and activism of many women who protested and manifested themselves against Pinochet's regime in Chile in the 1980s. CADA, acronym for Colectivo Acciones del Arte (Art Actions Collective), was an initiative that included men and women artists. Yet, the works of novelist and critic Diamela Eltit (b. 1949) and photographer and video artist Lotty Rosenfeld (1943–2020) stand out in the way they took women's voices from the depths of their peripheral position to articulate resistance and opposition to the dictatorship. Eltit's seminal novel *Lumpérica* (E. Luminata, 1983) is an example of avant-garde writing that dodged censorship, as the text is unintelligible, or at least hard to understand or interpret at a first reading.

Rosenfeld's artistic projects were brief but symbolic, also difficult to categorise as explicitly threatening the regime. Art finds a way to express itself through the interstices of monolithic structures. At the same time, Carmen Berenguer (1946–2024) addressed the horrors Chilean society was living by invoking IRA fighter Bobby Sands in her celebrated poem *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (Bobby Sands Faints at the Wall, 1983), published the same year as Eltit's groundbreaking novel. Berenguer's *Bobby Sands* never mentioned Chile or the dictatorship, emphasising that censorship can be skirted, and daring to express dissent is worth the effort and the risk.

Berenguer was also an activist. She participated in performances alongside Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis (The Mares of the Apocalypse, 1987–1993), a queer collective formed by chronicler Pedro Lemebel (1952–2015) and writer and performer Francisco Casas (b. 1959). Las Yeguas's performances attempted to generate visibility for sexual dissidence in Chile. Berenguer assisted Lemebel and Casas, together with poet Nadia Prado (b. 1966), in their famous performance *La refundación de la Universidad de Chile* (The Refoundation of the University of Chile) in 1988. By 1989, Chileans had already chosen to return to democracy and such demonstrations of dissent were not synonymous with persecution or disappearance, as in previous years.

The only author studied in this volume who was imprisoned by Pinochet's regime was Elvira Hernández (b. 1951), and her poetry book *La bandera de Chile* (1981/1991) was written as a response to that terrible experience. Hernández is also devoted to literary criticism, mostly signing this work with her legal name, María Teresa Adriasola, keeping Elvira Hernández exclusively for her creative writing. Interestingly, Hernández's work is also influential for later poets, and it is possible to see this especially in younger writers such as Nadia Prado and Malú Urriola (1967–2023), whose works are also studied in this volume. It is likely that Hernández is the most cited contemporary Chilean woman poet from the cohort studied here. This also means that her work is not only relevant in terms of its creative intent, or avant-gardeness, but also as a beacon for other poets. The only other Chilean women poets who are quoted as much as or more than Hernández are Nobel Prize awardee Gabriela Mistral (1889–1957) and Stella Díaz Varín (1926–2006).

The youngest poet studied in this volume is Alejandra del Río (b. 1972). In her work we see the marks the dictatorship left on those who experienced those times as children. Hence, her *Escrito en braille* (Written in Braille, 1999), dedicated to her son Julián, is, in a way, a project that generates a warning about the present for a

generation that is just being born. Del Río's child was not going to be raised during the regime, but during the Transition, so *Braille* acts as a sort of navigation chart for him. In general, Del Río's work is also extremely reliant on Mistralian poetry. At the same time, it is clear that her training in Hispanic literature gave her rich cultural knowledge that she imprinted in her work, with many references to classical texts or biblical scenes. Just as the poets from the 1980s were characterised by their activism, Del Río's work outside of poetry writing can also be considered alternative. She has spent years developing a poetic pedagogy called 'Educación Poética' (Poetic Education), which she still practises today. 'Lo que queremos es que las personas se beneficien de la práctica de la poesía, que a través de ella tengan herramientas concretas para llevar adelante sus proyectos individuales de aprendizaje y sanación, enmarcados en un colectivo que le dé sentido a su creación' (What we look for is for people to benefit from the practice of poetry that, through it, they obtain concrete tools to carry out their individual projects of learning and healing, framed within a collective that will give meaning to their creations; Del Río 2023: n.p.). This means that Del Río's project goes well beyond poetry as a literary expression. She sees poetic writing, through poetic education, as a tool to heal the spirit.

Marina Arrate (b. 1957) trained as a psychologist, so her poetry is certainly expressing her concerns for the mind of those whom she depicts. She also works as a psychoanalyst who looks to support those who are struggling to understand the world around them. Her poetry reflects this quest of the self to find space and to express questioning that, outside the literary realm, may seem inadequate. Arrate's interest in the female psyche is seen throughout her poetic production and working in collaboration with other artists. Her poetry book *Trapecio* (Trapeze, 2002), published after *Uranio* (Uranium, 1999), studied in this volume, contains photographic work by Claudia Román. On this occasion Arrate decides to juxtapose image and poetry in a way that engages with the reader in new forms. The use of images is also relevant in *Bracea* (Butterfly Stroke, 2007) by Malú Urriola. Interestingly, *Trapecio* explores the theme of the circus and its nostalgia, while *Bracea* explores the deformed body and the photos exhibited in this book depict people who were indeed circus acts, freak shows.

It is almost impossible to approach works by Nadia Prado and the late Malú Urriola and not recall their collaborative project *Poesía es* + (Poetry = more, 2002), performed one year before the publication of their respective works ©*Copyright* (Prado, 2003) and *Nada*

(Nothing, Urriola, 2003). What is remarkable about *Poesía es +* is that it examines the precarity of poetic work in Chile with a project that was funded by a grant. The fact that *Poesía es +* was a collective project is also relevant, as these poets worked together and shared this grant. What is there to say about this system other than using its own mechanisms to uncover its failings?

Prado's work, especially ©*Copyright*, relies heavily on the Chilean poetic tradition, considering influences from Gonzalo Millán (1947–2006), who in 1979 published one of the most important poems written from exile, *La ciudad* (The City). Also, her training as a philosopher makes her work closer to the deep considerations developed by Stella Díaz Varín as a member of the 1950s generation. Díaz Varín's defiant attitudes were also influential for Prado, especially as Prado's works explored more transgressive topics, such as lesbian sexuality or tearing down the patriarchy. Prado also participated in the 1988 intervention organised by Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis, together with Carmen Berenguer. These poets' presence and collaboration with Las Yeguas is also symbolic of the support that sexual minorities have always received from the feminist movement and feminist activism. Prado's interest in Chileanness also brings her work closer to that of Elvira Hernández, another of her poetic mentors.

In addition to her poetic work, Malú Urriola contributed to Chilean popular culture as a scriptwriter for Chilean television. Some of her writing helped shed light on women's suffering in Chilean society. For example, TV series *Cárcel de mujeres* (Women's Prison, 2007), broadcast by Chilean National Television, shows the lives of a group of imprisoned women and how they face violence within the prison, their battle against substance abuse, and their romantic relationships, being a series that uncovered lesbianism, which was still a taboo subject in Chile at that time. Urriola also worked as a scriptwriter for TV series *Maldito corazón* (Cursed Heart), broadcast by Chilevisión, which recreated crimes of passion where women were either the murdered or the murderer.

Furthermore, Urriola's performative work continued after her collaboration with Nadia Prado in *Poesía es +* back in 2002. She developed an act of photography, poetry and videoart entitled *La luz que me ciega* (The Light that Blinds Me, 2010) together with photographer Paz Errázuriz and visual artist Carolina Tironi. Errázuriz and Urriola had collaborated in the past, with Errázuriz's photography appearing on the cover of her poetry book *Hija de perra* (Daughter of a Bitch, 1998). *La luz que me ciega* was also exhibited in the

Chilean Pavilion for the 2015 Venice Biennale, which was curated by Nelly Richard. For Richard, Errázuriz's work stands out as 'las tierras incógnitas y las identidades recónditas que el arte fotográfico de P. Errázuriz persigue en lo más ínfimo de un habitar restado de toda circulación global' (the unknown lands and the hidden identities that the photographic art by P. Errázuriz chases in the most minute of places devoid of any global circulation; Richard 2015: n.p.), and it is an art of the image that, presented with poetic work such as Urriola's, achieves the portrayal of 'cuerpos precarios y mentes extraviadas en una geografía del abandono, a mucha distancia' (precarious bodies and lost minds within a geography of abandonment, very far away; ibid.).

It is clear that the six authors selected for this volume are more than the excellent poetry that they write. They all engage in different aspects of Chilean culture and address society in many ways. Be it through activism, pedagogy or collaboration with other artists, the six poets studied in this book have a commonality: the need to create languages to get away with different visions and ways of being, far away from the monolithic discourse inherited from the dictatorship. The discontent presented in the poetry analysed, from the 1980s to the 2020s, keeps getting deeper and more alarming in the ways it shows social inequality. At the same time, these poets lucidly demonstrate that they are aware of the direction Chile is taking. Their poetry is warning of an accumulation of distrust in neoliberalism as it is evident that it has done harm to those who are the most vulnerable. These poetic works show how discontent kept growing, and this frustration paved the way for a social movement that first demanded non-profit education (2011) and later on a complete overhaul of neoliberalism (2019). As a student protester put it: 'We are subjugated by the rich—and now it is time for that to end' (Franklin 2019). Despite this re-foundational intent that characterised the 2019 protests, it has been observed that the counter-hegemonic demonstrations of those times were much ado about nothing, meaning that the overall system remains almost intact today.

Social discontent in Chile should not be considered a random incident or an unexpected series of public 'rants'. I would argue that there had been clues that people felt frustrated with the Transition to Democracy and that the long-awaited economic 'miracle' could benefit more people. This also set a perception of injustice that, together with rising levels of inequality, led to a social uproar. 'En efecto, la transición chilena se ordenó bajo la doble consigna de la redemocratización y la neoliberalización hasta que, en 2011,

irrumpió el movimiento estudiantil con la consigna de la educación gratuita ("Fin al lucro") impugnando la hegemonía neoliberal que, de cierto modo, se mantenía incuestionada desde el final de la dictadura' (Actually, the Chilean transition was established under the two-sided premise of redemocratisation and neoliberalisation until, in 2011, the students' movement emerged asking for free education (end to profit) challenging the neoliberal hegemony which, in a way, had not been questioned since the end of the dictatorship; Richard 2015: n.p.). Cultural expressions echo what is seen in the streets; it is what members of the economic elite fail to see. This also explains their complete surprise after the 2011 and 2019 protests.

One may argue that the 2019 revolt was a wake-up call for the Chilean politico-economic elite; conversely, given what happened later and the disregard of the constitutional process by the masses, the revolt can be considered a sort of vanishing point where there was an outpour of frustration that only meant that. Now the country can enjoy some stability until the next wave of protests. *Capuchita negra* (Little Black Hood) by Alejandra del Río was published in late 2019, and it is almost a chronicle for a death foretold. In Del Río's imagination, the revolution fails. On the contrary, before the referendum on the possibility of writing a new constitution, many established authors—including Del Río—submitted short poems for the anthology *Arde* (Burn, 2020). This is the only sort of poetry that shows hope and a joy that is seldom seen in Chilean poetic work in general. The fracture caused by the dictatorship and the disappointment attached to the transitional times were never reasons for celebration. Finding hopeful poetry was indeed a pleasant surprise.

Regarding neoliberalism in Chile, it is important to point out that most of the Chilean citizenry do not directly or explicitly consider it a big problem in their lives, nor is it widely blamed as the root of inequality in the country. Corruption cases in government have led to a distrust of public spending and the coverage of services, and this has contributed to the belief that the private sector offers better and 'honest' deals. The results of the last rounds of constitutional referenda show that Chileans mostly reject the idea of an ideological text, tilting either to the left or to the right of the political spectrum. This is neoliberalism's biggest win: Pinochet's constitution remains, and no changes are approved. The 2019 social unrest was a display of discontent that did not amount to structural changes that, at the time, seemed to be sought by most of the country's citizens. In a more global sense, Chile seems to be a far more stable country

politically and economically speaking regardless of who is in the presidential seat. In December 2023, *The Economist* situated Chile as seventh on the list of countries with the most economic growth and prospects. This also means that there is a way forward which is much more centrist, avoiding political extremes, and which looks for agreement. This view is reminiscent of how the transitional left-leaning governments ruled, always negotiating with former Pinochet supporters who had been elected to parliament. While Pinochet himself is not a threat to the population or to the people who ever opposed him, his constitution was finally what kept the country together after two rounds in which Chileans preferred to keep what they had. This is also proof that Chileans, despite feeling discontent regarding social inequality, are mostly reticent towards drastic change and look for reform to a pre-existent framework, namely neoliberalism, rather than a complete overhaul of it with a re-foundational tone.

A Failed Revolution, Alejandra del Río's Prophecy in *Capuchita negra*[1] (2019)

Capuchita establishes its poetic temporality between 1985 and 1989. These were also years when Alejandra del Río was a teenager. The voice of this poetry, Capuchita—as a character—embodies an adolescent. The collection opens with a dedication to the memory of Paulina Aguirre Tobar, a twenty-year-old woman who was part of a leftist movement and was murdered in March 1985 by the regime's intelligence agency (CNI). This means that *Capuchita* commemorates those who died resisting the regime and, throughout the work, readers can understand that future martyrs are also being remembered. This poetic work anticipates social unrest in Chile. The book's first edition, dating from December 2019, has a note on its back cover indicating: '*Capuchita negra* de Alejandra del Río se terminó de editar en la ciudad de Arica, el mismo día en que el pueblo chileno despertó' (*Capuchita* by Alejandra del Río had its final edits in the city of Arica, the same day that the Chilean people woke up.) This means that what Del Río imagined and poured into this work preceded the actual uprising. Del Río's *Capuchita* shows awareness of an imminent social revolt but also that it would be

[1] All the translations from this book are mine.

one that would fail. I will provide a few examples from this text[2] to prove this point.

Capuchita opens with a poem entitled 'Convocatoria', which in English can be understood as calling for a meeting, calling for applications, or calling others to assemble before a protest. I take the last of these as the best option to understand the meaning of this first poem. This 'Convocatoria' also acts as a sort of genesis. In it the speaker reveals the intent of the poetry:

> mi labia encantará
> la hiel de tus ramas
> destilará en este libro
> y los girones sucios sabré exponer
> uno por uno
> al sol de la conciencia
> (Del Río 2019: 11)

> my wordiness will enchant
> the gall from your branches
> it will distil through this book
> and the dirty twists I will know how to expose
> one by one
> under the sun of your conscience

From a comparative standpoint, *Capuchita* is far less cryptic than *Braille* (1999). The twenty-year gap between these productions sheds light on Del Río's conscious attempt at being more direct. Her speaker here is established as a sort of sorceress or high priestess, far from the humble guiding figure from *Braille*. In *Capuchita* there is a sense of authority coming from the female voice and that makes her closer to the idea of the empowered woman. Capuchita, through her voice and her actions in the poetry collection, will expose some uncomfortable truths. The first one is to be found in the poem following 'Convocatoria'.

'Se vende lindo país con vista al mar' (Lovely Country with Sea View for Sale) encapsulates a more evident criticism of neoliberal Chile. The title also reads as an advert, aiming to attract potential buyers. The whole country, with all its belongings (even its citizens), would be part of the deal. The catch is in the poem itself, as the purchase comes with unwanted characters:

[2] My analysis of *Capuchita* only considers a few quotations that prove its prophetic nature. The text requires further study, as it is one of the richest of Del Río's works.

los hambrientos que ensucian
la copia feliz del Edén
pues así son las callampas
(Del Río 2019: 12)

the hungry who dirtied/stained
the happy copy of Eden
for that's how the shanties are

'La copia feliz del Edén' is a direct reference to Chile. This is a line that appears verbatim in the Chilean national anthem and is a poetic depiction of Chile after other lines elevating the country's great nature. This reference to the anthem is in stark contrast with the hungry and 'callampas', a shortened version of 'poblaciones callampas' (shanty towns) in Chilean Spanish.

Since *Capuchita* is imagined between 1985 and 1989 although published in 2019, there is a connection between that evoked past and the present in Chile. By the late 1980s it can be stated that Chile was 'up for grabs' given the extreme process of privatisation that took place as part of its neoliberal reform. By 2019, the rule of the market is certainly identifiable by common citizens, to the point that it inspired protests.

The poem 'Juguemos en el bosque' (Let's Play in the Forest) not only refers to a famous nursery rhyme, but also depicts the dynamics of post-Pinochet Chile rather explicitly:

los lobeznos juegan a la guerra
mientras se pacta el armisticio
la mama cose una capucha
cuando la familia juega
mientras el lobo no está
(Del Río 2019: 16)

the wolf cubs play war
while the armistice is agreed
mamma sews a hood
when the family plays
while the wolf isn't there

The nursery rhyme can be recognised by most Spanish-speaking children and adults. It also entertained a game where the children played until the wolf was out there to get them and eat them—the child that was caught would 'lose' the game. The first line of the nursery rhyme reads: 'Juguemos en el bosque mientras el lobo no está' (Let's play in the forest while the wolf isn't there), which in

Del Río's work is constructed in the title and the last line of this poem. The children can play in the forest at a time when it is safe for them. The mother knows that this time is brief and that is why she is sewing a hood while the family plays and there is no danger. She is aware that the wolf will return and try to eat them. The wolf cubs would be preparing to attack and they can represent the descendants of the big wolf, General Pinochet, today's conservative political elite in Chile. The armistice was being agreed, in the same way that the Chilean democracy was handed back to the citizenry. These lines also imply that someone in the family is aware that there is violence coming, in this case the mother figure, who wishes to prepare her children and make them hoods to wear in protests so they are not identified by the authorities.

Poem 'El once' (The Eleventh) can be considered prophetic:

> Las fechas no pueden olvidarse
> están escritas
> con la sangre de los caídos
> (Del Río 2019: 22)

> Dates cannot be forgotten
> they are written
> with the blood of the fallen

'The eleventh' will always refer to 11 September 1973, the date of the coup. However, from a more contemporary perspective, 18 October 2019 suffered a similar outcome as many protesters fell during confrontations with the police, who used extreme force against them. As this poem was certainly written before 18 October, a recent reading of events helps to find a connection between two key moments in Chilean contemporary history. This poem asks people not to forget those who gave up their lives protesting, be it people like Paulina Aguirre Tobar or the many that fell in 2019.

It can be argued that the eve of the 2019 uprising was prophesied by Del Río in *Capuchita*:

> La guerra en avanzado estado de gravidez
> tranquila se aplica
> un poco de maquillaje

> Nuevas circunstancias exigen
> otras formas de lucha
> (Del Río 2019: 65)

War in its advanced state of pregnancy
calmly applies
a bit of make-up on herself

New circumstances demand
other ways of resistance

Del Río's poetry signals that something is coming, that war will give birth to a big conflict which is currently hidden under the make-up she wears. The build-up to that moment in *Capuchita* is felt in earlier poems, such as 'Barricada' (Barricade), where the cause for protest is clear and expressed as 'hartazgo ancestral / resentimiento perpetuo, desprecio / por la propia vida' (ancient weariness / perpetual resentment, contempt / for one's own life; Del Río 2019: 23). These lines encapsulate the feelings of those who turned to the streets. 'Barricada' closes with 'recobrar el poder de las masas' (to recover the power of the masses; ibid.). This latest example indicates that Del Río lucidly foreshadowed what took place in October 2019. That 'ancient weariness' and 'perpetual resentment' came alive just in the terms she depicted when writing her barricade.

The idea of the country at war with itself was also something that rang true after the first protests in October 2019. The then president, Sebastián Piñera, stated on live television on 20 October 2019 'we are at war', which ended up fuelling discontent and united those who were protesting at the time. Del Río's work also speaks about finding new ways to resist, which relate more to recent Chile than to dictatorship times. Additionally, she leaves her readers a terrible warning, as in the poem 'Vacío histórico' (Historical Void):

Cambiar el mundo
no parece ya tan urgente
en esos cuentos del futuro
no aparecía
la parte en la que el enemigo engulle
la familia
la infancia de los hijos
(Del Río 2019: 85)

Changing the world
doesn't seem so urgent anymore
in those stories about the future
there wasn't
the part in which the enemy eats
the family
the offspring's childhood

These lines preconfigure a failed revolution. Despite the speaker having ideas strong enough to change the world, it seems a futile exercise. She ultimately acknowledges that changing the world is an impossibility, even for future generations. Here, Del Río's imagination expresses a negative outcome, that the world as it is, with all its injustice and pain, will remain this way. Whatever is left is the word, the poetry written, and those words commemorating the ones who gave their lives for a cause.

Capuchita pays tribute to those who died during Pinochet's regime as well as those who came to die later, in 2019 or 2020, as protests were staged for many months, only to be halted by the Covid-19 pandemic. In 'Responso por el lobo' (The Wolf's Final Rite):

> Descanse en paz
> lobo de la rebelión
> tu muerte no fue en vano
> pronto brillarás en los twitters
> y en los posteos te recordarán
> (Del Río 2019: 109)

> Rest in peace
> wolf of the rebellion
> your death wasn't in vain
> you shall soon shine on twitters
> and the postings will remember you

The more contemporary nature of these lines, through its references to social media, dislocates the poetry, which is anchored between 1985 and 1989. References to Twitter and online posts bring the idea of an online memorial, common in our current age. Those who have fallen can be eternally commemorated through virtual means, resisting the idea of forgetting, and so will the legacy of any of these 'martyrs'.

Towards the end of the collection, readers understand that the imagined revolution that was written in *Capuchita* has failed:

> Sácate la capucha
> ya no la necesitas
> la noche terminó
> (Del Río 2019: 116)

> Remove your hood
> you don't need it anymore
> the night is over

These lines suggest that the time for protesting and resisting is over. Capuchita's face can be seen so she can return to a world that remains unchanged, where hope would be brought by others in new generations. The uprising prophesied in Del Río's poem failed, as did the one that started in October 2019. 'The night is over' also means the poetry is coming to an end. Capuchita tried to join a revolutionary moment that was doomed to fail.

It is certainly astonishing how accurately Del Río imagined an unsuccessful revolt. It seems that all the elements were there which in the end became true. Del Río's work reminds us of this often forgotten aspect of poetic writing, which is its power to foresee what is to come. We find this in the works of Hernández, especially when she imagines a profit-driven Santiago in *La bandera de Chile* (The Chilean Flag, 1981/1991). Nevertheless, Hernández herself was confident in the writing of a new constitution, as she contributed with a poem for the volume *Arde* (Burn, 2020), to be studied in the following pages.

Brief Chants of Hope in *Arde* (2020)[3]

Arde, so far, is the only poetic anthology that shows actual hope for the future and for Chile. Published a year after the first protests, in October 2020, ARDE is an acronym that means 'Acción Revolucionaria de Escritorxs' (Writers' Revolutionary Action), who made a call for poems to be submitted to them for an anthology of poetry dedicated to the constitutional process the country was going through. The volume was published online as an open access PDF file a few days before the first constitutional referendum. All the poetry (437 poems in total) contained in the volume advocated for the approval of the constitutional draft. This means that the poetic productions that form *Arde* were rather hopeful that the result would be positive. In October 2020, 80% of the electorate voted that they agreed with the writing of a new constitution. Up to that moment, the civic way to resolve the issues raised by the 2019 protests would be through the approval or rejection of a new constitution.

Reading certain poems from *Arde* show that this hopeful poetry is completely different in nature and scope from Alejandra del Río's *Capuchita negra*, published only the year before. For this study, I have selected poems by authors I have studied in this volume.

[3] All translations into English are mine.

From the six that form my analytical chapters, only Marina Arrate and Nadia Prado did not submit a poem for *Arde*. Surprisingly, and despite the failed revolution that she wrote about prior to the revolt, Alejandra del Río submitted a piece for *Arde*, alongside Carmen Berenguer, Elvira Hernández and Malú Urriola. In the absence of Arrate and Prado, I will instead study Rosabetty Muñoz's and Diamela Eltit's contributions. The order of poems analysed follows that of the book. Most of the works submitted for this collection by consolidated authors are rather brief, only a couple of lines, and this is also the case with other renowned writers and artists such as Raúl Zurita, Pía Barros and Lina Meruane, to name but a few.

Elvira Hernández's poem strikes the reader by its brevity:

> Lo escrito,
> escrito está: APRUEBO
> (*Arde* 2020: 22)
>
> What's written
> is written: I APPROVE

By paraphrasing a famous line uttered by Lady Macbeth in Act III, Scene ii of Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* (1606): 'What's done is done' (Shakespeare n.d.: 94), Hernández pours all her hopes into the verb APRUEBO, which is taken as a fact. The new constitution will be written, so all that remains to do is to approve it. Hernández's economy of words here signals that the idea of approving the new constitution is meaningful in itself and it does not require further explanation.

Carmen Berenguer positions her hopes in the future:

> Es urgente una carta en blanco para
> escribir una nueva vida. ¡Yo Apruebo!
> (*Arde* 2020: 53)
>
> It is urgent to have a carte blanche to
> write a new life. I Approve!

Berenguer's hopeful view regarding the new constitution as a way to build a completely new life is almost dazzling. It seems like a vision that should become true in the near future—despite the fact that Chileans actually rejected the new constitutional draft twice in 2022 and 2023. The urgency to have this new text, as Berenguer writes in 2020, is certainly revealing of the long time many Chileans have waited for change. Berenguer and her generation had to withstand the Pinochet years and the transitional ones,

so the constitutional process was, for them, a glimmer of hope after fifty years.

Rosabetty Muñoz's contribution speaks of an inclusive Chile:

> APRUEBO la posibilidad de soñar
> juntos un nuevo país, lleno de poesía
> donde quepan todos y cada uno
> pueda desplegar su belleza
> (*Arde* 2020: 62)

> I APPROVE the possibility of dreaming
> together a new country, full of poetry
> where everyone fits in and each one
> can unfurl their own beauty

Muñoz touches on another element of the new constitution that would be written at that time: inclusivity. One of the issues that arose after the writing of the first attempt was that indigenous rights would be recognised and that Chile would be a plurination—that is, understanding the coexistence of different national groups. This was a polemic element of the new chart, and was likely a very strong reason for its rejection. For Muñoz, the idea of writing a new constitution was a dream come true; the idea of an open society was central to her.

Malú Urriola, as briefly as Hernández and Berenguer, writes two lines:

> Una estrella es una palabra
> que alumbra: APRUEBO
> (*Arde* 2020: 74)

> A star is a word
> that illuminates: I APPROVE

As in most cases from the cohort, she writes 'approve' with capital letters, emphasising the centrality of the term. Approving would be illuminating, safeguarding the path for the future of Chile and its people. Approving also means having access to the light, getting out of the darkness that had covered Chile for so long.

Diamela Eltit, also in two lines, expresses her sheer commitment to the process:

> APRUEBO Convención Constitucional
> Con todo sino ¿pa qué?
> (*Arde* 2020: 181)

I APPROVE the Constitutional Convention
Go hard or go home!

Eltit joins her approval of the Convention with a recognition of those who were on the streets. 'Con todo sino, ¿pa qué' was the slogan of the 2019 uproar—which may also be translated into a slogan in English to emphasise its meaning rather than its literal translation. Eltit is recognising the activism that led to the moment of having a constitutional process; she is paying homage to those who went to the streets and protested. She was indeed a protester when she participated, in opposition to General Pinochet's regime, in the CADA collective in the 1980s. Participating in social movements can indeed bring concrete results, such as a constitutional vote. Nevertheless, the passing of time would show that the Chilean neoliberal model is very resilient and that its overhaul is not taking place any time soon.

Finally, Alejandra del Río approaches the idea of a new constitution very pedagogically, in line with her poetic education project:

Soñar, educar, sanar, crear, organizarse, conversar, escribir,
trabajar, reflexionar, orar, marchar, debatir, investigar, estudiar,
plantar, cosechar, proteger, descubrir, bailar, recordar,
unir, proyectar, empatizar, incluir, cuidar, amar, reír, jugar,
amar, luchar, votar.

Necesitamos todos los verbos para construir el Chile digno
que nos merecemos.

Yo apruebo.

(*Arde* 2020: 207)

To dream, to educate, to heal, to create, to organise ourselves, to talk, to write,
To work, to reflect, to pray, to march, to debate, to research, to study,
To sow, to reap, to protect, to discover, to dance, to remember,
To unite, to project, to empathise, to include, to take care, to love, to laugh, to play, to love,
to fight, to vote.

We need all the verbs to build the dignified Chile
that we deserve

I approve.

Despite foreseeing the failure of revolution and writing it in *Capuchita*, Del Río feels inspired by the political juncture in 2020 and chooses to believe that the future can be different. Del Río

begins with the idea of a dream, as in Muñoz's poem, and the need to be inclusive in terms of language and action. The Constitution is a written text, hence too the importance of the written word, especially all the possible verbs, as Del Río very hopefully writes.

Arde allows readers to understand a moment in Chilean history that, albeit brief, brought great joy to the artistic scene in Chile. From those who fought the dictatorship through ambiguous productions and dodged censorship in the 1980s, to those who lived through the regime as children, there are generations of poets and artists who saw in this 2020 process the only glimmer of hope in almost fifty years. Little did they know that the Chilean electorate, for many reasons that political thinkers will study for decades to come, would not agree on a constitutional chart that was leaning to any of the extremes of the political spectrum. Certainly that hope expressed so directly in *Arde* was momentary, but it existed, and that matters for the future too.

Poetic productions between the 1980s and 2020 are testament to the big changes Chile has been undergoing and they also help us to understand what brought about the present juncture. The fact that the constitutional processes failed does not solve the issue of social inequality and the possibility of a new uprising. In preparation for such a moment, it is important to recognise the value of poetic writing and its ability to capture and express the citizenry's frustrations. Chile is a country of poets, it is often said, and it is through its poetry that we have witnessed its history unfold.

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Index