BREAKING THE SILENCE:
EFFECTS OF THE DICTATORSHIP ON CHILEAN SOCIETY

An Analysis of Four Works of Chilean Literature:
La Muerte y La Doncella by Ariel Dorfman, Estrella Distante, and Nocturno de Chile by Roberto Bolaño, and Por favor, Rebobinar by Alberto Fuguet

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ABSTRACT

Chile can be seen as having a past that is unfinished, deeply troubling, and in need of being addressed collectively. Torture, disappearance, censorship and rebellion have constituted the lives of Chileans for many years due to the effects of a bloody coup d'etat led by General Pinochet and backed by the armed forces, which overthrew the then democratically elected Socialist Government, led by Salvador Allende in 1973. Chile’s sudden outbreak of violence, a nation hitherto known for its political tolerance, shocked its citizens. As hundreds of ordinary Chileans vanished without a trace throughout Pinochet’s dictatorial regime, it was not surprising that Chilean society soon succumbed to a culture of fear. This period of dictatorial rule has subsequently impacted severely on Chilean society and its citizens.

Democracy was finally achieved after seventeen years of authoritarian rule, but the Chilean transition to democracy from 1990 onwards has been fraught with difficulties. As Chile has undergone social and political change, so too have the content and perspective of Chilean literature. Literature provides an important avenue for influencing readers and promoting social change. This research analyses the effects of the dictatorship on the different factions of Chilean society and is portrayed through four novels, La Muerte y La Doncella by Ariel Dorfman, Estrella Distante, and Nocturno de Chile by Roberto Bolaño, and Por favor, Rebobinar by Alberto Fuguet. They focus on the interrelationship between political, art and national identity.

This research argues how the Pinochet dictatorship has shaped Chilean society, primarily the effect it has had and still has today on the Chilean people. It shows how problematic it is for Chileans to come to terms with what has been done to them when there are not the right avenues available to them. It is also a condemnation of silence, not only to the conservative rightists, but also to the entire intellectual scene dominated by fear and self-censorship, and it shows how important memory is to quell the collective struggle against truth and non-remembrance. This research ultimately emphasises how the Pinochet regime is at the essence of all four of these novels and how so many lives have been affected by an authoritarian regime that lasted nearly two decades. Chile can be seen as a country that is afraid and simultaneously needful of understanding its fear and its scars, not only about the long-term effects of torture and violence on human beings, but how as a nation they can move forward and accept their past.
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INTRODUCTION

This study is situated in the crossroads of two paths, one of literature and one of Chilean political history. Chile, its people and its culture, and especially its literature are of huge interest to me. I have chosen to focus on this subject due to my ever increasing interest in the Pinochet dictatorship, primarily the effect it has had and still has today on the Chilean people. My previous study on the Pinochet regime focused mainly on the ways in which torture and fear was used to repress a nation, and how Chilean identity, including gender, classicism and race was portrayed through various characters in two pieces of Chilean literature. In this study I will expand on those ideas but have chosen to focus primarily on collective memory, analysing the different reactions to the dictatorship and the effect it has had on the individual, especially through the transition to democracy. My main theme will focus around this question - how are the consequences of a dictatorship on society portrayed through literature? I propose to answer this question by analysing four pieces of Chilean literature. These include two novels by Roberto Bolaño, *Estrella Distante* and *Nocturno de Chile*; a play, *La Muerte y La Doncella*, written by Ariel Dorfman; and lastly *Por favor, Rebobinar*, a novel by Alberto Fuguet. I have specifically chosen these four literary pieces because they are each defined by their main characters’ struggle with personal memories of the Pinochet regime. All of the characters are from different facets of society and have vastly different experiences to tell. However, none of them, regardless of who they supported, have been left unscarred by the consequences of the Chilean dictatorship. These three Chilean authors are widely acclaimed writers and all very capable of revealing the most complex dimensions of Chilean society, either through their own experiences, or taken from those close to them.

I have organised my analysis into six chapters. The first chapter will introduce the reader to the period of politics I have chosen to focus on, which is reflected in the four novels. This will include two parts. Firstly a brief overview of the 1970s and 1980s when General Pinochet, backed by the armed forces, overthrew the then democratically elected Socialist Government, led by Salvador Allende in 1973 in a bloody coup d'etat. It shows the way in which torture and fear were used as a means to consolidate power by a repressive, authoritarian regime. The second half will focus on how peace was restored, and the main
hurdles Chile and its citizens had to conquer, and in some ways are still conquering, in order to complete a transition to democracy.

The second chapter deals with the ability of victims, and their torturers, to confront the past. This is depicted through Ariel Dorfman's widely acclaimed play, La Muerte y La Doncella. It brings up the long term effects of terror and violence on people in a time when being cautious was seemingly the only option in order to pave the way for the transition to democracy. This theme is depicted through the character of Paulina, a victim of the regime, who kidnaps the man she believes is responsible for her rape and torture, and puts him on trial. A woman who will not forget or let society forget what has been done to her. It shows how problematic it is for Chileans to come to terms with what has been done to them when there are not the right avenues available to them, especially when their torturers are out there free, constantly wondering if their crimes will ever be revealed. Ultimately it raises the question of how can those who tortured and those who were tortured co-exist in the same land?

The third chapter will focus on Estrella Distante, written by Roberto Bolaño. It is the exile journey of the lost generation of Chile. I will analyse their dispersion throughout the world and the effect this has on individual and collective identity. Through the two main characters’ relationship, the narrator and Carlos Wieder, I will depict how human nature has a hypocritical complicity, a dark side, that despite the narrator's intentions, he cannot escape violence. The narrator's assistance in helping to track down Wieder, who murdered countless women during the regime, and ensure his execution, can be seen as retributive justice, an act of justice. However, by assisting in his murder, it also aligns Wieder’s morals with the narrator’s, defining it as a vengeful act. This suggests that the narrator is unable to escape a barbaric sense within himself, that the settling of personal accounts can in no way adjust the terrible things that have happened during the dictatorship.

The fourth chapter will be an analysis of Roberto Bolaño's novel, Nocturno de Chile. The main theme I will address in this chapter is self-censorship, as portrayed through the character of Sebastian Urrutia Lacroix, an Opus Dei priest and literary critic, who is politically very conservative. It is the unlikeable Lacroix that allows Bolaño to show the reader an authentic picture of contemporary Chile, through Lacroix's participation in Pinochet's triumphal radical right-wing historical project. The story is linked to factual events as many of the characters’ traits mirror those of a few well-known Chileans. It is Bolaño's
intent to condemn the actions of Lacroix, the condemnation of intellectuals who bury themselves in literature, ignoring the horrors of what is happening to their country. It is also a condemnation of silence, not only to the conservative rightists, but also to the entire intellectual scene dominated by fear and self-censorship.

The struggle for memory/identity is confronted in the fifth chapter, in Por favor, Rebobinar by Alberto Fuguet. It focuses on the debate between those who feel forgetting the past is the only way to move forward, and those who feel the need for justice is paramount. The focus is on the younger generation, those who lived out their childhoods under the repression of the Pinochet regime. It is this generation who recognises that neither repressing the past, nor dwelling on the past is the right answer. Through the various characters in the story we witness the difficulties of not only coming to terms with the actions of their parents' generation, but the need to discover who they are and the need to question the official government version of history that varies from their own personal experience. It shows how important memory is to quell the collective struggle against the truth and non-remembrance. Fuguet's characters are metaphors representing the conflict between past and present in Chile, unwittingly still a part of Pinochet's legacy.

The sixth and final chapter is a comparative analysis where I will address all the issues I have raised in the previous chapter, outlining their similarities and differences in regard to subject, technique, tone and style. I then summarise and conclude my study emphasising how the Pinochet regime is at the essence of all four of these novels and how so many lives have been affected by an authoritarian regime that lasted nearly two decades. Chile can be seen as a country that is afraid and simultaneously needful of understanding its fear and its scars, not only about the long-term effects of torture and violence on human beings, but how as a nation they can move forward and accept their past.
CHAPTER ONE

The political situation in Chile during its transition to democracy and the subsequent effect on Chilean identity

Chile can be seen as having political significance due to its exceptionalism. It has undertaken various political experiments in the past and many of its neighbours have looked to it for economic guidance. From the 1930s to the early 1970s, Chile enjoyed a democratic inclusive, and seemingly stable, multiparty system that spanned the political spectrum from the conservatives to the communists and Marxists. This period then led onto Chile’s short experiment with ‘A Peaceful Road to Socialism’¹ which saw Salvador Allende elected as President in 1973. (Faundez 310) Allende’s governance, however, was short lived due to the military coup which imposed an experiment of a rigid form of neoliberalism by General Augusto Pinochet and his military regime. Most recently, in the post 1990 period, Chile has seen a return to democracy and sustained macro-level economic growth under the guidance of the Centre-Left rule coalition, the Concertacion party. In 2009, Chile elected its first right-wing government since Pinochet’s dictatorship ended in 1990. Throughout these changes, the United States of America have continued to have a constant presence and influence in Chilean politics. The issues I address in this chapter deal with the brutality of the dictatorship during its seventeen years of domination; the regimes downfall in the 1988 referendum; and the subsequent transition to democracy in 1990. I initially focus on the dictatorships’ culture of fear and repression and the introduction of its neo-liberal policy. I then examine the effects of the dictatorship on Chilean citizens and how Pinochet’s legacy continued throughout the transitional period and still exists today.

For seventeen years, Chile answered to the rule of one man, General Augusto Pinochet. After a military coup toppled the Socialist President Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973, Pinochet set a brutal shadow army against dissidents. Chile’s sudden outbreak of violence, a nation hitherto known for its political tolerance, shocked its citizens. As hundreds of ordinary Chileans vanished without a trace, it was not surprising that Chilean

¹ President Allende claimed that Chile was one country where a revolutionary government could carry out a socialist programme without resorting to an armed confrontation. Several characteristics of Chilean society made Allende’s claim appear quite plausible: a long tradition of almost uninterrupted parliamentary democracy; widespread political participation from the masses, an above average level of economic development among underdeveloped countries, a strong working class firmly controlled by the Marxist parties, and a military force who had traditionally respected the verdict of the polls.
society soon succumbed to a culture of fear. It can therefore be seen that this period of dictatorial rule has subsequently impacted severely on Chilean society and its citizens.

Chilean society has always been highly segmented and stratified. Chile’s complex social structure is made up of a large popular sector; the lower class of peasants, urban and rural workers and urban shanty town dwellers. The diverse middle sector is made up of teachers and other professionals, white collared workers, bureaucrats and small merchants, whereas the small upper class sector is formed mostly by landowners and businessmen. These groups have rarely worked cohesively, as they do not share explicitly understood interests. They have often been internally fragmented and loyal to different political parties. These social forces conflict with issues of distribution of wealth and income, the control of economic resources and ultimately political power. Historically the upper middle class and elite class have mostly held the power. However the popular sector has always been politically aware despite their poverty, and has been able to mobilize in order to attain certain concrete goals. They tend to be better organised at grassroots level, and due to this are regarded as a potentially powerful political force (Hecht Oppenheim 5)

In 1970 Salvador Allende, the leader of the Chilean Socialist Party was elected president. He became the first Marxist in the world to gain power in a free democratic election. He was head of the revolutionary coalition, Unidad Popular (UP), a complex coalition of Communists, Socialists, Radicals, the centrist Social Democrats and the Popular Action Unity Party (MAPU). Their main aim was to construct the path of socialism in Chile, thus Allende promoted a socialist vision in regard to his policies. Political and economic issues are interconnected and form the context within which government policies are made. This is often more evident in lesser developed countries where major political decisions centre on issues of economic development. These decisions subsequently impact the various groups of society in different ways. Determining the direction in relation to development strategy is regarded as a fundamental political decision. This is because it can affect the standard of living in society. Latin America was in a process of dependent development at this stage. This meant they were meeting the needs of other nations, but not their own. It was felt there was a necessity to make structural changes within Chile. The emphasis was on control of basic needs of production, protecting the basic industry from foreign competition and capital, and carrying out a land reform programme. The main purpose was to end the relationship of economic dependency with more industrially advanced nations, in a sense, to end neo-colonialism. (Constable and Valenzuela 24-25) The state was to play an activist role
in breaking these ties of dependency. Although economic growth was an important issue, the emphasis was more on changing the economic and political power relations, a radical structural position.

Prior to the military coup, the political system encouraged political participation through voting – congressional, municipal and presidential elections. These elections were always staggered which maintained a continued involvement in politics for the public. However, the UP’s economic policies threatened the base of power and wealth the economic elite had always enjoyed. Structural reforms would potentially shift the balance of power away from the wealthy, as they owned the major farms and industries. Not surprisingly, the United States of America (US) also did not support Allende’s economic proposals due to the large amount of investments many of its powerful companies had in Chile’s infrastructure, especially Chile’s copper mines. Failing to stop Allende from assuming the presidency, a military coup was regarded by the US as the only option to get rid of the threat of socialism in Latin America, an area they perceived as their own backyard. The wealthy Chilean elite supported this option too but General Rene Schneider, army commander in chief, put any thoughts of an immediate coup to a halt as he was loyal to the principle that the armed forces should support the elected government. (Hecht Openheim, 99-101) It came as no surprise that he was assassinated in October, 1970 by right wing terrorists,² horrifying the Chilean public, but as a result removing any obstacles for a military coup. A strong, vocal right-wing opposition to Allende’s policies and a hostile attitude from the US was not helped by the UP’s internal factions arguing over the political direction of their government. Subsequently, the configuration of social forces, political parties and institutional opposition was what Allende’s government faced during 1970 to 1973.

Despite the initial military backing of Allende’s government, a campaign of sabotage, riots, strikes and terror continued by the Right, encouraged by the US. The international factor that added to the equation was the nature of the international world order at the time, with an emphasis on the Cold War, creating huge tension between the USSR and the US. This meant that the attitude of the US in regard to the threat of socialism in Latin America

² The U.S Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities published a report titled Covert Action in Chile, 1963-1973, which provides details of U.S behaviour. Strategies dubbed Track I and Track II outline their secret actions. In Track II, the CIA worked with right-wing military men to facilitate a coup. The plan was to kidnap General René Schneider, and the U.S assisted by sending money and weapons. The kidnapping plan however went awry as General Schneider tried to defend himself and was killed in the bungled attempt.
was particularly hostile and intolerant. US ploys against Allende included Kissinger’s secret ‘40 Committee’ or task force to sabotage the Chilean government, a US$1.5 million subsidy for anti-Allende media and a massive covert interference in Chilean affairs. (O'Shaughnessy 42-43) The US government had imbued the Chilean forces with the idea that the Chilean national interest was also the US national interest. Many soldiers were trained in army schools in the US and were led to believe that they were liberating their country from the ‘internal enemy’. Often their training in the US was based upon political ideology. They believed the stereotypes and thoughts embedded in them in the US, which resulted in their support of the military coup due to their naivety, ignorance and political short-sightedness. By the time of the coup, the political views of the US were so well disseminated among Chilean armed forces that it was too late to alter the outlook of the majority.

On September 11, 1973, President Allende's democratically elected Chilean government was overthrown in a bloody coup d'état by the military junta, which included General Augusto Pinochet, General Gustavo Leigh, General Merino and General Cesar Mendoza, the newly appointed Commanders in Chief of the army, air force, navy and carabineros, respectively. The military authorities who took over the government after the September 1973 coup had among their goals the depolitisation of public life and the liberalisation of the economy. To pursue depolitisation, military authorities smothered political and social organisations. They set up specific public policies to reduce state intervention and regulation of economic and productive activities. Unchecked by representation and participation mechanisms, deregulation, decentralisation, and state disengagement policies penetrated all levels of Chilean society, its economy and its politics. General Pinochet appointed himself Supreme Head of the Nation and President of the Junta on June 27, 1974 under decree law 527, eventually taking on the title of President of the Republic of Chile by decree on December 16, 1974 (O'Shaughnessy 78).

The military junta knew that they needed to justify the brutal repression that followed the coup. Therefore, a counter revolution against the rising popular movement of socialism was introduced. The regime achieved this with the promise to bring Chile to economic greatness with the introduction of a capitalist ideology. Pinochet rejected Allende’s policies, especially the idea of an activist state and felt it was necessary to modernise Chile, but with the exclusion of political liberties. A group of Chilean University of Chicago economists, known as the Chicago Boys, pushed for free market ideology. The military government backed a neoliberal economic plan for national development. This involved freeing the
market forces, privatising vast segments of the economy and withdrawing the state from the role of overseeing economic and social change. (Constable and Valenzuela 168-172) Economic liberalisation coupled with brutal political repression was the method they chose to impose on the people of Chile.

Torture as a means to consolidate power was the strategy used in phase one of Pinochet’s regime. The military’s use of systematic repression and torture was attained by social control. The Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA) was formed as Chile’s secret police force. It was officially established on June 15, 1974. Colonel Manuel Contreras was chosen to head DINA with the main duty of centralizing the work of the already formed military intelligence agencies of the different branches of the armed forces. However behind this screen lay crueller intentions, like kidnapping and torture. Those taken by the DINA officers, if not shot immediately, were sent to clandestine torture centres, such as Villa Grimaldi or ‘La Venda Sexy’, a torture centre notorious for its sadistic sexual crimes. Most torture centres used beatings, simulated firing squads, and electric shock treatments, among other barbaric acts. Thousands of people ‘disappeared’ this way. CIA Station Chief Ray Warren ensured CIA help in supervising the planning and organisation of the new intelligence structure and in training its principal officers. The use of torture and kidnapping was not arbitrary or random. The regimes first two years focused on eliminating the MIR (Revolutionary Left) network. They were seen as a major threat due to the MIR belief in armed struggle to achieve socialism. By the end of 1975 the underground MIR network was severely damaged. In 1975 the focus drifted to socialists in general, and by 1976 the focus was on members of the Communist Party. Of those killed during the regime, the majority had links to these three political parties. The 1991 Chilean Human Rights Commission Report cited 686 of the 2,279 victims as being workers or peasants, almost one third of the total victims. (CHRC 94) Often those killed were justified by the military under the ‘ley de fuga’ (law of escape) which states that prisoners who try to escape will be shot or that the prisoner died as a result of a shootout with leftist forces.

Another key commission was the Caravan of Death, which, in 1973, took the lives of no fewer than seventy five political prisoners in five Chilean cities. The mandate was to travel to the five provincial cities of Cauquenes, La Serena, Copiapo, Antofagasta and Calama, supposedly to “standardise sentences” but, in fact, to “toughen” the military in the provinces by executing political prisoners who were awaiting trial or had received “lenient” sentences (Verdugo 90). The majority of the prisoners murdered during this mission were
waiting in prison to be judged. Their crimes were holding political views and participating in political organisations that could be characterised as liberal, leftist, socialist or communist. Some were merely in the wrong place at the wrong time. Therefore, brutal violation of human rights during the first phase of military rule was deemed successful because the military ultimately prevented any widespread revolt and suppressed virtually all organised opposition to their regime.

The regime did not always use torture or detention, but often opted to forcibly exile dissidents, mostly well-known public figures, who spoke out against the regime. “Sometimes they would take people, still dressed in nightclothes, from their homes in the early morning and deposit them on the Argentine border high up in the Andes Mountains.” (Hecht Oppenheim, 109). Mass exile was vital to Pinochet's objectives of gaining and holding absolute, uncontested control over Chile. The majority of those forced into exile were members of left parties, although non-partisans with leftist sympathies were numerous and most opted for self-exile rather than to remain in Chile under extreme repressive rule. Prominent members of radical left wing groups, like the MIR, who had managed to avoid detention and sneak out of the country, were considered too dangerous a threat to his regime, and thus needed to be eradicated. Pinochet subsequently came to an agreement with his neighbouring dictatorial regime leaders to deal with this problem. Operation Condor was the co-ordinating committee of the apparatuses of state terror in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. It worked in a way similar to Interpol in the sense that the countries involved were united in the fight against ‘communists’, ‘leftists’ and ‘subversives.’ This operation was maintained in secrecy for years and was responsible for thousands of victims. This resulted in many exiles fleeing further afield to Europe (Muñoz 95).

Since exiling the regime's enemies was central to Pinochet's mission of eradicating the Chilean left, it was necessary to prohibit exiles' return. By Decree Law 81 of November 1973, the military government required citizens who had left the country after the coup to

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3 The most active period of this multinational secret police and army cooperation against leftwing and other opposition was between 1975 - 1978. As Chile and other South American countries one by one came under repressive military regimes, up until 1976, Argentina was the only country in the region where thousands of Chilean, Uruguayan, Bolivian and other political exiles were able to find refuge. In March 1974, Chilean, Uruguayan, and Bolivian police leaders met with the deputy chief of the Argentine federal police, Alberto Villar, to investigate ways of working together to wipe out the presence of thousands of ‘subversive’ political exiles in Argentina. Villar promised that the Argentine Federal Police’s Foreign Affairs Department would deal swiftly with any foreigners that the neighbouring juntas wanted eliminated. The overall result of this massive political repression and terrorist dirty war, was that an estimated 35,000 people were murdered, many disappearing without a trace. Hundreds of thousands of others were imprisoned and tortured.
obtain permission from the Ministry of the Interior to re-enter Chile. Thus no exile considered dangerous was allowed to return. When they renewed their passports at Chilean consulates, many exiles had the letter L stamped on them, indicating that the bearers were on the list of those prohibited from returning (Wright and Oñate 2007: 43). Having portrayed exile as a humane alternative to prison for ‘enemies of the nation,’ the regime had no intention of changing its policy on return. When foreign correspondents covering the plebiscite on the 1980 constitution asked Pinochet whether exiles would be allowed to return, he replied, "I have only one answer: No" (Comite Pro Retorno de los Exiliados Chilenos 1980: 10).

Phase two of the military regime, from 1977-1981 involved institutionalizing the new political and economic realities. By implementing the Chicago Boys free market system, Pinochet hoped to deregulate the economy and encourage trade under the concept of comparative advantage. This involved reducing tariffs drastically and deregulating finance. Government owned or controlled enterprises were sold off or returned to private hands, opting for private sector control rather than state intervention in the Chilean economy. This meant that a very small group profited and controlled the major commercial and industrial enterprises and banks. Conflicts of interest between public policy and private gain were very much apparent under this new system. The model meant that the strong would survive and the weak would fall by the wayside. Pinochet’s new neo-liberal policy was easily imposed upon Chilean society as the regime was operating within a “state of exception” and could use violence and fear as its chief weapons. Due to this environment of fear and repression, the Pinochet regime succeeded in instilling and legitimising the free market as a set of values that became inscribed in Chile’s public imagination. Right up until Pinochet lost power in 1990, his regime carried out a ‘structural adjustment’ of the Chilean state, promoting values like individualism, competition, consumerism, and privatisation (Lazzara 273)

The new political reality included, for the first time, a timetable for a transition to civilian rule. The new rules he outlined in his July 1977 speech took the form of a new Constitution which took effect in October 1981 after a controversial plebiscite to keep him in power occurred in September 1980. The Constitution that Pinochet had created reshaped Chile’s political institutions. He called the future democracy a protected or authoritarian democracy. The new Constitution prevented organised Marxist groups from the political realm, gave the military a permanent political role, and enhanced presidential power. There was to be a period of almost a decade before this protected democracy would even take place.
Phase three consisted of Pinochet’s economic miracle taking a turn for the worst in late 1981-1982. Many large firms went bankrupt and the regime was forced to intervene, despite its firm adherence to the market model. The most important outcome from this period was not just the questioning of the economic model, but its political impact. A political space was suddenly opened up for critics of the government to question military rule. It laid the groundwork for phase four - popular mobilisation against the dictatorship in favour for democracy.

A new generation of Chileans began coming into prominence in the early eighties. Those who were children in 1973, were now teenagers and young adults. They had to process the troubling issues of the 1970s and find their place in a world of military dictatorship. It became evident that this new generation would not easily conform to the “chronology of crisis and institutionalisation that occurred in the adult public domain” (Stern 2006: 180). A minority “awakened” and built a culture of dissent. The rebelliousness of some university students was not easy to contain. As Stern explains: “By 1980-82, youths took the lead in placing barricades on the road to oblivion. They were the great chink in the armour of regime institutionalisation” (179). A minority of students turned their universities into forums for expression and dissidence that defied the military’s control. By the late 1970s, debate became a prevalent aspect of university life. This was firstly due to the high turnover of military rectors put in place by the regime, and secondly, Gonzalo Vial, the minister of education in 1979, felt universities had been drained of intellectual life due to war mentality of the military rectors, so he assumed a new policy of phasing out these military rectors in the hope of reinvigorating university culture.4 Students began a path of hardening as more aggressive grassroots actions took place. Youth divisions of political parties became more prominent and they often held rallies to oppose the regime. Although they were still fearful of the regime, they felt secure at organised political events with their comrades. Throughout 1983-86, university and non-university youths participated heavily in massive protests.

During this youth ‘awakening’ period, opposition political parties had started to organise themselves and forge large anti-Pinochet coalitions. Ordinary working-class and middle-class people responded by forming a network of grassroots economic and political

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4 Vial believed that the more civilian profile of the Cabinet led by Interior Minister Fernandez, along with the 1977 dissolution of the DINA and the 1978 amnesty, signified a break with the past. He backed a civilizing of the military government and promoted a reform plan to grant universities latitude to solve problems on their own and to foster an education more profound than technical apprenticeship. His plan ultimately failed because it clashed with Pinochet’s concept of security as Pinochet valued order above all else.
organisations, women’s organisations and labour unions which were all joined by a common goal: to end the dictatorship. Large-scale street actions demonstrated that the military rule had not managed to suppress Chilean society entirely. These grassroots organisations evolved into a massive social movement in favour of democracy and proved to be critical players in the popular mobilisation period of 1983-86. Opposition political parties were able to take advantage of the political space created by both the economic crisis of the early 1980s and popular mobilisation in the streets. However throughout this period Pinochet still maintained power and managed to suppress these movements through violence and repression, mostly due to the opposition’s lack of unity. It was eventually decided that other mechanisms would have to be used to bring the dictatorship to an end. They realised that if they were to do this they would have to “play politics by the very rules that Pinochet had devised and to defeat him” (Oppenheim 180). In other words, the only way to displace Pinochet was to confront him in the electoral arena in the 1988 presidential plebiscite.

The opposition’s new strategy was to win the presidential plebiscite that Pinochet had called for October 5, 1988, with himself as candidate. If the opposition could convince enough of Chile’s citizens to vote no, then in accordance with the 1980 Constitution, Pinochet would be forced to schedule competitive presidential and congressional elections the following year. This determination to win was the goal that served to bring all the opposition factions together. By early 1988 they had joined into a unified ‘Concertación por el No’ (Hecht Oppenheim 133). On October 5, 1988 their grand efforts paid off: The no vote won, with 55 percent of the popular vote. Despite this huge victory, they still had to prepare for the presidential and congressional elections in order to achieve the democracy they had been pursuing for so long. They maintained their successful coalition of sixteen political parties, and transformed it into the Concertación para el Democracia. They named Patricio Aylwin as their presidential candidate. He faced two candidates, one Pinochet picked to represent the right, Herman Buchi, former minister of finance, and Francisco Javier Errazuriz, another candidate from the right, but with a more populist discourse. Five months later after a period of hard campaigning by the Concertacion, Aylwin won a majority of the popular votes and became the first civilian president to be elected in Chile since 1973. Despite rigged electoral rules, the Concertacion candidates won a majority of the elective seats in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. However, due to the presence of nine nonelective
senators, they lacked a majority in the upper house. 5This became a major frustration to the new Concertacion government as they were forced to make concessions in order to appease this majority during the transitional period.

The installation of a civilian as president did not mean that Chilean democracy was instantly re-established. A long-term process was to take place in order to reform the institutional order. The Concertacion leaders aspired to more than just a transitory electoral alliance; they wanted this alliance to be an effective coalition for governance. Initially they sought to eventually create a full democracy, rather than accept the truncated one Pinochet had given them as a long term challenge. However they were not prepared for how fraught with difficulties this transitional period would be. The political system created by Pinochet had many undemocratic features. The Chilean military still wielded considerable power and influence in the political realm. The consensus over the meaning of the term democracy caused major problems. The political institutions instigated by Pinochet were fundamentally undemocratic, but the Right refused to accept any changes. Hence Aylwin was forced to accept for the most part Pinochet’s constitution that guided his rule. In it, Pinochet had reserved a few special powers for himself. Until 1998, he remained the Army's Commander in Chief and upon his resignation he had himself appointed Senator for Life. His constitution put limits on the full exercise of democracy and made the military the "guarantors" of the government's "institutionality." (Hecht Openheim 184)While Aylwin held office, Pinochet also staged unannounced military maneuvers as if to remind everyone that he could, at any moment, seize the government again. Such tactics kept him and his allies shielded from almost all human rights prosecutions. In 1991 he declared, "The day they touch one of my men, the rule of law ends." (Stern 2010:19).

The biggest obstacle facing the Concertacion government was the extremely broad formal amnesty provision. It was faced with deciding how to address the human rights violations committed by the Pinochet regime. The main hurdle was the 1978 amnesty provision, a decree-law that protected the military from possible retribution by giving the military amnesty for any criminal acts that had taken place during the state of siege, between September 1973 and March 1978. This provision meant it would be difficult to conceive of prosecuting without provoking subversive and violent reactions. Presented with a lack of

5 In Chile's bicameral parliament, the Concertación had no majority in the Senate. Bicameral legislatures tend to require a concurrent majority to pass legislation. This forced them to negotiate all law projects with the right-wing parties, a situation they found themselves in constantly for over fifteen years.
room to manoeuvre due to the still powerful elites and institutions associated with the old regime, and the need to establish effective control over the state apparatus, the Concertación government chose to use a truth-telling mechanism, establishing the National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation through presidential decree just six weeks after his inauguration in 1990.

The Rettig Commission, as it was commonly known as after the lawyer who headed it, was a temporally limited body charged with collecting, verifying, and making public data, testimony, and other evidence about past political violence. (Hayner) However its mandate stipulated that it was not allowed to assign criminal responsibilities or sanctions. As Collins noted, the Rettig Commission “short-circuited the link between truth and consequences, providing incentives for perpetrator testimony such as anonymity or the possibility of immunity from prosecution via amnesty.” (Collins 10) This controversial aspect of truth-telling initiatives outraged the victims and the families of those murdered or disappeared. To them it represented an apparent willingness to make a trade-off between truth and justice, especially because the Rettig Commission was expressly forbidden to name individual perpetrators.

The Concertacion’s form of limited truth and justice led many youth to disengage from the past. These activists, who had been monumental in campaigning and achieving the change necessary for a restoration of democracy, suddenly found that there was no room for them in the negotiations. There is a striking difference between the political passion of the youth before the end of the dictatorship and their apathy during the transitional period. The Concertacion government managed to co-opt the student movement and defuse the social tensions and this led the youth to withdraw from politics and search for meaning in other spheres. Chile in the nineties became a culture of stalemate and ambivalence.

Thus, Chile was not able to make more progress during the 1990s to remove the shackles of the dictatorship. As sociologist Tomas Moulian has stated: “La llamada transición ha operado como un sistema de trueques: la estabilidad, se dijo, tiene que ser comprada por el silencio” (32-33). Given Pinochet’s continuing powerful position, albeit now from behind the scenes, his legacy of fear continued. In fact, Moulian suggests Pinochet had successfully recreated himself into the “Dictador en el Patriarca” (33). The transition to democracy forced Chile’s political elites to elaborate memory narratives that would favorably position the nation within a global economy. Chile’s national psyche was profoundly changed by the
introduction of the free market model (Lazzara 273). Over time, the market approach affected not only people’s behaviour but also, eventually, their basic values. Chileans became self-interested and the notion of collective interests was discarded. Utopian possibilities had long been abolished, the individuals were now used to being powerless spectators. To fill in this void, they turned to consumerism to establish their identity. The Pinochet regime and the Concertación governments “disciplined” Chileans by turning them into “credit-card citizens” obsessed with maintaining appearances and driven by individualistic desires (102). Moulián affirms that, in general, Chilean subjectivity today is largely defined by materialistic concerns, a condition that reflects the deep symbolic penetration of consumerism into the social fabric. This logic reads as a euphoric celebration of the nation as “market, merchandise, and brand,” a space imagined as a business whose citizens are primarily producers and consumers (114). As other critics of neoliberalism have observed, the free market “absorbs differences,” neutralizing them and allowing them to exist only as long as they do not pose a threat to the system’s overall hegemony (135).

It can be seen that the politics of memory became a significant issue in the 1990s. Documenting and coming to terms with human rights violations under military rule played an important role in the political legitimacy of the ruling Centre-Left coalition that steered Chile’s democratic transition in 1989-91. At the same time, the continuing power of Pinochet, the military and the business sector in the 1990s imposed sharp constraints on Centre-Left memory strategies, and it eventually bred a demoralising sense of impasse. The nation had suffered a collective trauma, whether it was during the Allende period or under military rule. Chileans were extremely sensitive to situations that they thought might recreate previous crises. It was a psychological issue as people afraid to speak their minds openly due to a “culture of fear”, had learned a high degree of self-censorship. This fear limited popular participation. Majority belief in the truth of massive and unjustifiable human rights violations and in the consequent imperative of criminal justice kept running up against ambivalence. There was cultural weariness with the memory question, and loss of political will to engage it, yet it was inflected by the moral impossibility of declaring openly its abandonment. Right or wrong, many also believed that the large minority of Pinochetista supporters and sympathisers included sectors too powerful to challenge hard. One result was a kind of moral schizophrenia, where an outrage or polemic would erupt and arise all over again the impossibility of forgetting the past. Another result was that by the end of the nineties, many activists felt increasingly ignored and abandoned by the state. Even after
Pinochet retired as army commander and was subsequently arrested in London, the human rights question still remained volatile and bred ambivalence. The Chilean judiciary gradually shifted its jurisprudence on dictatorship-era human rights abuses over time, ruling the country’s 1978 amnesty law inapplicable in many cases. At least seventy six military and police officers have been convicted for human rights abuses and some 700 others are still under investigation. (Marny 79-83) It is essential for the well-being of the nation that Chilean society can continue to address these past atrocities, the culture of ambivalence and amnesia and establish a consensus about the best way to move forward.
CHAPTER TWO

Confronting the past in La Muerte y La Doncella by Ariel Dorfman

As Chile began its transition to democracy in 1990, many questions surrounded the possibility of dialogue and a public accounting of the traumas of the military coup. It was these troubling issues that brought Ariel Dorfman to write a play about three characters, who were struggling to find a way to speak to each other and be heard. Ariel Dorfman was forced into exile not long after the 1973 September 11 military coup. A strong advocate of left wing politics, he had also had a role within the Allende government as a cultural advisor. He fled abroad with his family, unable to return until Chile returned to democracy in 1990. La Muerte y La Doncella was his first significant work after the 1988 plebiscite that saw Chileans vote against the continuation of Pinochet as head of state. He wrote it in three weeks during his return to Chile in 1990.

La Muerte y La Doncella is a play that grew out of a very concrete, local event: the establishment of the Chilean Commission on Truth and Reconciliation in 1990, known as the Rettig Commission after the lawyer who headed it. At the time many Chileans were struggling with their own hidden suffering from what had been done to them, while other Chileans were wondering if their war crimes would now be revealed. Dorfman’s work is well known for addressing critical social issues, and insisting passionately that art and politics are integrally connected. It is in this context that Dorfman created the characters of Paulina Salas, a torture victim, Gerardo Escobar, her husband and a lawyer about to head a national truth commission, and Dr Roberto Miranda, her supposed torturer.

Dorfman felt he had to “break the silence which was weighing upon so many of my self-censored compatriots, fearful of creating ‘trouble’ for the new democracy.” (Dorfman 146) He had so many questions he knew Chileans were asking themselves privately, but that hardly anyone seemed keen to pose in public:

How can those who tortured and those who were tortured co-exist in the same land?
How to heal a country that has been traumatised by repression if the fear to speak out is still omnipresent everywhere? Is it legitimate to sacrifice the truth to ensure peace?
Are people free to search for justice and equality if the threat of a military intervention haunts them? (146).
These questions led him to write this play revealing many of the hidden conflicts and he hoped, in the years to come, it would be used as an instrument to explore Chilean identity and the contradictory options available at the time.

The play has a deceptively simple plot line, beneath which lies layer upon layer of questions and dilemmas. No country is named but it can be assumed it is Chile, “aunque puede tratarse de cualquier país que acaba de salir de una dictadura” (11). Paulina Salas, a torture survivor, is married to Gerardo Escobar, a lawyer who has just agreed to serve on, indeed lead, a truth commission. This commission will investigate crimes committed by a military junta that resulted in death, or the presumption of death, during a dictatorship.

Gerardo experiences car trouble on his way home one night and is aided by Dr Roberto Miranda. Later when Dr Miranda stops by their beach house to return Gerardo’s tyre so it can be fixed, Paulina recognises his voice and is convinced this doctor is the same doctor who raped and tortured her while she was held in detention. She kidnaps her alleged torturer while her husband is asleep, and decides to take the law into her own hands by putting him on trial in her own home. Her intention is to make Dr Miranda confess as she believes her husband’s truth commission will ignore her need for justice. When Gerardo awakes in the morning to find Dr Miranda tied up and gagged with his wife calmly pointing a gun at him, he is stunned and unsure whether to believe her story. Dr Miranda continues to plead his innocence, stating that Paulina is insane and needs help, while Paulina has no way to prove her story because she was blindfolded at the time of her torture. Paulina’s solution to the impasse is to suggest a home trial, allowing her husband to represent Dr Miranda. However, she makes it clear that she will only let him go unharmed if he confesses to her torture.

Gerardo reluctantly agrees to her plan, but it is unclear as to whether he genuinely supports her because after listening to her story, one that she has never properly shared with him before, he then shares the details with Dr Miranda. This enables Miranda to fabricate a confession to fit the story she has told, duly recorded by Gerardo. While he replays this to his wife, Dr Miranda is forced to put his confession in writing and sign it. Gerardo then leaves the house to retrieve Dr Miranda’s car, under the impression that Paulina will set him free now she has his confession. However, Paulina has not yet finished with Dr Miranda. She confronts him about the small errors that she had deliberately made in her account to Gerardo, on the assumption that her husband would then share the details with Dr Miranda. She wanted to see if Miranda would correct them, which he did. She then tells him that she is going to kill him. At this point the lights go down and a mirror is placed in front of the
audience, forcing them to look at their own reflections. The play ends mysteriously with Paulina and Gerardo at a concert, which is also attended by Dr Miranda, who may or may not be a phantom.

The Issue of Justice

This play is important because it displays the core dilemma of Chileans having to come to terms with their traumas with no avenue available to them for redress and their torturers living freely alongside them. Paulina encounters a man whose voice she believes to belong to her torturer. However she is unable to identify him unequivocally because, like the majority of Chilean victims, while she was detained she was always blindfolded and therefore had never seen his face. Despite Paulina’s insistence that her lack of sight had enhanced her other faculties allowing her to precisely recall his voice, the way he laughed and certain phrases he used, the fact that she did not see her torturer’s face renders Paulina unable to testify as a witness against him. Her circumstantial evidence would not be accepted in a court of law. Gerardo recognises her lack of evidence but does not consider his wife’s reasons as adequate, saying that “el recuerdo vago de una voz no es una prueba de nada, Paulina.” (Dorfman 37) Using his legal expertise, he applies methods of evidence generally employed in a criminal law case to rebuke Paulina. Wielding a gun is the only way she can control the situation: “[…] apenas te deje de apuntar, la conversación se acaba. Porque ahí tu usas tu fuerza física superior para imponer tu punto de vista” (38). This does not justify her violence, but it allows the audience to recognise her predicament and the perversity of her situation. A victim of violent persecution is often forced to resort to using violence herself in order to be heard, even if her actions are comparable to her oppressors. This lack of justice contributes to her inability to come to terms with the traumatic events she went through and forces Paulina to decide between falling into the oblivion offered to her by way of madness, and confronting her past by staging an impracticable trial she can control. (Vieira 126-127)

Paulina lives in a state of perpetual apprehension. This is evident in the play, for example, when she hides behind a curtain with a gun because she does not recognise Dr Miranda’s car approaching her house. The audience later learns that she had been kidnapped, beaten and raped repeatedly by the military police fifteen years earlier because of her involvement in an underground resistance movement. Dorfman uses the character of Paulina to question the possibility, and the means, of redressing the violence inflicted upon victims
such as her. The constant anxiety shown by Paulina is a common trait in those who have been tortured; it is a scar they must live with. Jean Amery⁶ states that one of the most insidious results of torture resides in the victims’ loss of trust in the world:

> Whoever has succumbed to torture can no longer feel at home in the world. The shame of destruction cannot be erased. Trust in the world, which already collapsed in part at the first blow, but in the end, under torture, fully, will not be regained. That one’s fellow man was experienced as the antiman remains in the tortured person as accumulated horror. It blocks the view into a world in which the principle of hope rules. One who was martyred is a defenceless prisoner of fear. It is fear that henceforth reigns over him (Amery 40).

Paulina does not have confidence in strangers and seems to be incapable of trusting her husband completely. Her anxiety is tied to the fact that, unable to overcome her past, she remains tethered to the events she went through during the years of the dictatorship. She is afraid that if she let Dr Miranda go now, he would return to her in the future. She feels she can only release her past by having Dr Miranda confess to his crimes and repent fully for what he did to her. “Sólo puedo perdonar a alguien que se arrepiente de verdad, que se levanta ante sus semejantes y dice esto yo lo hice, lo hice y nunca más lo voy a hacer.” (Dorfman 80) Paulina represents the challenge defined by traumatic events. It is up to her husband, and more broadly, to Chilean society, to listen to her story and to piece together the impossible history of not only her trauma, but that of innumerable others.

Dorfman has taken the events occurring in Chile as Patricio Aylwin became the first elected president after the dictatorship of Pinochet, and used them as the fundamental conflicts at the centre of his play. The creation of the Rettig Commission in 1990 provided Dorfman a key event within the context of Chile’s transition to democracy. It is significant to note that a play about silences and the omissions in the mandate of the Rettig Commission was written by an exile. Like Dorfman, thousands of other exiles were forced to flee their homeland, and they also suffered immensely from the dictatorship. However, by their very

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⁶ Jean Amery, formerly a philosophy and literature student in Vienna, participated in organized resistance against the Nazi occupation of Belgium resulting in his detention and torture by the Gestapo, and several years of imprisonment in concentration camps. Améry survived internments in Auschwitz and Buchenwald, and was finally liberated at Bergen-Belsen in 1945. His most celebrated work, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*, suggests that torture was "the essence" of the Third Reich.
absence, their traumas were less evident and less likely to be recognised officially than those of torture survivors like Paulina.

**Dorfman’s Play**

Many in Chile had grown suspicious of exiles, as the general consensus seemed to be that they had abandoned their nation and lived the easy life abroad. These same people had come to believe in the myth of exile being a choice and not a painful tragedy. It is not surprising that the same two social sectors that refused to listen to victims like Paulina, Pinochet supporters and the left-centre members of the transition government, were the very ones who could not tolerate watching *La Muerte y la Doncella*. What pained and stunned Dorfman most was that many of his own friends were among those who refused to watch it, fearing it to be inopportune or inconvenient. “So many of my self-censored compatriots, fearful of creating trouble for the new democracy,” (Dorfman 146)

Dorfman’s choice to write *La Muerte y la Doncella* as a play rather than a novel was intentional: “He was convinced the play would serve an important public function because it would allow the nation to collectively address the contradictory and complicated process of recovering from the dictatorship.” (McClennen 183) Theatre was a common way for artists to stage the conflicts of the dictatorship in a non-confrontational way. However, *La Muerte y la Doncella* was, as stated by Henry James Morello, an example of one of the least fractured and most direct efforts to publicly stage social damage. In a time when few had a voice it is easy to understand why this play was not well received by the Chilean theatre going public, compared to less threatening, more allegorical plays. Perhaps the public was not ready, or just not interested in being confronted so intensely with the issues highlighted by the play, especially one written from the point of view of an exiled writer, a supposed outsider. It was a play designed to provoke rather than to please. When discussing with Dorfman why his play did not attract a large audience, in the documentary *A Promise to the Dead: the Exile Journey of Ariel Dorfman*, actor Paula Sharim describes the play as “sticking a finger in a wound.” (McClennen 184)

Dorfman felt that theatre would best highlight the issue of both a lack of dialogue and a lack of public accounting of the trauma of the military coup. This explains why the three

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characters almost never engage in dialogue all together on stage. There are scenes where all three characters are visible to the audience but one character is typically set apart from the other two. The one on the side can listen, but not contribute to the conversation. This construct highlights the way that segments of society were marginalized from debates about how to move forward. There are only two occasions where all three characters intercommunicate. The first occurrence is in Scene One, Act Two where Dr Miranda addresses Gerardo, appealing to his sense of justice and ignoring Paulina other than to say that he has never seen her before in his life and that she is sick.

Señora, yo no la conozco. No la he visto antes en mi vida. Puedo sí decirle que usted está muy enferma. Pero usted, señor Escobar, no está enfermo, señor. Usted es un abogado, un defensor de los derechos humanos…usted es responsable de lo que hace (Dorfman 45).

The second time occurs as Miranda signs his confession. His voice is heard on the tape recorder, and he echoes the words as he writes down his confession. Paulina attempts to talk about her feelings, but she is told to be quiet by Gerardo. Despite all three voices being heard in this scene, they do not actually engage as it is evident that there is no dialogue between them. It proves there is no better choice of genre at highlighting the difficulties of dialogue than theatre. (McClennen 185) This play ultimately asserts the right for everyone, particularly the victim, to participate in the social and political space.

The Rettig Commission

Pinochet retained the support of a significant number of Chileans, mainly those on the political right, only narrowly losing the 1988 plebiscite. A new democratic government was elected with President Aylwin replacing Pinochet as head of state. President Aylwin was aware Chile had to officially recognise the widespread abuses that had occurred under the military regime, but the 1978 amnesty law limited his options for responding to the Pinochet regime abuses in particular. Despite Pinochet no longer being President, he was still in command of the armed forces and therefore still able to threaten another coup if people became unruly, or more specifically, if attempts were made to punish the human rights violations of the outgoing regime. Nullifying the amnesty was not viable as the risk of another coup was ever present. Pinochet had made it clear the new government was not to
“touch a single hair of a single soldier” (Kritz 454) nor ignore the 1978 amnesty, lest he repeat the events of the September 1973 coup.

President Aylwin opted to choose a policy that would investigate and establish the truth about the past. He created the National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation through presidential decree just six weeks after his inauguration in 1990. The mandate of the Rettig Commission directed it to “establish the most complete possible picture of the most serious violations of human rights resulting in death and disappearances perpetrated by agents of the state or by private citizens with political reasons.” (Chilean Human Rights Commission 11) Its mandate however, excluded the cases of torture that did not result in death. The President’s prudent and practical decision was based on two factors, firstly to avoid opening the commission to thousands of cases that could not be fully investigated, and secondly they needed to limit the number of cases to a reasonable number due to the assumed reparations program that would follow once the report was finalised. (Hayner 305) The Rettig Commission was given nine months to conclude its investigation. Eight members were appointed, four of whom were selected intentionally as known supporters of Pinochet, including former officials of his government. The other four had been in opposition to Pinochet’s regime. This strategy of making sure both sides were represented fairly proved particularly powerful when the final report emerged with the backing of all eight members. Raul Rettig, a former senator, was appointed to chair the Commission, which is commonly known as the Rettig Commission. This truth commission mirrors the one Gerardo, an important lawyer, heads in La Muerte y La Doncella.

Through the establishment of the Rettig Commission, the newly appointed government, led by President Patricio Aylwin, hoped the process of reconciliation would begin during what was an uneasy transition to democracy. It was an important step toward healing a sick country; the truth of the terror, that many had undergone privately, would finally receive public recognition. However, true justice would not be achieved as the names of the perpetrators would not be made public, nor would they be prosecuted. As deaths and disappearances only were to be investigated, those who had survived the horrific ordeal of torture and illegal imprisonment, like Paulina, would not have their cases addressed. Laura Novoa, a commission member, explains their stance of not naming the perpetrators. “It was an implied must not to name names. The commission mandate grew out of a political compromise, and we worked under those restrictions.” (Hayner 126) The new government had to find a way of not alienating Pinochet supporters as they continued to occupy
significant areas of power in the judiciary, the senate, the town councils, and particularly the economy. The government was forced to lead Chile through a path among those who wanted the past totally buried, and those who wanted it totally revealed.

The commissioners started by analysing the extensive records held by the non-governmental organisations. Regardless of previous documentation, testimonies had to be taken again from the families who had missing or killed family members. The Commission placed advertisements in newspapers globally inviting exiles to come forward with any relevant information they may have. Unfortunately they did not have the power of subpoena resulting in little co-operation from the armed forces: “Los militares no van a permitir a ninguno de sus hombres que vayan a declarar, y si ustedes los citan van a decir que se vayan a la puta que los parió.” (Dorfman 29) Of the 3,400 cases originally given to the Commission, only 2,920 cases were deemed to fit within its mandate. Due to the limited mandate and the relatively small number of cases, the members and their staff of sixty could undertake a thorough investigation of each case. (Hayner 48)

“As it began to operate,” the Report of the National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation states:

[T]he Commission believed that its primary duty was to determine what really had happened in every case in which human rights had been seriously violated. Only by determining what had happened in each individual instance would the Commission be able to draw up as complete a picture as possible of the overall phenomenon of the violations of these basic rights. (28)

The 1800 page report was completed in February 1991. It is a powerful indictment of the practices of Pinochet’s regime, describing both the brutality that took place and the response by domestic and international actors. Over 95% of rights violations were attributed to state agents, and 4% to leftist armed groups. (Hayner 48) The report also discredits one of the central arguments of the military to justify its violent tactics. This is the idea of Plan Z which, supposedly, threatened Chile with an internal war had the regime not stepped in and implemented significant force against its opponents.

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8 “Plan Z”, a document supposedly found in the desk of a communist former under-secretary for the interior. It sets out a plan for the murder of the armed forces' high command at a presidential banquet, a left-wing seizure of power and then the elimination of opposition figures. Most in Chile now question its existent, believing it to be a CIA fake.
President Aylwin released the Commission’s report to the public with an emotional message on national television. On behalf of the state he begged for forgiveness from the victims; he stressed the need for both forgiveness and reconciliation and he asked the armed forces to “make gestures of recognition of the pain caused.”(Hayner 48) Pinochet responded with a long statement expressing “fundamental disagreement” with the report and insisting the army “had saved the freedom and sovereignty of the homeland” (48) with its 1973 military coup. He did not question any specific aspect of the report however.

Initial plans to hold national reconciliation events to follow up the report were thwarted by several leftist attacks on prominent members of the rightist political elite in the weeks following the report’s release. The assassination of Jaime Guzman, a close acquaintance of Pinochet, effectively ended the public discussion the Rettig Commission had hoped to initiate, with Aylwin forced to declare that the period of reconciliation was over. Amstutz argues that the Commission never caught the public’s imagination due to its brevity and the fact the hearings were never made public. A year later it was reported that the “Rettig Report, with its deeply disturbing revelations and conclusions, has not re-surfaced since.” (Hayner 49)

Despite the intentions of the Rettig Commission, the issue of past abuses was not often comfortably discussed by the public or press in Chile for many years. To bring up the subject of past abuses under the regime in any social context was considered to be in bad taste. It was not until Pinochet stepped down as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces to take his post in the Senate in 1998, and was subsequently arrested in London later that same year on an extradition request from Spain, that the issue of past human rights violations began to be widely discussed and debated in Chile. Wounds of the past seemed more evident at the beginning of the millennium than in 1990 when democracy had resumed. After Pinochet returned to Chile in 2000, unrest escalated in Chile as victims sought some way of holding him legally accountable for past human rights abuses. (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 56)

Gerardo’s position is that torture is never the best way to find out the truth because it is an unethical and unreliable practice. “Mientras tú me estés apuntando, no hay conversación posible.” (Dorfman 38) he says, referring to Paulina using a gun to control the situation. His

position supports the standard human rights argument against violence. It also mirrors that of Ariel Dorfman who demands that people take a good hard look at any torture survivor “before anyone dare maintain that, to save lives, it might be necessary to inflict unbearable pain on a fellow human being.” (Dorfman 2006: 98)

Gerardo feels Paulina should try and liberate herself from her past trauma, “Te quedaste presa de ellos, todavía estas presa en ese sótano en que te tenían. Durante quince años no has hecho nada con tu vida. Nada…Que te liberes de ellos, Paulina, eso es lo que estoy pidiendo. (52) In this dialogue, Gerardo points out that his wife’s situation reflects that of her country. The Chilean government will need to impose silence upon some of its citizens in order to reunite the different factions of its society and move forward under the same political system. Just like Paulina, Chile will have to find the balance between the erasure of repressed memory and the all-consuming fixation on memories past.

Gerardo’s character represents the voice of compromise. He feels society must not dwell too much on the past in order for life to continue and for society to move forward as an entirety: “[… ]hasta cuándo! Nos vamos a morir de tanto pasado, nos vamos a sofocar de tanto dolor y recriminación.” (66) By adopting the role of mediator, he represents that part of society who want to move on and he believes in the possibility of creating a common space where different social factions can co-exist. Several critics argue that he stands for the middle way in Chilean politics. Sophia McClennen sums this up: “Paulina and Dr Miranda represent the poles of the left and the right with Gerardo standing in for the moderate centre.” (99) Not only does he symbolise democracy but also justice as he is a lawyer and is committed to upholding juridical procedures. Yet despite his attempts at mediation he is weak and naïve, incapable of truly controlling either party. Gerardo has a tremendous stake in the outcome of his wife’s kidnapping because as a lawyer he is a trusted and respected public figure. Dr Miranda is quick to point this out, appealing to Gerardo’s sense of justice:

Pero usted, señor Escobar…. Usted es un abogado, un defensor de los derechos humanos, un opositor al gobierno militar, …usted es responsable de lo que hace y lo que debe hacer ahora es desatarme de inmediato. Quiero que sepa que cada minuto que pasa sin que usted me libere lo hace más y más cómplice y tendrá que pagar las consecuencias… (Dorfman 45)

Gerardo is certain that if he does not convince his frenzied wife to release Dr Miranda then his career and newly appointed position on the Truth Commission are most definitely at risk.
He desperately tries to convince her that her actions are risking the future of the Truth Commission before it has even begun:

Tú no ves por qué, pero todo el resto del país va a ver por qué y especialmente los que no quieren que se investigue nada van a ver por qué. Uno de los miembros de la Comisión Presidencial a cargo de investigar la violencia de estos años y que tiene que dar muestras de moderación y ecuanimidad…y objetividad, que uno de sus miembros haya permitido que secuestren, amarren y atormenten en su casa a un ser humano indefenso…Tú sabes cómo los diarios que sirvieron a la dictadura me van a crucificar, van a usar este episodio para menoscabar y quizás terminar con la Comisión. (49-50)

However, Paulina is unconvinced and feels his career will not be affected by her actions. She will not be reasoned with because she feels this is the only way she can have her voice heard:

No quiero hacerte daño y menos quiero hacerle daño a la Comisión. Pero ustedes en la Comisión se entienden sólo con los muertos, con los que no pueden hablar. Y resulta que yo sí puedo, hace años que no hablo ni una palabra, que no digo ni así de lo que pienso…pero no estoy muerta…y sí que tengo algo que decir…así que déjame hacer lo mío y tú sigue tranquilo con la Comisión. Yo te puedo prometer que este enjuiciamiento no les va a afectar, nada de esto se va a saber. (50-51)

Paulina again touches on the issue of being ignored by Chilean society. Despite the Rettig Commission describing the practices of torture in some detail in their report, those who were tortured and survived were not listed as victims, nor were their cases investigated. She considers the Rettig Commission to be a betrayal of those who, like her, were forced to live in terror under the military regime, and still not provided with a platform to have their say and their captors’ crimes punished, even after a return to democracy. Testimony from survivors such as Paulina was primarily used only to try and determine the fate of those imprisoned with them who did not survive, as well as to understand the general practices in the detention centres.

Most torture survivors continued to suffer psychologically. Many, not able to unburden themselves from their personal trauma with no way to relieve their personal pain, broke down completely. Added to this were those who were seriously injured, physically handicapped or in dire need of assistance. It was not only they themselves who suffered, their extended families suffered as well. Many were unable to work and provide for their families.
and there were some, like Paulina, who never officially denounced their torture and arrest. Paulina had kept silent all these years; not even her own mother knew as she had never been formally denounced or incarcerat-ed. It is also revealed that Gerardo has only heard parts of her story, the majority of her experience painfully internalized within her memory. Layers of betrayal and years of silence have thwarted the possibility of communication between them. As in real life, this ultimately caused huge amounts of stress, creating rifts in relationships that tore families apart.

Truth commissions can offer victims a safe environment to relate their experiences. Elizabeth Lira, a Chilean psychologist who works with victims of political violence, states that the simple act of recognising a person’s traumatic experience could be extremely important to their psychological healing.

In Chile, going to the truth commission was like entering into a family: there was a sense of security, a national flag standing on the table, a mandate from the president, and there was a commission saying ‘we want to hear what you have to say. (Hayner 148)

Suddenly after fifteen years of silence, of being cast aside and the world being told their claims of disappeared family members were all lies, their accounts were listened to and it was publicly acknowledged that disappearances had in fact taken place. From their own investigations, Human Rights groups had provided detailed written accounts, so testimony taken from family members did not necessarily provide the Rettig Commission with new information. However, according to Lira, “the symbolic aspect of taking testimony from the families was much more important.” (149)

The role of testimony as a means of working through traumatic memories and for social and cultural resistance is a must for ethical recovery of a community after the experience of ultimate exclusion. Primo Levi, a survivor from Auschwitz explains this feeling: “The need to tell our story to ‘the rest’, to make ‘the rest’ participate in it, has taken on for us, before our liberation and after, the character of an immediate and violent impulse.”

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The need to share is important because they are speaking for the ones who did not survive, and their suffering would be meaningless if the stories were silenced.

The play directly addresses the question of how healing can occur, and it puts lawyers and judges (Gerardo represents both) in the centre of the healing process. The juridical procedure during the years of the regime was regarded by the Chilean public to be a mockery of what a proper justice system should represent, and it has taken a while for the judges to regain the Chilean public’s respect and trust. The Judiciary remained in place after the military coup. Of the three powers, it was the only one that continued to function without intervention or dissolution by the new leaders. However, it did little to challenge the regime’s actions. The Truth and Reconciliation Commissions report identified the key areas where the Judiciary failed the rights of the Chilean public. It noted that the Judiciary had two fundamental instruments to prevent the violation of human rights: habeas corpus and punishments of the guilty. However, the Judiciary failed to accept any habeas corpus brought to it, blaming Article 4 of the Código Orgánico de Tribunales and the ineffectiveness of the legislation that regulated it. The Constitution of 1980 included an article that prohibited judges from analysing the authorities’ reasons when they ordered arrests, transfers and exile during states of exception. (Chilean Human Rights Commission 38) The courts also failed to uphold the principle of ‘immediacy’, where a period of twenty four hours is set for a decision on a habeas corpus. The courts did not accept habeas corpus for arrests ordered by DINA and later by the CNI. And, the courts failed to oversee compliance regarding the restrictions of places of detention which require persons to be only arrested, subjected to preventative detention or jailed in their home or in public places designated for that purpose. In fact there were some detention centres that were deemed inaccessible to judicial personnel for many years.

Administrative incommunicado was extensively applied as punishment, which the courts failed to monitor. The commission believes that:

If the courts had respected the constitutional mandate to act immediately; or observed the legal mandate to decide on habeas corpus within twenty four hours, or exercised the legal power which is the essence of the remedy, which consists of physically seeing the detainee; or had they observed the norm which requires the passing of judgement before the harm resulting from unjust imprisonment becomes grave, then death, disappearance and torture could have been prevented in many cases. (40)
Moreover, the perpetrators would have been made aware that their actions were not legal by at least one of the powers of the State, which could eventually punish them. When prosecuting crimes committed by government agents, the courts often adopted excessive rigor and legal formalism when weighing the prosecutions proof against the perpetrators. This often hindered the application of the corresponding punishment. The courts also accepted the version of events given by the authorities, which contributed to preventing the punishment of those responsible. They dismissed cases based on the Amnesty Law of April 1978 whenever Armed Forces and Police personnel were implicated in a case covered by the law. It was used to such an extent that it prevented even an initial investigation of the events. The Supreme Court also failed to oversee the military courts, which was within its powers in time of war. This meant that the Supreme Court did not demand that the actions of the wartime courts martial be carried out according to the rule of law.

Many other questionable actions of the courts facilitated the violations of human rights. These included the recognition of secret laws never challenged by the courts; the approval of abusive searches in marginal neighbourhoods; its exaggerated formalism in the interpretation of the law; its acceptance of confessions obtained under torture as proof; and the application of sanctions and poor annual qualifications to judges who adopted a courageous attitude in the investigation of human rights violations. Therefore it can be seen that the ineffectiveness of the Judicial Power in preventing the gross violations of human rights in Chile was due, in part, to important failures of the legal system as well as a weakness and lack of energy on the part of many judges with regard to their obligation to ensure effective respect for the basic rights of the person.

The attitude towards the judges during this period is summed up by Paulina in La Muerte y La Doncella:

¿Los tribunales? ¿De justicia? ¿Los mismos tribunales que jamás intervinieron para salvar una vida en diecisiete años de dictadura? ¿Vas a entregarle tu informe al juez Peralta? ¿El que le dijo a esa pobre mujer que dejara de molestarlo, que su marido no estaba desaparecido sino que se había ido con alguien más joven y atractiva?

¿Tribunales de justicia? ¿De justicia? (21-22)

It is evident that although she is desperate to have her torturer punished, in light of her own experience she is suspicious of the legal processes in her own country, and is quite possible that given the opportunity she would have rejected any adjudication system.
Gerardo does not want to participate in Paulina’s forced trial of Dr Miranda; his reason being that the justice system that allowed her to be imprisoned and raped with no consequence was unacceptable and therefore any kangaroo court established according to her criteria is equally unacceptable:

Si algo me ha reventado de ello es que se acusaron a tantos hombres y mujeres, hicieron de juez y parte y acusadores y ejecutores y no les dieron a quienes condenaron la más mínima garantía, la posibilidad de defenderse. Aunque este hombre haya cometido los peores crímenes del Universo, tiene derecho a defenderse.

(43)

Paulina is also ethically motivated, but she stresses repeatedly that corruption in the country’s legal system leaves considerable doubt that the military's abuses will be properly rectified.

It was independent organisations, including a Church-based human rights project, that were forced to step up and challenge every case of illegal detention or disappearance in court as the Judiciary system was no longer trusted to undertake fair and just procedures. Many trials involved crimes that were considered proven only by the confession of the accused, despite there being no information to prove the occurrence of a punishable event. There were also numerous courts martial where a defence lawyer was not appointed. These organisations rarely won the release of those detained, but at least they were able to establish clear records of each case. These records subsequently proved to be an important source of information for the lawyers investigating for the Rettig Commission.

The Rettig Commission also touched on the behaviour of the courts in its report, stating “During the period that concerns us, the Judiciary did not react with sufficient energy with regard to violations of human rights.” (Chilean Human Rights Commission 37) The Supreme Court immediately rejected the report as “impassioned, reckless, biased.” (Wielbelhaus-Brahm 55) The Rettig Commission’s mandate was clear in that it shall not “assume jurisdictional functions proper to the courts…Hence it will not have the power to take a position on whether particular individuals are legally responsible for the events it is considering.”(Report of the National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation 26) Therefore the outcome of the commission’s investigations depends solely upon later rulings by judges because “traspasamos lo averiguado a los tribunales de justicia para que ellos dispongan si corresponde o no…” (Dorfman 21) However, despite the leaders of the country changing, the
legal system remained intact from the years of the regime, meaning the amnesty law that the leaders gave themselves before renouncing their power still remained.

**Human Rights Violations and the Role of Doctors in Torture**

The Chief of Staff at the time of the commission, Jorge Correa, admitted that “often, we knew who tortured, but not who pulled the trigger on those who didn’t survive. We probably could have said who some were, but it would have required further investigation to track each accusation back to the primary source, the primary witness and to validate its accuracy. It is much more easy to say, ‘This person was disappeared,’ than to say, ‘This person was disappeared, and this is exactly who did it.” (Hayner 126)

The play reminded “everyone about the long-term effects of terror and violence on people precisely at a time when we were being asked to be notably cautious.”(Dorfman 146)

Torture was used by the regime to break the spirit, terrify the public, to create a global spectacle and to discover the truth. Pinochet’s regime set about finding the truth in the most violent and deceptive ways possible. Every regime that tortures does so in the name of salvation, state security or some superior goal which to them and their followers justifies their use of extreme violence.

Torturers are often thought of as muscular men of limited intelligence. Sexual assault is frequently part of the torture; many torturers are sexually perverted, psychotic or sadistic, while others may be considered normal by psychiatric standards. It is alarming that state-sanctioned brutality exists at all, but it is doubly alarming that medical personnel participate in this brutality, especially because a doctor prescribes to a value system that the doctor above all must protect the patient. However there exists irrefutable proof that, during the seventeen years of the dictatorship, doctors and other members of the health care professions caused brutal suffering to their peers.

Dr Miranda in *La Muerte y La Doncella* is representative of the various doctors and nurses who went against their profession’s code of ethics and took part in torture sessions using techniques such as prolonged beatings, electric shock, and mind-altering drugs to interrogate, punish, and intimidate political dissenters. Falsifying medical certificates and autopsy reports of a person tortured or killed while in official custody was also a common occurrence. Doctors involved in acts of torture were, for the most part, members of the armed
forces. Others may have become involved due to coercion or fear of reprisal, like Dr Miranda. He was approached by his brother, a member of the secret services who told him that by assisting them he “tienes la oportunidad de pagarles a los comunistas lo que hicieron a papá.” (72) His father had suffered a heart attack the day his land was taken over by the peasants at Las Toltecas and the stroke had paralysed him, leaving him speech impaired. Despite his brother trying to ignite a sense of revenge in him, he insists he originally agreed to participate for ‘humanitarian reasons’ so that he would be able to stop the prisoners from dying and alleviate their suffering. However, the psyche of being at war eventually won him over and ‘la máscara de la virtud se me fue cayendo…” (73)

How can a respected citizen like Dr Miranda be transformed into a sadistic torturer? The answer it seems is that the doctors became socialised to atrocity. As Robert Jay Lifton states: “The great majority of these doctors were ordinary people who had killed no one before joining…. they were corruptible and certainly responsible for what they did, but they became murderers mainly in atrocity-producing settings.” (416) In his supposed confession, Dr Miranda admits that he manipulated his torture victims, including Paulina, by putting music on to aid his role as the good guy. He was able to gain their trust merely by being a doctor, by allowing his victims to believe in the hopeful idea of what a doctor represents, after enduring savage beatings by other guards. Yet he brutally betrayed their trust by raping his victims, allowing power to corrupt him. Some doctors used the torture sessions as scientific experiments, whereas others administered nontherapeutic medicine in an attempt to make prisoners lose control and cooperate with their interrogators. Having doctors participate in torture, for whatever motive, heightens and justifies public fear. The immense betrayal of trust between a doctor and his patient is directly linked to a torture victim’s perpetual loss of trust in the world.

It can be seen that doctors and other medical personnel were part of a command structure that permitted, encouraged, and sometimes orchestrated torture to a degree that it became the norm with which they were expected to comply in the immediate prison environment. Many military doctors, often young, pretended to ignore what they saw and appeared very much afraid of talking about it. A few justified what was happening on political grounds that the country was at war, taking for granted, obviously, that the practice of torture was an acceptable part of war. Physicians employed by the armed forces may have experienced a conflict of conscience - between loyalty to the patient-prisoner or to the institution to which they belonged.
The Colegio Medico de Chile took an active public role in condemning the practice of torture in Chile. It repeatedly referred to the guiding rule in the International Code of Medical Ethics: “Under no circumstances is a doctor permitted to do anything that could weaken the physical or mental resistance of a human being, except for strictly therapeutic or prophylactic indications imposed in the interest of the patient”. Those doctors who did stand up to the regime and were active about investigating the use of doctors in torture sessions were at risk of becoming victims themselves, and many doctors were subsequently arrested for treating torture victims and enemies of the government. They were seen as guilty by association. Although they were active in denunciating and investigating any claims of a physician involved in torture, their judgements only carried a moral weight. This is because the college was stripped of most of its powers in 1981 under new legislation imposed by the Pinochet government in its revised constitution. Under the revised law, 'the law of labour associations', “physicians were no longer compelled to join the college, thus they no longer had to submit to the college's code of ethics or to its disciplinary tribunals.” (Goldman 1414)

Unfortunately the process of condemning these doctors was slow and tedious according to surgeon Pedro Castillo, a member of the college who also served as the president of Chile's national commission against torture: “We don't want to make a mistake in our denunciations”, said Castillo, “otherwise we will lose our credibility. We might do ourselves more harm than good.” At the time of the overthrow in 1973 of the government of Allende, a former president of the Colegio, human rights were not mentioned in the code of medical ethics because no one thought it was necessary. Therefore major revisions in the Chilean code of ethics were undertaken and completed in 1983. According to Jorge Jimenez, another member of the college: “We had no provisions regarding torture, because we didn't have the problem before [Pinochet]. We had to add to it.” (Goldman 1416)

We are brought to the question of what to do with the likes of Dr Miranda – Pinochet’s regime has fallen; as with many former Nazis, Dr Miranda will likely never misbehave again. (Heald 25-26) The sad truth is that despite the Colegio Medico de Chile’s mammoth efforts, even if they could provide evidence that showed the participation of doctors in torture sessions, many doctors were commissioned officers, meaning their cases would be referred to the military court and it is unlikely they would have faced any type of disciplinary measure. Ironically, it is Dr Miranda who acknowledges what their fate will be. He believed that a kind of national purgation was not only necessary, but inevitable.
En este país todo se termina sabiendo. Que sus hijos, que sus nietos vengan y les pregunten es verdad tú hiciste esto de que te acusan...y ellos tendrán que mentir, dirán que jamás, yo no, dirán, son calumnias, es una conspiración comunista, qué sé yo qué estupidez dirán, pero se les notará en cada mirada y los mismos hijos, los nietos les tendrán pena y asco. No es como meterlos en la cárcel pero...(Dorfman 27-28)

**Conclusion**

Therefore it can be seen that the Rettig Commission was presented as a gesture towards finding the hidden truths; but it was such a weak attempt, so small in the face of so much suffering, that its efforts in some ways made the suffering so much more painful because they denied the truths of so many victims such as Paulina. This play is not merely Chilean in scope, but also a story that relates to many other countries that have suffered similar problems when returning to democracy. It is ultimately about a country that is afraid about the long term effects of torture and violence on human beings, yet needful of understanding its fears and its scars.

When we allow someone to be tortured by our agents, it is not only the victim and the perpetrator who are corrupted, not only the "intelligence" that is contaminated, but also everyone who looked away and said they did not know, everyone who consented tacitly to that outrage so they could sleep a little safer at night, all the citizens who did not march in the streets by the millions to demand the resignation of whoever suggested, even whispered, that torture is inevitable in our day and age, that we must embrace its darkness? (Dorfman: The Washington Post)

The ambiguous ending of the play *La Muerte y La Doncella* strongly suggests that neither Paulina nor Chile as a whole will ever be able to find a fully acceptable resolution to their dilemma. The mirror that descends in front of the stage seems to pass the decision of whether she will kill Dr Miranda or spare him onto the audience, as it is up to them individually to reach their own verdict about the best outcome. The reader/audience represents the citizens of Chile who will need to determine how to deal with their past and the flickering of a light across the audience, illuminating a few spectators, suggests that there will be varying opinions on how to achieve this. The play ends with no agreement reached, but the
final scene of Paulina and Gerardo in a concert hall with Dr Miranda demonstrates that despite political differences, there is no other alternative but to share a common public space with their former adversaries.

Paulina: “Y lo vemos en el Tavelli y le sonreímos y él nos presenta a su señora y le sonreímos y comentamos lo lindo que está el día y…”

Gerardo: “No tienes para qué sonreírle, pero sí, de eso se trata. Empezar a vivir, sí.” (53)
CHAPTER THREE

The Lost Generation in *Estrella Distante* by Roberto Bolaño

*Estrella Distante* offers a subtle but frightening look into the nightmarish saga of Chile in the aftermath of Pinochet’s 1973 military coup. It is a powerful short novel that whisks the reader through recent decades into a world of underground poetry and leftist politics of the Allende era; the Pinochet years of abduction and murder, silence and forgetting; the lonely, melancholic dispersion of Chile’s lost generation throughout Latin America and Europe. It is nothing less than, “la historia de Chile. Una historia de terror.” (Bolaño 119)

The seed for this novel can be found in Roberto Bolaño’s earlier work, *La Literatura Nazi en América*, where its final chapter is dedicated to fascist Lieutenant Ramirez Hoffman of the Chilean Air Force. Bolaño, believing that this chapter should be explored further, wrote *Estrella Distante* about a Chilean pilot named Carlos Wieder. The main subject I have chosen to focus on is what is referred to as the lost generation of Chile and is tied specifically to their reactions to the military coup of September 1973. Through following this lost generation as they disperse throughout the world, I analyse the following issues: the effect of exile on the individual, the feelings of compliancy and guilt, the weighted issue of retributive justice, and finally the compromised process of democratisation. Bolaño’s blend of fiction and reality portrays a snapshot of Chilean poets of different stripes, and in particular reveals how a disturbingly lost, idealist generation search for meaning in a time of violence.

The reconstruction of Carlos Wieder’s career over twenty years is told by an unnamed narrator, a former classmate of Wieder from the poetry workshops they both attended during the Allende years. Part detective novel, part surrealist nightmare the story is set in Concepcion, southern Chile, and initially describes a charismatic yet mysterious figure during the years of the Unidad Popular government, known then to his poetry workshop classmates as Alberto Ruiz-Tagle. Passing himself off initially as an autodidact and leftist poet, Ruiz-Tagle disappears after the military coup but soon emerges under his real name, Carlos Wieder, as a pilot in the dictatorship’s Air Force. He becomes famous for his aerobatic stunts of skywriting his patriotic poetry during the first few years of the dictatorship, and is quickly hailed as the mascot of the new regime. While the majority of his former left wing classmates
are imprisoned, ‘disappeared’ or forced into exile, Wieder is the man, the military believe, who could “hacer algo espectacular que demostrara al mundo que el nuevo régimen y el arte de vanguardia no estaban, ni mucho menos, reñidos.” (Bolaño 86) However, he takes his new found fame and artistic inspirations too far, revealing himself as the leader of a right-wing death squad that raped and murdered women by hosting a photo exhibition of his mutilated female victims, including the Garmendia sisters, his ex-classmates. Wieder ends up exiled in Europe and the story turns into an investigation as the narrator embarks on a literary journey of clues, tracing Wieder’s career abroad in order to track him down, assisted by the narrator’s friend Bibiano O’Ryan, and Abel Romero, a private investigator, who suspect him not only of ‘disappearing’ their poet friends, but also of committing further violent acts.

**Wieder’s Political Performance**

The politics of Wieder’s fascist performances are important in depicting the violence of the new era ushered in by Pinochet. Although Wieder is a fictional character and not based on any particular historical right wing vanguard artist, the novel is clearly anchored in the very real circumstances of Chile in the 1970s. It is through Wieder’s character that Bolaño draws on fascist iconography and the sinister displays of power by the Chilean armed forces during the early months of the military coup. It becomes clear that Wieder takes advantage of the current political turmoil to suit his own creative needs, replicating the domination and terror of the political system in his art.

It can be seen that the character of Wieder (previously known as Alberto Ruiz Tagle) identifies with the right wing ideology for a sum of reasons. The first is the financial support a political regime is capable of providing to one of its supporters in regard to their artistic activities, especially one who is talented and willing to propagate on their behalf. The second reason lies in the binary opposition of discourse established between the left and right before the 1973 coup. Wieder cannot identify with the left as he does not see art as a means to achieve social justice and equality. His notion of art involves violence and is therefore incompatible with the utopian vision of his classmates who are clearly leftist sympathizers. Lastly, once Pinochet gained power, any opposition was swiftly dissolved and both ideological sides ended up governed by violence. This explosion of violence allowed Wieder the freedom to carry out his crimes. He strongly identifies with fascist ideology as it relates violently with its environment, targeting those who do not share its beliefs. In Wieder’s case,
throughout the novel, art and violence are closely linked. The freedom given to him by the regime is precisely what allows Wieder to publicly transgress ethical boundaries in pursuit of an art that he considers absolute. In other words, Wieder identifies with the Pinochet dictatorship due to its tendency to support fascist barbarism and destruction, therefore, allowing him to develop his own artistic concepts linked with violence.

In Wieder’s first poetic performance, the use of the airplane to write on the sky is clearly a declaration of overwhelming power and derives from the vanguardism of European fascism. His act is witnessed by prisoners, imprisoned following the military coup, including the narrator and the ‘loco’ Norberto. Wieder rewrites the opening verses of the Book of Genesis, in Latin, the commanding language of the Romanic imperial realm. He transcribes in the sky the mystical foundation of military sovereign command, ensuring that those who are watching understand that Chile is entering into a new era. The verse is meant to be linked to both life and pain, but Wieder uses it from a different perspective than that intended in the Book of Genesis. In the verse he describes the world being in darkness, (the Allende government) but through the creation of light (the military coup), there is a final confirmation that this whole act of ‘creation’ has been good, (“Et Vidi Deus…Lucem Quod…Esset Bona…) despite sacrifices in the process of the coming of the new (“Et Divist…Lucem A Tenebris…), meaning disappearance, murder, torture, imprisonment and other types of atrocity. (Pozo Martínez 179) At the end he simply writes “Aprendan” (Bolaño 39). It can be seen that Wieder uses the sky as a platform from which everyone can either appreciate his ideology, or those opposed to it, can feel threatened by his destructive words.

It is only the “loco” Norberto, a fellow prisoner, who reacts with any clear interpretation of the event: he believes that another world war has begun. Norberto’s thoughts are not far from the truth: an undeclared war had begun in Chile and indeed a new world had been brought into being by an all-powerful authority. Norberto alone seems to have understood the lesson to be learned: not only has a new day dawned in Chile (above the symbolically-named city of Concepcion), the creator has the power to separate the light from the darkness; read metaphorically, to divide the nation.

In the description of the observation of the sky writing from the prison yard, Norberto’s insistence that the plane is a German Messerschmitt 500 from World War II reinforces the connotation of Axis-power fascism. Furthermore, the emergence of a fighter jet over the horizon echoes the coup itself as on the morning of September 11, 1973, Hawker
Hunter fighter jets flew over the city of Santiago and bombed the presidential palace, resulting in the death of President Salvador Allende and his colleagues. The narrative’s emphasis on the plane’s repeated emergence from different directions of the horizon reminds the reader of the ominous Caravana de la Muerte - the helicopters that landed in towns throughout the entire nation in the weeks following the coup, carrying military officials who swiftly executed suspected opponents of the new regime. This reference is backed up in the following chapter when the narrator explains their discovery that Alberto Ruiz-Tagle was in fact Carlos Wieder:

la palidez de Carlos Wieder (una palidez fotográfica) lo hacía semejante no solo a la sombra que había sido Ruiz-Tagle sino a muchas otras sombras, a otros rostros, a otros pilotos fantasmales que también volaban de Chile a la Antártida y de la Antártida a Chile bordo de aviones que el loco Norberto desde el fondo de la noche decía que eran cazas Messerschmitt. (55)

As Wieder emerges in the novel as the poet of the new regime, his performances begin to anticipate the collusion of military and economic power that will define not only the junta, but the historical founding of the nation and the future transition to democracy in the 1990s. He begins to do air shows for military officials, businessmen, and their wives (41), his audience thus representing the partnership responsible for Chile’s neoliberal makeover which was carried out by Pinochet’s economic advisors, and has gone largely unquestioned since by the centre-left coalition of the Concertacion that has governed. (Lynd 174)

Wieder’s climaxing event, another aerial poem written on the Santiago sky, followed by an exhibition of photographs of his torture victims, confronts Chile’s military and business elite with the violence upon which their privilege in Pinochet’s Chile is founded, and it is his open celebration of this which aggravates the authorities and results in Wieder being nudged into exile. His long aerial poem is in praise of death, equating death with the nation and its transformation:

La muerte es amistad/ La muerte es Chile/ La muerte es responsabilidad/ La muerte es amor/ La muerte es crecimiento/ La muerte es comunión/ La muerte es limpieza/ La muerte es mi corazón/ Toma mi corazón/ Carlos Wieder/ La muerte es resurrección. (Bolaño 89-91)
It is a barely veiled reference to the state-sponsored terror inflicted upon any suspected dissident of the regime. The repetition of the phrase ‘La muerte’ is a reference to the deaths caused by the regime, by the state, and that is why “La muerte es Chile.” (89) The rest of the poem can also be linked to suit the political situation of the time: death is friendship (between the armed forces); is communion (creating a community, a new power); is responsibility (the country was in danger of being destroyed by Allende’s socialism); is growth (the country grew economically under Pinochet); and above all, is cleansing (ideology). (Pozo Martínez 180-181)

However, it is after his aerial display that he unveils his true masterpiece - his photograph exhibition, displayed in a small locked bedroom. Specially selected guests are invited to view, to their horror, a display of hundreds of photographs of mutilated women, sadistically photographed in the moments before their deaths. Included is the image of “una joven rubia que parece desvanecerse en el aire” (Bolaño 98), as if she had been thrown from an airplane. The reactions of the guests range from nausea to anger to quiet ambivalence, and no one seems surprised when the authorities turn up and confiscate the photographs. Wieder’s public celebration of the dawn of a new era proves to be too overtly triumphant of the violence upon which the new order is founded. The authorities’ stance is clear: perpetrators of the violence should not celebrate their own sadism and the crimes should be kept discrete and invisible to the public. His work is clearly an analogy to Pinochet’s legacies of neoliberal capitalism and an unapologetic insistence that any and all use of military force against Chilean citizens was necessary and worthwhile. Wieder is seen as a sadistic murderer capable of celebrating his own crimes, which are also those of the state. The effect of the exhibition on his guests is psychologically devastating and many of them leave the house immediately. The guests, most of them military members, have presumably also taken part in acts of violence. The photos force them to confront their own actions (or orders), which are now laid bare, stripped of any justification and are no longer protected by the silences of their fascist ideology. They can see themselves reflected in the photographs and they are very conscious of the fact that in other circumstances it could easily have been them in the photographs. It is simply too much for many of them to bear:

nos mirábamos y nos reconocíamos, pero en realidad era como si no nos reconociéramos, parecíamos diferentes, parecíamos iguales, odiábamos nuestros rostros, nuestros gestos eran los propios de los sonámbulos o de los idiotas. (98)
All of what occurred at Wieder’s sky poetry and photographic exhibition is narrated by Lieutenant Julio César Muñoz Cano who was an eye witness at both events and years later wrote about Wieder’s poetic acts in his autobiography Con la soga al cuello\textsuperscript{11}. It is through this biography that the narrator is able to describe in detail what occurred. By sharing these stories, Muñoz is in effect confessing his involvement with the military and its actions. However, it is noted that he only confesses years later, when the military can no longer apply retribution against him, like they did when Wieder exposed too many of their repressive methods.

It can be seen that the character of Wieder personifies the brutality of the Pinochet regime. Wieder’s actions are by extension the same as many members of the FACH, actions asserted on behalf of the dictatorship. Although Wieder’s colleagues are sickened by what they see, they do nothing about it, as how can they punish someone who has not done anything but follow orders? Years later, after the fall of the regime, a fellow military officer who had accompanied Wieder on a number of missions in Santiago – a small number he was quick to point out – affirmed at a trial that Air Force Lieutenant Wieder had only done his duty as a Chilean: what other Chileans should have done, or had tried to do but could not. It was widely regarded by those in the military that prisoners are a dead weight in times of civil war. Such was the maxim that had guided Wieder and several of his colleagues, and with the nation in the throes of that catastrophe, who could blame them for overstepping the bounds of duty? “A veces, añadía pensativo, un tiro de gracia es más un consuelo que un último castigo.” (118) Therefore, the only difference between the regime’s philosophy and Wieder’s actions is that the pleasure Wieder generates experimenting with these new artistic creations goes beyond the fulfilment of civic duty. It is for this reason that Wieder is discharged from the Air Force and told to quietly disappear into exile.

\textbf{The Lost Generation}

Just as this disturbing poet represents a chilling depiction of the violence and torture perpetrated by the Pinochet regime, Bolaño creates a poignant portrayal of the sad story of Chile through the desperation of his wandering poets. Throughout the interconnected stories that make up \textit{Estrella Distante}, the most explicit theme is that of the effects of political

\textsuperscript{11} Both Lieutenant Julio César Muñoz Cano and his autobiography, \textit{Con la soga al cuello} are fictional, made up by Bolaño.
repression and exile. Amidst the narrator’s story there is a portrait of how the coup changed not only his life, but the lives of his friends. Exiles are often marginalised and rendered lost by totalising political systems. Bolaño as an exile himself knows only too well the melancholic effect it can have on the individual, hence his focus on what is known as Chile’s “lost generation.” (Tepper: N.Y Times)

The narrator and protagonist, an ex-sympathiser of MIR or some other Trotskyite party, was a keen member of the poetry workshops which were popular during the Allende era. They were places where one could relish in the idea of a revolutionary utopia: “la llave que nos abriría la puerta de los sueños, los únicos por los cuales merecía la pena vivir.” (Bolaño 13) Briefly imprisoned after the 1973 military coup, once released, he witnesses the daily spectacle of military violence, a reality of monstrosity and evil “me parece que estamos entrando en el campeonato mundial de la fealdad y la brutalidad.” (27) This cruel new reality forces the narrator to make a choice. As Chiara Bolognese explains, it is the:

[R]elato de los hechos más crueles perpetrados por los militares del régimen, de la denuncia de cómo esta violencia desgarradora afectó a toda una generación de jóvenes que tuvieron que elegir entre marcharse del país o aceptar vivir en el silencio del miedo y de la negación. (Bolognese 147)

The narrator is not willing to accept this abrupt new reality of living in fear and silence, yet nor is he willing to become a martyr for a failing cause. He opts instead to abandon his former Marxist dream by self-exile to Europe, moving around while working in menial jobs. He sinks into solitude and depression, displaying a fully cynical attitude toward life: “no tenía dinero, mi salud dejaba bastante que desear, hacía mucho que no publicaba en ninguna parte, últimamente ya ni siquiera escribía. Mi destino me parecía miserable” (Bolaño 130). Before the appearance of the detective, the narrator is unable to carry out any acts of ‘justice’ against those who committed the horrendous criminal acts in Chile. On the one hand he feels condemned to maintain that kind of mentality, but on the other, it is important to note, he also feels a sense of guilt about his lack of action: his attitude is typically that of a disenchanted generation who were forced to helplessly watch those in power maliciously destroy what was important to them:

La lucha armada que nos iba a traer una nueva vida y una nueva época, pero que para la mayoría de nosotros era como un sueño o, más aproPiadamente, como la llave que nos abriría la puerta de los sueños, los únicos por los cuales se merecía la pena vivir.
The dreams that were worth living for have vanished and are no longer a part of the narrator’s world. The lack of a social cause to be involved in means the narrator becomes an increasingly lonely and anguished figure. “Yo sentía que mi vida entera se estaba yendo a la mierda” (133). Regardless of their destinations and material circumstances, exiles carried heavy psychological baggage: the bitterness of defeat, feelings of guilt for having left dead, jailed, or disappeared comrades behind and memories of prison and torture they had endured. These concerns added to the sudden, violent, forced uprooting that profoundly affected the exiles, compounding the challenges of adaptation. They arrived with dreams shattered, families torn apart, careers destroyed.

Although the narrator is aware of his disillusionment, he feels driven by the force of the circumstances and doomed for failure. He has been forced to give up the collective ideal in order to survive. As Slavoj Žižek explains, the melancholic:

is not primarily the subject fixated on the lost object, unable to perform the work of mourning it, but, rather, the subject who possesses the object, but has lost his desire for it, because the cause which made him desire this object has withdrawn, lost its efficacy. (148)

The reader is able to understand the nightmare that the narrator is going through because of his personal correspondence with Bibiano O’Ryan and in his conversations with the detective, Abel Romero. The reader thus gets the sense that the narrator would rather forget about Wieder and Chile. The narrator tries to turn his back on the past and is even unwilling to see Soto, despite them living in the same city for a brief period: “Por aquel tiempo yo no estaba de humor para encontrarme con viejos amigos” (Bolaño 76). His desire to forget, matched by the impossibility of forgetting makes the story hit harder. As Avelar explains, “the memory of the trauma is the real trauma” (33). Exile becomes a period in which time and memory remained silent and the continuity of cause and effect was lost. The narrator wants to deny his past, but he lacks the ability to build a future because his memories remain buried, yet festering under the surface.
At one stage in the novel, the narrator dreams that he is on a large ship crossing the ocean:

Soñé que iba en un gran barco de madera, un galeón tal vez, y que atravesábamos el Gran Océano. Yo estaba en una fiesta en la cubierta de la popa y escribía un poema o tal vez la página de un diario mientras miraba el mar. Entonces alguien, un viejo, se ponía a gritar ¡tornado! ¡tornado! Pero no a bordo del galeón sino a bordo de un yate o de pie en una escollera. Exactamente igual que en una escena de El bebé de Rosemary de Polansky. En ese instante el galeón comenzaba a hundirse y todos los sobrevivientes nos convertíamos en náufragos. En el mar, flotando agarrado a un tonel de aguardiente, veía a Carlos Wieder. Yo flotaba agarrado a un palo de madera podrida. (130-131)

It is here that the narrator has a troubling revelation: “Comprendía en ese momento mientras las olas nos alejaban, que Wieder y yo habíamos viajado en el mismo barco, sólo que él había contribuido a hundirlo y yo había hecho poco o nada por evitarlo.” (131)

According to Jeremías Gamboa, this dream of a sinking ship in which both the narrator and Wieder are aboard, can be regarded as an allegorical interpretation of the history of Chile in the seventies. (Paz Soldán and Faverón 221-22) It can be deciphered in the following way: The galleon that sinks into the depths represents the Chilean nation as well as the socialist project embodied by Allende; the tornado that sinks it is the military coup; Wieder helps sink the ship due to his affiliation with the military by participating in its repressive actions; the narrator survives, but feels guilty for his lack of ability to stop the sinking of the left. Therefore, the shipwreck of Chile can be regarded as a ‘moral shipwreck’, maintaining political stability solely due to its extremely violent methods. The idea of the socialist project being sunk is also mentioned earlier in the novel when the narrator is imprisoned following the military coup: “Por aquellos días, mientras se hundían los últimos botes salvavidas de la Unidad Popular, caí preso.” (Bolaño 34)

In addition to the narrator feeling shipwrecked and lost, the dream also alludes to a dark sense of guilt and impotence. In a way the dream captures the nuances of complicity between the Chilean public (including those who left in exile) and the murderers who worked for Pinochet. It can be seen that the narrator throughout the novel seems to focus on the peculiarities in the lives of others, never his own, as this is the only way a person who suffers
this crisis can avoid being accountable for their own failures. It is Bolaño’s intention to unmask an attitude that is like a child’s game according to Alberto del Pozo Martínez:

la técnica es como la del niño al que el padre hace culpable de algo, y, en vez de auto humillarse (confesarse) empieza a señalar (y por tanto, a retratar) las culpas de sus hermanos, maquillando la suya propia. (El Retrato de Artista 191)

It is fitting that his dream takes place in the midst of an ocean where moral, political and aesthetic coordinates go missing. The idea of being in the same ‘boat’ as Wieder suggests their common ground of being Chilean; however, it is more precisely their being a part of the same generation that is of significance. The narrator’s dream in this sense is Bolaño’s way of reflecting upon the burden the shipwrecking of the revolutionary ideals of the sixties and seventies represents for their generation.

The Effect of Exile

Juan Stein, Diego Soto, Lorenzo and Abel Romero are a few of the narrator’s acquaintances whose individual stories of exile are shared in the novel. Despite these characters living and resisting Pinochet’s coup in different ways, they are united by living in exile and by finding life in their escape from Chile.

Most Chilean exiles were educated and could have had the capacity for something greater, yet were hindered by Chile’s political circumstances. They are generally defined as being middle class; neither poor nor rich. The conditions of the Chilean poor were much more desperate, and those who were wealthy, the upper class of society, were shielded from the problems created by the economic and political shifts that hampered those who ended up self-exiled. It is generally more “average” citizens that find themselves out of place when society experiences change. Exiles not only lose their homeland, but also their sense of belonging. The narrator and his friends grew up in the 1950s in left-leaning middle class families. Their coming of age took place during the 1970s, a period Kendall Whitney12 describes as the “decade of broken dreams” (37), characterised by the coming to power of the military dictatorship that brutally crushed revolutionary ideals and which also brought about the neoliberal economic policy in Chile. This policy, through exploitative practices, has

seemingly strengthened Chile’s economy but at a cost of only benefitting the wealthy upper class. Bolaño’s narrator and his friends, ‘representations of a generation’ exemplify the frustrations of many Chileans who have lost out. Ultimately the new regime resulted in the disintegration of the utoPian community embodied by the young poets, fleeing into exile following the disappearance and death of its members.

Stein is a Chilean literature professor who led one of the poetry workshops which the narrator attended. A poet and a revolutionary, he disappears mysteriously after the coup. The narrator and Bibiano go to his house but no one answers; “la escena además de traernos a la memoria momentos indeterminados de varias películas consiguió acrecentar la sensación de soledad y abandono que nos producía no solo la casa de Stein sino la calle entera.” (65) They assume he is dead because being a Jewish Bolshevik along with his association with Chile’s more radical poets meant he was bound to have been killed or “disappeared.” The narrator then leaves Chile. Shortly after leaving he receives a letter from Bibiano, accompanied by a newspaper clipping. We learn that Stein was part of a group of “terroristas chilenos” (66) who had crossed into Nicaragua from Costa Rica with the Sandinista troops. Now that he has taken up the battle cry of the oppressed throughout the world, there is no longer a shortage of information about and Stein begins appearing and disappearing everywhere:

[C]omo un fantasma en todos los lugares donde había pelea, en todos los lugares en donde los latinoamericanos, desesperados, generosos, enloquecidos, valientes, aborrecibles, destruían y reconstruían y volvían a destruir la realidad en un intento último abocado al fracaso. (66)

Stein travels to Africa with groups such as Los Chilenos Voladores and the Frente Farabundo Martí\(^\text{13}\), becoming the quintessential revolutionary poet warrior fighting wars against injustice all over Latin America and Africa. However, after living dangerously for so long, “como en las películas de vaqueros aún no se ha fundido la bala que pueda matarlo.” (67) It is said that he dies in combat, but his death remains shrouded in mystery.

Stein’s revolutionary stance in exile represents those abroad who were unable to fight directly in their own countries due to forced exile. Many exiles nevertheless chose to resume

\(^{13}\) Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) is, since 1992, a left-wing political party in El Salvador and formerly a coalition of five guerrilla organizations. The FMLN was formed as an umbrella group on October 10, 1980 from the left-wing guerilla organizations: the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí (FPL), Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP), the Resistencia Nacional (RN), the Partido Comunista Salvadoreño (PCS) and the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos (PRTC). The FMLN was one of the main participants in the Salvadoran Civil War.
their political activity in their host countries. This was achieved, for example, by participating in public protests to spread Chile’s cry for help, or like Stein, they joined guerrilla groups in neighbouring Latin American countries to fight against repression in areas where there was still an iota of a chance in succeeding against the regimes. Due to the 1979 Sandinista victory in Nicaragua, and developments within Chile and the Soviet Union, the Communists in 1980 announced their support for "all forms of struggle," including popular insurrection. In the early 1980s they fostered the creation of the Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez, a guerrilla group, and organized youth in the ‘poblaciones’ to participate in the broad-based opposition movement that erupted in Chile in 1982. (Furci 166)

Mass exile was vital to Pinochet's objectives of gaining and holding absolute, uncontested control over Chile. Yet exile turned out to be a double edged sword; for while it removed a major part of the left from the country, it also gave regime opponents the means to disseminate their message throughout the world and deny the military regime the legitimacy it sought. Upon arriving at their exile destinations, militants of the Socialist and Communist parties, the MIR, and even the smaller left parties established local units wherever a handful of members were found, and regional, national, and international party structures were soon in place. One exile noted that for many expatriates, political parties replaced the family, the circle of close friends, and sporting and cultural associations as the primary social grouping. (Wright and Oñate, 2007: 39)

The detective Abel Romero is also forced into exile. During the time of Allende, he had been “uno de los policías más famosos” (Bolaño 121), famous for solving a couple of crimes that “en su día estremecieron, como suelo decirse, a los lectores de la crónica negra chilena.” (121) He was awarded the Medal of Valor by Allende himself, but as Romero recalls that although the crime cases he solved made him famous at the time, he had to pay for it dearly later on in prison.

After being imprisoned for three years due to the military coup, Romero is forced into exile where he moves to Paris with his wife and child. He takes on any work that he can, from bill posting to waxing office floors at night, hoping to save enough money so he could eventually return to Chile. In the developed countries, like France, most exiled professionals were unable to work in their fields. Many found menial jobs that provided a living but no satisfaction. Unfortunately these types of traumas had to be borne without the support and solidarity provided by the typical Chilean extended family. (Kay 200) Chileans' lives in
forced exile varied significantly according to personal circumstances and the countries where they settled. Yet for nearly all exiles, adaptation to living abroad without prospects of returning any time soon was a difficult challenge. It becomes clear that Romero desperately wants to return to Chile. While visiting the narrator in Barcelona they share Spanish wine over dinner. Romero compliments the wine, stating that it is better than French wine. When the narrator asks him if he has something against the French, “[l]a cara pareció ensombrecérselo y dijo que quería irse, solo eso, ya son demasiado años.” (Bolaño 128)

Since exiling the regime's enemies was central to Pinochet's mission of eradicating the Chilean left, it was necessary to prohibit exiles' return. By Decree Law 81 of November 1973, the military government required citizens who had left the country after the coup to obtain permission from the Ministry of the Interior to re-enter Chile. Thus no exile considered dangerous was allowed to return. When they renewed their passports at Chilean consulates, many exiles had the letter L stamped on them, indicating that the bearers were on the list of those prohibited from returning. Having portrayed exile as a humane alternative to prison for "enemies of the nation," the regime had no intention of changing its policy on return. (Wright and Oñate, 2007: 43) When foreign correspondents covering the plebiscite on the 1980 constitution asked Pinochet whether exiles would be allowed to return, he replied, “I have only one answer: No.” (Comite Pro Retorno de los Exiliados Chilenos 1980: 10)

Hence when democracy is officially returned to Chile, Romero has already planned his homecoming. Yet he is not in a position to return until he has proper finances to re-establish himself and his family. This is the reason he takes on the job to assassinate Wieder purely as a means to recuperate his life in his homeland. The narrator, curious to know who is funding Wieder’s assassination asks Romero. However, all Romero will tell him is that his client is a very wealthy Chilean and that he has made his fortune in the last few years in Chile, not abroad. He then goes on to comment that, “parece que en Chile hay bastante gente que se está haciendo rica.” (Bolaño 145) Romero then discloses to the narrator he will return to Chile soon. Romero reveals he hopes to set up his own business, a business that he has studied in Paris “y no puede fallar.” (145) The narrator doesn’t immediately comment because every exiled Chilean had dreams of returning to Chile and setting up a business. Romero goes on to say that he wants to be a funeral director, initially starting off small.

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14 Romero is referring to the economic policies that the Pinochet regime had introduced during its time in power, which allowed many middle to high class Chileans to enjoy a new found wealth, despite increasing the poverty gap.
although he is certain the business would grow. This can be interpreted as an indication of the economic prosperity the Chilean economy experienced in the last years of the regime, which continued under democracy. Regardless of this, the narrator thinks Romero is pulling his leg, “no me joda, dije.” (146) Romero goes on to explain that the secret is to provide a decent funeral for people who do not have much money, something dignified and elegant: “un entierro de burgueses para la pequeña burguesía y un entierro de pequeños burgueses para el proletariado, ahí está el secreto de todo.” (146) He believes that this is the key to success, not just in that particular business but in regard to life in general. In his opinion it was all about knowing how to treat the family of the deceased, commenting on how kind, courteous and morally superior the deceased was, whoever it happened to be. He finishes by saying that it’s mainly about how to deal with people, not elbow grease, and having lived abroad for years he had plenty of stories to tell: “En Chile se mueren por cuestiones así.” (147) Unfortunately for Romero, this was often not the case. Many ‘retornados de exilio’ received an icy reception from those who had remained in Chile. Years of the dictatorship’s propaganda against them had succeeded in many believing they have enjoyed a “golden exile.” Acquaintances often shunned them and no one wanted to discuss with them their time in exile; it was seen as a taboo subject even within families. This attitude led to exiles forming their own social networks for aid and solace.

Diego Soto was Stein’s best friend and rival teacher of the other poetry workshop the narrator attended. He represents those of the silent left who left quietly after Pinochet gained power. The majority of the exiles were members of left parties, although nonpartisan’s with leftist sympathies, like Soto, were numerous. Soto was well known in intellectual circles for his high intelligence and indifferent attitude. He settles in Paris as an exile where he lives a comfortable, ordinary life as a university professor and a mediocre translator, with his French wife and two children - “no albergaba ninguna esperanza de volver a Chile.” (77) The narrator refers to Soto’s happiness in “escapado de la maldición” of the violence in Latin America while describing his bourgeois lifestyle with slight disdain.

Soto was one of many exiles who chose not to return to Chile. They had several reasons for not returning. For those who had married nationals of their host country and had children, bringing their families to a land of different culture and language was problematic. Some, like Soto, after long years, had adapted and found satisfying jobs and living conditions. Others chose to stay in their adopted countries after hearing from those who had returned and found it painful or impossible to adjust to a new Chile. It was a country that had
changed profoundly in their absence and that had evolved in the opposite direction from their ideals.

Lorenzo can also be seen as another example of an exile who found happiness having left Chile. His is a cruel story of adversity at every level: a child from a poor family, who lost his arms in an unfortunate accident when he climbed up a high-tension pylon and subsequently was shocked, a homosexual and an artist and in Pinochet’s Chile no less:

Érase una vez un niño pobre de Chile...Así que Lorenzo creció en Chile y sin brazos, lo que de por si hacía su situación bastante desventajosa, pero encima, creció en el Chile de Pinochet, lo que convertía cualquier situación desventajosa en desesperada, pero esto no era todo, pues pronto descubrió que era homosexual, lo que convertía la situación desesperada en inconcebible e inenarrable. (81)

Lorenzo, or “Lorenza, como también le gustaba ser llamado” (83), becomes so desperate with his unfortunate circumstances that he tries to commit suicide by jumping into the Pacific because “es difícil ser artista en el Tercer Mundo si uno es pobre, no tiene brazos y encima es marica.” (81) As he sinks under the water, his life flashes before him like a movie, some parts in black and white, others in colour, showing him all of the things that make life worth living. Suddenly drawing courage from nowhere, he decides he does not want to die and slowly teaches himself to swim, like an eel, back to shore. His reasoning being “[m]atarse…en esta coyuntura sociopolítica, es absurdo y redundante. Mejor convertirse en poeta secreto.” (82-83)

The murderous dictatorship has rendered suicide pointless. Lorenzo eventually saves enough money to leave Chile. His story of exile, unlike his life in Chile, is a success. His new life is full of friends and lovers and he becomes the sensation of the 1992 Paralympic Games as Petra, the mascot with no arms. It is no coincidence that what marginalizes Lorenzo in his home country is what he is celebrated for in Barcelona.

Lorenzo represents those who left Chile in search of jobs, adding economic exile to the array of exile experiences in the novel. Many Chileans were unable to find work in Chile as they were blacklisted by the government due to their previous political affiliations.
However, it was not all dependent on where your political sympathies lay as hundreds of thousands of Chileans were driven out in search of economic survival due to a lack of jobs during the economic crises of 1973-1977 and 1982-1986.

### The Question of Retributive Justice

However, the destiny of the narrator in becoming the detective’s accomplice is the real turn of the screw in *Estrella Distante*. The overt issue of retributive justice due to the failings of the transitional government in punishing the perpetrators of human rights violations (HRVs) can be seen as the most conflicting point highlighted during the last chapters of the novel.

Bolaño wrote *Estrella Distante* during the initial years of the Concertación government, when Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle was President. It is not a coincidence that the President’s last name and that of Wieder’s pseudonym Alberto Ruiz-Tagle are the same. If the new coalition government is what is meant to bridge the gap between the repression of the brutal past regime and an environment where reconciliatory measures are paramount to the nations’ ability to move forward, then why is Bolaño identifying a link between the democratically elected president who ousted the military, and the Lieutenant-poet who, under the command of the military, implemented some of these political crimes? It would appear that the sharing of this seemingly innocent name clearly points to a continuation of a political regime which only on the outside appears to have ousted the past regime. In other words, Bolaño is suggesting that there has not been a true separation from the past regime, and instead the new government is simply a disguised continuity between the previous fascist and the new democratic leader.

In the last chapters of *Estrella Distante*, now sometime in the early nineties, democracy had returned to Chile. The narrator however remains in exile. This transitional government, the Concertación, was fraught with having to please both sides in order to secure a peaceful transition to democracy. Although Pinochet’s regime had been formally defeated in the 1988 election, he was still head of the armed forces, and therefore still had access to arms. In order to secure a peaceful handover, the Concertación government had little choice but to allow the outgoing regime exit guarantees. A formal handover of power masked a highly pacted transition offering little immediate room to reform compromised institutions.
The biggest obstacle facing the Concertación government was the extremely broad formal amnesty provision. It was faced with deciding how to address the HRVs committed by the Pinochet regime when the amnesty provision meant it would be difficult to conceive of prosecuting without provoking subversive and violent reactions. Presented with a lack of room to manoeuvre due to the still powerful elites and institutions associated with the old regime and the need to establish effective control over the state apparatus, the Concertación government chose to use a truth-telling mechanism, known as the Rettig Report.

The Rettig Commission was a temporally limited body charged with collecting, verifying, and making public data, testimony, and other evidence about past political violence. However, its mandate stipulated that it was not allowed to assign criminal responsibilities or sanctions. As Collins noted, the Rettig Commission “short-circuited the link between truth and consequences, providing incentives for perpetrator testimony such as anonymity or the possibility of immunity from prosecution via amnesty.” (Collins 10) This controversial aspect of truth-telling initiatives outraged the victims and the families of those murdered or disappeared. To them it represented an apparent willingness to make a trade-off between truth and justice, especially because the Rettig Commission was expressly forbidden to name individual perpetrators.

Chile, along with many other Latin American countries, at this time employed the system also common in Continental Europe whereby magistrates (judges), rather than state prosecutors, received the initial denunciations of a crime from the police or the public and were themselves responsible for the subsequent investigation. The problem was that many of the judges had been personally appointed by Pinochet; not long prior to him standing down as President. Therefore the judges allied to Pinochet were not sympathetic to the victims’ plights at all, choosing to use the amnesty clause wherever possible to close a case. Investigations seldom led to prosecutions and prosecutions seldom led to judicial condemnation. When judicial condemnation did occur, more often than not the perpetrators received lenient sentences.

An example of the lack of judicial condemnation during this period of time is evident in Estrella Distante. The narrator recalls that as the years went on, it was gradually supposed in Chilean literary circles that Wieder was dead, an idea “en el fondo tranquilizadora pues los tiempos empiezan a cambiar.” (Bolaño 116) The Chilean public had also lost all signs of Wieder until 1992, when his name appeared prominently in a judicial report on torture and
the disappearance of prisoners. It was the first time he had come to public notice in a non-literary context. In 1993 he was linked to an independent operational group responsible for the death of various students in and around Concepción and Santiago, and then in 1994 a collective of Chilean journalists published a book about the disappearances and mentioned Wieder. Wieder was eventually indicted by “un juez pesimista y valiente’ (119) in a case that would not get very far. The narrator notes that the defendant, of course, did not appear for the trial. Another judge, in Concepción, named him as the prime suspect in the murder of Angélica Garmendia and the ‘disappearance’ of her sister and aunt. Amalia Maluenda, the Garmendia twins’ Mapuche maid gives a surprise testimony regarding the twins’ ‘disappearance’ and alleged murder, as she was the only one in the house to escape the violence that occurs during the night in question. However as the narrator relates, “[n]inguna de los juicios prospera. Muchos son los problemas del país como para interesarse en la figura cada vez más borrosa de un asesino múltiple desaparecido hace mucho tiempo. Chile lo olvida.” (120) It is precisely this indifferent attitude toward the punishment of perpetrators that upset many of the victims and their families. To the victims of the HRVs the judiciary system was perceived as a mockery of justice. They felt betrayed and bitter about their initial belief in justice under the new democratic government and it only provoked their desires for individual retributive justice.

It is through the narrator that the issue of personal retributive justice is presented in the last chapters of Estrella Distante. Retributive justice sees crime primarily as an offense against the state, deriving an automatic right and indeed duty of the state to isolate and punish the offender. In this case it is the lack of retributive punishment by the state that presents the opportunity for the narrator in seeking his own personal retributive justice against Wieder.

The reader is introduced to the private detective, Abel Romero, once Pinochet’s regime has ended and Chile is in its first few years of transitional democracy. He has been hired by an anonymous client to locate and eliminate Wieder for reasons unknown to the reader, or the narrator. Romero contacts the narrator in Barcelona and asks for his assistance in finding Wieder, reasoning that not only is the narrator familiar with Wieder’s antics but in order to find a poet he needs the help of another poet. However, the narrator takes offence to this statement because: “para mí Carlos Wieder era un criminal, no un poeta.” (Bolaño 126) For him, a poet is an artist and someone like Wieder, a criminal, is in no way related. Nevertheless, Romero’s response erases the distinction: “Bueno, bueno, dijo Romero, no nos pongamos intolerantes, tal vez para Wieder o para cualquier otro usted no sea un poeta o sea
un mal poeta y él o ellos sí, todo depende del cristal con que se mira.” (126) It is precisely this indistinct notion of perception - what is right or wrong depending on one’s personal view - which hints at the main dilemma of the novel. For the narrator, helping in the capture and ‘execution’ of Wieder is an act of justice, but at the same time it can also be considered an act of murder, which places the narrator in a moral zone similar to Wieder.

The narrator, at first apprehensive about being involved in the investigation, rapidly becomes immersed in the game of tracking Wieder through his literary pseudonyms, in the hope of establishing where he is now. As the investigation progresses, the narrator notes that he was quickly becoming “cada vez más involucrado en la historia de Wieder, que era la historia de algo más, aunque entonces no sabía de qué.” (130) After months of identifying Wieder’s sadistic literary work and pursuing him, the narrator is confident they have found his current pseudonym. Romero disappears for a while, successfully returning with the knowledge of Wieder’s apartment location and his daily routine. However, he wants the narrator to confirm his identity first before he finishes the job. The narrator at once becomes uneasy, awakening to the reality of the situation. “¿Cómo he llegado hasta aquí?, pensé. ¿Cuántas calles he tenido que caminar para llegar hasta esta calle? (149)

The narrator nervously waits inside a café for Wieder to arrive for his daily coffee. He attempts to read his book but feels like “el corazón parecía que se me iba a salir del pecho” (151). At this moment, the narrator is not only facing up to what, for him, represents evil, but he is also obligated to confront this violent past and to understand it; an action that will allow him to shape the present. As Wieder arrives and takes a seat a few tables away, unaware of the narrator’s presence, the narrator observes him and considers the ethical and aesthetic reflections on the passing of time:

Lo encontré envejecido. Tanto como seguramente estaba yo. Pero no. Él había envejecido mucho más. Estaba más gordo, más arrugado, por lo menos aparentaba diez años más que yo cuando en realidad solo era dos o tres años mayor. Miraba el mar y fumaba y de vez en cuando le echaba una mirada a su libro. Igual que yo, descubrí con alarma….Pensé que parecía un tipo duro, como solo pueden serlo – y solo pasados los cuarenta – algunos latinoamericanos…una dureza triste e irremediable. Pero Wieder no parecía triste y allí radicaba precisamente la tristeza infinita. Parecía adulto. Pero no era adulto, lo supe de inmediato. Parecía dueño de sí mismo. Y a su manera y dentro de su ley, cualquiera que fuera, era más dueño de sí
mismo que todos los que estábamos en aquel bar silencioso. Era más dueño de sí mismo que muchos de los que caminaban en ese momento junto a la playa o trabajaban, invisibles, preparando la inminente temporada turística…no parecía un poeta. No parecía ex oficial de la Fuerza Aérea Chilena. No parecía un asesino de leyenda. No parecía el tipo que había volado a la Antártida para escribir un poema en el aire. Ni de lejos. (152-153)

The narrator is acutely aware of the difference between the ‘legend’ of Wieder, and all that he represented, and the man now sitting before him. It is simply the effect of the passing of time, almost 20 years. Now that Wieder is finally before him, he has been reduced to a “hombre con pasado”. In other words, the narrator is finally able to comprehend his life in the dictatorial period and to establish continuity in respect to the way he actually lives now: exile and disillusions. However, the initial feeling of freedom, of having solved a problem turns to a feeling of horror for the narrator when he realise Wieder is about to die and suddenly their mission seems to crumble to the point of insignificance. The narrator encounters a predicament when he recognises in Wieder someone caught up in the same tragic drama, and he no longer feels it is right to continue with Wieder’s assassination. However his argument to Romero is not very convincing: “Es mejor que no lo mate dije. Una cosa así nos puede arruinar, a usted y a mí, y además es innecesario, ese tipo ya no le va a hacer daño a nadie” (154-55). Romero ignores the narrator replying “A mí no me va a arruinar…al contrario, me va a a capitalizar. En cuanto, a que no puede hacer daño a nadie, que le voy a hacer, la verdad es que no lo sabemos, no lo podemos saber, ni usted ni yo somos Dios, solo hacemos lo que podemos. Nada más.” (155)

The narrator’s unease seems to indicate that in this act, justice has not been served. Instead, Wieder’s death is seen more as a private act of revenge, even though his death will in no way make up for the damage done to the national community. Generally a victim is compelled to harm a perpetrator only in response to the harm suffered. In this case the narrator is prompted to retaliate against a perpetrator because he does not want the perpetrator to harm others. Therefore the personal retributive desire is a retaliatory response for the killing of the narrator’s friends. The narrator thus ends up involved, indirectly, in a criminal act. Wieder’s death is not mentioned directly, but Romero’s intentions are clear. The narrator’s silence suggests his complicity and feelings of guilt. The private revenge undertaken is extremely unsatisfying not only because there has been no public accounting of his crimes – only a privately financed murder that renders the supposed justice a case of
personal revenge – but because the narrator has glimpsed the torturer’s humanity. It is not that Wieder does not deserve punishment or retribution, but rather that this killing has silenced all of the history that surrounded Wieder. In other words, all of the circumstances that led him to become who he became and to do what he did.

William Faulkner’s quote that opens the novel sums up the meaning of justice in Chile: “¿Qué estrella cae sin que nadie la mire?” (Bolaño 10) As Juliet Lynd explains, the quote “evokes the existential question of bearing witness to a spectacle to give it meaning.” (Lynd 186) Neither the reader, nor the narrator, witness Wieder’s downfall, and because of that his death becomes insignificant. It creates a convincing argument for a public accounting of the crimes of the dictatorship complete with trials and testimonies and due punishment for the perpetrators.

**Conclusion**

Therefore, it can be seen that the catastrophe represented by the defeat of Allende, and Chile’s subsequent destiny under military dictatorship and afterwards, eventually reaches everyone. In *Estrella Distante*, history and justice have been taken out of the realm of the public and have been relegated to the private domain and to the individual destinies of Bolaño’s characters. By avoiding sentimental testimonial in his descriptions, Bolaño allows for a more psychological reflection on the dictatorship that leaves the reader wondering what the origins of evil are.

After the murder of Wieder, the narrator expresses his unease to the detective about what has just happened: “Nunca me había ocurrido algo semejante, le confesé. No es cierto, dijo Romero muy suavemente, nos han ocurrido cosas peores, piénselo un poco. Puede ser, admití, pero este asunto ha sido particularmente espantoso.” (Bolaño 157) This final reflection about their past signifies that once shared, it is capable of being understood. Despite the horrific political events in Chile, there exists the possibility of a generation (Romero, the narrator) not only to grasp its importance and learn from it, but to also recognise the power that these events have had on their lives. Sharing personal stories can be seen as beneficial because it allows a person, like the narrator, the chance to not abandon their past and to recall the memories of those fateful events in the hope that everyone can learn from it.
A distant star glimpsed in the night sky is thus symbolic of the allegorical workings of
the novel and of memory itself: to see a star means we are receiving light from the past, a
light which we can only properly distinguish once the source of emission has disappeared. It
seems that the only way a nation that has suffered atrocities under a repressive regime, like
Chile, can move forward is through fostering a culture of memory, “to create public spheres
of ‘real’ memory that will counter the politics of forgetting, pursued by post-dictatorship
regimes either through ‘reconciliation’ and official amnesties or through repressive silencing”
(Huysssen 15). The novel attacks any single-minded insistence on justice for the perpetrators,
reminding the reader that whatever the fate of the torturer, insistence on that singular
vengeful pursuit, however understandable, will not render justice on a broader scale. It
instead points the reader to the myriad of stories that have led to the need for justice, to the
infinite series of injustices that bound up an entire generation of Chileans in an epic struggle
that has yet found no resolution.
CHAPTER FOUR

Self-Censorship in Nocturno de Chile by Roberto Bolaño

Roberto Bolaño was a Chilean writer well known for his harsh and very public criticism of the Chilean literary establishment. Not averse to controversial comments, his blunt and provocative ways did not endear him to fellow writers. He did not shy away from criticising his peers, Chilean politics or society and for this reason he was often shut out by the country’s cultural establishment. Nevertheless, despite some critics mixed feelings towards him, no one can fault Bolaño’s extraordinary prose. His novels have a refreshing directness which serves to prevent any sense of complacency and conventionality. He writes not just to satisfy his reader, but to stir them. His narratives often involve the denunciation of the dark side of the avant-garde, focusing on their complicity with power and political repression. Richard Eder notes that with the central themes in Bolaño’s works, “the pen is as blood-stained as the sword, and as compromised.” (New York Times)15

Bolaño was born in Chile but moved to Mexico with his family as a teenager. He soon dropped out of school in Mexico, working various jobs but focused on his passion for poetry. A keen Marxist supporter, he returned to Chile in 1973, ready to assist the Revolution, especially Allende’s radical reforms that would redistribute land owned by the Church and the wealthy to poor farmers. However, within days of his arrival the coup occurred and the military seized power. Bolaño was arrested and imprisoned for a few days but escaped the clutches of Pinochet’s regime because two of his jailers were previous classmates. He then left Chile and lived in Spain in voluntary exile until his premature death from liver disease in 2003. Bolaño had conflicted feelings about his native country. As Ariel Dorfman notes, “he did not fit into Chile, and the rejection that he experienced left him free to say whatever he wanted, which can be a good thing for an author.” (Rohter: New York Times) Bolaño was seen to be an ethical outsider able to reveal the weakness and hypocrisy of a floundering literary establishment, and as such was a powerful force for the revitalisation of that establishment.

Nocturno de Chile is a novel that embraces the political on a personal level while exploring the intersection of art, politics, religion and culture under the auspices of the brutal Pinochet regime. The personal element in this multi-layered novella, comes in the form of a priest, Sebastian Urrutia Lacroix, known simply as Father Urrutia. Life as a humble priest and minor poet is not enough for Father Urrutia. He yearns to become part of the literary elite and with drive, ambition, and connections he eventually becomes one of the most famous and influential literary critics of his day writing under the pseudonym H. Ibacache. We first meet Father Urrutia on his deathbed, and in a complex monologue he uses his last hours to recall significant moments in his life. At times it becomes an hallucinatory rant as he rails against a “joven envejecido” whom he claims has defamed him. Now, at the end of his life, it is his name, his position, and his status in the eyes of others that matters most. “Ahora me muero, pero tengo muchas cosas que decir todavía…hay que aclarar algunos puntos.” (11) Thus the reader follows his attempts to justify his actions, or inactions, his “palabras y silencios.”(11)

The jeering “joven envejecido” is never properly identified but most likely it is Father Urrutia’s younger, more idealistic self, calling him to account for the sins he has committed during his life-time. Alternatively, the “joven envejecido” may represent the author Bolaño; or more broadly, the collective conscience of Chile. On a superficial level, this short but profound book could be no more than an examination of one man’s life. On closer inspection, however, it is also a critical analysis of what was happening in Chile as a whole during this one man’s lifetime. Father Urrutia’s search for meaning takes him through a maze of political intrigue, religious hypocrisy, societal self-interest, and the ugly machination of collective and individual power; Pinochet’s power in particular. On his deathbed, Father Urrutia is seeking both acclaim for his achievements and atonement for what he did or did not do to gain exulted status for himself. While the story told in Nocturno de Chile is many layered, the format of the narration is unusual in its singularity. It is presented in one long paragraph with one scene and one narrator with the occasional interjection from the invisible voice of the “joven envejecido.” This single paragraph comprises seven seemingly disconnected stories, or parables, and as Bolaño states in an interview in Las Últimas Noticias “Cada cuadro es
arbitrario y al mismo tiempo, paradójicamente, es ejemplar, es decir se presta a la extracción de un discurso moral.” (Pinto <online>)

The first story begins with Father Urrutia telling us about entering the seminary at the age of fourteen and even at that young age it is clear that his ambition was never directed toward serving God. Just days before his ordination Father Urrutia meets a man named Farewell. Farewell is Chile’s greatest literary critic and Father Urrutia admires him and aspires to be like him. Farewell takes a liking to the young Urrutia and invites him to La-Bas, his estate, where Father Urrutia meets Farewell’s intimate circle of friends, the country’s finest literary and academic minds. From the moment he enters society as a young man, Father Urrutia’s heart is fixed on gaining status and stature among the great writers and poets of South America.

It is during this weekend at Farewell’s estate that Father Urrutia’s mind-set is first explored. Farewell, as a wealthy aristocrat, comes from a long tradition of those who take from the weak. He benefits from the hard labour of the landless peasants who work on his estate. When Father Urrutia enters Farewell’s home, he willingly becomes part of that system and, in this setting, Bolaño pointedly contrasts Farewell’s wealth with the poverty of his peasant workers. Father Urrutia takes a stroll through the estate grounds admiring the gardens and beautiful scenery, but he is disgusted by the filth of the peasants and disparaging when they respectfully offer him what little food they have. His descriptions of them are crude, “todos eran feos” and at one point he feels physically sick by the appearances of the peasant children. (Bolaño 33) Despite his youthful appearance, the peasants’ obvious deference to him as a priest causes Urrutia great discomfort and his inner vanity is revealed when they ask for his assistance with a sick child. Rather than taking the time to care for the child, Father Urrutia is more concerned about what Farewell’s distinguished guests would think of him if he was subsequently late to dinner, still attired in his priest’s cassock. This suggests that Father Urrutia is ambivalent about his religious role and is more ambitious than pious. A priest is called to serve the poor, to love others and to fight for justice and peace yet he would readily spurn all these if it gained him acceptance into Farewell’s intellectual circle. Urrutia

16 Pinto, Rodrigo ‘Bolaño a la vuelta de la esquina’ Las Últimas Noticias, Jan. 28, 2001 <http://www.letras.s5.com/bolao1.htm>
also comments that some of the neighbouring peasants may have travelled some distance in the hope of hearing mass from him but dismisses this because “el pretexto del fin de semana era literario y no religioso.” (31) Over the course of the weekend, Farewell makes several sexual passes at Urrutia but the priest does nothing to rebuff him in case it hampers his desperate need to be included in the wider group. His disregard for his upbringing, the Catholic Church’s strict teachings about homosexuality, and his priestly vows of chastity again shows the extent he will go to in order to attain his ambitions. It becomes evident that, for Urrutia, literature will always take precedent over religion.

Urrutia the priest, has evolved rapidly into, Urrutia a member of the cultural elite. This retelling prompts the “joven envejecido” to begin accusing him of injustice and cowardice, challenging him to rise beyond his selfish interests. Urrutia is more comfortable revelling in the fine foods and highbrow conversation of the aristocrats to bother with the peasants and their poor diction and humble bread. He is blindly pursuing his dream of achieving literary success and is oblivious to the presence of human suffering:

La voz de mi superego que conducía mi sueño como un piloto de nervios de acero, era el superyó que conducía un camión frigorífico por en medio de una carretera en llamas, mientras el ello gemía y hablaba en una jerga que parecía micénico. (35-36)

The refrigerated truck symbolises Urrutía’s insulation from a world going up in flames around him. ‘Jerga que parecía micénico’ is an expression that represents the shift of an unrefined person to a person of culture. The “joven envejecido” confronts Urrutia about his insulation from the suffering and injustices around him; the very things that Roberto Bolaño believes should be the true concern of artists and critics.

Bolaño makes fun of the literary elite in the first of Urrutia’s narratives by having him tell of his awe when he realises that one of the guests at Farewell’s dinner table is Pablo Neruda, Chile’s greatest poet. A staunch communist, Neruda is normally viewed as a poet of the people and his poetry often included references to the impoverished and destitute of his native land. Yet here, when Urrutia first meets him, he is reciting poetry to the moon and the stars, enjoying fine wine and rich meals, and along with the others, blissfully ignoring the suffering of the workers on his host’s estate. By singling out Neruda, Bolaño is suggesting that despite writing poetry and literature that appears to value the dispossessed, the writers themselves disregard the terrible conditions of the peasants who live on the very land, they or their friend own.
Role of the Catholic Church

Having shown his disdain for the literati, Bolaño turns his attention to the Church. Stories of past popes are conveyed via a conversation Urrutia has with Farewell and, through this section of the narrative, Bolaño focuses on the collusion between the Catholic Church and political power. The stories Urrutia shares concern former popes’ political escapades and how certain popes were able to navigate the political times and increase the power of the church. This dovetails with what Urrutia truly values about his vocation; its doorway to power. The “joven envejecido” accuses him of selling his soul to the dictatorship that was to come but Urrutia defends his stance and retorts that “que hasta los poetas del partido comunista chilena se morían por que escribiera alguna cosa amable de sus versos. Y yo escribí cosas amables de sus versos.” (70) Bolaño wants Urrutia to be seen not as a fascist revolutionary, but rather someone with an aristocratic view of literature who is keen to preserve the traditional political, social and aesthetic values.

The link between the Church and political power is Bolaño’s focus in the fourth tale. Urrutia tells how he gains entry to various circles and how his disposition to associate with powerful people leads him directly into the upheaval of the Chilean government. Fellow priests with links to Opus Dei recommend Urrutia to leaders of this very conservative and secret right wing group. He is then sent on a mission to Europe by two mysterious Opus Dei agents: Señor Oido y Señor Odeim.17 His mission is to study and report back on how the priesthood in Europe are preserving their churches and cathedrals which are being damaged by pigeons excreting on their facades. Bolaño implies, however, that the real reason for Urrutia’s mission is to find a way to preserve the Church itself in Chile from attacks as a result of the rise in popularity of Marxist Socialism by replicating the European solution. The pigeons and their excrement are allegorical and the decay has more to do with the institution rather than its buildings.

In Europe, Urrutia discovers that the priests there have devised a method to “defender del paso del tiempo” (85) that uses falcons to prey on the pigeons hence eradicating the source of the decay. It is a brutal solution and Bolaño uses powerful imagery, subtly suggesting that the Chilean Church will use “the falcons” to silence “the pigeons” (the common people) if they “excrete on” (criticise) the Church. The killer falcons are the agents of fascism who execute the Church’s dirty work. The one priest, Father Antonio, who

17 Señor Oido y Señor Odeim are hate (odio) and fear (miedo) spelt backwards.
expresses reservations about killing the pigeons, “que también, pese a sus cagadas, eran criaturas de Dios,” (89) is ridiculed by Urrutia for being “mordidas por las dudas y el arrepentimiento a destiempo.” (89) Urrutia’s trip to Europe is Bolaño’s way of saying that he felt the Chilean Church learned much from its European counterparts on how to bend and pander to political power. Urrutia recounts a dream he had where, “miles de halcones que volaban a gran altura por encima del océano Atlántico, en dirección a América.” (95) These falcons (agents of fascism) will settle in Latin America where they will gradually gain power in Chile. Fascism is a swift way to defend a society against the ravages of time or progress, but it is also one that gives little thought to the people who stand in its way, acting just like a falcon killing pigeons. Bolaño is suggesting that in order to preserve its cultural dominance the Church will, when necessary, bend to the will of the state.

Urrutia reveals that he is a member of the very conservative and secretive right wing group, Opus Dei. Bolaño is not shy in his criticism of the Catholic Church hierarchy and uses Urrutia’s character to portray his displeasure at how, in his opinion, the Church as an institution supported Pinochet’s regime. He is especially critical of the Opus Dei branch of the Church for its alleged support of fascist regimes, including Franco in Spain and specifically the Chilean dictator, Augusto Pinochet. It is important to note that Bolaño does not directly tie church leaders to acts of violence or injustice, he only hints at the acceptance of such acts.

It is common knowledge that Pope John Paul II served communion to Pinochet and his generals in 1987 in a stadium in which Pinochet had committed mass murders of political prisoners. The Pope then posed with Pinochet on the balcony of La Moneda to a receptive crowd of Pinochet supporters. Many felt the Pope should have excommunicated Pinochet due to the brutality of his regime. Author Venise Wagner describes how many of her Chilean friends, including her boyfriend Victor Peralta, saw the Pope as “a beacon of social justice” (Wagner 14)\(^\text{18}\) and were certain his visit to Chile, the first visit to Chile by a sitting pope, would aid in the demise of Pinochet. The excitement of hearing the Pope speak at the rally in La Bandera soon led to disappointment when no denunciation was forthcoming. The Pope alluded deftly to political repression, but never once referred to Chile as a dictatorship nor did he call for Pinochet to step down. Victor Peralta and his friends felt let down by the Pope.

\(^{18}\) Wagner, Venise. Love in the Time of Pinochet. San Francisco State University, 2012
They desperately needed some form of political action from the pontiff after suffering through fifteen years of repression, but all they got instead was a speech full of spiritual encouragement. The Chilean Catholic Church had already voiced its opposition to the human rights abuses occurring under the regime, and the same had been expected of the Pope. This view emulates one of Professor Brian Smith’s major themes in his book, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism* which explores the difference of view, on key issues, between Catholics on lower levels of the church and the bishops. (Smith 41)

Pope John Paul II made offhand remarks to journalists whilst on his flight to Chile, as published by The Washington Post, which revealed that what he personally thought was very different to his official stance on the regime: “Some would want to separate us from this mission,” he said. “These people would want to tell us, ‘Stay in the sacristy, do nothing else.’ They say it is politics, but it is not politics.” (Wagner 14) It seemed to Victor and his friends that although the Pope personally did not seem to support the repression, he was more concerned with his public image and who the Church might offend if they chose a side. Instead of voicing his concerns he chose to walk the fine line between the call for human rights and keeping his message spiritual and pastoral. (14-16) The Church’s collusion with political power was especially shameless in Bolaño’s view because the Pope was well aware of the injustice being done, even before Pinochet came to power.

Latin America has a long history of authoritarian regimes, well known for their iron fist ways of dealing with opposition groups. This neo-conservative backlash against the liberation movements in Latin America was supported by some ultraconservative Catholic religious organisations like Opus Dei and Legionaries of Christ. Critics have especially accused Opus Dei of encouraging and pursuing alliances with right-wing political figures or governments, such as Franco’s regime in Spain. Journalist Penny Lernoux noted that after Franco’s death in 1975, Opus Dei “expanded to other countries in Europe, and to the United States and Latin America, gaining political influence in the latter, particularly in Pinochet's Chile …. Opus Dei members and sympathisers supported the CIA-backed coup that overthrew Chilean President Salvador Allende, and one of them, Hernin Cubillos, became General Pinochet's foreign minister.” (Appleby 18) Within the Catholic Church, Opus Dei is also criticized for allegedly seeking independence and more influence. In his book Smith claims that Opus Dei members were among the first chief administrators of General Pinochet's repressive regime; although there is no evidence to suggest that they were repressive. (141) The Spanish theologian and author, Fr. Juan José Tamayo Acosta in an article published
in the Spanish newspaper, El País,\textsuperscript{19} denounced this type of cohabitation between the Institutional church and military dictators in Latin America as ‘anti-democratic, anti-evangelical, anti-human and anti-divine.’

The Catholic Church hierarchy could have used its position of influence to criticise the government more effectively. Within an authoritarian regime that controlled the existence of political parties, trade unions, and workers’ unions, the Catholic Church became the only public voice allowed within Chile. It is the lack of action by the Church as a whole that Bolaño is criticising, especially towards the end of the regime during the 1980s. No public denunciation against the regime was ever made by the Pope, even though their Catholic followers encouraged the Church to take a strong stance against the abuse of human rights. In his discussion of the military regime, Smith criticizes the bishops for waiting seven months before citing violations of human rights and the moderation of their comments when they finally did. He credits this to the bishops’ private sympathy for a military coup as the only means to end the chaos in September 1973, strong support by several bishops for the new regime, and concern to maintain unity in the hierarchy. (Old Allies 291)

In fact Pinochet, an ardent Catholic himself, tried to manipulate the public into thinking the Church and the regime shared the same ideals. Many of his supporters were religious, and to have the Church’s endorsement would make his regime all the more legitimate in their eyes. It was clear that the Church did not support Marxism because of its atheist ideals and many bishops had supported the military intervention to end Allende’s Socialist government. Pinochet tried to capitalise on this shared stance against Marxism and in March 1974, the junta published a Declaration of Principles, most of which had been written by right-wing, Catholic former student leader, Jaime Guzman. It drew on Catholic political thought to justify the coup and to argue that the regime's attempts to privatise and decentralise the economy were applications of papal social principles; particularly the principle of subsidiarity enunciated by Pope Pius XI in 1931. (Sigmund 33)

It is important, however, to note that there were individuals within the church who did openly oppose Pinochet’s regime, most importantly Cardinal Silva Henriquez, the Archbishop of Santiago. He was not a traditional Catholic in that he saw the role of the

\textsuperscript{19} Acosta, Fr. Juan José Tamayo. \textit{El País}. (2. 3.99) Translated by ‘Remember Chile’. <http://www.remember-chile.org.uk/comment/vatican.htm>
church as being involved in society for the sake of service rather than for the sake of image, political ends, and social acceptance. The Chilean Catholic Church, led by Cardinal Silva, was confrontational during the 1970s. Cardinal Silva was heavily attacked by traditional groups, especially the Chilean Society for Tradition, Family, and Property, because he had appeared alongside Allende at several public events, and therefore was associated with the values of the left-wing groups. He believed wholeheartedly though that the only side to be on was the side of the victims, regardless of their political ideology. He created the human rights organisation, Comité Pro Paz in October 1973, "to aid all families and persons affected by the current situation.” (32) It helped support victims of the coup with legal aid, employment and health care. However the offices of Comité Pro Paz were under constant threat by the regime’s security forces, and many priests were intimidated or harassed by government intelligence units, and it was forced to close in December 1975. Defiantly, Cardinal Silva replaced it with the Vicaria de la Solidaridad, a Catholic aid program. It was part of the Archdiocese of Santiago and as a pastoral office within the church it was legally separated from the Chilean state, therefore untouchable to the new regime. The Vicaria de la Solidaridad represented the values associated with the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. It was able to provide legal defence and support to victims of the dictatorship.

During the 1980s the relationship between the Catholic Church and the state began to change. The Catholic Church still persisted with its objective of a return to a democratically elected civilian government, but the bishops began to change their tactics for two main reasons. Firstly, the Vatican was uneasy with the political overtures of the confrontations with the regime and wanted the Church to pay more attention to theological and ecclesiastical matters. The Church was perceived as becoming more “political” by the military and traditional Catholics, many of whom were upper-class supporters of Pinochet. The Vatican was uneasy with Cardinal Silva’s confrontational style and wanted the church to retreat from the political arena. The Church felt it was vulnerable to attacks from the government and the right which could make it difficult for the Church to carry out its most important spiritual mission. Secondly, the retirement of several liberal bishops, including Cardinal Silva, allowed the Vatican the opportunity to replace them with conservative and moderate bishops. The Vatican felt the replacements would be less confrontational and more willing to engage in dialogue with the authorities. (Meacham 278) Juan Fresno Larrain succeeded Cardinal Silva in June 1983. Like many of the bishops, and like Bolaño’s character Urrutia, he had favoured military intervention to end Allende’s Socialist government. His promotion as
leader of the Catholic Church in Chile was welcomed by Pinochet’s wife, Lucía Hiriart, who is alleged to have exclaimed “Parece que Dios nos ha oído” (Otano 138) His view on the role of the Church in society differed from Cardinal Silva’s. He believed that the hierarchy’s apparent endorsement of the opposition reinforced the divisions in Chilean society, alienating many believers from the saving grace of the church, and contributed to the loss of the church’s moral authority. (Meacham 290) Fresno maintained his role as a conciliator, not an activist, and worked behind the scenes to affect change by facilitating meetings with party leaders on the subjects of reconciliation and the transition to democracy. Once the Post-National Accord was set up, the result of “bilateral meetings with selected party leaders on the subjects of reconciliation and the transition to democracy,” (Fleet10) the Church began to withdraw from politics and pursue a more politically neutral stance.

Complicity in Chile’s cultural establishment

Allende’s rise to power followed by his violent fall is marked in the novel with Urrutia holed up in his library reading Greek poetry and philosophy, seemingly oblivious to the turmoil that is happening in the outside world. For Urrutia, literature transcends political differences; it is a privileged space that allows him to escape the vulgarity of the world. This is a potent passage as not only does it illustrate the passivity of the literary class towards the political struggles in Chile, but it proves that although Urrutia considered himself a “patriot”, he does nothing to support or condemn any of the political actions during this turbulent period. Bolaño supported the idea that the lower classes of society – the labourers and farmers – needed to be uplifted, not kept down. He believed that poets and writers like himself (and his protagonist Urrutia) had a moral obligation to be a part of that social revolution. Bolaño notes that writers appear more and more marginalised in contemporary society. A climate of censorship, silence and complicity in order to survive in a dictatorial country has resulted in the dispersion of a national community. It is essential to him that literature regains its aura. A writer is a witness who must be able to keep “los ojos abiertos” as quality writing means: “saber meter la cabeza en lo oscuro, saber saltar al vacío, saber que la literatura básicamente es un oficio peligroso” (Echevarría 37) Bolaño is questioning the period of self-censorship which many of Chile’s writers willingly imposed on themselves during the regime. Art, when it is under repressive regimes like Pinochet’s, has to be expressed through alternative methods in order to protest, confront and critique the political
circumstances. There existed strict limitations when censoring literary works and many writers did not want to encounter any difficulties with the military authorities. However, there were a few writers who felt it absolutely necessary to address Chile’s political concerns through their writing. They succeeded in getting their message across to the world through various ways; publishing their work underground or cleverly passing by the censors undetected. Bolaño felt there should have been more writers who ignored the risk and took on the huge responsibility of representing their country’s struggles. Bolaño made constant references about the value of a writer in many of the articles he wrote or interviews he gave: “Para acceder al arte lo primero que se necesita, incluso antes que talento, es valor.”

(G.Aguilar <online>)

After returning from Europe, Urrutia notes that in Chile “la situación en la patria no era buena.” (Bolaño 96) He is referring to the rise of Socialism, prior to the election of Allende, which he and Farewell, as elite conservatives, opposed: “Chile. ¿Cómo ha podido cambiar tanto? […] ¿Se han vuelto locos los chilenos?” (96) He sees the military regime as a way to restore order to Chile. The only reference to Urrutia being aware of what is happening politically are his brief comments about political events intertwined with what he was reading, leading up to the death of Allende and the military coup:

Cuando volví a mi casa me puse a leer los griegos. Que sea lo que Dios quiera, me dije. Yo voy a releer a los griegos. Empecé con Homero, como manda la tradición, y seguí con Tales de Mileto y Jenofanes de Colofón y Alcmeon de Crotona y Zenón de Elea (que bueno era), y luego mataron a un general del ejército favorable a Allende y Chile restableció relaciones diplomáticas con Cuba…y se organizó la primera marcha de las cacerolas en contra de Allende y yo leí a Esquilo y a Sófocles y a Eurípides, todas las tragedias, y a Alceo de Mitilene y a Esopo y a Hesiodo y a Heródoto (que es un titán más que un hombre), y en Chile hubo escasez e inflación y mercado negro y largas colas para conseguir comida y la Reforma Agraria expropio el fundo de Farewell y muchos otros fondos…y también releí a Demóstenes y a Menandro y a Aristóteles y a Platón (que siempre es provechoso), y hubo huelgas y un coronel de un regimiento blindado intentó dar un golpe y un camarógrafo murió filmando su propia muerte y luego mataron el edecán naval de Allende y hubo disturbios, malas palabras,

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The death of Pablo Neruda, shortly after the military coup, signalled the end of an era for the Chilean literati. Neruda, a Nobel Prize winner, signified the glory of South American literature. His death occurred just as Pinochet was coming to power and is symbolic of a loss of autonomous power for the literary elites. Their leader, Neruda, a self-acclaimed communist, is gone and they must now bow before the political power who will determine their future. The story Farewell recounts to Urrutia about the shoe maker and the Austro-Hungarian Empire is significant because it illustrates how artists will wilfully bow down before political power in the hope it may benefit their art. The shoe-maker is known as the finest shoemaker in all the land due to his long-lasting shoes. The Emperor is impressed with his shoes, which meant he was often invited to important balls and social functions. Yet he is not content with the shoes being his only legacy. The shoe-maker wishes to build a monument and call it Heroes’ Hill in honour of all the heroes of the empire. He approaches the Emperor to ask for financial help to assist in his dream. The Emperor is enthusiastic and promises to help him. The shoe-maker becomes obsessed and puts all his time and effort into finishing his project, but time passes him by and soon the Emperor has died, the empire has fallen and two wars occur. The shoemaker is now broke because the Emperor never gave him the money to build the monument. When he returns to Vienna, no one recognises him. The only thing that remains of his legacy are the people who still have a pair of his long-lasting shoes. The story highlights how the shoe-maker’s artistic talents were wasted through his patronage of an empire that was initially enthusiastic for his project, but never followed through on promises of support. The shoe-maker’s real art, his shoes, lasted much longer than his desired legacy. Bolaño is conveying the idea that true power only lies within the empire and artists can suffer under its will. He witnessed fellow artists give in to the temptations of political power; through self-censorship their art legitimised the brutality of the regime. The art of those who stay true to themselves is more likely to be remembered than those whose integrity is lost to the fickleness of power.

This story follows with Urrutia being summoned to teach secret classes about Marxist Communism to Pinochet and his junta. Urrutia is reluctant, but he agrees to do it. His
reluctance highlights the divided nature of Urrutia. Although he seems to be disinterested in politics, it is clear that he understands that associating himself with Pinochet is wrong on a moral level. However his concern is more with what others will think about his association with Pinochet as he still cannot tell for himself what is good or bad:

¿Lo he hecho bien? ¿Aprendieron algo? ¿Enseñé algo? ¿Hice lo que tenía que hacer? ¿Hice lo que debía hacer? [...] ¿Si les contara a mis amigos escritores lo que había hecho obtendría su aprobación? ¿Algunos manifestarían un rechazo absoluto por lo que había hecho? ¿Algunos comprenderían y perdonarían? ¿Sabe un hombre, siempre, lo que está bien y lo que está mal? (113)

By accepting the job, Urrutia has ignored Farewell’s advice, told through the story of the shoe-maker. Pandering to power, whether it is literary or political, will ruin the purity of faith he once had, and it will ruin the integrity of his art.

During the classes, Pinochet reveals to Urrutia that learning about Marxist Communism is his way of knowing how far his enemies will go in the pursuit of their ideas. He also states that he believes that he is the most intellectual of all the former Presidents as he is the only one who has written books (115-118). Bolaño is suggesting here that the nature of power does not always come in the form of blind patriotism or thoughtless action, but can be masked by intellectualism. The intellectual classes can be instrumental in supporting brutality, as Urrutia has shown by teaching Marxism to Pinochet. The reader is able to see that Pinochet and Urrutia are not necessarily that far removed from each other.

Self-Censorship in Chile’s cultural establishment

Nocturno de Chile is important because it is not just a book about politics, the church and the condemnation of Chile’s intellectuals. Although Bolaño’s novels intersect with important historical moments, he is more interested in portraying the individual’s reaction to the events. What intrigues Bolaño mostly is how individuals react at moments of difficulty, and how this defines them throughout life. Bolaño presents Urrutia as a character who lacks basic self-knowledge, especially over his ethical judgement. Urrutia’s storytelling is a process of validation and justification of his behaviour. Faced with the “joven envejecido” in his dying hours, he looks back at various moments of difficulty in his life and tries to justify what he considers to be a set of practical and acceptable actions according to his judgement.
The real focus is on the stories which highlight Urrutia’s ethics and his right or wrong conduct. He is portrayed as a cold idealist who will say anything to avoid the tarnishing of his reputation, always trying to impose his version of events. However his final breakdown is a delirious outpouring of stories while searching for validation of his moral and artistic values.

The second story narrated by Urrutia during his deathbed confession is important because it helps to illuminate the readers’ understanding of Father Urrutia’s dark association within the cultural and political establishments via the parallels of two diplomats. The story is set in Paris where Salvador Reyes, a Chilean diplomat and writer, participates in social gatherings with fascist friends during WWII. Reyes is introduced to Ernst Junger, a German diplomat and well known writer at one of these functions. He coincidentally meets Junger again whilst both are visiting a Guatemalan painter who is dying of hunger and is unable to leave during the Occupation of Paris. The painter, relentless in his silence, sits by the window in a state of deep melancholy, reflecting on what is happening to Paris. The painter is clearly contemplating the horrors and catastrophe created by WWII. With Paris under siege by the Germans, France would inevitably fall to the Nazis and at this stage, allied victory over the Nazi regime was not guaranteed. The painter represents this perceptiveness and the impending threat of Nazi invasion. Reyes, however, is indifferent to what is happening; his lack of concern apparent as he continues to try and impress the artists or writers he meets. He is offended when the painter does not read his book, presenting the question of why anyone would be worried about literature when the world around them is in turmoil. Reyes attempts to see through the painter’s eyes during a brief moment of silence, but he can only partially understand. The moment is soon broken by Junger’s arrival and Reyes reverts back to his focus of impressing those around him. The absurdity of the situation is that neither men want to discuss the real issue, the meaning of the war, so instead, they talk about books and art, however as Farewell rightly says “no hay consuelo en los libros.” (65)

Reyes and Junger are representative of others involved with the institutions of art and functionaries of the state, who are absorbed in literature while ignoring the spectre of human suffering right in front of them; just as Father Urrutia did leading up to Allende’s fall from power and throughout the brutal military regime that followed. As Pierre Lopez notes “Junger es de cierto modo la representación de la actitud de Urrutia en un ámbito y tiempo distintos…Urrutia se hace el desentendido de las represiones de la dictadura de Pinochet…tal como Junger no ve ni le interesa ver a la represión nazi en el Paris ocupado.” (Rodriguez 10)
It becomes apparent to the reader that although Urrutia is aware of the ethical problems raised in the story, he prefers to confront his ethics through others so as to avoid a direct connection with similar questionable acts in his own past. It can be seen that his monologue is more a constant negation of guilt and excuses rather than contrition.

It becomes apparent that Father Urrutia is not sure if he is the judge or the judged. He is surprised when his pseudonym H. Ibacache, the literary critic, begins to gain more fame than his real name, Sebastian Urrutia Lacroix, which he uses for his poetry. He plans for Ibacache to be a name of "purity," a name that represented clear and concise thinking on literary and artistic matters. This inner confusion presents itself clearly when Father Urrutia reaches moments of difficulty in his life, and instead of confronting them and working through them, he fails to act. As a young man he goes through a phase of “aburrimiento y abatimiento” and as a result his poetry takes on a form unlike any of his poetry before: (Bolaño 72)

[P]oemas llenos de insultos y blasfemias y cosas peores que tenía el buen sentido de destruir apenas amanecía, sin mostrárselos a nadie, aunque entonces muchos se hubieran sentido honrados con tal distinción, poemas cuyo sentido último, o lo que yo creía ver en ellos como sentido último, me sumían en un estado de perplejidad y conmoción que duraba todo el día. (72)

Instead of continuing through this struggle to create his own style, as all good artists have to endure, he gives in to his agony and frustration when he is offered a chance to escape to Europe and undertake a mission set by Opus Dei agents. Had he not allowed himself to be co-opted he might have remained true to the spirit of his poetry and stuck with it. His tendency to give up easily when difficulty arises illustrates his weak will. When he returns from Europe, he notices a big change in Chile’s situation. He recognises the grimness of the situation and what he should do: “No hay que sonar sino ser consecuente, me decía. No hay que perderse tras un quimera sino ser patriota, me decía. En Chile las cosas no iban bien. Para mí las cosas iban bien, pero para la patria no iban bien.” (96) Yet instead of taking action at this time of political turmoil and rallying alongside his patriots, he chooses the easier solution and hides away, burying himself in Greek literature. Later he shows his relief with what he regards as Pinochet at last bringing peace to his country. As he would later do with Pinochet, he quickly concedes to the wishes of men who can take away his inner turmoil, showing his willingness to comply. By doing so he unwittingly becomes a part of the chain of fascism.
The climax of the novel surrounds the literary parties at María Canales’s house. Canales and her husband, Jimmy Thompson, an American secret agent working for the regime, are characters based on real historical figures. The incidents that take place during their parties have been linked to actual events as the character of María Canales is based on real-life author Mariana Callejas, whose American husband Michael Townley was a political assassin and a secret agent who used their basement for interrogations. Writers and artists would attend Canales’s parties due to the regime’s strict curfew ceasing the vibrant café culture that used to exist. “Había toque de queda. Los restaurantes, los bares cerraban temprano. La gente se recogía a horas prudentes. No había muchos lugares donde se pudieran reunir los escritores y los artistas a beber y hablar hasta que quisieran.”

In the face of political repression, upheaval and danger, writers continued to swoon over the written word. They would gather in her house night after night, while seemingly unbeknown to them, torture and executions were being committed in Canales’s basement. This is the most damning scene for the literati in the book. Their inaction becomes direct association after one of the artist’s mistakenly sees the torture first hand “sobre el catre había un hombre desnudo, atado de las muñecas y de los tobillos […] pese a la luz deficiente vio sus heridas, sus supuraciones…” yet he returns to the party and does not tell anyone. Urrutia brings up the question of why nobody said anything at the time, simply saying they were afraid. He also questions why Canales would have parties when torture victims were there. He asserts that normally her parties would be held when no one was being held downstairs, but that this one time “la costumbre distiende toda precaución, porque la rutina matiza todo horror.”

Years later when Canales’s husband’s acts are revealed during the transition to democracy, artists are no longer willing to be associated with Canales and lie about attending her gatherings. This shows that they are more concerned with their own selves, their career and their art, than they are with justice. It is immoral to use aestheticism to escape from responsibility. Therefore the brutality of the Pinochet regime creates as much blood on their hands as those who are directly responsible. Edmundo Paz Soldán sums it up: “la gran casa de María Canales es la casa de Chile, la casa establishment literario, que sigue con sus cocteles y recepciones mientras en los sótanos de la casa se tortura a los opositores al régimen.”

Urrutia returns to see Canales years later, her house and life no longer the same; all form of splendour has vanished. Remembering a phrase that Canales said to him, Urrutia repeats it several times, contemplating its meaning. He addresses the ‘joven envejecido’, asking if there is a solution but then he answers it himself. “Así se hace la
literatura en Chile, así se hace la gran literatura en Occidente.” (Bolaño 148) The creation of fiction in Bolaño’s works are always tied to political horror and in one way or another these horrors serve as a source of inspiration for artists, an experience they can never be completely free from. It is also a more general question, a cry of helplessness at the inability of literature to change, justify or redeem the disaster that is modern history.

Farewell is portrayed as a father figure to Urrutia. Urrutia shows he is in need of a guiding hand, something he never received from his real father, describing him as an “encarnado en la sombra de una comadreja o de un hurón” that slithers in between corners. (62) One key piece of advice Farewell instructs him is: “Querer es bueno. Impresionarse es malo.” (51) Years before the coup when they are eating dinner in a restaurant, shadows dance and dash across the walls. It is portrayed as a vision of the chaos that will eventually envelop Chile. Farewell is entranced and compels Urrutia to look, despite it hurting Urrutia’s eyes:

El dolor sólo se mantuvo en los ojos, lo cual era fácil de subsanar, pues cerrándolos el asunto quedaba finiquitado, algo que hubiera podido y debido hacer, pero que no hice, pues la expresión de Farewell, la inmovilidad de Farewell sólo rota entonces por un ligero movimiento ocular, fue adquiriendo para mí connotaciones de terror infinito o de terror disparado hacia el infinito, que es, por otra parte, el destino del terror, y elevarse y elevarse y no terminar nunca. (63)

However, it becomes evident that Urrutia has not learnt from this lesson. As terror arrives in Chile and the time comes for Urrutia to look, he chooses instead to close his eyes. It is yet another moment during the book when Farewell is trying to get Urrutia to understand, but he fails to receive the message, until the very end. He now has to take responsibility for his choices, and too late Urrutia wonders “Soy yo el joven envejecido? Esto es el verdadero, el gran terror, ser yo el joven envejecido que grita sin que nadie lo escuche? Y que el pobre joven envejecido sea yo?” (149-150)

Urrutia’s recollections of the Pinochet years firmly pin his guilt of association with the regime. He chose to remain politically ignorant, writing his reviews and calling for a return to classic art, though no one is listening. Bolaño is critiquing the act of criticism. What use, he asks the reader, is art when people are mindlessly suffering? What use is the critic if she or he cannot be critical of the most infamous evil surrounding them? Even though Urrutia, and by association the church and the literati, might not have physically been in legion with the Pinochet regime, their inaction is as much a sin as the regime’s brutal action.
As Stacy D'Erasmo explains, “part of Bolaño's genius is to ask, if we perhaps find a too-easy comfort in art, if we use it as anaesthetic, excuse and hide-out in a world that is very busy doing very real things to very real human beings. Is it courageous to read Plato during a military coup or is it something else?” (New York Times)  

Urrutia finally realises fascist Chile has become the Judas Tree. Poetry and art are stifled by an autonomous regime where everyone is afraid to speak out, and critics cannot say what they really mean. “Chile entero se había convertido en el árbol de Judas, un árbol sin hojas, aparentemente muerto.”(Bolaño 138) In the Bible, Judas was the apostle of Jesus Christ who betrayed him to the Roman soldiers in exchange for money. Jesus was then captured and crucified. In the Book of Acts, Judas then hangs himself in a tree out of shame for what he did. This tree is known as the “Judas Tree.” By turning a blind eye to the injustice, Urrutia becomes irrelevant. He is a critic who cannot criticise. Rather than exposing the injustice all around him, he chose to review classic art:

[...]

He becomes too afraid to give his real opinion on anything, including literature. Not only can he not distinguish between what is right and wrong, he is now unable to judge what is good and bad in his own area of expertise. He reveals he thinks María Canales is a mediocre writer, but he won’t say it directly, instead saying that she had “un talento, cómo decirlo?, recogido en sí mismo, encerrado en su vaina, ensimismado.”(125) The direct censorship imposed by the regime bred a form of self-censorship in which Chilean writers attempted to ward off

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official sanctions by second-guessing the authorities’ reaction and discreetly toning down or eliminating material deemed likely to incur official displeasure. Bolaño has admitted to being less than impressed with Chilean literature, especially with the writers who chose to escape into magic realism while ignoring the realities. It is true that in a dictatorship those who do choose to criticise must weigh the benefits of speaking the truth against the dangers of official reaction. Often tragedies do not become horrific and the real truths revealed until they are written about. For this to occur, there has to exist some writers who will take that risk, those who are willing to offer discerning voices and publish rebellious material, if even through clandestine methods. Only then, Bolaño suggests, will the great writers be distinguished from the rest and they will be truly worthy of the adoration shown them.

Urrutia mentions at the start of the novel that “Uno tiene la obligación moral de ser responsable de sus actos y también de sus palabras e incluso de sus silencios, sí, de sus silencios, porque también los silencios ascienden al cielo y los oye Dios y sólo Dios los comprende y los juzga, así mucho cuidado con los silencios.” (11) Significantly, it is Urrutia’s silences that are now being judged, rather than his words, because he refuses to speak out.

Bolaño makes it clear to the reader that politics and literature are inextricable. The story then begins to not be just about an elderly guilt-ridden priest bemoaning his complicity in the Pinochet regime, but the story of a man who realises he has not only failed his country, but has also failed the generation of writers that follow him. This is suggested by his encounter with Canales’s son, Sebastian, a pallid faced young boy. Sebastian has been born into a vile world, with vile parents, and is subjected to awful things, through no fault of his own. “[..]el niño me miró por encima del hombre de la empleada que lo cargaba en brazos y tuve la impresión de que esos grandes ojos veían lo que no querían ver.” (129) Urrutia takes on the figure of a “father” who has failed his children, showing that the terror unleashed by the coup has become more than just politics to him. It was his responsibility to instruct the future generation and despite being a powerful and influential critic, he failed to give them proper guidance. Urrutia ultimately fails to be a father figure because he is afraid. He cares only about himself and his reputation and as a result is a poor artist; rightfully receiving the condemnation Bolaño gives him. With a father like this, one who was a powerful and influential critic, how could Chile’s next generation of authors hope to have proper guidance?

Fascism, a horror like no other, defeats time by means of absolute terror and leaves a society paralysed, parents forced to allow the state to raise their young.
Throughout the novel Urrutia has continued to avoid responsibility and minimize his guilt, not wanting to hear what the “joven envejecido” is accusing him of. He strongly emphasizes that he did not go to Canales’s house as often as others did, and only had two meaningful conversations with Canales. He also feels that he cannot be blamed for teaching Pinochet. He did what he had to do, or so he would like to believe. He once stated that his “silencios son inmaculados.” (11-12) It is clear to the reader that this is not the case. Though he walked a careful path and kept quiet when he needed to in order to rise to fame and gain the trust of famous and important people, he ultimately failed to be a voice for the people who needed him most; the suffering and the poor. Therefore, his silences are not as immaculate as he would like to believe. Urrutia’s dreams and the “joven envejecido” will not leave him alone however. The appearance of the Judas Tree is his dreams shows that he is well aware of his own guilt. It is a powerful imagery suggesting that like Judas, Urrutia, the literati and conservative clerics have betrayed their country and ideals for their own personal benefit. Chile is now like that dead, leafless tree, with the falcons of fascism perched in its branches. Art and literature can no longer flourish there.

**Conclusion**

Therefore, it can be seen that Bolaño’s novel is not necessarily a harsh critique on Christianity or art. His criticism is directed at the institutions and groups that form around the ideals of Christianity and art, those who inherently looked out for their own interests over those of the highest ideals. It is a powerful allegory about the deceptions of political life. Paula Aguilar sums up the two challenging areas within the novel “el problema de la memoria/amnesia y el lugar del escritor frente a lo sucedido, cómo, y desde dónde narrar el horror.” (Aguilar 128) In times of severe oppression and censorship, art becomes the vessel for historical memory. The onus is then on the truly great writers and artists to make a stand and allow the truth to come forward, in the hope that future generations will learn from past mistakes. It is especially those who have important roles in society who set the example. Most people would accept that religious leaders have a role in speaking out in a pluralistic society on behalf of what they see to be fundamental moral values. While religious leaders may not be experts on politics, many citizens give special attention to their views on moral questions, because these leaders have special training in this area.
The final pages of the novel indicate that the ‘joven envejecido’ is actually Urrutia’s own conscience. Urrutia represents all the Chileans who failed to confront the turmoil around them, those who chose to ignore all the injustices. Through Urrutia, Bolaño laments for the political state of affairs in Chile, forced to come to terms with the fact that many Chileans quietly complied with or even supported Pinochet’s repressive regime. Urrutia’s endless, obsessive, memory driven rant is paradoxically his only escape and his prison. His worst sin is a sin of omission. What he failed to say or do is what will forever condemn him. He cannot forgive himself, nor can he cleanse his reputation in the eyes of the world. Urrutia realises that his obsession with his legacy has been his downfall and that neither he, nor Pinochet and his oppressors, can hide the truth. The “tormenta de mierda” (Bolaño 150) will not escape them. The novel ends on a note of dark optimism that some measure of justice will ultimately prevail. The truth will always emerge, therefore Urrutia and others like him, will either keep trying to justify their actions and remain forever fixed on their guilty conscience, or they will stop and finally confront what they have done, as the last sentence suggests: “Y después se desata la tormenta de mierda.” (150)
CHAPTER FIVE

The Struggle for Memory/Identity in Por favor, Rebobinar by Alberto Fuguet

Alberto Fuguet is one of the writers behind the idea of McOndo, a group who represented popular culture while largely rejecting the use of magical realism in contemporary Latin American fiction. These authors, like Fuguet, place themselves within that literary tradition that has politicised the stories through mass culture. In the era following Latin American military dictatorships nothing is left to find or hope for. Chile is seen as a nation shifting between the thresholds of memory and the desire to forget. Many authors who experience dictatorship use historical fiction as a method of representing reality during and after the period of political repression. This methodology is an artistic necessity when non-official discourse focusing on the present is discouraged or prohibited; thus, the act of re-writing the nation's history in order to re-interpret the past is a useful tactic.

The struggle for memory is confronted directly in Por favor, Rebobinar by Alberto Fuguet. The characters are portrayed through his novel as a generation caught up in a divided nation unable to agree on the best way to move forward and deal with past atrocities. Through the eight young adults experiences I highlight the difficulties they endure in coming to terms with the actions of their parents’ generation, and how to cope with the lack of national debate about the past. It results in the need to discover where they fit in among a world consumed with the power of mass media. I do this through exploring the themes of amnesia versus anamnesis; the effect of Pinochet’s continuing neo-liberal policy and consumerism; the struggle with identity; and lastly the act of rewinding and recovering their past through memory.

Por favor, Rebobinar is a novel set in Santiago following the fall of Pinochet’s dictatorship and the subsequent restoration of democracy. It is a mosaic of stories, a “texto paradigmático”, (Paz-Soldán 43) along with the eight separate annexes which, when put together, form a story - a kind of family portrait - about a group of young adults from the affluent areas of Santiago: Lucas García, Enrique Alekán, Julián Assayas, Andoni Llovet, Damián Walker, Pascal Barros, José Luis Cox, and Gonzalo McClure. Each character shares a story about his life, which either end in tragedy or they learn from their experiences and use it as a positive to move forward with their lives. They are all linked through their
participation in the cultural industry; fashion, television, film, radio. In the novel there is room, via annexes, for all kinds of discourse on mass culture written by the characters themselves: interviews with writers and musicians, reviews of books and movies and compact discs, columns about Santiago nightlife, etc.

Despite a mix of personalities, they all lead disoriented lives with no solid identity and are therefore transient in nature. They are all in their twenties yet they dread the day they turn thirty, as it represents having to grow up and be an adult. None of them are ready to give up their carefree lives, preferring to live purely in the moment for as long as possible. “Mi pasado, mi presente y acaso mi futuro eran temas que intentaba evitar.” (195) Fuguet’s characters can be described as neither heroic nor despicable. They are sophisticated urbanites who choose to live life day by day, consumed in the realm of American popular culture. They are described as “una generación desencantada, idiotizada, apática, solitaria, traumada, sobre estimulada y adicta.” (86) It can be seen that the obsession with mass media and mass consumerism has resulted in a preoccupation with image and pursuing fame. Regardless of having embraced the social fantasies of what success is deemed to be by the mass media, Fuguet’s characters continue to roam in a perpetual present, in a constant crisis of affection with family and friends. They will remain like this unless they learn how to retrieve their suppressed memories and ‘rebobinar’.

Amnesia vs. Anamnesis

In Chile, several age groups grew up under the authoritarian control of Pinochet, a regime that lasted seventeen years, nearly twice as long as the other dictatorships that took place at a similar time in Argentina and Uruguay. Due to this long period of command, there were many teenagers or young adults in the late 1980s who have clear memories of repression, resistance and the transition to democracy. Alberto Fuguet was born in the 1960s and is part of the generation who remember vividly what their childhood was like under the dictatorship. This generation is known as the ‘children of the dictatorship’, or as Ana Ros describes them: “Pinochet’s children” (118). It refers to those who lived out their childhoods in repressive conditions, and thus witnessed the immediate change to society, especially the curfew which restricted their activities as adolescents. A militaristic aesthetic was enforced at all levels of society. Many from this generation were too young to be fully informed about the political regime and the atrocities occurring under it, and therefore had to suffer through
the repression without properly understanding it. Most were not even aware of the persecution and human rights violations occurring.

The contextual theme in this novel is the highly divisive nature of Chilean society during the transition to democracy – those who believe forgetting the past is the only way to move forward versus those who feel justice is paramount. Throughout the transition to democracy there was a lack of national conversation in Chile in an official sense. Open debate about the violent past within and between groups and generations became more difficult due to the negotiated terms of the transition with the future political elite. The military in Chile negotiated the terms of the transition allowing Pinochet to stay as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and retained significant civilian backing from strategic segments such as the investor class, land owners and privileged families.

As noted previously in Chapters 2 and 3, the transition to democracy was fraught with many issues, due to the continued strength of the military regime. Although the Concertación government were initially dedicated to bring truth and reconciliation to Chile, when investigations took place over the government’s past finances and punishment over the regime’s crimes, Pinochet was quick to reaffirm his position, “if anyone lays a finger on one of my men, the rule of law is over” (Collins 79) This attested that Pinochet and his partisans were still too powerful to take on in the struggles over collective memory, even though a majority of Chileans now believed in the need for justice. During the dictatorship, Allende and the UP were forbidden to be spoken about in public. The new government avoided talking about Allende at all costs because this was the most polarising event and they did not want to evoke any socialist sentiments. It became a taboo subject and consequently prevented a critical discussion of Allende’s legacy. The Concertación tried to gain ground in the area of HRVs but Pinochet’s threat of another coup resulted in a stalemate over punishment and justice.

Given Pinochet’s continuing powerful position, albeit now from behind the scenes, his legacy of fear continued. The nation had suffered a collective trauma, whether it was during the Allende period or under military rule. Chileans were extremely sensitive to situations that they thought might re-create previous crises. It was a psychological issue, as people afraid to speak their minds openly in a “culture of fear”, had learned a high degree of self-censorship. This fear limited popular participation. Levinson notes that although the military coup happened in 1973 it:
[D]id not make a direct hit, a real golpe, until now, as Chile experiences a kind of mass concussion to which, in the end – because of the stunned state of the people and the stunned people of the state – nobody can testify. And that is the golpe. The impossibility of testimony, and through testimony (true or false), of knowledge of the event that is now striking. (Levinson 2003: 99)

A longing for political freedom and hope for change had inspired a strong political youth movement in the late 1980s. Many fought against the dictatorship for a more egalitarian society. However, the post-dictatorship turned out to be very different from the more equal, united, and free country they had envisioned. The Concertación’s form of limited truth and justice led many youth to disengage from the past. These activists, who had been monumental in campaigning and achieving the change necessary for a restoration of democracy, suddenly found that there was no room for them in the negotiations. There is a striking difference between the political passion of the youth before the end of the dictatorship and their apathy during the transitional period. The Concertación government managed to co-opt the student movement and defuse the social tensions and this led the youth to withdraw from politics and search for meaning in other spheres. Chile in the nineties became a culture of stalemate and ambivalence. As Carrasco explains “youth apathy in the 1990s responded to the weakening of democratic values and the displacement of politics as an instrument to run society” (Carrasco 16).

The parents of Fuguet’s characters related to the past in different ways, partly because they lived through dissimilar experiences, and partly because they have specific and conflicting interests. The dictatorship usually related to traumatic or painful memories that their parents preferred not to evoke, or revisit, as Andoni recounts in his story: “en mi familia la memoria está mal vista. No se habla del pasado porque el pasado está lleno de dolor.” (214) There were conflicting narratives in the public sphere about the meaning of the repression and this caused a state of confusion among many of their children. With no official account of the past, it was hard for them to comprehend how the atrocities had occurred, especially by those who were supposed to protect the collectivity. The problem was that the dynamics of cultural and political hegemony did not move in tandem. It did not just create a sense of impasse, but it produced a memory culture of ambivalence. It was this huge conflict of attitudes and it was this uncertainty of emotions that greatly affected the younger generation. It was too unfathomable the notion of being able to move forward without properly addressing the past. Consequently many became indifferent and unable to relate
their anger and frustration about the present to a conflictive past that also held the key to social change. Despite the younger generations’ limited understanding of the political occurrences, it was impossible not to sense that history had been suspended “and we had the misfortune of being chosen to suffer through this period of stopped time” (Contreras 33)

Noticeable anxiety of the past is apparent in Fuguet’s characters. They represent those in the ambiguous outsider-insider position. They are outsiders in the sense that they do not have the same emotional investment as those who lived through the events as adults and have not fully accepted the pre-existing narratives and silences. They are insiders in the sense that they encounter the past through adults’ interpretation and the scars left by the violence on individuals, social interactions, and institutions (Ros 137). Their political apathy means they have absolutely no interest in their country’s history or that of the present or recent past, and nor do they see reconciliation as an achievable goal. They recognise their detachment from the violent past, as most of them came from relatively wealthy backgrounds and therefore were not exposed to the experience of those who had suffered repression. Thus they never really fully understood at the time, the horrors of the dictatorship. They never questioned their families’ perspectives on the coup, many choosing to remain silent about the dictatorship due to the polarising reactions from their parents and allowed the past to become the exclusive domain of the victims’ families and the activists. They relate to the violence of the past as detached spectators, as can be seen in Julian’s account of playing Marco Polo with his brother:

Aún estaba Pinochet y los terroristas perpetraron un atentado que corto toda la luz de la ciudad...A pesar de lo oscuro, me acuerdo, vi el terror en sus ojos, pero no nos soltamos de inmediato, seguimos rozándonos hasta que el juego, y el nado, y la complicidad desaparecieron sin darnos siquiera oportunidad de arrepentirnos. (140)

This detachment led them to depoliticise the past and present, minimise the human rights violations and explain the differences between Chileans as an abstract and unhistorical question of national character and lack of will: “we Chileans are always focusing on others’ defects instead of their virtues, therefore we will never arrive at an agreement.” (Ros 133)

As a result of this, the characters apathy about their nation’s past means they are not very sympathetic to those around them who have lived different realities. Andoni is so consumed by his own personal issues that he does not care about matters on a national level, even though he is aware they are occurring. This is evident in the writers’ workshop Andoni
attends when he notes that, “[l]a cosa política ahora estaba más pesada; el registro electoral estaba el frente y siempre se armaban marchas y protestas y lanzaban bombas lacrimógenas y estupideces por el estilo” (Fuguet 190)

Andoni is referring to the 1988 plebiscite on the extension of military rule, for either Pinochet himself or by a designated successor. As the plebiscite approached, most of the centre and left opposition united as the “Concertación por el No” and did everything possible within the limits of the regime's tolerance to prepare for 1988. The opposition triumphed in the plebiscite and Pinochet was forced to acknowledge defeat. (Oñate and Wright 8-9)

Andoni then refers to when one of his colleagues in the workshop, “relató cómo la DINA secuestró a su padre mientras él jugaba con sus soldaditos de plastico.” (166) This is Fuguet’s way of placing the Pinochet regime in the context of his characters generation, when the DINA detained and interrogated opponents at will, along with torture centres and disappearances. (Oñate and Wright 5) However, Andoni complains afterwards because he is tired of hearing about Chile’s political situation:

A continuación me toco soportar eso que se llama ‘el periodo de adaptación’. Muchos de mis compañeros literarios eran retornados del exilio o hijos de detenidos desaparecidos. El ambiente era, por decir lo menos, tenso. Más radical que el del Liceo. (Fuguet 190)

This shows that Andoni has adopted a cynical view of both socialism and democracy, expressing distaste for any form of politics. He is representative of the apathy and incuriosity about political and social issues which was most pronounced in affluent students. As a result he does not share in a collective identity and characterises society’s increased individualism and lack of solidarity. This individualism is also related to the neo-liberal economic model that had a strong influence on Andoni and his friends’ behaviour, which I discuss in the next section.

**Pinochet’s Legacy: the neo-liberal policy**

Fuguet’s characters in Por favor, Rebobinar reflect his own personal experience of life in Chile. Pinochet has brought Chile into a world where neo-liberalism reigns and the influence of the mass media and consumerism greatly affects Fuguet’s characters. Mass media consumes their lives allowing them to disconnect from their past, and their disillusion
with the present. Fuguet explores the effects of globalized pop culture on Chilean youths; disenchanted with the post-dictatorial nation and lacking a clear path in life, Fuguet’s protagonists wander aimlessly, a lot of the time in a drugged stupor, through Santiago’s shopping malls, partying and obsessing with their self-image until they lose touch with reality.

Pinochet knew that the brutal repression that followed the military coup of 1973 needed to be justified for it to be accepted by his supporters. He needed a counter revolution, or more precisely a reaction against the rising popular movement of socialism. The regime achieved this with the promise to bring Chile to economic greatness with the introduction of a capitalist ideology. It was easily imposed upon Chilean society as the regime was operating within a “state of exception” and could use violence and fear as its chief weapons. Due to this environment of fear and repression, the Pinochet regime succeeded in instilling and legitimising the free market as a set of values that became inscribed in Chile’s public imagination. Right up until Pinochet lost power in 1990, his regime carried out a “structural adjustment” of the Chilean state, promoting values like individualism, competition, consumerism, and privatisation. Universities were instructed to promote the ethics of an ultra-capitalist society: competition and efficiency, reverence for private property, and acceptance of inequality. Chicago school disciples were appointed in the University departments to ensure monetarist theory was imparted onto the students. Despite education officials denial that they were imposing political doctrine on to their students, Pinochet’s intentions were clear when he announced in a 1976 speech: “Absolute ideological pluralism…was radically incompatible not only with the current emergency situation of the country but also with the very essence of the regime born on September 11, 1973.” (Constable and Valenzuela 252). This was his way of eliminating any intellectual challenge to the regime’s legitimacy.

Over time, the market approach affected not only people’s behaviour but also, eventually, their basic values. The Chicago Boys believed that bureaucratic rules stifled and distorted individual behaviour, so with these removed, Chileans became self-interested and the notion of collective interests was discarded. Utopian possibilities had long been abolished, the individuals were now used to being powerless spectators. To fill in this void, they turned to consumerism to establish their identity. New lifestyles emerged, especially for the wealthy. Elegant housing developments were built in formerly wooded areas, consisting of large, private homes with expansive lawns and inner courtyards, all protected by high fences and gates. New services were built, such as schools and stores. As a result, the wealthy
were even more insulated than before from the poor. Tucked away in these distant
neighbourhoods, with malls and other services, they could live their lives without worrying
about how others coped. They did not have to worry about political repression or poverty as
they were able to avoid seeing it.

As a result, the characters in *Por favor, Rebobinar* were raised in a neo-liberal culture
in which narrow self-interest is considered the only valid and possible motivation for
individuals’ actions. Nelly Richard observation that there was an existence of “una
complicidad entre postdictadura y posmodernidad” (O’Connell 188) fits in with how Fuguet
describes his characters’ personal realities. They all grew up in these affluent areas and were
thus insulated from what was happening in other parts of Santiago. This meant they
experienced the political reality of the time through a distorted filter. As Chilean writer
Gonzalo Contreras describes the biggest issue for these youth was the curfew:

…which wiped out a good part of my adolescence and, generally speaking, a new
militaristic aesthetic was enforced at all levels of society. At that point, no one knew
anything about persecution or human rights abuses, at least not in my
social circle.

(Contreras 33)

Fuguet presents a generation that has grown wary of ideological proposals and utoPian
promises of social liberation, a generation who instead move with ease in a world of fast food
and global culture. In the era of information, a cultural change took place as these youths
became hooked into global culture through surfing the internet or watching cable television.
A cultural change involves the growth of an individualistic, consumer-oriented culture.
Fuguet explores the effects of globalised, especially Americanised, pop culture which he
aptly displays through the attached sections after each main character’s chapter. These
attachments are made up of various types of pop culture, including interviews with writers
and singers, book summaries, movie reviews, music album reviews and newspaper columns.
It is Fuguet’s way of illustrating how much mass culture plays a part in today’s world,
especially in McOndo authors’ works. They seemingly suffer an excess of information. They
are full of information that is not useful to them, but knowingly still pursue their knowledge
of trivia. Lucas García is a good example of this excess of information, admitting, “aprendí
cosas realmente insólitas, absolutamente inútiles…sé demasiadas cosas que no debería y no
sé demasiadas cosa que me hacen falta.” (Fuguet 19) This emphasis they place on the
importance of trivia highlights the fact they know very little about the important issues that they should be caring about, yet are happy to ignore.

The obsession with Americanism is very apparent in Lucas. He highly values any type of mass media that comes from America and consumes it relentlessly. This is recognised as the globalisation effect, yet as identified in this case, it can be very dangerous because it can create a sense of their own culture being inferior. The strength of the American cultural industry on Lucas is so strong that he worships it with profound awe, something the Chilean cultural industry can never surpass. He runs a film club and works as a film critic, “el segundo crítico más joven del país” (66). Film is his life. It is American film which he mostly idolises, especially the American actors. In his eyes a Chilean director will never be on par with an American director, usually referring to Chilean films as overrated, “no está mal si se piensa que es un filme chileno.” (22) During his story, he muses about how a film about his life would be, “se filmará en USA, con actors yanquis.” (78) His sense of reality is confined to what he interprets it to be through American movies:

Soy un maestro del zapping, de la cultura de la aproPiación. Digamos que afano, pirateo, robo sin querer. Es como si tuviera un digital sampler en mi mente que funcionara a partir de puras imágenes. No soy un tipo creativo. No invento, absorbo. Trago. (22)

Gonzalo McClure also reflects on Chilean pop culture being substandard compared to American pop culture because when he notices a cassette tape tangled in the branches of a tree, he thinks “seguramente el cassette cayo de una avioneta, alguien la bató porque se cortó, porque se le atascó, seguro que era nacional.” (470) Even Andoni’s friend Balta, a writer admires the young American authors but does not even consider Chileans as writers, rather as “narradores que entusiasman a las viejas del club de lectores.” (204) This obsession with accessing every aspect of American mass media could intensify the social contradictions of Chilean society as these youth will always be dependent on what occurs and is produced by North Americans and ignore what is being produced in their own country.

Por favor, Rebobinar clearly shows how the Chilean economy had become firmly enmeshed within the world economy. Lowering of tariff barriers meant Chileans were able to buy all kinds of imported products, from Barbie dolls to Nikes and computers. Multi-national corporations became firmly established in the country. It also had the effect of making Chile a more polarised society in terms of wealth and income. There was now an open enjoyment
of wealth as the idea of individual gain over social responsibility took root among the more affluent people. Mass consumerism took over Chile and became a society immersed in a never-fulfilled desire for goods. Alain Touraine, asserts that: “in a post-industrial society where production centres more on cultural services than material goods, the idea of defending the subject and its personality and culture from the logic of apparatuses and markets replaces the idea of class struggle.” (117) In this sense, subjects acquaint themselves with an increasingly consumerist society within which the individual seems displaced either as a commodity or a means to production. With the “class struggle” rendered obsolete in Touraine’s view, the result is ‘every man for themselves’, and the absurd contradictory situation of an individual struggle which leads to a mass mentality. (117)

Image became an obsession, something which many of the characters in the novel were fixated with, such as Andoni, a model and Pascal, a famous singer. It became a society where everyone was harshly judged by their appearance, “su falta de sofisticación me apena.” (Fuguet 312) The boom in modern advertising meant their careers relied on people ‘consuming’ their image, wanting to share in a part of their ‘cool’ worlds, including in Pascal’s case, lots of teenagers buying his music, “tenía todos mis cassettes, lo que la transformaba en una groupie al cubo.” (348) Their lives are full of constant parties, drugs and alcohol, socialising and always striving to be a part of the cool crowd in the cool bars:

El nuevo dueño me saludó y me regaló una tarjeta dorada para que volviera siempre…tenía trago gratis y tantos tipos me saludaban que no sabía quién era quién y la fotógrafa de vida social disparaba y disparaba…otra línea, otro trago gratis… (170)

These two characters define what was cutting edge in Chile at the time. They emphasise the reality that the price of accessing this culture was not just the legwork; you also had to have cash at a certain point to get it. Young people were constantly exposed to a wealth of new status symbols, being fashionable was a must in this image-driven society. They become unwitting consumers and producers of a false consciousness. As one girl points out to Enrique, “no hay nada más pasado de moda que lo que recién paso de moda, no crees?” (120) The novel is consequently full of Chilean slang mixed with the brand names of American products and the languages of accounting, economics, and corporate finance, thus revealing a culture of the “copy” completely lacking in originality. According to Andrew

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Brown\textsuperscript{23}, “If you were going to know about what was cool you had to be “in the know,” you had to know who to talk to, you had to know where to look, you had to be connected to the different underground distribution channels.” (Garrett and VanWieren 158)

In "Nada que hacer," Fuguet looks at Santiago’s media-driven culture in the historical context that produced this phenomenon. Toyo, returning from a business trip, is offered a ride home by La Maca, a friend’s ex-wife. La Maca, "coordinadora de medios y eventos de Bilz&Pap," represents a company that is marketing what Toyo mockingly refers to as "la nueva gaseosa que combina lo mejor de dos mundos" (404). Fuguet is highlighting the influence of the economic climate of the time in their lives, in the form of mass consumerism. This is even more evident with Fuguet’s use of mass-media language when Toyo and La Maca discuss alternative music and La Maca observes that "todo ahora es alternativo. Hasta Bilz&Pap es alternativo" (417) They offer a glimpse into the world of unwitting consumers and producers of false consciousness and thus are symbolic of Pinochet’s legacy through his neo-liberal policy.

It can be seen that Chile’s national psyche was profoundly changed by the introduction of the regime’s neo-liberal economic model. The free market was promoted as a set of values and a way of life that became emblazoned in Chile’s public imagination. This, in turn, had a vast effect on individuals, especially their identity, as shown in the novel. These characters look for themselves in popular culture to establish their identities, even though they are aware it is a mere form of glamorous escapism. Fuguet constructs a world in which technology permeates and penetrates every character, reconfiguring their discursive strategies in such a way that they cannot articulate their own identities without depending on technological imagery.

\textbf{Identity Crises}

It becomes clear in the novel that Fuguet’s characters all share in the need to discover who they are. They are unhappy people, and as previously mentioned they submerge themselves into popular culture and consumerism to try and hide their unhappiness and loneliness. None of them, initially at least, are content with the direction their lives are

\textsuperscript{23} Professor J. Andrew Brown, from Washington University in St Louis, is an author of various innovative interdisciplinary works which focus on science, literature, and popular culture.
heading yet they lack the aspirations and encouragement to change this. There are various causes of their emptiness, including their lack of historical self-awareness, the effect of dysfunctional families, their lack of solidarity, the emphasis on being successful and their unwillingness to delve into their memory boxes. They have no notion of home and stability and cannot rely on their parents for support. They all suffer from an identity crisis which is shown by their stationary, lost and confused outlook. These crises mean they are always ensuring they have evasion plans in place before they are threatened with commitment or responsibility, yet they are also trying to reconnect with themselves, trying to restore what they can of their fragile identities. Fuguet aptly emphasises his characters’ lack of identity due to a society that is stationary and unable to move forward as a collective group.

The subject of dysfunctional families is exposed quite visibly in Por favor, Rebobinar. Broken homes and strained relationships with their parents are features most of these characters share, suggesting Chile’s weakening ties to family and community. Most notable is the parents’ absence of affection, intimacy and understanding towards their children. The characters all grew up in unhappy families, regardless of their parents’ political affiliations. Therefore they blame their parents for how they have turned out. Fuguet recognised that lack of communication and stability had contributed to children’s identity, defining who they are today, but it is clear it is not who they wanted to be.

Lucas’ story exemplifies the lack of intimacy among families. It is not a coincidence that Lucas’ favourite film is Edward Scissorhands, “un tipo incompleto” (125), a boy who is misunderstood by his parents and by society. Lucas views himself as a prisoner in his family environment where feelings are undervalued and never expressed. This is motivated by his mother’s beliefs that if you love someone, you do not have to go around showing it. “Según mi madre, solo aquellos que no se quieren, que tienen dudas. Necesitan recurrir a los gestos de cariño. Una familia que realmente se quiere, no tiene que andar demostrándolo” (80). His younger sister, “un poquito grunge” (51), leaves home as a teenager because she cannot stand to be around their mother who she describes as a “hipócrita”. (51) She now tells people, “ya no tengo apellido. Típica familia disfuncional”. (103) His mother, depressed because her husband is cheating on her, eventually tries to commit suicide and Lucas is the one who discovers her heavily sedated with cut wrists in the bathtub. She survives but is left brain dead and lives the rest of her life in a nursing home. Lucas comments that his mother was not even able to succeed in killing herself and that he can identify with her sense of failure.
Lucas’ relationship with his father lacks any type of intimacy as he never bothered to form a bond with Lucas. As a result of his family relationships, Lucas’ memories are always associated with films, filling the void of affection. This is evident when he relates the story of him as a baby falling into a swimming pool, witnessed by his father who continues filming instead of saving Lucas, leaving his mother who was heavily pregnant to stop him drowning. The psychological effects on him are extensive, “quizás sea una estupidez, pero si tu viejo no te toma en cuenta, uno empieza a dar por hecho que nadie lo hará.” (47) This shows that lack of affection and love can have a profound effect on an adolescent, especially in regard to their self-worth. He fails at school and is not accepted into University because his grades are not good enough. He does not have any close friends and is incredibly lonely and depressed. He watches films because they numb him from his reality. It is because of Lucas’ upbringing that he eventually breaks down and in an act of rage where he cannot express his feelings, he burns their house down.

Another of Fuguet’s characters who is brought up in an abnormal family is Julian. In “El desorden de las familias” he unsuccessfully searches for permanence and belonging. He feels betrayed by his father for abandoning his family for another woman and for not even being able to say goodbye. Angry that his father is so weak and cowardly, Julian now refuses to have anything to do with him. “Lo que los débiles hacen en nombre de su miseria es solo una artimaña para vengarse - para destruir - a lo que somos fuertes. Lo que se ha hecho por error, debido a esas flaquezas incontrolables, impulsado por el miedo o la confusión, es justamente lo que más daño hace” (142-143).

His mother is so distraught, she relies on sleeping pills so she can sleep, “lo que ella misma ha declarado que es su mejor estado, quizás las únicas horas del día en que se siente realmente bien.” (135) So Julian looks to his older brother Gabriel for stability and belonging. He wishes to have a closer relationship with Gabriel, but he feels shut out of his life: “Siempre cierra algo, esconde cosas, se refugia, ni habla.” (131) When his mother decides to start afresh a new life and move on with dignity, Julian gets excited about the idea of Gabriel and him finding their own apartment, giving them, “una nueva oportunidad para empezar y arreglar todo lo malo, compensar todo lo desechado.” (135) He desperately wants to return to the life he remembers as a child, where he had security and happiness, before his father betrayed them. He imagines a life where, “todo puede seguir su curso normal. Si es que se puede usar esa palabra: normal. A veces creo que ni siquiera sé lo que significa. Sólo que no tiene nada que ver conmigo, claro.” (132) But when he approaches the idea with his brother,
Gabriel has already made plans to move in with their father. Julian therefore fails to resolve his inner conflict because he is not able to position the reality of his present situation in context with his past, resigning himself to the possibility that his family's history, like their house, is nothing more than, "un inmenso vacío de recuerdos y deberes y traumas y silencios que nos han hecho ser lo que somos, no lo que hemos querido ser" (145)

Pascal Barros in “Pantofobia” reveals a young child whisked away into exile to Europe. From then on he was always ‘huyendo’, describing his life as always being in transit. His father, Federico Barros was a famous socialist leader and one of Allende’s ministers. Even though he was revered by his fellow socialist exiles, ‘considerado un santo’, he had no time for his son. Pascal refers to him as “un déspota, un tipo egoista y vanidoso” (368) He remarks the only characteristic he inherited from his father was a, “cierta incapacidad de expresar afecto.” (107) Pascal’s mother leaves her husband and takes Pascal to America, where she remarries and suddenly there is no space for Pascal in her new life. His father is later killed in exile by a bomb in ‘una oficina de solidaridad’ in Paris. (106) This is no doubt a reference to the Vicariate of Solidarity, an organization founded by the Catholic Church that attempted to monitor human rights violations and provide aid to families of victims of repression, nationally and abroad. (Agosin 9) Distraught, Pascal sets off on a road trip around America, working in mindless jobs and eventually turns to a life of drugs and rock bands where, “yo me encerré en mí mismo.” (109)

It is apparent that most of the characters blame their parents for why their lives are so messed up – “nuestros padres son unos pobres huevones…no crecen nunca.” (420) However, La Maca and Tomás Gil feel condemned in making the same mistakes as their parents, despite trying not to. La Maca reveals her sense of failure with how her life has turned out. “Lo más triste del caso es que uno jura y rejura que no va a cometer los mismo errores que ellos y aquí estoy, separada y con un hijo que me va a salir con quién sabe que tara porque su padre es un pobre huevón y ni lo cotiza” (420-421). Tomás also seems to have committed the same errors of his father when he leaves his pregnant wife. He rues the fact he always wanted his father in his life and now that he is living with him due to his marriage break up, he can’t stand being around him and his womanising ways. “Toda tu vida quisiste tener un padre; ahora lo tienes”, his friend Toyo reminds him. “Y no pasa nada. Lo que yo quería, Toyo, era un viejo como los de la tele. Como ese comercial de Nescafé en que el tipo va a pescar con su viejo.” (441) Tomás’ reality is a huge disappointment to him.
The memory culture of ambivalence is a key reason for Fuguet’s characters’ identity issues and struggle with memory. The difference in cultural and political hegemony in Chile created a huge conflict of attitudes and uncertainty. The younger generation knew that memory mattered, but the temptation to forget was too easy for them. Mindful forgetting was adopted by many who acknowledged that the dangerously divisive problem had no solution. (Stern 146) This ambivalent culture also included a mix of triumphalism and disenchantment.

In “Cierta gente que solía conocer”, Damían’s class reunion acts as a convenient coming together, showing us through his reactions with the others how his recollections are facilitated through the context of history and politics. His former classmates are for the most part like him – social outcasts. This is a metaphor suggestive of national disrepair. The party is full of sexual tension and numerous examples of drug and alcohol related self-destructive behaviours, which symbolize the detrimental effects of intentional non-remembrance. This reunion unlocks a cache of memories for Damían, and with Fuguet’s use of the Pinochet regime for narrative connection, Damían’s feelings of isolation and hopelessness are validated.

When his former classmate Ricardo gets a bit personal with his questioning, Damían reacts by trivialising what was once part of their shared reality when he says ,”esto no es el cuartel de Investigaciones y que no tiene derecho de preguntarme nada.” (319) This is especially significant because Ricardo’s father was a military attaché who had risen dramatically through the ranks to become a General, subtly suggesting complicity. Damían’s memory affront takes place on a personal scale, but his sudden switch of attitude represents a wider cultural dynamic, a culture of ambivalence where prudence could quickly lead to expressive outbursts, albeit on a small scale in private spaces; significant public outbursts rarely happened until the mid-nineties. As Steve J. Stern explains Chile was a place where many took the memory question personally and passionately, “as an intensively lived and searing and formative experience.” (Stern 146) Yet they were also aware that the politics of memory produced division, and as such prudence was the safer option. It was a culture susceptible to triumphalism and disenchantment.

The impasse in place produced a culture of contradiction. Triumphalism became a common value because Chile’s notable socioeconomic results included unprecedented prosperity. This was particularly evident among the affluent citizens of Santiago, as illustrated in Damian’s story. At the reunion, Damían learns that many of classmates are
business managers of various companies and are earning a lot of money. They are enticed by
the cult of success, ‘exitismo’. Many of them are portrayed as highflyers, but bachelors. He
notes that most of them studied “ingeniería comercial.” His friend Susan joins him in
appraising their classmates. He tells her that she is,” una de las pocas que se salvaron…casi
todos acá están totalmente a la deriva.” (315) The women are now all married to rich
husbands, “un verdadero club de canasta”, Susan mocks. Damían can see that despite the
money and the egotistical attitudes, those who had become a part of the ‘exitismo’ of Chile’s
socioeconomic climate, none of them, “alcanza a ser un holograma de lo que fue.” (316)
Instead drugs and alcohol have consumed their lives as well. Even as beneficiaries to this
prosperity, the climate created sociocultural anxieties. They seem successful in their careers,
but their personal lives are marked by confusion, lack of commitment and responsibility.

There was also disenchantment and ‘malestar’, as Chile promoted the egotistical, and
forgot about its sense of community. A society where success was paramount, but values,
expectations and loss of identity suffered. Therefore, Chile’s success was not always seen as
real, or that the consequences of its success were not socially inclusive. The stories of
Damían, Andoni, Pascal and Enrique represent the less favourable underbelly of this new
Chile.

Damían immediately knows he does not fit in with his ex-classmates, describing the
scene of everyone around the pool “sacada de un cuadro…o quizás esto es como un
comercial.” (307) He lives alone, unlike most bachelors in Chile who continue living with
their parents, ‘otra característica que me separa de los demás.” (308) His downfall was he
never had a plan. If he had gone to University he could have made something of himself,
because he did not have parents that cared enough to support him. Education was paramount
in Chile, a world where acquiring knowledge guaranteed you a certain lifestyle; you could
support your family and not be left behind by the modern world. He instead delivers pizza,
although his main income is as a drug dealer. When he is asked what he does, he replies,
“nada, no hago nada, deambulo por la orilla oscuro.” (322) Damían suffers from severe
depression and low self-esteem. His only girlfriend became pregnant, they married but the
marriage only lasted six months before she left him because he became too needy. He went
from being a “solitario recalcitrante a padre feliz y a separado drogo en menos de un año.”
(420) His ex-wife describes him as “un trancado”. He does not know what he wants from life.
“Siento que no tengo nada que hacer aquí, que no pertenezco. Toda mi vida he estado solo y
esta gente no hace más que confirmarlo.” (322)
Before he leaves, his friend Carla imparts some advice, telling Damían that he will never acquire a sense of self-worth by denying his past. “Lo que pasa es que te saltaste etapas… eso envejece”, to which Damian responds, “más que saltarme etapas, las perdí. Y no creo que hoy sea el momento para empezar a recuperarlas.” (328) This illustrates Damían losing a struggle between personal memory and historical self-awareness. Ironically he predicts his fate when he reflects on the price one must pay for the decision to repress memories “Me gustaría alejarme de mí mismo. Eso es lo que deseo. Toda mi vida escapando de la oscuridad, pero basta que oscurzca para que todo vuelva a aparecer. (329) His story ends badly when he is later arrested attempting to sell drugs to undercover police. It does not appear in the newspapers though because his mother, who had never looked out for Damían, strikes a deal with the police in exchange for “cierta información relacionada con su ex marido, un americano que resultó estar ligado a los servicios de seguridad” (487), a subtle referral to the Americans who worked alongside Pinochet in the DNI. Damían is released but part of the deal is he has to leave the country, so he quietly disappears. As his friend Gonzalo recognises in regard to Damián’s outcome ‘Hay lugares, en ese sentido, que son más aptos para esa tarea. Creo que a Damián le hará bien estar lejos.” (487)

Fuguet makes a micro-social analysis of his generation in Pascal Barros, “Totalmente confusos”, exploring his sense of alienation and an uncertain future by narrating his social activities and how he relates to it. Ignacia Urre, a journalist covering a story for an alternative magazine, "La Acne," is sent to Juanco’s, an infamous Chilean-owned night club in Santiago, “por esas famosas fiestas llenas de guapetones chicos CNI” (97), which was closed down for political reasons. It has now re-opened as Patagonia, where it is popular with “adolescents con anillos en la nariz…aspirando polvo de angel”, in mosh pits dancing to loud techno rock. (98)She describes the clubs patrons as living in a dream-like world, stripped of their own aspirations and sense of themselves, “totalmente perdidos.” (104) She is there to interview Pascal Barros, who is idolised by the youth. Through Pascal, Fuguet reflects ironically that popular demand in post-Pinochet Chile had turned to musicians, “Es el poeta de la alienación. Algo así como el espejo trizada de toda una generación desencantada.” (106) Pascal becomes their unwitting icon by which they measure their value. However, despite his godly status, he reveals that he is unable to let go of the emotional burdens of his adolescence (mentioned previously) and distances himself from the very emotions and memories he sings about by repressing them. He feels alienated within a collectivity of which he does not feel a part, relating a quote someone once told him about Albania as to how he feels about himself.
Todo aquel que ha venido a esta tierra se ha acercado como enemigo, conquistador o visitante incapaz de entender.” (356-57)

‘Rebobinar’ Memory

The title of this novel, Por favor, Rebobinar (Please, Rewind) is a reference to video culture with the processes of memory and testimony presented as a way to "rewind". It promotes the catharsis of writing, a technique Fuguet believes can help trauma and anxiety by becoming aware of ones’ repressed feelings and fears. His characters are able to be released from their entrapment to the present, and confront their past by delving into their memories. By being able to ‘rewind’ means they can face the challenges of the future. Writing can be seen as the technology to assist in the recovery of memory and identity. Fuguet makes it clear however, that it is not just any type of writing which will produce this effect. It has to be writing associated with pain, an emotional or psychological pain rather than physical, something similar to an autobiography, a story that highlights the non-fictional aspects in which the imagination is put to one side to focus solely on what is real.

Andoni is portrayed as Fuguet’s most complicated and heartrending character in this novel, consequently making this the pivotal section due to the amount of detail narrated combined with Andoni’s conflicted recall of events prior to his suicide. It is through Andoni Llovet’s losing struggle with his identity that his friends are able to see how important it is to embrace their past and their memories so they can have a future. Andoni was a model, part-time actor, and aspiring writer, whose memories blocked his literary expression because, “hay muchas cosas de mi pasado que detesto, tengo que reconocer que son casi mis únicos recuerdos. Esto me da rabia porque no consigo eliminarlos” (165). He writes his self-portrait from, “una dimensión que no vale, que no afecta” (162), having been evicted from his body after his suicidal car crash. In this non-existent state, Andoni is about to finally reflect and see where he went wrong. “Después de mucho pensarlo, decidí que lo mejor que podía hacer en una coyuntura como esta era arrancarme de todo y rebobinar.” (182)

Andoni wants to be more than just a model; he desperately wants to be a writer. His problem is his lack of resolve. He becomes disillusioned after attending his literary workshop because he is unable to write about his past. His first chapter of his book, ‘Una vida modelo’ is criticised by his colleagues, the consensus being it is “banal e inútil y hasta reaccionario”
Set within a world of mass consumption about a model’s life, Andoni’s writing offers no analysis of the events it attempts to portray; he simply describes them from a tolerable distance. He quickly becomes disillusioned with how to go about writing his novel because no one really believes he has the talent and his colleagues prove useless when they suggest to him contradictory ideas:

Según ellos, sus vidas son su principal materia prima. Pero rápidamente como quien cambia de canal, se dan vuelta la chaqueta y acotan que la ficción no es para nada un striptease psicológico, que la distancia es vital, la distancia y la autoconciencia, que más bien hay que partir desnudo para terminar vestido, que la literatura no es solo contar la verdad sino recrearla, retransmitirla, rebobinarla tanto en términos éticos como estéticos. (210)

Not yet fully defeated by the writing process, he eventually decides on a new writing project. In Andoni’s allegorical Las hormigas asesinas, a catastrophic event in Chile causes killer ants, who for years have been feeding off the bodies of the victims of the Pinochet regime, to leave the tombs and attack Santiago. The only ones who will survive the attack will be those who are in love. Andoni’s characters torture themselves searching their memories to discover whether or not they have ever loved or been loved by someone other than a family member. Remembering his friend’s advice to him that "si no duele, no vale" (210), Andoni equates his characters’ agony with the personal conflict he had (when he was alive) with his memories by recalling a conversation with his therapist, who told him that "existe algo como la memoria recuperada. De tanto indagar, uno descubre cosas olvidadas. Empieza a recordar aunque no quiera." (280)

However, before he can finish his project, he succumbs to his depressive state and commits suicide - “ahí me di cuenta que estaba un tanto perdido. Para ser querido por otros, hay que quererse uno” (168). Therefore, having been, “incapaz de rebobinar para no toparse con escenas que uno ya no quiere vivir” (289), Andoni’s character represents the notion that the processes of memory are essential in producing a sense of self, which Fuguet connects with Andoni’s desperate attempt to "arrancarme de todo y rebobinar." (137) Fuguet fittingly compares our unconscious to a hard drive, something we all have inside us. “La luz se te puede cortar, te pueden robar el Mac, un virus te atacó, da lo mismo, tu disco duro sigue adentro, contigo, vayas donde vayas, hagas lo que hagas.” (172) Due to the wonder of the
unconscious, nothing is forgotten, any repressed memories remain intact and can be salvaged. It all depends on the willingness of the subject.

In “Una estrella y media,” Fuguet bases Lucas’s account on the “Freudian premise that only those memories that can emerge from the unconscious can be forgotten” (O’Connell 35). Lucas is now undergoing psychiatric treatment for burning down his family home in a moment of madness. “Digamos que estoy en un punto intermedio de mi vida. No sé cuál es, pero sé que es un momento de transición más que de decisión.” (13) With the help of his psychologist, Max, he is able to write down his feelings and eventually discovers that writing helps him understand himself and discovers that movies no longer numb him. Initially, writing in his journal is at first painful for Lucas when he realizes that "el cine ya no me anestesiaba como antes." (23) This frightening side effect, the sudden realisation that there is a future if one can get beyond the numbness of repressing the past, puts Lucas in a panic. As the story ends, however, Lucas finds that he, like the writing in his journal, is becoming "menos paranoico, menos obsesivo, menos autorreferente" (70) and discovers that for him recollection and forgetting are not contrary to one another but are merely different methods of existence, part of the same process of his account of the past. He realises that he was not to blame for his father’s lack of affection, and is determined not to put his own future children through the same pain he experienced: “siento que es como poco natural que un padre no pesque a su hijo, en especial si es hombre. Si yo tuviera un hijo, sería tal el orgullo y el cariño que sentiría por el que me pondría a vomitar.” (47) He learns to take control of his life and to play an active part in it: “Me gustaría pasar de ser un introvertido a ser un extravertido…que me hastié de ser un espectador pasivo y decidí actuar. Tomar la acción en mis manos.” (29)

In the last chapter of the novel, “Adulto contemporáneo”, Fuguet brings closure to the lives of his characters through Gonzalo McClure who is struggling to come to terms with the responsibility of being a first time father and how that affects his view of himself, his identity. He is a radio announcer on an evening programme called “Polución nocturna” on Radio Interferencia. He is about to become a father for the first time and panics when his wife Pía announces the news to him. Music is his life, it keeps him feeling young, so when Pía tells him after humming along to The Carpenter’s, “We’ve Only Just Begun,” Gonzalo is annoyed that now every time he hears that song it will remind him of this moment. He begins a ridiculous rant about how she should have chosen another band, like Neil Diamond, one that he relates to, not The Carpenters whom he considers mainstream pop. He connects the song, one enjoyed by an older generation, to becoming a father and this scares him. He does
not want to become an “adulto-joven”, even though Pía reminds him that that is what they both are. “Pero no quiero serlo! Estoy bien como estoy.” (471) His feelings overwhelm him, equating fatherhood on par with losing his freedom, his independence. He had always done whatever he had wanted, and he thinks that by becoming a father he would now be trapped, not able to escape. His immediate reaction, however, embarrasses him, making him feel cowardly and “mal agradecido.” (472)

Gonzalo decides then, that he needs to write his feelings down to come to terms with what his future will bring. His soul searching evokes memories of when he first met Pía and she told him that she enjoyed his radio show because he did not take himself too seriously, causing him to reflect that “antes me tomaba muy en serio.” (475) This is in reference to starting their radio station, “La Interferencia nació a partir de las radios piratas, de la idea de robarse el aire y controlar el dial. Quisimos interferir, molestar, indagar.” (478) Gonzalo connects his identity to this radio station, an identity that allows him to remain as an ‘adolescente alternativo’. His radio station shares similarities with Chile’s Radio Cooperativa, set up during the Pinochet regime but forced to self-censure as any reporting that went against the regime’s ideology would lead to closure. It became, however, the most credible news source in Chile. (Oñate and Wright 189-190) Their choice of alternative rock became the medium for the collective identity of Santiago, for a generation of people who needed to connect, to be a part of a bigger ideal.

Gonzalo recalls how he struggled with the impact of silence throughout his life. He was always frustrated by his own father’s silence, “siempre fue un hombre callado, triste y severo, en especial consigo mismo”, (474) not understanding that it was a necessary survival skill used by many Chileans to avoid being physically and emotionally hurt during Pinochet’s repressive regime. Subsequently Gonzalo was quiet; he hated the sound of his voice, and everyone always told him how much he sounded like his father. It was not until his father died that Gonzalo had a breakthrough, when one night a McDonald’s employee recognises him from his voice and tells him how much she loves his radio show. This gives Gonzalo the confidence he needs, and as fate would have it, later that night he meets Pía at a party. After wandering lost for so long he finds hope in his new relationship and his life takes on a new direction. He realises it is not a coincidence that his voice sounds like his fathers. “Pía me dice que solo comenzé a hablar una vez que él no me pudo escuchar. Yo creo que, en rigor, ahora hablo por él. Es más, hay noches en que me siento que me escucha. Atento” (474).
It can be seen that by delving into his past, Gonzalo is able to come to terms with leaving behind his prolonged adolescence and become a father. Thus, for Fuguet radio represents individual and collective memory and is a necessary social construction for Gonzalo. His identity is tied to his radio station. Through his reflections with his past, he adopts a new perspective and is able to look forward to his future without being scared. Gonzalo is now able to see that he no longer needs to adopt a certain attitude to withstand setbacks and always be on the defensive. He can now see his purpose in life has changed for the better by starting a family with his wife. It makes him happy to have found his place and he no longer worries that he has shifted from non-conformity to mainstream. “Quizás sea cierto. Se me ocurre que no se trata tanto de armarse un mundo sino saber cómo insertarse en él. Pensear que antes lo único que deseaba era formar una banda. Ahora solo quiero formar una familia. Dios, como nos cambia la vida.” (491)

**Conclusion**

Therefore it is Fuguet’s younger generation, represented by the characters in the novel, who ultimately recognise that neither repressing the past nor dwelling on the past is the right solution. Their personal stories fuse together to create a bigger picture, and by analysing the central themes; the lasting effects of mass consumerism, the weakening ties to family and community, the lack of national discourse, it can be seen how they have had a profound effect on the individual. Thus, as Fuguet emphasises, the act of remembering is important for Chileans to discover where they belong. If by rewinding back through their memories they learn the effects of absent parents, then it is important they do not commit the same mistakes of their parents and become founders of a new path that values family affection. As Fuguet’s character Pascal explains:

[N]osotros somos los desechos tóxicos de las generaciones anteriores. Ellos no fueron capaces de resolver sus conflictos: ni personales, ni matrimoniales, ni sociales. Terminaron matándose entre ellos. Esa es nuestra historia. No hay que andar pregonándola, pero tampoco hay que olvidar de dónde salimos. En este país corrió sangre y aún no cicatriz. Ahora no se reprime a los comunistas sino a los que piensan distinto, a los que denuncian la hipocresía. (124)
Fuguet is highlighting the need for this generation to understand what happened and to seek ways of reconciling their nation, without forgetting why it occurred. Failure to connect a painful past experience to the present and to articulate it in such a way that others can understand and respond to it often results in collective forgetting. When Gonzalo admits he does not want to be like his father, his wife Pía responds, “el tuyo no fue tan tan malo. Era asustadizo no más.” (471) Fuguet is suggesting here that Pía’s acceptance of mutual silence, like many in Chile, indicates the acceptance of a new form of repression, an affirmation of the regime’s lingering impact. The socioeconomic market stresses the importance of personal responsibility, economic liberty, and the owning of property by individuals rather than the state as the fundamental goals of government. This philosophy, fostered by laissez faire economics and enforced by neoliberal policies makes apparent the idea that we, as a collective people, are no longer working together as a collective society but rather that we are many ‘individuals’ left to struggle on our own. This is why Por favor, Rebobinar stresses how important remembrance is for Chile to move forward from the effects of the regime, reiterated here by Chilean critic, Alberto Madrid24:

¿Qué hacemos con la memoria? La desterramos al olvido, la transformamos en pasado soportando la pérdida sufrida, sin olvidarla, y descubrimos el verdadero rostro de nuestra sociedad, para comprender de que debemos desprendernos. Esta es una de las tareas individuales y colectivas de la sociedad chilena, en el proceso de recuperación de la democracia. (16)

Through the act of writing, Fuguet insinuates that writing can also be a positive connection for young adults in finding or rediscovering their personal roots. Writing is a way of exploring personal trauma which is an obvious trait in his characters:

Mira, cabro, si no duele, no vale. Escribir es fácil. Expresar verdades, no. …Si les duele, vale. Si no, no. Punto. En la medida en que uno sea capaz de escribir sobre cosas de las que uno jamás hablaría en público, ni en la más afianzada de las confianzas, entonces estamos en territorio real. (210)

The personal portraits offered by Fuguet present a perspective of the lingering affects of the dictatorship on Chilean society. Now the characters are enlightened by their newfound sense of belonging; their strategies for understanding memory allow them an active role

within the context of recent Chilean history. The novel ends, despite Andoni’s suicide, on a positive note. The group disperses; some go forward while others are left behind. Those who move forward, like Gonzalo, are willing to mature and accept adulthood, leaving their youth behind. They achieve this by the act of “rebobinando” back through their memories:

Dicen que la manera más limpia y sana para salir de un presente que agobia y que no vislumbra ningún futuro es poner marcha atrás e internarse al pasado. Solo el pasado, con sus hechos y sus recuerdos, podrá esclarecer lo que hoy nos parece tan enredado y oscuro. (480-481)
CHAPTER SIX

Comparative Analysis

This final chapter offers the reader a comparative analysis of all four of the novels: La Muerte y La Doncella by Ariel Dorfman, Estrella Distante and Nocturno de Chile by Roberto Bolaño, and Por favor, Reboninar by Alberto Fuguet. All three of these writers are of Chilean nationality, yet they have all experienced a significant amount of time living abroad at various stages of their lives, which has subsequently influenced the themes in their literary works. The main reason these four writers’ works provide a good analysis is because in their own ways they use literature to condemn the world of social convention which fostered an environment of silence in Chile; the consequence of a long period of authoritarian rule. This theme is the basis of each novel; however they all differ in their focus on the impact of silence on Chilean society, each choosing to portray a different faction of society and therefore perceiving it in a different way.

These three writers share in the experience of having spent their childhoods in more than one country, having been uplifted from Chile at an early age due to their parents varying circumstances. They, therefore, all understand what it is like to have more than one place they feel they belong, to know how it feels to be an insider and an outsider at the same time. However that is where the similarities end as their experiences differ considerably due to their individual circumstances, mostly due to their differences in age as they are almost a decade apart, with Ariel Dorfman being the eldest and Alberto Fuguet the youngest. Ariel Dorfman, having been initially raised in Argentina and then the United States, eventually settled in Chile with his family when he was a young adolescent and he remained there until the beginning of Pinochet’s dictatorship. Dorfman was forced to leave Chile not long after the 1973 military coup, due to his role as a cultural advisor within the Allende government. It was not safe for him in Chile and he was forced into exile, unable to return until after democracy had been restored in 1990. Once he was permitted back into Chile, he returned immediately with his family and subsequently wrote La Muerte y La Doncella in 1990. Roberto Bolaño was raised in Chile but moved to Mexico with his family as a teenager. A keen Marxist supporter, he later returned to Chile in his early twenties in 1973 ready to assist the Revolution. However, within days of his arrival, the military coup occurred and he was briefly imprisoned. Upon release from prison he went into voluntary exile, opting to lead a
transient existence in Europe and Latin America. He eventually relocated permanently to Spain and remained there until his premature death in 2003. It was while he was in Spain that he wrote both *Estrella Distante* (1996) and *Nocturno de Chile* (2000). Alberto Fuguet was born in Chile but moved to California with his family where he spent his childhood until the age of 13. His family returned to Chile in the mid-1970s during the time of the military regime, a conflicting time for a teenager who regarded America as his home and had to adapt to a very different environment; his adolescence constricted by the repression of Pinochet’s regime.

The three writers’ varying individual experiences of the military regime are, as a result, depicted in the characters and background of each of their novels I have studied. The literary ideology they identify with has also influenced the way their characters are portrayed. Dorfman, Bolaño and Fuguet are all part of a group of writers in Latin America known as the post-boom era. This group of writers published their works prominently in the 1980s onwards. Their writing was greatly influenced by the rise of dictatorships occurring at the time throughout Latin America, especially in the Southern Cone, and consequently their themes dealt with social upheaval, social commitment and political radicalism. Their works do, nonetheless, differ slightly in their approach to the realities of the time - the realities they personally experienced - due to the changing socio-political influences.

Dorfman, born in 1942, was part of the initial movement from the Boom to Post-Boom ideology. Post-Boom writers of his age are identified by their tendency to privilege the powerless. Dorfman felt his writing was “driven by the need and glorious potential of human beings to tell stories, and on the other hand the brutal fact that, in today’s world, most of the lives that should be telling these stories are generally ignored, ravaged and silenced” ([Resistance](#)). This belief in turn is the reason behind *La Muerte y La Doncella* and its depiction of repression and violence, abuse and suffering, as seen through his character Paulina. It is her personal resistance to her environment that is key to his play. His play also highlights the conflicting dilemma of this period, when writers were publishing in an increasingly delicate environment due to the fragile state of the transitional government. These writers, therefore, were faced with how to confront these issues without destroying the national consensus, which created democratic stability.

Born in the 1950s and ten years younger than Dorfman, Roberto Bolaño was also in support of socio-political commitment and an emphasis on Latin American preoccupations, in
this case Chile’s dictatorship. How he differs from Dorfman though, is his tendency to openly discuss disagreeable subject matter in a provocative manner. He achieved this through his damning criticism of Chile’s collective silence, in particular his polemic views on the silence of the literary establishment during the regime. This is particularly evident in his novel *Nocturno de Chile* observed through his right-wing sympathiser, the Jesuit priest, Sebastian Urrutia Lacroix. In *Estrella Distante*, he still maintains his criticism of the collective silence of Chilean society, but also includes important Post-Boom issues such as the effect of exile, and the question of justice in the transitional phase of democracy.

Fuguet is a writer who is not only included under the wider umbrella of the Post-Boom, but is also part of a group of writers whom critics have referred to as ‘the generation of the 1990s.’ (Quiceno <online>) This is in reference to the period in which they started publishing prominently. Fuguet, in 1996 co-edited the anthology McOndo, whose title derives from a combination of McDonalds and Macondo, the fictional town created by Gabriel García Márquez. McOndo represented popular culture while largely rejecting the use of magical realism in contemporary Latin American fiction, a common theme of the Boom generation. This is because McOndo considered magical realism literature merely commercial writing for foreign consumption. Fuguet and this group of writers, whilst still under the umbrella of Post-Boom writers, have evolved with the economic realities of the time. They grew up under the dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s, and consequently experienced the development of neo-liberal economic policies which introduced to their generation mass media and consumerism. Hence it is for this reason they prefer fiction guided by popular culture, with more urban or interior spaces. Therefore it can be seen that these three writers’ works of fiction inevitably reflect the social and political reality in which the writer operates.

Another feature these novels share is in their depiction of gender roles. It can be seen that the majority of the women in all of these novels are illustrated as either victims, like Paulina in *La Muerte y la Doncella* or the female poets ‘disappeared’ by Carlos Wieder in *Estrella Distante*, or they are relegated to the sidelines as wives or mothers, as seen in *Por favor, Rebobinar* and *Nocturno de Chile*. In *Estrella Distante* women are particularly marginalised through the character, Carlos Wieder, a misogynist who deliberately targets women as his victims, brutally torturing and murdering them, then disfiguring them to suit his own artistic desires. The few women who are respected and considered ‘on par’ with the male characters are La Maca and Carmen in *Por favor, Rebobinar*. Yet, despite these two women
appearing to be respected due to their capabilities in achieving high power positions within high profile companies, they are nevertheless, demeaned by their fellow male colleagues as either ‘masculino’, or by her friends: “tienes más energía y bolas que muchos de mis amigos” (408), in the case of La Maca, or forever single in the case of Carla Awad because men feel threatened by her power, “le tienen pavor” (314). In both of Bolaño’s two novels and in Fuguet’s novel, the stories are narrated in the most part by males. The only female whose voice is heard is Ignacia Urre in Por favor, Rebobinar, but even then her sections are only sideline stories to provide either background information in regard to the other male characters (97), or to describe the political and economic environment that the characters live in (293). Her own personal story is only ever fleetingly referred to by her male friends in their individual chapters.

It should be noted that, although Dorfman’s female character Paulina, is a victim of torture and repression, and her torturer is male, she is the main character in La Muerte y La Doncella and the story revolves around her individual experience. In contrast to Bolaño and Fuguet, Dorfman tends to predominantly have women at the core of his writing. This is because he is aware that women often tend to be the least powerful and marginal members of society. Yet when they do rebel, “they do so with a determination, fury and dignity which cracks the world open, which compels authority to reveal itself in all its arbitrary ugliness” (Resistance vii). This can be seen as the reason as to why he is inclined to bring their stories to the forefront of his literary works. Their detonating factor is their lack of influence, which makes their insurrection extremely precarious. In order to prevail, his characters portray the need to convince men who hold power to change their conduct, to directly challenge them to enable their versions to be validated and accepted.

The portrayal of female voices in these novels suggests that women in Chilean society remain marginalised and their voices unheard. It could be suggested that women’s voices do not feature prominently in these novels because they are written by males. When I researched the vast range of Chilean political novels to study, I noted the lack of female writers. I would have liked to include female writers’ perspectives, yet I could not find a novel that was appropriate for my analysis. This could be coincidence that Chile’s most successful writers are predominately male, yet I would argue that it highlights the fact that female Chilean writers have in the past been undervalued and not encouraged due to chauvinistic tendencies. It is, however, encouraging to see that Chile is now producing and supporting a number of
very talented female writers, such as Marcela Serrano, Lina Meruane and Alejandra Costamagna.

The various narration techniques adopted by these writers are presented in a way that adds impact to the different points of view each novel adopts. Bolaño in *Nocturno de Chile* has chosen to critically analyse the underbelly of Chile’s cultural elite through the eyes of a right-wing sympathiser, literary critic and Jesuit priest by the name of Sebastian Urrutia Lacroix. It is through Urrutia’s recollections of various events within his literary and religious social circle that Bolaño condemns the societal self-interest, religious hypocrisy and collective silence of the cultural elites, both of right and left wing sympathisers. His main character, a right wing sympathiser who attempts to justify his actions throughout the novel, was crucial in depicting these criticisms to the reader and denunciating the dark side of Chile’s cultural establishment.

Bolaño adopts a different point of view in *Estrella Distante*, in which he opts to have his narrator as a left wing sympathiser. Rather than being in the mind of evil like Urrutia’s character, the narrator in *Estrella Distante* instead recounts the actions of Carlos Wieder, an evil right wing sadist. This means that the reader does not have access to the reasons behind Wieder’s actions; they can only interpret it through the eyes of the narrator who is a mere bystander. They do, however, have first-hand access to the effects of exile as portrayed through the narrator’s feelings and experiences. Bolaño deliberately tells this story through the narrator’s point of view so the reader is left to question whether the narrator was right in assisting in the murder of Wieder; whether retributive justice can be justified or whether it is simply a vengeful act.

Fuguet, on the other hand, chooses to tell the story of his generation through the voices of various characters. Each of the eight main chapters are about a different characters personal experience of growing up under a repressive military regime, and then the subsequent transition to democracy. Fuguet chooses this method to show the effect of the dictatorship on the individual; experiences he faced himself, including alienation from the public sphere, disintegration of the family structure, and the loneliness and futility of the individual experience. His novels are almost always told from the point of view of middle- and upper-class youngsters under the Pinochet regime in the eighties because that is his personal experience. This is because he thinks, artists “have to be very, very careful when
talking about things that you did not live, where people really suffered. I try not to write about things I don’t know or I haven’t lived.” (Nicholson and Reinaga 216)

Dorfman’s narration technique is in contrast to Bolaño and Fuguet because La Muerte y La Doncella was written primarily as a play. Subsequently his characters have to display their feelings to the audience through either conversation with one another, or through a narrator who informs the audience of any extra information considered relevant before each scene. Therefore, his characters expressions, actions and silences are just as important to convey to the audience as their dialogue. It is for this reason that the events occur in only one environment, in this case Paulina and Gerardo’s summer house. The recollection of memory is shared in dialogue to provide background information about the events taking place, and why they act in the manner they do. It is significant that the perspective of the doctor, Paulina’s supposed torturer, is mainly ignored, apart from a few cries of desperation, and an eventual confession that may or may not be true. He is for the most part of the play gagged. This can be seen as a deliberate gesture by Dorfman because it is the voice of the repressed that Dorfman is wanting to articulate, not any type of justifications on the part of the doctor. Dorfman also employs a similar technique to Bolaño in regard to leaving the ending as an open question, an effect which allows the audience or reader to decide how it ends, and why it should end in that way. It is performed this way to provoke the audience into thinking about the portrayed events in a bigger picture.

Universal appeal is another manner in which these three writers are similar. Dorfman makes it clear in La Muerte y La Doncella’s afterword that although his play is set in Chile and drawn from his country’s experience under Pinochet’s dictatorship; his work, nonetheless, has a global theme. He explains that after watching his country being ravaged, suffering could only ever be justified if it was able to be turned into something else. In other words, not just to learn from repression, but to grow with it and from it, to make it significant. He thought the best way to convey this was by punishing with words the men who would not be punished with other means, in order to prove that those who had suffered from repression had not suffered in vain. (Resistance ix) From his need in exile to communicate the torment of Chile’s repression to those who were not aware of it, he developed the story to convey that repression can emerge in many different places; that many nations have been beset with similar problems to Chile’s. Bolaño in turn uses a mix of Latin American slang in his novels, which is derived from his Chilean, Mexican and Spanish backgrounds. He does not consider himself a certain nationality, rather he identifies with a Latin American identity. His
characters’ tendencies to ‘wander lost’ therefore appeal to a global identity. Fuguet’s work is characterised by a United States/Chilean hybridity, with constant cross-references to the popular cultures of the two nations. His work predominantly features urban characters, references to pop culture, songs and movies. These themes make his work more universal, more global. He explains his reasons for this in an interview with Laura Quiceno:

La idea de escribir es para conectar con otros…para tratar de plasmar en algo lo que uno ve, siente…y me atrae captar no sólo los sentimientos sino la época. Y esto por algo muy sencillo: me parece extraordinariamente difícil escribir de un pasado que no conozco. Entonces uno mira la calle y está llena de cine, de música, de cultura pop. Yo creo que la cultura es pop…no uso estos elementos para ser más global; creo que todos vivimos en un mundo global interconectado…lo que me importa de verdad es que los sentimientos y miedos y deseos que exploro sean universales. Universal en todos los sentidos: que se puedan entender donde sea y que en el futuro siga entendiéndose.” (Quiceno <online>)

Finally, it can be seen that these writers have all had their fair share of criticism from their peers. Dorfman was criticised initially as an exile for returning to Chile after the military regime and attempting to portray events he did not have first experience of; and secondly for writing about issues that were deemed sensitive in the environment of a fragile transition to democracy. Many people inferred his work could invoke attacks that could undermine the stability during the transitional period. Fuguet has been criticised for not being more supportive of non-elites (Triandis 12), and has subsequently been labelled a ‘right wing Pinochet supporter’ (Nicholas and Reinaga 214) due to his constant portrayal of middle and upper class citizens. Despite this poorly directed criticism, Fuguet maintains that he will continue to portray those he considers ‘messed up’ adolescents in society; the people in society who are often overlooked. He does this not necessarily to “empower them but just to say, “they’re there” (217), they exist and therefore are entitled to a voice, the opportunity to be understood. Hence the importance of writers such as these three in continuing to question and defy the status quo is vital so that prominent societal issues will not be overlooked, and vulnerable citizens will have the opportunity to have their concerns represented.

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In conclusion, it can be seen that La Muerte y La Doncella, Estrella Distante, Nocturno de Chile and Por favor, Rebobinar justly portray the reality of the various factions of society in Chile in regard to the on-going effects of the military regime. Dorfman, Bolaño and Fuguet, through this analysis, have subsequently revealed the importance of writing literature on the denunciation of the regime and the transitional period. Although the novels choose to focus on different aspects of the transition to democracy, there exist some parallel themes. These include the notion of repression in an authoritarian environment; the dimension of voices in Chile’s political arena; the frustrations of a fragile transitional government; and ultimately the recognition and condemnation of silence as a lingering effect of Pinochet’s military regime. All of these authors are acutely aware that in times of severe oppression and the subsequent self-censorship of its citizens, art becomes the vessel for historical memory.
CONCLUSION

The Pinochet dictatorship has permanently marked every aspect of Chilean society in ways we have only begun to understand today, over thirty years after its violent inception with the September 11, 1973 coup d’état, and now over two decades after Pinochet’s defeat in the 1988 plebiscite. For many, the Pinochet years have come to signify one of the most painful periods in the country’s history. The regime’s systematic campaign of terror – including disappearances, torture, exile, and intimidation – designed to eliminate the political left, held devastating consequences for an untold number of people.

The Concertación governments were determined to seek truth and reconciliation and eventually reconcile Chileans. They have yet to accomplish this goal, but during their governments, Chileans nevertheless broke the silence and started confronting a past of brutal repression that still manifests itself in many aspects of the present. In Chile the transitional government did not prosecute the military’s human rights violations, thereby creating a context of impunity at the expense of victims’ interests. The political and legal response to the dictatorial crimes therefore shapes the way of remembering and has a strong influencing effect on the younger generations who did not personally experience life under the regime.

Chile needs to make significant advances toward societal and governmental recognition. Then literal memory can give way to “exemplary memory.”(Ros 7) Without denying its singularity or minimising it, this way of remembering uses the painful event as a model to understand new situations with different actors and components and allows us to draw lessons from the past to help orient our actions in the present. This type of thinking implies an emotional distance from the past, often difficult to achieve for those whose lives have been transformed by a traumatic event. In order to learn from it, it is necessary to see it as something completed and no longer active in the present. In an environment where victims’ memory has not been acknowledged, working through trauma can be understood as a betrayal of the dead and a political defeat. Antonius Robben notes that groups and individuals:

[C]annot mourn their losses when others deny that those losses took place. The contest of memory denies conflicting parties sufficient room to work through their traumas and hinders them from gradually standing back from the past and proceeding
from testimony to historical interpretation and from re-experience to commemoration. (Robben 27)

I chose to study these authors because their literary works all present Chile as a past that is unfinished, deeply troubling, and in need of being addressed collectively. Torture, disappearance, censorship and rebellion: this is what has constituted the lives of Chileans for far too many years. Perhaps most crucially I chose these three writers because they illustrate particularly well issues concerning Chile as a real and symbolic terrain for contesting and rewriting national narrative in the post-coup years. These authors skilfully underline the interrelationship between political, art and national identity. They show that even now, when the dictatorship is over and the arduous transition to democracy is over, Pinochet’s legacy of fear and amnesia still continues to visit and damage every citizen of his country. Their books reveal many of the hidden conflicts that were just under the surface of the nation, and in some cases still are, posing a clear threat to people’s psychological security.

These writers want a different Chile, a country that takes its past as a warning but also as an inspiration. Most Chileans do not believe in reconciliation and have passed their perspective on to their children. According to Marcela Serrano, a Chilean writer, the polemic intensified after the regime because “no hubo espacio para la memoria cuando empezó la democracia en Chile, nadie quería acordarse de su pasado.” (Garcia-Corales 229) This illustrates the importance of literature in continuing to confront polemic issues. Therefore it can be seen these three writers all aptly represent the role of a writer - to provoke emotions. They show that society is marked by silence, classism, rigid gender norms, violence and disillusionment about politics and collective projects. They all highlight in their novels Chile’s reluctance to remember, to learn more about the past and deal with still-too-painful memories. Literature is an instrument through which our identity can be explored. Most importantly, literature is a work of art that might help a collective to cleanse itself. In other words, to force the readers to confront these predicaments that, if not directly challenged, could lead to their ruin.
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