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Metafiction In Mourning: The Intersections Of Gender Performance And Postdictatorial Memory In Novels By Luisa Valenzuela, Clarice Lispector, And Diamela Eltit

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METAFICTION IN MOURNING: THE INTERSECTIONS OF GENDER PERFORMANCE
AND POSTDICTATORIAL MEMORY IN NOVELS BY LUISA VALENZUELA,
CLARICE LISPECTOR, AND DIAMELA ELTIT

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DEDICATION

To my parents and grandparents,
who always granted my wish to read it just one more time.

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I have received widespread and constant support during the at times daunting, at times thrilling task of writing a dissertation. First, I thank the Graduate School and the Women's and Gender Studies Program at the University of South Carolina for awarding me the Summer Dissertation Fellowship and the Harriott Hampton Faucette Award, respectively. Both awards were integral to my ability to complete this project, and I am thankful to both of these institutions that continue to support graduate research.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project is to build on two major theoretical fields, feminism and postdictatorial memory, in the context of Latin American women's writing. The development of Latin American feminism has run concurrently with the broader feminist movements of the 20th century, but has been shaped by the particularities and diversity of the region. Specific concerns relating to postcoloniality, religion, and nation have caused theorists like Debra A. Castillo to discuss Latin American feminism on its own, focusing on the inherent privileging of praxis over theory and the necessary pastiche of local and international theories. The development of Latin American feminism must also be considered within the context of the authoritarian governments that ruled during the mid-20th century. The 1970s and 80s saw the rise of military dictatorships in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. The widespread use of censorship and state-sponsored terrorism through detention and disappearances created an atmosphere of anxiety and trauma from which the national communities have yet to entirely heal. Idelber Avelar's theoretical considerations of postdictatorial memory and the narrative of transition to democracy highlight the effects of social and personal trauma as depicted in literature. He develops his theory on mourning literature to describe a set of texts that neither engage in the official discourse of the dictatorship nor produce a counter-narrative that only exists relationally. Instead, Avelar's mourning literature rips apart the binary and recognizes the multiplicity of truths that the social trauma of dictatorship constructs. Novels by Luisa Valenzuela of Argentina, Clarice Lispector of Brazil, and Diamela Eltit of Chile take part

in this project of mourning with an added caveat that recognizes the heteronormativity inherent in the discourses not only of the dictatorships, but also of their broader societies. Drawing from Judith Butler's concepts of grievability and gender performativity, this study analyzes novels by Latin American women writers that identify the heteronormative strictures of their milieux and blur the boundaries of sex and gender. Through a range of metafictional strategies, the writers studied here make clear to their readers that productive mourning of dictatorship cannot exist without a deeper critique and deconstruction of the heteronormative discourse on which both the dictatorships and the opposition are based.

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INTRODUCTION

The scene is now a familiar act of protest: a procession of women circling a plaza, white scarves covering their heads, photographs of their children in hand. The *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo) began their marches of resistance on April 30, 1977, to protest the disappearance of persons carried out by the Argentinean military dictatorship. Though their demonstrations were silent, the message was clear to their fellow citizens, to the politicians whose buildings they passed on their marches, and to the international community that took note of the group of mothers helping to raise awareness of the human rights abuses that were occurring in Argentina and across Latin America during the latter half of the 20th century. The *Madres* are still active in Argentina, maintaining their protest of the disappearances that occurred during military rule (1976-83) as well as seeking justice for broader social and economic issues. Like one of their trademark expressions, “*¡Ni un paso atrás!*” (Not one step back!),¹ the *Madres*’ grassroots movement continues to advance, inspiring similar protests in other countries and multiple protest groups within Argentina, including *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, *H.I.J.O.S.*, and *Herman@s* (Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Children, and

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the English translation is my own. Translations of titles and names of organizations reflect standard use. Published translations of literary and critical texts are cited when available. Any emphasis, unless otherwise noted, is in the original text.

Siblings).² The *Damas de blanco* (Ladies in White) reflected the *Madres*' imagery in their protests of the *Primavera negra* (Black Spring) in Cuba in 2003, during which 75 dissidents were jailed for speaking out in favor of free speech and human rights. The *Damas*' silent protests in the streets of Havana, their white garments, and their pins depicting jailed relatives directly reflect the influence of the *Madres*' strategy in confronting human rights abuses while living under authoritarian rule.

The *Madres*' protests were not the first to incorporate gender performance or to turn government discourse back on itself, however. The *cacerolazos* (casserole protests) that began in Chile in 1971 also took hold internationally as cost-effective way to protest the government's economic failures. Though men have often joined in the *cacerolazos*, the most visible protests in Chile were organized by the *Poder Femenino* (Feminine Power) organization. The women protestors did not require extensive resources or clear organization to incite a *cacerolazo*: they simply used the empty pots and pans from their own kitchens, clanging them in the streets, to speak out against Salvador Allende's economic policies. The *cacerolazos* surfaced again during Augusto Pinochet's military regime to protest the economic downturn that eventually served to delegitimize Pinochet's government and spurred the popular push for democratic rule in 1988.

At a basic level, like the *Madres*, the *cacerolazos* draw on the gendered performance of women-as-mothers to protest injustice—the Chilean administrations were impeding upon the women's ability to feed their children and, therefore, to be good

² The last two groups incorporate both men and women into their organizations. The acronym *H.I.J.O.S.* stands for *Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio* (Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice against Forgetting and Silence). *Herman@s* uses the @ sign to represent both the masculine o and the feminine a. The full name of the *Herman@s* group is *Herman@s de Desaparecidos por Verdad y Justicia* (Siblings of the Disappeared Ones for Truth and Justice).

mothers. The *Madres* and offshoot groups based on familial relationships play even more directly into Argentina's nationalist discourse of the "Grande Argentine Family" (Jelin, "Victims" 180). The narrative of the Argentinean military government during the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (National Reorganization Process) relied on the heteronormative structure of the desirable Argentinean as an obedient citizen-child and on the self-contradictory response to the *Madres'* demand for the return of their *desaparecidos* (disappeared ones). The military regime's reaction to the *Madres* was both an outright denial that the disappearances took place and the paradoxical suggestion that, had the *Madres* been better mothers, they would not have lost their children. Thus, by choosing to publicly perform their grief through, rather than against, the heteronormative vocabulary of the dictatorships, the *Madres* were able to reveal cracks in the system, inconsistencies in the dominant narrative of reorganization.

I open with the *Madres* and similar examples to underscore the central issues of this project: the performative nature of grief and subjectivity, the direct connection between authoritarian rule and heteronormative structures that govern society, and the necessity of an alternate route out of the hegemonic/counter-hegemonic discursive divide surrounding dictatorship. The *Madres* have, of course, been challenged for their perceived use of strategic essentialism by critics like Diana Taylor, who both recognizes their success in drawing attention to the crisis of human rights in Argentina and warns against the possibility of being written into a "bad script" that precludes the *Madres'* political participation as anything other than maternal figures. Absent from Taylor's critique, however, is a complete appreciation for the *Madres'* performative evolution—a crucial facet of their overall political impact. Though the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* did

originate as an organization of mothers performing grief and claiming justice on behalf of their children, since the early days of the protests, the *Madres* have broadcast their performance as parody.

The *Madres* did not merely bring the private category of “mother” out into the public, they blurred the public/private binary entirely, shifting “mother” from a biological signifier to a socially-constructed, politicized one. Taylor acknowledges that many women who protested were not the actual mothers of the *desaparecidos* and many more were not mothers at all, but they identified themselves as symbolic caretakers of their missing fellow citizens (188). Though the choice to protest as mothers could serve to reinforce the classification of women as nurturers, the *Madres*’ opening up of the “mother” category to include all Argentinean women protesting for the human rights of all Argentines politicizes rather than essentializes. Moreover, the women’s clothing and head scarves were calculated costume choices designed to parody the institutional conception of “mother” as a private, powerless figure. Taylor notes the intentionality of such performances (195), but fails to value the destabilizing effect the choice to change out of business or modern attire and into dowdy, matronly dress has on the category of “mother” itself. As Judith Butler has established with her theory on the performativity of gender and the subject (which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 1), the ability to parody an identity serves to subvert the very existence of that identity as natural and predetermined. Thus, by dressing in a form of mother drag, the *Madres* foreground “mother” as a social (not natural) category that their continuous iterations work to unmoor.

Finally, the *Madres'* organizational transformation over time refutes any conception that the women held no political power of their own and only protested on behalf of others. In 1986, the *Madres* split over various political concerns into two factions now known as *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* and *Madres de Plaza de Mayo—Línea Fundadora* (Founding Group), in which the former maintained the original goal of the recovery of the *desaparecidos* and the latter shifted focus to the prosecution of military officials. Since the division, both groups have continued their push for public memory while also collaborating with human rights organizations abroad, drawing attention to other social justice issues like education and wealth inequality, and establishing media and institutional outlets for protest, including monthly publications, interactive websites, and the *Asociación's* radio station and university that opened in 2000. Far from the strategic essentialism of motherhood in public, the *Madres* have created an enduring grassroots movement that tackles discursive heteronormativity through performance and parody and extends the discussion beyond the battle of fact over fiction. While it is true that the *Madres'* central purpose of demanding the return of their children was reactionary to the hegemonic narrative of the *Proceso*, their ability to redefine the category of “mother,” to undermine the discourse of the “Grande Argentine Family” from within, and to orient their personal motives toward national and international human rights goals demonstrates the transformative capacity of a non-essentialized (and, thus, non-binary) approach to gender, mourning, and discourse.

The *Madres'* movement in Argentina, then, serves as a socio-political parallel for the literary texts that I consider in the present study. Luisa Valenzuela, Clarice Lispector, and Diamela Eltit each occupy a distinct position as a woman author who lived and wrote

during and after military regimes in their respective countries of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. Like the *Madres*, these three authors faced the complexities of confronting the hegemonic discourses of subjectivity, the nation, and gender by choosing an alternate path out of the good/evil, us/them, male/female binaries. My analysis of their works draws on Latin American theories of postdictatorial memory and gender studies analyses of the history of Latin American feminism and the psycho-social construction of gender, sexuality, and subjectivity. I apply tenets of postdictatorial memory studies here not to invoke any chronological marker of writing after dictatorship that they may suggest, but to underscore a certain analytical disposition such studies have of considering the effects of dictatorship on the society as a whole as well as their efforts to theorize a way out of the trauma of state-sponsored terrorism that reject an uncomplicated victim/perpetrator construction. In thinking through the processes of mourning required for a nation to move forward from authoritarian military rule, each author directly links the rise and propagation of dictatorship to the rigid heteronormative binaries that inform social structures and political discourse. Consequently, for Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit, the interrogation of gender and sexuality is essential to a full understanding of authoritarianism and a necessary condition for the prevention of future trauma.

Of the three authors studied, all have been recognized as major female voices in the literature of their respective countries, though their socio-political commentary is often sidelined in favor of gender-centric and stylistic readings of their work. My purpose, then, is to take a both/and approach to the authors' novels that exposes the interconnectedness of gender, politics, and style in their literary projects. In one of the rare studies that considers all three authors, Raquel G. Pina contrasts the alternate paths

for women that Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit imagine to those of their 18th- and 19th-century counterparts, concluding that the 20th-century texts rewrite roles for both women and the nation by thinking beyond traditional positions ascribed to women in Latin American foundational fictions. In a similar vein, I argue that Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit create innovative national imaginaries in their novels by seeking a third option to hegemonic/counter-hegemonic historical and gendered discourses. This third option involves a productive mourning of dictatorship and gender that the authors accomplish in part through their novels' metafictional configurations.

The use of metafiction by Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit is not coincidence, but a tactical stylistic reflection of the structural dismantling their works hope to achieve. Metafiction serves to expose the discursive work of fiction, to make clear its artifice, and to challenge narrative authority. While metafiction is not remotely new (Cervantes' *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, designated by many as the first novel in the West, makes substantial use of metafiction as do a multitude of ancient texts), variations on the form continue to emerge and trouble classification. More importantly for a study of postdictatorial memory and gender, the metafictional style is particularly appealing to authors writing under or in reference to authoritarian rule. Nelson H. Vieira, drawing on Patricia Waugh and Frederic Jameson, discusses metafiction as the exploration of the relationship between the literary and nonfiction worlds, or the gap between the linguistic system and the experience it attempts to describe. The metafictional intention is thus remarkably similar to the performance of mourning and gender in that it seeks "the object forbidden," which is "often shut out by the doors of convention or systems of closure, literary or otherwise" (Vieira 588). Censorship as the catalyst for metafiction makes

clear, then, its utility for the woman author writing on dictatorship and gender. In deploying metafiction this way—as a strategy—Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit can emphasize the instability of authority and the foreclosures that trauma and rigid heteronormativity impose on their characters and their societies.

The novels I consider in this project make use of metafiction in order to tease out the authors' arguments about the roots of dictatorship, their connection to gender, and the need to think through dictatorship from a non-reactionary position. While I analyze their use of metafictional devices, this is not meant to be an exhaustive narratological study of their fiction. I am utilizing the term metafiction as a broad characterization of the various self-reflexive aspects of the authors' works. Metafiction in this study, then, will include statements that make clear the fictional nature of the works as well as any instances of metanarration in the texts, in which the extradiegetic author and/or a diegetic author-character reflect specifically on the process of narration and writing more generally. I am concerned with the manner in which each author deploys metafiction in an individual text as a tactic for achieving her broader goals of debinarization and productive national mourning. As a result, I do not claim that such projects necessitate a certain type of metafictional device or that metafiction is engaged by each author in the same manner, only that metafiction is utilized for its ability to illuminate discourses at play and, especially, to activate the reader's participation in the construction of alternate forms and subjectivities.

The process of mourning through metafiction allows these authors to circumvent the hegemonic/counter-hegemonic divide—a divide that is most evident in the competing truths of official (military) national histories and the *testimonio* (testimonial) genre,

which chronicles, in explicit detail, first-hand accounts of torture and imprisonment under dictatorship. The four novels that I analyze in this study serve neither discourse completely while recognizing the existence of both. Valenzuela's, Lispector's, and Eltit's fictional texts engage with the social histories of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile either directly, through incorporation of nonfictional names, dates, and spaces, or obliquely, through more generalized discussions of power relations, authorship, and gender. These novels defy easy classification, though one might consider them *novelas testimoniales* (testimonial novels), a term that is resistant to clear definition itself. The *novela testimonial* combines aspects of the fictional novel and the *testimonio*, for the genre's utility and intricacy, Joanna R. Bartow notes, "lies in its simultaneous reference to an internal, controlled, imaginary world and the external world imposed upon it (or rather elicited by the author)" (27). The destabilizing effect elicited by the *novela testimonial* that is both separate from and dependent upon external reality, compounded by metafictional devices, allows the authors to alter the system from within. Caren Kaplan speaks of "out-law genres" as those that "often break most obvious rules of genre" and, consequently, facilitate "a deconstruction of 'master' genres, revealing the power dynamics embedded in literary production, distribution, and reception" (119). While in some respects Valenzuela's, Lispector's, and Eltit's novels can be considered a form of out-law texts due to their dismantling effect on discourse, the transformative quality of their works derives from the authors' abilities to expose, parody, and critique power structures in ways that highlight the existence of multiple truths and the socially-constructed nature of reality and subjectivity.

Unlike purely counter-hegemonic texts, which seek to establish themselves as oppositional and somehow outside the system to which they are, nevertheless, inextricably linked, Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit have composed their novels with the recognition that there is no Archimedean point from which to construct their discourses. Metafiction in mourning, then, refers to the authors' attempts to rewrite postdictatorial and gender discourses productively, which necessarily involves admission of one's own participation in and responsibility for the systems of power—a responsibility that counter-hegemonic writings seem desperate to shirk. Though the content and form of the novels studied here are not identical, it is my assertion that each author maintains a commitment to moving beyond binarism, and, in the same way the novels draw attention to the structures that underlie the content of dictatorship (male/female, father/mother, us/them, etc.), their novels draw attention to their own constructed nature. Susan Snaider Lanser highlights the relative lack of overlap in feminist and narratological studies, commenting, "With a few exceptions, feminist criticism does not ordinarily consider the technical aspects of narration, and narrative poetics does not ordinarily consider the social properties and political implication of narrative voice" (4). By identifying and analyzing four novels by three Latin American women authors as metafiction in mourning, this project is concerned with the socio-political statements made by the authors concerning gender and dictatorship as well as the strategic narrative devices that are necessary to their expression.

In reference to the form and content of the authors' expression, however, I diverge from Lanser's overriding statement regarding discursive authority. The specific works—the metafiction in mourning—that have been produced by Valenzuela,

Lispector, and Eltit expose a much more complicated relationship with discourse than Lanser allows. Lanser “assume[s] that regardless of any woman writer’s ambivalence toward authoritative institutions and ideologies, the act of writing a novel and seeking to publish it [...] is implicitly a quest for discursive authority: a quest to be heard, respected, and believed, a hope of influence” (7). Metafiction in mourning, a concept I will further develop in the first chapter, is a quest to be heard; however, it is simultaneously a quest to be added to, reformulated, and critiqued in the mind of the reader. Mourning productively entails recognition of difference, of the Other. The novels I have chosen reflect this acknowledgement of Otherness in their content and their metafictional structures, which compel the reader to accept the socially-constructed nature of all discourse and, in turn, his/her participation in the novels’ constructed discourses. While the authors bring their words and messages to the page, the metafictional turns of the novels undermine the authority of authorship and rely on the reader’s ability to tease out the blurry lines of fact and fiction, interior plot and exterior realities, power and agency, dictatorship and heteronormativity.

The following chapters will develop the theoretical implications of metafiction in mourning and chart the authors’, narrators’, and characters’ individual paths to productive mourning and acceptance of Otherness in their relationships to postdictatorship and gender constructs. In the first chapter, I will briefly review the history of feminism in Latin America, examining the long-standing contention between theory and practice, as a means of understanding the tactical metafictional approach of the authors in this study. I continue with an overview of postdictatorial memory studies in Latin America, mainly through Idelber Avelar’s discussion of mourning literature and its ability to find a way

out of the hegemonic/counter-hegemonic bind. Avelar's theories, though useful for theorizing mourning that is productive (i.e., that works beyond the truth/fiction bind), neglect to fully interrogate the heteronormative structures and socially-constructed nature of gender and identity that provided the foundation for dictatorships to arise. Butler's work on gender performativity and precarity are necessary to fill in the gaps of Avelar's theory on mourning literature. Through two of Butler's later theoretical works, *Precarious Life* and *The Psychic Life of Power*, I establish points of contact with Avelar's work on postdictatorial memory. Specifically, her discussion of grievability (who can and cannot be mourned in the public arena) and her rereading of Freud's theory on mourning open up Avelar's conception of mourning, which draws heavily from Walter Benjamin, and introduce the social construction of identity and gender into the discussion of mourning. By putting these two conceptual strains into conversation, I have developed a theoretical framework that corresponds with the literary and socio-political thrust of the novels by Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit.

I begin the textual analyses with Valenzuela's *Cola de lagartija* (*The Lizard's Tail*), showing the ways in which this novel alternately condenses and expands time and space in a thinly-veiled critique of not only Argentina's military dictatorship, but also the cult of Peronism that preceded military rule. Valenzuela most clearly demonstrates the ways in which heteronormative power structures subtend Argentinean society overall (not just the discourses of "evil" dictators) and will produce a cycle of traumatic repetition if not addressed by the author, the author-narrators, and the readers. I choose to begin with *Cola* due to the novel's unflinching renderings of heteronormative masculine dominance and the devastating effects an imagined plenitude of Self can have on both the individual

and society. The second chapter examines a later text by Valenzuela, *Novela negra con argentinos* (*Black Novel (with Argentines)*), which picks up with the themes of dominance and plenitude considered in *Cola*. Unlike *Cola*, in which the male protagonist's fate serves as a lesson in failed subjectivity, *Novela negra* follows one male and one female Argentinean exile living in New York City through their particular and ultimately successful mourning processes. *Novela negra* expands Valenzuela's societal critique, recognizing the specificity of the Argentinean situation while also exploring the destructive qualities of imagined wholeness as they relate to romantic relationships and sexual orientation. Written during Valenzuela's self-exile from Argentina, *Novela negra* traces personal and social trauma, drawing implicit connections to issues of grievability regarding the *desaparecidos* in Argentina and AIDS victims in New York. Though both of Valenzuela's novels interrogate the perceived unity of male subjectivities, in *Novela negra*, the reader finds a clearer path out of destruction.

In chapter four, Valenzuela's metafictional techniques are contrasted with Lispector's novel, *A hora da estrela* (*The Hour of the Star*), whose male narrator consistently absorbs his female counterparts in misguided attempts to access Otherness. Lispector's male author-narrator serves as a stand-in for the heteronormative male voice, but only superficially. Her characters reflect a more intersectional approach to subjectivity in that race, class, and regional identity are significant markers of status alongside gender. At the same time, however, Lispector deploys such categories in order to reveal their unstable and socially-constructed nature. The running dialogue the author-narrator maintains with the reader adds metafictional layers to the central story of Macabéa, a poor girl from Northeastern Brazil living and working in Rio de Janeiro.

Throughout the novel, it becomes clear that the author-narrator's power over the text is directly related to his sense of subjective plenitude, and his final encounter with difference results in personal transformation, though not without social casualties.

In the final analytical chapter, Diamela Eltit's novel *Lumpérica* (*E. Luminata*) brings the focus of the study firmly back to the milieu of dictatorship while it continues with themes related to authorship and the negotiation of discourse. The most structurally diverse of the novels in this study, *Lumpérica* shifts focus to a central female character and takes a mixed genre approach to storytelling, incorporating aspects of dramatic performance, poetry, film, and novelistic writing. Foregrounding the constructedness of the text serves to mimic the constructed nature of discourse and to provoke even greater participation from the reader, who is forced to negotiate the elements of genre while simultaneously being asked to engage with the snippets of character and plot being delivered. Marked by Idelber Avelar as being one of his exemplar pieces of mourning literature, *Lumpérica*'s contribution to the project of postdictatorial memory has already been firmly situated in this new classification. The novel is essential to the present study, however, not only because of Eltit's long history of political activism and art, but also because of the key and understudied connections she makes between authoritarianism, gender, and representation. Thus, *Lumpérica* elucidates the major theoretical underpinnings of the intersections of gender performance and postdictatorial memory central to this study while pushing the representational and metafictional boundaries of the novel genre.

Though the last stronghold of military rule fell in Chile a quarter century ago, the negotiation of memory persists in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and across Latin America,

with “official” histories and counter testimonials declaring multiple, competing truths. It is urgent, therefore, that readers take heed of Luisa Valenzuela’s, Clarice Lispector’s, and Diamela Eltit’s reflections on the relationship between heteronormativity, dictatorship, and mourning as they negotiate a path out of such dichotomous binds. Perhaps more importantly is for readers to take up the authors’ challenges to accept the inherent precarity of the socially-constructed Self and recognize the absolute difference of the Other in order to mourn productively. Moving forward, the authors will show, often requires a doubling back to reread the discourses at play, to open up previously foreclosed narratives, and to evaluate the societal complicities that allow authoritarian power structures to reemerge. The popular reports’ refrains of *Nunca más/Nunca mais/No más* (Never again/Never again/No more) from protestors in opposition to the dictatorships in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile are what Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit also wish to achieve, and their novels rely on metafictional tactics to instruct their readers on how to detect and dismantle the oppressive rhetoric of either/or.

CHAPTER 1: MOURNING AND GENDER IN METAFICTIONAL NOVELS:

A TACTICAL APPROACH TO THEORIZING POWER

The current study brings together three major names in the study of Latin American women writers to consider how they view the relationship among mourning, authoritarian power, and gender in their works written during or in response to the military regimes in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile during the latter half of the twentieth century. Though Luisa Valenzuela, Clarice Lispector, and Diamela Eltit have all been studied for their works' contributions to the feminist project, their individual ties to the feminist movement and political action could not be more diverse. Lispector's work, lauded for its innovative language, emphasis on style, and treatment of female characters, has often been considered apolitical aside from its commentary on gender. Ironically, though celebrated by Hélène Cixous as the quintessential figure of *écriture féminine*, Lispector herself did not accept a feminist designation (Fitz, *Clarice* 23).³ As a precursor to second-wave feminism whose first works were published in the 1940s, Lispector maintained an uncomfortable relationship to the feminist label, despite being a self-declared "pioneer in women's journalism in Brazil" and studying law because she "was always concerned with attacking injustice," (qtd. in Lowe 174). The competing drive to

³ Cixous first began publishing on Lispector in 1979. See *L'heure de Clarice Lispector* for a bilingual collection of her first writings. See *Reading with Clarice Lispector* for a translated collection of her writings on Lispector from 1980-1985.

be a writer about social injustice and women's issues in Brazil versus the concern of being associated with a term that can be isolating (considered a writer *for* women), oppressive (given from the first world to the third), and overly theoretical (producing insufficient social change) is a struggle that continues to plague Latin American feminist studies.

Conversely, Diamela Eltit is well-known for her participation in the Chilean Women's Movement and political activism under the Pinochet dictatorship as one of the founding members of CADA (*Colectivo de Acciones de Arte*/Art Actions Collective). Active from 1979-85, the collective staged art actions in an effort to protest Pinochet and solidify art's role in social movements. CADA's open-ended slogan of "No +" (No more), an art action that was performed in late 1983 and 84, allowed for individuals to complete the slogan to correspond with their own varied demands for political and social reform. Documentary footage produced by CADA and scripted by Eltit in 1989—the year between the plebiscite's vote of "no" against Pinochet's reelection to the presidency and the transfer of power to democratically-elected Patricio Aylwin—draws the explicit connection between CADA's slogan and the Women's Movement, as women protestors chant "*No más porque somos más*" (No more because we are more; CADA). Eltit's early work as a performance artist, as well as her continued work in literature, art, and criticism, situates her as a feminist-activist.

On the spectrum of public political participation, Luisa Valenzuela lies somewhere between Lispector and Eltit, consistently engaging with issues of language, power, and sexuality in her work and, in the novels studied here, vocalizing internal dilemmas over the utility of her chosen position of writer-as-activist. Valenzuela was

politically active, though not necessarily on the front lines like Eltit: in an interview with Gwendolyn Díaz, Valenzuela makes clear that she “was active in finding asylum for people who were persecuted by the dictatorship” while living in New York from 1979-89 (101). The selection of texts from women authors with diverse experiences of dictatorship—one writing against dictatorship while living abroad (Valenzuela), one living and writing under dictatorship (Lispector), and one living under and actively protesting against dictatorship (Eltit)—will demonstrate that gendered narrative tactics extend across national boundaries and that gendered critiques of power can unite the work of women who have divergent relationships to both politics and feminism. Additionally, the selection of the texts included here work to broaden the classification of “mourning literature,” as identified by Idelber Avelar, to include works by authors who have varying degrees of personal connection to dictatorship and its victims but that are, nevertheless, engaged in the process of working through national traumas in particularly gendered terms.

Theory versus Praxis: The Challenges of Mediating Latin American Feminism

Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit’s range of personal statements regarding feminism and political action reflect both the development of women’s movements in Latin America and their tenuous connection to second wave feminism as a global project, which is nevertheless focused on and in the Western world. Historically, Latin American cultures have faced particularly difficult obstacles to overcome in the name of gender equality while, at the same time, remaining justifiably critical of U.S. and French models of feminism. Part of the project of second wave of feminism, from the 1960s through the beginning of the 1980s, was to recover women’s voices previously overshadowed by and

almost entirely erased from the canonical versions of literary history. This time period coincides not only with the major dictatorships considered here (and those across much of Latin America), but also with the boom period, during which many (mostly male) Latin American authors began to gain international attention and standing. Debra A. Castillo notes that, in Latin America, feminist critics worked to close the gap separating two formative figures of Latin American feminist writing: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, whose writings date from the late 1600s, and the contemporary author, Luisa Valenzuela (6). Castillo's statement stresses the longstanding exclusion of women's voices from the arena of Latin American letters, considering that both Valenzuela and Clarice Lispector were actively publishing during the boom, yet gained international regard well after the male authors, like Carlos Fuentes and Gabriel García Márquez, who dominated the boom period.

Castillo's mapping of the Latin American feminist project also reveals the specific challenges of motivating women's movements in a region where the colonial past combined with Catholicism and the cult of *machismo* creates major barriers to the tasks of self-recognition and agency in which feminist theorists are engaged. Castillo singles out the damaging effects of the woman author perhaps most widely read outside of Latin America, Isabel Allende, who she argues (and I would concur) is complicit in the replication of woman as a "natural, primordial, but containable and manageable element" through her formation of female characters in her novels (23). The masculine normalized universal is especially relevant to the study of Latin American feminism, for, as in the case with Allende, women often uphold and enforce the same structures that keep them consigned to the private sphere, represented as mothers and/or women with a strong sense

of *pudor*—a term that encompasses chastity, propriety, and shame in reference to sexuality. Popular Latin American novels written by women are replete with female characters who maintain the social order dictated by men. As Gloria Anzaldúa points out in her pioneering book on the Chicano/a consciousness, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, “Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them” (38). Stereotypically, in Latin American culture, it falls to the woman, as a nurturing mother figure with no sexual subjectivity of her own, to uphold the cultural values. Men, however, under the tenements of *machismo*, can transgress the boundaries of propriety by acting on their impulses with unbridled sexuality and violence. Though often challenged from within Latin American societies, these stereotypical formulations continue to manifest in the formation of subjectivities and social relations, to the detriment of all genders and orientations.

Scholars like Catharine A. MacKinnon have worked to reveal the routes by which such power structures become naturalized and reiterated by the culture at large, including the oppressed—in this case, women. As she states, “Speech theory does not disclose or even consider how to deal with power vanquishing powerlessness; it tends to transmute this into truth vanquishing falsehood, meaning what power wins becomes considered true” (*Only Words* 78).⁴ According to MacKinnon, all oppressive groups speak in order to blot out the voices of the oppressed, to reinforce their own rhetoric, and to maintain their dominant position. Couched in a language of domination and sent by those in power, these messages are rarely considered in terms of their oppressive projects.

Circulated by the oppressors and, eventually the oppressed as well, such messages are

⁴ MacKinnon is a U.S. feminist scholar whose works deal with legal vocabulary and issues of dominance through speech acts. For more on MacKinnon’s work on legal issues, including her controversial stance opposing pornography, see *Feminism Unmodified* (1987) and *Are Women Human?* (2006).

accepted as a verifiable truth. As Lucía Guerra Cunningham points out, “If one considers that writing is, in essence, an act of the imagination which results in a meaningful process of self-identification, one must say that women writers faced the paradoxical situation of adopting the already fictionalized images of women in order to fictionalize themselves”

(6). These fictionalized accounts of women (reproduced by both men and women), patterned after idealized types of femininity, require that women first dismantle the models by de-naturalizing and de-mythologizing the figure of Woman in order to reconstruct them as multi-dimensional figures with which they could identify.

Thus, while uncovering the systematic silencing of women, Latin American feminist criticism has also focused on the internalization of stereotypes that portray woman as idealized maternal, natural beings, which is a difficult task considering that the most visible women authors tend to reinscribe feminine norms, and, moreover, such reinscriptions are capitalized upon in the political arena. Social activism by women in Latin America has often been realized at the expense of women’s own advancement, most often due to their external and internal characterization as natural nurturers. This activism, though, has a long history—as Bell Gale Chevigny observes, political action on the part of Latin American women traces back to independence movements. While women were essential participants, they did not lead revolutionary groups or enter battle except to provide medical care, a role that emphasized their function as nurturer even during their wartime participation (140). When their participation in political events was no longer needed (when the struggle was over, when their demands were met or merely noticed), Latin American women have historically returned to the household, at times in

complicity, at other times in duress, instead of remaining visible participants in the political arena.

A significant part of the Latin American feminist project has been to frustrate the concepts outlined by Chevigny and others that suggest little-to-no political participation by women in the history of the region. Though Chevigny describes one trend in Latin American women's social activism, June E. Hahner and Francesca Gargallo in their respective works have provided exceptional cases as well as pointed to countertrends in women's public participation. Hahner has collected texts written by influential female voices from the colonial period to the twentieth century revolutions. Her study—though it brings to prominence figures like the Incan Micaela Bastides Puyucahua, advisor to José Gabriel Túpac Amaru during the indigenous uprising of 1780, and the prominent Cuban revolutionary and subsequent leader of the Federation of Cuban Women, Vilma Espín—also demonstrates that to be a rebellious voice in Latin America often necessitated an elite education or a family connection (Bastides Puyucahua, for instance, was Túpac Amaru II's wife). The indigenous voices that resound throughout history are either equally exceptional, such as the diary of Carolina Maria de Jesús, the black, literate woman living in the favelas of São Paulo who published her diary, *Quarto de despejo* (published as *Child of the Dark* in English), in 1963, or come in the form of testimonials (a genre that will be problematized later in this chapter) translated through and arranged by other, usually male, voices. Though not entirely unproblematic, Hahner's text provides a counterpoint to the conception that Latin American women, as a homogenous group, have been forced out of the political arena during times of peace, especially

because “peacetime” for many of the women included in Hahner’s work continued to include oppression and poverty.

In a similar vein, Francesca Gargallo’s concise article on the various forms of feminism in Latin America functions to dispel the notion that Latin American women’s movements were entirely influenced by their United States and European counterparts. Like Hahner, Gargallo points to demands for equal rights from the early 1900s in Mexico, Colombia, and Ecuador. In Brazil as early as the 1880s, women’s organizations were publishing feminist material, such as the newspaper, *A familia [sic]* (77). A strong claim against the theoretical influence on Latin American women’s movements comes from Gargallo’s underscoring of Rosario Castellanos’s 1950 thesis entitled *Sobre cultura femenina (About Feminine Culture)*, which “explored whether women who create culture exist” and suggested that women should write outside of the molds assigned to them (78).⁵ Well before widespread discussion of gender in second wave feminism and independent of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), Castellanos marked a conscious theoretical consideration of women’s place in Latin American society.

Just as Gargallo’s article underlines the multiple feminisms in Latin America, Victoria González and Karen Kampwirth highlight political involvement by Latin American women from the left and the lesser-studied right of political ideologies. Their collection of essays serves to both de-homogenize women’s movements across Latin America and de-binarize an us/them political dichotomy within feminist studies. As they explain, the common discourse concerning the divide between left- and right-wing women is formulated thusly: “For if ‘our women’ fight for values like truth, justice, and

⁵ Raúl Fonet-Betancourt also points to Castellanos’s thesis as a defining moment in what he calls the “*relación difícil*” (difficult relationship) between women and the field of philosophy (83).

motherhood, then ‘those’ women must favor something else or have been manipulated by male politicians” (324). Such a logic oversimplifies difference and leads to the disregard of a large portion of women who identify with right-wing politics of their own accord and are, in turn, suppressed by the very movements that should be working toward their equality. The authors argue for coalition building across race, class, and political ideology in Latin American feminism and recognize that certain issues are central to both sides. González and Kampwirth note that the most obvious link among Latin American feminist movements across national borders and political parties, for better or for worse, is the mobilization of women as mothers. As proof of the unifying theme of motherhood, Elsa M. Chaney notes that the First Inter-American Congress of Women held in 1923 articulated the women’s movement as *maternidad social* (social motherhood; 21).

While it may be a unifying theme and one that may have eased the early stigma of political participation for women, the persistence of maternalism within Latin American feminism continues to hinder women’s full political participation for and on behalf of themselves (and, of course, clearly problematizes the involvement of women who are not or cannot be mothers). Women in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile achieved complete suffrage in 1934, 1947, and 1949, respectively, but their political participation has been inextricably linked to motherhood well into the latter half of the twentieth century. Chaney finds that “the female public official often is forced to legitimize her role as that of a mother in the large ‘house’ of the municipality or even the nation, a kind of *supermadre*” (5).⁶ The *supermadre* figure is doubtless most recognizable in the life and

⁶ Chaney’s work, of course, was published well before the recent wave of female presidents in the countries studied here: Michelle Bachelet (Chile: 2006-2010, 2014-), Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (Argentina: 2007-15), and Dilma Rousseff (Brazil: 2011-). Chaney’s work does, however, set the scene for the preceding political period during which all three authors studied here were writing.

work of Eva Perón. Looked to as a powerful female figure, the wife of Argentinean President Juan Perón highlights women's reliance on motherhood as their only means for social change as well as Latin American society's unwillingness to accept them in any other mode. Donna J. Guy describes how feminism in Argentina was eventually subsumed under the Peronist mythology, linking all of Eva's and other feminists' work to programs for child welfare (157)—an absorption Eva herself helped to promote, stating “I so truly feel myself the mother of my people” (qtd. in Chaney 21). The strategic essentialism inherent in the *supermadre* figure, though providing a means through which to enter political discussion, has proved difficult to overcome in public discourse where the essentialized woman is ultimately reinforced over any political advancements achieved.⁷

The problematic reliance on the essentialized woman as mother/nurturer in Latin American women's political activism is related to one of the major divisions in the international feminist community—the critique from many first-world feminists that, in Latin America (and the third world in general), the intense focus on activism overwhelms theoretical concerns and often contributes to the reinscription of suppressive categories. Historically, the social issues and political instability of Latin American countries obligated women and feminist thinkers to place political and social change above theoretical concerns in the development of the feminist project, causing a divide between

⁷ I refer here to the feminist postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak's coining of the term in 1984 to describe the act of taking on an essentialist category by choice as an activist maneuver toward some political gain (i.e., to fight for Brazilian women's rights, one must first choose to inhabit the categories of “Brazilian” and “woman” even while acknowledging that neither category exists as a universal descriptive). Spivak later distanced herself from the term, if not the concept, for, as she states in a 1993 interview, “my notion just simply became the union ticket for essentialism. As to what is meant by strategy, no one wondered about that” (35). For her original interview on strategic essentialism, see Spivak and Grosz. For her comments on discarding the term, see Danius, Jonssen, and Spivak.

first world and third world feminists along the lines of theory/practice. Speaking of the obstacles facing Latin American feminism, Castillo argues that Latin American women do not have the same luxuries as European bourgeois critics in developing theories of domination, for they must deal with the concrete issues of political revolution and the possibility of “disappearing” as a result of their intellectual writings (qtd. in Castro-Klarén, *Narrativa* 363). Moreover, while French and U.S. models have imparted theories and possibilities for social change,⁸ at the same time, these movements originally excluded conceptions of race, class, sexual orientation, etc., from their models of feminism, in turn, excluding Latin American women.

The praxis v. theory divide and issues of intersectionality and difference were on full display at the International Women’s Year Tribunal in Mexico City in 1975. The proceedings, organized by the United Nations, brought together women from across the globe to discuss women’s advancement. Domitila Barrios de Chungara, the Bolivian wife of a mine worker and secretary of the working-class rights organization, Housewives Committee, was among the participants. As a leading figure in a women’s organization that fought to improve the wages and working conditions of their husbands under the repressive regime of General Hugo Banzer Suárez, Barrios de Chungara spoke out about the lack of knowledge about and concern for the lived experiences of indigenous, working-class women, who have little time or resources to commit to sexual liberation

⁸ Naomi Schor delineates French and U.S. feminism by explaining that French feminists, having uncovered the false neutrality of the masculine universal, attempt to dispel it; however, they still believe in universalism, though they feel there is a divergent female universalism. U.S. theorists, on the other hand, use the falseness of the male universal as justification for destroying all universals. Both strains of feminist theory, though, have historically ignored their own limitations with reference to race, class, and sexual orientation (9).

and gender equality.⁹ Furthermore, María Luisa Femenías points out that Latin American feminists cannot realistically look toward postcolonial feminism either. For Femenías, difference poses an obstacle even within postcolonial feminist movements, which propose to operate on the basis of ethnic difference but are dominated by English-speaking postcolonial theorists unfamiliar with the diversity among postcolonial nations beyond the context of former English colonies (131). The lack of diversity consciousness in European and U.S. feminist criticism raised by these and other critics has, in part, instigated the divide in feminist practices that relegates Latin American women to the practical/political side of feminist action.¹⁰

While Latin American feminist criticism has challenged mainstream feminist approaches for replacing a white male universal with a white female version, many critics and theorists have also held up the charge of “too political” as a valuable aspect of the Latin American approach. Sara Castro-Klarén, for one, defends the political siding of Latin American feminist criticism by critiquing mainstream feminism for being centered only on the conceptual issues of domination “over the infinite modalities of being *a woman in the world*” (*Narrativa* 17). Castillo tempers this argument by suggesting that perhaps it is more genuinely “Latin American” to move from praxis to theory, as revolutionary acts have always held more weight and authenticity in the region—a fact one can intuit by reviewing Latin America’s turbulent political past (32). Furthermore, Castillo states, “In Latin America, pure theory, like pure blood, has lost most of its

⁹ Barrios de Chungara later published a *testimonio* of her experiences, *Si me permiten hablar...*, translated as *Let Me Speak!*

¹⁰ Amy K. Kaminsky notes also that formulations of feminist institutions exasperate the political/theoretical divide even within Latin American feminist criticism—U.S. Latin American scholars generally find employment in the humanities, while scholars working in Latin America usually work in the social sciences (*Reading* 9).

metaphorical and rhetorical appeal as a political instrument” (34). Though she recognizes this unique tenet of Latin American feminism based in the region’s ethnic and cultural backgrounds, Castillo also realizes the need for theory building in order to better analyze Latin American literary texts and achieve greater literary and critical significance on an international level.

Castillo’s identification of strategies, or tactics, in women’s writing is appealing, for it allows critics to account for the multiplicity of voices that surface in Latin American discourses, imbued as they are with varied national, cultural, ethnic, and class differences. Deborah Shaw has praised Castillo’s schematic for the possibilities of particularity-in-unity that it provides: “Multivocality is a useful theoretical concept as it allows for dissonance and for harmonies. Patterns may emerge as writers are engaging with specific social and historical realities from a variety of subject positions” (qtd. in Dore 170). Chicano/a literary critic, Tey Diana Rebolledo has also recognized the advantages of Castillo’s feminist schematic for Latin American literature and acknowledged that, due to Castillo’s theory construction, Chicana writers have a place in this model, constituting a part of what she deems “the Third World continuum.” Rebolledo notes that Castillo’s work “frames a theoretical basis of support for the practice of eclectic criticism,” which reflects the complicated, evolving nature of Latin American voices while also safeguarding the discipline from trends in literary criticism that can force studies into obsolescence (2-3). Castillo’s approach of analyzing texts through common strategies, then, allows her to include a variety of voices and emphasize the practical, revolutionary nature of Latin American feminist writing while also moving toward an integrated theory. The current project analyzes the metafictional approach as a

tactic employed by Luisa Valenzuela, Clarice Lispector, and Diamela Eltit to interrogate the patriarchal and repressive systems of their individual countries in ways that foreground gendered constructs. By adding the metafictional approach to the tactics identified by Castillo (silence, appropriation, cultivation of superficiality, negation, marginality, and the subjunctive mood), it is possible to expose in these authors' works a push toward reading and writing as politically-motivated acts while also highlighting their contributions to theories on gender and postdictatorial memory.

Significantly, Castillo does not completely disregard French and U.S. feminist theories, noting their influence on Latin American writers. Instead, she suggests a more selective approach, in which only those theories that are relevant to a given text are applied. Castillo acknowledges that Latin American feminist criticism is indebted to international models, but also suggests that theorists look inward for ways to grapple with feminist issues that are more suited to Latin America. This process of combining mainstream and regional elements to work towards a more cohesive and less exclusionary set of feminist theory resonates with Ella Shohat's discussion of the relevance of multiculturalist/transnationalist feminism to current academic practices. As she maintains, "I am not interested in having clear and neat categorization of spaces allocated to each specific region. I am more concerned with investigating the multichronotopic links in the hopes of creating an intellectual dialogue that bypasses the institutional scenario of feminist/queer studies versus area studies." Shohat favors what she calls "a kaleidoscope framework of communities-in-relation," in which feminist practices can be traced across national and regional boundaries without reducing them to a universal conception of feminism and "without ever suggesting that their positionings are identical" (69). In this

way, Shohat distinguishes between relationality and relativism, affirming that her framework involves viewing multiculturalist/transnationalist feminism as it is “situated historically as a set of contested practices, mediated by conflictual discourses, which themselves have repercussions and reverberations in the world” (71).

To mediate division within Latin American feminism and among international feminist theories, the present study draws from Castillo’s focus on tactics to analyze the metafictional approaches that bridge theory and praxis in the works studied here. Combined with the relationality described by Shohat’s multiculturalist/transnationalist feminism, my attention to metafictional strategies allows for a comparative approach to Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit’s work that neither reduces the authors’ work and socio-historical contexts down to a singular Latin American voice of the oppressed nor forecloses the possibility of gaining insight into the authors’ shared narrative tactics. Throughout my readings of novels by Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit, I examine the metafictional tactics the authors employ at various historical moments in their relationships to the military regimes of the Southern Cone—tactics that allow the authors to interrogate, to remember, and to mourn both the social trauma of dictatorships and the gendered structures of oppression that produce, support, and outlast the regimes.

Mourning and Memory: A Literary Approach to Social Trauma

Due to their familiarization with living under gendered repression, women seem well-suited to the task of writing about the social trauma of oppressive military dictatorships. As Patricia J. Mills points out, trying to *name* women’s experience has always been central to the feminist movement, with the difficulty of expressing domination being known in the 1960s as “the problem with no name.” Through the

struggle to represent that which had been so repressed, women experienced an awakening (aptly described by Kate Chopin's 1899 novel of the same title), or a remembering: "Along with the new practice of naming one's experience for oneself, the traces of memory reformed through naming created feminist theories of domination and liberation" (Mills 132). Likewise, the abundance of cultural production appearing in the wake of the decline of the Latin American dictatorships has given rise to an equally rich field of cultural and literary criticism with the goal of examining and evaluating attempts to recount and to represent the unrepresentable, or *nombrar lo innombrable* (to name the unnamable) as Fernando Reati deems it in the title of his 1992 study. Idelber Avelar gives an account of the shifting trends in Latin American scholarship on postdictatorial cultural production, citing that many critics had left behind literary texts for the genre of *testimonio* or indigenous, artisan, or media arts. Avelar makes the argument that, in addition to the critics' claims that such media are more culturally impactful and less elitist/intellectual than literary genres, the turn to *testimonio* in particular can be described as "reacting against the privileged position enjoyed by that trend of modern Latin American literature known as the boom" (24). Major critics in the field of Latin American postdictatorial memory, including Nelly Richard, Beatriz Sarlo, Alberto Moreiras, and Avelar himself, have raised issue with the overreliance on *testimonio* as the focus of memory studies even as they attest to the genre's value.

Since the transitions to democracy (a concept that Avelar also problematizes), the Southern Cone countries plagued by military regimes have enacted various forms of

institutionalized forgetting through amnesties and pardons.¹¹ Amy K. Kaminsky plainly explains the effects of such public forgiving: “Amnesty is, of course, quite literally the opposite of memory” (*After Exile* 21). Thus, testimonials, necessary and useful in terms of the juridical process, were concerned with stating the facts—often in sustained, gruesome detail—of torture, captivity, and murder. Alberto Moreiras adds that, during Central American civil wars and the “quasi-genocidal practices” of their militaries as well as the Southern Cone dictatorships, *testimonios* provided an avenue for expressing solidarity abroad—a necessity that, having declined over time, seems inversely proportional to academic interest concerning the genre (213). Moreiras, Avelar, and Chilean critic Nelly Richard trouble the resistant qualities attributed to such texts by revealing them to be participatory in the selfsame discourse they wish to contest. Richard, who works mainly in the Chilean context, explains that this testimonial type of artistic production was becoming “*movilizado por la izquierda tradicional buscaba sobre todo vengarse de la ofensa dictatorial tramando—en su simétrico reverso—una épica de la resistencia que fuera el negativo de la toma oficial*” (“mobilized by the traditional left was seeking, above all, to take revenge for the dictatorial offense, plotting—in its symmetric reverse—an epic of the resistance that would be the negative of the official take”). Richard deems this work “*heróico y monumental*” (“heroic and monumental”) but recognizes the restrictive binaries created by such production: us/them, good/bad,

¹¹ Avelar, drawing on the work of Willy Thayer, interrogates the very notion of a transition to democracy in *The Untimely Present*, pointing out that the “return of democracy in itself does not imply a *transit* to any place other than the one where the dictatorship left off. ‘Transition to democracy’ meant nothing but the juridical-electoral legitimation of the successful transition carried out under the military, that is, the ultimate equation between political freedom for people and economic freedom for capital, as if the former depended on the latter, or as if the latter had somehow been hampered by the generals” (59). For more on Thayer’s discussion of the “transition” see his *El fragmento repetido* (The Repeated Fragment).

truth/fiction, etc. (*Insubordinación* 16/*Insubordination* 4).¹² Moreiras similarly warns that testimonial criticism “might end up becoming [...] a tool for imperial representational self-knowledge in the place where it was supposed to be its very opposite” (216).

Moreiras’s caution here suggests the Gramscian concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony in public discourse.¹³ As both Moreiras’s and Gayatri Spivak’s discussion of the subaltern suggests, though, to participate against is, nevertheless, to be implicated in the same hegemonic forces that a movement, a discourse, a text wishes to dismantle.

In line with Spivak’s discussion of hegemonic discourse, Moreiras, Richard, and Avelar examine texts that do not ascribe to a strict remember/forget logic. Instead, Richard notes the new “*obras que no quisieron atender la mera contingencia figurativa del ‘No’ sin a la vez traspasar su reclamo a todo régimen de discursividad que había convertido la rigidez dicotómica del sí/no en un nuevo reducto carcelario*” (“works that refused to attend to the merely figurative contingency of the ‘NO’ without simultaneously critiquing the entire discursive regime responsible for transforming the dogmatic rigidity of ‘YES’ versus ‘NO’ into a new imprisoning paradigm”; *Insubordinación* 16-17/*Insubordination* 5).¹⁴ The problematizing of simple divisions are crucial to postdictatorial texts that interrogate the discourses and circumstances surrounding oppressive dictatorships instead of engaging in a rhetoric of competing truths. In order to

¹² Where possible, I have included official, published translations of material followed by the page number of the original-language publication and their translated versions. When unable to obtain printed translations, the following translation is my own and only the page number of the original text is included in the citation.

¹³ Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* contain his theoretical writings, including his development of the concept of hegemony.

¹⁴ Here, Richard is also alluding to Chile’s 1988 Plebiscite during which the yes/no decision was “yes” to ten more years of Pinochet or “no” in favor of replacing Pinochet with an elected president.

move beyond the binary of hegemonic/counter-hegemonic discourses, Richard maintains, “Remembering is much more than evoking a prior event: it is an elaborative knot that conjugates residues of historical signification with ongoing narratives” (*Cultural Residues* 44). By employing their varied metafictional tactics, I argue that Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit create works that fall under the constructions described by Richard, as they bring to light multiple truths in the consideration of the relationship between dictatorship, gender, and narrative. Their use of multiple-genre frames, narrator-authors, character-writers, and intradiegetic discussions on discourse foregrounds competing narratives within their novels and, thus, destabilizes the competing postdictatorial discourses they examine without ascribing themselves to a singular hegemonic version.

Avelar’s work on postdictatorial literature provides a guiding framework for my readings of Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit, based on his conception of mourning literature, which ultimately provides a point of intersection with gender theory. Similar to Richard’s “residues,” Avelar points to cultural production that refuses to engage in the various dialectical structures available as literature that is working through or mourning. The literature he studies from Argentina, Brazil, and Chile is what he calls “untimely”—it is a mourning literature that searches for the ruins of the past and their breakthroughs into the present. Most notably for Avelar, whose work is greatly informed by Walter Benjamin, mourning literature is structured by the primacy of allegory. Allegory is acutely tailored to postdictatorial Southern Cone literature due to its anachronistic qualities (which Avelar contrasts to the immediacy/inseparability of the symbol): “The impossibility of representing the totality is one of the sources of allegory, because allegory is a trope that thrives on breaks and discontinuities, as opposed to the

unfractured wholeness presupposed by the symbol” (*Untimely* 11). An allegory serves to represent the abstract through the concrete and is, thus, never completely aligned to that which it strives to represent. An allegory gestures toward its referent without ever being able to name it completely. The “impossibility of representing the totality” is ever-present in the postdictatorial literature Avelar studies, in which authors attempt to come to terms with—to mourn—national identities, lost loved ones, and the atrocities of torture under dictatorship. In mourning literature, unlike the straightforward *testimonios*, the authors and characters recognize that they must move outside of binarized or reactionary discourses in order to work through the shared social and intensely personal traumas of Latin American state violence and oppression. Avelar sees in the process of writing/reading the postdictatorial literature he studies the same necessary processes of working through that result from trauma (21). Richard echoes Avelar’s critique of *testimonio*, extolling cultural production that is able to “*introducir una distancia entre el punto fijo (muerto) de lo ya sido y una memoria-sujeto (en proceso y movimiento)*. (introduce a distance between the fixed (dead) point of what has already been and a memory-subject (in process and movement)). This distinction is crucial to mourning and memory because the desired form of cultural production “*hace que el pasado deje de ser mera revelación de lo sucedido y pase a ser entendimiento crítico*” (“makes it so the past stops being the mere *revelation of what happened* and comes to be *critical understanding*”) (“Introducción” 13). The untimeliness or anachronicity of mourning produces the allegorically untimely fiction that Avelar analyzes and that I contend the authors’ works studied here represent in their considerations of power and its relationship to gender.

Part of the transformational quality of Avelar's untimely texts lies in their ability to resist contestations of singular, unified truths. Because the traumatic event is never fully representable, mourning literature, unlike *testimonios*, must suspend verisimilitude, foregrounding Otherness (69-70). The strict dichotomies presented by non-allegorical testimonial literary and critical texts risk falling away into a totalizing, all-encompassing "alternative logic" of the tyrannical forces within (and outside of) the text. For Avelar, the immanence of allegory naturalizes the history of tyranny in the novel so that neither the characters nor the readers can counter or think outside such a logic (74-5). The effect is a confrontation with Otherness. These novels do not succeed in naming the unnamable, for the "immanence of defeat" that comes with all allegory, which is always gesturing backward into the past and never fully representing its referent, maintains an outside world separate from the novel. Within the diegetic space of the novel, the totalizing effect of allegory will not allow for verisimilitude to enter, thus not allowing the reader to cover up the Otherness of this world, forcing the reader to remain in mourning (74). The metafictional approach of Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit, it will be shown, successfully achieves the distancing effect that Avelar requires of mourning literature, but do so in ways that force the reader to recognize loss as an essential component to subjectivity, and they achieve this recognition through their focus on gender.

Mourning with Gender in Mind: Postdictatorial Memory and Butlerian Theory

Avelar and the other Latin Americanist critics/theorists studied here find much of *testimonio* to be locked into a static bind with the official narratives and enforced forgetting of the South American military regimes, and they see an alternate route of transformation through texts that do not rely on an either/or discourse, but rather

consistently engage with Otherness as a means of working through/working toward a more complex understanding of power and loss. In her theoretical work on these same subjects, *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler seeks to resolve the seeming impasse of resistance among the discursive theories of Michel Foucault and the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.¹⁵ As a point of departure, Butler considers the subject in terms of Foucault's discourse and Louis Althusser's interpellation,¹⁶ recognizing the Otherness that is a constitutive necessity of subject formation. Butler emphasizes that the debates surrounding the subject and agency misunderstand the temporality of power, believing it to exist before the subject as part of its "becoming" or after as what the subject enacts, in the sense of "wielding" (14). For Butler, relations of power are necessarily concurrent with the condition of subjection, which carries with it the dual meaning of "becoming" and "submission." Foucault and Althusser posit that subject formation is dependent on social interaction as well as a psychic component—there must be a psychological imperative for Althusser's individual to turn to the policeman's call, for example—and, according to Butler, this necessitates a psychoanalytic explanation.

To become subject(ed) requires a fragmentation of the Self as one comes into contact with the Other, a recognition in Hegelian terms, in which the subject must face a loss of imagined wholeness. Inasmuch as one must continuously repeat this moment of formation, for, as Butler notes, a resistant object "is better than no object at all," one is

¹⁵ Freud's conception of the division of the psyche which Butler will critique can be found in his *The Ego and the Id*, while Lacan's *Écrits* are useful for understanding his extensions and reformulations of Freudian psychoanalysis.

¹⁶ For Foucault's foundational theories on power and sexuality, see his *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, volume 1 in particular. For more on Althusser's discussion of interpellation, see his "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*.

complicit in and desiring of subjection (61). Through her discussion of the desiring of subjection (as the moment in which one is both socially recognized and subjugated), Butler seeks to bridge Foucault's and Freud's conceptions of subjection that seem to forestall agency by explaining subjection as "the peculiar turning of a subject against itself that takes place in acts of self-reproach, conscience, and melancholia that work in tandem with processes of social regulation" (17-8). As Peggy Phelan notes, psychoanalysis makes evident that the continued, repetitious experience of loss is central to the formation of the subject from birth. She conjectures, "Prior to recognizing the specific content of an affective grief, perhaps the human subject is born ready to mourn" (5). Butler reads this readiness to mourn as a form of primary melancholia in which the original "passionate attachment" to one's parents battles with the desire to project autonomous subjectivity, thus precluding any acknowledgment of and fostering humiliation for one's primary dependent, vulnerable condition (6). Noting Freud's own imprecision and reconsideration on a clear divide between mourning and melancholia throughout his career, Butler situates melancholia as a defining characteristic of the subject (particularly the sexualized subject) and, through a reconceptualization of conscience, concludes that melancholia is less a failed opposing process and more of a facilitator to mourning.

In interrogating the concepts of interpellation (Althusser) and discursive productivity (Foucault) in the formation of subjectivity, Butler distinguishes the trope of turning that describes the internal form power takes in psychic descriptions of subject formation (2-3). She notes that the regulation of the subject in Nietzsche's theory of "bad

conscience” is expressed as a “turning *on* oneself” (3).¹⁷ In psychoanalysis, conscience is generally considered the internalization of external regulation, the result of punishment drawn in from the outside world that installs regulatory practices in the subject’s psyche. As Butler reveals, though, the individual is pre-disposed to turning on itself—to submitting to subjection before conscience has had cause to form. The trope of turning in the formation of the psyche, Butler contends, is a result of the foreclosure of the primary “passionate attachment,” always already lost as the precondition of social existence. The melancholia that results from this foreclosure precedes any formation of the ego and, as Butler argues, is the process through which the landscape of the psyche is formed. As Butler explains:

the attachment to the object that is understood in melancholia to be redirected toward the ego undergoes a fundamental transformation in the course of its redirection. Not only is the attachment said to go from love to hate as it moves from the object to the ego, but the ego itself is produced as a *psychic object*; in fact, the very articulation of this psychic space, sometimes figured as “internal,” depends on this melancholic turn. (168)

In Butler’s reading of Freud, then, melancholia as the unrepresentable loss and structuring principle of the psyche is completely distinct from the concept of mourning, for which melancholia provides the geographical language the ego requires to work through the loss of a person, object, or ideal.

Avelar, in his consideration of allegory and representing the unrepresentable, makes use of the Freudian concepts of mourning and melancholia through his reading of

¹⁷ See Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals* for further reading on his explanation of “bad conscience.”

Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's work in psychoanalysis, maintaining a difference between introjection as successful mourning (and that process in which his literature of mourning engages) and incorporation as unsuccessful melancholia, which results in the development of an "intrapsychic tomb" and the loss of part of the Self within the psyche (8). While I accept Avelar's categorization and description of "literature of mourning," I find Butler's redescription of mourning v. melancholia similar to but more beneficial than Avelar's for the study of works written under and concerning dictatorship, due to the social and gendered concerns that her reading brings to light. Avelar reads Abraham and Torok's discussion of melancholia as incorporation in which melancholia is a reactionary dialogue that functions to keep the lost object hidden, repressed (8). In Butler's model, melancholic responses are not utterly antisocial and, as will be explained in the next section, exist in a context specifically related to gender and sexuality. In fact, she points to the "indirect and circuitous" speech employed by the melancholic as evidence of her claim that melancholia is the result of an object being excluded from what is acceptable for a subject who wishes to remain as such, to maintain social existence (186).

For the present study of Latin American literature, I propose that Avelar's reading of literature of mourning would be enhanced by Butler's melancholia, especially as it relates to grievability. Though written in response to the United States' experience of 9/11 and the resulting "war on terror," much of Butler's *Precarious Life* echoes the experience of Southern Cone military regimes, under which certain lives were considered ungrievable and, subsequently, unlivable and unreal. The explanation Butler provides for the social regulations that exclude individuals and entire populations from grievability, and necessarily from subjectivity, could be employed constructively to describe the eras

of repression, the trauma, and the institutionalized forgetting in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile: “The derealization of the ‘Other’ means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral” (33-4). Butler’s consideration of power and the relationality of the socio-political and psychic aspects of subjectivity provide a much-needed vocabulary for reading literary expression relating to dictatorship—a vocabulary that expands upon Avelar’s attempt to translate a psychic/antisocial discussion of melancholia into a socially interactive process.

Butler’s work is also crucial to the current project as it ties issues of social regulation and melancholia to gender performativity and heteronormativity. Butler’s deconstruction of gender began with her publication of *Gender Trouble* in 1990, in which she lays out her theory on the performativity of gender, now one of the driving critical frameworks behind women’s, gender, and sexuality studies. Working against identity politics, she held that masculine/feminine were fraught categories that communicated imaginary ideals to which subjects attempted to appeal by repetitively performing gender norms, imitations that could only ever fail to produce the effect of a unified subject.¹⁸ She extended and clarified her work on heteronormativity in *Bodies That Matter*, drawing from a Foucaultian conception of discursive power’s productivity, to investigate the ways in which the categorization of man/woman produces and regulates material bodies. In part, this text functioned as a corrective to charges that Butler was suggesting gender performances were conscious choices that could be easily changed. Instead, Butler has repeatedly attested that the performativity of gender and other identity categories is a socially imposed compulsion, which can be destabilized (though not easily transformed)

¹⁸ For a thoroughly researched overview of how identity politics functioned in the academy and in the specific context of Latin America from the 1960s-90s, see Hale.

by drag and other forms of parody that, by contrast, reveal the cracks in everyday iterations.

Mourning Metafictionally—Novel Tactics in Theorizing Gender and Power

Butler's work on the performativity of gender is particularly useful when considering Latin American cultures' histories of rigidly binarized gender norms. Moreover, as Butler's later works theorize the connection between social and psychic structures of power, adding to the theoretical frameworks developed by Avelar, Richard, and Moreiras for specifically Latin American contexts, Butler brings together gender and melancholia in a manner that reflects the metafictional strategies I analyze in Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit. Having determined the ways in which melancholia is a necessary condition for the formation of the subject because it describes the original foreclosure of a child's parental love and provides the spatial structure and vocabulary for the psyche and mourning, Butler inquires about the possibility of gender as a melancholic identification. Extending her previous work on homosexuality and the oedipal complex, Butler reveals that the incest taboo (considered one of the regulatory practices that enforce heterosexual identification) in fact already assumes the distinction and suppression of homosexual desires—that the oedipal conflict could not be carried out unless homosexuality was already forbidden.¹⁹ Butler explains that, for a girl to complete the Freudian oedipal phase positively, she must disavow her mother as an object of desire. Conversely, a boy must deny any identification with the mother in an act that determines his desire: "he wants the woman he would never be" (*Psychic* 137). In the

¹⁹ Gayle Rubin first discussed the ways in which the sex/gender system socially constructs and suppresses similarities and thus homosexuality, implementing the incest taboo as a reinforcement of heteronormativity in her essay "The Traffic in Women."

sense that gender and sexuality are based on a foreclosure of homosexual love, Butler characterizes the performance of gender as a melancholic act: “the performance allegorizes loss it cannot grieve, allegorizes the incorporative fantasy of melancholia whereby an object is phantasmatically taken in or on as a way of refusing to let it go. Gender itself might be understood in part as the ‘acting out’ of unresolved grief” (145-6). Butler’s reading of allegorical gender performance and heterosexual melancholia provides, then, a theoretical framework through which to approach the novels by Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit, which I argue draw on metafictional tactics to produce texts that seek the roots of authoritarian power and social trauma while simultaneously interrogating gendered binaries.

To study texts from relational yet distinct historical time periods and spaces, I invoke “a politically informed psychoanalytic feminism,” as laid out by Butler (*Precarious* 45) as well as the transnationalist feminism prescribed by Shohat. Keeping in mind Castillo’s emphasis on tactics, one can begin to mediate the divide between praxis/theory that has plagued Latin American feminist scholarship. As I have shown, Butler’s scholarship adds valuable gender to and furthers the social dimensions of the work done by Avelar, Richard, and Moreiras while aligning with their theories on the structure of power, hegemonic discourses, and allegory. I draw selectively from these theorists to build a framework that dialogues with the issues of power, memory, and gender present in the transformative fiction of Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit. In this study, I argue that the metafictional approach employed by these authors directly connect rigid distinctions of gender and sexuality to the socio-political situations in their respective nations. Through the allegorical interrogation of such structures of power, the

authors seek to destabilize male/female and hetero/homo binaries while working through the social and psychic trauma of military dictatorships.

CHAPTER 2: REVISING THE DISCOURSE, REWORKING THE MYTH:

GENDER, PLENITUDE, AND THE OTHER IN *COLA DE LAGARTIJA*

Luisa Valenzuela's body of written work is extensive, and her relationship to her home country of Argentina is one that has been influenced greatly by experiences both within and outside of its borders. Born in Buenos Aires in 1938 to a well-to-do mother whose literary connections brought Valenzuela into contact with Argentina's most influential writers of the day (including Jorge Luis Borges and Ernesto Sabato, among others), Luisa Valenzuela began working as a journalist in her late teens and traveled extensively throughout Europe, Latin America, and the United States. Valenzuela's literary endeavors received recognition early in her career as well as, most notably, the Fulbright she received at the University of Iowa, resulting in the publication of her second novel, *El gato eficaz* (The Efficient Cat), in 1972. In 1974, Valenzuela returned to Buenos Aires, where she remained until 1979. During the Argentinean military dictatorship lasting from 1976 to 1983, Valenzuela inhabited both the position of the writer under oppression and that of the expatriate writer. It is no doubt because of this dual position that Valenzuela has ardently denounced the concept of two Argentinean literatures—one written by those who left and another, more authentic literature produced by those who stayed (Díaz 101). In fact, Valenzuela has often spoken of the need to leave Argentina for New York in 1979 to “preserve” her memory and of her return to Buenos Aires a decade later in terms of maintaining it (Gass and Cuoco 94). The two novels studied in this and the following chapter effectively bookend Valenzuela's period of

expatriation and, as a result, offer a distinct perspective on the military regime and Argentinean society at large that epitomize Beatriz Sarlo's veneration of literature that "*siempre piensa desde afuera de la experiencia, como si los humanos pudieran apoderarse de la pesadilla y no sólo padecerlo*" (always thinks *from outside* the experience, as if people could take control of the nightmare and not only endure it; 166).

Valenzuela's fourth novel, *Cola de lagartija* (1983), is integral to the study of postdictatorial memory for its unusual narrative structure, choice of protagonists, and fusion of history and myth. Written during her stay in New York and first published in Buenos Aires in the same year that saw the official conclusion of the military regime as well as the formation of the *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons/CONADEP), *Cola* digs much deeper into Argentina's history than a simple consideration of state terrorism and its most recent incarnation of authoritarian rule. Characteristic of Valenzuela's work, her novel constitutes a broad consideration of the circumstances that produced the 1976 military coup and fostered the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (National Reorganization Process). The novel considers not only those that led the military dictatorship, but also factors of influence and/or complacency extending from the Church, the cult-like atmosphere surrounding Peronism and Eva Perón in particular, the left-wing guerrilla fighter-activists, the rural poor, and the intellectual community (including the author herself). As D. Emily Hicks has noted, "Valenzuela alone presents us with the possibility that we ourselves have given birth to the monster of fascism, and her proof of paternity consists in the traces we repress" (80). Thus, *Cola* aims to investigate possible answers to the question of how such repressive regimes come to and remain in power without

leaving the author or reader to fall prey to a facile separation of us/them, good/evil. In an interview with Magdalena García Pinto shortly before the release of *Cola* in Argentina, Valenzuela divulged her concerns about how such a comprehensive critique would be received in her home country, describing the novel in the following manner: “*es un libro muy político, muy feroz, muy crítico de todos, de todo el mundo, de la derecha, de la izquierda, del medio, de los peronistas, de mí misma*” (it is a very political, very vicious book, very critical of everything, of everyone, of the Left, of the Right, of the center, of the Peronists, of myself; 235). The very aspects of Valenzuela’s novel that can make it an uncomfortable read especially for the Argentinean reader—the ways in which it leaves no group or individual out of the formula for oppression even as it recognizes the extreme trauma carried out by the dictatorship—are the same aspects that make *Cola* a prime example of Avelar’s mourning literature. Valenzuela’s text consistently engages the competing discourses at work in the allegorical space of *Cola*’s Argentina and reveals the gaps in each, even her own.

As an example of mourning literature, then, *Cola* brings together the issues of memory/forgetting, good/bad, dictator/oppressed in unique ways. As an example of feminist mourning literature, *Cola* directly connects such false dichotomies to man/woman, father/mother, hetero/homo, thereby demonstrating a clear correlation between gender, sexuality, and the language of domination. Valenzuela’s personal statements about feminism have generally maintained an arm’s-length positioning, but she has consistently supported the advancement of women’s movements abroad and at home. She demonstrates her affinity to the feminist spirit, but is cautious about strict terminology: “I think of myself as somebody who is a born feminist but doesn’t like

any *isms*. I don't want to be obliged to anything. I hate labels" (qtd. in Lee and Bilbija).²⁰ While her appraisal of feminism may involve some hedging, Valenzuela's literary output is consistently analyzed in terms of its feminist components. A chapter dedicated to Valenzuela's short story, "*Cambio de armas*," in Castillo's *Talking Back* touts Valenzuela's fiction "as a refusal of the traditional restrictions and the customary censorship of feminine *pudor* and ladylike *recato* (prudence, coyness)" concerned with "taking back from men the right to use all words, including the precise and functional words for the woman's body" (99).²¹ As a postmodernist, post-boom writer who often deals with the oppressiveness of gender constructs, Valenzuela's work is typically read only in terms of its ability to deconstruct, decenter, and psychoanalyze, leaving the reader with an assemblage of empty signifiers and the task of drawing his/her own conclusions.²² In *Cola*, Valenzuela does layer meaning through structure, dialogue, and symbolism; however, by integrating her critiques on power, mythology, and gender, Valenzuela produces a text that instructs its reader to accept the precarity of the Self in order to avoid destruction of the Self and the Other.

²⁰ Valenzuela's comments during the Writer in Politics conference in 1992, for instance, show her gratitude to international women's movements for bringing the "oppressive possibilities of language" to light—a central aspect of her work, as this study and many others show. Similarly, she speaks of the *Madres* as allies working toward the goal of not forgetting the state terrorism in Argentina (qtd. in Gass and Cuoco 91-3).

²¹ Valenzuela's own statements about the "fascination with the disgusting" or "*regodeo en el asco*" that she believes unites Latin American women's writing ("Phallus" 243-4) supports Castillo's reading by suggesting that one must accept all language, including the grotesque, in order to articulate anything at all.

²² See Shaw and Perricone for examples of such readings.

(Re)visionary History: A Metafictional Form for an All-inclusive Critique

Luisa Valenzuela's interest in alluding to while transcending the boundaries of conventional genre, an aspect of her work that adds to her feminist credibility by demonstrating her attempts to explode the master narrative from within, takes on a particularly historical bent in *Cola*. The novel's *roman à clef* elements are impossible to ignore, yet the common intentions for drawing on the genre—to remain an anonymous participator, to avoid self-incrimination or scandal, to rewrite historical events in a manner more palatable to the author—are all incongruous with the novel's actual development. Firstly, the most metafictional move made by the author is that “Luisa Valenzuela”²³ is directly inserted into the narrative as both the first-person narrator of the majority of the novel's second section—one who signs her own name to the text—and as the character Rulitos (Curly Lady) in the final section. Similarly, the historical figures included in *Cola* are thinly veiled at best and, as a result, would not provide much defense if recourse for libel was a concern. El Brujo (the Sorcerer), the name of one of the novel's major protagonists, was in fact a widely used nickname for José López Rega, the Minister of Social Welfare from 1973-1975 who rose to power on the coattails of Juan Perón and was the orchestrator of the infamous *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina* (Argentine Anti-communist Alliance), or the *Triple A*, a secret organization involved in the disappearance of persons. Juan Perón and his second and third wives, Eva and Isabel, are known throughout the novel as Generalisísimo, la Muerta (the Dead Woman), and la Intrusa (the Intruder), respectively, though they are not live characters within the text

²³ I will use quotation marks when referring to the fictional narrator of the text who is constructed as a representation of the author herself. Luisa Valenzuela sans quotation marks will refer to the author, who, in actuality, has written the entire novel.

(Eva/la Muerta's body, however, is part of the textual universe and integral in el Brujo's plot). The señor Presidente (Mr. President) heard from in the "Capital Día" (Capital Day) sections is undoubtedly General Jorge Videla, one of the leaders of the military coup that deposed Isabel Perón and instituted the *Proceso*. Though never referred to by name, he is positioned as el Brujo's adversary in the present tense of the text, which points to the true innovation of *Cola*.

While the historical figures are easily identifiable, the landscape and chronology that Valenzuela creates for Argentinean history is only partly so. The direct rivalry in which Valenzuela places el Brujo and señor Presidente is a compression of the mid-twentieth-century timeline. López Rega was forced out of his post as Minister of Social Welfare in July of 1975, reassigned as ambassador to Spain, and had fled Argentina by the time military junta and Videla came to power. As much as Valenzuela condenses the history of events, she conversely expands the setting of the novel to include the Amazon jungle in Brazil, the capital city of Buenos Aires, the fictional rural town of Capavari, and the mystical lagoon and *Tacurú* (anthill) castle el Brujo usually inhabits. Unlike a standard *roman à clef*, however, the fictional events that Valenzuela writes into her fictionalized time and place do not serve to rewrite the larger historical landscape in a way that eliminates the censorship, violence, and corruption that plagued Argentina in the 70s and 80s. El Brujo still tortures, airplanes still dispose of the bodies of the *desaparecidos*, Videla still maintains power, intellectuals and political dissidents still must communicate in code for fear of retaliation. The question remains, then, why invoke the features of the *roman à clef* genre if not to avoid unwanted recognition or to put forth a revised version of historical events for public consideration?

The answer rests with Valenzuela's goal of comprehensive societal critique, which a happier ending to an Argentinean horror story cannot invite. El Brujo, expounding on his reasons for dealing in the cocaine industry explains that the drug is "*Ideal para los que sólo buscan la euforia y el olvido y se niegan a volver la mirada para adentro*" ("Ideal for those who seek euphoria and refuse to look inward"; 71/57). This critique from the mouth of el Brujo on euphoria and oblivion seekers ("*olvido*" as forgetting or oblivion is notably left out of Rabassa's English translation) can serve to illuminate Valenzuela's choice of a novel that is at once representative of a recognizable, modern Argentina while also being removed from specificities and facts of its history. In his chapter on "Memory and Forgetting" from *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson explained that nationalism emerged first in the Americas and involved a radical break with/forgetting of the past relationship with the colonizers. In second- and third-generation nationalists, there existed a tension between the simultaneous "reverse ventriloquism," or memory on behalf of, the revolutionaries and a blurring over, or forgetting, of the internal divisions that arose in the long history of any given nation (200). As he explains, "All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives" (204). Not only the linear narrative of history, but the novel as well was integral in the formation of an imagined community that resulted in the new conception of a unified nationhood.

In Argentina, a country that was confronted by, and in many ways continues to face, a crisis of consciousness, a radical break with the perpetrator of violence was not possible, as the nation continues on, unchanged in terms of who was to be considered

effectively “Argentinean.” Valenzuela, though, works to counteract the drive toward the “amnesias” that Anderson views as inevitable in the formation of national identity. Instead, Valenzuela positions her novel so that it spans the divide between fiction and reality, not to cover over the cracks in the divided Argentinean society and thus create a tidy picture of the healing nation, as the multiple laws and pardons passed under the democratic leadership of Presidents Raúl Alfonsín and Carlos Menem attempted to do.²⁴ Perhaps because of the immediacy of the traumatic history (Valenzuela began work on *Cola* in 1981, two years before the official conclusion of the military regime), but additionally due to the desire to “*mantener viva esa memoria del dolor para que no se vuelva a repetir, o intentar que no se vuelva a repetir*” (keep alive that memory of pain so that it is not repeated, or to try to keep it from being repeated; 232), the fictional aspects of *Cola* open up spaces in the retelling of history in which to consider neither what factually occurred nor who specifically was to blame, but how to keep such terror and tragedy from recurring. Thus, for Valenzuela as for Avelar, Richard, and Sarlo, the task is situated outside the memory/forgetting divide where the focus shifts to the manner of remembering that will produce effective change and comprehension of past atrocities.

A crucial factor for comprehension of the Argentinean circumstance as highlighted by Valenzuela in *Cola* is the requisite analysis of the numerous perspectives and discourses competing to become the final word on history. Valenzuela’s text shifts from multiple-perspective first-person narration, interspersed with omniscient third-

²⁴ Alfonsín passed the *Ley del Punto Final* (Full Stop Law) in 1986, which put an end to any further investigation or prosecution of crimes committed during the *Proceso*, and the *Ley de Obediencia Debida* (Due Obedience Law) in 1986, which exonerated subordinate officers during the *Proceso* from prosecution on the basis that they were merely carrying out orders. Menem handed down a series of political pardons in 1989 and 1990 to officers of the *Proceso* who had been tried for their crimes, including General Videla.

person accounts, unassigned dialogues, fictional newspaper articles, and “Luisa Valenzuela’s” letter addressed to the reader. The varied narrative styles serve to highlight the constructedness of the account the reader is receiving and suggest a structure that is itself representative of mourning literature. Sarlo has described the “*giro subjetivo*” (“subjective turn”) within the disciplines of sociology and history, which “*han devuelto la confianza a esa primera persona que narra su vida (privada, pública, afectiva, política), para conservar el recuerdo o para reparar una identidad lastimada*” (have regained trust in that first person that narrates his/her life (private, public, affective, political) in order to preserve the memory or to repair a wounded identity; 22). Sarlo is, of course, critical of the sole reliance on such first-person narrative accounts in the same way that Avelar and Richard warn of their tendency to construct a false dichotomy of hegemonic/counter-hegemonic discourses. As Stephen Hart notes, however, the first-person narrative of *Cola* forces the audience into some level of intimacy with el Brujo and “deconstructs the paradigm whereby political matters are meant to be treated in solemn, historical, objective prose” (88). Furthermore, the reader is forced to confront el Brujo as an individual with a personal, albeit narcissistic, version of events, thus demythologizing the figure of villain. The competing viewpoints of his subordinate/submissive, la Garza (the Egret), and “Luisa Valenzuela,” who, it will be shown, is not offered up as the voice of reason, but as another subject struggling with her own ability to effect change in society, work with and against el Brujo and the other voices in the novel to construct the social reality of the text and counteract the conception that any single voice could capture the complexity of historical events as traumatic as those described in *Cola* and, by extrapolation, Argentina’s history. Through the interplay

of these first-person narratives, the key issues of failure of recognition and the struggle against mythology will arise.

Foreclosed Desire, Split Psyche, and Gendered Violence: El Brujo's Myth of Unity

While the competing discourses in the text may seem endless, the events of *Cola* are structured in a tripartite format in which el Brujo's life and voice open the first section, "*el uno*" ("the one"). From the beginning of the novel, the reader learns of the unusual circumstances surrounding el Brujo's birth, childhood, and present physical condition. It quickly becomes clear that el Brujo's existence has been constituted of gendered violence, physical (both bodily and spatial) Otherness, and a psychic turn toward solipsism that will eventually lead to his demise. Of his birth, el Brujo explains, "*Dicen que mi madre gritó el doble al nacer yo y después se murió para siempre: no le quedaba otra cosa por hacer en este mundo*" ("They say my mother gave a double shriek when I was born and then died forever: there was nothing left for her to do in this world"; 14/4).²⁵ Never having known his father, the young Brujo is then taken in by Don Ciriaco and Doña Rosa to be raised with their six children in a primordial lagoon setting. As a child, he then witnesses Doña Rosa's rape at the hands of policemen who are searching for a guerrilla fighter. After intently watching her rape and seeing the policemen leave, el Brujo explained that he "*soñaba que volvían esos caranchos. Era un sueño excitante*" ("dreamed those vultures were coming back. It was an exciting dream"; 46/33). Hence from a young age, el Brujo had unwittingly enacted and mistakenly viewed violence against women that he later remembers as fitting and even desirable.

²⁵ Aside from the nickname and interest in sorcery, this is another characteristic the fictional and historical persons share: José López Rega's mother also died while giving birth to him, though in the capital of Buenos Aires, not the mystical jungle setting of *Cola*. For more on the life of the historical "Brujo," see his biography by Larraquy.

The reactions toward gendered violence that he narrates to the reader, though, cannot be assessed without recognition of his original Othered position. Born a virtual orphan on the outskirts of society, it is to this liminal space that el Brujo returns to construct his *tacurú* castle. Though surrounded as a child by others who were physically and mentally deformed—Doña Rosa’s daughter, Seisdedos (Sixfingers), and Eulogio, “*el opa*” (“the idiot”)—el Brujo was Othered by them for his own physical deformity, the fact that he has “*tres pelotas*” (“three balls”; 16/5). Having experienced such a traumatic Othering, el Brujo visits his teacher to ask about his deformity, and in the scene that follows the now third-person narrator alludes to homoerotic assault on the part of the teacher, who also dresses el Brujo in feminine clothing for the “*bautizo*” of Estrella and el Brujo’s “*casamiento*” to what he now considers his twin sister situated between his two testicles (“baptism”/“marriage”; 27/15-6). The reader no doubt recognizes the compounding of shame and sexual abuse; however, the story is related neither from the initial childhood perspective nor from the perspective of an adult who has worked through his trauma. Instead, el Brujo still expresses anger at the idea of Eulogio’s possible existence: “*El Eulogio supo mi secreto y por eso mismo ya debe—debería—haber muerto*” (“Eulogio knew and for that reason he must already be—should be—dead”; 53/39). At the same time, el Brujo has reclassified his Otherness as exceptionality, learning the power of sorcery in Brazil and continuing to plot with/for el señor Presidente’s government even though he has been cast out of the capital.

In the novel’s present, el Brujo conceives of himself as complete, divine, and destined to attain near immortal power. While his third testicle, Estrella, is central to his delusional plans of grandeur, it would be misguided to think of him in his own solipsistic

terms. For one, it is important to recognize that he is deeply engaged in his own mythmaking. The reader learns that his words are set forth because, according to him: “*mi vida y por lo tanto mi diario constituyen una gran novela. La novela. La Biblia.*” (“My life and therefore my diary combine to form a great novel. *The* novel. The Bible”; 55/41). Believing that his story must be told, el Brujo is constructing his autobiography, and the conscientious reader of Valenzuela’s work recognizes that el Brujo’s story is a carefully honed narrative that serves to increase his mystique and power.

Based upon the information divulged in that self-narrative, many critics have deemed el Brujo as Juanamaría Cordones-Cook does: the “perfect hermaphrodite” (89).²⁶ In Cordones-Cook’s terms, to be a “perfect hermaphrodite” appears to mean that the individual is biologically equal parts man and woman, which does feed into el Brujo’s self-conception of wholeness, but neglects the fact that el Brujo, for most of the novel, remains *el Brujo*. He is gendered masculine through language by society and himself, and his dominant, destructive patriarchal discourse reinforces such a classification. His overwhelming disdain for women is a recurring theme: “*¿Mujeres? ¿para qué quiero mujeres? Yo vengo con mujer incorporado, soy completo. No tengo por qué andar buscándome en espejos*” (“Women? What do I need women for? [...] I come with a built-in woman, I’m complete. I’ve got no reason to go looking for myself in mirrors”; 36/24). Moreover, even as he discusses his Estrella-sister-testicle, he maintains their separateness. Estrella is part *of him*, completely surrounded by male genitalia, subordinated to el Brujo’s *logos* in which her pain or sadness is related through “*blancas, doloridas lágrimas*”—i.e., male ejaculation (“white, painful tears”; 32/22). His frequent

²⁶ See also Romo (155).

linguistic slips also serve to reinforce the interpretation that el Brujo does not view himself as a perfect fusion of male and female, but as a separate male entity: his boasting about the people he permits to visit his secluded *tacurú* castle begins with “*Vienen a consultarme,*” which he immediately revises to, “*Vienen a consultarnos, a mi hermana y a mí*” (“They come to consult me”; “They come to consult us, my sister and me”; 14/4). Thus, even as he takes pride in his own perceived completeness, he continues to reject any personal association with the feminine, maintaining paradoxically that he is both whole and the discrete possessor of an internal female Other.²⁷

Through his statements of wholeness, el Brujo is ostensibly rejecting the social origins of identity as Judith Butler theorizes them: “Subjection exploits the desire for existence, where existence is always conferred from elsewhere, it marks a primary vulnerability to the Other in order to be” (*Psychic* 20). Sharon Magnarelli suggests that el Brujo has “eliminated desire” by incorporating the female Other (139), but, as I have shown above, el Brujo’s incorporation of the female is in no way a seamless blending of gender and biology. El Brujo, perhaps subconsciously, continues to respond to the desire for existence through the Other by writing his autobiography (for his novel/diary/Bible serves no purpose without a reader) and by persistently amassing servants and subordinates. What is more, his group of underlings is almost completely female. He keeps a group of concubines on which he performs scientific experiments aimed at sterilizing them and from which he receives sexual favors. The Machi, “*la madre, la*

²⁷ The paradoxical oneness and separateness also references Christianity’s Holy Trinity in which Father, Son, and Holy Ghost exist as simultaneously unified and distinct beings. Valenzuela’s novel also includes depictions of corruption in the Church, though her religious critique is outside the scope of this paper. It is important to note, though, that el Brujo’s holy trinity introduces a representation of womanhood with Estrella into a religious concept that is wholly masculine.

maestra, la bruja” (“the mother, the teacher, the witch”) is an ancient woman who is relegated to the depths of his caves until el Brujo wishes to brag of his plans and accomplishments (76/61). When the Machi does not respond to el Brujo with the desired praise and submission, el Brujo has her murdered and made into a soup that he ingests, exhibiting literal responses of the classic melancholic incorporation. The former military man who becomes el Brujo’s closest assistant is a eunuch given the linguistically feminine title la Garza and is unable to perform the penetrative sexual acts el Brujo asks of him. Thus surrounded by female/feminized Others, el Brujo responds with violence, medical, physical, and sexual—acts reminiscent of López Rega’s *Triple A* and those carried out during the *Proceso*, but with explicit gendered overtones unconnected to any real conception of political dissidence.

Leticia Romo suggests that the narrative purpose for el Brujo’s characterization as a power-hungry sexual deviant is so the reader can “contrast the aberrant sexual life led by ‘El Brujo’ with the loving sexual affair between Navoni and Valenzuela-character throughout the novel” (154). While it is true that *Cola* will develop an extended association between el Brujo and the other first-person narrator, “Luisa Valenzuela,” to suggest that el Brujo is used as a vehicle through which to condemn non-heteronormative relationships skews the argument Valenzuela makes about gendered discourse and relationality in this novel and the rest of her work. I will demonstrate below that “Luisa” is neither completely contrasted with el Brujo nor is her relationship with Navoni a stand-in for the romantic ideal.²⁸ The sadistic characteristics of el Brujo’s interactions with his

²⁸ Additionally, in the following chapter on *Novela negra con argentinos*, it becomes obvious that non-heteronormative sex acts are not indiscriminately condemned by the author.

invited Others is best understood as a result of his inability to accept the vulnerability of his body and his subjectivity.

According to Butler's and Jessica Benjamin's readings of Hegel, an individual acquires subjectivity only through the relationship with the Other—identity is based on the contrary drive to claim independence and the need for recognition.²⁹ In her study of sadomasochism in literary texts, Benjamin conceptualizes sadomasochism as the social dramatization of the psychic drives to assert (dominant) and surrender (submissive). The S/M relationship centers not on the obvious acts of physical pain, but on the pleasure of witnessing the dominant's control, the will to resist annihilating the submissive. The constant tension that usually plays out in the psyche is then mapped onto two separate beings, but these manifestations threaten to dissolve into complete omnipotence on the part of the dominant and complete absence, which is to say dehumanization and death, on the part of the submissive. As Benjamin explains:

The master's denial of the other's subjectivity leaves him faced with isolation as the only alternative to being engulfed by the dehumanized other. In either case, the master is actually alone, because the person he is with is no person at all. And likewise, for her part, the slave fears that the master will abandon her to aloneness when he tires of being with someone who is not a person. (220)³⁰

²⁹ For the original discussion of the master/slave dialectic, see Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*.

³⁰ In her assignment of gendered pronouns, Benjamin is referring to the roles represented in the specific text she is studying, *The Story of O* by Pauline Réage, not permanently relegating the submissive role to female and dominant to male.

El Brujo's extreme proclivity toward gendered violence and dominance, then, as read through the psycho-social configuration of sadomasochism, serve to highlight his intense rejection of the Other's influence, and his urge to close himself off from society is exhibited in his physical space (the *tacurú* castle and, later, his pyramid covered in mirrors). His drive toward omnipotence is evident in his ultimate goal of self-insemination, seeing that he views himself as the "*la neurona padremadre*" ("fathermother neuron"; 79/65). His obsessive narcissism thus derives from an utter rejection of precariousness (in Butler's terms), and can be traced to his arrested development as a child.

Having caused the death of his mother upon his own entrance into the world and having never known his father—"Él, que fue su propio padre y destruyó su claustro" ("He, who was his own father and who destroyed his own cloister")—el Brujo seems never to have gone through the originary processes of desire and identification as described in Freud's psychoanalysis (38/26). His primal scene was, of course, the rape of his surrogate mother, and his identification has been transferred from an absent father, not to a surrogate father, but to himself. El Brujo does, however, express desire in the novel toward a single character that alludes both to his absent mother and the Argentinean obsession with the mother figure: Eva Perón.³¹ Early in the novel, in a section of free indirect speech, the suggestion is made, "*Quizás otra habría sido la historia de habérsela podido fornicar a la Muerta*" ("Maybe history would have been different had he known [the Spanish verb *fornicar* denotes "to have intercourse with"] the

³¹ Again, as Elia Geoffrey Kantaris notes, the gendered discourse in the text is explicitly connected to state terrorism (50). El Brujo refers to the triumvirate of women who have helped him achieve his power, by dominating their bodies and eliminating their political agency, as the "*Triple E*," for Estrella, Eva, and Estela, Isabel Perón's given name.

Dead Woman in her lifetime”; 37/25). La Muerta becomes central to his plan for self-insemination, as el Brujo amputates the finger from her corpse in order to garner mystical feminine power from it en route to his ultimate goal: “*tendré la esencia de la única mujer que importa para mí y Estrella recibirá los beneficios de una femineidad digital que le señalará el camino*” (“I shall have the essence of the only woman who matters to me, and Estrella will receive the benefits of a digital femininity that will show her the way” 105/86). El Brujo desires the severed finger from the corpse of la Muerta, a symbol that at once references the feminine, the phallus, physical Otherness in the sense that it connects him to Seisdedos, a problematic turn toward gendered reversal because it “*será el arado y me abrirá el surco*” (“will be the plow that will open the furrow for me”; 105/86), and his own mother who he was also unable to know in life. El Brujo, drawing from his range of experiences with failed and foreclosed identification and desire, invests in the mythology surrounding the historical figure of Eva Perón and, in turn, fetishizes her corpse’s finger as the key and catalyst that will (re)produce him as a complete being purged of the need for the Other.

Unraveling the Myth and Refusing Submission: “Luisa’s” Discursive Intrusion

El Brujo’s textual counterpart forcefully interrupts the text in the second section entitled “D*os.” As Linda Craig has suggested, the title speaks in at least two registers, possibly referring to the Spanish *díos* (god), in which case el Brujo is either the false or incomplete version, and/or the fact that two (*dos*) voices begin to compete in first-person narration with the arrival of “Luisa” (152-3). This narrator makes immediately clear the multiple levels of discourse at work in the text by explaining that she is writing a novel that is competing with el Brujo’s: “*Porque ahora sé que él también está escribiendo una*

novela que se superpone a ésta y es capaz de anularla” (“I know now that he, too, is writing a novel that superimposes itself on this one and is capable of nullifying it”). She has begun writing as a mission in social activism, vowing to “*intentar hacer algo, meter[se] en lo posible*” (“try to do something, become involved as much as possible”; 147/125). Instead of working against el Brujo, though, her own thoughts are being usurped by his web of mythology and her speech is beginning to merge with his.

Even though “Luisa” is aware of the facts of el Brujo’s life—that he was born in a specific, mappable place, *la Laguna Trym* (the Trym Lagoon)—she feels powerless against the discourses from el Brujo himself and from señor Presidente, who have transformed el Brujo’s location into “*el difuso e inhalable Reino de la Laguna Negra*” (“the diffuse and undiscoverable Kingdom of the Black Lagoon”; 147/125). Such mythologizing tactics both confer power on a figure that would be otherwise powerless and allow the current government to distract the public from the crimes being committed under the *Proceso*. All of the major voices of the novel seem to be aware of the discursive practices of the regime and the ways in which they conceal and construct a straw man that, in turn, invades the social subconscious, creating order out of misplaced fears. The government voices, though wary of el Brujo, recognize that his tactic of “*descubriendo enemigos hasta entre los ciudadanos más irreprochables*” (“discovering enemies even among the most irreproachable of citizens”) has influenced and sustains their own regime (57-8/43-4). For his part, el Brujo is aware of his influence expanding, stating, “*Cuando a uno lo toman por símbolo el tamaño de uno se vuelve inconmensurable*” (“When people take you for a symbol, your size becomes immeasurable”; 63/49). Both he and the capital intellectuals are aware of his positioning

as a government scapegoat, but all characters in the text seem to reinforce the myth, even those actively working against it.

Many critics have analyzed the contrast between the two major voices of the text, el Brujo's and "Luisa's," and have noted that her power lies more in that which she does not say. As Cynthia Margarita Tompkins states, "while the sorcerer's sections display a discourse that revolves around self-creation, self-sufficiency, and absolute power, Luisa Valenzuela's discourse is tentative, exploratory, and intent on reading between the lines" (61-2). While I agree that part of "Luisa's" agency stems from her decision at the conclusion of the second section to cease writing his biography in the hope that, without it, he will cease to exist, it is crucial to note that her abandonment of his biography is not a step towards forgetting as remedy. "Luisa's" actions leading up to this ultimate denunciation of el Brujo demonstrate that what her discursive move accomplishes involves the unraveling of myth and the recognition of one's supreme precarity in relation to Others.

Valenzuela, in examining her country's historical trajectory, which led to el Brujo's rise and the subsequent military regime's *Proceso*, places much of the blame with the general public's willingness to subscribe to the multiple mythologies of Peronism, motherhood, and magic. As was noted above, both el Brujo and the Peronists, known in the novel as "Pueblistas" (Peoplists), are deeply invested in the figure of Eva Perón, an icon that comes to represent the confluence of all three discourses Valenzuela and "Luisa" are working against. El Brujo has gone to great lengths to attain la Muerta's finger, and the Pueblistas organize to protect the "Santuario Secreto" ("Secret Sanctuary") where they worshipped la Muerta and left offerings to the woman they

describe as “*nuestra luz, nuestra guía. La Capitana. Una madre para todos nosotros*” (“our light, our guide. Our Lady Captain. A mother to all of us”; 115/95). The Pueblistas’ subplot highlights the fanaticism that historically surrounded Eva Perón’s life, death, and remains,³² and serves to tease out the connections that keep el Brujo from becoming an evil outsider archetype. Valenzuela shows that el Brujo and the Pueblistas share similar mythologies, which suggests that the circumstances for becoming el Brujo are already present in a large section of society. Through “Luisa’s” actions regarding el Brujo and superstition, then, Valenzuela demonstrates the steps each Argentinean must take in order to avoid repeating such patterns.

By beginning her section vowing to do something about el Brujo’s place of power in the novel and implicitly in historical discourse, “Luisa” suggests that her act of writing will counter el Brujo’s voice, but she soon strays from such a direct path. The result is that “Luisa” is able to wrench herself out of the simplistic good/bad, us/them discourse. She begins by acknowledging her relationship to el Brujo in terms of recognition, revealing through her other relationships that the government’s ability to alienate Argentineans from its public figures and from each other is one of its most damaging features. Without recognition of one’s social dependency and bodily precarity, it is easy to become a “*País de avestruces [...] negando los peligros*” (“a country of ostriches [...] denying any danger”). Instead, “Luisa” views el Brujo in relation to herself, noting “*una afinidad de voz*” (“an affinity in the voice”) when comparing their writing (148/126). By demonstrating that she is able to view el Brujo as a human being with a specific past

³² The novel includes references to the many bizarre historical events that took place after Eva Perón’s death, including embalment, plans to display her corpse in a public monument, and the loss and return of her body. For a historical account of these events and Eva Perón’s life, see Fraser and Navarro.

rather than a mystical figure of inestimable power, she also comes to view him as someone not completely unlike herself.

Aware, though, that her own voice is becoming increasingly impossible to differentiate from el Brujo's, that she is being subsumed by his discourse. "Luisa" comes to the conclusion that his power over her is directly connected to her own participation, however tangential, in the dark arts. She attends an Umbanda ceremony and there receives a warning to destroy the magical paraphernalia she has accumulated, "*Debes desprenderte, hija mía, de todo lo que signifique brujerías, y mira que tienes muchos cachivaches*" ("You have to break away from everything that means witchcraft, and see, my child, you have all kinds of knickknacks"; 159/137).³³ With the statement "*similia similibus curantur*" ("like cures like"; 159) and her destruction of an Eshú statue, which is associated with el Brujo and like him possesses a sort of genital deformity (a half-erect penis), "Luisa" suggests that to even minimally commit oneself to the notion that magic and superstition are factors of el Brujo's power is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

By destroying the artifacts that gave credence to el Brujo's mythology, "Luisa" supplies a cure not just for el Brujo, but for Argentina's cycle of dictatorship and state terrorism as well. Moreover, she critiques the ineffective counter-hegemonic approach to dictatorship through interactions with her occasional lover and member of the resistance,

³³ López Rega's involvement in sorcery was a reflection of his time period, when there was an explosion of interest in the dark arts in Argentina and Brazil. Cordones-Cook includes a detailed discussion of the religious hybridity taking place in Buenos Aires during the late 1960s and 70s and how they relate to *Cola*.

Alfredo Navoni, and the rejection of his tactics.³⁴ Navoni reaffirms the utility of her writing, but only serves to reiterate the false conception of us v. them by suggesting: “*al menos matalo al Brujo ¿eh, chiquita? Así nos sacamos ese fantasma de encima*” (“at least kill the witchdoc, eh girl? so we can get that ghost off our backs”; 212/187). “Luisa,” however, stands by the ineffectiveness of this conception—that killing him in fiction will not effect change in society, nor will it allow for a better understanding of what produced him. Again, she acknowledges that el Brujo is not a singularly evil being who, once eliminated, will bring back balance and peace to Argentina. She establishes that he is a product of competing discourses fueled by superstition and an extreme rejection of the precarity of his own subjecthood, and she recognizes that anyone has the capacity to become a Brujo type: “*Después de todo quizá le profese una cierta simpatía: es nuestra contracara, el lado oscuro de nuestra lucha*” (“Maybe I do feel a little sympathy for him, after all: he’s our reverse face, the dark side of our struggle”; 222-3/198). Even though “Luisa” has been able to assess critically the discourses that have spread the mythology of el Brujo and has recognized that his obsession with unity is effectively *el lado oscuro* of everyone’s psyche, she becomes less and less able to maintain her subjectivity due to both el Brujo’s dominance and her social isolation.

As el Brujo moves forward with his plan to inseminate Estrella and give birth to himself through the completion of a giant pyramid, fertility rituals, and multiple injections, “Luisa” finds herself to be submitting to his will, even proclaiming, “*Estoy*

³⁴ Catherine Perricone has charted the major characters in much of Valenzuela’s work, including *Cola*, but has not classified any of them as “Guerrilla Fighters” or “Non-violent Opponents” (88), yet Navoni (a character who appears in more than one of Valenzuela’s works) is a prime example of a Non-violent Opponent. “Luisa’s” rejection/questioning of Navoni’s discourse as one of resistance to the regime is central to separating Valenzuela’s novel as mourning literature from what would otherwise be a simply counter-hegemonic text.

tendida de ir a buscarlo personalmente el Brujo y ponerme a su servicio. Convertirme en su escritora fantasma” (“I’m tempted to go and look up the witchdoc in person and put myself at his service. Become his ghost writer”; 244/221). The drive to submit, to become the masochist to el Brujo’s sadist, stems from her distress over the inability to connect with Navoni. Navoni, with whom she was once in love, has become fixated on his various missions to the point that he is often rendered “*inaccesible*” (“inaccessible”; 155/133). Furthermore, when she is able to see him, they must operate under a system of codes and forced forgetting upon departure in order to maintain their safety: “*Ahora casi sin despedirnos, nos separamos, media vuelta y si te he visto no me acuerdo*” (“Now, almost without saying goodbye, we’ve parted, we turn, and if I saw you I don’t remember”; 156/134). Another connection, then, between el Brujo and his enemies arises: the fear of destruction, psychic and physical, unites them all as they become inaccessible to one another. The driving tension of subjectivity becomes impossible—“Luisa” and Navoni cannot face each other in recognition while el Brujo refuses to admit his dependency on the Other.

“Luisa,” fearing both complete submission to el Brujo and complete disconnection from Navoni and her fellow citizens closes the second section of the novel with another tactic highlighting the fictionality of the novel. “Luisa’s” decision to “*abandon[ar] de la pluma*” (“abandon the pen”) believing that “*Sin mi biografía es como si no tuvieras vida*” (“Without my biography, it will be as if you never had a life”; 250-1/227) is a radical narrative move that is one of the most often analyzed portions of the text. The most common reading of “Luisa’s” maneuver is that Valenzuela chooses to demonstrate the political agency of silence for women. Claudine Potvin, for example,

suggests, “If the words constitute weapons in the Sorcerer’s arsenal, the absence of language or the refusal of a certain discourse (the biography, for instance) represents also a powerful gun for the rebellious woman writer” (216). While the discussion of silence as a feminist tactic is constructive, it is essential to point out that, though this could be considered “Luisa’s” choice, it certainly is not Valenzuela’s, at least not entirely. The novel does not conclude with “Luisa’s” departure, and Luisa’s third-person formulation, Rulitos, emerges in the third part of the novel. In fact, it is her voice, in dialogue with a fellow intellectual-resister, that closes the novel. “Luisa’s” concluding letter includes in the second section, then, two main goals: to lessen el Brujo’s power through her silence and to provide the opportunity to reconnect with Navoni and receive information: “*quizá Navoni puede venir a mí sin correr ningún peligro y aportarme ese conocimiento al que no tengo acceso aquí y ahora*” (“maybe Alfredo Navoni will be able to come to me without running any risk and bring me the knowledge to which I have no access here and now” 250/227). While she believes that silence as a political act will affect el Brujo, she is also deeply concerned about her ability to maintain her subjectivity. Having recognized el Brujo’s discourse for what it is—a dominant’s drive toward perceived self-sufficiency that will lead to the utter objectification of all Others—and divested herself from it, “Luisa’s” final act is to cut herself out of an uneven dialogue and reenter society, to direct her voice at Others who will attempt to recognize it.

Severing the Thread: “Luisa’s” Tactics for El Brujo’s Failure

The third and final section of *Cola* focuses primarily on el Brujo’s preparations for his self-insemination, pregnancy, and the birth of his child/self. Even as el Brujo conducts feminizing rituals in order to become the “*hembra receptora*” (“receptive

female”; 280/254), his gender identification remains male. He summarizes his goal in terms of male domination and patriarchy “*Ahora seré mi propio hijo como una vez fui mi propio padre. Ya sin ayuda de mujer alguna, sin apoyo de potencias enemigas*” (“Now I shall be my own son, as once I was my own father. And without the help of any woman, without the support of hostile powers”; 283/257). From el Brujo’s viewpoint, the fear of the Other consistently reappears in his construction of enemies that are both political and gendered, which he must overcome by preserving masculinity and singularity. As he moves closer to the birth of his son, whom he calls “Yo” (“I”), el Brujo begins to hallucinate, seeing grotesque images of his past violent acts that he believes are mocking him, to which he responds again with melancholic incorporation in order to create a perfect, whole being. He explains, “*Por él tengo que aguantarlas y saborearlas, incorporarlas a mi sistema ya tan convulsionado. Yo debe ser aguerrido y temerario*” (“For him I must bear them and suck them in, incorporate them into my convulsed system. I himself must be warlike and fearless”; 289/263). The reader, however, never sees the embodiment of the militant masculine being that el Brujo wishes to reproduce. La Garza, returning from a mission for el Brujo, witnesses “*un estallido seco y un chorro granate*” (“a big bang and a crimson jet”; 305/279) springing from the top of el Brujo’s pyramid, and Rulitos along with her fellow intellectuals takes note of the thin thread of blood running through the capital. The conclusion of *Cola*, consequently, is ambiguous, and its final implications for Argentina have been interpreted in myriad ways. Based upon the readings of el Brujo and “Luisa” included here, though, the implication of an end to the cycle of repression seems possible if not probable.

Of the many critical readings of *Cola* and its conclusion in particular, the overwhelming majority consider it a bleak outlook for the future of Argentina. The “*hilo rojo*” (“red thread”; 307/279-80) seen by Rulitos is generally considered to be proof of el Brujo’s demise. Its relation to the prophecy that opens the novel, “*Correrá un río de sangre [...] y Vendrán Veinte Años De Paz*” (“A river of blood will flow [...] and Then Twenty Years of Peace Will Come”; 9/n.pag.), is what leads Rulitos’s companion to suggest, “*este hilo no puede ser el tan mentado río de sangre, porque entonces en lugar de veinte años nos tocarían apenas veinte minutitos de paz*” (“this little thread is certainly not the river of blood so often mentioned. If it were so, we would not get twenty years but under twenty *minutes* of peace” 308/280). This final statement is what leads most critics to read Valenzuela’s overarching theme as resignation to unstoppable cycles of violence and dictatorship—that after the unspeakable violence perpetrated under el Brujo’s rule and during his pregnancy attempt, all that will result is twenty minutes of peace before he is replaced by another dictator hungry for power and willing to seize it through violent repression.³⁵ Romo, recognizing the ambiguity of the novel’s conclusion provides multiple readings, including an uncommonly optimistic one: “The possible interpretation of the end as the death of ‘El Brujo’ would signify that no one can concentrate power absolutely or indefinitely; hence the hope for peace” (156). Taking Romo’s suggestion one step further, I assert that Valenzuela’s text ends, if not on an optimistic note, then an intentionally ambiguous one, for her “Luisa” has given the reader the tools with which to move beyond the fear of precarity and acknowledge that power structures similar to el Brujo’s always have the possibility of resurfacing.

³⁵ See Shaw and Cordones-Cook for two examples of such readings.

In an opening section entitled “*Advertencia*” (Warning), which is absent from the English translation, a conversation between two unnamed voices, one of them seeming to be the “Luisa” of the novel, discuss the implications of writing el Brujo’s story. While the second voice insists “*Eso no puede escribirse*” (That cannot be written) because it will be dangerous, is too recent, and is “*incomprensible*” (incomprehensible), the other voice, “Luisa’s,” insists that it will be written anyway. She affirms the need to take control of its writing in order to “*entender algo de todo este horror*” (understand something out of all this horror) and insists that el Brujo will be the protagonist because, “*Nuestra arma es la letra*” (Our weapon is the letter; 7). The opening warning reinforces Valenzuela’s message about dangerous discourses and mythologies that subtends the text at the same time that it establishes a distinct mourning position, in Avelar’s terms. Forgetting or not telling is not an option for “Luisa” because she recognizes that the story will be controlled and propagated anyway, but instead of working against, she chooses an approach that will reveal. Allowing el Brujo to speak will bring about the opportunity to understand him, to analyze him, and, ultimately, to bring about his downfall.

Returning to Romo’s reading of the conclusion, I agree that el Brujo’s death is the most logical reading of the novel’s end; however, perceiving merely “the hope for peace” neglects the discursive work Valenzuela and her second protagonist, “Luisa,” have done throughout the novel. “Luisa” rids herself of any magical remnants that made her an accomplice of el Brujo’s mythology, acknowledges that in competing with el Brujo’s narrative she was becoming his submissive, and used “*la letra*” (“the letter”) against him by focusing it elsewhere, by reforming connections with Others. Benjamin has explained that “Domination, for Freud, is inevitable since otherwise the death instinct, that primary

drive toward nothingness (complete loss of tension), would turn inward and destroy life itself” (221). There is no better explanation of el Brujo’s demise, and “Luisa” played an active part in engineering it by not allowing el Brujo to reify her, to make her into the ultimate submissive. Moreover, if the careful reader has paid attention to “Luisa’s” other interactions with sorcery and superstition, the “ *río de sangre*” (“river of blood”) of the prophecy is recognizable as part of the same discourse that fostered el Brujo and that would continue to foster authoritarian leaders if it were allowed to circulate. “Luisa’s” reaction to the red thread at the novel’s conclusion, in its humorous and sarcastic tone, suggests that she has ceased to wait for or believe in such a river: “*Con un poco de suerte ahora sale el presidente de la Casa de Gobierno, patina en el río de sangre, se rompe la crisma contra el cordón de la vereda y ¡oh gloria! Por fin sabremos de la paz*” (“With a little luck, the president will come out of Government House now, slip on the river of blood, crack his skull on the curb, and, oh glory! we’ll know peace at last”; 307/279).³⁶ Much more than a straightforward refusal to participate in the dominant discourse, “Luisa’s” actions as a competing narrator in the text reveal a commitment to understanding the varied constructions of historical events, to working against discourses that mythologize power, and to stressing the importance of the Other in the formation and preservation of the Self.

Conclusions: A Metafictional Plan for a New Reading of Dictatorship

“Luisa’s” acceptance of the precarity of her subjectivity and her bodily experience lies in stark contrast to el Brujo’s obsessive attempts to avoid and punish the Other and to

³⁶ Humor in Valenzuela’s works, including *Cola*, is an aspect that has not been given its proper attention in this study. See Dianne Niebylski for a study of humor as resistance in works by Latin American women, including a discussion of some of Valenzuela’s work. In connection to *Cola*, Magnarelli points out the double signification of “*río*,” which means both “river” and “I laugh” (165-6).

orchestrate a plan for ultimate plenitude of being. The double signification of the novel's title directly connects el Brujo's desire for completeness with his violent suppression of Others, in that *cola de lagartija* is literally the "lizard's tail," a reference which calls up both the ability of the animal to regrow a severed tail and the instrument of torture—a whip—that appears in the novel during moments of violent outburst from el Brujo. El Brujo, of course, also hopes to engineer an act of parthenogenesis in the novel, which the lizard is capable of doing as well. Within el Brujo's obsessive plans and dominant discourse, gender plays a central role: stemming from his childhood experiences of being abandoned and Othered, el Brujo's violence is directed toward female or feminized figures, and his parthenogenic exploits involve the rejection of a female Other in reproduction.³⁷ Even as he works to cut out the female and all Others from his subjectivity, el Brujo cannot resist the mythology of la Muerta any more than Argentinean society could resist the mythology of the Peróns and Eva in particular. It is at these prevalent mythologies of Eva/motherhood and good/evil that Valenzuela directs the force of her critique.

As the author has explained, "My literary quest is precisely to try to figure out how one can escape the cycle of power and domination. I think the only way to escape it is through a true reading of the situation, through understanding how one is dominated and how one may feel compelled to dominate" (Valenzuela qtd. in Díaz 105). *Cola de lagartija* provides an escape plan of sorts through its narrator-character "Luisa" and does so in a distinctly mournful manner. Valenzuela and her narrator counterpart assert that the story must be told, but the text reveals that the restatement of facts of Argentinean history

³⁷ Interestingly, in cases of lizard parthenogenesis, the offspring are entirely female. For more information on parthenogenesis in lizards and other animals, see Schön, Martens, and van Dijk.

and the state terrorism of the military dictatorship is insufficient to comprehend the matrices of power at work or to circumvent their repetition. Rather, Valenzuela's novel foregrounds its fictionality in order to reflect and dissect the fictions of gender, nation, and religion/mythology that assist in the production of historical figures like Eva Perón, José López Rega, General Jorge Videla, the guerrilla fighter, the expatriate writer, etc. Recognition and the precarious relationship between the Self and Other are at the heart of "Luisa's" escape plan and, in the next chapter, will reappear in her consideration of the exile's position in *Novela negra con argentinos*. Where Valenzuela works to humanize the source with el Brujo in *Cola*, her focus shifts to interrogating the effects of state terrorism and foreclosed mourning on the average Argentinean in *Novela negra*.

CHAPTER 3: DETECTING TRAUMA: REDRESSING MELANCHOLIA AND
MOURNING CREATIVELY IN *NOVELA NEGRA CON ARGENTINOS*

Where *Cola de lagartija* concerned itself with the causes of domination and violence, the second of Luisa Valenzuela's novels in this study takes as its area of examination the effects, often subconscious and misdirected, of repressive dictatorships and state terrorism. *Novela negra con argentinos* was first published in the United States in 1990, immediately following Valenzuela's return to Argentina after a decade spent in New York (1979-1989). The novel did not appear in print in Buenos Aires until the following year. Published after Argentina's reinstatement of democracy, *Novela negra* surfaces in current literary criticism as a purely psychoanalytic feminist text regarded as such for its formal interventions, attention to writing and the body, and considerations of the psychological aftermath of torture and totalitarian rule. After an unexpected and unexplainable outburst of violence, the novel's protagonists, Agustín and Roberta, live together, cross-dress, and meet a man dying from AIDS as they work through their personal relationships to the trauma that occurred under military dictatorship and consider their status as Argentinean self-exiles. It is my argument that this novel consciously brings together aspects of the 1990s New York queer culture and Argentinean exiles to emphasize parallels in the melancholic experiences of both groups. Judith Butler's theories concerning mourning and melancholia are useful in considering the relationality of the psychological manifestations of survivor's guilt and the legacy of

the *desaparecidos* for Argentines to that of AIDS and the queer community. Thus, Valenzuela's use of cross-dressing is more than a deconstructive approach to gender subversion resulting in female empowerment, counter to the many characterizations of *Novela negra* in current criticism. Instead, Valenzuela employs cross-dressing and allegory, relating to both Judith Butler's gender performativity and Idelber Avelar's conception of an untimely present, as methods for managing her characters' divergent experiences of melancholia and moving both of her protagonists to write mournfully.

A Detective Novel (for Argentines): Valenzuela's Formal Appropriation

Before considering the destabilizing work done by Valenzuela's metafictional tactics, it is crucial to place the novel in relation to its literary inheritances and interventions. Though translated literally to English as *Black Novel (with Argentines)*, Valenzuela's title points the reader more directly to the text's place in literary history—*Novela negra con argentinos* signals its correspondence to the *noir* genre (or detective fiction) and highlights that it will deal expressly with Argentines, *porteños* (from Buenos Aires). Debra A. Castillo defines the tactic of appropriation as the strategic use of concepts by “drawing attention to their traditional uses and connotations, in this manner estranging them from the commonplace and appropriating them for other, yet-to-be-defined usages” (101). In appropriating the structure of the detective novel, Valenzuela employs a tactical transformation of the traditional genre as a means for commenting on the unrepresentability and, ultimately, unknowability of the trauma of military dictatorship.

As is custom for the *noir* genre, Valenzuela's novel begins with both a crime and the hard-boiled facts: “*El hombre—unos 35 años, barba oscura—sale de un*

departamento, cierra con toda suavidad la puerta y se asegura de que no pueda ser abierto desde fuera. [...] El hombre, Agustín Palant, es argentino, escritor, y acaba de matar a una mujer” (“The man—thirty-fiveish, dark beard—comes out of an apartment, shuts the door carefully, checks that it can’t be opened from the outside. [...] The man, Agustín Palant—Argentine, a writer—has just killed a woman”; 3/9). Though this straightforward presentation of facts opens the novel, Laura R. Loustau discerns the beginning of a breakdown in genre conformity from the first pages. Already Valenzuela has begun to subvert the strictures of a *novela negra* in that the “whodunit” is not important—the reader and the protagonists (Agustín being one of them) know who committed the murder. Instead, the “why,” the motive for committing such an unexpected act of supreme dominance and violence, is the central question of the novel (104). Laura Mulvey’s connection between psychoanalysis’s foundational myth and film noir provides insight into Valenzuela’s plot construction:

So, what is specific about Oedipus, the crucial issue that separates him from the simple detective of the whodunit, is the theme of internal transformation which obliquely relates him to the modern, post-psychoanalytic, heroes-in-crisis of the *film noir*. The story he investigates is his own; he is the criminal in his detective story. The evidence and clues he compiles all pile up against him but also allow him to see his own history, to go through the process of recognition and understand the historical turning-points in his existence. (190)

During this process of self-recognition, though, Agustín is often resistant and occasionally self-sabotaging. Agustín enlists the help of Roberta, a fellow Argentinean and novelist, though he neglects to tell her the victim’s name (Edwina Irving) and leads

her to believe he has killed a man. His efforts to understand his motivation, to “*saberlo todo. Por qué pasó, por qué yo, todo*” (“know everything. Why it happened, why [him]. Everything”) are inextricably linked to Roberta (44/47). This twist in plot construction, moving from the culprit to the motive, grounds the novel in a quest for the roots of self-knowledge and gendered identity, as the perpetrator knows neither why he committed the act nor why he has recast his victim as male.

Critics like Loustau home in on Valenzuela’s transformation of the *noir genre* and utilize this formal appropriation as proof of the novel’s feminist deconstructive tendencies. Loustau claims that Roberta is established as the novel’s central “detective,” who takes on an active and masculine role in the face of Agustín’s passivity (102). This female intervention by both Roberta and Valenzuela, then, brings about the swift disappearance of *noir* characteristics (103). Loustau’s crude division of masculine/feminine roles in the text serves to uphold the binary that Valenzuela’s work so ardently rejects. While it is true that Roberta remarks about Agustín, “*él era el vulnerable, él, el desesperado*” (“he was the vulnerable one, he was in despair”), her simple alignment with a masculine power is undermined by the intense maternal response she has to Agustín: feeding him, bathing him, housing him (37/41). Though Roberta does take control of their search by urging Agustín to revisit his previous stops and gather information, her role is supportive: “*Podés contar conmigo, no sé cómo pero voy a tratar de ayudarte a averiguarlo*” (“You can count on me. I don’t know how, but I’ll try to help you find out”; 40/43). The fact that her first action “*no fue de indagación sino de ocultamiento*” (“was not one of interrogation but of concealment”) further contradicts her positioning as the central detective figure seeking power through knowledge and

evidence (40/44). Roberta removes Agustín's clothing, hides the murder weapon (a revolver) in her bathroom, and even thinks to take away his newspapers so as not to arouse suspicion at his absence. Her actions all suggest that there is a competing, imminent power also attempting to gather evidence about the crime. Roberta's role is not, as Loustau proposes, simply an empowered female character usurping man's control, but a complex figure of shifting gendered roles who, like (and partly because of) Agustín, never arrives at a full comprehension of the crime or motive.

Agustín's need for Roberta, who like him has moved to Manhattan to flee Argentina's military dictatorship, also highlights intersubjectivity as central to self-conception and broadens the scope of a simple detective novel to include social issues surrounding the specific group identifications of the Latin American diaspora. Judith Butler, in analyzing grief and desire, maintains that subjectivity necessitates Otherness as a condition for its existence and that gendered and sexual identities are never merely the possession of the subject but rather, "a way of being *for* another or *by virtue* of another" (*Precarious* 24). Thus, identities are at the same time possessions and disposessions such that Butler suggests developing new language for the process, as "relationality" does not sufficiently describe the elements of undoing present in the formation of the subject. Roberta and Agustín dramatize Butler's undone mode of relationality as they embark on a journey for knowledge throughout the novel that is relational to the point that their identities become enmeshed. With her thought, "*Yo soy vos y vos sos yo. ¿A quién hemos matado?*" ("I am you and you are me. Whom did we kill?"), Roberta reveals both her distance from the violent episode and a sense that she is somehow implicated in Agustín's act crime (48/51).

The sense of shared culpability for Agustín's act that surfaces in *Novela negra* is directly connected to the characters' shared sense of being Argentinean. Upon their first meeting at a writers' conference, Roberta comments, "*En el fondo de nuestra almita siempre seremos unos porteños timoratos*" ("Deep down in our little souls, we'll always be pusillanimous *porteños*"; 10/15). When Roberta suggests the possibility of fleeing after the murder, going back to Buenos Aires, Agustín states that he prefers just the one corpse in New York to all those in Argentina. Roberta counters that the Argentinean corpses are not his, to which Agustín replies "*Como si lo fueran. Todos somos responsables*" ("They might as well be. We're all responsible"; 78/78). In expanding the guilt to include Roberta and all Argentineans, the novel diverges from the detective genre's customarily tidy response to the "whodunit" question.

As Martha Barboza de Tesei points out, though, the history of the *novela negra* in Argentina is a long and varying one. The modern detective story is most associated with Edgar Allan Poe, whose mastery of the short story was approached by only a handful of writers, one of whom being Argentina's Jorge Luis Borges. Through Borges, the detective story was able to transcend the high/low culture divide. The genre became "*extraño*" or "*ajeno*" ("strange or alien") through Borges' use of foreign models, and Barboza de Tesei notes that other writers became increasingly concerned with adapting the detective story to the Argentinean setting, most often through parody. In the 1970s, she explains the transformation undergone by the genre: "*El crimen ya no es considerado en su individualidad, sino como consecuencia de una sociedad que genera individuos violentos y corruptos. Es la sociedad la que se convierte en la gran acusada*" (The crime is no longer considered in its individuality, but as consequence of a society that produces

violent and corrupt individuals. It is the society that becomes the great accused; 503). While memory and economic causes are foregrounded in the 70s, the next transition concerned questions about identity, the Other, authenticity, and writing as a practice (505). Though Barboza de Tesei expressly situates Valenzuela within this last wave of *novela negra* writers, Valenzuela's focus on her character's guilt through their association with Argentina suggests that her novel spans the socio-political traditions of 70s detective stories and beyond. Moreover, Barboza de Tesei's genealogy of the *novela negra* in Argentina indicates that, in straying from traditional U.S. and European models, Valenzuela in part rejects the hegemonic structure of the detective story even as she consciously inserts her work into the history of Argentinean literary forms. Valenzuela's appropriation of the literary *noir* genre provides her the structure through which to explore the task of mourning dictatorship by neither reiterating the hegemonic discourses surrounding it nor delivering a reactionary refusal of said discourse. *Novela negra* both is and is not a detective novel, and its exploration of the causes of violence brings both protagonists to work toward their personal traumas and mourn.

The Social/Psychic Trauma of Military Dictatorship and Foreclosed Mourning

Valenzuela's appropriation of form in *Novela negra* reflects the ways in which her work is rarely reducible to a simple inversion of power structures, rather it remains in critical tension with the range of socio-political and gendered, sexualized, and nationalized identity categories that the author places in dialogue. The social and psychic dimensions of these categories as they appear in *Novela negra* are rooted in the regional instances of political trauma experienced in South America's Southern Cone over the second half of the 20th century. Trauma studies, rising out of/in response to the

pathologization of war veterans' experience, has extended to major traumatic events throughout history, namely the Holocaust and slavery. While the trauma associated with Argentina's military dictatorship has been linked to the Holocaust in both their resulting diaspora and the competing discourses surrounding memory, the specific socio-historical context makes the Argentinean experience explored by Valenzuela distinct.³⁸ As Amy K. Kaminsky notes, Argentina, a country which for better or worse has consistently touted itself as the most European of South American countries, has deep connections to European history, which were also reflected in the images of dictators, torture, and concentration camps that emerged from the so-called Dirty War period (*Argentina* 168). Though the number of victims (usually estimated at 30,000 by human rights organizations) is significantly less than the Holocaust, the state-sponsored violence also resulted in an exodus from Argentina—approximately 2.5 million people fled the military regime between 1975 and 1982 (Portela 16). The Latin American diaspora is sizeable considering that periods of dictatorship and violence occurred not just within Argentina's national boundaries, but throughout South America, including Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Brazil (Calveiro 123).

Though the official duration of Argentina's military dictatorship dates from 1976-1983, it is important to recognize that torture and violence have been a part of Argentina since the colonial period. Pilar Calveiro underlines that various forms of colonial torture lasted into the 19th and 20th centuries (against indigenous populations and blacks, for example), only becoming a public issue when implemented on "*gente como nosotros*"

³⁸ Jelin draws on theorists of the Holocaust in her analysis of state repression across Latin America's Southern Cone, specifically in relation to postdictatorial silencing and competing discourses of memory (*State Repression*).

(people like us; 120). The specific dates of the dictatorship are equally insufficient in comprehending the climate of fear present in Argentina, for the *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina* (Argentine Anticommunist Alliance) was founded by José López Rega (who ironically filled the post of Minister of Social Welfare) in 1973, a year before President Juan Perón's death and three years before the official institution of the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (National Reorganization Process) (Portela 12). The *Proceso*, as it was known mainly by its supporters, took as its major objective the restoration of "Western Christian" aspects of culture, rejecting any ties to Communism (13).³⁹ Even after increasing international pressure to relinquish power and end the imprisonment, torture, and censorship tactics in use by the military dictatorship, the discourse of the *Proceso* proved to be difficult to counter/silence. M. Edurne Portela explains how the *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (CONADEP; National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons), which led the investigations into detention centers and brought officers to trial beginning in 1985, also engendered the "teoría de los dos demonios" (theory of the two devils) and began the process of coerced national forgetting, or what she deems "institutionalized amnesia" (22). The "theory" depicted both the military officers and the guerilla fighters they targeted and tortured as equal and opposite forces, situating all of Argentinean society as the victim of these two

³⁹ This stated objective led to the United States' problematic involvement, as the dictatorship's *Proceso* seemingly corresponded to U.S. interests in the Cold War and reacted against the Cuban Revolution. The U.S. officially recognized the military junta when led by General Jorge Videla that removed López Rega and Isabel Perón from her essentially titular post as President. Kaminsky discusses how this official recognition caused friction and public outrage over the images of torture that began to surface internationally during the military regime (*Argentina* 173). This marks merely one of many troubling U.S. interventions into the politics and economies of Latin America, but also makes Luisa Valenzuela's exile to New York and her choice to set her novel in this international financial capital significant. Her Manhattan setting is perhaps more evocative in the way that it unknowingly anticipates Calveiro's pronouncement that torture and disappearance continue to occur even within the U.S., where the tortured individuals have been resignified as "terrorists" (128).

opposing forces (20). Agustín's assertion in *Novela negra* that, "*Todos somos responsables*" ("We are all responsible") functions, then, to dissolve the either victim or victimizer discourse the *teoría de los dos demonios* espouses by building on Valenzuela's conclusions about the societal circumstances of military dictatorship in *Cola de lagartija* and replacing either/or with a more nuanced configuration of responsibility (78/78).

The process of silencing that began (or rather, continued) throughout the reinstatement of democracy sustained the collective trauma of the military dictatorship period. Under President Raúl Ricardo Alfonsín and culminating with President Carlos Saúl Menem's final pardon in 1990, the government enacted a series of legal steps that served to reinforce the fragmentation and silence instituted during authoritarian rule. Kaminsky in *After Exile* explains the damaging effects of such institutionalized forgetting: "the past that is to be forgotten is precisely that past that has formed this phantom generation, who so badly need their past" (21). This is also precisely the past with which Valenzuela as Argentinean and expatriate writer is attempting to work through in *Novela negra*. Though Valenzuela never experienced physical torture before leaving for the United States in 1979, where she remained for the duration of the dictatorship, she couches her reason for exile in similar terms, stating that she left to "preserve [her] own memory" ("Trying" 94)—a memory that, according to Avelar's terms, is not merely reactionary, but is one that expresses the situation of Argentinean self-exiles in an untimely manner by means of their suppressed memories and the eruption of these memories into the novel's present, producing a text that is "foreign to [its] present" (20). Moreover, as in true allegory, the memories expressed by fiction like Valenzuela's necessarily fail to represent the unrepresentable, to name the trauma.

Unrepresentability, however, does not equal failed mourning, as Valenzuela's characters will reveal. Here, I turn to Butler's work on mourning and melancholia for a vocabulary through which to explain Roberta and Agustín's experiences in the text as well as how they relate to their identification as Argentineans.

Butler provides the concept of precariousness and its relation to precarity as a means of comprehending the subject's physical materiality and its dependency on Others. Bodies, in that they are produced and regulated discursively, are always vulnerable to the Other (*Precarious* 29). Later in her work, Butler reaffirms this vulnerability of bodily subjectivity by contending that "Lives are by definition precarious: they can be expunged at will or by accident; their persistence is in no sense guaranteed." Precarity is then the widespread condition of "maximized precariousness" at the societal level "for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence who often have no other option than to appeal to the very state from which they need protection" (*Frames* 25). While Butler's precariousness refers to human bodily experience and her precarity could apply to a range of causes and experiences of differentially heightened precariousness in specific groups, her concepts effectively describe the social atmosphere of military dictatorships in Latin America as it will relate to Roberta and Agustín's experiences of melancholia in *Novela negra*.

Perhaps the most traumatizing aspect of the military dictatorship on Argentinean society as a whole was its presence in its invisibility. (Individual victims of torture, of course, experienced a more immediate, situated form of trauma through physical pain and its psychological effects.) As Portela points out, the military government was able to stave off the judicial system for so long precisely because it could use the very absence of

bodies—the material lack of the *desaparecidos*—as a defense that no crime had occurred (14). Kaminsky underscores the government’s contradictions as well as the effects of such a self-contradictory discourse on the public. The military regime claimed both that the disappearances were not occurring and that anyone who was punished deserved to be. The widespread psychic trauma derives from, “The tension between knowing and not-knowing that is more or less willed,” for one is both afraid of punishment and eager to believe that one “is living in, and is part of, a sane, civilized world” (*Argentina* 159).

The omnipresence of the threat of violence and the lack of bodies to mourn result in a trauma that cannot be expressed (as all trauma cannot be fully expressed/represented) and also the impossibility of mourning in the sense of most psychoanalytic theorization on the process. As I have stated previously, the failure to mourn described by Avelar is synonymous with melancholia—an incorporation of the lost object and a withdrawal into the ego. The subject of melancholia is the point at which Avelar’s and Butler’s work diverge, however, in that Butler views melancholia as a constitutive condition of subject and ego formation, with special regard the gendering and sexing of the subject. Melancholia in the Butlerian sense refers to the foreclosed possibility of homosexual love that structures all subjectivity in a heteronormative society. Melancholia is the originary response to foreclosed objects that provides the psyche with a structure and allows the subject to mourn. Whereas Avelar’s conception of mourning as opposite of the failure of melancholia would suggest that Argentineans faced with the inability to know or state the object of their psychic trauma (being that the bodies have been “disappeared”) can only become melancholic, Butler’s reading of mourning provides an avenue for grieving those that have been labeled ungrievable by societal foreclosure. In reading Freud’s

development of the theory of mourning over time, Butler detects his inconsistent beliefs on the description of successful mourning. Based on her own bridging of psychoanalysis and Foucaultian discursive productivity, then, Butler suggests her own description for successful mourning derived from an understanding of the subject which is inextricably linked to the Other: “Perhaps, rather, one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly for ever [*sic*]. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to a transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance” (*Precarious* 20-1).

Elsewhere, Butler suggests that the only way to avoid inscribing subjects to the ungrievable/non-human is to rethink the framework that allows the separating out of justifiable and unjustifiable violence and to recognize that the violence one experiences is not completely external: “What we call aggression and rage can move in the direction of nullifying the other; but if who we ‘are’ is precisely a shared precariousness, then we risk our own nullification” (*Frames* 182). Recognizing the “shared precariousness” would thus would breakdown the framework that allows for the distinction between justified and unjustified violence and, subsequently, the grievable and ungrievable. A reading of Roberta and Agustín’s interactions with violence, coupled with their performances of gender and recognition of their precariousness, suggests that Valenzuela, in interrogating the discourse that has allowed for the framing of justifiable and unjustifiable violence (Self/Other) in the case of Argentina’s military dictatorship, represents a path toward reframing the binary and, ultimately, mourning.

Roberta: Dress-up and Drag as Remedy

Roberta begins her mourning process much earlier than does her companion Agustín, who remains melancholic throughout the majority of the novel. Her psychic transformation is preceded by a gender-bending physical transformation that ultimately leads to her recognition of precariousness in subjectivity. Immediately following Agustín's partial murder confession to Roberta, Roberta concocts a plan to change Agustín's appearance. Ostensibly, this is to avoid his possible arrest, to disguise him from the police that are assumed to be searching for him. After concealing the material evidence of his crime, Roberta convinces Agustín to shave his beard, to wear glasses, and to dress in her clothes (48-52). At this point in the novel, Judith Butler's performativity as speech act interweaves with theatrical performativity to produce a blend of identities and realities. Though she assures Agustín, "*Lo cambiás vos y vas a ser vos*" ("You're the one making the change, and you'll be yourself"), Roberta soon takes control of his identity, fulfilling his earlier intuition that Roberta "*pretende [...] usarlo a él de personaje*" ("[has] it in mind to use him as a character"; 44, 22/47-8, 27) in her novel. They decide that in order to recover the events leading up to the murder, they must author the events in the form of a play because Agustín had attended a play by chance, where he met the victim (49). Though intended to be co-authored, Roberta is the one staging the scene, costuming Agustín and renaming him Gus or "Magú," a cartoon character's name to match his glasses (52). She then takes him to an antique clothing store, stating, "*Ya que hay que cambiar las apariencias, cambiémonos de ropa, Magú, revistámonos, como quien dice*" ("As long as we're changing appearances, Magoo, let's change our clothes—seek redress, as they say"; 55-6/57). In attempting to help Agustín uncover his

motivations, Roberta becomes playwright, assigning multiple characters to him, characters which he is never able to passably perform, as he still holds on to a conception of subjective wholeness.

Roberta, however, takes a different approach to sex/gender performance, returning to the antique clothing store without Agustín and engaging in a co-writing of identity session with the black store clerk, Bill. The two quickly succumb to erotic play by assigning each other costumes. Unlike Agustín, Bill negotiates with Roberta, often refusing roles and, as a result, demanding recognition of his alterity when he asserts, “*No quiero ser Otelo. [...] Soy un leopardo*” (“I don’t want to be Othello. [...] I’m a leopard”; 63/64). Out of their mutually constituting theatrics, Roberta begins to develop an intimacy with Bill that she has been unable to foster with her fellow countryman, Agustín. Bill is consequently present at Roberta’s “*cambiar de sexo*” (“sex change”; 72). According to Butler, gender is performative in that “acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause” (185). Within this cycle of reiteration, though, Butler finds the possibility for small interventions, through her example of drag. As she explains, in drag, “we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance” and have the ability to create “dissonance” between the “naturalized,” unified aspects of gender (187). Roberta achieves this dissonance as Agustín could not. Bill begins the defamiliarization process by clipping off part of her hair, which she then has cropped and dyed orange (72-73). She adds to her short hair “*el traje [...]. De hombre, claro está,*

compadrito de los años 40.” (a man’s suit, of course, a number from the forties”; 72/73).

When Roberta returns to Agustín in drag, he is unable to label her anything other than “Roberta/Bob,” “Bobbie,” and “Bob” (73). Roberta’s drag exemplifies Butler’s performativity as she becomes slightly different/dissonant versions of her assigned sex/gender until she is eventually viewed naked by Agustín and considered completely “*andrógina*” (“androgynous”; 75).⁴⁰ It is essential that Roberta begin her process of mourning by revealing the fissures in her own performance of gender. Instead of authoring new identities for Agustín, she must co-write her Self with an Other. In playing dress-up with Bill, Roberta comes to accept that she does not possess a uniform, complete identity, but rather that her subjective existence is constituted by her relationship with the Other.

After successfully passing as androgynous, in the second part of the novel, Roberta commences the process of mourning. Roberta retreats into her apartment, which comes to stand for the psychic landscape, not alone, but with Agustín, and they remain there for an unidentifiable amount of time: “*Los días pasan, un mes o más; quizá esté nevando*” (“The days go by, a month or more; it may be snowing outside”; 100/97). During this period of incubation, Roberta is suspended in time and place by the fantasy trips she imagines taking with Agustín. In creating this socio-psychic space where secular time has no meaning, Valenzuela’s protagonist participates in writing her own literature of mourning as described by Avelar and, concordantly, “rescue[s] past defeats out of

⁴⁰ Though Roberta engages in drag and is regarded as androgynous by Agustín, it is important to note that her “sex-change” is not regarded as literal, thus disregarding the factor of biology. Narrating from Roberta’s perspective, Valenzuela writes: “*Y todo quedaba de aquel lado de la testosterona, tras un umbral que ella no podría franquear aunque quisiera*” (“It all came down to a matter of testosterone, a threshold she was unable to cross however much she tried to”; 73). Nor is Roberta regarded as a man linguistically, as “androgynous” maintains a feminine ending in the Spanish.

oblivion and remain[s] open to an as yet unimaginable future” (Avelar 21). After having a recurring nightmare in her nest of clothes, “*los mismos que en su infancia la despertaban en medio de la noche*” (“The same ones that used to awaken her in childhood”), Roberta is able to accept her fear as constitutive—“*Mi miedo es parte de mi y no hay de qué asustarse*” (“My fear is part of me and there’s nothing to be frightened of”; 110-1/107). Roberta is then ready to leave her cocoon. She attempts to relinquish her authorial control of Agustín by no longer referring to him as “Magú” and enters the outside world with a new sense of place. Walking around the city with Agustín, Roberta gasps, “*Este barrio es otro, ya no puede meterte miedo. Ya no*” (“This neighborhood is different, it won’t scare you anymore. No more”; 117/112). Roberta’s participation in allegorical temporal disjuncture allows her to successfully piece together a childhood trauma, which she traces to a horror story that included the vivid image of a woman “*con un hacha en la mano. Tiene la masa encefálica al aire, alguien la mató de un hachazo en la cabeza y ella está buscando venganza*” (“with an ax in her hand. Her encephalic matter is exposed; someone killed her by hitting her on the head with an ax, and she’s seeking revenge”). As a child, she never found out how the story concluded, and “ahora vaya una a saber cómo terminan todas [las historias]” (“now, who knows how any story does”), she says to Agustín (125/120). Roberta’s dream here can be interpreted as both her previous inability to accept her precarious bodily state, the ax representing her aggression towards her vulnerability, as well as the current impossibility of naming the trauma of living under military dictatorship. In accepting that she is both bodily vulnerable and psychically transformed by the loss she cannot name, Roberta is able to experience intimacy with Bill—“*se le llenaron de ternura [...] las interioridades, el alma*” (“her

innermost recesses, her soul, oozed with tenderness”; 151)—an intimacy that remains inaccessible to Agustín. Through her untimely and allegorical transformations during the course of the novel, Roberta is able to work through the multiple traumas in her life (stemming from childhood nightmares and dictatorship) and successfully mourn, in Butlerian terms.

Writing with the Body/Writing Allegorically

Roberta’s renewed ability to affect others and experience affect herself, through her intensely emotional relationship with Bill, is linked in the text by the concept of “writing with the body.” A key concept in Valenzuela’s own philosophy of language and literature, the process of writing the body here has less to do with the theories of *l’écriture féminine* that it echoes.⁴¹ Elsewhere, Valenzuela has described the process as: “*Es un estar comprometida de lleno en un acto que es en esencia un acto literario [...] y quizá el miedo tenga mucho que ver en todo esto*” (“It is a state of being fully engaged in an act that is, in essence, literary [...] and maybe fear has much to do with this”) (“Escribir” 121). Valenzuela describes writing with the body in a manner that situates the process in terms similar Butler’s precariousness: it is a bodily act in which full commitment seems to inspire the fear of vulnerability. In the novel, Roberta repeatedly urges Agustín to write with the body, and in her own undertaking she is described, “*como quien está preparándose en el otro rincón del ring, de pie sobre la lona, Roberta baila sus pensamientos [...]. El combate parecería ser contra todas las costras interiores que suelen oponerse al noble fluir del material secreto, si no fuera que esporádicos ramalazos de Agustín*” (“like a boxer warming up in the opposite corner of the ring,

⁴¹ In his article, Belén Ramos Ortega draws any and all lines of reference to the various theories of language and corporeality, including Foucault, Cixous, Irigaray, Lacan, etc.

Roberta is dancing her thoughts [...] The fight might seem to be against all the internal scabs that tend to block the noble flow of secret material, were it not for sporadic flashes of Agustín” (8/14). Writing with the body in the novel, then, is a physical process that binds the psychic and the social. Moreover, the process seems to be the first step to writing anything, for both of Valenzuela’s writer-protagonists experience extended writer’s block throughout the novel. Roberta, though she attempts to write Agustín, is only able to write with the body at the end of the novel, once she has accepted her precariousness and mourned.

Toward the novel’s conclusion, Valenzuela includes a critique of a pornographic story supposedly written with the bodies of Roberta and Bill, which serves equally as a parody of literary criticism, a description of their sex act, and a review of the novel as a whole, of which, “*El final estertóreo no puede sorprendernos*” (“the final gasp is not surprising”) but is considered “*un final literariamente feliz, verdadero logro seminal y semántico*” (“a literary happy ending, a truly seminal, semantic achievement”; 230/218). Their description echoes Avelar’s definition of untimely literature, recognizing as noteworthy “*la constante tensión de estilo que promueve diversos niveles de lectura y amenaza alcanzar la culminación a destiempo*” (“the constant stylistic tension which fosters at various levels of reading and threatens to reach an untimely culmination”; 229/217). Roberta and Bill, through their relationship that recognizes the performativity of gender, the precariousness of the body, and the psycho-social formation of subjectivity, are able to review Valenzuela’s text as allegorical.

Agustín: From Consumption to Creation

In considering the writing of the body, Agustín's inability to do so in the text could easily be attributed to sexual difference, which Z. Nelly Martínez seems to do when focusing solely on the association of female creation and the witch figure, mentioned as one among many descriptors for Roberta's writing in *Novela negra* (186). A more nuanced understanding of Agustín's shortcomings emerges when considering that Roberta "*llevaba cinco años viviendo en New York*" ("had been living in New York for five years") when Agustín had arrived (11/16). Though the book gives little reference to dates except to note that democracy has since been reinstated in Argentina, it is likely that Agustín spent much more time in the midst of the military dictatorship, the denials, and the disappearings than his protagonist counterpart. This assumption is bolstered by the frequent nightmares that startle Agustín with images of severed fingers "*que cierta vez aparecieron en el basural a la vuelta del cuartel*" ("that once appeared in the garbage dump behind the general headquarters"; 4/10) and his thoughts about the bodies he knew were "*arrojados de helicópteros a medio mori, con la panza abierta para que no flotaron*" "hurled half alive from the helicopters, bellies slit so they wouldn't float" (132/139). Though he did not experience torture personally, Agustín undoubtedly is part of what Antonious C.G.M. Robben considers "collective trauma," which affected the Argentinean society as a whole, with varying levels of "social trauma" in "group-specific conditions" (345).⁴² Robben delineates three major groups of Argentinean society: the

⁴² As a product of these group-specific conditions for writers, Valenzuela explains the worst parts of censorship during the military dictatorship: "*Estaba latente la amenaza de violencia directa y escribir podía poner en riesgo no sólo la propia vida sino también la de quienes nos rodeaban*" (The threat of direct violence was latent and writing could put at risk not only your own life but that of those who surrounded us; qtd. in Burgos and Fenwick 208).

military personnel who denied the death flights, the captains who witnessed the death flights and testified to their validity, and the relatives and acquaintances who suffered over the deaths and disappearances—the group to which Agustín belongs (341-342). Because these groups “cannot reconcile their diverse experiences,” the societal trauma in the Argentinean context is “varied and heterogeneous” (342). While both Avelar and Butler view the reconciliation of diverse experiences as an impossibility, they both seek to describe a path out of the remembering/forgetting deadlock. Avelar focuses on the allegorical nature of his literature of mourning as an approach that engages with neither the dictatorial discourse nor the counter-hegemonic *testimonio*, and Butler advocates the need for an alternate framework through which to view acts of violence (like state-sponsored torture) that would not divide acts into justifiable/unjustifiable and lives into grievable/ungrievable. Through Agustín’s experience of melancholia and mourning, Valenzuela articulates a path to avoid such dichotomies.

Agustín’s original melancholic responses and their eventual transformation into productive mournful acts also reveal a deep connection to trends in trauma studies and a connection to queer culture. In the context of queer studies, Ann Cvetkovich situates herself in a similar vein with Avelar and Butler, ascribing to the need to consider trauma “culturally rather than clinically” (18). Cvetkovich chooses to distance herself from Cathy Caruth’s abstract theory of trauma by focusing on trauma as a “collective experience” that helps explain “how we live and especially how we live affectively” (19). She notes queer theory’s major intervention into trauma in that it problematizes both the medicalization of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and queerness, believing that focusing on the diagnosis of individuals overshadows the social issues at work (45). As

an additional and equally relevant rereading of Caruth, Laura Di Prete notes a turn to the body in the natural sciences and humanities with regard to trauma (13). According to Di Prete and the trauma narratives she studies, language and the voice are not always sufficient representations when faced with the unrepresentability of trauma, the inability to name the trauma in its totality. A focus on the body “seek[s] to recover that which is normally absent within representation: the vulnerable, material, violated, fragmented, suffering body” (15). These interventions into trauma theory align to describe Agustín’s narrative in Valenzuela’s text and his transition from paranoid, melancholic response to allegorical mourning.

Immediately following his murder of Edwina, representations of Agustín’s obsessive response to his own corporeality subtend the rest of the work. In the aftermath of his deed, Agustín struggles to maintain control over his body, alluding to torture in the act of straightening his tie: “*esa defensa del porteño contra el desajuste de una ciudad demasiado desconocertante, esa posibilidad de ahorcarse un poquito cumpliendo a diario la condena*” (“that *porteño* [...] defense against an overwhelming city, the act of strangling oneself slightly in the daily service of one’s sentence”; 4-5/10). He later remembers the lack of control he had over his own body during the moment of the kill—“*metió la mano en el bolsillo e hizo lo que hizo sin siquiera poder imaginario, quedándose después clavado en el asombro de un estampido sordo y de una acción que parecería pertenecerle a otro*” (“he reached into his jacket pocket and did what he did without ever imagining it, only to remain transfixed by a dull explosion and an act that seemed to belong to someone else”; 21/25). After the murder, he briefly gives his body up to Roberta, allowing her to alter his appearance in an attempt to alter his identity. The

reiterations do not allow for transformation, though, for Agustín is deeply embedded in melancholic behavior. Unable to accept that his subjectivity is socially constituted, and so unable to accept the loss of part of himself in his grief, Agustín exhibits the traditional melancholic responses of incorporation and self-beratement.

Agustín's pursuit of wholeness in response to the gaps that structured his life in Argentina—the holes in his knowledge, the literal spaces left by the disappeared ones—sets him in the perpetual to-and-fro of desire and rejection. Drawn in by the image of Edwina, the secondary actress making soup on-stage, Agustín decides he must be with her that night. It is “*la abierta sonrisa*” (“her open smile”) that Edwina directs toward him that incites Agustín's seemingly involuntary reaction of shooting her (21/25). The literal gap or hole of Edwina's mouth is met with violence by Agustín and is followed by an intense desire to know simple facts. Walking home after the murder, Agustín needs to know Edwina's last name, then crumples the program and throws it “as if he were pulling a tick off his body” (18-19). Later, after secretly tearing out a newspaper clipping of Edwina's image, he consumes it in a literal act of incorporation. The need to possess that which is gone, which he cannot know culminates with him eating her picture, and the description of his response coincides with the illusion of wholeness that melancholic acts seek to maintain. He eats the picture upon feeling “*Ganas de vomitar, la conciencia de que algo por fin puede ser vomitado y por lo tanto expelido de sí. No quiere vomitarlo*” (“An urge to vomit, the awareness that something could finally be regurgitated and thereby expelled from him. He didn't want to vomit it up”; 76). Agustín's desire to incorporate on a figurative level persists through Roberta's process of mourning. After Roberta tells him her trauma story in hopes that he will learn to accept his fear of

incompleteness, he merely incorporates her trauma by having her nightmare about encephalic matter.

Agustín's self-beratement manifests itself in acts of physical self-regulation. During their time locked away in Roberta's apartment, Agustín exercises relentlessly—his stationary bike taking him equally as far as his quest for ultimate truth of his crime. The need to control his body, though, is as bound up in the collective trauma of being Argentinean as is his need to understand the murder. Even as he recognizes that the exercise is addressing the "*signos externos*" ("outer signs") when "*en las profundidades hay otras*" ("there are others in the innermost recesses"), he also considers his actions a "*castigo*" ("punishment") in order to "*expiar las culpas*" ("expiate guilt") like that of the "*presos, los desaparecidos, los forzados*" ("prisoners, *desaparecidos*, forced laborers"; 110/106). Agustín posits himself paradoxically as murderer and victim and acts out his own punishment through corporeal regulation. He perceives of himself as both murderer of fellow Argentineans through inaction and victim of a military dictatorship's terror-inducing tactics. Agustín views himself as not straddling the psychic conception of victimizer/victim and because he is entrenched in the paranoid need to take in, to fill the space, he cannot come to terms with his own precariousness. Thus, he cannot write with the body and cannot achieve a route to Butler's non-violent aim.

Agustín begins his mourning process late in the novel when confronted by a man dying from AIDS. This confrontation with the precarity of the body of the Other posits a relationality among these two populations (Argentinean's affected by the military regime and queer people affected by AIDS) that Butler herself draws. In discussing precarity (the condition of precariousness across a large population), Butler suggests that both

populations affected by state-sponsored violence and by AIDS experienced the foreclosure of grieving loss, homosexuality has been foreclosed through the conditions of subject formation in a heteronormative society (*Frames*). Socially, the implicit, illicit nature of violence and death in society during the Argentine military dictatorship and 1990s AIDS culture links the two communities. Jason Tougaw points out the “even the ‘AIDS Test’ is more accurately a test for HIV antibodies. It can detect the virus only through inference” (171). Similarly, it was only through inference that the *desaparecidos* were identified in Argentina, due to the continued absence of bodies individuals were presumed to be dead. The AIDS virus and its effect on the gay community are present within Valenzuela’s text implicitly at first as well.

Though the relationships of the main characters in *Novela negra* are all seemingly heterosexual, on multiple occasions, a reference to queerness—gay male couples in particular—emerge from the depths of the text. Roberta even considers that the original murder itself might have been a “*conflicto homosexual*” (“gay squabble”) before learning that Agustín had actually murdered a woman (44/48). The threat of AIDS arises obliquely and early in the novel as well in the S/M house of Roberta’s friend Ava. Though both Roberta and Agustín have difficulty conceptualizing the enjoyment of S/M role-playing (living as they are in the shadow of state-sponsored torture) Roberta looks on as a man is thrashed with a whip. Though the torture itself seems “*de cartón*” (“make-believe”) to her, she cannot help thinking that the man’s blood was “*el verdadero peligro, la inédita ruleta rusa a la que todos allí jubagan: la contaminación, el ser salpicados por la probable muerte roja como en un Poe muy fines del siglo XX*” (“the real danger, the

Russian roulette all of them were playing: contamination, being splattered by probably red death in a very postmodernist Poe”; 93-4/92).

Fittingly, confronting this postmodern red death provides Agustín with the means to accept the unrepresentable and unanswerable. Invited to a party by one of Roberta’s friends, Agustín is not prepared to face New York’s bohemian underground or the contrived performance hosted by Edouard—the former ballet dancer/choreographer, who is dying from AIDS—and organized by his one-time lovers, Antoine and Mark. By mistake, Agustín ventures into the temporal and spatial loophole that forms Héctor Bravo’s living quarters—bathed in white, operating at unusual hours so that Héctor can care for Edouard, it is “*el paso a otras latitudes*” (“a passage to other latitudes”; 192/180). As with Roberta’s cocoon, Agustín spends an immeasurable amount of time in this homosocial gathering space with Héctor, a Uruguayan exile whose vague past could easily designate him as either a Tupamaro (Uruguayan guerilla) or state official. In either instance, Agustín finds an immediate “*sensación fraternal*” (“brotherliness”) in Héctor’s space (195/183). Confronted with both the precariousness of bodily subjectivity in the dying Edouard and his soon-to-be mourners as well as the potential Otherness of Héctor, Agustín creates his own allegorical psychic space in which to mourn through discourse.

A shared language and a shared regional experience mark their similarities; however, Héctor, identified as “*un hombre para ritos de pasaje*” (“a rites-of-passage man”), a thanatologist, does not share Agustín’s need for complete knowledge and tidy endings (218/206). Upon listening to Agustín’s murder story, Héctor, parodying a psychoanalyst gives Agustín “*un tendal de razones, todas astutas e igualmente válidas, a saber: la mataste porque viste en ella una imagen de tu madre que no te gustó. Una*

imagen de todas las mujeres, de cierta mujer en particular y no damos nombres” (“a slew of answers, all equally valid: You killed her because you saw in her a mother image you didn’t like. An image of all women, of a certain woman in particular, and we’re not naming names”; 220/207-8). Within the confines of Héctor’s otherworldly den, Agustín is confronted with the supreme example of the materiality of death in the body of Edouard, slowly wasting away from an inferred virus that pits the body against itself. It is here that Agustín finally chooses an allegorical approach to his trauma. Instead of reacting with fear or violence, Agustín is moved to acceptance of his precarity and a conception of interdependency with Héctor, the representation of military power, which he expresses not through the aggression of the novel’s opening murder, but through “*la escritura catártica*” (“cathartic writing”; 221/208). Though Agustín’s writing does not appear in the novel, his transformation at the acceptance of loss, which in Butler’s terms is synonymous with a loss of part of the Self, is signaled in his emergence from Héctor’s den and his message to Roberta that he will finally “*poder enterrar a sus muertos*” (“be able to bury his dead” (232/220).

Conclusions: From Melancholic Destruction to Mournful Creation

By reading *Novela negra* through Butlerian conceptions of precariousness and grievability as well as Avelar’s approaches to postdictatorial memory, the allegorical nature of Valenzuela’s novel is foregrounded. In charting the diverging paths of the two compatriot-exiles, Agustín and Roberta, Valenzuela dramatizes—for this novel is very much about performance and performativity—the individual and interdependent processes necessary to work through trauma, underscoring that working through is not equivalent to completely remembering or forgetting, but rooted in the ability to accept a

certain transformation of subjectivity. Drag and the complete alterity of the AIDS sufferer provide the mechanisms required for Roberta and Agustín to accept their traumas and continue on as writers. Writing becomes a goal that is to be achieved only after the individual has learned to accept the unrepresentability of traumas experienced within and without Argentina, as children and adults, individually and as a collective.

Valenzuela's novel thus serves as both an example of mourning literature and a representation of successful, though divergent, mourning processes in both Roberta and Agustín. Perhaps more importantly, Valenzuela highlights Agustín's ability to move beyond a framework of justifiable/unjustifiable violence and work toward the recognition of unforeclosed grievability. Clarice Lispector's novel, *A hora da estrela* (*The Hour of the Star*), will delve into many of the same thematic concerns that Valenzuela does in *Novela negra*—the precarity of bodies in transience, the grievability of those subjects unrecognized by history. Like Agustín, Lispector's narrator must also come to terms with his participation in the construction and erasure of Others. Lispector's Rodrigo does so, however, through the ostensible authorship of the novel and his personal, transformative (if one-sided) relationship to his protagonist. Unlike *Novela negra*, *A hora da estrela* also takes a more intersectional approach to feminist theory in its foregrounding of class and race as well as gender, which also serves to highlight the particularities of Brazilian society and its military dictatorship.

CHAPTER 4: DE-ROMANTICIZING THE POOR IN MODERN BRAZIL:

RETHINKING SUBALTERNITY AND THE NORTHEAST IN *A HORA DA ESTRELA*

Clarice Lispector's literary work might, at first glance, be considered out of place with the novels of Luisa Valenzuela and Diamela Eltit that are most often positioned squarely under the feminist, socially-engaged category. It is precisely the confusion of such categories and the evasion of easy interpretation, however, that are hallmarks of Lispector's personal circumstances and, more importantly, her writing. The in-betweenness of her life and work makes the study of Lispector's texts essential to an investigation into the intersections of gender and memory, for who better to consider these intersections than an author who has been considered both Brazilian and not, marginal and privileged, pro-female and not feminist, revolutionary and a-political? The Ukrainian-born Brazilian writer maintained a vagueness about her political stances and her private life throughout her career, thus inspiring critics and biographers to search for clues to her ideology and influences in her texts and, paradoxically, to focus a good deal of critical attention on Lispector's persona as it relates to her writing. For instance, in an otherwise traditional literary critique of Latin American women's writing, Eleonora Cróquer Pedrón, having named Lispector "*una escritora-mujer-esfinge*" (a writer-woman-sphinx), sees fit to assess Lispector's eccentricity by way of her appearance and mannerisms, describing: "*los rasgos eslavos y penetrantes de su rostro [...], su excesivo maquillaje, el defecto de dicción que le hacía arrastrar las 'r' y producía en la suya la sensación de un habla extranjera*" (the Slavic and penetrating features of her face, [...])

her excessive make-up, the speech impediment that caused her to drag out her r's and produced in her speech a sense of foreignness; 57, 63).⁴³ The popular fusion of Lispector's puzzling identity with her equally perplexing writing is never clearer than in Diane E. Marting's "bio-bibliography" on the author. In it, Marting notes the original mystery surrounding Lispector—that her birth date has been impossible to pin down, for 1920, 1921, and 1927 all appear in Lispector's official documents. Much scholarly work, then, has gone into reproducing the image of Clarice Lispector that, seemingly, the author put forward herself—one of strangeness, of the interstitial author.

The intense scrutiny of Lispector's appearance and origin, no doubt, are an effect of the nonconformist nature of her writing and an attempt to interpret that difference as Other, as non-Brazilian, as dislocated from time and space. The most common evaluation of her body of work is that her fiction is lyrical, female, and intimate—a style that contrasted sharply with the realist, predominantly male, and socially-oriented conventions that were popular in Brazil and Spanish-speaking Latin America when she began publishing in the 1940s. Cróquer Pedrón notes that Lispector's first reviewers were already commenting on the difficulty of placing her within the literary landscape of Brazil (59), but Clarice Lispector has for at least half a century now been more than a minor presence in Latin American literature. Despite being seldom read outside of Brazil at the beginning of her career, as David William Foster makes plain, "The inevitable point of reference for any discussion of women writers in Brazil is Clarice Lispector, a writer whose works have achieved as much international recognition as those of Machado

⁴³ Due to the non-technical nature of the passage, I have chosen to translate "*arrastrar*" literally, as "drag out"; however, in linguistics, "*arrastrar las erres*" refers to an assibilated r, in which the letter is pronounced akin to the s in pleasure. This pronunciation would be unusual in Portuguese, in which word-initial and doubled r's are pronounced like the English h.

de Assis and João Guimarães Rosa” (973). She is undoubtedly this study’s most widely known author and the only one who has achieved the status of the proper adjective, *lispectoriano*.

What “*lispectoriano*” denotes in terms of form and style has been well-documented and generally agreed upon by critics. Earl E. Fitz has identified the “emphasis on the play of language,” that no text is ever stable due to “semantic play” and “slippage,” and the “refusal to make distinctions between ‘literary’ and ‘nonliterary’ language use, between genres, and between language and metalanguage,” as central elements of Lispector’s fiction (*Sexuality and Being* 6). Fitz discusses Lispector’s work in terms of poststructuralism, while Aída Toledo builds on this reading, tracing Lispector’s influence back to the vanguardists of the 1920s (238). Other common formal elements of Lispector’s fiction include her prevalent use of parody (Barbosa, “Parodies”), her metaliterary techniques (Nunes 283), and her employment of silence to signal the failures of language (Sáenz de Tejada 46). An effect of Lispector’s language play, layering of meaning, and especially the use of silence, is that her work is often praised for its stylistic novelties but disregarded in terms of social impact. As Philip Swanson suggests, “The difficulty, then, for the critic who wants to ‘say something’ about Lispector is that her works appear to say ‘nothing’ in any conventional sense of the term” (129). Such difficulty has not, of course, kept critics from “saying something” about the author’s literature, but it has often lead critics to push Lispector further into the abstract, a category that, as my reading of her second-to-last novel in this chapter will demonstrate, does not fully describe Lispector’s contributions to Brazilian literature.

Defining Lispector's work as abstract, thus not realist and not sufficiently socially-engaged, is a consequence of her stylistic tendencies as well as her complex relationship with feminism. The majority of Lispector's work is focused on the realities of women's lives, and when asked about the status of women in Brazil, her response was, "It leaves much to be desired; she is still enslaved" (qtd. in Lowe 175). An affinity to the feminist cause, then, is difficult to deny; nevertheless, Lispector never publicly deemed herself a feminist. It is worth noting here again that the women's movements in Brazil, as in much of Latin America, took hold as a means to improve economic and social circumstances, whereas the feminist movement's goal of advancing women's rights on the basis of being a woman did not become popular until the late 1970s. Sonia E. Alvarez borrows Maxine Molyneux's distinction between "strategic gender interests" v. traditional feminism to explain the manner in which Brazilian women's movements functioned (28). Alvarez also points out that the organization *Nos Mulheres* and its associated publication of the same title were founded in 1976, making it the first organization in Brazil to openly identify with feminism (30). Consequently, Lispector's death from ovarian cancer on December 9, 1977, coincided with the rise in the contemporary feminism in Brazil and precluded the possibility of the author becoming more openly active and aligned with the movement. Then again, Lispector had a strong record of keeping her political participation explicitly separate from her writing: Marting observes that Lispector had been photographed marching in protest of the dictatorship, but she refused to address her participation in interviews ("Bio" xxix).⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Giovanni Pontiero notes that Lispector had also marched in student protests in support of those "debarred from education because they were unable to pay," which demonstrates her public interest in politics and the economy that will be seen in *A hora* ("Dreams" 286).

Lispector's personal dismissal of a feminist label by no means kept her out of feminist criticism, and her work's connection to well-known theorists in the 70s and 80s may have provided the grounds to continue reading Lispector's texts as solely abstract and subjective. Signaling the first major feminist interest into Clarice Lispector's work, Rosario Castellanos published a review of *A Paixão segundo G.H.*, Lispector's fifth novel, originally published in 1964. Responding to her own question “¿Quién es Clarice Lispector?” (Who is Clarice Lispector?) with the statement, “*una de las grandes narradoras en lengua portuguesa de nuestros días*” (one of the greatest Portuguese-language storytellers of our time), Castellanos goes on to note the race, class, and gender issues present in the novel as well as Lispector's signature style (99).⁴⁵ The identification of intersectional relationships in *A Paixão* exhibits the socially-motivated critique that I believe Lispector's work deserves, but the French feminist theorist, Hélène Cixous, whose interest in Lispector's work after her death increased international attention, chose Lispector as a key example of her theory of *écriture féminine*. Cixous' book, *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, maps out this theory of women's difference in language across Lispector's body of work. While I agree with Joanna Bartow's claim that “Cixous misreads Lispector, ignoring the violence in her work so that Cixous can see in Lispector the embodiment of her own theories of women's writing” (26), many scholars, including Swanson, took their cue from Cixous when analyzing Lispector's oeuvre. As I have previously discussed, the due wariness of Latin American scholars when faced with

⁴⁵ The delay in international recognition for Lispector's work (*A Paixão* appearing more than twenty years after her first novel) can in part be attributed to the early skepticism of both her work and the authenticity of its Brazilianness. Additionally, Foster perceives a broader lack of cultural exchange between Brazil and other Latin American countries, especially Argentina, and suggests that the countries' focus on national development and Western cultural models left little space for intracontinental attention (967).

feminist theories dispersed from the first world makes Cixous' easy appropriation of the Brazilian author's texts problematic at best. That Cixous' theories have since been critiqued for their essentialist views on women and femininity only compounds concern about accepting her view of Lispector's work as the standard for *écriture féminine*. Thus, in choosing Lispector's novel for the present study, one goal is to recover the "violence" that exists in them, which is to say their depiction of social injustice and suffering that is neglected by solely formal analyses and those that take Lispector's writing as an exercise in female difference. Lispector's novels are stylistically unique, but they are not without content, and one that speaks directly to power and struggle in the Brazilian context. *A hora da estrela*, is the last work of fiction that Lispector completed and was published in the same year as her death, 1977. The short novel, consisting of less than a hundred pages, stands apart from Lispector's fiction in many ways: its overarching male voice, its overt engagement with poverty, and its (more or less) linear plot among them. The foregrounding of social issues in *A hora* triggered a broader range of criticism than her other works had received. Along with predictable inclusion in studies on women's writing and Brazilian literature, *A hora* received attention from analyses like Bartow's addressing *testimonio* and Irene Marques' on subalternity.

The novel about the unfortunate Northeasterner, Macabéa, and her overpowering narrator-author, Rodrigo S. M., requires such a span of inquiry because it layers observation and critique on gender, social class, and, to a lesser extent, race/ethnicity. While all of these studies rightly point to the gendered discourse at work between Rodrigo and Macabéa and the presentation of their relationship as a dynamic between the intellectual elite and the subaltern figure, the discussions of this relationship have been

reductive. Rodrigo is not simply a stand-in for patriarchal power, and Macabéa is not only the embodiment of the subaltern. Their one-sided relationship dramatizes the foreclosed mourning of a society under dictatorship, ruled by propaganda and industrialization. Furthermore, Rodrigo's transformation throughout the novel reveals the adverse effects of economic hardship on society and human connection, effects that neither dictatorship nor democracy could avert. No character in *A hora* is as flat or archetypal as s/he first appears, and Lispector employs all of her usual semantic and formal techniques to subvert the expectations of her readers. Unlike Valenzuela's characters, who investigated the cause of violent action and imagined or created alternate paths out of the fragmentation of dictatorship, Lispector's Rodrigo creates an imagined class of Others whose refusal to be boxed in reveals the cracks in his conception of Self. Lispector's novel establishes the class, race, and gender power structures operating in Brazil in order to reveal the writers' and readers' complicity in their preservation. Then, through Rodrigo's struggle to write the Other and the evolving relationship he builds with his main character, Lispector dramatizes the process of coming to terms with one's own precariousness through mourning.

Power Reframed: A Restructured Novel for an Uncommon Dictatorship

Just as Lispector stands apart from the common postdictatorial memory study, the distinctive structure and methods of the Brazilian dictatorship give cause for a unique approach to writing and critiquing memory. While the period of dictatorship in Brazil carries the unfavorable distinction of being the longest single span of rule, twenty-one

years to Chile's seventeen and Argentina's six,⁴⁶ in many ways the military officials in charge arranged the power structure to be equally as restrictive but seemingly less centralized than in other Latin American countries. Whereas General Pinochet became the public images of power in Chile and the military junta more covertly exchanged the leadership roles in Argentina, Brazil's peaceable succession of five military leaders conveyed stability and gained more public support than the other two countries' military regimes. As Bradford E. Burns explains, the Brazilian military had removed leaders and quickly relinquished power back to civilian rule five times between 1930 and 1965, thus earning the trust of the Brazilian people as a type of *poder moderador* (moderating power) and implying that the removal of President Goulart in 1964 would be a similarly short period of transition (446). The combination of what Craig L. Arceneaux describes as the "collegial" style of rule in which generals were chosen to act as the head of state at regular intervals by a type of military electoral college and the "*milagre econômico brasileiro*" (Brazilian economic miracle), a period of rapid growth coinciding roughly with General Médici's rule (1969-73), resulted in a unified military front and moderately pacified citizens relative to other Latin American dictatorships.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ These numbers refer not to the total time under military/dictatorial rule in each country, but only to the historical periods under consideration in this project, specifically Brazil from 1964 to 1985, Chile from 1973 to 1990, and Argentina from 1976 to 1983).

⁴⁷ Arceneaux identifies additional contributing factors to public acceptance of the dictatorship, including civilian participation in elections and the *conselho* system (152, 159-60). Though the military maintained ultimate control over the legislature and judiciary, after an initial purge of the branches by General Branco, citizens were permitted to elect local officials, and military officers, for the most part, did not run for public office. Similarly, the councils, which allowed the public to work with military officials and make recommendations on policy, provided the front of political participation while the military officials held all power to disregard suggestions.

The military, of course, had its opponents and disappeared or silenced dissidents over the course of the dictatorship, but the public's comparative support of Brazil's military rule is evidenced by the country's response in the nearly thirty years since its conclusion. Though all three countries studied here maintained significant periods of silence and amnesty postdictatorship, the governments of Argentina and Chile both launched investigations immediately upon return to democracy and, eventually, brought perpetrators of human rights violations to trial. It was not until May 2012 that the *Comissão Nacional da Verdade* (National Truth Commission) began its allotted two years to investigate crimes connected to the dictatorship in Brazil.⁴⁸ All previous information regarding torture and disappearances under the dictatorship was derived either from individual testimony or the *Brasil: Nunca Mais* report published in 1985 by the Archdiocese of São Paulo, which assembled information discovered in documents from the Military Superior Court between 1964 and 1979. Based on these documents and other matters of public policy, Arceneaux points to Médici's time in power as the most repressive (170). Both censorship and detention were at their height during Médici's time in office, followed by General Geisel's policy of slow transition to democracy, *distensão* (decompression). Thus, though Brazil was still operating under dictatorship when Lispector wrote *A hora*, the author was poised to look back on the more authoritarian Médici regime that ended in 1973 and to put the eased restrictions on publication to her benefit when writing *A hora*.

⁴⁸ Brazil's investigations will be markedly different from Argentina and Chile's as well due to the Amnesty Law of 1979 that prohibits the prosecution of officials in connection with crimes committed under the dictatorship. Chile also maintains an amnesty law that forbids prosecution from the date of the coup, September 11, 1973, through 1978, though courts have found ways around the law and prosecuted individuals in certain cases, most notably General Pinochet, though he died before serving his sentence.

The success of the Brazilian economy, however, was inversely proportional to the force of state repression during Médici and Geisel's terms in executive office, and this economic turmoil is what drives Lispector's critique in *A hora*. The international oil crisis of 1973-74 marked the beginning of a major downturn for Brazil and highlighted the weaknesses of Brazil's economic agenda, weaknesses that continued to plague the country well into the 1990s. The economy boomed and suffered in accordance with worldwide markets due to an over-dependency on foreign investment, namely from the United States, from which Brazil received more money than any other Latin American country during that period. Added focus on rapid industrialization without investment in infrastructure and soaring national debt and inflation combined for an unstable system. This export-based economy changed very little pre- to post-military coup, with most of the technocrats in advisory positions maintaining their posts (Arceneaux 450).⁴⁹ As Burns observes, Brazil was effectively funneling its capital into the neoliberal capitalist first world without regard to its own national development (469). Moreover, the dictatorship favored a trickle-down policy, encouraging increased growth over distribution, thus widening the already large wealth gap between export cities and the poverty-stricken Northeast (468). Lispector's novel, then, reflects a time in Brazilian history when the trauma of Médici's repressive term was still in the near past, coming to a close in tandem with an economic downward spiral that disproportionately affected an already subjugated

⁴⁹ This is a prime example of Avelar's argument against the rhetoric of "transition" in Latin America. As he explains, "'Transition to democracy' meant nothing but the juridical-electoral legitimization of the successful transition carried out under the military, that is, the ultimate equation between political freedom for people and economic freedom for capital, as if the former depended on the latter, or as if the latter had somehow been hampered by the generals" (59). In Brazil, the 1964 coup was arranged, in fact, to sustain the capitalist, export-based economic policies already in place—then President General Goulart had announced plans to nationalize oil companies among other leftist reforms and was deposed later the same month.

working class. From its close chronological viewpoint contemporary to the novel's action, *A hora* transmits the experiences of one member of the extremely impoverished, Macabéa, and dramatizes the encounter with and mourning of an Other.

To tell her story of the unfortunate in standard *lispectoriano* form, the author constructs a multilayered narrative in which everything can be read at surface value, though nothing is intended to be. As Fitz notes in his biography of Lispector, her characters tend to be universal and easily understood outside of the Brazilian context (*Clarice* 28); nevertheless, the author does make calculated references to the setting of *A hora* that serve to situate the characters within the political and economic structures described above. Though the action of *A hora* takes place within the city of Rio de Janeiro, Macabéa has recently moved to the city from Alagoas, and Northeastern identity pervades the narrative. Both Macabéa and her textual narrator hail from Alagoas, and the minor character who acts as Macabéa's love interest, Olímpico, is also originally from the Northeast, the nearby Paraíba. The forced migration and devastating poverty affect Macabéa and Olímpico, whose tedious jobs as a typist and metal-worker barely provide for housing and food: Macabéa lives in a bedsitter with four innocuous women all named Maria while Olímpico is a squatter in an abandoned warehouse. Though the narrator does not live in the dire conditions of his characters, he recognizes that, coming from the Northeast himself, “*só me livro de ser apenas um acaso porque escrevo*” (“I have only escaped from a similar fate because I am a writer”; 45/36). By casting the majority of her main characters as Northeasterners like herself, Lispector brings the plight of the poor to the forefront of the narrative.

The narrator underscores the widespread political corruption and economic inequality across Latin America when he states that his story “*é escrito sob o patrocínio do refrigerante mais popular do mundo que nem por isso me paga nada, refrigerante esse espalhado por todos os países. Aliás foi ele em que patrocinou o ultimo terremoto Guatemala*” (“is being written under the sponsorship of the most popular soft drink in the world even though it does not earn me anything. It is the same soft drink that sponsored the recent earthquake in Guatemala”; 29/23). Not only does this statement situate the narrative in near contemporariness to *A hora*’s composition—the Guatemalan earthquake occurred on February 4, 1976—, but also Lispector makes an apt comparison between two countries where long-term political turmoil and involvement with the United States left the poor utterly disenfranchised. The Guatemalan Civil War, which began in 1960, bears resemblance to the Brazilian context with its series of fraudulent elections of military officials as well as forced disappearances and a highly repressive period from 1970 to 1972. The earthquake in 1976 revealed the country’s lack of infrastructure, resulting in approximately 25,000 deaths and extensive homelessness, which disproportionately affected the poor whose substandard housing could not withstand the natural disaster. The government’s inability to respond to the disaster demonstrated the ineffectuality of the regime and spurred popular discontent.⁵⁰ Drawing such a comparison between Guatemala and Brazil, Lispector makes clear her indictment of Brazil’s economic reality, not simply as a universal complaint against poverty as a moral wrong, but as a specific result of government policy and U.S. interference, represented metonymically by the ubiquitous symbol of U.S. capitalism—Coca-Cola.

⁵⁰ For an innovative analysis of the intersection of politics and environmental disasters, including Guatemala’s 1976 earthquake, see Buchenau and Johnson.

The economic instability that neither postdictatorship democracy nor the dictatorship itself (in their shared overreliance on foreign capital and disregard for development) could alleviate understandably becomes the central problem for Lispector's novel; however, she includes other more oblique references to the political corruption and repression as well. Olímpico embodies the poor Brazilian fooled by the appearance of political participation when he divulges his future aspirations for public office. With his poor vocabulary, his propensity for stealing, and his volatile and aggressive manner, Olímpico seems wholly unfit for public office. As the narrator derisively comments, though, Olímpico would likely have luck in politics: "*E não é que ele dava para fazer discurso? Tinha o tom cantado e o palavreado seboso, próprio para quem abre a boca e fala pedindo e ordenando os direitos do homem*" ("After all, didn't he have a gift for making speeches? He possessed that singsong intonation and those unctuous phrases one associates with the man who makes public speeches defending and upholding human rights"; 57/46). The narrator implies that Olímpico's pleasant voice and empty words will be enough to bring him success in the political arena, and Macabéa, though less consciously, harbors the same distaste for politics: wondering about marrying Olímpico, the reader learns that she is not pleased with the idea of being a politician with him, "*pois deputada parecia nome feio*" ("because the word 'politician' sounded quite unpleasant"; 57/47). The reader also finds Macabéa exhibiting the effects of oppression, or, as the narrator describes it, the "Neurose de guerra" ("neurosis of battle"). She was fascinated by soldiers, physical representations of the dictatorship's repressive ability, and when she saw one on the street, "*pensava com estrecimento de prazer: será que ele vai me matar?*" ("she would think, trembling with excitement: is he going to murder me?"; 44/35).

Lispector includes these snippets of the characters' daily interaction with politics and the military and, in doing so, further reveals the remoteness of the power structures that nevertheless affect the poor in subtle yet profound ways. Olímpico dreams of being part of the ineffectual system, and Macabéa responds with fear and wonderment at the ever-present possibility of death or disappearance, but neither has any real control over their future lives.

The characters' lack of control is structurally conveyed within the novel through the intermediary of the author-narrator, Rodrigo S.M. As an intrusive male figure situated between the female author and female protagonist, the character of Rodrigo and Lispector's narratological choices concerning him and the novel's framing as *poioumenon* have received ample critical attention. The majority of the scholarship concerning Rodrigo focuses on his position as male author and the considerations of gender, power, and authority that go along with his standpoint. Renata R. Mautner Wasserman, for one, has signaled the implications of Rodrigo S. M.'s name: "S.M." could easily stand for "sujeito *masculino*" in order to contrast with the female author or to emphasize the creative power of "authoring" and narrating a text (131). Marta Peixoto has also focused attention on the narrator to demonstrate his function "as a distancing device that opens up the textual space for various kinds of irony." The clearest examples of such irony involve Rodrigo's discussion of his writing style. Peixoto points to Rodrigo's comments on female authorship as the most apparent use of irony (92). Very early in the novel, Rodrigo notes that other writers could easily tell Macabéa's story, "*Um outro escritor, sim, mas teria que ser homem porque escritora mulher pode lacrimejar piegas*" ("Another writer, of course, but it would have to be a man for a woman would

weep her heart out”; 18/14). The narrator-author attempts to re-inscribe masculine discourse while the reader is constantly aware that Rodrigo’s existence is dependent upon the nonfictional female writer’s, Lispector’s, ability to take up a masculine stance.

The Rodrigo frame is not, however, simply a means of structural parody in that Lispector employs him to muddle any clearly defined masculine/feminine line. Rodrigo’s repeated insistences that “*é um relato que desejo frio*” (“I want my story to be cold and impartial” 17/13) that the novel “*tem fatos. Apaixonei-me subitamente por fatos sem literatura*” (“contains facts. I have always been enthusiastic about facts without literature”; 21/16) serve to foreground his masculine and hegemonic discourse while simultaneously undermining it. Rodrigo’s words are not merely ironic (in that Lispector wrote them), they are also self-contradictory. For example, in the above quotation, Lispector employs the verb *apaixonar* (translated as “enthusiastic” by Pontiero, but more commonly used to denote obsession or the notion of falling in love) to suggest that even the very masculine voice of the narrator-author, who describes himself as distanced but obsessed, cold yet impassioned, cannot easily separate logic from emotion at the outset of the novel. Thus, within his own framework, Rodrigo is unable to avoid the emotion considered to be characteristic of women’s (substandard) writing, and he must consistently interject into the plot of *A hora* to recommit to his original goal of disengagement. In describing the circumstances of Macabéa and Olímpico’s mismatched courtship, Rodrigo’s preoccupations slip into the narrative to restate his process: “*Não, não quero ter sentimentalismo e portanto vou cortar o coitado implícito dessa moça*” (“I am determined to avoid any sentimentality so I shall eliminate, without further ado, any hint of compassion implicit in this story”; 57/46). Rodrigo’s reiterations implicitly expose

his failure to remain detached and reveal that detachment itself is a process, an unnatural one that even men must work at. As he develops his character, Rodrigo becomes more entrenched in Macabéa's story and even less successful at projecting an authoritative/authorial male voice.

Rodrigo as author-narrator-character, then, is a complex figure who serves both as the personification of hegemonic narrative discourse and as a model of its fallibility. This double purpose of Rodrigo is neglected by the many critics who view him either as the male Other or as an extension of Lispector's voice when he is, in fact, both and more. Peixoto argues the former, stating that it is Rodrigo's maleness that holds together the narrative rather than his particular identity (92). Both Pontiero ("*Hour*") and Antonio Luciano de Andrade Tosta, whose works were published in 1991 and 2009 respectively, demonstrate the longstanding practice of attempting to read Lispector's biography and ideology into her works by searching out similarities between her voice and Rodrigo's. Lispector herself practically invites such readings by adding to the novel's structure the authorial interventions in her own name with the dedication and the title page. As the story of Macabéa unfolds, however, it is crucial to maintain separation between the multilayered narrative in order to interpret the characters, including "Lispector" the author, in their complexity and avoid collapsing them into endless binaries: male/female, powerful/powerless, upper/lower class, etc. The "*Dedicatória do autor*" ("Author's Dedication") and the title page serve to envelope the narrative of *A hora* with an additional perspective, another unreliable narrator through which to interpret, who is neither Lispector herself nor Rodrigo. Furthermore, these introductory sections provide clues to the reader as to how to read the following text—namely, without the expectation

of coming to simple and specific conclusions to the novel's central question(s) concerning Otherness. By incorporating two voices of differing genders, each with his/her own claim to the text's authorship, Lispector decenters and intermingles authority.

Unlike Valenzuela's texts that contain either two competing narrators (*Cola*) or two cooperative protagonists (*Novela negra*), Lispector's novel questions power imbalance and gender by surrounding the novel's destitute, female character with a male author and by preempting the fictional author's voice with a version of Lispector's own. The dedication emphasizes the distinction between authorial voice and author and provides a framework for reading *A hora*. By attributing the dedication to "*Na verdade Clarice Lispector*" ("Alias Clarice Lispector" 7/7), Lispector opens up a conversation about authorship relevant to a text that is attributed to two writers. Pontiero's translation as "alias" fits with his conflation of Lispector's and Rodrigo's voices in his critical work. "Alias" leads the reader to believe that the "author" (written in the masculine form, thus signifying Rodrigo) is, in fact, a pseudonym for Lispector herself. While this could be the implication, "*na verdade*," meaning "actually" or "truthfully," carries a broader range of interpretations about authorial identity: that Lispector is *actually* the creator of the author, that the dedication is *actually* written by Lispector when the novel is not, that any claim to authorship is never *truly* reducible to the historical person under whose name it appears. Whatever the intent of the phrase "*na verdade*," it signals that *A hora* is not a straightforward narrative and that any act of representation is always left to the interpretation of the reader. Like Valenzuela, then, the author's dedication as a metaliterary device serves in part to destabilize the traditional (masculine) authorial voice as conveying the Truth and also to suggest that the reader will play an important part in

the meaning of the text and, thus, the contribution to postdictatorial memory the novel will make.

The importance of an active reader is the major implication of the dedication as “*na verdade*” Lispector discusses her influences and her difficulties with writing. Addressing an unspecified “*vós*” (“you”),⁵¹ Lispector reminds her readers to pay attention to invisible structures that nevertheless exist: “*E—e não esquecer que a estrutura do átomo não é vista mas sabe-se dela. Sei de muita coisa que não vi*” (“And we must never forget that if the atom’s structure is invisible, it is none the less real. I am aware of the existence of many things I have never seen”; 7/8). The invisible structures—of the novel, of society, of dictatorship—are shown to guide even the most unusual of tales about an author, her narrator, and his character. Reading and writing between the lines and among multiple significations is how Lispector instructs her audience to proceed, and her answers to the problems of Brazil, poverty, and gender with which *A hora* contends cannot be realized without participation of another: “*Esta história acontece em estado de emergência e de calamidade pública. Trata-se de livro inacabado porque lhe falta a resposta. Resposta esta que espero que alguém no mundo me dê*” (“This story unfolds in a state of emergency and public calamity. It is an unfinished book because it offers no answer. An answer I hope someone somewhere in the world may be able to provide”; 8/8). The open-endedness and the multifarious interpretations of *A hora* are thus reflected in the author’s dedication, which previews the major themes of socio-economic crises, authorship, and Otherness the novel will address.

⁵¹ “*Vós*” is the second-person plural pronoun that has almost completely been replaced by the use of the third-person plural pronoun, “*vocês*,” except in Northeastern Brazil and Northern Portugal.

A final major structural element of *A hora* that deserves discussion is the title page, on which thirteen titles are listed, line by line, separated by “*ou*” (“or”; 12/9). Perhaps most notably, “*A hora de estrela*” (“The Hour of the Star”) appears second, under “*A culpa é minha*” (“The Blame is Mine”), and the titles continue to oscillate between sentiments of guilt and empathy. Cróquer Pedrón suggests that the list of titles demonstrates the way the text wavers and remains inconclusive in that the title page represents the question of genre that should be decided before writing but is negotiated throughout Lispector’s text (146). The appearance of Clarice Lispector’s signature inserted into the list of titles serves to reinforce the question of authorship in which the dedication and the novel are invested by signifying Lispector’s participation. When Rodrigo claims ownership over the titles to discuss his authorial choices concerning the unusual punctuation of “*.Quanto ao futuro.*” (“.As For The Future.”; 17/13), the reader is again faced with a doubling of voices. The metaliterary tactic that calls into question the “true” authorship of *A hora* functions as a micro-level version of the novel’s larger socio-political question: who controls public discourse? Similarly, who possesses the means to alter or subvert the public discourse concerning poverty, women, and dictatorship? The novel’s characters and authors struggle against the invisible power structures of late-1970s Brazil not to uncover a simple answer to these questions, but rather to force the reader to acknowledge his/her role and requisite participation in both the structuring and dismantling processes of hegemonic discourse.

Differentiated Others: Decentering Brazil’s Regional and Racial Stereotypes

One of the major strategies employed to implicate the reader and uncover the damaging discourse of dictatorship (and the enduring economic ideology of Brazil)

involves the presentation of stereotypical figures, the charge of the reader in the construction of those stereotypes, and the subtle unveiling of their instability within the text. Postcolonial critic Homi K. Bhabha reconceptualizes the stereotype to better describe the competing intentions and products of colonial discourse. As he explains, the application of stereotypes attempts to fix the identity of the colonized, the Other, in order to reflect an imagined unified Self. Stereotyping, Bhabha explains, does not merely convey hatred of the Other, but rather ambivalence—the same ambivalence that is at the root of the split subject. Because the subject is a product of the lack it attempts to mask as a unified subject, stereotyping the Other as something knowable and deficient allows the colonizer to return to the primal fantasy of the Self and, by extension, the nation. As Bhabha explains, stereotyping reproduces “a similar fantasy and defence—the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, colour and culture” (116).

I add gender and class as they arise in *A hora* to this list of difference, for Bhabha’s explanation of the unstable nature of stereotypical discourse is, in many ways, akin to Butler’s conception of gender performativity: a set of signs that must be compulsively reiterated to maintain a fantasy of ideal plenitude, though the very need to reiterate reveals the ideal to be a socially constructed fantasy. According to Bhabha:

in the identification of the Imaginary relation there is always the alienating other (or mirror) which crucially returns its image to the subject; and in that form of substitution and fixation that is fetishism there is always the trace of loss, absence.

To put it succinctly, the recognition and disavowal of ‘difference’ is always disturbed by the question of its re-presentation or construction. (116)⁵²

Moreover, a stereotype cannot be facilely corrected through a more thorough understanding of the Other being stereotyped. A stereotype “is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality,” but rather an “arrested, fixated form of representation” that disavows difference (107). *A hora* makes use of stereotypical discourse through the colonizer’s, Rodrigo’s, presentation of his characters and his desire to completely know them. Lispector, however, dramatizes Rodrigo’s desire for unity and his difficulty in grappling with difference by refusing to reduce her characters to Rodrigo’s desired depictions and making evident his inability to fully know even the Others that he has created.

The major division that Rodrigo employs to classify himself versus the Others of his novel is created along class lines, though gender and race play key roles in his considerations of Macabéa’s coworker, Glória, and Macabéa herself. Olímpico, though, possesses the most similar intersectional qualities with Rodrigo: he is both male and Northeastern. Invoking the regional novels of social realism against which Lispector’s fiction has often been compared, Olímpico serves as the would-be archetype of the picaresque rural figure of the *Sertão* (interior or backlands) against Rodrigo’s academic, middle-class station. Olímpico, in fact, embodies a mixture of characteristics attributed to both the *cangaceiro* and the *sertanejo*, resisting easy classification. His macho tendencies

⁵² With his inclusion of the terms “Imaginary” and “mirror,” Bhabha is incorporating Lacanian vocabulary to make the association of stereotypical discourse with psychoanalysis and the mirror stage. For Lacan, the infant’s ability to recognize him-/herself in a mirror is crucial to subject formation pre-entry into language. This recognition inspires both pleasure at viewing the Self as a differentiated being and fear at the separation from imagined unity with the mother. For more on the mirror stage, see Lacan’s *Écrits*, specifically “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience.”

toward the social ambition, banditry, and violence associated with the nomadic *cangaciero*, or Northeastern bandit. Olímpico's interest in politics and his false gold tooth are attempts at raising his social status, as is the rebranding of himself as "Olímpico de Jesus Moreira Chaves" from his actual plain "Jesus" and the illegitimacy that surname reveals (54/44). The shame of his own legitimacy is not enough, though, to tame his intense virility: "*era um diablo premiado e vital e dele nasceriam filhos, ele tinha o precioso sêmen*" ("Olímpico was a demon of strength and vitality who had fathered children. He possessed the precious semen in abundance"; 71/58). Olímpico discounts Macabéa's interest in a radio program that marks the time by countering that he has a watch, which the reader learns he stole from a coworker because "*ele era un verdadeiro técnico em roubar*" ("[he] was very skillful when it came to stealing"; 61/50). In terms of violent and aggressive masculinity, Olímpico often responds to Macabéa's attempts at conversation with explosive anger, is fascinated by the sight of "*o açougueiro e sua faca amolada*" ("a butcher at work with his sharp knife"; 65/53), and had killed a man when he lived in Paraíba—"Olímpico era macho de briga" ("Olímpico had proven his manliness in combat"; 70/57). The inclusion of the *cangaciero* model with its primitive associations is always an ambiguous symbol, however, for Lispector will undermine this ferocious personality with Olímpico's idiosyncrasies more akin to the romantic backwoods *sertanejo*, archetypes to which he neither fully corresponds to nor fully strays from.

In discussing Lispector's (mostly female) characters, Fitz reacts against the common criticism that they are "thin, weak, and poorly drawn," sacrificed to a broader focus on style and language ("Freedom" 51). In accordance with Fitz's rebuttal, though

the characters in *A hora* may appear to be sketches, the sparing use of detail in constructing their lives is nevertheless loaded with destabilizing implications. Most obviously, though many of Olímpico's actions often correspond to either the *cangaceiro* or *sertanejo* ideals, his actions suggest a level of awareness and attempt at working within the modern urban culture. Though Rodrigo comments on Olímpico's greasy hair, unsuited to the urban fashion, there is little else about Olímpico that distinguishes him from the Rio citizens. The fact that the narrator must inform the reader of Olímpico's Northeastern characteristics is in itself proof that Olímpico is engaged in a form of cultural passing. He keeps secret the deeds that most closely associate him with the backlands bandit: he tells no one about killing a man and stealing the watch.⁵³

In other ways, Olímpico's actions and reactions reveal his inability to maintain the ideal undivided masculine identity through his relationship with his female counterpart from the interior, Macabéa. His aggressive outbursts toward Macabéa are brought on by his failure to participate fully in the modern cultural landscape of Rio. As Barbosa observes, "Olímpico and Macabéa's relationship is largely based on the power and effect of words that they do not know" ("Parodies" 118). Thus, when Macabéa seeks Olímpico's help in understanding abstract concepts like algebra, which she mispronounces as "*élgebra*," or mimetism, Olímpico responds by reinstating strict guidelines for proper, honorable gender roles: he tell her such words are "*de homem que vira mulher*" ("[for] men who've turned into pansies"; 61/49) and that "*O Mangue está cheio de raparigas que fizarem perguntas demais*" ("The brothels in Mangue are full of

⁵³ For a detailed account of the historical figure of the backlands figure in the mid-to-late 1800s in Brazil, see Martha S. Santos's text, which analyzes the gendered structures that normalized violence and banditry as features of Northeast masculine honor.

women who asked far too many questions”; 67/55). His ability to embody the hardened masculinity that he preaches is, however, impeded by his own physical reality. Olímpico avoids Macabéa for days after attempting to prove himself by lifting her in the air with one hand only to falter and drop her in the mud, giving her a bloody nose.

Not only does he fail to meet the Northeastern standards of virulent *cangaceiro* masculinity, but Olímpico also destabilizes them by holding seemingly incongruent characteristics simultaneously. He is motivated by desires for wealth and political power, yet, according to Rodrigo, “*não sabia que era um artista*” (“remained unaware that he was also an artist”; 56/45) due to the beautiful carvings he made. While bloodlust drives many of his actions, past and present, one of Olímpico’s weekly rituals involves searching out and attending the funerals of strangers. Rodrigo explains that Olímpico “*fraquejava*” (“lost all courage”) at funerals and that “*Semana em que não havia enterro, era semana vazia*” (“A week that passed without a funeral left Olímpico feeling empty”). The urge to attend the funerals of “*desconhecidos*” (“complete strangers”) establishes a compelling contrast with the inability of Brazilians to locate their approximately 500 *desaparecidos* and sufficiently mourn their losses. For Olímpico, Lispector also sets up an implicit comparison by immediately following his defining act of violence—the murder of the man in Paraíba—with the description of his reading of obituaries, when “*seus olhos ficavam cheios de lágrimas*” (“his eyes would fill up with tears”; 70/57). Such descriptions of a rich internal world inaccessible to his author situate Olímpico firmly in the *sertanejo* camp of characteristics as well. Crucially, for Olímpico’s character, his ritualistic actions reveal a compulsive need to perform mourning, to

displace feelings of vulnerability and perhaps broader societal injury, when the *cangaceiro* discourse of honor and masculinity fails to sustain him.

Though Macabéa and Olímpico's relationship is fraught with lack of mutual understanding and respect in spite of a shared cultural heritage, Olímpico's final blow to their relationship, in which he unceremoniously casts Macabéa aside to pursue her more physically and socially attractive coworker, Glória, both falls in line with his eye toward social mobility and, paradoxically, destabilizes his backwoods identity. Cynthia A. Sloan notes that Lispector's line "written" by Rodrigo—"O sertanejo e antes de tudo um *paciente*" ("The man from the backwoods is, above all, patient"; 79/65)—harkens back to the regionalist novels that her text subverts. Sloan observes that the phrase alters a notable description of the Northeast hero, as established by José de Alencar and in Euclides da Cunha's *Os sertões* (translated as *Rebellion in the Blacklands*). The substitution of "*forte*" with "*paciente*" ("strong" with "patient") dissolves the notion of the romantic *sertanejo* to replace him with a downtrodden figure at the mercy of his restricted political and economic reality. As Sloan explains, "after all, the 'sertanejo' has no choice but to be patient and to take all that life throws his way precisely because he is not strong enough to rebel" (93). Olímpico, then, through his past and present actions in the text, simultaneously exposes the problematic nature of any fixed descriptive, specifically the intertwined gender and class implications of the *cangaceiro* and the *sertanejo*. Like Macabéa, as will be seen in the next section, Olímpico is not simply out of time in the modern Brazilian landscape as a stereotyped character would be, rather he exhibits characteristics of both the backwoods roaming bandit (violence, robbery, defense of hypermasculinity), the romantic *sertanejo* (inaccessibility, silence, backwards nature)

and a more modern Rio citizen under dictatorship (focus on social mobility and the inability to properly express loss and mourning).

Before turning to the two main protagonists, Rodrigo and Macabéa, Glória's intricate gendered, racial, and class positioning obliges a brief analysis as she is one of the few non-Northeastern figures in the text who also exhibits decentering characteristics. Rodrigo makes clear in his description of Olímpico's drives that Macabéa's former boyfriend is interested in Glória for her social standing and relative wealth, not her sexuality. Though Olímpico's attraction manifests itself in the physical, it is directly connected to class: "*ele logo adivinhou que, apesar de feia, Glória era bem alimentada*" ("Olímpico perceived at once that, although she was ugly, Glória was well nourished"). Glória's life circumstances ultimately appeal to Olímpico's modern and traditional characteristics. In terms of class mobility, he discovers that "*Glória tinha mãe, pai e comida quente em hora certa*" ("Glória had a father and mother, and that she ate a hot meal that same hour every day"; 72/59). That her father is a butcher combines his desire for steady employment with his fascination with violence and blood. Finally, Olímpico's virile masculinity is represented in Rodrigo's observation that, "*Pelos quadris adivinhasse que [Glória] seria boa parideira*" ("Watching those hips, Olímpico could see that Glória was made for bearing children"). Like *A hora*'s other major characters, Glória receives very little description, but the amalgamation of characteristics that make her a compelling mate—"material de primeira qualidade" ("someone of first-class quality"; 72/59)—in Olímpico's view merge modern economic concerns with essentialist and exotic femininity.

While Glória functions as the regional Other for the rest of *A hora*'s major characters as the only *carioca* (woman from Rio de Janeiro), she is just barely their economic foil and maintains a nearly impossible mixture of racial and gender signifiers. Though dating Glória is certainly a step up the social ladder for a Northeastern metalworker like Olímpico, Rodrigo identifies Glória as one of the “*terceira classe de burguesia*” (“third-class suburban bourgeoisie”; 79/66). Glória, of course, works with Macabéa and is, thus, not a member of the intellectual elite nor is she particularly well-off financially. She contrasts most starkly with Macabéa in terms of her physicality: where Macabéa is described as having a “*corpo quase murcho*” (“parched body”; 72/59), Glória “*tinha em si a força da mulatice*” (“displayed that vitality one associates with a mulatta”; 71/59). The modern and primitive associations Olímpico makes with Glória's body are doubled and further complicated by the narrator's details on her origins. She is deserving of the bourgeois marker due to the “*bom vinho português*” (“rich Portuguese wine”) in her blood, reflected in her coloring, which is “*branca*” and “*loura*” (“white” and “fair”). Through her movement, described in sexualized terms, Rodrigo detects “*sangue africano escondido*” (“some remote strain of African blood”). The suggestion of African heritage only just distinguishable in the *carioca* of European descent is mirrored in Rodrigo's description of her hair, “*Oxigenava em amarelo-ovo os cabelos crespos cujas raízes estavam sempre pretas*” (“She dyed her curly mop of hair bright yellow though the roots remained dark”; 71/59). These very few details given about Glória serve to cast her, like Olímpico, as both and more: African and European, modern and primitive, higher-classed yet more highly racialized/gendered, and, perhaps most exceptionally, ugly yet desirable. Such intersectional signifiers are seemingly

incompatible when taken all at once, but Glória more than any other character in the novel pushes the limits of categorization and highlights the ways in which relationality drives social conception and construction of Self/Other. To the macho social climber, Glória is high-class and maternal; to the destitute competing female, Glória is rich and ugly; and to the middle-class intellectual, Rodrigo, Glória is third-class and subtly mixed-race. Thus, though a minor player in the novel's action, Glória is a major indicator of the social construction of Self and the internal and external complexity of the Other.

Subalternity Recast: Transforming the Self, Mourning the Other

Lispector employs the relationships among Macabéa, Olímpico, and Glória to problematize the stereotyping, or fixing, of various Others by gender, class, and race, but it is through the connection the narrator creates with his own protagonist, Macabéa, that *A hora*'s full commentary on power and Othering is resolved. Rodrigo's authoring of what is ostensibly a subaltern figure has occupied the main thrust of critical attention; however, the critics have oversimplified Macabéa's and Rodrigo's roles in ways that inadequately analyze Lispector's intricate treatment of characterization (as discussed, in part, above) and power roles, thus falling into the same elitist, Western-centric trap of Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial intellectual. Critics who have written on Macabéa as the quintessential subaltern figure, as Bartow and de Andrade Tosta have, overlook the effects of Lispector's narrative structure and layered cultural signifiers that disrupt strict binaries, including colonizer/colonized. Though Macabéa is the narrative's stated protagonist, Rodrigo's transformation is central to *A hora*'s project as he struggles with his inability to access the inner thoughts of the Other and is made to confront his own

precariousness, his socially-constituted Self, through Macabéa's death and his own mourning.

Rodrigo begins "his" novel in the position of the intellectual and literal authority figure versus his subaltern Macabéa, for whom, he admits, "*é verdade que também eu não tenho piedade*" ("It is true that I, too, feel no pity"; 17/13). As with her complex construction of her other characters, Lispector positions Rodrigo as straddling the colonizer/colonized divide, though he places himself firmly on the side of power. It is difficult to identify Rodrigo as a singularly colonizing force in the novel because, as a Northeasterner who has had "*mau êxito*" ("limited success"; 22/17) as an author, he is, like Lispector herself, also at the mercy of the economic downturn and the dictatorship. Nevertheless, his repeated desire to provide a "*narrativa tão exterior e explícita*" ("narrative that is so open and explicit"; 16/12) as to bore both himself and his reader as well as his declaration that "*E dever meu, nem que seja de pouca arte, o de revelar-lhe [a Macabéa] a vida*" ("It is my duty, however unrewarding, to confront her with her own existence"; 18/13) align with Spivak's transparent observer who is "complicit in the persistent constitution of Other as the Self's shadow" (75). As Spivak explains, poststructuralist intellectuals often unwittingly construct a "self-consolidating other" that serves to reaffirm Western thought and unify the sovereign subject (89). The result is the conception that intellectuals "must attempt to disclose and know the discourse of society's Other," implying that the Other is knowable (66). For Spivak, however, the "transparency" of the intellectual functions as a mirror in which his/her own ideologies are reflected back. Rodrigo's stated goals make clear that he is attempting to fulfill the role of transparent observer, and Spivak's critique makes known that his project can only

end in a false sense of subjective plenitude unless Rodrigo is able to acknowledge difference, to recognize that Macabéa cannot be completely known to him.

Moreover, Lispector gives her reader a quite literal presentation of the construction of the Other as a self-consolidating figure. Because the reader receives Macabéa's story through Rodrigo, critic de Andrade Tosta considers that "*o romance indica que o poder dominante limita a agência de pessoas que estão em uma posição subalterna em sociedade, tolhendo as suas ações e, de certo modo, até seus pensamentos*" ("the novel indicates that the dominant power limits the agency of people that are in a subaltern position in society, impeding their actions and, in a certain way, even their thoughts; 255). With a similar approach, Bartow states, "Macabéa is the truly subaltern in a silent life (that we, and Rodrigo, do not listen to), that seems to be nothing more than subsistence; she cannot speak for herself because she is unaware of herself" (121). The problematic nature of these claims lies in the fact that they both take Rodrigo's observations about Macabéa at face value, Bartow nearly echoing Rodrigo's words: "*Quero antes afiançar que essa moça não se conhece senão através de ir vivendo à toa. Si tivesse a tolice de se perguntar <<quem sou eu?>> cairia estatelada e em cheio no chão*" ("First of all, I must make clear that this girl does not know herself apart from the fact that she goes on living aimlessly. Where she foolish enough to ask herself 'Who am I?', she would fall flat on her face"; 20/15). To suggest that Macabéa's thoughts are shaped by Rodrigo's power or that she is unaware of herself is to accept Rodrigo's reading of her. Rodrigo, of course, is creating her and, thus, does hold the authorial power over her thoughts, but accordingly, the reader must recognize that his observations are

less depictions of the lived experience of a subaltern (which Spivak has taught us cannot be known) than they are reflections of his own guilt, desire, and fear of the Other.

At the outset of the novel, Rodrigo in fact admits his fear and self-reflective tendencies when he explains that the character of Macabéa is based on another “real” (though diegetic) person, in whom he recognizes aspects of himself. As he explains, “*É que numa rua do Rio de Janeiro peguei no ar de relance o sentimento do perdição no rosto de uma moça nordestina. Sem falar que eu em menino criei no Nordeste*” (“In a street in Rio de Janeiro I caught a glimpse of perdition on the face of a girl from the North-east. Without mentioning that I myself was raised as a child in the North-east”; 16/12-3). Before the action of the novel begins, Rodrigo constructs a similar scene in which Macabéa looks into a mirror and he narrates, “*no espelho aparece o meu rosto cansado y barbudo*” (“in the mirror there appears my own face, weary and unshaven”; 28/22). Having seen a girl not entirely unlike himself living in destitution, who is, all the same, utterly inaccessible to him, Rodrigo sets out to create a character of which he can claim complete knowledge and with which he often over-identifies. Rodrigo’s project, then, effectively blurs the re-presentation/speaking for distinction that Spivak distinguishes by recasting the Northeastern girl in Macabéa, an action that Rodrigo repeatedly claims he is undertaking as an obligation.

The root of Rodrigo’s feelings of obligation becomes obvious through his frequent auto-interruptions: “*Mas por que estou me sentindo culpado? E procurando aliviar-me do peso de nada ter feito de concreto em beneficio da moça?*” (“But why should I feel guilty? Why should I try to relieve myself of the burden of not having done anything concrete to help the girl?”; 30/23). Rodrigo’s guilt is less characteristic of

authoritative, colonial power, than it is a recognition of middle class complicity through silence and inaction—a complicity that Rodrigo passes on to his readers, which Marques reminds us are likely middle/upper class just like *A hora*'s writers (113). He first addresses the reader implicitly with the previously quoted statement, “*é verdade que também eu não tenho piedade*” (“It is true that I, too, feel no pity”; 17/13), the “*também*” (“too”) suggesting that Rodrigo’s reader is in agreement with him. Later, he makes a more direct statement when he claims in a parenthetical aside that the reader who “*possui alguma riqueza e vida bem acomodada*” (“is financially secure and enjoys the comforts of life”) will need to work to comprehend the utter misery of Macabéa’s daily reality, whereas “*Se [o leitor] é pobre, não estará me lendo porque ler-me é supérfluo para quem tem uma leve fome permanente*” (“If he is poor, he will not be reading this story because what I have to say is superfluous for anyone who often feels the pangs of hunger”; 38/30). Thus, Rodrigo simultaneously critiques the upper/middle-class position that maintains the privilege of reading about poverty and subjugation while attaching himself and his reader to that very position.

From this standpoint, Rodrigo also takes on the assumptions of the transparent observer by indicating to his privileged reader that, through some mental work, the reader can know Macabéa’s experience and that Rodrigo is capable of transmitting it. He embarks on his own process of identification with Macabéa by attempting a kind of method writing, in which he barely sleeps, ceases shaving, and wears tattered clothing. Rodrigo does this “*para [se] pôr no nível da nordestina*” (to put [him]self on the same footing as the girl from the North-east”). Furthermore, his writing process contains gendered and linguistic components. His withholding of basic needs extends to the

avoidance of sex and soccer, through which he seemingly attempts to emasculate himself (29/22). As Barbosa points out, Rodrigo even makes an effort to emulate his characters' speech not only through his penning of their dialogue, but also by incorporating working-class vernacular into his narration. She notes that Rodrigo mixes popular vocabulary with the more "erudite" pluperfect verb tense when describing Olímpico. In another section, Rodrigo takes on characteristics of common speech by leaving nouns singular after plural articles, a common occurrence in colloquial Portuguese ("Affirmative" 238). All of these obligations that Rodrigo fulfills (whether through personal desire or through perceived societal pressure) are based on the principle that, by emulating his characters and placing himself in their circumstances, Rodrigo can be and is acting as a transparent observer.

Rodrigo's method serves to reinforce his conception of the accessibility of the subaltern while also critiquing the social realist novels against which Lispector's work has been evaluated and, at the same time, acknowledging the pressures of writing under dictatorship. He follows his description of his method by commenting, "*talvez eu tivesse que me apresentar de modo mais convincente às sociedades que muito reclamam de quem está neste instante mesmo batendo à máquina*" ("I might have to present myself in a more convincing manner to societies who demand a great deal from someone who is typing at this very moment" 25/19). Rodrigo's explanation for his writing process makes clear his concern with literary versus social action, reiterating "Lispector's" (as the narrator of the dedication) fear of social status as hindrance for the author writing on oppression: "*Dedico-me à saudade de minha antiga pobreza, quando tudo era mais sóbrio e digno e eu nunca havia comido lagosta*" ("I dedicate [the novel] to the memory of my years of hardship when everything was more austere and honourable, and I had

never eaten lobster”; 7/7). The novel’s dedication, then, demonstrates Lispector’s concern with the representation of the other, and, by employing Rodrigo as an intermediary, her novel explores the ways in which one can never fully know the subaltern through a character-narrator that begins “his” novel believing he can.

Even as he asserts his claim over Macabéa’s story, Rodrigo paradoxically struggles with his inability to access the thoughts of his own protagonist. Rodrigo cannot understand Macabéa’s ability to carry on in such destitute circumstances, though he insists on his complete knowledge of her. He ponders: “*Será que o meu ofício doloroso é o de adivinhar na carne a verdade que ninguém quer enxergar? Se sei quase tudo de Macabéa é que já peguei uma vez de relance o olhar de uma nordestina amarelada*” (“Can it be that it’s my painful task to perceive in the flesh truths that no one wants to face? If I know almost everything about Macabéa, it’s because I once caught glimpse of this girl with the sallow complexion from the North-east”; 69/56). Again, he claims supreme authorial control, which he gleans from gazing for a fleeting moment upon a similar figure in his “real” life. Thus, he believes that his gaze, his brief observance of the Other, is sufficient for understanding the lived experience of another. He is consistently angered, however, by Macabéa’s failure to fight against the system that is oppressing her. He describes a singular moment of hope for her social awakening when she sees the book *Humilhados e Ofendidos (The Shamed and Oppressed)*⁵⁴ in her boss’s office, but that is lost when she concludes “*que na verdade ninguém jamais a ofendara, tudo que acontecia era porque as coisas são assim mesmo*” (“that no one had ever really oppressed her and that everything that happened to her was inevitable”; 50/40). He takes his claim to

⁵⁴ Lispector, here, is alluding to Fyodor Dostoevsky’s 1861 novel, which is more commonly translated to English as *The Humiliated and Oppressed*.

knowledge of the Other a step further, then, by suggesting the he does not merely know Macabéa, rather he knows her better than she knows herself. From his privileged position as author and middle-class intellectual, Rodrigo considers his evaluations of Macabéa—that she is insignificant, oppressed, and unconscious of her oppression—to be the definitive truth on her circumstances.

As the novel progresses, the reader becomes aware that, though Rodrigo may be writing Macabéa, he is often unable to read her. Rodrigo as intermediary becomes Rodrigo as opaque observer—his self-positioning as the author-intellectual becomes clear to the reader, and through this distancing effect, the reader can recognize Rodrigo's ultimate inability to access Macabéa. Having implicated the reader early in the novel as inhabiting a similar space to Rodrigo, the ability to view the narrator's frustrations and obstacles to comprehending his characters effectively teaches the reader to recognize and accept difference. Bartow reads this distancing process in *A hora* in terms of its connection to the *testimonio* genre, "Lispector's novels make fictitious the gesture to cede authority and space to the voiceless: the author-narrator-transcriber himself becomes witness and informant" (138). Bartow suggests here that, unlike traditional testimonial in which the transcriber is hidden much the same as Spivak's transparent observer, Rodrigo's overwhelming presence in the novel forces the reader to acknowledge the transcriber's self-identification/reflection in the narrative and in the testimonial informant/witness, who would traditionally be Macabéa, though, as Bartow points out, is more aptly Rodrigo in this case.

In contrast to Valenzuela's texts that involve two competing voices, *A hora* provides a space in which one voice, Macabéa's, is completely subsumed by the other,

Rodrigo's. Mara Galvez-Breton attempts to explicate the narrative structure of the novel by positing it as a post-feminist text that both speaks *of* and *as* the Other. Relying on Irigaray, though not yielding to the concept of a distinct feminine language, Galvez-Breton describes the *of/as* difference: speaking *of* is "to name, distance, evaluate à la representational language" whereas speaking *as* "is to voice the silent voices, to take on the language of the other, while necessarily subverting it in order, once again, to avoid falling into the trap of the One" (71). Galvez-Breton's analysis on the surface seems to fall in line with Bartow's and even Avelar's concepts concerning testimony and allegory; however, her discussion of speaking *as* suffers from an overreliance on gender as the singular Othering effect of the novel as well as a reductionist view of the complex metafictional narrative structure of *A hora*.⁵⁵ As discussed above, Rodrigo's relationship to Macabéa is predicated upon their similarities, that they are regionally connected, in addition to their differences, that they are of opposite genders and different social classes. This complex intersectional relationship to Macabéa provides Rodrigo access to a very small cross-section of her experience and is complicated by the fact that Rodrigo as author-narrator is expressly creating her. While Rodrigo undoubtedly speaks *of* Macabéa, his few attempts to speak *as* his characters are overpowered by his looming metafictional presence and his increasing awareness of his difference and precariousness in relation to Macabéa.

Lispector's repeated invocation of mirrors throughout *A hora* is a motif that is of particular use in charting Rodrigo's transformation concerning his subject position and

⁵⁵ Galvez-Breton also consistently refers to Rodrigo as "Relato" throughout her article, apparently due to a misreading of the novel's punctuation: "*Eu, Rodrigo S. M. Relato antigo*" ("I, Rodrigo S. M. A traditional tale"; 17/13), where the period after "M" should indicate both his initialized name and the conclusion of a sentence.

Macabéa's difference. The first appearance of a mirror, when Macabéa looks in and Rodrigo sees his own reflection, is characteristic of his transparent observer's belief in his ability to know the Other, for he views himself and Macabéa as the same: "*Tanto nós nos intertrocamos*" ("We have reversed roles so completely"; 28/22). Having told his reader multiple times that Macabéa possesses no self-awareness, in this first mirror scene, he concludes by describing Macabéa's reaction to herself in the mirror, "*Olhou-se e levemente pensou: tão jovem e já com ferrugem*" ("She studied herself and mused: so young and yet so tarnished"; 32/25). The contradictory nature of Rodrigo's statements on Macabéa's mental capacity and social awareness so early on in the novel signal his intellectual blind spots to the reader, but Rodrigo's movement from his perceived place as transparent observer to accepting of difference in relation to Macabéa is the final *lispectoriano* contribution that surfaces through multiple reflections.

After lying about a toothache to her boss, Macabéa spends a free day enjoying her time alone in the small room vacated by the four Marias. Macabéa enjoys the freedom of her "*arduamente conseguida solidão*" ("well-earned solitude"), solicits coffee and boiling water from her landlady, and watches herself in the mirror as she drinks it—"*Encontrar-se consigo própria era um bem que ela até então não conhecia*" ("To confront herself was a pleasure that she had never before experienced"; 51/41). Again, it is impossible to judge the thoughts and feelings of Macabéa as true testimony of the Other when they are so observably ascribed to her by Rodrigo. Nevertheless, this second instance of the mirror in the text breaks with the previous melding together of Rodrigo and Macabéa. Here, Macabéa has willfully deceived her boss in order to capitalize on a desire to be free in her solitude and partake of some small luxuries. She can already be seen as more than the

obedient, naïve waif as Rodrigo has portrayed her, and, as she begins to diverge from his stated ideal Other, Rodrigo clearly sees her as a separate being, a subject that, in fact, causes him unease. He comments that he “*Desconfio um pouco de sua facilidade inesperada de pedir favor*” (“[is] a little suspicious of the ease with which this girl is asking favours”; 52/41) and wonders why Macabéa has changed and is able to look in the mirror without her reflection being “*tão assustador*” (“quite so alarming”; 52/42). The inconsistent statements that Rodrigo provides about Macabéa—among them that she is powerless as she manipulates, that she is unconscious of her circumstances as she makes insightful observations, that she is innocent as she dreams of sex—never serve to direct the reader to a true understanding of Macabéa. The narrative structure functions to reinforce Spivak’s conceptions about the inability to know the subaltern and, through the suspension of verisimilitude required by Avelar’s mourning literature, foregrounds the Otherness of her world.

The final two mirror incidents (one literal, the other metaphorical for Rodrigo) occur in response to Macabéa’s continued misfortune of losing Olímpico to Glória. The suffering caused by this loss has more to do with Macabéa’s loneliness and longing for human connection than it does for her lived relationship with Olímpico. Her conclusion that they would marry had less to do with Olímpico himself than with a belief in the teleological progression of heteronormative relationships. Outside of her connection to Olímpico, Macabéa is ostensibly alone: the narrator notes that “*Nem Glória era uma amiga: só colega*” (“Not even Glória could be called a friend; just a workmate”; 77/63). Macabéa’s desire to develop significant relationships drives her to a kind of drag and pursuance of the heterosexual, feminine, upper-class ideal. The day after her breakup,

Macabéa buys a new lipstick and, in the bathroom at work, colors her lips in an attempt to look like the ultimate symbol of Western, wealthy femininity—Marilyn Monroe. The result of this parody is a grotesque image that resembles neither Marilyn nor Macabéa: “*ficou olhando no espelho a figura que por sua vez a olhava espantada. Pois em vez de batom parecia que grosso sangue lhe tivesse brotado dos lábios por um soco em plena boca*” (“she stood staring at herself in the mirror, at a face which stared back in astonishment. The thick lipstick looked like blood spurting from a nasty gash”; 75/61-2). Thus, Macabéa has progressed from being a reflection of Rodrigo, to a distinct entity, and finally to a self-fashioning parody that, however grotesque, asserts a type of agency on Macabéa’s part.

The novel moves toward its close with Macabéa searching out, with increasing intensity, the experiences she believes will assist her in forging meaningful connections with others. All of these experiences, the lipstick, a medical exam, a reading with a fortune teller, are representative of the social status from which she has been precluded. Through these actions of his protagonist, Rodrigo fully reveals and begins to relinquish his self-identification with Macabéa. After her medical exam, during which the doctor recommends she quit dieting to lose weight as a means to cover up his guilt at her obvious economic destitution, Rodrigo makes clear his need and inability to control his character’s reactions. He claims strong feelings for his character—“*estou apaixonado por Macabéa*” (“I adore Macabéa”; 82/68)—but also extreme frustration that she does not reflect his own inclinations. He wishes that she would say, “*eu não acho que um ser fale com o outro, a verdade só me vem quando estou sozinha*” (“I find that people don’t really communicate with each other. The truth comes to me only when I’m alone”; 83/68).

Rodrigo firmly breaks through his perceived transparency when he notes in the next paragraph, “*Vejo que tentei dar a Maca uma situação minha: eu preciso de algumas horas de solidão por dia senão <<me muero>>*” (“I can see that I’ve tried to impose my own situation on Maca: I need several hours of solitude every day, otherwise *I die*”; 83/68-9). Consequently, as Macabéa seeks out more opportunities to connect to others, Rodrigo is finally able to see her as Other and, against his own stated inclinations, becomes progressively more affected by her presence.

The final scenes of *A hora* are replete with irony, destruction, and, paradoxically, connection. Convinced by Glória to go see the fortune teller, Madame Carlota, Macabéa receives news that all of her wishes will come true: her job will not be in jeopardy, Olímpico will desire her again, she will come into great fortune, and she will soon meet a blond foreign man she will marry. At the prospect of such good fortune, which will bring her the human connection she desires and the financial security she needs, Macabéa steps into the street where she is struck by a yellow Mercedes and where she eventually dies. Macabéa’s death is in fact identical to the fortune of the girl Madame Carlotta had read before her, while Macabea’s blond foreigner (as well as the emblematic title of the novel) ultimately comes to stand for the all of the destructive forces that contribute to her death. Brazil’s foreign-based economic policies that forced her into poverty and the foreign investors themselves who were concentrated only on the material wealth they could gain at the expense of Brazil’s people are present in the foreign-made car with the star ornament and the driver who speeds away after striking her. Moreover, the voluntary blindness of Rio’s inhabitants to the plight of the working-class Northeastern woman is interrupted by Macabéa’s sudden and remarkable visibility. Just as the other citizens on

the street are forced to see the girl in her death and recognize her difference, so is Rodrigo brought to face the subject of his creation for what she is—an Other, a difference by which his own subjectivity is in part formed.

Macabéa's extended death scene (unfolding over nine pages of the short novel) serves, in Rodrigo's case, as a dramatization of the social construction of subjectivity, a discussion on grievability, and a recognition of the precarity of both characters' existence. When Butler asks in *Precarious Life*, "How does the prohibition on grieving emerge as a circumscription of representability, so that our national melancholia becomes tightly fitted into the frame for what can be said, what can be shown?" (148), she is formulating a question that I argue is also central to Lispector's novel. In late-1970s Brazil, where the grieving of disappeared lives and the lives of those, like Macabéa, who exist in near invisibility is systematically forbidden, Rodrigo's fight to keep his own character alive represents an undoing of authorial power and the process of mourning that maintains difference. Like the rest of the novel, Rodrigo continues to speak in contradictory terms throughout Macabéa's death, but, for instance, though he asserts to his reader, "*Mas que não se lamentem os mortos*" ("But don't grieve for the dead"; 102/85), he spends much of her death communicating his unwillingness to let her die and his uncertainty over her life's conclusion. He vows, "Vou fazer o possível para que ela não morra" ("I shall do everything possible to see that she doesn't die"; 97/80), but he also admits to not knowing if she will: "*Macabéa por acaso vai morrer? Como posso saber?*" ("Is Macabéa about to die? How can I tell?"; 98/81). Again, Rodrigo's self-contradictory statements call into question his narrative authority over his protagonist, but he is now able to accept himself that elements of the Other are outside of his control.

Rodrigo's transformation from transparent to opaque observer, from one who assumes complete knowledge to one who acknowledges the inaccessibility and necessity of the Other, is completed in the final pages of *A hora*. Rodrigo underlines the precarity of socially-constituted subjectivity with his statement, "*Quanto a mim, substituo o ato da morte por um seu símbolo. Símbolo este que pode se resumir num profundo beijo mas não na parede áspera e sim boca-a-boca na agonia do prazer que é morte*" ("Personally, I substitute the act of death with one of its symbols. A symbol that can be summarized by a deep kiss, not up against a wall, but mouth to mouth in the agony of pleasure that is death"; 99-100/82). Pleasure, desire for another, physical proximity are shown by Rodrigo, like Butler, to necessarily involve the risk of death (social or bodily) at the hands of the Other. Rodrigo then divulges his own acceptance of this precarity and his connection to Macabéa when he states, "*Macabéa me matou*" ("Macabéa has murdered me"; 103/85). With this statement, Rodrigo reflects Butler's pronouncement that, in grieving the loss of someone, true mourning occurs in the subject's ability to accept that s/he has been transformed, perhaps irrevocably, by the loss. As Butler suggests, "Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to a transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance" (*Precarious* 21). Rodrigo's acceptance of Macabéa's death, against which he had authorially struggled, combined with his acceptance that Macabéa's death has profoundly altered his subjectivity—that she symbolically killed him, or a part of him—solidifies Rodrigo's transformation. The dramatization of the author-narrator's metamorphosis from detached authoritative figure to engaged socially-constructed subject within the novel serves to provide a third path for the reader in which power is not simply

subverted, the hierarchy is not merely reversed, rather an alternative route to a more equal relationality emerges from Rodrigo's experience with Macabéa.

Conclusions: Mourning outside the Box, a Route around Hierarchy and Stereotype

To be sure, *A hora da estrela* does not present a happy ending for its subaltern-like figure, Macabéa, or the Brazilian society she and Rodrigo represent. Lispector, of course, warned her reader in the dedication that the text would not end neatly. Again, “*Trata-se de livro inacabado porque lhe falta a resposta. Resposta esta que espero que alguém no mundo me dê. Vós?*” (“It is an unfinished book because it offers no answer. An answer I hope someone somewhere in the world may be able to provide. You perhaps?”; 8/8). The novel hinges on the reader's participation and associated transformation—by reading Rodrigo's transition from intellectual observer to engaged mourner, the reader can be roused to action in a manner that does not fall prey to the hegemonic/counter-hegemonic divide of the *testimonio*. The novel in effect instructs the reader on the ways in which citizens so easily stereotype, maintain the status quo, and deny socially-constructed subjectivity in order to confront the reader with his/her privileged, complacent position—a position, Lispector makes known, that she as author also often inhabits.

The Brazilian context, which presented a dictatorship that seemed, superficially, to be improving the economy and upholding tenets of democracy, necessitates a more circumvented attack on power and grief than do the Argentinean and Chilean texts considered here. As a result, Lispector's work tackles authority, economic inequality, and mourning through the historically fraught figure of the *sertanejo/a*, decentering and demystifying this and other identity categories through a complex web of significations.

The structural layering of narrative voices provides for the circumstances of Avelar's mourning literature in that it suspends verisimilitude in order to draw the reader into the alternative logic of the novel. In the end, Macabéa cannot be saved and cannot be heard by her narrator and reader; however, reading the mourning process of Rodrigo as he comes to comprehend Macabéa's simultaneous Otherness and connection to himself provides an avenue for the reader's own transformation. No one has been able to read Macabéa at the novel's conclusion, but no one can romanticize her life into a guilt-ridding example of backwoods triumph either, which is slight progress in itself. Though the protagonist dies without ever being known by her multiple authors and readers, her relationship to Rodrigo remains a catalyst for further action. The novel begins with a creative force: "*Tudo no mundo começou com um sim. Uma molécula disse sim a outra molécula e nasceu a vida*" ("Everything in the world began with a yes. One molecule says yes to another molecule and life was born" 11/15). Though Lispector and Rodrigo uncover no solutions to Macabéa's circumstances, the novel concludes with the same positive response: "*Não esquecer que por enquanto é tempo de morangos. Sim.*" ("Don't forget, in the meantime, that this is the season for strawberries. Yes." 104/86). This deceptively innocuous ending in the affirmative all the same signals a movement forward, suggesting that the way out of the postdictatorship discursive bind will be a step toward the Other.

In the following chapter, Diamela Eltit's *Lumpérica (E. Luminata)* will find multiple points of overlap with Lispector's short text even though the structure is significantly more intricate and the author's history of direct political participation sets her apart from Lispector. Class, marginality, and issues of authorship and representation

form the central concerns for Eltit, and she pushes the boundaries of genre and language near to the edge of comprehension. In many ways, Eltit's narrative style is akin to Lispector's characteristic lyrical play of sign and referent; however, Eltit's experience with art activism and political protest expose a clearer connection to dictatorship in her novel, and the central figure and scenes furtively critique the repressive tactics, the economic policies, and the political rhetoric of a Chile under the singular rule of General Augusto Pinochet.

CHAPTER 5: REDIRECTING THE GAZE: THE BODY AS A PERFORMATIVE SITE OF
TRAUMA IN *LUMPÉRICA*

Born in the same year Chilean women were granted full political enfranchisement, Diamela Eltit (1949—) is a coincidental leading figure for her nation, for feminism, and for the present study. Her body of work includes a diverse array of artistic, literary, critical, and political output and posts: in addition to her art actions, novels, and critical essays, Eltit served as the cultural attaché to Mexico from 1990-94 and most recently has taught creative writing at New York University. Whereas Luisa Valenzuela eventually chose self-exile from Argentina out of fear of being persecuted for her literary output and Clarice Lispector resided and published in Brazil during the dictatorship somewhat covertly (in that her work was and often continues to be regarded as less openly political or critical of dictatorship), Eltit was engaged in active resistance throughout the long Chilean military dictatorship under General Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). As one of the founding members of CADA (*Colectivo de Acciones de Arte/Art Actions Collective*), Eltit and her fellow artist-activists began staging art actions that opposed the military dictatorship, yet were deftly concealed by a complex relationship with language and experimentation in artistic representation. One of CADA's most notable acts, the "NO +" (No more) campaign, for example, which lasted from 1983-89, involved tagging the slogan on the walls and signs of Santiago to semiotically disrupt public spaces. The "NO +" strategy clearly demonstrated resistance to Pinochet's regime broadly and to the 1988 plebiscite that could have triggered an eight-year extension of his

rule in particular, but it was also artfully anonymous and open-ended so as not to give way to direct political repercussion. Thus, CADA and Eltit in her own right have consistently produced work in which politics, art, and critical theory necessarily coalesce, marking them as major contributors to the *Escena de Avanzada* (Progressive/Vanguard Scene), as named by Nelly Richard, that broke with traditional forms of artistic expression as a response to the most brutal years of the Pinochet era.⁵⁶

Eltit published four novels during the dictatorship, the first of which, *Lumpérica*, was written between 1976 and 1977, during the height of the state-sponsored violence, eventually to be published in 1983 within the context of cruelty, censorship, and neoliberal capitalism that marked Pinochet's regime. *Lumpérica*, like the other novels by Valenzuela and Lispector, reconceptualizes gender, genre, and authoritarianism as it reflects on the conditions that produce such power structures and sets forth suggestions for their dismantling. Unlike Lispector and Valenzuela, Eltit is more comfortable with a feminist label, though she clearly invokes the ideology with an intersectional bent that coincides with the development of feminist and women's movements in Chile. Marjorie Agosín charts the history of Chilean women's movements from the early 1900s through the return to democratic rule in the early 1990s, noting that Chilean women's groups were generally a microcosm for the intersectional and essentialist issues that plagued women's movements globally. Like the trend in Latin American political participation by women, in which women's issues would fold into broader social issues groups or disappear entirely after suffrage, to later reemerge during the Pinochet regime, the varied groups that arose in the early half of the century often relied on essentialist conceptions

⁵⁶ For an in-depth study of this artistic shift and its contributors, see Richard's *Márgenes e instituciones: Arte en Chile desde 1973*.

of women as good wives and mothers and fought for programs that would help them more easily fulfill such roles. These groups were most often comprised of middle and upper class women, who viewed their relationship to rural and working class women as one of charity rather than as partners moving toward similar goals (132). Though Agosin points to a few organizations that did view their movements as important for women as political beings and were more inclusive of class issues, such concerns rarely surfaced until the resurgence of women's political participation in reaction to Pinochet.⁵⁷

Eltit places herself firmly in the camp of intersectional feminism with her essay, "*Errante, errática*" ("Errant, Erratic"), in which she writes on *Lumpérica* and her work in general. Eltit delineates her thoughts on what it is like to write as a woman in Chile under dictatorship even as she maintains a separation between masculine/feminine writing versus the physical sex (and, one can infer, the gendering) of the writers themselves.:

"Como yo no nací en cuna de oro y me enfrento diariamente a salvar la subsistencia de mi familia y la mía propia, estoy a perpetuidad en la vereda de trabajadoras y porto la disciplina, pero también la rebeldía legítima y legal de la subordinada social" ("Since I was not born with a silver spoon in my mouth and each day take on the salvaging of my family's subsistence as well as my own, I am continually made to toe the line of women who work, and I carry that discipline within me but also the legitimate and legal rebelliousness of the socially subordinated woman"; *Emergencias* 174/E. *Luminata* 8-9).

Thus, Eltit's first novel will find perhaps unexpected alignment with Lispector's *A hora*

⁵⁷ One major women's organization that focused on more radical and political issues for women, namely access to birth control, was the *Movimiento Pro Emancipación de la Mujer Chilena* (MEMCH/Chilean Women's Pro-Emancipation Movement) (Agosin 132). MEMCH was one of the organizations unified under the left-wing *Frente Popular* (Popular Front), which gained some political ground in the late 1930s and early 40s and contained prominent figures of Chilean letters, such as Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral, representing a historical melding of the political and literary figure in Chile that Eltit represents today.

da estrela in its consideration of socioeconomic status, the relationship between genre and gender, and the concerns of authorship and authoritarianism. Such parallels are surprising only insofar as the common trend of critical attention to these authors would connect Lispector and Eltit solely through their lyrical narrative tendencies if at all. (The previous chapter on Lispector's intensely political text has, however, addressed the misgivings of the general critical perspective on her writing as virtually apolitical.) Unlike Lispector, Eltit's political conviction has never been questioned in the critical sphere, and her first novel, *Lumpérica*, extends the metafictional tropes and gender themes taken up by Lispector and Valenzuela while interweaving Eltit's own concerns about performance, representation, and class.

To say that *Lumpérica* defies genre as well as plot and occasionally language itself would be to echo the many major critics who hold up Diamela Eltit's work as an example of the new and fragmentary reflection of Chilean society and national memory. Building on critics like Idelber Avelar and Nelly Richard, I will home in on the manner in which Eltit's novel both decenters power and reveals the problematic heteronormative structures that subtend Chilean society as a whole. *Lumpérica* thus recognizes and works to dissolve dichotomies—whether they be art/activism, male/female, or reader/author—in favor of a cyclical, inclusive conception of such categories that necessitates an Other's (in this case, her reader's) participation. Though Eltit does not succeed in answering any of the questions she raises about the past, present, or future in the national memory—and, in fact, one could argue resolution was never her goal—her novel forces her reader to engage, analyze, and hold a multiplicity of realities together at once rather than fall into the complacency that provides the foundation on which absolute power can flourish. In

Lumpérica, Eltit utilizes filmic language, liminality, and performative strategies to enact a scene of public mourning as a restorative act of for the social trauma and subsequent crisis of subjectivity suffered by Chile under Pinochet.

Dictatorship on Display: Pinochet, the Neoliberal Project, and Discursive Staging

The 1973 military coup, led by Augusto Pinochet, which resulted in the assassination (or, for the “official” narrative—the suicide) of then President Salvador Allende, ushered in a seemingly paradoxical coupling of state-sponsored violence and neoliberal economic policy in Chile. Like the many military dictatorships that swept across Latin America in the latter half of the 20th century, the Pinochet regime generated a period of widespread social trauma and human rights violations, marked by the disappearances of political dissidents, with estimates ranging from 1000 to 3000 *desaparecidos*. Eltit captures the tenuousness of living under such a conflictual state of power in her essay “*Errante, errática*” (“Errant, Erratic”), stating:

Aprender a convivir con la impotencia, soportar un estado de humillaciones cotidianas que se pueden experimentar en forma profunda cuando se es empleada pública bajo dictadura, luchar por no caer en la comodidad de la indiferencia, sobrevivir en medio de una desesperada y desesperante urgencia económica, entre otras situaciones, fue mi manera de habitar por muchos, demasiados años.

(Learning to coexist with powerlessness; putting up with a state of daily humiliations, which can be felt deeply when one is a public employee under dictatorship; struggling not to find solace in indifference; surviving in the midst of

a hopeless, helpless economic emergency, among other situations—that was my way of living for many, too many years; *Emergencias* 171/*E. Luminata* 4-5)⁵⁸

Eltit’s reflections capture not only her personal experience and the foundational conflicts that structure her novel (violence, activism, class concerns, the margin at the center, etc.), but also encapsulate the wider context of Chilean society under dictatorship, which was broadly experienced as an intense shock to the national imaginary. Catherine Boyle notes that the social trauma that permeated Chilean society was merely heightened by the extreme violence of the Pinochet regime, for it originated with the September 11th military takeover itself (97). Though a government coup is a destabilizing event in any context, Boyle’s point about Chile’s national self-conception is pertinent when reviewing the national histories of the countries studied here.

For comparison, in Argentina, a series of military coups coupled with democratic elections occurred throughout the World Wars, to be followed by the rise of Peronism, which put Juan Perón’s populist labor movement in constant conflict with the military and civilian Right, resulting in the 1955 coup, Perón’s self-exile, and later the military-led *Revolución Argentina* (Argentinean Revolution) in 1966. Perón’s brief return to power in 1973 quickly turned over to his wife and Vice President, Isabel Perón, beginning the period of oppression led by her Minister of Social Welfare, José López Rega, that carried over into the military rule on which Valenzuela’s novels focused.

Brazil’s history as an independent nation has been marked by military dictatorship from

⁵⁸ The essay “*Errante, errática*” was republished and translated into English for the edition of *E. Luminata* translated by Ronald Christ. The republication includes a slightly different version of Eltit’s original essay, including the following addition that sheds more light onto the author’s specific concerns when composing her first novel: “I lived in a territory where history mingled with hysteria, crime coupled with sales. The signs of negative power fell mercilessly on Chilean bodies, producing disappearances, illegalities, indignities” (5). In this brief addition, Eltit touches on nearly every major theme of her novel: official histories versus multiple realities and performance, gender, power, embodiedness, and grievability.

the original coup against the Portuguese throne in 1889. Getúlio Vargas's military dictatorship that established control in 1930 was intended to be short-lived with reinstatement of democratic rule as the immediate goal after stabilization, but the regime, which lasted until 1945, was soon marked by Vargas's dissolution of Congress and abolishment of the Constitution. Vargas was later elected democratically in 1951, and his suicide in 1954, motivated by the opposition call for his removal, prompted a series of democratically elected, though unstable presidencies until another coup in 1964, which ushered in the series of military dictators that ruled as Lispector penned *A hora da estrela*. In contradistinction, Chile, though not unfamiliar to political unrest, had enjoyed just over forty years of democratic rule between 1932 and the military coup in 1973, which led to Pinochet's rise to power. Thus, as Boyle suggests, the 1973 coup itself served as a traumatic and undeniably violent event, with the attack on the Presidential Palace, *La Moneda*, and the controversial death of Salvador Allende. As Boyle explains, "The site of memory began to brim with violence, and memory itself was traumatized before it became filled with the violence that was to follow" (97). Chile, a country that prided itself on its comparatively long history of democracy, was already experiencing a severe reordering of national identity, then, even before the institutionalized detentions and disappearances began, setting the country's military dictatorship apart from the others previously studied here.

Another major distinction from other military dictatorships in Latin America and the Argentinian and Brazilian cases specifically is that Chile's regime maintained the singular prominence of General Augusto Pinochet, who governed nearly exclusively from the coup in 1973 until the return to democratic rule in 1990. As is the case with

many of the military coups-turned-dictatorships in Latin America, the military junta that took control of the government with the bombing of *La Moneda* on September 11, 1973, was understood to be a necessary but brief seizure of power before a quick transition back to democracy. However, the governing structure separated out amongst the four branches of the military (Army, Navy, Air Force, and the *Carabineros*, or military police) was deftly maneuvered and manipulated by General Pinochet until he had succeeded in consolidating all political power to himself. Craig L. Arceneaux describes Pinochet's swift rise to power through his plan of "institutional aggrandizement," which "occurred in four steps as Pinochet moved from army commander, to president of the Junta, to president of the republic, and finally, to generalissimo of the armed forces" (73). Thus, Pinochet achieved his steady takeover of political power in Chile by shifting military officials around to different governmental posts, instituting mandatory leaves of absence between political postings, transferring political weight to counsels that included advisors aligned with his own programs, and selecting regional and civilian leaders who gave the appearance of decentralized power but were in their posts only as long as they had Pinochet's favor. These tactics, then, allowed Pinochet to simultaneously keep his supporters in positions of power without allowing them to gain enough influence to challenge his position.

Even after the 1988 plebiscite in which he was decidedly voted out of power, Pinochet had such control over the legal and judicial systems, he was able to extend his legacy well beyond the transfer of power in 1990. Arceneaux explains how Pinochet focused his efforts during the last two years of his rule with a three-pronged strategy: "the extrication of government personnel, the *leyes de amarre* (the binding laws), and the

constitutional reform battle” (101).⁵⁹ The laws passed in these last two years included not permitting congressional investigations before 1990, gerrymandering districts, and maintaining university positions for his supporters (102). Together with convincing older Supreme Court judges to retire early so that he could appoint young judges aligned with his political perspective, Pinochet’s legal tactics ensured that any changes to his political program or prosecution for his regime’s human rights crimes would be nearly impossible to execute.

The major economic changes upon which Pinochet embarked in order to move from the socialist practices instituted by Allende’s government to the neoliberal theories backed by the U.S. and Pinochet’s U.S.-educated technocrats were decidedly less permanent and ultimately less effective than his other efforts, even though they were praised from abroad and continue to shape Chilean economic practices. The CIA’s involvement in the backlash against leftist governments in Latin America was all but transparent in Chile, where the civilian economic advisors were dubbed *Los Chicago Boys*, educated, as they were, at the University of Chicago in the school of economic thought developed by Milton Friedman (who lectured in Chile and met with Pinochet in 1975) et al., and which emphasized free market and *laissez-faire* policies. Following the Chicago Boys’ advice, Pinochet instituted the “*programa de recuperación económica*” (economic recovery program) in 1975 that shocked the Chilean economy and, though it produced positive results from 1977 until the crisis in 1982, was never advantageous for poor and rural citizens.

⁵⁹ The term “*leyes de amarre*” (binding laws) is used to describe a number of laws passed between 1988 and 1990, including a number of constitutional organic laws that would require a four-sevenths congressional majority to alter. Such laws were aimed at all sectors of Chilean society, affecting the economy, political parties, education, etc. (Arceneaux 102).

As Arceneaux points out, however, the economic policies of the Chicago Boys were only popular with Pinochet insofar as they supported Pinochet's political program, and, once the middle class began to feel the adverse effects of the crisis by 1983, Pinochet was quick to compromise on the Chicago Boys' neoliberal theories for his own political gain (94). Tomás Moulian points to the lack of political effect the economic shock had on Pinochet's rise, explaining that it was due to the atmosphere of terror created by the repressive tactics and disappearances as well as to the all-consuming neoliberal ideological position to which Pinochet publicly ascribed. Few were able to protest the economic ramifications, and those who did were labeled "*fuera de la razón*" or "*particularistas*" (unreasonable; individualistic) or were said to be "*incapaces de mirar las medidas aplicadas con espíritu nacional, atrapados en sus intereses parciales*" (incapable of viewing the applied measures with a national spirit, captured by their biased interests; 206). This kind of rhetoric—of a national community threatened by the selfish demands of undesirable citizens and/or the threat from other nations—characterized Pinochet's regime and reflected much of the Cold War rhetoric from the United States. Such rhetoric, though, is both undermined by and paradoxically more difficult to counter due to its dehistoricized nature. As Mary Louise Pratt points out, "*El discurso de Pinochet es un discurso de enunciados en el que palabras como 'por consiguiente' y 'por lo tanto' se refieren no a hechos o razones sino a esencias y leyes eternas*" (Pinochet's discourse is a declarative discourse in which words like "consequently" and "therefore" refer not to facts or events but to essences and eternal laws; 20). Such a rhetoric also creates clear borders between good/bad, us/them, center/periphery. Consequently, Pratt is right to claim that Eltit believes that "*en cualquier estructura hegemónica es necesario*

privilegiar la marginalidad como fuente de saber crítico” (in any hegemonic structure, it is necessary to privilege the marginality as a source of critical knowledge; 21).⁶⁰ In her novel, Eltit problematizes the stark binaries of Pinochet’s discourse, revealing that a focus on essentialism subtends Chilean society more broadly, and, through the structure of the novel as well as her protagonist, she brings the margins to the center as a means of staging the process of working through trauma.

Eltit’s choice of narrative, protagonist, and setting also serve to parody the megalomaniacal tendencies of Pinochet, who fashioned the official narrative of himself as savior of the Chilean people from the inevitable catastrophes of Communism—a protection that, he would maintain, necessitated the “excesses” (i.e., violence) against those who were not in line with Pinochet’s project (Lazzara 12). Pinochet as an icon, as a public image, became a kind of celebrity perversion—the image of the *Generalísimo*, mustachioed, often behind a pair of dark sunglasses, and always in his military garb, provided for the capitalistic-inspired media saturation that granted Pinochet both omnipresence and near total control over his regime’s public image. Boyle describes Pinochet’s postdictatorship performative identities that contained “his various incarnations as a frail old man, a victim of arbitrary discrimination, the betrayed friend of Britain, an unrepentant dictator, the great patriarch and savior of his country, and, most recently as the loving grandfather” and stretched well beyond his time out of power, when he existed alternately as a fugitive, prisoner, and pardoned official (94). Eltit’s

⁶⁰ Pratt suggests that *testimonio* is the antithesis to Pinochet’s rhetoric in its complete rootedness in the real, the witnessed (21). While she is justified in pointing to a later work by Eltit as confirmation of her prioritizing of the periphery, Pratt erroneously views Eltit’s text, *El padre mío* (1989), as a testimonial work. While Eltit gathered recordings of a schizophrenic man on the streets of Santiago originally intended for documentary footage, her decision to adapt them into a novel that deals with a broader category of paranoia, trauma, and linguistic crisis aligns her with Avelar’s concept of mourning literature rather than a purely counter-hegemonic testimonial retelling.

novel, then, is a carefully calculated take on authority and performance that pits her protagonist—female, characterized by her continuously transmuting identity, and reiterated through a series of discrete but palimpsestic scenes—against the singular image of the Chilean dictator.

Lumpérica, though categorized as a novel, is comprised of ten sections (or movements or scenes) that blend together and contrast prose, verse, drama, filmic language, and photography to craft a text that is effectively all literature and anti-literature at once. Eltit's work has no real plot. Instead, the text charts the actions of a woman named L. Iluminada (not her true name, just one of her many aliases in the text) as she interacts in varying degrees with other unnamed people in a crowd in a city square in Santiago at night. She and the others perform a series of ritualistic, though ultimately nonsensical actions—at times sensual, primal, formal, or artificial—that repeat with slight variation throughout the text. These actions in the square are interrupted by metaliterary interjections and interrogation scenes that prove less straightforward than they at first seem. In fact, there is no direct reference to dictatorship, torture, or disappearances in the text, though the setting is evident and the text brims with the tension of imminent violence throughout. The structure of the text thus reflects an array of postmodern and deconstructionist tendencies, including fragmentation, pastiche, and a certain degree of hyperreality in the descriptions of the lighting from the billboard over the square: “*donado por el letrero que se encenderá y se apagará, rítmico y ritual, en el proceso que en definitiva les dará la vida: su identificación ciudadana*” (“bestowed by the signboard that will turn on and off, rhythmic and ritual, in the process that will definitively give them life: their civic identity”; 9/14). The lighting and the

advertisements it flashes onto the bodies of the individuals below serve as an ever-present reminder of the neoliberal capitalist forces that have shaped society and have placed these misfit characters in the square at the margins. At the same time, the billboard and the filming equipment present in the opening scenes create a paranoiac atmosphere—there is the sense that everything is exactly timed and that someone is always watching. This is not, however, the unnamed paranoia of the postmodern author, but the very real and justified paranoia of a country under a dictator whose economic policies adversely affect the poor and keep the country in a state of constant flux and whose surveillance of the population is both well-known and unseen.

The urban square inhabited from dusk to dawn by the “lumpen” (the anonymous group of social misfits) and the sometime-protagonist L. Iluminada clearly references the mandated curfew that kept citizens of Santiago out of public spaces at night. The interrogation scenes, which turn out to be investigations into a ruined film take contain the characteristic tropes that precede torture scenes: the endless repetition of questions, the weariness of the interrogated, a breakdown in the details of the answers. The scenes’s referent shifts, however, when the interrogated (a former extra with a small role in the film) ends up critiquing the scriptwriting and filming technique of the interrogator (presumably the *auteur* of the film being made in the square). Such misdirection on Eltit’s part serves multiple purposes. First, it reminds the reader of the clandestine nature of the violence that was occurring in Chile as Eltit was writing—the most terrorizing aspect of the military dictatorship’s violence being its unpredictability and the lack of evidence left behind, *los desaparecidos*. At the same time, Eltit’s purposeful lack of time markers and inclusion of interrogation scenes force the reader to acknowledge the

inconclusiveness of trauma as well as the impossibility of its representation. The interrogation scene involves multiple mediations on the part of the interrogated about what could have happened in the park, what was reasonable, and what was possible, without any gesture toward a final resolution of events.

Such modulations of recurring scenes constitute a major part of the work's content and focus. It would not be useful to analyze individually the 10 sections/movements/scenes of *Lumpérica* here, as literary critic and theorist Idelber Avelar has already undertaken this task in his text, *The Untimely Present*, where he lays out his concept of mourning literature akin to what the critic Nelly Richard speaks of when she considers Chile's cultural residues. The literature Avelar studies from the Southern Cone is what he calls "untimely" or mourning in that it searches for the ruins of the past and their breakthroughs into the present. The interstitial space of the square in *Lumpérica*—a space that is necessarily a via point rather than a destination—coupled with the time of night during which any action takes place, sets the scene for such residual, mourning events. L. Iluminada spends the night in the square, where, according to the curfew, she is not supposed to be. She and the lumpen perform their rituals under the light of the electric sign that imprints her with the reflected neon glow of advertisements. At the conclusion of the text, L. is alone in the square, mesmerized by the

fragments of words imprinting themselves on her dress,⁶¹ and this repetitive sequence serves to magnify the untimeliness of the scene: The light “*Estaba programada para la noche y su programación no tenía la racionalidad de Chile que paraba su ritmo nocturno*” (“was programmed for the night and its program did not have the rationality of a Chile that halts its rhythm at night”; 202/196). Thus, the sign is out of place in a city under curfew, and, similarly, L. Iluminada feels out of place with the sign—“*Pensó que ella no estaba en concordancia con lo contemporáneo de la técnica que la complacía*” (“She thought she was not in harmony with the up-to-date technology that pleased her so”; 202/197). Eltit, focusing on the margins as she does with L. Iluminada, constructs a scene in which every element is disjointed due to the unspoken trauma of a Chile under dictatorship. As she writes, “*La inutilidad de ambos—plaza y luminoso—en la noche la golpeó de pleno. Hasta ella misma era el exceso*” (“The uselessness of both—square and sign—in the night struck her with full force. Even she herself was an excess”; 203/197). Here, the reader is faced, in microcosm, with a Chile in contradiction—one that opens its borders to foreign investment and trade to support a neoliberal economic program developed in the U.S. and one that locks its citizens in their homes at night to stifle any oppositional speech or act that would counter the official narrative of General Pinochet and result in the “excesses” of dictatorial violence.

⁶¹ An oblique connection can be made here to a particularly female form of protest in Chile during the dictatorship. Agosin notes that women’s groups, with their popularity rising during the most oppressive years of the dictatorship (through 1980), began collecting scraps of material and sewing *arpilleras*, small appliquéd scenes of daily life in Chile that also served as visual representations of torture and the *desaparecidos* (137). This creative form of protest that parodically conformed to the heteronormative narrative Pinochet wished to disseminate (women at home being good mothers, taking care of their children, sewing as members of church groups or other women’s organizations) finds an echo in the scene from Eltit’s novel, which shows fragmented, or scraps of, words displayed across L. Iluminada’s clothing as a visual representation how the oppression of both the economic and political systems in Chile have been written into her daily life.

Genre and Gaze: Parodically Capturing the Pinochet Era through Reiteration

Among the pastiche of genre scenes that Eltit constructs in *Lumpérica*, a few that provide specific connection both to the political discourse of the Chilean dictatorship and the heteronormative discourse on which it and the whole of modern Chilean history is built merit further investigation. The combination of genres and the repetition of scenes provide little linear movement of plot. The two major strands of the novel are: 1) L. Iluminada in the square including description of her and the anonymous lumpen's movements, and 2) the interrogation of an unnamed man that resolves into discussion of the same major story, L. Iluminada and the lumpen. The rest of the novel's ten sections consist of meditations on these events, told in verse and prose, bookended by the events in the square. The scenes on which I focus now are, in fact, scenes, narrated and annotated, as if a film were being shot in the square. The subject of the film is apparently L. Iluminada, but the director is left unnamed and could be Eltit herself as author and/or the ubiquitous power structure in Santiago, Pinochet and his surveillance team.⁶² Though the rewrites and annotations of these scenes add to the layers of meaning, it is the intentional employment of filmic language that sets these sections apart, as they apply to the visual in a manner that implicates both the repression of Chilean citizens under Pinochet and the repression of women under the male gaze. The tension between the seen and the unseen during the Chilean dictatorship is encapsulated in Moulian's description:

⁶² Pinochet's intelligence agency, the *Dirrección de Inteligencia Nacional* (DINA, National Intelligence Directorate) operated independently from the military and carried out disappearances and detentions until 1977, when it was replaced by the *Central Nacional de Informaciones* (CNI, National Information Center), though, as Arceneaux notes, this shift was largely superficial and done in response to international pressure concerning human rights violations (79). For more on DINA's role in the military dictatorship, see Policzer.

Las dictaduras revolucionarias, que tratan de destruir antiguas formas de vida para imponer un nuevo orden racional, usan simultáneamente el silencio y la economía austera del poder disciplinario combinada con la estridencia y visibilidad del poder represivo. Esto significa que ese tipo de dictaduras une el actuar invisible del poder, del cual sólo se ven sus efectos, con la furia, en apariencia sólo pasional, del castigo. (The revolutionary dictatorships, which try to destroy former ways of life in order to impose a new rational order, simultaneously use silence and the austere economy of disciplinary power combined with the stridency and visibility of repressive power. This means that that type of dictatorship unites the invisible act of power, of which only the effects are seen, with the fury, apparently only passionate, of punishment; 174)

Moulian here, relying heavily on Foucaultian conceptions of discipline and oppression, pinpoints the central tension that Eltit's filmic language seeks to highlight. For Eltit, the visual plane of power in Chile, the visible imposition of Pinochet, or "*el rostro que no iba a cesar*" ("the face that would not quit") as Eltit has described him (*Emergencias* 21), versus the invisible disappearances is particularly suited to filmic language due to the oversimplified, tantalizing images that appear onscreen coupled with the unequal constructions of male/female power and agency that the film medium implicitly reinforces in its audience.

Feminist film criticism owes its strong beginnings to the foundational work of Laura Mulvey, including her 1975 essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," as well as her subsequent work involving camera and pen. That Mulvey's work on the male gaze and female objectification in cinema would coincide with Eltit's writing of

Lumpérica is not surprising given the spread of Second Wave feminism from Europe and the U.S. extending into Latin America (if not always extending to the actual needs of Latin American women) and the homegrown women's movements that were springing up in response to the economic crises during both Allende's presidency and Pinochet's rule. Mulvey and Eltit both serve as representations of the avant-garde in their respective artistic fields, and, with Mulvey's later work, they both tackle a very similar theoretical question: how can one develop a new language that speaks to women's experience of oppression without relying on previous heteronormative discourses, be they hegemonic or counter-hegemonic? Eltit's answer involves taking Butler's gender performativity and interjecting it into a literal and literary series of reiterations of filmic takes in written form.

Mulvey's original essay explained the psychoanalytic processes that govern identification and desire in film. She succinctly explains her essay as follows: "I argued that the spectator's position, active and voyeuristic, is inscribed as 'masculine' and, through various narrative and cinematic devices, the woman's body exists as the erotic, spectacular and exhibitionist 'other', so that the male protagonist on screen can occupy the active role of advancing the storyline" (162). In the very first pages of the novel, Eltit's reader can detect a similar spectator-like position when reading about L. Iluminada's fragmented body: "*la luz eléctrica la maquilla fraccionando sus ángulos*" ("the electric light makes her up by splitting her angles"). The narrator here constructs and instructs the gaze for the reader: "*Cualquiera puede constatar sus labios entreabiertos y sus piernas extendidas sobre el pasto—cruzándose o abriéndose—rítmicos en la contraluz*" ("Anyone can testify to her half-open lips and her legs stretched

out on the grass—crossing or opening—rhythmic against the backlight”; 9/14).

Immediately, Eltit seems to be presenting a cinematic image of a woman-object much in line with Mulvey’s critique of phallogentric cinema, for *L. Iluminada* is reified in her prostrate, fragmented, silent, and erotic state.

Eltit creates a specimen of the standard filmic construction in which a female figure on screen becomes spectacle, out of time, a blank canvas onto which male-centric desires of voyeurism or fetishism can project. As Mulvey puts it, “cinematic codes create a gaze, a world and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire,” and this is true for male and female spectators alike (25).⁶³ In written form, however, Eltit’s reader is exposed to the construction of such arresting images with the opportunity for scopophilic reaction precluded by a Brechtian sense of defamiliarization. Invoking the filmic language of set, shot, and montage disrupts her reader’s expectations and conception of time, providing these scenes with the “breaks and discontinuities” characteristic of Idelber Avelar’s untimely literature (11). Including the *Comentarios*, *Indicaciones*, and *Errores* (Remarks, Notes, and Mistakes) for each scene, however, does not merely mark an attempt to name that which is unnameable, even as the scenes often include suggestions of the repressive tactics of the trauma of dictatorship. Instead, the

⁶³ Mulvey’s theories find their basis in the psychoanalysis of Freud, who had very little to say on female sexuality, other than that it was a regression of active male sexuality. Thus, when the female spectator watches a film constructed around phallogentric identifications and desires, she is able to do so with a sort of nostalgia for an active form of sexuality that is not actually different from her own but merely a previous step on the path to her own normal female development, which eventually results in passivity (Mulvey, 30). Of course, many feminist scholars looked to redress Freud’s lack of consideration for a non-relativistic study of female sexuality by this time in the development of feminist theory, particularly Luce Irigaray, Hélèn Cixous, and Julia Kristeva. Judith Butler’s later, more radical take on the sex-gender system and its spectrum of genders and sexual orientations informs this current study moreso than the French feminists cited here; however, it is useful to consider the cinematic and other artistic output of the latter half of the 20th century in relation to these conceptions and disavowals of psychoanalysis because it is within this context that Eltit attempts to chart a third path.

commentary is reiterative in the Butlerian sense. The setting for *L. Iluminada* is out of time, pointing both backward through the dissection of the scene and forward with the implication of correcting the errors and shooting the next take

It is with this sense of defamiliarization and asynchronous movement that Eltit then embarks on the physical discovery of her subject-object, *L. Iluminada*, which brings together referents of torture and abjection through the shifting embodiment of her character. The three scenes that are “shot” in the first section of *Lumpérica* include movements around the public square by both *L. Iluminada* and the lumpen that are at times ritualistic, at times random. The spacing and staging of the bodies in the square are significant in their untimeliness: the curfew means that no one but societal outcasts would be found in the space once considered public but now fundamentally altered by the military regime, who is symbolically present in the light from the sign that pierces and surveils the square, a light that is flashing its capitalist advertisements and is described in terms of “*lo ortodojo*” and “*lo helado*” (its “orthodoxy” and “frigidity”; 10/15). Eltit has noted that the attack on La Moneda that signaled the military coup in 1973 abruptly altered the conception of bodies and space in that what had been public and open was now inhabited by only military bodies and became the reserved space of the dictatorship to regulate the movements and bodies of citizens (*Emergencias* 21). The plaza, specifically, as a historical site of public protest in Latin America, serves to highlight the paranoic effect the dictatorship had on its citizens. As both an orienting space for Latin American cities and a stage for the performance of unrest, the plaza is a uniquely multi-

referential space that Eltit employs in *Lumpérica* to explore the effects of dictatorship on bodies and psyches.⁶⁴

Two common threads throughout Eltit's work concern the ways in which power inscribes itself on the body and the body as a political entity.⁶⁵ In this novel, the body as performative site of trauma and mourning, as oscillating between abject and holy, allows Eltit to explore gender, trauma, and precarity in the plaza. L. Iluminada, first shown in stagnant shots as feminine object, is also at times the driver of the ritualistic action in the square, the jumbled faces of the lumpen waiting to take their cue from her. She performs a series of mundane actions, some of which incline toward the grotesque and the erotic. The scenes in the square are described as ceremony, as baptism, and as rebirth, mixing a ritualistic if not fully Judeo-Christian tone to the successively painful and orgiastic events, during which L. Iluminada smashes her head on a tree, masturbates, and plunges her hand into fire. The narrator often describes the body as abject, but wounds become doubly or triply coded by their correspondence to stigmata and to victims of torture. For instance, she smashes her own head on a tree "*hasta que la sangre rebase su piel, le baña la sangre su cara*" ("until the blood overflows the skin, it bathes her face that blood"), thus the scene takes on bapstimal elements even as "*se muestra en el goce de su propia herida, la indaga con sus uñas y si el dolor existe es obvio que su estado conduce al éxtasis*" ("she parades her pleasure in her own wound, she probes it with her fingernails and if there is pain it is obvious that her state leads to ecstasy"; 19/24). The shifting

⁶⁴ For an analysis of the plaza's place in the social construction of Latin American cities, see Rosenthal.

⁶⁵ Gisela Norat, Amanda Holmes, and Avelar have all produced excellent analyses of Eltit's treatment of the body in public space, for further reading.

symbolism of the body makes it impossible for the reader to choose one fixed reading of L. Iluminada, and instead must hold these three layers of competing and sometimes opposing signification together at once.

The bodily harm that L. Iluminada self-inflicts in the square performs the abjection associated with Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory as well as the unnameable trauma of torture as it exists in a society living under state-sponsored terrorism. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva outlines her conception of the abject as that which does not "respect borders, positions, rules," which lies outside the Symbolic order, and thus has the capacity to throw subjectivity into crisis. Kristeva's supreme example of the abject is the corpse, which serves to both repel and morbidly attract the subject, but which must be "radically excluded" in order to maintain the separation of split subjectivity, to maintain the psychic difference between the Self and the not-Self (2). The abject corpse, then, is a particularly fraught object for the Chilean people, who suffer daily with the absence of the physical remains of their disappeared loved ones rather than suffering through the confrontation with torture and death that could initiate the mourning process and against which they might position their split subjecthood. In *Lumpérica*, the entirety of the square becomes a stand-in for the abject—a public space that is closed off to the public, inhabited by the lumpen (the pale-faced masses) and L. Iluminada, who are at best liminal subjects, and at worst the radically excluded of Pinochet's ideal Chilean society. The abjected object within the text, specifically L. Iluminada's "*costra personal*" ("personal scab"; 10/15), which she repeatedly prods and opens in ritualistic scenes, serves as the object against which the masses within the text and the reader without can define their own subjectivities.

The abject is often associated with femininity, as it exists outside of the symbolic order through which the subject enters into the language system and wherein Lacan's Name of the Father regulates the Mother/child relationship, thus producing the entrance into subjectivity for the child and the abjection of the Mother figure. While L. Iluminada is ostensibly female in the descriptions of her body and the pronouns used to define her, her ritualistic actions are reiterations that consistently shift her identity in relation to the Others she confronts, both the lumpen and the reader. In her "*ropas grises*" ("gray garments") with her "*cabeza prácticamente rapada*" ("practically razed head"), L. Iluminada is often as androgynous figure, her outfit significant only in that "*la particulariza*" ("it particularizes her"; 31/38). In the numerous layers of discourse at work in the novel, L. Iluminada, which is an alias she has chosen for herself, becomes a receptacle for a constantly shifting Otherness that is not objectified, but rather meets the gaze of the mourning subjects she encounters.

In one such discursive layer, L. Iluminada's performance takes on messianic proportions, though in the context of the square, the lumpen require not religious transcendence but profane embodiment to be saved. The rhythmic, ritualistic, and circular movement around the square produces a sequence of baptism, crucifixion, and rebirth, all of which serve to further constitute L. Iluminada as a physical being, as precarious. Sara Castro-Klarén has noted the ways in which the three filmic scenes that open *Lumpérica* are laden with religious signifiers that act upon the body: "*El ritual también reconfigura el cuerpo al restringir sus poses y sus combinaciones. Tales restricciones vinculan el cuerpo a la promesa de un ritual: la reintegración a la comunidad y la liberación del dolor de la muerte*" (The ritual also reconfigures the body upon restricting its poses and

its combinations. Such restrictions link the body to the promise of a ritual: the reinstatement to the community and the liberation of the pain of the dead; “Escritura” 107-8). What the Chilean community needs, of course, is the recuperation of the body—of their own bodies from the limitations of expression enforced by the dictatorship and of all the disappeared bodies of family, friends, and fellow citizens.

L. Iluminada responds to this need by performing the rituals that suffuse the square with the concreteness of her own body, revealing that “*su estado general es precario*” (“her overall state is precarious” 19/24), and, due to her extended posing and the consistent reopening of her wound, that she “*estaba partida de plenitud*” (“was parted from plenitude”; 22/27). The only words L. Iluminada repeats throughout these scenes—“*tengo sed*” (“I’m thirsty”)—foreground this precariousness in its declaration of embodiment and call for assistance from an Other. In observation of L. Iluminada’s performances, the lumpen gradually constitute themselves as these Others in recognition and precarious bodily connection. Originally, the lumpen only gaze at L. Iluminada as object, but they later move beyond this fetishism to see her as a subject for their identification: “*han soltado sus cuerpos, se han sometido a la admiración condicionando sus pintas. En suma, han aprendido de la exhibición*” (“they let their bodies go, submitted to the admiration conditioning their looks. In short, they have learned from the performance”; 26/31). The lumpen’s shift in perspective corresponds to Mulvey’s explanation of the structure of film, which aligns the female image with passivity/object/fetish and the male protagonist with activity/subject/voyeuristic identification. The second scene in which the gaze shift occurs is primarily structured around L. Iluminada’s cry, in reference to which the remarks on the scene tell the reader:

“Por eso la reiteración continua del mismo. Volverlo amplificado hasta el ensordecimiento para que se vaya transformando lentamente—por tecnología—desde el timbre femenino a distintos gritos masculinos pero conservando las mismas inflexiones: idéntica curva de recorridos” (“That’s why the continuing repetition of same. Returning to it continually amplifying it up to earsplitting so that it’s gradually transformed—by technology—from the feminine timbre to differing masculine cries but preserving the same inflections: identical curves in range”; 24/29). Thus, the repetition of the sound and the addition of volume cause the perception of L. Iluminada to transfer from feminine to masculine, with corresponding positioning of the gaze.

This masculine version, artificial as it is, of L. Iluminada does not persist in the novel, but with the reiterations of poses and movements in the third scene, she pushes beyond the binary to incorporate an amalgamation of gendered signifiers that continue to skew toward the feminine but with contradictory constructions. It is during this scene that the lumpen also push actively against the filmic binary of female “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey 19) as well as move beyond the masculine site of identification to interact with their film star, accept their precarious embodiment, and acknowledge her Otherness. L. Iluminada commits the final act of self-inflicted violence (of these first three scenes, at least) by plunging her hand into fire. For the lumpen, her now abjected hand has the desired effect on their superego, as they are able to radically separate their Selves from that which is not-them: *“haberla empujado a eso por la minusvalía de la mirada los hace llegar a constituirse en otros”* (“having pushed her to that by the diminished value of their gaze makes them succeed in constituting themselves as others”; 37/43). Having through repetition of the scene of self-immolation established their own subjectivity, the

lumpen are eventually able to view L. Iluminada as an equalized Other and submit to their own precarity and a pleasure that was previously foreclosed to them—L. Iluminada touches each one of them, and the lumpen respond to her thirst, which now takes on both physiological and existential connotations. In the end, “*Todos han sido tocados y cada uno de ellos le ha procurado calor*” (“All have been touched and each one of them has provided heat for her”; 41/48). Within these three filmic takes that constitute the first scene of the novel, L. Iluminada performs abjection and precarious embodiment through ritual and reiteration in front of the fictional camera and fictional audiences of the text. In doing so, the central figure transitions the liminal lumpen from a lost sense of Self (an effect of the social trauma of dictatorship) into established, though still anonymous, subject positions that express their newfound recognition and newly accepted precarity through cooperative gestures and erotic touch—the reverse of the torturous acts parodied by L. Iluminada in the scenes.

The reiterative acts of L. Iluminada do not merely reach her diegetic audience: her author makes a textual appearance, and L. Iluminada directs her focus outward to her reader within the text. Like the other authors in this study, Eltit breaks into her novel, but she chooses to do so with some consistency throughout. The first use of the personal pronoun I in the text is not clearly attributed, and could well refer to L. Iluminada herself: “*Si [sic] yo misma tuve una herida, pero hoy tengo y arrastro mi propia cicatriz*” (“Yes I had a wound myself, but today I have and drag my own scar”; 19/24). The abrupt insertion of this thought makes it unclear if L. Iluminada thinks this sentiment or if Eltit is including it as the narrator’s commentary, though the fact that Eltit later writes herself by name into the text and will also draw on a personal historical performance in a future

section suggests that her developing narrative presence may stretch back to this early scene. The narrator soon engages in a *desdoblamiento* (a splitting), or a process of iteration in which she experiences the same recognition and desire for erotic interaction with L. Iluminada as that experienced by the lumpen, thus breaking down an authorial boundary and hierarchical arrangement of power. The event of “*mi cara de madona mirando su cara de madona*” (“my madonna face looking into her madonna face”; 28/34) leads to the cataloging and comparison of fragmentary body parts until the narrator expresses her desire for erotic union with L. Iluminada, “*mi surco de madona busca su surco de madona infértil*” (“my madonna furrow seeks her infertile madonna furrow”; 29/35). The inclusion of the motherly/martyr-like language to describe the narrator and L. Iluminada is complicated by the contradiction in terms (the madonna or mother figure would necessarily be fertile in order to garner the title at all), by the religious and erotic dynamics, and by her shifting relationship to L. Iluminada. When she later names herself within the text as “*diamela eltit*” (90/90), L. Iluminada remains a figure both like and not-like the author. When she explains of L. Iluminada, “*Sus ojos son a los míos guardianes*” (“Her eyes are to mine guardians”; 89/88), and later, “*Su alma es a la mía gemela*” (“Her soul is to mine the twin”; 90/90), the narrator maintains the tension of recognition and doubling between herself and L. Iluminada, though the consistency of recognition of the Other and erotic pleasure derived from the precarious body remains.

The inclusion of the eventually named narrator as part of the textual apparatus that produces the Other while also being produced by the Other serves, like the lumpen’s experience with L. Iluminada, serves to instruct the reader about his/her own process of identification and engagement. While describing the first take, the list of mistakes reveals

L. Iluminada's attempt to disrupt an audience outside the confines of the novel: "*Ella misma no dejó ver su mejor ángulo, escurrió la mirada directa a la cámara, volvió el rostro ante el zoom*" ("She did not show her best angle herself, sneaked a look directly into the camera, turned her face during the zoom"; 17/23). The character's attempt here to break the fourth wall, in a doubly figurative manner, indicates a desire to freeze the filmic time, to interrupt any fetishism or voyeuristic desire in which a reader could be engaging at this point. The many defamiliarizing effects Eltit includes through metafictional techniques keep the reader from identifying too deeply with L. Iluminada and from slipping into complacency, but the would-be distancing device of the look is a challenge to the hermetically sealed world of the novel in which L. Iluminada, and by extension Eltit, wants the spectator-reader to engage. Having observed both the lumpen's and the author's recognition of L. Iluminada's subjectivity and their own precarity, the reader is thus reminded of his/her status as spectator, and repeated references to "*el que la lee*" ("the one reading her"; 101/100) force the reader to metacognitively review his/her position at various points in the novel.

The necessity of this shifting of positions reminds the reader of his/her own biases and assumptions as well as gestures toward a community of readers (both inside and outside the text) whose reading of L. Iluminada will add negotiations of meaning to her subjectivity. L. Iluminada in textual form is a constant reproduction that adds to her power: "*De reiteración elevará la mirada. Situación ahora no filmica sino narrativa, ambigua, errada*" ("From reiteration she will raise up her gaze. No cinematic situation now but narrative, ambiguous, erring"; 99/98). The reader negotiates this meaning, uncovers the power structures, and meets the figurative gaze of the Other in the character

of L. Iluminada: “*su actuación es nada más que para el que la lee, que participa de su misma soledad. Enfretarán mirada a mirada, pensamientos enfretarán y sólo por eso habrá que inventar el placer que se ha evadido*” (“her performance is solely for the one who reads it, who takes part in her self-same solitude. They will come gaze to gaze, thoughts will face off and that’s the only reason why it will be necessary to invent the pleasure that has been avoided”; 101/100). Though the figure of L. Iluminada and Eltit’s novel overall cannot be read for a unified understanding of the Chilean dictatorship and the heteronormativity that structures Chilean society, L. Iluminada’s reiterative performances and the reiterative power of making meaning through engaging with the Other are the processes that will (the future tense being an integral statement on the part of Eltit, the author) move the characters, the reader, and Chilean society out of the nameless trauma and assist in their mourning of the past for a productive future.

Eltit includes in her novel the varied and shifting discourses of film language, gender, (anti)religion, and the political landscape of Chile under dictatorship and, in this layering, reveals the interconnectedness of these power structures. In each system, the subject is urged by authority to accept imagined plenitude and hierarchy instead of meeting the gaze of the Other. Eltit’s characters, on the other hand, advise the reader to look for connection, to recognize his/her own participation and potential for change, slight and difficult as it may be. Her characters also are not working outside of the system—throughout the film takes, for instance, the directoral presence, the authoritarian light source, and the artificial aspects of film consistently impede upon the performances in the square. The characters are nevertheless able to show that, through reiterative parody, the scene can be altered. Nelly Richard describes the novel’s consistent

reinscription as follows: “*La autonarratividad desconfiada de Lumpérica da a leer la historia (la Historia) como construcción-reconstrucción de textos en borradores que le ofrecen al lector una multiplicidad combinatorial de tramas alternativas o divergentes*” (The cautious autonarrativity of *Lumpérica* results in reading the story (History) as a construction-reconconstruction of texts in draft form that offer the reader a combinatorial multiplicity of alternative or divergent plots; “Tres funciones” 39). The multiplicity of combinations that *Lumpérica* puts forth does not, however, imply that the reader gets to choose an ending or singular meaning from the text. Rather, s/he must experience the modulations in meaning from the text’s reinscriptions for what they reveal—the coexistence of multiple discourses and meanings, all of which could be true.

In terms of dictatorship, Moulian explains that each new regime must make the discursive choice between “*restauración*” and “*revolución*” (restoration and revolution). In Pinochet’s case, the original story was that his regime would restore democracy, the economic system, and the moral character of Chile to the greatness it had once been; however, his own goals quickly shifted to creating a new Chile that, while grounded in much of the same gendered rhetoric it always relied on, would resolve into something Pinochet felt to be better (195). In Eltit’s case, the author recognizes the continuity of power structures and gendered oppression that continue to shape Chilean society no matter the form of government in power, and her novel works to reveal to the reader that, while revolution is the goal, it will be achieved in small performative iterations that move toward the shared constitution of subjectivity and the breakdown of binary structures.

Circling the Wound: The Gendered Body as Performative Site of Trauma

Even as Eltit deconstructs and reconstructs the scenes of untimeliness in the square, working to constitute subjectivities as separate yet reciprocal, her text delves deeper into the foundations of the power structures that have caused the unnamed trauma in the text (and in Chile). In doing so, gender binaries reveal themselves to be underpinnings of the larger system. L. Iluminada being the only identifiable woman within the text is portrayed as abject (in Kristeva's terms) and is offset by the unnamed male *interrogatorio* as well as the sign in the square, which is described in terms of its penetrating light. Eltit's destabilization of gender identities, though subtler than in Valenzuela's texts, functions as a means to an ending that, while unresolved, can be read as hopeful. Whereas the lighted sign in the square may have penetrative qualities, it is important to note that all sexual acts performed or alluded to in the text are non-penetrative. The motif of rubbing (*frotar*) characterizes much of the movement in the square by the lumpen and L. Iluminada. This orgiastic motif brings bodies into contact with one another; however, it does not serve to distinguish any lumpen from the group or to stratify power relations amongst them. Eltit also plays with the madonna/whore dichotomy through her first-person narrative voice (named diamela eltit, though not synonymous with the author's voice) to describe L. Iluminada in motherly terms and also to narrate snippets of a lesbian experience between L. Iluminada and the narrator. Erotic pleasure, then, occurs solely in terms of bodily contact (whether with the Self or Others), and not in terms of penetration.

In constructing the gender dynamics in *Lumpérica*, Eltit's reliance on familial relationships in the text are a direct response to Pinochet's historical rhetoric on Chile as

a national family, which, much like during the Argentinian military dictatorship, was employed to identify desirable character, eliminate dissidence, and ally women in particular to the cause. Pratt summarizes Pinochet's message for women, noting its connection to pre-coup politics as well:

A las mujeres el dictador les dicta que de acuerdo a las tradiciones de Occidente su "misión como mujeres y madres" ha sido y sigue siendo la de 1) defender y transmitir los valores espirituales, 2) servir como un elemento moderador (parece ser, frente a los impulsos bélicos del hombre), 3) educar y transmitir consciencia, y 4) servir como depositarias de las tradiciones nacionales. (The dictator dictates to women that, in accordance with Western tradition, their "mission as women and mothers" had been and continues to be that of 1) defending and transmitting spiritual values, 2) serving as a moderating element (seemingly, against the bellicose impulses of men), 3) educating and instilling conscience, and 4) serving as repositories of national traditions; 18)

Thus, in the Chilean context, Woman was always already Mother, whether biological or figurative, to the nation's children, making Pinochet the corresponding Father. Such rhetoric revealed itself in the structure of the new government from the day of the coup, during which, Eltit notes, cartoons played on the public television broadcasts, marking the beginning of an infantilization of the public that would last throughout the dictatorship (*Emergencias* 20). Arceneaux explains how this structure manifested itself within the regime too: Pinochet's strategy of limiting power by shifting military officers resulted in a large age gap (of ten or more years) between Pinochet and the military leadership, creating a fatherly relationship that affected loyalties even after the return to

democracy (75). The structure of the family permeated all arenas of public and private life in Chile, as Eltit suggests, before, during, and after Pinochet's regime.

Creating this family dynamic in the national political arena was reductive (all women are not mothers, all women are not essentially nurturing, etc.) and served to reinforce the regime's power, but it also backfired in many ways as women began to recognize the political utility of the role forced upon them much like the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina. Patricia M. Chuchryk, drawing on the feminist work of Chilean sociologist, Julieta Kirkwood, explains how the public/private divide that made women invisible in the political arena also constructed the means by which they could rebel nearly unnoticed (70). Pinochet's attempts to depoliticize and garner support from women included organizing the CEMAs (*Centro de Madres*; Mothers' Center) and the *Secretaría Nacional de la Mujer* (National Secretariat of Women), which he placed under the control of his wife, Lucia Hiriart. Such strategies caused many women to critically review the concepts of Woman and Mother in Chilean society and, though women generally desired a return to democratic rule, many of them recognized for the first time that true democracy for women had never existed under the Right or the Left, for it was the authoritarian structuring of the traditional family that linked all governing ideology in Chile (79-80). When Eltit takes the mother figure in her text and links it with the conflicting imagery of androgyny, traditionally masculine acts of martyrdom, infertility, and (homo)sexuality as she does with L. Iluminada, she is arguing against limiting women's political power and breaking apart the binarized constructions of male/female and mother/child as they pertain to the persistent heteronormative family structure in Chile.

Couching the mother figure in alternately sexualized and violent terms also allows Eltit to explore alternate structures of relationality that resist traditional masculine, penetrative mechanisms of power. As for penetrative violence, though the immanence of torture and disappearance seem poised at the edges of each scene, pain in the text is always self-inflicted. L. Iluminada, during her performances for the camera at the text's opening, repeatedly injures herself by bashing her head off the concrete and trees and continuously re-opening her head wound in the abject and somewhat grotesque manner discussed above. This performance of violence mimics one Eltit actually performed and also fictionalizes in section 8 of *Lumpérica*. In 1980, Eltit, as an act of resistance, staged a performance in a brothel in which she read aloud from what would later be published as *Lumpérica* and cut into her own arms. The lone picture in the text is a remnant from Eltit's performance, which the narrator then dissects in detail, wondering about the meaning of the slices, their relationship to one another, and to the project as a whole. Just as Eltit did with genre, the gender norms of *Lumpérica* are anything but the norm. The self-mutilation, the masturbatory practices, and the collective anonymity that is the lumpen all function simultaneously to subvert the reader's expectations about the bodily practices of the gendered characters; however, they also serve to isolate and insulate the characters from one another until they are eventually able to meet the Other's gaze through L. Iluminada's performative violence.

The first section of the novel includes the three filmic takes centered around L. Iluminada's opening of the wound, falling to the ground, and plunging her hand into fire. These scenes of self-inflicted pain sit alongside the second and seventh sections in which a man is being interrogated for interrupting the second scene when he caught L.

Illuminada during her fall. Taken together, these sections function as a microcosm of the psychic effects of torture, even as they are overlaid with the capitalist rhetoric of movie making. Elaine Scarry notes that both displays of power, the torture and the interrogation, must work in conjunction during war in order to result in the “unmaking” of the subject (19). In the novel, Eltit separates the two processes across different chapters, different subjects, and different genders, speaking to Scarry’s claim that the two are not in fact connected: “World, self, and voice are lost, or nearly lost, through the intense pain of torture and not through the confession as is wrongly suggested by its connotations of betrayal” (35). Thus, Eltit pulls these two processes out of the cyclical and mistaken productive arrangement generally suggested by the interrogation-torture-confession teleology.

In the interrogation scenes, which come spatially after the scenes in the square, though the events are suggested to be somewhat synchronous in the action of the novel, Eltit maintains her insistence on the multiplicity of truths and suggests that interrogation is itself a performance: “*Comenzaba de nuevo. Era como una escena circular ensayada una multiplicidad de veces. Una escena errada, inútil. Pensó en romper ese círculo, alterar el punto de vista, pasar a otro asunto desenmascarando la fragilidad de la base. Empezar de nuevo pero con otro principio. Modificar su rol, cambiar el tono, socavar su agotamiento*” (“It was starting all over again. It was like a circular scene rehearsed countless times. A scene gone astray, pointless. He thought about switching to another subject that would unmask the weakness of its foundation. Start all over again but with another beginning. Modify his role, change the tone, undermine his exhaustion” 139-140/141). The interrogated figure here is emphasizing the circular reasoning of

interrogation by which truth will never be uncovered because there does not exist one objective conception of reality in the same sense that official and counter-histories both contain elements of truth and are discursively real. This perspective is bolstered by his consistent use of words like “*probable*,” (“probable”; 138/136) and “*razonable*” (“reasonable”; 139/138) to describe his answers to the interrogators—the interrogated molds his own perception of reality to fit within the rhetoric and perspective of his interrogators. Divorced from the immediacy of the torture scenes, the supreme futility and performative aspects of interrogation come through.

Conversely, the scenes of violence that are self-inflicted by L. Iluminada highlight the utility of performing violence as it is mapped on the body in a society where such acts are carried out in clandestine detention centers and whose effects, which is to say the wounds, the corpses, and the psycho-social trauma, are erased or invisible. Avelar, Scarry, and others have written on the unnameability of trauma and the inexpressability of pain. As Scarry explains, “Physical pain is not identical with (and often exists without) either agency or damage, but these things are referential; consequently, we often call on them to convey the experience of pain itself.” For instance, the fire has no agency in reference to the pain it causes L. Iluminada, and her fall produces no visible damage. The external image or referent is necessary, however, to make experience “sharable” (15-16). It is this attempt to share the experience of pain and trauma for which the character L. Iluminada exists. She performs her physical pain, which the reader learns is all an illusion. She films the shots over and over, as cathartic, reiterative events that challenge the official elision of bodies in pain.

During the second scene of her fall, the actions are replete with loss, referencing the loss experienced by Chile and the families of the *desaparecidos*. Performing that lack as a means to mourn publicly and work through the trauma is L. Iluminada's charge. The abject wound on her forehead drives her to "éxtasis" ("ecstasy"; 19/24), a state manifest with one sense of loss—of self-control, of bodily experience. The statement (either by L. Iluminada or, more likely, the narrator) about a personal wound—"Ya no me acuerdo cuánto ni cómo me dolía, pero por la cicatriz sé que me dolía" ("I no longer remember how much or what way I suffered, but from the scar I know I did suffer"; 19/24)—perfectly aligns with Scarry's explanation of the necessary though artificial referents of pain and reinforces the lack of referents that exist for the *desaparecidos*, a major obstacle for the productive mourning of the dead. L. Iluminada's cry that pierces the scene after she has bashed her head off the tree is emitted "sólo para los pálidos" ("only for the pale people"), who then "distinguen sus cuerpos" ("tell their bodies apart"; 20/25). The cry, a sound that exists outside the symbolic order, would suggest a dissolution or destruction of subjecthood in Scarry's terms (4); however, the performative nature of this cry as a speech act is made clear in the text: "no es la herida la que causa el grito, sino exactamente a la inversa; para herirse era precisa el grito, todo lo demás es un pretexto" ("it's not the wound that causes the cry, but precisely the reverse: for her to be wounded the cry was necessary, all the rest's pretext"; 24/29). The cry, then, produces the condition of being wounded—the abject wound, which the reader and the lumpen as actors in a scene know is artifice, a special effect of the film—and it reformulates their subjectivity, which Butler has inferred exists in an originary state of melancholia, socially constructed as always already relational. The loss and terror have caused in the lumpen

the dissolution of subjectivity akin to Scarry's body in pain, or better, akin to a Freudian sense of melancholia in which the subject has become psychically intertwined with the lost object. Through L. Iluminada's restorative performance of the cry, which will be repeated over and over, the lumpen are able to mourn productively, to recognize the loss in an Other and of an Other, and to distinguish themselves as subjects.

In her work *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler delves into the societal relations that determine which lives are deemed livable and, thus, grievable in a given society. When deaths are shielded from the public or go otherwise unacknowledged, those individuals are effectively eradicated, insofar as Selves exist in terms of their relationship to Others. As she explains, "The derealization of the 'Other' means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral" (33-34). Such a description is both an effective means of explaining the condition of the *desaparecidos* and the unnamable trauma their families and friends continue to experience. It is equally apt for describing the status of the characters in *Lumpérica*. Set in the transitory and prohibited space of the square during curfew, the text draws from a range of unnamed and marginalized characters. Eltit's lyrical complexity surrounding marginalization exists in the very title of her text, of which critics continue to debate the exact definition. All tend to be in agreement that *lump-* refers to the *lumpenproletariat* (Marxist terminology for those so far removed from society they will never achieve class consciousness), and whether the remainder of the title refers to *América*, or *perica* (a slang term for prostitute), extreme marginalization is evidently at play. It would naturally be the homeless, criminals, and prostitutes who can "afford" to be in the off-limits areas as they themselves are off-limits to society—the interminably spectral beings of whom Butler speaks.

The final section of the text, however, supplies a moment of possibility for L. Iluminada, in that there is a suggestion of the precarity that Butler maintains will preclude any recurrence of the state-sponsored terror witnessed by L. Iluminada and her fellow Chileans. It is difficult to speak of an ending to *Lumpérica*, given the cyclical nature and relative lack of plot that Eltit so masterfully weaves together, and yet two brief instances—two small iterations—in the final section offer a conclusion of sorts. In this installment, L. Iluminada is in the square completely alone, watching as everyone scurries away for the evening, and she becomes hypnotized by the sign, its lights, and the palpable lack of belonging it all implies. L. Iluminada’s last actions involve observing the early-morning stirrings of her neighbors, observing herself from every angle in a mirror she has just purchased, and watching as the first person crosses into the square where she sits: “*Sus ojos se cruzaron. Ella sostuvo la mirada por un instante, pero después la dejó ir hacia la calle de enfrente. La gente era ahora heterogénea, mujeres, hombres, estudiantes. Todos ellos iban a alguna parte*” (“Their gazes crossed. She held the gaze for a moment, but then turned hers toward the street opposite. The crowd was mixed now, women, men, students. They were all going somewhere”; 207-208/203). Unlike the lumpen throughout the text, daytime has brought identity and order to the people, but also a brief moment of understanding and recognition for L. Iluminada. Whereas the lumpen had moved in one imperceptible mass, now L. Iluminada can observe the individual people, and she is able to see herself in the mirror and then to maintain eye contact with another, to recognize her connection, however brief, to an Other. It is this recognition of relationality, the acknowledgement of the need for the Other not only for bodily

preservation, but also for psychic existence that, according to Butler, can rebuild the foundations of a society full of ghosts.

Lumpérica's conclusion also points to Eltit's larger project of merging art and activism, of eradicating complacency in her reader, and consequently in her fellow Chileans. Just as individuals must acknowledge their precarity (which is to say, their interdependency and ultimate vulnerability) in order to avoid societal obsolescence, so too must Eltit's reader participate in the activity that is reading her work. Eltit states, "*sigo pensando lo literario más bien como una disyuntiva que como una zona de respuestas que dejen felices y contentos a los lectores. El lector (ideal) al que aspiro es más problemático, con baches, dudas, un lector más bien cruzado por incertidumbres*" (I continue to think of literature as disjunction rather than as a zone of answers that leave readers happy and contented. [...] The (ideal) reader to whom I aspire is more problematic, with gaps, doubts—a reader crossed by uncertainties"; *Emergencias* 174/*E. Luminata* 8). Her challenging text makes clear from the first section, though, that the reader will be integral in sifting through the material, the repetitions, Eltit provides. By setting up the first section as a series of scenes followed by remarks, notes, and mistakes in the scenes, Eltit clues the reader in to the multiplicity of realities and interpretations at work within the novel and, through the interrogation scenes, especially, within the world beyond the novel—a world marked by official histories, unofficial counter histories, and glaring absences.

Eltit titles the central section (section 5) of *Lumpérica*, "*¿Quo vadis?*", attaching an evangelical allusion to the ritual in the square. The Latin phrase, meaning "Where are you going?", according to Christian tradition, was asked to the crucified and already risen

Jesus by one of his disciples, Peter, who met him on the road while fleeing Rome in fear of his own possible crucifixion. In response, Jesus replied he was on the way back to Rome to be crucified again, thus providing Peter the support and resolution to return. In the context of *Lumpérica*, L. Iluminada writes out the phrase again and again in the square but the lumpen continuously stamp it out. Like all of the rituals and performances in the square, this one seems to be equally as pointless, as the characters circle back on their words, never moving forward. Again, though, the text's conclusion (or the point at which Eltit has stopped circling back) makes reference to the phrase when the now heterogeneous mass of people (which is to say individual, recognizable, and non-spectral beings) all have a place to go.

Conclusions: Mourning on Stage, Engendering the Display

Eltit's text charts the same path for its unnamed characters and readers—demanding they return to the beginning multiple times to scrutinize the details, uncover the complexities, and sustain the multiple versions of events that are at play. The destruction of simple genre distinctions coupled with the shifting nature of gender in the novel set the foundation for an exploration of events that is multivocal, nonlinear, and nonpenetrative. Judith Butler's conception of gender illuminates the category as an imaginary ideal that, through its reiterations, can be parodied and, thus, decentered. Similarly, Eltit's reiterations of scenes that explore repeated events from different angles, through different genres, and with different narrative voices are able to undermine a singular version of the events that take place in the public square during the state-imposed curfew. The violence, sexuality, and ritualistic expressions performed in the square attempt to bring the audience closer to the immediacy—which is to say, the

interactive and transformative capability—of the art actions in which Eltit herself often engaged. With her text, she blends her own real-life performances with the performances of L. Iluminada and her lumpen to reveal the cracks in the official history and the official public image constructed by Pinochet during and after his authoritarian rule.

Juan Carlos Lértora analyzes Eltit’s body of literary work as a minor literature, which “*Se trata, por lo común, de construcciones fragmentarias, basadas en la enunciación colectiva, centradas sobre personajes representativos de experiencias límite, habitantes de un mundo signado por la total precariedad*” (deals, generally, with fragmentary constructions, based on collective enunciation, centered on characters representative of liminal experiences, inhabitants of a world marked by total precarity; 30). In breaking down conceptions of authorship and blurring easy identification with genre and gender, Eltit forges her own version of mourning literature that circles back on itself in order to move forward. Eltit’s text espouses precarity, which lies in its preoccupation with embodiment as antithetical to the missing and symbolic bodies of the *desaparecidos* and to the psycho-social connections and distinctions made between characters and other characters, characters and their author, characters and their reader, etc. As she has explained,

Me pregunto: cuál sería la manera posible de referirse a la historia política chilena cuando esa historia es a la vez personal, corporal, sin caer en el absorto vértigo testimonial o en el previsible ejercicio de construir una mirada ‘inteligente’ o distante sobre acontecimientos que radican caóticamente—sin principio ni fin—en la memoria y cuyas huellas perviven en una atemporalidad transversal que, a menudo, asalta perceptiblemente en el presente. (I ask myself:

what would be a feasible way of referring to the Chilean political history when that history is at once personal, corporal, without falling into the engrossing testimonial vertigo or into the expected exercise of constructing an ‘intelligent’ or distanced gaze about events that reside chaotically—without beginning or end—in the memory and whose traces remain in a transversal atemporality that, often, noticeably bombards the present; *Emergencias* 17)

It is through her metafictional techniques and investigation of gender constructs that Eltit finds not only a feasible, but transformative method for addressing her country’s traumatic past and present. Eltit engages her reader to reanalyze, to participate, and, above all, to avoid complacency as s/he attempts to dissect the events that occur in the square. In the end, *Lumpérica* catalyzes an exploration of the social trauma experienced under the Pinochet regime through performance and interpretation and then permits readers to move on without telling them exactly where to be.

CONCLUSION

El gran riesgo que acecha a la mujer es la dificultad para encontrar un lugar público en el que depositar su historia y la historia de su palabra cultural y política, como no sea el espacio del drama o del anecdotismo sentimental.

The great danger that lies in wait for woman is the difficulty of finding a public place in which to deposit her history and the history of her cultural and political word, other than the space of drama or sentimental anecdote.

—Diamela Eltit, *Emergencias* (192)

Eltit's struggle is one that all three authors in this project have grappled with throughout their careers, but it is a predicament that becomes particularly evident in their work that specifically recognizes the entanglement of their own histories with those of their respective national communities. Though each author's approach to her project is distinctive, Luisa Valenzuela, Clarice Lispector, and Diamela Eltit all converged on the novel format and on the metafictional techniques that would allow for new ways of writing about and remembering dictatorship. Their choices served to place them outside the bind of either the hegemonic camp of official Histories or the counter-hegemonic camp of witnessing *testimonios*. Each author chose independently to work within the discourses at play (much like the Latin American women's movements that undoubtedly influenced them) and to turn familiar forms into the uncanny, the provocative, the transformative. Whether writing directly about dictatorship or covertly addressing the

repression, censorship, and economic failures of the regimes under which they lived, Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit never focus solely on the obvious crimes of dictatorship, rather they take a longer socio-historical approach to their topic in the attempt to find the roots of such apparatuses in the past and to preclude their reemergence in the future of their nations.

The authors' projects are not, of course, quite so simplistic as to be historical or archaeological investigations into the causes and effects of dictatorship, for the major shift in the consciousness of these three authors lies in their conception of the inadequacies of binary oppositions. Though appealing to fall back on, reductive structures that imply simple distinction, culpability, and superiority, which is to say the dichotomies that structure the majority of postdictatorial discourses—good/evil, us/them, male/female, etc.—did not effectively describe the social situations of their national communities in ways that would lead to productive reflection and preemptive change. In order to accomplish such comprehensive and long-ranging explorations of the Argentinean, Brazilian, and Chilean societies in fiction, Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit first had to confront the trauma caused by radical dissolution of government, economic instability, state-sponsored terrorism, and, perhaps most difficult to reconcile, the silence of citizens shocked into complacency even as thousands were detained, tortured, and disappeared. The trauma generated by these and other dictatorships in Latin America in the latter half of the 20th century had profound psychic and social effects on the public, compelling the authors to search for new methods of mourning.

It is at this juncture—where the effects of dictatorship and the needs of a healing populace meet—that the theoretical work of critics like Nelly Richard and Idelber Avelar

intervenes to conceptualize the trends in artistic output surrounding postdictatorship and to identify some of the common misconceptions about the changing political and economic landscapes of the countries whose dictatorships had dissolved, the focus of the present study being those modern military regimes that existed in Argentina (1976-1983), Brazil (1964-1985), and Chile (1973-1990). Richard's work identified a host of avant-garde authors and artists who were carrying forth new conceptions of discourse and time, who were engaged in a process of "*desmemoria*" ("disremembering") and recognized that "*el pasado no es un tiempo irreversiblemente detenido y congelado en recuerdo bajo el modo del ya fue que condena la memoria a cumplir la orden de restablecer servilmente su memoriosa continuidad*" ("the past is not a time irreversibly seized and frozen in recollection under the rubric of what *already was*, thus condemning memory to follow the dictum of obediently reestablishing its own continuity"; *Insubordinación* 14/*Insubordination* 2). The literary camp was particularly positioned to engage in this conversation around the discontinuity and, for the authors studied here, with the multiplicity of competing truths that establish all history, but specifically the histories of nations whose military regimes were quick to establish an official version and wipe out all discordance. Richard was eager to identify texts that neither supported the official history nor denied that it contained some level of truth, and the novels in this study decidedly align with Richard's classification as being neither bound to the regime's discourse nor unconditionally opposed and counter-hegemonic like much of the testimonial literature produced during and after the dictatorship.

Which is not to say, of course, that the novels by Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit do not in any sense testify, rather they bear witness in a fuller sense of telling multiple

narratives, often through plots that loop back, undermine, and seemingly confuse themselves. In doing so, they attempt to reach that unnameable center of trauma—a move that Avelar indicates as a central feature to his theories on mourning literature. Literature which relies on the primacy of allegory to gesture toward that which cannot be expressed is particularly suited to trauma, as it exists outside of linear time and captures the sense of “untimely eruptions” (or, in Richard’s terms, the “residues”) of the past in the present. For Avelar, the internal logic of mourning literature, which unlike other instances of the uncanny, does not force a binary of rational/other-wordly, but rather it inclusively accepts all Otherness as part of the authoritarian system it seeks to portray. In doing so, however, Avelar reads these texts as maintaining a sense of failure that is appropriate to allegory: “the reader finishes them with the sense that the true story has not been told, that the other to which allegory alludes [...] remains unspeakable” (77). The novels in the present study do in fact fall in line with many of the elements described by Avelar; however, the addition of metafictional strategies and a reevaluation of mourning through the theoretical writing of Judith Butler provide for a more complex system of relationships, both within and outside of the text, than Avelar’s mourning literature allows. Though trauma cannot truly be named, the authors in this study structure their texts not to suggest that “the true story has not been told,” but to emphasize that the story must be made through exchange of meaning, performed by the characters as a means to communicate with their reader.

By placing Butler’s theories in conversation with Avelar’s, it becomes clear that both her readings of psychoanalysis and her major contributions to gender theory and performativity provide the vocabulary necessary to interpret the revolutionary works of

Valenzuela, Lispector, and Eltit. Butler's reanalysis of subjectivity puts forth an originary melancholia that constructs subjectivity as always already split, always already relational. As Valenzuela's, Lispector's, and Eltit's characters and readers discover, the socially constructed subject, acknowledgement of the grievable Other, and acceptance of one's own precarity are necessary psycho-social events that must occur before an individual and a community can heal from the trauma of dictatorship. Butler's groundbreaking work on gender performativity also echoes with the conceptions of fluidity across the sex-gender system that are found in the novels—a view of sex and gender that marks a major intervention by the authors for their time periods and their cultures. Just as Avelar recognized that the narrative of the transition to democracy was a false discourse more accurately described as similar economic systems extending across differing governmental structures, the authors identify an even longer history of constrictive and prescriptive heteronormativity that extended as far back as any of them could remember or imagine. Julieta Kirkwood's essay, "*El feminismo como negación del autoritarismo*" ("Feminism as Negation of Authoritarianism"), published in 1983, recognized the link not only of dictatorship and women's subordination, but of the familial organization, embedded in the culture and reinforced by religion and government, that structured women's lives and relegated them to the private sphere. All three authors in this study home in on the family and the rigidity of gendered and sexed representations previously available to them, and their novels consistently highlight the performance of socially constructed ideals, underscoring the need to deconstruct heteronormativity as both a means to healing and to prevention of future authoritarian leaders, both at home and in political office.

As has been shown, each author espouses facets of mourning literature in their works together with gendered concerns, recognition of the Other, and metafictional cues to their readers. Each individual text, however, was chosen due to its particular placement in the history of dictatorship and the positioning of its author. Luisa Valenzuela's novels bookend the dictatorship in Argentina, concerned as they were with the rise of a tyrant before the 1976 coup in *Cola de lagartija* and the postdictatorial consideration of exiles in *Novela negra con argentinos*. Valenzuela maintains a middle ground, as the only author who wrote against the dictatorship during some of the most oppressive years under General Videla and then outside of the confines of dictatorship from her self-exile in New York City. Clarice Lispector's *A hora da estrela*, though written under dictatorship, was heavily regarded as unthreatening, due to Lispector's previously labeled lyrical works. In fact, *A hora* contains a stark critique of the economic policies of the Brazilian dictatorship as well as the toxic nature of rigid heteronormativity and provides the most comprehensive examinations of race and class in the present study. Diamela Eltit's *Lumpérica* was written, published, and circulated during Pinochet's regime and during her own political protests as part of the art action group, CADA. Like Lispector, Eltit's complicated style made it difficult to claim outright dissidence, and her novel in which she so clearly condemns Pinochet's neoliberal policies and repressive politics was published at the beginning of Pinochet's fall from middle-class and international approval in 1983. Though each author has a distinct relationship to feminism and women's movements in general, their work is bound together by their avowal that their nations would never fully heal from the social trauma of military dictatorships and state-

sponsored violence without a profound restructuring of the heteronormative ideology on which the dictatorships and the subsequent democracies were built.

It must be noted, of course, that while all three authors occupied different nations, spaces, and positions toward feminism, Valenzuela was born into and Lispector and Eltit came to form part of the white, educated elite in Latin America. Thus, future studies would benefit from analyses of authors whose considerations of race, class, sexual orientation, gender, etc., issue from spaces and identities that are even more liminal, from an intersectional perspective. I likewise do not claim that only those writers who identify as women can detect and dismantle the heteronormative underpinnings of their social landscapes, so it would be prudent to investigate texts from authors across the sex-gender spectrum for similar uses of metafiction and mourning to interrogate authoritarian regimes and their gendered narratives.

Finally, it would be pertinent to apply a similar combination of theories to other texts in each author's bibliography. Valenzuela has published four novels since *Novela negra*, and her most recent, *La máscara sarda: el profundo secreto de Perón* (*The Sardinian Mask: The Profound Secret of Peron*; 2012), would suggest a continuance of her interest in the psycho-social development of political officials as well as the repetition of power structures throughout Argentinean history. Lispector's final posthumously published novel, *Um sopro de vida: pulsações* (*A Breath of Life: Pulsations*; 1978), was written simultaneously with *A hora* and deals with similar themes, foregrounding authority/authorship and gender in the lyrical style more closely associated with Lispector's work. Eltit's *Lumpérica* was her first novel, and she has since produced an impressive dozen of novelistic publications, many of which have already been studied in

connection with the Chilean dictatorship, gender, and the body as political entity. She has also continued her focus on marginality with a specific interest in mental illness. Further study in the authors' own literary output would shed light on whether or not they have maintained a connection to the project of metafiction in mourning outlined here.

The authors' own work would be of express interest due to their intellectual struggles with the utility of writing as political action and their project of effecting change in and with a proactive, perceptive reader. To see whether this project has deepened, transformed, or been abandoned entirely in the authors' own work would provide a more robust understanding of its application and consequences. The authors' dedication to postdictatorial memory remains an essential one even now, a quarter century after the last government studied here returned to democratic rule. The *Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo* continue to raise awareness of their disappeared loved ones and to recover grandchildren taken from detainees and given to families aligned with the military regime, with the 117th recovered grandchild reported in August, 2015 (Arabskyj). Brazil's government, though it has celebrated 27 years without military rule has been plagued by economic peaks and valleys as well as longstanding corruption rumors under the current presidency of the ex-guerrilha and detainee, Dilma Rousseff. Perhaps the most symbolic event for Chile in recent years, was the 2013 election, which pitted former President (and winner of the election) Michelle Bachelet, who was tortured by DINA and whose father died in detention during the military dictatorship, against Evelyn Matthei, daughter of General Fernando Matthei, who served as an integral part of Pinochet's regime. All these events demonstrate that the project of mourning dictatorship has not yet come to a close, if it ever truly can, and the current state of women's issues in

Latin America and the world over impart that the deconstruction of heteronormative binaries is in no way complete. Thus, continuing to study these and other errant, erratic authors—to be similarly errant, erratic readers—will continue to be a reparative tactic for our Selves and the Others whose precarity both threatens and sustains.

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